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Impact of the Liberation Movement
The liberation movement of the Dalit Christians has brought significant impacts on the social, political and economic life of the Dalit Christians.

SOCIAL IMPACT

The efforts of the European Christian Missionaries to spread Christianity in India were very much successful among the Dalits. The social condition of the Dalits was highly deplorable in many ways in Tamil Nadu. In order to get rid of all the social degradation and obtain equal social status, the Dalits embraced Christianity in good number. But the prevalence of caste discrimination in the Church further worsened the social condition of the Dalit Christians.

While spreading Christianity among the Non-Dalits, some of the Christian missionaries adopted a different method without knowing the consequences of it. They openly proclaimed that nothing would go against their social status even after embracing Christianity. The missionaries pretended themselves as high caste Christians. This greatly encouraged the Non-Dalits to come to Christianity. At the same time, the Dalit Christians were severely hurt, their expectations and aspirations were totally foiled as the system of caste entered the Church.

The task of spreading Christianity was carried out by some of the Christian Missionaries without breaking the basic teachings of Christianity. They fought for justice and equality of men. The prevalence of caste in the Church was vehemently opposed by them and went to the extent of eradicating it from the Church for which they had to undergo a lot of sufferings.\(^4\) Besides, they taught that everyone is equal before God and there should not be any discrimination in the name of caste which greatly annoyed the Non-Dalits in the Church.\(^5\)

There was a difference of opinion among the missionaries over the issue of caste. The Christians who were desirous of maintaining their social status in the Church extended their full support to the missionaries who were in favour of allowing the system of caste to be practised in the Church. This resulted in providing separate seating arrangements for the Dalit and Non-Dalit Christians in the Church, accordingly the structure of the Church was made.\(^6\)

The Dalit Christians were forced to have separate cemeteries and hearses in a number of places.\(^7\) All these could be possible because of a few missionaries who strongly supported the system of caste in the Church. The Dalit Christians could not tolerate all these disabilities in the Church. Hence, they started agitating against the discriminations. As the Dalit Christians were not properly organised, they could

\(^4\) L.Stanislaus, *op.cit.*, p.112.
not achieve much before independence. Their protest was successful wherever they got support from the missionaries. The rallies which divided the Dalit Christians from the rest of the communities were removed in some places.

The Dalit Christians were suppressed by the high caste people in a number of ways. At one stage the identity consciousness of the Dalit Christians made them react against the suppressions. This led to a number of conflicts between the Dalit Christians and the high castes which resulted in the Dalit Christians' moving towards urban centres. The Dalit Christians felt that the structural mobility can take place only through modernization. Modernization can be achieved mostly in urban centres. Therefore a number of Dalit Christians left their villages and moved towards urban centres for education and employment. But the Government policies were not in favour of the Dalit Christians, hence they were not able to become bureaucrats who can play a vital role in formulating the policies in their favour.

After independence, the number of foreign missionaries slowly declined. The leadership of the Church was passed on to the hands of Indian priests who were mostly from upper castes.\(^8\) The caste discrimination took a new turn when the Non-Dalits received tremendous support from the Non-Dalit religious heads. They always had an upper hand in the Church. The Dalit Christians were forced to intensify their struggle for the following reasons.

\(^8\) W. Fernandes, *op.cit.*, p.54.
On account of the efforts taken by the Church, Dalit Christians also got an opportunity to receive education. The educated Dalit Christians started seriously thinking of the inequality practised in the Church and decided to deal with these in an organised method. Hence a number of organizations were established by the Dalit Christians. Their solidarity and strength was exposed to the Church. The Church was made to look into the problem of the Dalit Christians seriously. A number of Christian religious organizations came forward with new policies and programmes to pacify the Dalit Christians.\(^9\)

In Madurai, it was stated that about 25% of the Dalit Christians were literate and 10% were SSLC holders and a majority of them were teachers. In Tirchirappalli, 10% were literate, 1% SSLC holders 0.05 % were graduates and that was the situation in general of the Dalit Christians throughout Tamil Nadu.\(^10\) The Backward Classes commission pointed out that "While there may be some progress in the field of elementary education, the converts have not made as such progress in high school education or Collegiate education as their Hindu brethren. It ascribes that the same spirit of Renaissance which animates the Hindu Scheduled castes has not spread to the Christian section, and that owing to the absence of employment opportunities similar to those reserved for Scheduled castes, there was no great temptation for the converts to go in for higher education. It was claimed that they have not been able to make any headway in government employment and that they stand now where the scheduled castes stood

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\(^10\) Report of the Harijan Convert Welfare Enquiry Sub-Committee, p. 31
20 years ago. Though these assertions have not been statistically supported, it must be conceded that there is a large element of truth in them.\textsuperscript{11}

The policies and programmes which benefited the Dalit Christians were opposed by some of the Non-Dalit Christians. When the Dalit Christians made an attempt to establish their rights in the Church there were clashes between the two groups. Sometimes, the priests who were in support of the Dalit Christians were also punished.\textsuperscript{12} The efforts taken by the Church created a lot of awareness among the Dalit Christians and made them receive education and get employment in Christian institution.

In fact, the discrimination of the Dalit Christians practised by the Church has been reduced because of their liberation movement. The struggle of the Dalit Christians against the Central and State Governments has brought about remarkable impact on the society. When the Government of India extended special rights to the scheduled caste, the Dalit Christians who aspired for equal social status in Christianity, went to the extent of ascertaining that they are untouchables. But the Government of India repeatedly stated that the demands of the Dalit Christians can not be considered as untouchability is not practised in Christianity.\textsuperscript{13}

The prolonged struggle of the Dalit Christians could gain support from Christian religious organization, political and non-political leaders. This greatly encouraged the Dalit Christians to continue their struggle against the Government of India. The Church

\textsuperscript{12} L.Stanislaus, \textit{op.cit.}, p.113.
\textsuperscript{13} C.P.Thangaraj, \textit{op.cit.}, p.3.
could have felt that if the demands of the Dalit Christians are considered by the Central Government, their responsibility of extending special concessions to the Dalit Christians can be withdrawn. Besides, the Church wanted to please the Dalit Christians who were the majority in the Church, by showing enormous support to their struggle. The struggle was made known to all sections of the society. Though their struggle was not successful against the Central Government, the Dalit Christians learnt a lot out of it.

The Hindu Dalits were against the demands of the Dalit Christians. They felt that if the Dalit Christians were given the right of scheduled castes, they would be highly benefitting as they have an opportunity to receive education from the Christian institutions where normally high standard of education is maintained. This ultimately paved the way for bitterness between these two groups. Hence, the Dalit Christians were not able to get the support of the Dalit Hindus.

The Government of India included the Sikh and Buddhist Dalits in the list of Scheduled Castes in 1956 and 1990 respectively. This angered the Dalit Christians when they were denied these privileges only on the basis of religion. Dalit Christians could identify the political and non-political leaders who had real concern for them.

The extension of Scheduled Caste privileges to the Dalit Christians who were reconverted to Hinduism created a lot of suspicion in the minds of the Christians. The Government of India was deliberately denying these rights to the Dalit Christians as to reconvert them to Hinduism. Thus the secular nature of the constitution is very often questioned by the Christians. One of the important impacts of the Dalit Christian
liberation movement is that the Dalit Christians cannot be easily exploited either by the Church or by the Government as before. Therefore the Church and the Government cannot simply ignore the demands of the Dalit Christians.

**ECONOMIC IMPACT**

The Government of Tamil Nadu, realising the facts that the Dalit Christians are suffering from all such social disabilities as the Dalit Hindus even after their conversion it decided that it is not the religion but the social disabilities and the educational backwardness that should be the basis for help. Hence it extended all the concessions granted to the Dalit Hindus by the State Government to the Dalit Christians. In respect of reservation of seats in educational institutions and recruitment to public services, the Dalit Christians are treated on a par with the Backward Classes.

Details regarding the concessions extended to the Dalit Christians by the Government of Tamil Nadu are given below:

The State Education Department supplies books and slates free of cost to the students studying in standard I to III. All the Dalit Christians who are studying in standards IV to X of primary, upper primary and secondary schools are eligible for the supply of all the text books by the Harijan and Tribal Welfare Department irrespective of the annual income of the parents. The special fee payable by the Dalit Christian

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students studying in high schools are reimbursed to the institutions by the District Harijan Welfare Officers. Similarly, the examination fees payable by the X standard students are reimbursed to the Director of Government Examination by the Director of Harijan and Tribal Welfare, Chennai. Hence, neither special fee nor examination fees be paid by the Dalit Christians in schools.

At present no tuition fee is levied up to +2 regardless of the income limit of their parents.\footnote{G.O. Ms.No.722, Social Welfare Department, dated 13 October 1977.} Hence, free education is ensured to the Dalit Christians at all stages of education. All the students belonging to Dalit Christian community whose parents' annual income does not exceed Rs.3000/- are eligible for Harijan and Tribal Welfare Department state scholarship to pursue Arts, Science, Professional, Industrial and Technical courses.\footnote{T.R.Pinheiro, \textit{op.cit.}, p.3.}

Special coaching for academically weak students, coaching for meritorious college students, hostel facilities, tuition facilities in hostels, merit grants and awards to bright students are given. A special award exclusively for the Dalit Christian students is given. Two students (a boy and a girl) from each district who have obtained the highest percentage of marks in higher secondary examination in the first attempt studying in regular full time courses and who pursue their education continuously beyond higher secondary course are entitled to this award. There is no income limit for this award. At present 50% of the seats in educational institutions and posts in public services are
reserved for Backward Classes. As the Dalit Christians have been included in the list of Backward Classes, they have to compete with the caste Hindus and Christians for admission in educational institutions and appointment in public services which is highly impossible for them to make use of the reservation.

Tools and appliances are supplied free of cost to the technically trained persons belonging to the Dalit Christian Community to help them get self-employed. Tools and appliances are supplied free of cost to the technically trained persons belonging to the Dalit Christian Community to help them get self-employed.19 Interest free loans to petty traders belonging to the Dalit Christian community are given by the Director of Harijan and Tribal Welfare. The amount of loan ranges from Rs.125/- to Rs.15,000/- depending upon the nature of trade.

Dalit Christian agriculturists of the Kanyakumari District, who own not less than half acre of land and who not less than one acre of land in all other districts are eligible for subsidy to sink irrigation wells, instal tube wells and pump sets in their lands. With a view to facilitating rapid advancement of the Dalit Christians in the field of industry the Government has organised several cottage industrial co-operative societies, which are run by the Director of Industries and Commerce, Director of Social Welfare, Director of Handlooms and Textiles and the Tamil Nadu Village Industries Board.

House sites are given free of cost to the Dalit Christians who do not own house sites and who cannot afford to pay the cost. Extent of such site ranges from 3 to 5 cent per family. Under the Rural Housing Scheme, houses of an estimated cost of Rs.3,000/- each is constructed. The individual member's involvement of Rs.600/- under this scheme,

19 Ibid., p.10.
a subsidy of Rs.600/- is also allowed. The Tamil Nadu Harijan housing and development co-operation undertakes the construction of houses for the Dalit Christians.

Besides, concessions are given to inter-caste married couples belonging to the Dalit Christian Communities. A sum of Rs.50/- is granted to all the Dalit Christian families for performing funeral rites on each death in the family irrespective of the age of the deceased, provided the annual income of the head of the family of the deceased does not exceed Rs.3,000/-.20

The liberation movement of the Dalit Christians made the Church come out with some constructive policies and programmes for the upliftment of the Dalit Christians. Though some of their policies and programmes are not properly implemented, to some extent the Dalit Christians have benefited out of them. Many of them could get job and receive education in the Christian institutions. Hence, very few of them have attained economic self sufficiency while majority of them are still in the poor economic condition.

**POLITICAL IMPACT**

The struggle of the Dalit Christians against the Presidential (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950 has brought about a number of political impacts. Their main demand of including themselves in the list of Scheduled Castes has been brought to the notice of the Central Government and State Governments from 1950. The ruling political parties and their leaders at the centre were made aware of the problem. The repeated attempts made

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by the Church and Dalit Christian Associations compelled the then Prime Ministers and other ministers to have discussion with the representatives of the movement on their issues. During their discussions the representatives were given assurance that the problem of the Dalit Christians will be looked into.

The role of the Christian MPs in the Parliament had its own impact. The issue of Dalit Christians was raised and elaborately discussed by the Christian MPs in the Parliament which resulted in making other parliament members understand the nature of the problem. The non-Christian members of the parliament have also shown a lot of interest in solving the problem of the Dalit Christians. Mr. Gopalaswamy, Mr. Ramvilas Paswan, Mr. Thangabalu and others extended their support and spoke in the parliament in support of the Dalit Christians' issue.

The Constitutional amendment bills were introduced in the parliament to amend the presidential (Scheduled Castes) order 1950, but owing to lack of two third majority the bills were not passed. The conferences, seminars, public meetings, dharnas, rallies and fasting organized at the capital and various state and district headquarters made most of the citizens of India understand the problem of the Dalit Christians. Particularly, it created enormous awareness among the Dalit Christians.

At the time of elections, various political parties at the centre and state were made to include the following in their election manifesto. "If they come to power, they would take necessary steps to include the Dalit Christians in the list of Scheduled Castes". In order to get the votes of the Christian community and please the Dalit Christians the
above strategy was adopted. The efforts taken by the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, M.Karunanithi and his party are highly significant. During his Chief Ministership the Dalit Christians were included in the list of Backward Classes to avail themselves of the benefits of Backward Classes. Besides, he sent his recommendations on various occasions to the central government to include the Dalit Christians in the list of Scheduled Castes.

The representation made by the various Dalit and Non-Dalit organizations to the Central and State Governments had the following impacts:

Rev. Fr.Jerome D’Souza, SJ., and Dr.H.C.Mookerjee, both then members of the Parliament called on the President Rajendra Prasad on 6 December 1950. The following reply was made by the President “that is not the intention of the Government of India that there should be any difference or grounds of religion or caste. The only effect intended by this order is that converts to Christianity will no longer be entitled to the political privileges of reservation of seats in Parliament or the State Assembly. The reply further stated that it was not intended that such Christians if they are in fact backward should be denied privileges such as scholarships to which they were entitled prior to the setting up of the constitution”.21

As a result of the representation and memorandum submitted by the Dalit Christians, the Government of India issued directives to the State Governments clarifying

21 Letter of the President of India, New Delhi, to H.C.Mookerjee, dated 17 December 1950.
that by the order it was not intended that scheduled caste coverts to Christianity, if they are in fact backward, should be denied privileges such as scholarship to which they were entitled prior to the constitution. The Ministry of Education stated that, such Indian Christians, who were educationally and economically backward who deserve Government help for their upliftment and that for the purpose of award of scholarship, might be included in the list of other Backward Classes.\textsuperscript{22}

Sri.L.M.Shrikant, Commissioner for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, Government of India had sent a letter to Major A.F.W. Da Gosta, the then General Secretary of the Catholic Union of India in which it was stated that steps would be taken to see that no injustice was done with regard to giving of scholarships and grants to such institutions where Christian converts were receiving education. In spite of the clarification and interpretation contained in the letters of the President and the Primer Minister and also of the several Ministers of the Government of India, some of the State Governments refused to accept the directives or advice of the centre. They stuck to their right to interpret the constitution order in a sense which excluded the Christians from the scheduled castes on the plea that there was no caste in Christianity.

The Government of Madras had pointed out that according to the President’s Order of 1950 converts to Christianity or any other religion could not be regarded as Scheduled Castes for purpose of reservation and other concessions in the matter of appointment to the public services and that such converts were however regarded as Backward Classes

\textsuperscript{22} Letter of the Ministry of Education, Government of India, the letter No.F. 34/50/54, dated 13 February 1951.
and they were eligible for half fee concession in schools and full fee remission in colleges.\textsuperscript{23}

The Government of Madras decided to do away with the distinction between Harijans and Harijan converts to Christianity in the matter of educational concessions and they accordingly directed that all the educational concessions applicable to Harijans be extended to Harijans converted to Christianity also with effect from the academic year of 1957.\textsuperscript{24} Further, on a representation made by the Secretary of Paravan Welfare Association, Tuticorin, through its letter dated 10 July 1957 the Government of Madras made it clear that converts to Christianity or any other religion need not produce any certificate of conversion for the purpose of educational concessions.\textsuperscript{25}

The Paravan Uplift Association, Madras submitted a letter to the Madras Government dated 23 July 1960. The Director of Harijan Welfare Department, Government of Madras replied on 2 August 1960 stating that Christians belonging to Backward and Scheduled Castes were not eligible for amelioration schemes under the Harijan Welfare Department.

In the reply dated 7 December 1962 the Government of Madras pointed out that Dalit Christians were eligible for all the concessions admissible to the Hindu Harijans from the State funds and no discrimination was shown against them in the matter of

\textsuperscript{23} A consolidated account of 30 years' effort in the cause of Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin, p.16.
\textsuperscript{24} G.O.Ms.No.731, Government of Madras, dated 25 April 1957.
giving aid to Dalit Christians, but only Hindu Harijans are eligible for the benefits under certain schemes financed by the Government of India.

G.S.Reddi, M.P., gave notice of a Bill to amend the Presidential Order 1950 in order to delete para 3 there of which stands in the way of extending all the benefits and concession to the Dalit Christians discriminating them on the basis of religion. But the bill was not passed by the Parliament as majority of the members of the parliament were not in support of the bill.26

In a letter dated 19 September 1970 addressed to the Secretary, Paravan Uplift Association, Madras, the Director of Harijan Welfare, Madras had clarified that the Dalits converted to Buddhism and Christianity from Hinduism were eligible for all concessions after their conversion to Hinduism. Pointing out that the order contained in the above letter and a similar letter dated 23 October 1970 of Director of Backward Classes were opposed to the secular character of the State, J.C.Rayan, the then President of the Catholic Union of India sent a memorandum to the Government, Madras dated 26 November 1970. He had also requested therein to cancel the said orders and restore freedom of conscience and religion. He had also warned that if discrimination of this kind was not removed, it would not help national integration.27

The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu announced in May 1990 the extension of educational and economic benefits enjoyed by the Scheduled Castes to the Dalit

26. Ibid., p.6.
Christians. On 27 August 1993, V.Narayanaswamy, MP initiated the debate on the amendment bill. Most of the party leaders had assured that their party would support the bill. In spite of all these efforts, the amendment bill introduced by V.Narayanaswamy was not passed by the Parliament as majority of the members of the Parliament failed to support the bill. The failure greatly disappointed the Dalit Christians, hence they were compelled to continue their struggle against the Central Government. The intensive lobbying and meeting with the MPs, ministers and ultimately the Prime Minister in July 1996 had apparently only ended in an assurance that the needful would be done in the following session. But nothing happened.

The United Front Government announced a Common Minimum Programme which contained the assurance of including the Dalit Christians in the Scheduled Caste list very soon. This raised hopes that the end of the discrimination of the Dalit Christians by the Government was close at hand. The struggle for equal rights for the Dalit Christians reached its climax with the Dharna at the Parliament street, New Delhi on 27 November 1996. Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, runs, members of the parliament and lay leaders numbering over 500 sat in Dharna and courted arrest to draw the attention of the Prime Minister to render justice to Dalit Christians. Mr.H.D.Deva Gowda, the then Prime Minister, assured the delegation led by Archbishop M.Arokiasamy of Madurai that he would convene a meeting of all political parties to discuss the introduction and passing of the bill to extend statutory benefits to the Dalit Christians.
But after all the all party meeting was never to be and his assurance proved to be an empty one. His successor, Mr.I.K.Gujral, who was a consensus Prime Minister, was not interested to take up the issue. The United Front Government itself couldn’t survive in the political turmoil. In order to win the support of the Hindu Dalits and to identify themselves that they are very much in favour of the Hindus, the ruling BJP openly stated that the Dalit Christians will not be included in the list of Scheduled Castes.

As the Dalit Christians are not given the rights of Scheduled castes, they are not able to contest both in the Parliament and the Assembly constituencies reserved for Scheduled castes. In Tamil Nadu, there are seven Parliament constituencies and forty five assembly constituencies reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Hence, the Scheduled Castes of Tamil Nadu have their representatives in the Indian Parliament and the legislative Assembly of Tamil Nadu. Their support is very much required by the leading political parties to form a government.

But the Dalit Christians have no such opportunities. In case they want to contest the elections, they will have to contest in the general constituencies for which a lot of money and man power are required, which the Dalit Christians do not possess. As a result there is not even a single member of the Dalit Christians both in the central parliament and legislative assembly of Tamil Nadu at present. Thus the Dalit Christians are politically powerless.

28. Ibid., p. 31.
Conclusion