Chapter Five

Theological Response to the Dalit Experience of Land – Alienation

5.0. Introduction

Dalit experience of land alienation is rooted in the denial of the care centred land-Dalit relationship, which resulted in Dalit experience of pathos, as studied in chapters three and four. The experience of multiple forms of land alienation is nothing but Dalit sufferings in multiple forms. It sounds as though Dalits are bound to suffer without any active response to the land alienation. In the present chapter the Dalit theological responses are explored under the following sections: 1. Locating the exploitative context that determines land-Dalit relationship in Arnakonda, 2. Exploring into Dalit resistance to exploitative ideology found in their encounter with the Christianity, Communist and Ambedkar movements, 3. Identifying Dalit faith found in their socio-cultural life, 4. Exploring the Biblical approach to land-people relationship as an affirmation for the Dalit praxis, and 5. Dalit theological Response to the multiple forms of land alienation.

5.1. Locating the Exploitative Context

Under the section on “Intricacies of Dalit Land Alienation and Social Sufferings” (see sub-section 4.2 in Chapter four) the basis of Dalit pathos has been reflected upon. It showed that they were not just cultural experiences, as popularly assumed, and they had material basis, evident in the denial of land-Dalit relationship of subsistence and care. Such exploitation takes place in a violent form by destroying the subsistence systems of agriculture and not recognising Dalits as ‘tillers and keepers’\(^\text{129}\) of soil. It all happens in the caste based social relations of production. The

\(^{129}\) This expression is taken from the Bible, from Genesis chapter 2:15.
following is an exploration into the ideology of caste based production relationships namely the ‘Brahmanical ideology’.

In this chapter I wish to explore into Brahmanical ideology which constructs land - people relationship or ‘nature-culture’ relationship of its own. The caste based hierarchical Indian society divides people into higher and lower castes as ‘natural’ and ‘super - natural’ the same has been justified using the theological underpinnings of the creation myth in the Brahmanical ideology. By doing so, the distinction between the ‘natural’ and ‘super - natural’ dimensions was dismissed. Such a stratagem of Brahmanical ideology was exposed by Jyothiba Phule (1855), a pioneer for the Dalit cause. He critiqued the ‘natural – super - natural’ relationship as found in the Brahmanical ideology in the following manner:

The rationale of the Brahmanical ideology is theological in content. The context in which the Brahmanical ideology emerged was based on the ulterior motives of the Brahman claim for a privileged position and establishment of Brahman supremacy over the rest of the castes. For this the Brahmans have aimed to justify asymmetrical application of justice in a mundane matter. By doing so, they appropriated a position more exalted than that of god’s.

Reflecting on Phule, Mahesh Gavaskar says,

The means by which Brahmanical ideology is established, as well as perpetuated, is in multiple forms. Firstly, through cultural acts of the Brahmans through their writings, secondly, by creation of landlordism to suit the purposes of Brahmanical ideology and thirdly, to place Dalits away from the land control and to position them to serve as ‘slaves’ and later ‘agricultural labourers.\(^{132}\)

\(^{130}\) The word ‘ideology’ is used here to denote ideas developed by the Brahmins in particular historical epoch, motivated by a purpose, and hides the exploitation by the land owning privileged castes on the one hand and hides the vulnerability of the exploitation of the land owning Dalits on the other.

\(^{131}\) As cited by Mahesh Gavaskar, “Colonialism within Colonialism: Phule’s Critique of Brahman Power”, Paper presented at the Cultural Studies Workshop jointly organised by the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta and International Development Studies, Roskilde University, Denmark, on 19-23 November 1995 in Mysore.

\(^{132}\) Ibid
Firstly, about the Brahmanical writings: The Brahmanical ideology was perpetuated by appropriating the traditions of the people and rendering them as Brahmanical writings, and ultimately attributing divinity to these writings. One of the important aspects of the Brahmanical writings was the integration of knowledge, stories and practices of the indigenous people in inventing the Brahmanical ideology. The *Puranas*¹³³ (Hindu scriptures) are made out of creation myths created by the bards, the wondering poets. The myths of the bards, which were in oral tradition, were taken over by the Brahmins and given a written format, which became the *Puranas*. The authorship of *Puranas* was transferred to Brahmin sages Vasishta and Bharadhwaja. This is how the *Puranas* originated. Among these *Puranas*, according to Nagendra Rao,¹³⁴ on the one hand, the ‘Greater Puranas’ were ones which were used to legitimise the rule of royal families for a return of huge land gifts to the Brahmins, on the other hand the ‘Lesser Puranas’ were those, which were used to explain caste based social relationships and legitimised the landownership. While doing so, the Lesser *Puranas* integrated the local cultures and local traditions into the Brahmanical culture and practices.¹³⁵ Similarly they integrated the religious traditions of Adivasis as well.

Secondly, *Brahmanical ideology* is perpetuated through landlordism: The intrinsic relationship between the emergence of landlordism and how caste is consolidated through the mediation of Brahmanical ideology is observed by Rajan Gurukal (1993) and others. According to Gurukal,¹³⁶ how the native rulers, in the medieval India, indulged in land grants to the Brahmins and to the Brahmanical institutions is recorded in the Brahmanical writings. The land gifts to the Brahmanical institutions were instrumental in strengthening the temples and pilgrimage practices. Such land

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¹³³ The *Purana* were said to be the literary works in Sanskrit language from the post-Gupta period. It was explained that there are a total of 18 Greater *Puranas*. Cf. Mahesh Gavaskar, “Colonialism within Colonialism: Phule’s Critique of Brahman Power”.

¹³⁴ The origin of Puranas was explained by Nagendra Rao that they had the beginning after seventh century A.D, in the context of emerging local kingdoms (Hindu) in South India, where the Brahmin movement from the North India to the South took place. Cf. Nagendra Rao, *Brahmanas of South India* (Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2005), 163-64.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

gifts facilitated the perpetuation of Brahmanical values at the periphery, while facilitating integration of people at periphery into caste villages, and thereby, paved the way for the formation of the modern State. Through land gifts expansion of agriculture and peasantization correlated with the State formation in the periphery. This then formed a new kind of socio-political structure, both at the regional as well as at the local levels. Gurukul further said that all through these processes the spread of 'vedic', 'sastric-puranic' ideas had strengthened the privileged caste rulers and legitimised the social caste division and facilitated cultural integration.  

Thirdly, the Brahmanical ideology tried to posit a section as slaves, during early peasantization. Gavaskar explains from Phule’s point of view as follows: The Brahmanical rationale traps the labouring masses in the notions of ‘fate’, ‘accumulated demerits from previous births’ (sanchit) and notions of ‘predestination’ (prarabdha). The Brahmanical mechanisms of trapping had led the labouring masses to lose their dialectical relationship with the world and have turned them into slave (dasa) to the alien forces (external forces). In other words, the formation of peasantization in India was based on land alienation, by which people outside of the caste system were integrated into the caste village as ‘slaves’ and the same was mediated by the Brahmanical ideology. It was the so called upper caste people who took a lead in the kind of peasantization mentioned above. According to Bhairabi Prasad Sahu, the labouring masses were once free people, the tribal communities were not a part of the caste village, but they were integrated in a particular manner into the caste-based peasantization. It was these slaves, who identify themselves today as Dalits. In Sahu’s words “[T]he consolidation of caste society was inextricably related to the emergence of a permanent stock of landless agricultural labourers, usually within the fold of the untouchables”.


138 Ibid.


140 Cf. Bhairabi Prasad Sahu (ed), Land System And Rural Society In Early India (New Delhi: Manohar publishers & Contributors, 2004), 22.

141 Ibid., 32.
5.1.1. Brahmanical Ideology at Work in Arnakonda

The Brahmanical ideology discussed above is very much operational at the Arnakonda village. Dalits had been confined to the ‘marginality’ in ‘land-people’ relationship, as discussed at different levels in chapters three and four, and they were strategically ‘included’\(^\text{142}\) into agriculture as agricultural labourers, and also as Paleru (agricultural labourers in a caste based agricultural contract labour system). This eventually was one of the causes of Dalits’ experience of land alienation. Using the practices of caste based preferences, which was evident in the land sale as well as in providing access to the pathways, water sources and in use of agricultural machinery, the OCs had favoured BC sub-castes and they had excluded the Dalits. Such discrimination through restriction of access to the civic amenities (by the privileged landowning caste people) is understood as part of the Brahmanical ideology. These practices of caste based preferences had worked towards the consolidation of caste nexus between the OCs and the BCs. The results of increased caste consolidations were further seen in the destruction of minor irrigation systems, which were created and maintained by the Dalits, and also in disregarding the Dalits as ‘tillers and keepers’ of the soil. The consolidation of the caste forces is very much evident in Arnakonda and this is evident in the caste encompassment that keeps Dalits under the surveillance and control of the caste people.

With regard to the State governance at the village level, the State authorities worked together with the caste people, who own huge acres of land. It was seen in the case of OCs having prior information about the canals system and they did not lose land (see sub-section 3.3.2.4). Based on such information they exchanged their lands and also sold the lands. The Dalits, who had no access to such information, had lost their lands in the canals. Similar was the case of OCs selling their lands, which were located at Pandivagu based on the prior information about the forthcoming canals.

\(^{142}\) The word ‘inclusion’ is popularly understood with a positive meaning. But, in this text its reference goes to the history of Indian peasantization in which the forest lands as well as the forest dwellers were included into caste village. Therefore, the word ‘inclusion’ does not carry any positive connotation. Sahu used the word ‘land clearance’ to indicate this phenomenon. Cf. Ibid., 8-21.
system, and probably also about the forthcoming granite-quarry industry. The Dalits were ignorant about the State projects at Arnakonda and they suffered loss of land.

Having understood the role of Brahmanical ideology in Arnakonda, which goes in parallel with the increased social sufferings of Dalits, the pertinent question raised is, “whether the Dalits passively accept the Brahmanical ideology as a reason for Dalits suffering?” “Do they show any sign of faith that resists Brahmanical exploitation?” The following discussion focuses on Dalit resistance to Brahmanical ideology.

5.2. Exploring into Dalit Resistance to Brahmanical Ideology as found in their Interface with Christianity, Communist and Ambedkar Movements

Dalit resistance to Brahmanical ideology is seen in their encounter Christianity and other liberative movements. Such responses by the Dalits were based on their critical approach aiming at developing Dalit praxis. They were aware of the limitations of their own religio-cultural practices in building resistance to Brahmanical ideology on the one hand and exposing Brahmanical domination over their cultural life on the other. Following is an account of their awareness:

Our goddess is weak. She is interested in the production of life and protection of life- a subsistence goddess, the Katta Maisamma, and Pochamma. In contrast, the gods of the so called upper caste people are worrier gods, very strong and our goddess can not withstand before the Hindu gods. Having the subsistence goddess on our side, we cannot face the Hindu gods. It is impossible to face them. We need a stronger god on our side, so that we can

143 One of the Mala Dalit goddess is called Katta Maidamma, whose shrine is placed on the bund of water tank. The location of placing her on water bund indicates to belief of the Mala in her as a conserver keeper of the tank as well as life in it. There is no temple for this goddesses and no priest. People directly relate with her. Cf. Interview with a Dalit farmer identified as FS1 in Arnakonda on 17th May 2010.

144 One of the Madiga Dalit goddess is called Pochamma, who is adored by these Dalits, believing her to be the healer and particularly protector of children from diseases. There is no temple for this goddesses and no priest. People directly relate with her. Cf. Ibid.
face the Hindu gods; we can face the landlords. We realised that the God has come to us as stronger one in the form of Jesus Christ, Ambedkar and warriers in land struggles, the communist.  

The above testimony shows about Dalit critical approach towards their religio-cultural resources and their search for an ally to strengthen their resistance movement. The Dalits of Arnakonda were very much aware of their dependence for subsistence on the privileged land owing castes. Therefore, they maintained docility and submissiveness in a pretending manner, until a strong ally was found by them; it is similar to the experience of Dalits from rest of the Telangana villages. Whereas, the testimony of yet another Dalit farmer (FS2) from Arnakonda informed us about finding an appropriate ally in Dalit resistance movement, for which the Dalit Christians had to bear the accusation by the caste people (OCs) of provoking the anger of gods by deserting them in order to worship Jesus Christ. It happened in the context of Dalits not attending to the fields of the privileged caste people but engaging themselves in the Mission land. It reminds us of Brahmanical strategy to make Dalits feel guilty by reminding them of ‘one’s duty to caste is important and not ones rights in society’. On being critical about exposing Brahmanical domination in the religio-cultural life of Dalits, as informed by a Dalit farmer (FS2) in Arnakonda, the so called privileged land owing caste people want the Dalits to perform their rituals in

145 Cf. Ibid.

146 Similar to the experience of Dalits in Arnakonda, Meera Nanda has observed that the religio-cultural traditions of Dalits are in many ways the making of the dominant Varnashrama Dharma traditions; therefore, they are subordinate and not independent. To overpower the dominant traditions by the Dalit traditions by themselves is an impossible task. Nanda sighted the Dalit practice of ‘sati’ in North India and says that Dalits strive to follow the traditions of Varnashrama Dharma. The case of Charanshah, who succumbed to the practice ‘sati’ had burned herself to death along with her dead husband’s body in November 1999 at Satpura, Uttar Pradesh. Cf. Meera Nanda, Breaking the Spell of Dharma and Other Essays (Haryana: Three Essays Collective, 2007), 110-117. The Dalits of Arnakonda, contrary to the arguments of Meera Nanda, have not identified their goddesses as well as their religio-cultural traditions totally with the privileged land owning castes. Their goddesses are understood as subsistence goddesses and not warrier goddesses. Cf. Ibid.


148 Cf. Interviewed a Dalit farmer identified as FS2 from Arnakonda on 20th May 2010 at Arnakonda.


150 Cf. Interviewed FS2 on 20th May 2010 at Arnakonda.
the interest of the caste people. According to the testimony of a Dalit farmer (FS2) in Arnakonda as given below:

The privileged landowning caste people had assigned places for the Dalit gods, under a tree or a rock, and they kept surveillance on the activity of Dalits. We detested it by denying to carry out the religio-cultural practices within the surveillance of the caste people. The privileged land owning caste people believed that the Dalit drum had power to drive away the evil spirits of the village, therefore, they demand from us to play the drum and observe rituals within their surveillance.\textsuperscript{151}

The above views, which are drawn from the religio-cultural sources of Dalits, agree that the Dalit gods or goddesses are not powerful enough to empower them to resist land alienation. Instead their goddesses are engaged only with the subsistence life. They need an ally to stand resisting the village powers. Such an understanding had paved a path for the Dalit interface with Christianity, Ambedkar movement and Communist movement, which will be discussed bellow.

5.2.1. Dalit and Christianity Interface: Perception of God

An account of the origin of Christianity in Arnakonda as given by the former Panchayat President, who was interviewed under the number FS3, is given below:

Firstly, the Christian missionaries (Methodist Mission Society\textsuperscript{152} [MMS]) came to Arnakonda to start mission work among the \textit{Mala} and \textit{Madiga} Dalits. They acquired 11 acres of land and started agricultural works, grew flower gardens, opened an educational institution for the Dalits, and a Church. The missionaries have trained \textit{Mala} and \textit{Madiga} Dalits of Arnakonda to be preachers, teachers and

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{152} In 1884 to 1917 eleven mission centres were established all over Telangana, mostly in rural regions. During the famine in 1896 and 1900 there was ‘mass movement’ of Mala Dalits into Christianity. It was only with the work of Rev. H.G. Prince in 1906 the MMS work among Madiga Dalits had started at Sangareddy region. Since 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, a number of educational institutions, snf medical hospitals were constructed by the MMS based on local needs. The Dalits were given prime importance in all these services. To construct Churches, parsonage, purchase of land etc, was to facilitate services among the marginalised. A shift in the mission work of the MMS from urban to rural has taken place with the works of Benjamin Wesley, Rev. William Burgess, Rev. Charles Walker Posnett and Benjamin Pratt in February 1882.
both. We loved those flower gardens. Secondly the Dalit education has started ever since the Christian missionaries came to this village. The teachers were our village people only, from the Dalit castes. Thirdly the Dalit youth had become more assertive and they developed a sense of self esteem.\footnote{153}

In line with the testimony of Dalit encounter with Christian mission, as given above, a Dalit farmer remembered the following names as the first Dalits to be trained by the missionaries, who were remembered with great respect by every caste community in Arnakonda. He said, “Some of the persons to be remembered as the first ones to be trained by the missionaries are Panaganti Mark Pantulu, Katta Samuel Pantulu, Chetarla Daveedu Pantulu, K. Nathanielu, Tamadi John, Yesudasu, Bollamalla John, and Panaganti Abraham”.\footnote{154}

Since 1947, with the formation of the Church of South India (CSI), the MMS had been merged with the CSI and the Christian mission was the responsibility of the CSI. The Church owns a small piece of land, donated to it by the Panaganti Mala Dalit household within the Dalit colony, in which a school for adults was conducted by the Panaganti Mark on every night, and the school concluded with prayers and devotion every night. The Biblical understanding of ‘land-God-people’ relationship was taught to the Dalits. Through such an education, the Dalits have developed Christian faith which goes beyond the missionary convention of conversions.

\footnote{153}{Interview with the former president of Arnakonda Panchayat, an OC caste person identified as FS3, on 17th May 2010 at Arnakonda.}

\footnote{154}{Interview with a Dalit Christian farmer identified as FS4 from Arnakonda on 20\textsuperscript{th} May 2010 at Arnakonda. On the point of encounter between the Dalits and the Christian mission known as Methodist Mission Society (MMS) the following historical narration is educative. In the light of experiences to serve the lower strata of caste society namely Mala and Madiga communities, the MMS has identified caste exclusiveness between the backward castes and the scheduled castes, and also among the Dalits themselves. In the light of Dalit pathos and the need to reconstruct them, “Mass Movement Commission” was appointed in 1918 to make an in depth study of the situation at Hyderabad State and elsewhere in India. The recommendations of the commission was to make room for the participation of lay persons in mission works, need to develop self-governance, need to formulate Panchayat in each congregation, summer schools for the village elders, recommendations to improve the financial condition of the village congregations, endowment of pastorates with a few acres of ‘glebe land’, funding of agricultural loans, formation of co-operative credit societies, vocational as well as normal training schools and need to educate the village congregations through regular meetings at different administrative levels such as sectional and circuit levels. Cf. P.Y.Luke and John B. Carman, \textit{Village Christians and Hindu Culture: Study of a Rural Church in Andhra Pradesh} (New Delhi: ISPCK, Indian Print 2009), 15, 18-24.}
An important impact of the encounter between Christianity and Dalits is that Dalits have developed courage to openly express their decent against their social sufferings. For instance, one of the stanzas of a Dalit Christian song goes as follows:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Manujulara Vinudi} &\quad -\quad \text{Mailanu Guurchi Kanudi} \\
\text{Roogamu Petu Purugu} &\quad -\quad \text{Roothala Puti Perugu.} \\
\text{Papa bheeti Vidudi} &\quad -\quad \text{Rootha Baata Tolagudi} \\
\text{Karunagala Yesu Raktham} &\quad -\quad \text{Kadugu Papa Rothanu} \numberline{155}
\end{align*}
\]

(Listen you humans – Understand and see the pollution.
Bacteria that causes disease - Is born and grows in slush.
Leave fear of sin – Leave the path of slush
Blood of gracious Jesus – Cleanses sinful slush).

The above poem was said to be written by the Christian Dalits of Arnakonda. Background for the lyrics of this song is that the imposed culture of the caste system has assigned food and place for Dalits. They should carry the dead animals of the dominant castes to their habitat, located outside the village; to skin it, make leather goods for the privileged caste, and eat the meat of the dead animal. In the process of preparation of the meat, the whole place gets filled with flies and other infecting organisms. The Dalits had no immediate access to water in order to keep the place clean. These songs which refer to bacteria and flies are an allusion to the polluting caste ideology. The Dalit assertion takes Christian faith to critique the polluting caste ideology, which is also known as ‘Brahmanical ideology’ for it segregates people based on the notions of purity and pollution. And at the same time, to express their faith in terms of hope in overcoming sinful ideology is also expressed. Below is yet an account of exploration into Dalit and Christianity encounter.

\numberline{155} This poem was presented by a Dalit Christian (FS5), who migrated out of Arnakonda village some time back in order to find a job in Balasa, a nearby industrial town of Maharashtra State, at the time of interview on 19th May 2010 at Arnakonda. He returned home from Balasa and engaged in agriculture.
5.2.2. Dalit and Christianity Interface: Appropriating Biblical Stories

The Dalit Christians in Arnakonda have staged many dramas, based on the Biblical stories such as birth of Jesus Christ, Naboth story on ‘inherited land’ and Jesus’ story of death and resurrection. Along with the songs, the drama was also empowering the Dalits. The very enactment was a movement of assertion. The idea given by the story has direct message to the higher castes. For instance one of the Dalit Christian said that he had greatest satisfaction over giving away Christian message to the privileged caste people that his God can save everybody.\textsuperscript{156} He further explained about the message of Jesus’ story as follows:

The story brought newness in the understanding of God as a ‘suffering God’ at the hands of rulers and guards (sipayee) and never a ‘demanding God,’ who because of his sufferings became saviour of people. This message had alerted the privileged land owning castes to keep at distance from exploiting us, for now on we were viewed by the Doralu (caste landlords) as people owned by God. Ever since the privileged caste people had referred to Jesus Christ as God of the Mala Madiga (Mala Madigala Devudu) in Arnakonda. Prior to it Jesus Christ was addressed as God of white people (the western missionaries) and not as God of Mala Madiga.\textsuperscript{157}

Such an encounter between Dalits and Christianity in Arnakonda has nurtured ‘self-dignity’ among the Dalits to face the dominant ideology. Such an encounter hathseen Christianity and Dalits has contributed to the emergence of the Church in Arnakonda, which shall be discussed below.

5.2.3. Dalits and Christianity Interface: Emergence of the Church

This section presents emergence of Dalits as Christian leaders on the one hand and missionary work engaged in developmental activity as well as educational activity of Dalits on the other. Dalits from Arnakonda and from the immediate neighbouring village called Chopadandi were ordained as ministers of the Church of

\textsuperscript{156} Cf. Interview with a Dalit Christian farmer (FS6), who is also a story teller in Arnakonda, on 3\textsuperscript{rd} May 2010.

\textsuperscript{157} Interview of FS6 on 3\textsuperscript{rd} May 2010.
South India. One of them had become Bishop in the Diocese of Karimnagar, namely Rt. Rev. K. E. Swamida. Many Christian Dalits are members of the Diocesan Council, a highest administrative body of the Diocese, and contribute to the development of mission and ministry of the Church.

The Church had empowered the Dalits of Arnakonda by addressing the needs of the Dalits in agriculture. According to the report given by the Dalit Christians the missionaries had provided financial assistance to dig agricultural wells; they had given the Church lands to the Dalits to do agriculture without any contract deals; and they had also provided the required technical training or vocational training to the Dalits. For educational purposes, the children of the Dalits of Arnakonda were selected through a long procedure and the selected students were sent to study in the mission high schools at Secunderabad city, for English medium schooling and to Doornakal town, Alair and Jagityala for Telugu medium schooling. It was further said that the Dalit children had experienced breath of fresh air by living in the hostels, away from the surveillance of caste people. To be precise, the children of Dalit parents were moved away from the caste village; by so doing the children were kept away from the surveillance of the privileged caste people. Otherwise the children of Dalits had to work for the privileged caste people by caring for the village cattle. Dalits found interest in the mission and ministry of Church and they started defining the meaning of Padiri (Pastor) and Pantulu (Brahmin priest) through appropriating the title of Brahmin priest to apply to pastor as an act of assertion, as it happened in the MMS field Churches of Telangana.

5.2.4. Dalits and Christianity Interface: Defining Padiri (Pastor) and Pantulu (Brahmin priest)

The word Padiri and Pantulu are two different words. Padiri denotes Pastor, a Christian terminology used in Telangana. The word Pantulu, in a caste village, stands for Hindu priest, as well as a Brahmin officer, who maintains village land documents, looks after village revenue affairs. Yet another name for Pantulu was Karunam, who looks after the village revenue affairs. The Dalit experience with the Pantulu is an experience of denial and exploitation. The Pantulu as a ‘religious teacher’ kept Dalits
out of the educational institutions; *Pantulu*, as a ‘Temple administrator’, kept the Dalits out of the Temple; and as a ‘village revenue administrator’ alienated Dalits from their lands.\(^{158}\) The Dalits were disappointed with the values of the educated *Pantulu*. They had given new meaning to the word *Pantulu* by prefixing a Christian terminology *Padiri* and reinterpreted the word *Pantulu* as others in the region had also done it. The Christian teacher cum Evangelist, who was appointed by the MMS was given the title *Padirola-Pantulu*. By doing so, Dalits interpreted *Pantulu* as one, who has potential to empower them. In contrast to the ‘denial’ experience of the Dalits at the hands of the village *Pantulu*, the *Padirola-Pantulu* has been ‘including’ Dalit men and women in education and in other forms of services rendered to them.

The habitat of *Padiri* is important, which is called *Padirola-Bhoomi* (mission compound). It consists of few acres of land, meant to be used for the educational and hostel accommodation, health services, agriculture purposes and spiritual purposes. Wherever land was not available the *Padirola-Pantulu*, the very house in which he lived was used as *Gudi-Badi* (Church cum school). The *Dora-gadi* (a mini palace of the village landlord)\(^{159}\) signified the domination of caste landlord and his governance; In contrast to this, the *Gudi-Badi* stood for Dalit inclusion and Dalit empowerment. To be precise, *Gudi-Badi* was a sign of hope in the midst of the oppressive structure of *Dora-gadi*.

Another important aspect of the *Padirola-Pantulu* was that this *Pantulu* belonged to one of the Dalit castes, either *Mala* or *Madiga*. The *Padirola-Pantulu*

\(^{158}\) The observations made by the researcher at the time of study in Arnakonda through listening to the casual conversations of Dalits is that the *Karunam Pantulu* was an exploitative person and people of the village feared at him for he holds land records with him and he was an important person in the matter of village revenue governance. This observation matches with the existing studies about officers of village revenue administration in Telangana villages. To look after the village revenue system Hindu personal were appointed by the Nizam and to look after the military Muslim personal were appointed by the Nizam. These revenue officers were the one, who used malicious ways to alienate the lands of the marginalised people such as Dalits and Adivasis to a greater extent. Cf. A. Satnarayana, *Land, Caste and Dominance in Telangana*, working paper, Centre for Contemporary Studies, Nehuru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, Second Series, Mumber LXXVIII, July 1993:11-12; B. Janardhan Rao, *Land Alienation In Tribal Area* (Warangal: Kakatiya School of Public Administration, 1987),103-106.

\(^{159}\) To explain life in ‘*Dora gadi*’ and Dalit exploitation the Telugu novel by Dasharathi is informative. Cf. Dasharathi Rangachaya, *Chillara Devundla* (Hyderabad: Hyderabad Book Trust, 1969).
worked for the education of both Mala and Madiga Dalits. When privileged land owning caste rulers (Dora Rajyam) had segregated the Dalits, the Padirola-Pantulu, in contrast, had become indispensable for the empowerment of the Mala and Madiga Dalits. According to a Dalit farmer identified as FS7, the Padirola-Pantulu was instrumental in negotiating with the district collector on the distribution of land to the landless; also in resisting the privileged caste people’s domination, even in a physical sense, and even before some sections of the Dalits embraced Christianity. Why the caste people should listen to the Padirola-Pantulu, who happened to be most of the times a Dalit Christian? The caste people had realised that the Padirola-Pantulu no longer depended on them for subsistence and he had become independent. They had also seen how the foreign missionaries had treated the Padirola-Pantulu with respect and this became a model to be followed by the privileged caste people in relation with Dalits.

After exploring the Dalit and Christian encounter, the role of Communist movement in Arnakonda in relation to Dalits is explored below.

5.2.5. Dalits and Communism Interface in Arnakonda

The Communist Party of India (CPI) was powerful in the Northern part of Telangana, in which the district of Karimnagar is located. The works of CPI were remarkable in developing resistance to the landlordism in Telangana villages and it worked towards land reform, to benefit all sections of the people. Even though the works of CPI were remarkable, the actuality was that the Dalits did not benefit much by the CPI-led land reforms. But, the works of Marxist and Leninist groups

\[\text{160} \text{Cf. Interview of FS7 a Dalit farmer in Arnakonda on 17th May2010 at Arnakonda.}\]

\[\text{161} \text{The works of Communist Party of India are explained to be very pertinent particularly in relation to \text{‘Telangan’ and \text{‘Land Tenancy’ question. Subba Rao explains that the privileged landowning castes had preferred Sudra castes over Dalits to work in their respective lands as tenants at will. In the course of time these tenants were recognised as farmers under the \text{‘Hyderabad Tenancy and Agricultural lands Act, 1950’ (promulgated on June 10th), which had benefitted around 600,000 tenants. It was 6, 700, 000 acres or 25% of the total cultivated area that was under tenancy. It was said that Hyderabad State was unique and distinctive of enacting a tenancy law in Indian early history of land reforms. Before the law was enacted in any other State of the Indian union, it was enacted in Telangana. But, Dalits were deprived from celebrating the joy over the Hyderabad Tenancy Law. Andhra Maha Sabha, a wing of the Communist Party, took the lead to distribute land through the ‘Panch Committee’ at the village}}\]
(CPIML) had directly benefited the Dalits of Arnakonda in acquiring land to the landless Dalits.\(^{162}\) The Dalits could procure *poorambok* (government waste lands) lands located near the *Pandivagu* (water stream) and *Mirapacheruvu* (water tank) and procured land patta (land registration document) later. One significant contribution of the movement was that the Dalits could face the privileged land owning caste and question them on Dalit land alienation. In 1980s, a Dalit initiative to reclaiming the *poorambok* land from the illegal occupation of a *Kaapu* man of *Nomula Palle*, in Arnakonda, had resulted in police action against the Dalits. But in 2010, another Dalit took the initiative to reclaim the land from the illegal occupation of yet another *Kaapu* man, and this time it did not result in police action.\(^{163}\) Similarly with the impact of Communism Dalits could safeguard their lands taking recourse to the SC, ST Atrocities Act. Though it did not contribute to Dalit ownership of land, Communism in Arnakonda did make an impact in terms of their assertiveness in acts of resistance and legal redress.

In Arnakonda, it was not only the influence of Communism but, the influence of Ambedkar movement was also seen. The following is an account of it.

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\(^{163}\) At the time of field study an incident occurred in Arnakonda. I was in the house of a *Kappa*, OC farmer in Arnakonda, doing in-depth interviews. Suddenly yet another *Kappa* family barged into the former *Kappa* man’s house, where I was sited, and started to complain about the Dalit assertions in claiming the *Poorambok* land, which had been under the control of the *Kappa* man for quite some time, but illegally. On listening to the complaint, the former *Kappa* had encouraged for a police case but, rest of the *Kappa* households rejected the idea of lodging police case. They stated that the Dalits in Arnakonda were supported by Dalit organizations and they were more learned about their rights. In such a context the 1980 as well as 2010 incidents were discussed by the *Kappa* families.
5.2.6. Dalits and Ambedkar Movement in Arnakonda

The district of Karimnagar is closer to the Maharashtra State, where Ambedkar movement had been very strong. Because of paper mill and coal mines at Balarsha, in the State of Maharastra, which is located near the Telangana borders of the Andhra Pradesh State, many Dalits from Arnakonda had migrated to Balarsha and they managed to secure employment in the above said industries. Those Dalit migrants encountered Ambedkar movement while they were working at Balarsha. On their return home, the Dalits had brought with them songs of the Ambedkar movement as well as Ambedkar ideology to the Arnakonda and the Arnakonda youth were educated on that. As a result cultural groups were developed in Arnakonda to conscientise Dalits and to make appropriate representation to the State government on pertinent issues affecting Dalit life in Arnakonda. The egalitarian ideology of the Ambedkar movement had again boosted the self-image of Dalits, changing them to fight for their human rights.\textsuperscript{164} Even though the Dalits were not given a place in State run farmer school (\textit{Ryutu-Patasala}), they became confident to claim their rights. Thus the contact of Dalits in Arnakonda with Ambedkar movement gave them an opportunity to conscientise themselves, and as a result, become confident of taking on the exploitation.

After exploring Dalit encounter with Christianity, Communism and Ambedkar movement, and observing their impact in enabling the Dalits to assert and be confident, below is the account of Dalit faith, which keeps them go on resisting the caste exploitation.

5.3. Faith of Dalits in Arnakonda

The faith element of Dalits is evident in their resistance to Brahmanical ideology. The concept of ‘faith’ is used in this thesis as a ‘meaning-structure’ developed by Dalits in their relation to land-people experiences. “Faith” as meaning-

\textsuperscript{164}Cf. Interview conducted with a Dalit farmer identified as FS 8 of Arnakonda on 20\textsuperscript{th} May 2010 in Arnakonda village.
structure is adopted from the theological works of a liberation theologian by name Juan Luis Segundo. Segundo\textsuperscript{165} said that faith belongs to anthropological dimension of the human life, which shows abilities of a person either to choose or to reject something based on different factors namely ‘freedom’, ‘creation of value-structure’ and role of ‘referential witnesses’. He further explained the three factors mentioned above as follows: the freedom informs about the conditions of environment leading to choices been made; creating a value-structure informs about value/happiness that can be placed as the highest value (kept above all, and yet to be realised) to the rest of values.\textsuperscript{166} Segundo’s explanation of faith is appropriate to this study for the following reasons: 1) Faith of Dalits is liberative by exposing land alienation (it reflects state of freedom). 2) Faith of Dalits is critical by virtue of its potentiality to judge over the Brahmanical ideology (it evaluates value-system) and 3) Dalit faith relates with the faith experiences of the marginalised people in the Bible and in this sense faith holds transcendental dimension (it takes referential group into consideration). By explaining Dalit faith as a ‘meaning-structure’, it is possible to explore Dalit faith in terms of Dalit praxis.

The *Mala* and *Madiga* ‘faith’ (meaning-structure) took shape predominantly in two contexts (historically) namely 1) in the context of developing agriculture in which both land and Dalits were free people and 2) in the context of developing agriculture in which both land and Dalits were under the encompassment of caste value-system which was in nexus with the capitalist value-system. In the first phase, the land-people relationship was a relationship of subsistence and in the second phase it was an experience of land alienation. In the first phase the Dalit faith was enriched by increased ‘social-bond’ and increased ‘solidarity’. In second phase the Dalit faith was to expose the land alienation, as a response. The following is a detailed account:

The Dalit faith (meaning-structure) did not emerge all at a time in the history of Arnakonda but, sequentially. To say about land alienation of Dalits is to acknowledge an affirmative relationship between the ‘land’ and *Mala, Madiga* Dalits prior to their experience of land alienation. The first phase in which Dalit faith took

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
shape was in the context of Dalits ‘clearing’ of the land for agriculture. Through clearing, Dalits had transformed the barren land into arable land and prepared it for sustainable agriculture. There was no room for dominant ideology in the conversion of land. It was a land-Dalit relationship of subsistent sustainable agricultural environment that the faith of Dalits took shape. This shows Dalit knowledge; knowledge of the ‘organic life’ on topsoil, knowledge of seeds, methods of cultivation in relation to ‘complex nature’ of soil. Dalits had worked together very hard, very systematic to build the organic life on topsoil through different forms of subsistence labour activities such as clearing of the land from weeds, levelling, building water sources, construction of bunds and pathways, and replenishing the topsoil. By caring for the organic life on topsoil, the Mala, Madiga, Dalits had become aware of the finite basis of economic activity in land, water, hills, plants and animals, and the importance to operate only with care and restraint. Such an organised cultivation of the Mala, Madiga Dalits in agriculture had resulted in a ‘social- bond’ between them, which went beyond any necessity for conjugal relationship. The economic activity in such social relationships was based on the ‘Right to live’ (a motivational factor and a highly held value) and not based on any kind of market centred ‘profit accumulation’. In the absence of market centred values the Mala, Madiga, Dalits had neither suffered from internal competition nor from identity crisis. It was the social bond of Mala, Madiga, Dalits which stood instrumental in developing Dalit solidarity. Even the term ‘Mala’ and ‘Madiga’ resumes meaning through land-Dalit relationship based on subsistence, which will be discussed below.

The faith of Dalits took shape, for second time, as a response to the Dalit experience of land alienation in Arnakonda. As explained in chapter two, sub- section 2.4.1. ‘Reddy Caste,’ the context of Dalits developing subsistence agriculture was disturbed with the introduction of new administrative policy of ‘irrigation taxes’ by the Nizam’s Domain, and because of it, the Dalits of Arnakonda had to invite the non-Dalit households of ‘Pingali’ families from a neighbouring village to Arnakonda and offered them an exchange of land with a condition that they pay taxes on behalf of the Dalits. This shows prevalence of negotiative atmosphere as long as the market values did not fully control the communities, and the Dalits could negotiate with the
privileged landowning caste. But, with the introduction new administrative policies new laws were promulgated such as new ‘tenancy’ laws, ‘irrigation taxes’ and thrust towards ‘cash crop’ cultivation.

The aspect of caste seems to be not visible in the talk about tenancy, taxes, etc. But, a connection between the caste factor and introduction of new ways of land administration is made by Thirumali, a historian. According to him, the new land tenancy policy was in need of caste people, who can exercise control over land and people and justify the same. In such a context the once *sudra* caste people known as *Velama, Kamma and Reddy* demanded the Nizam’s Domain to recognise them as people of ‘higher caste status’ and enumerate them separately as ‘landlords.’

“The land revenue policy of the State (Nizam’s) helped the *Kamma, Reddy* and *Velama* substantial landholders since they were not subjected to caste oppression and produced for the market.” Whereas, the Dalits were socially oppressed, they couldn’t be counted as free people. Thirumali further says,

“To the peasants land was their life. It was the means through which they solved all their social and family problems. Apart from this, their place in the village depended upon the size of their landholding....Independence and subordination, thus primarily related to the nature of rights over land.”

Thirumalis reports, as quoted above, show that land has to do with the ‘well being’ and ‘power.’ The *sudra* caste people wants to exercise control on huge area of lands taking advantage of new tenancy laws. The Nizam’s Domain did accept the demands of the *sudra* people and the *Kappu, Velama* and *Reddy* were recognised as

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167 This micro-level phenomenon fits into a broader policy matter of the Nisam’s Domain such as introduction of new ‘land tenancy,’ ‘taxes’ and encouragement for ‘cash crop’ cultivation in Telangana, as reported by scholars. The commercialisation of land and agriculture had started way back in late 19th century and it increased by the early 20th century in Telangan region and Dalit experience of land alienation from such periods are yet to be studied at micro-level. Cf. S. K. Iyengar, *Economic Investigations in the Hyderabad State 1929-30* (Hyderabad: Government Press, 1931). I. Thirumali, *Against Dora and Nizam: People’s Movement in Telangana 1939-1948* (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, Distributors, 2003).


169 Ibid, 83.

170 Ibid, 79.
peasants, and they had access to procure good landholding since 1931. It was those caste upgraded Kappu caste people had readily came to Arnakonda on invitation by the Dalits of Arnakonda. Eversince, the Dalit experience of land alienation had started in Arnakonda.

The caste factor is further evident in Dalit experience of land alienation. The once Dalit farmers were subjected to land alienation and the same people were compelled by the circumstances either to leave the village or to turn into a caste based agricultural bonded labourer, called as ‘vettolu’\textsuperscript{171} and ‘chillarolu.’ But, with the changing administrative policies ever since the nation got independence laws were promulgated to stop vetti and new form of caste based contract seems to have started, which is today practiced in Arnakonda as paleru contract form of labour relationships.

To respond to the ally of these two great powers namey caste and market powers and also to address the changes brought about in land-people relationship the Dalits had to strategically develop their ‘meaning-structure,’ and they searched and found suitable ideological ally in Christianity and also in Communism as well as Ambedkar movement. Below is an account in which Dalit faith was grounded contextually:

\textbf{5.3.1. Grounding of Dalit Meaning-Structure (Faith)}

One of the non-Dalit respondents had remembered his childhood events, which were associated with the Dalit experience of land alienation. His memory attests to the presence of the Dalit faith (meaning-structure). He was a former president of Arnakonda Panchayat, (FS 82),\textsuperscript{172} and he recollected aspects of Dalit land alienation as follows: “The Tamadi family named Mala Dalits were the first ones to pitch their tents and plough the land in Arnakonda and subsequently they were joined.

\textsuperscript{171} The \textit{vettolu} are those, who own tools of production and work for the privileged caste landlord and the \textit{chillarolu} are those, who do not own tools of production but, only work for labour. This word \textit{chillarolu} is used derogatorily even today in the village.

\textsuperscript{172} Cf. Interview with the FS 82 was conducted on 17\textsuperscript{th} May 2010.
by more *Mala* and *Madiga* households. The land and agriculture were developed by Dalits to such an extent that even the rulers of that time, the Nizam, had recognised this village as a revenue village and imposed tax system in Arnakonda. The Dalits, who were into subsistence economy, were ignorant of money economy and the need of payment of tax in the currency form. To deal with such unknown system they decided to invite yet another farming household with the family name *Pingali*, who knew about mathematical calculations and money matters. The Dalits had entered into a mutual agreement with the *Pingali* families to exchange arable land for the payment of taxes to Nizam on behalf of Dalits. That was the beginning of Dalit land alienation,” he reported.\(^\text{173}\)

The Brahminical meaning-structure of the *Pingali* households had begun its operations in a subtle manner in Arnakonda, which finally distanced and destroyed the gentlemen agreement between the *Pingali* and the Dalits. Eventually Dalits were turned *vetti*\(^\text{174}\) labourers.

The report given by a Dalit farmer (FS9) from the similar epoch of Arnakonda history from the oral tradition of the people confirms the role of the Brahmanical ideology as the root cause of Dalit land alienation in Arnakonda, which is presented below. According to Bollamalla, some *Mala* and *Madiga* Dalits worked in the fields of a *Pingali Kapu* caste farmer in Arnakonda. There was a division of labour and *Mala* ploughed the land and *Madiga* prepared the field bunds. The *Kapu* man also worked along with Dalits in the field. At the time of noon meal, the wife of the *Kapu* brought food for all the three in the same pot, which was every day practice and all

\(^{173}\) Ibid.

\(^{174}\) *Vetti* is a kind of caste centred labour system practiced regionally with some kind of variances. Bellow is an account of historical view on *vetti* system of labour. In the early Medieval India the farmers were to pay tax to the state in the form of labour known as ‘*vetti*’ or ‘*vetti* chakiri’. But, the nature of *vetti* chakiri at ‘Agraharam’/ land gifted to Brahmans, Temples, Monasteries, was to labour/ *vetti* for the local lords and not for the state. Kautilya’s *Arthashastra*, viewed as Hindu dharma instructions, seems to provide rational for such practices. But, with the feudalistic formation in India the *vetti* as labour tax from farmers was turned into *vetti* as corvee/ labour rent. Cf. Marlene Njammash, “From the Ancient labour Tax to the Feudal Corvee: A Marxist Approach to the Study of Vesti,” in Bhairabi Prasad Sahu (ed), *Land System And Rural Society In Early India* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Contributors, 2004), 263 – 275. For a detailed account of *vetti* system of labour in Telangan Tirumalli’s work provides it. Cf. Inukonda Thirumali, *Against Dora and Nizam: People’s Movement in Telangana 1939 – 1948* (New Delhi: kanishka Publishers, 2003).
the three used to partake of the same pot. One day, the lady of the Kaapu man fetched food only for the Kaapu man and she did not bring food for the Mala and Madiga workers. On questioning about such discrimination, she replied that she was asked by the people back at home to answer that the Brahmin had instructed them to keep the food pot of the Kaapu separated from the Mala and Madiga. The Mala and the Madiga men resisted such discrimination arguing that the pot was made by the potter caste without any discrimination of caste; similarly the agricultural works were divided in the interest of producing food grains; and was questioned as to why she brought a new meaning-structure based on discrimination? 175 This reporting by a Dalit farmer points to the role of Brahmanical ideology in the process of discrimination against the Dalits.

5.3.2. Brotherhood basis for Dalit Faith

In the context of land alienation of Dalits guided by the Brahmanical ideology as stated above, the Dalit education (not in terms of formal or informal education but, knowledge of land and cultivation) and organisation was demonstrated. The Dalits have identified land that was not under the control of the privileged castes, such as lands that were submerged in water tanks, lands that were attached to hills (bora). They developed new and innovative skills to work with those lands that otherwise were not viable for cultivation. In such a new context, the Dalits’ social- bond was renewed. In this period, some Dalits couldn’t withstand the dominant caste value-system of power and status and they were compelled to leave the land and agriculture; while only some Dalits committed themselves to agriculture. The Dalits, who remained with the land and agriculture were called Mala and Madiga, whereas, those who were compelled to leave land/agriculture were identified by the Dalits as ‘brothers’ in Arnakonda. There are Mala brothers as well as Madiga brothers; culturally treated as ‘brothers’ of a single mother by their respective Mala and Madiga caste people. It is the State government, which treats the brothers of the Mala and Madiga as ‘sub-castes’. The identity of Mala and Madiga is based on their holding on to land on the one hand, and being in solidarity with the ‘brothers’,

175 Interview of a Dalit farmer of Arnakonda identified as FS9 in Arnakonda on 17th May 2010.
through sharing the produce of land with them at definite intervals of time every year on the other hand.

5.3.2.1. Mala Brotherhood in the Formation of Dalit Faith

Relationship between the Mala and their respective ‘brothers’, as well as Madiga and their respective ‘brothers’, needs to be explained so as to elucidate the ‘faith’ of Dalits and their ideology. According to the report of FS10, a bard, the following is an account of genealogy of Mala.

The Mala were said to be a total of five brothers; the elder brother Ayuru Mala got married, left agriculture in spite of owning land, a bullock cart and bullocks. He earned his livelihood by narrating the story of Rama. He migrated to Ragampet. The second brother was Jangam Mala, who was also compelled to leave agriculture and he imitated his elder brother and he tells the story of Shiva. He migrated to Julapalli village. The third brother was Mala, who did not leave the land and agriculture. He fell in debt because of his commitment to continue agricultural activity. He was also engaged in picking the forest produce such as castor and survived for three years while developing agriculture. The fourth brother Nathakani Mala, was compelled to leave agriculture and started weaving and selling clothes. He migrated to Kothapeta and Endapelli villages. The fifth brother Maati Mala, who was a playful boy, would not help in the agricultural work. He was married so that he may feel responsible. In spite of the marriage, he remained the same and even his spouse was similar to him. He visits the Arnakonda village once in every three years and collects rice and other goods from the Mala houses. His whereabouts were not known for quite some time. The sixth and the seventh were sons born to Mala. The elder son was Velamalla or Veluma and the younger one Gurram Mala.176

According to the report of FS10 the story narrated about sons as follows:

A Mala had employed yet another Mala to work in his fields. The employed Mala had a wife from the same, Mala caste. The employed Mala couple had no children and he passed away without any child. Subsequently, his wife was given a job in the fields of the Mala. Slowly trust was built between the widow Mala and the Mala employer and they developed an affair; and the lady became pregnant. Knowing about the affair, the legal wife of the Mala beat the concubine of Mala and the Mala was compelled to build a hut for his concubine near to his fields. The lady gave birth to a son. The news of the birth of a son to the concubine had threatened the security of the son of the legal son of Mala. In order to safeguard the child of the concubine, the Mala

176Interview with a farmer cum bard of Arnakonda identified as FS10 on 15th May 2011.
had decided to send the son of the concubine to school, whereas, his legal son was put in agricultural works. For Dalits, schooling is only for those who don’t own land and agriculture. The concubine’s son grew in age and stature; he enquired about his father and right to own property. His mother answered to him saying that the boy had no legal father and no legal property to own, except the property at their disposal to live and to grow food and live stocks. The boy was disturbed over the matter. One night, the boy had a dream of an angel, who instructed him to go to the city of Hyderabad. The boy left for Hyderabad but, he couldn’t get entry to see the King. The boy returned home disappointed and he managed to get two sharp knives and once again he went to the city of Hyderabad. This time he rushed towards the King’s room and stabbed the two guards at the door post, who stopped him from entry, and the boy landed before the King. At that moment the King was writing and he was bent. On seeing the boy in blood stains, the King asked him, HOW DID YOU COME IN? In response, the boy pierced a knife into his belly and said ‘by piercing knife in came in’. The King was impressed by the Boy and summoned for his mother. On enquiry, he came to know the problem of the inheritance to the boy. The King said that the legal son of the Mala was like ‘junupalu’ (thick milk of a cow churned right after the birth to a calf) and son of the concubine was like ‘vellipalu’ (thin milk churned from the same cow after a weeks’ time of delivery). The King had named the son of the concubine Velama or Velamala and he gifted the boy with 40,000 acres of land in the district of Karimnagar. The boy got his wife from the Mala community and was later called as ‘Dora’ (title for landlord) and his wife ‘Dorasani’ (wife of landlord) by the Dalits. Through such identity of being called as ‘Dora’, the velluma had gained other identities than that of being a son of Mala.  

There was yet another son to the Mala called Guram Mallaiah. He was sent to fetch a Guram (horse) from the nearby village, to be used for the wedding of his brother; but he returned home after the wedding ended and everybody left the village. Feeling bad about his delay in bringing the horse, Mallaiah refused to enter into the village; on that night he took food in the outskirts of the village and he took his wife along with him and left the village. Ever since, he was called Guram Mallaiah. He periodically visits Arnakonda village and collects food grains from the Mala and goes away. A total of five brothers and two sons constitute the Mala originated ‘brothers’ in Arnakonda. The relationship between ‘brothers’ of Mala was explained as not to have a relationship of ‘Mancham’ (no conjugal relationship) but, only a relationship of ‘Kancham’ (sharing food). The Mala ‘faith’ is in sharing of food with the once alienated brothers. It is by being mindful of the brothers that the Mala strives to own land.

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177 Ibid.
178 Ibid.
5.3.2.2. Madiga Brotherhood in the Formation of Dalit Faith

Similar to the Mala story, the Madiga story of five brothers and two sons is narrated by FS10 as given here:

The eldest brother was Sindi Madiga, who was compelled to migrate to the Banjarpalli village. He earned through enacting dramas (bagotham) of Hindu epics. The second son was Dakali Madiga, who migrated to Gopalaraopeta. He was a hermit, who depended on the Madiga households for his subsistence needs. The third brother was Madiga himself, who did not leave Arnakonda village, but borrowed money for interest and continued in agriculture. The fourth brother was Nuluka Sandu Madiga, whose whereabouts were not known; he also made his subsistence through begging from the Madiga households on every visit of his to Arnakonda. The fifth brother was Gosika Madiga, who migrated to the Chittalapalli village. He earned his wage through brooms and selling them. The last two were sons of the Madiga, who were compelled to leave the land, agriculture and Arnakonda village. Once again, the identity of Madiga in Arnakonda was based on land ownership, as well as sharing of the land produce with the brothers and sons, who were compelled to leave their lands and agriculture.

The genealogical narrations given above show Mala Madiga Dalit faith, which had exposed the exploitative context of land alienation. Because of which some of the Dalits had to leave the village and lost their identity as landowners. And yet to retain the identity of Mala and Madiga was to retain Dalit identify based on owning land, producing and meeting the needs of brothers; a renewed understanding of ‘farmer.’ To care for the alienated people constitutes the highest meaning-structure of the Mala and Madiga. The once existent social-bond and solidarity were shattered because of land alienation of Dalits. But, the highest value of Mala and Madiga was a hope and a vision to regain the lost social-bond as well as solidarity. Having viewed the Dalit faith, the following sections give an account of the Biblical view on land-people relationship, which serves as referential point for Dalit faith.

\[179\] Ibid.
5.4. Biblical Explorations on Land-People Relationship

“...The land for which Israel yearns and which it remembers is never an unclaimed space but is a place with YHWH, a place well filled with the memories of life with him and promise from him and vows to him.”\(^\text{180}\) (emphasis original)

The theme of ‘land-people’ was viewed as central theme in the Bible. Walter Brueggemann (1977), a pioneer in doing Biblical theology on land, reflected on this theme in his well-known work called *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (1977). Lilbrune said that Brueggemann had distinguished land as ‘place’ from land as ‘space’. The space denotes “an arena of freedom, without coercion or accountability, free of pressures and void of authority,”\(^\text{181}\) whereas, the place was explained as something, where people feel secure, draw meaning to life and find well-being. At the same time, a place relates to responsibility which involved care for the land. Based on this distinction Brueggemann had presented the God of the Bible as the God of history (Place)\(^\text{182}\), as well as the God of nature.\(^\text{183}\) Brueggemann said, ‘I will no longer talk about YHWH and his people but I feel we must speak about YHWH and his people and his land’.\(^\text{184}\) (emphasis original)

Brueggemann had presented the land-people relationship as a ‘subsistence’ relationship. He had emphasised ‘land’ and not just ‘people’ in the economy of God’s relationship with land and people. The significance of land in the Biblical faith explains the nature of the crisis in ‘land-people’ relationship. The people of Israel had suffered from ‘rootlessness,’ which meaning people living without land. And to leave aside ‘rootlessness’ and only articulate on ‘meaninglessness’ (do and not to do kind of


\(^{182}\) The word place is used in term of historical; the Biblical Israel had encountered God in place and time. Cf. Ibid.

\(^{183}\) Cf. Ibid., 24-29.

values) is critiqued by Brueggemann. Theologically, God had promised the land to his people, who were landless, and it was in that Promised Land that the faith of the people of God was nurtured in terms of their relationship with land and with one another. In accordance with the promise of God to the landless, God had rejected any sort of abode for God’s self in an alien, man built houses (and values). Instead, along with the people of God, who were landless sojourners, moving towards the Promised Land, God became a sojourner, living in tents, as one without any concrete shelter. The land-people relationship was explained by Brueggemann using a web of phrases, ‘land-landless,’ ‘landlessness-rootlessness, ‘land-rootage’, land-landless-promise of God’ etc. These phrases point to source of pathos emerging out of landlessness, under the context of alien systems. In response to such pathos God was understood by Israel as one, who stood against the forces of alienation, and at the same time, had cared for the vulnerable. Brueggemann developed land-God- people theme, as a triangular relationship of land-God-People as follows.

5.4.1. Walter Brueggemann: Land-God-People Relationship

The relationship between land and people is explained in terms of the Biblical Israelites generating faith, here on earth, and finding an identity of being the people of God. The following aspects are a study in detail from Brueggemann.

Walter Brueggemann is an Old Testament scholar, born to the German parents in 1933 and he is a citizen of the United States of America. He is professor in Theology at the Columbia University. His reflection on land seems to emerge out of his strong conviction about God’s promise of land to the people of Israel. Later it was said that he became very critical about the contemporary Israel for its creation of hatred ideology and violence against the Palestinians.

5.4.1.1. Israelites’ Memory as Landless Sojourners and Promised Land

While discussing about the memory of the Israelites in the Bible, it can be seen that the Israelites do not remember much about Egypt, a land of slavery, but, they remember the presence of God, which transformed their lives; from being slaves to being the children of God. Such a memory of Israel is connected with the Promised Land which will be discussed below.
Another aspect of the term sojourner is taken from the Israelites’ memory of wilderness, as recorded in the book of Exodus. Referring to the sufferings of Israel in Egypt as slaves and God sending Moses to liberate his people from slavery and leading them out of Egypt through wilderness, Brueggemann explained about the wilderness as barrenness, similar to the barrenness of Sarah and both were related to the ‘seed’. The experience of wilderness was explained as a condition of ‘seedlessness’. Because of hard hit life conditions in the wilderness the memories of wilderness were the memories of ‘murmur, protest, and quarrelsome dissatisfaction’ by the Israelites. The question of Israelites in the wilderness was their yearning for the older order; through their demand for the bread of Egypt. The response of YHWH was once again to transform the context and turn the wilderness experience of alienation and meaninglessness into an experience of faith; God had shown his glory in the wilderness by protecting the Israelites day and night, giving them the shadow of a cloud during the day and a pillar of light during the night; moreover, God provided them manna (bread), quail and water.¹

Brueggemann made the point that the promise of God to the landless sojourners was to reveal the God as God of ‘sustenance’ and ‘care,’ El-Shaddai (God Almighty).² He further established that, the pathos of Israelites emerged out of the denial experience of subsistence such as denial of land and relationship with God, who promised land to the landless and also transformed the old into a new form of relationship.

¹ Cf. Ibid., 26-40. The Biblical theological discussion on spirituality of land, as discussed by Brueggemann and Habel is about “ownership.” There is yet another dimension of spirituality in the Christian tradition, as discussed by Belden Lane, professor of theology at Saint Louise University. His explorations in to desert fathers had led him to ask two important questions- what do you learn to ignore? What do you learn to love? It is through giving one self that desert spirituality is experienced.

² Cf. Ibid. The problem of using name of God as God-Almighty is discussed by Bas Wielenga, which is instructive, if viewed from the marginalised people’s point of view. The ‘Priestly’ document has used the name of God El- Shaddai in Hebrew language in the book of Exodus 6: 2-3. According to BaastianWielenga, the translation of El- Shaddai as ‘God Almighty’ was taken from the Latin translation of Hieronymus. The Greek translation of El- Shaddai is ‘pantokrator’, which is translated in to English as ‘ruler of all’. The dangerous assumption in translation of El- Shaddai as God-Almighty is to emphasize on the power of God in liberation of people of Israel from Egyptian slavery. Whereas, the emphasis in use of God’s name is not so much on God’s power, but on God’s will, on God’s purpose and God’s presence with people, who struggles for liberation. Cf. Bas Wielenga, It’s Long Road To Freedom: Perspectives of Biblical Theology (Madurai: Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, 1998), 91-93.
5.4.1.2. Land as Gift, Memory and Faith Commitment

Another aspect of the Israelites’ memory was in terms of how they viewed land as a gift from God; something that binds them both with land as well as with God. Highlighting the significance of the Israelites’ memory of God in relation to land from the book of Deuteronomy, Brueggemann had explained land as a ‘Gift from God’; and something that was received, improved upon, and never to be commoditized. He demonstrated the significance of land-God-people relationship as a ‘binding relationship’ in the memory of the land as a gift from God. He said that the land serves as the basis for the faith commitment of Israelites in keeping and developing land.

Three significant aspects of land as gift are: firstly, land is *sola gratia* (grace alone): not built, not filled, not hewn, and not planted by the Israelites. Instead, it was explained as received without any reference to merit and conditions. Secondly, land is for *satiation* (satisfaction); it meets every subsistence need of the Israelites; the once deprived people under the alien governance of the Egyptian Pharaoh, and those who were once deprived of a dignified life being sojourners in the wilderness, were guaranteed of their subsistence needs. Thirdly, land brings the knowledge of God as a caring God, as inferred from Deuteronomy 11: 10-12, which says,

> For the land which you are entering to take possession of is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and watered it with your feet, like a gardener of vegetables; but the land which you are going over to possess is a land of hills which YHWH your God cares for; the eyes of YHWH your God are always upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

Such faith in God, who cares, was contrasted with the coercion and precarious life in Egypt. It further served as a source for the qualities of humanness that were a distinctive heritage, said Brueggemann. When land was realised as a gift, the people who were once sojourners become heirs, and cease to be slaves and develop an identity of belonging to land, instead of land belonging to them.\(^{188}\)

\(^{188}\)Cf. Ibid., 45-48.
Such a memory of the Israelites about God as one who gave them land as a gift had served the purpose of understanding God, YHWH, as their source of ‘qualities of humanness’ which was a distinctive inheritance, said Brueggemann.\(^{189}\) It further led them to ‘faith’ commitment to God, the faith in contrast to precarious life always lived under exposure and also in contrast to the life of coercion in which land was held by fearful, wearisome duty, said Brueggmann.\(^{190}\)

5.4.1.3. Land as Word of God

Land management was an important aspect of the Israelites’ life after they settled in the land of Canaan. Inferred from the early prophetic books such as Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings, Brueggemann explained that there were two models of land management before the Israelites, namely the ‘Canaanite model’ and the ‘Prophetic model’. The Canaanite model was king-centred in which the king holds power over the life of the people. The danger with such a model was explained based on the book of 1 Kings 21\(^{st}\) Chapter, by relating it to the story of King Ahab and Naboth the farmer. King Ahab demanded land alienation from Naboth and in response Naboth rejected the power of Ahab for coveting his land. It was a conflict of two values, explained Brueggemann; the former viewed land as a commodity and the latter understood land as gift; an inherited land that was never to be commoditised. In the Prophetic model, the prophet listened to the voice of God, spoke to the King on behalf of God and on behalf of the exploited people. It was a call to repentance, as inferred from the story of King David and Prophet Nathan in the book of 2 Samuel chapter twelve. What model did Israelites opt for in land management? The Israelites opted for the Canaanite model. The Prophetic model was not quite adequate in providing resilience and durability to the land and sustenance to the people, critiqued Brueggemann, which led the Israelites to opt for the Canaanite model of land management.

\(^{189}\)Cf. Ibid., 48.

\(^{190}\) Cf. Ibid.

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In response to the Canaanite model in land management, God gave instructions for selecting a king, who can keep the covenant relationship of land-God-people, in which people live in the gifted land. According to the Deuteronomic writings God instructed Israelites to choose a king from their own kith and kin, to avoid the denial of memory of God in the land; the king should not acquire more houses, more wealth and more wives, which lead to plunder and warfare, said Brueggemann. Instead, the king of the Israelites was asked to listen, write down Torah, the word of God; read it every day and follow it. It was in such a sense that the land and people were connected through the word of God which aimed to create new relationships of care for the land; to avoid any denial of the source of land as gift and the purpose of the land entrusted, which was beyond religious obedience to God.

Brueggemann also highlighted the importance of the institution of Sabbath, which was not an institution of any religious devotion occupied with the metaphysical, but, was concerned, in its early formative periods, with the release of slaves as mentioned in Exodus 21:1-11, Deuteronomy 15: 12-18, later for resting the land as recorded in the book of Leviticus chapter twenty five and for cancellation of debts as mentioned in the book of Deuteronomy 15:1-11. To be precise, Sabbath was a Biblical institution to care for land beyond any exploitative and enslaving relationship of land-God-people.

Having briefly surveyed Brueggemann on land-God-people triangular relationship, it is inferred that the Bible explains God as one who is committed to land and people, giving a new orientation to land-people relationship. Another important work on land-God-people relationship is by Norman C. Hable, whose studies are mentioned below.

Norman C. Hable: He is a Biblical Scholar, hails from Yultcart, Australia. He is both an academician as well as an activist in his own right. His connection with Asia is that he worked in South India as Principal of Kodaikanal International School, Tamilnadu. He, along with his wife, had started a school and health programme for the oppressed Tribal and Dalit women in Kodaikanal some time in mid-1980’s, which was called “Grihini Programme.” His research is to develop spirituality rooted in Earth and filled with justice, called The Earth Bible project.

\[1\text{Cf. Ibid., 74.}\]
5.4.2. Norman C. Habel: Land God’s Inheritance

Habel reflects land-God-people on the basis of Biblical prophesy. He chose the word nahalah (Hebrew) for land, and not erase (Hebrew). The word nahalah refers to the meaning-structure inherited in peoples’ relationship with Land. According to Habel, nahalah was an entitlement, referring to land, which carried the memories of the past and ties such memories with the sacred heritage.\textsuperscript{192} Drawing from the book of Jeremiah, Habel explained that the Land as nahalah was an entitlement of God, the YHWH (Jeremiah 2:7),\textsuperscript{193} and at the same time, it was also an entitlement of the Israelites (Jeremiah 17:4).\textsuperscript{194} The question then arises, how the same land entitlement can be held good for both parties, God as well as Israelites? Habel explained that God had accepted the Israelites as his own people, therefore the Israelites were viewed as God’s entitlement or God’s ‘allotted portion,’ vis-à-vis, YHWH was also understood by the Israelites as their ‘allotted portion’.\textsuperscript{195} Habel had pointed to the theological understanding of land-God-people relationship based on the concept of ‘entitlement’, as something initiated by God.

The above interpretation of the texts reminds us of the spirit of solidarity and owning of the people, whose lands were alienated and people reduced to slaves. The destiny of solidarity, according to nahalah point of view, was resettlement in the land, which was the land of YHWH. It is in this background that various images of God and Israel relationship is studied.

5.4.2.1. God the Tiller and Keeper of Land

The image of YHWH as the owner of land (not estate) was not rooted in the meaning-structure of ‘land to rule’, which means, to exercise control in terms of

\textsuperscript{192}Cf. Norman C. Habel, \textit{The Land Is Mine} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 76.

\textsuperscript{193}Cf. Ibid. Jeremiah 2:7 “I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things....”

\textsuperscript{194}Cf. Ibid. Jeremiah 17:4 “By your own act you shall lose the heritage that I gave you....”

\textsuperscript{195}Cf. Ibid. Habel worked with the text Jeremiah 10:16 “…Israel is the tribe of his inheritance....” The word inheritance is translated by Habel as ‘allotted portion’.
authority over land and the people of the land. Instead, the image of God was intrinsic to the meaning-structure of the tillers and keepers of the soil. The explanation by Habel as follows: In the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah contrasted YHWH’s land with the wilderness land, which had full of past experiences of Israelites in the wilderness. At the same time, God’s land was compared with the land of the Garden of Eden, a land of plenty and pleasure, as mentioned in the book of Jeremiah 2:7; 12:10. YHWH, being the owner of the land, keeps the land’s fertility by sending rains as mentioned in the book of Jeremiah 3:3; 5:24; 31:12. It was in such a relationship between land-God-people that YHWH was understood as the ‘God of fertility’; and the source for land fertility, rather than a mere creator of the earth as explained in Jeremiah 14:22, said Habel. It was an important image of God in relation to the land, which otherwise portrayed God as creator, who exercises control over creation. After explaining ‘land-God’ relationship as subsistence and caring relationship, Habel reflected on the images of God in relation to the people of Israelites. Habel said “YHWH’s nahalah is a garden or vineyard, like a devoted peasant, YHWH carefully plants the people of Israel. YHWH’s people are ‘a choice vine, from the purest stock’ (Jeremiah 2:21; 5:10; 8:13; 11:7). Israel is the vine and God’s abode is the vineyard (Isaiah. 5: 1-4). Israel is holy to the LORD, the first fruit of his harvest”.

The above text presents an image of God as Father/Abba. YHWH had fetched Israel, carefully from the land of bondage, and placed them in God’s land. By virtue of which, the Biblical Israelites lived no more as slaves, servants or as poor peasants. The Israelites were placed in a highly privileged status; as a favoured child, a choice vine that was associated with having been placed in a fertile land. The

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196Cf. Ibid. Jeremiah 2: 7 “I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things…” 12:10 “Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyards, they have trampled down my portion, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness”.

197Cf. Ibid. Jeremiah 3:3 “Therefore the showers have been withheld…” 5:24 “…who gives the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain, and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest”. 31:12 “…their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again”.

198Cf. Ibid. Jeremiah 14:22 “Can any idols of the nations bring rain? Or can the heavens give showers? Is it not you, O LORD our God? We set our hope in you, for it is you who do all this”.

199Cf. Ibid. 79

200Cf. Ibid. Jeremiah 2:14 “Is Israel a slave? Is he a home born servant? Why then has he become plunder?”
Israelite meaning-structure was derived from such an experience of God in relation to the land.

As a peasant, YHWH was more concerned about and also jealous about the maintenance of the fertility of the Land that gives meaning to the triangular relationship of land-God-people. God intends that Israelites should not allow any other ideology that destroys the fertility of land. Destruction of the land fertility was attributed to exploitative ideological reasons.

5.4.2.2. Dalit Theological Response to Multiple Forms of Land Alienation

The faith of Dalits was shaped in their relationship with land, and not because of any philosophical teachings of any guru. Therefore, Dalit theology needs to be rooted in life relationships centred on the land, which are embedded in emotions, and drives them to the utmost value of care. The emotional aspect of Dalits had been rooted in their sense of value, feeling responsible and at the same time addressing the exploitative devices of Brahmanical ideology. As discussed under the section 4.3 as a whole, “Faith of Dalits in Arnakonda”, the Dalit faith (meaning-structure) can be characterised by their ‘subsistence’ value in relation to, firstly ‘people-people’ relationship. To meet the subsistence needs of their community members, Dalits had been engaged in ‘land conversion’, and through which they had developed knowledge of land and agriculture. The people-people relationship of Dalits had not resulted in striving for their bargaining power of its caste members, as it happened with the people-people relationship of the privileged castes. But, it resulted in land-people relationship of ‘care’ and ‘subsistence’, which was the second aspect of Dalit subsistence. Secondly, while developing land-people relationship, the *Mala* and *Madiga* Dalits of Arnakonda had developed social-bond, which was evident in their ‘coming together’ through sharing of knowledge, synergising of their resources in terms of cultural as well as material sharing of labour power. Such a ‘coming together’ of Dalits was to strengthen the bond of land-people relationship, which can be said as sustainable development. In this land-people relationship each member of the Dalit community had contributed to strengthen the land-people relationship, which was an important aspect of land-Dalit relationship, whereas among the tribal, it was
responsibility of the clan to look after the individual members of the clan. To the extent a Dalit member gets elevated socially or economically, the Dalit community expects from that Dalit person to be more of caring and responsible in strengthening of land-people relationship.

Dalit faith has taken stock of alien value-systems, which crept into Arnakonda and had been destroying the prevalent land-people relationship of subsistence. It was first in the form of Nizam’s administration with its land measurements and tax payment system. Later through the operations of Brahmanical value-system of land concentration in the hands of, firstly Pingali households of the privileged land owing caste followed by Damera on the one hand and increased land alienation of Dalits on the other. The increased land concentration or landlordism went along with the caste consolidation, and paradoxically increased land alienation and increased number of agricultural labourers from Dalits. In such a context some sections of Dalit community left the land and left the village. Swimming against the current, few Dalits had remained with the land and committed themselves to strengthen land-Dalit relationship, which can be explained as ‘transformative’ in spirit, as it anticipates the restoration of land-Dalit relationship of subsistence in which the once gone brothers can come back and take up the lands.

**5.4.2.2.1. Moral-Economy and Moral- Spiritual Life of Dalits in Arnakonda**

To address the Brahmanical value-system in the interest of land-Dalit relationship the Dalits had chosen Dalit ideological path evident in their encounter with Christianity, Communism and Ambedkar movements. They resisted Brahmanical value-system, and at the same time developed Dalit assertion in defence of their lands. In such resistance as well as assertions the transcendental aspect had been an important one to reflect upon land-Dalit relationship meaningfully. Theologically land-Dalit relationship took the form of land-God-people relationship, a triangular relationship. In this triangular relationship God stood for ‘judge’ in order to prevent any exploitative relationship between the land and people relationship.
Bastiaan Wielenga (1982), a Biblical theologian, reflected on land-God-people relationship in which the knowledge of God was shared instructively in organising of land-people relationship, without any kind of exploitation. He explained that the will of God in relation to nature-people had to do with the knowledge of God, which served as a basis for the ‘moral-economy’ and ‘moral and spiritual life’ of the community. He further said as follows: The Biblical understandings of God as a ‘toiling God’, which was explicit with the use of the word ‘to till’ (abad) in the book of Isaiah chapter 43: 23-24, had twofold functional purposes one in the context of ‘human sinfulness’ and other in the context of ‘rebellion’ of the children of God against God. As toiling God in the context of human sinfulness, God became the ‘suffering God’ for the redemption of God’s people from the sinful structures. In the context of rebellion by the people of God, the very same toiling God took the role of a ‘judge’ and chose not to fight on behalf of the people of God, instead fought with the people of God themselves. He further drew our attention by showing Jesus Christ in line with the ‘toiling God’ as ‘suffering God’, who ‘humbled’ himself (tapeinor) taken low social status, for the salvation of the marginalised. The Dalits (irrespective of their religious affiliations) in Arnakonda had used this image of God as a ‘suffering God’ very extensively in explaining their sufferings been as ‘seen by God’, who does ‘justice’ to them. The Dalit Christians did not stop with the understanding of God as a ‘suffering God’, who watches over them, but, they understood God as one who fulfils the promise of giving ‘promised land’ in eschatological sense. Greater number of Dalits in Arnakonda use the image of God as a ‘judge’, as explained above. In the context of Dalit sufferings, in view of multiple


202 Cf. Ibid.

203 Cf. Ibid. Isaiah 43:23-24 “...I have not made you ‘abad’ (work or serve) with offerings, or wearied you with frankincense. But you have burdened me ‘abad’ (work or serve) with your sins; you have wearied me with your iniquities”, See BastiaanWielenga, 1982:69.

204 Cf. Ibid. Addressing the dominant models of God, which reject subsistence relationship between land-people, Sallie McFague and others have highlighted the relationship between subject and subject, land and human beings and proposed models of God, which take subsistence relationships as the basis, such as God as Mother, Lover and Friend. Cf. Rajula Annie Watson, A Christian Understanding of Land Ethics (Delhi: ISPCK, 2004), 257-58.

205 Cf. Ibid., 68-80.
forms of land alienation, Dalits invoked the name of God as a ‘judge’, who argues on behalf of the weaker ones and argues against the exploiters.

Using the theological understanding of God as a ‘suffering God’ who ‘sees’, ‘understands’ and ‘emotionally moves’ over the sufferings of the Dalits and arises as a ‘judge’ in defence of them, the ‘moral-economy’ of Dalits is built upon. It means to uphold the principal of caring through ‘coming together’, ‘sharing’ and ‘maintaining of social-bond’, and to be in ‘solidarity’. The ‘moral and spiritual life’ of Dalits is very much influenced by the above said understanding of God, by which the Dalits develop a spirituality to question the immorality in terms of exploitation and violence caused through multiple forms of land alienation. The Dalit assertion is not just political but, it is very much a spiritual event in line with the God of sufferings and God, who is righteous judge.

5.4.2.2. Moral – Economy and Moral – Spiritual Life in Relationship with Land

Dalit relationship with land is a relationship between the two beings, who are mutually enriching one another through their relationship, not in terms of ‘utilitarianism’. Dalit understanding of the finite nature of land and the need to care for land is complemented and enriched by the Biblical understanding of the words ‘to till’ (abad) and ‘to keep’ (shamar), which are used in Genesis 2:15 “the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till (abad) and keep (shamar) it”. These words reveal land-God-people relationship, a triangular relationship meant to strengthen the land-people or land-Dalit relationship. The word abad denotes ‘to serve’ and the word shamar denotes ‘to conserve’; these two motifs ‘to serve’ and ‘to conserve’ are at the root of the land-people relationship, in which God becomes a forerunner or model to be followed. As explained above under the section 4.4, “Biblical Explorations on Land-People Relationship”, land-people relationship is explored in terms of ‘sufferings’ in the absence of ‘seed’ or ‘not belonging to land’. In

The word ‘utilitarianism’ is a concept, used understand human relationship with nature only in the interest of exploitation of nature and reaping of highest profits and utmost enjoyment through such relationship with nature.

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such a context God is explained as one, who promised land, which signifies ‘promise of belongingness’ both to the land as well as to God and finally to one another as brothers, as sisters, and not in the manner of master-slave relationship. The image of God in such a context is God the ‘tiller of soil’ and not necessarily in the form of ‘creator God’. God as tiller gives the meaning of God as co-labourer, who suffers with Dalits while being in relationship with land. The activity of God in ‘serving’ and ‘conserving’ garden is understood in the sense of God standing in freedom and land is equally in ‘free’ state without being burdened by any alien ideology or alien value-system. The theological idea of ‘God as tiller’ reflects ‘ownership’ of God, unlike in the modern sense of the word ownership, in which the social relationships are determined by property relationship. In God’s ownership image, God is seen to be in service of soil, who also conserves the life in the soil and by doing so God ‘beautifies’ the garden. In beautifying the garden, the garden is shown as a place to invite the people, who were once slaves, to live in it as children. To serve the garden and conserve its beauty, dwell upon the promises of God, to be cleansed of tears, quenched of hunger and thirst and devoid of buying or selling of food in the garden. It truly reminds of ‘transformed relationships’ in production of life and sustenance of life without exploitation. This triangular relationship of land-God-people transforms the land-people relationship.

**Conclusion**

The theological response of Dalits has exposed Brahmical ideology and its role in Arnakonda causing Dalit pathos. This theological response is further seen in the Dalit encountered with the Christianity, Communism and Ambedkar movements as a form of response through assertion. The faith aspect of Dalits, which yet another important aspect of Dalit theological response is explored to understand the transcendental dimension of Dalit faith. A parallel between the faith of Dalits on the one hand and Biblical faith centred on the theme land-God-people on the other is understood. Dalit theology is furthered through the renewed understanding of God to develop moral-economy and moral-spiritual life, which constitute part of Dalit praxis. The transformative potentiality of Dalit praxis needs to be strengthened further.