Role of Organisations in the Political Liberation of the Dalit Christians
ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONS IN THE POLITICAL LIBERATION OF THE DALIT CHRISTIANS

It can be said that with the promulgation of the Presidential order 19th of 1950, began the long and arduous struggle for redressal of grievances of the Dalit Christians. The Christian Community with the support of various ecclesiastical, political and non-political leaders launched a peaceful agitation on their behalf directed towards both the Central and State Governments from various angles. The following attempts were made and steps taken to obtain equal treatment for the Dalit Christians who are being discriminated on the basis of religion:

ECCLESIASTICAL ORGANIZATIONS

The ecclesiastical organization acknowledged that the Dalit Christians are discriminated by the Church in the name of caste. Hence, the denial of rights enjoyed by the Scheduled Castes to the Dalit Christians by the Central Government purely on the basis that there is no untouchability practised in Christianity, was considered by the Church as an injustice done to the Dalit Christians. Therefore the ecclesiastical organization actively took part in the struggle of the Dalit Christians against the Government. The following are the role of different ecclesiastical organizations and the Christian religious leaders in the struggle:

Fr. Jerome D’ Souza, SJ., was the pioneer among the Christian religious leaders to raise the issue of the Dalit Christians in the Parliament. He called on the President Rajendra Prasad on 6 December 1950 and appraised him of the misgivings and resentment of the Christian Community. Further, he raised this matter in the Parliament on 30 May 1951 and pleaded not to deny the concessions and help to those who by a personal decision have chosen Christianity for their faith.

The Catholic Bishops’ conference of India is an important organization which consists of all the Catholic Bishops of India. The political discrimination of the Dalit Christians was realised by the organization. In order to end the discrimination, the CBCI has made the following efforts. The CBCI appointed an ad hoc committee for the Welfare of the Dalit Christians with Bishop Thumma as Chairman to study the Dalit Christian problem and report the modus operandi to be employed in implementing the recommendations made in the Catholic Union of India Enquiry Committee Report. Bishop Thumma issued an explanatory circular to all Bishops on the subject on 17 July 1974.

In accordance with the decision of the CBCI and the Catholic Union of India a Joint Committee for the Dalit Christians Welfare with Bishop Thumma as Chairman was constituted in February, 1976. Archbishop D. Athaide, Bishop Cornelius Elanjikal and Fr. Joseph Kochupuramlil representing the CBCI, D.V. Dmonte, A.G. Augustine,  

---

2 Ibid., p.5.
3 Ibid., p.7.
4 A circular to all the Bishops of India, dated 17 July 1974.
M.S. Muthu and E. Jayachandra Raj representing the Catholic Union of India were the other members of the committee. The joint committee thoroughly studied the sufferings experienced by the Dalit Christians and an elaborate report was prepared on this matter. The report was sent to the Central Government to make it very clear that the social and economic conditions of the Dalit Christians are deplorable.\(^5\) Hence, the Dalit Christians should be given the rights enjoyed by the Scheduled Castes.

A National conference on Human Rights was organised by the National Coordination Committee for Dalit Christians at the YMCA, New Delhi on 27 November 1997. Archbishop Alan de Lastic presided over the proceedings. The points that emerged from the deliberation were:\(^6\)

1. The whole Christian Community should involve itself in the struggle for equal rights to the Dalit Christians.
2. Since reservation for the Dalit Christians is a remote possibility more emphasis is to be given for getting OBC statutory benefits and non-statutory benefits to the Dalit Christians.

The following plans were formulated for the future action by the conference:

1. To organise Dharna and National consultations for equal rights to the Dalit Christians in collaboration with the CBCI Commissions for peace and justice, labour and other human rights organisations.
2. To encourage people's movements to take up strong actions for obtaining justice.
3. To involve in intensive lobbying in Delhi.

The CBCI General meeting was held in Mangalore in January, 1978. The problem of the Dalit Christians came up for serious consideration. Cardinal Picachy, President of the CBCI, in his presidential address highlighted the problem. In the final statement issued by the conference, the Bishops emphasised that they were committed to struggle on behalf of the Dalit Christians so that the present discrimination practised against them on the basis of religion might soon end.7

The part played by the CBCI was very well supported by the actions taken by the Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council in support of the Dalit Christians. The Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council is also one of the important organizations which consists of all the Catholic Bishop of Tamil Nadu. The TNBC took active part in the struggle of Dalit Christians against the Central and State Governments.

The Bishops of Tamil Nadu who met at Tindivanam in South Arcot District for their annual meeting in January 1988, resolved that the Tamil Nadu Bishops' council, after carefully studying the social, educational and economic consideration of Dalit Christians in Tamil Nadu found that the Dalit Christians, even after conversion, continue to suffer from the extreme social, educational and economic backwardness arising out of the traditional practice of untouchability, and the Tamil Nadu Bishops council requested the Government of Tamil Nadu to recommend to the central Government to include the Scheduled Caste Christians in the list of Scheduled Caste.8

---

7. Ibid., p.11.
In addition to the efforts taken by the Church organization against the Presidential order of 1950, their attention was focused on the State Government of Tamil Nadu to obtain the status of Most Backward Class for the Dalit Christians, since the State Government has the power to include them in the list of MBC after making careful study on the subject.

Bishop Peter Feranando and Fr.Philominraj, Secretary of the TNBC Commission for SC/ST/BC met the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu M.Karunanithi on 23 June 1999 and presented a memorandum urging the Government to extend MBC status to the Dalit Christians, till the time the centre includes the Dalit Christians in the list of the Scheduled Caste. The Bishops and the secretaries of the commission were requested to urged the people to send petitions to the Government for this purpose.9

Archbishop Arul Das James, Bishop A.M. Chinnappa, Bishop Jude Paulraj, Bishop Lawrence Pius, Fr.S.Lourduswamy and Fr.Philomin Raj attended a conference conducted by the DCLM at Valluvarkottam, Chennai on 14 February 2001, at which the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Mr.M.Karunanidhi was the Chief Guest. He was again requested to include the Dalit Christians in the MBC category. Again a delegation of the Bishops and Secretary of the TNBC commission for SC/ST/BC met the Chief Minister on 15 February 2001 and requested him to extend the privileges of the MBC to the Dalit Christians.10

An Ecumenical delegation represented by the Church leaders of various denominations, Rev. Michael Augustine, Archbishop of the CNI, Rev. Dr. Anand Chandnlal, Moderator of the CNI, Rev. Pritan Santram, Bishop of Delhi, Fr. S. Lourdu Swamy and others submitted a memorandum to the President of India, Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma and apprised him of the plight of Dalit Christians to Christianity.¹¹

The above measures of the ecclesiastical organisations made the Central and State Governments to realise that the Christian Community of India has an important demand which should be seriously looked into.

**NON-DALIT CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATIONS**

Some of the Non-Dalit Christian organizations also took up the cause of the Dalit Christians. Their support extended to the problem of the Dalit Christians is highly significant. They also gave great pressure to the Central and State Governments over the issue. The late Sri. G.X. Francis, President of Catholic Regional Committee of Nagpur, sent a memorandum to the Prime Minister on 24 October 1950, pointing out the hardship caused to the Dalit Christians on account of the presidential order 19 of 1950.

Christians belonging to Backward Classes were not given State aids and facilities in some states as the Prime Minister had mentioned in his latter. Hence Sri. P.Ghako M.L.A., on behalf of the Backward Class Christians Federation Travancore – Cochin, submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister Nehru, on 22 November 1950,

¹¹ Letter to various organisations of the Dalit Christians by the Secretary Fr. S. Lourduswamy, TNBC Commission for SC/ST/BC, dated 20 May 1994
complaining that state aids and facilities were withdrawn from Christians belonging to Backward Classes.\(^\text{12}\)

The Christian members of the Parliament submitted a memorandum in 1951 to the President of India alleging discrimination against the Dalit Christians with regard to the grant of educational, social and economic assistance to them.\(^\text{13}\)

The Catholic Union of India is the most powerful Catholic Christian organization, established to protect the interests of the Catholic Community in India. The CUI took up the cause of the Dalit Christians at its annual general meeting held in Mangalore in January 1951. They passed a resolution drawing the attention of the Government to the blatant discrimination against the Dalit Christians and requested all the diocesan units in different parts of India to take up the issue seriously and represent the matter to the Chief Ministers of their respective States.\(^\text{14}\) On behalf of the Dalit Christians the Secretary of Paravan Welfare Association of Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu submitted a memorandum to the Government of Madras on 23 May 1952, requesting to extend the concessions admissible to Scheduled Castes to the Dalit Christians.\(^\text{15}\)

In December 1952 on the initiative of Sri.P.M.Marcose, a Dalit Christian M.L.A., Fr. Joseph Kochuparambil and several Christian political leaders including

\(^\text{12}\) A Consolidated account of 30 year's effort in the cause of Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin, op.cit., p.7.
\(^\text{13}\) Ibid., p.8.
\(^\text{14}\) Report of the annual general meeting of the Catholic Union of India, held at Mangalore in January 1951.
\(^\text{15}\) A consolidated account of 30 year's effort in the cause of Christians of Schedule Caste Origin, p.12.
M/s. T.J. Mathew and P.G Cherian from Travancore – Cochin State (now included in Kerala) submitted a memorandum to the President Rajendra Prasad and Prime Minister Nehru requesting to end the discrimination shown to the Dalit Christians. Following this, protest meetings were held at different parts of the State when resolutions with identical requests were forwarded to Central and State Governments.\textsuperscript{16}

When the Backward Classes Commission, appointed by the President of India with Sri. Khakasaheb Kalelkar M.P. as Chairman under Article 340 of the constitution of India, visited Travancore – Cochin State in 1954, leaders of the Christian Community represented to them that the Dalit Christians should be treated in effect as Schedule Castes so that they may be enabled to get all the State aids and facilities enjoyed by their Hindu brethren and by themselves before conversion. Rev. Bro. Rousius, Chief Promoter, Diocesan Social Works addressed a letter to the Governor of Madras dated 30 August 1962 pointing out the discrimination against Dalit Christians in giving aids.

A Dalit Christian, barber by profession, in Tanjore District got some equipments free for his work from the Government of Madras in 1969. But they were confiscated the very next day on the grounds that he was a Christian. Although J.C. Rayan, the then President of the Catholic Union of India, represented this matter to the Government through his latter dated 27 May 1969, it was of no avail.\textsuperscript{17}

Besides, the Catholic Union of India at its Annual General Meeting held in Mangalore on 18 April 1971, exhaustively considered the problem of the Dalit

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, p.5.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}, p.13.
Christians and also suggested ways and means to solve it. On a resolution moved by
G.S.Reddi, Harijan Converts Welfare Enquiry Sub Committee consisting of G.S.Reddi,
Fr.Jerome D’Souza, Fr.L.Desai, S.Chinnappan, L.Gonsalves and A.G.Augustine as the
convener was appointed to make an in-depth study of the problem and suggest solutions.
The voluminous report published by the Committee in 1973 was a landmark in the
struggle. The copies of the report were forwarded to the Prime Minister, State Chief
Ministers, Cardinals, all the Bishops and organisations far and wide. The report gave a
new inspiration and added momentum to the efforts in the cause of the Dalit Christians.\textsuperscript{18}

D.V.D’Monte, the then President of the Catholic Union of India, presented a
memorandum to Smt.Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India and
Sri.M.Karunanidhi, the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu at Bangalore on 5 May 1973
along with copies of the CUI Enquiry committee report and pleaded to end the
discrimination shown to the Dalit Christians and requested for the amendment of the
President’s order of 1950.\textsuperscript{19}

The first All-India Action Programme was chalked out by G.S. Reddi when he
became the President of Catholic Union in 1974. The programme consisted of Prayer,
Protest meetings and demonstrations in different dioceses all over India from 13 to 15
April 1975 with the co-operation of the CBCI, different Christian denominations and non-
Christian leaders. Processions, rallies and public meetings were held all over the country.

\textsuperscript{18} Report of the Harijan Converts Welfare Enquiry Sub-Committee, constituted by the
\textsuperscript{19} C.P.Thangaraj, \textit{op.cit.}, p.7.
F.M.Z. Choudhary, President of Catholic Association of Punjab conducted a 24 hour token hunger strike in Jullunder. Thousands of telegrams and Post-cards protesting against the discrimination were sent to the Prime Minister, Union Home Minister and State Chief Ministers from all Parts of India. This programme helped to awaken the whole Christian Community to the need to work for the cause of the Dalit Christians.\(^{20}\)

The conference of Christian leaders was held at Madras on 12 June 1975 under the auspices of National Christian Council of India. Representatives of the Catholic Union of India also actively participated in it when papers were presented and resolutions were adopted against the discrimination shown to the Dalit Christians. At the annual General meeting of the Catholic Union of India held in Calcutta in May, 1975, in the place of the Action Committee, a commission for Harijan Christian Welfare was constituted with Sri A.G. Augustine as Chairman and Fr. Joseph Kochuparambil as convener.\(^ {21}\)

A high powered National delegation of Catholic leaders led by D.V. Monte, President of CUI met the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in New Delhi on 21 September 1976 and submitted a memorandum about the said economic plight of four million Dalit Christians who suffered discrimination solely on grounds of religion. G.G. Reddi, P.Anthony Reddy, M.P. and E.Jayachandra Raj, Executive Secretary of CUI were among the members of the delegation.\(^ {22}\) At the annual general meeting of the CUI held in

\(^{21}\) Ibid., p.20.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., p.21.
Madras on 1 May 1977, a resolution regarding the Government of India to amend the constitution Order 1950 was adopted.

On behalf of Tamil Nadu Christian Depressed and Backward Classes Kazhagem, T.R. Pinheiro, President, Sri. D. Amrose, Vice President and R. Rubin, Secretary forwarded an appeal to all the members of Parliament on 26 January 1978 to support the cause of the Dalit Christians for equal treatment and make use of the opportunity of the introduction of G.S. Reddi’s Bill in the Parliament to see that Justice was done to them.\(^{23}\)

The Christian Progressive Forum met the Chief Minister and Education Ministers and presented a memorandum on 22 February 1989 requesting them to reserve 8% Quota for the Dalit Christians in case of compartmentalization of Backward classes, and if not, to include the Christians in the Most Backward Class\(^{24}\).

V. Narayanaswamy M.P., of Pondicherry, prepared the constitution (Scheduled Caste) order Amendment Bill. Rev. Michael Augustine, Archbishop of Pondicherry and CBCI commission secretary contributed to the intensive lobbying to secure the support of MPs and Ministers. A memorandum signed by 200 MPs, a unanimous resolution of Parliamentary forum of SCs / STs and a favourable judgement in the Mandal case, had exerted pressure on the Government to extend statutory benefits to the Dalit Christians. All these efforts in the past formed a background to move the bill in the Parliament. On 13 August 1993 V. Narayanaswamy, M.P., moved a Private bill in the Parliament for the

\(^{23}\) *Ibid.*, p.21

amendment of the constitution (Scheduled caste) order to include the Dalit Christians in the SC list and made epoch-making speech in the Rajya Sabha.\footnote{25}

On 17 August 1993 a delegation of MPs under the leadership of Peter Marbiniang, MP, submitted a memorandum to Shri. Narashimha Rao, Prime Minister and requested him to introduce the Government Bill in the Monsoon session of the Parliament. A delegation of Church leaders and MPs, met Mother Theresa at her convent in Delhi and pleaded her to speak to the Prime Minister personally about this cause. Mother Theresa sent a letter mentioning the demand of Dalit Christians to Prime Minister.\footnote{26}

The Tamil Nadu Regional SC/ST/BC commission organised rally, convention and higher strikes at Caddalore on 6 March 1995 and resolutions were sent to the Prime Minister, Ministers and M.Ps. Besides a higher strike was observed all over Tamil Nadu on 24 April 1995.\footnote{27} Christian MPs Shri P.C. Thomas, Shri. Charles and Shri. Oscar Fernandes raised questions regarding the issue of the Dalit Christian in the Parliament on 10 May, 1995.

The leaders of the united Christians council, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, met the Prime Minister Narashima Rao in Madurai on 11 August 1995 and expressed the problem of the Dalit Christians and asked him to introduce the Government bill in

\footnote{25. A consolidated account of 30 year’s effort in the cause of Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin, p.10.}
\footnote{26. \textit{Ibid.}, p.12.}
\footnote{27. \textit{Report of the Commission for Scheduled Caste / Tribes and Backward Classes}, to all the Church Leaders and Secretaries, CBCI centre, New Delhi, dated 5 June 1995.}
the forthcoming winter session of the Parliament. Besides, the council launched a very powerful programme in New Delhi and Tamil Nadu to draw the attention of all the political parties at the National and state level from 18 November 1995 to 10 December 1995.28

**DALIT CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATIONS**

The Dalit Christians realised the importance of establishing an organization of their own. They wanted to fight for their demands through their organization. As a result a number of Dalit Christian organizations were established. Among the Dalit Christian Organizations the Tamil Nadu Scheduled Caste Christians' Association was the oldest one.29 In the beginning the association fought for the injustice done to the Dalit Christians in the Church but after independence its activities were directed against the Central and State Government to obtain the rights of Scheduled Caste.

The Tamil Nadu Scheduled Caste Christians' Association was established in 1932. This association convened the conference of All India Scheduled Caste Christians in Tiruchirappalli in 1976. A number of Bishop and delegates from different states actively took part in the conference by which the sufferings of the Dalit Christians were exposed to different sections of the people. In the same year, the association leaders along with

28 A circular to all the Churches of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry by the United Christians Council, Madurai, dated 6 November 1995.
other leaders of different organisations met the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi and put forward the problems faced by the Dalit Christians.\(^{30}\)

A delegation of Christian leaders under the auspices of All – India Scheduled Castes Christians leaders council met the Prime Minister at New Delhi on 2 November 1976 and presented a memorandum requesting the Government to include the Christian Dalits in the list of Scheduled Castes.

Under the auspices of All – India Scheduled Caste Christian Leaders Council, a delegation of representatives from various states met Prime Minister Moraji Desai in New Delhi on 30 September 1977 and presented him a memorandum on the discrimination against the Scheduled Caste Christians. Archibishop of Agra, G.S. Reddi, M.P., Pulavar Mariadas, M.C. Paul, M.S. Arockiadas and Fr. D.C. Meulder were among the members of the delegation.\(^{31}\)

The All India Scheduled Caste Christians' Associations was established owing to the efforts undertaken by the Tamil Nadu Scheduled Caste Christians' Association in 1978. In the same year an important meeting of sixty Members of the Parliament was held in Madurai. The leaders of the association met the Parliamentary group and expressed to them the discrimination of the Central Government against the Dalit Christians.\(^{32}\)


\(^{32}\) A consolidated account of 30 year's effort in the cause of Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin, p.19.
A number of Dalit Christian Associations had been functioning in different names for the same cause. The Tamil Nadu Scheduled Caste Christians' Association made an attempt to unite all of them and fight collectively against the central Government. As a result the Federation of Tamil Nadu Scheduled Caste Christians was established on 18 March 1990 by uniting seven association of that kind. Thus the strength of the organisations increased.33

The issue of extension of the protection of Civil Rights Act 1955 was taken by the All India Scheduled Caste Christian Leaders Council. The following case very clearly stated that the civil Rights Act was not applicable to the Dalit Christians. V.S.Lurthu, a Dalit Christian filed a case in the First Class magistrate court at Vellore in Tamil Nadu against Mr. Srinivasan, a high caste Hindu, for having abused him mentioning his Caste. The magistrate in his verdict (Case No.31/77) acquitted Srinivasan stating that the person could not be penalized for having abused the petitioner, since the petitioner could not be considered an untouchable as he is a Christian.34 So this proves that the protection of Civil rights Act is not applicable to the Christian Dalits.

Thus the All India Scheduled Caste Christian Leaders Council made a number of attempts to obtain the protection of civil rights to the Dalit Christians by submitting a number of memorandum to the Central Government of India.35 The Dalit Christians’

34 C.P.Thangaraj, op.cit., p.12.
Liberation Movement of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry had pleaded the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu M. Karunanidhi to include the Dalit Christians in the list of Most Backward Classes. Since the Political Party of M. Karunanidhi had taken part in the Ministry headed by the Prime Minister Vajpayee, the DCLM requested him to send his recommendation to the Central Government to include the Dalit Christians in the list of Scheduled Caste. But the letter had no effect.

The Dalit Christian Associations organised a number of rallies, demonstrations, conventions and conferences to show their protest against the Church and the Government.

The first state level conference was held by Tamil Nadu Untouchable Christians Association in Tiruchirappalli on 23 July 1933. In order to create awareness among the Dalit Christians and to exhibit their problems to the public, a rally was organised and started from Town Hall and ended at Municipal Public Hall. The rally and the conference were attended by thousands of Dalit Christians and leaders of other communities. The Chief guest of the conference was M.A. Muthaiah Chettiar and the prominent leaders who attended the conference were S.Michael, V.K.S. Antony samy, A.Ponusamy, T.Antonysamy and V.U. Arputhasamy. The local secretary of the conference was A. Dhansamy who made the rally and the conference highly remarkable.

---

36 Letter to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu by the State President, Dalit Christian Liberation Movement, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, dated 19 July 1999.
37 Pamphlet issued by the Tamil Nadu Untouchable Christian Association, Tiruchirapalli, dated 23 July 1933.
A consolidated effort was taken by the Tamil Nadu ‘SC’ Christians Association in Tiruchirappalli in 1978. The President of the association J. Singarayar got the support of institutions managed by different Christian missionaries in Tiruchirappalli. As a result in January 1978, a rally was organised and started at Annalsilai and ended at Collector’s office, Tiruchirappalli. About three thousand five hundred people from different walks of life attended the rally, and the meeting held at the collector’s office premises. The rally and the meeting were considered important because they got the attention of both the central and state governments and the public. The strength of the rally further encouraged the Dalit Christian leaders to intensify their struggle.38

The Tamil Nadu ‘SC’ Christians Association held an important meeting at R.C. School, Manakkal, Lalgudi in Tiruchirappalli on 19 November 1988. The Chief guest of the meeting was A. Fernandez, President of Tamil Nadu ‘SC’ Christians Association, Tiruchirappalli District. The main agenda of the meeting was to establish its branches at the taluk level. A number of delegates from different districts attended the meeting and gave valuable suggestions. The meeting was organised by P. Samidurai, Secretary, Tiruchirappalli District.39

---

The same association organised a special meeting at Bishop Heber Higher Secondary School in Tiruchirappalli on 5 May 1990 at 10. A.M. The meeting was presided over by Pulavar Mariadoss, President, Tamil Nadu SC Christians Association. The organiser of the meeting was V. Jesu. The purpose of the meeting was to insist the government not to yield to any opposition to the bill to be introduced in the parliament in August 1990. Some resolutions were passed and sent to the Government of India.\(^4^0\)

A historic rally was organised in New Delhi on 17 August 1990. The Arch Bishop of New Delhi Allen De Lastic presided over the rally. Christian leaders from all over India took active part in the rally. A large number of Dalit Christians, Bishops, Arch Bishops, Priests, Nuns, Students and the Public participated in the rally. There was a Dharna in front of the Parliament house on the same day. The main purpose of the rally and Dharna was to pressurize the government to include the Dalit Christians in the list of Scheduled Caste. The rally and Dharna attracted the attention of the public and various political parties.\(^4^1\)

Christian United Federation held a rally and a conference in Madurai on 12 March 1994. The rally ended at Thamukkam Ground where the conference was attended by the Vice-President of India, Mother Tersa, Bishops, Arch Bishops, Priests, Nuns, Dalit


\(^{4^1}\) Circular Sent by the Secretary, CBCI SC/ST/BC Commission, New Delhi, dated 25 August 1990.
Christians, Students and Members of the Parliament and Assembly. One of the important resolutions passed in the conference was that Dalit Christians must be included in the list of Scheduled Caste.\textsuperscript{42}

Another rally and conference was organised by the Dalit Christians Liberation Movement at Dindivanam on 20 September 1994. The rally was headed by A.Selvaraj, President, DCLM, Dindivanam. The rally was started from Arul Oli Illa Vazal and ended at Vedavalliammal Thirumana Mandapam. At the end of the rally the conference was attended by the chief guest A.Anthony Raj, founder President, DCLM. The main resolutions passed in the conference were to put an end to the discrimination practised against the Dalit Christians by the Church and the Central Government.\textsuperscript{43}

The meeting of the Catholic Bishops of Tamil Nadu was held at Vellankanni on 29 January 1995. In order to represent their grievances, about one thousand five hundred Dalit Christians went to Velankanni and sought Permission to meet the Bishops. But they were not given permission. Hence they staged a demonstration. At last the demonstrators were sent out of the place by policemen which created a lot of discontentment against the Bishops. The DCLM organised another rally in Villupuram on 28 February 1995 against the Church and the Government.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{42} Pamphlet issued by the Christian United Federation, Madurai, dated 12 March 1994.
\textsuperscript{43} Hand-out issued by the DCLM, Dindivanam, dated 20 September 1994.
\textsuperscript{44} Tracts issued by the DCLM, Vellankanni, dated 29 January 1995.
The Dalit Christians organised a rally, convention and hunger strike in Cuddalore on 6 March 1995 to derive the attention of the Church and the Government. The rally was attended by more than a thousand volunteers. The resolutions passed in the convention were sent to the Prime Minister and Members of the Parliament. Another hunger strike was observed all over Tamil Nadu as directed by the TNBC SC / ST / BC commission on 24 April 1995 for the same purpose.\(^{45}\)

In order to turn the attention of the Parliamentarians a two day Dharna was held at Junter Manter, New Delhi on 27 and 28 April 1995. The Dharna was attended by a number of religious leaders, Dalit Christian leaders and students.\(^{46}\) A Cycle rally was organised from 25 Nov 1995 to 6 December 1995. It had to start from Kanyakumari to Chennai. The cycle rally was mainly attended by the Federation of Tamil Nadu, Dalit Christian Students. The purpose of the rally was to create awareness among the Dalit Christians and to consolidate their position to fight against the church and the government.\(^{47}\)

DCLM held a state level conference at Nallayan Illam in Tiruchirapalli on 2 August 1998. The Chief Guest of the conference was A. Anthony Raj, founder President, DCLM. The conference was organised by the Tiruchirappalli Unit, DCLM. On 7 June

\(^{45}\) Pamphlet issued by the TNBC SC/ST/BC Commission, Cuddalore, dated 6 March 1995.

\(^{46}\) Circular sent by the Secretary, CBCI SC/ST/BC Commission, New Delhi, dated 5 June 1995.

1999 an important demonstration was held at Villupuram in front of the collector’s office a large number of Bishops, Priests, nuns, leaders of Dalit Christians, and students raised slogans against the central government. At the end of the demonstration a memorandum was submitted to the collector. The demonstration was presided over by C.M. Mathew and the special invitee was M. Mary John.  

Thus the Dalit Christians showed their resentment to the central Government and the church through rallies, demonstrations, hunger strikes, public meetings, conventions and conferences. The following were the other important Dalit Christian leaders who worked for the cause of Dalit Christians in Tamil Nadu C.P. Thangaraj, General Secretary, Christian Progressive Forum, Siga Jaganathan, United Christian Association, Coimbatore, S. Mohan Das and Lobo Albert Roy of Madurai, M. Stanislas of Tanjore. C. Paulmani and R. Sameed Raj of Nagercoil, A. Antony Doss Prema of Villupuram, M.S.Raj of Vadalur, R.A. Das of Dindigul, Jeyakaran Joseph and D.D. David of Vellore, James of Tirunelveli, A. Antony Cruz, and Adaikaladoss of Tiruchirapalli.

All the above attempts made by the Dalit Christian organization made the Church, Government, political and non-political leaders understand the strength and weaknesses of the organizations.

49. Address book of Tamil Nadu ‘SC’ Christians Associations, Tiruchirappalli, pp.1-10
SUPPORT OF THE POLITICAL AND NON-POLITICAL LEADERS

Some of the political and non-political leaders came forward to support the demands of the Dalit Christians. As they felt that the demands of the Dalit Christians are highly reasonable, they joined hands with the supporters of the struggle. Above all the political leaders wanted to earn the support of the entire Christian community by raising their voice against the injustice done to the Dalit Christians. When Mr. K. Kamaraj contested for the M.P. seat from the Nagercoil constituency, he assured that he would do all the needful for extending the privileges, now enjoyed by the Scheduled Caste Hindus, to the Dalit Christians also.

One of the leaders of Samyukta Socialist Party Mr. Madhu Lymayee, introduced a Private Member Bill in the Lok Sabha on 26 March 1970 demanding the extension of the legalized protection that were given to the Hindu Scheduled castes to the Muslims, Christians and others belonging to the Minority religions.50

The Madras District Backward classes Welfare Society Conference was held at the White Memorial Hall at Egmore in Madras. Mr. P. Sivasankaran, M.P., K. Manoharan, M.P., Mr. Mayava, M.P., Mr. A.V.P. Asaithamai were also present. One of the resolutions of the conference reads as follows: All the Privileges that are given to the Scheduled Caste Hindus should also be given to the Dalit Christians.51

---

51 A consolidated account of 30 year's effort in the cause of Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin, p.31.
One of the resolutions passed by the National Executive Committee of the Democratic Party which met at Bangalore on 13 December 1970 says: Just as the government provides educational and other privileges to the Hindu Scheduled caste, they should also be given to the Dalit Christians.\textsuperscript{52} The Muslim League M.L.A., Mr. K. A. Wahab, who took part in the discussions in the Tamil Nadu Legislation Assembly Budget session in 1971, stressed that all the Privileges that are given to the Hindu Scheduled castes should be given to all the converted Harijans also.\textsuperscript{53}

The executive members who spoke in the first Tamil Nadu A$\ddot{a}$i Andhras conference held at the Ashok Hotel in Egmore, Madras in 7 July 1972 demanded that all the educational concessions that are given to the Harijans should also be given to the Andhra Harijan Christians. The conference was orgnaised by the Madras Telugu Harijans Mahasabha.\textsuperscript{54} One of the 23 resolutions passed by the South Arcot District D.M.K. conference on 15 July 1973, was as follows: \textsuperscript{55}

"The conference stresses the Central Government that all the privileges that are given to the Hindu Scheduled Castes should also be extended to the Dalit Christians also".

The conference of the Swatantra Party was held at Salem in Tamil Nadu. The conference strongly recommended that all the concessions and privileges enjoyed by the Scheduled Caste Hindus should also be extended to the Scheduled Caste Christians.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p.31.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p.32.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p.35.
\textsuperscript{55} A consolidated report of the Tamil Nadu Scheduled Caste Christians Association, Tiruchirappalli, pp.1-5.
Mr. V. Gopalswamy, M.P., made an elaborate statement in the Rajya Sabha in connection with the problem of the Dalit Christians. His speech was highly in support of including the Dalit Christians in the list of Scheduled Caste. Thus he extended his full support and made the members of the Rajya Sabha know more about the problems of the Dalit Christians.66

The support extended by a number of political and non-political leaders gave good encouragement to the Church and the Dalit Christians' organizations to intensify their struggle against the Central and State Governments.

JUDICIAL ATTEMPTS

In spite of the repeated attempts made by various organizations and important leaders, the Central Government did not respond positively to the problem of the Dalit Christians. Therefore they sought the help of judiciary with great hope. The following cases were filed in the supreme court and other courts of India:

"The constitutionality of the Presidential order 1950 promulgated in the Ministry of Law Notification No. S.R.O.385 (C.O.19) Dated 10 September 1950 was taken up in the Madras High Court by Mr. Mitchell as he was not included in the list of Scheduled caste. In the course of his judgement Mr. Rajamannar, the Chief Justice dismissed the

66 Daily Thanthi, dated 10 May 1990, p.2
case on the grounds that Mr. Mitchell failed to prove that he suffered the same disabilities within the Christian community as those of scheduled caste in Hindu social order."

Mr. Soosai filed a writ Petition in the Supreme Court, New Delhi in 1983. He belonged to Adi Dravida Community and was a convert to Christianity. He was a cobbler by Profession and worked on the roadside at one of the cross-roads in Madras. In May 1982, the officer of the Tamil Nadu Khadi and Village Industries Board Surveyed the sites on which cobblers were working, including the place occupied by Mr. Soosai, and subsequently on July 27 1982, several cobblers were allotted bunks free of cost by the Regional Deputy Director, Khadi and village Industries Board. On enquiry he came to know that the allotment of bunks free of cost was consequent to a proposal under the special central Assistance Schemes exclusively intended for scheduled caste under G.O. Ms.No.580 Social Welfare Department, dated 13 February 1982. As he was denied the allotment by the department, he challenged the validity of the Presidential order (Scheduled caste), 1950."

Movement for Protection of Human Rights of Marginalised communities was also an organisation which worked for the cause of the Dalit Christians. The secretary of the organisation filed a writ Petition in the Supreme Court of India Challenging Para 3 of the constitution (Scheduled castes) order 1950 as ultra Vireos as it discriminates the Dalit Christians on the ground of religion."

---

57 A copy of the Judgement, High Court of Madras, Vide AIR Madras (1952) 474.
58 A copy of the writ Petition No.9596 of 1983, Supreme Court of India, New Delhi.
59 A copy of the writ Petition (Civil) No.1017 of 1984, Supreme Court of India, New Delhi.
The writ petition was heard by the Division Bench Consisting of Chief Justice P.N. Bhagawathi, Justice R.S. Pathale and Justice A.K. Sen. The judgement was pronounced on 30 September 1985 dismissing the writ petition. “The ground on which all the three cases were dismissed was the Dalit Christians have not proved that they suffered from the same disabilities with in the Christian community as that of scheduled castes in Hindu and Sikh Social Order”. Thus their judicial attempts also failed.

The Christian organisation had been taking tireless efforts to include the Dalit Christians in the list of Scheduled Caste since 1950. Their efforts were partly successful in Tamil Nadu as they were able to make the Government of Tamil Nadu to include themselves in the list of Backward Classes. Their efforts were not successful against the Central Government due to various reasons. The ruling parties at the centre assured a number of times that they would make necessary arrangements to amend the Presidential order of 1950, to include the Dalit Christians in the list of Scheduled Castes but they did not try their maximum to do it so. As the Christians are very few in number, their votes will not have much effect in forming the Government. Therefore the National Parties did not show much interest on the issue.  

60. A copy of the Judgement, Supreme Court of India, New Delhi dated 30 September 1985, p.5.
61. A report of the Scheduled Caste, Tribes and Backward Class, *op.cit.*, p.3.
Besides the Hindu Mahasabha, R.S.S., Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the BJP are dead against amending the order. The basic reason behind it was, the Dalit Christian should not be given the concessions enjoyed by the Hindus as they are Christians by faith.  

Some of the Dalit Hindu organisations and leaders were also against the issue of the Dalit Christians. They felt that the benefits enjoyed by them would be shared by the Dalit Christians if they are included in the list of scheduled caste. The Christian Organizations failed to bring heavy pressure on the Central Government as they followed peaceful means to get the problem of Dalit Christian solved. They were not able to take up wider lobby among the leaders who were against the bill, introduced in the Parliament for the sake of the Dalit Christians.

The struggle of the Dalit Christians against the central Government for the amendment of the parliament classes to include the Dalit Christians in the list of Scheduled Castes became weak because the BJP dominated Political Parties formed the Central Government in 1996. As the BJP had no concern for the Dalit Christians, their demand was not taken into account by the ruling BJP. Hence the Dalit Christians are not taking much effort to pressurize the Central Government to look into their problems at present.

---

63 Letter of the President, Dalit Christian Liberation Movement to various Dalit Christians Organization, Tiruchirappalli, dated 2 October 1996.
The failure greatly disappointed the Dalit Christians hence they were compelled to continue their struggle against the Central Government. The Dalit Christians failed to consolidate their position, still majority of the Dalit Christians are unaware of the political discrimination practised against them by the Government of India. They should find an able leader to lead them in the right direction. Besides, they should get the support of the entire Christian Community in India which would greatly influence the like-minded political parties to set right the problem.