Introduction
Social Movements are the vivid expression of widespread popular dissent, protest and an ardent desire for change. Disillusioned over the dismal state of affairs in any given period, the disenchanted people mobilize themselves to bring about some desirable change in the direction they want. Pitted against the hegemonies of dominant castes and classes, the people strive for some major structural change. Social Movements are thus organized efforts of a section of society "to bring about either partial or total change in society through collective mobilization based on an ideology".  

As H. Blumer has rightly observed the Social Movements "have their inception in a condition of unrest, and derive their motive power on one hand from dissatisfaction with the current form of life, and on the other hand, from the wishes and hopes for a new scheme of system of living". From this it is understood that the essential features or elements of a Social Movements are collective mobilization, stand for or against change, presence of an ideology and a more or less conflictual nature.

1 John Desrochers, Social Movements Towards a Perspective, Bangalore, 1991, p.16. 
2 Ibid., p.23.
Social scientists often distinguish between old and modern movements which are further classified into class-based and autonomous mass-based movements. The Dalit Christians in Tamil Nadu feel that they are discriminated socially, economically and politically therefore they mobilized themselves to bring about some desirable changes in the direction they want through a powerful movement.

**EXPLANATION OF A FEW TERMS**

**Dalits**: The term dalit is derived from the Sanskrit Word dal which means to crack, open and split. When used as a noun or adjective it means burst, split, broken, downtrodden, scattered, crushed and destroyed. The noun forms of dal for masculine, feminine and neutral are dalita(h), dalita, dalita(m) respectively.

A term reflected the broken or suppressed condition, increasingly accepted by the people themselves who were treated as ‘Untouchables’ and ‘Outcastes’ in Indian society. The present usage of the term dalit goes back to the nineteenth century.

Marathi social reformer and revolutionary Mahatma Jyotirao Phule (1827-1890) seems to have been the first to use the word dalit in connection with caste in a term dalitodhar and described it as the upliftment of the depressed.

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It is Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar who coined the term dalit to describe the oppressed and broken victims of the caste-ridden society.\(^6\) But during the 1970s, the “Dalit Panther Movement” of Maharashtra gave meaning to the term dalit as a constant reminder of the age-old oppression in the caste system, demoting both the state of deprivation and the people who are oppressed.\(^7\) The word dalit is also a Marathi word: its literally meaning is “those who have been broken, ground down by those above them in a deliberate and active way”.\(^8\)

Dalit Christians: An increasing number of Christians of ‘Untouchable’ origin use them to denote themselves since it best reflects their suppressed and degraded socio-economic condition.

Diocese: A diocese is an ecclesiastical administrative unit, normally spread out in one or more civil districts. A diocese has a few ‘areas’ which are sub-administrative units known as ‘Parish’. The Bishop is the ecclesiastical head of a diocese.

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\(^6\) L.Murugkar, *Dalit Panther Movement in Maharastra*, Bombay, 1991, p.6. The author says, “Initially this term became applicable only to members of the Mahar Community in Maharastra, but later it was used with reference to the scheduled castes as a whole.


SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This thesis analyses the liberation movement of the Dalit Christians in Tamil Nadu since independence. The central theme centres around the various discriminations practised against the Dalit Christians and their liberation movement. The influence of the Christian Missionaries made some of the Hindus, especially the 'untouchables', embrace Christianity. The major reason for doing so was that they felt elevated in the Indian society. The long continued practice of casteism, even after their conversion to Christianity, subjected the converts to certain social disabilities in India.

The Dalit Christians are discriminated by the church and the society in the name of caste while the Government of India discriminates them in the name of religion. In order to liberate themselves from these discriminations, the Dalit Christians launched their movement against the church and the government. The purpose of this research is to bring out the deteriorating living conditions of the Dalit Christians and their liberative movements in Tamil Nadu.

Though certain attempts had been already made by some scholars on "Dalit Christians in Tamil Nadu", some of the aspects are unexplored. The works of Antony Raj on "Discrimination Against Dalit Christians in Tamil Nadu", J. Kananaikil on "Scheduled Cast Converts and Social Disabilities: A survey of Tamil Nadu" and W. Fernandes on "Dalit Christians in Tamil Nadu" have dealt with the discriminations practiced against the Dalit Christians in the church and by the government of India. But they have not touched
the aspects of various measures undertaken by the church and Christian organisations for their liberation from these discriminations.

Hence the scholar has made an attempt to make an elaborate study on the role of church and various Christian organisations in the liberative moments of Dalit Christian in Tamil Nadu since Independence. The study also offers ample scope for further original research.

**HYPOTHESIS**

This researcher began this study with four specific hypotheses as the backdrop. They were (1) Christians of ‘Untouchable’ origin, in spite of their conversion to Christianity suffered serious discrimination and degradation in society. Their ‘Untouchable’ caste root is the primary reason for their continued socio-economic discrimination and disabilities. (2) The Government has aggravated their condition by denying them the scheduled caste privileges (3) Although their conversion to Christianity was to protest against the obnoxious caste system and though they had joined the Church seeking liberation and solace in the new community, the Church has not only failed to fulfil their expectations but even discriminated against them and (4) The attempts made by various organisations have not liberated them from their disabilities.

**OBJECTIVES**

The researcher has seven objectives while embarking on this study. They are (1) to know the socio-economic condition of the Christians of ‘Untouchable’ origin (2) to
bring out the various discriminations practised against the Dalit Christians (3) to describe
the practice of caste system in the Church (4) to examine the steps undertaken by the
Church for the liberation of the Dalit Christians (5) to analyse specifically the struggle of
the Dalit Christians against the discrimination of the Government (6) to examine the role
of various organizations for the liberation of Dalit Christians and (7) to narrate the
impacts of Dalit Christians liberation movement.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used here is both descriptive and interpretative. The
descriptive method has been followed since the research takes into account the socio-
economic, political and religious conditions of the Christians of ‘Untouchable’ origin.
Interpretation forms part of the methodology since the research takes into account the
efforts that the other scholars have made to study this problem.

A phenomenological and sociological framework describes the caste system and
the problems faced by the Christians of ‘Untouchable’ origin.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The primary sources consist of Government Regulations, Acts, Reports, Orders,
Proceedings, Publications and Judgements of Supreme and High Courts. Besides, reports,
policies, proceedings and publications of the Church, Institutions, Organizations and
Native newspapers reports also serve as an important source of information.
In addition to the above said sources, various books, journals, articles, published and unpublished theses have served as valuable secondary sources of information. The following researches undertaken by various scholars have also served as ample sources for this search.

The book entitled *Discrimination Against Dalit Christians in Tamil Nadu* by Antony Raj was a rich source of information. The Jesuits of the Madurai Province, under the guidance of Antony Raj undertook a study on “Discrimination against Dalit Christians in Tamil Nadu”. The research was done between 1989-92. The questionnaires were administered to 9000 families throughout the State. The unit of study is a family. In the choice of the respondents, the following factors were taken: the urban, rural, Christian communities (Catholics, Church of South India and Lutherans) and Dalits (Sakkiliyars, Paraiyars, Pallars and others). A random sampling questionnaire method was used. This study took a diachronic view of the Indian social reality and took a subaltern approach to Dalit reality. Apart from structured questionnaire, various missionary reports, parish records, Census, British Administrative records and the published and unpublished resources on conversion to Christianity formed the secondary source. It is an extensive research on the discriminations against the Dalit Christians in Tamil Nadu. Although some of these research findings are published as short articles in various journals, the original manuscript has not been published in full. In this study, the references concerning this research are from the original manuscript.
J. Kananaikil's *Scheduled Caste Converts and Social Disabilities: A survey of Tamil Nadu* gives a true picture of the plight of the Dalit Converts. He undertook the study to evaluate the economic and social disabilities suffered by the Dalit converts to Christianity vis-a-vis their counterparts who are not converts. More specifically, this study looks at the disabilities suffered by the Dalit converts to Christianity in Tamil Nadu. He used two methods: interview schedule and collection of existing documents. The survey was conducted in the fourteen Catholic dioceses, and there were 322 respondents (801 per cent rural and 19.9 per cent urban) belonging to 17 different Dalit communities. This study was undertaken in 1989-90.

W. Fernandes's book *Dalit Christians in Tamil Nadu*, makes a probing study of Dalit Christians in Tamil Nadu. He made this study among the Catholics in 1993. He had used a random sampling questionnaire method, held personal interviews using adversary interview technique (Bishops, Major Superiors, Rectors, Principals, Secretaries of SC/ST Commissions and others) and conducted group discussions. Altogether the total number would be 188 i.e. 97 upper caste males, 37 females, 49 Dalit males and 5 females. For an analysis of the historical situations, he has reported much of the available literature.

**LIMITATIONS**

This study does not exhaust the various theories on the origin of the caste system and Dalits, and the various theories of stratification in Indian Society. Various liberative
movements and activities are present in Tamil Nadu and India, but this study does not delve into their history, ideology or methodology. Since the Catholics form the majority among various denominations of Christianity in Tamil Nadu, the data used mostly in this research work are closely associated with the Catholic Christians of Tamil Nadu.

CHAPTERISATION

The layout of the thesis depends upon the central theme, the liberation movement, and is therefore divided into six chapters excluding Introduction and the Conclusion. The vast data and statistics have been used to highlight the impact of the liberation movement on the social, economic and political life of the Dalit Christians in Tamil Nadu. The Introduction deals with the research question, brief history of Tamil Nadu, hypotheses, objectives, methodology, sources of information and explanation of a few terms.

The first chapter presents the situation and general problems of the Dalits in India. It concentrates mainly on the socio-economic conditions and various discriminations practised against the Dalit Christians in Tamil Nadu.

The second chapter treats the situation of the Dalit Christians in the Church. It presents evidence of Caste discrimination against the Dalit Christians in the Church. It deals with the response of the Church against the steps taken by the Dalit Christian organisations against the caste discrimination in the Church.
The third chapter presents the various measures undertaken by the Church for the socio-economic liberation of the Dalit Christians. It examines the results achieved by the Church out of these measures.

The fourth chapter presents the detailed information about the origin of reservation for the scheduled castes in India. It analyses the causes for the struggle between the Dalit Christians and the Government of India over the policy of reservation. It deals with various reports of the commissions which further aggravated the struggle.

The fifth chapter presents the efforts taken by the Dalit Christians, Church and other organizations in the struggle. It deals with the numerous responses given by the Government to the struggle.

The sixth chapter deals with the socio-economic and political impact of the Dalit Christian Liberation Movement. It analyses the causes of the failure for the movement.

Having analysed the Dalit Christians Liberation Movement and its impact in Tamil Nadu, conclusion is drawn.