

**TOWARDS A PRACTICAL DALIT THEOLOGY:
A STUDY ON THE STATUS AND RELEVANCE OF DALIT THEOLOGY
AMONG GRASS ROOTS DALIT CHRISTIANS IN THEIR STRUGGLE AGAINST
CASTE OPPRESSION**

by

VINCENT MANOHARAN JOHN PACKIANATHAN

APPENDICES

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Appendix 1: Discrimination and atrocities against Dalits in India

Quote from the report of Dr. Prasad, D.S. (2004) "Dalit Human Rights Monitor 2000-2003: Report on Atrocities on Dalits -". Hyderabad, Sakshi Human Rights Watch - AP.

In Government Services: 37.8% of the villages, Dalits to sit separately in government schools; 27.6% of villages, Dalits prevented from entering police stations; 25.7% of villages, prevented from public retail shops; 33% of villages, public health workers refuse to visit Dalit homes ; 23.5% of Dalit hamlets, mails not delivered to their homes; 14.4% of villages, not permitted to enter Local Government buildings ; 12% of villages, Dalits denied access or forced to form separate lines at polling booths ; 48.4% of villages, denied access to water sources. *In Market Access:* 35% of villages surveyed barred access to local markets; 47% of village cooperatives, Dalits prevented from selling milk, and 25% of villages, prevent Dalits from buying milk. *In Work:* 25% of villages, Dalits were paid lower wages, worked longer hours, delayed payment, suffer verbal and physical abuse; 37% of villages, wages paid at a distance to avoid physical contact. *In Religion and Rites:* 64% of villages, temple entries restricted; almost 50% of villages, no access to cremation grounds. *In Private sphere,* 73% of villages not allowed to enter non-Dalit homes; 70% of villages, no inter-dining; 35.8% of villages, denied entry to village shops.)

Appendix 2: The status of Dalits (Scheduled Castes) in the field of education and employment as per Census of Government of India 2001 and the annual report 2006 and 2011 of Ministry of Personnel, Govt of India

Scheduled castes constitute 16.6% of the total population according to Census 2001.

The *literacy* rate among SCs is 54.70%; in Higher Education they are 10.29% and in Technical Education 7.23%. In terms of owning *land*, 77.1% of SCs are agricultural labourers (National Sample Land Holding Survey 1999-2000, GOI, 2000).

The Ministry of Personnel & Public Governance and Pensions, Government of India Annual Report 2004-2005, states that the SCs *in Government Jobs* is only 11.93%, crowded in Class C and D, but not in A and B, the higher positions (GOI, 2006a).

As per Public Enterprises Survey, Annual Report Vol. 1 of Ministry of Heavy Industry Enterprises, 2004-05, in *Public Sector employment*, SCs constitute only 16.3% of population (GOI, 2006b).

The recent 2010-2011 report of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pension, Government of India, reports that Dalits constitute 12.5% only in Grade A Services; and 14.9% in Grade B; 15.7% in Grade D; 19.4% in Grade D; however 51.4% as sweepers (GOI, 2011)

Appendix 3: Glossary

The glossary can be found at the end of the main text and is repeated here for ease of reference when consulting the translations of field interviews.

Adi	[Sanskrit] First, original
<i>Advaidha</i>	[Sanskrit] A philosophy originating in Hindu thought, of non-dualism. God and world are not two identities; God and Universe are one. Compare: Dvaidha
Arcot Lutheran	See also Lutheran . Arcot Lutheran refer to Christians who belong to congregations within the Lutheran tradition and originating in the region of Arcot, in Tamil Nadu
Aryan	[Sanskrit] Underlying meaning: Noble Understood/expanded meaning: The term used to describe a group of people, speaking an Indo-European language, probably from northern Europe, who entered northern India c. 1000 B.C. The Aryans are commonly thought to have brought new developments, including Sanskrit (and Indo-European language) and the early texts of Hinduism (Vedas). In western culture, and in particular, in theories of racial hierarchy and linguistic ethnicity common in the nineteenth century, the Aryan race came to be regarded as a civilizing and advanced ancient people associated with European descent, white/pale skin colour, social sophistication and biological superiority. Brahmins claim descent from the Aryan invaders of India
<i>Arunthathiar</i>	[Tamil] An outcaste. A sub-group within the larger Dalit identity. <i>Arunthathiar</i> s often face discrimination within Dalit communities from other groups, because they are perceived as having low status even in comparison to other Dalits.
Avatar	[Sanskrit] According to Hinduism, God/divinity may incarnate in the form of avatars. Hindu scripture contains multiple accounts of divine incarnations which have existed on earth to destroy evil
<i>Bakthi</i>	[Sanskrit] A devotional way of life. A form of worship of a Divine being
<i>Bakthi marga</i>	[Sanskrit] A devotional path to understand God
<i>Bhangi</i>	[Hindi] A sweeper or cleaner

<i>Brahma Samaj</i>	[Sanskrit] A nineteenth-century theistic movement within Hinduism, founded by Ram Mohan Roy
Brahman	[Sanskrit] The Absolute, the Supreme being
Brahmin	[Sanskrit] The highest of the four varnas of Hindu society. The priestly and superior class in the caste ladder
Brahmanism	[Sanskrit] Hinduism as interpreted and followed by Brahmins
Buddhism	Major world religion. Introduced in India by Lord Buddha c. AD 4 th -6 th century. Now practiced as a minority religion in India but widely practiced elsewhere
<i>Chandogya Upanishad</i>	[Sanskrit] One of the primary (important) <i>Upanishads</i> . One of the major Hindu scriptures
<i>Chandalas</i>	[Sanskrit] Untouchables. A traditional term for the people classified as being outside the Hindu caste system. While the term Dalit has been chosen by the members of the marginalized community to denote their oppressed status, this term recalls their marginalized existence as people who performed ritually impure tasks (according to Brahmanical Hinduism), such as the disposal of corpses
<i>Chaturvana</i>	[Sanskrit] A fourfold caste system in Hinduism, determining hereditary social status and occupation. See also: varna
Chitpavan	A region in western Maharashtra mostly dominated by Brahmins
CSI	Church of South India: an umbrella group comprising most protestant congregations in south India, with the important exception of Lutherans
Dalit	[Hindi] Underlying meaning: The broken people, the outcaste Understood/expanded meaning: The self-designated group name used by those considered to be outside the Hindu caste or <i>varna</i> system (see also untouchable). People traditionally considered 'unseeable/untouchable' by Hinduism. Often used by people within this group to denote pride in their membership of this social group, and therefore, opposition to the caste system, in which it is a

despised category.

<i>Dasas/Daysus</i>	[Sanskrit] A population group referred to in early Hindu scripture and mythological texts has having been in India when the Aryan invaders arrived. According to these texts they were enslaved by the Aryans. <i>Dasas</i> have since been associated with Dalits and/or Dravidian -speakers, who are seen as the descendants of this group, still suffering the enslavement of their ancestors at the hands of the Aryan/Brahmin oppressors
Devadasi/Jogini	[Sanskrit] Women forced into prostitution in some Hindu temples.
<i>Dharma</i>	[Sanskrit] Underlying meaning: Natural law or order Understood/expanded meaning: A duty (usually a profession or occupation, but also related to social status) related to the caste in which a person is born
<i>Dhobi</i>	[Hindi] Washerman
<i>Diakonia</i>	[Greek] Service, ministry, particularly related to Christian ecclesiastical administration
Dravidian	A language family, including the modern south Indian languages Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. It is not related to the Indo-European language family, which dominates northern India. Dravidians are often seen in theories of the Aryan invasion as being descendents of the original inhabitants of India displaced by the Aryans
<i>Dvaidha</i>	[Sanskrit] A philosophy of dualism, originating in Hindu thought. God and Universe are not one but two different identities. Compare: Advaidha
<i>Gnana marga</i>	[Sanskrit] A philosophy originating in Hinduism. A path to understanding God via wisdom
Indo-European	A language family including Sanskrit and its descendent languages in north India. The major linguistic division in the modern nation of India is between Indo-European languages in the north and the Dravidian-speaking states in the south
Hinduism/Hindu	The majority religion in India. A very varied and set of beliefs and practices oriented around ancient scriptures

(the *Vedas*) and based on the principle of rebirth, with the aim of gaining enlightenment and thereby escaping from the cycle of rebirth. For the purposes of this study, an important feature of this spiritual aim is the connection to ***dharma***, by which a person may gain either enlightenment or more positive rebirth (see ***karma***) by adhering to their hereditary occupation and social status. This principle underpins the rigid caste system

Islam/Islamic	A major world religion based on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (d. A.D. 632), and part of the Abrahamaic tradition shared by Judaism and Christianity. A minority religion in India
<i>Jati</i>	[Hindi] Underlying meaning: Tribe/group/clan Understood/expanded meaning: Usually synonymous with caste or sub-caste
<i>Jivanmukta</i>	[Sanskrit] One who has attained the position of having been liberated from the cycle of rebirth through enlightenment in Hindu and Buddhist thought
<i>Karma</i>	[Sanskrit] The actions and repercussions of the actions undertaken by a person in their previous incarnations within Hindu thought. <i>Karma</i> is perceived as being connected to a person's conformity with <i>dharma</i>
<i>Kerygma</i>	[Greek] Preaching
<i>Koinonia</i>	[Greek] Communion, participating, especially in a Christian ecclesiastical capacity
<i>Kshatriya</i>	[Sanskrit] Ruling or warrior class, second in the caste hierarchy of Hinduism
Lutheran	Lutheran Christianity describes churches which regard themselves as living within the tradition of the Protestant reformation thinker, Martin Luther. In south India, Lutheran communities are significant for not regarding themselves as part of the umbrella Protestant group, the Church of South India
Manu	A Hindu scholar (c. AD 8 th century) who interpreted God's words according to the <i>Vedas</i> and fixed rules, duties, customs as a code for each caste group

<i>Manusmriti</i>	[Sanskrit] A Hindu code written by Manu c. AD 700
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
<i>Pallar</i>	[Tamil] An outcaste. A sub-group within the larger Dalit identity
<i>Paraya(r)</i>	[Tamil] An outcaste. A sub-group within the larger Dalit identity
Pentecostal Church	A collective term for a range of Christian congregations and organisations, which have developed in the two centuries, and which regard themselves as a renewal movement within Christianity. Baptism and personal spiritual revelation are prominent in many Pentecostal communities. It is one of the strong denominations of Christianity in south India
RC	Roman Catholic: major world religion (Christian denomination), founded on scripture, tradition and the authority of the bishop of Rome (Pope). One of the major Christian denominations in south India
<i>Rig Veda</i>	[Sanskrit] First among the four <i>Vedas</i>
Saivite	[Sanskrit] A follower of Shiva. A Hindu who believes Lord Shiva to be the Supreme Being, and who adheres to practices within a Saivite tradition. Compare: Vaishnavite
<i>Sanyasi</i>	[Sanskrit] A renouncer of a worldly life, dedicated to a divine life. An ascetic
<i>Sat-chit-ananda</i>	[Sanskrit] The Truth- Consciousness-Bliss according to Hinduism
<i>Satyagrah</i>	[Sanskrit] Insistence upon the realization of truth by non-violence
Scheduled Caste (SC)	Constitutional term for the Dalits of Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist faiths. Dalits of Christian or Islamic faiths are not SCs
<i>Shudra</i>	[Sanskrit] The serving class. Fourth in the caste hierarchy of Hinduism. Classed as untouchable according to Vedic tradition but not outcaste, and therefore in a less subjugated position than Dalits

<i>Sikhism/Sikh</i>	Major world religion based on the teachings of Guru Nanak (fl. AD 15 th century) and subsequent Gurus. A minority religion in India, but the majority religion in some regions (notably, the Punjab)
<i>Upanishad</i>	[Sanskrit] Philosophical text. The early source of Hindu religion, alongside the Vedas
<i>Vaishnavite</i>	[Sanskrit] A follower of Vishnu, who believes that Vishnu is the Supreme being. One who worships Rama and Krishna, the Avatars of Vishnu and practices Hinduism within this tradition. Compare: Saivite
<i>Vaishya</i>	[Sanskrit] Trader/Business class. Third in the caste hierarchy of Hinduism
<i>Varna</i>	[Sanskrit] Underlying meaning: Colour Understood/expanded meaning: A broad category in which Jatis/castes were classified, involving a fourfold division of Brahmins (priests), <i>Kshatriyas</i> (warriors), <i>Vaishyas</i> (traders) and <i>Shudras</i> (servants)
<i>Varnashrama</i>	[Sanskrit] A social order based on colour divisions. See varna
Veda (pl. Vedas)	[Sanskrit] The oldest scriptures of Hinduism, preserved in Sanskrit
Vedism/Vedic	[Sanskrit] Pertaining to or being arranged according to the <i>Vedas</i>

Appendix 4: Abbreviations

The abbreviations can be found at the beginning of the main text and are repeated here for ease of reference when consulting the translations of field interviews.

AFDCL	Alternative Forum for Dalit Christian Liberation
BT	Black Theology
CDLM	Christian Dalit Liberation Movement
CISRS	Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society
DCLM	Dalit Christian Liberation Movement
DT	Dalit Theology
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of the Third World Theologians
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
TTS	Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, Madurai
UTC	United Theological College, Bangalore
WCC	World Council of Churches
WT	White Theology

Appendix 5: Letter from translator

Revd S Chandra Mohan

*Honorary Presbyter, Church of South India Diocese of Trichy-Tanjore,
Development Consultant and Trainer of Trainers: Local Capacities for Peace*

01.12.2011

To
The University of Birmingham

WHOMEVER IT MAY CONCERN

I, Revd Chandra Mohan, an Honorary Presbyter and a Development Consultant living in Chennai (India), had the pleasure of accompanying Mr. John Vincent Manoharan, a PhD student from the University of Birmingham during his field work in the state of Tamilnadu, from October 2010 to Jan 2011. We met with sixteen interviewees; all identified by the researcher as grassroots Dalit Christian activists, involved in struggles against caste oppression inside and outside the church.

The interviews conducted by the researcher were aimed at understanding the status and relevance of Dalit theology among the grassroots Dalit Christians as a faith motivation to intensify the struggle against caste oppression.

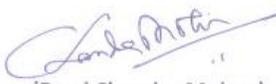
I took the responsibility of recording what the interviewees shared in their mother tongue, Tamil. I then translated the interviews (questions and responses) into English on the basis of my recordings.

I hereby assure whomever it may concern that I took all possible care to remain unbiased during the process of recording and translating the interviews. To the best of my ability I made every effort to do my job carefully and honestly as a translator.

I thank Revd John Vincent Manoharan for having provided me with such an opportunity, which offered me a wonderful chance to understand the reality of Dalit theology among grassroots Dalit Christians.

I wish Revd John Vincent Manoharan every success in his research studies.

Yours sincerely,


(Revd Chandra Mohan)

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Appendix 6: Tabulation of interviewees' details

Sl. No	Persons (Laity/Clergy)	Gender	Age	Sub-Caste	Literacy level	Denomination	Region	Districts
1	2	4	5	6	8	9	7	7
1	1 (L)	F	44	PR	12 th std	RC/BROTHERN	North	Chennai
2	2 (L)	M	71	AR	Did not go to school	CSI	West	Erode
3	3 (L)	F	39	AR	10 th std	CSI	West	Erode
4	4 (L)	M	54	PR	B. Sc	LU	Central	Ramanathapuram
5	5 (L)	F	26	AR	Primary level	PC	North-East	Thiruvannamalai
6	6 (L)	M	40	AR	12 th Std	ALC	North - East	Karur
7	7 (L)	M	34	PR	M.A.,	RC	North	Chennai
8	8 (L)	F	42	PL	B.A.,(Now doing M.A.,)	CSI/PC	South	Tirunelveli
9	9 (L)	F	45	PL	6 th Std	PC	South	Tirunelveli
10	10 (L)	F	50	PL	S.S.L.C.,	CSI	South	Tirunelveli
11	11 (L)	M	50	PL	9 th Std	CSI	South	Thuthukudi
12	12 (C)	M	57	PR	B.Th., BD., M.A (His).,M.A(Soc) ., M. Phil and now pursuing PhD	LU	Central	Tiruchirappalli
13	13 (C)	M	44	AR	G.Th B.Th, B.D. M..A., M.Th., Now pursuing D.Th	CSI	West	Dindugal
14	14 (C)	M	40	PR	Theology, Philosophy, HR, Tamil & English literature	RC	North	Chengalpattu
15	15 (C)	M	41	SCM	P.G., B.D.,	ALC	North East	Thiruvannamalai
16	16 (C)	F	46	PR	B.A., B.D., M.Th.,	CSI	North	Chennai

F	Female
M	Male
AR	Arunthathiar
PL	Pallar
PR	Parayar
SCM	Sub-Caste Mixed
RC	Roman Catholic
PC	Pentecost
ALC	Arcot Lutheran
LU	Lutheran
CSI	Church of South India

Total Persons	16
Men	9
Women	7
Total Persons	16
CSI	6
Lutheran	4
Pentecost	2
Roman Catholic	2
Roman Catholic/Brethren	1
CSI/Pentecost	1
Total Persons	16
Clergy	5
Laity	11
Total Persons	16
Parayar	5
Pallar	5
Arunthathiar	5
Sub-Caste Mixed	1

Appendix Seven: Translations of field interviews

Person – 1

8th Dec 2010 - Madurai

Interview by J. Vincent Manoharan, Research Student, University of Birmingham - Thesis Title "Towards a Practical Dalit Theology"

.....

1. Personal Details

a. What is your name?

I am

b. What is your family name?

Father is Mr.....

My husband is

24 years gone since I got married. I have two girl children. Initially we were Roman Catholics and we now go to Brethren Assembly, a Pentecostal church. Almost 5 years we go to this church as family.

c. What is your sub caste?

Dalit- Parayar

d. What is your age?

44 Years

e. Have you had a formal education?

I have studied up to +2

f. Are you married?

Married

g. What is your job?

Social Worker. I work for the rights of the unorganized, for example among rice mill workers. Since 18 years of my age I do this work. Initially I worked for the domestic workers. Earlier, served as Health worker. Now I joinedin its Worker's centre and serving here. Domestic workers, mostly Dalits, live more in Madurai Keerathurai area. It is an area of Thevar community people. I fight for the rights of mainly Dalit women.

h. Where do you live?

.....
Madurai District

- i. How many years have you lived at this address?

Since birth

2. Relating to Church?

- a. Can you tell me which denomination you belong to?

Earlier Roman Catholic, now Brethren- Pentecostal

- b. Do you have a church in your home village/town?

We have many churches in the places I live. Ours is Brethren.

- c. Do you attend worship regularly?

Regularly I attend Sunday services. Monday we have prayer meeting.

- d. Please tell me whether you are a member of the Church?

I am a member of Brethren church

- e. Do you hold any position in your local church, if so, what?

No

- f. What church activities are you involved in?

I go to prayer meetings, gospel meetings

- g. Do you hold any position in the Church hierarchy?

I am not holding any position in the Brethren church but a member in the women group

- h. Can you describe the caste composition of your church?

When we were in RC church, majority was Dalits. There was a small number of Non Dalits. But non Dalits were dominating. Dalits sit at the back seats of church. Not only as Dalits, we continued there without jobs and any opportunities from the Church. Later both Dalits and non Dalits became equal in numbers. Earlier and now exist number of discriminations related to caste in the churches.

In Mother Mary flag hoisting festival we are discriminated. The Priest was a non Dalit. In the festival Dalits adorned Mother Mary statue with a garland; immediately, the garland was removed and thrown away. We were upset but we waited for the festival to get over. But the car which

carried Mother Mary overturned. It was said that since they discriminated Dalits, it happened so. Like this many discriminations.

3. Relating to caste practices

- a. Please tell me about the caste discrimination, if any, that exists inside or/and outside the Church?

A number of caste atrocities exist. If a Dalit dies, the non Dalits drag and delay in offering us a place in the cemetery. Sometimes it takes even two days, till then we need to wait with the dead body.

Women will not be allowed to speak in the church. Only men they allow. If at all allowed, it is only for non Dalit women. Dalit women we cannot imagine.

No inter caste marriage takes place.

Since Brethren churches are called Elder brother-younger brother churches, they do not encourage marriages happening within the church members' families. This is a convenient excuse to prevent inter-caste marriages.

They ensure bride or bridegroom from other churches. They do not encourage us to decide whether the bridegroom is good or bad. Because of this, many young girls commit suicide.

Now in the Brethren churches, pastors are from Parayas and Pallars.

There are more Naidus in RC. Caste discrimination prevails in all churches.

- b. Could you please share the type of discrimination that you have faced either within or/outside the Church?

RC Priests do not come from Dalit background. Mostly they come from Non Dalits. Among Nuns there are Dalits and Non Dalits. Non Dalit Sisters who are elderly will dominate the Dalit sisters. Dalit sisters will assist them.

Among the Bishops, only Non Dalits are high in number. Among the 24 organizations the RC church has, few Dalits are only in leadership. Therefore, no helps to Dalits. Both Dalits and Non Dalits are in committees of RC/Brethren. Although it appears that elders come together to decide, the Dalit voices are always muffled in decision making.

I am not sure whether the Dalits are in higher positions in Catholic organizations. Fatima College is an RC institution; yet the majority of staff and workers are from non Dalits.

- c. Have you ever suffered physical violence owing to caste practices-if so, how and by whom?

Many. For example: though my daughter wrote Tamil examination in the Fatima College, a Non Dalit teacher marked 'absent' to my daughter. When a Dalit teacher raised voice, she was silenced. The issue became legal. Then my daughter was allowed to write the examination again.

Incidence of reducing marks for Dalit students; Preventing Dalits to come up; providing Arts subjects only to Dalits; Making them to Keep arrears in exams ; when Dalit teachers support, mocking them up- are some of the different atrocities that the Dalit go through in the educational institutions besides in the church related discriminations.

Christian Parayas are in Backward Caste list while Hindu Parayas in Scheduled Caste list. Therefore, no cooperation exists among Dalits. Dalits of Hindu Faith also have no right to enter into the famous Hindu Meenakshi Temple. Non Dalits demand money from Dalits for church events and celebrations but no opportunity is given for our development. We are not treated equally. There are number of discriminations in the places of work. It is numerous.

The situation of women is worse. There are more wages for non Dalit women. Dalit women are paid low wage and long hours of work. There are no bathrooms for Dalit women in the places of their work. Only after going home the women can relieve themselves.

Even a domestic worker, if a Dalit, has to enter into owner's homes only through back door. They are not permitted to wash utensils or go into Kitchen. There is separate plate/tumbler and separate food for Dalits.

In villages there are separate tumblers for Dalits. Tea is offered in coconut shells in some places – this practice continues. Dalits are forced to live separately. Even in cities they live like that. In Chittalakshi Nagar, a slum in Madurai, non Dalit women first will fetch drinking water from the public tap and then they will allow the Dalit women to take water.

Dalits are threatened and their assets are appropriated. The upper castes will let the waste water to spill over near the Dalit houses. They will not allow the Dalits to repair their houses out of jealousy. Thus they will ensure taking away the Dalit house later.

When ward councillors are Dalits, they are persecuted. Leelavathi was killed. Then Pandeewari was also killed. Hence women are afraid to become ward Councillors. Non Dalit officers do not take action against the perpetrators as they are afraid of dominating caste people
28th ward Councillor is the only one from SC Arunthathiar. In many wards Dalits are not there. Only Non Dalits occupy positions.

When we raise issues, Non Dalits either oppress or insist for compromise in the church. Dalits are weakened because the power positions are occupied by the rich and corrupt non Dalit people.

- d. Kindly tell me whether you had ever been taken to a police station or court or put in prison because of your caste or your work against caste discrimination?

I have been associated with a number of struggles. I joined in struggles relating to 10 to 15 incidences for bonded labor and rape issues. For Caste issues- 5 or 6 times. I have been to police station for many issues. Two times I was arrested; one time I was in prison.

I used to help Dalit women to write petitions. I talk to Non Dalit women when they inflict atrocity against Dalit women. If settlement does not come, we go to police to give complaint. Therefore, I am seen as an enemy or a trouble maker.

If the Dalit issue is big, we always organize meetings to discuss and plan for struggle. We encourage the victim to stand for the struggle. We provide solidarity. We ask the victim to stay front in struggles. We paste posters. We try to get compensation to the victimized. Therefore, we always meet, discuss, plan and struggle.

- e. How did your priest or pastor react to your suffering discrimination or physical violence on account of caste?

They usually discourage me; Not to participate in any struggle; they say that struggle is against Gospel.

- f. Could you please tell me about the reaction of the hierarchy of the church to your experiences described in the previous question?

They say that struggle is political and Christians should shun away from any political activity; and hence they always discourage my work for Social Justice

4. Relating to the "action-reflection" process for organizing struggles

- a. Can you please share something about the activity based meetings you have organized/taken part in against the caste system? (These meetings can be either inside or outside of the church)

I am interested in people's work. I am a Dalit and I want Dalits to come forward to claim their right and I would like to help them. More than the Dalit, non Dalits come forward for their general issues to be raised. I like to serve for Dalits. As I shared we always hold meetings to discuss and plan for struggle. This is our practice.

In my work there is risk. I do pray. I speak up for Dalit rights This is God's blessing. God gives me courage and strength.

Few Pastors' sermons help us to fight against caste. Most of them will not speak of caste. They advice us not to go for struggles. Preachers say so. 'It is not good', they say. They want to pursue others to become Christians but not encouraging Dalits to involve in struggles while they are in trouble. I don't listen to the Pastors.

- b. Please tell me the role of your priest or pastor in your activist meetings?

They will not participate in our meetings or struggles

- c. Can you say whether you have been visited by any church leader during the course of your meetings or struggles? And if so, then what resulted from these visits?

No pastor will visit us during the course of our struggles

5. Relating to Faith/Themes articulated by Dalit theologians

- a. Please share with me whether you see any passage in the Bible which gives you strength or hope to become involved in the struggle with caste? Can you describe how it helps you?

The non discriminatory work of the Lord challenges me.

- b. Do you pray when you face hardships? If yes, then what are the benefits of praying? How does it help you?

Before going to struggles, I used to pray in the house. We will pray at the time of starting the Dalit Christian meetings. During the struggle we do not pray. Prayer is personal.

- c. Do you read from specific books or written material as part of your planning for any struggle? If so, what are they? Can you share why you have selected these materials to assist you?

I have not read any specific books or written materials but I go with prayer

- d. Can you describe the typical themes or ideas of the sermons that are preached by your priest or pastor? Give me an example please?

Our pastors preach about Salvation, Love, giving tithe to church, and to always remain prayerful and patient

- e. Please share with me the impact of such sermons in terms of encouraging or motivating you to remain in faith and to sustain your struggles against the caste system?

Their sermons help me to be patient and tolerant, but no encouragement to my struggles for the rights of people

- f. Can you tell me some of the songs you sing to sustain you in your struggles?

No idea- we have secular songs to inspire us for our struggles.

- g. Please tell me, do you wear/use/keep any religious signs or symbols? What is the importance of these things to you?

We, as Pentecosts, do not know what the figure of Jesus is. Hence we do not have a picture of Jesus in my house. We do not celebrate Christmas. We do not celebrate any birth anniversary or death day. Only we thank God for the New year with celebrations

- h. As a Christian Dalit, do you feel that you are different from Dalits who belong to other religious traditions? If so, then how?

All Dalits go through similar problems in their religions; but it is sad that caste exists within the church

- i. How would you describe God in terms of your present struggles? How would you describe Jesus Christ in terms of your present struggles?

Jesus helps me in my struggles

- j. Are there any differences in how you see Jesus Christ, Ambedkar, Marx or your local Dalit leaders?

Ambedkar is our Dalit leader. Christ is our God.

k. How do you understand Christ's mission in terms of your present situation?

Christ came into the world to save us; he helps me in my work

l. Could you tell me about your understanding of the purpose of Christ's suffering and dying on the cross?

Christ died for the sins of the world

m. Can you tell me about your understanding of the Kingdom of God?

Eternal place

n. Do you use your Dalit art, music, dance and drums during worship and during your struggles?

TTS uses Dalit arts and music in worship service. Not us.

o. Why do you use those and what do you get out their use?

p. What do you understand by the term Dalit Theology?

Heard in TTS

q. Do you have any access to any literature on Dalit Theology?

I have not studied any Dalit theology books. One or two Dalit Teachers from TTS sometimes participate in our struggles. They give advice.

r. Have you attended any meeting and conference concerned with Dalit Theology and if yes, then what was your experience?

No.

s. Have you heard the sermons related to Dalit theology in sermons of pastors and Bishops?

Pastors do not speak about caste or Dalits in Sermons.

t. Can you tell me whether you have met any Dalit Theologians?

I know Larbeer, Jawahar and Devasahayam- Strong Dalit leaders.

u. Has any Dalit theologian participated in your struggles or discussions?

Yes, they did sometimes – not all times.

- v. Assuming you have heard of Dalit Theology, can you say whether it has helped you in your struggles?

We place the picture of Ambedkar during the struggles. We keep the photo of the Scavenger Worker Muthu, our leader and also Political party leaders. We never placed the picture of Jesus Christ. Even when Dalit Christian issue comes, we do not keep the picture of Jesus Christ. I am not sure 'why'?

In DRC meetings they place Ambedkar and MGR photos. They too do not place the picture of Jesus. In public events the picture of Jesus is not laid. They do not say the words of Jesus to encourage us. In Mahalir Sakthi, an organisation, there are more Hindus.

Bible is a weapon to me; Words of God enlightens me.

- w. What do you say about the saying, 'God is, God of the oppressed?'

First time I am hearing this

- x. Do you relate this saying to your caste oppressed situation?

I do not know

- y. What do you think about the Exodus experience of Israelites?

I know the Exodus story

- z. Are you able to relate the same with your caste situation?

If I pray, God will help me

- aa. What do you think about the preferential option of God for the oppressed people?

No idea; first time I am hearing this

- bb. What is your opinion on the saying that once you were no people and now you have become God's people?

No idea

- cc. What do you think about the saying messianic intervention?

No idea

- dd. What is your idea about messianic people and messianic responsibility?

First time I am hearing like this

ee. What do you think about Moses and his role in liberating Israelites?
Can you correlate this to your situation?

I know God sent Moses to help and lead Israelites

ff. What is your idea about you are created in the image of God?

All are created in the image of God

gg. Do you feel that since you have God's image you have a responsibility to transform the society?

I am a social worker and I want to help the poor as God helped

hh. What do you feel that Jesus a Dalit and Christ a Liberator?

How are you saying that Jesus is a Dalit? Jesus is God

ii. What is opinion about Nazareth Manifesto?

First time hearing; in Pentecostal churches we do not read about Manifestos.

jj. What is your understanding about Jesus's saying that 'First will be the last; and Last will be first?'

We need to humble ourselves and then God will lift us up

kk. What is your opinion about Dalits are called to struggle for transformation?

I am helping the poor to struggle

ll. What is your idea about salvation? Do you feel liberation from caste is a salvation for you?

Salvation is from Jesus Christ

mm. What do you think about the saying that the struggle for Dalits will liberate Non Dalits also from their caste mindset?

Non Dalits will not come out of Caste

nn. What is your understanding about kingdom of god? Do you feel that your Dalit culture has the characteristics of kingdom of God?

No idea

oo. Has Dalit theology reached grass root Dalit Christians?

No – Not at all.

pp. Do you sense that there is the necessity for Dalit theology in the struggles against caste discriminations?

qq. What are your suggestions for taking Dalit Theology to grass root Dalit Christians?

rr. What impact this interview/conversation has created in you?

I am thinking why we are not placing the photo of Jesus in our struggles. I am able to recall my life and involvement by this interview.

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Person – 2

21st Dec 2010 - Kundadam

Interview by J. Vincent Manoharan, Research Student, University of Birmingham - Thesis Title "Towards a Practical Dalit Theology"

.....

1. Personal Details

a. What is your name?

My name is

b. What is your family name?

My parents are

My Grandfather is

we are Christians for 3 generations- Grandfather; father and then me

c. What is your sub caste?

Dalit - Mathari- Sakkiliar; known as Arunthathiar

d. What is your age?

71 yrs

e. Have you had a formal education?

Parents did not educate me; they sent me as a bonded labor; I studied in night school and learned to read and write

f. Are you married?

Married; wife

I am blessed with 4 children

g. What is your job?

First, sheep/cattle tendering. Then, worked as water lifter from deep well until electric motors came. I worked as bonded laborer in a big farm of an upper caste person, a Goundar. I worked as a bonded- farm laborer for a long time. I was like a slave. Then, gradually I emerged as a worker handling money and account for the farm. Before marriage, I was with Langton Missionary for about 5 years. I worked for the church with this Missionary. I left the farm laborer work, as the land owner insisted that my children should also work in the farm.

h. Where do you live?

.....

Tirupur District

i. How many years have you lived at this address?

Around 71 years

2. Relating to Church?

a. Can you tell me which denomination you belong to?

CSI

b. Do you have a church in your home village/town?

Almost 8 years passed since the church is built in my village. There is separate church and worship – one for Arunthathiar and one for Parayars. We Arunthathiars worship separately. Bishops have constructed walls to separate churches. We have Separate wells also.

c. Do you attend worship regularly?

I go regularly to church. When I was a farm labor, I assisted a missionary lady; she did social service and she helped me to spin on chakra and to act in drama. Since then I am faithful to Lord.

d. Please tell me whether you are a member of the Church?

I am a member in my church by paying subscription. The subscription increased from Rs.1 to Rs.2, then to Rs.5 and then to Rs.10 and now it is Rs.30 per month and I pay it. We are asked to pay in proportion to our monthly salary.

e. Do you hold any position in your local church, if so, what?

I was a treasurer for 2 years in the church. During the period of Anandan Pastor, I served as secretary for 2 years. Now there is no permanent committee. I am only a temporary secretary.

f. What church activities are you involved in?

I do Christmas celebrations specially. I collected donation for church building from Coimbatore. I enact drama to be played in the church during celebrations.

g. Do you hold any position in the Church hierarchy?

I am a member of the Diocese. I am also member in Diocesan men fellowship

h. Can you describe the caste composition of your church?

My church has more of Arunthathiar people. Adi-Dravidas- Parayars are also there. 23 small churches are in this pastorate. Almost each caste has half of the total congregation members. Earlier a Goundar was in the

church who provided support to Arunthathiars. He was sent out of church. He was refused even a matchstick. Missionaries placed his children in good education. There are much discrimination on Arunthathiars by Parayars and other castes.

3. Relating to caste practices

- a. Please tell me about the caste discrimination, if any, that exists inside or/and outside the Church?

Caste is within the church and outside as well. There is no inter- caste marriage. There is no giving out and taking in. Some friends eat in our houses. The local people, in general, do not eat in our houses. During carol services, if we offer other caste persons tea or coffee in our home, some drink and some refuse it. There is a cemetery. We bury all the dead there. We sit there together. 20 years before there were separate cups for Holy Communion. Now it is not there. In all respects, discrimination exists in church.

- b. Could you please share the type of discrimination that you have faced either within or/outside the Church?

I faced a number of discrimination all along my life. It is numerous. The pastors who came to us were all Parayars. 40 years before one Arunthathiar served as pastor. Recently Anandan came in- we conducted fair elections and we took the leadership. Now a Parayar Pastor is here. So, our position again changed.

We have a church school here with 5 teachers; only one teacher is from Arunthathiar, rests of them are Parayars. Educated Arunthathiar are out of church benefits. There are teacher trained women here from our community but they are not appointed. In the Diocese of Trichy-Tanjore, there exist 3 or 4 caste groups. There are Vanniars, Goundars, Paraya-Adi-Dravidas and then Arunthathiars. In the Governance it is Paraya Adi-Dravidas dominated. In committees if they are 10 people we are only 4. In the Diocese only Parayars dominate. In number we are high; in positions they are high.

- c. Have you ever suffered physical violence owing to caste practices-if so, how and by whom?

Gounders tried to force me to come out of church and to worship idols-Gods. Though they had caste in their hearts, they do not speak about caste openly with me, like earlier times. They want to exercise caste discriminations indirectly/subtly.

I am in the DMK Political party almost for 12 years. I was its branch secretary. I am currently the Assistant secretary in my area. Because I was in DMK, I was sent out of the village. 3 Times I was in central Jail; 15 days in Coimbatore; 7 days and another 4 days for struggling against caste discrimination. I struggled with our church congregations. I struggled to ensure the people welfare

- d. Kindly tell me whether you had ever been taken to a police station or court or put in prison because of your caste or your work against caste discrimination?

I was taken to Police station a number of times- For my struggles.

- e. How did your priest or pastor react to your suffering discrimination or physical violence on account of caste?

They were sympathetic, but could not speak out openly; they came and met me in prison

- f. Could you please tell me about the reaction of the hierarchy of the church to your experiences described in the previous question?

Church hierarchy did not have any reaction.

4. Relating to the "action-reflection" process for organizing struggles

- a. Can you please share something about the activity based meetings you have organized/taken part in against the caste system? (These meetings can be either inside or outside of the church)

We prayed before God when the Hindu Gounders attacked the churches and the Christian pastors. When we did the ministry, the Hindutva people interfered and attacked us. We struggle against this also. For organising struggles we hold meetings. We discuss in such meetings and plan for our struggles. After the struggles we meet again.

- b. Please tell me the role of your priest or pastor in your activist meetings?

While we were in Jails, the pastors came and met me - When I was part of the struggles of DMK party, several pastors came and saw me. For not for the caste struggles.

- c. Can you say whether you have been visited by any church leader during the course of your meetings or struggles? And if so, then what resulted from these visits?

When the Hindutva people attacked us, they came but not for any struggle against caste.

5. Relating to Faith/Themes articulated by Dalit theologians

- a. Please share with me whether you see any passage in the Bible which gives you strength or hope to become involved in the struggle with caste? Can you describe how it helps you?

Question did not bring an answer.

- b. Do you pray when you face hardships? If yes, then what are the benefits of praying? How does it help you?

We pray in our family for our development and for the development of others. We ask God to give strength to our hands and legs to work and ask for protection. Since my God is alive, I asked his protection when I was attacked. The people who spoke against me are not alive now.

- c. Do you read from specific books or written material as part of your planning for any struggle? If so, what are they? Can you share why you have selected these materials to assist you?

In the David-Goliath story, the heroism of David inspired me. There was a setback after I got married. My family discouraged me to go for struggles. They are afraid of church and outside authorities. But I continued my fight and struggled.

- d. Can you describe the typical themes or ideas of the sermons that are preached by your priest or pastor? Give me an example please?

They insist us to believe God. They ask us to pray and then stop by that. They never encourage us to struggle. Diocese conducts spiritual meetings. Church is guided by the pastor. As the pastor is, so is the congregation.

- e. Please share with me the impact of such sermons in terms of encouraging or motivating you to remain in faith and to sustain your struggles against the caste system?

The sermons helped me to realize that I should not be a slave. It told me that the humanity has one blood and one feeling. I learnt that Jesus worked for the people; he was threatened. I struggle because I heard that he struggled. A Hindutva element blunts the struggle sense. But the church leaders do not follow what do they preach. Lip service only.

- f. Can you tell me some of the songs you sing to sustain you in your struggles?

I do sing Christian songs but not for struggles.

- g. Please tell me, do you wear/use/keep any religious signs or symbols? What is the importance of these things to you?

Question not asked.

- h. As a Christian Dalit, do you feel that you are different from Dalits who belong to other religious traditions? If so, then how?

Hindu Arunthathiars criticize the struggle of Christian Arunthathiars. They do not support us for our struggle against church. Hindu Arunthathiars always speak low of Christian Arunthathiars. They say that these people weep by tying themselves with Jesus.

- i. How would you describe God in terms of your present struggles? How would you describe Jesus Christ in terms of your present struggles?

God is my helper; Jesus is my helper

- j. Are there any differences in how you see Jesus Christ, Ambedkar, Marx or your local Dalit leaders?

Without Ambedkar there is no Arunthathiar liberation. Since God's power was with Ambedkar, he studied well, he became intellect and spoke; Jesus is my God

- k. How do you understand Christ's mission in terms of your present situation?

We have realized power through Jesus. Missionary assistance and educational help had helped us to come up. Gounders never wanted us to get educated. Present church does not help us as the Missionaries did. We are discriminated.

- l. Could you tell me about your understanding of the purpose of Christ's suffering and dying on the cross?

Christ' suffering and death is for my sins

- m. Can you tell me about your understanding of the Kingdom of God?

Going to heaven

- n. Do you use your Dalit art, music, dance and drums during worship and during your struggles?

We do not do.

- o. Why do you use those and what do you get out their use?

p. What do you understand by the term Dalit Theology?

No idea

q. Do you have any access to any literature on Dalit Theology?

I did not read

r. Have you attended any meeting and conference concerned with Dalit Theology and if yes, then what was your experience?

No

s. Have you heard the sermons related to Dalit theology in sermons of pastors and Bishops?

No

t. Can you tell me whether you have met any Dalit Theologians?

No. No one rises as Dalit Christian leader from our caste; but there are leaders for Dalits outside Christianity.

u. Has any Dalit theologian participated in your struggles or discussions?

No idea. I do not know Dalit theologians.

v. Assuming you have heard of Dalit Theology, can you say whether it has helped you in your struggles?

No idea

w. What do you say about the saying, 'God is, God of the oppressed'?

God is always hearing our prayers

x. Do you relate this saying to your caste oppressed situation?

y. What do you think about the Exodus experience of Israelites?

He sent Moses to release them

z. Are you able to relate the same with your caste situation?

God will help us to liberate

- aa. What do you think about the preferential option of God for the oppressed people?
First time I hear this
- bb. What is your opinion on the saying that once you were no people and now you have become God's people?
No idea
- cc. What do you think about the saying messianic intervention?
No idea
- dd. What is your idea about messianic people and messianic responsibility?
First time I am hearing like this
- ee. What do you think about Moses and his role in liberating Israelites?
Can you correlate this to your situation?
Moses was sent by God to liberate Israelites.
- ff. What is your idea about you are created in the image of God?
All are created in the image of God
- gg. Do you feel that since you have God's image you have a responsibility to transform the society?
I work for no caste
- hh. What do you feel that Jesus a Dalit and Christ a Liberator?
Jesus is not Dalit; he is God
- ii. What is opinion about Nazareth Manifesto?
No idea
- jj. What is your understanding about Jesus's saying that First will be the last; and Last will be first?
Bible tells so
- kk. What is your opinion about Dalits are called to struggle for transformation?
My family is in the struggle
- ll. What is your idea about salvation? Do you feel liberation from caste is a salvation for you?
Salvation is from sin.

mm. What do you think about the saying that the struggle for Dalits will liberate Non Dalits also from their caste mindset?

Non Dalits have caste in their minds. We cannot change them

nn. What is your understanding about kingdom of god? Do you feel that your Dalit culture has the characteristics of kingdom of God?

No idea

oo. Has Dalit theology reached grass root Dalit Christians?

Dalit Christians need help

pp. Do you sense that there is the necessity for Dalit theology in the struggles against caste discriminations?

Dalit Arunthathiars need help

qq. What are your suggestions for taking Dalit Theology to grass root Dalit Christians?

The flag of Jesus should be raised up. Since no one joined me, I was not able to walk alone with raised flag of Jesus. People should be organized to hoist flag for Ambedkar and for Jesus

rr. What impact this interview/conversation has created in you?

It helped me to look back my life.


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Person – 3

21st Dec 2010 - Kundadam

Interview by J. Vincent Manoharan, Research Student, University of Birmingham - Thesis Title "Towards a Practical Dalit Theology"

.....

1. Personal Details

a. What is your name?

Name

b. What is your family name?

Husband

I am a third generation Christian. We have 2 daughters;

c. What is your sub caste?

Dalit- Arunthathiar

d. What is your age?

39 Years

e. Have you had a formal education?

Up to 10th Standard

f. Are you married?

Yes

g. What is your job?

I am working as worker in ICDS Anganwadi- A social worker. I work for our Dalit women.

h. Where do you live?

.....

.....

Thirupur District

i. How many years have you lived at this address?

Since Marriage

2. Relating to Church?

a. Can you tell me which denomination you belong to?

CSI

b. Do you have a church in your home village/town?

Yes. But we have two separate services in our church - one for Paraya and another for Arunthathiars. We are majority. We have invited Parayars for a common worship; they did not want to join us; they have caste feeling.

c. Do you attend worship regularly?

I go to church regularly

d. Please tell me whether you are a member of the Church?

I am a member. I pay 3% of my salary as church tax.

e. Do you hold any position in your local church, if so, what?

I am organizing the women fellowship

f. What church activities are you involved in?

I had been in Child care committee and in social committee; I do conduct women fellowship program

g. Do you hold any position in the Church hierarchy?

I had been a DC Member of the Diocese for 4 times

h. Can you describe the caste composition of your church?

Both Arunthathiars and Parayars are in my church. Arunthathiars are majority. I am one of the members of the 8 member Pastorate committee. Arunthathiar 3 persons; Parayars 5 persons.

When Anandan was pastor, all the 8 Pastorate committee members were Arunthathiars. It is not now. When he was Pastor, a proper election was conducted. When there were more voters for Arunthathiars, all the Parayars withdrew their nominations. So we were declared as elected. Parayars objected to our election and said invalid. Later a commission was appointed by the Diocese, which enquired and declared the election valid.

Now a Parayar pastor has come. Now in the pastorate committee, there are 5 Parayars. We are only 3. Again their domination came in.

3. Relating to caste practices

a. Please tell me about the caste discrimination, if any, that exists inside or/and outside the Church?

Pastor's wife will not mingle with us. She won't talk much. I organize women fellowship meet. In this pastorate to which my village church is affiliated, there are over 250 Arunthathiar families. Parayars are only 40

families. They have gone to cities for the sake of education. We have no other castes in the church. But we have caste discriminations within the church.

Caste plays a dominant role in church based employment and postings. Parayars consider that we are not fit for employment. Since my family is educated, all caste people start coming to our house. Parayars will not enter into the houses of other Arunthathiars.

There is no inter-caste marriage. I am for inter caste marriage. Especially in rural areas there is no possibility for inter caste marriage. There are invisible caste discriminations in the church. All will sing in the Church; if we sing wrongly Parayars insult us. I am in a precarious situation of not being able to protect my people all the time.

Earlier there were separate cups for drinking water and tea. Now there is a change. There is no discrimination in cemetery so far.

In the Diocese, Parayars dominate. We have no equal share in the governance. Now slowly change comes in. However we are like blind people although we have eyes. We need to act upon the wish of the pastor.

- b. Could you please share the type of discrimination that you have faced either within or/outside the Church?**

Outside the church, Goundars inflict lot of caste discriminations on us. They dominate. Since our family is educated one, they hate us - out of jealous. They broke our house gate. As Dalits, we have the right to enter into temples managed by the government. But Goundars prevent us. Goundars will bury their dead in their own lands. There is a separate graveyard for the Dalits.

There are separate marriage halls for Goundars and Arunthathiars. They appropriated our lands. They forged the signature of our elders and took away our lands. Earlier we were farm laborers, now our people go to companies for work as labourer. Land owning people are angry with us. They attack us. We suffer.

The local leadership of all political parties are in the hands of upper caste men. All caste people are in the parties. Whosoever has money, from upper caste, they become leaders. By caste, Goundars are leaders of the parties. They defeat us always. They removed my husband from job and defeated him in elections by 6 votes.

- c. Have you ever suffered physical violence owing to caste practices-if so, how and by whom?

I raise questions on caste issues within the Church. But, not as a big struggles. I have organised in struggles related to ICDS program. We are not struggling against caste within the church. Since we give respect to the elders and also we worship the same God, we are not struggling against caste discriminations within the church. We are told by Church that we are all Christians and one. So we are not struggling inside the church. But we are suffering. But we struggle against discrimination outside the church.

- d. Kindly tell me whether you had ever been taken to a police station or court or put in prison because of your caste or your work against caste discrimination?

I have complained to the police since Gounders broke the gate of my house. Once, a dominant caste person sent message for my daughter to go to his home to collect a membership card of a political party. There, they threatened her to sign in a white blank paper. She refused and came back. When we questioned this, they got angry and broke open our house gate. We went to the police. His father came for a compromise. Police protection was sought to my house for two days. Since we challenged, our rights were restored. I go to police station for all struggles.

- e. How did your priest or pastor react to your suffering discrimination or physical violence on account of caste?

We did not tell him. He will not come also.

- f. Could you please tell me about the reaction of the hierarchy of the church to your experiences described in the previous question?

Church leaders are not interested in our struggles. No point in telling them.

4. Relating to the "action-reflection" process for organizing struggles

- a. Can you please share something about the activity based meetings you have organized/taken part in against the caste system? (These meetings can be either inside or outside of the church)

My family challenges caste discriminations; I have not organized meetings for struggles but – for women fellowship only. We discuss all these in these meetings. This is the place we plan for everything.

- b. Please tell me the role of your priest or pastor in your activist meetings?

We do not expect the pastor to our struggles. They will not come.

- c. Can you say whether you have been visited by any church leader during the course of your meetings or struggles? And if so, then what resulted from these visits?

No.

5. Relating to Faith/Themes articulated by Dalit theologians

- a. Please share with me whether you see any passage in the Bible which gives you strength or hope to become involved in the struggle with caste? Can you describe how it helps you?

No specific idea. I read Bible.

- b. Do you pray when you face hardships? If yes, then what are the benefits of praying? How does it help you?

I do pray always. I pray for the needs of my family. I pray for our future. I pray for Christian bridegrooms for my daughters. During that issue with the Gounders, I prayed for God's interventions and I believed that God will help me. No one came to help us. No Goundars came to help us. I prayed that 'God you are my help, I prayed.' God helped me.

- c. Do you read from specific books or written material as part of your planning for any struggle? If so, what are they? Can you share why you have selected these materials to assist you?

I like the stories of Saheus, Abraham; I like the story of Joseph and his 12 brothers.

- d. Can you describe the typical themes or ideas of the sermons that are preached by your priest or pastor? Give me an example please?

Pastor's sermon always are relating to our faith on God. They say that God will protect us. But they do not speak about caste. They speak of Jesus's sufferings. In Retreats and in fasting meetings, they say that God will meet our needs. They conduct such meetings in the 2nd Saturdays. Mostly, prayers.

For our struggles, pastors will not come there. We will not tell the pastor also. We do not invite the pastor in our family and societal discussions. He never came. Pastors are not living here. They live in other towns. We do not expect anything from the pastor. He completes his pastor's work right at the church itself.

- e. Please share with me the impact of such sermons in terms of encouraging or motivating you to remain in faith and to sustain your struggles against the caste system?

Their sermons helped me to affirm my faith

- f. Can you tell me some of the songs you sing to sustain you in your struggles?

I sing songs in our house prayer meetings and in churches

- g. Please tell me, do you wear/use/keep any religious signs or symbols? What is the importance of these things to you?

I wear a cross in my wedding thread as a symbol. I believe and am aspiring for good life. I believe that I will get everything because of Kingdom of God, Salvation. I believe that I will get everything if I help others. We celebrate the thanks giving festival grandly. We collect donations.

- h. As a Christian Dalit, do you feel that you are different from Dalits who belong to other religious traditions? If so, then how?

I have faith in Jesus. Other Dalit Arunthathians worship their gods

- i. How would you describe God in terms of your present struggles? How would you describe Jesus Christ in terms of your present struggles?

Jesus is my help

- j. Are there any differences in how you see Jesus Christ, Ambedkar, Marx or your local Dalit leaders?

I know Meera Kumar in Delhi as Dalit leader. I know Ambedkar. I know local Dalit leaders. Ambedkar has not reached to the Arunthathiar community. But Jesus is a living God.

- k. How do you understand Christ's mission in terms of your present situation?

Christ is my help and helper to my people

- l. Could you tell me about your understanding of the purpose of Christ's suffering and dying on the cross?

He died for my sins

- m. Can you tell me about your understanding of the Kingdom of God?

I think it is the world to come

- n. Do you use your Dalit art, music, dance and drums during worship and during your struggles?
No
- o. Why do you use those and what do you get out their use?
Question not asked
- p. What do you understand by the term Dalit Theology?
No one has talked to me about Dalit theology; Anand pastor only talk about us.
- q. Do you have any access to any literature on Dalit Theology?
I have not read any Dalit literature.
- r. Have you attended any meeting and conference concerned with Dalit Theology and if yes, then what was your experience?
No
- s. Have you heard the sermons related to Dalit theology in sermons of pastors and Bishops?
No
- t. Can you tell me whether you have met any Dalit Theologians?
Pastor Anand is a Arunthathiar. I know him only.
- u. Has any Dalit theologian participated in your struggles or discussions?
Pastor Anand talked to us during our suffering and struggle.
- v. Assuming you have heard of Dalit Theology, can you say whether it has helped you in your struggles?
No answer
- w. What do you say about the saying, 'God is, God of the oppressed?
Pastor Anand sometimes tells so
- x. Do you relate this saying to your caste oppressed situation?
In our daily life, we face lot of caste oppression from the church
- y. What do you think about the Exodus experience of Israelites?

z. Are you able to relate the same with your caste situation?

aa. What do you think about the preferential option of God for the oppressed people?

Not much heard

bb. What is your opinion on the saying that once you were no people and now you have become God's people?

We are people of God

cc. What do you think about the saying messianic intervention?

No idea

dd. What is your idea about messianic people and messianic responsibility?

I am here to tell my people liberation

ee. What do you think about Moses and his role in liberating Israelites? Can you correlate this to your situation?

We hear Moses at Churches not in our real life

ff. What is your idea about you are created in the image of God?

All are created in the image of God

gg. Do you feel that since you have God's image you have a responsibility to transform the society?

Of course, I have the responsibility

hh. What do you feel that Jesus a Dalit and Christ a Liberator?

Jesus is my God

ii. What is opinion about Nazareth Manifesto?

No idea

jj. What is your understanding about Jesus's saying that First will be the last; and Last will be first?

Our pastors tells us from Bible. But they behave differently

kk. What is your opinion about Dalits are called to struggle for transformation?

I am working hard to tell our people to fight against caste

ll. What is your idea about salvation? Do you feel liberation from caste is a salvation for you?

To me Salvation is for all. Jesus saved all.

mm. What do you think about the saying that the struggle for Dalits will liberate Non Dalits also from their caste mindset?

We have more oppression from Goundars and Parayas

nn. What is your understanding about kingdom of god? Do you feel that your Dalit culture has the characteristics of kingdom of God?

Not understood

oo. Has Dalit theology reached grass root Dalit Christians?

pp. Do you sense that there is the necessity for Dalit theology in the struggles against caste discriminations?

qq. What are your suggestions for taking Dalit Theology to grass root Dalit Christians?

There is no security for my family in the area where we live. My daughters suffer without security. Those who govern the church help their relatives. They have no will to upgrade Dalit Arunthathiar girls. They speak about love but refuse to help us. There is separate stand for Pastor's child and separate stand for Congregation members. This should change.

rr. What impact this interview/conversation has created in you?


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Person – 4

22nd Dec 2010 – Usilampatti

Interview by J. Vincent Manoharan, Research Student, University of Birmingham - Thesis Title "Towards a Practical Dalit Theology"

.....

1. Personal Details

a. What is your name?

I am

b. What is your family name?

Father's name is

Mother's name is

My wife name is

she is of 3rd and 4th generation Christian. We have 3 children.

I come from village, in Ramanathapuram District.

All our relatives belong to CSI except us; we were earlier Hindus. Now Lutherans. There are 60 Dalit families and one Thevar family in my village.

c. What is your sub caste?

Dalit-Parayar

d. What is your age?

I am 54 years old

e. Have you had a formal education?

B.Sc., Mathematics .

f. Are you married?

Yes

g. What is your job?

I am in charge of an NGO, A Registered Trust. I work for the rights of Dalits

h. Where do you live?

I am from Ramanathapuram District. But now live in Madurai District. However, I visit my native village quite often.

.....

Madurai District

i. How many years have you lived at this address?

For over 15 years

2. Relating to Church?

a. Can you tell me which denomination you belong to?

I am a Member of TELC

b. Do you have a church in your home village/town?

Yes- In my native village there is a small Church

c. Do you attend worship regularly?

Yes, I do

d. Please tell me whether you are a member of the Church?

I am member of TELC

e. Do you hold any position in your local church, if so, what?

I worked in TELC project; Now I do not hold any position; I was a Synod Congregation Committee member earlier; then I was a delegate to Synod for 3 times; and then was a Boarding Manager for a term

f. What church activities are you involved in?

I go to church regularly; participate in all functions; I formed the pastorate committee in my village church; thus, after 2003, two persons represented us in TELC

g. Do you hold any position in the Church hierarchy?

I applied for a post in 1980 in the village school project; many came for the interview; I was only wearing Dhoti; all others were in pants. There was only one post; they interviewed 7 persons and selected me; since I involved very much in the project, they selected me as a VSP staff; it enabled me to travel all over Tamilnadu. I learned the activities of TELC. I saw my village a very backward area. Hence I voiced my concern at the Church. I initiated the pastorate committee election and made the people informative.

h. Can you describe the caste composition of your church?

In my native village all are Dalits. But in TELC all caste people are there but the majority is Dalits.

3. Relating to caste practices

a. Please tell me about the caste discrimination, if any, that exists inside or/and outside the Church?

There was no caste issue in my village church. Because, all are Dalits. But the place where I live now, it overflows with caste issues. Dalit cannot oppose non Dalits and survive; among 150 families are in TELC in this present congregation in which only 30 families are Dalits. Rest are Thevars, Kallars and Nadars; among the Dalits there are Parayars about 20 families and Pallars about 2 families; When I shifted here for the sake of my wife's job, this church people refused to accept and delayed my membership. Here in this church, one can become member if he/she leans or support non Dalit members. TELC here is in the hands of few upper caste families.

There are many untouchability practices here. They eat together in marriages; they come and eat in my house; in the Holy Communion, one cup is used. There is no problem in the use of burial ground. However, everyone keeps up their caste identity.

But in the church governance, they do not allow a Dalit to get in. At the most they bring a Dalit who is submissive to them. Dalits cannot vote according to their free will. They are compelled to vote; Most of the Pastors belong to Non Dalits. Dalit Pastors cannot work here independently and peacefully. There are two Higher Secondary Schools and two middle schools attached to this Pastorate. And also a Teacher Training institute for girls. Non Dalits only serve as teachers. No Dalit serves.

In my native village area both Udayars and Dalits have separate churches in other denominations especially in RC church; they sit separately for worship. In a particular village, a Catholic Priest closed down a Dalit church and opened up a Udayar church. Outside the church, acute discrimination exists in all forms. Dalits cannot take independent decisions in anything. Dalits are not able to get even Government lands. They are excluded from the main village. They walk in public path wearing their shoes. They are totally discriminated

- b. Could you please share the type of discrimination that you have faced either within or/outside the Church?**

I faced a lot of discriminations inside and outside the church. It will go for hours if I speak.

- c. Have you ever suffered physical violence owing to caste practices-if so, how and by whom?**

When I struggled, I was threatened by the caste people and police. I was threatened to be implicated in the Rowdy list by the Police.

- d. Kindly tell me whether you had ever been taken to a police station or court or put in prison because of your caste or your work against caste discrimination?

I was taken to police station and was threatened. I am always in their surveillance and records.

- e. How did your priest or pastor react to your suffering discrimination or physical violence on account of caste?

One Dalit Pastor who converted me supported me; other Pastors never bothered about the issue and they are not in favour of me.

- f. Could you please tell me about the reaction of the hierarchy of the church to your experiences described in the previous question?

They have other priorities; they do not bother about us. They are not happy with me as I challenge them.

4. Relating to the "action-reflection" process for organizing struggles

- a. Can you please share something about the activity based meetings you have organized/taken part in against the caste system? (These meetings can be either inside or outside of the church)

I have helped my village area through motivating them and making them leaders of the church to look at the plights of the people. I faced oppositions.

We organized 5000 women against the atrocities inflicted on a Dalit woman and we highlighted this issue.

The culture of giving the high caste a free set of leaf baskets and compulsion to receive free food from high caste got reduced now. We stopped the discriminatory practice of beating drums, after we formed the Trust. There was an issue of Dalits force to take bath separately in the local pond – away from the area where caste people bath; we challenged and gave complaint. As a result, there emerged a compromise and the practices of excluding Dalits from such public and common places considerably reduced.

We organised a struggle of fasting and rally by elders for securing road to the graveyard. Dalits bought a separate graveyard and attempted to bury their dead there. Non Dalits objected to that. We tried to bury the dead with the police escort. Police dragged me into their police van and tried

to create a black/rowdy file against me. They threatened me. I was asked to give the particulars about my organization. I was threatened. Till date non Dalits do not allow us to bury the dead at that place.

We used to call the victims and other members and hold meetings to interact with them for the struggle. A review will take place by the leaders of the struggles after the completion of each struggle; there was an action- reflection process.

I have been to police station for the issues of others. We struggled against the issue of an attempted rape; we organised this struggle in association with a catholic Priest. People spoke to the Superintendent of Police. There were struggles at 3 places and police promised that they will arrest the culprit within 3 days.

- b. Please tell me the role of your priest or pastor in your activist meetings?

Some Dalit pastors show some interest by asking what I do. That is all. Non Dalit Pastors will not come and support me also.

- c. Can you say whether you have been visited by any church leader during the course of your meetings or struggles? And if so, then what resulted from these visits?

No Bishop, no church leader visited me; except the CSI Diaconal Ministry once.

5. Relating to Faith/Themes articulated by Dalit theologians

- a. Please share with me whether you see any passage in the Bible which gives you strength or hope to become involved in the struggle with caste? Can you describe how it helps you?

I read Bible. I like the story of Good Samaritan; I would like to associate my actions with the Good Samaritan.

- b. Do you pray when you face hardships? If yes, then what are the benefits of praying? How does it help you?

We pray individually as well as a family. I pray God to strengthen me to challenge injustice. I became Christian accidentally. My wife is also a Christian. My brother also became Christian. I got a job and position because I became a Christian. When I ask in prayer, my prayer is answered. When we are in pain, we see those who inflict violence on us also go through difficulties, as God punishes them.

- c. Do you read from specific books or written material as part of your planning for any struggle? If so, what are they? Can you share why you have selected these materials to assist you?

.....

- d. Can you describe the typical themes or ideas of the sermons that are preached by your priest or pastor? Give me an example please?

Usually 90% pastors' sermons are rooted around the Bible. Only 10% speaks about what is happening in the world. Very few speak about the rights of the people. But many are around Church politics.

Once a Bishop preached that "God has admitted the suffering people in the inn, the Church, by paying the price through his blood; we need to look after them; God he will come back". He also told that the Church is called to the work of healing.

He also said that we must be prepared to take the whip when there is injustice. What he said is a good reflection. But no church does this. No pastor speaks like this as well.

- e. Please share with me the impact of such sermons in terms of encouraging or motivating you to remain in faith and to sustain your struggles against the caste system?

I got the inspirations from the discriminations I faced more than the sermons.

- f. Can you tell me some of the songs you sing to sustain you in your struggles?

No Christian songs. Only secular songs during struggles.

- g. Please tell me, do you wear/use/keep any religious signs or symbols? What is the importance of these things to you?

I put cross mark on the forehead. I believe that Jesus will protect me.

- h. As a Christian Dalit, do you feel that you are different from Dalits who belong to other religious traditions? If so, then how?

All Dalits and Dalit Christians face discriminations in the name of Caste

- i. How would you describe God in terms of your present struggles? How would you describe Jesus Christ in terms of your present struggles?

God is my support to my struggle; he is in the form of Jesus

- j. Are there any differences in how you see Jesus Christ, Ambedkar, Marx or your local Dalit leaders?

Ambedkar played good role in the liberation of Dalits in India. Jesus gave good example for liberating humans.

- k. How do you understand Christ's mission in terms of your present situation?

Salvation is an act of getting unique power. Those who got it claim that one can feel it. Several Denominations emphasize immersion baptism. They say the touch of God is the true salvation. Since they get Salvation, they praise him. They conduct themselves not to do sins

- l. Could you tell me about your understanding of the purpose of Christ's suffering and dying on the cross?

He died for the sins of the World

- m. Can you tell me about your understanding of the Kingdom of God?

Kingdom of God is the place that brings tranquility to people. People believe that there is heaven and hell

- n. Do you use your Dalit art, music, dance and drums during worship and during your struggles?

Not in church.

- o. Why do you use those and what do you get out their use?

Question not asked

- p. What do you understand by the term Dalit Theology?

There is Dalit Theology, I heard; but I do not know much. Church talks about various other things. Dalit theology has not gone deeper. I do not know much.

- q. Do you have any access to any literature on Dalit Theology?

I have not read any books related to Dalit theology

- r. Have you attended any meeting and conference concerned with Dalit Theology and if yes, then what was your experience?

No

- s. Have you heard the sermons related to Dalit theology in sermons of pastors and Bishops?

When pastors speak they do not refer Dalit theology

t. Can you tell me whether you have met any Dalit Theologians?

I have not exposed to Dalit theology; I went to NCCI Nagpur with 3 people on behalf of the church and when I went to Hyderabad meeting, they spoke about Dalit issues- but not Dalit theology. I have not seen in the villages nor in small towns, any meetings related to Dalit theology – not even caste issue.

u. Has any Dalit theologian participated in your struggles or discussions?

No

v. Assuming you have heard of Dalit Theology, can you say whether it has helped you in your struggles?

My experiences related to untouchability both within the Church and outside the Church motivated me; the infliction of discrimination against me and on the people motivates me. One Pastor was the reason for my coming into the Church. Also the influence of friends and Dalit leaders; and also people like you; had I had been in the prayer and Bible reading, I could have gone further forward; I do not have time to do that. I struggle for my people and my mind is in that.

w. What do you say about the saying, 'God is, God of the oppressed?'

We are told so

x. Do you relate this saying to your caste oppressed situation?

I have been fighting against caste for years

y. What do you think about the Exodus experience of Israelites?

God liberated Israelites from Egypt.

z. Are you able to relate the same with your caste situation?

Yes. We need to be out from caste.

aa. What do you think about the preferential option of God for the oppressed people?

This is not taught at the churches. I need to think this.

bb. What is your opinion on the saying that once you were no people and now you have become God's people?

Dalits are always no people to high castes

- cc.** What do you think about the saying messianic intervention?
No idea
- dd.** What is your idea about messianic people and messianic responsibility?
No idea. I work for the rights of Dalit Christians for years and it is my responsibility
- ee.** What do you think about Moses and his role in liberating Israelites?
Can you correlate this to your situation?
Every Christian should become a Moses
- ff.** What is your idea about you are created in the image of God?
All are created in the image of God
- gg.** Do you feel that since you have God's image you have a responsibility to transform the society?
Of course, I have the responsibility always.
- hh.** What do you feel that Jesus a Dalit and Christ a Liberator?
No idea. But Jesus was with poor. But I do not know that he is a Dalit.
- ii.** What is opinion about Nazareth Manifesto?
I think it talks about Freedom
- jj.** What is your understanding about Jesus's saying that First will be the last; and Last will be first?
Dalits will enter into Kingdom of God
- kk.** What is your opinion about Dalits are called to struggle for transformation?
We are already in the struggle for challenging caste
- ll.** What is your idea about salvation? Do you feel liberation from caste is a salvation for you?
I work for salvation
- mm.** What do you think about the saying that the struggle for Dalits will liberate Non Dalits also from their caste mindset?
Non Dalits will not remove themselves from Caste

nn. What is your understanding about kingdom of god? Do you feel that your Dalit culture has the characteristics of kingdom of God?

No idea

oo. Has Dalit theology reached grass root Dalit Christians?

Dalit theology should come down to grassroots. Bible should be made simple. Congregation should be taught to undo bondage.

pp. Do you sense that there is the necessity for Dalit theology in the struggles against caste discriminations?

The way you explain, I feel 'Yes'

qq. What are your suggestions for taking Dalit Theology to grass root Dalit Christians?

Grass root educated youth should be shared Dalit theology. Theological colleges, especially TTS, are trying to promote themselves as rural based. But they have not gone into grassroots. It should reach.

rr. What impact this interview/conversation has created in you?

I am happy about the longtime reflection with Vincent, also meeting Chandra Mohan; Vincent is a good speaker; it impressed me because he avoided the rights based speech and talked about faith and religion.


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Person – 5

4th Jan 2011 - Thiruvannamalai

Interview by J. Vincent Manoharan, Research Student, University of Birmingham - Thesis Title "Towards a Practical Dalit Theology"

.....

1. Personal Details

a. What is your name?

I am

b. What is your family name?

My father is

My mother

My Husband Mr

Almost 5 years and 6 months have passed since we got married; We have 2 children.

I belong to Christian Pentecost; when I was 5 years old, except my father, all others got converted to Christianity. We joined the Pentecost church just before we got married.

My mother and father were of strong Hindus. My father was a patient with paralysis. When my sister was in my mother's womb, my father had this attack. My grandfather was in poverty. He used to mend shoes; I do not know what sin both my father and grandfather committed and were born like this. They went to Chennai and consulted several physicians. Finally my Father was placed in a church and was healed. He was completely healed. We do not know in which church he was healed. After this, my mother got converted. Father did not like it. Each week we went to Roman Catholic Church.

My sister got married. After this, I got baptism. My marriage took place in a church. Although my husband does not go to church he allows me to practice Christianity.

c. What is your sub caste?

Dalit- Arunthathiar.

d. What is your age?

I am 28 years old

e. Have you had a formal education?

Not studied well.

f. Are you married?

Married

g. What is your job?

Currently I am a Social Worker.

h. Where do you live?

.....
.....
Thiruvannamalai Dt.

i. How many years have you lived at this address?

Since marriage

2. Relating to Church?

a. Can you tell me which denomination you belong to?

Each week I go to Pentecostal church

b. Do you have a church in your home village/town?

Yes

c. Do you attend worship regularly?

Yes, I go

d. Please tell me whether you are a member of the Church?

Yes

e. Do you hold any position in your local church, if so, what?

No

f. What church activities are you involved in?

I go to prayer meeting and ministry

g. Do you hold any position in the Church hierarchy?

No

h. Can you describe the caste composition of your church?

In my church there are Parayyas and Arunthathiars. In recent times, Mudaliars and Koundars are coming in. There are 50 families. Parayar Pastor is conducting prayer meeting.

3. Relating to caste practices

- a. Please tell me about the caste discrimination, if any, that exists inside or/and outside the Church?

I am not seeing marriages that take place outside castes. Problems come in this issue. I have not seen marriages which deny caste in my church. So far the burial issue did not come in our church. I do not know how it would be in future. Each will hold their caste. They will not mingle with others. But we worship together. Caste feeling is there.

- b. Could you please share the type of discrimination that you have faced either within or/outside the Church?

Caste is active and visible outside the church. In our area there is an upper caste woman. This woman is always lodging false complaints against Sakkiliars - Arunthathiars with the police. She is very caste minded and rude. She hates Dalits.

Goundars live closer to my mother in law's house. Even if they have milk to sell, they will not sell milk to us - for my child. I am disturbed at this. We Arunthathiars cannot challenge this.

Incidences like misbehaving with Arunthathiar girls and later cheating and deserting them is common. They abuse our girls.

We lack all basic facilities and civic amenities. We suffer a lot. Our area is abandoned.

Now I am with Dalit liberation movement and I slowly start challenging practices like this.

- c. Have you ever suffered physical violence owing to caste practices-if so, how and by whom?

I see daily violence against Arunthathiars perpetrated by high castes. My community suffers physical and mental violence.

I too undergo mental violence by this.

Since I am in a Dalit movement, non Dalits will not touch me.

- d. Kindly tell me whether you had ever been taken to a police station or court or put in prison because of your caste or your work against caste discrimination?

I have been to police station a number of times for seeking justice to Dalits as a social worker. I participated in many struggles.

- e. How did your priest or pastor react to your suffering discrimination or physical violence on account of caste?

My pastor has not come to any of the struggle which I participated.

- f. Could you please tell me about the reaction of the hierarchy of the church to your experiences described in the previous question?

My pastor of my church is supreme; there is no hierarchy above him.

4. Relating to the "action-reflection" process for organizing struggles

- a. Can you please share something about the activity based meetings you have organized/taken part in against the caste system? (These meetings can be either inside or outside of the church)

We struggle for the rights of graveyard for all Dalits with the help of Dalit Gnanasekaran, the movement leader. He is a Dalit Pastor. With his encouragement we highlighted the issue.

Our Dalit Liberation movement organised struggles for road facility and other basic facilities, besides our struggle for graveyard. We quite often go to the police station. We gave petition for taking action against perpetrators and violators.

We challenged many dominant caste people through our struggle. When the Police and others asked us why we went to Dalit leaders, we replied 'since you did not respond we went to them'. No men of our community are bold enough to oppose the dominant castes. Men are slaves to arrack. Hence we women are bold. I am very bold now.

For our struggles we conduct meetings, discuss and decide. This is our usual practice.

- b. Please tell me the role of your priest or pastor in your activist meetings?

My pastor never participates in our meetings or struggles.

- c. Can you say whether you have been visited by any church leader during the course of your meetings or struggles? And if so, then what resulted from these visits?

My pastor will not participate; they do not consider this as an important matter.

5. Relating to Faith/Themes articulated by Dalit theologians

- a. Please share with me whether you see any passage in the Bible which gives you strength or hope to become involved in the struggle with caste? Can you describe how it helps you?

No idea. No specific passage. I like Holy Bible.

- b. Do you pray when you face hardships? If yes, then what are the benefits of praying? How does it help you?

We pray day and night. I pray with my children. If my husband is in good mood, he will join us. I pray for dawning of a good day. I pray for good politics. I pray for the sick. I pray for others. I pray for victory for the struggles. Prayer helps.

- c. Do you read from specific books or written material as part of your planning for any struggle? If so, what are they? Can you share why you have selected these materials to assist you?

No. No idea

- d. Can you describe the typical themes or ideas of the sermons that are preached by your priest or pastor? Give me an example please?

In the sermons they say:

God looks at you;

Help others

Love others

They do not talk about caste. They teach us to tolerate the evil and pray. They say that Christians are called people like lamb and therefore to be silent, tolerant and un-harmful. When I ask anything differently they call me a 'blabber'.

In the retreats persons whom the pastor knows alone are allowed to speak. We are never called to speak. It is a discrimination.

- e. Please share with me the impact of such sermons in terms of encouraging or motivating you to remain in faith and to sustain your struggles against the caste system?

Pastor Dalit Gnanasekaran preaches differently. He used to come to my house and pray. He speaks with authority in struggles. He speaks with authority with officials. He struggles for equality. He speaks for the rights

of the poor. Hence we go to him for help. Though many religious people come and approach him, he calls himself a Dalit and a Pastor.

My mother used to tell our struggles with our Pentecost church Pastor. Our pastor never came to any of our struggles; instead he would say that he would pray for us. He would say that our struggle will win. He would say that there are lot of sins at Thiruvannamalai; He asked us to pray for such sins. I see the difference in these Pastors.

- f. Can you tell me some of the songs you sing to sustain you in your struggles?

No idea. No song to support our struggle. Movement songs are there.

- g. Please tell me, do you wear/use/keep any religious signs or symbols? What is the importance of these things to you?

I am wearing a small cross as a Christian symbol. It comforts me.

- h. As a Christian Dalit, do you feel that you are different from Dalits who belong to other religious traditions? If so, then how?

All Arunthathiars have same problem in their religions.

- i. How would you describe God in terms of your present struggles? How would you describe Jesus Christ in terms of your present struggles?

I see Jesus as my father. He gives me all than what my father and mother gives. He has given me good life. I wished to have a good husband even if he is a lame person. My husband met with an accident and he is alright now. I experienced safe deliveries of my children.

I see Jesus as Holy God. He answers the prayers of people even if he is a Hindu.

- j. Are there any differences in how you see Jesus Christ, Ambedkar, Marx or your local Dalit leaders?

Ambedkar is a Dalit leader; He is the leader of the oppressed caste; Jesus gave him all talents.

- k. How do you understand Christ's mission in terms of your present situation?

Christ came to give us Holy life

- l. Could you tell me about your understanding of the purpose of Christ's suffering and dying on the cross?

He came to give us heaven

m. Can you tell me about your understanding of the Kingdom of God?

No idea

n. Do you use your Dalit art, music, dance and drums during worship and during your struggles?

No in worship. But in our struggles we use drums.

o. Why do you use those and what do you get out their use?

p. What do you understand by the term Dalit Theology?

I do not know much about this.

q. Do you have any access to any literature on Dalit Theology?

I read a pamphlet at the Dalit Resource Centre at TTS

r. Have you attended any meeting and conference concerned with Dalit Theology and if yes, then what was your experience?

No

s. Have you heard the sermons related to Dalit theology in sermons of pastors and Bishops?

No

t. Can you tell me whether you have met any Dalit Theologians?

No. But Dalit Gnanasekaran is a Dalit Pastor. I do not know whether he is a Dalit theologian.

u. Has any Dalit theologian participated in your struggles or discussions?

No. Only Dalit Gnanasekaran our movement leader attends and leads our struggles.

v. Assuming you have heard of Dalit Theology, can you say whether it has helped you in your struggles?

No idea.

w. What do you say about the saying, 'God is, God of the oppressed?'

Gnanasekaran says so

- x.** Do you relate this saying to your caste oppressed situation?
No idea
- y.** What do you think about the Exodus experience of Israelites?
Gnanasekaran has explained that Israelites were freed from Egypt.
- z.** Are you able to relate the same with your caste situation?
I am not able to fully understand this.
- aa.** What do you think about the preferential option of God for the oppressed people?
No idea
- bb.** What is your opinion on the saying that once you were no people and now you have become God's people?
No answer
- cc.** What do you think about the saying messianic intervention?
No idea
- dd.** What is your idea about messianic people and messianic responsibility?
No idea
- ee.** What do you think about Moses and his role in liberating Israelites?
Can you correlate this to your situation?
Moses was a man of God
- ff.** What is your idea about you are created in the image of God?
If all are created in the image of God, then why this caste problem?
- gg.** Do you feel that since you have God's image you have a responsibility to transform the society?
I am already telling Dalits to struggle against caste
- hh.** What do you feel that Jesus a Dalit and Christ a Liberator?
No idea. But I work for Dalit
- ii.** What is opinion about Nazareth Manifesto?
No idea

- jj.** What is your understanding about Jesus's saying that First will be the last; and Last will be first?
No idea. My Pastor says that we will be in Heaven like this.
- kk.** What is your opinion about Dalits are called to struggle for transformation?
We struggle for a long time.
- ll.** What is your idea about salvation? Do you feel liberation from caste is a salvation for you?
Jesus gives us salvation.
- mm.** What do you think about the saying that the struggle for Dalits will liberate Non Dalits also from their caste mindset?
Non Dalits are caste people. How could they drop caste?
- nn.** What is your understanding about kingdom of god? Do you feel that your Dalit culture has the characteristics of kingdom of God?
God will bring this at the end.
- oo.** Has Dalit theology reached grass root Dalit Christians?
No. I do not understand
- pp.** Do you sense that there is the necessity for Dalit theology in the struggles against caste discriminations?
I am not able to understand.
- qq.** What are your suggestions for taking Dalit Theology to grass root Dalit Christians?
Church is not telling us the full picture of Jesus, I think. It tells Jesus a calm person. They tell Jesus is calm and also forgiving. We are taught to see one side of God, I think. Gnanasekaran wants us to resist the injustice as Jesus did. I need to know more about Jesus.
- rr.** What impact this interview/conversation has created in you?
I was able to share our burdens and what I do and what our Pastor does. I need to know more. I want to ask Gnanasekaran on the questions that you asked.



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Person – 6

4th Jan 2011 - Thiruvannamalai

Interview by J. Vincent Manoharan, Research Student, University of Birmingham - Thesis Title "Towards a Practical Dalit Theology"

.....

1. Personal Details

a. What is your name?

I am

b. What is your family name?

Father

Mother

Both of them converted to Christianity; My Children are still in Hinduism; in my record I still have a Hindu Certificate; I go to Christian worship; my wife

is still a Hindu. I give freedom to my children to have their own choice of religion.

c. What is your sub caste?

Dalit-Arunthathiar

d. What is your age?

I am around 40

e. Have you had a formal education?

Up to +2

f. Are you married?

Married

g. What is your job?

I am the State Organizer ofDalit Movement. Almost 15 years have passed since I have come into the movement. I am a leader now.

h. Where do you live?

.....
Karur-District

i. How many years have you lived at this address?

Since birth

2. Relating to Church?

a. Can you tell me which denomination you belong to?

Arcot Lutheran Church; I got baptism in Salem pastorate

b. Do you have a church in your home village/town?

Now I go to the Pentecost church which is close to my house.

c. Do you attend worship regularly?

Whenever I am in my village I go

d. Please tell me whether you are a member of the Church?

I subscribe to the church

e. Do you hold any position in your local church, if so, what?

No

f. What church activities are you involved in?

I involve with the church where there is a need

g. Do you hold any position in the Church hierarchy?

No

h. Can you describe the caste composition of your church?

ALC church has Nadars, Parayars, Arunthathiars and other castes.

3. Relating to caste practices

a. Please tell me about the caste discrimination, if any, that exists inside or/and outside the Church?

Caste issue is both internal and external. We go to the church to worship. But there too caste discriminations exist though we do not want it. Among the Dalits there are Parayars and Arunthathiars in our church. Within them also discrimination exists.

b. Could you please share the type of discrimination that you have faced either within or/outside the Church?

Outside the Church discrimination is acute and more visible. There are atrocities perpetrated by Hindu fundamentalist forces in my area and in my village. In Karur area there are issues relating to graveyard.

Caste discrimination exists within the church, besides other things, more visibly in the area of governance and in projecting/helping one's own caste persons /relatives in offering jobs and positions.

Whatever caste discrimination exists outside, the same discriminations exist inside the church but little invisibly. ALC church supports and defends its dominant caste members. Even it defends who appropriate Dalit students' money in schools.

There exists no inter caste marriage as it pollutes the upper castes. Since there are opportunities for governance, business and property interests, many upper castes are in the churches of CSI and Lutheran. They continue to exist in these churches because they have privileges and opportunities in churches. They practice caste.

- c. Have you ever suffered physical violence owing to caste practices- if so, how and by whom?**

Yes, mostly mental violence- when I involved in the struggles against caste outside the church.

- d. Kindly tell me whether you had ever been taken to a police station or court or put in prison because of your caste or your work against caste discrimination?**

It is regular. I go to Police Station for the caste issues representing our movement, quite often.

- e. How did your priest or pastor react to your suffering discrimination or physical violence on account of caste?**

ALC Pastors do not involve themselves in justice work and in struggle. Only Dalit Gnanasekaran a Pastor who heads our movement supports us.

- f. Could you please tell me about the reaction of the hierarchy of the church to your experiences described in the previous question?**

Hierarchy supports the struggle of Dalit Gnanasekaran who belongs to ALC- but and not all struggles.

4. Relating to the "action-reflection" process for organizing struggles

- a. Can you please share something about the activity based meetings you have organized/taken part in against the caste system? (These meetings can be either inside or outside of the church)**

Invillage, there are about 1000 Pallar caste persons who are against 50 Arunthathiars. In the nearby village, Sakkiliars are asked to bow their hands to get water from the other castes for drinking. I got agitated and scolded the one who poured water into the hands of the Sakkiliar and not giving water in a tumbler. Then I challenged and educated the Pallar caste persons against this discrimination. It took some time. Later, it led me to arrange even inter-caste marriages for 3 Pallars with 3 Sakkiliar girls. There are divisions within the Sakkiliars as to Telugus and Kannadigas. Caste practices are many like this.

Our Movement always conducts meetings to discuss and plan our struggles. After the struggle also we meet to review and for further planning.

- b. Please tell me the role of your priest or pastor in your activist meetings?**

Neither ALC nor Pentecost pastors participate in struggles.

- c. Can you say whether you have been visited by any church leader during the course of your meetings or struggles? And if so, then what resulted from these visits?**

They neither participated nor visited us.

5. Relating to Faith/Themes articulated by Dalit theologians

- a. Please share with me whether you see any passage in the Bible which gives you strength or hope to become involved in the struggle with caste? Can you describe how it helps you?**

I like the statement in OT that 'I will not leave thee nor forsake thee'. I also like the statement that the 'Lord's Grace will abide on the head of those who do justice.'

- b. Do you pray when you face hardships? If yes, then what are the benefits of praying? How does it help you?**

I pray when I am alone. But I do not want to be in the cage of a Christian. I want to have a common identity as a leader of my movement. My Parents pray for me. They always pray for me even through mobile phone. I ask for my own things as the last part of my prayer. I generally pray for day to day events which affect me and affect Dalits. I prayed for 3 cents of land each to 33 families. I prayed for the final settlement of this issue. Like this only I pray – for the struggles, for the victory of demands.

- c. **Do you read from specific books or written material as part of your planning for any struggle? If so, what are they? Can you share why you have selected these materials to assist you?**

No.

- d. **Can you describe the typical themes or ideas of the sermons that are preached by your priest or pastor? Give me an example please?**

While Pastor Dalit Gnanasekaran preaches I get inspired. He connects Bible with the day to day persecution of people. Other Pastors, Don't.

- e. **Please share with me the impact of such sermons in terms of encouraging or motivating you to remain in faith and to sustain your struggles against the caste system?**

Gnanasekaran's sermons motivate me to organise and lead struggles. I cannot refer any single sermon.

- f. **Can you tell me some of the songs you sing to sustain you in your struggles?**

No Christian songs. But secular songs inspire us for our movement and struggles.

- g. **Please tell me, do you wear/use/keep any religious signs or symbols? What is the importance of these things to you?**

I do not wear any religious symbol.

- h. **As a Christian Dalit, do you feel that you are different from Dalits who belong to other religious traditions? If so, then how?**

Both Hindu Dalits and Christian Dalits suffer the same caste oppression. No difference. We Christian Dalits are oppressed inside and outside church.

- i. **How would you describe God in terms of your present struggles? How would you describe Jesus Christ in terms of your present struggles?**

The grass root village people see Jesus as God. There are Christians who says that God will take care of everything. When there was an issue by which the churches were ransacked by the Hindu militant groups, the AG Church (Pentecostal) Christians said that God will look after the issue and we need to pray only not to involve in resistance or struggles. I was not for this.

j. Are there any differences in how you see Jesus Christ, Ambedkar, Marx or your local Dalit leaders?

Ambedkar is a leader for Dalits. Marx, is a great ideologist. Jesus is the one who worked for transformation in the society

k. How do you understand Christ's mission in terms of your present situation?

Christ came to the world to save us.

l. Could you tell me about your understanding of the purpose of Christ's suffering and dying on the cross?

He came to give us new life

m. Can you tell me about your understanding of the Kingdom of God?

Kingdom of God is good life.

n. Do you use your Dalit art, music, dance and drums during worship and during your struggles?

Not in worship. But use Dalit songs and Dalit drums in our struggles.

o. Why do you use those and what do you get out their use?

It inspires and energises us.

p. What do you understand by the term Dalit Theology?

I have not read Dalit theology.

q. Do you have any access to any literature on Dalit Theology?

I am trying to understand Dalit theology.

r. Have you attended any meeting and conference concerned with Dalit Theology and if yes, then what was your experience?

No

s. Have you heard the sermons related to Dalit theology in sermons of pastors and Bishops?

Not so far

t. Can you tell me whether you have met any Dalit Theologians?

I think – Pastor Dalit Gnanasekaran.

- u. **Has any Dalit theologian participated in your struggles or discussions?**
Dalit Gnanasekaran participates in the struggles that I organize. No one else.
- v. **Assuming you have heard of Dalit Theology, can you say whether it has helped you in your struggles?**
No idea
- w. **What do you say about the saying, 'God is, God of the oppressed?'**
I have heard this from Dalit Gnanasekaran
- x. **Do you relate this saying to your caste oppressed situation?**
Yes
- y. **What do you think about the Exodus experience of Israelites?**
Moses went to release them. I know the story
- z. **Are you able to relate the same with your caste situation?**
God helps us to liberate
- aa. **What do you think about the preferential option of God for the oppressed people?**
Dalit Gnanasekaran says that God is with the poor
- bb. **What is your opinion on the saying that once you were no people and now you have become God's people?**
No idea
- cc. **What do you think about the saying messianic intervention?**
No idea
- dd. **What is your idea about messianic people and messianic responsibility?**
First time I am hearing like this
- ee. **What do you think about Moses and his role in liberating Israelites? Can you correlate this to your situation?**
Moses was sent by God to liberate Israelites. We need Moses
- ff. **What is your idea about you are created in the image of God?**

All are created in the image of God

gg. Do you feel that since you have God's image you have a responsibility to transform the society?

Of course, I have the responsibility

hh. What do you feel that Jesus a Dalit and Christ a Liberator?

Jesus worked for Dalits of his times.

ii. What is opinion about Nazareth Manifesto?

No idea

jj. What is your understanding about Jesus's saying that First will be the last; and Last will be first?

Bible says so.

kk. What is your opinion about Dalits are called to struggle for transformation?

We are already in the struggle for transformation

ll. What is your idea about salvation? Do you feel liberation from caste is a salvation for you?

No idea.

mm. What do you think about the saying that the struggle for Dalits will liberate Non Dalits also from their caste mindset?

Non Dalits always oppress us. They will not drop caste.

nn. What is your understanding about kingdom of god? Do you feel that your Dalit culture has the characteristics of kingdom of God?

No idea

oo. Has Dalit theology reached grass root Dalit Christians?

No

pp. Do you sense that there is the necessity for Dalit theology in the struggles against caste discriminations?

Sure

qq. What are your suggestions for taking Dalit Theology to grass root Dalit Christians?

In the rural area, Dalit Christians live without any aspirations but with discriminations. The church hierarchy has not gone deeper into the problems of grass root.

Struggle should go along with worship. Dalit Christians do not understand this. Church stops with worship services. It does not teach or encourage struggle for its own rights or for its members or neighbors. It may be due to no proper understanding or fear of consequences or due to anticipated persecutions that come out of struggles. Thinking and thanking God is only a ritual. More than that, nothing happens in Church.

I see Dalit Gnanasekaran as an angel. He called me when I sat in a corner of the church to bless me among many people. That changed me.

Caste will not change even if one changes his religion- caste affiliation does not change. There are no marriages denying caste system. If one converts into Islam and his marriage is solemnized, he becomes part of a community of business. But that is not the case with Christians. Christianity will fail if Nadars do not marry Parayas; Parayas marry Sakkiliars; Sakkiliars marry Thevar.

Church has not taught us to struggle-to struggle against injustice. It has not helped to see the Christianity in a proper way. It has helped to make their caste group grow. Pastors are increasing in number but pastorates do not develop and grow. Many identify themselves with people who win in the church elections. Dalit theology should go to the grassroots to change this.

rr. What impact this interview/conversation has created in you?

It has helped me to review my thinking. I need to know more about Dalit theology.


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Person – 7

7th Jan 2011 - Chennai

Interview by J. Vincent Manoharan, Research Student, University of Birmingham - Thesis Title "Towards a Practical Dalit Theology"

.....

1. Personal Details

a. What is your name?

My name is

b. What is your family name?

Father :.....

Mother:.....

My mother hails from Roman Catholic; Father is Lutheran; I am a member of Catholic church; 3rd Generation Christian

c. What is your sub caste?

Dalit - Parayar

d. What is your age?

I am in 30s

e. Have you had a formal education?

MA Sociology;

f. Are you married?

No

g. What is your job?

I head an Non Governmental Organization.

I am the State Convenor of a State level Dalit Christian Front

h. Where do you live?

.....

Chennai.

i. How many years have you lived at this address?

Since Childhood

2. Relating to Church?

a. Can you tell me which denomination you belong to?

Roman Catholic

b. Do you have a church in your home village/town?

Yes; Catholic Church

c. Do you attend worship regularly?

Yes

d. Please tell me whether you are a member of the Church?

I am a member of the Church

e. Do you hold any position in your local church, if so, what?

No

f. What church activities are you involved in?

I relate with the Church in youth activities

g. Do you hold any position in the Church hierarchy?

No

h. Can you describe the caste composition of your church?

All caste groups are in the Church; mostly Dalits; There are 17,000 families are in my church; There are Dalits, Naidus, Reddiars, Udayars, Mudaliars, Nadars, and Thevars in our Church. Majority are Dalits; the present priest is from Chettiar caste and not a Dalit

3. Relating to caste practices

a. Please tell me about the caste discrimination, if any, that exists inside or/and outside the Church?

Caste practices exist in visible and invisible forms; upper caste persons who already are working in the Church administration and in other power positions invariably recommend the emerging jobs to their own upper caste people. Even one or two Dalits who there, should get along with non Dalits, otherwise they would be sent out. Parish priest would work only for the benefit of his own caste people. If Dalits are submissive to him, he will support them. Only upper caste people occupy Church leadership positions, though Dalits are majority.

b. Could you please share the type of discrimination that you have faced either within or/outside the Church?

When upper caste priest come to Dalit area for conducting Holy Mass, they would avoid eating in Dalit houses. We came to conscious of this fact very late. The Church hierarchy appoint Dalit priests as assistants to upper caste Priests and the Dalit priests are sent to visit the Dalit families; Only recently, after all these years, a Dalit was allowed to be a member in the finance committee; In the committees, only the upper caste personnel are there. When they decide for renovating the church buildings, they would make the Dalit member only as a signatory. The other 6 members would be from upper caste and they would decide and handle everything. Dalits are used for cleaning the church, cleaning the toilets; they would employ Dalit women to these jobs; Administration is always in the hands of upper castes.

Upper caste people are appointed in all the 4 schools attached to our parish. They provide only 5 jobs to Dalits in a place where there is a possibility of giving employment to 50 persons. If we ask, they say there are no vacancies; they would recruit Dalits for menial works of cleaning and sweeping only.

The priests subtly abuse these women sexually. Dalit women bear these atrocities in order that they do not want to loose jobs in order to support their families.

From the marriage information Bureau of the church, they seek the brides or bridegrooms only from their own castes. Love marriages are rare and that too will end up as inter-caste marriage, outside the church. On the other hand, all marriages are happening as caste marriage in the church.

Reading of Text in the church comes as a rotation during the Easter and Christmas times in the masses. They used to divide the responsibilities at that time; Priests always give importance to non Dalits only. Also for confirmation priority is given to the high castes. Since the Church is near Chennai city, there is no discrimination inside the graveyard. When we asked the other church people adjacent to Chennai city, they express discriminations related to caste in their churches and also in graveyards. Where there administration goes beyond Rs.10,000, the Church appoints upper caste priests only to such parishes. Still Dalit priests are not appointed there.

Youth group used to have a picture of Ambedkar for their meeting. The parish priest saw it, got angry and announced he would only write the marriage banns provided that the youth remove the picture of Ambedkar, our leader. Only after the Bishop advised him he cooled down and obliged. He still remains a casteist.

The Church is trying to empower Dalits by creating SC-ST commission in each church. There will a group for SC-ST in each church for name sake, and it will not be allowed to do any activities. It is a cheat. These groups have not been formed in many churches in Chennai. When asked, why there is no report about these commissions, it was replied that all priests are non Dalits and they do not show interest in forming SC/ST commissions.

We are forced to bear with priests who practice caste. On December 6, the Death anniversary of Ambedkar, even though the vice president was a Dalit, the Dalit empowerment program did not happen. The parish priest simply shakes off his hands for such functions related to Dalits and prevented them from organising such events.

- c. Have you ever suffered physical violence owing to caste practices-if so, how and by whom?

I am the State convener of (Christian Dalit Front) It was formed during the program conducted byTrust. I liked the Front. Since I had the experience of struggling for the rights of Dalit Christians, I accepted the responsibility. This Front takes up the issues of Dalit Christians.

Our Front is functioning for the past 2 and half years. We address the issue of discriminations that prevails inside and outside the church.

Most of the village churches, Dalits are forced to sit on the floor; and upper castes sit on the chair. Dalits are discriminated both in the job and in schools. It is good, if a census is taken up to enumerate the number of Dalit Christians in Church institutions. Dalit students are not admitted to course which have scope for jobs. This is a major discrimination which exists in almost all schools and colleges managed by Church and Christians.

There are less Dalit students in matriculation and management schools. In Tamilnadu there are 70% Dalit Christians are there in Churches. Hence we struggle in each District, demanding job and educational reservation according to the percentage of Dalit Christians in that area. Similarly there are a number of issues.

- d. Kindly tell me whether you had ever been taken to a police station or court or put in prison because of your caste or your work against caste discrimination?

No for personal reasons. I visited Police stations for the issue of our people as a movement leader.

- e. How did your priest or pastor react to your suffering discrimination or physical violence on account of caste?

They do not encourage either struggles or justice based actions

- f. Could you please tell me about the reaction of the hierarchy of the church to your experiences described in the previous question?

The present Chennai Bishop is a Dalit; yet he could not bring change among the priests who practice caste. He cannot do anything as such is the system.

4. Relating to the "action-reflection" process for organizing struggles

- a. Can you please share something about the activity based meetings you have organized/taken part in against the caste system? (These meetings can be either inside or outside of the church)

I conducted several meetings and struggles; even in Chennai too; we asked for a white report from the church; we demand proportionate representation to Dalits both in the Catholic and protestant church based institutions. We demand from them a common plan of action.

Earlier the Roman Catholic Church created a 10 point plan and it was not implemented. We want a similar common plan in each Church. We challenge all discriminations. We demand with the Govt, the right to embrace any religion and we struggle for SC status to all Dalit Christians.

I am also the propaganda secretary to a National level Dalit Christian Movement. It takes up Dalit Christian issue at the National Level. Our state level Front plans its program at the state level. We hold regular meetings to discuss and work out struggles. After the struggles we conduct review meetings and also to plan further struggles. We give the responsibility to the executive committee, which decides and sends the plan of action to each member. National movement is led by others. For any common issues we plan together and organise common struggles.

- b. Please tell me the role of your priest or pastor in your activist meetings?

Some priests, mostly Dalits who support the cause of Dalit Christians and participates in our struggles

- c. Can you say whether you have been visited by any church leader during the course of your meetings or struggles? And if so, then what resulted from these visits?

Yes, Bishops from the Catholic Church and from Church of South India have participated while we organised demonstrations for our rights against the Govt.

But they will not support our struggle against the church.

5. Relating to Faith/Themes articulated by Dalit theologians

- a. Please share with me whether you see any passage in the Bible which gives you strength or hope to become involved in the struggle with caste? Can you describe how it helps you?

No specific portion.

- b. Do you pray when you face hardships? If yes, then what are the benefits of praying? How does it help you?

I pray in the morning and evening. I do participate in prayer meetings for the past 10 years. I do also go for announcing good news. There is no compulsion in me to go to regular Mass for the past 3 years. Having come across the different discriminations inside the Church, I lost interest in going to the Worship in the Church.

I do pray for the dead; for the peace in the country; for the ministry to proclaim gospel all over India; I pray for my needs; my family needs. When priests come to a meeting, they would start the meeting with prayer;

But we do not pray when meet as a movement; no one prays in the place where struggles takes place; in the hall meetings of our state level Front we pray- but not during struggles.

- c. Do you read from specific books or written material as part of your planning for any struggle? If so, what are they? Can you share why you have selected these materials to assist you?

I do read Dalit books. I read Bible privately- not in our meetings.

- d. Can you describe the typical themes or ideas of the sermons that are preached by your priest or pastor? Give me an example please?

There is no relationship between the message of Christ and the messages that are preached, as I understand. Priests do not explain theology nor do they explain the words of God connecting to the reality. Priests say

some stories; they would not explain properly why Jesus came and for what and for whom he came. They simply preach if you are pious God will reward and bless you. This kind of preaching they do. These messages forces us to tolerate all evils and oppressions. They never talk about caste discrimination. There is caste inside their hearts. They would not advocate or support inter-caste marriage. They will not speak about oppression. They would ask us to pray and be humble.

- e. Please share with me the impact of such sermons in terms of encouraging or motivating you to remain in faith and to sustain your struggles against the caste system?

Their sermons have no impact on me

- f. Can you tell me some of the songs you sing to sustain you in your struggles?

I sing good Christian songs. But in our struggles we sing secular songs.

- g. Please tell me, do you wear/use/keep any religious signs or symbols? What is the importance of these things to you?

I put cross on my forehead whenever I pray.

- h. As a Christian Dalit, do you feel that you are different from Dalits who belong to other religious traditions? If so, then how?

I worship Jesus and that is the only difference. All Dalits face discrimination in all religions.

- i. How would you describe God in terms of your present struggles? How would you describe Jesus Christ in terms of your present struggles?

I see Jesus as a highly motivational force; he says that he came to minister but not to be ministered.

Priests say that Jesus came for us to save us. But, not to struggle. They say that He would come back as God and we must be prepared to meet him.

- j. Are there any differences in how you see Jesus Christ, Ambedkar, Marx or your local Dalit leaders?

I see Jesus as a motivator; Ambedkar is a Dalit liberator

- k. How do you understand Christ's mission in terms of your present situation?

Christ mission is to change the world

- l. Could you tell me about your understanding of the purpose of Christ's suffering and dying on the cross?

Christ suffered against injustice.

- m. Can you tell me about your understanding of the Kingdom of God?

Kingdom of God is the new world without discriminations

- n. Do you use your Dalit art, music, dance and drums during worship and during your struggles?

So far no in worship. But in outside struggles we sing secular songs.

- o. Why do you use those and what do you get out their use?

- p. What do you understand by the term Dalit Theology?

I have no full understanding about Dalit theology. I have heard about Dalit theology. I think, liberating the oppressed people is Dalit theology

- q. Do you have any access to any literature on Dalit Theology?

No

- r. Have you attended any meeting and conference concerned with Dalit Theology and if yes, then what was your experience?

No. Gurukul Theological college students usually visit our area. They would come to understand our area situation. I have joined in their conversations. But our Church do not speak about Dalit theology or theology.

- s. Have you heard the sermons related to Dalit theology in sermons of pastors and Bishops?

No

- t. Can you tell me whether you have met any Dalit Theologians?

I see Communist leader Fidel Castro as a motivational leader; for the last 17 years I see Vincent as a Dalit leader; I see Mayavati as a political leader for Dalit liberation

- u. Has any Dalit theologian participated in your struggles or discussions?

AFDCL leaders are Dalits. But no Dalit theologians.

- v. Assuming you have heard of Dalit Theology, can you say whether it has helped you in your struggles?
My experiences within the Church motivate me.
- w. What do you say about the saying, 'God is, God of the oppressed?'
We are told so. But church behaves differently
- x. Do you relate this saying to your caste oppressed situation?
Yes I want to relate this saying to my caste oppressed situation
- y. What do you think about the Exodus experience of Israelites?
Moses led Israelites into Canaan.
- z. Are you able to relate the same with your caste situation?
Yes
- aa. What do you think about the preferential option of God for the oppressed people?
God's preferential option is for the oppressed is not taught at the churches. Never.
- bb. What is your opinion on the saying that once you were no people and now you have become God's people?
I heard this in some Preaching because of our conversion to Christianity all have become God's people. Not only Dalits.
- cc. What do you think about the saying messianic intervention?
Christ came as Messiah to give freedom to humanity
- dd. What is your idea about messianic people and messianic responsibility?
God has called me to work for dignity for human beings
- ee. What do you think about Moses and his role in liberating Israelites?
Can you correlate this to your situation?
We must become Moses
- ff. What is your idea about you are created in the image of God?
All are equal- no one is inferior to any one

gg. Do you feel that since you have God's image you have a responsibility to transform the society?

Of course, I have the responsibility

hh. What do you feel that Jesus a Dalit and Christ a Liberator?

Jesus identified himself with the poor and Christ was a Liberator in his times

ii. What is opinion about Nazareth Manifesto?

Messianic intervention

jj. What is your understanding about Jesus's saying that First will be the last; and Last will be first?

A complete reversal in the Kingdom of God

kk. What is your opinion about Dalits are called to struggle for transformation?

We are already in the struggle for transformation

ll. What is your idea about salvation? Do you feel liberation from caste is a salvation for you?

Dalit liberation is salvation for Dalits. But church will not say like this.

mm. What do you think about the saying that the struggle for Dalits will liberate Non Dalits also from their caste mindset?

No mercy for kitten from the mouth of dogs

nn. What is your understanding about kingdom of god? Do you feel that your Dalit culture has the characteristics of kingdom of God?

No idea

oo. Has Dalit theology reached grass root Dalit Christians?

No. I already said this.

pp. Do you sense that there is the necessity for Dalit theology in the struggles against caste discriminations?

Yes. But it needs to be shared with the Dalit Christians.

qq. What are your suggestions for taking Dalit Theology to grass root Dalit Christians?

Jesus who came in as representative of the oppressed is preached differently. Sundays are seen as days of worship than seeing it as day of

thinking about liberation. Dalit theology should go to grassroots. True Christianity has not gone to the people.

We want to see our Church which currently speaks no Dalit theology into a Church which speaks about Dalit theology. I have been speaking about Dalit issues with friends.

Only few Dalits have come up in Education. No Government employment opportunity and educational opportunity have reached rural Dalit Christians. Although Church gets lot of funds through offering and through schemes, they have not gone to the Dalits. The situation that was about 100 years ago, still persists. We need to create a new life in Church for the welfare of especially the rural Dalit Christians.

rr. What impact this interview/conversation has created in you?

I have felt the experience of understanding Dalit theology. I have received information for my alternate thinking. I came to know of Christ; I am able to think about Today's' Christianity and the need of different Christianity to our people.



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Person – 8

8th Jan 2011 - Chennai

Interview by J. Vincent Manoharan, Research Student, University of Birmingham - Thesis Title "Towards a Practical Dalit Theology"

.....

1. Personal Details

a. What is your name?

I am

b. What is your family name?

Father is :.....

Mother is :

Husband is:

I am a 3rd generation Christian. Father is from Roman Catholic background; Then we moved to CSI. We have 3 girl children;

c. What is your sub caste?

Dalit - Pallar; husband is also a Pallar

d. What is your age?

I am 42 years

e. Have you had a formal education?

I completed +2, and finished BA through correspondence, now pursuing MA through correspondence

f. Are you married?

Yes

g. What is your job?

Social Work-

I am the Convenor of a State level Dalit rights movement -
.....

h. Where do you live?

.....
Tirunelveli District

i. How many years have you lived at this address?

Since 1982

2. Relating to Church?

- a. Can you tell me which denomination you belong to?

CSI

- b. Do you have a church in your home village/town?

Yes, CSI church

- c. Do you attend worship regularly?

Yes

- d. Please tell me whether you are a member of the Church?

I am a member of the church

- e. Do you hold any position in your local church, if so, what?

I am in the Administrative committee of the local church

- f. What church activities are you involved in?

I serve the administration of the local church

- g. Do you hold any position in the Church hierarchy?

I am in the administrative committee

- h. Can you describe the caste composition of your church?

There are 850 families in the church. Majority Dalits; Pallas, Parayars and Arunthathiars are also there. But Pastor is a Nadar.

3. Relating to caste practices

- a. Please tell me about the caste discrimination, if any, that exists inside or/and outside the Church?

The pastors and evangelists from Nadar community will not eat with us. They will not share availability of the different welfare schemes in the Diocese. Therefore we are not able to avail any benefit. Only Nadar caste people enjoy all benefits.

There is no inter caste marriage among Christians. Caste differences are there among Dalits also. Only through some love marriages, some changes occur. At least we all eat together only in those occasions.

In the committees, in our church all members belong to Pallas. There is no representation for Parayars or Arunthathiars. I am in the administrative committee.

The domination of traditional families in the church administration got slowly changed and new fresh families have come inside the church; Only rich among the Pallar caste were leading the administrative committee earlier, now we are; there is no discrimination in the graveyard.

- b. Could you please share the type of discrimination that you have faced either within or/outside the Church?

Our CSI church comes under the Tirunelveli Diocese; in other churches in Palayamkottai areas, Dalits cannot become members in the administrative committees. It is full of Nadars.

We gave place to the Church for opening a school; 50 acres we gave. Yet they-the Nadars- administer the school. There is no teacher post for us. Church insists us to register our land in the name of CSI, to appoint our people also as teachers. This is a cheat. Church betrays us.

Nadars practice caste. Nadars are majority in the Diocese; In the schools, the Nadars dominate and give priority to wives of pastors and their relatives, all Nadars, in the appointment; if at all they appoint a Dalit, they post them in distant places. In the Diocese, almost 15 pastorates are Dalit pastorates; We are now taking cast wise statistics on those who work in our church institutions; we also look into their seniority. We struggle against the caste

There are discriminations outside the church. We are told that there are mother Pallars and Father Pallars in Thevarkulam area. There was an issue of two tumbler system in the village; Earlier Dalits had to take their tea from leaf made containers; 6 years before the Thevar community washed the place from where the Dalits fetched water. They appropriated our 24 cents land which is reserved for our cemetery; they cleaned it using earth movers. Hindu Dalits cremate their bodies there. A number of discriminations like these.

- c. Have you ever suffered physical violence owing to caste practices-if so, how and by whom?

No. I am a state level leader.

- d. Kindly tell me whether you had ever been taken to a police station or court or put in prison because of your caste or your work against caste discrimination?

Yes. I went to Police station for our issues.

- e. How did your priest or pastor react to your suffering discrimination or physical violence on account of caste?

They would not participate in our struggles

- f. Could you please tell me about the reaction of the hierarchy of the church to your experiences described in the previous question?

Hierarchy is supporting caste based church. They will not support us.

4. Relating to the "action-reflection" process for organizing struggles

- a. Can you please share something about the activity based meetings you have organized/taken part in against the caste system? (These meetings can be either inside or outside of the church)

We are organizing Dalits for struggle under the banner of our(our state level movement). We work against; for abolition of untouchability; abolition of bonded labor; we work for their alternate employment.

We mobilise Dalit youth; we members discuss and organizes struggles. We organize the discriminated Dalits on various issues like demanding rights in the graveyard etc., We meet ; we plan – we struggle - we negotiate and we struggle once again- again negotiate – again struggle- it goes like this.

- b. Please tell me the role of your priest or pastor in your activist meetings?

My Pastor will not participate in our struggles

- c. Can you say whether you have been visited by any church leader during the course of your meetings or struggles? And if so, then what resulted from these visits?

No. Never

5. Relating to Faith/Themes articulated by Dalit theologians

- a. Please share with me whether you see any passage in the Bible which gives you strength or hope to become involved in the struggle with caste? Can you describe how it helps you?

Psalm 91 comforts. In the Revelation those passages relating to 666 number make us afraid. These are passages I like. These passages help us in the struggles as motivational forces

- b. Do you pray when you face hardships? If yes, then what are the benefits of praying? How does it help you?

I do pray. I pray for the safety and welfare of my family. I pray for my work. We thank for the safety during night. We prayed for our family issues; and we ask for protection from enemies. I pray for our struggles.

- c. Do you read from specific books or written material as part of your planning for any struggle? If so, what are they? Can you share why you have selected these materials to assist you?

Psalm 91 inspires me

- d. Can you describe the typical themes or ideas of the sermons that are preached by your priest or pastor? Give me an example please?

Sermons are often used to increase money for the use of church. CSI observes each week with an issue. Fasting; meditation; fasting again But they will not talk about caste or oppression. They do not preach them in the sermon, but during personal conversations they cite persons with caste names. Dalits are very low in the eyes of non Dalit Pastors.

- e. Please share with me the impact of such sermons in terms of encouraging or motivating you to remain in faith and to sustain your struggles against the caste system?

Their sermons do not help our struggle

- f. Can you tell me some of the songs you sing to sustain you in your struggles?

I use some songs during my problems to comfort me.

- g. Please tell me, do you wear/use/keep any religious signs or symbols? What is the importance of these things to you?

I wear cross

- h. As a Christian Dalit, do you feel that you are different from Dalits who belong to other religious traditions? If so, then how?

Dalit Christians suffer both within the church and outside the church. Other Dalits suffer in their religions. No difference.

- i. How would you describe God in terms of your present struggles? How would you describe Jesus Christ in terms of your present struggles?

When I was a student in schools, I suffered under the hands of upper caste girls. I suffered with caste practices; since I witnessed the incidence of a Dalit girl underwent sexual molestation by an upper caste person, I felt the difficulties and hence I vow to struggle. I pray God for help.

- j. Are there any differences in how you see Jesus Christ, Ambedkar, Marx or your local Dalit leaders?
Ambedkar my leader; Jesus my God
- k. How do you understand Christ's mission in terms of your present situation?
Jesus died for the sin of the world
- l. Could you tell me about your understanding of the purpose of Christ's suffering and dying on the cross?
Jesus suffered because he questioned the oppressors
- m. Can you tell me about your understanding of the Kingdom of God?
Kingdom of God is where Jesus is
- n. Do you use your Dalit art, music, dance and drums during worship and during your struggles?
No- Not in worships- but in struggles
- o. Why do you use those and what do you get out their use?
For struggles it energises us.
- p. What do you understand by the term Dalit Theology?
I have no idea
- q. Do you have any access to any literature on Dalit Theology?
No
- r. Have you attended any meeting and conference concerned with Dalit Theology and if yes, then what was your experience?
No; our pastors do not speak about Dalit issues in retreats or meetings or prayers or in sermons.
- s. Have you heard the sermons related to Dalit theology in sermons of pastors and Bishops?
No
- t. Can you tell me whether you have met any Dalit Theologians?
I see Vincent, Chandra Mohan and Baskar as Dalit leaders. I see Dr krishnaswamy. I see one Seyyan in Tirunelveli. As motivational force, I see our cadres.

- u. Has any Dalit theologian participated in your struggles or discussions?
AFDL struggles are participated by a few good pastors in some places in the state. But, no one from our church.
- v. Assuming you have heard of Dalit Theology, can you say whether it has helped you in your struggles?
I am motivated by my problems
- w. What do you say about the saying, 'God is, God of the oppressed?'
God is always on the sides of the oppressed
- x. Do you relate this saying to your caste oppressed situation?
I think so
- y. What do you think about the Exodus experience of Israelites?
God redeemed Israelites from sinful Egypt
- z. Are you able to relate the same with your caste situation?
Non Dalits practice caste and so we need to get freedom
- aa. What do you think about the preferential option of God for the oppressed people?
No idea.
- bb. What is your opinion on the saying that once you were no people and now you have become God's people?
No idea. Never heard. But we are God's people.
- cc. What do you think about the saying messianic intervention?
- dd. What is your idea about messianic people and messianic responsibility?

- ee. What do you think about Moses and his role in liberating Israelites?
Can you correlate this to your situation?
She does not understand these questions. (Saying - first time she hears like these.)
- ff. What is your idea about you are created in the image of God?
All are equal in the sight of God

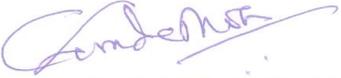
- gg.** Do you feel that since you have God's image you have a responsibility to transform the society?
Yes
- hh.** What do you feel that Jesus a Dalit and Christ a Liberator?
I am yet to understand this.
- ii.** What is opinion about Nazareth Manifesto?
No idea
- jj.** What is your understanding about Jesus's saying that First will be the last; and Last will be first?
Will be in Heaven
- kk.** What is your opinion about Dalits are called to struggle for transformation?
Dalits are already in the struggle
- ll.** What is your idea about salvation? Do you feel liberation from caste is a salvation for you?
Salvation is saved life to all
- mm.** What do you think about the saying that the struggle for Dalits will liberate Non Dalits also from their caste mindset?
Non Dalits will not remove themselves from Caste
- nn.** What is your understanding about kingdom of god? Do you feel that your Dalit culture has the characteristics of kingdom of God?
Kingdom of God is where Jesus is – No idea to connect with our culture
- oo.** Has Dalit theology reached grass root Dalit Christians?
No
- pp.** Do you sense that there is the necessity for Dalit theology in the struggles against caste discriminations?
Yes; it may help to oppose caste and untouchability practices. I want to know this first.
- qq.** What are your suggestions for taking Dalit Theology to grass root Dalit Christians?

Dalit theology could help the grassroots if it comes down as it talks about caste. So far such things have not been spoken. We have not read the Bible accordingly. It was not taught to us for our understanding. Bible should be simplified to the level of reading of LKG and UKG with these ideas.

We do not know theology as we have not been taught. We have been taught as Jesus is merciful, graceful, comforter and as one who gives us everything as a father when we ask any thing. I have heard that Jesus is liberator. We worship him as God. We are told by Church that Christian women should not go to the police station, but should be quite, calm and pray. Jesus is also pictured as quite person. I think we have not read Bible correctly, when I listened to you. But we will continue our struggle.

rr. What impact this interview/conversation has created in you?

It gave opportunity to think about God differently. I want to know Dalit theology.



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Person – 9

21st Jan 2011 - Tirunelveli

Interview by J. Vincent Manoharan, Research Student, University of Birmingham - Thesis Title "Towards a Practical Dalit Theology"

.....

1. Personal Details

a. What is your name?

I am

b. What is your family name?

My husband name is

We have 4 children -3 girls and a son. My grandfather, grandmother and father were Hindus. My Mother was a Roman Catholic. After the marriage my father also became a RC member. After my marriage we shifted to Pentecostal church

c. What is your sub caste?

Dalit - Pallar

d. What is your age?

45 years

e. Have you had a formal education?

6th standard

f. Are you married?

Married

g. What is your job?

Agriculture worker –
I involve in struggles against caste.

h. Where do you live?

.....
.....
Tirunelveli District

i. How many years have you lived at this address?

Since marriage

2. Relating to Church?

- a. Can you tell me which denomination you belong to?
Pentecostal Church - Earlier RC
- b. Do you have a church in your home village/town?
Yes. Local Pentecostal church
- c. Do you attend worship regularly?
I attend worship/service regularly
- d. Please tell me whether you are a member of the Church?
Yes. I am a Member of Pentecostal church
- e. Do you hold any position in your local church, if so, what?
No
- f. What church activities are you involved in?
I go for prayer meetings.
- g. Do you hold any position in the Church hierarchy?
No; some time I take responsibility for organizing meetings
- h. Can you describe the caste composition of your church?
In my church, there are Dalit Pallar, Sakkiliar, Thevar, and Nadar. Majority is Pallar in my church.

3. Relating to caste practices

- a. Please tell me about the caste discrimination, if any, that exists inside or/and outside the Church?
Discrimination exists but it is invisible. So far Marriages take place within the castes. Now, in some places inter-caste marriage starts taking place. If God wills, such marriages would happen, despite opposition from families. In our church, a Pallar is the pastor. When we tried to have a Pentecostal church of our own, the upper caste people objected to it. However, now we have our church. Other caste people are not happy. For the last 3 years, a Pentecostal church exists here.

No Inter caste marriages took place in our church but in the nearby village church.
- b. Could you please share the type of discrimination that you have faced either within or/outside the Church?

Caste discriminations are not so acute now as it was before.

Villages become unrest if love marriages happen.

But in Churches people would not talk about high caste or low caste, but we maintain caste.

Other caste people will not eat in our Dalit homes.

There are separate graveyards for Konar, for Nadar, for Thevar castes and Dalits.

Dalits who work as teachers, and who are not locals would rent houses at the places of Nadar or Thevar.

Thevar or Nadar will not rent houses to local Dalits.

- c. Have you ever suffered physical violence owing to caste practices-if so, how and by whom?

Not met any violence so far.

- d. Kindly tell me whether you had ever been taken to a police station or court or put in prison because of your caste or your work against caste discrimination?

Luckily No

- e. How did your priest or pastor react to your suffering discrimination or physical violence on account of caste?

Our pastor will not encourage us to participate in struggles

- f. Could you please tell me about the reaction of the hierarchy of the church to your experiences described in the previous question?

Our pastor is all in all. I do not know about the church hierarchy.

4. Relating to the "action-reflection" process for organizing struggles

- a. Can you please share something about the activity based meetings you have organized/taken part in against the caste system? (These meetings can be either inside or outside of the church)

We Dalit Christians are in struggles. The Roman Catholic Dalit people take lead in struggles. No one from my church participates in the struggles. They would not even speak about the struggle. Our pastor will not

encourage struggle. We are asked to pray. But I go for struggle. Before going for struggles we gather to discuss. I attended many meetings and struggles.

- b. Please tell me the role of your priest or pastor in your activist meetings?

They never encourage struggles.

- c. Can you say whether you have been visited by any church leader during the course of your meetings or struggles? And if so, then what resulted from these visits?

They do not speak about any struggle but only ask us to pray. They will not visit us or to the struggle place.

5. Relating to Faith/Themes articulated by Dalit theologians

- a. Please share with me whether you see any passage in the Bible which gives you strength or hope to become involved in the struggle with caste? Can you describe how it helps you?

No specific portion. I read Bible.

- b. Do you pray when you face hardships? If yes, then what are the benefits of praying? How does it help you?

I pray during the night. We pray as family. Also pray individually. We pray for the salvation of the world, and we pray for everything in order in the world. I pray for the salvation of our people. We are told to pray for those who sin. We are told that those commit sin knowingly will be beaten up many times by God. We pray so that the eyes of the sinners are opened. We pray for our oppressors also so that their eyes would be opened not to commit violence on us.

I pray for the success of our struggles.

- c. Do you read from specific books or written material as part of your planning for any struggle? If so, what are they? Can you share why you have selected these materials to assist you?

No.

- d. Can you describe the typical themes or ideas of the sermons that are preached by your priest or pastor? Give me an example please?

Our pastors will not speak about resisting or opposing evil. They will tell us that we should walk in the Truth. They that man should not get

destroyed. I do not know what Jesus is telling about those who do not want to live together.

Jesus said to forgive others who do wrong. He told the Pharisees as hypocrites. We pray that our Youth should not walk with those who do wrong. We tell the upper caste people who does wrong that they are doing wrong. We would not tell this to all of them; but with whom we are familiar with.

Jesus was in Holy Spirit hence he opposed the Pharisees. We are in flesh. I do not know whether it is a convenient excuse.

Pastors tell us to say good news to people. Sometimes we tell the upper caste that what they do is wrong. We do not act like Jesus who took a whip and flogged those who did wrong. Jesus was God who did like that. We cannot do like that as we are humans.

- e. Please share with me the impact of such sermons in terms of encouraging or motivating you to remain in faith and to sustain your struggles against the caste system?

Our pastors will not speak about our issues or struggles. They told us to pray, worship and glorify God.

- f. Can you tell me some of the songs you sing to sustain you in your struggles?

I sing Christian Songs. But not in our struggles.

- g. Please tell me, do you wear/use/keep any religious signs or symbols? What is the importance of these things to you?

I do not wear cross as symbol. Our church people do not encourage that; they speak to love and forgive.

- h. As a Christian Dalit, do you feel that you are different from Dalits who belong to other religious traditions? If so, then how?

All Dalits have problems. All have different religions. We worship Jesus. They pray their Gods.

- i. How would you describe God in terms of your present struggles? How would you describe Jesus Christ in terms of your present struggles?

Jesus is a God of love. He will protect and save us.

- j. Are there any differences in how you see Jesus Christ, Ambedkar, Marx or your local Dalit leaders?
No Idea.
- k. How do you understand Christ's mission in terms of your present situation?
Christ came and died for us.
- l. Could you tell me about your understanding of the purpose of Christ's suffering and dying on the cross?
I do not understand this. Jesus died for our sins. That is what our pastor says.
- m. Can you tell me about your understanding of the Kingdom of God?
Jesus is King and He will come at the end of world.
- n. Do you use your Dalit art, music, dance and drums during worship and during your struggles?
No - in worship services.
- o. Why do you use those and what do you get out their use?

- p. What do you understand by the term Dalit Theology?
No idea about Dalit theology. No one speaks about that in our church. I know what is 'Dalits'. We are Dalits. I have not gone to such theological meetings.
- q. Do you have any access to any literature on Dalit Theology?
No idea
- r. Have you attended any meeting and conference concerned with Dalit Theology and if yes, then what was your experience?
No one has told us about Dalit theology. I never attended any meeting so far.
- s. Have you heard the sermons related to Dalit theology in sermons of pastors and Bishops?
No idea. Never.
- t. Can you tell me whether you have met any Dalit Theologians?

No.

- u.** Has any Dalit theologian participated in your struggles or discussions?
We are not encouraged to participate in any struggle. No Dalit theologian came to our struggle – not even our pastor.
- v.** Assuming you have heard of Dalit Theology, can you say whether it has helped you in your struggles?
No answer.
- w.** What do you say about the saying, 'God is, God of the oppressed'?
No idea.
- x.** Do you relate this saying to your caste oppressed situation?

- y.** What do you think about the Exodus experience of Israelites?
God sent Moses to release Israelites. I know the story
- z.** Are you able to relate the same with your caste situation?
No idea
- aa.** What do you think about the preferential option of God for the oppressed people?
No idea
- bb.** What is your opinion on the saying that once you were no people and now you have become God's people
No idea
- cc.** What do you think about the saying messianic intervention?
No idea
- dd.** What is your idea about messianic people and messianic responsibility?
First time I am hearing like this
- ee.** What do you think about Moses and his role in liberating Israelites?
Can you correlate this to your situation?
Moses is a man of God.
- ff.** What is your idea about you are created in the image of God?

We are in the image of God

- gg.** Do you feel that since you have God's image you have a responsibility to transform the society?
No idea
- hh.** What do you feel that Jesus a Dalit and Christ a Liberator?
I do not understand this. Jesus is God that I know.
- ii.** What is opinion about Nazareth manifesto?
No idea
- jj.** What is your understanding about Jesus's saying that 'First will be the last and Last will be first?'
In heaven First will be last and Last will be first
- kk.** What is your opinion about Dalits are called to struggle for transformation?
We struggle
- ll.** What is your idea about salvation? Do you feel liberation from caste is a salvation for you?
No idea
- mm.** What do you think about the saying that the struggle for Dalits will liberate Non Dalits also from their caste mindset?
Non Dalits oppress us. We struggle against them.
- nn.** What is your understanding about kingdom of god? Do you feel that your Dalit culture has the characteristics of kingdom of God?
Jesus is the King and He will come at the end.
- oo.** Has Dalit theology reached grass root Dalit Christians?

- pp.** Do you sense that there is the necessity for Dalit theology in the struggles against caste discriminations?

qq. What are your suggestions for taking Dalit Theology to grass root Dalit Christians?

Pastors should talk about caste.

rr. what impact this interview/conversation has created in you?

I learned that I need to know a lot.



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Person – 10

21st Jan 2011 - Tirunelveli

Interview by J. Vincent Manoharan, Research Student, University of Birmingham - Thesis Title "Towards a Practical Dalit Theology"

.....

1. Personal Details

a. What is your name?

I am

b. What is your family name?

Married; my husband is.....

I got married in 1978; I have two sons and a daughter.

I am a 2nd generation Christian;

c. What is your sub caste?

Dalit - Pallar

d. What is your age?

I am around 50 years

e. Have you had a formal education?

SSLC

f. Are you married?

g. What is your job?

Social work for the upliftment of our people; I help them to reach to welfare programs of Government.

I also do the evangelism ministry; I carry Jesus to people.

I am the President for the area Churches 'Auxiliary for Social Action program – a People's Federation. It concerns for people's issues.

h. Where do you live?

.....
.....

Tirunelveli District

i. How many years have you lived at this address?

Since Marriage

2. Relating to Church?

a. Can you tell me which denomination you belong to?

Church of South India

b. Do you have a church in your home village/town?

Yes - we have a church

c. Do you attend worship regularly?

Yes. I attend church regularly

d. Please tell me whether you are a member of the Church?

CSI member

e. Do you hold any position in your local church, if so, what?

No

f. What church activities are you involved in?

Women fellowship

g. Do you hold any position in the Church hierarchy?

No

h. Can you describe the caste composition of your church?

In my church, there are around 1800 members; there are Arunthathiars and Nadars along with Pallars; Majority is Dalits. But the Pastor is a Nadar. If a relative of us, a Pallar comes as Pastor, he would be sent out quickly from this pastorate; Though I do the women fellowship work earnestly, the Diocese does not give importance to me as I am a Dalit. I am in CASA as its Area President.

3. Relating to caste practices

a. Please tell me about the caste discrimination, if any, that exists inside or/and outside the Church?

After the Tsunami CASA decided to leave the follow up responsibility to People's Federation; hence they conducted election. I contested; the dominant non Dalit group in the Church did not want the Federation president-ship goes to a Dalit. They plotted against me; and they managed that I should not be recognized or won in the contest; but I spoke against the dominance of Nadars. After the intervention of the local

Pastor, they kept quiet and chose me for a 3 year term; yet I am not given the power or roles and responsibilities, though I hold the position.

If a pastor from our caste comes into our village, the dominating caste group will divide our people into two and chase away our pastor from our pastorate; from the Diocese, one teacher comes to our church for conducting prayer; she prays well; but she always brings a separate tumbler so that she does not drink water from us.

If an upper caste person marries a Dalit girl, she will not be allowed inside their house; she is persecuted.

In the graveyard, there is a separate place for the Arunthathians.

Caste Christians discriminate me because I am a Dalit. They give me coffee in a separate cup. They treat me lower than the Nadar pastor's wife if we go together for meetings.

Even the pastor used to say always openly that he works in a Pallar area. It shows his anti Dalit consciousness.

- b. Could you please share the type of discrimination that you have faced either within or/outside the Church?**

I suffered much discrimination both within the church and outside the church as I told you earlier.

- c. Have you ever suffered physical violence owing to caste practices-if so, how and by whom?**

Dominant caste people play subtle caste discriminations. I never met a physical violence as I do not oppose them vehemently

- d. Kindly tell me whether you had ever been taken to a police station or court or put in prison because of your caste or your work against caste discrimination?**

No for personal reasons.

- e. How did your priest or pastor react to your suffering discrimination or physical violence on account of caste?**

Such event never occurred. Pastors will not come for our support or rescue.

- f. Could you please tell me about the reaction of the hierarchy of the church to your experiences described in the previous question?

Church hierarchy does not bother about these discriminations.

4. Relating to the "action-reflection" process for organizing struggles

- a. Can you please share something about the activity based meetings you have organized/taken part in against the caste system? (These meetings can be either inside or outside of the church)

We struggled for the rights of Dalit Christians after we were guided by Christudoss Gandhi, a Bureaucrat. Since I undergo all discriminations, and since I experience insulting words and since I am born as a Dalit, I struggle. For organising struggles, we conduct meetings and decide. It is a usual practice.

- b. Please tell me the role of your priest or pastor in your activist meetings?

They never participate in our meetings.

- c. Can you say whether you have been visited by any church leader during the course of your meetings or struggles? And if so, then what resulted from these visits?

They neither participated nor visited me

5. Relating to Faith/Themes articulated by Dalit theologians

- a. Please share with me whether you see any passage in the Bible which gives you strength or hope to become involved in the struggle with caste? Can you describe how it helps you?

I see equality in the story of Samaritan woman in the days of Jesus.

In the story of Moses in Exodus, Moses is portrayed fighting for the equality of a Hebrew, although he was brought up as an Egyptian. The story of exodus is not seen deeply. It is not giving the sense of liberation to our people. Our people are not like Moses, as they do not get the feeling to rouse, when one of our people or neighbor is beaten by others. They were not properly taught. Bible was not described to them properly.

In the NT, I consider very much the change of heart of Peter. The word of God said to him, 'do not treat things polluted which God declared as Holy'.

- b. Do you pray when you face hardships? If yes, then what are the benefits of praying? How does it help you?

I pray for the welfare of people for their good prosperous life and for peace among people; I am anticipating support from God.

- c. Do you read from specific books or written material as part of your planning for any struggle? If so, what are they? Can you share why you have selected these materials to assist you?

No any particular passage. But I like the passage where Christ took whip. It is my personal passage. Not from church.

- d. Can you describe the typical themes or ideas of the sermons that are preached by your priest or pastor? Give me an example please?

Jesus was not preached as one who opposes injustice. Jesus is seen as Nadar; Pastors do not speak against caste; while eating together they act as casteists; during the time of food in Christian meetings, normally Dalits have to wait for the last row or round for their turn.

Pastors give ordinary and simple message but they do not practice even that message; they preach for getting offering and for salary; if any one raises questions about Christian values towards caste, he/she would be sidelined in the church.

- e. Please share with me the impact of such sermons in terms of encouraging or motivating you to remain in faith and to sustain your struggles against the caste system?

Their sermons will have no message. Usual sharing of Bible stories. It is rhetoric.

- f. Can you tell me some of the songs you sing to sustain you in your struggles?

No idea. No such Christian song is there

- g. Please tell me, do you wear/use/keep any religious signs or symbols? What is the importance of these things to you?

I wear cross in my neck chain. Cross is the symbol which tells that Jesus was crucified; It is told as the symbol of redemption;

I have not seen cross as the symbol of resistance.

Suffering is the way for redemption.

- h.** As a Christian Dalit, do you feel that you are different from Dalits who belong to other religious traditions? If so, then how?
Dalits in Hindu religion face open atrocities and discriminations; but it is in a more subtle form within the church
- i.** How would you describe God in terms of your present struggles? How would you describe Jesus Christ in terms of your present struggles?
I see Jesus as redeemer; I see him as one who gives life; I see him as my father and my bridegroom; I see him as my God and as my all.
- j.** Are there any differences in how you see Jesus Christ, Ambedkar, Marx or your local Dalit leaders?
Ambedkar brought liberation to Dalits.
- k.** How do you understand Christ's mission in terms of your present situation?
Christ resisted evil of his time.
- l.** Could you tell me about your understanding of the purpose of Christ's suffering and dying on the cross?
Suffering leads to victory – salvation
- m.** Can you tell me about your understanding of the Kingdom of God?
Kingdom of God is free from all troubles and difficulties. All will be equal there.
- n.** Do you use your Dalit art, music, dance and drums during worship and during your struggles?
I like the song My Redeemer Lives; it is not giving courage but gives comfort
- o.** Why do you use those and what do you get out their use?
I sing them for inspirations
- p.** What do you understand by the term Dalit Theology?
Not much. But I think Dalit theology looks into the welfare of the backward.
- q.** Do you have any access to any literature on Dalit Theology?
I did not see a book- neither in sermon nor in retreats.

- r. Have you attended any meeting and conference concerned with Dalit Theology and if yes, then what was your experience?
No
- s. Have you heard the sermons related to Dalit theology in sermons of pastors and Bishops?
Dalit issues are spoken at CASA meetings only – not in sermons
- t. Can you tell me whether you have met any Dalit Theologians?
No
- u. Has any Dalit theologian participated in your struggles or discussions?
No
- v. Assuming you have heard of Dalit Theology, can you say whether it has helped you in your struggles?
No
- w. What do you say about the saying, 'God is, God of the oppressed?
God is always with poor
- x. Do you relate this saying to your caste oppressed situation?
God is with us.
- y. What do you think about the Exodus experience of Israelites?
I know this story that God saved them.
- z. Are you able to relate the same with your caste situation?
God is with us.
- aa. What do you think about the preferential option of God for the oppressed people?
I do not understand. But it is not taught at the church. But God is with us.
- bb. What is your opinion on the saying that once you were no people and now you have become God's people?
No idea
- cc. What do you think about the saying messianic intervention?
No idea

- dd.** What is your idea about messianic people and messianic responsibility?
Nothing was taught like this to us.
- ee.** What do you think about Moses and his role in liberating Israelites?
Can you correlate this to your situation?
Every Dalit should become a Moses
- ff.** What is your idea about you are created in the image of God?
All are created in the image of God
- gg.** Do you feel that since you have God's image you have a responsibility to transform the society?
No answer
- hh.** What do you feel that Jesus a Dalit and Christ a Liberator?
Jesus is God
- ii.** What is opinion about Nazareth Manifesto?
Not heard in the Church
- jj.** What is your understanding about Jesus's saying that First will be the last; and Last will be first?
The last will first in Heaven
- kk.** What is your opinion about Dalits are called to struggle for transformation?
We are already in the struggle against caste.
- ll.** What is your idea about salvation? Do you feel liberation from caste is a salvation for you?
Salvation is for all
- mm.** What do you think about the saying that the struggle for Dalits will liberate Non Dalits also from their caste mindset?
Non Dalits will not remove caste from themselves
- nn.** What is your understanding about kingdom of god? Do you feel that your Dalit culture has the characteristics of kingdom of God?
No idea
- oo.** Has Dalit theology reached grass root Dalit Christians?

I do not know Dalit theology. It has not reached us.

pp. Do you sense that there is the necessity for Dalit theology in the struggles against caste discriminations?

I think so - since it talks about Dalits.

qq. What are your suggestions for taking Dalit Theology to grass root Dalit Christians?

For the present church Jesus is not the motivator; there is no love in the church; the meaning of Dalit is equality; loving is part of Christianity; but there exists an emptiness in the church; there is no effect of love or equality in the church. We Dalits long for that love and equality. Who will bring this?

rr. What impact this interview/conversation has created in you?

Many things were not clear to me; I need to know Dalit theology. We need good Dalit Christian publication. Talking to you was good. It provided me many ideas for Dalit liberation.



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Person – 11

21st Jan 2011 - Tirunelveli

Interview by J. Vincent Manoharan, Research Student, University of Birmingham - Thesis Title "Towards a Practical Dalit Theology"

.....

1. Personal Details

a. What is your name?

I am.....

b. What is your family name?

Father is

My wife name is

I am a convert from Hindu background

c. What is your sub caste?

Dalit- Pallar

d. What is your age?

Around 50

e. Have you had a formal education?

9th fail

f. Are you married?

Married

g. What is your job?

I manage an independent Prayer group.
(Resisting Caste oppression).

h. Where do you live?

.....
Thuthukudi District.

i. How many years have you lived at this address?

For almost 25 years

2. Relating to Church?

a. Can you tell me which denomination you belong to?

I belong to CSI - Church of South India. But I have a prayer group and conduct prayer meeting every Friday. Earlier there came around 60 people; they are from different castes such as Pillaimar, Maravar, Vellalar and also Dalits. After the fasting prayer, we eat food. I always say that I will allow them in my fellowship, only if they all take food together. They all take food together. I speak to those who clean the streets and try to bring them into Christian fold.

b. Do you have a church in your home village/town?

I manage a prayer fellowship

c. Do you attend worship regularly?

I do

d. Please tell me whether you are a member of the Church?

Member of CSI

e. Do you hold any position in your local church, if so, what?

No

f. What church activities are you involved in?

I conduct prayer fellowship

g. Do you hold any position in the Church hierarchy?

No

h. Can you describe the caste composition of your church?

Pillaimar, Maravar and also Dalits.

I had arranged inter caste marriages; Members opposed this.

One time a CSI Pastor who was a Nadar and me went for a marriage. We both had food there. While returning from the marriage in a bus, the Pastor asked me the caste of the bridegroom.

He told me that he would die if he eats in the home of a Dalit Pallar. I was shocked of his caste mentality.

3. Relating to caste practices

a. Please tell me about the caste discrimination, if any, that exists inside or/and outside the Church?

The Non Dalit evangelists will not go to Dalits. Many Dalit evangelists do hide their caste and do the ministry. Non Dalits will listen to only non Dalit evangelists.

My son applied to the CSI College; there they did not consider him because he was a Dalit. Hence he went to Kolar Goldfields and studied nursing course there.

Pastors want to have castes with them. CSI Nadars will not marry any one at the Roman Catholic because Dalits are there more in number.

CSI Nadars organize themselves in the area and build churches for themselves. They do not come forward to build a church for the Dalits in that area. Even if the Dalits build a church, only Nadars will take care of the governance.

Nadar Pastors send the catechists to bury the Dalits. If a Nadar dies, the Pastors stay there until the body is buried. When I resisted this kind of discriminations, they hated me.

Since I speak the word of God, many are jealous of me. Even birds have unity but men do not unite themselves. Wild animals hear the words of God? - No, it is only human beings. They believe the evangelists who come 'tiptop'.

I am struggling for employment opportunity for Dalits and the disabled. Many evangelists and pastors cheat women according to 2 Tim 3. Women get fascinated towards the persons who speak "heavenly language". I tell the people not to place offering to CSI and RC churches. I tell the people not to give the pastors. I tell the people to give to the hungry. Even the word of God also tells the same.

Church is not fighting the injustice of the Governments. In the outside world, there is no unity among Pallars also. Dalit pastors are discriminated. Caste devil will not go unless there is prayer and fasting. Political leaders cheat Dalit people; I do not go for voting.

- b. Could you please share the type of discrimination that you have faced either within or/outside the Church?**

I explained it earlier. There still exists the caste discrimination. Two tumbler system is prominent in North Ilanthalikulam area. There is two tumbler system in Perambalur area – in Trichy District and many other places in this State and in this area. Children are admitted into schools

after asking their caste background. Caste discrimination exists in all forms in everyday life.

- c. Have you ever suffered physical violence owing to caste practices-if so, how and by whom?

No physical violence. But caste people do not like me and my challenging work.

- d. Kindly tell me whether you had ever been taken to a police station or court or put in prison because of your caste or your work against caste discrimination?

No

- e. How did your priest or pastor react to your suffering discrimination or physical violence on account of caste?

CSI Nadar pastors do not like me

- f. Could you please tell me about the reaction of the hierarchy of the church to your experiences described in the previous question?

There is no hierarchy in my fellowship. But in CSI. They do not like me. They do not support me.

4. Relating to the "action-reflection" process for organizing struggles

- a. Can you please share something about the activity based meetings you have organized/taken part in against the caste system? (These meetings can be either inside or outside of the church)

Through my fellowship I try to bring equality among people. That is our activity meeting. For any resistance we hold meetings.

- b. Please tell me the role of your priest or pastor in your activist meetings?

CSI pastors are not helpful to caste annihilation. They do not support us.

- c. Can you say whether you have been visited by any church leader during the course of your meetings or struggles? And if so, then what resulted from these visits?

They neither participated nor visited me.

5. Relating to Faith/Themes articulated by Dalit theologians

- a. Please share with me whether you see any passage in the Bible which gives you strength or hope to become involved in the struggle with caste? Can you describe how it helps you?

The Bible has every message for my strength

- b. Do you pray when you face hardships? If yes, then what are the benefits of praying? How does it help you?

We pray from midnight 1 am to early morning 4 am. My wife is also like that. We pray in the midnight. We conduct fasting prayer on each Friday. We pray for removal of deceases, for marriages, for the removal of idolatry at the nation and for good ministry. Because of prayer, leprosy removed from me. I pray to God to meet our needs.

- c. Do you read from specific books or written material as part of your planning for any struggle? If so, what are they? Can you share why you have selected these materials to assist you?

I read no books except Bible. God is my helper. He did shut the mouth of lion in the story of Daniel.

Blessing of God is conditional. The remark of Nathan and John the Baptist might have taken off their heads but the evil cannot kill the soul.

I believe in this and I carry my ministry and struggle.

- d. Can you describe the typical themes or ideas of the sermons that are preached by your priest or pastor? Give me an example please?

No pastor speaks about or resists caste discriminations. They never talk about caste in the church. Their sermons are rhetoric.

- e. Please share with me the impact of such sermons in terms of encouraging or motivating you to remain in faith and to sustain your struggles against the caste system?

Their sermons never talk to us- No message for us

- f. Can you tell me some of the songs you sing to sustain you in your struggles?

Let me sing a song for you (He sings)

The people of Canaan will be afraid of you

Emorites will shiver at you

Canan is much distance away

But God would lead us

But God would lead us

Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah

My wife wrote this song
She dictated and I wrote
God gave her the tune for this song.

Like this we have many songs to energise us. But not from our traditional Hymn books. We compose and sing.

- g. Please tell me, do you wear/use/keep any religious signs or symbols? What is the importance of these things to you?

I do not mark cross or symbol on my forehead or neck; I do not lay hands on any other heads. I do not believe in this.

- h. As a Christian Dalit, do you feel that you are different from Dalits who belong to other religious traditions? If so, then how?

Dalit Christians undergo lot of problems both within the society and in the church. Dalits in other religions also suffer the same.

- i. How would you describe God in terms of your present struggles? How would you describe Jesus Christ in terms of your present struggles?

I see Jesus as my helper

- j. Are there any differences in how you see Jesus Christ, Ambedkar, Marx or your local Dalit leaders?

Ambedkar is Dalit leader

- k. How do you understand Christ's mission in terms of your present situation?

Christ came into the world to give us life

- l. Could you tell me about your understanding of the purpose of Christ's suffering and dying on the cross?

He came to give us help in this world

- m. Can you tell me about your understanding of the Kingdom of God?

It is a free place for all who fear God.

- n. Do you use your Dalit art, music, dance and drums during worship and during your struggles?

No

- o. Why do you use those and what do you get out their use?

- p. What do you understand by the term Dalit Theology?
I have not heard about this. We speak about Dalits and their problems.
- q. Do you have any access to any literature on Dalit Theology?
I have not read any books related to Dalit theology. CSI pastors never speak about caste discriminations. If they speak, Bishops will not give them salary. When I went for preaching in, the Pastor told me not to preach about 'sin' but preach about 'blessings' only. I speak about the caste dominance in CSI.
- r. Have you attended any meeting and conference concerned with Dalit Theology and if yes, then what was your experience?
No
- s. Have you heard the sermons related to Dalit theology in sermons of pastors and Bishops?
No
- t. Can you tell me whether you have met any Dalit Theologians?
No.
- u. Has any Dalit theologian participated in your struggles or discussions?
No
- v. Assuming you have heard of Dalit Theology, can you say whether it has helped you in your struggles?
Dalits inside the CSI are suffering a lot
- w. What do you say about the saying, 'God is, God of the oppressed'?
No idea
- x. Do you relate this saying to your caste oppressed situation?
Caste is really a problem here
- y. What do you think about the Exodus experience of Israelites?
God sent Moses to release Israelites
- z. Are you able to relate the same with your caste situation?
God sent Moses and he is sending me

- aa.** What do you think about the preferential option of God for the oppressed people?
First time I hear this
- bb.** What is your opinion on the saying that once you were no people and now you have become God's people?
We are always God's people
- cc.** What do you think about the saying messianic intervention?
No idea
- dd.** What is your idea about messianic people and messianic responsibility?
First time I am hearing like this
- ee.** What do you think about Moses and his role in liberating Israelites?
Can you correlate this to your situation?
Moses was sent by God to liberate Israelites. We need Moses
- ff.** What is your idea about you are created in the image of God?
All are created in the image of God
- gg.** Do you feel that since you have God's image you have a responsibility to transform the society?

- hh.** What do you feel that Jesus a Dalit and Christ a Liberator?
I do not understand why you are saying Jesus as Dalit?
- ii.** What is opinion about Nazareth Manifesto?
No idea. Hearing first time.
- jj.** What is your understanding about Jesus's saying that First will be the last; and Last will be first?
If you are faithful to God, God will take care of you
- kk.** What is your opinion about Dalits are called to struggle for transformation?
Dalits and we- Dalit Christians are suffering and struggling already
- ll.** What is your idea about salvation? Do you feel liberation from caste is a salvation for you?

All of us need salvation from sin

mm. What do you think about the saying that the struggle for Dalits will liberate Non Dalits also from their caste mindset?

Caste is in the minds of non Dalits and it is difficult to remove the caste mindset

nn. What is your understanding about kingdom of god? Do you feel that your Dalit culture has the characteristics of kingdom of God?

All will live together at the end.

oo. Has Dalit theology reached grass root Dalit Christians?

No

pp. Do you sense that there is the necessity for Dalit theology in the struggles against caste discriminations?

Sure – because, the way you explained.

qq. What are your suggestions for taking Dalit Theology to grass root Dalit Christians?

People like you should think and work.

rr. What impact this interview/conversation has created in you?

We need to educate our people on Bible, against Caste. Thanks for interviewing me as I am able to look back.


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Person – 12

7th Dec 2010 - Trichy

Interview by J. Vincent Manoharan, Research Student, University of Birmingham - Thesis Title "Towards a Practical Dalit Theology"

.....

1. Personal Details

ss. What is your name?

I am

tt. What is your family name?

My father's name is :.....

My Mother:.....

My parents committed me to the ministry. Initially I did not like the ministry. When I was doing my college studies, I came into contact with Naxalites (Extreme Left) and involved in Social Equality thinking. I was motivated to do sacrifice for such involvement. I wanted to work against all injustices in the church and eliminate those who are involved in such kind of actions. Actually I wanted to become a Naxalite during my college studies. After the college, when I was in the motor mechanic course, a prayer group met me and moulded me and I offered myself to the ministry. My father was a Hindu convert. By birth I am a Christian. My mother is a traditional Christian

uu. What is your sub caste?

Dalit - Pallar

vv. What is your age?

Running 57 years

ww. Have you had a formal education?

SSLC; then PUC; then Motor mechanic two years. then B.Th; Then BD. I secured high marks in BD. Others advised me to do M.Th but the Bishop refused to send me for higher studies. I did MA History and MA Sociology, then I did MPhil. Now I have registered in the Tamil University for my Doctoral studies.

xx. Are you married?

Yes

yy. What is your job?

I work as a Pastor in TELC in the rural areas of There are 50 families in this pastorate. It is a separate pastorate. Also there are two rural sub churches attached to it. In all the three churches 90% members are Parayas and Pallars.

zz. Where do you live?

.....
Trichy District

aaa. How many years have you lived at this address?

For the past 5 years, prior to that in Trichy town

2. Relating to Church?

a. Can you tell me which denomination you belong to?

I am from TELC protestant church

b. Do you have a church in your home village/town?

Yes

c. Do you attend worship regularly?

As a Pastor I conduct services in all these three churches.

d. Please tell me whether you are a member of the Church?

e. Do you hold any position in your local church, if so, what?

f. What church activities are you involved in?

g. Do you hold any position in the Church hierarchy?

h. Can you describe the caste composition of your church?

Questions not asked

3. Relating to caste practices

a. Please tell me about the caste discrimination, if any, that exists inside or/and outside the Church?

Not in my church in my present pastorate. Caste discriminations mostly exist outside the church. Nearby our church, the Thevar community lives. They are minority, but still they dominate and decide everything. Dalit depend on them and hence they go along with them. Since all are Dalits inside the church, there is no discrimination among them inside the church. But outside the church, in their living places, they are not treated equally on the basis of caste and religion. Although the younger generation is educated, they are not treated in par with others. They are discriminated. Discrimination exists in many forms.

b. Could you please share the type of discrimination that you have faced either within or/outside the Church?

There are separate cemeteries for the Dalits. In my earlier Pastorates caste greatly existed. All forms of discriminations existed there. When I worked in a Vanniar dominated area, Dalits were the minority. I went there as a first Dalit pastor. Hierarchy promised them that I will be transferred from the place in an year. Vanniars first refused to accept me. They are the illicit liquor brewers and always they had guns with them. I was a Dalit pastor in a Vanniar parish. 5 years I was there. At the end of first year, when the Bishop transferred me, the same Vanniars refused to accept my transfer. I used to mingle with any congregation whatever is given to me. Then I went towhere I spent 10 years. It is a Dalit congregation. Then I was the Director ofProject in Trichy. Then there was a year gap. I became chaplain of I studied chaplain course in Delhi for 3 months.

I got 32 transfer orders owing to my allegiance to poor and down trodden and also against injustice, during my tenure. Though I received so many transfer orders, I involved myself in each congregation, understood the needs of the people and helped them.

When my father was a catechist, he worked under Missionaries. My father used to go to villages such as Suranam, Negamam, Varavani and Gopalapattinam. In these places, Dalit women were not allowed to wear their upper cloths to cover their breasts. They cannot use common water tank/well. They should stand on the periphery of the tank and get water poured to them by high caste women. This is what was my father told me. But now the situation is little changed but still the discrimination continues.

During my tenure, I found Dalit Christians cannot use umbrella; they were asked to drink in separate tumblers. The Dalits catechists who travelled with me used to put the Bible and the shoes inside a bag and carried them. Dalits were compelled to beat drums for the high caste funerals and to carry carcasses of dead animals. Pallar community used to be militant to some extent. In 1978, in Paramakkudi area, both Pallars and Parayars used to show conflicts among them separating themselves. In other places, congregations usually belong to the same community. In.....the Roman Catholics unleashed discrimination on the Dalit Christians. Dalit Christians used to adjust with other caste people in or to live with. When I worked in as a Director, I saw the discriminations related to caste inside the church.

Bishop asked to me work in ... as a Director. As a result I could travel to all the pastorates. I saw refusal of water to Dalits. Especially in Coimbatore- Ottanchatram area and in Madukkarai, I saw discrimination against the Sakkilia Christians. They cannot even speak or question. Women were relatively beautiful but under severe abuse. In Arulpuram, we had a leather project from the church. Gounders were in the practice of abusing the Sakkilia women sexually. Dalit Christians used to adjust with the dominant caste. High caste Christians used to pay church subscription for the lower castes and thus they dominate them. Dalit Christians are treated as animals. When I was a Director for...., we tried to make them independent by giving them projects like goat rearing and drinking water wells.

c. Have you ever suffered physical violence owing to caste practices- if so, how and by whom?

No physical violence on me. But I faced mental violence. Larger time of my work I spent in rural areas. I faced discrimination in the form of not getting support from the church to my involvement.

d. Kindly tell me whether you had ever been taken to a police station or court or put in prison because of your caste or your work against caste discrimination?

In during the shrimp farming issue, I thought church could play a role to protect the interest of farmers and agricultural laborers. I tried to motivate the congregation youth to read Bible differently to become active in opposing injustice. The opponents tried to implicate me in a bomb blast issue. I was convinced that the role of the pastor is to participate in the people's struggles. I decided that my job is to train young persons and the women to change the oppressive scenario. Police tried to arrest me. They tried to brand me as Naxalite. I was about to be arrested. I was warned by an informer. Then I caught the last bus in the night and I absconded myself for 15 days during which time, I did not go to the pastorate. My theology which I learned helped me to struggle with the people.

They wanted to implicate me as if I conspired to burn a paddy storage hall. Friends of my daughter raised questions with my daughter in school why police are coming to your house and what your father did. It was so difficult for me to make them to understand. It took so much time to motivate them. My wife wanted to insist me to keep quiet, but I went on in my own way of challenging injustice and caste discrimination as a Pastor.

e. How did your priest or pastor react to your suffering discrimination or physical violence on account of caste?

In pastorate, a friend of mine, a Dalit Mr. was under implication in an untouchability case. Most of my time was spent in meeting the local panchayat, in involving in untouchability cases and in meeting the sub inspector of Police in this matter. I was able to help the people of who were implicated in the illicit liquor cases. My struggles were supported by Dr Carr, attached to TTS. I was able to stop the eviction process under the garb of airport extension in Trichy. But no others bothered to even ask me and my work. No support from anyone in the Church.

f. Could you please tell me about the reaction of the hierarchy of the church to your experiences described in the previous question?

80% church hierarchy did not support. I felt I am an untouchable Dalit in the eyes of the church hierarchy. My father was victimized. I could feel the discrimination in governance. Although my church is called a Dalit church, the leadership is also in the hands of Dalits, they forget the problems of Dalits. They discourage me not to take risk or they threaten me with transfer. This is how I was transferred 32 times. Since a pamphlet carried the situation of pastorate red in colour I faced lot of difficulties as I was branded as a communist. But Bishop supported me. Some other Bishops also supported me. But not always. Church is a hindrance to practical Dalit liberation.

4. Relating to the “action-reflection” process for organizing struggles

a. Can you please share something about the activity based meetings you have organized/taken part in against the caste system? (These meetings can be either inside or outside of the church)

In to the churches, pastors mostly look for benefits to come in the form of offering or revenue. They do not want to practice the theology that they learned in TTS. But I took risk. I did not have any support. I got angry and conducted meetings among the affected people and led protest rallies against the Dalit atrocities. In 1978, there was no fixed wages for Dalit workers. There was no minimum wage. We submitted a petition to the Munu Athi commission. We gave it to MGR, the Chief Minister. We explained to him about minimum wages.

I organized church youth group and educated them. I could not motivate some who are like -the depressed syndrome people- into struggles. But however they listened to me. After an year they tried to ask for more wages. When I left for another pastorate....., they compromised with the dominant caste by promising on the betel leaf, as a local custom and went

to their original status of serving the upper caste. They paid fine for their upraisal to the Non Dalits. It was a failure to me. But I could understand their situation. They could not stand on their own legs because they depend on the non Dalit land lords. For their food and livelihood, they sell themselves to land lords. No other go as that was their situation.

No pastor has taught congregation members to look Bible differently, related to their daily suffering life and struggles. Pastoral work stops with cultic practices such as Baptism, Marriage, funeral, communion, Christmas and harvest feasts. They teach submissive ideologies which will not touch their inner feelings and they involve in mere routine job. There are good teachings such as not to refuse spilled over grains on the field for the poor. No one teaches them about this, but we finish our worships with four songs, a lord's prayer.

I am different. I engage the youth to discuss their problems and motivate them to go for struggles.

b. Please tell me the role of your priest or pastor in your activist meetings?

Question not asked

c. Can you say whether you have been visited by any church leader during the course of your meetings or struggles? And if so, then what resulted from these visits?

If I look back, the Bishops of other castes did more to Dalits than the Dalit leaders. It is not the problem of teaching. But we did not practice. If they practice what they teach, the Dalits would have been developed a bit. There exists the survival issue. Church leaders do not want to involve in "unnecessary" struggles. They want to be urban pastors. New generation does not want to tolerate caste discriminations. But the young pastors do not want to involve in liberation ministry. They want rich church committee posts. Hence they want to involve in church politics. Only a small percentage/group has got benefitted by the church. They relegate common people and poor. Due to various reasons, a large number of church people go out of the church. Therefore members want to go to Pentecostal church. Church is not relevant to their daily life and struggle. Church leaders do not bother.

No church leader visits any of the struggles of people.

5. Relating to Faith/Themes articulated by Dalit theologians

- a. Please share with me whether you see any passage in the Bible which gives you strength or hope to become involved in the struggle with caste? Can you describe how it helps you?

Since I am a pastor and a disciple, I believe that a text or order should provide practical application to answer the tears of the people. Worship is not an entrance to heaven.

The exodus experience of Israelites helps us to face challenges in the life. It tells that God will give us strength to face issues. In my preaching, I will share life experiences. I try to provide a Service without any emptiness. Bible gives me strength to prepare my journey.

Good Samaritan story! I reflect differently. How long we will provide treatment and provide bandage? Is that alright people get injured each day? What is the new dimension? How come we create a situation where there are no thieves and oppressors? I preach like this.

I used passages to provide leadership and motivation to promote people movement, to unite and promote people power. We do not tell the story of prodigal son without literal explanations; we give them allegory to it. There are Pharisees, Sadducees and Tax Collectors. Jesus says to accept Tax Collectors.

In the kings' feast, poor participated. Kingdom of God is not looking at the status of a person. Kingdom of God is for the least. Bible encourages this. It motivates poor. Very radical ideas are here. It tells a story where the person who came at the 6th hour also gets equal wage to that of the person who came first- telling that God does not look at people but their needs. It tells that God wants equality among human beings.. I preach like this.

- b. Do you pray when you face hardships? If yes, then what are the benefits of praying? How does it help you?

Prayer is my strength. When a caste issue erupted at, I conducted communion service under a tree. At the time where there were clashes, I conducted the service under a neem tree. People joined hands, participated in the cup. We prayed so that our struggle will give us benefit. We remembered the incident and sat before the cross silently. It was a meaningful worship service. It enabled us with strength. We mobilized struggles with that strength.

c. Do you read from specific books or written material as part of your planning for any struggle? If so, what are they? Can you share why you have selected these materials to assist you?

I always explain Bible portions in the perspective of Jesus

d. Can you describe the typical themes or ideas of the sermons that are preached by your priest or pastor? Give me an example please?

As a pastor, I do preach contextual sermons relating to people's life situation and needs. I already explained.

e. Please share with me the impact of such sermons in terms of encouraging or motivating you to remain in faith and to sustain your struggles against the caste system?

My readings from Bible helped me to guide the church in struggle. In turn it helped the congregation to struggle.

f. Can you tell me some of the songs you sing to sustain you in your struggles?

Question not asked

g. Please tell me, do you wear/use/keep any religious signs or symbols? What is the importance of these things to you?

Cassock, I wear, is the symbol of slave

h. As a Christian Dalit, do you feel that you are different from Dalits who belong to other religious traditions? If so, then how?

Dalits in all religions suffer the same.

i. How would you describe God in terms of your present struggles? How would you describe Jesus Christ in terms of your present struggles?

God is a Liberator God; Jesus came to liberate

j. Are there any differences in how you see Jesus Christ, Ambedkar, Marx or your local Dalit leaders?

Jesus Christ, Ambedkar and Marx worked for liberation of people

k. How do you understand Christ's mission in terms of your present situation?

Christ wants us to create a new world

l. Could you tell me about your understanding of the purpose of Christ's suffering and dying on the cross?

Jesus provides power to us to work for liberation though his dying on the cross

m. Can you tell me about your understanding of the Kingdom of God?

Kingdom of God is a new world of alternatives

n. Do you use your Dalit art, music, dance and drums during worship and during your struggles?

Not used in church – not possible.

o. Why do you use those and what do you get out their use?

Question not asked

p. What do you understand by the term Dalit Theology?

Dalit theology emerges in the tears of Dalits and in their needs. Dalit theology should come out in the context of rain, hunger, the rottenness of seeds at the time of plantation. Dalit theology was not there when we studied in TTS. Recently at Gurukul, they talked about Green theology. Theology reflects and speaks at context. In our times Dr Carr placed the seeds in the Rural Theological College. Pulikuthi incident gave clarity to Dalit theology.

q. Do you have any access to any literature on Dalit Theology?

In recent times, I have read some literatures produced by the TTS. I read books of Bishop Azariah and Bishop Devasahayam

r. Have you attended any meeting and conference concerned with Dalit Theology and if yes, then what was your experience?

I learned Dalit theology after participating in meetings held at ECC and at CASA. I saw in those places the emergence of Dalit theology. I was able to view Bible in the life experiences of people. I studied Bultmann and Indian Christian theology at Seminary. Dalit theology is an ongoing theology. It helps to grow the Dalit voice for liberation

s. Have you heard the sermons related to Dalit theology in sermons of pastors and Bishops?

No. Many pastors do not know about Dalit theology

t. Can you tell me whether you have met any Dalit Theologians?

When I worked in..... one Catholic Priest Father Alphonse was a challenge to me. No TELC pastor challenged me like him. Father Alphonse is a very practical man; His life and attitude challenged me. Bishop Johnson is another inspiration. I have been benefitted by his writings, his speech, also by the books of Bishop Azariah, Bishop Devasahayam and their Bible study.

u. Has any Dalit theologian participated in your struggles or discussions?

There are no many Dalit theologians. Even this small number, they speak and write only. I have not seen them in action in their personal life. I have seen them in their ministry. Although TELC leadership is a Dalit leadership from top to bottom, they do not do anything to Dalits.

v. Assuming you have heard of Dalit Theology, can you say whether it has helped you in your struggles?

Yes. Very much.

w. What do you say about the saying, 'God is, God of the oppressed?

God is certainly God of the oppressed

x. Do you relate this saying to your caste oppressed situation?

Church is not telling this to the congregation

y. What do you think about the Exodus experience of Israelites?

He sent Moses to release them

z. Are you able to relate the same with your caste situation?

Church has to educate the congregation to get out of caste

aa. What do you think about the preferential option of God for the oppressed people?

We need to tell this in the church

bb. What is your opinion on the saying that once you were no people and now you have become God's people?

Paul's saying - which we have to explain

cc. What do you think about the saying messianic intervention?

We have not told it to the congregation

dd. What is your idea about messianic people and messianic responsibility?

Each church leader has the responsibility of messianic work

ee. What do you think about Moses and his role in liberating Israelites? Can you correlate this to your situation?

We need to interpret the Exodus situation to congregation in the caste context

ff. What is your idea about you are created in the image of God?

All are created in the image of God

gg. Do you feel that since you have God's image you have a responsibility to transform the society?

As a pastor I am called to change the society and educate the church to change the society

hh. What do you feel that Jesus a Dalit and Christ a Liberator?

Yes. Jesus identified himself with Samaritan and he played the role of Christ the liberator

ii. What is opinion about Nazareth Manifesto?

Ensures Freedom and Dignity to human beings

jj. What is your understanding about Jesus's saying that first will be the last; and last will be first?

We need to explain this to the congregation

kk. What is your opinion about Dalits are called to struggle for transformation?

We are already in the struggle for transformation

ll. What is your idea about salvation? Do you feel liberation from caste is a salvation for you?

In Indian context, salvation is not only liberation from caste but from all sins of oppressions

mm. What do you think about the saying that the struggle for dalits will liberate Non Dalits also from their caste mindset?

Non Dalits will not remove themselves from Caste

nn. What is your understanding about kingdom of god? Do you feel that your Dalit culture has the characteristics of kingdom of God?

Dalit culture has more values of Kingdom of God

oo. Has Dalit theology reached grass root Dalit Christians?

Dalit theology has not gone to grassroots. It is only my frustration. Theology should also emerge from grassroots

pp. Do you sense that there is the necessity for Dalit theology in the struggles against caste discriminations?

There is the need for Dalit theology at people level. It should touch their lives. Not a doctrine. But a life motivation

qq. What are your suggestions for taking Dalit Theology to grass root Dalit Christians?

Pastors should go to villages and teach the youth and women Dalit theology. It should go to bottom level. There is retreat, briyani (rich food) and good food in rural areas like what is there in urban areas. Dalit theology should be taught to the grassroots relating to their day to day lives. In small groups it should be taught. Colleges/ Seminaries have become only academic institutions. Re-Reading of Bible is necessary. Sunday school children should be taught Dalit theology.

Children' perspectives should change. Dalit theology should be taken as a bunch to the next generation.

Through Sunday schools, we should take up environment and disability issues and address them. We should prepare youth and women. Dalit theology should address a holistic change in Humanity.

rr. What impact this interview/conversation has created in you?

This interview helped me to review my life. I need to do a lot more.



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Person – 13

22nd Dec 2010 - Dharapuram

Interview by J. Vincent Manoharan, Research Student, University of Birmingham - Thesis Title "Towards a Practical Dalit Theology"

.....

1. Personal Details

a. What is your name?

I am

b. What is your family name?

Son of

He is not exactly my father. My mother was married to her maternal uncle. All her seven children died at the time of their birth. Hence she was deserted. She returned to her sister's house where she was found, pregnant. Hence there was a dispute, as to whether I was the son of

When I was in my mother's womb, my grandmother had a dream. She did not want to kill me. After I was born, I was placed on a parapet wall of a well. But I was rescued by a woman. I do not know exactly what my date of birth is.

In 1962, the Madurai mission worked in my area. Bishop Leslie New Begin built a church in my village. I used to attend the church. When I was in my 5th standard, I got myself admitted in a hostel in Ambilikkai. Our families were then deported to Pachalur Hills in Pulikkuthikkadu. I heard Jesus through Youth for Christ. I was baptized by preacher Jeevanandham.

The words of Jesus, that "Ho youth, remember the Lord in your youth" from Job inspired me. When I tried admission in TTS, no one believed me that I am a Christian. I did not have a Baptism Certificate. They heard my background and admitted me. I am a Dalit. I came to understand that I am called Mathari or Sakkilian or known as Arunthathiar since I belonged to the villa..... We are called Mathari at Coimbatore area, and called as Begada at Rajapalayam area and as called as Sakkilian at Oddanchatram area and now we are now called as Arunthathiars. My wife is; We have two sons.

c. What is your sub caste?

Dalit – Arunthathiar

d. What is your age?

44 years; I do not know my exact date of birth

e. Have you had a formal education?

G.Th; B.Th; B.D;M.A; M.Th; now studying D.Th.

f. Are you married?

Yes

g. What is your job?

CSI Pastor from 1992

h. Where do you live?

.....
Dindigul District

i. How many years have you lived at this address?

More than 20 years

2. Relating to Church?

a. Can you tell me which denomination you belong to?

Church of South India

b. Do you have a church in your home village/town?

Yes

c. Do you attend worship regularly?

d. Please tell me whether you are a member of the Church?

e. Do you hold any position in your local church, if so, what?

f. What church activities are you involved in?

g. Do you hold any position in the Church hierarchy?

Question c to g not asked

h. Can you describe the caste composition of your church?

Mostly Arunthathiars. A few Parayars and Goundars.
Caste discrimination exists in the church

3. Relating to caste practices

a. Please tell me about the caste discrimination, if any, that exists inside or/and outside the Church?

Dalits are treated as slaves in the villages. In the village, if any theft occurs, Dalits are regularly implicated. Dalit Parayars are kept half naked, our women also to stand half nude; we, the Sakkilia men are forced to stand in full nude before the Goundars. They used to whip us. Because we are low castes.

After my 12th Standard, I used to sing and pray in my church. The wife of Jacob Cherian, a familiar person of that area encouraged me to become a Pastor.

Then I met Rev Anburaj. He belonged to Naidu community. He is a Telugu speaking person. I met him so that I can continue my study. There was one CMS Missionary by name Dr. Mathews Christian who was an Irish person. She visited our village and regularly attended us. She helped to become Pastor.

I was in poverty in school days, at the time of my passing 10th standard, still I remember, I could not pay even the school fees of Rs.120, and hence I went to the road construction work. On seeing this, 'Why you did not go to school', Dr. Christian asked. I replied I could not pay the fees. She said that she would talk to Jacob Cherian, the School Manager.

My mother went to nearby forest, collected fire wood and fed us with that income. Dr. Christian insisted that I should become a pastor. She paid my fees of Rs.2000 for my +2 class, where I took commerce group; I secured 80% marks, and got admission in Palani Arts college. She talked about me with Jacob Cherian. Dr. Cherian had a friend Kurian at Hauz Kauz in Delhi Green Park extension area. He had an All India Bible Institute. They decided that I should be sent there to study theology and they booked my train ticket as well.

My mother did not like it. She shouted at the Missionary. But I went to Coimbatore and took the train. One unknown person took care of me, helped me to secure the correct seat in the train, took care of me for 3 days in train and left me at Delhi at the Institute.

I was there for 3 years doing my G.Th. After completing it, I came back to my place and I was there as a Missionary under the All India Prayer Fellowship and worked as an evangelist. Then Dr. Christian Mathew heard about TTS and its social service, took me to TTS and got me admitted there. I got selected at the interview, studied there and completed B.Th. I got married in 1992.

After my studies, I had a problem in getting job. I understood that the issue of caste plays a major role in appointments of Pastors. I studied at TTS without any sponsorship from any diocese and therefore no diocese considered me for appointment. Some friends who belonged to Diocese of Trichy suggested me to apply to Diocese of Trichy. I applied and called for an interview. I met with the Bishop and told him about my call. Since I belonged to Madurai area, there was a lot of discussion in the Diocesan Executive committee whether to take me in Trichy Diocese. Moreover, I belonged to Arunthathiar caste.

But Bishop selected me. God heard my prayers. I was a youth worker for 3 years. Then I was a candidate for Ministry. I got ordained as Deacon in November 1993. I got my presbyter ordination in 1994. Meantime, my wife was selected for teacher training course. She got through and got appointed as teacher 1996 under Reservation the Quota for Arunthathiars. I worked in that area from 1994 to 1998. I finished my B.D in 1998. I tried to join UTC in 2003. I have no sufficient English knowledge, so I was not selected there.

I studied M.Th at TTS. I continued my first semester at TTS after paying the semester fee. Dr. Carr helped me to study. Meantime Christian Mathew died in an accident which caused great difficulty. With great difficulty, I continued my studies in TTS.

- b. Could you please share the type of discrimination that you have faced either within or/outside the Church?

Many. But to quote one: I published an article on the plights of Madhigas in People's Reporter, which focused on the issues relating to caste discrimination in the Diocese of Trichy.

It had a repercussion in the hierarchy of the Diocese. Bishop was worried at the publication and I was asked to appear before the council of the Diocese.

Ministerial committee discussed the question of my continuance in the Diocese. I appeared before the council. They told me that I should have placed my grievances, if any, before the Diocese, instead of writing in a journal ; but I stood firm on my decision.

I appeared before the next council. They stopped paying my fees for the next 3 months. I continued my insistence to get justice to the Arunthathiars. I tried my best to ask employment in the Diocese for the educated Arunthathiars. I was penalized like this. This is one example.

- c. Have you ever suffered physical violence owing to caste practices-if so, how and by whom?

Not physical violence but suffered mental violence

- d. Kindly tell me whether you had ever been taken to a police station or court or put in prison because of your caste or your work against caste discrimination?

No - I appeared before the Council of the Diocese.

- e. How did your priest or pastor react to your suffering discrimination or physical violence on account of caste?

Bishop was considerate to my grievances

- f. Could you please tell me about the reaction of the hierarchy of the church to your experiences described in the previous question?

Bishop was often listening to my grievances. But council members were against me.

4. Relating to the "action-reflection" process for organizing struggles

- a. Can you please share something about the activity based meetings you have organized/taken part in against the caste system? (These meetings can be either inside or outside of the church)

In Kundadam area, the Arunthathiar's houses were burnt. RSS had already been inflicting problems to Arunthathiars. RSS people used to beat people wearing cassocks. In this situation, Bishop insisted that I should go to that area.

I went there in 2005, organized a festival for the 35 congregations associated with the pastorate. This CSI festival took place after 16 years. This incident brought a lot of irritation to RSS. They came and met me and threatened me shouting, " Jesus is the God of Parayas; and You Arunthathiar is trying to make Parayas and Sakkilias to worship Jesus". I told them boldly that my role is not to convert people but help the Christians grow in Christian faith. It brought a name to me as a Rowdy Pastor.

I instructed Arunthathiar congregation to tell the Goundars that they would boycott and would not work in their lands as a protest, if they prevent them from going to church. Meantime, the Tamil nationalist groups were dissatisfied with Arunthathiars saying that Arunthathiars belonged to Telugu origin as they are a Telugu speaking community. These events disturbed my work but I challenged them.

In fact even among students in TTS, this kind of negative attitude towards Dalits and especially Arunthathiars was present.

The meetings that I organised and the decisions arrived at led to struggles. This is how I motivated Dalits.

- b. Please tell me the role of your priest or pastor in your activist meetings?

Bishop was in support of me. But not the committee members.

- c. Can you say whether you have been visited by any church leader during the course of your meetings or struggles? And if so, then what resulted from these visits?

No. But they were watching how I handled the issue

5. Relating to Faith/Themes articulated by Dalit theologians

- a. Please share with me whether you see any passage in the Bible which gives you strength or hope to become involved in the struggle with caste? Can you describe how it helps you?

Exodus 3 and Luke 4: 18-19; they tell God is our liberator

- b. Do you pray when you face hardships? If yes, then what are the benefits of praying? How does it help you?

I pray because it strengthens me

- c. Do you read from specific books or written material as part of your planning for any struggle? If so, what are they? Can you share why you have selected these materials to assist you?

Bible inspires me

- d. Can you describe the typical themes or ideas of the sermons that are preached by your priest or pastor? Give me an example please?

Church is not preventing to preach good sermon; it is up to the pastor to deliver good sermon. But Pastors are not doing it.

- e. Please share with me the impact of such sermons in terms of encouraging or motivating you to remain in faith and to sustain your struggles against the caste system?

My commitment to my God sustains me.

f. Can you tell me some of the songs you sing to sustain you in your struggles?

There are good songs in the song book which inspire me.

g. Please tell me, do you wear/use/keep any religious signs or symbols? What is the importance of these things to you?

h. As a Christian Dalit, do you feel that you are different from Dalits who belong to other religious traditions? If so, then how?

i. How would you describe God in terms of your present struggles? How would you describe Jesus Christ in terms of your present struggles?

j. Are there any differences in how you see Jesus Christ, Ambedkar, Marx or your local Dalit leaders?

k. How do you understand Christ's mission in terms of your present situation?

l. Could you tell me about your understanding of the purpose of Christ's suffering and dying on the cross?

m. Can you tell me about your understanding of the Kingdom of God?

n. Do you use your Dalit art, music, dance and drums during worship and during your struggles?

o. Why do you use those and what do you get out their use?

Question number g to o were not asked

p. What do you understand by the term Dalit Theology?

I was introduced to Dalit theology while I was doing my B.Th

q. Do you have any access to any literature on Dalit Theology?

I read AP Nirmal; Dr. Devasahayam; Bishop Azariah; Larbeer and Gustao's Liberation theology books

r. Have you attended any meeting and conference concerned with Dalit Theology and if yes, then what was your experience?

Several

s. Have you heard the sermons related to Dalit theology in sermons of pastors and Bishops?

t. Can you tell me whether you have met any Dalit Theologians?

u. Has any Dalit theologian participated in your struggles or discussions?

v. Assuming you have heard of Dalit Theology, can you say whether it has helped you in your struggles?

Question s to v not asked

w. What do you say about the saying, 'God is, God of the oppressed?

God is always on the sides of the oppressed

x. Do you relate this saying to your caste oppressed situation?

Of course.

y. What do you think about the Exodus experience of Israelites?

God on time and heard the cries of Israelites.

z. Are you able to relate the same with your caste situation?

Yes

aa. What do you think about the preferential option of God for the oppressed people?

God's preferential option is for the oppressed- It is not taught in the churches

bb. What is your opinion on the saying that once you were 'no people and now you have become God's people'?

Paul says so.

cc. What do you think about the saying messianic intervention?

Liberation of the oppressed is Messianic intervention

dd. What is your idea about messianic people and messianic responsibility?

As an ordained person, I have the responsibility

ee. What do you think about Moses and his role in liberating Israelites? Can you correlate this to your situation?

God sent Moses to liberate Israelites. Every Christian should become a Moses

ff. What is your idea about you are created in the image of God?

All are created in the image of God

gg. Do you feel that since you have God's image you have a responsibility to transform the society?

Of course, I have the responsibility

hh. What do you feel that Jesus a Dalit and Christ a Liberator?

Jesus identified himself with the poor and Christ is the Liberator

ii. What is opinion about Nazareth Manifesto?

It is for Messianic intervention

jj. What is your understanding about Jesus's saying that First will be the last; and Last will be First?

Kingdom of God will be like this

kk. What is your opinion about Dalits are called to struggle for transformation?

We are already in the struggle.

ll. What is your idea about salvation? Do you feel liberation from caste is a salvation for you?

I work for the Church to get salvation

mm. What do you think about the saying that the struggle for Dalits will liberate Non Dalits also from their caste mindset?

Non Dalits will not drop 'caste' from themselves.

nn. What is your understanding about kingdom of god? Do you feel that your Dalit culture has the characteristics of kingdom of God?

No idea about Dalit culture connecting to KoG

oo. Has Dalit theology reached grass root Dalit Christians?

No

pp. Do you sense that there is the necessity for Dalit theology in the struggles against caste discriminations?

Of course

qq. What are your suggestions for taking Dalit Theology to grass root Dalit Christians?

Dalit theology has not reached 90% of the people. Dalit theology is not shared in the Dioceses of Trichy and Coimbatore to which I am associated. May be some might speak in Chennai diocese. No theology is

spoken at the grassroots. Speaking Dalit theology is considered as sin or a revolt. I speak Dalit theology not because Church is not motivating me. I am oppressed and hence I speak Dalit theology

The sense of determination to oppose caste arises out of the discrimination that I faced. Either directly or indirectly people like us are involving ourselves in Dalit theology. Both Church Hierarchy and Dalit sub caste hierarchy prevent this attempt. Church hierarchy provides importance to certain pastors of its own caste and run the administration of the church. But there is no teaching at the whole church for a life of justice

The word Dalit is used for church politics. Church leadership says: Church is for all; hence do not talk about caste. In urban churches, prosperity evangelical theology is in force. Liberation theology is spoken little at the rural churches. Not in all areas and not always.

Church is not preventing me to walk as a Dalit pastor associated with Dalit theology. Since Dalit theology questions the caste discrimination within the church, Church tells not to speak about Dalit theology

It is good to say that Jesus is liberating God; He helps us in our struggles; and good to conduct small struggles and make changes through education. But Church has gone backwards from providing education to the Dalits. We require more people to do service. We need to emphasize the concept of God as liberator from Exodus 3; Luke 4: 18-19. We are not able to use the names of Ambedkar or Local Dalit leaders in the pulpit. They have been identified as sub caste leaders. We need to take the strategy of Ambedkar with Christian justice. I have not even finalized my D.Th thesis title. I want to question why the Arunthathians are backward when compared to other Dalits. Since both I and the other Arunthathians are oppressed, I want to do that. If we say the word Dalit, only the educated get familiarized with that word. The word Dalit should be made and identified with ordinary people. I believe that my thesis will take up the issue to Global level.

rr. What impact this interview/conversation has created in you?

It helped me look back my life, my faith and my involvement.



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Person – 14

3rd Jan 2011 - Chengalpattu

Interview by J. Vincent Manoharan, Research Student, University of Birmingham - Thesis Title "Towards a Practical Dalit Theology"

.....

1. Personal Details

a. What is your name?

My name is

b. What is your family name?

Mother is from CSI. 3rd generation Christian from the side of father; Got ordained in 2001; while I was studying in school, in vocational camp, I got the inspiration to become religious.

From school, I went to my father's village for John's feast, in the month of April. There, the Catechist asked me to clean the church. He heard me reading the scripture and appreciated me and said that I could read the text in the worship. He took me to the Priest. The Priest also appreciated the way I read, but the moment the Priest came to know that I belonged to a Dalit family, he behaved differently and said that I cannot read in the Holy Mass. He said that a wage worker at a construction site, should not desire the work of a mason. I felt ashamed and I could feel the shivering of my heart.

I developed fever immediately. With fever, I was carried to the city. My mother carried me to a Church father at Avadi. That church father asked me what happened. I explained the discrimination and humiliation that I faced at the church at my father's village. He was shocked. He told me that if God willing, I could also become a Priest, a church father. I was sent to vocational guidance. Later, I was chosen for the ministry of God. I took the vow to become a Priest. Now I realize that becoming a father is not sufficient for Dalit liberation. I was working in Chennai for some time. Then I worked at themission area, as a correspondent to a church school. There I was chosen to become a Vicar- Father in charge of parish. A Vicar will have 10 to 15 parishes under his jurisdiction. God elevated me.

c. What is your sub caste?

Dalit - Parayar

d. What is your age?

40 years

e. Have you had a formal education?

Theology, Philosophy; MA in Human Resources; BA in Tamil Literature and I am also doing MA Tamil literature in correspondence course

f. Are you married?

No . I am an ordained Priest in the RC Church.

g. What is your job?

I am an ordained Priest in the Roman Catholic Church. I am currently the Director fora church based organisation which cater to the needs of all faith communities. In the District where I work, there are 10 Vicars and 82 Parishes. The organisation which I head helps the Parishes through social work. In the Diocese there are 430 villages. This organisation has 54 staff of them.

h. Where do you live?

.....
Kancheepuram District

i. How many years have you lived at this address?

For the past few years

2. Relating to Church?

a. Can you tell me which denomination you belong to?

I am part of.....a Catholic Diocese; It is a Dalit Diocese- as Dalits are majority; also this is a reserved area constitutionally.

b. Do you have a church in your home village/town?

There is a Catholic church in my home place as well

c. Do you attend worship regularly?

d. Please tell me whether you are a member of the Church?

Question c and d not asked

e. Do you hold any position in your local church, if so, what?

I am the Director of, as well as a Priest

f. What church activities are you involved in?

I am involved in Development Ministry

g. Do you hold any position in the Church hierarchy?

I am a priest in the Diocese and a Director for a church based organisation.

h. Can you describe the caste composition of your church?

In the Diocese, 70% members are Dalits. Others are migrated people. They are Telugu Naidus and Reddiars; they were brought here by Missionaries. They are the uprooted people from Andhra.

Currently the Diocese has a total number of 110 priests, including 25 Dalit priests. New ordinations have brought in few more Dalit priests inside the church. I am not able to tell you the number of Nuns in the church. Few Dalit parishes have sent few women as Nuns. Their numbers are very few. In Tamilnadu there are 19 Catholic Dioceses. Including 2 Latin Dioceses.

3. Relating to caste practices

a. Please tell me about the caste discrimination, if any, that exists inside or/and outside the Church?

In the Diocese almost 70% are Dalits. A survey was conducted in 1962. This survey helped Dalits to gain benefit under the 10 point scheme. We conducted another survey in 1991. We came to know that many Dioceses have not implemented the 10 point scheme. We identified 120 Dalit Priests among more than 1000 Priests in all 19 RC Dioceses. I wanted to organize a Dalit Priests Forum so that Dalit Priests will not be afraid in the Dioceses where they serve.

I realized the caste discriminations while I was studying in seminary. For example, while the students were playing foot ball at the seminary, I saw them using caste name and abusing Dalit Boys. I created a lobby for justice sake. A black mark was placed on me. There was opposition to me to stand in Church elections. I saw the caste wanting- oppressing Priests organizing against Dalits. In the RC Church there are Priests from Arunthathiar and Puthiraivannar castes but very nominal.

b. Could you please share the type of discrimination that you have faced either within or/outside the Church?

Dalits cannot participate in the main feast celebrated by Catholic Christians. The car processions do not enter into Dalit Christian areas. Caste graveyards are there in the Church compound. Prime areas inside the church are reserved for Non Dalit Christians and side wings are allotted to Dalit Christians. Hence in recent years, churches are built as a hall. There is no more a church in a Cross shape.

There is visible economic discrimination against Dalits. The income coming from Church lands mainly managed by High caste Priests only; Priests are appointed for conducting rituals only- not doing pastoral work.

Dalits would decorate the car. They would till the land. If the Dalit Priests do not oblige to the demands of the dominating caste Christians, they are sent out from the Parishes. There are Anbiam(a fellowship of congregation) for the name sake. But only caste prevails there. The decisions of Parish committee are mostly decided by the dominating castes only. Dalit women who are married to non Dalit men cannot live in the houses of dominant castes. She/they are treated as victims there. But any Non Dalit women coming to Dalit family are treated fairly. Many like this. No way better than the outside discrimination.

- c. Have you ever suffered physical violence owing to caste practices-if so, how and by whom?

A particular Village church was closed for 12 years for caste problem. Equal rights were denied to Dalits in the feast. Already 3 Priests were manhandled by the Reddiars. Deliberately at one time a Dalit person was refused first prize in a church event; he was given 3rd prize. The dominant caste person who won 3rd prize was given first prize. This came up as an issue. As a result, the dominant caste members have beaten up the Priest. Usually the Diocese authorities will close the church when such incidents take place. The matter went to Court. In this context, I took over the charge of the church school in that village.

The Reddiars opened the church and converted the issue as a language one, since they are Telugu speaking and the Dalits are Tamil speaking. We Dalits staged a protest blocking the national high way. We asked how the church can be opened. Did the court permit it? The Reddiars were having the key of the church.

We broke open the church on October 5, and conducted Holy Mass this time. We prayed for all of them. Then the Reddiars came and we had negotiation in the presence of Government officials. The Reddiars told the officials that I should not conduct the Mass in Telugu language. While I was the Vicar Father, the church hierarchy appointed another Priest

without my knowledge. I wrote my resignation letter. The congregation staged a protest in front of the Bishop's house until 11 pm night. Bishop then had a discussion with officials. The church got opened in 2006 July. Now there saying two Mass one in Telugu and another in Tamil at different times; Telugu Mass is being attended by Reddiars and Tamil Mass by Dalits. Thus worship takes place but caste remains.

There are 5000 families are in another Village church. In which Dalit Christians form 350 families; Dalit Christians live in their places next to Catholic upper caste Christians. All Parish councils have members from Non Dalits-Vanniars only. There is separate graveyard; even the funeral - carts carrying the dead bodies are also separate - one for Non Dalits and another for Dalits. Under the leadership of a Casteist, there were attempts to divide the church into two, also to divide the legal Panchayat . When Dalits used the common path, walking on the common path was also refused to Dalits. The issue became sensitive, as a result Vanniar Christians organized themselves and damaged and ransacked 102 Dalit Christian houses.

There was already an issue in which the Non Dalit Christians molested Dalit Christian women in the Diocesan area of Pondicherry. Meeting was organized. I coordinated the meet of Dalits and gave visibility to the issue. We observed a week of sorrow and hoisted black flags. Non Dalit priests were sent out of Dalit Parishes. However, till now the festival car is not coming into Dalit areas; neither a common graveyard. Till now the demands of Dalits for equal rights are not heard. 50% changes have happened at..... Caste issue is strong and similar outside the church as well.

- d. Kindly tell me whether you had ever been taken to a police station or court or put in prison because of your caste or your work against caste discrimination?

I had to confront the police during these issues.

- e. How did your priest or pastor react to your suffering discrimination or physical violence on account of caste?

Bishop was supporting the cause of Dalit Christians.

- f. Could you please tell me about the reaction of the hierarchy of the church to your experiences described in the previous question?

Bishop is for justice.

4. Relating to the "action-reflection" process for organizing struggles

- a. Can you please share something about the activity based meetings you have organized/taken part in against the caste system? (These meetings can be either inside or outside of the church)

I fought for the justice inside the church which I have already explained . I conducted several meetings to organise struggles.

- b. Please tell me the role of your priest or pastor in your activist meetings?

The Dalit priests are being organized for justice

- c. Can you say whether you have been visited by any church leader during the course of your meetings or struggles? And if so, then what resulted from these visits?

Many Dalit Priests joined together in the struggle in the villages that I narrated but not the Non Dalit Priests.

5. Relating to Faith/Themes articulated by Dalit theologians

- a. Please share with me whether you see any passage in the Bible which gives you strength or hope to become involved in the struggle with caste? Can you describe how it helps you?
- b. Do you pray when you face hardships? If yes, then what are the benefits of praying? How does it help you?
- c. Do you read from specific books or written material as part of your planning for any struggle? If so, what are they? Can you share why you have selected these materials to assist you?
- d. Can you describe the typical themes or ideas of the sermons that are preached by your priest or pastor? Give me an example please?
- e. Please share with me the impact of such sermons in terms of encouraging or motivating you to remain in faith and to sustain your struggles against the caste system?
- f. Can you tell me some of the songs you sing to sustain you in your struggles?
- g. Please tell me, do you wear/use/keep any religious signs or symbols? What is the importance of these things to you?
- h. As a Christian Dalit, do you feel that you are different from Dalits who belong to other religious traditions? If so, then how?
- i. How would you describe God in terms of your present struggles? How would you describe Jesus Christ in terms of your present struggles?

- j. Are there any differences in how you see Jesus Christ, Ambedkar, Marx or your local Dalit leaders?
- k. How do you understand Christ's mission in terms of your present situation?
- l. Could you tell me about your understanding of the purpose of Christ's suffering and dying on the cross?
- m. Can you tell me about your understanding of the Kingdom of God?
- n. Do you use your Dalit art, music, dance and drums during worship and during your struggles?
- o. Why do you use those and what do you get out their use?

Question a to o were not asked

What do you understand by the term Dalit Theology?

I came to know Dalit theology in the Seminary; Dalit theology was not taught as a separate subject. It was given as part of the larger and systematic subjects.

- p. Do you have any access to any literature on Dalit Theology?

I have read the books of Fr. Amaladoss, Webster and Prof Maria Arulraja

- q. Have you attended any meeting and conference concerned with Dalit Theology and if yes, then what was your experience?

Not specifically But I am in the Dalit struggle

- r. Have you heard the sermons related to Dalit theology in sermons of pastors and Bishops?

Dalit theology is becoming a defending shield in high places; this theology is not yet understood by the people; In fact, not carried to them. Non Dalit speak of Dalit theology for name sake

- s. Can you tell me whether you have met any Dalit Theologians?

I know Prof Maria Arulraja.

- t. Has any Dalit theologian participated in your struggles or discussions?

Yes. But not much

- u. Assuming you have heard of Dalit Theology, can you say whether it has helped you in your struggles?

I am a Dalit and I faced discriminations; This motivates me

- v. What do you say about the saying, 'God is, God of the oppressed'?

God is always on the side of the oppressed

- w. Do you relate this saying to your caste oppressed situation?
Of course. There is connection.
- x. What do you think about the Exodus experience of Israelites?
God on time heard the cry of Israel and liberated them. We are also called to liberate Dalits
- y. Are you able to relate the same with your caste situation?
Yes
- z. What do you think about the preferential option of God for the oppressed people?
Yes. But, God's preferential option for the oppressed is not shared among the congregation.
- aa. What is your opinion on the saying that once you were no people and now you have become God's people?
Paul says so. I believe.
- bb. What do you think about the saying messianic intervention?
Liberation of the oppressed is Messianic intervention
- cc. What is your idea about messianic people and messianic responsibility?
As baptized and ordained person, I have the responsibility
- dd. What do you think about Moses and his role in liberating Israelites?
Can you correlate this to your situation?
Moses was sent by God to liberate Israelites. We must become Moses;
- ee. What is your idea about you are created in the image of God?
Yes. All are created in the image of God
- ff. Do you feel that since you have God's image you have a responsibility to transform the society?
Of course, I have the responsibility
- gg. What do you feel that Jesus a Dalit and Christ a Liberator?
Jesus identified himself with the poor and Christ is the Liberator

- hh.** What is opinion about Nazareth Manifesto?
Messianic intervention
- ii.** What is your understanding about Jesus's saying that First will be the last; and Last will be first?
Kingdom of God will be like this
- jj.** What is your opinion about Dalits are called to struggle for transformation?
We are already in the struggle for transformation
- kk.** What is your idea about salvation? Do you feel liberation from caste is a salvation for you?
I work to enable the Catholic Church to get salvation
- ll.** What do you think about the saying that the struggle for Dalits will liberate Non Dalits also from their caste mindset?
Non Dalits will not drop caste from them.
- mm.** What is your understanding about kingdom of god? Do you feel that your Dalit culture has the characteristics of kingdom of God?
Yes. Dalit culture manifests KoG to some extent.
- nn.** Has Dalit theology reached grass root Dalit Christians?
No. Not yet.
- oo.** Do you sense that there is the necessity for Dalit theology in the struggles against caste discriminations?
Dalit theology has not reached out to the grassroots. Only educated Dalits, speak of Dalit issues but not Dalit theology. In general, Dalit Christians do not speak of this. Much importance is given to general Dalit issues than Dalit Christian issue.

Laws rule the world. Dalit Christians are in double oppression as they do not get SC status to enjoy benefits from Government. Other Dalits do see Dalit Christians as competitors if they become SCs.

Dalit theology has a role to play.
- pp.** What are your suggestions for taking Dalit Theology to grass root Dalit Christians?

Dalit Christians in grassroots have not got even basic education; both Missionaries earlier and now Churches educated mostly non Dalits. A thorough review needs to be taken. Catechism has helped to safeguard the hierarchy and property of the Church. There is not an effective Dalit Christian movement has emerged and survived.

No theology has gone to the people. If a theology has gone to the people, they would have asked for equal rights. They should have asked for Dalit theology.

There is a big gap between what we speak and what we do. The gap between the faith and action should be filled up. Both education and economic empowerment should go to the Dalits.

Worship of Jesus has created a devotional movement. But it has not helped us to oppose injustices. Is there a mother who does not get angry? Jesuits has made their institutions more academic. Dalit theology has to be carried to grassroots as a movement.

qq. What impact this interview/conversation has created in you?

I was able to reflect my life and think over the theological stand.


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Person – 15

4th Jan 2011 - Thiruvannamalai

Interview by J. Vincent Manoharan, Research Student, University of Birmingham - Thesis Title "Towards a Practical Dalit Theology"

.....

1. Personal Details

a. What is your name?

I am

b. What is your family name?

My wife is:.....

I am a 3rd Generation Christian; my Wife is home maker; we have two daughters. Wife also is a 3rd Generation Christian; from my mother's side, my grandfather belongs to Paraya community and my grandmother belongs to Arunthathiar Community. In my father's side, my grandfather belongs to Paraya Community and my grandmother belongs to Vellalar Community. My father's father is an Arcot Lutheran Church member.

c. What is your sub caste?

I am half Paraya and half Arunthathiar – mixed. But I do not accept the concept of caste and sub caste; I am a Dalit

d. What is your age?

41 years old

e. Have you had a formal education?

I am a post graduate; I finished my BD Degree at UTC

f. Are you married?

Yes

g. What is your job?

I am an ordained Candidate for ministry at the Arcot Lutheran Church; I will get the ordination as a Pastor shortly

h. Where do you live?

.....
Thiruvannamalai District

i. How many years have you lived at this address?

Since the last few years

2. Relating to Church?

- a. Can you tell me which denomination you belong to?
Lutheran - Arcot Lutheran Church
- b. Do you have a church in your home village/town?
Yes
- c. Do you attend worship regularly?
Yes. I assist my Pastor for the worship. I too conduct.
- d. Please tell me whether you are a member of the Church?
Yes
- e. Do you hold any position in your local church, if so, what?
Candidate for Ministry
- f. What church activities are you involved in?
I am currently working in the ALC
- g. Do you hold any position in the Church hierarchy?
No
- h. Can you describe the caste composition of your church?
Number of caste people are there. Therefore discriminations exists in the church

3. Relating to caste practices

- a. Please tell me about the caste discrimination, if any, that exists inside or/and outside the Church?
Number of caste discriminations exists inside the church; Non Dalits dominate Dalits; in 1857 one Carl Erstoch was sent here as Missionary to the German based Leipzig Mission. He opposed the stand of not to disturb the caste system inside the Church.

He opened up a school at Melpattambakkam. He opened up especially for Dalit students. This school got supported by Danish Mission.

Arcot Lutheran Church was born out of opposition to caste system; later it has lost its Dalit perspective. As a result a separate Dalit Desk was created in the church in 2007.

From 1980s the post of Bishophood came to local /Tamil people; Until then, it was Missionaries who were Bishops

From 1980s, most of the Bishops are from Non Dalits; only few Dalits have become Bishops. The present church hierarchy is not able to be effective. Dalit people are also reasons for this situation. They want to hide their caste consciousness / identity while they are inside the Church. Though they hide, the Non Dalits know them well and do not treat them as equals. Dalits hide to avoid discrimination.

In the worship services, Non Dalits seat themselves separately. It is visibly known. They create their own sitting space in the church. They are in key positions at all levels of the church. When a Dalit pastor conducts the Holy Communion service, several non Dalits do not want to get the Holy Communion from the hands of non Dalits.

They do not want Dalits to be equal to them. There are no struggles inside the church against the caste. If I struggle against this practice, my ordination will get affected. In order to get ordination, I need to act like an opportunist, compromising my commitment.

If I speak about Dalit, my own church people call me over phone and scold me. For me more than serving Eucharist in the church, it is better to mobilise 1000 Dalits to submit petitions to the District Magistrate e on each Monday-the petition day – for the redressal of their day to day caste affected problems.

- b. Could you please share the type of discrimination that you have faced either within or/outside the Church?**

Many. I already explained. But the recent one is that a Dalit Christian editor is advised to get permission from the Church committee in order to publish a Church magazine. I was furious over this dominance and preventing a person to publish articles on the Dalit situations. I was seen as a challenger. The committee members were not happy about me. They have a different view on me. They will definitely victimise me.

- c. Have you ever suffered physical violence owing to caste practices-if so, how and by whom?**

We face physical violence when our Dalit Liberation Movement takes up struggles. I am part of this movement along with Rev. Dalit Gnanasekaran.

- d. Kindly tell me whether you had ever been taken to a police station or court or put in prison because of your caste or your work against caste discrimination?

In the movement, we face Police on a Daily basis.

- e. How did your priest or pastor react to your suffering discrimination or physical violence on account of caste?

ALC Leaders are not interested in addressing caste discriminations both within and outside the church; they have other agenda. They will not support us.

- f. Could you please tell me about the reaction of the hierarchy of the church to your experiences described in the previous question?

Time being the Church hierarchy does not want to stop the work of Dalit Movement; it all depends on how long our funds exist for our work. Hierarchy does not want this work. They will be happy if this work is stopped.

4. Relating to the "action-reflection" process for organizing struggles

- a. Can you please share something about the activity based meetings you have organized/taken part in against the caste system? (These meetings can be either inside or outside of the church)

We organize struggles outside the church for the Dalits. We conduct meetings of affected Dalits and plan for the struggle. We meet again for a review and plan further. It is a cycle.

- b. Please tell me the role of your priest or pastor in your activist meetings?

ALC pastors are indirectly advising the congregation members not to support or participate in struggles against the caste oppression or to join this movement.

- c. Can you say whether you have been visited by any church leader during the course of your meetings or struggles? And if so, then what resulted from these visits?

Some sympathises with us. But they do not come to the struggling places.

5. Relating to Faith/Themes articulated by Dalit theologians

- a. Please share with me whether you see any passage in the Bible which gives you strength or hope to become involved in the struggle with caste? Can you describe how it helps you?

Oppressions on Dalits emanate from Hindu Mythologies. The idea in Deuteronomy 26.5 that I am a wandering Aramaean is a superb saying. We need to learn the Bible from this perspective. We need to learn the history. I am still in the desert. We have an illusion that we have reached Canaan. But actually not yet.

- b. Do you pray when you face hardships? If yes, then what are the benefits of praying? How does it help you?

I pray . For everything.

- c. Do you read from specific books or written material as part of your planning for any struggle? If so, what are they? Can you share why you have selected these materials to assist you?

I do read Dalit books.

- d. Can you describe the typical themes or ideas of the sermons that are preached by your priest or pastor? Give me an example please?

I preach sermons relating Dalit issues / Dalit theology

- e. Please share with me the impact of such sermons in terms of encouraging or motivating you to remain in faith and to sustain your struggles against the caste system?

I get my motivation from Deut 26.5. I motivate others.

- f. Can you tell me some of the songs you sing to sustain you in your struggles?

We sing Christian songs in the churches. In the movement Dalit songs.

- g. Please tell me, do you wear/use/keep any religious signs or symbols? What is the importance of these things to you?

Cassock is a symbol for liberation but used otherwise now.

- h. As a Christian Dalit, do you feel that you are different from Dalits who belong to other religious traditions? If so, then how?

Dalits in all religions face discriminations

- i. How would you describe God in terms of your present struggles? How would you describe Jesus Christ in terms of your present struggles?

I see Jesus as the one who led liberation; hero of liberation

- j. Are there any differences in how you see Jesus Christ, Ambedkar, Marx or your local Dalit leaders?

Ambedkar and Jesus are people who worked for liberation

- k. How do you understand Christ's mission in terms of your present situation?

Christ came to liberate us

- l. Could you tell me about your understanding of the purpose of Christ's suffering and dying on the cross?

Indian Christian Theology has been made as Brahmanical Theology; Dalit theology is people theology; Bible should be explained from Dalit people's perspective.

- m. Can you tell me about your understanding of the Kingdom of God?

Kingdom of God is true liberation

- n. Do you use your Dalit art, music, dance and drums during worship and during your struggles?

No- in the church. In our movement – Yes.

- o. Why do you use those and what do you get out their use?

I sing songs for inspirations

- p. What do you understand by the term Dalit Theology?

Dalit theology is people's theology. I did not understand caste until I was in the 12th standard; my father was a teacher and we lived inside a compound; I was treated as a son of a school head master. I did not even think of caste even when I was studying in College.

While I was studying at MCC, one Brahmin lady asked me what caste I belonged to. To know this, I asked my grandfather what caste I belonged to. He started to explain the different discriminations he suffered under caste. He narrated the experience of begging before the oppressors putting a Hindu symbol on his forehead.

The moment I told my caste to the Brahmin lady, she smiled at me and sidelined me then. I came to know of caste at UTC. I came to know the

discriminations shown on Dalit students at UTC since the time of AP Nirmal. I was shocked.

q. Do you have any access to any literature on Dalit Theology?

I learned Dalit theology from Prof. Maria Arulraja, Prof Mohanrazu and from Prof. Prabhakar

r. Have you attended any meeting and conference concerned with Dalit Theology and if yes, then what was your experience?

Several

s. Have you heard the sermons related to Dalit theology in sermons of pastors and Bishops?

Our Bishops do not speak of Dalit theology

t. Can you tell me whether you have met any Dalit Theologians?

Yes, Prof. Mohanrazu.

u. Has any Dalit theologian participated in your struggles or discussions?

Dalit Gnanasekaran is a Dalit theologian who is our leader. No one else participated.

v. Assuming you have heard of Dalit Theology, can you say whether it has helped you in your struggles?

It inspires my struggle

w. What do you say about the saying, 'God is, God of the oppressed'?

God has revealed Himself as one who always supports the oppressed and he hears the prayers of the oppressed

x. Do you relate this saying to your caste oppressed situation?

Church in India has to realize the commitment to Dalits

y. What do you think about the Exodus experience of Israelites?

Exodus event is important to them. Baptism came from this experience. Israelites experienced this and their faith was on this event

z. Are you able to relate the same with your caste situation?

Yes, We need to relate the same with the caste situation here

aa. What do you think about the preferential option of God for the oppressed people?

God is always on the sides of the poor

- bb.** What is your opinion on the saying that once you were no people and now you have become *God's people*?
- cc.** Will non Dalits accept this?
- dd.** What do you think about the saying messianic intervention?
Liberation of the oppressed is Messianic intervention
- ee.** What is your idea about messianic people and messianic responsibility?
I have the responsibility to fulfill Messianic call
- ff.** What do you think about *Moses* and his role in liberating Israelites?
Can you correlate this to your situation?
Exodus and Dalit liberation are parallel events
- gg.** What is your idea about you are created in the image of *God*?
All are created in the image of God
- hh.** Do you feel that since you have *God's image* you have a responsibility to transform the society?
Bringing the humanity in the image of God is the role of the church
- ii.** What do you feel that *Jesus a Dalit and Christ a Liberator*?
Jesus by birth a Jew was all along with the oppressed
- jj.** What is opinion about *Nazareth Manifesto*?
Liberation of the oppressed
- kk.** What is your understanding about *Jesus's saying that First will be the last; and Last will be first*?
I know the meaning of this relating to Dalits.
- ll.** What is your opinion about *Dalits are called to struggle for transformation*?
We are already in the struggle for transformation
- mm.** What is your idea about *salvation*? Do you feel liberation from caste is a salvation for you?
Salvation is from oppression. Of course

nn. What do you think about the saying that the struggle for Dalits will liberate Non Dalits also from their caste mindset?

Non Dalits will not remove caste from themselves.

oo. What is your understanding about kingdom of God? Do you feel that your Dalit culture has the characteristics of kingdom of God?

Dalit culture has components of equality and brotherhood

pp. Has Dalit theology reached grass root Dalit Christians?

Dalit theology has not gone to grassroots; Although Mr. is with us for the past 2 years, I have not taught him Dalit theology; Dalit theology stops at the door steps of Seminaries

qq. Do you sense that there is the necessity for Dalit theology in the struggles against caste discriminations?

Sure

rr. What are your suggestions for taking Dalit Theology to grass root Dalit Christians?

We need to devise new ideas to overcome Myths. Dalit theology is offered as an optional subject at many Seminaries; the essence of Dalit theology is to sensitize the non Dalits and make them understand the need for Dalit liberation and make them participate in the overall Dalit Liberation work.

Serampore University should offer Theologies which are contextual to the need. My church does not want to accept my perception that Jesus is a liberator. Dalit theology should sensitize the oppressors. We need to evolve Dalit worship. We need to bring Dalit liberation motive right from the Sunday Schools. Our teaching should attract children and inspire children. Jesus stood opposite and challenged the dominating ideologies. He showed children as model.

There are visible and invisible forms of struggle history available in the Dalit History. From Madurai Veeran, several Dalit Heroes were able to spread their rays among Dalits. We need deduction of theology today.

ss. What impact this interview/conversation has created in you?

I am able to relook at my theological insight.



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Person – 16

26th Jan 2011 - Chennai

Interview by J. Vincent Manoharan, Research Student, University of Birmingham - Thesis Title "Towards a Practical Dalit Theology"

.....

1. Personal Details

a. What is your name?

My name is

b. What is your family name?

Father's name is :

My Mother's name is:

My Husband We have a daughter. My Grandfather is a Roman Catholic person; Father is a protestant; 3rd Generation Christian; Husband is a 2nd generation Christian

c. What is your sub caste?

Dalit- Parayar; My husband is also a Parayar

d. What is your age?

46 years

e. Have you had a formal education?

BA Economics; BD and then MTh

Husband also studied BD and MTh

f. Are you married?

Married

g. What is your job?

Pastor -Chaplain

h. Where do you live?

.....

.....

Chennai

i. How many years have you lived at this address?

10 years

2. Relating to Church?

- a. Can you tell me which denomination you belong to?

CSI

- b. Do you have a church in your home village/town?

I am a chaplain in a Christian Institution

I have a church in my place of living

- c. Do you attend worship regularly?

I do – I am a Pastor

- d. Please tell me whether you are a member of the Church?

Member of CSI

- e. Do you hold any position in your local church, if so, what?

Yes Pastor – Chaplain in a Christian Institution

- f. What church activities are you involved in?

I am in charge of the chaplaincy

- g. Do you hold any position in the Church hierarchy?

I am a presbyter at CSI

- h. Can you describe the caste composition of your church?

In the Church, there are Parayas, Nadars and Pallars. Others are very few in number. There are issues of caste. But it is not visible. All keep their relationships with their own caste people. Casteists generally enquire the new comer from which village he/she comes from and through that slowly they will identify to which caste that person belongs to. It is quite normal everywhere to first identify the caste of a person.

During elections, people vote for their own caste persons. Marriages are held within caste only. There exists inter dining. Inter marriage is a problem.

3. Relating to caste practices

- a. Please tell me about the caste discrimination, if any, that exists inside or/and outside the Church?

Equality is there in the church worship and in church activities; However caste discriminations exist in the relationship; In some places and at times, text readings are not be given to low caste persons; in general, the Secretary or the Treasurer comes from dominant castes; in cemetery,

bodies are buried without separation because it is a common ground. They bury the dead in a row.

There are severe discriminations among Roman Catholic members comparatively. In all churches, committee members dominate from oppressor castes. In RC, Anbiam (Fellowship) groups are caste based. At some places Nadars organize themselves and form their own church; I heard that at in a particular church since the church has more number of Nadars, it has become almost a Nadar church; and if the church has more numbers of Dalits, it becomes almost a Dalit church.

In RC church, there are more Upper caste priests and nuns whereas in protestant churches it is balanced. The RC priests talk about justice and women equality; but they do not talk caste issues that too in sermons. Among Protestants only the Dalit Pastors speak about caste but not the non Dalit Pastors.

- b. Could you please share the type of discrimination that you have faced either within or/outside the Church?

Since the Roman Catholic are constructing their own church nearby us, they currently use protestant church to have their worship. I have observed that there is no emphasis on Dalits in their preaching. There is no emphasis as spoken by Fr Mark and Fr Jerry.

Church People do not want to raise their voice against caste; I am wondering that why they came into the church- just to hide their caste?

When we were working in, three fourth of the church members were non Dalits; I was the first Dalit priest there; that congregation has got high caste consciousness; they first said they do not want a lady pastor; they biased with gender than caste in that situation initially; I found out that majority of them were migrated people from south. They migrated here along with their relatives. So they dominate.

Dalits are not raising their voices against caste; if we motivate them they would come out; since they do not see any support to their cause, Dalits are not raising their voices; if we speak on the basis of Bible, then, they will come out and struggle.

Dalit Christians are active in Unions and in struggles outside the church. I am wondering why they are not struggling inside the church? Faith and the identities of their friends might help them to struggle outside the church. I think that they have not studied Ambedkar. The slogans such as

'educate; agitate and organize' are helping to revolt outside but inside church they are quiet.

Earlier the speeches of Local Dalit leaders motivated us; not any more now. Before, we- my husband and me joined, the congregation members mostly non Dalits were informed that two Dalit extremists are coming as Pastors. The reason was that I spoke emotionally when I was made as the Director of the Dalit Department and in the group discussions. We placed a Nadar lady as a recording secretary to write the resolutions of the discussions- who took the news about us and informed the congregation in that pastorate that we, two are Dalit extremists, coming to their church as Pastors. Thus we got an open identity at that church. But this is how the non Dalits project us.

My husband served there for 6 years while I served there for 5 years. The congregation appeared to be decent but they played caste politics and caste dynamics. They ensured caste to play a role in every aspect of church very silently/subtly. Because of our work, they were not able to oppress Dalits during our tenure.

While we worked in another Church, it was surprising to get to know from a Nadar lady that she was preferred to get any girl as a bride to her son irrespective of caste background. It was a good change of heart. I taught them the songs of Parattai, a Dalit poet. I was able to teach them Dalit theology through two songs namely, "the manger is ready" and " father and mother" .

When we went to the Village churches in, we experienced a great joy of seeing Dalits. But the Dalits looked at us as Priests but not one among them as Dalits.

I preached in a city church and announced for a retiring offering for building a church. In the preaching I referred about Ambedkar who said I cannot sleep until my people get awakened. There was one contributor at the church who heard my preaching. He was about to offer Rs.10,000; but because of my Dalit preaching, he offered us Rs.5,000. I had to pay a price of Rs. 5000 for referring Ambedkar. We are criticized as spoiling the elder brother-younger brother relationship by preaching about caste in the churches.

I studied at TrichyCollege, which is a Brahmin College. I did not understand that caste discriminations is shown against me in the college initially. Perhaps I would have got the seat there either through a Dalit quota or through a Christian Quota. My father was

from a Political party; he had taught me the art of public speech and how to read and speak clearly and loudly. He also studied Ambedkar and Periyar. He had taught me to use body language in my speech and to raise or low my voice at times of my loud reading. In the College, at one time, a Brahmin lecturer asked me to read. When I read, she retorted saying that she is not able to tolerate my body language and my voice; she supported the feeble voice of a Brahmin girl a colleague of mine in the college. Later I came to know the discriminations shown on Dalits in that college on various counts.

- c. Have you ever suffered physical violence owing to caste practices-if so, how and by whom?

The caste congregation is always against me on the basis of caste. Suffered no physical violence.

- d. Kindly tell me whether you had ever been taken to a police station or court or put in prison because of your caste or your work against caste discrimination?

No for personal reasons. For struggles – yes.

- e. How did your priest or pastor react to your suffering discrimination or physical violence on account of caste?

CSI Nadar congregation and Nadar Pastors are often against me

- f. Could you please tell me about the reaction of the hierarchy of the church to your experiences described in the previous question?

Church hierarchy has understood the caste issue in the church. But will not condemn openly. It will not support us either.

4. Relating to the “action-reflection” process for organizing struggles

- a. Can you please share something about the activity based meetings you have organized/taken part in against the caste system? (These meetings can be either inside or outside of the church)

I conducted meetings for bringing equality among all. Participated in struggles against caste atrocities. Meetings and struggles are part of our life.

- b. Please tell me the role of your priest or pastor in your activist meetings?

CSI pastors are aware of the caste discriminations within the church. But they will not support openly especially the non Dalit Pastors.

- c. Can you say whether you have been visited by any church leader during the course of your meetings or struggles? And if so, then what resulted from these visits?

5. Relating to Faith/Themes articulated by Dalit theologians

- a. Please share with me whether you see any passage in the Bible which gives you strength or hope to become involved in the struggle with caste? Can you describe how it helps you?

Isaiah 11 the situation of peace

- b. Do you pray when you face hardships? If yes, then what are the benefits of praying? How does it help you?

I pray. I always pray. It strengthens and energises me.

- c. Do you read from specific books or written material as part of your planning for any struggle? If so, what are they? Can you share why you have selected these materials to assist you?

Bible is the only book which speaks of equality at many places.

- d. Can you describe the typical themes or ideas of the sermons that are preached by your priest or pastor? Give me an example please?

Present sermons are mostly towards economic development, prosperity, comfort of people, individual salvation and individual development; Community sharing and liberation are spoken at few occasions only.

Being a woman, I speak about women's liberation. If the text has a relevance to caste oppression, I would not hesitate to speak about caste oppression.

Dalit Pastors perceive things through caste; Dalit women look at things through women oppression and caste as well.

When I preached, everybody appreciated me for my boldness. In the pastorate committee, men used to shout at me. I had to argue that the Pastorate committee is not meant for shouting. There is a short sightedness on Dalit Feminism. Christianity being a minority religion does not give the importance to women rights but to minority rights only. Patriarchy is not questioned.

- e. Please share with me the impact of such sermons in terms of encouraging or motivating you to remain in faith and to sustain your struggles against the caste system?

I speak textual sermons. Dalits like it. Non Dalits will not.

- f. Can you tell me some of the songs you sing to sustain you in your struggles?

- g. Please tell me, do you wear/use/keep any religious signs or symbols? What is the importance of these things to you?

- h. As a Christian Dalit, do you feel that you are different from Dalits who belong to other religious traditions? If so, then how?

Dalit Christians undergo a lot of problems both in the society and in the church

- i. How would you describe God in terms of your present struggles? How would you describe Jesus Christ in terms of your present struggles?

Jesus is liberator

- j. Are there any differences in how you see Jesus Christ, Ambedkar, Marx or your local Dalit leaders?

Ambedkar, Jesus and Mark spoke in their contexts

- k. How do you understand Christ's mission in terms of your present situation?

Christ came into the world to offer dignity of life to all.

- l. Could you tell me about your understanding of the purpose of Christ's suffering and dying on the cross?

His suffering was to liberate the poor

- m. Can you tell me about your understanding of the Kingdom of God?

A caste free/ gender oppression free place is his kingdom.

- n. Do you use your Dalit art, music, dance and drums during worship and during your struggles?

Inside church No. I saw them used in outside struggles

- o. Why do you use those and what do you get out their use?

- p. What do you understand by the term Dalit Theology?
 I read about Dalit theology at TTS. I learned about Ambedkar there .
- q. Do you have any access to any literature on Dalit Theology?
 The Book by Bishop Devasayam "on the outskirts of the village" inspired me. But not now- any more. Now I read Gail Omvet, Dr Bastian Wielanga, Dr Gabrielle, Dr John Jeyakaran and Dr Carr.
- r. Have you attended any meeting and conference concerned with Dalit Theology and if yes, then what was your experience?
 Many times
- s. Have you heard the sermons related to Dalit theology in sermons of pastors and Bishops?
 Yes and also I do
- t. Can you tell me whether you have met any Dalit Theologians?
 Yes, many of them.
- u. Has any Dalit theologian participated in your struggles or discussions?
 I always share my struggles with them.
- v. Assuming you have heard of Dalit Theology, can you say whether it has helped you in your struggles?
 Yes, it helps me for my struggle inside the church
- w. What do you say about the saying, 'God is, God of the oppressed?
 God always sides with the poor
- x. Do you relate this saying to your caste oppressed situation?
 We need to tell congregation about this
- y. What do you think about the Exodus experience of Israelites?
 He sent Moses to release them
- z. Are you able to relate the same with your caste situation?
 Exodus story is in a way applicable to the caste liberation struggle in India
- aa. What do you think about the preferential option of God for the oppressed people?

God's option is always for the poor

bb. What is your opinion on the saying that once you were no people and now you have become God's people?

When Dalits got converted they become God's people. Non Dalits also became God's people.

cc. What do you think about the saying messianic intervention?

These are concepts which we need to explain to congregation

dd. What is your idea about messianic people and messianic responsibility?

Church has been called to fulfill this Messianic responsibility

ee. What do you think about Moses and his role in liberating Israelites?

Can you correlate this to your situation?

Moses was sent by God to liberate Israelites. We need Moses

ff. What is your idea about you are created in the image of God?

All are created in the image of God- I believe this.

gg. Do you feel that since you have God's image you have a responsibility to transform the society?

Of course, I have the responsibility and I exercise

hh. What do you feel that Jesus a Dalit and Christ a Liberator?

Yes. We need to define and share these terms to the congregations

ii. What is opinion about Nazareth Manifesto?

Dignity and justice for all beings

jj. What is your understanding about Jesus's saying that First will be the last; and Last will be first?

It is a preferential option for the poor

kk. What is your opinion about Dalits are called to struggle for transformation?

We are already in the struggle for transformation

ll. What is your idea about salvation? Do you feel liberation from caste is a salvation for you?

Freedom from Caste- that is the salvation.

mm. What do you think about the saying that the struggle for Dalits will liberate Non Dalits also from their caste mindset?

Non Dalits will not remove themselves from Caste.

nn. What is your understanding about kingdom of god? Do you feel that your Dalit culture has the characteristics of kingdom of God?

Dalitism is closer to Kingdom of God

oo. Has Dalit theology reached grass root Dalit Christians?

No. Not at all.

pp. Do you sense that there is the necessity for Dalit theology in the struggles against caste discriminations?

Sure. There is a big need.

qq. What are your suggestions for taking Dalit Theology to grass root Dalit Christians?

Are we trying to create a society without caste? Or are we work for the liberation of the oppressed? For me, definitely we want to create a society without caste. This work brings tension everywhere; we need to work with this tension only.

What kind of theology we should talk to create a society without caste? I long and work for a society wherein both a cow and a lion can graze together; a society where the lion will eat the grass as a cow. It is a society where the powerful comes down and dines with the powerless. We pastors are not able to speak Dalit theology much; we have other agenda and priorities in the churches to fulfill. We have the main agenda to raise money for the church/harvest festivals. We speak about equality only in the liberation Sunday. That is all.

I like the words of Ambedkar that "I cannot sleep until my people get awakened". Today is Republic day. In this day no one would think of Dr Ambedkar, who wrote Indian Constitution. I had the satisfaction today, that I was able to hoist the flag on this day of Formation of Constitution and I was able to thank Dr Ambedkar.

In all the text of the Bible, one could see Dalit liberation, Women Liberation and Liberation of the Environment. Since our perspectives are

one-sided, we have not achieved Dalit liberation. Dalit liberation has not happened because of the developed/caste people.

There is the necessity for Dalit theology in the grassroots. Dalits struggle against Globalization, lose their lands and migrate to cities and become people of nothing. We need to encourage the congregation to participate with secular movements. Many in the congregation bring the evil politics into the church from outside the church. We struggle only when a church is getting demolished by Hindutva forces. But we are not concerned about when Dalits are attacked in Uthapuram separation wall issue. We do not condemn them. We only go for relief work, where there is flood.

If people who know Dalit theology are in secular movements, the nature of the movement will be better. There will be accountability also. If we read Ambedkar deeply, any Dalit would get inspired. Church would not speak about Ambedkar in its meetings. At some places, we a few only talk about Ambedkar.

A movie on Ambedkar has come. Ambedkar is contextual today as that of Jesus in his context. It is good to compare Jesus today with that of Ambedkar because it explains Jesus well. There are many things unwritten about Jesus. Leslie Newbegin would say that the Bible and the News Paper should be explained side by side.

Dalit theology is contextual. The Cain Abel incident in OT is closer to Dalit theology. Cain and Abel indicate two separate societies. One was doing agriculture and another was a nomadic one. In the conflict of these two societies, an innocent society was murdered.

Exodus story tells about the people who were slaves get liberated. The story of prodigal son tells about the concern of the father on the son outside the house. The concern of the father was with the son who was eating the food offered to the pigs. The concern of God is with the people who are not able to come inside the church. Though we go to the church, offer and though our bodies are nearer to him, the mind of God is with the persons who are far away from him. We should understand this.

The church is engrossed in the worldly things. We all believe that God would help this concern and God would not leave us. We do not project Christ as one who resisted evil. We think Christ is too big and he would not listen our apathy. Our people suffer with survival issues. Jesus is not preached as one who condemns money. Our Churches do not want to create enmity with the rich people. How the liberation would come, from

up or from below? Many think that the liberation will come from up. It is wrong.

We need multi-dimensional liberation approach. Liberation is possible provided there is joint action with personal commitment, support from hierarchy and support from people. Lot of women liberation issues are in Bible. We need to start the liberation of the oppressed from the liberation of Dalit Christian women.

rr. What impact this interview/conversation has created in you?

It helped me to recall about my ministry; and how caste made its impact on the church.



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