

A Theology of Justice, Peace and Life: From the Perspective of Dalit and Minjung

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Introduction : Dalit and Minjung

Much has been reflected upon and written by theologians during the second half of the last century upon the theme 'Justice, Peace and Life.' But invariably the focus of almost all of them had been on 'Peace' rather than on 'Justice,' perhaps because of the two devastating Wars that had wrecked the world, and also because of the ensuing ethno-national conflicts that engulfed the entire globe and kept us constantly on the brink of a *possibility* of yet another fierce war. However, the theme of 'The integrity of Creation' had also been brought in by some as part of their reflections, but this perhaps was effected more because of various development projects owned by the dominant world, rather than for any other concern. One thing that catches the attention is the fact that very little attention is given in all these reflections to the question of 'Justice,' and consequently to the concerns of the vast majority of the oppressed communities all over the world. Dalits of my country and Minjungs of Korea - about whom we shall discuss in this paper - are part of these communities.

At this point I shall like to express my happiness and thanks to the

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organizers for proposing to look at this significant theme from the perspective of Dalits and Minjungs and explore for relevant theological reflections in this regard. The burden of my argument shall be to underline the importance of the element of 'Justice' in theological reflections that are meant for oppressed communities. Incidentally, I will digress here a bit to make an observation with regard to Constitution of my country. I am proud to say that, in spite of the serious age-old problem of discrimination etc. within our society, our Constitution opens its Preamble statement with a promise "to secure to all its citizens: Justice in all areas- "social, economic and political" ¹⁾ This clearly shows the importance of Justice in a social construct.

Now I shall begin my reflections by first introducing the two oppressed communities of Asia that we are discussing today. It is indeed fortunate that these two are in dialogue with each other now for more than a decade.

Who are Minjung?

I have learnt about Minjung of Korea indirectly through my various encounters with the Minjung theologians, and also by reading their works. What I gathered was that 'Minjung,' though a Korean ancient term, came into popular use in theological writings of Korea only from late 1970's; and by 1980's the term gained currency in Asia. By the beginning of 1990's it was a familiar term in other parts of the world as well. 'Minjung,' is a combination of two Chinese characters: 'min' which means 'people' and 'jung' which means 'mass.' Literally therefore, the term would mean 'the mass of the people' or 'the people.' But Prof. David Kwang-sun Suh cautions us about this literal meaning by explaining: "When we try to translate into English, 'mass' is not adequate for our theological purpose; and 'the people' is politically dangerous in anti-communist Korea, because it has become a Communist word. Nonetheless, 'the people' is close to what 'Minjung' seeks to convey sociologically, and theologically as well. Although 'the people of God' may be safest theological expression in both Korean and English, the phrase is now almost a cliché and does not say exactly what is meant theologically and politically." ²⁾

1) *The Constitution of India*, Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi, 1999, 1

2) Suh Kwang Sun David, *The Korean Minjung in Christ*, CCA, Hong Kong,

Another Minjung theologian Prof. Kim Yong-Bock clarifies further the meaning of the term 'Minjung' by saying: "It is a Korean word that can be translated as 'people' in English, but the translation does not do justice to the word. It has more encompassing meaning that refers to the people who are politically oppressed, economically deprived, exploited and, therefore, poor, socially alienated and culturally and religiously repressed or discriminated against. It refers to the people who are weak and powerless in terms of their class, race, culture and religion as well as in terms of their input and influence of political, economic and social events."³⁾

Who are Dalits?

The second Asian community, with whom we are concerned in this paper, is a section of the Indian people, who have given themselves the name 'Dalit.' The term 'dalit' is derived from the Sanskrit root *dal* which means burst, split, broken or torn asunder, downtrodden, scattered, crushed, destroyed. But although the term has ancient roots, its contemporary usage to specify a section of the people of India who have suffered oppression throughout history under the prevailing religious and social norms, is only recent. Today *dalit* has become a part of the vocabulary of all North Indian languages. For example, the well-known Hindi dictionary *Bhasa-Sabad Kos*, describes *dalit* as "an undeveloped or backward section of people, such as untouchables (*achut*) or surviving caste (*shudra*) among the Hindus."⁴⁾ In Panjabi, the *Mahan Kos* of Bhai Kahan Singh defines *dalit* as one who belongs to the lowest caste (*hini jati*) and has been trampled down by or broken under the feet of the upper caste (*uchi jati*).⁵⁾

It is in this sense that the term 'dalit' is being used in this paper. Dalits are those people of India who have been cast out of the mainstream of society because the architects of the system did not see it fit to include them in the graded fourfold caste structure of the Indian society. Not only have they been considered 'outcastes,' but have also been condemned to live life

1991, 23.

3) Kim Yong Bock : *Messiah and Minjung- Christ's Solidarity with the People for New Life*, CCC, Hong Kong, 1992, 7.

4) Dr. Ramsankar Sukal Rasal: *Bhasa-Sabad Kos* (in Hindi), Allahabad 1971, 778, 779.

5) Bhai Kahan Singh: *Mahan Kos* (in Panjabi), Patiala, 1981 (reprint), 624, 625.

of 'untouchables,' now for more than three and a half millennia. On the basis of this status they have forever borne extreme forms of social disadvantage and oppression, together with continuous assaults on their humanity which virtually reduced them to a state of being *no-people*.

It is interesting to note that the Sanskrit root *dal* - which we had mentioned earlier - and the Hebrew root *dal*, bear almost similar meaning. The Hebrew root *dal* means to hang down, to be languid, weakened, low and feeble. Since Sanskrit and Hebrew belong to two different linguistic families — the Indo-Germanic and the Semitic — some scholars see this as mere coincidence. Be that as it may, a reading of some of the fifty or so passages in which the Hebrew root *dal* appears in the biblical literature can shed some fascinating light on the situation of Dalits in India today. The fact that Indian biblical scholars, translators and interpreters have not taken note earlier of the parallel between what the Old Testament is talking about and the workings of the caste system in Indian society can be explained by the contextual nature of all biblical interpretations. The training of these Indian scholars had been under European, particularly British, missionaries and whatever concern they have shown while relating the biblical message to the Indian context has largely been effected by the viewpoint of their peers. For the most part they have ignored the context of the masses of Indian people which would have included the Dalit concerns.

However, recently some western interpreters have also tried to go beyond the word-meaning to understand the text of Old Testament more deeply. For example, while *dal* in the Old Testament is often understood as 'poor,' which merely refers to the economic status of certain people, C.U.Wolf in an essay on the term 'poor' in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, writes:

They are those whose prosperity and social status have been reduced. In this respect they are the opposite of the rich (Exodus 23:3; 30:15; Leviticus 14:21; Proverbs 22:16). In physical strength in psychological ability, they are also impaired and helpless (Job 34:28; Psalm 82:3; Jeremiah 40:7; 52:16).⁶⁾

6) Wolf, C.U.: 'Poor' in the Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (An Illustrated Encyclopedia), 843.

This important point made by Wolf can indeed help in interpreting the situation of Dalits in India. Like the *dal* in the Old Testament, Dalits are not only economically and physically poor or weak, but they are poor in their “psychological ability” as well; indeed, their being has been “impaired” to such an extent that they have become “helpless.”

After this general introduction of the two oppressed Asian communities of Asia, let us try to understand their specific contexts upon which our biblical and theological reflections should rightly be based.

Context: Minjung *Han* and Dalit *Peeran*

The context of both Minjung and Dalit communities can be best appreciated in the backdrop of what C.U. Wolf tries to underline while defining the ‘poor.’ It is a fact that during oppression, more than the physical poverty of the oppressed, it is their psychological ability that gets ‘impaired’ rendering them to a state of ‘helplessness’ and perpetual enslavement. We know that the two Asian communities have been historically oppressed in every aspect of their life. No doubt it is important to strive to give them back all that they have been denied physically till now. But that is not enough. What is more important is to understand the deeper *hurt* of their oppression, which has gone deep down in their psyche and can be seen easily even in those who have managed to gain some status - economic, educational, etc. — in the society. Most of them continue to carry a complex of inner ‘inferiority’ deep within them. Minjung call this ‘pain’ their *han*; and Dalits call it their *peeran*. It is this context of their life — *the excruciating pain in inner-self* — that a theologian should try to make his reference point so that the liberation or salvation can be brought about for them in order to give them the experience of ‘wholeness of life.’ No doubt ‘Peace’ is an essential element of such a life, but then both ‘Peace’ and ‘Life’ are basically the fruits of ‘Justice.’ It is ‘Justice’ therefore, that a theologian should try to get the oppressed, because by doing so he/she shall not only transform the life of the oppressed, but also that of the oppressor. When we talk about *han* or *peeran* we are not talking of individual level, but the level of the communities; so any Justice rendered this way will soothe *han* or *peeran* of the entire community, and shall also bring Peace to the oppressors.

To understand the issue more clearly, let us discuss briefly the context of the *Minjung han* and *Dalit peeran*, which is supposed to be the core

subject of our 'Theology of Justice, Peace and Life.'

Minjung Han

One of the best definitions of *han*, is given in the footnote by Prof. Suh Nam-dong in his article 'Towards a Theology of Han' which says: "*Han* is a deep feeling that rises out of the unjust experience of the people. 'Just indignation' may be a close translation of *han*, but it evokes a refined emotion yearning for justice to be done..." The author explains further: "*Han* is the suppressed, amassed, and condensed experience of oppression caused by mischief or misfortune so that it forms a kind of 'lump' in one's spirit."⁷⁾ This meaning of *han* is very close to the experience of Dalit, about whom a Dalit theologian had said that they are with a "wounded psyche."⁸⁾ Meaning thereby that *han* is psychological in nature which could be inflicted by socially caused situation, resulting in a feeling of helplessness.⁹⁾ We have already seen that while explaining the Hebrew word *dal* C.U Wolf also arrived at similar conclusion: "In physical strength, in psychological ability, they are also unpaired and helpless."¹⁰⁾

Prof. Suh Nam-dong listed four aspects of *han* of Korean people:

- a) Koreans have suffered numerous invasions by surrounding powerful nations so that the very existence of the Korean nation has come to be understood as *han*.
- b) Koreans have continually suffered the tyranny of the rulers so that they think of their existence as *backsong*.
- c) Also, under Confucianism strict imposition of laws and custom discriminating against women, the existence of women was *han* itself.
- d) At a certain point in Korean history, about half of the population were

7) Suh Nam Dong: *Towards a Theology of han*, in 'Minjung theology - People as the Subjects of History,' CCC, Singapore, 1983, 68. (notes no 1)

8) Azariah, M: *The Church's Healing Ministry to Dalits*, in 'Towards a Dalit Theology' edited by M. E. Prabhakar, CISRS and CDLM, ISPCK, Delhi, 1988, 118.

9) Suh Kwang Sun David, *A Biographical Sketch of an Asian's Theological Consultation*, in 'Minjung Theology people as the subject of History,' CCC, op.Cit., 24-25.

10) Refers to the reference no. 6.

registered as hereditary slaves and were treated as property rather than as people of the nation. These thoughts of their lives as *han*.

To stress on his point further Prof. Suh Nam-dong quoted a stanza from the work of a Korean poet Ko Eun, who cried: "We Koreans were born from the womb of *han* and brought up in the womb of *han*."¹¹⁾ Here again we hear the echoes of the cries of Dalits in India, who have suffered for centuries under their *han*.

In this regard David Kwang-sun Suh very poignantly refers to a banned poem written by a poet Kim Chi Ha called 'The Story of the Sound' (1972). The poem tells the story of a poor person named Ando who is imprisoned and given unjust and cruel treatment in the prison. His head and legs are chopped off so that it is the trunk of his body which keeps rolling and bumping against the prison walls, creating disturbing soulful sounds. These sounds coming from the deep prison cell are in fact the expressions of Ando's deepest '*han*.' Prof David Kwang-sun Suh says: "It is this noise which is the '*han*' of the oppressed people; and the '*han-cry*' of the unjustly-treated people heard as strange bumping sounds day and night from prison gives an incredible threat to their oppressors. This noise is cry of the Minjung in the prison cells, and in the prison- like conditions of the society. It will accumulate to make the noise of revolution."¹²⁾

The deep sense of Minjung *han* is expressed by number of traditional Minjung religious stories. Both Prof. Suh Nam-dong and Prof. David Kwang-sun Suh have included several such stories in their works.¹³⁾ Maltugi is the Hero of one such famous story of a mask dance, who originally is a slave of three ruler brothers named 'Yangban.' Yangban are supposed to be the Masters of Maltugi, but when he appears with them on the stage for mask dance, Minjung audience become one with Maltugi and take his side to laugh at the false dignity of their ruling masters. They "become one in expressing their deep-seated *han*, the unresolved angry feeling of injustice and hunger deeply stored in their hearts and stomachs. This moment they become critical of the existing order and social system.

11) Suh Nam Dong: Op. Cit., 58.

12) Suh Kwang Sun David, *The Korean Minjung in Christ*, Op. Cit., 79.

13) See: Suh Nam Dong: Op. Cit., 163-66.; Suh Kwang-Sun David, *The Korean Minjung in Christ*, Op. Cit., 108-111, 170-172.

As they shout with Maltugi in the mask dance, they let out their *han*, their frustration, and their desire for resistance... *Han*, the deep feeling turned inside, is coming out in the open. The Minjung and audience join with Maltugi in shouting for a fight, the fight against injustice and oppression. In the mask dance play, Maltugi is no longer a subservient slave boy; he is an independent fighter, ready to resist and to cut the vicious circle of oppression. In the laughter and shouts of the Minjung audience, we hear the voice of the Minjung for liberation; we sense the storm coming”¹⁴⁾ Prof Suh Nam-dong pleaded to the Korean theologians to make this *han* the theme of their theology. Because he says: “If one does not hear the sighs of the *han* of the Minjung, one cannot hear the voice of Christ knocking on our doors.”¹⁵⁾

Dalit Peeran

The name ‘Dalit’ itself, which the oppressed community of India has adopted recently, expresses the deep-seated *peeran* it harbors within. The name encapsulates all aspects of oppression the community had undergone for over three and a half millennia, and also represents the *peeran* which gets personified in every member of the community. There was not only physical suffering; they suffered much more socially, politically, culturally and religiously. And it is this multi-pronged oppression which pushed them into their present state ‘with no identity.’ It is indeed an irony that in a country that boasts of multi-ethnicity, Dalits remain ‘no people’ belonging to ‘no nation.’ Today they are both vertically and horizontally divided, for which they are not responsible, because these divisions have been imposed upon them by their opponents. Today they are socially untouchables, politically subjects and economically slaves. Living in segregated parts of the Indian villages, Dalits have different names of their dwelling in different Indian languages: so they have *Thathis* in Panjab, *Maharwarda* in Maharashtra, *Cherris* in some South India and *harijan bastis* in cities. It is in these localities, where one can observe the Dalit *peeran* visibly. A few examples from Dalit poets and writers are being given below to make my point clear.

A Christian poet Joshuva Kavi expresses his pain (*peer*), when he realized his state being outside the preview of fourfold human society:

14) Suh Kwang Sun David, Ibid, 171-172.

15) Suh Nam Dong: Op. Cit., 68 (middle).

I have heard that four sons
Were born to Old Brahma
But tell me, O Savithri, Who is this
Panchama (fifth) who is worse than faces?¹⁶⁾

Because he sees himself as a Dalit, outside of the preview of human society, therefore it is hard for him to find a friend among the human beings. His feeling about this truth expressed as:

In this fatted, arrogant world,
Who are friends and relatives to the poor
Except, worms and creatures of anthills?
Or
Who will talk to the low, except
A bird or a bat or a rat?¹⁷⁾

But a Dalit Marathi poet Jyoti Lanjewar, after expressing her *peeran* upon her Dalit state, also declares that she no longer will keep silent about her human rights. Both these aspects she expresses in her following poem:

Their inhuman atrocities have carved caves
In the rock of my heart
I must tread this forest with wary steps:
eyes fixed on the changing times
The tables have turned now
Protests spark
now here
now there
I have been silent all these days
listening to the voice of right and wrong
But now I will fan the flames
For human rights.

16) Ranjan, P. Swarnalata (tr.): *Christian Aspiration as Expressed by Jashuva Kavi in Gabbilam (The Bat)*, in 'Indigenous People: Dalits' edited by James Massey, ISPCK, CTE-5, Delhi, 1994, 327. (top)

17) Ibid, 327. (below top)

How did we ever get to this place
 This land which was never mother to us?
 Which never gave us even
 the life of cats and dogs?
 I hold their unpardonable sins as witness
 And turn, here and now,
 A rebel.¹⁸⁾

It is another Marathi poet Yusoja, who narrates the painful crushed life of the Dalits in his following poem:

On roads laid out according to the plan
 breaths thwarted till yesterday, crawled and sped along
 And with each swing of these orphaned breaths
 my mute existence was moved
 And swayed as a pendulum.
 The unscrupulous pundits awaken desire
 in the stillborn womb of civilization,
 flaunted overhead, naked placards,
 with slogans of purity and holiness
 their metaphysical gymnastics trampled and
 scattered my life, unbalanced already,
 the life of the Dalits crushed
 By tyrant stones of grinding inequality.¹⁹⁾

To experience the real *Dalit peeran*, I reproduce a part of the story by a Dalit writer Bandhumadhav entitled 'Poisoned Bread.' The story is about the leftover food that is kept aside overnight to be given to a Dalit for his / her wages. Mostly such food turns poisonous because it is not kept covered or in a proper place. As a result the leftover food becomes not only the instrument to kill the very humanness of a person, but even at times becomes the cause of a death.

18) Lanjewar, Jyoti: translated by Shanta Gokhale in *Poisoned Bread*, Translation from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature, edited by Arjun Dangle, 1992, 22.

19) Yusoja, translated by Charudutta Bhagwat in *Poisoned Bread*, Translated from Marathi Literature, edited by Arjun Dangle, 1992, 67.

Come harvest tie with its operations of winnowing and sifting... That day, as usual, Grandpa Yetalya took me with him as he went out looking for a job of winnowing and treading out the corn at the threshing floor... We stopped at a threshing floor. There, tidying a pile of disheveled ears of corn was Bapu Patil. Grandpa approached Patil and saluted him with a *johar*. Acknowledging Grandpa's salute like a swaggering Maharaja. Bapu Patil said, 'Hey, what brings you here at such an early hour? Hope you haven't come here with your mind set on evil. For don't they say, an encounter with a Mahar in the morning, and you're doomed for good.' '...Why do you say that, Anna? I am your slave. I have come to you on purpose on hearing of the operations at your threshing floor. My Lord is our bread-giver and we find it a privilege to beg for our share of corn, master. I am your begging Mahar and feel proud to be so...' Don't give me that line; you're no longer the Mahar-Mangs (names of two Dalit communities) of the good old days, to beg for your share of the corn. You are not Harijans! You've even started claiming equality...

The next moment I set to work with my head bent low, moving the grubbing-hoe in the heap of corn. Somehow I managed to suppress my anger. Bapu Patil was standing close by, watching us for some time. After a while he left but not before warning us: 'Finish the job before I return from breakfast. We'll yoke the bullocks for the winnowing in the evening. Harry up. Don't you know you have to work hard if you want your share of corn?' ...

But after we had toiled throughout the day Bapu Patil did not give Grandpa even a few measures of jowar. Grandpa was crestfallen. As we dejectedly left the threshing floor, however, Grandpa could not fail to notice the pen where stale, rancid pieces of bread lay scattered on the ground in front of the oxen. It's rightly said that as the Chamar has his eye on the chappal, so does the Mahar on stale bread. Flies were swarming over the moldering crumbs which had turned green and foul. Grandpa begged Bapu Patil for those crumbs. The oxen seemed to have refused to eat them... Thanks to if we can at least get this stale crumbs.. We forget all the while that the crumbs they give us make us slaves...' At night everyone at home greedily hogged the stuff. What with the heavy meal, we feel asleep immediately after supper. But the next

morning we work up to the sound of Grandpa writhing like a poisoned dog. He was vomiting and purging too... I was sitting by Grandpa's bed... Sitting by the side of his bed, shedding tears, I felt benumbed and despondent. My mind was wailing in agony. When shall the meek and humble people of my community be uplifted? And when shall they be treated like human beings... When? In the mean time my maternal uncle had brought a doctor... Examining Grandpa, the doctor asked, what did mhe eat last night? I went into the kitchen and brought the earthen pot in which the rancid crumbs of bread mixed with duli had been... The doctor looked surprised as he said, 'That's it! The mould in the stuff created toxin. The toxin must have caused his dysentery. It's a serious case... Grandpa showed great amazement as he lay in bed: 'What? You say the crumbs had turned to poison? It was in fact poison? Poisoned bread...?' ... None of the medicines suggested by the doctor proved effective and we became helpless. Mustering all his strength and with tremendous will power Grandpa finally succeeded in articulating a few words: 'Mahadeva, don't weep, my boy. I'm an old thing now. And being so old, I may stop breathing any moment. What can I say to you now? I can only say: never depend on the age-old bread associated with our caste. Get as much education as you can. Take away this accursed bread from the mouths of the Mahars. This poisonous bread will finally kill the very humanness of man...' Then he stopped abruptly, turned his face away and closed his eyes forever.²⁰⁾

At the end of this section I will add a saying from my own mother tongue Panjabi: "*Jis tan lage, soi ta jane*" which means that the real pain can only be known by the one who suffers. A few examples from the Dalit writings testified to this harsh truth of *Dalit peeran*, which should be the core of Dalit theology. Giving a direction for Dalit theology, the pioneer Dalit theologian, the late A.P. Nirmal had said: "It will be based on their own Dalit experiences, their suffering, their own aspirations and their own hope. It will narrate the story of their sufferings and their pathos. It will anticipate liberation which is meaningful to them."²¹⁾

20) Bandhumadhav, translated by Ramesh Dayate in *Poisoned Bread*, Translations from Modern Marathi Literature, edited by Arjun Dangle, 1992, 147-149, 151-153.

Biblical and Theological Reflections

Before we attempt theology for Minjung and Dalit, we must first take a look at the reflections in Old and New Testament with regard to the Poor and Oppressed. Even a casual perusal of the Bible will show that 'Poor' and 'Oppressed' do not necessarily refer to economic condition of the sufferer. In different places both these words have different connotation. This is very much in accordance with the present thought on the subject. In an article in *Development Dialogue* a checklist of different forms of poverties prevailing today in the world is given. According to the checklist there is in the world.

- Poverty of subsistence (due to insufficient income, food, shelter etc).
- Poverty of protection (due to bad health system, violence, arms, race, caste, class etc.)
- Poverty of affection (due to authoritarian, oppression, exploitation relations with the natural environment etc.)
- Poverty of understanding (due to poor quality of education).
- Poverty of participation (due to marginalization and discrimination of women, children and minorities)
- Poverty of identity (due to alien values upon local cultures, forced migration, political exile etc.).²²⁾

In Bible also we come across similar observations. For example the author of Exodus, while describing the oppression of Israelites from the hands of Egyptians says: "Therefore they set taskmasters (*nagash*) over them to oppress (*ʾanah*) with forced labor" (*Ex. 1:11*). Here the title *nagash* is used for the 'taskmasters' who oppress others in order to exploit, force and exert pressure on them. It is in this sense that this word is used here and also later in the Exodus (5:6, 10, 13, 14). *Anah* is the other term used which for oppression, which directly affects the inner most being of the persons. Besides *nagash* and *ʾanah*, there are other terms used in Hebrew to show the different aspects of oppression which include: *ʾashaq* meaning

21) Nirmal, Arvind P.: *A Dialogue with Dalit Literature*, in 'Towards a Dalit Theology,' op.Cit., 76.

22) *Development Dialogue*, A Journal of International Development Co-operation published by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Uppsala, 1989:1, 21.

oppressing (Jer .6:6, 22:7), *yanah*, meaning deadly violence (Eze. 18:7, 12, 16), *ratsats* meaning crushing and despoiling (Isa. 12:3), *daka* meaning grinding (Prov. 22:22) etc. The same way number of words are used for an oppressed person which include: *ani* meaning inferior (Am. 2:6) *dal* meaning economically and psychologically poor (Jer.5: 4), *ébion* meaning very poor and in a wretched state, (Ex. 23; 6, 11) *rash* meaning poor or needy (Prov. 17:5) and *misken* meaning a socially inferior or dependent person (Eccl. 9: 15, 16). I am now giving below a few examples where the term *dal* and *‘ani* have been used in the Old Testament.²³⁾

There are a number of passages in the Hebrew Old Testament, which deal with the different aspects of concerns that are relevant to Dalit and Minjung in today's world. There are even some passages that go into the deeper meaning of oppression while reflecting the treatment met by the oppressed communities in the biblical world. In fact these passages are in the form of tragic songs, which are sung on behalf of such oppressed groups. A few selected passages are being given here:

- 1 They will give back the fruit of their toil, and will not swallow it down;
from the profit of their trading they will get no enjoyment.
For they have crushed and abandoned the *dalim* (the poor) they have seized a house that they did not build. (Job 20:18,19).
- 2 Do not remember against us the iniquities of our ancestors; let your compassion come speedily to meet us, for we are *dalonu* (brought very low) (Psalm 79:8).
- 3 Those who oppress *dal* (the poor), insult their Maker,
but those who are kind to the needy honour him (Proverbs 14:31).
- 4 O Lord, do your eyes not look for truth?
You have struck them, but they felt anguish;
you have consumed them, but they have refused to turn back.
Then I said, "These are only *dalim* (the poor)
They have no sense for they do not know the way of Lord, the law of their God" (Jeremiah 5:3-4)

23) See for detail discussions: Tamez, Elga: *Bible of the Oppressed*, Orbis Books, New York, 1982, 62-63, 70-71.

These passages give some glimpse of the kind of oppression prevalent in the biblical world. The first passage from of Job 20:18, 19 is part of a longer narrative, in which one of Job's friends Zapher makes some observations about the wickedness of the powerful oppressors and their methods of oppressing others including *dalim* (the poor). In verse 19 a special reference is made to the oppression, which is perpetrated on the oppressed. The oppressed are left alone after being crushed and even their houses are taken by their oppressors. Here for the oppressed Hebrew word *dalim* is used. In the Book of Amos, the prophet has even named the oppressors. About the people of Israel, he says that they "trample the head of the *dalim* (the poor) into the dust of the earth" (Amos 2:7). In Amos 4:1, even rich women perform the role of oppressors against *dalim*. The prophet speaks on behalf of the oppressed and poor to their oppressors very forcefully in his discourse by saying.

Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
and bring to ruin the poor (*ani*) of the land,
saying, "When the new moon be over so that
So that we may sell grain;
And the Sabbath, So that we may offer wheat for sale?
We will make ephod small and the shekel great,
and practice deceit with false balances,
buying the poor (*dalim*) or silver,
and needy for a pair of sandals,
and selling the sweepings of wheat. (Am. 8:4-6).

In passage two quoted above from Psalms 79:8, the Psalmist addresses his whole community as *dalonu* (Dalits). This is almost like saying "The whole of the Indian Christian community is composed of Dalits" or "The Indian Church as a whole is the Dalit." Of course the Psalmist says his community's lowest state of *dalitness* is because of the past collective sins of their ancestors. He used a verb *dalonu* with the meaning "brought very low." The next passage is clear. Here the creator God is being equated with the oppressed and poor. According to this to oppress the *dal* (poor) as a community means insulting or oppressing God himself (Proverbs 14:3)

In the last passage quoted above, the Prophet Jeremiah *describes* the state of dalitness. One may even beat them, but it does not give them pain;

changing their dalit state perhaps is the most difficult. They themselves have become completely unconscious of their dalit state, so no correction is possible, and there is no way they can go back - after all according to Jeremiah "these are only *dalim*, they have no sense' (Jeremiah 5:4). Is this not the state of the majority of the Dalits in India today or other various oppressed communities in the world, like Minjung.

Prophetic and Theological Response

Against such oppression it is Justice that needs to be given priority. Peace is an important factor in the world today no doubt but it cannot be Peace without Justice. Three major Christian traditions namely Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant have common view with regard to Justice. For example Metropolitan Paul Gregorios a leading Eastern Orthodox theologian says: "Now peace, if it is integral to justice, cannot be simply the absence of conflict. For justice can be attained only by confrontation and conflict with injustice."²⁴ A Roman Catholic scholar Fr. Joseph H Ficher S.J. is still more direct when he said "Without justice there can be no lasting peace; without love there can be no lasting justice."²⁵ A Protestant scholar Walter A Wagner, while saying the same thing, adds in his statement the affect of 'peace with justice' upon the life of all living beings, when he says: "*Shalom*, the reign of peace with justice, will transform relationship among all creations and natural forces."²⁶ Wegner also says in his article on 'peace' : "The conviction that there can be no peace without justice and no justice without equality clearly derives from the prophetic time as did the cadences and rhetoric of the movement."²⁷

Before moving further in our reflections of 'Prophetic and Theological Response,' it may be worthwhile to refer the views of a great Dalit leader Dr B R Ambedkar, who was the main architect of the present Indian

24) Gregorios, Paul: *Problems in a Christian Philosophical Approach to Peace, An Eastern Orthodox View*, in 'Voices From World Religions' edited by Henry O.Thompson, ISPCK, Delhi 1993, 26.

25) Fitcher, S.J., Joseph H: *Catholic and World Peace*, in 'Voice From Religions,' Op. Cit., 35.

26) Wagner, Walter A.: *A Protestant Presentation on World Peace Today*, in 'Voices From World Religions' Op. Cit., 57.

27) Ibid, 61.

Constitution. According to Dr Ambedkar the sole purpose of creating an instrument in Indian Constitution was to establish an 'ideal' or 'just society' based upon the three universal principles, "liberty, equality and fraternity." He elaborated by saying, "Justice is simply another name of these principles."²⁸⁾ Dr Ambedkar's 'just society,' which he also called a 'democratic society,' involved two things: "The first is an attitude of mind, an attitude of respect and equality towards other fellow beings. The second is a social organization free from rigid social barriers."²⁹⁾ Ambedkar also warned that in a society, those who continue to "suffer from inequality," will one day blow up the structure" of it.³⁰⁾ In other words, what he wants to emphasize is that there cannot be a 'peace without justice.' Ambedkar's this point leads us to our next part of reflection on 'justice, peace and life' in the Bible.

The prophets in the Bible also proclaimed the 'will' of God to the people of Israel at different times. For example prophet Isaiah addressed them as Unfruitful Vineyard (Church). He said:

For the Vineyard of the Lord of hosts is hour of Israel,
And the people of Judah are his pleasant planting;
He expected justice, but saw bloodshed;
Righteousness, but heard a cry! (Is 5:7)

The author of Isaiah in 'the Song of Unfruitful Vineyard' narrated the conditions of the people of Israel and Judah, and told them how they had invited the Lord's punishment on themselves by practicing 'social injustice' in various forms, which included amassing of property at the expense of others (Is. 5:8-10); drinking and committing debauchery (Is. 5:11) and lack of knowledge of their faith (Is. 5:13). Finally after denouncing these evils, which had become part of his people's life, the prophet announced the Lord's judgment on them (Is. 5:14-17). The most

28) Quoted in: Massey, James: *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar - A Study in Just Society*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2003, 102.

29) B. R. Ambedkar, 'Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah,' in *Dr Babaseheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches*, vol. 1, compiled by Vasant Moon, Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1989, 222.

30) Constituent Assembly Debates, Official Report, Book No. 5, vol. XI, 14-26 November 1949, New Delhi, 1999, third reprint, 979.

important verse of the song tells us that the basis of God's judgment was "justice" and "righteousness" (Is. 5:16). This point is stressed by other prophets as well (Mic. 2: 1-6), Ezek. 45:11, Am. 6:4-7). At another place Isaiah again proclaimed on behalf of the Lord that 'justice' and 'righteousness' were the criteria to determine whether one's faith was built on God's firm foundation or not (Isa. 28: 17).

Amos was also one of the prophets who spoke directly about 'justice' and 'righteousness.' For Example, at one place he addressed the people of Israel saying:

Ah, you turn justice to wormwood,
And being righteousness to the ground! (Am. 5:7)
He continued to address God's people and demanding from them to:
... let justice roll down like waters,
And righteous like an ever-flowing stream (am. 5:14)

'Justice' means the establishment of the right, through fair legal procedures (Am.5:15; Deut. 25:3), in accordance with the will of the Lord. And 'righteousness' means the quality of life in relationship to others in the community that gives rise to justice.

Like Amos, prophet Micah also summed up the definition of the religion in the prophetic teaching, while challenging the people of Israel in the following words.

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
And what does the Lord require of you
But to do justice, and to love kindness,
And to walk humbly with your God? (Mic.8)

In continuing the prophetic traditions of the Old Testament, in the New Testament too the prophet of the prophets, our Lord Jesus Christ, rebuked and denounced religious leaders of his days by saying:

Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees hypocrites!
For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin,
and have neglected the weightier matters of law:
Justice and mercy and faith.
You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but

Swallow a camel! (Mt. 23:23-24)

Here, 'tithe' represents the tenth of agricultural produce given to support the temple and its priests (lev. 27, 30-33, Num. 18:8-32, Deut. 25:1-5). 'Gnat' is an unclean insect (Lev. 11: 41-44) that was avoided by priests in their food while the camel, which also was supposed to be unclean, was conveniently swallowed by them (Lev. 11:4). Such was the hypocrisy followed by the priests at the time of Jesus.

Various oppressed groups were the focus of the Nazareth manifesto that was released in the beginning of his ministry by the Prophet of the prophets, Jesus Christ by declaring:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
Because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor ,
He has sent me to proclaim release to captives,
And recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed
(in Hindi translation 'Dalit') go free (Lk. 4:18).

Besides such biblical references against the exploitation and oppression of the poor and needy, the message of the entire Bible is also centered on two divine interventions pointing in the same direction. On the one hand, the biblical message affirms that God takes the side of the oppressed, poor and the needy (Ex. 3:7-12) and on the other, that God liberates the oppressed (Lk. 4:18-19). The second intervention, besides offering liberation to the various oppressed groups of human beings (subaltern), also offers hope for their future by proclaiming "the year of the Lord's favour" (Lk. 4:19), which means that the time of their liberation is coming. The overall purpose of these divine activities is to create and maintain the balance in the created world, especially among the human beings.

One most important factor in all the prophecies and proclamations of both the Old and the New Testaments (as pointed by Bishop Newbigin) is that these speak of liberation or salvation in terms of actual historical happenings, and not as "a matter of doing justice and mercy in concrete situations."³¹⁾ (Jer. 22:6; 1John 4:8, Cf. 3:14-24). An Indian theologian, Fr. L

31) Newbigin, Lesslie: *The Open Secret, An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Revised Edition), SPCK, 1995, 23.

Stanislaus, affirms this when he says “Since the Gospel is linked to the concrete lives of the people, the Church’s proclamation includes the issue of human rights, social justice, equality, peace and development.³²⁾ Bishop Juliao Labayan of Philippines also sums up his discussion on ‘Prophetic mission’ of the Church saying: “The task and mission is simply to continue the history of salvation that her founder, Jesus Christ, inaugurated and sealed with his blood... Here too lies the purpose and rationale for transforming the Church from the historical model of a Christendom (imperialist) Church to that of the Church of the poor. The purpose and rationale of the Church’s mission is to be light, leaven and salt of the earth towards making the earth a place where God of love, justice and peace will be at home with His people and His whole creation³³⁾ (Jer 22:6;1 John 4:8; Cf. 14-24).

Conclusion: Theology of Justice, Peace and Life

In this paper, first I tried to introduce to you the people - Minjung and Dalits - who are the target groups of our discussion. Then I tried to ascertain the core of the context of these two communities to which the proposed ‘Theology of justice, peace and life’ could be addressed. After this I looked into the biblical and theological responses already available to us concerning our theme. Now in the concluding section, I will consolidate my argument first, before giving my views on the topic.

Summary Statement

Minjung and Dalits are the two oppressed Asian communities that have many common experiences insofar as their plight as tormented people is concerned. Both these communities are oppressed in all aspects of their life: politically, economically, and socially. The oppression unleashed on them has impaired them not only physically but even psychologically so much so that in due course they have accepted their helplessness as part of their lives and as natural order of things. To perpetuate their oppression and to keep the

32) Stanislaus, L.: *The Liberative Mission of the Church Among Dalit Christians*, ISPCK, Delhi, 1999, 291.

33) Labanya, Julio: *Revolution and the Church of the Poor*, Quezon City, Philippines, 1995, 60.

vanquished communities forever under subjugation, the dominants manipulated to destroy their religious and cultural identity and formed policies to divide and rule them.

It is a fact that oppression unleashed on a people is not enough to destroy them; it is the acceptance of the oppression which destroys them. This is what happened with Dalits and Minjung communities. Centuries of oppression has affected their 'humanness' to an extent that they started considering themselves as non-humans. However, the process of awakening from this state began with their getting alive to their *han* or *peeran*. They started questioning the oppressors which definitely disturbed the status quo of prevailing false 'peace.' Now their demand was for 'justice' which had always been denied to them.

The other observation that I had made is that the concern for poor and oppressed has been central to the text of Old and New Testament. Various meanings of poverty and oppression are explored in the biblical text culminating in two major points: (1) God takes the side of the oppressed, poor and needy; and (2) God is committed to liberate the poor and oppressed. With these observations in mind, the Dalit and Minjung theologians would indeed do a service to take up the challenge to work on theology for these two oppressed communities. This would also mean the theologians abandoning part of their academic life and status to avoid possibility of reducing every effort of theirs only to an 'arm-chair' theology.

Minjung Han and Dalit Peeran Demand a Paradigm Shift

Han (unjust experiences) and *Peeran* (suffering and pathos) have been named as two central contextual realities by Prof. Suh nam-dong and Prof. A.P.Nirmal for theologians who would be working on 'Minjung theology' and 'Dalit theology.' But I feel that we should expand our concern farther to arrive at theology of more inclusive and permanent nature. We are aware that world is changing very fast, and in that scenario poverty and oppression are also assuming fresh dimensions. Everywhere in the world we encounter myriad category of poverty (of subsistence, of protection, of affection, of understanding, of participation and identity and so on) which imparts *han* and *peeran* to almost everyone. Even the oppressors are not free from experiencing these. Therefore a 'theology of justice, peace and life' has to be the one, which becomes an enabling tool of bringing 'transformation' in

the lives of not only the oppressed communities of the world, but also in the lives of their oppressors. Moreover, this 'transformation' should target not the individual needs, but the collective needs of the people. In fact by stressing this, I am trying to hint at a holistic approach, which includes not only the person as a whole, but the community as a whole. Such approach will in fact address the structural problems that encouraged the culture of violence in the first place, spilling oppression and misery all over. Structural justice will naturally come about, leading to structural peace emanating from Justice.

Shalom in the Old Testament conveys this meaning very clearly as 'completion or 'wholeness.' Prophet Isaiah in 9:7 talks about an "endless peace," which has a dual meaning 'justice with righteousness' (i.e. right relationship) which will be the characteristic of the reign of God on this earth. Again Jesus' Nazareth manifesto is also a good example of the holistic approach to overcome *han* and *peeran*, both in the oppressed and the oppressors. Jesus has named four such groups: of poor (*deen*), who are faced with all kinds of poverties; economic physical, social etc. (Lk. 10: 25-27, Jn. 4: 1-41, Mt. 20: 1016); of captives (*bandi*), that refer to those who are prisoners to various ideologies, structures and systems; and blind (*andhey*), which includes that group of people who refuse to see beyond their self-interest and have closed their mind and heart to truth and values (Lk. 4:37-45). The fourth group is of 'oppressed' which would mean 'Dalit' or 'Minjung.' So Nazareth manifesto of Jesus is the charter of establishing a 'just society' or 'just social order' in this world, where according to the author of the book of Revelation there will neither be *han* nor *peeran*.

See, the home of God is among mortals
 He will dwell with them as their God;
 They will be his peoples,
 He will wipe every tear from their eyes,
 Death will be no more;
 Mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
 For the first things have passed away. (Rev. 21: 3-4).

This should ideally be the end goal a theology of 'Justice, Peace and Life' from the perspective of Dalit and Minjung.

Abstract

Much has been reflected upon and written by theologians during the second half of the last century upon the theme 'Justice, Peace and Life.' But invariably the focus of almost all of them had been on 'Peace' rather than on 'Justice,' perhaps because of the two devastating Wars that had wrecked the world, and also because of the ensuing ethno-national conflicts that engulfed the entire globe and kept us constantly on the brink of a *possibility* of yet another fierce war. One thing that catches the attention is the fact that very little attention is given in all these reflections to the question of 'Justice,' and consequently to the concerns of the vast majority of the oppressed communities all over the world. Dalits of my country and Minjungs of Korea - about whom we shall discuss in this paper - are part of these communities.

Han (unjust experiences) and *Peeran* (suffering and pathos) have been named as two central contextual realities by Prof. Suh nam-dong and Prof. A.P. Nirmal for theologians who would be working on 'Minjung theology' and 'Dalit theology.' But I feel that we should expand our concern farther to arrive at theology of more inclusive and permanent nature. We are aware that world is changing very fast, and in that scenario poverty and oppression are also assuming fresh dimensions. Everywhere in the world we encounter myriad category of poverty (of subsistence, of protection, of affection, of understanding, of participation and identity and so on) which imparts *han* and *peeran* to almost everyone. Even the oppressors are not free from experiencing these. Therefore a 'theology of justice, peace and life' has to be the one, which becomes an enabling tool of bringing 'transformation' in the lives of not only the oppressed communities of the world, but also in the lives of their oppressors. In fact by stressing this, I am trying to hint at a holistic approach, which includes not only the person as a whole, but the community as a whole. Such approach will in fact address the structural problems that encouraged the culture of violence in the first place, spilling oppression and misery all over. Structural justice will naturally come about, leading to structural peace emanating from Justice. This should ideally be the end goal a theology of 'Justice, Peace and Life' from the perspective of Dalit and Minjung.

Key Words

Minjung, *Han*, Dalit, *Peeran*, justice, peace, life, *shalom*