CHAPTER – 2

SURVEY OF LITERATURE
2.1. IDEAL OF EQUALITY AND REALITY OF INEQUALITY

Equality is perhaps one of the concepts that has inspired humanity for centuries and still continues to inspire it, in spite of the predominance of situations and relationships which are unequal.

The phenomenon, the empirical nature, as such, appears to be in favour of inequality. Physically, emotionally, intellectually, health wise, complexion wise, people have been found to be unequal. In spite of that for centuries the ideal of equality has challenged generations.

Is there any argument in favour of equality? There is a paradox in the whole enterprise of equality. People constantly try to become unequal - become better than others. There is a simultaneous effort at becoming like others - emulating those who are better off, those who have larger economic, political and social resources. People want to have control over others - the effect is striving for an unequal relationship. At the same time people want to be free from the control of others. Is equality a realisable ideal, or is it merely a desideratum of the religio-spiritual world, which is more like a mirage?

How do we understand the great yearnings expressed in French revolution of liberty, equality and fraternity¹ (Desai, 2002), which were again echoed in the preamble of Indian constitution?² After more than two centuries, have those aspirations of the French revolution been realized; after half a century have those ideals of the constitution of India been translated to practice?

2.1.1 Sources Shaping Equality Ideal

Is the deep craving within the human spirit to be at par with others, to be treated like others as a human individual a sufficient reason for ‘equality’ being considered a cherished good?

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¹ http://mars.wnec.edu/~grempel/courses/wc2/lectures/rev891.html
² We the people of India, having solemnly resolved …to secure to all its citizens:
   - **Justice**, social, economic and political;
   - **Liberty** of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;
   - **Equality** of status and of opportunity;
   - And to promote them among all
   - **Fraternity** assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation…
   (Cited from Basu, 2002[1993]:20)
Or is equality being cherished on the basis of the religious call of various faiths? Of Christianity which claims equality on the basis of the 'one fatherhood' of all human families - ‘... Father, from whom every family...takes its name’ (Eph.3:14-15); Of the Upaniṣadic exploration into reality “Brahman is truth” (Tait Up. II.1), “This self is Brahman” (Mānd Up. II.2), “Thou art that” (Chānd. Up. VI.8.7) and “I am Brahman” (Brahd Up. I.4.10)³ - expressions of the equality of all; The Sanskrit tradition has many axiomatic sayings which speak of such an ideal, such as ‘vasuḍaḥaṁ kuṭumbakam’, ‘sarpavahiṣṭaḥ sukham, sarve santu nīrāmayaḥ, sarve bhadrāṁ pasyantu, mā kaścid dukhbhāg bhaveti’, ‘...lokaḥ samastāḥ sukhino bhavantu’⁶ Bhagavad Gīta has some very clear pronouncements on equality⁷. Or is the Islamic ideal⁸ of 'brotherhood' enhancing the ideal of equality? Are religions in general for equality or inequality?

2.1.2 Equality Defined

What is the equality that we refer to when we speak for that and speak against ‘inequality’? Betelle (1992) says that equality as an ideal has diverse historical expressions and cannot be used with a single, univocal meaning.

Lohia, the great Indian socialist leader, ranks equality along with truth and beauty as the high aims of life. Gore’s description brings in greater conceptual clarity. He sees equality as ‘a value, a goal, an ideal and not necessarily a description of the human condition at a given point of time.’ It does not refer to the biophysical or biopsychic equality of different individuals (Apte, 1990).


⁴ For the broadminded (udāracaritānām), indeed, the earth/universe itself is, but a family. Mahā Up. 6:71-72. (http://www.celextel.org/108upanishads/maha.html?page=3)

⁵ May all be happy; May all be free from disabilities; May all behold what is auspicious; May none suffer from sorrow. (Ref. Sivananda, 1997(1947):6)

⁶ svaṣṭi prajāḥbhāyāṁ puripālayantu nyāyēna mārgēṇa mahim māhitāḥ gōḍrāhmānebhyo sukhamatu nityam lōkāḥ samastāḥ sukhino bhavantu. Source not traceable. Thought to be part of the Vedas, many parts of which are feared lost. http://archives.amritapuri.org/bharat/mantra/lokah.php

⁷ vidyāvinaya sampanne brāhmante gavī hastini, saṁti caiva svapake ca panditāṁ saṁadarsinah (BG V.18)

The Oxford Dictionary provides three aspects of equality: a) Conditions of having equal dignity, rank or privileges with other; b) condition of being equal in power, ability, achievement or excellence; and c) Fairness, impartiality, equity due to proportion.

Equality implies the deliberate acceptance of social restraints upon individual expansion (Apte, 1990).

Aristotle looked at equality of numbers (sameness in number or size) and of proportions (of ratios). His theory of distributive justice is based on ‘proportional’ equality. Medieval philosophers Hobbes and Locke stated that human beings were equal in their natural condition. According to Hobbes, nature hath made men so equal in the faculties of the body and mind that the weakest can kill the strongest and no one can outwit the other. Men are held equal in a sense that all have a common human nature, they have the same basic motives, good and bad, are having basic common needs, similar capacities to feel pleasure or pain or some ability to act deliberately or to choose rationally (Apte, 1990). Equality in strict sense implies ‘Every man to count for one and no one to count for more than one’ (Berlin, 1978:99).

The norm of proportionality would mean dividing people into classes on certain criteria, with each of the classes having equal right to what is apportioned to the respective class. Here again, the classification could be based on merit (meritarian) or need (compensatory). While former goes well with the principle of equality, ‘equal rewards for equal merit’, the latter leads to real equality, by providing for in proportion to the needs of people (Beteille, 1992).

Apte (1990) has cited Dr. Lohia’s definition on equality: “An abstract concept and generalization, equality can mean an atmosphere, an emotion and perhaps also a wish that all arrangements political, social or economic shall be equal as between one individual and another.”

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India and a visionary, dreamed of an age of equality formal. However, he realized that everybody was not physically, intellectually or spiritually equal or could be made so. Hence, he found that it was necessary to provide ‘special opportunities for educational, economic and cultural growth to backward classes so as to enable them to catch up to those who are ahead of them’ (Nehru, 1961: 521).
2.1.3 Egalitarianism

Egalitarianism, as a doctrine or philosophy, is a brand of equality. It broadly implies:

a) all persons should be equal
b) that governments, or change in government can eradicate or reduce inequality
   and c) the primary political end should be equality (Letwin, 1983).

Equality is at times seen from the angle of ‘sameness’ - sameness in kind versus
sameness in degree (depending on individual endowments). It is perhaps, against
such perceptions that authors like Lucas and Letwin (1983), have argued against
equality, and the contradiction in the very notion of equality; however, they were in
fact describing equality in the purely formal sense, and what is necessary is to
adequately clarify the concept of equality when one argues for that. As has already
been mentioned, there cannot be one univocal understanding of the term.

Simple, formal equality does not require an argument, but a departure from that calls
for a justification. One argument is that people are different, and hence should be
differently treated. However the ideal of equality - before law, equal citizenship etc -
as proposed here would oppose that, and propose that the areas of life in which
such differences exist should not be allowed to interfere with the treatment of people
as equal human beings. This could be illustrated by examples of arguments such as
‘the tribals are illiterate, and hence not to be given voting power’

Egalitarian9 doctrines tend to express the idea that all human persons are equal in
fundamental worth or moral status. So far as the Western European and Anglo-
American philosophical tradition is concerned, one significant source of this thought
is the Christian notion that God loves all human souls equally. In modern democratic
societies, the term "egalitarian" is often used to refer to a position that favors, for any
of a wide array of reasons, a greater degree of equality of income and wealth across
persons than currently exists.

An egalitarian might rather be one who maintains that people ought to be treated as
equals - as possessing equal fundamental worth and dignity and as equally morally
considerable. In this sense, a sample non-egalitarian would be one who believes
that people born into a higher social caste, or a favoured race or ethnicity, or with an
above-average stock of traits deemed desirable, ought somehow to count for more
than others in calculations that determine what morally ought to be done.

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/egalitarianism/
Egalitarianism is said to be instrumental, when it is seen as a means for furthering or achieving some other goal; whereas it is said to be non-instrumental, when it is perceived as an end in itself, or part of the end. It is said to be conditional, when it is attached with certain other conditions, e.g., equal distribution of resources among all, only on condition that all are equally deserving. Equality is also looked at from the angle of desirability. There are strong arguments against equality. However, if equality is considered ‘valuable’ then it is one good reason to deem it desirable. At times, it is also regarded from the angle of its applicability - as a fundamental moral principle or ultimate norm on the basis of which individual conduct and institutional arrangements should confirm.

The ideal of equality of opportunity or formal equality has emerged as an acceptable norm by substituting the norms of hierarchical society with the norms of free market centred competitive economy. A job or development opportunity is offered to the applicants on the basis of relevant criteria of merit, in most cases the relevant criteria being linked to the principle of profitability. On the other hand, it also implies that the customers of services and goods would make their choices based on the very same principle (price and quality) rather than other accidentals like sex, age, colour, creed or ability. However, it is a fact that to implement equality of opportunity, an orientation of the hearts and minds of members of society is needed, not merely legal enactments. Two of the commonest of the applications of this principle are in the matters of admission to various academic disciplines and to the jobs (especially) in the public sector.

The opportunities are equally open to all - but the access to such opportunities will depend on the initial stock of resources one has plus one’s ability and willingness to play as per the set criteria. The ideal operates perfectly in a society where wealth is transferred from generation to generation, which provides a minimum level of capabilities. Thus the just operation of the principle has the pre-requisite of the development of minimum capabilities. A state educational programme accessible to all is a basic indicator of such environment. Policies that secure at least a minimal expected threshold of school and skill formation for all its members are also warranted. An alternative is to eliminate entirely the advantages accruing from family wealth and social status in all such competitions. Such a situation is directed towards the classless ideal.

It is against such thinking that John Rawls (Rawls, 1971 and 2001) has formulated this ideal as a principle of equality of fair opportunity (EFO). This principle holds that
any individual in society with the same native talent and ambition should have the same prospects of success in competition for positions that confer special benefits and advantages. EFO goes beyond equality of opportunity by requiring that all efforts by parents, to give their children a comparative advantage in competitions for desirable positions and posts are somehow entirely offset. In a society regulated by EFO, socialization is adjusted so that among people equally willing to work to become qualified for a particular career and equally endowed by genetic inheritance with latent ability needed for that career, all have the same chances of success in that career.

This calls for measures that would control the allocation of resources and socialisation processes so that all those who have similar native talents get similar opportunities for development. A highly controversial theory, this is hardly ever practised.

Locke, one of the earliest proponents of equality propounds the theory of equality of everyone at birth to achieve and do whatever one chooses in so far as it does not harm the rights of others in any way. The rights imply duties, duty of not infringing upon the rights of others. Taken to its logical conclusion it also implies the right to ownership of land and other material resources, which in turn may go against the principle of egalitarianism. A more leftist variant of Lockean rights asserts that each person is the full rightful owner of herself and each adult person has a right to a per capita share of ownership of the unimproved land and resources of the earth, thus combining a robust self-ownership and an egalitarian world ownership.

Though Marx cannot be treated as an egalitarian in the strict sense, however, his writings in this regard are challenging. In the first stage of communist revolution, equality is sought by way of distributing resources based on each one's labour. The defects of this system is rectified in the second stage, where the norm would be: ‘from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs’ (Marx, 1978).

Apte (1990) traces the gradual consolidation of the seminal thinking on equality in the Christian thinking of middle ages. The Protestant reformers further asserted the equality of Christian believers undermining the unequal status accorded to priestly class. The thinking of Locke and Rousseau stressed the need for equality. The thinking on equality reached its zenith, perhaps, in the Declaration of Rights of 1789: “Men are born free and equal in rights.” The declaration stressed the equality between the adherents of various forms of faith, and between men and women, between various races and geographical regions (within the state).
Apte (1990) lists a few aspects of the practice of equality:

1. Impartiality - Impartial allocation of benefits or burdens by one actor or another.

2. Equal share to all - Everybody is to count for one, nobody more than one in the allocation of benefits and burdens. E.g., food is allocated equally to all.

3. Equal share to equals - Equal share to all who are equal with respect to some property.

4. Proportional Equality - Depending on the needs and burdens unequal shares are given. ‘To each according to his need and to each according to his right.’

5. Unequal shares corresponding to relevant differences - are justified. E.g., age and citizenship for voting rights, but not sex, race or wealth; wealth regarding taxation etc. This is in tune with the Aristotelian dictum: “The unjust is unequal, the just is equal, that is, it is unjust to make equal awards to those who share unequal virtues.’

In the modern era, where money rules a great deal of human activities, an egalitarian is one who stands for equality in ownership of money and wealth by individuals of a society.

The crucial question in this regard is this: Is it inequality (and the elimination of that) what matters; or is equality a desideratum in itself? This question is addressed by posing a few streams of related reflection:

Equality might be upheld as one value among others, and increase in wealth or in wealth per capita may be included along with equality in a pluralistic ethics.

Another consideration in this regard is that of real equality and formal equality. Whether the principle of equality is actually operational is the question. Sen (in various writings from 1980 onwards) refers to this in connection with capabilities - basic functioning capability equality and equal real freedom. The doctrine of sufficiency holds that it is morally valuable that as many as possible of all who shall ever live should enjoy conditions of life that place them above the threshold that marks the minimum required for a decent (good enough) quality of life. Sufficiency can rationalize egalitarian transfers of resources from better off to worse off persons.
when such transfers would increase the total number of people who ever achieve sufficiency

The questions in this connection pertain to a) relevance of freedom as a condition of ensuring equality - one might choose not to make use of the resources provided b) the lack of personal responsibility - one might choose to squander the resources provided instead of utilising it c) how to reconcile the wide variety of options in achieving capabilities, which might run into conflict.

If equality were a virtue in itself, efforts at bringing about equality by way of destruction of the property of the haves, and rendering them have-nots could be considered desirable. But that does not increase the good of anybody, except perhaps a vague potential emotional satisfaction.

Martha Nussbaum explores how the capability approach to social equality might function appropriately as a public conception of justice (Nussbaum 2000). Capability ideal is also linked with resourcist ideal, where, as argued by Rawls (2001), the society is expected to provide for the resources that are deemed as primary social goods which are defined as distributable goods that a rational person prefers to have more rather than less of, whatever else she wants. Tawney (1931) presents the case for the presence of abilities to ensure equality. It is not merely the absence of disabilities, but the presence of 'practical equality' implying measures providing adequate strength to make use of the opportunities.

Rao & Walton (2004) speak about 'cultural capital' of a group in terms of its 'capability set' implying the need to develop the capability set in order to ensure equal development of the group.

In this analysis, Elizabeth Anderson’s comment appears relevant, "The proper negative aim of egalitarian justice is not to eliminate the impact of brute luck from human affairs, but to end oppression, which by definition is socially imposed" (Anderson 1999: 288). This direction of thinking requires one to distinguish between socially caused inequalities from other inequalities.

The argument for unequal treatment (compensatory treatment) comes from the fact of historically conditioned social disabilities of certain groups, who had been treated for long by the dominant sections of the society as if they were not equal in humanity, and hence have deprived such groups for ages of what was normally due
to human beings. This aspect has to be taken into account in any consideration of equality in the new social order.

The meritarian principle of equality is based on the argument that the society must remove all artificial barriers against free competition, and then leave each individual to fend for oneself. The compensatory principle would argue for societal intervention to ensure that the competition is not just free, but fair as well. As Justice Mathew asserted, ‘…equality of opportunity…depends, not merely on the absence of disabilities, but on the presence of abilities’\(^{10}\). Where such abilities have been damaged by historical forces, society has an obligation to restore them.

The modern democracies, including India, try to balance and blend both aspects of equality. The compensatory principle is based on the recognition of the existing social disparities and their historical basis. The former takes into account the individual, the latter looks at the individual as the member of a group or community, by being born in it. The structure of the traditional Indian society had been based on the autonomous village community, the caste and the joint family system, all of which consider ‘group’, rather than individual (Beteille, 1983).

2.1.4 Inequality

The Idea of Natural Inequality

Apte (1990) consolidates the various theoretical expositions on equality-inequality and finds that inequality is more easily described than equality. A survey of the history of human civilisation reveals treatises on equality, but practice of inequality. There would be numerous examples of belief in ‘inequality’ of human beings - superior-inferior; high-low; strong-weak etc. It is a universal phenomenon that there is demonstrable inequality - there are unequal opportunities, unequal rewards, unequal endowments, unequal worth.

Why a set of people are considered ‘not equal’ or generally backward? E.g., the blacks, the Dalits? Do complexion, physique and brain get impacted upon by physical labour, and are the traits handed over to the generations? Or is there a racial question of particular races being of better or worse stock than the rest?

Ancient Greek civilization, considered to be an enlightened one, had unequal groups, and seemed to have practised discrimination towards the slave classes

almost in line with the caste system of India (Tripathy, 1994). Rousseau contends that natural inequality is established by nature, and moral/political inequality by the mutual consent of men (Cervelatti et al, 2005).

In the United States, unequal treatment of the basis of racial difference has been persistent. Thomas Jefferson, the mind behind American Constitution, was afraid that his own daughter born of a black woman, would be persecuted by the Americans. Cassius Clay who brought Olympic medal in boxing for America in the Rome Olympics 1960 was insulted on the basis of his racial origin. Martin Luther King Junior was shot dead by the racists in America (KEN, 2005).

The moral philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment of 18th century saw Civil Society as that distinct social sphere separate from the state which is constituted and held together by the production, distribution and consumption of goods as well as the organization of social labour. In this context, social inequality was construed as the lack of access to the scarce economic value, and hence was treated in a strictly material sense (Brennan, 1997).

All historical analysis point to the existence of social inequality in various forms in all parts of the world. Marx renders this famously in the narrower terms of class, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle” (Thompson & Tunstall, 1971:237). It was his view that inequality has come to be regarded as part of human nature. Substitutes have not been found for fear and greed which are the forces leading to inequality (Apte, 1990).

Marx and Engels looked at the phenomenon of the division of labour as a threat to equality, as dehumanizing and commodifying human labour. Emile Durkheim looked at it as a positive factor. However, he noted that it remained positive as long as it was spontaneous, and became pathological when such divisions were forced upon. He said ‘it is not sufficient... that each have his task; it is ...necessary that his task be fitting to him’ (Beteille, 1983:20).

In this consideration, the ideal of equality and the reality of inequality challenges one to understand the various manifestations, causes and effects of inequality and to seek ways and means to reduce it, if not eliminate it.

Sharma (1997:17), quotes the set of questions posed by Dahrendorf (1969) which are very relevant to understand the phenomenon of inequality:

1. Why is there inequality among men?
2. Where do its causes lie?

3. Can it be reduced, or even abolished altogether?

4. Do we have to accept it as a necessary element in society?

Functionalists like Parsons speak about biological or non-social criteria of inequality.

Thus inequality can be on the basis of race, where race is seen as ‘...a human group that perceives itself and/or is perceived by other groups as different by virtue of presumed innate and immutable physical characteristics' (Smith & Preston, 1977:355). While physical characteristics are used in determining racial groupings, it is perception that forms the true basis for such categorization. From an anthropological point of view what is perceived in human beings are differences - “...differences become inequalities with the application of scales...constructed by particular human beings under particular historical conditions" (Beteille, 1983:8).

Here the question of ethnicity comes into play as a factor leading to differentiation and inequality. Ethnicity ‘...is based primarily on cultural rather than physical or biological characteristics. An ethnic group is a human group that perceives itself and/or is perceived by other groups as different by virtue of presumed cultural characteristics’ (Smith & Preston, 1977:356).

Parson’s (1951) pattern variables are said to be the elements leading to value patterns, which form the basis for social order. Of the pattern variables he mentions, one of the patterns in choosing the mode of behaviour is that ascription-achievement. Whether the actions are guided by ascription orientation or achievement orientation has bearing on the interpersonal interactions.

Discussion on inequality and stratification generally begins with the sphere of production where classes are concerned, but status groups are determined by the patterns of consumption. Parson combines these two elements (Grusky 1994). Bourdieu (1977, 1984) argues that classes are capable of reproducing themselves by instilling tastes and shared dispositions in those belonging to it.

The Marxian basic argument against inequality is that of distribution of material wealth, the means of production, which leads to all sorts of discrimination, and the change in the economic system leads to the disappearance of such inequality (Beteille, 1983, Thompson & Tunstall, 1971). Marxian explanations can be formulated as follows (Sharma 1997):
- Continuity of tradition and emergence of modernity side by side in the field of social stratification.

- Determination of social relations by the direction of social change

- Coexistence of the structure and process of social stratification.

Weber criticizes Marx for a mono-causal theory while he appears to have substituted Marx's economic materialism by political and military materialism (Gerth and Mills, 1970 as in Sharma, 1977). Weber gave the concept of inequality the dimension of power. “The explanation of everything by economic causes alone is never exhaustive in any sense whatsoever in any sphere of cultural phenomena, not even in the economic sphere itself” (Weber 1949:71). He defines power as ‘the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action’ (Weber, 1970:180). Power is valued, and the real power comes from factors other than purely economic. The striving for power is also conditioned by the honour it entails. For Weber the primary resource from which people are deprived is social honour. “The uneven distribution of social honour, in turn, is usually associated with the distribution of economic resources and a rights-based system of inequality” (Brennan, 1977:3).

For Weber any given social phenomena gains relevance for human beings only to the extent of human consciousness about it (ontological problems are dependant on epistemology). Hence to understand social phenomena, there is the need for reflective knowledge. In reflection, the 'experience', is made into an 'object', and it acquires perspectives and interrelationships which were not ‘known’ in the experience itself (Weber, 1949:178 cited in Brennan, 1977:9). ‘...when a human being reflects upon his raw experience, a pre-objectified, subjective experience becomes an “object”, a “complex of observed facts” (Brennan, 1977:10). In understanding social phenomena of any sort, one has to take into account symbolic productions of that as well (Bourdieu 1991).

From the discussion on inequality based on the distribution of resources one needs to distinguish social inequality. It “…is the result of discrimination perpetuated by institutional structures that over centuries have denied the possibility of a reasonably human existence” (Mohanty, 2006:3788). This then leads to a deficit in “…cultural capital... which is the ability to use knowledge, gained from praxis and contemplation,
to both understand the world around us as well as articulate a world view that
defines our identity” (Mohanty, 2006: 3788).

The functionalist approach of Davis & Moore (1945) speaks about the need for some
form of institutionalised inequality (stratification) for the smooth functioning of society
- division of labour and motivation, and a spontaneous process by which the best
come to possess the positions of leadership and property. Lensky (1978) supports
this by mentioning the need for elements of motivation where people who have
greater skills are motivated to seek important positions.

In analysing manifestations of inequality, Beteille (1983) says that there are
underlying contradictions in a society which idealises equality, and promotes
competition, resulting in equality only before competition and inequality after that.
He describes equality of opportunity as the price paid by the society to ensure the
inequality of reward. He examines two opposing ideologies, leading to the same
outcome - that inequality is the natural order of things. There is the argument that fair
and free competition permits the establishment of the natural scheme of things, on
the one hand. On the other hand, we have the Hindu caste society, from outside
appears to be an arbitrary division of the society into four varṇās according to one
scheme and into innumerable jātis according to another, by a strict order of ranking.
For the Hindus, this belonged to the natural order of things based on the theory of
the three gunās (qualities) in various combinations in the individuals belonging to the
various varṇās. A just and stable society ought to preserve this natural order. In
one, the logic for inequality is competition, while in the other, it is the birth.

2.1.5 Institutionalisation of Inequality - Stratification and Identity of the
Oppressed

Every human society has a system of social stratification, or institutionalised social
inequality. Differentiation based on ethnic and racial identities can turn into social
inequality based on the normative orientation of the society. This can be based on
any of the material or symbolic dimensions of the society. The levels that lead to
stratification are called social strata. The life-style, customs, opportunities, power
relations, socialisation etc. are influenced by the strata to which one belongs (Smith

Grusky (1994) observes that the general trend in the theorizations is to relegate
ascriptive factors to sidelines as influential in stratification. Factors such as race and
ethnicity are generally seen as vestiges of traditions which will wither away under the
rationalizing influence of socialism (Kautsky 1903), industrialism (Levy 1966) or modernization (Parsons 1975). However, the post war experience of the society has seen a deepening of ethnic identities and resultant differentiation, rather than their withering away.

Sen (2006) speaks about multiple identities - identities appropriate to situational contexts - an industrial labourer in the morning, a black in the afternoon, an American in the evening etc. He says that identity is at the heart of violence. Negatively defining identities can lead to exclusive, competing and mutually antagonistic groups and communal hatred.

Individual identities are always plural. When identities are inclusive and open-ended, it can contribute to social capital and become a unifying force.

When exclusive identities lead to the inferiorisation of one’s identity whether on the basis of race or culture, economic exploitation or political marginalisation, it leads to a debilitating destruction of self-confidence (Heredia, 2006). This is the violence that happens in situations of social inequality.

An authentic pluralism instead of denying individual identities demands porous boundaries for communities in overarching civil society. This allows overlapping groups and makes for greater social cohesion (Sen, 2006).

2.1.6 Stratification – Various Forms of the Manifestation of Institutionalised Inequality

Grusky (1994) says that the research on stratification helps to understand the contours and distribution of inequality and to explain its presence in spite of the egalitarian values of the society.

Stratification systems are those institutions which generate such inequalities:

1) institutional processes that define certain types of goods as valuable 2) the rules of allocation that distribute these goods across various positions or occupations in the division of labour and 3) the mobility mechanisms that link individuals to occupations and thereby generate unequal control over valued resources.

He lists a range of variables leading to stratification, as propounded by many authors including Marx, Weber, Dahrendorf. These include both reductionist approaches and synthesizing approaches towards understanding stratification. The table itself is worth citing:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Basis of Stratification</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Ownership of land, farms, factories, businesses, liquid assets, labour power etc</td>
<td>Karl Marx; Erik Writh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Household (head), work place (manager), party and social (legislator), charismatic leader</td>
<td>Max Weber, Ralf Dahrendorf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>High status consumption practices; good manners</td>
<td>Pierre Bourdiue; Paul DiMaggio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Access to high-status social networks, association and union membership</td>
<td>W. Lloyd Warner; James Coleman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honorific</td>
<td>Prestige; “good reputation”; fame; deference and derogation, ethnic and religious purity</td>
<td>Edward Shils; Donald Treiman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil</td>
<td>Rights of property, contract, franchise &amp; membership in elective assemblies; freedom of association and speech</td>
<td>T.H. Marshall; Rogers Brubaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Skills; expertise; on-the-job training; experience; formal education; knowledge</td>
<td>Kaare Svalastoga; Gary Becker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Grusky, 1994:10).

Various modes of inter-strata contacts can be observed.

- ‘Segregation implies a stringent separation between racial or ethnic groups with no group necessarily considered superior.’ (Smith & Preston, 1977:359) The separation could be voluntary or involuntary, as with apartheid.

- Stratification: is seen as the “enforced separation of racial or ethnic groups with one group being clearly dominant” (op.cit. 360). In stratified societies the deprived and exploited classes are anxious to shed their strata related position.

- Assimilation is the ‘...cultural blending of two or more previously distinct peoples’ (ibid.) where the people who are dominated assume the cultural characteristics of the dominant group and be part of that group.

- Annihilation is the attempt by one group to eliminate another racial or ethnic group.

- Amalgamation is the inevitable outcome of interracial and interethnic contact, where the previously distinct groups blend together to form new or mixed groups.
2.1.7 Social Classes

The western sociological theories of stratification have basically concentrated on the classes. Parsons defines classes as “groups of persons who are members of effective kinship units which, as units, are approximately equally valued” (Parsons 1954: 77). Here the measures of this construct are basically those of achievement, occupation prestige, socio-economic status or success in the labour market (Grusky, 1994).

In this respect, social mobility was one of the core themes in determining the nature of stratification. The conventional method was to analyse bivariate “mobility tables” in relationship with the occupational origins and destinations of individuals (Grusky 1994:18).

Grusky (1994) refers to the revolutionary ‘path model’ of Blau and Duncan (1967) in the sense it focused on the process of mobility and the influencing factors like schooling, aspirations, parental encouragement etc. Another critique of mobility studies stressed the need to focus the individual traits. It was also observed that women and minorities were at disadvantage due to the insufficient human capital investments and the relatively lower and lesser opportunities in the labour markets.

The degree of crystallization of these strata is indexed by the correlations among the resources listed above. If the correlations are strong, the upper class will appear consistently at the top of all status hierarchies, and the lower class consistently at the bottom. The degree of inequality depends on the dispersion or concentration of material resources across the individuals in population. Thus one finds greater equality regarding citizenship rights, but economic and political good are still concentrated among select few (Grusky, 1994).

2.1.8 Stratification Based On Ascription

The stratification system that rests on ‘ascriptive processes’ maintains that factors based on birth influences the subsequent social standing of the individuals. It is here that we find that the perceptions and values of the society are working as a superstructure. C. Wright Mills speaks about the inequality resulting from stratification which is applicable in such relations, in which a select few - power elite - become sole possessors of power in the society. There are middle level interest groups who

\[^{11}\text{as cited in Grusky, 1994:17}\]
wield some power, and there are unorganised masses (Smith & Preston, 1977). The concentration of power with some is simultaneously the disempowerment of many.

2.1.9 Marginalisation - as the effect of Social Inequality

The process by which people lose or are deprived of power in their lives to make choices for themselves is marginalisation. Kurien (1998) refers to the complex process of ‘social exclusion’ which is the marginalisation of individuals from society through economic deprivation and social isolation. Prakash (2005) equates social discrimination with marginalisation. It is against the oppression in such interactions that Anderson (1999) points to the ideal of egalitarianism in terms of ending the oppression thus produced.

Meyer12 (1994) says that the egalitarian values help in the reduction of some forms of inequalities (e.g., civil inequalities), some forms of inequality get merely concealed rather than eradicated or reduced, under various social subterfuges.

2.1.10 Aspiration for Liberation

Manifestation of inequality as a social evil, implies unjust relationships. And liberation lies in the establishment of just relationships.

Perhaps all religions and philosophies speak of liberation as the end of life. In some of the religious-philosophic traditions of India this aspect has been seen as the final goal of life: mukti or māksha. The dominant Hindu thinking has been based on the desire for release from this world of cycles of birth and rebirth. Buddhism has spoken about nirvāṇa (liberation) as liberation from cravings which can be achieved by the eight fold middle path of integration (Thottakkara, 2005).

The biblical concept of liberation had been that of “bringing glad tidings to the poor, liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to the prisoners...” (Lk. 4:18). Elsewhere, liberation is revolutionary: scattering the proud, putting down the mighty from their thrones, exalting the lowly, and filling the hungry with good things (Lk. 2:48-53). Another biblical reference to the ideal of liberated state is the definition of the kingdom of God as “righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).

Speaking about the liberation of the oppressed class of proletariats Marx says: “The emancipation of the oppressed class thus implies necessarily the creation of a new

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12 As cited by Grusky, 1994.
society. For the oppressed class to be able to emancipate itself it is necessary that the productive powers already acquired and the existing social relations should no longer be capable of existing side by side...there will be no more political power properly so-called, since political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in civil society (cited in Grusky, 1994: 76)

Weberian analysis of inequality also points to consciousness as the key to liberation - the need for people to be aware of the existing inequality. In the last century the development philosophy propounded by the educationist philosopher Paulo Freire had great impact on the thinking and praxis regarding liberation of the oppressed and subjugated masses (Freire, 1973).

He describes how consciousness is at the root of oppression and liberation. What is required is the ‘emergence’ of consciousness from submergence - a stage of stupor (blind consciousness) to a transformed and liberated consciousness. This happens through what he calls ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’ and ‘education for liberation’ which instils in the learners a critical awareness of one’s context (Freire, 1972-2).

Two ways are generally proposed as means for an egalitarian society - 1. Human capital formation, 2. Political Action. Social scientists think that human and political capital are replacing the economic capital as the principal stratifying forces. Human capital is becoming a dominant form of property. Glaeser et al (2004) maintains that the fundamental force of growth is the accumulation of human capital formation and this and ensuing economic development can lead to the adoption of favourable institutions and political regime where people would be powerful enough to make decisions about themselves.

Both human capital formation and political action are combined in the ‘identity struggles’ where people learn to own and cherish the identities on the basis of which they are disempowered, and to organise themselves on the very same basis.

Another way of looking at liberation is to look at the processes involved. This can be analysed from the angle of who initiates the liberation efforts - whether the oppressed themselves, or others.

**Efforts by the Others**

Usually, the onus of bringing about a just and egalitarian society is assumed to be with the state which has the sanction of the society and the executive power to
initiate measures. In this context, affirmative action, protective legislations and positive discrimination are discussed.

Other institutions that are thought to be of influence are the religions which are thought to provide the ideological basis for action. These are thought to be helpful in generating a value framework conducive for an egalitarian society and influence their respective adherents to adopt a lifestyle suited to bringing about equality.

In the modern world, the civil society movements and voluntary organisations are also thought to be of great influence in addressing problems confronting the society.

**Efforts by the Oppressed Themselves**

The efforts by the oppressed themselves are usually aimed at conforming to the dominant value system. This includes social mobility efforts through education, change in occupation, and adoption of dominant value system, or in Freireian terms, value system of the oppressors. In sociological parlance, this is ‘reference group’ theory. Efforts by the oppressed also involves a critical awareness of one's situations and relationships and understanding of the oppressive features of the same. The understanding is aimed at an approach which seeks to transform the unjust and unequal relationships rather than adoption of the existing value system. It understands both the oppressor and the oppressed as the victims of an unjust system, both of whom requiring transformation for liberation. It also involves demystifying culture, and realising the worth of self and one's culture - like the proud elderly peasant whom Freire presents as saying, ‘I know now that I am cultured’ (Freire, 1973; D’Abreo, 1989).

However, before delving into ways to end disempowerment and the resultant marginalisation based on social strata and social inequality, it is necessary to look at the ways in which this appears in the Indian context through the process of stratification.
2.2. INDIAN CONTEXT OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY

A survey of Indian history and tradition would hardly prove equality as a cherished value. The social institutions, which received their ultimate sanction from religion, rather, perpetrated inequality. The abstract Hindu philosophy propounded a doctrine of unity of all (non-dualism or advaita), but indulged in social practice of inequality (Kapoor, 2004). The sources of ancient legal order - Dharmaśāstras prescribe indignities of all sorts for śūdrās and women. ‘A śūdra, though emancipated by his master, is not released from servitude; since this is innate in him, who can set him free from it?’ (The Law of Manu VIII:414). Ghurye (1969) describes in detail the structured inequalities laid down through various religious texts, which beyond doubt oppressed and marginalized a section of people in all fields of social life.

The very complex social structure of India, based on hierarchical stratification has been much discussed and researched, and its dimensions on every day life, and newer manifestations in the changing contexts continue to be of interest to social scientists and of relevance to planners and policy makers. The rare elasticity, resilience and permeability of caste gives it a unique position in the field of social studies (Koilparampil, 1982).

The Indian society can be analysed from a class perspective - which explains inequality in its various forms and in all realms (political, religious, commercial, and social), or on the basis of caste, which permeates its ideological and morphological aspects. There is yet no clear cut distinction made between the categories of caste and class; and there is considerable correlation between the two.

Class being based on economic criteria - ownership of means of production (Marxist), is more eclectic among the two, and includes consideration of occupation, income, education (determining one’s needs and the capacity to fulfil them). ‘Class is an aggregate of individuals as such very different from castes which is an enduring group... A class derives the character it has by virtue of its individual members. In the case of caste, ... it is the group that stamps the individual with its own characteristics.’ Class affiliations can be changed, but not the caste affiliations. It is sui generis (Beteille, 1992).

1 Cited by Chitra Tiwari, “Śūdras in Manu”. Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi-Patna-Varanasi, 1982. p.14. na swamīna nisṣṭha s pi śūḍr ā daśyādvīmucyate, nisargajam hi tatasya kastasmantadpohati By Manu’s time, the Sakas were considered as mlecchās or Śūdrās. A Śūdra could be bought and sold (Manu VIII. 413).
2.2.1. CASTE AS SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Of the types of institutionalised inequality in the human society, caste is found to be the most rigid and complex (Smith & Preston, 1977). Grusky (1994:10-11) in speaking about the varying forms of stratification describes the most extreme case of hereditary transmission of social status as that of the caste organization of Hindu India. “(1) A hierarchy of status groups that are ranked by ethnic purity, wealth, and access to goods or services, (2) a corresponding set of “closure rules” that restrict all forms of inter-caste marriage or mobility and thereby make caste membership both hereditary and permanent, (3) a high degree of physical and occupational segregation enforced by elaborate rules and rituals governing inter-caste contact, and (4) a justifying ideology (Hinduism) that successfully induces the population to regard such extreme forms of inequality as legitimate and appropriate”.

2.2.1.a. The Term & Definition

‘Caste’ is said to have come from the Spanish word ‘casta’ which means lineage or race. It is derived from the Latin word ‘castus’ which means pure or chaste. The usage has come into prominence through the Portuguese to denote the Indian institution of ‘jāti’ which was maintained by keeping the purity of blood or lineage (Paravila, 2003).

Srinivas (1977) has defined caste as “… a hereditary, endogamous, usually localised group, having a traditional association with an occupation and a particular position in the local hierarchy of castes. Relations between castes are governed, among other things, by the concepts of pollution and purity and generally maximum commensality occurs within the caste” (also cited by Koilparambil, 1982:27).

According to Ghurye, “…caste is the most general form of social organization in India” (Ghurye, 1969:1). It is a social philosophy that is very strange to a western mind.

Koilparambil (1982) also cites Kroeber’s definition of 1930. However, the researcher feels that reference only to ‘position of superior rank or social esteem’ does not adequately describe the caste phenomenon. Dumont (1970) reduces all other features of caste into the single concept of ‘hierarchy’ deriving from the opposition of the pure and the impure (Rajawat, 2005).

Yogendra Singh (1977) has made a two-dimensional property space in the context of caste, all approaches are classified as universalistic-particularistic and cultural-structural. He refers to it as a phenomenon which is multi-dimensional, multi-causal,
hence requiring a multi-disciplinary approach of History, Economics, Politics, Sociology, and Anthropology to understand caste-class-power nexus both historically and contextually.

He summarizes the various approaches to ‘caste’ as a system of rituals and ideas, ‘class’ as a system of relations between the rich and the poor and as groupings of people based on their common economic and occupational interests, and ‘power’ as the resourcefulness of individual(s) or a phenomenon emanating from the state and its apparatuses.

Caste is generally considered a closed system of inter-group relations based on ascription of caste rank by birth and guided by the principles of connubiality and commensality (Singh, 1977). There have been various studies on this phenomenon. It continues to influence the social life in India through elements of purity-pollution, caste endogamy and lately, caste based ethnocentrism and mobilization. It is treated as the all-encompassing phenomenon, which influences the social, political and economic aspects of individual and group life.

Yogendra Singh (1977) discerns four notions in Dumont’s classical work on social stratification, ‘Homo Hierarchicus’ – 1) ideology 2) binary tension or dialectics 3) transformational relationship and 4) comparison. His argument regarding varna (occupation) as the deciding factor of hierarchy among jātis is criticized by Srinivas. However, in most of the analysis the ‘resilience’ of caste as a factor influencing the modern power relations in India is not considered.

Dumont’s (structuralist) enquiries are in the direction of establishing caste as a system based on the singular principle of ‘pure and impure’, a system of ‘ideas and values’. Here distinction is found between status and power, where the real power comes from the status; thus the real power lies with the status rather than offices, thus we find, in effect, the king is a subordinate to the priest. Hierarchy involves gradation, but is different from power and authority. It is applicable to all sorts of notions - castes, food, occupations, clothes, bride-givers, bride-takers... (Singh, 1977)

Sharma (1997) opposes the presentation of caste by the various authors like Ghurye and Dumont as rigid, unchanging, archaic, yet, functional and as encompassing all other aspects of society, as contradictory and implying denigration of Indian society.

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He refers to the findings of historians like Romila Thapar and Kosambi which speaks about the mixed castes, and the presence of flexibility in structure.

Ambedkar himself did not accept the purity-pollution theory as the basis of caste based untouchability. He traces its origin in the clash between the Brahmanic and Buddhist cultures and power, symbolised in the use of beef consumption. Kosambi also favours an economic motif, rather than a religious motif (Kapoor, 2004). According to Sharma (1997), in India, the forms of social inequality had been multidimensional and dynamic, being constantly structured and re-structured. In Indian society, unlike the Western societies, individuals have not been the basis of social ranking, and contest has not been the means of mobility, rather it was sponsorship.

Sharma (1997) seems to be apologetic in proving that Indian caste system is not absolutist and rigid, and that there had been discontinuities and breakdowns in the history of its existence. He feels that Dumont's classification of *Homo Hierarchicus* cannot be applied totally to the Indian context, and there have been instances of a *Homo Equalis* in India. He tries to trace elements of equality in the instances of both Brahmans and lower castes performing rituals, though entirely different ones, and paid unequally, on the same occasion - birth, death etc., thus having priestly status.

He cites Khare (1975: 102) in further exploring the cultural aspects of inequality: “Castes express equality within their own group boundaries, and also in a limited manner with those placed above or below” (Sharma, 1997:46). He points out that today the debate on social stratification in India centres around a) whether changes in caste and class are transformational or structural; b) whether caste is closed or open; c) whether caste is organic and class is segmentary; and d) whether caste is being replaced by class and political power or not. Referring to Marriot’s study (1990) he points out that castes are not rigidly fixed categories, but are transformable.

What is this effort aimed at, is it to vindicate caste-system, as a theory having sane elements understandable from cultural backgrounds? Does it in anyway address the sufferings of those who are treated unequally in the social system - leave alone history, but today, in India?

While these academic discussions are meaningful, they do not seem to address the problems and sufferings of various segments of the society on account of what is said to be caste, and their affiliation to certain castes. Here, the relevance of going
back to Dahrendorf’s (1969) questions: whether they could be reduced or abolished altogether?

A moot question here is: whether the caste structure in anyway make the life of the lower castes better? Did it in anyway promote justice, or reduce injustice? What does a Social Work practitioner do with this theoretical possibility offered in understanding caste? That one can confidently go about with the efforts for equality, transformation of power relations? Does that step require such an understanding of the social history and organisation? Whether history proves this or not, one has to work for equality and transformation of the caste system for its sake, if equality is in the top order of the ‘hierarchy of one’s values’.

2.2.1.b. Origin and Evolution

Almost all studies and works related to caste have tried to elaborate on the plausible theories regarding the origin of caste system (Ghurye, 1969; Tripathy, 1994; Augustine, 1996; Trivedi, 1996; Chandra, 2004; Mukherjee, 1988). These include guṇa (qualities) karma (actions) vāda (theory), vaṇa (colour - ārya and anārya), racial (Aryan race and Dravidian race), occupational theory of a division of labour handed down hereditarily, and of subjugation - that a conquering race became the elite classes and the displaced and the subjugated races became the low and untouchable classes (Jose, 1991; Augustine, 1996; Augustine, 1991). It is said to have had its origins in India with the arrival of the Aryans. It is inferred that the early vedic time was devoid of caste system. When the population grew, they are said to have divided themselves on the basis of their different qualities (guṇa) and actions (karmas) - gunakarmabhāda. However, this is not an established fact, and there are arguments to the contrary as well. If vaṇabhāda (colour differentiation) is taken as the basis of caste, then only two castes would emerge - Āryavāṇa and dasavāṇa, which later on have been termed into savaṇa and avaṇa. The other plausible source is the profession people practised and inherited hereditarily. (Ghurye, 1969; Tripathy, 1994; Augustine, 1996; Trivedi, 1996; Tiwari, 1982).

There are also scholars who suggest a Dravidian origin of caste system (Rajawat, 2000). Augustine (1991) analyzing the various factors that have contributed to the evolution to Indian society traces the possible linkages of caste system to the

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3 Varṇa initially was used signify ethnicity – ārya and dāsa varṇa. Brahmins are said to have used this term to denote the four divisions of the society. (Augustine, 1991).
4 The word ‘aryan’ means noble (Kachiramattam, 2000). This might also mean that in contrast to Aryans, the non-Aryans were ignoble, or savages.
multiple roots of Indus valley civilization, and the Zoroastrians culture to whom the Aryans might owe their origin. However, there is no one theory that has been proven in a scientific sense, and they, at the best, serve as some explanations.

The writings of Megasthenes are indicative of the fact that during the time of his visits (late fourth century or early third century BCE) caste system had already been solidified. However, there are no direct references to the fourfold caste system in his writings, though he speaks about many other divisions. Augustine concludes that the non-brahmanical superiority of the Mauryan era, and Buddhist influence might have made the cāturvarṇya unenforcible (Augustine, 1991).

An understanding of caste from the angle of its origin and development is of relevance to this particular study only in so far as it helps one to understand how it has generated inequality and a system of maintaining it. Various Brahmanical religious texts amply prove that an ideological superstructure was created to continuously and systematically reinforce the division of society into perpetually unequal strata (Stephen, 2004). The religious ideology prevented the exploited majority from any sort of social mobility by depriving them of the right to knowledge, property and arms (Rajawat, 2005). The system came to be accepted passively by all sections, irrespective of their being oppressors or the oppressed.

There are two contesting world views on caste. The Brahmanic theory of caste claims caste to be divine and God given. The dalit-view maintains that caste had an origin and it could have an end; that action of the oppressed and exploited could lead to its end (Omvedt, 1994). Ilaiah (1996) argues with many others that a dalit analysis of the various Hindu epics indicate a process of conquest and subjugation of the native dalit population by the invading aryans. Thus the story of Ravana, Bali etc. are symbolic representation of the conquests of the culture and land of dalitbahujan (Jose, 1991).

The oppressive structure of the caste system had made the life of the majority a passive life of submission to the minority. The only challenge faced by this system in the whole course of its evolution were the rare voices of dissent like those of Carvakas, Buddhists, Jains etc. (Chittooparampil, 2005).

The Islamic and British regimes appear to have challenged the basis of caste system by a) opening up possibilities for seeking equality in other faiths like Islam and Christianity and b) by the spread of liberal western or modern education, making

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5 Cāturvarṇyaṁ mayāśrastarṇaṁ gunakarma vibhāgasaṁ (B.G. VIII. 13)
education accessible to the bahujan (majority), and opening the horizons of the thought of the general public to less oppressive and more liberal systems (Ghurye, 1969)

During the freedom struggle and after the birth of the democratic state of India, the embedded social inequality of caste system caught the attention and imagination of the national leaders and measures were initiated to address the problems, especially the inequality and marginalisation arising out of it. In spite of the legal banning of the caste system, caste still forms the fabric of Indian social reality. As Ghurye points out, “...Caste is the most general form of social organization in India” (Ghurye, 1969:1). It is a social philosophy and one that is very strange to a western mind.

2.2.1. c. Racial & Occupational Theories

Proposed reasons for the origin of caste system were racial and occupational. Racial theory says that caste system is based on racial differences. Occupational theory holds that the castes were formed on the basis of occupations\(^6\) (almost a kind of division of labour) which later on got transformed into an hereditary institution. Augustine (1991) traces the caste origin to the common racial origin of Aryans and the Zoroastrians, and sees a strong reason to believe that the four fold division has its roots in the Zoroastrian culture.

Racial question was disproved by Ambedkar (1946) with the help of physical anthropology and anthropometry, which showed that there was hardly any physical difference between the Brahmins and the untouchables belonging to the same region. Occupation also did not lead to untouchability as house hold slaves who were engaged in sweeping the road, gateway, privy etc. were not treated as untouchables. He further traces the origin to the resurgence of Brahmânical religion with emphasis on veneration of cow, and killing of cows and beef eating being treated as serious crimes\(^7\). The natives, in contrast, happened to be eating the dead cows or those which were killed by others. Thus there could have been two underlying reasons for the segregation (1) contempt and hatred of ‘broken man’ and (2) beef eating habit which was considered abominable (Trivedi, 1996).

Satish Deshpande and Yogendra Yadav (2006) after analyzing the proportionate representation of graduates belonging to various caste/religious communities assert

\(^6\) Manusmrti, the ancient code of Manu says: "In order to protect the universe, He the most resplendent one assigned separate occupations to those who sprang from his mouth, arms, thighs, and feet” (I, 87).
http://www.wisdomworld.org/additional/ancientlandmarks/CodesOfDuty-4.html#1top

that the arguments for the genetic or natural inferiority of social groups are beyond doubt unacceptable. In which case, the explanation for the highly skewed representation of various communities in our elite professions is to be sought in the social mechanisms of intended or unintended systemic exclusions in the educational system and to inequalities in the background resources that education presupposes. “If educational resources were truly equalized, the upper castes’ share in professional education would be roughly in proportion to their population share, that is, between 25% and 33%” (Desrochers, 2006:56).

**2.2.1. d. Conquest and subjugation theory**

A formidable theory regarding the formation of castes, was that of conquest and subjugation. There are many authors who argue that the castes termed lower were in fact, the occupants of the land and a great settled urban civilisation when the invading nomadic Aryans arrived on the Indian subcontinent - especially its Indo-gangetic plains and drove them away to the South of India. Those who still remained there were either enslaved and made to work as servant classes (Jose, 1991; Augustine 1996). In the subsequent relations, one can find the various forms of interface between two races or cultures in operation, viz., stratification and segregation, assimilation and amalgamation, and at times, annihilation. The last of the case being operational even today, in various pockets of the country.

*Varṇa* system was the basis of the division of the society, and the immutability of it was unquestioned. The Vedic literature functioning as an ideological superstructure seems to have strengthened it. It appears that as the time went by the system got crystallized and the divisions became very rigid and complex through the various socio-economic-religio-cultural processes and systems such as *pūjā* (rituals), *bāzār* (market/economy), and *itihāsa* (legend and history) [Oster, 1984].

**2.2.1.e. Features of Caste system:**

Ghurye (1969) has listed the following as the characteristic features of caste system:

1. Segmental division of society, based on one’s birth. Hence the social groupings based on caste is not changeable. Today there is freedom and possibility to change one’s traditional caste occupation, however, caste groupings do not change. Caste Panchayats used to be the governing councils which had say on almost all aspects of life, and it could get most of its decrees executed by the king’s officials.
2. Hierarchy - Castes are hierarchical in social status, based on purity and pollution, and almost everywhere in India, there is a definite scheme of social precedence with Brahmin at the head.

3. Restrictions of feeding and social intercourse - Usually food used to be accepted only from the people of the same caste. In this matter, there are regional differences and there are classification on the basis of castes from whom other castes can accept food of varying types. Generally, one can accept food from a person belonging to a higher caste.

4. Civil and religious disabilities and privileges on the basis of caste affiliation. There used to be and still are caste based sections in a settlement, both urban and rural. Entry to lower castes was generally denied. However, there had been instances in which higher castes are also denied access - e.g., the Parayans would not permit a Brahmin to enter their street. Members of some of the castes were not even permitted to erect houses above one storey in height.

5. Lack of unrestricted choice of occupation - the occupation was considered to be hereditary, and it was not considered right to abandon one's traditional occupation. It was not just the moral binding, but rather the restrictions laid down by other castes that did not permit one to have free choice of one's occupation.

6. Restrictions on marriage - most of them are endogamous as sub-castes.

Kolenda (1989) has observed that the ideologies that explain caste division could be a) interest theories, as far as the higher castes are concerned and b) strain theories as far as the oppressed classes are concerned.

2.2.1. f. Domains of Operation and Crystallisation

The caste as a social organization found its application in all domains of social and individual life. There is no single facet of Indian life which was untouched by caste. In the running of state, local administration, in the life of families, in the practice of religious faith (irrespective of the creed), in occupation, education, and interpersonal interactions caste became the determining factor.

There have been various structural processes not based on caste which have influenced the castes - e.g., adult franchise, green revolution, industrialization,
migration, land reforms, technology…(Singh 1977). However, in the final analysis, as suggested by Jadhav (2003:267), “…caste discrimination may have changed forms, but it has certainly not changed its substance” (cited in Vasavi, 2006).

2.2.2. THE EFFECT - UNTOUCHABILITY – OUTCASTES – MARGINAL PEOPLE

The effects of caste, when analysed, include a wide array of issues including the deterioration of health due to the endogamous system, backwardness of women, lack of literacy and education, oppressive and widespread poverty and backwardness, in general. However, the most widespread symbol and greatest impact of caste system was that of untouchability. Somewhere it is written about caste, ‘it (caste) has just one door, the door of exit. It has no door of entrance’. Its consequence is shunning human contact: either because one is within a particular caste, or because of violating the rigid norms of the caste.

Mukherjee (1988) traces the origin and evolution of the ‘untouchables’, through a survey of literature of Hindu tradition, beginning with Rgveda. She enlists some of the theories proposed by the scholars which are shows the reasons for marginalisation:

1. A section of the native population who were of tribal origin were subdued and made into the lower untouchable castes. Ptolemy’s reference to the tribe of kandaloi is perhaps to the candelas, who fall among the ‘untouchable’ groups.

2. From family and village slaves who did the ‘unclean’ job for the family.

3. From the miscegenation among the four varnas - varnasāṅkara, i.e., born out of the mixture of four varṇās. Hypergamous marriages (pratikōma) were worse than those belonging to hypogamous marriages (anulōma). The children from the former were the untouchables.

4. Polluting or unclean occupations (like cleaning, cremating) led to untouchability. In which case, one has to ask how is it that those engaged in oil pressing, weaving, basket making etc. are considered untouchables? Mukherjee (1988) wonders if purity-pollution is to be looked at as the effect rather than the cause of untouchability.
5. Of urban origin, as the services rendered by the Dalits were more of an urban nature. However, this does not stand scrutiny as their presence is found in the villages as well. Moreover, services such as cleaning the toilets, cremating, removing carcasses etc are required by the people in the villages as well.

Some reference in *Rgveda* towards a group termed *dīsās/dasyūs* whom they referred to as people inimical towards the *Rgvedic* people. They were considered powerful, invaders, almost like famine, and it was a preoccupation with the *Aryans* to obliterate them from the face of the earth. Another group coming in this category is that of *rūkṣasa*. They lived beyond the mountains, and were never permitted any where near the *yajña*. The *Aryans* seemed to be afraid of them, and equated them to disease. A third group were the *pûnis*, who appear to be wealthier than the *Aryans* on account of the cattle in possession. And a last group that falls in this category was the *asūrīs*, who were inimical to the *sūrīs* or gods, and were wealthy people.

Cedric Prakash (2005:38) gives a definition of social discrimination as “the marginalisation of individuals or groups by other persons or groups who have more power, be it in the social, economic or religious spheres.” This is irrespective of the size of the latter group; it is their economic, political or religious tools which give them the ability to wield considerable space in society. What happens through the social discrimination under caste system is marginalisation of groups, implying consistent loss of space in the society, and of power regarding their day-to-day lives.

2.2.2.a. Caste Related Marginalisation in the Social sphere

One of the arresting features of the caste system is the social distance between the top and bottom of the social ladder (Beteille, 1983). ‘*Social Lepers*’ was a simile employed for them during the earlier times when leprosy was a disease which made the infected an untouchable.

Beteille (1992) cautions against applying widely held ‘distribution of material wealth’ theory *in toto* to Indian situation to explain social discrimination experienced here. In that case, the change in the economic system led to the disappearance of such inequality. However, he says that focus should be on what was unique to India in this regard, namely, the distinguishing feature of untouchability. The poverty and destitution might be a ‘morphological aspect’ of caste system, but the ideological aspect is that of purity and pollution on the basis of which the strata were formed. And this was the crucial differentiating factor.
One sixth of Indian population falls in the category of untouchables. Primary attribute of a Dalit was that he/she was an *asprāya* (untouchable) to the caste Hindus, and the secondary attributes are their segregation into distinct hamlets, non-commensality and non-connubiality with the caste Hindus (Mukherjee, 1988:14). Some of the practices and prescriptions may be shocking to the present generation. In the social interactions, inter-dining, inter-marriage, common use of places of worship, public places and water sources were all prohibited. These practices still continue in many places, at times openly, otherwise, in more subtle ways.

It is against such cruel manifestations of caste that Dalit Kannada writer Devanoor Mahadeva (2001) refers to untouchability and its manifestations as the “great grandfather of apartheid”. It is the insider’s agony that is expressed in the words of the Dalit poet Kisan Phagu Bansode: “God, make me a beast or a bird, but not a Mahar⁸ at all!” (quoted in Shah, 1990). There is no exaggeration when Amitha (1999) uses the term ‘lost humanity’ to describe their situation.

### 2.2.2. b. Economic Deprivation

The Marxist explanation of inequality and discrimination on the basis of distribution of means of production, holds good in the case of India as well, perhaps differing only in degree (Beteille 1983). It was observed that the change in the economic system led to the disappearance of such inequality. However, as mentioned above, it explains only one aspect of the phenomena.

Social handicaps of the *avanās* described by Kachiramattam (2000) point to the economic deprivations resulting from this form of social inequality. They are: hereditary occupation of the menial jobs, prohibition on acquisition of property by *avanās*, and prohibition on learning (letters or *Vedas*)⁹ by *avanās*.

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⁸ Mahar – one of the outcastes of Maharashtra, now a much politically organized caste group, thanks to the initiative of Dr. Ambedkar and their progress in the field of education.

⁹ Manusmrti IV:80-81. Let him not give to a Shudra advice… nor let him explain the sacred law to such a man, … For he who explains the sacred law to a Shudra or dictates to him a penance, will sink together with that man into the [dreadful] hell called Asamvrita (http://www.ambedkar.org/ambcd/38B1.%20Who%20were%20the%20Shudras%20PART%20I.htm).

Brhaspati Smrti XII:12. A Śūdra teaching the precepts of religion or uttering the words of the *Veda*, or insulting a Brahmin shall be punished by cutting out his tongue (*ibid.*). *Gautama Dharma Sūtra* XX: 4-6. Now if he listens intentionally to (a recitation of) the *Veda*, his ears shall be filled with (molten) tin or lac. If he recites (Vedic texts), his tongue shall be cut out. If he remembers them, his body shall be split in twain (http://www.bergen.edu/phr/121/ManuGC.pdf).
Kancha Ilaiah speaks about the triple alienations of the outcastes: from the village production and marketing processes, from the village social setting; and from themselves, from their own identity as dalitbahujan (Ilaiah, 1996:116). A very visible form of caste based deprivation is the alienation from land. “In a narrow sense, it could mean the alienation of individual landholdings and means of livelihood. In the broader sense, alienation includes the loss of common property and rural commons” (Sharan, 2006:4443). In the pre-independence era, the outcastes were prohibited from owning the land. Even now, they live on the fringes of land, and the land they own, or allocated to them, is generally less productive, less reachable, uneven terrain (Trivedi, 1996).

In comparison with the rest of the population, the caste system has rendered the majority (45.4% of them) agricultural labourers and while 23.6% only were cultivators of some sort; This was in comparison with the privileged groups under caste system, among whom 20.1% were labourers and 40.5% were cultivators (Trivedi, 1996).

Almost all the Dalits lack access to or ownership over resources, and control over their labour, employment, wages, etc. This enforces upon them the necessity to depend upon the dominant castes, who in turn exploit them. It is this economic dependence which inhibits every resolve of the Dalits to fight against the dominant castes (Louis, 2004:126).

The nominal progress they have achieved in the domain of occupation has been mainly in the field of class four employment, that too, thanks to the reservation policy. In looking at these factors as affecting the sections oppressed under caste-system, Saradamoni (1981) speaks about the SCs being still at the lower rung of the economic classes in spite of the disappearance of social handicaps, and in spite of a visible shift - from slave labour to wage labour.

2.2.2. c. Social and Educational Status

About a quarter of the Indian population is thus cast outside, stigmatized, oppressed and crushed down through centuries of consistent and systematic violence. They are heavily concentrated in the states of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh (Daniels, 1998). Desrochers (2000) consider their total strength including both the official estimates and those categories

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10 1991 census – SC in India – 138.2 mln (16.3%); Keralam – 2.9 mln (9.9%), ST in India – 68.0 mln (8.0%); Keralam - 0.3 mln (1.1%)
excluded from the official lists to be about 260 million. He cites data from the Black Paper by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) in 2000.

### Revealing Data on Caste Based Deprivation (NCDHR)\(^{11}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indices of Deprivation</th>
<th>SC Rural</th>
<th>SC Urban</th>
<th>Others Rural</th>
<th>Others Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty line-Rural (1993-94)</td>
<td>48.11%</td>
<td>49.48%</td>
<td>32.36%</td>
<td>37.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per capita consumption (1987-88)</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household electricity</td>
<td>30.91%</td>
<td></td>
<td>61.31%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanitation</td>
<td>9.84%</td>
<td></td>
<td>26.76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy (1991)</td>
<td>33.25%</td>
<td></td>
<td>55.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Marginal (1985-86)</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td>57.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Progress in social development includes measures of well-being such as nutritional status and access to health care, school enrolment ratios, and gender differences in access to educational attainment (World Development Report, 1999 :187ff). It is observed that backward caste status leads to the economic deprivation which forces upon them a low calorie consumption, and results in their poor health (Iliaiah, 1996).

When the various indices of quality of life are compared, the deprived and backward castes which form the vast majority of the country’s population, are much behind in almost all categories. This is a clear indicator of the continued caste-class nexus. Besides the items in the table, the oppressed sections under the caste system suffer from a more negative sex-ratio - 922 against the already negative national rate of 944. Many (about 70-75%) of such families are female headed. Majority of them live in rural areas, which adds to their comparative backwardness.

Education is seen as the one means for acquiring human capital by which social mobility can take place. As observed by Grusky (1994:12) “educational institutions serve to ‘license’ human capital and thereby convert it to cultural currency”. However, the educational institutions are seen as means of imposing and internalising the negative cultural stereotypes. In the field of basic education,

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\(^{11}\) Cited in Desrochers (2000)
segregation during mid-day meals, prohibiting them from drinking water from common sources, forcing them to perform menial tasks in the school etc. happen even today. At times, they are referred to as 'government children' alluding to the benefits they derive from the government. Such treatment leads to high drop-out rates. The education rather than 'conscientizing' them on their situation, forces them to internalise a sense of inferiority, and instills in them a high degree of despondency (Vasavi, 2006).

Total lack of orientation towards a culture of orality from which the first generation learners come and resultant conditioning is something to be adequately addressed. Not taking this into account can lead to the loss of self-confidence and poor performance of the students of dalit communities. Anveshi report on caste-related violence at Central University, Hyderabad says that the sense of self-worth is the first casualty for the dalit student in the university life...they are regarded as unteachable (Vasavi, 2006).

Reinforcement of stereotyped images of inherent incapability happens through educational institutions. This further leads to either questioning the value of higher education or putting an end to the education of children with 8th standard as pointed out in the study of Jeffery and Jeffery (2004) in Bijnor district of Uttar Pradesh (Vasavi 2006). Maria Vicziany (2005) refers to Dalits completing college education as 'breakthrough generation'.

2.2.2. d. Visibility

Beteille (1983) views 'visibility' as the most notable feature of inequality in Indian society. Visibility factor could be that inequality was visible in all sorts of interactions. An indirect impact, is the invisibility of the deprived sections in all fields of power and prestige. This has been pointed out by Ilaiah (1996): A permanent dialectical process of the so-called upper castes ever remaining the anti-thesis, and the thesis of dalit existence being worked upon into a constantly mutilated synthesis. They have not been allowed to develop and maintain a history. Their story has been totally avoided from history, and if presented, they are evil symbols.

It has also occurred to dalit productions in the field of art - though they themselves are great artists, their art has never been acclaimed (Ilaiah, 1996), perhaps, they have gone down as wage labour and slavery. According to Kapoor (2004:211), ‘the process of liberation of Dalits …from invisibility to visibility, from a non-human to
human existence, has not been simple and linear... it has been prolonged because they had to fight against an invisible wall of segregation..."

2.2.2. e Lack of support

Vasavi (2006) has pointed out the reassertion of identity of the traditionally privileged caste groups, who while being of no support to the Dalits, have shown greater enthusiasm in coming together in the caste name, perhaps out of a sense of loss and deprivation. Those who were oppressed through caste system continue to suffer the oppression, and lack of support from the more privileged groups. Shotter (1989:162) has referred to this impact of social inequality as “lack of opportunity for being” (cited by Vasavi 2006).

2.2.2. f Brokenness

Being ‘broken asunder’ is the experience of those who are cast out of the caste system as outcastes. Berreman depicts the impact of caste systems in terms of the polarities it introduces. “The human meaning of caste for those who live it is power and vulnerability, privilege and oppression, honour an denigration, plenty and want, reward and deprivation, security and anxiety” (as cited in Vasavi, 2006; in Raman 2003:89)

This polarity of impact of caste-system was perceived and analysed by Ambedkar as an insider in the oppressed group. He made use of the term antyavīsayin. He termed them ‘Broken Men’.

Violence is part of this brokenness. Sen (2006) demonstrates how exclusive identities lead to violence. However, here neither the exclusivity nor the violence are the choice of the oppressed, but rather of the oppressors in the caste system. (Retaliatory violence is gradually taking shape, though they are exceptions, rather than the norm!) Violence continues to be part of the caste based oppression. National Commission for SCs and STs found an 8% increase in the atrocities being committed against the SCs. In 1995 alone there were 513 murders of the Dalits, 4000 grievous injuries and 787 rapes (Daniels, 1998).

Indian Express March 15, 2006. p. 10 Editorial

The editorial speaks about the abject misery being faced by the 1.18 crores of Dalits in Tamil Nadu while the state is making great strides in its march to economic progress. It speaks about the atrocities
committed against them including murder, maiming, rape and damage and looting of property. Since 1985 there have been caste conflicts in Tamil Nadu. Dalits in a small hamlet in T Shanmugapuram work as scavengers and owing to their social status. They are compelled to do free chores for upper caste people. If they refuse, their service is terminated. They are also barred from the temples frequented by upper castes, and prevented from using public toilets and hand pumps.

The violence and oppression are not always expressed and physical, but very subtle and silent (Ilaiah, 1996). It appears through interaction, avoidance, exclusion, neglect etc. Ilaiah’s (1996:14) words echo the experience of this violence very forcefully: “If our parents had been conscious about the conspiracy of this silent violence, they would have simply inhaled all the Hindus as naśam (like they usually inhale tobacco powder). What was arrested and what was stifled was that consciousness. The consciousness of ‘us’ and of ‘our’ culture was never allowed to exercise our minds. … our childhoods were mutilated by constant abuse and by silence, and by a stunning silence at that. There was the conspiracy to suppress the formation of our consciousness. For hundreds of generations the violent stoppage of the entry of the written word into our homes and our lives nipped our consciousness in the very bud”. The treatment they receive in the field of education (detailed above) is also a form of violence.

Vasavi (2006) points to the danger of youth who do not find themselves integrated into the mainstream on account of various factors, including the caste factor, being absorbed by fundamentalist elements as was amply demonstrated during the Gujarat riots in 2002. The energy that should have gone into the reclaiming of their own rights and contesting domination had been diverted into violence, thus enhancing the image of perpetrator of violence. Thus, those who were once victims, can easily be converted and transformed into perpetrators of violence, if the right orientation is lacking.

2.2.2. g The Oppressive Nomenclatures

Caste system introduced a system of taxonomy which in itself is oppressive and dehumanizing. Thus all those who were outside the pale of the system were referred to by demonizing terminologies such as dasyu, niśkṣasa, panchamas, (Kadankavil, 1999:105), mjecca, pancama, anya, chandīla (Kumar, 2000), acc īt, avaṛa, atī-
śūdra (Shah, 1990), or more patronizingly as harijans\textsuperscript{12}, depressed classes, servile classes, or weaker sections. Annie Besant used the term depressed classes in 1909 (uplift of the depressed classes) which was borrowed by the British. Due to the nature of their existence and work they were referred to as ‘servile’ classes (Tripathy 1994). Over the years, even the value neutral legal terminology Scheduled Caste has become oppressive due to the hang over of the stigma attached to the communities.

2.2.2. New Modes of Domestication

If the earlier mode of domestication was that of paternalism towards the subjects, the new design is that of hinduisation or in certain contexts, re-hinduisation\textsuperscript{13}. The rituals and stipulations by which a re-hinduisation (reconversion) is being promoted in North India points to the processes of domestication the Dalits are subjected to (Vasavi 2006). Cooptation is found to be another strategy, as has been evidenced by the political parties - all of which, including a party which had its origin and goal in the caste based Hindu religio-politics - of domesticating the oppressed sections of caste system. The educational system which continues to reinforce the value system of the dominant classes under the caste system, is another (perhaps, unwitting) tool of domestication\textsuperscript{14}.

2.2.3. Identity of Subjected Personhoods

Vasavi (2006) speaks about the subjected personhoods - how the caste related indignities affect the lives and relationships of the deprived groups. The author refers to Shotter (1989) who says that the personhood is a making of others, rather than something created by the person himself/herself. There is the possibility of erosion of a sense of worth of an individual or group based on persistent and

\textsuperscript{12} First use of this terminology was by Gujarati Poet Narsi Mehta. When a character of his poetry who was the son of a temple prostitute – devadāsi, was questioned as to his paternity, someone explains ironically that he was son of Hari – which means Brahmin indicating the illegal paternity of some of the temple employees. It could also mean the child of God, as Hari meant also Vishnu, the second of the triple Godhead. There are people who allege that Gandhi gave this nomenclature deliberately to them to indicate their status as illegitimate and degradable. (Jose, 1991) Ambedkar opposed this usage as it in no way justified the cruel treatment meted out against the Dalits in the name of a social division said to have been divinely ordered (Augustine, 1996). By the government order of Nov. 24, 1985, the use of this terminology was banned by the State.

\textsuperscript{13} Whether it is hinduisation (afresh) or re-hinduisation (implying one used to be Hindu) is debatable. Ref. “Why I am not a Hindu?” by Kancha Ilaiah, 1996.

\textsuperscript{14} A news item – Indian Express Dec. 13, 2006, presented social activist Aruna Roy, leading a group of Dalits on a march to a pilgrim centre usually reserved for the caste Hindus. The moot question is whether the Dalits have been helped to question the very frame work that make them ‘dalits’, rather than get the privileges of the insiders of the oppressor group.
pervasive humiliation, deprivation and indignities. Hence there is the need to identify the manifestations of such experiences and the spheres in which such experiences take place.

This happens in the process of socialisation into passivity of the children of dalit communities and of representation of scheduled community members in public sphere. At individual level if this leads to subjected personhood, at the macro-cultural level higher caste practices are being absorbed (e.g., dowry instead of bride price) leading to a submergence or loss of identity and erosion of positive characteristics of dalit culture. Even in the political field the positions they take are a replication of patron-client pattern of agricultural (read feudal) society. The trend idealized is that of submergence and loss of caste identity through ‘erasure and amnesia’ (Vasavi, 2006).

‘Mutilation’ is the word Ilaiah (1996:36-37) repeatedly uses to convey the brokenness and subjugated personality and identity of the people who are suppressed under the yoke of caste system. “...right form childhood, (the dalitbahujans) are trained more to obey and to listen than to command or to speak...Irrespective of their ages, people coming from the so-called higher castes can address the dalitbahujan castes in a demeaning manner (a male person is addressed as are and a female person is addressed as yende, yēvvative). ...The power relations...are so structured that the self-respect which is of critical importance in developing the personality of dalitbahujan women/men is mutilated.”

The words of dalit poet Kisan Phagu Bansode describes the agony of the mutilated subjects in a caste-system: “God, make me a beast or a bird But not a Mahar at all” (quoted in Shah 1990). The continuation of a socialisation of subjugation, domination and dehumanization developing in the Dalits a sense of being second-grade citizens (Louis 2004). Vasavi (2006) feels that the conditions in which the Dalits grow lead to a low self-esteem and poor self-image.

This is accompanied by a very low aspiration level - the capacity to aspire for a better future, is an important feature of cultural capital. The caste induced limitations tend to hold the majority of the oppressed to a minimal range of choices.
2.2.3. CRITIQUE OF CASTE

After the recorded and recognizable rejection of caste by Buddhism, and perhaps by Jainism and the Cārvākās, the history of India does not show an explicit critique of the vicious system of institutionalised social inequality of a caste society. There had been some whimperers in the form of Bhakti Movement, where the leaders of such socio-spiritual (religious) movements tended to criticise, and transcend the limits set by caste and religion. Some reformist attempts are found with Ram Mohan Roy, and Dayanand Saraswati. However, an open and daring critique of caste system became personified in Mahatma Jotirao Phule. A strong opponent of caste based oppression, in spite of his own handicap as a backward caste individual (mūli - gardener caste of Maharashtra), Phule exhibited great courage and insight in fighting the evil of caste, and trying to empower and liberate the oppressed castes and the women who were also oppressed under the male dominated caste system. According to Phule, to observe caste system is no religion. The caste system is a fraud, and originally it was not there. The Aryans, the Brahmins, introduced it for their own selfish ends. If a sweeper is to be considered lowly, then one’s mother should be classified a member of the class. The caste system should not be based on occupations either. A Brahmin boy may not be as meritorious as Sankaracharya, while a Camūr boy may be as virtuous as Sankaracharya (Keer, 1974).

Dayanand Saraswati’s Arya Samaj (1875) was launched with the call for a ‘return to the Vedic spirit’. Whether it implied also a caste-less society is not clear, though the present day Arya Samajis claim a casteless society as the underlying aim of Aryasamāj.

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of Indian nation, was another fighter against the caste inequality. While accepting and insisting upon caste system as part of the Hindu religion and culture, and arguing for its maintenance in its authentic sense, Gandhiji insisted on the value and virtue of ‘equality’ and stressed the need to set free all those who were oppressed under the caste system. Apparently, out of concern for the development of those who were suppressed under the caste system, he called them harijan, which literally means ‘God’s children’.

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15 A more elaborate treatment is given in the forthcoming pages, under the title “Coping and campaigns against Caste Inequality.”
16 a la Kabir: jāti pānti kucc pucche nahin kōi; hari kā hōi… (Let no one enquire about jati or religion, let all be of hari (God)…)
After, Buddha, Ambedkar is widely accepted as a true leader and liberator of the oppressed communities under the caste-system. His contribution lies in identifying caste as the analytical tool for understanding Indian society. He saw caste as a social reality rather than a moral/ethical issue. He tried to analyse the practice of *sati* from the caste perspective. Similarly, he also pointed out that the economy of a caste-based society cannot be re-productive. This is different from Gandhian perspective of looking at caste-system as a corrupted system which needs to be purified from its evils (Shamina, 2004).

Ambedkar’s thinking on caste mentality has been presented by Bose (1999:96) as follows: “The mental framework of the oppressing classes which try to establish themselves over other classes, one above the other, in order to establish domination (power) over the oppressed class can be termed as caste mentality”.

### 2.2.3. a Other Trends and Movements

The leftist movement did help in the suppressed classes getting organised. Though not directly targeted at the Dalits *per se*, indirectly it resulted in their progress as well. However, the leftist critique was based on the Marxian categories, that caste was a factor of an economy which was at the verge of disintegration, and that industrialization and urbanization would result in its end (Shamina, 2004). Hence it often lacked the multi-dimensional perspective, which the caste system presents.

From a humanistic perspective, caste societies are deficient in their sense of equality, liberty, fraternity and justice on account of the graded inequality of the system. Fraternity could not flourish, and the various laws and regulations were suited to suppress the majority and deprive them of liberty. The door to liberty, education, was denied to almost 95% of the people under this system (Matheikal, 2006).

Today’s capability approaches have criticised the caste system as something which prevents the acquisition of social and cultural capital for the majority, and the issue of entitlements for redressing the situation (Rao & Walter, 2004).
2.2.4. KERALA CONTEXT OF CASTE BASED INEQUALITY

As the present study is pertaining to a community within the state of Keralam, a brief analysis of the social organization of the state from a caste perspective is given below:

The state of Keralam, lies on the Southern end of the Indian sub-continent, with Arabian sea as its western boundary. The tiny state with a teeming population of 335 million stands as a unique model of social development. It stands very high on Quality of Life index, with a high literacy rate of 89.8% (national literacy rate of 52.1\(^1\)), IMR of 14.1 (compared to 70.5 nation wide\(^2\)), life expectancy at 70.7 and 86 respectively for male and female populations (compared to 62.4 & 63.4 nationwide\(^3\)) and a highly favourable sex-ratio (1058)\(^4\). The various development achievements of the state are considered to be unique and significant when the relatively low per capita income is considered.

The rare achievements in the various aspects of social development has made Keralam a progressive state, and from the angle of social equality too, it is said to be far ahead of the rest of the states. The factors that are thought to have contributed to its rare achievements are: the spread of literacy and education, progressive land reform movements, organization of the working classes, and the unique composition of the various religious groupings.

Against this background, it might appear as a surprise to the students of development studies that Mc Kim Marriot (1965), in studying the caste phenomenon of 5 different regions, viz., Keralam, Coromandel, upper Ganges, middle Indus and Bengal delta, found Keralam to be having the maximum rigidity. Swami Vivekananda’s oft-quoted comment about Keralam, ‘that I have walked into a lunatic asylum\(^5\)’ is said to have been made on observing the complex dehumanising caste system of Keralam. Even in the modern age of total literacy, it is found that almost all political alliances and decisions, and the appointments to various posts of importance, have caste consideration as an underlying factor.

\(^1\) http://www.censusindia.net/literates1.html;
\(^2\) http://www.censusindia.net/results/eci13_page1.html
\(^3\) http://ncw.nic.in/statistics%20tables/SexRatio.html
\(^4\) ibid.
Starting with revolutionary temple entry proclamation (1936), Keralam has progressed to be one of the most egalitarian states of the Indian union. However, that still does not mean that it is devoid of social inequality based on caste system. As observed earlier, in tune with the general trend, such inequalities are still operational in this progressive state as well; however, much more subtly than elsewhere.

Keralam is said to have been derived from Cēraḷam after the Cēra kings who ruled Keralam in the first two centuries. According to Fr. Bernard, about 4th century B.C. Aryan Brahmins are said to have come and settled in Keralam and gradually other castes are also said to have settled in the state, beside its existing native population consisting of cerumar, vēṭuvar, kāṭar, malayar, pulayar, kuravar, and kuricciyar (Thoma, 1992/1916).

However, many authors, including Dalit Bandhu, are of the view that a well established Buddhist tradition of about 1200 years was wiped out from the region by Aryan power. Till 800 A.D it is said to have been a homogeneous, casteless society, perhaps of a single race, under the sway of Buddhism. This was replaced by a casteist Hindu society in the 8th century A.D. With the onset of Hinduism, divisions on the basis of caste emerged. The much touted legend of Parasuraman is read today as a story of the conquest of a non-hindu land, for or by Hindu Brahmins. This story is indicative of the casteist foundation of the Kerala society (Bandhu, 1992). This assumption that caste system was an alien introduction in Keralam, is strengthened by the fact that the exact four-fold caste system is not identifiable here. The castes existed here were Brahmins, Nampūtiri, Nāir, Īzhavās, Paraya, Pulaya, and Araya. Kṣatriyās and Vaisyas were not recognizable here. The royal families were made Kṣatriyās through a ritual called ‘hiraṇyagarbha’.

Another indicator is the existence of nampūtiri as a caste is not found elsewhere. ‘nampūtiro’ means Buddhist monk, when the Hindu revival happened, the priestly

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6 Some of the terminologies in use in the region are indicative of this: e.g., pāḷi (the term Christians and Muslims use for their centre of worship). The term is from the ancient Buddhist language pāḷi in which the term means a Buddha vihāra. There many places in Keralam which end in pāḷi, which are thought to have been centres of Buddhism. When people adopted newer religions of Christianity and Islam, they retained the term for their centre of worship, where as the Hindu renewal resulted in the destruction of Buddhist culture in Keralam, that the resultant Hindu culture deliberately refrained from using this term for their centres of worship. There is also a tradition that hundreds of Buddhists were killed on spears (śūlam) and hence the name of the town at the banks of Periyār called Ālavāi, which means spear.
class equivalent of Buddhism is said to have been integrated into the caste fold as equivalent to the Brahmans.

The legends of Parasurāma and Mahābali are indicative of the Brahmin domination and depiction of the lower status of the other castes. In fact, pulaya would mean the owner of pulam, that is, the earth. Perhaps, it was to destroy this claim that the earth was declared as brhamaswam and dēvaswam (property of the Brahmans and the Gods), by the conquerors, while making the erstwhile owners their slaves. The occupations created in the new feudal system are those of mēnon, pilla, vīyar, pīṟati, kaimal, kuruppu, nampūr. However, according to the caste tradition their descendents began to be known in those names, thus forming an intermediate caste and class (Bandhu, 1992).

This is not the case with the Īzhavās, who are a people, who form the largest caste group of the state and who were considered outcasts (Jayaprapaksh, 1999). Pathirappally (1999) states quoting various scholars that original inhabitants of Keralam were cērama, and so were the first Christians in this region. This was said to be a time before the caste divisions and inequalities came into existence in this region. Keralam was called cēranat (land of cērama) after them (Thomas, 1999).

Kadankavil (1999) refers to the historical analysis of P.K. Balakrishnan (Jātivyavasthayum Keralaum) which says that inequality in Keralam was not a contribution of Aryans or Nampīriris, rather it had been there even before them and that the fall of cērans was on account of the internecine rivalries among them. He lists the opinions of the authors who consider the origin of the various dalit communities from the original cērans who are said to have been the sovereigns of this land in the ancient times. He cites N.K. Jose’s view that the Dalits are those who were driven out from the Indus valley at the arrival of the Aryans, and who were subjected to oppression in the land, where as those who fled the valley along the sea-coast, established themselves as fisher-folk, and were relatively free from caste oppression and slavery. Those who came to South along the mainland, were subjected to the oppression of the powerful invaders, and in the course of time became the subjected castes.

Kadankavil (1999) agrees with the much discussed theory that the Cēra rulers were the original inhabitants of this region, and the term cērama (used for Pulaya community) comes from that. He points to the presence of the members of this community all over the state, in every village as an indication of their being the
original inhabitants of this land. It is said that the other groups have emerged from them after their subjugation by the new settlers. The subjugation was so total, that the subjugated groups were treated as slaves owned by the more powerful castes.

2.2.4.a Manifestations of Caste Inequality in Keralam

Today, Keralam, in general, is perceived as an egalitarian state of the Indian union. However, caste exists and operates in a very subtle manner, but pervading all realms of life in the state. There is the secular political system, in which most of the decisions, especially regarding party positions, positions in administration, permission to start institutions, appointment to various positions of prestige and power, caste considerations become vital irrespective of the political parties and fronts. Both the major political fronts - leftist front, and the congress led centrist front - play along the caste lines in all their decisions, and they have caste linked components within their fold or as their supporters. The third political force BJP, has a more explicit Hindu religious foundation, which implies caste influence as well. Thus, in the present scenario of Keralam, caste is more a basis for organized political strength, and bargaining power, than mere religious or occupation division of the society. The vital issue in the present context is the fact that the marginalized sections under the caste system are the least politically organized on caste lines, and they are still the most backward sections of the society.

2.2.4.b The Groups regarded as Untouchables in the Past

As per the amended Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Order Act, 1976, there were 68 caste groups under that category (Kadankavil, 1997-6:23). Jāinirmaya, an 18th century work on castes in Keralam, lists 72 castes - 8 of Brahmins, 2 neuna (lesser, pronounced nyūna), 12 ‘antarāja’ (intermediate), 18 Śūdrās, 6 artisans, 10 patita (fallen or damned), 8 nica (low) and 8 extra (Koilparampil, 1982:37-38).

2.2.4.c Missionary Endeavour and End of Slavery in Keralam

There are evidences which speak about slavery in Keralam. Pulayar, parayar, kuravar, vēṭuvar were the slave castes. It was with the arrival of the Christian Missionary Society/London Missionary Society (CMS/LMS) missionaries that efforts to ban slavery in the states of Kochi and Travancore began. By 1819, slavery was abolished in those areas directly under the British (East India Company). In 1853, Travancore King made the children born to the slaves free. In 1854 slave trade was banned in Kochi and almost 5800 slaves were set free. On June 24, 1855 slavery

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7 Ref: e.g., the news item of Sep. 11, 2009. Election to Dalit Congress.
was abolished in Travancore. In Malabar region slavery was abolished way back in 1843 by missionary initiative (Gopalan, 1999).

2.2.4.d Identity and Assertion by Dalits in Keralam

The earliest of such attempts in history is seen in Chānnār Lahafa, a revolt by the Chānnār community of the South, for the rights of their woman to cover the upper part of their body. This was inspired by the missionary efforts at education of the Chānnār community. In the course of LMS work among the backward castes, there was split between the two caste groups, viz., Čānnār and Parayuś, which resulted in Parayuś losing interest in reformation and conversion. The former group became stronger in faith, and are today called as Nāṭārs. The conversion process led to conscientisation of this group. One such result was the decision of Čānnārwomen to cover their breasts (to wear a top), which was denied till then. This led to a conflict which is known as Čānnār Lahafa. It had two stages - first part was for the right to wear a close fitting apparel over the breasts called rauka, and the second was to cover the upper body part of the women by using melmu (a kind of shawl or blouse) over the rauka. This led to violence between the Čānnār and the caste Hindu groups who took this as a violation of the unquestionable caste norms. The former were supported by the police and the administration. The latter was supported by the missionaries, and under their influence, the British government intervened to influence the local administration to give liberty to wear dress that would protect their modesty (Jose, 1991).

Kooiman (1989) gives a sketch of the efforts of LMS in conversion such as education, employment and fight against civil liberties. He is of the view that the Čānnār struggle for the right to wear ‘tops’ must be seen as the product of both Christianisation and Sanskritisation. He concludes that the change of life and thoughts in the LMS Christians was not substantial.

Bandhu (1994-3) presents a glorious picture of Ayyankili, as a proud fighter for dalit rights in a milieu marked by caste oppression. In the history of India and Keralam, he is seen as the lone representative of the dalit community to have asserted one’s right to be a free individual and inspired others to do so. However, his efforts for a wider, non-sectarian oppressed caste front through sādhu jana paripālana sangham

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* Researcher’s Note: Čānnār community of South Keralam, had toddy-tapping as their main occupation.
(Organisation for the Protection/Care of the Poor) were foiled by the manipulative attempts of the dominant sections of those times, with the patronage of the Diwan. In 1937 *sūdhu jana paripālana sangham* was wound up and the more exclusive *pulaya mahājana sabha* came into being. The meeting was presided over by Diwan C.P. Ramaswami Iyer himself (Bandhu, 1994b).

Kerala scenario of social organisation presents a hierarchical society based on caste system. However, the fourfold system seems to be missing, with a near total absence (but for some exceptional ruling families) of the *Kṣatriya* and *Vaiśya* castes. At the lower rung, with varying degrees of untouchability were a whole range of caste groups providing various services for the society. Perhaps, due to the climatic or geographical features, the typical scavenger caste, who are treated as most polluting, seems to be missing.

Though the castes at the lowest rung of social hierarchy, namely the Pulayas and Parayas were treated with very dehumanising norms of purity-pollution, it appears that there was also a sort of mutual dependence and care in the unequal and unjust relationships. While the *Pulayar* are considered to be highly knowledgeable in the matters of agriculture, and dependable, the *Parayar* were recognized for their skill in the manufacture of household utensils, music and warfare. The terms like *Pulayanārkōṭa* (the Pulaya fortress), *Parayappāṭa* (the Paraya army) and the references to a *Cēramar* Kingdom, which possibly is a *Pulaya* dynasty etc. point to a degree of difference in the caste situation of Keralam, when compared to the rest of India.

However, marginalisation and oppression on the basis of one's birth and exploitation are undeniable facts of the past and present of Keralam. And as mentioned earlier, these sections form the least politically organised groups in the state, having no stake in the political order. The writings of Kannur King is a strong indicator of the conscious economic advantage underlying the exploitation that was involved in the caste system. King of Kannur had written to the King Manuel of Portugal in 1507: “It is my desire that certain sections of the people in my kingdom whom I and my *nayars* hold as slaves..., *tines* (*tiyan*) and *mucuas*, may not be converted to Christianity... The conversion of the slaves will give rise to conflicts between them.

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and my vassals. The *nayars* derive their income from them and they do not want to lose it” (Mundadan, 1984:379). This statement is a pointer towards the motif of the oppressors that perpetrated the caste system, and resisted conversion, namely, economic advantage; and the that of the oppressed, namely, liberation and emancipation from the oppressing systems.

It is against this background that conversion to Christianity by the oppressed classes is discussed, and how their hopes of emancipation were realised or not realised are being examined in this study.
2.3. DALIT - ASSERTING BROKENNESS, RECOGNIZING THE REALITY OF OPPRESSION

The analysis of stratification of Indian society reveals the caste based institutionalised inequality as its basic structure. It also brings to the fore the victims of this structural injustice, viz., the outcastes, who have been rendered ‘untouchables’ by the dominant privileged castes.

The history has seen their being given various epithets, and the most frequently used terminology is that of Scheduled Castes, which denotes their legal status as castes included in the Schedule of the constitution. It has also been understood that the nomenclature itself can be very oppressive and be helpful in perpetrating oppression direct or oppression indirect by way of paternalism. It is against this background, that analysis of ‘dalit identity’ is made in this section - both from its theoretical perspective as to its implications, and from the historical perspective of its origin and evolution in the modern times.

2.3.1. ASSERTION OF THE SHARED IDENTITY

The discovery of ‘identity’ as a factor of crucial significance in the growth and development of individual and groups is relatively new. The realization of the fact of multiple identities (Sen, 2005) presents the question of ‘formidable’ identity - the one chosen to be presented often. Are identities chosen and contextual? Or are there identities which cut across and remain affixed in spite of the contexts?

Scholars have analysed how one’s identity as a person is a status conferred upon by others. And “if others do not take one’s expressions of self seriously, if they do not respond to your utterances and other expressions as you intend, then you are being denied your opportunity to be a person - you are being degraded and humiliated” (Shotter 2004:7). “Identity formation is a universal and historical (interactional) process which is based on the experience about oneself and the experience in relation to others” (Louis, 2004:123). Interactional, because this process does not take place in a vacuum, rather within a social milieu. Efforts at freeing the individuals from this, and providing them opportunities for self-assertion is the responsibility of the larger society.

Two important aspects in identity formation are - a) ideological-symbolic component implying belief systems and resultant patterns of behaviour b) material-productive
component, meaning the ecological and economic conditions shaping the primary livelihood activities and productive relations with others (Louis, 2004).

However, this requires infusing pride in the group as a community. The successful case of the ‘Jāṭs’ is cited by Louis (2004). In 1925, the Jāṭ leader, Rattan Singh, pleaded with the community: ‘Fame is greater than beauty; he who does not respect himself or his country, he is not a man, he is like an animal and his life a living corpse’ (in Jāṭ Sudhar). Today the Jāṭs have become a very powerful group in North India.

As far as India is concerned, to date no viable alternative has been provided for the caste based identity (Vasavi, 2006). Desrochers (2006) finds that caste identity as a reality has to be reckoned within the Indian society. What is required is that this unavoidable element of Indian reality is to be radically transformed as to be without the dehumanising elements of untouchability, occupational stratification and social discrimination.

John (2003) says that in choosing to be called ‘Dalit’, the Dalits have assumed the identity of an oppressed people who are reasserting their humanity against those who for centuries treated them as sub-human. The term ‘Dalit’ implies the assertion that ‘we are the broken and crushed people who will not allow any further oppression’ (p.287).

2.3.1.a Evolution

It is found that it was Jotiba Phule who used the term first, and later on, Swāmi Vivekanand used it (Kapoor, 2004). However, it was the 1970s that saw the terminology ‘Dalit’ gaining currency in referring to the oppressed groups under the caste system. Two dalit writer-activists, Namdeo Dhasal and J.V. Pawar initiated the movement called Dalit Panther in 1972, in Mumbai. The article ‘Kāla Swātantrya Dīrī’ (Black Independence Day, by Raja Dhale created a sensation among the Dalits and the term came to be in vogue (Shah, 1990).

This seems to have emerged because of two underlying reasons.

1. Assertion of the reality of their broken, subjugated and oppressed existence.

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1 A caste group of North India – predominantly in U.P., Haryana and Punjab, considered to be of lower status in the caste hierarchy, and mostly confined to agricultural sector (Researcher’s explanatory note).
2. Need for identifying commonalities for united and collective action.

While accepting the fact that the oppressed people who suffer from the unequal treatment meted out to them by the society are not a homogeneous community, they themselves have found the need for united action and a common platform to work for their progress and development. Brokenness and oppression are the common facts of their existence they themselves have identified, and feel should be addressed. This spirit is well articulated in Gangadhar Pantawane’s statement: “To me dalit is not a caste. He is a man exploited by the social and economic traditions of this country. He doesn’t believe in God, Rebirth, Soul, and Holy Books, teaching separatism, Fate and Heaven because they have made him a slave. He does believe in humanism. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution²(Kapoor, 2004:56).

3.3.1. b The term - ‘dalit’

Though it might appear as a contradiction, however, the term has its origin from Sanskrit, a language which has been instrumental in the pronouncements of all oppressive measures under the caste system. It is derived from the Sanskrit Root ‘daal’ which means torn asunder or broken (Daniels, 1998).

Gopalan (1999) mentions the root ‘daal’ which means to injure or to suppress. Thus the derived term ‘dalit’ now functions as both a noun and an adjective. In the noun form, it refers to a people torn asunder, or suppressed.

“In most Indian languages, the term ‘dalit’ represents the oppressed, the downtrodden. The expression ‘dalit’ is therefore a statement of their struggle for human rights. Much more than a change of name, it expresses a new outlook, identity and pride ”(Daniels, 1998: 130).

Krishna Iyer (1998) refers to the term ‘Dalits’ (broken or crushed people) as something ‘these traumatised and desperate communities call themselves...” Shah (1990) quotes Zeliott regarding what is implied in the term ‘Dalit’ “…those who have been broken, ground down by those above them in a deliberate and active way. There is in the word itself an inherent denial of pollution, karma and justified caste hierarchy” (1978:77).

Pandey (2006) says, “By ‘Dalits’ I refer to India’s untouchables or ex-untouchables, ‘acchūts’, harijans, scheduled castes, to cite a few of the names used to describe them.

... the term 'Dalit' (literally, 'crushed', 'downtrodden' or 'oppressed'), widely used as a term of description for those at the very bottom of the social, cultural, economic heap, is also now used as a term of militant self-assertion on the part of many of those so oppressed" (EPW, May 6, 2006: 1779).

2.3.1.c Acceptance of the term

Kannanaikil tracing the evolution in terminology from the degrading and oppressive term ‘untouchables’, to the Depressed Classes and Scheduled Castes (British administration), and Harijans (Gandhiji), comments: “Finally, it was left for the ‘untouchables’ themselves to coin a new name for themselves: Dalits...The term, Dalit is no more another name for the ‘untouchables’. It connotes dignity, pride and the self-identity of a people” (Kannanaikil, 1993:410).

Vasavi (2006) looks at the acceptance the terminology has gained in a realistic manner. The official category of SC/ST is being preferred or more often used rather than the traditional caste name on the one hand; on the other hand, the trend is catching up with the activists promoting one common dalit identity, and thus all Dalits being brought under one category. However, the latter is yet to gain widespread acceptance among the communities concerned.

While ād-dharmis of Punjab do not mind being called Scheduled Castes, some of them resent being called Dalits (Louis & Jodhka, 2003). A small section of neo-Buddhists find the term Dalit unacceptable as they feel a sting of humiliation. They feel that this usage is promoting casteism and classism (Shah, 1990).

The usage of ‘bahujan’ is gaining currency. This literally means the 'majority', and more specifically to the majority who are deprived of power, in contrast with the minority who hold power. The combination of dalitbahujan is being used by Ilaiah (1996) in which he tries to look at the common factor of oppression and deprivation of the non-exploitative culture of the majority - both within the caste (śūdra) and outside the caste (atiśūdra).

2.3.1.d Dalit - the implications

The Dalit Panthers, in 1973, have broadly interpreted the term to make it more inclusive as: ‘all Scheduled Castes and Tribes, landless labourers, small farmers and nomadic tribes, who are committed to fighting injustice stemming from political power, property, religion and social status’ (cited by Shah, 1990:330).
Ram (1998) refers to it as the current nomenclature by which all those diverse oppressed ethnic groups are referred to. He says that it has a wider connotation which is more inclusive - of ex-untouchable castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Buddhist converts, other backwards castes or classes, minorities, women and the poor of the upper caste in Hindu society. However, in the restricted sense, he uses the term for “the SCs of the Hindu caste system and for those SCs who have converted to Buddhism, Christianity, Sikkhism and Islam in India” (p.104).

Ramaiah describes the usage in terms of acknowledgement of the fact of oppression and generation of pride of their existence. “The term or label or nomenclature ‘Dalit’ ...is a term which they very strongly associate themselves with. The conscientious individuals belonging to this category feel proud of identifying themselves as Dalits since the literal meaning of this term does not imply any notion of caste, but aptly depicts the oppressed and powerless state of this community” (Ramaiah, 1998:125).

Rajasekhar’s analysis in this regard is insightful: He classified the Untouchables into 3 groups: 1) Harijans - who have allied with the dominant groups, and have obtained power positions in politics; 2) the Scheduled Castes - who have made use of the privileges accorded them by the state, and have become educated and employed, and are engrossed in their own well-being; and 3) the Dalits - who are angry with the present system and want to bring about change through revolution (See Augustine 1996). Elsewhere, he says that Dalits are all those who are oppressed and underprivileged, and the Scheduled Castes are the Dalits among the Dalits.

In the final analysis, today, what constitutes dalit-ness is their consciousness, as belonging to a group which has borne the oppression of centuries, and thus being one people, a nation! (Jose, 1991). Jose brings in the comparison of the Jews as a nation, who were scattered all over the world, spoke various languages, were oppressed globally, but still were one people, one nation. Similarly, he asserts, that the Dalits are one people, scattered all over the country, after the invasion of Aryans and displacement of the Ādi-dravidians from their settlements, perhaps, from those well-established civilization of Indus valley. Their religious symbols were co-opted and aryanised to the extent that they became part of the Aryan culture, and thus came to be thought of as part of the Aryan culture and religion, which were later named as Hindu3, after the river Indus. The vital difference between the Jews and

3Ref. Jose, 1991. Hindu – P. Parameswaran, Kerala Kaumudi June 1989. Hindu refers to a culture, and all who dwell in India are Hindus. Dalit Bandhu opposes this view as a contradiction to the popular
the Dalits in this respect is that while Jews had a very strong sense and knowledge of history, this was totally lacking among the Dalits, as is the case generally with the Indian subcontinent (Jose, 1991).

Ilaiah points out the triple alienations of the outcastes: from the village production and marketing processes, from the village social setting, and from themselves, from their own identity as dalitbahujan (Ilaiah, 1996). Perhaps, the most fundamental among the three is the last, alienation from their own identity. It is against this backdrop that dalitism as an assertion of dalit identity is being spoken of.

‘Dalitism’ as an expression of the consciousness of the downtrodden has been a notable feature since the beginning of the eighties. The lack of a written normative ordering of society has led to the Dalit culture being trampled upon and submerged in the dominant culture, whether it was Hindu, Christian or Islam. Dalit protests, Dalit writers, critics and literature have become an instrument of the educated middle class from among the Dalits paving way to an articulated dalit world vision, namely, ‘dalitism’. It is a philosophy, a value system and a social order which deeply respect perspectivism (Raj, 2002).

2.3.2. DALITISM – A STRENGTH BASED APPROACH TO DALIT REALITY

“It is through loving ourselves and taking pride in our culture that we can live a better life in future”, says Ilaiah (1996:132). In asserting one’s identity, one needs elements to be cherished and to be proud of. In their absence, that identity is often shunned. Dalitism endeavours to identify the strengths of dalit culture, which are not seen elsewhere. In contrast to the dominant cultures with values on individualism and universalism, the dalit cultures stress communitarianism (Raj 2002).

Vasavi (2006) refers to the loss of the “vast repertoire of knowledge and skills that members of the scheduled communities possessed”. A listing could include crafts and artisanal abilities, knowledge forms of medicine, ecology, agriculture, animal husbandry, etc. which are being continually eroded on the basis of their non-viability in the industrialized era, and in addition to the association of such works with pollution. Education has to have a broader perspective in which such skills and domains become integrated.
2.3.2.a Strengths of the Dalit Culture

Ilaiah (1996) presents many positive elements of dalit culture which are to be realized and preserved for creating a more equal and productive society. He highlights the values in the dalit culture as follows:

- collective communitarian consciousness, which serves as a source of hope against situations appearing hopeless. “The very mode of Dalitbahujan existence makes the notion of ‘private’ impossible, indeed unthinkble. Every personal relationship among the Dalitbahujans is both social and political. Here human bonds are structured in terms of ‘we’ but not ‘I’. Even if the concept of ‘I’ exists, it does not have the same meaning ...as ...among the ‘upper’ castes” (pp. 40-41).

- A culture of sharing - of sorrows and joys; an uninhibited and open culture, where there are minimum things to be kept secret, rather, everything is debated in the open - man-woman relationships, parent-child relationships, fights.

- A productive, protective and procreative culture.

- An epistemology blended with and rooted in productive labour; knowledge of science of cultivation, soil, medicine - learned through the scientific and experimenting mind of the Dalit.

- Preservation of bio-diversity - a dalit culture; women having a major role in the preservation of various varieties of seeds/species.

- A culture which is more friendly with the nature. He refers to it as a stronger consciousness that gives more importance to nature than to sacred beings. It is a consciousness that constructs its own kind of character.

- Women’s equal role, even in the presence of patriarchy. Women drink, eat and smoke with men; they have due share in the productive labour. Freedom from oppressive man-woman relationships is possible; Women are respected for their own selves, can re-marry, can play leadership roles in the productive field. “Because of ... (her) inherently assured rights, a wife does not have to treat her husband as a God. A dalitbahujan woman does not have to perform pādapūja (worship of feet or worship at feet) to her husband...does not have to address her husband in a the way she would address a superior.”
- A religion very earthy - bound by the earth and life of today; friendly to nature and productive labour. No need of an exploitative mediator for relating to God. Their gods are real people who have gone before them and set a path for them in making their lives better. e.g, Kaṭṭamaisamma, the goddess, for her water conserving method; Birappa, the god, as an expert sheep breeder; Pēccamma, the goddess, for her herbal medicines for various illnesses; Pēṭarāju, the god, as the protector of fields.

- Raj (2002) identifies Dalits as eco-people whose religion was based on the worship of earth. This is part of a culture of ‘cosmosity’, a life in identification with the cosmos. Another trait is the worship of ancestors.

- Concern for today and unconcerned about tomorrow. A confidence in the power to labour (and earn!). Ilaiah has a criticism for the general criticism of the dalit way of life: “The state agencies, and also the Indian ‘upper’ castes, have been criticizing the culture of dispossession among the Scheduled Castes as ‘spendthrift’. These groups speak of the latter as ‘lazy fellows’...the ‘lower caste bastards’ should not be given anything as they do not know how to retain or invest it’...It is rather, that they have never believed in the power embodied in property (op. cit. 42).

In the context of dalitism, he argues for the need to dalitize rather than Hinduize, the society at large. “It is only a conscious Dalitbahujan movement which can, step by step, decasteize society, socialize the means of production, and finally create human socialism in India” (Ilaiah, 1996:52).

Ilaiah (1996) posits an equal society or reduction in inequality as the solution for fundamental problem of human selfishness and presents ‘dalitwādās’ to counter its obverse that the survival of human systems depends on preservance of inequalities. The dalitwādās exhibit an energy sans cut-throat competition.

2.3.2.b A Rights Perspective

Bandhu (1994-1) says that dalit issue is not a minority rights issue, but a human rights issue of a majority community. For, he observes that the Dalits are Dalits first, and then, Hindu or Christian. And when the development of Dalits is concerned, they form almost 25 crores among Indian population.

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4 Where Dalits dwell as a community, kind of a slum or hamlet.
2.3.2.c Identity Politics

Identity Politics the post 1980 era has seen a steady emergence of nation states based on ethnic identity often through the assertion of sections opposed to social transformation. Religion and ethnicity are becoming the central concerns of nation-statehood. A similar trend is seen within India as well, where religion and caste based identities have been politicised to gain access to power. Thus we see the emergence of Hindutwa, Bahujan samāj, power war in the North Eastern states etc. on the basis of religious, caste and ethnic identities. The immediate impact of such resurgences is felt by the subaltern groups. “...this type of politics is generally based on hatred for the followers of other religions and repression of the weaker sections of society like women and Dalits. It creates a hysterical atmosphere and the real issues of society are thus hidden and bypassed” (Pinto, 2002:96).

On the other hand, ‘caste’ identity is constantly being discovered by various castes as a platform for getting organized in the national politics. It is also the outcome of the realization that the dalit problems require political solutions. It was Ambedkar who projected the dalit issue as a political problem. It seems that Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) took a leaf from his charter. Its ideology is that ‘political power is the sole means for dalit empowerment’. Hence it is willing to align with any group that helps it to gain political power (Aram, 2002).

In the context of Keralam, the dalit identity has not yet emerged as a powerful political force. The last century saw the successful organization of an oppressed caste - Īzhaviyās getting organized and becoming a force to be reckoned with, though it has not yet become a political party, nor has it contested elections. In a similar manner, the forward caste group of the Nairs are also organized under the Nair Service Society (NSS), wielding considerable influence in political matters and decisions. However, the Dalits have not yet become a politically organized group, nor do they seem to exert influence as a group in political decisions. Rather, the Dalits in Keralam are found to be at the receiving end in the caste considerations in the political field. There is no caste based organization for all the Dalits to come together. Organisations like pulaya mahāsabha are restricted to the smaller groups, and do not wield much influence. It is also likely that the oppressed castes generally have identified themselves with the left politics, which have addressed the issues of just wages for labour (in the organized fields), land allocation through the land ceiling act.
2.3.3. DALIT IDENTITY TO COUNTER CASTE-INEQUALITY

In short, *dalitism* has emerged the single formidable approach to fighting the social inequality faced by a large section of Indian population. It holds the key for acceptance of one's identity at birth, identifying the strengths in the tradition, preserving the elements that can contribute to the common weal, and continuously transforming one's identity as would fit the ideals of justice and development.

Pandey (2006) speaks about dispositions as the crucial factor determining untouchability - of non-untouchables towards so-called untouchables, and the latter towards themselves and towards the rest of the society. This is to be examined.

Louis has defined “assertion ... as ‘the act of claiming one’s rights’ or ‘a positive statement about oneself or one’s intent’. Thus, assertion could be defined as a positive declaration about oneself, one’s past, present and future” (2004:121). He notes that with the emergence of *dalit* assertion, social scientists have been forced to take note of caste discrimination.

While, this has become a fundamental approach or a basic strategy to be adopted to counter caste based inequality, cutting across all other strategies, even then, other strategies that have been adopted or could be adopted also need to be analysed.
2.4. MODES OF COPING WITH INEQUALITY

The identification of the common denominator upon which all the Dalits could balance their lives is their status of being oppressed, crushed and broken - being dalit. While assertion of ‘dalit’ identity forms a basic approach to coping with unjust inequalities, there should be, and there have been, other modalities adopted by the oppressed community and those siding with them, to cope with the unjust situation.

Loius (2004) claims that in spite of the continuing oppressive systems, the Dalits have become socially aware and politically conscious. When we look at the social inequality as it appears today, the inequality based on caste is apparently on the decrease. However, the situation is far from satisfactory. There are still pockets of serious injustice, and sections who still suffer dehumanising backwardness.

An effort is made to trace the various processes and events that can be seen as attempts to decrease or eradicate inequality and bring in equality.

2.4.1. MOVEMENTS FOR THE LIBERATION OF THE DALITS

The survey of Indian history shows a few recognizable movements which acted against the oppression of caste inequality, and thus in some sense, stood for the liberation of the Dalits.

2.4.1.a Buddhism & Sri Buddha

The first revolt against caste system is said to have been led by a non-dalit, the Kṣatřya Prince Siddhartha, who left the royal throne and went in search of the cause of suffering and means to eradicate it, and in the process became the Buddha (the enlightened one) and led to a great reformist religio-spiritual movement, Buddhism. Indirectly, his movement became a revolt, not because he opposed caste system, rather, because he did not observe caste system, and embraced everyone into his fold without the distinctions of high and low. His challenge to the dehumanising system was by way of proposing an altogether different way of life. Thus he substituted love as the eternal law (sanātana dharma) and stipulated absence of oppressiveness and hatred (adōśa) as one of the three means for the ultimate goal (arhatta). Many stories indicative of the rejection of caste order are found in the Jātaka stories (Chittooparampil, 2005). The substitution of the Aryan language with the local Pāli, is also seen as a method of defying the dominant culture (Rajawat, 2005). Buddha rejected all claims of superiority based on birth and emphasized conduct (caraṇa) and character (carita) as the determinants of a person’s worth. His
dhama (religion) and sangha (community) embraced members of all four varnas without distinction (Augustine, 1991). Ambedkar referred to Buddhism as a revolution as great as the French Revolution. In his unfinished work, “Revolution and Counter Revolution”, Ambedkar posits an era of conflict between Buddhism and Brahminism, regarding social organization, which finally ends in the triumph of Brahminism in Pushyamitra in 8th century, leading to a more repressive regime supported by religious and moral codes like Manusmriti (Kapoor, 2004).

Khare (1984:xii) speaks about Buddhist inspiration in coping with discrimination. Buddhist sutra says: “You are your own master; you are your own destiny. Therefore, keep yourself as restrained as a trader keeps his beautiful horse.”

However, Bougle’s (1971:73) observation is worth noting: Buddhism did challenge the non-equalitarian Hindu system. However, “if they worked at replacing the roof, they never gave a thought to changing the foundation”.

**2.4.1.b Jainism**

Jainism had its starting point with the enlightenment of Vardhamāna Mahāvīra who is said to be the last (twenty fourth) in the line of fiarthakarās or spiritual leaders (Thottakkara, 2005). They raised a challenge to the existing caste based unequal system by embracing everyone into their fold, and dealing with everyone based on the principle of ahimsa (non-violence) and by making use of Prākrit, the commoner’s language instead of Sanskrit (Rajawat, 2005).

**2.4.1.c Cārvākās:**

Also called lōkāyata, they were a group of people who rebelled against all sorts of systems and structures, and in that sense challenged the caste based inequality as well. They are said to have been a school of thought between 6th and 5th centuries BCE. They questioned everything that was beyond direct experience, and accepted only two values: wealth (artha) as the means, and pleasure (kāma) as the goal (Thottakkara, 2005). It placed little value on nobility of birth or caste superiority, and included the latter among one of the eight forms of arrogance a householder was asked to shun. The purpose of religious conduct (carita) is to remove the condition of inequality. Under the broad banner of non-injury is included the shunning of covetousness which leads to social and economic inequality (Augustine, 1991). But

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1 Cara vak yasya sah – He who has beautiful words.
they also could not exert much influence on the Indian mind, so as to end or alter the oppressive caste inequality, rather have become co-opted into the system.

2.4.1.d Bhakti Movement - Kabir and Other Bhakti Poets

It is often acknowledged that Bhakti movement of the middle ages served as a counter culture to the existing oppressive caste order. Bhakti movement is seen as a socio-spiritual movement, with spiritual appearance and social content - it linked devotion to praxis. Sufism, the stream within Islam, preached equality of all as children of the only God, and the caste differences as man-made. Kabirdas (1440-1518) and Guru Nanak (1469-1539) are accepted as the leaders of Bhakti movement. It was a movement from ‘below’, in the sense of being initiated by people of oppressed castes, and embraced all without distinction. At times, Kabir sayings are open criticism of caste system and ritualism. However, not all leaders of Bhakti movement were radical to withstand the dominant caste strategy of cooptation. (Augustine, 1991; Chittooparampil, 2005; Thottakkara, 2005; Rajawat, 2005)

Another leader of Bhakti movement was Raidas or Ravidas (1450-1520), who belonged to the camār caste was a great inspiration for the dalits. His ‘nirgun bhakti mārg’ was revived by Mangoo Ram in 1926, by establishing Ād Dharm. “For the untouchable poor in the towns, the message of caste equality and the denial of ritual hierarchy in bhakti gave them a means to question discriminations, disabilities and deprivation that they continued to face” (Gooptu, 2001:151).

2.4.1.e Satya Śōdhak Samāj - Joti Rao Phule

One of the earliest attempts at organizing the Dalits and working for their uplift began with the work of Mahatma Jotirao Phule in Pune, Maharashtra. While himself belonging to a śūdra caste, he led a movement that worked relentlessly towards the liberation of the ati śūdras or the untouchables of those times, especially the Mahars and Mangs of Maharashtra. Satya Śōdhak samāj established in 1873, was both a movement and an organisation which worked for the liberation of the Dalits and the women with education as the main strategy. He was of the view that social slavery was worse than political slavery and was convinced that education was the way to social equality. His campaign at times turned really vituperative in the criticism of Brahmanical authority and exploitation. He preferred the rule of the British to that of

2 Jatipanti kucc pucce nahin koi Let no one ask about caste or religion; what is important is to be the Lord’s.
3 devotion to God who is formless and nameless; beyond all attributes (guna)
self-rule by the native caste Hindus, for he sensed that it would merely lead to the reinforcement of the caste based inequality and cruelty. A radical thinker and activist of his times, his movement had the traits of conflict - against the Brahman domination; reform - of the Dalits, other oppressed classes and the women; development - in the sense of promotion of education; and legislation and policy related efforts by influencing those who were in power, especially the British and the King of Baroda, Sayaji Rao Gaikwad, Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur etc. His strategy also had elements of sanskritisation, in that he developed and promoted an alternative ritual based religious practice through Satya sodhak samaj. The important difference lay in the absence of the Brahman priest. His other important weapon was pen, which he wielded like a sword. His own books and the journal Dinbandhu - Friend or relative of the Suffering - were having a one point agenda of liberation and end of oppression (Keer, 1974).

2.4.1.f Sree Nārayana Dharma Paripālana Yogam - Sree Narayana Guru

One of the earliest mass movements in the history of the struggle for social equality is seen in the Izhava caste movement in Keralam, under the leadership of the enlightened Sree Narayana Guru. The revolutionary non-violent assertion of the human rights of this oppressed caste began with the consecration of sivaling (Phallus symbol) at Aruvippuram in 1888. His disarming response to the questioning upper caste groups was that his consecration (pratistha) was not of savarna Siva, but of Izhava Siva. Thereafter, his series of pratisthās generated a wave of awakening among this community. The founding of Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam in 1903 consolidated the gains of the movement and established it into an organization. While the organization took the educational and organizational attempts of the community by establishing numerous schools and institutions of higher education, it failed the guru in following his basic precepts of liberation and equality beyond religions and castes: “One caste, one religion, one God for humans” and “what is important is that man becomes good, irrespective of what religion he follows.” In the course of its development it has become an exclusive community, which wields considerable influence in today’s political scenario of Keralam (Kapoor, 2004).

2.4.1.g Sādhu Jana Paripālana Sangham - Ayyankāli

Ayyankāli emerges as the pioneering dalit leader who with rare insight asserted the basic facts of dalit existence as the poor (sādhū), and tried to establish solidarity
among the oppressed on the basis of their being poor under the banner sādhu jana paripālana sangham.

Ayyankāli’s vision is also seen in the expression of vision of dalit community in response to Gandhiji’s visit after the Temple Entry Proclamation, and addressing him ‘pulaya raja’. He said that his desire was to see at least 10 people of his community having obtained a B.A. (rather than their being permitted to enter the temples) shows his visionary stature, whose thinking (and practice) were not different from the great leader Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar who gave the Dalits the motto: “educate, agitate, organise”.

Ayyankāli sent a petition to the King asking him not to permit any forced conversions, and if anyone wanted to convert willingly, not to block that either. A government order was released to this effect (Bandhu, 1994c: 65).

The history of dalit conversions to Christianity can be traced back to the attempts of LMS missionaries in 1806. Pulayar, Parayar, Kuravar and Cānnār became Christians. To prevent this outflow from Hinduism Sadānandaswāmi founded brahmanīṣṭhā maṭham. Fights between the converted Christians and members of the maṭham became common. It was then that Ayyankāli stepped in, to unite both these sections under sādhu jana paripālana sangham in 1905. This was a movement which focused on the status of the community as ‘poor’ (sadhu) a realistic nomenclature rather than the idealistic and condescending nomenclature of harijan (Bandhu, 1994b).

Hence, Ayyankāli’s contribution becomes unique, as a visionary who understood that what was needed was not conversion to other religions, but the unity of all the Dalits (the oppressed and the poor), and hence he formed sādhujanaparipālana sangham, and even went away from brahmanīṣṭhā maṭham, which was again an effort to retain the Dalits in the Hindu fold, a concern more from the fear of Hinduism/Hindus losing strength, rather than the development of the society in general or that of the Dalits. So also with Christian conversions, as the goal was not the progress of the Dalits, but strengthening of the Christian fold, or of the spiritual well-being of the souls of the Dalits (Bandhu 1994c).

Ayyan Kāli’s effort was to unite all the deprived classes, rather than initiate a sanskritization process in which they would aspire to be like savarnās. He realized that the rights must be taken, and not just given as doles. He approached the government for the admission of the children of the Dalits (sādhu) in schools, and it
was granted; when the savarnās opposed this, he asked the sādhus to boycott work in the fields of such savarnās. Ayyankāli countered in the same coin attempts against dalit liberation using physical force (Bandhu, 1994b). However, his vision and efforts were thwarted by the manoeuvres of the dominant castes under the leadership of the Diwān as described in Sec. 2.2.5.d.

**2.4.1.h Periyar, E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker and Self-Respect Movement**

In Tamil Nadu, it was Periyar (1879-1973) who gave leadership to the slavery established through the Brahmanical scriptures. His efforts were oriented to include all non-Brahmins, Christians, and Muslims in the struggle against caste-based oppression. He was instrumental in changing the appellation ‘untouchables’ into ‘depressed classes’ in the official documents. He challenged the oppressed people to throw away the baggage of ancient scriptures, which sanctioned unjust and exploitative social relations. Starting off as a congress member, he got disillusioned with its elitist and high caste orientation and launched his own in 1925 what came to be known as Self-Respect Movement, perhaps drawing inspiration from the Vaikom agitation in which he himself took part. In 1940s he assumed leadership of Justice Party, and transformed it into Drāvid Kazhagam, which became the basis for the Dravidian politics of the South. His was non-sectarian, non-religious, atheist militant, almost extremist kind of movement. Those who thought of a more involved political process opposed his stance, leading to a new party, Drāvida Munnētra Kazhagam, led by C.N. Annādurai and M. Karunanidhi. This further split to form Anna DMK. However, the Drāvida movement led by Periyar did succeed in making the Dalits of Tamil Nadu assert their identity and resist the hegemony of Brahmanism. However, the power and inequality induced by caste, did not end there; rather, it has reappeared in new permutations and combinations in the civic life of Tamil Nadu (Kapoor, 2004; Chandra, 2004; Chittooparampil, 2005, Rajawat, 2005).

**2.4.1.i Hindu Movements**

Ārya Samāj was founded by Dayānand Saraswati (1824-1883) in 1875. He found the key to the degeneracy of Hinduism in its deviance from the Vedic religion. Satyārtha Prakāśh remains the basic text of Aryasamāj. Dayanand championed education and merit, and argued that a person from the lowest level of society could become a Brahmin by virtue of qualifications. He held that Vedas and sacred texts were not barred to the outcastes and women but was open to all (Hansen, 2006).

Contemporary and a close friend of Sree Narayana Guru, Chattampi Swāmkal (1853-1925) worked for the revival of Hinduism by criticizing the Brahmin
domination, ritualism and inequality (especially of women) prevailing in the Hindu society of Keralam. He also tried to defend Hinduism, and criticized Christian religion through his work Kristumataschēdanam. He promoted vegetarianism. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chattampi_Swamikal)

2.4.1. j Freedom Struggle & Constructive Work - Mahatma Gandhi

As Gandhi entered the national movement for freedom struggle, he began to stress social reform of the community as pre-requisite for political freedom. It appears that his concern for the Dalits emerged from his concern for India and Hindu community as a united nation. For the uplift of the Dalits, he established Harijan Sēvak Sangh. While he insisted on the obligation of so-called caste Hindus towards the Dalits as atonement for the iniquity of their forbears, he also stressed that “it is for each one to free oneself from bondage by one’s own effort. Harijans should not look upon themselves as lowly, weak or crippled” (cited by Rajawat, 2005:277).

2.4.1.j.1. Antyōdaya - Harijanōddhāran & removal of untouchability

For Gandhi, untouchability and caste based inequality were something to be tackled by Indian society. He based his arguments against it on the basis of ethical and religious principles. He was of the view that it was a sin to treat people unequally and inhumanly on the basis of their castes. Gandhi tried to distinguish between varna and jāti. The former being the divinely ordered division of labour, which is to be preserved and the latter to be abolished, as no occupation was below dignity, and all who engaged in various occupations were fulfilling vital roles for the society. For him it was the duty of the caste Hindus to change the situation. And all the institutions - religious and educational, should be open to all without discrimination.

Gandhi asked the Dalits to observe cleanliness, abstain from alcohol and left over food. He also asked them not to rely on the government for the redressal of their problems, nor on change of religion, but rather on self-reliance and self purification.

The congress under Gandhiji’s influence passed a resolution in 1917 to work actively for eradicating untouchability. Gandhi was very negative regarding the government proposal in 1932 for separate electorate for the Dalits. He viewed it as a step in perpetuating the discrimination against the Dalits and would lead to the dismemberment of the Dalits from the Hindu fold.

The Congress passed a resolution in 1932 (Sitaramayya: 536) which reads as follows:
The conference resolves that, henceforth, amongst Hindus no one shall be regarded as an untouchable by reason of his birth and that those who have been so regarded hitherto will have the same right as other Hindus in regard to the use of public wells, public school, public roads and all other public institutions. This right shall have statutory recognition at the first opportunity and shall be one of the earliest Acts of the Swaraj Parliament, if it shall not have received such recognition before that time.

It is further agreed that it shall be the duty of all Hindu leaders to secure, by every legitimate and peaceful means, an early removal of all social disabilities now imposed by custom upon the so-called untouchable classes, including the bar in respect of admission to temples.

Gandhi declared a fast unto death on the eve of passing the bill on separate electorate. A solution was finally arrived at by statutory reservation of seats, through primary election. However, all this did not do away with the discriminatory practices, and a disillusioned Ambedkar, described the congress policy loaded with moral overtones as a ‘Plan to kill by Kindness’.

However, in the later decades, especially, after independence, Gandhian approach to this issue in general, and the terminology ‘harijani’ have been severely criticised, and there have been many authors, especially dalit authors or pro-dalit authors, who have described Gandhi as a casteist, and his efforts including the terminology as a camouflage for the same, and at best, paternalistic. His stance on the communal award – against creating special constituencies for the Dalits – has been perceived as a severe blow to the progress of the Dalits. Kadankavil (1997) and Jose (1991) have presented and critiqued the various instances in Gandhi’s life through which an apparent anti-dalit stance emerges.

Bandhu (1994c) analysing Gandhi’s encounter with the dalit leader Ayyankali of Kerala, finds a hidden Hindutva agenda behind Gandhiji’s addressing him as pulayarāja, while Gandhi was, at that time trying to popularise the term harijan for the Dalits. He asks then why did it not occur to Gandhi that he was harijanrāja rather than pulayarāja. Is it because he and people like Diwan C.P Ramaswami Iyyer
could not digest Ayyankali’s stand for *dalit* unity, rather than Hindu protection and concessions for *dalit* liberation?

All the criticisms notwithstanding, it is accepted that Gandhi’s leadership did make *dalit* issue a matter of national concern and brought that to the consciousness of the general public.

**2.4.1.j.2. Temple entry**

In 1918, * İzhaivas* appealed to the government of Travancore for the opening of state temples to all Hindus, and in 1921 this was accompanied by a threat to convert into Christianity *en masse*. In 1924-25, the famous Vaikom Satyagraha took place for obtaining rights to the roads around the Vaikom temple. In this, Gandhiji was personally involved, and also maintained the stand that this should be a struggle within Hinduism, for its reformation, to be waged by the Hindus themselves. Though the struggle resulted in gaining access to the roads, the access to temples came to be a reality only in 1936, with the Temple Entry Proclamation. In analysing Gandhi’s stance in the whole issue, Ambedkar while appreciating his initiative in bringing the issue of untouchability to the fore, also pointed out the disharmony in the same, saying that his insistence on this factor, did not match with the intensity with which he promoted *Khādi*, making renouncement of untouchability a pre-condition for voting rights in the party (Zelliot, 1998).

Temple entry, still remains a symbol and a paradoxical one at that. Even after 80 years of the Vaikom struggle, temples of this country are not really open and accessible to the Dalits. Much fanfare is made when a group of Dalits succeeds in obtaining entry into a temple closed to them⁴. It is a paradoxical symbol because in spite of the oppression and casting out, the path the Dalits still seek or are encouraged to seek is a path of ‘assimilation’ into the oppressor’s system, rather than finding a path of their own, as shown by Phule and Sree Narayana Guru.

**2.4.1.k Neo-Buddhist Movement - Baba Saheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar**

*Dalit* assertion finally found its personification in Dr. Ambedkar, who established himself as a leader of reckoning in the national politics, in spite of the limitations of his caste background. The fight for access to the use of the water of ‘Chaudar

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⁴ Reference: Bhilwara, Rajasthan. Dec 12: More than 400 Dalits together entered a temple in Bhilwara district’s Suliya village peacefully on Tuesday, defying the age-old ban on their entry there, enforced by the influential Gurjars under the leadership of the famous social activist Aruna Roy (The New Indian Express, Edition. 13 Dec. 2006); Keradagada village in Kendrapara District in Orissa where on Dec. 14th four Dalit men’s entry into a 300 year old temple was a news item (The Hindu, 15Dec. 2006)
pond’, access to Ambādevi Temple, Kālā rām Temple etc. were the first phase of his public work (1925-30). This was followed by a series of literature on dalit history and rights - Caste in India (1916), Annihilation of Caste (1936), Who were the Śūdras? (1946), The Untouchables etc.

He defined caste as the factor of fragmentation of what was once an undivided whole.

He observed that the basis of Hindu religion was caste, and if caste does not exist there would be no Hindu religion as well. For, it is through the caste based ritualistic observations that one finds one’s spirituality and religion. Hence the remedy for caste annihilation lies in the rejection of religion. The failure of the efforts of Sri Buddha, Mahātma Phule, Sri Ayyankālli, Periyār Sri Rāmswāmy Nāicker was on account of the resistance of religions (Bose, 1999).

However, Ambedkar sensed that the caste to be destroyed would take ages, and it would result only from a clash between the upper and lower castes. Hence other means had to be sought. He found this in the constitutional remedies through compensatory measures, and in collective assertion of one’s identity by choosing an egalitarian religion - Buddhism.

Today, when the contribution of two great National leaders towards this issue are compared, Gandhian nomenclature of ‘harijan’ has come to be regarded an object of ‘pity’ (and compassion), but Ambedkar’s ‘Dalit’ is an individual filled with pride and self-respect (Loius, 2004). Ambedkar’s emphasis on rationality, education, cleanliness and the call for a move to the cities (Pandey 2006). This was in contrast with the Gandhian approach in three ways: a shift from spiritualist-moralising stand to rational and realistic analysis of the problem; whereas Gandhi extolled the rural and the village based development, Ambedkar saw in the rural the subjugation of the oppressed people at work, and he saw the city life as an opportunity for liberation from the clutches of caste; and lastly, whereas Gandhian vision had the upper castes as the people having the ‘moral’ duty to treat the Dalits respectfully and equally, to Ambedkar, it was the Dalits themselves who had to organise and agitate to attain liberation. It was not to be a benefactor’s whim, rather, the right of the oppressed.

Today, Ambedkar has become an icon, a symbol, a rallying point for the Dalits. He is almost a modern day saint, who is gradually being elevated to the position of a deity or an incarnation, so much so that an attack on his statue is termed as
desecration.5 His picture decorates the walls of a dalit home, his works are avidly read and studies by action groups among the Dalits. And he stands tall as a symbol of what a Dalit can achieve.

2.4.2. OTHER MODELS

2.4.2.a Conflict Models - Dalit Panther

The dalit scenario in general has become very identity conscious. V.T. Rajashekar (2006) proposes caste war (varṇa yuddha) based on caste identity thesis. For him ‘India’s road to socialism lies in caste war’ (Dalit Voice, June 16, 2006:4).

The efforts for due representation is being identified as the means to ensuring equal rights. In the election to the local bodies 2005, Dalit Christians of Keralam launched a forum called ‘Human Rights Front’ (manuṣyāvakāsa munnar). It was meant to capture the vote bank of the marginalized sections. Their logic being ensuring that true representatives of the basic community (āṭīṣṭhāna vargam) would be elected irrespective of caste and creed (Circular by P.O. Peter, Convener Sep. 14, 2005).

Kapoor (2004) speaks of anger responses, expression of which may involve risk as has been exhibited in the violence-counter-violence incidents in the various part of India, the latest being the burning of train boggies in Maharashtra in reaction towards the desecration of Ambedkar statue in Kanpur on November 30, 2006.

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5 Thus, e.g., the desecration of Ambedkar statue in Kanpur, U.P. on November 29th 2006, leading to widespread violence and arson all around the country, especially in Maharashtra.
2.4.2.b Conversion for Liberation

Phule described how the Portuguese forcibly converted the Brahmins, Śūdrās and AtiŚūdrās to Christianity and made them happy; similarly, the Muslims too. However he maintained that these people embraced Christianity or Islam because they were suppressed, harassed and ground down under poverty (Keer, 1974).

It was one of the strategies Ambedkar adopted to liberate the masses from the clutches of caste based slavery. It was at the same time a way to liberation as well as a socio-political protest. It was a movement from a hierarchical community to a community of equality. However, Ambedkar’s dream of a united dalit struggle has not yet been materialized. Rather, the Dalits themselves have maintained within them the caste based hierarchy through sub-castes, religion and even class (Pinto 2006). According to Pandey (2006) conversion includes mass religious conversions of the Dalits to Buddhism (1956) and to other religions before or after that.

The last three or four centuries have seen the conversion of Dalits into various egalitarian religions such as Islam, Sikkhism and Christianity, besides the organized mass conversion under Ambedkar’s leadership. The most pronounced among these movements, and spread all over the country was the conversion into Christianity (various denominations). Starting from the beginning of 18th century the phase of conversion from dalit and tribal communities in India, gained in strength and lasted till the last quarter of 20th century. “Missionaries realized that the slave communities were more open to the gospel which would liberate them from social anathema” (Chandra, 2004:25). It is significant to notice that during and immediately after the period of riots between the Nāir and the Pulayar communities, mass movement had taken place to Christianity from the Pulayar in Keralam (Gladstone, 1984:289). The missionary zeal of the Christian missionaries and the craving for emancipation of the dalit communities, complemented each other in the flow of people into various Christian denominations. While established Churches had greater number of new converts into their fold, gradually, the inequalities within those Churches, led the people to seek liberation elsewhere, and this has found realization in their accepting evangelical and Pentecostal traditions (Chandra, 2004, Fernandes, 1983).
**Conversion for Emancipation**

Māda, 2006. narrates the experiences of Sulochana, a teacher from *dalit (pulaya)* community, who was forced by discriminating circumstances to leave her job as a craft (coir) teacher in a government school, way back in 1940s. She had the good fortune to get basic education in those times, and also an employment. But the school headmaster and other teacher colleagues would not let her come near. (the headmaster would keep the attendance register on the desk, and move away. He would touch it again only after swiping it with a piece of paper or cloth.) She was forbidden to approach the students. And the students would call her ‘*adiyār* teacher’. Pained by her isolation and insult she resigned the job and sought other jobs and finally became a daily labourer.

She describes the arrival of Basel Mission in Madayi Panchayat, which led to an outflow of people from *pulaya* community. In 1996 there were 2984 people in the reserved category in the 40185 strong panchayat. This region witnessed a massive conversion from the scheduled castes. The Catholic Mission called *Chirakkal Pulaya Mission*, established by Father Cairony and Fr. Tafarel in 1939 and their humanitarian approach led to this conversion.

She says that though she resisted becoming a Christian, finally she had no way but to join to prevent becoming isolated from the community. Though she did not receive anything by joining the Basel mission, the attitude of people changed since their conversion. People began to come to her come. Isolation got over.

Her contemporary Stephen speaks about the various factions in the Pulaya caste - caste within caste (sub-castes) based on *taravāru (illam)* or clans. There are lower and higher clans among the *Pulayar*. For marriage alliances this is a matter of concern. *Taiyil kūṭar, Čēran kūṭar, Kōzhi kūṭar* - these are lower clans. In Malabar, this tradition was changed by *Vilakriyan* clan in Mattool. They invited all the clans for marriage. It was the initiative of one Pallan Choyi.

Sulochana: “Due to conversion, we got mental peace. We did not crave for financial betterment. (*sāmpatika meccam āgrahiccittilla*). Since the teacher post was resigned voluntarily, there are no privileges (allowances) from that source either.”

She cites the example of Kelappaji, who did not differentiate between *harijans* and others. “He was a great man. A person with love...for him all human beings were one. When I was in the hostel I did not have the feeling of being a harijan.” (p.23)

Madai says in his remarks: “Even when the society is being extremely ‘modernized’, and when new salary-appointment-wage conditions are being formulated, caste and community are seeking ways to find entry into Kerala minds with black masks of inequality (high-low). Between the contradictions of a depoliticized *dalit* chauvinism and politicized (high) casteism, the problems of marginalised communities continue to remain unresolved.” (p.23)

In the section ‘Good News for Dalits’, Webster (1992) quotes an old folk song (described as ‘slave song’) of the *Pulayar* of Nagercoil, which describes how the...
acceptance of Christianity has rendered them free. This is of 1883, which is an indicator of the feeling of freedom that the conversion brought to the oppressed castes.

2.4.2. c Religiosity and Spirituality

John (2003) refers to popular religiosity of songs and rites as a means adopted by the Dalits to cope with oppression. Finding new identity outside Hinduism by adopting other religious faiths was another effort. However, the dominant section of those religions did not give them the acceptance as equals. Hence, the stigma of ‘untouchability’ has continued to remain.

Sanalmohan (2004) raises the ‘lack’ of history as an important aspect of dalit existence. He highlights efforts or movements which were expressions of a deep desire to discover the history of the historyless. The case of ‘pratyakṣa rakṣā sabhā’ founded by Poykayil Yohannan is cited. A reflection of the experience of slavery in their prayers and songs was helpful in creating a consciousness that was alert towards their historical experience. This history is ritualized leading to the hope of future liberation (mōkṣam). The rituals remind the present generation of the experiences of slavery through the dress and other symbols of servitude.

2.4.2.d Political Organisation - BSP

Ambedkar was the first dalit leader to realise the importance of political organisation and initiated the same. In 1942, he founded the All India Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF), a political organisation for the Dalits. In 1945 elections, it was completely routed without a single seat. In 1957, this was transformed into Republican Party of India. However, its influence did not extend beyond Maharashtra, and was mainly confined to the Mahar community. 1970 onwards, it has witnessed splits and weakening of its activities. Rajawat (2005) observes that the party no longer remains a representative of the dalit interests.

Though of a very late arrival, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has established that one of the most effective ways of liberation for the Dalits is political organisation. It is the brainchild of a Sikh Dalit, Kanshi Ram, who resigned his job in 1964 following a long-drawn dispute on caste issues. Drawing inspiration from Ambedkar, he initiated BAMCEF (Backward And Minority Community Employees’ Federation) in 1978 and DS4 (Dalit Sōṣit Samāj Sanghaṛ Samiti) in 1981. From his convictions and efforts was born the political party of BSP on April 14, 1984. His basic tenet is that political power is the key to remove all blocks in the way of progress. Their central theme is
‘retributive justice’ which is meant to correct the wrongs done against the Dalits in the past by providing them their rightful share and place in the society today. In the short span of its existence, and having the clear goal of ‘power by any means’, it could achieve the rare feat of placing a *dalit* woman as the Chief Minister of the state of Uttar Pradesh. It has its base in the North Western region of India, and has established a new identity for the Dalits as ‘*bahujan*’ – the majority (Chittooparampil, 2005).

2.4.2.e Dalit Literature

John (2003) finds *dalit* literature as an avenue for *dalit* expression and assertion. Zelliot (1996) has surveyed and presented the *dalit* response to discrimination and oppression through the literary expression. Kapoor (2004) examines the *dalit* literature and compares the same with the African American literature and points out the underlying anger and resentment at the suppression and taken-for-grantedness, which at times turn into violence, and at times does not. In the USA such a debate was held on such sentiments, the discussions, later, were published as “Anger and Beyond”. However, *dalit* literature is not a literature of hatred. *Dalit Sāhitya* first promotes human greatness and human freedom and for that reason it is an historic necessity. It goes beyond the narrow confines of protest, to human greatness.

It reveals 1) “A new frame of reference questioning ‘symbolic violence’ based on biological, hereditary or racial inequality, power and authority, whether visible or internalized; 2) the formation of a counter-hegemonic discourse, leading to the perception of an alternative way of organizing human situation; 3) affirmation of a redefined identity; and 4) creation of a new aesthetics based on the hitherto neglected resources of evaluation and experience” (Kapoor, 2004:135).

2.4.2.f Human Capital Building

John (2003) says that processes to help the Dalits to empower themselves based on their own resources and experiences, and contribute towards the transformation of their oppressors. This would require a re-socialisation of themselves with new empowering values, attitudes and behaviour patterns. He points out the need for a shift from one-to-one counseling to group based psychological approach for community action to undo caste-based oppression and domination.

Why quotas go unfulfilled is often answered by stating that there are no sufficient number of qualified candidates to fill up the positions. This might be true, but policy
response should not be doing away with reservation but to work towards preventing drop out rates, and enhancing quality increasing mechanisms (Mohanty, 2006).

2.4.2.g Sanskritisation

Castes, if they grew in political and economic power, it was only after mimicking the behaviours and life-styles of higher castes (Srinivas, 1962). It has been observed that the followers of some of the leaders who transcended caste barrier themselves formed into fragmentary groups forming new castes. The historical movements against casteism like *satya sōdhak samāj* by Mahatma Joti Rao Phule and SNDP of Kerala led Sree Narayana Guru, finally ended up perpetrating casteism of a different order. Kapoor (2004) refers to the usage ‘Dalit Brahmans’ in this connection.

2.4.2.h Passing

Velaskar & Wankhade (1996) mentions the phenomenon of ‘passing’ as detailed by Berreman, in describing the strategies the Dalits adopt to cope with stigma of caste inequality. The attempt to escape from one’s stigmatised group identity by its concealment, and if necessary, its falsification. General practice is to pass on as a member of a super-ordinate group by adopting their dress, cultural orientation and mannerisms. With respect to the Dalits this occurs through concealing of caste, adopting high caste names, passing as Christians or Muslims in order to obtain food and lodging services, and simply to gain acceptance and avoid rejection. This also happens by way of keeping distance from one’s own community members. Their study found that some of them, especially those who adhere to Ambedkerite philosophy, feel very guilty about this behaviour as they feel they have gone against the principles they were taught by Ambedkar. Perhaps, it is this sentiment that is echoed in Ambedkar’s observation in 1956: “The educated - highly educated class have betrayed me. I had expected that after acquiring education - higher education, they will serve the society. But I see a crowd of clerks who are engaged in feeding their own stomach" (Kapoor, 2004:88).

2.4.2.i Clustering

Velaskar & Wankhade (1996) study also points out another strategy to cope with discrimination - Clustering is getting clustered in groups having same or similar identity. It might be due to constraints they feel as no one else might be interested in including them in their company; it might also be out of sheer need for security against alienation in a hostile society.
2.4.2. j Migration

Ambedkar’s emphasis on rationality, education, cleanliness and the call for a move to the cities, from the rigid and never-changing village life. He felt that the village life contained many contradictions which were concealed under the ideal picture presented about it (Pandey, 2006; Kapoor, 2004).

2.4.2. k Human Rights Perspective

The NHRC advocated a rights-based approach, rather than a welfare oriented approach towards the Dalits. In participating in the Durban World Conference against Racism in 2001, NHRC took an independent view from that of the government, in favour of the inclusion of caste discrimination as a form of racism (Desrochers, 2004).

Dalit Bandhu, N.K. Jose is of the view that peaceful means no longer hold strength, rather it has created a ‘sermonising/exhortation culture’ (upadēśa samskāram) which is ineffective and which depends on the goodwill of the dominant groups, and continued dependence of the subjugated groups (Kadankavil, 1999). What is required is the assertion of rights, rather than waiting for the condescendence of the savaṇḍa groups. That was what Sree Narayana Guru said on commenting on the Temple entry struggle of Vaikom that what was required was not satyāgraha, but walking the prohibited roads by removing the obstacles laid there in.

NCDHR was born out of the initiative of a few Human Rights Activists who have been working among Dalits and were studying the effectiveness of SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989. The persistent discrimination against the Dalits has led them to take this step. It tries to collaborate with the groups and movements already working for this cause. One of the basic tenets of dalit movements is that Dalits of all religions are primarily Dalits and should be listed as SCs. The campaign was to be carried out between 10th Dec. 1998 and 14th August 1999.

Amitha (1999:60-61) cites the key demands of NCDHR:

We assert that dalit rights are Human Rights. We affirm that the denial of the basic needs of the Dalits is a gross violation of dalit Human Rights. We seek the inclusion of caste discrimination and untouchability in the International Convention on Racial Discrimination (1966). We demand that the perpetrators of untouchability be severely punished according to the provisions of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and Rule (1989 and 1995). We demand full protection of Dalits in the Panchayati Raj Institutions and other democratic
institutions of the country. We demand that land, usurped by the State and private bodies, be restored to the Dalits. We demand reservations for Dalits in all private bodies (which receive some subsidies from the central or state governments). We demand that special measures be taken for the protection of the rights of *dalit* women. We demand that all Dalits, irrespective of their religious faith, be considered as SCs (and be eligible for reservations). We demand the right to freedom of thought and expression for the Dalits. We demand that a White Paper be placed in the Parliament on the atrocities against Dalits, (land reforms and Dalits) and the reservation facilities actually granted to Dalits since 1947. We demand that Dalit Human Rights be explicitly and constitutionally guaranteed in the Asian countries where Dalits are domiciled.

**2.4.2.1 Asserting and Promoting Dalit Culture**

Amitha (1999) also speaks about programme for promoting ‘*dalit* culture’. However, the pertinent question is whether the Dalits themselves know what *dalit* culture is, do they cherish it, and if at all to be promoted, is to be in *toto*, or certain aspects or elements of it.

Pinto (2006) is of the view that religion in the *dalit* context is an accident, rather than the core of their identity. The identity is that of a people oppressed - *dalit*. However, the religious affiliations, and the award or denial of reservation benefits have made the Dalits a divided community, where the multiple identity has diluted the core identity. He says that the way in which reservation benefits have been awarded in India on the basis of religious affiliation “is an attack on *dalit* identity and on their right to choose a religion of their choice” (Pinto, 2006:14).

The basic struggle of the Dalits is for land (economic - restoration of land allocated to the depressed classes during the British Raj and access to common property resources), social rights (the right to touch and be touched) and cultural rights [right to a self-defined identity and right not to be sanskritised.] (Stephen & Prabhakar, 2005).

**2.4.2. m Efforts at Moving the Global Community**

UN sponsored World Conference against Racism and Discrimination at Durban, South Africa, in 2001, debated on this issue and demanded inclusion of them as a matter of natural justice. All religions, in spite of their egalitarian claims are bound by the larger system within which they operate.
On 6th Oct. 2005, a team of activists from India, comprising Kancha Ilaiah, Indira Singh Athawale, Joseph D’Souza, T. Kumar and Udit Raj testified before a US congressional House Committee on the issue of caste discrimination. They urged the members to prevail upon the US businesses in India and various projects funded by the World Bank, IMF and USAID, to provide some economic opportunities and reservations to Dalits, just as they practise affirmative action in their own country (Raj, 2006)

2.4.3. MEASURES BY THE STATE

According to Galanter (1984) both formal and substantive form of equality are the functions of the state apparatus. The role of the state is second to none in ensuring justice and equality in the society. It is the only system which influences all sections of the society, and is meant to ensure justice to all without distinction. The measures generally taken by the state, and specifically in India, in connection with social equality are discussed here in.

2.4.3. a Merit versus Caste; Equality versus Social Justice

Scholars studying society and its stratification say that ‘caste is decaying, but casteism may live under the cloak of ‘merit’. When the question of admission of students into Engineering, Medical and Technical Institutions arises, merit shrewdly demands that a Brahman boy whose ancestors have been trained in intellectual pursuits be compared with a boy belonging to a class kept away from education for scores of generations’ (Keer, 1974:x).

The problem of equality (formal) is that in most of the societies it promotes inequality, because of the inequalities existent in the society. It had been the experience of most of the progressive states that it called for special treatment of the sections suffering from social inequity so that the society as a whole progresses towards the ideal of equality. Various forms of institutional arrangements for this purpose are found in various parts of the world.

Mandal commission report in unequivocal terms present the case of merit in the Indian caste context: ‘In fact, ‘merit’ itself is largely a product of favourable environmental privileges and higher rating in an examination does not necessarily reflect higher intrinsic worth of the examinee. Children of socially and educationally backward parents coming from rural background cannot complete on an equal footing with children from well to do homes. In view of this ‘merit’ and ‘equality’ should be viewed in proper perspective and the element of privilege should be duly
recognised and discounted for when ‘unequals’ are made to run the same race” (Aggarwal & Aggarwal, 1991:40).

2.4.3. b Affirmative Action and Positive/Protective Discrimination

Two major concepts in this regard have been Protective Discrimination or Reservation as is practised in India, and affirmative action as is in vogue in the United States of America.

2.4.3.b.1 Affirmative Action

An affirmative action in the words of Nicholas Smith is “preferential access to social resources for persons who are members of groups which have been previously disadvantaged by adverse discrimination” (as quoted by Udayakumar, 2003).

Affirmative action is said to be the voluntary brand of reservation (Raj, 2006). It needs to be taken up voluntarily by institutions under the general framework of constitution. The US universities had initiated affirmative action not only on the argument of equality, but also seeing the desirability of diversity in contrast to a monochromatic culture.

Affirmative action to bring in social justice would entail some cost to the principle of selection by individual merit alone. This cost, as a society placing high value on equality, should be willing to bear (Beteille, 2003).

Ronald Dworkin one of the ardent proponents of affirmative action, speaks about having sound policies rather than arbitrary decisions based on a concern for rights. The policy should take into account the issue of rights, and the decisions should be based on well thought out policies. Beteille observes that reservation policy in India has more political implications than it has elsewhere, e.g., USA (Beteille, 2003).

2.4.3.b.2 Protective/ Positive Discrimination

Protective or Positive discrimination implies unequal treatment to certain sections of the society, in order to bring about greater equality. Galanter prefers the usage ‘compensatory’ rather than ‘protective discrimination’, as the former is a position involving a rights perspective and the latter having a paternalistic tone in it (Galanter, 1984). In India, this has taken the form of reservation in the various fields of education and job opportunities.

Reservation
The important consideration in the matter of reservation is the concept of representation in the state apparatus. Ambedkar brings in this concept in defining minorities: ‘any backward class of citizens, which in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the state.’... (Stephen, 2006). If sections of the nation are deprived of their due share in the ‘national cake’ there have to be special provisions to ensure that they get their due.

However, there are many critics to the whole policy of compensatory principle. Amneus (1979) finds the combination of "Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action" as an Orwellian expression. “You will be employed, paid and promoted on the basis of merit, motivation, and achievement” and the translation of "Affirmative Action" is "if you are a member of an unsuccessful group, a government bureaucracy will finance your reward by discrimination against" the privileged classes. He finds the most egregious part of affirmative action programme the inclusion of onomastic criteria with sexual and racial, which means that Americans would not be discriminated against just because their surnames are Spanish in origin.

He questions the affirmative action as he fears that it destroys the key to success of any society, i.e., motivation. It destroys the motivation in the mainstream population, as they feel that their merit, motivation and achievement would be unrewarded, and it would destroy the motivation in the disadvantaged groups because they would feel that these are all unnecessary for them, since they automatically qualify for society’s rewards because of their sex, their race, their onomastic classification - or just because they happen to be in an unsuccessful group.

Beteille (1983) gives the logic of reservation as explained in the introductory part. The meritarian principle is based on the argument that the society must remove all artificial barriers against free competition, and then leave each individual to fend for oneself. The meritarian principle depends on liberalism, and the market, whereas, compensatory principle draws strength from Socialism. The compensatory principle would argue for societal intervention to ensure that the competition is not just free, but fair as well. It requires capabilities to appropriate the opportunities. The society has an obligation to restore such abilities to people who have been deprived of them by historical forces in the society.

The modern democracies, including India, try to balance and blend both aspects of equality. The compensatory principle is based on the recognition of the existing social disparities and their historical basis. The former takes into account the
individual, the latter looks at the individual as the member of a group or community, by being born in it.

2.4.3. c History of Reservations in India

Indian has a long history of compensatory justice in the form of reservation for the backward sections of the society from the time of the British rule. Stephen (2006) gives the details of such measures from 1800s to 1950s.

_British Times_

Reservation practice started with the British rule, termed as representation then. It began with the Muslim community, and the programme was inspired by the W.H. Hunter's work, "Indian Mussalman". The communal Government Order of 1926 gave representation to Brahmans, Muslims and non-Brahmins in the various government posts. In 1919 Baba Saheb Ambedkar, on his own appeared before the South Burroughs committee and made a series of remarks, pointing out the plight of the oppressed in the highly divided caste society. It was Ambedkar's leadership that presented before the Simon Commission (which was boycotted by the Congress) the demand for separate and specific constitutional safeguards for the oppressed classes in public services. But even for him reservation was not meant to be a permanent measure, but only of a temporary nature, for a period of 10 years (Radhakrishnan, 2006).

Efforts to enumerate and classify castes were made from 1871. Commissioner Risley decided to rank the _jātis_ according to their position in the _vāṇa_ in 1870s. In 1901 Census, the backward classes included classes which were under-educated and there were special consideration for them in education. They were given reserved seats since 1919. In 1925 the term 'depressed classes' was used for the castes which were untouchables. In 1935, Government of India Act designated them as Scheduled Castes, and other lower castes as Other Backward Classes.

British interventions led to protective discrimination in the form of separate electorate for those listed under Scheduled castes and tribes (GoI [scheduled castes] order 1936, First Schedule to the GoI Act of 1935).

It is generally accepted that the south Indian states have been more progressive in enacting legislative measures for compensatory provisions to bring about equality. Tamil Nadu seems to have been the place where assertion of a collective history enabled building up of a cultural identity, different from the dominant Aryan
Brahmanical culture, leading to social change. Leadership given by E.V. Rāmaswāmi Nāicker (Periyar, the leader of the Self-Respect Movement) in the rejection of sanskritisation is also worth noting. Mr. Rajah, erstwhile political leader of TamilNadu, is reported to have stated: “It is not Mr. Gandhi's untouchability propaganda that will drive the demon of untouchability and unapproachability. A strong Depressed Class element in the Public Services alone will.”

In the princely states of Travancore and Cochin, the Īzhavīs, Christians and Muslims obtained representation in 1936. In 1937 they got a quota of 8 seats each in the assembly.

In Karnataka, the Backward Class commission in its report, recommended ‘recognition of castes for their equalization’ (Beteille, 1992:42).

2.4.3.d Constitutional Provisions in India

Indian Constitution has many provisions through Articles 14, 15, 16, 17, 29, 38, 46, 334, 335 and 342 guaranteeing equality before law and preferential treatment for the sections of Indian society who had been traditionally backward educationally, economically, politically, and socially. These provisions indicate a quest for equality (Sharma, 1997; Aggarwal & Aggarwal, 1991).

Sawant (2003) analyses the provisions the state has made through the constitution to address the problem of inequality. The constitution guarantees the right to all citizens to be treated equally irrespective of their caste, race, religion, sex, descent, place of birth and residence. However, exceptions to this are made regarding four classes identified for preferential treatment: (i) women and children of all social groups Art. 15(3) (ii) the socially and educationally backward classes 15 (4) (iii) Scheduled Castes and Tribes and (iv) the weaker sections (Art. 46) meant for those other than the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes who are backward both socially and educationally and need to be protected from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. The focus is on ‘poor individuals’ irrespective of the social groupings or classes.

Article 15 (4) provides for special treatment of the socially and educationally backward classes and for SC and STs (by amendment in 1951). Art. 16 (4) permits the state to make any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class, which in the opinion of the state, is not adequately
represented in the services under it. Art. 17 abolishes untouchability, and any act arising from that as an offence.

Art. 46 directs the state to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the ‘weaker sections of the people’, particularly of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes and also directs the state to ‘protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation’. Art. 335 members of these communities should be taken into consideration consistently with the maintenance of efficiency of administration in the appointments to the various posts of service of the Union and the state.

Art. 338 provides for a Special Officer for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes having the duty to investigate all matters relating to the safeguards provided for them under the constitution.

Art. 340 provides for the constitution of various commissions from time to time to assess the status of the backward sections and make necessary recommendations.

These apparent violations of the principle of equality implied in the compensatory approach, are actually meant to ensure the very same principle, as almost 85% of the population comprises of the backward classes including the Scheduled castes and tribes. It is these exceptions that make the deprived sections capable of availing the benefits which they are otherwise not able to. The principle should be put to creative use to create an egalitarian society, in which two unequal individuals being treated as equals would bring in more injustice. The provision is made for promoting with special care their educational and economic interests and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of social exploitation.

**Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989**

This has been another important measure the state has taken to address the injustice arising from inequality. The act provides for stringent measures against unequal treatment and violence against the Dalits. Since 1990, 21000 cases registered, 4000 (18%) were put under it; 2602 of these (60%) brought to court, 8% of the total were acquitted and only 1% ended in conviction.

Social Ostracism is still a phenomenon to be reckoned with - A 1986 survey of 1155 villages identified 613 wells, 821 temples, 496 hotels and restaurants, 473 barber shops and 603 laundries which denied the dalits access.
2.4.3. e Various Commissions

The Indian union has, under Art. 340, constituted various commissions from time to time to assess whether the deprived sections of the society are making progress and whether the measures taken for their development are adequate.

Kākā Kālēkar Commission on backward communities was constituted in 1953 and it submitted its report in 1955. It found that backwardness was based on caste and recommended various provisions for reservation in employment and education. However Nehru government rejected the report saying that its findings might lead to perpetuating the caste system. Mandal Commission’s comment on this report criticises it for recommendations without conducting a survey proper, and without providing the rationale for reservation quotas it recommended. Three of its members were opposed to the crucial recommendation to accept caste as a criterion for social backwardness. Kaka Saheb’s letter in this regard shows his concern regarding caste criterion because of its likely exclusion of Muslims and Christians from its ambit (Aggarwal & Aggarwal, 1991).

The Janata Party manifesto during the 1977 elections promised the implementation of Kākā Kālēkar report. However, when they did not do this, and when the people protested, they appointed another commission headed by Mr. B.P. Mandal in 1979 (1 Jan.). It submitted its report on 31st December 1980.

Mandal Commission

It was given the terms of reference as follows:

- Prescribe the criteria to define the communities which are socially and educationally backward.
- Make recommendations for the development of sections thus identified.
- Examine the provisions for reservation for those communities which are lagging behind in employment and promotions.
- Submit a report to the President with the findings and recommendations for the development of the backward sections.

Its findings:
“In India, ... the low ritual caste status of a person has a direct bearing on his social backwardness” (Aggarwal & Aggarwal, 1991:39).

It found that 52% of Indian population is backward. Some 3743 communities were identified as socially and educationally backward, including Dalit Christians.

As shown below, the employment and education were very low among the SC/ST and OBCs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of the Total Population</th>
<th>% of the people employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22.5% SC/ST</td>
<td>Only 18.72% employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52% BC</td>
<td>Only 12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23% Forward Castes</td>
<td>63.73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It recommended a reservation quota of 27% for the OBCs which triggered of nation wide violence led mainly by the urban elite upper castes fiercely arguing for merit (scores in the qualifying exam) as the only criterion.

The Mandal commission report was refused to be signed by one of its members, Mr. Naik, as he felt that for the recommendations to be just, the OBCs should be seen as two larger categories, viz., the intermediate backward classes and the depressed backward classes, in the interest of the most backward among the OBCs. The situation was such that the intermediate backward classes had effectively utilised all the privileges and had really become powerful and dominant to the extent of turning against the most backward classes.

2.4.4. CRITIQUE OF RESERVATION POLICY

Udayakumar (2003) feels that there is a general feeling that the reservation policy of India does not meaningfully address the issue of backwardness, as usually the beneficiaries are the creamy layers of the marginalized (dalit) sections. OBCs and the poor among the upper castes are very much left behind in reaping the benefits of development, welfare and other opportunities.

Udayakumar (2003) speaks about four positions as far as caste system is concerned:

1. The vision of a casteless society. Very often naïve arguments are brought forth to address the issue. E.g., avoidance of caste question in surveys etc,
economic progress which will dissolve the caste barriers etc. But often this
position is held by those who happen to be in the privileged classes. They
tend to forget the victims of the evil system they now want to eschew.
Another section which has benefited from the reservation based on caste,
possibly, feels threatened seeing many others heading in the line. There are
still others who would like to bring all sections under the over-arching banner
of Hindu pride.

2. Casteist position - which considers caste as the basic factor which
determines all other aspects of human relationship, power positions and
kinship. This is also seen as a means to rise to leadership positions by those
who are able to manipulate the caste feelings. Though the clutches of
kuladharma (occupational duty according to one's birth) which helped in
perpetrating the system by condemning an individual to one's parental
occupation, are slowly disappearing, it is only a matter of social justice that
those who oppressed under the scheme is demanding affirmative action from
a 'caste sensitive' angle.

3. Unlike in the US, the efforts at weakening the racial hierarchy through
attempts to increase the multiracial category, may not work in India. For the
caste thinking is so embedded into Indian psyche that even the courageous
inter-caste couples are forced to adopt for official matters the caste of one of
the partners. Besides, the castes themselves are not homogeneous entities,
rather are a complex of innumerable sub-castes to which one actually owes
one's identity.

4. Another intermediate position, which is almost utopian, is that of choosing
one's own caste.

Raj (2006) agrees that flaws in reservation policy need to be addressed. Very often
the most deserving do not get the benefit of reservation.

Certain basic premises in this regard are:

1. The fact of caste system being an oppressive and unjust system should be
delineated.

2. Caste categorization as a matter of power involving cultural, economic and
political dimensions
3. The fact of caste evil as operational in all aspects of life.

In spite of all progressive steps, the lower castes are still discriminated against. One of the battles to be won in eradicating this evil is that of reservation. Rather than reservation, the caste factor is to be accounted in assessing eligibility with adequate positive score being given for the same. Use of computer technology in assessing the eligibility of the applicants for education and employment is suggested to avoid the possible human manipulation. A proposed eligibility point system is given below:

Eligibility Points

51 points on the basis of caste status and 49 points on the basis of 7 other factors.

1. Caste - 51 (forward less, BC - medium, SC etc. - max)
2. Gender - 7 points
3. Domicile - 7 points
4. Family education - 7 points
5. Family employment - 7 points
6. Family property - 7 points
7. Family income - 7 points
8. Traumas & disabilities - 7 points

Dalit Bandhu (2005) points out the contradiction in the Government stand regarding reservations for the socially backward sections. There is mix-up of religion and caste. He cites the example controversy regarding the marriage of the son of the Congress leader Vayalar Ravi, an Īzhava Hindu and his wife Mercy, a Christian, to prove the point. He was brought up as a Hindu, however, his entry at the famous Guruvayoor temple called for a purṇyāham (purificatory ritual) based on the fact that he was the son of a Christian woman, although she is not a Christian by her faith any more. So the point in discussion is not that of religious belief of faith, rather matter of birth or origin.

On the other hand, in 2003 in Delhi, there was an attempt to prevent almost hundred thousand Dalits who were to formally accept Buddhism as their religious faith. The question is whether their conversion to Buddhism or any other religion for that matter, would take away from them their social backwardness overnight, and make
them equals to the *sāvanā* caste members. It was against similar background that Ambedkar made this statement when on Oct 14, 1956, he dared the consequences and together with three lakh people accepted Buddhism. “... some people say that, now that some seats have been reserved for us in the legislature. Why should we lose them? I say to them that we are glad to vacate them for you. Let the Brahmins, Rājputs and other caste Hindus come forward and fill these by becoming *Camārs*, sweepers and *Mahars* and take advantage of the opportunity. Why should they mourn over us?” (Das, 1969:147).

Majority of the Dalits (SCs and STs) are landless agricultural labourers, casual labourers or marginal farmers. The protective measures and their adequacy is a major issue. They have definitely improved the conditions of the SCs, but to what extent? And in comparison with the forward groups, how far have they come up and benefited from the progress the nation in general has made? The desire for equality which had no avenues for expression has today gained that and the untouchables have become conscious of this.

The states were given freedom to implement the recommendations for reservation in 1953. And the progressive south Indian states took the lead in this matter. Prof. Radhakrishnan feels that Dalits have not benefited from the reservation, because the majority of the benefits go to the OBC creamy layer (case of Tamil Nadu). He feels that the Mandal Commission recommendations dilute the facilities given to the Dalits. The government should have made an assessment of reservation of the last 6 decades.

(P. Radhakrishnan, interview on the web -

Oommen (1984:45-61) finds that the policy has created greater inequality among the backward classes with a few reaping the benefits and a mass of others being deprived, and underprivileged. Stratification within the dalit community further deteriorates the chances for improvement of their human status.

There is also growing thinking whether it should be caste or family the criterion of reservation in the face of increasing politicisation on the basis of caste since the Mandal commission report and its implementation.

In spite of all its limitations, many scholars still find state mediation through reservation the best available option to promote equality. Kunhāman (2002) is of the
view that the marginalized section like Dalits who suffer from the triple alienation of wealth, knowledge and power, can come to the mainstream only through state mediation.

Occupational delinking has transformed the social relations between the Dalits and their erstwhile masters. Land ceiling and distribution of land among the Dalits have led to a great difference in identity assertion.

Daniels (1998) is very emphatic that reservation should continue, because 5 decades of such reservation is negligible when compared to the 3 millennia long discrimination they have suffered due to the reservation in favour of the other castes. And reservation indeed has done good to the dalit community, by way of improvement in their socio-economic status, howsoever negligible that might be. Some go to the extent of saying that if any improvement in the socio-economic status of the Dalits has happened it is because of reservation.

**2.4.5. THE DALITS AFTER THE STRUGGLE**

In analysing, how the products of caste based inequality of Indian society, the subjected and marginalized personalities of the Dalits, have tried to cope with the age-old oppression and subjugation, one finds three major trends:

a) Efforts by Others - Non-Dalits to eradicate inequality and establish equality. In most of the cases, the leadership comes from individuals from the more privileged sections under the caste system. From Sri Buddha to Gandhi, there had been several initiatives and several models which helped in bringing release to many, and which led to bringing the problem into the consciousness of the society.

b) Efforts by the Dalits and other less privileged sections - From the middle ages, we find individuals from dalit sections leading the suppressed people along the path of liberation - either through religio-spiritual movement like Bhakti Movement, or through reform and assertion as shown by Phule and Ambedkar. There had been group movements to egalitarian (or less discriminating) religions like Sikhism, Islam and Christianity. Though Ambedkar movement had religious conversion component as well, its core had more to do with the famous Ambedkar motto: ‘educate, agitate and organise’. This has stressed the discovery, acceptance and assertion of one’s caste based identity and strengths within it. The recent trends in this
stream point to rights based approach with a call for Dalit Solidarity (Das & Massey, 1994).

c) The third stream of efforts to end inequality has come from the national ideal of equality, fraternity, liberty and justice, enshrined in the constitution and supported by the various constitutional provisions. This has taken the shape of various compensatory policies, and programmes. Though it has been criticised and contradictions in the state policies been pointed out, so far what has created the greatest impact on the lives of the Dalits has been the state intervention in the form of reservation.

Is the struggle over?

‘Mahāmās have come and gone, but the Untouchables have remained untouchables’ (Stephen, 2006: 22). This saying is a pointer as to the means to be adopted for radical change. Thumma (2000), in the same vein, says that though the Dalits have joined every religion in India to escape from the slavery imposed by Hindu caste system, the result was only in becoming Dalit Muslim, Dalit Sikh, Dalit Christian and Dalit Buddhist, rather than obtaining human dignity and equality. The change sought to be brought about by the elite benefactors cannot in fact bring about the desired change. While the state interventions are important, the real change has to come from within - from the subjected personalities themselves. However, this does not negate the need for support from the more privileged groups and from the state itself.

Industrial societies show that the human and cultural capitals (professional training, higher education, degrees) are becoming more crucial in defining the higher classes. It is to be examined if it couldn’t apply to caste societies as well - especially with places like Keralam where agrarian society is gradually disappearing and knowledge and service society is taking over? When the stalwart leader of Pulaya community, Ayyankāli was asked what was his greatest desire, his response was to see ten graduates (BAs) from his community (Bandhu, 1994c).

Pinto (2003) points out that the subaltern struggle at the present stage is one of fight for economic and social emancipation. The key to the success in this struggle lies in capabilities approach.

Krishnan (2006) poses the question whether the affirmative action is in fact leading to the caste system becoming stronger or weaker. It is also a moot question, whether
compensatory policies add to the good of the smaller groups (castes) or/and the public. He quotes Muthaiah: “Reservations broke the monopoly of one or two castes in various fields but preserved caste identities. The demand for proportional representation in politics made by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is strengthening single-caste or sub-caste movements demanding separate quota in various fields in proportion to their population...Then it is essential to strengthen single and sub-caste identities... and erase the stigma attached to castes as the caste identities are necessary to foster the respectable existence of every caste and for reservations. Multiple identities like Dalits and Bahujans are democratic as they are designated on principles of liberty, equality, fraternity and unity among the SCs, STs and OBCs. But the benefits of their (struggles) may go in favour of advanced castes within the SCs, STs and OBCs, giving scope for the exploitation of the weaker by the advanced within themselves.”

The general picture of the caste based inequality and its human products - the Dalits - has been presented. The marginalisation experienced by the Dalits is something they have internalized. However, the social milieu has contributed to an awakening in them, and the past few centuries have seen various modes of responding to the silent violence of casteism and untouchability. The lines of action the Dalits have chosen were: 1) assertion of their identity and building up of self-respect 2) militant action and 3) appropriate political tools (Chandra, 2004). Besides these, another method the Dalits adopted in coping with the inequality was conversion to more egalitarian religions. They sought and hoped for emancipation from subjugation and oppression in religions or religio-spiritual movements like Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam and Christianity. Some conversions are said to have been forced. The rest are said to have been of choice; but even that choice, in many cases, might have been somewhat forced, forced by the oppressive structures and systems.

Conversions to Christianity in this context have happened in India in most of its states. Conversion to Christianity and the experience of equality there in are surveyed in the next section.
2.5. CHRISTIANITY\(^1\) - AN EGALITARIAN RELIGION OF LOVE AND LIBERATION

Christianity had its origin from Jesus Christ, whom Christians accept as the incarnation of God in human history. The short thirty-three years of his extraordinary and revolutionary life of a radically different message of love and concern for the poor and the marginalized, ending in a violent death, led to one of the most powerful movements and organisations in the human history, which is Christianity. Christianity as a religion draws its inspiration from the life (person) and teachings of Jesus Christ, for which the New Testament of the Bible becomes the main source of reference.

One of the main motifs of Christ’s teaching is ‘liberation’. Apparently, his first public address, as reported in the Bible, is about that (Lk. 4:16-22). In the temple, Jesus reads out from the Old Testament of the Bible a prophetic utterance of Isaiah, the prophet (Is. 61:1 f): “...He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to the prisoners.” And he said that this saying was fulfilled in him. His sole concern as evidenced in most of his interventions seemed to be freeing people from oppression of all sorts. For this he was willing to take risks, challenge authorities, break norms (in mingling with people of ill repute (Mtt. 11:9), in interacting with people whose contact was polluting [people afflicted with leprosy - Mtt. 8:2-3; People considered outcasts like the Canaanite woman - Mtt.. 15:22-28 or the Samaritan woman - Jn 4:1-12], in breaking the ritualistic norms of Sabbath for healing the sick - Mtt.. 12:11-14). From such inspirations there had always been an underlying principle of working for the poor and serving them, all through the history of Christianity, though there had been junctures when power and rituals nearly drowned this spirit. However, there had been repeated revival of the spirit both in practice and in the teachings of the Church. The modern times saw a powerful renewal of this stream of thinking in the liberation theology, which argued for very radical approach towards the issues of justice\(^2\). Though the official Catholic Church teachings have toned it down, especially its methodologies which appear non-compatible with the Spirit of non-

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\(^1\) For an understanding of Christianity from a rational and sociological perspective, see. “We Christians: A Christian Self-Introduction”, edited by Dr. John. B. Chethimattam, 1996.

violence and forgiveness of Christianity, the principle in itself has not been challenged³.

According to Kadankavil (1999-b) when Jesus says ‘the poor will always be with you’ (Jn. 12:8) he is challenging his followers to proclaim all through their lives the message of the liberation to the poor. And the fruit of that liberation is that all who accept God’s parentage will be brothers and sisters. This spirit of equality is the core of Christian message.

The early ideological expressions on Christianity have several instances indicating equality and egalitarianism - both in the material and spiritual realms, as one of its distinguishing features.

Acts 2:44-47 “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts…”

Acts 10:14-15 “What God has made clean, you must not call profane…”

The incident involved the leader of the Church, St. Peter being challenged in a vision not to discriminate between high and low, pure and impure between humans, for all are clean before God. And the incidents that follow showed beyond doubt that God in whom Christians proclaim their faith does not discriminate people on the basis of their birth, culture and race (Acts 10:44-48).

St. Paul, one of the earliest and most established ideologists of Christian religion, is rather vehement in his criticism of apparent double standards in the early Christianity in dealing with different races who had come into the Church (Gal. 2:11-14). Paul's elaborations on this issue are very fundamental to Christian faith:

Gal. 3:28 “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

Rom. 10:12-13 “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

³“The Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation” Sep. 1984, Cardinal Ratzinger & “Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation” 22nd March 1986. While the first one was more in the direction of pointing out the negatives, the second one presented liberation as a theme of Christian Theology.
2 Cor 5:16-17 - “Because of this we no longer look on anyone in terms of mere human judgment...This means that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old order has passed away; now all is new."

Titus 1: 15 “To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure.”

Rom 14:14 “…in the Lord Jesus … nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.”

And beyond grand pronouncements on equality, it stipulated norms for praxis to ensure equality, by asking for extra care, added concern for those who were weak (Rom. 15:1-2) and ‘with one mind and one mouth, glorify God.’ (Rom. 15:6). The whole of chapter 12 of the first letter to the Church of Corinth is a proclamation of the richness of diversity, and need for extra-sensitivity towards those who are disprivileged or backward in the society (I Cor. 12:12-24). James 2:1-9 warns strongly against any sort of discrimination based on social status. In another letter, St. Paul stresses the equality of everyone, irrespective of his or her status at birth (Col. 3: 10-11).

Thus Christianity, in its origin and inspirations, presented a radical shift from the then existing concept about God, people of God, and community, in that it stresses equality of all as children of God. It was a community open to all, without distinction, who were willing to accept the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, as a love. This religious ideology has found its expression in accepting into its fold people of all nationalities, languages, races and socio-economic status all across the world throughout the twenty centuries of its existence. However, it cannot be claimed that the professed equality was practised in the Christian community always, as was evidenced by the experience of the Blacks in America and the Christian majority in India today (Jose, 1991; Arurlraja, 1996).

2.5.1. CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

Christianity in India is usually considered as a western religion, having had its spread through the Western Missionaries. It is still surprising to many to learn that Christianity in India is twenty centuries old, and is perhaps, one of the oldest among Christian traditions. To understand the origin and development of Christianity in India, one has to focus on Keralam, the cradle of Christianity in India.
2.5.1.a Christianity in Keralam - The Syrian Catholic Church

It is widely accepted with the support of a living tradition in a faith community that one of the disciples of Christ, St. Thomas the apostle, arrived in India, on the Kerala coast (in A.D. 52), preached the Christian faith, established Churches and was killed in A.D 72, at Mylapore in Tamil Nadu. The other traditional source that refers to the establishment of the Church by St. Thomas is the oral tradition of songs, which were popular among the St. Thomas Christians. Thus goes the tradition the conversion was from among the Brāhmins and the community enjoyed the status of a higher caste, and retained that through purity and pollution norms. The earliest historical document indicating the existence of a Christian community is Tarisappally Copper Plate which is dated to be of 8th century A.D. Besides various other commercial and revenue related matters, it also points to the status of the Christian community as a caste community (Thoma 1992; Kunjanpillai, 1955, Mundadan, 1984). They came to be known as Nazarōnikal (after the name of Jesus as the Nazarene) or St. Thomas Christians (after the name of the apostle St. Thomas). This Church is said to have been guided and supported in administration by the East Syrian Church of Persia (Mundadan, 1984).

2.5.1.b Distinguishing Features of Syrian Christian Community

On their arrival in India, Western Christians beginning with the Portuguese, took notice of the presence of a vibrant Christian community different from theirs in rituals and traditions. Their observations have been documented in many places. On the basis of these and as well as other evidences, a profile of the Syrian Christian community could be constructed.

- A forward community well established within the caste hierarchy
- Homogeneous or almost homogeneous in nature based on endogamy.
- Indigenous and integrated with the local culture
- Local leadership and involvement in trade and agriculture

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4 The Syro Malabar Church or Syro Chaldean Church. Ref. Pathikulangara, Varghese
5 The Western Missionary endeavour is said to have begun with the arrival of Vasco De Gama on the Malabar coast, in 1498.
6 In the context of the present study on caste based social inequality in the Church community, the researcher is elaborating only on the first of the characteristics listed, namely caste character.
2.5.1.c Interface with the Western Tradition of Christianity and Origin of Stratification in the Indian Christian Community

With the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498 on the west coast of India, there began also an attempt, which can be described as aggressive, at conversion of the natives into Christianity. From the very beginning of their arrival the Portuguese began efforts to reform the St. Thomas Christians, in the sense of making them conform to the Western traditions of Christianity. Their efforts gradually led to the development of a Latin Church distinct from the existing Syrian Church. The basic distinguishing feature was the liturgical rites and languages, namely Latin and Syrian (Aramaic) respectively. St. Francis Xavier who preached Christianity in the 16th century (1542-52) is said to have been a major contributor towards the building up of Latin Church in Kerala and elsewhere in India, especially in Goa and Coromandel Coast. It is also established that some of the erstwhile Syrian Christian communities (parishes) came under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Latin rite during the course of time and because of various Church related developments. One such development was the schism of 1653 (Thoma, 1992, Koilparampil, 1982).

The Portuguese colonisation efforts, and its by-product - conversion process of the fisher (mukkuva) folks of Kerala coast, did not result in the existing community accepting them. They were not included in the traditional community, perhaps, for varying reasons (liturgical traditions and opposition to Portuguese customs). Instead, all this led to the formation of a new caste like community of Christians in Keralam, who became the Latin Christian community of Keralam. They were never allowed to be part of the traditional Christian community. They belonged to the diocese of Kochi, whereas the others belonged to the diocese of Angamaly. Already caste was showing its colour in Christianity in Keralam (Jose, 1991)!

It was with the incident of kūnan Cross\(^7\) in 1653, that there emerged a split in the Church in Keralam and India for the first time. A majority of them later returned to the Catholic fold. Those who opposed the western domination and sought for autonomy in administration or continued linkages with the Eastern Churches formed denominations away from the communion with the Roman Catholic Church. This

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\(^7\) Literally, it means ‘bent cross’. The tradition goes thus that the protesting native Christians hung to a huge rope (vatam) which was tied to the cross while taking an oath not to abide by the rule of the Portuguese Missionaries. With the impact of pressure exerted by so many people the cross is said to gone bent.
was mediated through the leaders of the protest group, the Arch Deacon Thomas, and Mar Gregorious, the bishop who arrived from the Middle East at the former’s invitation. The latter introduced elements of faith different from the existing faith, which crystallised the split. They were initially called puttenkūttukār or people of the new faith (Thoma 1992). There were further divisions in this splinter group, some of them retaining affiliation with the Churches of Middle East, some others becoming affiliated to the Protestant Churches of the West, and still others getting absorbed into Evangelical and Pentecostal groups of 20th century. Koilparampil (1982) presents briefly the various denominations of Christianity within the state of Keralam.8

With the arrival of Western colonisers, starting with the Catholic Portuguese and ending with the Protestant Anglican English, Christian missionary activity in India got out of the bounds of the region of Keralam, and spread all over. It found appeal mostly with the people who were suppressed and subjugated under the caste system. And they took to Christianity with the hope of liberation and equal treatment.

2.5.2. CHRISTIANITY AND CASTE

The initial response of a Christian or non-Christian regarding caste in Christianity would be of surprise and denial. There are very powerful sayings in the Bible, the sacred scripture of the Christians, which present a very strong case of egalitarian ideal.

However, a closer examination of the Indian Christian community from its inception to the present day, reveals how ingeniously caste system has found its way into an otherwise egalitarian community. Nor is this an altogether new or exclusively Indian phenomenon. Murphy (1954) has described comparable situations in the western Christianity, as to how stratification in the society takes place in a country like US, where the Catholics used to find themselves as lower class; and among themselves, the Irish used to enjoy a higher status, when compared to the East European immigrants.

2.5.2. Caste reality in Indian Christianity - with Specific Reference to Syrian Catholic Church of Keralam

The first Christian community of India in Keralam appears to have assimilated the caste values to Christianity *mutatis mutandis*, without much ado. Though it was a thriving community of believers in Christ, it absorbed almost all the characteristics of a caste - thus it was endogamous. It practised purity and pollution norms. Fair skin was also considered a determining feature, which would assert the high caste status of a Christians (Fuller, as cited by Koilparampil, 1982). It had the standing of an intermediary caste, though its followers claimed for itself a descent directly of Kerala Brahmins - i.e., *Nampūtiṅs*. Within the Syrian Christian fold, till the arrival of the Portuguese, there were two caste like sections: a) the descendents of the settlers from the middle east called *Thekkumbhāgam* (the Southists), who had formed into an endogamous community within the Church, and the descendents of the native Indians who had accepted Christian faith (Kadankavil, 1997-2). Contrary to the missionary nature of Christian religion this Christian community does not seem to have been missionary, for the caste values seem to have made the community survive and proliferate only through birth in the community, rather than by conversion (Thenayan, 1982). This is also evident from the writings of Fr. Bernard (Thoma 1992) where he refers to the decree of well-known Synod of Udayamperoor (Diamper) of 1599, on the caste-based untouchability in the Christian community.¹⁰

Gouvea (1606) speaks about the practice thus: “Like the other people of Malabar, they avoid touching low caste men, and if they happen to touch them, they wash themselves, not owing to the superstitions... but because they live among the Nairs, and, if they touch low castes, they themselves become untouchables and thereby lose ordinary intercourse and communication in buying and selling, and the honour from their kinds, because it is only with the Christians and Brahmins that the Nairs may have intercourses, both being high caste man. All other castes are considered low, and their number is large...” Gouvea seems to justify the practice in terms of a survival strategy, rather than caste discrimination. Decree II of session IX of the Synod of Diamper speaks of the rules of purity and pollution among the Syrian Christians and prohibits the practice declaring that before God all were equal (as cited in Zachariah, 1994:49).

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¹⁰ Also see “The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper.” Edited by Dr. Scaria Zacharia. 1994. (IX-II, III)
Authors like Dalit Bandhu and Kadankavil, who refute the Brahmin conversion tradition, suggest that the initial converts should have been of some other castes, in all likelihood lower, as the caste system itself was non-existent in Kerala. Bandhu asserts that the Christians were converts of the fisher folk as evidenced by the edicts of Tarisappally (848), Thazhackattuppally (mid 11th century) and veerarogha pattayam (1225) (Bandhu, 1994a; Kadankavil, 1997-2). Pathirappally (1999) states quoting various scholars, that, original inhabitants of Keralam were Cērāmar, and so were the first Christians in this region. If that be the case, the community has undergone a sanskritisation process to stake a claim to nampūtiri origins (Koilparampil, 1982, Srinivas, 1977).

However, according to Fr. Bernard, the historian of St. Thomas Christians, to assume that it was the backward/lower castes of those times, who accepted Christianity is also not right. For, given the kind of caste system prevalent during those times, it was impossible for the Dalits to have tried for conversion (Thoma 1992). That Kerala Christians had a caste pattern of existence almost in line with the upper castes of the Hindus is also enunciated by Kunjanpillai (1955). Zacharia (1994) concludes that it was the caste values that made the Indian (Kerala) Christians uninterested in proselytisation. Conversions from the lower castes began only after the synod of Diamper, when Roz became the bishop of St. Thomas Christians. Special arrangements were made for them in the churches, either by erecting separate buildings, or by reserving a particular part of the church for them.

Koilparampil (1982) in his study had found that the Catholics of Keralam were not very much different from the Hindus with regard to caste observances. Even today, the caste vestiges still remain within the Christian fold with degrees of inferior-superior, touchable-untouchable, and endogamous communities. Earlier, Gough (1961) had pointed to the caste structuring of Kerala Catholic community on a similar pattern as that of the Nairs.

2.5.2.b Dalit Conversions to Christianity

After the initial phase of Christian conversion in the early centuries after Christ, and the one with the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century, serious efforts were taken to bring Christianity to the lower castes of India only by 18th century. It was in 1706, Lutheran Missionaries of New Jerusalem Church, under the leadership of Zeegenbalg, preached among the lower castes of Tranquibar. But before long, the pattern of discrimination was repeated in the Church as well, as evidenced by the
writings of Benjamin Schultz who opposed the distribution of communion\textsuperscript{11} to the 
\textit{dalit} converts from separate cups/plates/vessels. However, due the fear that 
Christian message will never have acceptance among the higher castes of India, 
further efforts concentrated more on attracting such groups to the Christian fold, and 
establishment of Christian educational institutions in the various urban centres 
became a trend, and many of them did influence the elite class of those times 
(Bandhu, 1991).

Paravila (2003) in his doctoral dissertation traces the history of \textit{dalit} conversion from 
the arrival of Francis Xavier in 1542. Caste based conversion could be noticed in 
the efforts of St. Francis Xavier, where those castes which occupied a lower status 
was the target; whereas De Nobili (1606) in Madurai concentrated on work among 
the higher castes. In the latter, a kind of shunning of ‘polluting’ contacts and 
behaviour was adhered to, to attract the higher castes to the Gospel message.

A second phase of work among the lower castes began only in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, with 
the Baptist missionary John E. Clowgh converting about 200 \textit{madigōs}\textsuperscript{12} from Telugu 
speaking area. In states like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat, the Christian 
Dalits are equally discriminated against and tortured with other Dalits whenever they 
try to assert their rights (Jose, 1991).

\textbf{2.5.2.c. Dalit Conversion in Keralam}

It is assumed that Hinduism (the Aryan pattern of caste Hinduism) came to Keralam 
only much later than elsewhere, and when it arrived, Christianity was already there. 
However, instead of opposing a movement towards oppressive division of society, it 
seems to have co-opted the system and seems to have become a caste in itself, not 
letting the message of liberation to go out to other sections suffering oppression.

Jose (1991) criticizes Kerala Church for this failure. He points out two historical 
documents - the first one around A.D. 800 which addresses the leader of the 
community as ‘the head of the faithful’, which later on in 15\textsuperscript{th} century finds an 
address as ‘the head of the caste’ (\textit{jōtikku kartavyan}). They relished their \textit{savarna} 
status and had slaves as per the customs of the society. Claudius Buchanan (1800)

\textsuperscript{11} ‘Communion’ refers to receiving of the consecrated bread in the Christian sacrament of the Holy 
Eucharist, which is the community celebration of life, sacrificial death, and resurrection of Jesus 
Christ. The consecrated bread and wine are the sacramental symbols of the body and blood of Christ. 
(Researcher’s note)

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Madigas}
mentions his conversations with a local *nasrānī* priest at Kannankulangara Angadi who said that he had no knowledge of the people of his community having grown or lessened in number, implying that there was no addition to the community from new conversions.

British Chaplain Dr. R.H. Kher, and later on, Claudius Buchanan made detailed study about the Christian presence in Keralam, and as a result in 1816 CMS (Church Mission Society) missionaries came to Keralam. In 1830 Samuel Reeds Dale bought Kali and employed her for domestic work. Later she was converted into Christianity and became Lucy. The CMS missionaries worked among the *Cēramar* caste. In 1854 (Sep. 8) the eight-member *pulayći* family of Theyyattan (Habel) was received into Christianity (Jose, 1991). Gopalan (1999) points out that the conversion of the Dalits was not by force, but rather under the influence of the affable dealings and the promise of various help. By adopting Christianity they hoped to escape the suppression of the Hindus.

However, in 1806 itself LMS missionaries, beginning with Ringel Taube, had come to S. Malabar (Travancore), Myladi. One convert Maharasan came to know about him, and through him Rev. J.C. Kolf came to Myladi from Tranquibar. Taube began work with *parayōs* and *Pulayōs*. Maharasan got converted as Vedamanikyam in 1806 (from *parayō* community). The work continued among *parayōs*, and later on spread to the *cannārs*. CMS concentrated on traditional Christians, but it did not last long, and they parted their ways in 1836 with *Mavēikkara Padiyola*. CMS and LMS came to an understanding that river Kallada will be their boundary of operation, North of it for the CMS and the south for the LMS. Thus began conversion efforts among the *Pulayas* and *Parayas* of that region. With the missionary initiative to prohibit slavery becoming successful in 1855, and the advancement of education and equality for the converted Dalits, there began an outflow to Christianity. Various churches such as Anglican, Salvation Army, Free Church of God, and Pentecostal Church, began to work actively among these groups. Their progress had influence on other backward classes including the Nairs (Chattampi Swamigal), and these were all anti-*Brahmānical* movements. Many of the *Īzhavās* also benefited from the education initiated by missionaries, which was open to all castes irrespective of their religious affiliations.

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* Nasrani – after Jesus the Nazarene.
The notes prepared by CSI (Church of South India) youth movement, Changanachery, Kottayam (2003) under the title “Culture And Identity” presents the Dalit Christian problems within the CSI community, which are not very different from that of the Catholics. It points to a pattern of caste based difference and discrimination in the CSI as well. This is in contrast to the general perception among the Dalits in the Catholic Church that in CSI, Dalits have a much better or equal treatment and opportunities.

“The Church was dominated by the upper class, the key posts of Bishop, Registrar and the two diocesan secretaries and corporate managers were held by the upper class. Most of the ordained priests and the members of the diocesan-governing committees were upper class. Congregation remains caste based. Often two churches belonging to two different communities were situated only a few hundred yards apart. A very few backward men had become priests but the highest attainment most could hope for was to serve as a catechist or reader in one of their own poor pastorates. Therefore, dalit people were often victims of jibes, condescension and prejudice. Intermarriage between the two communities, which in the long term would have negated the caste divide, was unknown.”

The result was a drift to fundamentalist, evangelical or Pentecostal churches, or hybrid theologies of Hindu and Christian mix, all expressly opposed to casteism. Kadankavil’s booklet on Dalits in the Christian Church of Keralam (1997-2), gives a picture of Dalit presence in the various Churches in Keralam.

2.5.2.d. Dalit Conversions to Syrian Catholic Church

Bandhu (1994c) says that the history of Dalit conversions to Catholic Church began only in 1856 with the conversion at Nedumkunnam. However, even before that flow from Dalit communities to Christianity had begun.

It was a belated realization that led to the Catholic efforts at conversions. The archbishop of Kochi, Martini (1844-53) realizing the Anglican (and Protestant) influence on account of conversions, and the need to have the upper hand, and perhaps other
material advantages\textsuperscript{14} as well persuaded Palakunnel Vellyachan to work among them. However, it was in 1857, under the influence of the then Bishop Barnardine (1853-1868) that he agreed to it. His chronicles (\textit{Pālakkunnaī Vellyaccantē Nēḻōgamam})\textsuperscript{15} describes in details about the earlier efforts of conversion to Catholic Church from among the Dalits.

The vows\textsuperscript{16} the neo-converts had to take included the expression of their preparedness to be still \textit{Pulayās} and at the service of their respective \textit{accans} and having no other privilege other than having the true faith, and readiness to suffer the dual punishments (from the Church and from the owners) if they ever tried for equality. These are very revealing as far as the Catholic motive and attitudes towards the Dalits and their conversion. It was in the year 1857 that he came to know about a group of \textit{Īzhavās} in Koratty (near Changanachery) and \textit{Pulayās} of Nedunkunnam. After much exploration and correspondence between the Apostolic Administrator Bernardinos of Thresia, the Vicar General and Prior, Blessed Cyriac Elias Chavara, and himself, in the year 1858 (\textit{vrscikam}), a group of people were prepared for baptism.

After a thorough examination of the motives of the converts to be, they were accepted into the Christian fold. Thereafter, the missionary, Fr. Marselinos instructed Agasty to acquire the land of Koratty in his name to prevent the threat of Hindus, and to distribute new clothing (after the existing Christian tradition) for the new converts at the cost of Rs. 7/- . About 18 people, some of whom not well instructed, were given baptism, communion and confirmation the very next day. Though there was threat to his life and person, Fr. Palakunnel went back to his place, and the Hindus who were planning to assault him did not do that because of the presence of the missionary’s butler Jenis Gomes, who courageously went before the priest to provide him protection.

Later on, he erected a temporary structure for the new converts in his own ancestral property because of the bitter opposition of the Christians. Some of them went away from the Mass as they came to know that the \textit{Pulayās} had entered the Church. Some others went to far away places in search of water (as there was no water in

\textsuperscript{14} The letter of the arch-bishop to Fr. Palakunnel in Jose, 1991: 86

\textsuperscript{15} This being one of the earliest documents and considered authentic due to the involvement and leadership of the author himself. The researcher has cited liberally from the work. The translation from the original Malayalam is of a free nature.

\textsuperscript{16} the vows, see Jose, 1991: 88-89
the vicinity of Nedunkunnath to cleanse themselves of the pollution. A few others went to the Hindus and tried to instigate them against this movement.

After a few days, another batch was baptized by Bp. Bernardinos, in the Church at Kurumbanadam in spite of the protests by the traditional Christians. There was also the threat that the temporary structure for the new converts would be burnt by Hindus (Palakunnel, 1971:22).

His letter refers to the decision of the Synod of Udayamperoor which exhorted the faithful to baptize the youngsters among their slaves (ajimakkâr) and to instruct the grown up in the way of salvation, without forcing them to get baptized. It was also instructed that the bishop should penalize those who did not follow this instruction, as it was the duty of all to ensure the salvation of those under them (Palakkunnel, 1971:23).

Fr. Palakunnel noted that the new Christians who are like animals would grow strong and courageous in faith only if the priests concerned took deep interest (Palakkunnel, 1971: 25).

Other Pioneers in Dalit Conversion

Authors like Kadankavil (1997), Jose (1991) have given details of the various attempts of dalit conversion to Syrian Catholic fold. Blessed Cyriac Elias Chavara, one of the founders of the first indigenous religious order for men, the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, who was also the Vicar General of the Syrian Catholic Church in the middle decades of 19th century. With the establishment of the first monastery of the order in 1831 at Mannanam, he is also said to have taken care of the uplift of the Pulaya Christians of the locality. His direct involvement in this matter is seen in 1864 as cited in the Mannanam Chronicle17. It mentions the establishment of a catechumenate around that time and that young boys from around used to come to the monastery and would remain there till evening. In order to promote their study, provision for meals was also made through collection of pîiyari (a handful of rice kept apart by the families and pooled together) (Mannanam Chronicle, Vol. 3. p.30). Though a Sanskrit school was established in 1846 and though it is said that it was open to all, there is no concrete evidence as to whether the Dalits were admitted there. The chronicle also records the establishment of a structure with the provision

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17 The citings are from ‘Positio’ the documentation on the process of beatification (the process of honouring the members of the Church after their death, with the title ‘Blessed’, on the basis of outstanding practice of Christian virtues). In 1986, Fr. Cyriac Elias became the first Indian Christian to be beatified
of a chapel in the land donated by Thuruthimalil family (Vol. 3, p. 90). This is said to have been at Arpookkara, near Mannanam. He was instrumental in establishing a catechumenate in Edathua as well. It is observed that between 1866 and 1931, the efforts by the Carmelites had led to the conversion of over 20000 Dalits into the Syrian Catholic Church.

In the 20th century, Thevarparampil Kunjachan18, having his base at Ramapuram near Pala, worked for almost five decades, for the conversion and pastoral care of the Dalits belonging to Pulayās, Parayōs, Pōnars, barbers, hunters, and carpenters in and around Ramapuram. About 5000 people are said to have been baptized by him. His efforts included home visits, provision of relief and assistance to those in need of treatment and education, and training them in Christian faith life (Chacko, 1987).

2.5.2.e. Resistance To Conversion

As there began an outflow from the depressed classes to Christianity, there were efforts to restrain this. One such was Brahmiṃṭha maṭṭham. Further to this, the temple entry gave to the depressed classes a right - access to the temples for worship with the upper class Hindus. The government under the diwanship of C.P. Ramaswamy Iyyer was restricting all the special privileges for the depressed classes only to those who had not got converted into Christianity (Bandhu, 1994c).

Ayyankali, the only leader of reckoning in the modern history of Dalits in Keralam, seems to have resisted and worked against Christian conversions, the goal was not the progress of the Dalits, but strengthening of the Christian fold, or of the spiritual well being of the souls of the Dalits. He opposed Charathan Solomon, the representative of Dalits from Kuttanad, when he argued for the converted Dalits (Assembly Proceedings, Feb. 12-24, 1913). This he did, perhaps, because he sensed that Solomon was not worthy of such a stance after his conversion to Christianity, and reverting back to Hinduism, on the basis of which he was nominated to the assembly (Bandhu, 1994c).

Ayyankali was not against the support of Christians or working with them, as seen in his accepting the support of Missionary Edmund during the Perināṭu conflict. During

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18 Officially, Fr. Kuzhumpil Augustine (1891-1973) was elevated to the status of ‘Blessed’ in the Catholic Church, in 2006, on the basis of his practice of Christian virtues, especially through his apostolate among the Dalit Christians of Ramapuram.
that time the Dalits were given shelter at the Missionary school, but their becoming or being Christians was not a condition.

Bandhu (1994c) also raises a pertinent question: If Ayyankali had not opposed the outflow of Dalits to Christianity, what possible difference would have been there, other than the Dalits being fewer in number and Christians (Dalit Christians) being more in number? Would it have made the situation of the Dalits (Dalit Christians) any better?

Though Fr. Palakunnel's evangelization efforts among the Dalits were more from a forward Christian vantage point, yet he was opposed, ostracized and even attacked on that account. At Nedumkunnam, when the new converts came for the Mass the next Sunday, and the forward groups, boycotted, and many of them felt that they should have a purificatory bath. In 1864, Edathua witnessed the conversion of another group; here again, the priests did not take initiative and a layman did the initiation. And a pulakappāla was constructed for them so that they do not enter the Church and pollute it (Bandhu, 1991:95).

2.5.2.f. Criticism of Catholic Conversions of the Dalits

N.K. Jose (1999) points to conversion as a means adopted by the oppressed castes to attain liberation from oppression. From the end of Muslim sovereignty in 1707 when the Muslim population was said to be just about 1%, by 1907 it grew up to 25%. The author accounts this as a response to the resurgence of caste oppression in the absence of the Muslim power, forcing the oppressed classes to seek other way out (like, religious conversion) for their freedom.

While the protestant (LMS/CMS) missionaries inspired the converts to assert their equal rights, to the extend that Chattampi Swamikal wrote the book ‘Kristumatchēdanam’ (the destruction of Christianity), the Catholics in converting the lower castes who were attached to their lands tried to make them all the more submissive.

The dialogue between the catechumens and the missionary priest before the first conversion as cited by the pioneer Syrian Catholic missionary among the Dalits itself is evidence for this.19

19 “I kūtuvan āstamōyirkkanna pulayar mōmmādiśa mungiyōl moppīḷamōrōyittu natanna chōttamuntu kalayōmmennu vakkakanni mōmmēdiśa mungunnatennu nerallōṭta abhiprōyangalē
It was more of a movement to freedom for the Dalits of South and Central Travancore, where as in the case of Catholic conversion, more to the North of Travancore, it seemed more a prerogative of the ‘owner’ (landlord) to decide what religion his ‘slave’ should follow, and a way to check the threat of the slaves from going away (Jose, 1991).

He sees three motives: 1) to create an alternative to protestant efforts and assert the catholic supremacy of the Christian Church. 2) to make sure that the working class remain docile and available, even after slavery had been abolished in 1855. 3) To

paranju aaddôhavum pulayarō mukkunnatinu maticcatallenge dhyanattinu vannappōl avarō mutakkiyilla”. Translation: That the pulayas were eager to receive baptism because of their eagerness to sit at par with the traditional Christians during the social celebrations. Such wrong opinions prevented the missionary apostolic Marsellenious from conferring baptism on them.

After clarifying the issues with the missionary he agreed to confer baptism and finally on Dhanu 24th 1858 a group of 18 Izhavas were baptized. Later on, the catechumens among the Pulayās were brought to the missionary on his visit to Nedumkunnam, and he was made to understand the genuineness of their preparation. While the bishop was passing by Karukachal, he made the pulayōs to kneel down and make the sign of the cross. After witnessing this and after getting clarification regarding this from the priests concerned he decided to confer baptism on them the very next day. However, Fr. Palakunnel sensed that his elder brother was opposed to this, and hence he did not proceed with the process. At this the bishop took initiative and enquired why this was not happening and realizing the brother’s opposition decided to visit Fr. Palakunnel’s brother and persuade him to cooperate in this matter. At this juncture the Hindu community began to get restless about this. (According to Fr. Palakunnel (1971:15), the Satan instigated the Hindus.)

Secretary to the bishop, Fr. Thomas and Fr. Palakunnel questioned them about their views. ‘Do you intend to go away leaving your masters (accammôrō upôkshiccum vaccum valla dikkilum poykkalayân ēnну nirîpiczûc mîmmôdziṣa mungunnatakunno?). They replied in negative and responded that even after that they would live only by working (for them) (āyālum ājangal velayetutō kazhiyattulû, āyatinal ājangalatō tannō accammîrku vēlã etukkunnatu ājangalku sammatamākkunnû.)

Q: Would you become proud because of the baptism and would stop giving way to the Hindus (kavyan)? Will you oppose this practice?
A: We will give way to them and move away farther for them than before. Even then we want to go about knowing the creator God. (ennōlum ājangalku utaya tampurînē arinju natannōl mati)
Q: Even if you get baptized, if you think that you can leave this status and walk around in the status of the māpillâs, it is in vain. In any situation one can be a child of God, there is no need to change the (social) status to follow the gospel (vēdam).
A: We will continue to remain pulayōs. We need only vēdam.
Q: Promise in one voice three times, so that every one can hear that when you get baptized, you would not think of yourselves as sudarma, and would not leave your masters (accammôr).
A: Ājangal māmmôdziṣa mungunnatinōl ājangalatō accammôre upôkshiccu pōkayillō. (three times)
reap the benefits of the proportionate government privileges on the basis of numerical strength.

He concludes the third motive from the government policy of having representatives to the legislative assembly on the basis of population. And the result is shown in the census reports of Travancore - Christians growing from 191009 in 1854 to 697387 in 1901. He alludes this to the inclusion of the neo-convert Dalits into the Christian group. According to him, almost 430000 Dalits joining the fold (Jose, 1991).

2.5.3. PROBLEMS FACING THE DALIT CHRISTIANS

While the analysis of the caste based inequality in the social organization of India is applicable to the Indian Christian community as well, the plight of the majority of the Indian Christians, who happen to be Dalits, is perhaps, a little worse, on account of the added alienations they suffer.

In the early 1960s, K.C. Alexander has made an exhaustive study of the problems of the New Christians in the central Travancore region (Alexander, 1968).

2.5.3.a Economic Deprivations

Nehru had once said that he could not perceive a problem specific to the untouchables. To him the problem was that of economic deprivation, of which the untouchables were also a part (Jose, 1999). Even now, 80% are landless, and have less than 100 days of work in a year (CSI Youth Movement, 2003). There has also been large-scale occupational displacement on account of modernization with agriculture disappearing, mechanization further displacing them on account of the lack of training, and their inability to afford the kind of education required in the age of information technology (ibid.).

Koilparampil (1982) has pointed out the caste based inequality in the Syrian Catholic Church, being perpetrated against the dalit converts by neglecting them and not giving them a due share in the resources and functioning of the Church.

2.5.3.b. The social status

The social status remains the same as it used to be before conversion: As a Rev. P.C. Joseph had said: “I do not perceive any difference (in social status), though Churches have come up all around - There is the paray ô Church, the pulay ô
Church, the fisherman marackōn’s Church\textsuperscript{20}.” Or as the famous Malayalam poet Vayalar had sung: “Even after the conversion as a Christian, Īttāppiri is still an untouchable\textsuperscript{21}.” Till recently there used to be separate churches or spaces separately allocated for dalit Christians.

Gopalan (1999) cites the contradiction in Dalit Christians tracing their Christian background to 19\textsuperscript{th} century still treated as puṟu (neo) Christians, while converts (if there are) from other castes being never called as puṟuchristians. He quotes the example of one Edamaram, a convert from higher caste (Kadankavil, 1999: 108). Whereas if someone by name Choti\textsuperscript{22} becomes a Christian and receives the name Mathew, he would be called Mathaipulayan instead of being called Chotipulayan. There had been instances of discrimination regarding the burial place. In 1989 in the parish of Kuravilangadu (Kottayam Dt.) there had been an incident in which at night the body of a Dalit who was buried near a traditional Christian was exhumed and buried away (\textit{op cit.} p.111). He quotes from a memorandum submitted by the converted Christians to Simon Commission in 1929: “We remain today what we were before we became Christians - untouchables - degraded by the laws of the social position obtaining in the land, rejected by caste Christians, and excluded by our own Hindu depressed class brethren.”

Gopalan (1999) concludes his article by assessing the conversion to Christianity having not helped them in development. He reads a savarna ploy to weaken the Dalits in general, in the struggle between the Dalits of Hindu fold being supported by Savarna Hindus, and the Christian Dalits, being supported by traditional (savarna) Christians - the former against including Christian Dalits in the reserved list, and the latter for that. He points out that the traditional Christian community which now supports reservation for Dalit Christians, has not made any effort in reserving job opportunities for the Dalit Christians in the numerous educational institutions which they run.

Dalit Bandhu (Jose, 1991:x) quotes the couplet from the famous Malayali poet Vayalar, which depicts the plight of the Dalit converted to Christianity.

\begin{verse}
\textit{Parayantō pallī pulayantō pallī/ Minpituttakkaran mararakōntō pallī} (Rev. P.C. Joseph, Poykayil Sree Kumaraguru Jeevitavum Darsanavum, p. 54)
\textit{Kristyōniyayi maitham māriyēnklīum/ īttāppirikkōnttu īttāppippzum} (Vayalar). ‘Īttāppiri’ is a typical name of a Dalit Christian (Cited by Jose, 1991).
\end{verse}

\textsuperscript{20} Palliyōtpalḷi nirōnningnguvannittum/ Vytyōsam mōri ṅjōn kōnunnila

\textsuperscript{21} Kristyōniyayi maitham māriyēnklīum/ īttāppirikkōnttu īttāppippzum (Vayalar). ‘Īttāppiri’ is a typical name of a Dalit Christian.

\textsuperscript{22} A typical dalit name.
Kristy óniyayi matham m óriyenkilum

Ittāppirikkoru Tēontānippozhum

He says that the life of the Dalit Christian still befits the poetic description by the Malayali poet Kumaranasan: 'like a dark shadow of the urban civilization'.

2.5.3.c Oppressive Nomenclature and its Implications

There have been various names being used for the Dalit Christians. Koilparampil (1982) has quoted Imitiaz Ahmed, who has observed this fact with the new converts into Islam and Christianity. The prefix ‘new’ (puṟu), according to the latter implied a slightly inferior status.

K.C. Alexander’s study (1968) had pointed out the stigma attached to the term ‘puṟukristyānikal’, which literally means New Christians, but in practice segregates.

The term ‘New Christian’ is seen used by Fischer, the Dutch Protestant chaplain of Cochin from 1717 to 1723, which according to him consisted mostly of converts from the low castes (Mundadan, 1984:354). This was in vogue till 1950s, afterwards they came to be called as avāsakristyānikal (K.J. Varghese in Vijayapurattintē Caritrattūlkal in Kerala Times, 1988. Aug. 4:5).

They had been called by various nomenclatures over the past two centuries - puṟukristyānikal, avāsakrīstavar, parivartikrīstavar, harijankrīstavar, pulayakristyōni, Parayakristyōni, marddīta kraistavar, atisthōnavargakraistavar. (Gopalan, 1999). When Gandhian programme of harijanodharanam was in vogue, the term harijan began to be used for this section of Christians. After the political mobilization on the basis of ethnic identities, this term was discarded by the Dalit Christians as well. (On 1985 Nov. 24, Government of India prohibited the use of this terminology to indicate the Scheduled Castes.) The term, which they now have chosen for themselves is dalitkraistavar or dalit Christians (Jose, 1991:2).

As already elaborated, dalit is a nomenclature which expresses the process of making a human being a dalit, of centuries long oppression and avoidance getting ingrained into human psyche. It expresses the emotions and thinking which the oppressed people possess. It means literally broken, divided, separated, foot-trodden (Bandhu, 1994-2).

23 Nōgarika naralō kattintō syōmamōya nizhallempōlō (Āsōn)
The term was used as early as 1922 to signify those groups who were oppressed through caste system. Swami Sraddhananda was the President of dalitōddhōraka samiti of Delhi. And hence the INC conference in Bardola in 1922 appointed him as the convener of the committee for the upliftment of the untouchables (N.K. Jose, 1999 in Kadankavil, sanchārapatham).

Writer on dalit issues N.K. Jose raises the issue of whether the correct term should be ‘Dalit Christians’ or ‘Christian Dalits’. Can there be dalits among Christians when Christianity preaches the fatherhood of God and all who believe in him as equally children of God, while there can be Christians from among the dalits? There can be no divisions among Christians. Whether the Dalits should first assert and accept their dalit condition and then speak about their religious identity, which is a matter of choice rather than something they are born with, is a moot question (Augustine, 1993 & Jose, 1991). The term ‘Christian Dalits’ was adopted by Christian Dalit Liberation Movement in 1984 in its second formation meeting at Hyderabad (Paravila, 2003). The question has the basis in biblical ideal set forth in Biblical texts, Galatians (Gal. 3:26-28) and Corinthians, which speak about everyone in Christ as a new creation (2 Cor 5:16-17 - judgement not by human standards, and new creation in Christ).

2.5.3.d Marginalisation of the Dalit Christians and Loss of Dalit culture

Mathew M. John, in an unpublished article for internal circulation, under the title “The Present Dalit Reality” speaks about the marginalisation of the Dalits. He points to the threat of monoculturism absorbing in the diverse dalit cultures, in effect wiping them out. The political efforts remain at the level of marches and rallies. In the visual media, especially cinema and theatre, the Dalits are depicted as supportive or comical characters. Their rich tradition of folk culture is being absorbed and commodified. He cites the use of vōttēri of the folk songs, which are expression of the struggle and pathos of the dalit existence, as an example of this commodification. “This bleeding dalit reality is transformed into entertaining stereotypical hollow stuff by the dominant culture.” (CSI Youth Movement, 2003:20).

2.5.3.e Division among the Dalits themselves

The Dalits are also not able to put up a common front on account of the sub-casteism prevalent among them. Thus there are now Sāmbavar Christians, Čērāmar Christians, Kuravar Christians, Vettuvar Christians and so on (Kadankavil, 1997-2).
Another threat is the uncritical acceptance of the dominant culture by them.

2.5.3.f Discrimination

Gough (1963) observes that conversion to Christianity was taken recourse to by the Hindus of the so-called low castes to improve their social status. However, their fond hope that those thus converted would get greater acceptance by the intermediary castes like the Nairs was not materialised.

The Dalits converted to Christianity began to be discriminated by the forward sections of Christian community; and this led to their social displacement, both among the Dalits and among the Christians.

Gopalan (1999) considers the withdrawal of the British and consequent departure of English or western missionaries as the cause of resurgence of caste in Christianity. [However, this is debatable, as the converts from dalit communities to the Syrian Christian/Catholic fold during the 19th and early 20th centuries were kept apart as a group, in spite of being Christians]. He accuses the Christians to have extended the evils of caste system to Christianity as well.

Paravila (2003), in his study refers to Stanislaus’ (1999) presentation of six-fold discrimination - by the government, the Non-Dalit Hindus, Non-Dalit Christians, the hierarchical church, fellow dalit Hindus, the sub-groups of the Dalit Christians

2.5.3.g Discrimination by the State

Apart from all the problems encountered by the Dalits described earlier, the Dalit Christians suffer because of the discrimination by the state, the very institution the citizens look up to for ensuring equality. In flagrant violation of the spirit of the constitution and the values enshrined in the preamble of the constitution, the Dalit Christians are treated as with a kind of antagonism which make them feel like second-class citizens.

Alongside this, and adding to the disabilities arising from the ‘state-sponsored discrimination’ is the lack of support and understanding from the forward section of the Christian community which, in most parts of the country happens to be the minority. A grasp of this aspect of the Dalit Christian problem is very important, as the above mentioned discrimination by the state-apparatus has been to a great extent the contribution of the lack of sensitivity and understanding of the forward section of the Christian community itself.
2.5.3.g.1 The Constituent Assembly and Christian Representation

The Christian point of view was presented in the constitution assembly by the forward Christian representatives Dr. H.C. Mukherjee, Fr. Jerome D'Souza and Rajkumari Amrita Kaur. Dr. Mukherjee said that Christians did not require a reserved constituency/representation on the basis of their religious minority status. Though this stand was much appreciated as a noble stand on the part of the Christians (1935 - reservation only on the basis of religious minority status; 1950 - no reservation at all), the brunt was borne by the Christian Dalits who form almost 75% of the Indian Christians (Jose, 1991).

Due to the position taken by the Christian representatives to the constituent assembly which appeared magnanimous and in the spirit of national integration at that time, the Christians were not included for any special privileges, other than the freedom to run educational institutions for the noble motive of the moulding of the character of the adherents of Christian faith, in tune with the values and culture of their religion. However, in the process, it was the Christian Dalits who were deprived of what was due to them on account of their social backwardness.

The new dispensation under the Indian Constitution

Art. 25(1) of the constitution guarantees Indian citizens, right to freedom of conscience, declaration, practice and propagation of faith of one’s choice and Art. 15 (1) say that there cannot be any sort of discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, region etc. Hence, on the basis of religion, no citizen can be discriminated against. However, the reservation provisions are such that one is forced to stick to a religion, which may not be of one’s choice. And Dalit Christians are denied the protection through reservation on the basis of their faith, while the fact remains that change in religion has not really made them free from the clutches of centuries long backwardness. The confusion arises from equating socio-economic background as pertaining to religious faith. This has been reiterated by the various commissions that enquired into the situation of the backward classes, viz., the Mandal commission, and the commissions with Nettur P. Damodaran and G. Kumarapilla as chairpersons.

The crux of the issue lies in the definition of those deserving special treatment on the basis of their membership in Hindu community. “No person who professes a religion different from Hinduism shall be deemed to be a member of Scheduled Castes” (The Presidential order of 1950, Constitution -Scheduled Castes - order 1950). Argument
is based on the premise that untouchability as a practice is of Hindu origin. Hence, those who belong to other faiths do not suffer from the evil of untouchability and hence should not be included in this category. Islam and Christianity being free from this evil, those getting converted to these religions should not be included in the scheduled caste list. The fallacy of the argument lies in the conclusion that the spread of untouchability is restricted to the source of its origin, and that legal or moral principles (e.g., of equality) are always practiced as preached. The law has turned a blind eye towards the social reality, and has done a minor favour of going by the interests of the dominant upper caste thinking, but doing immense harm to a smaller community in the path of its progress. This social reality was observed by Gandhiji long back, that harijan whether Christian or Muslim, would continue to suffer the bondage of untouchability all through one’s life (Harijan, 1936 Dec. 26).

The provision has also contradicted itself by neglecting the fact that, untouchability is removed by law (art. 17) and hence legally, there would be no Hindu who is suffering from untouchability. It is a punishable offence wherever it occurs.

The constitutional provisions for reservation deprive the Dalit Christians from the right to seek civil protection and safeguards provided to all Dalits under the Protection of Civil rights Act, 1976, the Untouchability (Offences) Act 1955, and the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 (Chinnappa and Raj, 2006).

There had been struggles for equal rights and/or special privileges since 1950s. Due to the pressure they could exert, the Sikhs got this privilege in 1950, and the Buddhists got the same in 1990. But the Christians are still deprived of this status (Augustine, 1996).

Here again, a further contradiction is revealed: the criteria for determining the inclusion in Scheduled Castes is the social, economic and educational backwardness on account of the traditional practice of untouchability. When it comes to conversions to Christianity this backwardness is set aside, but the same is taken into account in conversion to Sikhism or Buddhism both of which are egalitarian in its faith, as Christianity.

2.5.3.g.2 Discrimination by the State and the Struggle for Rights

The union social justice minister Satya Narain Jatiya in the NDA cabinet stated in 2003 that the attempts to include Dalit Christians are an international conspiracy. He also stated that the Registrar General of India and the Chairman of the National
Commission for SCs and STs (both appointees of NDA) had advised against giving any reservation right to Dalit Christians (Pinto 2006).

In March 1996, draft bill was presented when Sitaram Kesri was the Welfare Minister. But owing to some procedural lapse, the bill could not be tabled. The Dalit Christians view this as a deliberate lapse and a sign of lack of commitment to the cause of justice for the Dalit Christians. In 2004, requests to revive the bill were made, but no political party had shown interest.

2.5.3.g.3 Findings of the various commissions

In 1965, Kumarapilla Commission report which studied the reservation of seats in educational institutions observed: The social backwardness of the Scheduled Castes is so great that the new convert is not easily assimilated with the congregation he has joined and others instinctively keep away from them until his standards rise. That will come only by gradual stages. The evidence is that the degree of segregation of the new converts from the Scheduled Caste is almost as high as before the conversion...we are convinced that in practice converts from Scheduled Castes are treated as socially backward (Augustine, 1996:41).

Kalelkar Commission: Similarly, Kalelkar Commission of 1955, which was constituted to study the problems of backward communities, said, “Even after conversion caste does not cease to exist. For example, those who get converted to Islam and Christianity continue to maintain their caste traditions and practices at times... In the South, the Scheduled Castes converted into Christianity were found to be generally backward and there was no free social intercourse with the rest of the Christian Communities” (Augustine, 1996:46)

The Mandal Commission (1992) and the ruling by Justice Bhagawati (AIR 1976 SC 939) point to the existing reality of backwardness of the Dalit converts to Christianity. “It cannot be therefore laid down as an absolute rule uniformly applicable to all cases that whenever a member of caste is converted from Hinduism to Christianity he ceases to be a member of that caste” (Ref. Augustine 1996:40).

2.5.3.g.4 Court Judgments

Some of the pronouncements by the court of law point to the justice issue involved.

“To deny them (Dalit Christians) the constitutional protection of reservation solely by reason of change of faith or religion is to endanger the very concept of Secularism

Observation of Justice J. Kanakaraj is quoted by Augustine: “There is a popular myth that when a person is converted into Christianity he is accepted and treated as equal to every other citizen. I am calling this attitude a myth because in practice there is no such acceptation or treatment. May be within the Church the person may have some concession or a show of equal treatment. But in the competitive world of seeking admission to the educational institution or seeking appointment to posts, he suffers from the same difficulties as his Hindu brother or sister suffers” (cited in Augustine, 1996:45).

“...so sadly and oppressively deep-rooted is caste in our country that it has cut across even the barriers of religions... today we find that practitioners of other religious faiths and Hindu dissentients are sometimes as rigid adherents to the system of caste as the conservative Hindus. We find Christian Dalits, Christian Nadars, Christian Reddys, Christian Kammas...”(Mandal Case Judgement, Art. 469, cf. p. 450)

“The change of religion did not always succeed in eliminating castes. The converts carried with them their castes and occupations to the new religions... the result has been that even among Sikhs, Muslims and Christians casteism prevails in varying degrees in practice, their preaching notwithstanding.

Minority Commission recommendation, 1980, says this: “Since the Christians, Muslims and Buddhists of SC origin continue to suffer from social and economic disabilities even after their conversion, there should be no objection to their availing of the concessions admissible to them before” (quoted by Chinnappa & Raj, 2006:43).

The Supreme Court, on Oct. 28th 2004, asked the Attorney General Milon Banerjee, to ascertain the Centre’s view on a petition seeking extension of reservation benefits for the SCs even after their conversion to Christianity. This was in connection with a PIL challenging the validity of paragraph 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, by which only those who profess Hinduism as the religion alone were included in the SC list (Desrochers, 2004).

The tribunal headed by former Supreme court judge, Justice S.B. Sawant on July 18, 2005, gave the judgement that the 16 million Christian Dalits of India deserve all the protection given to the Dalits of other minority communities. Supreme Court almost
reprimanded the Attorney General pointing to the neglect on the part of the government in taking appropriate action for over a year on a sensitive issue involving constitutional amendment. People’s Union for Civil Liberties had filed the case (Aug.17, 2005 Wed. Malayala Manorama).

No political party has shown commitment to this cause, and it was PUCL that finally came to the forefront to file a PIL (Elavungal, James. Satyadarsanamōla Vol. 12, No. 19, Oct. 24, 2005:2).

2.5.3.g.5 Lack of Political Representation and the Dalit Christians

In the state of Keralam, till 1964, they used to have at least nominal representation through the presence of congress MLAs P. Chacko (Thiruvalla) and P.M. Markose. However, after promising ministerial post, and getting the much needed vote for Kerala Congress in 1964, they totally neglected the Dalit Christian issue, and since then there has not been a representative of Dalit Christians in the assembly.

The state corporation for the welfare of the converted Christians - Parivartita Kraistava Corporation - remained without a chairperson for two years and a half.

2.5.3.g.6 A Hindutva Undercurrent in a secular state

Those who look at the dalit issue as a justice issue, in analysing the political decisions right from the constitutional assembly, suspect a right wing Hindutva agenda.

It starts with the defining of those who were to be considered for reservation privileges. It was K.M. Munshi who suggested that the reservation should be on the basis of religion and that only Hindus be treated as SCs (Jose,1991:49).

Such provisions were made in Keralam on Dec. 1, 1951 as follows:

“Person who belonged originally to Hindu Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and were subsequently converted to Christianity should on re-conversion to Hinduism be eligible to all educational concessions granted to Hindu Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. They will also be eligible for other concessions in respect of grant of land, establishment of colonies etc. for which Hindu Scheduled Castes and Hindu Scheduled Tribes are eligible” (Cited by Augustine, 1996:37). There is a similar order regarding the grants for students who belong to these categories.
The whole provision of re-conversion to Hinduism appears anti-constitutional in its spirit. The stipulation of the process regarding its certification by any one of the following agencies: Kerala Hindu Mission, *Akhila Bhārat Dayānanda* Salvation Mission, *Aryasamōj* Kerala Branch, *Akhila Bhārat Ayyappa Sēva Sangham*, *Sri Ramaḍōs* Mission Universal Society, Calicut *Āryasamōj* - smacks nothing short of a Hindutva agenda, as if the state is colluding with the right wing forces. If the earlier mode of domestication was that of paternalism towards the subjects, the new design is that of hinduisation or in certain contexts, re-hinduisation. The rituals and stipulations by which a re-hinduisation (re-conversion) is being promoted points to the processes of domestication the Dalits are subjected to (Augustine, 1996; Vōsavi 2006).

There has also been a rightwing campaign within the country to mislead ‘Hindu’ Dalits that their rights will be eaten away if Christian and Muslim Dalits were to be given reservation rights (Raj, 2006:35). The comment by K.V. Kumāran, All Kerala *Paṭṭika Jāti Varga* Federation President, is pertinent in this context: “Hindu Dalits should not oppose the inclusion of Christian Dalits in the Scheduled Caste list. There should not be any loss for those who are already in the list. Instead of the existing one percent reservation, they should be accorded reservation proportionate to their population.”

### 2.5.4. DALIT CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Dalit Christian response to the socio-economic problems they face as a community does not show much to mention except a few individuals who have done committed work, and the general trends in responding to the oppression and deprival they face.

#### 2.5.4.a Individual Dalit Leadership

There have been a few outstanding individuals from among the Dalit Christians who dedicated themselves to the cause of the community. Pampadi John Joseph did pioneering work among *Cērāmar* Christians. His *Cērāmar Sangham* was a response to the non-Christian dalit mobilization through Ayyan Kāli’s *sōdhujana paripōlana sangham*, to which the government allocated many privileges on condition that it remains exclusively Hindu. John Joseph insisted that all *Cērāmars* irrespective of their religion should join the *sangham*. Himself a convert to Christianity, he

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24 Whether it is hinduisation (afresh) or re-hinduisisation (implying one used to be Hindu) is debatable. Ref. “Why I am not a Hindu?” by Kancha Ilaiah, 1996.
popularised the term *Cēramar* for the *pulayas*. The letter he has written to the British Parliament highlighting the plight of the Christian Dalits and the need for special privileges for them in the year 1935, is a realistic picturisation of the Dalit Christian situation then, it is true to a great extent, even today. There in, he also highlights how Christianity has helped them and broadened their horizons. He also published a periodical ‘*Cēmar dutān*’ to bring the Dalit issues to the public (Jose, 1991:78-84; Bandhu, 1994c).

Poykayil Yohannan of *Pratyakṣa Rakṣā Sabha* was another leader from among the Dalits who worked for the uplift of the community. He was threatened and persecuted at several places because he preached against the discrimination practiced against the *dalit* Christians as injustice. There was no effort to counter his arguments, except the use of brutal force to suppress such responses.

In an earlier study, Palakkappillil (1997) has recorded the recollection of some of the Christian converts of Ezhupunna, who narrated how their efforts at self-assertion were met by physical violence.

### 2.5.4.b Dalit Solidarity

Fannon is quoted by Pandey (2006) “The practice of violence binds them together as a whole” (Fannon, 1963: 93). However, this does not seem to be true with the Dalit Christians of Keralam. They are a divided lot. It is in this context that writers like Massey (Das & Massey, 1994) and Bandhu (1994a) call for ‘*dalit* solidarity’. The call is to all *dalit* sections, irrespective of their regional-religious affiliations to come together for their rights.

### 2.5.4.c Reconversion

Gopalan (1999) points out re-conversion as one of the ways in which the Christian Dalits have tried to cope with the situation of deprivation. They convert back to Hinduism to receive the privileges due to the reserved castes. However, Kadankavil (1997) observes that in spite of the strong attractions offered in the form of reservation benefits, very few of the Dalit Christians have gone back from the faith. This shows how they value the spiritual tradition they have chosen.
2.5.4.d Political Organisation

Gopalan (1999) feels that the road to liberation lies in achieving power, political power, which needs united effort from the part of the various oppressed groups - the Dalits, the backwards castes, the minority communities.

The possibilities in political organisation have been pointed out in the Kerala context by T.J. Abraham, the state organizer of DCMS (2001). In 1991, there were 34 Christian MLAs representing the 19.32% population. However, not a single one among them was a Dalit Christian. It is said that there are as many as 50 influential pockets where the Dalit Christians can wield considerable influence on the election outcomes.


However, there has not been any successful organization of the Dalit Christians on political lines.

2.5.4.e. Dalit Theology

Theologising is a way of finding meaning in life and its realities from a God (Theos) perspective. The Dalit Christian reality calls for the task of finding meaning in the context of Christian faith community in which it has its roots and existence.

Prabhu (1992) says that the Bible itself should be read as part of dalit literature, with an unmistakable siding with the oppressed. Arulraja (1996) presents a strong case to have a dalit perspective in the theology and praxis of the Church in his book, “Jesus the Dalit”. The dalit theology is a theology of liberation of the oppressed, where God
is seen as liberator, and God in Jesus is seen as one who is concerned about and involved with the suffering of the Dalits. God is seen as the defender of the Dalits. It is also a theology of equality, as enshrined in the statement of Jesus in the throes of his suffering, that he was dying so that “they may be one” and that “all God’s children may be gathered into one” (Paravila, 2003).

Bandhu (1993) argues forcibly for the need of a dalit theology, in lines with thinking of black theology. However, he merely speaks about the need for substituting God images (white to black) and presenting Christ as black (oppressed, side-lined and dark). His argument is for a counter movement in theology, which will lead to the liberation of the Dalits (all the oppressed classes), apparently implying subjugation of the present dominating classes!

Alangāram (2003) takes the various facets of dalit existence and tries to relate it to the Biblical understanding of realities as shown and understood in the life of Jesus Christ. The reality of dalit rejection on the basis of purity-pollution resulting from their traditional tasks involving dealing with death is compared to the rejection Jesus had to face in his life. “He came to his own people, and His own people received Him not…” (Jn.1: 11). On the other hand, Christian community also ought to remember that Jesus was willing to accept rejection of the traditional Jewish community by daringly associating with those who were considered polluting and rejected - e.g., the Samaritan woman, the Good Samaritan turning the healer, the concern for those affected with leprosy, the concern for the socially reject categories of ‘sinners and tax-collectors’. While trying to find consolation for the rejection the Dalits face, all Christians have also the task of daring rejection by standing for the rejected and marginalized.

Alangāram (2003) also finds Jesus’ life without the least of the amenities of life replicated in the lives of the Dalits. ‘...the Son of Man has no where to lay his head’. In today’s context the lives of Dalits alienated from the basic right of land, and deprived of the basic amenities of housing, water and electricity, is Jesus’ own life clamouring for response by the community in general. The picture is a symbol of consolation for the Dalits. He points to the efforts of the Dalits in India for their emancipation from the oppressive caste structure by embracing various religions including Christianity. However, that has not ended their experience of oppression and discrimination. In addition to the added oppression within the Church, they are also deprived of the privileges due to the dalits according to Indian constitution. Alangāram sees the echo of Jesus’ cry ‘Eloi, Eloi, ἐκμῶ σαβαθθῶνι?’ - My God,
my God, why have you forsaken me? (Mk15: 34). The solace the Dalits have is the solidarity Jesus gives in their suffering, and the assurance he gives: 'blessed are the people who hunger and thirst for justice' (Mtt. 5:6).

The Dalits who have been suppressed into a culture of silence have remained in the state of perpetual backwardness, as they were always denied access to education. Whenever they tried to protest they were persecuted as was Jesus whose protests against the unjust structures led to his persecution. On the basis of this comparison, Alangāram 2003) speaks about the hope that the suppressed and oppressed Dalits have in Jesus, that they will also be glorified like him. However, it is to be explored whether this sort of theology in fact perpetuating the state of oppression by being reconciled to it.

Another Biblical image Alangāram (2003) employs is that of ‘sheep without a shepherd’ (Mtt. 9:36) that the Dalits are a people without leadership.

Alangāram (2003) looks at the options before the Dalits:

- Being angry and restless at the oppressive situation. Angry at a sinful situation that is historical, social and structural. They are angry at the structural inequalities perpetuated and fortified by the global trends of market-based competition, which leads to a competition among unequally placed people. However, his statement that they are prophetic and creative in their anger doesn’t seem apt, as this is found to be lacking.

- Opt for subversive actions - which he equates to choosing life and not death, and be fine-tuned with the Spirit and truth. Destruction of the power and influence of an established system. He refers to the hymn of Mary (Lk. 1:51-53), which speaks of God’s action in this regard. The author points out ‘beef eating’ as an act of subversion, in the Indian context, which in general may be valid for India, but not for states like Keralam. However, is the act a conscious and deliberately chosen or continued act, or merely a habit the Dalits have become used to? Jesus’ solidarity with the outcastes of those times - conversation with the Samaritan woman and the stay in Samaritan village for two days - is a subversive action for the transformation of the world.

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• Dalitness of divinity in the cross of Jesus, broken and torn asunder. In all the sufferings of Dalits, Jesus’ sacrifice is re-enacted. It becomes a call to all Christians to approach this reality with great care and concern!

Liberation is a key theme in the emerging dalit Theology - liberation of the Dalits from the oppressive structures, and liberation of the Non-Dalits from the attitudes that reinforces the discriminatory practices towards the Dalits. Liberation through education, associations and dalit solidarity. Paravila (2003) finds the scriptural basis for solidarity in Jesus’ prayer - that they may be one (Jn 17:23), dying for gathering into one all children of God (Jn. 11:52).

Pinto (2003) says that there is need for a new philosophy of revolution through subalternt assertion to create a new humanity and community.

2.5.4.f Dispositions and Identity

As discussed earlier, and elaborated by Ilaiah (1996) acceptance of identity and assertion of the same while adapting what is befitting for a human life of dignity is today widely discussed as the way to liberation. However, with regard to Dalit Christian community of Keralam, this needs to be explored. In an otherwise enlightened and progressive society, it is supposed that the Dalits also would be possessing a higher level of self-esteem.

Jain (1991) in review of the book, “Ethnicity: Identity, Conflict, Crisis” (eds. Kumar David and S. Kandirgamar) says that the solution may not lie in regeneration of communities which may incite ethnicity, but rather in a) a more just distribution of resources, b) in making development process more mass-oriented and c) in making the decision making process more participatory.

Paravila (2003) has quoted the observation by Louis regarding the problem with asserting one's identity leading to denial of reservation privileges, and consequent concealment of dalit identity. Vadakkēkkūṭu (2001) says about restoring the ‘self-image’ (ātmabōdham) of the broken people (the Dalits).

2.5.5. STATE RESPONSE

2.5.5.a. Political History of Reservation for the Dalit Christians

From 1909 to 1950 August, the Dalit Christians had reservation according to Gol Act of 1909. In 1935, Christians were included as a special constituency along with the
Muslims. At that time, the forward Christian regions of Goa, Travancore and Kochi were not under the British rule (Jose, 1991). However when the issue of reservation of seats for the lower house came for discussion, the Christian leadership (predominantly forward or savarna Christians) argued for religious minority status, rather than SC status, presenting Christian community as one without distinction of Dalits and Non-Dalits. Accordingly they were given 8 seats in the lower house at the centre, and in the lower houses of the states - Madras 9, Bombay -3, Bengal - 3, UP - 2, Punjab -2, Bihar - 1, Assam -1, Orissa -1, and 3 seats in the upper house of Madras. It was with this that Christians were removed from the list of social groups for special treatment.

2.5.5.b. Provisions in the state of Keralam

The state has provided 1% reservation in the government jobs. The state also provides fee concessions and lump sum grant equivalent to other dalit students for their particular course of study under the institutions run with government aid.

2.5.6. RESPONSE BY THE CHURCH

The response by the Catholic Church towards the Dalit Christian approach could be classified into broadly three categories. 1) Contest approach - where in the Church community and leadership strive for getting the constitutional rights of reservation benefits for the Dalit Christians. 2) Welfare Approach - where in the Dalits are brought under the broad umbrella of charity and welfare including sponsorships, scholarships, relief, housing related benefits etc. and 3) Community Organisation Approach - which contains 2 streams: a) strengthening the organisation of DCMS and its activities and b) promotion of locality based initiatives of Self Help Groups.

2.5.6.a. Organisation - Dalit Catholic Mahōjana Sabha

On July 24, 1955, a gathering of leaders - Fr. J. Maliparampil, Fr. G. Kochuparampil, Fr. Jacob Manalel, Fr. J. Kochuparampil and others initiated a new movement, called Avasa Cathōlica Mahōjana Sabha (ACMS). They elected Sri P.M. Markose as President, P.C Paul as secretary, and V.J. John as the treasurer. The first meeting was held at Chethipuzha under Fr. Placid’s leadership. Travancore Chief Minister Sri. T.K. Narayanappilla and Sri P.T Chacko were present. In that meeting the declaration regarding free tuition was made. Later on, educational support was

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26 Source: Notes prepared by C.C. Kunjukochu, former State President of DCMS, and being circulated by the diocesan DCMS office: “The Contributions by the Arch-diocese for the upliftment of the DCs” (2006).
introduced by EMS government. In the face of the threat of resignation by Christian MLAs if no solution was found for this issue, Sri Panampilly Govinda Menon sent an appeal to the central government to include the *DCs* in the scheduled caste list.

Fr. Veettuvelikkunnel initiated national level campaign with conferences at Bangalore and Charalkunnu.

In 1965 the organization adopted the name *Harijan Cathōlica Mahōjana Sabha* (HCMS) in tune with the prevalent Gandhian thinking and influence of those days, and in 1995 it changed its name, taking into account the new socio-political thinking in line with identity-assertion paradigm, and became *Dalit Cathōlica Mahōjana Sabha* (DCMS).

In 1984, it got its own office space in the diocese of Changanachery. In 1988, a pastoral council was held for discussing this issue and decided to set apart 10% of the admissions and also jobs for the DCs. DCMS also has feeder organizations like DCYL (*Dalit Catholic Youth League*), DCVS (*Dalit Catholic Vanita Sangham*) etc. They organize seminars, camps, cultural feasts, vocation promotion camps etc.

**Struggles**

The DCMS gave leadership to various struggles for securing equal rights for the Dalit Christian, on its own, and in collaboration with other *dalit* organizations.

Sri. K.F. Chacko gave leadership for a march from Angamaly to Trivandrum, and later on presented a memorandum to Dr. Zakir Hussein, the President.

Mr. V.J. John gave leadership to the march from Malayattoor to Rajbhavan. 20 lakh signatures were collected and submitted with the memorandum to President Venkataraman and Prime Minister V.P. Singh.

Though a bill was brought to the Parliament in 1996, as the procedures were not followed, it was rejected.

During the EMS government regime the Dalit Christians were granted educational concessions.

**2.5.6.b. Christian Initiatives**

A survey of history of initiatives from the part of the Christian community can be traced as follows:
C.C. Kunjukochu\textsuperscript{27}, remarks that the Dalits are a people denied reservation privileges because of their faith in Jesus Christ; because they accepted Christian religion. He recalls the leaders of this movement: Palakkunnel Mathai Mariam Kattanar, Puthenparampil Thommachen, Blessed Chavara, Blessed Thevarparampil Kurijachan. First in the series of conversions was initiated by Fr Palakkunnel in Nedumkunnam in 1856.

He has listed a set of measures taken by the Arch-diocese of Changanachery which includes reservation in education and employment, and starting of various projects for the development of Dalit Christians.

**AKCC** (All Kerala Catholic Congress) - 1971 Annual General Conference in Mangalore appointed a committee to study the problems of \textit{avasa kraistavar} with Augustine (1996) as its convener. Report was submitted in the conference at Salem.

1978 Charalkunnu - KCBC and Kerala Christian Council resolution to form an action council with representation from all Christian communities.


From the time of V.P. Singh ministry there had been efforts or promises to include Christian Dalits in the SC list.

In 1977, G.S. Reddy presented the Constitution Amendment (Scheduled Castes) bill, but it was not taken for discussion. P.J. Kurien’s bill was taken for discussion but was not voted on. On Feb. 28, 1992, George Fernandes presented a bill to include Christians of \textit{dalit} origin in the SC list in the pattern of the Sikhs and the Neo-buddhists. It was noted that it would cost annually 2 crore rupees, and 10 lakhs as non-recurring fund, and no further action was taken on it.

1992 June 16, 17 - A convention of all MLAs and MPs belonging to SC and ST was held in Delhi. An appeal was made by Mr. Peter G. Marbaniang MP that a bill should be presented and passed to accord the Christian Dalits equal status and privileges given to the Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist Dalits.

\textsuperscript{27} Source: Notes prepared by C.C. Kunjukochu, 2006.
The Catholic Church of India has dedicated the Sunday after August 15th every year as Justice Sunday, to renew the efforts to get the justice due to the Dalit Christians from the year 1986.

However, an analysis from a dalit standpoint, of the initiatives or failure in taking initiatives by Church, does not present a very bright picture.

In 1931 Dr. J.H. Hutton employed a questionnaire to assess the problems of the depressed classes. There was no effort from anybody to highlight the problems of Christian Dalits. Further, in the round table conference to discuss these issues, the Christian community was represented by Sir A.T. Paneer Selvam, who brought to the attention of the commission only the general problems affecting the Christians. Hence when the lists were prepared Indian Christians were not included in the Schedule.

In 1950, the position of 1931 was taken as the model. Again, the Christian representatives perhaps could not assess the problems the Dalits in India face, as all the three of them were from much-privileged strata of the Indian society.

P.J. Sebastian, a lay leader of the Syrian Christian community, is criticized by the dalit leadership of BCCF (Backward Class Christian Federation) for his negative role in diffusing the struggle in 1955 which would have gained privileges under the state government scheme (Jose, 1991:102).

In strongly worded letter to the editor of 'Integral Liberation' (Vol. 2, No.3, pp.212-3) five individuals from Kalady, (Ouseph, Kochuthresia, Anthony, Saby and Kuttiyamma) criticized the stand of the mainstream Church regarding the dalit issue; They perceive that efforts for reservation for Christian Dalits by the Church leaders have forgotten to take into consideration the concerned people themselves, their views and their participation. According to them, acceptance as Christians on par with the rest of the Christians is more important. They point out the discrimination meted out against them in Church matters and in social intercourse like that of marriage. They want the fellow Christians to work with them, rather than lead them. In their own words: “Equal opportunity and respect in the Church should come first; then join us in our struggles demanding rights from the government (if at all that is the problem)”.

28 Ref. 2.5.3.g.1. of this section.
Devassia (2005) gives a critique of the message of the Major Arch Bishop of the
Syrian Catholic Church of Keralam on the occasion of the golden jubilee celebration
of the DCMS which appeared in Sunday Shalom on Feb. 20, 2005. The message
was about ensuring free education and reservation in employment for the Dalit
Christians. He points out that the statement implies a confession that so far nothing
has been done for them in these two areas, and that it also indicates the ‘existing
caste difference, untouchability and cruel discrimination’ in the Syro-Malabar Church
as dalitar and adalitar and that this racial (vargiya) division as ‘traditional Christians’
and ‘Dalit Christians’ is making Christianity very barbaric and distorted. He further
alleges that the privileges the Catholic community has gained in the name of minority
rights for running various institutions and the numerous job opportunities there in are
not taken into account in ensuring equality for the Dalit Christians.

2.5.7. CRITIQUE OF THE APPROACH TOWARDS THE DALIT
CHRISTIANS WITHIN THE SYRIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The foregoing presentation on the history and development of Christianity in India,
with specific reference to the Syrian Catholic Church, and the conversion of the
Dalits into its fold since the middle of 19th century shows an underlying contradiction
in the community as to the values it preaches and the praxis of the same. This
contradiction is most glaring with reference to egalitarian ideal Christianity upholds.

Jose (1991) observes that the differentiation and consequent division in the Church
in India based on rites apparently is a question of power relationships; but deeper
still is the casteist mind set of Keralites that could not tolerate the acceptance a
people whom the existing Christians thought to be of lower caste as fellow members
of their faith community.

The Synod of Diamper29 is said to have abolished the evil tradition of ayittam
(untouchability). And as there was violent reaction there seems to have been an
alteration which said in 7th mautwa, 7th kutivicaram30, 2nd canon that when savarna
Christians are present there would be ayittam (untouchability), and in their absence
there would not be! A dalit perspective of the famous kōnnankurisu satyam points
to the caste significance of the Synodal decisions that were in conflict with the
commercial interests of the Syrian Christians. Their function as the class that
absorbed the pollution of the products of the dalits to make them usable for the

29 Synod is …..A very controversial official gathering of the Church of Keralam in 1599 in
30 Mautwa – section; kutivicaram – meeting/conference
upper castes was of commercial significance. The new decisions banning caste differentiation would have affected the trade, and this is said to have been the underlying reason for the revolt leading to the oath of Kōōnan Cross. Hence it had more to do with caste related economics and social status than the apparent struggle against religious domination (Muthukattil, 1999).

Bandhu (1994c) is unsparing in his criticism of the dalit conversions. It was not faith that made the converted or the missionaries/converters to convert religion, but a hope (a false one!) that they would find greener pastures, equal opportunities as Christians in Christianity. He draws parallel between the discrimination in Hindu community and Christian community - as the Dalits who had devotion to/faith in Vishnu or other Hindu deity along with savarna Hindus, the Dalits who professed faith in Jesus Christ along with the traditional (savarna) Christians were never treated equal, but were discriminated against; discrimination cut across religions, as caste worked as the social fabric for all the communities.

Balasundaram (1999) writes about the continued discrimination and lack of integration among the Christians of Kerala Church. Anantha Krishna Aiyar points out that the Church’s stand against all sorts of discrimination is found more in its violations than observance (Koilparampil, 1982:25).

There are writings which show the caste mentality within the Syrian Catholic Church - the migrants from the diocese of Verapoly who settled in the predominantly Syrian Catholic areas of Kottayam and other hill regions, were not given membership of the Syrian parishes, finally leading to the creation of a Latin diocese in those areas (Paravila 2003).

The consciousness of the Syrian Christians seems to have been in tune with the social milieu where the caste system was the accepted form of social organisation. According to Dalit Bandhu, N.K. Jose, the very usage for the leader of the community as ‘fōtikku karthavian’ (Mundadan, 1984:183), where community is referred to by the term ‘fōti’ which means caste, is indicative of the acceptance of the community as part of the existing caste system. Being favourable to themselves as belonging to the privileged group, it appears that change in the system hardly ever appeared to them as warranted. The omission of the efforts for Dalit conversion to Syrian Catholic Church, in his two volume work (Thoma 1992) well documented and

31 Angamaly Padiyola (a document written on palm leave) of 16th century.
researched work by Fr. Bernard ‘Mar Toma Kristyānikal’ (St. Thomas Christians) is also perhaps indicative of this disposition in the community.

Unwitting contributions towards the caste inequality might have been the efforts by Robert Dinobili (tattvabōdhakar) and Constazo Guiseppe Beschi (vīramunivar) who had assumed the high caste and Brahmānical cultural elements to present Christianity as culturally suited to the dominant castes. In fact, in 1623 Gregory XV permitted the high caste converts to maintain their caste-based distinctions. The rationale was that caste was more of a matter of social relationships than of faith. In 1779, the concept of separate cemetery for the Dalits was accepted by the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith. There was an instruction from the Viceroy in 1613, to the effect that only Brahmin converts should be ordained priests in Kochi and Goa (Pathirappally, 1999).

Jose (1991) criticises the book published by P.J. Sebastian in 1971 about the efforts of Fr. Palakunnel, the pioneering catholic priest of Syrian Catholic Church, as an effort to bring to light the greatness of Syrian Christian tradition rather than an effort at historical research. He says that the book publication shows that the attitude of the forward Christian of Syrian Catholic community was discriminatory in general, and condescending at the best, towards the Christian Dalits of the same Church.

In the studies by Mathew and Thomas (1967) and Koilparambil (1982) it has been pointed out as to how the Syrian Catholics live a caste like life and try to perpetuate it. The former showed how the Dalit Christians were always deprived of an equal treatment in the Church.

Thomas (1999) points out the lack of united efforts and neglect by those in power as the reasons for the backwardness of the Christian Dalits who according to him are the 75% of the Christian population in India.

2.5.7.a Call for Unity and Assertion of Identity

According to Dalit Bandhu, in India, Christianity is a religion of the Dalits, where almost two thirds of the total Christian population is dalit. They became Christian, because of the hope it offered, of being Christians at par with other Christians - brothers. But it never happened so (Bandhu, 1994a).

In the 50 years after independence the policies of protection and reservation has not changed the Dalits much. Including the dalit Christians in the reservation list is not
going to hurt the rest of the Dalits, nor is it going to benefit the Christian Dalits much. What is needed is a situation where Dalits, whether listed or not listed in the schedule, are able to live as human beings with the rest of the humanity. For this, all those who are Dalits should unite in struggle (Bandhu, 1994a).

He points out the subtle ways in which the forward classes have always managed to defeat the unity of the backward classes of the society. If the same should not happen the dalits have to be united. The history points to this phenomenon, how sādhujana paripūlana sangham initiated by Ayyan Kali was disbanded and instead pulaya sabha was facilitated by none other than Diwan C.P. Ramaswamy. The pulayaśas over the time have now been divided into eight groups, but the Nairs (now a forward group) who were of 42 divisions have now become united as one group (Bandhu, 1994a).

Dalit Bandhu calls for the unity of all Christians of Keralam for the cause of the Dalits, and asks the Non-Dalit Christians to shed their false claim of being descended from nampūtiris. The ‘unity of the community’ (sāmudāyika aikyam) according to him is possible only among the equals. He strongly points out that the Church has failed the Dalits and the Dalit Christians by not siding with them, and not including them in the development process as equals, and being smug and satisfied with the provision of doles from the resources the Church has managed to obtain from the western nations. He makes a radical call to the Christians of India to declare themselves as Dalits after the model of their leader Jesus, who lived and died the life of a Dalit, or else honestly agree that they are not followers of Christ, but merely the members of the institutionalised religion of Christianity. Similarly he calls upon the Dalit Christians to assert their dalit unity first, for that has been their identity, in spite of embracing Christianity, and fight for their progress together with other dalit communities (Bandhu, 1994a).

Thomas (1999) speaks about the ways in which the caste inequality is to be encountered by the discriminated sections. It is the way of assertion of one’s caste identity (jāti tanima). The need is to have swatwabōdham (identity consciousness). He is critical of communist influence, which suppressed the caste identity under the class identity (vargabōdham) leading to a state of stupor. Swatwa samudōya bōdham (Community Identity Consciousness) is what is required. In his view, strengthening the caste identity is not necessarily creating conflict. Assertion of one’s identity does not imply contradicting other different identities.
Status of Dalit Christians in Syrian Catholic Church

Bandhu (1994c) cites the census data of the Dalits and backward castes of 1891: Travancore - *Thiyyar* 387176, whereas the Dalits were 562420. At present, *Izhavās*\(^{32}\) are about 27% and Dalits 8%. His hypothesis is that this reduction is due to the conversions among *dalits* to Christianity. Some of the documents claim that there are almost three million *dalits* under the various Christian denominations.

**Visibility.** There is hardly any data available on Dalit Christians in any of the official Church documents, e.g., Catholic Directory of India. There is no mention of any of the *dalit* organizations in them. The omission of DCMS is conspicuous by its absence. In the listing of organizations within the Catholic fold, no mention of any *dalit* organization is found. In the Indian Christian Directory (2006) published by Rashtra Deepika, another comprehensive directory providing information regarding the entire Indian Christian population, there is no where any statistical data regarding the Dalit Christians. In its 2006 edition, reference to Dalit Christians is found in two articles: (i) Dr. Jose Kalappura, pp. 124-129 and (ii) Prof. George Menachery, pp. 133-38. These do not provide any data regarding their socio-economic status, which is perceived to be very low. While all sorts of organizations, and all the various denominations of Christianity are mentioned, there is no mention about the *dalit* reality among the Christians, which again is a pointer towards a ‘culture of silence’ prevailing over the *dalit* issue within the Church. The Catholic Directory (CBCI, 2006) cites among its commissions the Commission for Justice, Peace and Development and the Commission for Scheduled Castes/Tribes and Backward Classes. However, there is no mention of *dalit* associations under either of them. Though KCBC commission for SC/ST/BC decided to make a statistical database of the Dalit Christians, on Dec. 9th, 1996 to date no such study has been completed (Kadankavil, 1997b).

Koilparampil (1982) refers to the concept of disharmonic social system to describe the situation arising out of the caste system of Christian community which by its principles cannot have caste. From the times of Koilparampil’s and Gough’s studies, much water seems to have flown regarding inter-rite relationships. Though the caste elements still remain in inter-rite relations, they have become much more egalitarian. However, the case of Dalit Christians presents a very different picture. The stigma of untouchability is still borne by them even within the Church community.

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\(^{32}\) This nomenclature, at present includes those who were formerly called *Thiyyar, Chowar,* and *Ēhavar.* (Researcher’s note)
2.6. METHODS IN PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK IN WORKING WITH MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES

Social Work developed as a discipline out of the efforts to address problems faced by individuals and families, and groups and communities. It drew insights for practice from the social sciences. From the very inception it had taken a stand for the deprived, marginalized and afflicted populations. It always exhibited a strong sense of justice, especially distributive justice. In the course of its getting established as a profession, with its own knowledge base, though it appeared to become more clinical, individualized and with focus on ‘private troubles’, and drift away from what Mills (1961) describes as ‘public issues’ and the cause of social change, it had never altogether left its pro-poor, pro-marginalised, pro-justice, proactive stance. However, this drift was observed and a re-orientation towards public issues re-emerged in the 1960s with call for ‘war on poverty’ and emergence of a ‘development paradigm’ in Social Work. Of the primary methods developed in the field of Social Work - work with individuals, groups and communities - Community related action (in, for and with the community), generally called Community Organisation, had its origin from the very beginning of Social Work discipline itself - in the interaction of the ‘friendly neighbours’ (though criticized as not so friendly), and in the establishment of ‘settlement houses’. It vindicates the MacIver (1924) statement: “life is essentially and always communal life. Every living thing is born into community and owes its life to community”1.

A brief theoretical framework of Community Organisation (CO) and Practice is presented in this section, as a tool to analyse the problems faced by the target population, i.e., the Dalit Christians, and the interventions made on their behalf by the various stakeholders. The process of marginalisation and the CO framework in addressing that are described.

2.6.1. Marginalisation and Need for Organisation

“The Encyclopaedia of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes” (Yadav, 2000) has devoted a section on the Marginalisation of the Dalits. It is within power-relations that the process of marginalisation sets in. Power relations in a society can be defined as interactions between individuals and groups who constitute the nation, who possess in different degrees control over the scarce resources of the nation, and possess more or less incompatible and interdependent value systems, and who

1 Cited in Martinez, 1995.
function within the framework of the nation-state as individuals or as para-communities.

Marginalisation can be understood through the concepts of centre and periphery: a) in a geographical sense, periphery refers to dwelling in inaccessible regions or localities; b) in a cultural sense, centre means the central/dominant value system of the nation - periphery means the masses who are not fully integrated into the central value system. The latter form is evident in the depiction of groups of people (e.g., Dalits) as cultureless, and possessing negative qualities such as laziness, drunkenness and a lack of thrift than positive values. A more positive outlook regarding them as belonging to ‘little traditions’ in contrast to the ‘great brahmānic traditions’ appears condescending at best; c) In a political sense, centre would be those national elite who control the decision making processes in the nation, and periphery, who are insignificant in the political system of the nation (Yadav, 2000; Kananaikil, 1983).

Scheduled castes are identified as the periphery - culturally, geographically and politically. The Dalit Christians are further penalized for making use of the constitutionally granted freedom of religion, by depriving them of the privileges due to the castes who were stigmatised and marginalized through the caste system (Yadav, 2000).

The principle of power relations in society suggests that policies, which are meant to be beneficial to the peripheral groups, would not become effective, even if they were enacted, until the peripheral groups themselves are able to demand their implementation.

The marked differences between the centre-periphery dynamics of India and the rest of the world are:

1. Development of a system which relegated the dispossessed and the vanquished to the lowest rungs of the social ladder, with no means of emancipation

2. The process of religio-social sanction by which the social structure was legitimised

3. The socialisation processes that led to the internalisation of the unequal system without questioning
4. The heterogeneity of the dispossessed.

5. Their geographical dispersion throughout the land.

Stephen & Prabhakar (2005) describe how the political system even today marginalizes the Dalits as the political structure reflects social exclusion, discrimination and racial prejudices exhibited in our country at large. The Dalits are treated merely as vote-banks and even the reserved seats do not represent the aspirations of the community, rather only of the political parties.

Koilparampil (1982:101) describes marginalisation in terms of reference group theory: “…the ineligible man while aspiring to belong to the reference group through anticipatory socialization becomes a marginal man, apt to be rejected by his membership group for repudiating its values and unable to find acceptance by the reference group”. This effect happens with the Dalit who aspired to be a Christian in the Syrian community, she/he has lost the support of the natural group to which she/he belonged, but has not received acceptance within the reference group.

### 2.6.2. Freireian Thoughts On Subjugation, Liberation And Organisation

Freire’s analysis of marginalisation of humans leads to the analysis of human subjugation and humans as individuals working upon this world, creating culture and thus transforming the world through one’s own transformation of consciousness (Freire, 1973). From a closed consciousness which remains at the biological survival level, the human consciousness is capable of reaching a critical consciousness, transcending constantly in the process, the various levels of existence - of fatalistic subjugation to natural or supernatural forces, of naive acceptance of the oppressor’s value system as the guide for one’s development, to the radical and revolutionary stage in which the oppressive social structure with its value system (ideological superstructure) in its entirety is questioned and rejected (Freire, 1972a & b).

Conscientisation is the process of critical self-insertion into reality resulting in ‘denunciation’ of the reality as imposed upon a people, and ‘annunciation’ of a reality which is continually being transformed by their actions (Freire, 1972a: 42-43). Conscientisation is a joint project which takes place only among humans among other human beings united by their action and their reflection upon that action and upon the world (Freire, 1972a: 75).
Freire (1972b) presents organization, the consequence of unity as the dialogical action for liberation as opposed to manipulation as the anti-dialogical action for conquest and domination. Freire makes distinction between two types of organization: 1) of the dominant elites - organizing themselves to dominate and 2) of the revolutionary leaders - organizing themselves with the people for the practice of freedom.

This process involves the balancing act of authority where the extremes of imposing one's word upon the people and encouraging silence among the people are both eschewed. “Organization is… a highly educational process in which leaders and people together experience true authority and freedom, which they then seek to establish in society by transforming the reality which mediates them” (Freire, 1972b:147).

2.6.3. Understanding Community against the Frame Work of Community Organisation & Development

When the term community is used, the first notion that typically comes to mind is a place in which people know and care for one another - the kind of place in which people do not merely ask ‘How are you?’ as a formality, but would care about the answer. This we-ness… is indeed part of its essence. …Communities speak to us in moral voices. They lay claims on their members (Etzioni, 1993:101). For Biddle & Biddle (1965:77), ‘community is whatever sense of the local common good citizens can be helped to achieve’.

For the purposes of community development, community can be defined as any geographical area, or any group of people who may share common identity, needs, or other characteristic(s) that identify them as subjects of a planned change process (Clarke 2000). This helps to include groups who may have many diverse needs, even without the same geographical boundaries. There may be many sub-divisions of social identity within any geographical area, or within a seemingly homogeneous population.

In speaking about community, the organic solidarity of primary groups involving the close bonds of mutuality and common destiny, and resultant rewards and obligations, and mechanical solidarity of the secondary groups involving market directed exchanges and common duties and obligations helping individual to serve

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their goals are discussed. Dewey is referred to by Hillman (1950:6-7) in describing what people must have in common in order to form a community or society - aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge, - a common understanding - like-mindedness as the sociologists say. The communication, which insures participation in a common understanding, is one, which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions.

Racial and Ethnic communities

Besides the objective criteria of background, identity and self-consciousness are characteristics of an ethnic or racial community. Such ties transcend even national boundaries, and provide the means through which groups find identity and meaning in global ways. The question of identity based organization raises the issue of which identity (Sen, 2004; Kahn, 1995) - in the context of this study, is it the Christian identity, the Dalit identity, the Christian Dalit identity, or Syrian Christian identity?

2.6.4. Approaches to Social Change

Kahn (1995) presents a set of approaches to social change.

a) Service attempts to provide people with the basic they need to survive, subsist, develop, and even flourish within society. Essentially an individualized and personalized approach to social change, it rarely challenges the root causes of the issues addressed. E.g., the typical housing programme, and marriage funds

b) Advocacy begins with the assumption that if a large number of individuals in a society are suffering, there must be something wrong with the society that must be changed. For this, collective or individual lobbying for social change are initiated, especially by means of legal measures. This is something done on behalf of the affected by someone else (Kahn, 1995).

c) Mobilizing involves empowerment of the affected people to stand up for themselves. Usually centred around some specific issues, it could result in success or frustration, leading to further organization of the community (Kahn, 1995).

d) Organizing as a social change process creates and sustains an ongoing challenge to relationships of power within society (Kahn, 1995:572).

2.6.5. Community Organisation

Though community organizing is radical in nature, the methods of ‘organising’ are generally neutral or value free. However, the term ‘community organising’ is a long
term process, involving building permanent community organizations that can address and advance the needs of their members, by providing safe space and separate base of power for the disempowered and dispossessed to practise democratic skills of citizenship and leadership. Kahn observes that such a theory and practice is more popular with those who lack power than those who already have power.

In CO, the question ‘who people are’ is the constituency question. It can be defined by issue (a shared goal or goals), community (people living or working in a particular place) or identity (people sharing race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, age, physical ability, language, or tribe), which may overlap and intersect (Kahn, 1995). For Kahn, what is important is to accept people’s way of looking at themselves and the world and to help them build power based on their own analysis. He says that ‘people who have been exploited and oppressed often need to build a separate base of power for themselves’ before challenging the systems that are the cause of their problems. As the process has an aspect of ‘separateness’ it is termed ‘separatism’ at times or as ‘single-constituency organising’. However, these ‘separatist’ categories could be combined in the larger identities as ‘caucuses’. E.g., the Dalit Christians among the Christian community.

Kahn (1995) presents the view of Minnich. Successful community organization changes more than power. It also changes the relationship that the people being organised have to power. To do this, community organizing must change how people think about and relate to themselves and others. This requires political education. Culture – poems, songs, paintings, chants, sermons, stories, rhythms, pots, dances, and theatre – can make emotional and visceral appeal that can transform consciousness. He regrets that in CO, very often, culture is a mere add-on and an afterthought.

For larger issues, from ‘separatist’ organization, groups have to move to ‘coalitions’ with other ‘separatist’ groups on the basis of common interests. Kahn (1995) observes that any movement to consolidate its gain must build community organizations that can outlast the waning of the movement.

Kahn (1995) notes: “Community organizing is a tool that is used in all cultures and societies to redress the classic imbalance between the powerless and the powerful. It relies on the force of numbers - of many people thinking, working, and acting

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together - to counterbalance wealthy and powerful groups and the means they have to protect and extend themselves: constitutions, governments, bureaucracies, police forces, tax collectors, armies, corporation, caste and class systems, religious institutions, gendered and racialised violence, ownership and control of resources, educational establishments, and communication systems."

Organizing as a social change process creates and sustains an ongoing challenge to relationships of power within society (Kahn, 1995). Community organizing is radical in nature, and the methods of ‘organizing’ cannot be generally neutral or value free. It is a long term process, involving building permanent community organizations that can address and advance the needs of their members, by providing safe space and separate base of power for the disempowered and dispossessed to practice democratic skills of citizenship and leadership. Kahn observes that such a theory and practice is more popular with those who lack power than those who already have power. According to him, it is radical, and demands for fundamental change, for reapportioning, for restructuring.

The logic is, to be governed; a community must first be organized. As organizing includes a radical critique of power relations and a confrontation with the existing economic and political establishment, it is rarely welcomed by those in power, who tend to encourage service, or at worst, advocacy as the means for change. The authorities regard this method as leading to ‘biting the hand that feeds you’.

Weil & Gamble (1995) describe the purposes of CO as improving quality of life, advocacy, human, social and economic development, service and programme planning, integration of various channels and levels of services, political and social action, and social justice. Social and political action challenges inequalities that limit opportunities, confront decision makers who have ignored community needs, dispute unjust decisions, and empower people through boosting belief in their own efficacy and developing their skills to change unjust conditions.  

Another model that could be considered is Programme Development and Community Liaison. The assumption is that community liaison is essential in developing programmes as needed by the community concerned. Promoting functional communities where in various under-represented and underserved groups could come together on the basis of their common interests and gather strength to

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achieve common goals utilizing the ever-improving communication technologies is considered as another strategy. This could go hand-in-hand with coalition building strategy, for building broad-based multi-cultural and human service coalition (Weil & Gamble, 1995). In the context of the study, the coalition could be of the various Christian denominations at the primary level, and at a secondary level, various ethnic communities that have been marginalized by the discriminatory policies of the state.

The very raison d'etre of SW was to bridge the gap between the increasingly mobile and industrialized society and the support needs of individuals that had been typically met in gemeinschaft. Historically, Community Organisation, as a method, was used in the alleviation of the causes of pauperism, integration of immigrants into the community (e.g., Chicago settlement house - Jane Adams). It has characteristics of a ‘social movement’, an art of working in an egalitarian fashion with the local community collectively and with its members individually; involves a high level of respect for what laypeople can do in the community and the recognition that answers to our social ills are truly complex.

The various models of community organization have been listed by Rothman & Tropman (1987):

- Locality/community development attempts to create social conditions of economic and social progress, preferably with participation of the whole community.

- Social Planning usually addresses long-term goals of the community; where much stress is given to the process

- Social action has social change as the overarching goal, often involving challenging the existing power arrangements and structures.

A basic principle in all these is: caring for people, as the common task of professionals and lay people in their roles as friends and neighbours, and it requires the development of a truly cooperative and egalitarian relationship.
According to Sanderson and Polson\(^7\) (1939) community organization is a technique for obtaining a consensus concerning both the values that are most important for the common welfare and the best means of obtaining them (cited by Hillman, 1950:15).

### 2.6.5. a Value Frame Work:

Value Frame Work According to Ross (1955:77-78) the **basic value framework** of CO derives from the faith in “the essential dignity and ethical worth of the individual, the possession by each individual of potentialities and resources for managing one’s own life, the importance of freedom to express one’s individuality, the great capacity for growth within all social beings, the right of the individual to those basic physical necessities (food, shelter, and clothing) without which fulfillment of life is often blocked, the need for the individual to struggle and strive to improve one’s own life and environment, the right of the individual to help in time of need and crisis, the importance of a social organization for which the individual feels responsible and which is responsive to individual feeling, the need of a social climate which encourages individual growth and development, the right and responsibility of the individual to participate in the affairs of his community, the practicability of discussion, conferences, and consultation as methods for the solution of individual and social problems, “self-help” as the essential base of any programme of aid etc.”

### 2.6.5. b Assumptions regarding the method (Ross, 1955)

1. Communities of people can develop capacity to deal with their own problems

2. People want change and can change.

3. People should participate in making, adjusting, or controlling the major changes taking place in their communities. This is because (a) humans grow and fulfil themselves as they participate in the regulation of their own life, (b) unless humans so participate, they become entirely subjected to the whim of forces which leave them socially and politically isolated and their life meaningless, and (c) without such participation, democracy has no life or vitality.

4. Changes in community living that are self-imposed or self-developed have a meaning and a permanence that imposed changes do not have.

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\(^7\) Sanderson, D. and Polson, R. 1939. Rural Community Organisation. John Wiley & sons, Inc. (p.5-6)
5. Holistic approach to deal successfully with problems (not fragmented approach)

6. Cooperative participation and action in the affairs of the community for democracy. Need to learn skills which make this possible

7. Communities of people need help (professional) in organizing to deal with their needs, just as many individuals require help in coping with their individual problems.

Ross (1955:92) defines CO thus: “Community organisation is … a process by which a community identifies its needs or objectives, orders (or ranks) these needs or objectives, develops the confidence and will to work at these needs or objectives, finds the resources (internal and/or external) to deal with these needs or objectives, takes action in respect to these, and in so doing extends and develops cooperative and collaborative attitudes and practices in the community."

The first step is 'Needs Assessment'. Needs assessment is a systematic process of data collection and analysis as inputs into resource allocation with a view to discovering and identifying goods and services the community is lacking in relation to the generally accepted standards, and for which there exists some consensus as to the community’s responsibility for their provision (United Way of America, 1982:10).8

The typical way of ensuring a fair need assessment is participation - involving those who are affected. Participation involves a wide range of stakeholders and the use of their perspectives. Stakeholders are the people who are “affected by the programmes or service(s) being planned or evaluated and include (a) those who make decisions about programmes or funding, (b) those who provide the service, (c) those who receive the service, (d) the community at large that provides the funding for and receives general benefit from social programmes, and (e) the social science research community that is involved in developing methods and knowledge to apply (Innes & Hefflinger, 1989:227).9 It is here that Freirein thinking on organisation as a tool for liberation cautions the revolutionaries of the explicit distinction between working ‘for’ the people, and working ‘with’ the people. In the latter, the demand on the leadership is not to say their own word, but rather to say it with the people, that is, to initiate the experience of learning how to name the world (Freire, 1972b).

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2.6.5. c. Principles of Community Organisation (Ross, 1955)

Discontent with existing conditions in the community must initiate and/or nourish the development of the association (p. 156).

Discontent must be focused and channelled into organization, planning, and action in respect to specific problems (p. 162).

The discontent which initiates or sustains community organization must be widely shared in the community (p. 163).

The association must involve leaders (both formal and informal) identified with and accepted by, major subgroups in the community (p.165).

The association must have goals and methods of procedures of high acceptability (p. 171).

The programme of the association should include some activities with emotional content (p. 172).

The association should seek to utilize the manifest and latent good will, which exists in the community (p.174).

The association must develop active and effective lines of communication both within the association and between the association and the community (p.178).

The association should seek to support and strengthen the groups, which it brings together in cooperative work (p.184).

The association should be flexible in its organisation procedures without disrupting its regular decision making routines (p.185).

The association should develop a pace for its work relative to existing conditions in the community (p.186).

The association should seek to develop effective leaders (p.190).

The association must develop strength, stability, and prestige in the community (p. 195).
2.6.5.d. Some Important Factors Influencing Community Integration (Ross, 1955)

**Recognizing the Unrecognised Mechanisms** Ross (1955) cites Wilson’s\(^\text{10}\) insight in this regard. Community process may be immobilized because of ‘unrecognised mechanisms’ in group life... that resist change...” It is important that these mechanisms are recognized. Studies like the present one can lead to a process of recognizing and bringing to consciousness, such mechanisms within this particular community.

**Relationship between subgroups** (Ross, 1955). The dynamics of relationships of the subgroups influence the general integration at three levels\(^\text{11}\): 1) relationship within the subgroup. It is assumed that when the group has greater internal cohesion, it feels freer to venture into unfamiliar grounds, and may help community organization process. 2) relationship of the officials who deal with the new groups (or less integrated groups). Close personal relations, ability and willingness to identify with the group, to share their problems and their conditions of living, to provide friendliness, on the part of the officials, facilitate integration. 3) a set of conditions, the more they are met, the greater the degree of integration. They are: “development of group values and aspirations compatible with the common values in the community: ...A subgroup ... whose beliefs and practices ... are not inconsistent with those of the community will, other things being equal, facilitate community integration” (Ross, 1955:115-118).

- Extension of the scope of activities from within the group exclusively, to include various community-wide activities.
- The extent to which members of subgroups are oriented towards ‘reference groups’ in the wider community and the degree to which these ‘reference groups’ accept these members of the groups.
- The extent of development of relationships of subgroup members with ‘older prestige’ members of the community.
- The extent to which the larger community permits fulfillment of the role expectations and aspirations of subgroups.

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The extent of identification with the larger community

**Presence of Positively Identified Leaders:** Another important factor that leads to the sub-group integration and community organisation process is the role of the leader’s influence on, identification with and acceptance by the group can help the integration process. Such leader is called by Einstadt as ‘positively identified leader’ (Ross, 1955).

**Positive Assumptions About People** If the community encourager goes about with the positive assumptions about people, “people tend to become more ethically intelligent and responsible” (Biddle & Biddle, 1965).

**Publicity** Importance of publicity, which is done in a responsible manner, and not overdone in the progress of community development (Biddle & Biddle, 1965)

**Other factors** that influence community integration and organization are presence of and identification with symbols and rituals shared by all; practices of prejudice and discrimination with respect to minority groups or apathy regarding community affairs.

**2.6.5. e. Unpredictable Variations in the Process**

Authors point out unpredictable variations in the community organization process:

**Apathy:** The authors present apathy in the form of non-response, resistance or polite acquiescence implying indifference. However, the encourager or community developer has to be prepared not to get hurt, but rather, should try to understand the causes and seek other ways of approaching people (Biddle and Biddle, 1965).

Hostility or apathy could be on account of various factors such as: 1) a reaction to the deprivation of one’s past; 2) on account of anxiety about one’s future 3) projection of undesirables in oneself to the out-group, which could be indicative of lack of ego strength and of inadequate internal controls etc (Ross, 1955).

**Group Catharsis:** In the course of discussions, bitter complaints and accusations might emerge, giving release to pent-up emotions. An encourager is wise to be undisturbed by such occurrences. Effort in such situations must be to move forward from such situations while acknowledging the truth in the accusations (Biddle and Biddle, 1965).

**Slump:** This is a stage, which might occur after a successful project, or after a holiday season. Activities cease for weeks or months. Rather than pushing people
into a sense of guilt for negligence, the encourager has to revive contacts, and seek in conversations, new problems to be addressed by the group (Biddle and Biddle, 1965).

**Loss of Participants:** Some active participants may drop out or be forced out of the nucleus. Here it is important that ‘emergent leaders’ are groomed and made ready to take on leadership positions (Biddle and Biddle, 1965).

**Disintegration of Nucleus:** The authors point to the possibility of the disintegration of the nucleus itself. Here again, what is called for is an analysis of what went wrong, or more specifically, ‘what I did was wrong’, may open new possibilities of forging ahead with the process. Here, the encourager may have to take up the role of a ‘conciliator’ trying to bandage the wounds inflicted by misunderstanding. The authors call for two skills for the community encourager – a sense of humour that helps one go on without getting stuck, and imagination to invent newer ways of approaching people, without violating their dignity (Biddle and Biddle, 1965).

**Resistance by the Target Community:** Tendency of the alienated to resist the programmes and services that are designed to help them. Sometimes because of the superior-inferior charity implied in that. Great skill is required to help them to move beyond their resistance to a realisation of their needs, and their good potential. The Social Workers become discouraged or even cynical when their services, generously proffered are rejected, or they perceive people taking selfish advantage of the generous help (Biddle and Biddle, 1965).

### 2.6.5. f Larger Nucleus

In describing the process at a broader level, Biddle and Biddle (1965) bring in the concept of Larger Nucleus, or what is a representative community council. Here, the first area of caution is about the antagonism between the interests of the privileged and the underprivileged groups. When the developers identify themselves with one group to the exclusion of others, they tend to lose objectivity, conceive themselves as spokespersons for the deprived sections and end up in recounting their woes rather than encouraging them to become self-respecting participants in cooperative improvement.

### 2.6.5. g Action Design and Research Design

Here again, Biddle & Biddle (1965) present the case of the oppressed become oppressors in their turn, which hampers community development. In moving
towards action, the authors present the need for ‘action design’ and ‘research
design’. The former refers to a sophisticated form of the awareness of the process
that the members of a basic nucleus are asked to understand and adopt. The
research design is more in the domain of the larger nucleus, where it begins with the
gathering of all pertinent data concerning the chosen area of service. Depending on
the gaps in the available data a survey is to be conducted. The authors point out
that as the process of training - on the basic philosophy and on the praxis aspects -
progresses, the members involved become aware of the plurality of their
communities, and begin to recognize the diverse needs of the many groupings, and
the need for diverse programmes necessary to expedite development.

As the process grows, many volunteers assume the role of encouragers and they
undergo constant on-the-job training in dealing with the subtleties involved in the
development process.

2.6.6. Community Development (CD)

CD is often identified as an activity addressed to underdeveloped people...Its
purpose is to bring these disadvantaged people “up” to “our” level of advancement.
Some others identify CD as a rural phenomenon only (Biddle and Biddle, 1965).

Deliberate community development (CD) efforts aim to improve people’s lives by
improving important aspects of the life that they have in common. “It is the practice
of working with communities to help them recognize how they can improve
community life and welfare both in the present and in the future. It involves planned
change and enhancing the abilities (capacity building) of community members and
including them as participants in CD activities to achieve specific goals, and less
tangible qualitative improvement of social life of the community - e.g., increasing
capabilities, especially, leadership, of the members, strengthening of social bonds,
self help, building local leadership, create or revitalize local institutions (Harrison,

CO, according to Biddle & Biddle (1965) has the purpose of interrelating the
functioning of institutional structures (governmental - like city/local councils, police,
schools etc; or private - like the churches, service or social clubs etc.) in a manner
that will give the best of service to the people who need it. It pays attention to the
possible overlapping of services as well as to gaps in services (p. 223). Whereas,
CD is seen as functional, in that it initiates people-centred process that is based
upon their own perception of their needs. This entails the discovering or creating of
a community, utilizing the existing social structures, but creating new organizations and institutions when needed (p. 224).

They define community development as “…a social process by which human beings can become more competent to live with and gain some control over local aspects of a frustrating and changing world.” It is a group method for expediting personal growth, which can occur when geographic neighbours work together to serve their growing concept of the good of all. It involves cooperative study, group decisions, collective action, and joint evaluation that lead to continuing action. It calls for the utilization of all helping professions and agencies (from local to international), that can assist in problem solving. But personality growth through group responsibility for local common good is the focus (Biddle & Biddle, 1965:78).

The emphasis shifts from improvement of facilities, of economic life, and even of public opinion that supports community atmospheres… to improvement in people. But personal betterment is brought about in the midst of social action that serves a growing awareness of community need (Biddle & Biddle, 1965:79).

The term ‘process’ in the definition refers to a progression of events that is planned by the participants to serve goals they progressively choose. The events point to changes in a group and in individuals that can be termed growth in social sensitivity and competence (Biddle & Biddle, 1965:79).

An informal conversation is a chief means for establishing the encourager as a person as well as an organization employee. Such an informal exchange with individuals occurs most often in homes or in other places where people feel “at home.” …There is an art of creative listening and sympathizing. There is also an art of raising questions that invite the other person to talk about those things that are dear to him. Especially important is the skill that enables the other person to make articulate the concerns, fears, and frustrations that make life difficult for him (Biddle & Biddle, 1965: 93).

Ideal of community development is to happen through the basic nuclei while the larger nucleus or the umbrella body that comprises of the diverse sections of the community recognizes the diverse interests, prioritises special interests in order to promote the common good, and supports the processes at the basic level. “It is always difficult to move from the promotion of a special interest to the search for the community good. Even more difficult is to keep seeking for the experiences that develop people, despite failure and rebuff. Most difficult and painful of all is to
eschew the delights of power in favour of trying to be right - and never quite making it” (Biddle & Biddle, 1965:126).

It is seen as the improvement of local facilities and as personal growth of people. The second comes as a result of people working to accomplish the first (Biddle & Biddle, 1965). …Methodology of CD supports the conviction that social improvement does not occur until the people involved believe that improvement is possible. The people themselves must be sufficiently convinced to take the initiative. The fact that they may be mired in apathy does not preclude their growing into self-confidence of responsibility. As people are brought to feel a sense of community and adopt goals that serve their growing concept of community, the conviction that they are able to contribute to social improvement seems to increase in them (Biddle & Biddle, 1965:viii).

CD provides the small-scale laboratory wherein the hope for a favourable future can be tested experimentally. It develops human beings, hence it is an educational enterprise; but methods are very unconventional. It draws from behavioural sciences and it has a stress on action research. “Research methodology grows out of the unique experience of cooperating with people in a process of dynamic growth”. It offers the beginning of an applied social science for human improvement (Biddle & Biddle, 1965:viii).

CD, in other words, deals with ‘human beings in process of self-chosen change’ (Biddle & Biddle, 1965:ix). The selection or formation of a local organization to expedite cooperation is a difficult matter. The authors cite a case study, which shows how the development workers need to adopt new attitudes and skills as community development encouragers. They cite the white people’s thinking that ‘the decay is caused more by race than by low incomes and the accompanying poor educational and cultural standards’. The thinking does not seem much farther away from the sentiments usually expressed about the Dalits by the Non-Dalits.

CD lessons the authors present from the case are:

- People felt a need for improvement
- They trusted a person(s) who represented some authority or wisdom, who yet was friendly and invited their ideas.
They knew that he was aware of their failings, yet that he liked them, believed in their better impulses, and treated them as though he expected them to become better.

The worker was reluctant to propose solutions to their problems, and offered these as ideas for examination, not programmes for adoption.

The worker “worried” with them, seeking to help them expedite those activities, which they had chosen as good.

The worker was accepted as a friend who was “in favour of” whatever good action they and he could agree upon. (Biddle & Biddle, 1965:56-57).

To awaken initiative in others - rather than initiate things on one’s own.

A preliminary requirement is a belief in the people that they were at least potentially capable of self-guidance. The ability to convey this belief gives warmth to the relationship between the encouragers and the people involved. In psychology it is referred to as ‘rapport’, in theology, as ‘love’. A correlation can be made: “Intentions (toward people) affect outcomes (in their lives)” (Biddle & Biddle, 1965:59).

The authors criticize the mainstream social work profession for its elitism and focus on delivery of services in a one-way flow from the workers to the clients. Another distinction is made from the angle of publicity and fund raising campaigns. Whereas, the CO tends to depict the plight of the unfortunate to raise funds, the CD approach, would rather focus on promoting human resources (emergent leaders) so as to tap the resources within and to generate further resources. A third important difference lies in the scope of the community. In CO the stress is on providing for the less privileged, where as in CD, “attention is given to all citizens in a totality of emerging common good. More privileged ones work with (not for) the disadvantaged” (Biddle & Biddle, 1965:225). The authors conclude that Social Work should be freed from the preoccupation with methods, and be more concerned about the original humane impulses, which gave rise to the profession.

Thus people should be equipped to seek help, rather than wait for services to be imposed upon them. The seeking out of services can become a matter of dignity. “The development of a community atmosphere in which the seeking of professional help is regarded as wise and not an admission of pauperism or helplessness can be accomplished…” (Biddle & Biddle, 1965:228).
The criticisms levelled by Biddle and Biddle way back in 1965 regarding Social Work methods in working with community is worth noting. ..... Today, especially in the Indian context, this gap appears to have been bridged, with focus of Social Welfare agencies been turned on development processes and the professionals being employed to facilitate the human resource development through participatory processes of planning, acting and evaluating. However, the case to be noted in this regard is that while the Church based organizations have adopted the Professional Social Work approach with adequate stress on development perspective and participatory processes, this has not turned its attention to certain basic nuclei, in this context, specifically to the special interests and needs of *dalit* groups. A parallel can be drawn with their analysis of rural community. In speaking about the common good that is the rallying point for community development, the authors find that, contrary to the general assumption, there is no homogeneous interest as far as rural community is concerned - there are diverging interests of the various socio-economic groups. This is true with the Christian parish community as well. Hence, the need for promoting many special interest small nuclei, while maintaining the need for the larger nuclei or common forum.

The authors’ warning on ‘do-gooder impulses’ is also very pertinent in analysing the initiatives taken on behalf of the Dalit Christians by various Church based organizations. “Encouragers tend to develop ideas about ‘correct’ improvements people ‘must’ accept. They set out to bring the benefits they have chosen, and then they find the potential beneficiaries unwilling to acquiesce. In an extreme form, the do-gooder becomes desperate because he concludes that the people are so apathetic, stupid, or badly motivated that they will not or cannot do his bidding. When the encouragers of community development make process central, the do-gooder frustration is diminished. Citizens learn to modify their motivations, but at their own pace and by their own choosing. Emphasis upon process makes less compulsory the improvements that encouragers ‘know’ are good for people. But even so, the frustration is never wholly eliminated” (Biddle & Biddle, 1965:269).

The aspect of power the development facilitators should be conscious of, has much to do with this impulse: “Development for people of low status frequently means an increase in their influence. For those who already exercise control over others, it often means the humbling discovery that they are happier and more human when they share the decision making” (Biddle & Biddle, 1965:60).
2.6.7. Community Organisation and Community Development for Dalit Christian Community

The authors discuss the role of religion in community development. They find the guidance of religion a major force in giving direction to future planning. They serve as instruments for upholding basic values (Biddle & Biddle, 1965). While this aspect has great relevance in the matter of the development of Dalit Christians, as their identity is invariably tied with acceptance of Christian religion, it is yet to be assessed as to what extent this has been put to the advantage of the Dalit Christians.

Against this elaborate survey of the Social Work method of Community organization and Community Development, the measures already taken for the Dalit Christians are to be analysed. Further, the insights and the framework provide an approach for further planning of the course of development for the Dalit Christians by all the stakeholders.

Yadav (2000:468-474) in the article titled Scheduled Castes and the Struggle against Inequality, discusses the participatory framework for emancipation. He finds that in the dalit struggle, social praxis leading to liberation is found wanting. What theory can be of help? What is the element of ‘commitment’ of the activists to a particular theory - what is the ideology that drives the action for liberation?

The proposal is for participatory research - as a mid-way between detached analysis of social reality and research as ideologically committed action-programme. Its components are: 1. Information gathering on the context of action. 2. Discussion between actors and researchers on the information in order to clarify problems and work out guidelines for action and 3. Concrete action-programme. And ‘recycling’ of the process from step one again.

Two broad approaches are pointed out: 1. Marxian - with caste being seen as a class based on relations of production in ownership, use of labour, nature of market system and consumption pattern of different classes in society. 2. The other approach believes that the ethnic, socio-cultural and religious dimension of reality cannot be reduced to mere economic reality or interpreted as epiphenomena resulting from the material world.

Sharma (1997) is of the view that underlying the apparent social structures one finds the caste-class-power nexus, which needs to be taken into account when one studies social inequality, and possibilities of social mobility.
Social stratification, which is based on ranking of people as high and low in society, is multi-faceted and multi-causal. Caste, as seen in India, is not a uni-dimensional matter of purity-pollution, but a matter, which has equal implications as far as economic and power relations are concerned (Sharma 1997:14).

John (2003) refers to organization as the *dalit* response to atrocities. It gives the Dalits a new identity as a group, which finds further expression in politics, which in Paul Goodman's view is the 'therapy for abnormal and oppressive social structures'. Pinto (2006) argues the case of unity among all subaltern groups to come together for their rights rejecting the divisive ideology of high and low, pure and polluted, sacred and profane. A similar appeal is being made constantly by Das & Massey (1994) for '*Dalit Solidarity*'.

In the discussions on organization for emancipation, John (2003) underscores the importance of socialisation and re-socialisation. Socialisation is the process by which the individual gets moulded in the society’s values, demands and requirements. The caste ridden society socializes the Dalits for the requirements of a casteist society. He makes use of the Gramsci's concept of 'contradictory consciousness' to analyse the present day dalit consciousness. The autonomous element in the Dalit Consciousness is that of common sense, which comes out when engaged in world transforming labour, even when under the domination of oppressor groups. There is a contradicting borrowed element consisting of values the dominant groups have introjected, manifested in submissive spirit. “True empowerment lies in bringing about a synthesis of both these modes, a progression from contradictory consciousness to coherent consciousness, which is the ultimate goal of empowerment.” *(op cit.)*

He further speaks about the *collective consciousness* of Dalits, which has a core element of shared pleasure and pain, where no one is left out, all are included. This, John says, happens in *dalit wadas*, where the Dalits dwell together.

He also refers to the newer dimensions of *dalit* consciousness, especially, of the *vidrōhi dalit*, the *dalit*-in-revolt. However, this is more an exception than a trend. He points out the need for avenues for examining, analysing and asserting the *dalit* consciousness, what and how it is being promoted, and the need to accept fellow Dalits as sharers in that consciousness.

Another area that needs re-examination is the exploitative and oppressive transactions, where very often coping is achieved through identification of the exploited with the oppressor. This needn’t be always so, as in this transaction the
oppressor is also a slave of the ‘projection upon a primed vulnerable other’. This two-way aspect is termed ‘fusion’. There is a greater challenge, to adopt non-antagonistic models of Gandhi and Martin Luther King could be adopted so as to be liberated of both the projection and identification, resulting in the release of tremendous amount of liberative energy (John, 2003).

The situations are also to be analysed from the angle of understanding the ways in which they derive satisfaction from maintaining the status quo. The difficulties and dangers of change may include finding newer ways of meeting one’s needs whereas one might already have patterns of meeting their needs. Another task is to identify their power and become aware of it. It is about realizing what they could do about situations and taking responsibility, thus becoming empowered. A third task is that of doing away with the past introjections, and preventing newer introjections of the values of an oppressive society (John, 2003).

Desrochers (2002:50) has quoted Ambedkar about the dalit struggle: “Ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of human personality.” Is Organisation the answer? Can the scientific methods of Social work – viz., Community Organisation and Community Development as described above provide the Dalits and the Dalit Christians the needed framework for organizing their struggle to freedom? John (2003) comes with the powerful and vital question of who initiates the change, and he is unequivocal in the assertion that it should be the Dalits, though it does not mean that the non-dalits have no contribution to make.
2.7. STUDIES ON DALIT CHRISTIANS

Studies based on caste system in India have been many. The field has attracted eminent scholars from the disciplines of anthropology, sociology and other social sciences. On the whole, the studies on Dalit Christians have not been many. Especially, about Dalit Christians of Keralam, are still fewer in number and specifically, on the Dalit Christians of Syrian Catholic Church (Syro Malabar/Malankara), hardly any.

One of the earliest studies in the post-independence era, in connection with Dalit Christians is that of Alexander (1968, 1972/1998). His study among the Pulāyas in 1964 also included some 130 converts to Christianity. The Christians of the study were either of CSI or Mār Thomā Church. He found their socio-economic status not different from other Pulāyas, and also observed the degrading appellation of neo-Christians, being used for them. He also pointed towards their lack of integration, and their continuance with the non-Christian practices of propitiating various deities or spirits and dilution in strict monogamous relationships.

One of the path-breaking studies in the series of caste studies in Christianity has been that of Koilparampil (1982). His sociological study presents the reality of caste in operation in the Catholic Church and proves through his study how the Latin and Syrian rites in the Catholic Church of Keralam fit the description of castes. He brings out the social distance between these two groups, which is a function of caste elements operating in the Catholic community. The study pointed to the bishops and the priests as responsible for the caste rivalry among the groups. He also found that reference group theory was applicable in the case of social mobility efforts among the Latin Christians.

Kuriedath’s study of 1989 of the Syrian Catholic community deals with the changing patterns of authority within the Church.

Kananaikil’s study of 1990, “Scheduled Caste Converts and Social Disabilities”, a survey on Tamil Nadu, finds that conversion was used primarily as a form of protest, and that it did not automatically remove the social and economic disabilities they suffered. It also finds that economic gain was not the main motive of conversion.

Presents a history of the Dalit Christians in India. However, major focus has been on the North Indian sections. There has been some reference to the Parayās (paraiyar) of the South. However, the pulayā community of Keralam, which forms the largest section among the Dalit Christians in the state, has been more or less left out, but for some minor references. The brief references he makes in the context of Syrian Christians, are confined to the Protestant and Non-Catholic groups.

Another study of Webster among the Dalit Christians and Pastors of CSI. It highlights the need for a) making ministry to the Dalits a top pastoral priority of the whole congregation in order to make it effective; b) the need to introduce planning model along with the problem solving model, where the people having problems are involved in planning; c) reviving or introducing the participatory dimension in worship, especially through music; d) preaching addressing the whole life, rather than limiting to mind and will; e) the pastor to know the flock, through frequent pastoral visitation; promoting Christian education; f) involvement through social service and social action; g) participation in the local church governance and h) pastor’s personal life style as one based on essential needs than wants, and identification with them ‘as a Dalit hanging on the cross’.

A 1995 study by Kariyil, looks at the Syrian Catholic community, on the basis of the Weberian theory of Protest Ethics as promoting the spirit of capitalism. The study disproves the theory, on the basis of the evidence to the contrary being consistently exhibited by the Catholic Church of Keralam, especially the Syrian community. Palakkappillil (1997) had conducted an exploratory study regarding the experiences of discrimination among the Dalit Catholics of Syrian Catholic Church in Ezhupunna, a coastal parish of Ernakulam Arch-diocese, and had found that caste based inequalities were present among the Catholics, and that the Dalit Christians of the Syrian Catholic community of the parish had been very backward socio-economically.

Kochuthresia (2002) has made a detailed study of the “Socio-Economic Status of the Dalit Christians in Kerala”. Her study was conducted in the district of Kottayam, and her sample was from all the Christian denominations in the district. She found that the Dalit Christians had a low SES and this was linked to their education and occupation. She also found that their relationship with Dalit Hindus and other Christians was not good. There was hardly anyone to be found in a high position, nor were they participating in social, political and religious fields. She had suggested that the Dalit Christians be included in the SC list. Reservation for them
should be done at various levels: a. special seats in Higher Education, b. Posts in government sector, and c. Seats in Loksabha and Legislative Assembly. She also mentioned the need to make PCC effective. On the part of the Church it had to pay more attention towards the DCs to create solidarity among the DCs and the DCs and other Christians.

Thengumpally (2004), in his study on “CMI and Socio-economic and Religious transformation in Kerala in the 19th and 20th centuries”, has tried to present the status of the Dalits, during those times. The term he uses is ‘slave castes’. While the study describes the past stipulations regarding purity and pollution, the Brāhminical claims of the Syrian Christians, it also briefly examines the efforts for the upliftment of the Dalits by the CMI congregation.

Paravila (2003) in a study “Evangelisation: A Total Liberation” tries to bring out the plight of Dalit Christians of Latin Catholic Church, in the diocese of Vijayapuram and presents the efforts made for their development from a theological and evangelical perspective. It refers to the caste mentality of the Syrian Catholics in Keralam, conversion as a means of liberation for the oppressed castes. The means the diocese employed for liberation of the oppressed people included education, forming of associations, integral development programmes, promotion of human dignity, and promotion of solidarity. He analyses the evangelisation efforts of the diocese of Vijayapuram, Keralam, from the angle of a Dalit liberation theology.

Trivedi (1996) studied ‘social and land equality issues’ of the Dalits in Gujarat. The study found that the promised measures based on land ceiling and other reservation benefits to the Dalits were met with fierce opposition bordering violence. It also found that the land reforms intended to benefit the depressed classes have not really benefited a large number of them. The house sites provide to them were some times far away from the village and were not suitable for residential purpose due to water logging, uneven surface of the land etc., nor was the application of new technology possible due the size and features of the land. Those who were getting their livelihood from animal husbandry were faring better than others.

Massey (1995) enlists the following points regarding the deprivations faced by Christian Dalits:

They are not given their full fundamental rights enjoyed by their counterparts in other religions.
They are discriminated against because of their religion.

Christianity has not become a means of liberation for them, but has only added to their bondage.

His study calls for solidarity among all the Dalit communities.

Tharamangalam (1995) says that there are three castes among the Christians of Keralam, viz., Latin, Syrian and Putuchristians (New Christians). He refers to the Tamil Nadu situation where, the Dalit Christians are physically segregated in their quarters or cheri. He observes that non-catholic denominations are more open and come out against caste. In the Kerala context, he cites examples where Ezhava converts to Christianity have become integrated into the community, in spite of their original caste being known by many.

Sherly George (2004) has undertaken a study as part of her M.A. Sociology programme in Kerala University, titled, “Socio Economic Conditions of Dalit Christians in Oomanoor Panchayat in Kottarakkara”. The study presents the socio-economic status of the Dalit Christians and finds it to be very backward.

The survey of literature and studies on Dalit Christians point to the need for further studies that would present with evidence their socio-economic status, their aspirations, the efforts taken on their behalf, their perception regarding their own identity and status etc. Professional Social work draws a blank when interventions, models or research in this area are considered. This study is intended to be of some value in this regard, in the sense of presenting the Dalit Christian reality and presumed marginalisation within a community considered socially and economically forward, to analyse the interventions so far from the angle of professional social work method, and identifying avenues for professional social work intervention.

CONCLUSION OF THE SURVEY OF LITERATURE

Though there have been some studies regarding the Dalits and the Dalit Christians, studies specific to the Syrian Catholic Community have been minimal. The profile of a Dalit Christian that emerges in all those studies is that of subjected personhood, and of neglect and suppression within the community and by the state. The same, to a great extent is applicable to the state of the Dalit Christians of the Syrian Catholic Church as well. The literature about them mainly consists of views and opinions of people who have worked for them or with them, or in the nature of analysis of events in history that have led to their present status. Empirical studies specifically about them are minimal. In the literature available, they, like their counterparts elsewhere in the country, appear as a highly marginalized, neglected and influential section.
In a relatively forward (‘forward’ as opposed to ‘backward’ in the government categories for welfare measures) community, this section is seen as really backward, and being considered as part of the forward community, are denied the special protections due to the backward sections.

Their status within the Syrian Catholic Church becomes all the more vulnerable because of the social distance between the two groups. Unlike the Church in other regions of the country, and unlike most other Christian denominations, the Syrian Catholic Church has this major difference that the majority of the community belongs to the section having a higher ‘caste-like’ claim, and the dalit section happens to be a miniscule minority. Their estimated percentage is around 10% (which is thought to be on the higher side). This makes their position all the more vulnerable, their voices silenced and their protests, if any, suppressed or unheard in the din of the majority.

Professing highest forms of equality, the community fails in bringing the equality ideal to practice. The lack of visibility of the dalit section in the various fields of influence and leadership points to their backwardness. There are claims on the part of the Church of having spared no efforts for their upliftment. There is much hue and cry made, in various forums, about reconversion of Dalit Christians to Hindu religion for better socio-economic benefits, and also about their drifting away from the Catholic Community to new evangelical-protestant communities. However, those who make such allegation conveniently forget that it is the attraction of an equal treatment and/or economic benefits they receive in such communities that inspires this drifting.

It is against such background, that this study is conducted to scientifically find out the present socio-economic profile of the Dalit Christians of the Syrian Catholic Church of Keralam, to understand how the Catholic community perceives their problems, the interventions on their behalf, and their effectiveness. The study also seeks to look at the phenomena of inequality as it appears in the discriminatory practices in the context of the Dalit Christians of this community. Though the study takes into account the responses of both the sections of the Syrian Catholic community, effort is made to bring out the voices of the Dalit Christians regarding the various problems they face. It also looks at the interventions made on behalf of the Dalits, from a Social Work Methods perspective - regarding their awareness about them, and their perception about their effectiveness. The study also seeks to gather suggestions from the community itself what further interventions would take it to the ideal of equality.