

# Dalit Christians Struggle for Justice in the Indian Sub-continent

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## Introduction

In the wake of the contextual theologies world over, specific theologies with existential concerns have taken form. In the India-Subcontinent the women's liberation, ecological liberation; and with the specific influence of the black theology and the liberation theology, Dalit theology became a possibility in its particular socio-economic, political and religious context. Human tendencies seem to be universally common and oppression of the weak has been a ubiquitous dynamic showing different faces in different continents and countries. Dalit theology in India stands out with its undergirding principle of pathos, and hermeneutical principle of reading the scripture with the eyes of the poor<sup>1)</sup> and oppressed.

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1) Read issue dedicated to Biblical Hermeneutics on Poverty and the specific article, Matthew E. Thathapudie, "Poor in the Book of Deuteronomy: A Dalit Christian Perspective," in *Religion and Society*, Vol. 51, Nos 2-3, June-September, 2006, 101-114.

### ***Dalit Reading of Psalm 22***

Considering the hermeneutical principle of reading the scripture with the experience and eyes of the poor and oppressed, let me begin with a representative example of how a Dalit would read, identify, appropriate and draw inspiration. We would choose Psalm 22.<sup>2)</sup>

1. O Daridhra Narayana<sup>3)</sup>, O Dalit Bandhava!<sup>4)</sup>

Why do you behave like this?  
 Don't you see our sufferings  
 At the hands of these ruthless  
 So called high-caste people?  
 Why do you hide yourself and  
 Not come to rescue us?

2. Ceaselessly we screech to you  
 At the strike of every violence against us  
 Day in and day out  
 You don't even seem to care to answer our cries.

3. But we still own you and  
 Continue to worship you, in spite!

4. Could that be true then,  
 What we heard,  
 That you redeemed our forefathers and mothers  
 Who believed in you?

5. They raised their voices to you  
 And you delivered them!  
 They trusted in you

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2) The Dalit version of Psalm 22 has been paraphrased by the author. The German translation of the same is published by Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland (EMW), Hamburg, Germany, in another publication concerning the Dalit issue.

3) God of the poor.

4) Soul mate and rescuer of the Dalits.

And you never let them down!

6. But what is this?  
What happened to you now?  
We are being treated like dirt of its worst kind,  
We are called MLECHAS-  
An abomination to the human fold,  
And we are made untouchables.  
Disrespect and despise is their code of conduct  
Towards us - Dalits.
7. They mock at us, saying:  
"You are the 'cruse of God.'"  
They deprive us anything and everything  
That falls in the category of "decency" and "development"
8. Deliver us O God  
From the multiple oppressions of these multiple castes.
9. Is it not you who created us  
And sustained us till now,  
Under the protection of your merciful wings?
10. Ever since from our birth  
We have been your people and you our God.
11. Please God,  
Do not distance yourself from us  
At this critical juncture of troublesome times.  
There is no one to help.
12. They who call themselves high-castes,  
Arm themselves and  
Surround our habitation from all sides in the nights  
And take us in surprise with a sudden roar.
13. They abuse us with filthy language

And attack us brutally  
 For reasons only known to them-  
 "Children of a lesser God"!?

14. They pour petrol  
 And set our hamlets on fire.  
 They rejoice as our ghettos burn  
 As Nero fiddled while Rome burned.
  
15. Each of us still in our half sleep - drowsy mood  
 Not being able to sort out  
 If it's a dream or reality  
 Run for our lives  
 But fall at the swift strike of their  
 "Staffs," "swords" and "spears,"  
 AMMAA!<sup>5)</sup>
  
16. Many of our youth  
 Are ruthlessly served alive into pieces  
 Packed in gunny bags  
 Tied with stones and  
 Thrown into the nearby rivers  
 Never to be identified,  
 Lives lost forever!  
 The so-called high-castes, the police and  
 The governments with its law are all hand in glove.  
 And we never meet justice!
  
17. Our heritage is only a dreadful past  
 Our present life is filled with threats of death  
 Our history is only bloody events.
  
18. They even make our women parade naked  
 And rape them before our own eyes.

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5) "Ammaa" means O mother. This is the loud shout at the strike of every deathblow.

19. How can we bear this shame?  
Till when should we bear this pain?  
How can you tolerate,  
When such things happen to your children?  
*O Daridhra Narayana!*  
Enough is enough; do not be elusive,  
O our help come quickly to our aid!
20. Deliver us from the high - castes,  
Who pervert justice  
With their social status, money power,  
Political connections and influential contacts.
21. Deliver us O God,  
From the hands of these caste-obsessed beasts.
22. I shall witness of your deliverance  
To my Co-Dalits.  
In every community and religion.
23. You Dalits,  
Daughters and sons  
Of the wandering Dalits-Sarah and Abraham,  
Praise the God of the oppressed.
24. For God has despised or abhorred  
The affliction of the afflicted  
And God has not hid God's face from them  
When they cried to God.
25. From you comes my praise O God,  
I will offer to you as thanks giving  
What I have promised to you.
26. Every oppressed Dalit will be set free  
And shall live a life of freedom and dignity.  
May our freedom last forever.

Praise be to God our deliverer.

27. All the oppressed communities of the world  
Will come to know our liberation  
From the dreadful-caste-system and  
Will turn to you  
In hope of their own redemption.
28. For God's left hand is strong  
To deliver us from these evil conspirators and  
God's right hand is stronger  
To rule the world with justice.
29. God will make the proud  
To rub their noses on the ground and  
The ones bent with the burden of injustice,  
God will lift them up and  
Make them stand on their own feet.
30. O Ellaiah, O Yenamma tell of the liberating power of God  
To your son Samuel and your daughter Ruth, and  
To your grandson Nishan and  
Your granddaughter Parimala.
31. And let them in turn  
Sing God's deliverance to their children's children  
Who are yet to be born.  
Hallelujah!

The mood in this Psalm reflects the Dalit experience. This is an instance of how the Biblical texts filled with passion narratives make meaning to the Dalits, which help them to identify their own life experiences with the Biblical characters and find hope for their own deliverance. Dalit Christians, this is how, derive spiritual strength from the scriptures to lead a powerful movement in the struggle for acquiring justice in the caste dominated Indian Sub-continent

## **The Caste System**

‘Varna Dharma’ is the Indian social organization based on one’s color. It is the hierarchical caste system basically divided into four caste groups. First on the top of the ladder of the system are the Brahmins. Second, followed downward by Kshatrias. The third are the Vaishyas and the fourth are the Sudras. This caste system has a theological basis in Hindu religion. It is believed that the Brahmins are born out of the head of the Purusha (the primeval person), the Kshatrias are the fighters, the Vaishyas are the traders and the Sudras are the artisans of all kinds.

When the Aryans came into India, most probably around five to six thousand years ago, they drove the native Dravidians down beyond the Vindhya Mountains. The Dravidian religious concepts and worship practices are even ridiculed in the Vedas and the Dravidian religion was forbidden religion to the new immigrants as testified in the Vedas, too<sup>6</sup>). The Dravidians in order to escape from the Aryan invaders ran either into the forests (the forest dwellers today known as the tribal people) or far away to the South, as said, beyond the Vindhya and settled on land. However, eventually the native Indians were subjected to the Hindu social order but placed outside the caste system, on the basis of a different racial identity, since the Dravidians are considered to be the “Avarnas,” the colourless (dark). This placement outside the caste system naturally led to the placing of the peoples outside of everything that is enjoyed by the upper-castes.

As time passed, these free natives were subjected to a process of being de-historized, de-culturized, de-economized and above all de-humanized. Everything was decided by the upper-castes: where they should live - outside the village, what they should wear - precisely what they should not wear, how they should speak- using only self dehumanizing language, what they should do - only the most menial ritually polluting tasks<sup>7</sup>), how they should behave - utter slavish, how they should walk - tying a palm leaf to their waist, lest an upper caste stamps on their foot prints and gets polluted, what they should eat - precisely what they should not possess. They are the “Others” the objects of disrespect and maltreatment. Once, a free people

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6) See Rig Veda 7.21.5 and 10. 99. 3.

7) For future reading, M. N. Srinivas, (ed), Caste: its Twentieth century avatar, New Delhi: Viking, 1996.

with a dignified living have gradually become slaves in a dehumanizing system. The hopelessness is that a person is born into a caste and remains within that caste until death.

While the upper castes enjoy the privilege to opt and change their occupation the Dalits are supposed to be confined to the menial jobs assigned to them. The caste system in its “practice relegated millions of people to a lifetime of violence, servitude, segregation, and discrimination, all on the basis of caste”<sup>8)</sup>.

## The Dalits

The untouchables who are outside the caste system were called by several names in history. The upper castes called them “Avarnas”<sup>9)</sup> the colorless. But the colonial British called them “the depressed classes.” When the Indian constitution was being drafted, they were named “Scheduled Castes.” Mahatma Gandhi called them “Harijans.” One people many names! But why are there so many names? Do not these people have their own identity? All these names have been given to them by others. But for the first time Dr. B. R. Ambedkar<sup>10)</sup> who himself belonged to the untouchables appropriated a new name to these people - ‘DALITS’ which means oppressed or broken people. Since then this name has been voluntarily accepted by the outcastes. Today this name gives an identity and this identity becomes an unifying category for all the out-castes, who amount to about one sixth of India’s population.

Dalits have been oppressed throughout the history by the upper-castes. Most Dalits in rural villages are made to live in segregated hamlets, away from the caste Hindus settlements. The Dalits are prevented from owning land or receiving education<sup>11)</sup>, which in itself is a process that checks the

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8) Broken People: Caste violence Against India’s “Untouchables,” Human Rights Watch: New York/Washington/London/Brussels, 1990, 207. Henceforth referred as Broken People. The author is indebted to the materials in this book that have been extensively quoted.

9) In each region of India they are called with different names, for instance in Andhra Pradesh they are called “Malas” and “Madigas,” in Kerala “Parayas,” “Pulayas” and “Kuravas,” in North India with names like “Chamars,” “Mahars” and “Muucchis” and with many other names in each state.

10) Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is the Father of the Indian constitution.



upward mobility of the Dalits. The Dalits, however, “have been forced to continue their occupations as leather workers, disposers of dead animals, or manual scavengers, and to perform other tasks deemed too ritually polluting for upper castes”<sup>12)</sup>. They fall in the last level both socially and economically<sup>13)</sup>.

### ***The Dalit Experience***

In order to have a glimpse at the various ways the Dalits and also the Tribals suffer under the upper-caste degrading treatment, we take a look at the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, enacted in 1989. The prohibitions themselves are an indicative of the treatment meted by the Dalits. The under mentioned Dalit experiences are, however, not just confined to the Act alone.

The Dalits are forced into eating and drinking of inedible or obnoxious substances. They are also made to wash and use separate tea tumblers at the village teashops, in some places coconut shells are given to them to keep them from sharing the tea tumblers used by the upper-castes. On one hand they are not allowed to draw water from public wells and on the other hand their water springs and reservoirs are corrupted and fouled. Their bridegrooms are not permitted to ride a mare, which is *de facto* a marriage tradition in some villages. They are not even allowed to sit on their beds in their own houses when an upper-caste passes by. They are not allowed to wear shoes in the presence of the caste Hindus. They are subjected to forcibly removing their clothes and are paraded naked and some times with painted faces or bodies, a treatment of social shame and degradation. They are made to dispose the dead animals and their hamlets are usually the places where the human excreta, waste matter, carcasses and other poisonous materials are dumped. They are made to dig the village graves. The one employment that is forced upon them and the Tribals is the bonded labor, which has its vicious cycle of almost every member of the family joining the bonded labor because of their poverty, sometimes it continues into generations where the debts are high. This is the inheritance! There is a consistent effort from the side of the upper-castes in making the Dalits and

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11) Broken People, 27.

12) Broken People, 141.

13) Sudhir Hindwan, “Caste iron jacket,” *The Pioneer*, September 9, 1996.

Tribals landless. They are denied the right of passages to a place of worship. As an ongoing tradition in the villages, they are made to render free services at times of deaths, marriages and village celebrations. The upper-castes even take advantages of their dominant social and economic positions to exploit the Dalit and Tribal women sexually.<sup>14)</sup>

### ***Struggle for Justice: State Reservations***

India became a republic by the introduction of the Indian Constitution in the year 1950. The Dalits who are named as the Scheduled Castes, along with the Scheduled Tribes and the Backward Classes were granted reservations in the fields of education and employment. This was the effort by the government of India to correct former injustices done to the people of the lower-castes.

Article 341 of the Indian Constitution does not allow any discrimination on the basis of caste, color or creed. But very soon in the same year after the Constitution of India came into effect, there was a “Presidential Order 1950” released, which stipulates that one needs to belong to the Hindu religion in order to avail the reservations. It was a grave injustice to the Dalits, who belonged to the Sikh, Buddhist, Muslim and Christian faiths. There were demonstrations and appeals to the government of India to do away with the third paragraph of the presidential order, which perpetuates this injustice. The Indian government in 1956 extended the reservations to the Dalits of Sikh religion; later in the year 1990 the same was allowed to the Dalits of the Buddhist religion. While the Dalits of Islam depend on the minority rights and privileges, it is only the Dalit Christians who are left without the Scheduled Caste reservations. Dalit Christians are twice alienated<sup>15)</sup>, once for being Dalits and secondly for being Christians. Dalit Christians have now become the objects of ridicule. Dalit Christians instead

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14) This includes information from “the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) act 1989”; National commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Highlights of the report for the years 1994-95 & 1995-96, New Delhi: Government of India, 1997; and other interviews done by the Human Rights Watch, see: *The Broken People*, 8, 23,25-27 and 85.

15) K. Wilson as a title of his book used the term “Twice Alienated.” He was a former Professor of theology at the Andhra Christian Theological College, and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Osmania, Hyderabad.

of being considered to be the Scheduled Castes, they are taken as “backward classes” and treated as BC-C that is the converted Christians category, but that is not the end of the story, the third generation Christians are no longer considered to be even eligible for the BC-C, they do not belong any more to any category of reservation. This is a very clever constitutional way of depriving life to Dalit Christians. Dalit Christians are still fighting with the Indian Government for equal justice on par with the Dalits of other religions in this area of reservations.<sup>16)</sup>

Missionaries imparted education to at least a few Dalits. Most of these educated Dalits have migrated from the rural villages to the cities in search of employment and got settled in cities and towns. Missionaries hoped that these educated Dalits will be a source for the emancipation of their Dalit brothers and sisters. But this dream of the missionaries has not come true. The educated and employed Dalits usually are not much concerned about their poor Dalit brothers and sisters, who live in abject poverty and slavery subjected to violence from the upper-caste, police, village administration and political parties. In the face of this oppression the many of the urbanized Dalits are proud to say to their unfortunate Dalit brothers and sisters that it is our duty to suffer for our faith!

### ***Curbing Dalit Transformation***

The reservation system has helped some Dalits to get educated and employed. As it has been mentioned above the missionary education has also helped a few Dalits to live liberated life to an extent. Some Dalits have also gone overseas to work in the Middle Eastern countries and have become independent from the upper-castes economically. This, on the one hand and on the other hand the growth of the Dalit movements like that of the Dalit Panthers of India in the 1960s<sup>17)</sup> have contributed to the questioning of the cast oppression of the upper-caste Hindus. Dalit

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16) For more on the Dalit Christians struggle for equal justice, see Vasantha Rao, “Biblical Reflections on the Plight, Fight and Fight of Dalits, in: Moses Paul peter, (ed), *Struggles to Celebrate life*, Bangalore: Student Christian Movement of India, 1998, 16-37

17) For the Activities of the Dalit Movements see: Pendse, Sandeep (ed), *At Crossroads: Dalit Movement today*, Bombay: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 1994, 69-82.

movements have mobilized Dalits under the common Dalit identity to assert themselves economically and to organize themselves politically.<sup>18)</sup>

But the response of the upper-castes has taken an even more ugly turn. Every effort of the Dalits to challenge the social organization of the caste system under which they suffer or defy the upper-caste's domination invites the brutality of the upper-castes. For instance, in April 1998 a Dalit refused to sell country cigarettes to an upper-caste on credit. The upper-castes punished the Dalit by making him to play the role of a cow by forcibly piercing his nose, drawing a string through it, and making him to parade around the village, and then they tied him to a cattle post. The beastly nature of the upper-castes has surfaced in making the Dalit play the role of a beast<sup>19)</sup>. Any independent behavior of the Dalits is immediately curbed by the upper-castes.

The upper-castes cannot tolerate any economic alteration in the poverty stricken Dalits. The upper-castes with the help of the police destroy every symbol of their new economic growth. In December 1995 in Kodiyankulum, Tamil Nadu, the police, in what seems to be a well schemed deliberate assault, destroyed bicycles, tape-recorders, televisions, sewing machines, agricultural tools, tractors, lorries, granaries, educational certificates and many more things that belonged to the Dalits<sup>20)</sup>. The upper-castes even destroyed the crops of the Dalits either manually or by sending their cattle to feed. Many Dalits have only 'title-deeds' to land but are not in possession of their lands. Their land has been either illegally encroached or confiscated on some pretext by the upper-castes<sup>21)</sup>.

Every police raid puts the Dalits ten years back in their progress. Houses are thoroughly searched and things like money, chickens, watches, ornaments, and whatever they could pick up are looted.<sup>22)</sup> The All-India Civil Rights Team reports the police atrocities on Dalits in Bihar in the following way.

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18) Broken People, 9.

19) Indian Express (Bombay edition), April 28, 1998.

20) V. R. Mani, "Center seeks report on the police atrocities on Dalits," The Sunday times of India, December, 3, 1995.

21) About land alienation and land grabbing see: Broken People, 28.

22) Broken People, 4, 76, 79, and 106.

The material seized in this looting is of varied kind, and appears to be aimed at destroying the livelihood of people. Grain or rice stored in the house, all possible utensils, chairs, cots and tables, doorframes, etc., are taken away. Buffaloes were taken away in Uber village in Jehanabad [district, Bihar]. Goats were also taken away in some villages... in Uber, not satisfied with having taken away buffaloes, the police asked the house holders to give them Rs. 100 (US \$ 2.50) a day to feed the buffaloes.<sup>23)</sup>

Dalit women are thrice alienated i.e., they bear the triple burden of caste, class, and gender.<sup>24)</sup> Sexual abuse and other forms of violence against women are used by landlords and the police to inflict political 'lessons' and crush the dissent within the community.<sup>25)</sup> Women are raped by members of the upper-caste, by landlords, and by the police in pursuit of their male relatives.<sup>26)</sup> Dalit female children between the ages of six and eight are inducted into the Devadasi system (divine prostitution)<sup>27)</sup> to serve sex to the Hindu temple priests and devotees in the former times and now to the upper castes.<sup>28)</sup> This system has been the crafty invention of the upper-castes and the Hindu priests to destroy the self-respect of the Dalit women and to keep them under subjugation. Many upper-castes also use the method of keeping Dalit women as concubines to control the Dalit men.<sup>29)</sup>

The upper-castes and the police are ruthless towards the Dalit women. The upper-castes as well as the police raid the Dalit hamlets in midnight with the pretext of searching for arms, rebels and illicit liquor. They rape

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23) All-India civil rights team, "After the Massacre, Findings of an all-India civil rights team," A press release by the All India civil rights team, February, 1998, in: *Broken People*, 81, n. 225.

24) *Broken people*, 2.

25) *Loc. Cit.*

26) *Ibid*, 31.

27) See: Nagendra Kumar Sing, *Divine Prostitution*, New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation 1997.

28) Human Rights Watch interview with Jyothi Raj, Rural Education and Development Society, Bangalore, July, 26, 1998, in: *broken people*, 151, n. 477.

29) The *Arthasastra*, an economic and political treatise in Sanskrit interestingly suggests this method of subjugation of women to control affairs.

Dalit women and indiscriminately kill men, women and children. Invariably in every raid the Dalit hamlets are set on fire. While the women are raped the escaping men are caught and thrown into the fire. One case explains how brutally the Dalit women are killed.

In Nammakal District of Tamil Nadu

A girl was gang-raped, murdered, and then butchered. She belonged to the scavengers' community. The men belonged to the weaving community. They cut off her hand and leg and shaved her. They then cut her head and put a stick into her private parts and then hung her head with stick.<sup>30)</sup>

In another instance in Bihar, an eyewitness describes how Dalit girls were brutally butchered by the upper-castes.

Every one was shot in the chest. I also saw that the panties were torn. One girl was Prabha. She was fifteen years old. She was supposed to go to her husband's house two to three days later. They also cut her breast and shot her in the chest. Another was Manmatiya, also fifteen. They raped her and cut off her breast. The girls were all naked, and their panties were ripped. They also shot them in the vagina. There were five girls in all. All five were raped. All were fifteen or younger. All their breasts were cut off.<sup>31)</sup>

The question why the upper-castes are bent to such heinous and inhuman way of behavior towards the Dalits is answered saying. "Because for them Dalits are nothing. They give more respect to their animals"<sup>32)</sup>

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30) Human Rights Watch interview with TNWF and people's watch, Madras, February, 14, 1998, in: *Broken People*, 113-114, n. 349.

31) Human Rights Watch interview with Surajmani Devi, Jehanabad district, Bihar, February 25, 1998, in: *Broken People*, 61-62, n.147.

32) Human Rights Watch interview with TNWF and people's watch, Madras, February, 14, 1998, in: *Broken People*, 113-114, n. 349.

## **The Upper-Castes-Police-Judiciary-Political Parties-Nexus**

The upper-castes are able to exercise power over the police, area administration, judiciary, and also at the state government level.<sup>33)</sup>

Bhanwari Devi's case is a typical example of the influence of caste basis on the justice system and the inability of lower caste women to obtain redress. It is also a striking example of rape as a weapon of retaliation used to punish and silence women's rights advocates. The nature of the district judge's opinion sounded many alarms, and the case itself was taken up by several women's rights organizations in North India.

Bhanwari Devi joined the Rajasthan Government's Women's Development Programme (WDP), called Sthin, in 1985 ... She reported the marriage of the one-year-old daughter of Ram Karan Gurjar to WDP authorities. The police came to the village and tried to stop the marriage, but the family proceeded with the ceremony in secret. On September 22, 1992, in the presence of her husband, Bhanwari was gang raped by members of the Gurjar family in retaliation for her intervention in the child marriage. Upon approaching the police Bhanwari was told, however, that she was too old and unattractive to merit the attentions of young men.

The trial judge acquitted the accused on the reasoning that "rape is usually committed by teenagers, and since the accused are middle-aged and therefore respectable, they could not have committed the crime. An upper caste man could not have defiled himself by raping a lower-caste woman." Those accused of raping Bhanwari also enjoyed political support. BJP (Bharateeya Janatha Party) leader Kanhaiya Lal Meena reportedly organized a rally in support of the accused. As of February, 1999, Bhanwari was still in court appealing the acquittal.

Bhanwari's case, and in particular the manner in which it was handled by the police and the courts, is not an isolated incident.<sup>34)</sup>

When the police and the judiciary do not want to accept the fact that Bhanwar Devi was raped the 'Doctrine of Denial' is in vogue, because the

cost of knowledge is responsibility. This is the tactic that is employed to shun responsibility leading to only injustice to the Dalits.

Normally when the Dalits go to the police station to report the atrocities of the upper-castes against them, the Dalits are simply driven away from the police station. The police are not willing to register the complaints either because they belong to the same caste or they themselves fear the upper-caste. Even if it comes to the extent of registering the case due to pressure from public and other organizations, the “first information report” (FIR) is manipulated in order not to implicate the upper-castes. The police many a times pacify the Dalits with the promise of reconciliation or compensation. The Police also implicate the Dalits by registering wrong cases against them. Karupaia says:

The police put false cases against us because we organized a procession. They wanted to teach us a lesson. The section 436 charge (mischief by explosive substance) is still pending. One shop was burned but we did not do it. One hundred Thevars (the upper-castes) came behind us in the procession and set fire to a shop on the main road.<sup>35)</sup>

Even when the case is tried in the court of justice, the judiciary is not free from caste affiliations, gender bias, political influences and bribery. The local police biases regarding the case are reflected at the judicial level. Many times a lack of conviction amounts to the judicial corruption.<sup>36)</sup>

The hurdles that are faced by the Dalits at the trial levels are clearly explained by R. Balakrishnan.<sup>37)</sup> He says:

I have studied fifty to sixty cases: invariably the judge concluded that scheduled caste/ scheduled tribe (SC/ST) evidence is not valid because they are an interested party. To attribute a pattern to a community is a prejudice in and of itself. That itself is an atrocity. They do not give

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33) Broken People, 10.

34) *Ibid.*, 176.

35) Human rights watch interview with Karupaia, Murugesan's older brother, Madurai district, Tamil Nadu, February 15, 1998, in: Broken People, 95, n. 280.

36) *Ibid.*, 73, 170, 191-192.

37) R. Balakrishna is the director of the Tamil Nadu chapter of the National Commission for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.



weight to SC/ST evidence, but it is too much to expect evidence from a non - SC/ST when the victim is a Dalit. That is the dichotomy.<sup>38)</sup>

Even when judicial commissions are appointed by the State to investigate into the communal and caste clashes the findings are invariably in favor of the State.<sup>39)</sup>

Dalit children are the most unfortunate ones. Because of the family's poverty children are soon inducted into the bonded labor. They lose their childhood beginning with the harsh life system with oppression all around at a very tender age. If there are Dalit parents, who take keen interest in sending their children to school, the children face caste discrimination right in the school and in their very classroom. Most of the teachers belong to the upper-caste; many times the Dalit children are made to sit in the back of the class room or even outside the classroom. Dalit children often complain about their upper-caste teachers calling them names. Even the Dalit parents, who are interested in their children's education, stop their girl children from going to school after some years for fear of the misbehavior of the upper-castes towards them. When Dalit families are implicated into false cases, children do not attend school since their parents cannot spare money for them because money is used to fight court cases. The aftermath of every raid of the Dalit colony is that children are so terrorized by the police and upper-castes' violence that they are afraid of going to school. They are scared of further reprisals. The police have also harassed children, children have complained that the police kicked them and pulled their ears. The police also arrested Dalit school children. This they do against the law by registering their age as nineteen years. This too hampers the studies of the children.<sup>40)</sup>

The police punish anyone, who questions their actions; students are no exception to that. A teenage student narrates her experience:

It was Sunday, so I was home from school. On the street a twenty-years-old girl named Ladha was arrested. I saw it happen and asked my

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38) Human Rights Watch interview with Balakrishna, Madras, February 13, 1998, in: *Broken People*, 192, n.598.

39) *Broken People*, 124, n. 384.

40) *Broken People*, 2, 23, 26, 69, 76, 97 and 159.

neighbour why they were arresting women. The police shouted, “Karuvachi,” which means black girl. I said, “Don’t call me that.” He started using more vulgar words. He said, “What a bold pallachi (prostitute)!” I pleaded with him not to arrest me. I said, “I have to go to school tomorrow, sir.” They used the same vulgar words. “Why are you pallachis studying?” ... Still I was taken to the police station. Again I was beaten. They pulled off half my sari.<sup>41)</sup>

The words of the police why the Dalits are studying make their intentions quite clear that the upper-castes see education as the most powerful weapon for the transformation of the Dalits. Unfortunately there are some State Governments like the Government of Andhra Pradesh that were planning to privatize education. This only means that the Dalits will never be in a position to afford education. This will be another blow. Dalits without education would mean that the coming generations will be on the way back to square one.

## Conclusion

This is the Dalit experience. The words of the prophet Micah do depict the upper-caste atrocities against the Dalits, his words sound as though directed to the upper-castes saying: Hear, you so-called upper-castes!

It is not for you to know justice?  
 You who hate the good and love the evil,  
 Who tear the skin off from my people,  
 And their flesh off from their bones;  
 Who eat the flesh of my people,  
 And flay their skin off from them  
 And break their bones in pieces,  
 And chop them up like meat in a kettle,  
 Like flesh in a cauldron.<sup>42)</sup>

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41) Human Rights Watch interview with Muniamal, Virudhunagar district, Tamil Nadu, February 15, 1998, in: *Broken People*, 108-109, n. 333.

42) Micah 3:1-3, revised standard version.

Atrocities on the Dalits in Andhra Pradesh are invariably committed by the people belonging to the dominant Reddy caste. News papers carry news of incessant heinous crimes the Reddys commit against the Dalits. Our former Chief Minister late Dr. Y. S. Rajashekar Reddy, who belonged to the same caste, but Christian by faith has moved a motion in the State Assembly to consider the Dalit Christians for the Scheduled Caste reservations on par with the Dalits of other religious professions. The same has been sent to the Central government for further consideration. Dr. Reddy has also established what he called as 'Andhra Pradesh State Christian Minority Finance Corporation.' It is in and through this Corporation Dalit Christians are aided in their education, vocational training and employment. The Corporation also takes up issues concerning Christians with the State and the Central government. It also helps in reviving the Christian hospitals, educational institutions, reconstruction of church buildings, purchase of burial grounds, taking Christians on a Holy Land tour on a subsidized tariff.

This Corporation has become a ray of hope in the lives of the Dalit Christians of the state of Andhra Pradesh. Church Heads and Christians leaders and the respective state Christian Councils need to pressurize the Chief Ministers to establish such State Christian Minority Finance Corporations catering justice to the Dalits Christians in the Indian Sub-Continent. Mean while the struggle to consider the Dalit Christians for the Scheduled Caste reservations continues in the national scenario.

## **Abstract**

In the India-Subcontinent the women's liberation, ecological liberation; and with the specific influence of the black theology and the liberation theology, Dalit theology became a possibility in its particular socio-economic, political and religious context. Human tendencies seem to be universally common and oppression of the weak has been a ubiquitous dynamic showing different faces in different continents and countries. Dalit theology in India stands out with its undergirding principle of pathos, and hermeneutical principle of reading the scripture with the eyes of the poor and oppressed.

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### **Key Words**

Dalit Christian, Justice, sub-continent, caste system, caste reservation, India.