The Church, Marginalised and the Politics of Assertion: A Study of Dalit Christians in Kerala

A thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad
for the award of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Political Science

by
Rennymon K. C.
08SPPH05

Department of Political Science
School of Social Sciences
University of Hyderabad
Hyderabad – 500 046
Telangana, India

March 2018

Department of Political Science
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled **The Church, Marginalised and the Politics of Assertion: A Study of Dalit Christians in Kerala**, submitted by **Mr. Rennymon K C** (**08SPPH05)** for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science, is a record of bonafide work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance. This Dissertation has not been submitted either in part or in full to any other university or institution of learning for the award of any other degree.

Hyderabad
21-03-2018

Dr. BIJU B L
Supervisor

Head
Department of Sociology

Dean
School of Social Science

Department of Political Science

DECLARATION

I, **Rennymon K C (08SPPH05**), hereby declare that the work embodied in this dissertation titled **The Church, Marginalised and the Politics of Assertion: A Study of Dalit Christians in Kerala** submitted under the supervision of **Dr. Biju B L** is a bonafide research work. I also declare that to the best of my knowledge it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other university or institution for the award of any other degree or diploma.

Hyderabad **Rennymon K C**

21-03-2018

The Church, Marginalised and the Politics of Assertion: A Study of Dalit Christians in Kerala

Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor Dr. Biju B. L. for his inspiring guidance and support during the course of my research. Without his support and guidance, the dissertation would not have taken the present form.

Thanks to Dr. K. Y. Ratnam and Dr. George Tharakan for their valuable advice as doctoral committee members.

Thanks to the staff members of IGML (UoH, Hyderabad), SSS Library (MGU, Kottayam), MGU Library (Kottayam), and KNM Library (CDS, Thiruvnanthapuram)

Thanks to Sanalmash for his special love and concern that he showed all the time.

I am grateful to Roopesh, Stuart and Rajesh for their long term friendship, special caring and support.

Thanks are also to Anil, Suresh, Sharath, Subair, Binu, Nayana, Renjini PK, CP, and Paithalen for their long term friendship, special caring and support.

My indebtedness to Chanthu, Abin, Suresh and Vinoj for their special caring and support during my HCU days.

Thanks to Sudheesh, Sreenish, Gupta, Shayju, Manojan, Shafeeque, Greeshma, Amen, Praveena for being my long term friends in HCU.

Special thanks to my friends Vinil, Justin, Dinu, Kaleb, Simon for having discussions with them on my topic.

I have been greatly benefited from the discussions with Joby Mathew during my stay in HCU

My special thanks to Bishop Stephen Vattappara, Bishop Selvadas Promoth, Father Vinayaraj, Father Xavier Cherunellady, and Father John Areeckal for having discussion with them on the topic.

My special thanks also to Shibi Peter, P. O. Peter, T. J. Abraham, C. C. Kunjukochu, V. J. George, Simon John, Jaise Pandanadu, and Sunil Koyilerian for their discussion with me on my topic

Thanks to Josina for her support and being a lovable companion.

My indebtedness to my parents, brother and other members of my family for their affectionate support.

CONTENTS

Introduction **1-20**

Chapter 1: Modern Society and Politics in Kerala: The Background **21-45**

Colonial Kerala

- *Colonial Education System*
- *Activities of the Anglican Christian Missionaries*
- *Socio-Religious Reform Movements*
- *Working Class Movements*
- *Modernisation and land Relations*

The Post-independence Period

Communities and their Organizations

Economic Modernisation in the Post-Independence Period

Communities and the Party System

The Party Left and the New Questions

- *Left and New Social Movements*
- *Left and Dalits*

Dalits and the Modern Values

Chapter 2: Dalits in Kerala Churches **46-79**

History of Christianity in Kerala and Dalits

Christianity in Kerala until 1947: Denominational Divisions

- *Traditional Syrian Churches*
- *Catholic Churches*
- *Protestant Churches (Episcopal)*

A) London Missionary Society (LMS)
B) The Church Missionary Society (CMS)
C) The Basel Evangelical Mission

- *Protestant Churches (Pentecostal and other non-Episcopal)*

  The Role of American Missionaries
  The Role of Natives
  Dalits' Contributions to Pentecostalism in Kerala
  Mainline Pentecostal Churches in the Beginning
  Dalit Christian-Syrian Christian Relation in the early Pentecostal Churches
- *Non-Episcopal Churches other than Pentecostals*

The Churches after 1947 and Dalits

- *Catholic Churches*
- *Episcopal Protestant Churches*
- *Church of South India (CSI)*
- *Church Missionary Society- Anglican Church of India (CMS-ACI)*
- *Believers Eastern Church and Bible Faith Mission*
- *Non-Episcopal Protestant Churches*
- *Mainline Pentecostal Churches*
- *Other Mainline Pentecostal Churches*
- *Independent Pentecostal Churches*
- *Other Non-Episcopal Churches*

Chapter 3: Caste Related Practices within the Church and Dalit Christians **80-102**

Caste Discrimination within the Church

- *The Case of Catholic Church*
- *The Case of Traditional Syrian Christian Churches*
- *The Case of Protestant Churches*

Multiple Methods of Discrimination

A. *The Naming of Dalit Christians by Caste*
B. *Dalit Parishes*
C. *Discrimination during Worship*
D. *Priesthood*
E. *Church Administration*
F. *Representation in Church Institutions*
G. *Matrimonial Matters*
H. *Inter-dining*
I. *Calling by Name and Individual Dignity*

Inter-Religious Marriage and Dalit Christians

Chapter 4: Dalit Christians Engaging the Church **103-137**

Discipline by Church

- *Faith, Belief Systems, and Rituals*

Traditional Social Practices and the Church

- *Caste Discrimination within the Church*
- *Sub-Caste Differences among Dalit Christians*

Dalit Christians Identifying their Problems

- *The Ordinary Church Members*
- *Dalit Christian Leaders and Activists of Organisations*
- *The Case of Church Workers*

Struggle against Caste Discrimination within the Church

Role of Dalit Christian Intellectuals in Resisting Caste Discrimination

Dalit Christians in the Christian Intellectual Collectives

Dalit Christians and the Role of Contextual Theologies

- *Towards an Informal Contextualisation of Theology*

Chapter 5: Social Life of Dalit Christians **138-168**

The Socio-Economic Conditions of Dalit Christians in Kerala

- *Location of Living*

- *Land Ownership*
- *Occupation*
- *Economic Rationality of Dalit Christians*
- *Educational Status of Dalit Christians*
- Caste and Christianity: Social Identity of Dalit Christians
- *Towards a New Social Identity: Dalits Being a Christian Community*
- *Malayalis' Cultural Identity and Dalit Christians*

Caste Discrimination and its Social Implication for Dalit Christians

Sub-Caste Differences among Dalit Christians and its Social Implications

Dalit Christians being the Part of Peer Groups

Engagement with Cultural Sphere

The Church in the Public Life of Dalit Christians

The Church as an Institution in Social Matters

Chapter 6: Engaging Political Sphere: The Church, Politics and Dalit Christians **169-211**

The Caste and Minority Status

The Churches as Pressure Groups

- Syro Malabar Church
- Latin Catholic Church
- The Protestant Churches: CSI and CMS-ACI
- The Pentecostal Churches

Dalit Christians in the Mainstream Political Process

- *Elections: Candidates and Winners*

- *Party Affiliation*
- *The Left and Dalit Christians*

Independent Political Assertion by Dalit Christians

- *Major Dalit Christian Organisations*
- *Unity/Disunity among Dalit Christian Organisations*
- *Dalit Christian Movements and Dalit Christian Struggles*
- *Individuals, Independent Churches and Smaller Groups*
- *Differences among Dalit Christian Movements*

Dalit Christians, Dalit Hindus and Dalit Organisations

- *Dalit Christian and Dalit Hindus: The Conflicts and Cooperation*

Dalit Christians and Dalit Organisations

- *Role of Caste-based Organisations among Dalits*
- *Dalit Christians and Caste-based Organisations I*
- *Dalit Christians and Caste-based Organisations II*
- *The Church and Dalit Organisations*

Conclusion **212-220**

References **221-234**

Originality Report

Abbreviations

AG	- Assemblies of God
AKCHMS	- All Kerala Cheramar Hindu Maha Sabha
AKCS	- All Kerala Cheramar Sangham
BCM	- Bible Church Mission
BFM	- Bible Faith Mission
BJP	- Bharatheeya Janatha Party
BSP	- Bahujan Samaj Party
CDC	- Council for Dalit Christians
CoG	- Church of God
CMS	- Church Missionary Society
CMS-ACI	- Church Missionary Society-Anglican Church of India
CPI (M)	- Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI	- Communist Party of India
CSDS	- Cherama Sambava Development Society
CSI	- Church of South India
CSI-MKD	- Church of South India- Madhya Kerala Diocese
DCUF	- Dravidian Community United Front
DHRM	- Dalit Human Rights Movement
INC	- Indian National Congress
IPC	- Indian Pentecostal Church of God
IPMs	- Independent Pentecostal Movements
IUML	- Indian Union Muslim League
KDF	- Kerala Dalit Federation
KPMS	- Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha
KSS	- Kerala Sambavar Society
LC	- Latin Catholic
LDF	- Left Democratic Front
LMS	- London Missionary Society
MKD	- Madhya Kerala Diocese
MPMs	- Mainstream Pentecostal Movements
NCDC	- National Council for Dalit Christians
NSS	- Nair Service Society
OBC	- Other Backward Communities
OEC	- Other Eligible Communities
OX/OBX	- Other X’ians/Other Backward X’ians
PRDS	- Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha
RCSC	- Roman Catholic Syrian Christian
SC	- Scheduled Caste
SDAC	- Seventh Day Adventist Church
SJPS	- Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham
SNDP Yogam	- Sree Narayan Dharma Paripalana Yogam
ST	- Scheduled Tribe
TPM	- The Pentecostal Mission
UDF	- United Democratic Front
UPC	- United Pentecostal Church
WME	- World Missionary Evangelism

Introduction

Dalit Christians in Kerala constitute a marginalised group like all other Dalits. They have been struggling against caste-based discrimination and fighting for social justice for long. This study explores the social life of Dalit Christians in Kerala and their politics of assertion. Though the socio-economic condition of Dalits in Kerala is better than any other Dalits in any other states in the country, they are also suffering from many socio-economic problems. The case of Dalit Christians is different from that of Dalit Hindus. Dalit Christians are discriminated by the Church, society and the state. They are sometimes discriminated even by Dalit Hindus. It means that though both Dalit Christians and Dalit Hindus face similar problems, there are differences also.

Dalits being Christians

The term 'Dalit' means crushed, broken, downtrodden etc. The term was first used in Hindi and Marathi language in the 1930s as a translation of 'Depressed Classes', the term the British used for referring the social groups now called as Scheduled Castes. B. R. Ambedkar also used the word in his Marathi speeches (Webster 1999: 68). Jyotirao Phule (1827-1890) in his reformatory attempts to work for *dalituthan*, that is, the upliftment of Dalits or the downtrodden of Indian society used the term 'Dalit' for the first time. B. R. Ambedkar (1891-1956), though, did not popularise the word Dalit; his philosophy remained central to the emergence of the term Dalit. The term began to appear more frequently in the public discourse since the 1960s (Louis 2007: 3-4). The term 'Dalit' first used in journalistic writings as far back as 1931 to connote the untouchables, did not gain currency until the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra incorporated into the political vocabulary (Michael 1999a: 12). The Dalit Panthers Movement defined the term in its Manifesto in 1973:

> "Members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women, and all those who are being exploited politically, economically, and in the name of religion" (Manifesto of Dalit Panthers Movement 1973).

Now the term is not used as a broader as it was by the Panther Movement. It mainly denotes the ex-untouchable castes. For instance, the tribes are not Dalits because they did not have experience of untouchability as a caste practice. Those who were considered as untouchables in the past, and known as depressed classes and Harijans in during colonial period are termed as Dalits today. "Dalit" refers to one's caste rather than class; it applies to members of those menial castes, which have born the stigma of "untouchability" because of the extreme

impurity and pollution connected with their traditional occupations (National Commission for Dalit Human Rights). Webster concludes that it is the caste; and not religion or class that determine who a Dalit is. He says, "Caste alone has determined who is a Dalit, not class or religion. Social stigma and a variety of disabilities were based on caste; there were and, to a significant degree still are the defining characteristics of a Dalit, even if a Dalit moves up in social class or changes religion" (Webster 1999: 76-77). Michael says,

> 'Dalit', is now being used by the low castes in a spirit of pride and militancy. The name 'Dalit' is not merely a rejection of the very idea of pollution or impurity or 'untouchability'; it reveals a sense of unified class or a movement towards equality. It speaks of a new stage in the movement of India's Untouchables which is now a century old. Dalit self-assertion manifests itself today in a debate on several contrapositions (Michael 1999a: 27-28)

The term 'Dalit Christians' denote those who are converted to Christianity from the ex-untouchables or the people who are known as Scheduled Castes. In this sense, they are known as 'Scheduled Caste Christians' or 'Converted Christians from Scheduled Castes' also. Concisely the term 'Dalit Christians' mean those Christians who are Dalits by birth. Christian churches began to use the term 'Dalit' for Scheduled Castes at the end of the 1970s and in the early 1980s. The concept and category of 'Dalit Christians' and the slogan 'Dalit is dignified' were formulated by the Christian Dalit Liberation Movement in 1985 (Michael 2010: 54). It is estimated that out of the 20 million Christians in India, comprising 2.3 percent of the total population, nearly 70 percent, that is, 14 million are Dalits (Louis 2007: 7-8). Christianization of Dalits has been continuing for many centuries. However, another fact is that the conversion to Christianity has come to a halt after independence (Louis 2007: 16).

Dalit Christians in Kerala

It is a challenging task to understand the socio-economic and political situation of Dalit Christians in Kerala. It is very difficult to get a correct idea about their numerical strength in the state. They belong to various denominations and caste groups. Another difficulty is that in most of the churches some of its members are Hindus (i. e., Scheduled Castes) as per government records. In Kerala, the state government has created a separate development corporation in 1980 (Kerala State Development Corporation for Christian Converts from Scheduled Castes and the Recommended Communities Ltd.) for Dalit Christians. Even this corporation does not have adequate and reliable data about the strength of Dalit Christians in the state. The corporation collects the data from the various churches. The data given by the churches may not be accurate. Every Church tries to inflate their

number. Another thing is that some small churches are not well organised and they are unable to maintain a proper communication link with this corporation. Therefore, the number of believers of these churches is unknown to the corporation. Many churches may face divisions, which makes it difficult for the corporation to enumerate the distribution of Dalit Christians in each of them. This kind of division is more among the Pentecostals. In the case of Pentecostal Churches, more than hundreds of divisions are there.

Dalit Christians constitute a heterogeneous group in Kerala. The caste and sub-caste difference among them is a significant factor in this regard. Moreover, there are denominational differences and the subsequent theological and ideological variations among the Churches. Being Christians, they are discriminated by the Church, society and the state and sometimes even by the Scheduled Castes. Even though they are Dalits, they are not getting any preferential treatment from the government comparable to the Scheduled Castes (SCs). The governments do not consider them as SCs, but only as Other Backward Castes (OBCs). It seems that the Dalit Christians in Kerala are facing an identity crisis. They are treated neither as 'real' Christians by the Syrian Christians nor as 'real' Dalits by some Scheduled Caste groups. The economic condition of Dalit Christians is almost similar to that of Dalit Hindus. In the institutions owned by the churches, they are getting jobs very rarely. The churches in which the Dalits are in the majority (hereafter, Dalit Churches) have no schools, colleges, and hospitals. Apart from this, these churches have little capacity to influence the political system in Kerala because of many reasons.

Sub-Caste Differences among Dalit Christians in Kerala

The sub-caste difference among Dalit Christians is similar to that of Dalit Hindus. There is no difference between both of them in this regard. Dalits themselves discriminate and differentiate each other along caste and sub-caste line. Dalit Christians in Kerala comprised of various castes like *Pulayas*, *Parayas*, *Siddhanars*, *Kuravas*, *Aiyanavas*, *Vettuvas* etc. Out of all these caste groups, *Pulayas* and *Parayas* are numerically the dominant groups. Majority of the Dalit Christians in Kerala are *Pulayas*. Sub-caste differences are prevailing among them. The *Kizhakka Pulayas* (Eastern *Pulaya*s) and *Padinjara Pulayas* (Western *Pulaya*s) are the two Pulaya sub-castes. The Church has nothing to do with the sub-caste system among Dalit Christians. It is reflected in the social life of Dalit Christians, i.e., mainly in their marriage alliance, and less in religious life. However, the

Church has a role in the caste divisions among the believers. The study attempts to know how it affects the Church affairs.

Dalit Christians as a Special Category

Though the caste is the most important common cause of the problems of all Dalits, there are some other factors, which make the Dalit Christians' case different from Dalit Hindus. These factors are complicated to trace out for a detailed analysis. The role of Church becomes essential here. The Church appears as a modern institution to Dalit Christians, and it disciplines their socio-religious life. Despite the role of the Church, the socio-economic life of Dalit Christians has not become so different from that of Dalit Hindus. It means that the socio-economic conditions that both Dalits and Dalit Christians share in their life are more critical for Dalit Christians than their difference from Dalit Hindus based on religion. However, at the same time apart from caste, religious status also becomes a reason for the marginalisation of Dalit Christians. Since they are Christians, they are not eligible for any special entitlement, which is available to Dalit Hindus.

The Context of the Study

The conversion of Dalits to Protestant Christianity was a significant incident in the social life of Dalits in colonial Kerala. There is a view among the scholars and the public that Dalits embraced Christianity in pursuit of social justice in the nineteenth century. Though there are views against this argument, the response of Dalits through conversion against the caste discrimination and injustice is also meaningful. It is a fact that the conversion has made some changes in the religious life of Dalits, though it could not succeed in reducing their socio-economic sufferings. After the conversion, their status in the larger society outside the religious community has not changed substantively. Even within the churches, their caste became a reason for their discrimination.

In addition to Christianity, the socio-religious reform movements since the late nineteenth century also became instrumental in improving the social life of Dalits. The movements had a tremendous impact on all the marginalised groups of people in Kerala. Colonial modernity has a significant role in shaping and forming the socio-religious reform movements. Administrative systems in the colonial period also were compelled to address the problems of the marginalised social groups who were rising and formed organisations.

In the post-independent period, the group-based mobilisation inherited from the colonial period became politically more active in influencing the state politics in Kerala. It produced a polarised political system with an enhanced scope for group-based bargaining vis-à-vis the state for the particular benefits. In such a system, the random and less privileged social groups become less capable of influencing the politics. It rightly informs why the Dalit Christians in Kerala constitute a marginalised group of Dalits. They are numerically small, organisationally weak and politically disempowered.

Dalit Christians face discrimination within the churches, which in effect increases the gravity of discrimination in social life. Therefore, Dalit Christians struggle against caste-based discrimination within the churches and in society. The struggle by Dalit Christians for social justice overlaps the spaces of Church and the society. That means the struggle against caste discrimination within the Church is a necessary part of their fight for justice in the broader social realm.

Even though the Dalits received some attention in the programmes of different political parties in Kerala, in comparison with other social groups the political parties hardly regard them as a powerful pressure group. They are in search for due recognition from the governments and political parties to their identity and problems. The political parties ignored the specific group identity and the nature of demands of Dalit Christians. This neglect is evident in the party system. It is in this context that the Dalit Christians make serious efforts to articulate their political interests and try to become politically assertive.

Statement of the Problem

The Church enables the Dalit Christians to create a space of their own within the social system of Kerala. However, within the Church Dalits are discriminated on their caste background and this, in turn, limits their space both within the Church and society. They fight the Church while being the part of it, and seek a shared space for all Dalits in the larger society outside the Church cutting across the barriers of caste and religion. Within both the Church and the broader socio-political milieu outside the Church, they try to articulate demand and register their protests. All of these constitute the politics of assertion of Dalit Christians.

Objectives

The study inquires into the politics of assertion of Dalit Christians in Kerala against the caste discrimination within the Church and their socio-economic marginalisation within the larger society. The specific objectives of the study are as follows.

1. To analyse the relation between caste discrimination against Dalit Christians within the Church and their socio-economic marginalisation within the larger society outside the religion.

2. To analyse how both Dalits and Dalit Christians are historically marginalised, and how different from the case of the Dalits, the caste is reproduced in the case of Dalit Christians.

3. To analyse how Dalit Christians are articulating their political interest and assert themselves through their engagement with the Church, society and polity.

Review of Literature

The literature on Dalits in Kerala are plenty in number in English and vernacular language. However, there are very few studies on Dalit Christians. Many of the works on Dalit Christians, which are available in English, are mainly theological explorations. Social science research on this group is very minimum.

Dalit Christians in the Pan Indian Context

Many of the studies on Dalit Christians situate their problems in a pan Indian context. There are some books, articles, working papers, and study reports available on this. Most of the works focus on socio-economic conditions of Dalit Christians, caste discrimination within the Church and their demands regarding reservation. Some are focusing on theology. There is very less literature dealing with the politics of assertion of Dalit Christians. The particular situation of Dalit Christians in Kerala receives very little focus in such studies.

Two recent works *Dalit Christians in India*, edited by R. R. Patil and James Dabhi and *Margins of Faith: Dalit and Tribal Christianity in India*, edited by Rowena Robinson and Marianus Kujur are the collection of essays on Dalit Christians. Apart from the articles, which deal with the common issues of Dalit Christians in a larger Indian context, some are

also focusing on the particular cases of Dalit Christians living in states of India. However, Kerala's case is absent.

Some of the articles in the two books mentioned above are relevant for a review for the general problems of Dalit Christians in India. T. K. Oommen's 'India's Religious Minorities and State Policy' tries to analyse the socio-economic issues of Dalits Christians and their socio-political rights, especially their status as a minority religious group, reservation and their demand for inclusion in the Scheduled Caste category. He explores how the state discriminates Dalit Christians. He states that while denying Scheduled Caste status to Dalit Christians on the ground of religion, the state discounts their occupation and caste. James Massey's essay 'An Analysis of Dalit Christian Issue with Special Reference to 1950 Presidential Order' (2010) tries to sketch the historical background of reservation during the colonial period. He explains how the Indian state denied reservation to Dalit Christians through the Presidential Order in 1950. Vincent Manoharan and Patton Burchett discuss in their 'Dalit Christians and the Struggle for Scheduled Caste (SC) Status' how the denial of SC status to Dalit Christians become a human rights violation than a political and social issue.

S. M. Michael's 'Dalit Encounter with Christianity: Change and Continuity' (2010) study the situation of the Dalit Christians and their struggle for equality in different parts of the country and gives a detailed analysis of their discrimination by the Church, society and the state. This study gives a review of various Reports of the Government Commissions on Dalit Christians also. Jose Daniel's 'Towards Ending Apartheid Policy against the Dalits in India' also says that Dalits are facing discrimination from three sources and based on two grounds - by the state for they are Christians and by the Church and society for they are Dalits. James Dabhi in his 'Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin: Social and Psychological Perspective' discusses the discrimination of Dalit Christians and their continued marginalisation as a social group. Dabhi argues that their socio-economic condition is similar to that of Scheduled Castes, and in some cases, their situation is worse because they are not covered by the social security schemes of the governments on par with the SCs. They cannot get the protection of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. Praveen P. S. Perumalla's 'Christian Dalit Identity Denied' (2010) deals with the Identity question of Dalit Christians. He says that they are denied a Christian identity due to their caste and Dalit identity due to their religion. He says that Dalit Christians live under the Indian constitutional

authority and at the same time under the ecclesiastical authority. Both fail to deliver justice to them.

There are works which focus on the discrimination on the part of the state towards Dalit Christians. M.S.S. Pandian's, 'State, Christianity and Scheduled Castes' (1985) is one in this regard. Prakash Louis also in his 'Dalit Christians: Betrayed by State and Church' discusses the discrimination by the Church and the state.

Satish Deshpande and Geetika Bapna in their study report *Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities: A Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge* tries to say that Dalit Christians are facing marginalisation in every sense and their socio-economic status is almost same or more deplorable than the Dalit Hindus. The report gives in detail the socio-economic conditions of Dalit Christians with statistics. Though the report tries to address the problems of Indian Dalits Christians in general, there are some specific remarks on Dalit Christians of Kerala also.

Prakash Louis's *Caste-Based Discrimination and Atrocities on Dalit Christians and the Need for Reservations* also tries to say that Dalit Christians are discriminated both by the Church and the state and they deserve caste-based reservation, which is available to Scheduled Castes. He justifies the point citing the similarity of both in socio-economic status. Besides explaining the caste-based discrimination within and outside the Church and Dalit Christians' identity problem, Sobin George's *Dalit Christians in India: Discrimination, Development Deficit, and the Question for Group-Specific Policies* looks into the status conflict among the Dalit Christians. He prepared a socio-economic profile of Dalit Christians, and explores the data about their demography, development, education, occupation and poverty situations at all India level. Rowena Robinson's *Christian Communities in India: A Social and Historical Overview* presents a historical and contemporary profile of Dalit Christians in India. The paper considers them as a distinctive group by focusing on in their relationship with the state and other communities rather than treating them as a minority religious group.

Some of the research works available on Dalit Christians also deal with the caste-based and religion-based discrimination faced by Dalit Christians in particular states. K. Rajya Lakshmi in *Minority within a Minority: Aspirations and Experiences of Dalit Christians in India* (2014) discusses the plight of Dalit Christians in Andhra Pradesh as a

powerless group due to their caste status. Ria De in her MPhil thesis, *Developing the Dalit Christian: Identity, Discourse and the State* (2010) analyses the Dalit Christian identity by locating the group within the interplay of governmental machinery and developmental discourses.

Another important theme of studies on Dalit Christians is Dalit theology. Dalit theologians try to address the question of Dalit Christians by focusing on the liberating aspects of their politics than narrating their socio-economic condition. *A Reader in Dalit Theology* (1991), edited by A. P. Nirmal is one of such volumes in this regard. It is a collection of articles by some eminent theologists. They try to interpret and re-read Bible in the context of the marginalised by drawing upon the liberating messages of the Bible. Criticising liberation theology and other classical Indian theologies, Nirmal says that Dalit theology wants to emphasise that at the heart of the Dalit people's experience is *pathos* or suffering. He again says that the question of Dalit theology is linked with the identity of Dalits. Briefly, Dalit theology is an effort to reread, understand and interpret Bible in the context of Dalits in India. M. E. Prabhakar, V. Devasahayam, A. M. Abraham Ayrookkuzhiel and some other important theologians contributed to this volume on the subject. *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India* (1998) by Sathianathan Clarke, and *Theology and Dalit Liberation: Problems, Paradigms and Possibilities* (2010) by Peniel Rajkumar are the two well-known works regarding theological explorations into the Dalit question. Some PhD theses were also on this topic. Vincent Manoharan John Packianathan's *Towards a Practical Dalit Theology: A Study on the Status and Relevance of Dalit Theology among Grass Roots Dalit Christians in their Struggle against Caste Oppression* (2012), a PhD Thesis from University of Birmingham is an example.

John C. B. Webster has some critical studies on Dalit Christians in India in a larger Indian context. Different from many of the works discussed above, his writings raise certain political questions from a different perspective. K. Wilson's work also deserves special mention here. He also takes the problem of Dalit Christians to a different dimension and raises the question of affirmation. Besides explaining the problems of Dalit Christians with reference to their socio-economic conditions and demands for reservation, these two scholars have brought to the attention many other important dimensions of the Dalit Christian life and politics.

John C. B. Webster's *The Dalit Christians: A History* (1992) gives a general picture of Indian Dalit Christians focusing on their presence in Christian Churches, the impact of missionary Christianity on Dalit movements, caste discrimination within the Church and the reservation issues. Though there are some remarks about Dalit Christians in Kerala based on secondary literature, the study mainly focuses on the Dalit Christians living in Punjab and Andhra Pradesh. It looks at the issue of reservation for Dalit Christians historically. He says in his 'The Dalit Situation in India Today' (2001) that as part of the struggle for dignity, equality, justice and respect, Dalits have adopted four strategies, singly or in combination. Out of these, the fourth one is religious. Over the past 125 years, so many Dalits have converted to Christianity, and today the majority of the Christian population of India is Dalits. He highlights the importance of Dalit identity and Dalit theology as a way of assertion, and their critical stand to help the Dalits in their fight against 'Brahmanic Indianisation' of the Church. In another article 'Who is a Dalit?' (1999) Webster tries to conceptualise the category of Dalit and extend this to the group of Dalit Christians.

K. Wilson's *The Twice Alienated: Culture of Dalit Christians* is also a book having a broader scope in dealing with the problems of Dalit Christians. Rather than focusing on Dalit Christians' socio-economic life, he tries to emphasise on their assertion and self-respect both within the Church and society. He justifies the re-reading and reinterpretation of the Bible in the context of Dalits as an essential requirement in strengthening their movement for a political assertion.

Dalit Christians in Kerala (Writings in Malayalam)

Though limited in number, there are works about Dalit Christians, written in the vernacular language. Of the available literature on Dalit Christians in Kerala, the works deal with the socio-political assertion is more in number than those describing their socio-economic conditions. The important themes of the literature are caste discrimination within the Church, their struggle against caste discrimination, caste question of Dalit Christians, reservation issues, identity question, and the struggle for socio-political rights.

One of the most important works on the history of Dalit Christians in Kerala is *Dalit Chraisthavar Keralathil* (Dalit Christians in Kerala) written by Paul Chirakkarode. He was a Dalit activist engaged in the socio-political issues of Dalit Christians. While sketching the history Chirakkarode emphasise on the caste discrimination within the Church. It gives a detailed account of Dalit Christian struggles for socio-political rights against the Church and

the state. This book also gives a brief account of different Dalit Christian movements in Kerala also. A limitation of the book is an exclusive focus on Dalit Christians living in the central regions of Kerala. It pays only insufficient attention to the social group living in other parts of the state. Stanley Patrick's book *Malabarile Dalit-Dalit Kraisthava Charithravum Varthamanavum* (The History and Present of Dalits and Dalit Christians in Malabar) analyses the socio-political issues of both Dalit Hindus and Dalit Christians in Malabar (northern part of Kerala). It is the only study about Dalit Christians living outside central Kerala.

Some of the writings are biographical and autobiographical. The biography of Pampady John Joseph written by T.H.P. Chentharassery (1989) is an important reference. Pampady John Joseph, a Dalit leader, worked for the upliftment of both Dalit Christians and Dalit Hindus. In this biography, Chentharassery mainly narrates the life and activities of John Joseph. He also gives an account of the Dalit Christian movements started from the late colonial period. Since there are very few detailed accounts of Dalit Christian movements of the colonial period, some of the autobiographies/biographies are becoming very helpful.

V. D. John, a Dalit leader, in his autobiography, *Ente Jeevithavum Kalavum* (My Life and Time), describes the socio-economic and political problems of Dalit Christians in Kerala and their struggle for social justice. He says how Dalit Christians are discriminated by both the Church, state and political parties. This book gives the details of struggles and protests by the Dalit Christians within the Church and their agitation against the governments. He discusses in detail the strategy and mode of operation of various Dalit Christian movements. The book also helps to look at the degree of collaboration between Dalit Hindus and other backward caste groups. Biography of another Dalit activist, Kallara Sukamaran written by Elikkulam Jayakumar also explains in detail the instances of unity and cooperation between the Dalits of Hindu and Christian religions in the history of Dalit movement in Kerala.

Sanal Mohan in his article -*'Vimochana Samaravum Keraleeya Civil Samoohathinte Adheeshavalkkaranavum* ('Liberation' Struggle and the Hegemonisation of Kerala Civil Society) - shows a critical instance of the political polarisation between the Syrian Christians and the Dalit Christians in Kannur during the liberation struggle against the Communist government (1958-59). He gives an account of the physical violence unleashed by the Syrian Christians (who led the liberation struggle) against Dalit Christians for their support to communists.

'Dalithar Vimochana Pathayil' (Dalits on the Road to Liberation) (1988), a book edited by K. M. Chacko, P. T. Thomas and M. Kurian, is a collection of essays written by Dalit Christian activists and Church workers. Most of the essays focus on contemporary issues of Dalit Christians in Kerala. K. M. Chacko's 'Dalit Chraisthavarodulla Vivechanam Samoohathilum Rashtrathilum' (1988) (The Discrimination against the Dalit Christians in Society and Politics) explores how Dalit Christians are discriminated within the Church based on their caste background and by the state on their religious background. Simon John's 'Dalit Chraisthavarkkethire Vivechanam Sabhayil' (Discrimination against Dalit Christians within the Church) also criticises the discriminatory attitude in the appointment of candidates in the institutions run by the Church. Its focus is the conflict between the Dalits and Syrian Christians in the Madhya Kerala Diocese of Church of South India is the focus of the book. He also gives an account of Dalit Christians' membership in various Churches in Kerala.

K. J. Jacob's 'Dalit Samarangal Innale, Innu, Nale' (Dalit Struggles: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow) gives an account of the struggle of Dalit Christians in Kerala from the colonial period. It covers the struggle of Dalit Christians both within the Church and against the government.

Kaviyoor K. C. Raj in his book *Chennaykkalude Idaayile Kunjadukal* (Sheeps among the Wolves) critically examines the caste discrimination against the Dalit Christians by Syrian Christians of the Madhya Kerala Diocese of Church of South India (hereafter CSI-MKD). The inequality between the two groups in controlling the resources and property of the church gains central attention in this book. The two volumes of *CMS Sabha Charithram* (The History of C. M. S. Church) (1989) written by Bishop Stephen Vattappara also deals with the same issue. It describes the caste-based conflicts within CSI's Central Kerala Diocese and the formation of CMS-ACI causing a split and the formation of a Dalit Church in 1966. T. M. Yesudasan's *Baliyadukalude Vamshavali: Separate Administration Movementinte Vamshavum Avirbhavavum* (The Genealogy of Scapegoats: Origin and Evolution of Separate Administration Movement) (2010) also deals with the same issue focusing on the protest of Dalits within CSI-MKD against the caste discrimination.

There is some literature specific to particular churches also. The above said two works focus on the problems in the CSI church. Raison V. George in his book *Charithra Vazhikalil Daiva Sabha* (Church of God in the Routes of History) (2018) gives an account of the bifurcation of a Pentecostal church. He says how caste-based discrimination by the Syrian Christians led to

the bifurcation of the church for the two social groups. The author looks at the problem from a Dalit perspective.

Kerala Penthekosthu Charithram (Kerala Pentecostal History) (1994), written by Saju, gives a comprehensive history of the emergence and growth of Pentecostal Churches in Kerala. It is not sharing a Dalit perspective, but highly critical about the caste related problems within the Pentecostal Churches and the caste discrimination faced by the Dalits within the Church.

There are some Dalit Churches in Kerala. However, all of them in their official history may not highlight the problems of caste. For example, *Kerala Raksha Sainya Charithram: Porattathinte Nooru Varshangal (1896-1996)* (Malayalam) (History of the Salvation Army in Kerala: Hundred Years of Struggle, 1896-1996) (1998), hardly makes any direct remark on Dalits' problem. Interestingly, great majority believers of this church are Dalits. In the same way, *Bharathathile Daiva Sabhakal: Samkshiptha Charithram* (Churches in India: An Abridged History) (2001), written by K. A. Ipe, is also helpful in understanding the growth of independent Pentecostal movements among Dalits. However, the author hardly pays attention to the role of Dalit Pentecostals in spreading the faith and building the church. Pastor C. S. Mathew's work, *Mochanathinte Soorya Mukham* (Sunny Face of Liberation) (1999) and his biography written by Vijoy Skaria are giving a more detailed account of the emergence and growth of one of the important Dalit churches in Kerala. However these writing also hardly problematise the Dalit question.

P. Sanal Mohan and Vinil Baby Paul in their book *Viswasavum Vimochanavum: Kaippatta Habel* (Faith and Liberation: Kaippatta Habel) gives an account of the conversion of Dalits into Protestant Christianity in the second half of 19th century. Based on this, they try to bring out the significance of the first Dalit convert to Christianity as an icon for the Dalit Christians and their assertion.

The researcher also reviewed some of the poems, novels and short stories by Dalit Christians in Kerala. (more details are in the chapters). Among the literary works, Vinil Paul's devotional song depicts the social stigma of the Dalits. *Manchadikkariyude Kadha* (2003) (The Story of Manchadikkari) by the same author describes the socio-economic life of Dalit Christian villagers in a historical perspective.

Dalit Christians in Kerala (Writings in English)

There are some studies, which critically evaluate the implications of caste practices within the Church for the socio-religious life of Dalit Christians. *Caste in Kerala Churches* (1968) written by Ninan Koshy is an important study in this regard. The book with the help of some cases explains the attitude of Syrian Christians and backward class Christians towards Dalit Christians. K. C. Alexander in his article *Caste and Christianity in Kerala* (1971) also deal with a similar theme. Its focus is the caste discrimination against the Dalit Christians by the Syrian Christians in the social milieu. *The Neo-Christians of Kerala* (1972) by the same author also gives a detailed picture of the socio-economic conditions of Dalit Christians and their unequal relationship with Syrian Christians. A comparison of the socio-economic status of the two groups presented in the study reveals the gap. In another article, *The Problem of Caste in the Christian Churches of Kerala* (1977) K. C. Alexander gives a detailed account of caste practices among various Christian denominations. Apart from the influence of caste among the Syrian Christians he also brings to the attention the problems of Dalit Christians especially their family life, habits, faith, and even dress pattern as a reason for the polarisation between the two social groups.

C. J. Fuller in an article, *Kerala Christians and the Caste System* (1976) examines many dimensions of caste among Christians in Kerala. He explores caste among Syrian Christians in detail. He finds out the pollution based on caste and the ideology of Christian castes. Fuller gives a comparative analysis of caste practices among Christians and Hindus in Kerala. He says that the Christians of Kerala divided into Syrian, Latin and New Christian groupings, have the status of three caste groups. It also reflects in their relationship. The study is based on fieldwork in the erstwhile central Travancore region of Kerala (now the part of central Kerala).

Joseph Tharamangalam in *Caste among Christians in India* (1997) also classifies the Christians of Kerala into three caste groups - Syrian Christians, equal in status to Hindu 'upper' castes; the Latin Catholics equal to OBCs; and lastly the New Christians (*Puthu Kristhyanikal* in Malayalam) or Dalit Christians. This resembles the view of Fuller.

P. G. Abraham in *Caste and Christianity: A Pentecostal Perspective* (2003) gives an account of the practice of caste discrimination among Pentecostals. This work provides some empirical data and argues that Syrian Christians keep caste prejudices against Dalits within

the Church at various levels stretching from personal and family relations to Church affairs and administration.

There are some research studies on Dalit Christians of Kerala, which explored various aspects of the socio-religious life of Dalit Christians. Reju George Mathew in his study *Dalit Engagement with Missionaries and Syrian Christianity: A Study of Caste, Conversion and Modernity in Kerala* (2014) mainly discusses the history of the conversion of Dalits into Christianity and their engagement with missionaries, Syrian Christians and modernity. Apart from this, the work also looks at Dalit Christians' contemporary assertion within the Church. He locates their problems related to status within the social structure of Kerala. He mainly analyses their struggles within the Church and tries to enquire how they like to represent themselves in literary works. He brings it in contrast with their representation in the literary works by others. As part of enquiring their contemporary engagement, he tries to say how they engage with Dalit theology also. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the contemporary challenges that Dalit Christianity has to encounter. He discusses the threat of violence, discriminations and massacres from various Hindu right-wing organisations against Dalit Christians in India. However, it is not a fieldwork-based study, and it mainly depends on literary works and secondary literature. The importance of this work is that it tries to understand the contemporary socio-political life of Dalit Christians, by looking at their literary and artistic expressions.

Jestin T. Varghese in his M. Phil. dissertation *Between Faith and Self-Affirmation: The Problems of Dalit Liberation in the Church* (2012) deals with the issues within CSI-MKD focusing on the movement of Dalits in protest against caste discrimination and their self-assertion. Yesunatha Das in his study *An Evaluation of the History of Pentecostal Dalits in Kerala* (2001) makes an effort to write a history of Pentecostalism in Kerala from a Dalit perspective. He is criticising the Syrian Christians' way of writing the church history.

Simon K. John in his study *The Origin and Development of the Pentecostal Churches among the Dalits in Kerala: A Critical Evaluation of the Missionary Methods of Robert F. Cook (1913-1950)* (2005) points out an important difference between the Anglican Christian missionaries and Pentecostals in propagating Christian faith among the lower castes. While the former group was aiming at both material and spiritual wellbeing of Dalits, Pentecostals' mission (mainly that of Robert Cook) was mainly spiritual. It is a reason for the difference in the social and political consciousness of the converts belonging to Pentecostal and other

Protestant churches. Rennymon K. C. in his study *Engaging Civil Society from the Margins: Dalits in Independent Pentecostal Movements in Kerala* (2007) says that Dalit Pentecostals are averse in addressing the social problems they are facing, and they think that doing so is like indulging in worldly affairs. Moses Swamidas' work, *Conversion and Reconversion in India: A Study of the Experience of Dalit Christians in the Context of the Ministry of the Bible Faith Mission* (2001) gives an account of the Dalit Christians within the Bible Faith Mission.

Sara Abraham's study *An Ethnographic Study of Violence Experienced by Dalit Christian Women in Kerala State, India and the Implications of this for Feminist Practical Theology* (2003) becomes important because there is no other research study on Dalit Christian women.

Dalit theology has its religious and social implications for the assertion of Dalit Christians. However, in Kerala, there are only a limited number of works available on Dalit theology. Y. T. Vinayaraj's *Reimagining Dalit Theology: Post Modern Readings* (2008) and *Revisiting the Other: Discourses on Post Modern Theology* (2010) are the important ones. He says that the liberal humanist agenda of the western enlightenment project framed the theoretical and theological basement of the universal Christian mission in the modern period. Christianity is mainly an evangelical religion for almost all Dalits from the Protestant Churches than a theology-based religion. If this is a fact, it becomes a reason for the Dalits in Kerala Churches becoming incapable of looking at their Church and theology from the vantage point of their social identity. His latest work is *Dalit Theology after Continental Philosophy* (2016).

M. Stephen in his article *An Ethical Critique of Pentecostal Spirituality in India* (2002) is criticising of the Pentecostal theology for its reluctance to the politicisation of Dalit Christians. One of the issues of Faith Theological Review (2006 January) (a journal of Faith Theological Review) edited by M. Stephen is exclusively on Dalit theology. Thomas Manoj and P. Sunny are the other contributors to this volume. Thampi Manarcadu criticises Bible in the context of Dalits. His book, *Suvisheshathinte Puthiya Pariprekshyangal* (2011) (The New Connotations of Gospel), is essential in this regard.

The literature to explore the socio-economic conditions of Dalit Christians in Kerala is very less in number. P. Sivanandan's writings give some data regarding the socio-economic conditions of Dalit Christians. He says in *Economic Backwardness of Harijans in Kerala* (1976) that the economic situation of the Dalit Christians is no way different from that

of the Scheduled Castes. He says that in social development and distribution of social and economic opportunities is highly unequal for different social groups and there is a sharp difference between Dalits and others. In *Caste, Class and Economic Opportunity in Kerala: An Empirical Analysis* (1979), Sivanandan presents data regarding the income, landholding, education, and employment of Dalit Christians. He tries to analyse economic opportunity of various communities. He makes an inter-community comparison also. He makes use of the data from a survey conducted by the state government in the late 1960s, which later published a report.

Raju John in *Regional Socio-economic Scenario and Economic Upliftment of Dalits in India: What Does Contemporary Evidence Say?* (2017) tries to show the socio-economic conditions of Dalit Christians by comparing them with the Syrian Christians. The variables used for comparison include incidence of poverty, educational attainment, the extent of landholding, employment structure of the workforce, housing quality and possession of consumer durables. K. C. Zachariah's working paper *Religious Denominations of Kerala* (2016) discusses the demographic and socio-economic profile of various caste and religious groups (Castes among the Hindus, Sects among the Muslims and Denominations among the Christians) in Kerala. The study is based on the data from the Kerala Migration Surveys. Among other things, the author gives the demographic and socio-economic profile of Dalit Christians in Kerala. Apart from these, the works of K. C. Alexander, Ninan Koshy and C. J. Fuller also give a cursory glance at the socio-economic conditions of Dalit Christians in Kerala.

Methodology

The study depends on both primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected from the field, through interviews and participant observation. Other significant sources of primary data are the periodicals, pamphlets and notices published by various Dalit Christian organisations and the churches at various times. The study also draws relevant information from newspaper reports, websites and the social media pages of churches and other Dalit social groups and organisations. Secondary data is from books and articles.

The study is partially ethnographic. The researcher being a Dalit Christian has been able to come into direct contact with the community and collect information through lengthy interactions in their life-world. Both unstructured and semi-structured questions have been

used for conducting the interviews with respondents. The researcher interviewed three groups of people: a) the leaders affiliated to various Dalit Christian movements and organisations, b) priests and pastors of the Churches, and c) the laities or the ordinary church members. Apart from this, the researcher interviewed some eminent persons from among the Dalit Christians and other communities on topics relevant to the research and the issues taken for analysis. Participant and non-participant observation was the method to collect data from the field. For that purpose, the researcher participated in various meetings (both prayer meetings and organisational meetings) demonstrations and dharnas organised by the churches and various Dalit Christian organisations in Kerala and New Delhi. The researcher has attended Sunday worships and other religious functions in various Churches as part of participant observation.

Among the group of respondents, the researcher met the priests, pastors and the ordinary church members mainly in Kottayam, Idukki and Pathanamthitta districts. Dalit Christians in Kerala are mainly concentrated in these districts. To inquire into the Dalit Christians' community life, the researcher spent time in their settlement areas, mainly in Vakkadu and Mukkada in Kottayam district. The researcher visited the Dalit Churches and the Dalit Christian settlements in many places for non-participant observation. Dalit Christians from seven churches/denominations are the focus of the study. They are Syro Malabar Church, Latin Catholic Church, Church of South India, CMS Anglican Church of India, Church of God in India (Full Gospel-Kerala Region), and two Independent Pentecostal Movements (Bible Church Mission and Israel Pentecostal Church). These denominations reflect the diversities of Kerala Churches and the heterogeneity of Dalit Christian community. The units of these churches/denominations visited by the researcher are mainly from the Kottayam district. The leaders and activists of Dalit Christian movements interviewed for the study are from various parts of Kerala, and they include people belonging to other denominations also.

The Relevance of the Study

Only a limited number of academic studies are available on Dalit Christians in Kerala. Among these, only a few are relevant to understand their contemporary socio-political life. Most of the studies on the contemporary life of Dalit Christians deal with the caste discrimination against Dalits within the Church. Some of them are approaching this issue based on theological perspectives.

In this study, the researcher focuses on the politics of assertion by Dalit Christians in contemporary Kerala both within and outside the churches. Apart from this, the study tries to reflect the socio-religious heterogeneity of Dalit Christians in Kerala rather than concentrating on any particular Christian denomination or a Dalit caste/sub-caste group. Caste does not confine to their relationship with the dominant social groups inside the church. It is also present in their social relations among themselves. The study inquires into the problem of the two-fold appearance of caste in the life of Dalit Christians. Based on such a broader understanding of the incidence of caste in the Dalit Christians' life the study evaluates the political assertion of Dalit Christians. The researcher takes into account both informal and formal processes of their political assertion.

Chapterisation

The study consists of an introduction, six chapters and a conclusion.

The **first chapter** *Modern Society and Politics in Kerala: The Background* explains the location of the marginalised groups in the evolution of modern society and politics in Kerala.

The **second chapter** *Christian Churches in Kerala and Dalits* analyses the distribution of Dalits across various Christian denominations in Kerala, and spaces they get in these Churches. This chapter also discusses the impact of Church and Christianity in Kerala for Dalits.

The **third chapter** *Caste Related Practices within the Church and Dalit Christians* makes an enquiry into the practice of caste discrimination against Dalits within the Church by the non-Dalit Christians and the caste (and sub-caste) practices among the Dalit Christians.

The **fourth chapter** *Dalit Christians Engaging the Church* evaluates the effect of Christianity as a modern religion among Dalits. It critically evaluates the Church and Christianity as a mechanism of discipline in the social and religious life of Dalits. This chapter also examines the responses from Dalit Christians to the caste discrimination within the Church and the methods of the protest from Dalit Christians.

The **fifth chapter** *The Social Life of Dalit Christians* deals with the social life of Dalit Christians in Kerala by focusing on their engagement and disengagement with the Church. It also discusses how they try to assert themselves in Kerala society.

The **sixth chapter** *Engaging the Political Sphere: The Church, Politics and Dalit Christians* examine the political engagement of Dalit Christians by focusing on the relationship between the Church, politics and Dalit Christians.

Chapter 1

Modern Society and Politics in Kerala: The Background

Introduction

This chapter explores how a modern society is evolved and socio-political practices strengthened in Kerala, and the implications of this process for the marginalised social groups. The British rule in Kerala has brought the ideals and values of modernity to the society. The colonial modernity has made tremendous influence upon the social relations of Kerala, which were influenced by the caste related social practices. Even after the retreat of colonialism, the values of colonial modernity continue to influence the contemporary social system. At the same time, the influence of caste upon the contemporary Kerala society produces different consequences for various social groups. It shows that in Kerala after the colonial rule and modern political changes tradition continues as an influential factor.

Against this background, there is a little exaggeration in calling Kerala society as 'modern' in the strict sense. In fact, Kerala prefixed by 'modern' hardly gives an idea about the complex interaction between indigenous/traditional patterns of the society with the modern. The adjective, 'modern' may conceal the presence and prominence of the 'tradition'. The prefix also has different connotations. The term modernity itself has been conceptualised in a variety of ways. Most scholars say about different types of modernity or multiple modernities. Partha Chatterjee points out the difficulties to reach out a universal definition of modernity (Chatterjee 1997: 9). Even though one can ascribe some standard features to all varieties of modernity, it is different from region to region. It is varying with time, environment and social circumstances. He says, "There cannot be just one modernity irrespective of geography, time, environment or social conditions. The forms of modernity will have to vary between different countries depending upon specific circumstances and social practices" (Chatterjee 1997: 8). Viewed thus, Kerala also exhibit a modernity, which sometimes may not suit the ideal type.

Colonial Kerala

Concisely, the social system of colonial Kerala is the combination of the two factors, i.e, modernity and tradition. Dilip Menon says that the colonial modernity in India represented a compromise both with the metropolitan modernity as well as indigenous traditions (Menon 2002: 1662). Colonial modernity can be defined as the values, belief systems, and lifestyles

of the natives influenced by the culture, social relations, politics, science, and technology, which were brought about by the colonisers. Though there are some considerable changes in the traditional values due to the colonial impact, the present social system cannot be free from the social practices that evolved through casteism. Nicholas B. Dirks argues that, "colonialism in India produced new forms of civil society, which have been represented as traditional forms; chief among these is caste itself" (Dirks 1989: 44).

With the advent of colonialism, instead of the non-political characteristics of social practices political rule gained upper hand. New political ideals came to being. The European liberal ideals such as liberty, equality, democracy etc. influenced the people in non-Western societies. Capitalism as an economic idea came into India with the advent of British colonialism. During colonialism the European political ideals, thus influenced the indigenous social structure and practices. Sudipta Kaviraj observes that, the non-European societies before colonialism might not have developed a highly developed conceptual language of natural rights, based on an idea of what human beings in general naturally are (Sudipta Kaviraj 2001: 308). The introduction of modern political practices to non-Western societies began as a result of the combination of colonialism, liberalism, and capitalism in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries rather than attributing it to the sole universalizing force of capital (Sudipta Kaviraj 2001: 307).

British colonialism gradually began to change the native way of life of Kerala. Rajan Gurukkal seeks to perceive the specificity of the experience of social development in Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore (the three administrative regions of Kerala of the time) within the overall pattern of modernity under colonialism. He examines how colonial modernity operated as a new world-view affecting the indigenous way of life. To visualise the socio-cultural reconstruction effected by colonial modernity, Rajan Gurukkal (1999) identifies five sites, viz., evangelicalism, schooling, printing press, economy, and administration.[1] His central argument is that the generative force behind the series of social

[1] Evangelicalism ended the Jesuit monopoly over the Bible and it was made accessible to all. Colonial administration gave birth to various institutional structures, which were capable of affecting all walks of life of an individual under colonial life. Schools were established as the institutions of disciplinary mechanism. The schools transmitted the elements of colonial world-view and influenced the local societies. The establishment of schools was mainly an outcome of the Protestant missionary activities. The introduction of the printing press by the missionaries facilitated the circulation of information of information more widely and systematically. Reforms as evangelical actions were done by the Portuguese and British missionaries. Tipu Sultan in Malabar initiated some reforms as administrative actions who conquered power in the Malabar, and later defeated by the British. The princely rulers of Travancore and Cochin also initiated reforms.

and cultural developments, which went into the making of modern Kerala was colonial modernity (Gurukkal 1999: 80-96).

Hereafter, this chapter analyses the evolution of the society and politics of colonial Kerala by examining the education system, activities of the Anglican Christian Missionaries, socio-religious reform movements, national movements, the growth of working class movements and the modernisation of land relations.

Colonial Education System

Education was an important site of colonial modernity. The colonial rulers made efforts in the regions coming under their direct rule to enhance the access of people to modern education. They also tried to inspire and influence the rulers of princely states also to follow similar policies. Providing education to its subjects became the obligation of the state. Within the Hindu system, the opportunity to gain knowledge through formal education was exclusively available to Brahmins. The education system was under the control of temples. The state was ineffective to resist the command from the all-pervasive caste system which denied universality and equality in the field of education to different social groups. With the establishment of the British rule, the concept of education underwent a drastic change. In fact, the pre-colonial society hardly instructed the state to provide 'universal education' for 'the public'. During the period of colonial administration, education signified one of the strategic ways that enabled the insertion of individuals into the colonial discourse of modernity (School of Social Sciences 1997). The people were made as 'modern individuals' through the English education. It was an innovation compared with the objectives of the traditional educational system in the pre-colonial period. So the making of modern individuals was an inevitable part of colonial education. This modern individual is the part of western capitalist values. So it can also be said that colonial rulers transmitted the modern, western capitalist values in the three regions of Kerala as colonial modernity. Colonial modernity intertwined with capitalist values. The aim of imparting these values was actually to meet the political economic and administrative demands of the colonisers. Meaning of education seemed to be liberal, and in purpose, it was job oriented (School of Social Sciences 1997: 30).

Rajan Gurukkal also shares the same opinion. He says:

> The [modern] school was a well-defined space of meticulous regulations and disciplinary mechanisms [...] It functioned not merely as a pedagogic institution, but a regimenting station molding the future citizenry. As centres transmitting the elements of colonial world-view, the schools not only molded the students but also transformingly influenced the local societies. The values, norms, meanings, and measures not known to the traditional society spread informally to the areas surrounding the schools (Gurukkal 1999: 90).

Though the colonial education was, in fact, imparting colonial values upon the natives in general, it had a different implication for the social groups occupying the bottom rungs of the social order of those days in Kerala since it showed an emancipatory route for them from their traditional sufferings. The advent of the Christian missionaries in Travancore in the early 19th century launched a new age in the history of education. The Protestant missionaries were the pioneers in the field of modern education. At that time when education for females was not gaining any attention, the missionaries took it seriously. The missionaries were the first to start girls' schools. The missionaries staunchly supported the admission of people from the lower castes in the educational institutions. P. K. Michael Tharakan observes,

> "The missionaries believed that it was their duty to give the gospel to every jungle tribe and outcaste and they used education as an instrument for their social uplift. The missionaries used education as a powerful tool for enlightening the depressed classes liberating them from age-old bondage. The *Parayas*, *Pulayas*, Hill Aryans and *Nayadies* were converted to Christianity" (School of Social Sciences 1997: 35).

Activities of the Anglican Christian Missionaries

Anglican missionaries had a decisive role in the upbringing of the ex-untouchables in Kerala society. Nagam Aiya notes that the first missionary of the London Mission Society (LMS) to enter Travancore was the Rev. William Tobias Ringletaube, a native of Prussia. In 1806 he visited Trivandrum. The LMS spread its educational activities in the succeeding years in Travancore, and by 1820 there were 3000 students, the converts to Christianity from *Shannar* community receiving education from them. As the converts gained access to education and they enjoyed the protection by the missions, which helped them to advance gradually in the social scale (Aiya, 1999: 221-2).

Equality of individuals was the fundamental value upheld by Protestant Christianity, which had an important role to bring the missionaries closer to the cause of lower castes in Kerala. Different from the Hinduism, all human beings are equal before God at least in their theology. In Kerala, until the 19th century, most of the lower caste communities had their local indigenous gods and deities. The upper caste Hindus also had separate gods. The lower castes were prevented from worshipping the gods of the upper castes and even from

approaching the temples controlled by the higher castes. With the advent of Christianity and growth in conversion, the gods and deities of lower castes began extinct. The proclamation by the Travancore King granting permission to all Hindus irrespective of caste background to entry in temples in the middle of 20th Century shall be viewed as a step to reduce the large-scale conversion of lower castes to Christianity.

Missionaries' idea of equality before God was extended to political affairs by bringing in support for individuals' equality before the state and the rule of law. The traditional state was persuaded to stand against superstitions and to bring about social reforms. It was earlier unthinkable in the traditional society. It created a "chorus of assent" as much as "revivalist dissent", according to Dilip Menon. Missionary rhetoric gave a new and radical spin to the hitherto abstract idea of individuals, subjected equally to the rule of law. Compared with the caste system that defined the patterns of organisation of community and the subordination of the individual within it, missionary discourse posited the 'choosing, reflective person' as the premise of a new community of equality and brotherhood in Christ. In Hinduism individuals are not equals. Some were more individual than others within Hinduism (Menon 2002)

Protestant Christianity was able to provide certain benefits of modernity to the converted Christians of the ex-untouchables. In the pre-colonial society, the caste system marginalised them. In such a situation, Protestant Christianity was helping them to become members of the emerging public sphere and provided them with a new field of community in the name of the new religion to make their visibility in public. The Church and Christianity became a medium to engage with the public. Dilip Menon Says:

> "Christianity was the interface through which lower castes experienced modernity. And it was Christianity that allowed for their entry into a public sphere generated by inter-religious discussions. Such discussion as we have on the emergence of a public sphere in late 19th century India concerns itself largely with the activities of elite groups, either professional classes or mercantile groups" (Menon 2002: 1663).

Socio-Religious Reform Movements

With the breakdown of the pre-colonial caste system, various socio-religious movements began to emerge among the caste and religious groups. Socio-religious reform movements among the castes and communities in Kerala started by the end of the 19th Century and the early 20th century. Most of them were not entirely free from their traditions, and many of them were spiritual and religious movements. Each of them was aiming at reforming and uplifting their respective communities. They proposed the progress of their separate caste

and communities. According to K. N. Ganesh, many organisations, without abandoning their base and severing the link with their traditions, also emerged in the early part of the 20th century and stood for the upbringing of their respective communities (Ganesh 1990: 382). The struggle held against the feudal values, and the efforts made by the reform movements were helpful in bringing in modern values like individualism among the social groups. At the same time, these social groups and their movements also provided scope for continuity of the traditional values too. The proportionate weight given to modern values and the tradition varied from group to group but was a standard feature for all.

Sree Narayana Dharma ParipalanaYogam (SNDP) (1903), and Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (SJPS) (1907) Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha (PRDS) (1910) etc. were the examples of such movements in Travancore among the lower castes. Among them, both SJPS and PRDS tried to create a social space for Dalits. Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali and Poykayil Sree Kumara Guru Devan etc. were the leaders of these movements. Among them, except Ayyankali all others tried to reform their communities through religious reforms. Sree Narayana Guru from Ezhava community was one of the great social reformers that Kerala has ever seen. He consecrated the idol of *Shiva* at Aruvippuram in 1888 by challenging the upper caste dominance in Hindu religion. He founded the Sree Narayana Dharma ParipalanaYogam (SNDP) in 1903 for the upliftment of the community (Rajendran 1974).

In the south the *Pulayas*, and in Malabar, a similar caste known as *Cherumars* continued as slaves even in the beginning of the 20th century. Ayyankali was the most prominent leader of the *Pulayas*. In 1907, Ayyankali under the inspiration of Sri Narayana Guru started the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (Association for the Protection of the Poor) in Travancore. Among the *Parayas*, another lower caste, the reform movement began in the same period. The *Parayas* also was a slave caste. Poykayil Kumara Guru Devan, one of the prominent social revolutionaries of the 20th century was from this community. He founded the Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha (PRDS) for the upliftment of the downtrodden communities. Though the movement was intended for all ex-untouchables, a majority of its members were from the *Paraya* community. According to Sanal Mohan, the movement in its origins imbibed the methods of Christian missionaries, but later moved beyond the limits of the missionary project and eventually offered a critique of it (Mohan 2005: 35).

There were also social movements for reform and emancipation among the fisher folks in the same period. *Mukkuvas, Arayas,* and *Valans* were the major fishing communities in Kerala. Many of them had already been converted to Christianity and Islam centuries back. Pandit K. P. Karuppan, Swami Ananda Yogi and Rao Bahadur Govindan were the prominent social reformers belonging to the fisherfolks who formed associations for them. In 1910, Karuppan founded Vala Samudaya Parishkarana Sabha. It aimed at both the internal reforms and social mobility of *Valans* (Houtart and Lemercinier 1978a: 26).

The socio-religious reform movements in the colonial era were gaining currency among all the castes and communities irrespective of their placement in the social ladder and religious affiliations. It is not only the lower castes, but the upper castes also becoming conscious about the need for reforms in a modern way. They abandoned many of the traditional practices, and carried out changes in some others. There are both similarities and differences between the socio-religious reform movements of the lower castes and the upper castes. The analogy is that many of the traditional practices were either reformed or discarded by both. The difference is in the reasons that compelled both for reforms. While the lower castes were trying for reform by making use of the opportunities with the advent of colonialism, the higher castes initiated for a change as they were losing traditional hegemony supported by the caste system under pressure from colonialism and modernisation. *Nairs* and *Namboodiris* (the two major upper caste groups) got mobilised for social reforms against this background.

All these reform movements, formed by various communities were trying to reform the respective communities. The values of colonial modernity influenced the new standards stipulated for these communities to reform. However, it cannot be said that it is purely the contribution of colonial modernity. These movements were influenced by traditional values also. And, the role of traditional values in creating a new society was applicable to lower caste movements and upper castes. SNDP, one of the lower caste movements, was also trying to reform traditional Hindu religious values based on spirituality. Though some of the movements, like PRDS, among the untouchable castes like *Pulayas* and *Parayas*, were based on spirituality, it was entirely different from SNDP in criticising modernity. The main reason is that they were outcastes or *Panchamas* and were out of Hindu way of social life. So in their case colonial modernity was mainly contributing towards their social reforms, though they offered a critique of it.

Working Class Movements

Before the formation of Communist Party, there was a socialist group within the Indian National Congress. The Congress Socialist Party was formed within the INC in 1934. It was in October 1939 that a secret group of Congress Socialist Party leaders of Malabar resolved to transform their organisation into a unit of Communist Party of India. E.M.S. Namboodiripad points out the three gains of the socialists. 1) they changed the Indian National Congress in the form of a mass movement. 2) the INC was grown up in the princely state and British provinces of Kerala, and thus the national movement was also grown up. 3) at their initiative the organisations of working class, peasants, teachers, and students also came up across Kerala (Namboodiripad 1997: 224-39).

Among these, it was evident that the most important achievement of the Communist Party was the mobilisation of the proletariat and peasants. Class-based organisation in a society ridden with caste and community divisions contributed to the emergence of a new associational life based on modern values of equality, secularism, religious harmony, democracy etc. Class consciousness, instead of caste consciousness, was the base upon which the Party constructed its support, though many other interests also played a significant role. The movement was capable of removing and changing the age-old customs and traditional values substantially. E.M.S. Namboodiripad says,

> "The socialist/communist movement however broadened and strengthened the secular base of the democratic movement by calling on the working class and other sections of the working people to unite by the *class* to which they belonged, rather of their *castes*. The political, practical activity of the Socialist and Communists naturally helped the breaking down of caste and communal separatism and isolationism" (Namboodiripad 1984: 40).

The Party was taking into account socio-cultural specificities while forming its policies and programmes. The Party mobilised the peasants and agricultural labourers primarily based on their economic issues. However, the Party's mass support was not solely composed of the trade unions or the factory workers. In the northern part of Kerala, the Party grew by uniting and organising the people from all parts of life. Apart from addressing the economic issues, the Party was trying to take into account the socio-cultural aspects of the region. The Party tried to exploit socio-cultural specificities of the region to attract the people towards its fold. To draw the people to the Party, in the beginning, the leaders resorted to both modern and traditional means. In the north, the rural community was fostered both through the secular

culture of reading rooms as well as by the revival of the religious culture of the shrines (Menon 1992: 2711).

The context of the growth of the Communist Party cannot be confined to the organisations of working class groups and peasants in colonial Kerala. Some other settings can also throw light on the growth of the Communist Party in Kerala. At the beginning of the Communist Party, the leaders were mainly drawn from the upper caste people like *Nairs*, *Nambiars*, Brahmins etc. Efforts have been made to relate the birth of the Communist Party in Kerala with the breakdown of the social system in Kerala in the first half of the 20th century. Robin Jeffrey tries to relate the emergence of the leaders of the Communist Party in colonial Kerala to the collapse of the matrilineal joint-family system (Jeffrey 1979). The social disintegration in the form of the disintegration of the matrilineal joint family system made a generation free from old bonds and forced them to seek new ways. Jeffrey observes that by 1930, the matrilineal system that governed the lives of most caste-Hindus in Kerala was collapsing utterly. At the same time, orthodox notions of caste, which enforced extreme disabilities against low castes, were increasingly undermined by western education and new economic opportunities (Jeffrey 1979: 77-78). Dilip Menon also indicates the connection between the pioneers of the Communist movement in the 1930s and the changes and reforms that happened in *Nair* families in colonial Kerala.[2]

It is evident that the communist party played a decisive role in the process of democratisation of modern Kerala society. The progressive-minded people who were attracted to the Communist Party in its beginning were from various walks of life stretching from social reform movements to the national movement. K. N. Ganesh says that the progressive elements of the Ezhava social reform movements that developed in Travancore during the 1920s and 1930s, many social movements in Malabar, people's agitations against autocratic governments in Travancore, peasant struggles in Malabar etc. were attracted towards the communist party. The backbone of the communist party was, in fact, the organised proletariat (Ganesh 1990: 389).

The Party was standing not only for the economic and political liberation of the people but also for cultural intervention in the society (Namboodiripad 2008: 34). Through the

[2] The reforms weakened Nair Tharavadus and undermined their traditional authority in the countryside. Menon says, "Socialist organisation in this period would rely to a large extent on the relations forged between younger members of dominant Tharavadus and cultivators" (Menon 1992: 2705).

publications like *Prabhatham* and by using other mediums like popular drama the Party culturally intervened in the society. The Party was trying to influence all walks of life of people through its cultural intervention. But the cultural intervention cannot be confined to these kinds of cultural activities alone. The cultural life of the people is very much related to their religious life also. As it has already been mentioned, the traditional customs and rituals associated with the religious life were also exploited by the Party to strengthen its mass base.

Dilip Menon calls the Communist Party as a "conjunctural community" by analysing how the Party grew in Malabar. He says that the Congress Socialist Party and subsequently communism was trying to resolve the problem of caste inequality in Malabar in the period between 1934 and 1948 with the aspiration of creating a community of equals. The idea of community represents an aspiration and not an achieved entity. Communities are always in the process of formation without reaching realisation. There can only be conjunctural creations of community when a temporary balance is made between diverse individual initiatives (Menon 1992: 2705). He says about how the Communist party managed to negotiate a conjunctural community of landowners and cultivators. The traditional social system centred on *tharavadu* was rebuilt in the form of party-society by the CPI. The presence of upper caste leaders from prominent *tharavadu* in the leadership might have caused legitimacy, which in the opinion of Menon (1992) is an example of how the modern party retains the elements of traditional social forms.

So the Party leaders at that period were compelled to take some intermediary roles between landowners and cultivators. They were trying to anchor on the working class consciousness of the people. However, in a caste-ridden, traditional and semi-feudal society it is impossible to organise the people exclusively based on their class-consciousness. That is why the Communist party leaders of the Malabar region were resorting to various means to attract the people. However, the situation was different in Travancore and Cochin. The working class movements in coir industries in Alappuzha were more based on class-consciousness in comparison with those in Malabar (for more details, see, Robin Jeffrey 1984: 1159-65 and T. M. Thomas Isaac 1985: PE-5-PE-18).

Modernisation and land Relations

Landlordism was prevalent in the pre-colonial Kerala. Even though the British administration made some changes in the land relations, it did not weaken the landlordism. T.M. Thomas Isaac says:

> The agricultural land became a very important means of production in society with the spread agriculture. But the control over the land was not distributed equally among all. The ownership of land was to the landlords. The land was their birthright. The Namboodiris were the main landlords. But the manual labour in the fields was mainly done by the lower castes such as Pulayas, Parayas, Cherumas etc. (Isaac 1987: 14-15).

The old system of socio-economic life was replaced with a new type by the colonialism. Capitalism in Europe was a system of a higher order when compared to the system prevailed in the colonies. So it was easy for the Europeans to overpower the natives. In the economic sector, the contributions of the Dutch and the Portuguese were mainly in the agricultural field. But under the British rule, the trade and commerce developed a lot (Isaac 1987: 29).[3] Agricultural activities with commercial purpose also began in this period (Isaac 1987: 33-34). Agriculture-related industries came up, and the farmers began to cultivate new corps. Even though all the major entrepreneurs in all these new ventures of economic production were Britishers, gradually a new group of native entrepreneurs also became active. Plantation sector witnessed a high intensity of capitalist development. There was a migrant work-force, mostly composed of the slave castes moved from traditional agriculture to these new sites of production.

The transition from a semi-feudal economy to a semi-capitalist economy in the colonial period was an integral part of the modernisation of the economy. In the colonial period, the relation between the caste structure and the economy was different from the traditional settings. The commodification and social relations based on economic relations indicated a change towards the semi-capitalist system. Caste was situated differently in this changing economic system. The economic interventions made by the British changed the relationship between the state and the economy. It resulted in the dissolution of customary obligations that the traditional caste system demanded from the lower castes in the economy.

[3]During British rule, the changes occurred in the land relations in Malabar and Travancore were different from each other. In Travancore, the government seized one fourth of its total assets. In Malabar, the British government called back the *janmis* (who were in exile during Tipu Sultan's rule) and restored their position as the owners of the land. The British government gave a little attention to the demands of the traditional tenants (Isaac 1987: 32-33).

The Post-independence Period

Society and politics in the post-independent Kerala also naturally exhibit the complex interaction between modernity and tradition which they carried from the colonial period. Apart from tradition and colonial modernity many other legal changes and socio-economic developments that occurred in post-independent phase also reshaped the society and politics of Kerala. Traditional values together with modern ones have become a site where the society and politics of Kerala are located. The dynamics of the class, caste, and religious factors have a predominant role to play in the making of society and politics in the post-independent Kerala.

In the post-independence, the democratic space got widened, and constitutional governments through election by the citizens became a reality. These two have opened up new political options for the social groups. The people are engaging with the new democratic space and the state from a sphere related to their class, caste, community, religion etc. These factors also play a role in connecting them with the political party system. If some groups are less capable of making an active engagement in the social system they are less capable of active involvement in politics also. The presence of a community as an empowered entity in a social system is a necessary precondition for making its appearance in the political system.

Though the contemporary social system has its roots in the colonial social system, all the progressive values of socio-religious reform movements of the colonial period have not been brought to the contemporary social system. Many critics point out that the followers have later distorted the ideals of the socio-religious reforms. There is also a change in the orientation and demands of the social reform movements which represented the society of the colonial period and their successors (many of the caste, religious organisations) in the post-independent phase. According to K. N. Panikkar, the community based socio-religious reform movements of the colonial period were aimed at the upliftment of various communities. But those movements, with broad and shared interests, have lost their ideas (ideals?) and now represent narrow and vested interests. Panikkar views this transition as one from community politics to communal politics.

The democratic space in the post-independent Kerala gives representation to various caste-community and religious interests. It also confirms the view that the democratic politics in

Kerala is continuing as a mixture of tradition and modernity. Caste of today is performing some new functions which are different from the caste of the past. These new functions conform with modern values. Aditya Nigam, quoting Rudolph and Rudolph, says that the caste associations are 'para-communities' that enable members of castes to pursue social mobility, political power, and economic advantage (Nigam 2000: 4266). Actually caste is modernised here. Rudolph and Rudolph (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967: 33) say:

> Although the purpose of caste are wide ranging and diffused, affecting every aspects of members' life path, the functions and interests of casts associations have become increasingly specialised. The traditional authority and functions of the jati are declining, but the caste associations' concern to control or influence those who hold political power and thereby allocate resources, opportunity, and honour has revived and extended caste loyalties in new and larger contexts.

Democratic politics is not free from traditional values. In the context of Kerala, Gemma Cairo states this as follows:

> It is interesting to note that in spite of the change to the social order, caste identity in Kerala has not disappeared. In fact, caste movements and associations have come into political life, resulting in the increasing politicisation of the castes. Each community has adopted positions in relation to different political parties or even created their own parties. Inevitably, the development of new sources power and new political processes after independence has produced a change in the patterns of political mobilisation. In addition, there has been an alteration in traditional power relations. Kerala's religious configuration- 40% of the population is non-Hindu, mainly Christians and Muslims- has also shaped the political organisation on communal lines (Cairo 2001: 680-81).

Caste by itself is not a modern entity. But modernisation of caste points out a new function for caste that indicates a transformed caste performing more unique functions. It can provide a new modern self for individuals. It seems that caste in modern Kerala society has taken to place itself within a liberal-secular framework. It was evident from the social reform movements of the colonial period. It happened mainly in the case of every lower caste. Aditya Nigam says, instead of performing a religious or sacred function, caste plays a role in the modern individuals' making (Nigam 2000: 4266). Here modern values show some crucial negotiations with the elements of tradition. Aditya Nigam is quoting from Rudolph and Rudolph for substantiating this argument:

> But as liberal democratic ideas penetrated to wider sections of the population, the aims of caste association began to shift from sacred to secular goals. Instead of demanding entry into temples, prestigious caste names, and 'honourable' occupations and histories in the Census, the associations began to press for places in the new administrative and educational institutions and for political representation. Independence and the realisation of political democracy intensified these new concerns. Caste associations attempted to have their members nominated for elective office, working through existing parties or forming their own to maximise caste representation and influence in state cabinets and lesser governing bodies (Nigam 2000: 4266).

Communities and their Organizations

The major Hindu caste organisations in Kerala, for instance, *Nair Service Society (*NSS), and *Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam* (SNDP) are the dominant pressure groups in the state politics. The Muslims and Syrian Christians are also well organised social groups who have more direct representation in politics through own political outfits. But in comparison, the chances of Dalits to build up active community organisations and to become a significant pressure group has been very negligible. The Dalits are more facing the problems of the multiplicity of representation in the social and political sphere, which prevents them from becoming a united group. Their social and organisational divisions are mainly by sub-caste differences.[4] The attempts to unite them under some common organisations is as old as their mobilisation by the social reformers during the colonial period. Ayyankali's *Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham* (SJPS) and Poykayil Kumara Guru Devan's (Poykayil Appachan) *Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha* (PRDS) had this as an objective. Ayyankali tried to unite all the Dalits belonging to various sub-castes and religions under the SJPS. Poykayil Appachan attempted to create a new spiritual self, and his efforts also underlined the emphasis on unity among the Dalits through the PRDS.

A large number of community organisations which always claims a lineage from the social reform movements continue to exist without carrying whole value framework that they inherited from the past, which was so crucial to question the traditional caste related practices. Many others also live without making necessary changes to meet the new challenges coming from the continuity of caste-ridden traditions and values. In the case of Kerala, the internal features of caste structure - typical of the traditional society - have supplied some of the elements needed to transform the social consciousness of people, giving them the impetus to organise themselves and demand recognition of their social and political rights (Cairo 2001: 681). Some of them continue to exist with the same names and organisational base for the specific group inherited from the past, and some others have adopted new types of organisations and new names.[5] The caste organisations have not

[4] For example, numerous caste associations are functioning in Kerala for the Pulayas. Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha (KPMS) is one of the oldest and largest caste organization. However, the membership is restricted to Hindu Pulayas. Kerala Cheramar Sangham (KCS) and All Kerala Cheramar Hindu Maha Sabha (AKCHMS) are the two other major associations of this group. The membership in KCS is open for Pulayas of different religions.

[5] NSS, SNDP, PRDS etc. were organized in colonial period and still continuing in the same name. But in the case of KPMS, its root organization was *Travancore Pulaya Maha Sabha*, which was established in 1937 by debilitating the scope of SJPS, an organisation meant for all the untouchable castes.

advanced as social organisations having broader interest and a transformative potential concerning the remnants of the caste system. They mainly remain as community organisations with particular interests. The situation is worse for the Dalits, because of two reasons: First, the caste-less society has not become a reality so far. Second, the dominant communities and caste groups have gained the upper hand in the contemporary society and politics of Kerala by using caste as the primary medium for bargaining with the state and political parties. In the post independent Kerala, the unequal entitlement for social groups results in an uneven organisational capacity of different castes and communities. The dominant social groups turned the political system of Kerala into bargaining field wherein the Dalits are suffering from marginalisation.

Upper caste Hindus and Syrian Christians are the examples of those social groups who have been continuing their high bargaining power in politics.[6] They face significant counterweight from two other communities – *Ezhavas* and Muslims, which also gradually enhanced their weight vis-à-vis the state and society. In Kerala, these four groups mainly divide the social base of political power.

However, it is not very convincing to say that the presence of the communities through their organisations brings equal empowerment for all those belonging to their group. For example, within the Christian Churches, the clergies in association with the upper class enjoy the real power and not all of the laity. In comparison with Hindus and Muslims, the bishops and priests more directly coming in the relation between the community and the state. Cyriac Thomas says about the role of bishops in Church affairs and their influence in Kerala politics thus:

> A peculiar feature of the community and the Church is that the real leadership lies with the Bishops and the clergy and not with the laity. The lay leadership constitutes only a second line, but in times of actual confrontations, they function as agencies for implementation. The reason is that the resources of the community remain ultimately at the disposal of the Bishops and clergy. Hence, the Church has assumed such importance in matters like politics and elections. In the Christian community, even social leadership lies largely with the Bishops and the clergy and making use of their social position the Church leaders find it rather easy to influence even the political attitudes and the electoral preferences of their men (Thomas 1986: 103-04).

[6] However, even the Syrian Christians during the colonial period were not on par with the upper caste Hindus mainly in the access to political power in the two princely states. In Travancore, they were facing domination by the caste Hindus in their political life. There were restrictions to make any claim for government jobs. This situation prompted them to participate in a movement by the marginalised social groups claiming representation in the princely states in the 1930s. However, as a community, economically they were very strong in Travancore and Cochin mainly because of the presence of landlords, traders, industrial entrepreneurs and plantation owners from the Syrian Christians.

It is also common in the case of other communities and their organisations.

Economic Modernisation in the Post-Independence Period

There were some significant changes in the land relations in Kerala after 1956. The governments abolished tenancy. Ronald J. Herring observes,

> "The core of the reforms [in 1959 and 1969] was the abolition of the landlord-tenant social organisation of production, the establishment of relatively low ceiling on holdings to allow redistribution of land to the landless, and special measures to provide house and garden sites for a section of the largest and most disadvantaged agrarian class - the field labourers" (Herring 1980: A-59).

The Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act of 1969 has three objectives viz., securing the ownership rights of land to the tenants, provision of homestead land for the landless, and the imposition of ceiling laws in the case of surplus land. Though the Reforms achieved all these to a certain extent, certain scholars argue that it is essentially anti-feudal and pro-capitalist and not socialist in ideology/substance (Radhakrishnan 1981: A-130).[7]

The Land Reforms in Kerala as a progressive step towards the welfare of landless poor and the working class is facing some criticisms. It is true to say that it has given some opportunities to the landless poor, who were mainly belonging to the Dalits. "An important aspect of the Kerala scene in this context is the conferment of ownership rights on hutment dwellers, which also was the outcome of intense political struggle and effective legislation" (Krishnaji 1979: 515). However, the main drawback is that the Dalits managed to get small pieces of land for housing, but not sufficient agricultural land for production purposes. In this sense, Kerala's land reforms failed to the transfer of means of production to the actual producing class. Many of the Dalits have no sufficient land for agricultural activities or as an asset for meeting their economic needs.

Industrialisation process was very slow in Kerala. However, its effect on traditional social relations was very significant. Modern technology and machinery in modern industries need a massive amount of economic capital. Industrial units in Kerala are concentrated in some regions since the beginning. Most of these were in Travancore-Cochin. The princely rulers

[7] Ronald Herring also agrees with this view. He says, "The conceptualization was explicitly anti-feudal and pro-capitalist, not socialist" (Herring 1980: A-59). He argues that the framers of the land reforms themselves indicated this fact by drawing upon E.M.S. Namboodiripad who also held an opinion that land reforms must not discourage capitalist entrepreneurs because "capitalism in agriculture, like capitalism in industry, is an advance on the present situation in a semi-colonial semi-feudal country" (Herring 1980: A-67).

of Travancore and Cochin initiated policies for industrialisation, whereas Malabar was an industrially backward region in comparison (Isaac 1987: 38-39).

The British companies owned most of these industrial enterprises during the colonial period. Many of them were also interested in establishing plantation estates. The companies with industrial purposes were founded only at a later stage. The growth of banking companies is a significant landmark in the economic history of Kerala. The development of commerce, the spread of commercial agriculture, the growth of traditional industries, the emergence of modern industries, the formation of financial institutions like banks, and all the economic evolutions have made some drastic impacts in the social structure of Kerala (Isaac 1987: 40).

However, the different social groups benefited unequally from this industrialisation. The four major communities – Syrian Christians, *Nairs*, *Ezhavas*, and Muslims gained a sufficient number of native industrialists. The Dalits were becoming only a part of the emerging working class. Within the working class also, they were more marginalised. Mainly they concentrated in the plantation sector and some traditional industries such as cashew and coir because of their disadvantages as a category of poorly educated and unskilled labourers. This backwardness is related to their caste position. Dalits are unable to develop an entrepreneurial class. The industrial development in the economy has not provided them substantive gains. Every caste-community and religious group can successfully compete in the economy by possessing some material resource that they inherit from their past. The communities which had resources could only make an entrepreneurial class. Modernisation of the economy through industrialisation circumvented Dalits at large. In fact, Dalits still carry the weight of being a lower caste and resource-poor group, which is related to their continued deprivation of rights to land in the agricultural economy and the persistence of caste in Kerala society in various ways. This or which further affect limited their potential to become the beneficiaries of the industrial development.

Communities and the Party System

The two major political parties in Kerala are the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI [M]) and the Indian National Congress (INC). The origin of both of them is in the colonial period, though the CPI [M] was formed in 1964 after the split in Communist Party of India (CPI). In Kerala, there are two major political alliances - the Left Democratic Front (LDF)

led by the CPI [M] and the United Democratic Front (UDF) led by the INC since the 1980s. Most of the Keralites (around 80 percent) have been consistently voting for these two fronts.

The UDF has a strong support base among the religious minorities in Kerala. Roman Catholic Syrian Christians (RCSC) or the Syrian Christians from Syro Malabar Church are the supporters of various Kerala Congress parties which are most often part of the UDF. The rest of the Syrian Christians (non-Catholic Syrian Christians) are also mainly supporting the Congress Party in elections. "The majority of Travancore Christians and the Christians of Malabar who had migrated from Travancore became the supporters of the Kerala Congress, while the majority of Christians in the Cochin region continued to support the Congress" (Thomas 1985: 54).[8] It shows that a majority of the Syrian Christians lend their support to the UDF in Kerala. In the northern part of Kerala, the Muslim community is the main supporters of Indian Union Muslim League (IUML). The IUML is a political ally of the UDF. So the majority of the Muslim community is also supporting mainly the UDF. The Muslim league's strength in Kerala politics and its hold in north Kerala, made several parties depend upon the support (Aziz 1992: 125).

Ezhavas and *Nairs* are the leading caste groups within the Hindus. *Ezhavas* have been the traditional supporters of the Communist Parties. Though their community organisation had never openly supported or opposed either the Congress or the Communist Party, a significant number of the Ezhava community, mainly the poor are voters of Communists since very long (Rajendran 1974: 47).[9]

Like the *Ezhavas*, Dalit castes also were backing the communists in the elections and becoming members of communist parties. Now the situation has changed. At present, it seems, some Dalits are moving away from the Party. It is due to a variety of reasons. Among Dalits, many movements have started recently based on their caste identity. Dalits have begun to raise their political voice for new demands, which are difficult for the political parties in Kerala, including the organised Left, to address and resolve successfully.

[8] Though the author says about the political conditions up to the 1980s, still this observation is relevant. The Christian community has not made any substantial change in their voting and political support to the Congress party and its allies.

[9] G. Rajendran also observes, "The [SNDP] could not accommodate or tolerate communist ideology or methods. Necessarily, therefore, there remains a big gap between [the organisation] and the bulk of the Community which is poor."

In the case of *Ezhavas* also the Left has lost some of its support base from among the community, which is evident from the general elections held since 2014.

The NSS is noted for its firm anti-communist stand many times in the political history. It had allied with Syrian Catholic Church to launch an intense agitation known as liberation struggle (1958-59) to expel the first communist government from power. In the elections, NSS lend its support mostly to Congress and its coalition, but in the 1990s their leadership urged the community to maintain an equal distance from UDF and LDF. After that, the organisation hardly declares any open support to any of these fronts in elections. The advocacy for equal distance also did not cause any significant loss to the NSS. The *Nairs* hardly suffer under-representation in politics and getting candidates from their community in the elections. "It is found that whichever party comes to power, Nair community dominates the political scene in Kerala […].They do not follow as a community any political ideology but the politics of convenience." (Thomas 1985: 54). In short, Christians, Muslims, *Ezhavas*, and *Nairs* are the dominant caste-community groups in Kerala politics. A similar observation made by Hartmann (1968: 165) regarding the political role of these communities is still relevant.[10]

Communist Party drew their supporters from the working class group. Among these working class groups, the major communities were *Ezhavas* and Dalits. The party-led state governments gave adequate attention to the socially and economically marginalised groups through welfare, which was a reason for their support to the Left parties. Manali Desai's comparative study of Bengal and Kerala brings this point well. She says that even though the communists have held power in both states, only in Kerala, they have implemented far-reaching social policies (Desai 2001: 37). D. R. Mankekar also observes, "The communists in Kerala have earned the people's vote [in the 1957 election], and confidence through the hard work and a constant demonstrated concern for the underdog in a land of the underdogs" (Mankekar 1965: 97).

The left political parties have tried to replicate its competency outside the party system by spreading its activities in the socio-cultural field. It had enjoyed excellent support from the intellectuals in socio-cultural issues until very recently. Mankekar says about it thus: "The political power of leftist parties depends on the degree to which they have built

[10] He says that the politics of Kerala centres round these four communities - Nairs, Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims.

organisational strength, political hegemony, and a broad social base through their extra-parliamentary struggle" (Mankekar 1965: 97). However, in recent times, criticisms against the left on socio-cultural issues have been emerging actively in the state. Dalit question is an issue, which bypasses their hold. Leftist intellectuals always treated separate caste-based assertions in politics, even if it is from the marginalised groups, as a reflection of narrow and sectarian interests. As Aditya Nigam opines, the mainstream followers of colonial modernity discouraged the 'elision of caste' not entirely because of their upper-caste character, but there was a modernist-universalist desire to 'transcend' narrow 'sectional identities' (Nigam 2000: 4258). Such an attitude dominated the mainstream left perspectives about caste-based assertions in Kerala. It created a hurdle for the marginalised social groups including Dalits in the socio-cultural fields. Though modernity gave a space for their active emergence, the modern intellectuals most often criticised them indiscriminately from the vantage point of modern values.

In Kerala, the Congress party was not as strong as it was in other states. "Kerala is the only state in which the Congress Party has failed to emerge as the dominant political organisation in the immediate years after independence. The Congress had only limited success in its efforts to mobilise electoral support; even if it succeeded in doing so, it was unable to remain in office for an extended period" (Ahmed 1966: 389). However, for both the Congress and the Left parties alliances with other smaller parties became necessary to form a government. In the first two decades after state reorganisation, political instability was looming large in state politics. The Left and the Congress attempted to win the elections by forming alliances with smaller parties in the 1960s. In the 1970s, CPI and Congress allied and ruled the state with the help of other more minor political parties. It was only in the 1980s a stable bi-polar coalition led by Congress and CPI (M) came into being. Since the state assembly election held in 1982, LDF and UDF have been alternating victory between them in every fifth year.

In spite of not achieving higher economic productivity, Kerala could improve the aggregate quality of life. Kerala is ranking first in literacy, education, and health among the states in India. Kerala's achievement was an exceptional case within the development theories. The left parties claimed credit for this progress. However, the aggregate data at the state-level hides the inter-group differences. The tribes and Dalits in comparison with other social

groups were less capable of achieving the benefits of 'Kerala Model', and subsequently, it brought about a series of criticisms against this model itself.

In the mainstream literature, Kerala is hailed for its social harmony in inter-community relations. It is true that compared with many other Indian states, the social situation in Kerala is relatively peaceful. However, it hardly means the absence of influence of religious communities in politics in Kerala and their competitive bargaining. The Christian and Muslim parties have played vital roles in Kerala's coalition politics. Patrick Heller says, "The civic harmony has been maintained in a climate of highly organised and politicised social forces and against a backdrop of low economic development points to the efficacy of Kerala's democratic institutions in mediating and absorbing conflict" (Heller 2000: 500).

Kerala's socio-political system is not free from the community-based conflicts though they rarely turn into violence. In the view of James Chiriyankandath,"Modern Kerala presents us with a paradox: the state, best known to the outside world for its dissociation with communalism, is also where communalism has, arguably, found its most complex political expression" (Chiriyankandath 1993: 643). E.M.S. Namboodiripad also had noted this in his writings. He says, "It would be totally unrealistic to close one's eyes to the fact that even those political parties which claim to be secular and above all considerations of caste and community, have to take into consideration the caste or communal composition of particular constituencies when they select their candidates for elections" (Namboodiripad 1977: 3). It shows the prevalence of non-class forms of assertion and conflicts in the politics of Kerala. Modernity, in fact, has not fettered the non-class mode of competition and conflict.

The Party Left and the New Questions

Kerala's socio-political system is not entirely free from the influence of caste and religion. Traditional customs and values persist among the people. Impact of modernity is also apparent. Calling such a socio-political entity as modern and egalitarian is part of a dominant discourse, which leads to concealing many sorts of discrimination and dominance based on caste in Kerala. The left (communist parties) have made their strong political presence in the state. It is also a reason to call Kerala as modern based on a conviction that only in a modern condition that the left parties can gain political strength. However, many critics also point out that the left politics of Kerala is also not wholly a modern entity.

Left and New Social Movements

Though the party has taken specific efforts to reinterpret the Marxist theory in the Indian context, still there are some gaps. Though the Party takes into account the social situation and regional specificities to strengthen its cadre base, the non-economic issues get inadequate attention. The party shows preponderance to use a class language to respond to the very complex socio-economic and political demands raised by Dalits, many of which are not class questions.

The left politics primarily oriented towards class questions is facing a severe challenge since the late 1980s from the new social movements. The new social movements were seemingly more sensitive to the non-class issues. Oppression and marginalisation are the key themes around which they mobilise the people. They hardly limit their focus to class categories. For the Marxists, the category 'class' is all-inclusive. However, for the new social movements, the class is not adequate to explain all the problems. The new social movements do not try to overthrow or take over the government. Their aim is the democratisation of civil society (Sreekumar 2007: 99).

The organised Left and its governments failed in considering various new social movements for preparing new developmental schemes until the 1980s. However, in the late 1980s, the Left began to change its strategies. The Left started to make new developmental plans by taking into consideration the opinions of various organisations and movements in the civil society. However, this engagement was not very inclusive of all the currents of social movements. The left parties have avoided many vital organisations and groups having the potential to bring about alternative strategies (Sreekumar 2007: 40). That means in the view of the new social movements the Left hardly become useful to challenge the dominant models and practices of development. Therefore, the lefts' new development programmes seem not adequately taking into consideration the interest of the marginalised and oppressed social groups.

Left and Dalits

A social system perceived as modern is supposed to address the problems of the marginalised. In the context of modern Kerala, the questions regarding the marginalised are raised from different corners. The Dalits question also gains significance. The Left in Kerala is supposed to address them as a class-based supporter of the communist party. The party

has been trying to support their economic life through a variety of policies and programmes framed by the governments led by it. However, there are criticisms that no government in Kerala, including Left, were adequately addressing the socio-economic problems of Dalits. In spite of the claims about having modern standards, Kerala's social system is not inclusive of Dalits, and they are still marginalised.

In this context, a relevant question is how far the left politics in Kerala has succeeded in transforming the society into a socialist pattern. Social system influenced by caste is a constraint for the party to pursue a pure class politics. Parliamentary democracy constrains the Party in pursuing left ideals and programmes. Communist party had to face a social coalition formed against it with the active support of the ruling class. It is a challenge that the party faces in its political encounters, and it leads to the moderation of class politics, and gradually it avoids frictions with the dominant social groups. It invites further criticism that party fails to meet the demands of the basic classes and the downtrodden sections. Dalits are also criticising the party for its surrender to the pressure of parliamentary politics influenced by the caste and communal compositions and compromise that it makes with dominant social groups in politics. Since the downtrodden groups carry both social and economic identities, the party's class politics alone has not become very meaningful to address their demands.

The Left politics also avoided and silenced the particular community-based selves. They considered all such assertions are aiming at the fragmentation of class identity. When the subaltern castes are also raising their status as a resistance to the caste system, the left preferred to use the same standard of measurement. It led to a growing distance between Dalits and the left parties, which the latter started taking seriously only very late.

Dalits and the Modern Values

The place of subaltern social groups within Kerala's modernity is a critical issue, which shows many of its drawbacks. One of the significant questions here is how far the modernity is inclusive of Dalits. How does the current value structure, which shows hybridity between modernity and tradition, mute their independent voice? Do the left political parties, which describe themselves as the harbinger of modernisation and progressive forces, attend these issues? The assertion of Dalits in Kerala needs attention in the light of these questions.

There is a prevalent notion in Kerala that Dalits are socially developed in a more or less equal manner with non Dalits. This notion is based on another widely accepted idea that Kerala society is egalitarian and the presence of caste is not very much visible in social and public life. However, in fact, caste has achieved some new forms in Kerala society. Re-assertion of caste identity by social groups in politics and society is becoming common to all the social groups in Kerala. This kind of refashioning of caste-self has occurred in the case of Dalits also. However, they cannot use it as a capital for gaining a strong political presence.

The values of modernity have to be analysed in a new context, which raises the question how far these values are responsive to the Dalit question. The modern categories such as nation, citizenship and their foundational principles like nationalism, secularism, and democracy are not totally inclusive of the issues of Dalits. The modern universal categories mentioned above deny the right to claim a self by the Dalits. (deny their claims of self)How do they remain as "a part apart"? Left politics also offer them mainly universal categories. 'Working class' is used as such a category by left, which negates the caste-related socio-economic sufferings they are facing and subsequently deny the existence of 'little selves'. The 'Malayalee' identity can also be considered as such a secular identity and the subaltern identity of the marginalised is concealed by such universal identities.[11]

Though a modern individual is secular in public, he/she may be religious in his/her private life. Modernity tries to negotiate its values with traditional values. The influence of religion is very much evident in an ordinary individual's private life. Likewise caste also finds its place in the individuals' private life. However, this does not mean that caste and religion have nothing to do with the social/public life of an individual. It is because of this reason that modernity's private-public dichotomy itself is problematic. A public-private dichotomy hardly was a feature of the pre-colonial social system. By the effect of colonial modernity the 'public' was emerging as a corollary to the individual 'private'.The realms of both private and public are overlapping, and both are influencing each other. In other words, though the caste is the part of an individual's private life, it never stops from making its

[11] Aditya Nigam says, this resistance to the universal categories of modern politics is, at its core, a resistance to the very universalisms that characterize the emancipatory discourses of modernity which placed at their very centre, the abstract, unmarked citizen - Universal Man - or the equally abstract 'working class', as the subject of history. The idea of nation and its subjects called citizen is rather abstract. Citizen is an unmarked and unidentified individual. The subalterns in India cannot come under this abstract idea of citizenship. Dalit politics […] is deeply resistant to both the ideas (Nigam 2000: 4256). He argues that the subaltern identities silenced by the modernity seek for emergence through, what Partha Chatterjee describes as "political society".

effect/presence in public. The emerging public realm also remained relatively inaccessible to the lower castes due to the lack of any resource such as education, wealth etc. It is difficult even for those who are with such capitals and resources (like upper castes) to become a 'free' individual. For the marginalised it becomes more difficult.

Modern intellectuals of Kerala have been resisting the claim-making based on caste in the public realm, though the assertion of people based on forming caste groups as strong pressure groups is common in politics. Dalits who are still fighting caste-discrimination cannot avoid reference to caste. Since the dominant castes' values are dominating the public realm, Dalits are forced to speak about caste. The Malayalee identity in the making since the colonial period also carries the value system of dominant castes. The Malayalee identity goes in tune with the dominant castes' identity. Thus, the subaltern caste identity is submerged when a supposedly modern identity of Malayalee was in the making. This new and common identity, and an urge for all to grab on it, actually makes the Dalits becoming invisible in comparison with other social groups and castes.

The Western notion of individualism cannot be found in Kerala. Communitarian elements are very much evident in Kerala's social life. The social development, comparable to the modern western societies, is only in its outcome. It was never contributed by individualism overpowering communitarian tendencies. The degree of individualism that exists mainly permits them to bring an affinity with religion and caste. It tends to hide caste and religion in public, but always reserve to them the private sphere. Therefore, this private-public dichotomy, which strengthens community's values in private on a longer term, brings them to the public realm also. However, in this process too Dalits have many a comparative disadvantage to become a competent beneficiary.

Chapter 2

Dalits in Kerala Churches

Even though Christianity came to Kerala in the first century AD, however the conversion of Dalits is relatively a recent development from the late nineteenth century. Regarding the history of their conversion, there are different arguments among the scholars. The conversion has occurred at various times, and the focus groups and the places were different. Dalits were taken to the Church mainly by the British Protestant missionaries. Now they are spread over different denominations. They are with traditional Syrian Christian Churches, Catholic Churches, and Protestant Churches including Pentecostalism. *Pulayas* (or *Cheramas*), numerically the largest sub-castes within Dalits, are also more numerous among the Dalit Christians followed by *Parayas* (or *Sambavas*) in number. The other prominent sub-caste converted to Christianity are *Kuravas* (or *Siddhanars*). The Dalit Christians are heterogeneous due to the denominational differences and social variations based on sub-caste. This chapter explores the history of the conversion of Dalits to Christianity. The analysis focuses on the emergence and growth of Christian Churches in Kerala and the incorporation of ex-untouchables or Dalits into them.

History of Christianity in Kerala and Dalits

Dalits were neither the first nor the only lower caste group converted to Christianity. The first mass conversion of lower castes occurred in the 16th century by the Portuguese. The available accounts show that the converts were mainly from the fisher folks living in the coastal areas where the Portuguese established their control. The present generation of these converts is members of Latin Catholic Church. However, the conversion of lower castes took place in several episodes, and it was a dispersed and multi-centred process by taking a long time. The extensive conversion again received a momentum at the initiative of Protestant missionaries in the 19th century.

All the Christian denominations have the followers from lower castes, but there was no mass conversion at the initiative of the traditional Syrian Christian Churches. The tale told by the Christians claiming an upper caste background about their conversion by one of the disciples of Jesus Christ (Saint Thomas) in AD first century is not supported by any historical evidence. However, that story indirectly points out that the conversion in the early period was not inclusive of all castes. By taking it also into consideration, the best possible interpretation

is that in Kerala the frequency of conversion of the lower castes to Christianity enhanced after the coming of European powers. In the period after the Portuguese intervention also, the conversion of lower castes might have continued, but there is no adequate evidence to show that it was extensive and well organised until the 19th century.

Christianity in Kerala until 1947: Denominational Divisions

Studies in the history of Christianity in Kerala are mainly about the emergence of denominational divisions and their differences regarding theological principles. The social composition of each denomination very rarely becomes their focus. A detailed history of particular churches is also available, but most of them are traditional churches. Different denominations emerged in different periods, and the converts were from different castes. As a result, in the numerical strength of various social groups vary in the denominations. To study the history of the social diversity of Christians in Kerala, the contexts of different periods of conversions are also significant. Even though 'Christianity as a casteless religion' is the standard claim by all the denominations, the prolonged process of conversion of different social groups at different times to Christianity and their uneven distribution into various denominations are the facts which are not very easy to avoid. History of Christianity in Kerala shall be narrated as a process of conversion of different social groups, and the emergence of various denominations. It is not to say that theological differences are not an essential base for their difference. They remain as a factor, but the social composition cannot be minimised by projecting theology as the only marker of differentiation.

Traditional Syrian Churches

In Kerala, the Jacobite and Orthodox Churches, the Marthoma Church and Syro Malankara Church are the major traditional Syrian Christian Churches. Mar Thoma Church in 19th Century adopted many of the principles of Protestantism and Syro Malankara Church is now the part of Catholic Church. However, their origin from the Jacobite and Orthodox Churches is a reason for many to treat them as a traditional Syrian Christian Churches. There is no reliable evidence to provide information regarding the early stages of conversion of people to these Churches in Kerala. However, historical evidence shows the presence of Christians in Kerala from the first century AD. The Syrian Christians used to claim that in AD 52, Saint Thomas reached Kerala and converted some Brahmin families to Christianity (Agur 1990:

4).[1] This mythical genealogy is helping the Syrian Christians to claim a superior status in the social milieu and bring them on par with the upper caste Hindus (Viswanathan 1993: 13). At the level of status competition with other churches in Kerala, Syrian Churches can gain a benefit from this story, which is in circulation for many generations. However, there is no perfect historical proof regarding either the visit of Saint Thomas to Kerala or the subsequent conversion of Brahmin families to Christianity. Interestingly, the traditional Syrian churches in their official narration of the history of the church in Kerala also only mention it as a "tale of the people". It shows that they want to propagate it, though they do not want to take responsibility for authenticity.[2]

In the modern period, records are confirming the presence of wealthy sections among the Syrian Christians. There was a dominant class of traders and merchants among Syrian Christians and a good number of productive landowners. The Hindu upper castes had enjoyed a near monopoly in the ownership of agricultural land, but their presence in trade was far below the Syrian Christians (G. M. Moraes, quoted in Visvanathan 1993: 3). The Hindu kings of Travancore and Cochin in the 18th century, pleased with the hard working and prosperous Syrian Christians extended state's patronage to them. The subsequent mobility that the Syrian Christians achieved in their social status in south Kerala was comparable with any other non-upper caste social groups (L. R. Brown, quoted in Visvanathan 1993: 3). The claim about their origin from upper castes might have helped in this. The recognition of Syrian Christians by the princely rulers came in handy for them besides their claim about a high caste heritage. The cultural and social life of Syrian Christians was also showing a syncretism between Christianity and Hinduism of the upper castes. The upper caste Hindus never treated the Syrian Christians as untouchables. Syrian Christians also never practised untouchability with lower castes. In short, concerning their position in caste and class structure, the Syrian

[1] According to the belief, Saint Thomas landed at Malinankara near Kodungallor. The names of such Brahmin families mentioned are *Kalli, Kaliankara, Sankarapuri, Madapur, Vympilli, Muttedal, Kottakara, Panackamattom* and *Pakalomattom* (Cheriayan 1973: 31).

[2] Apart from this mythical genealogy, there are two versions of history - the apostolic and the Nestorian – available to sketch the origin of Christianity in Kerala. Agur enlists the writers favouring and discrediting the tradition of Saint Thomas. He writes, "Romanist writers generally and Jesuit writers in particular like Emmanuel Anger and Martino Martinez, believe the story. Among Protestants, Dr. Buchanan supports this view. Persons like Dr.Burnell opines that the Malabar church is not a Syrian origin one and the influence which had been on it was Nestorian […] The Syrian influence can be supposed to begin in the 8th century A. D. Agur ensures that "there is not the slightest doubt that when it first emerged into history, it was known to be a branch of the Asiatic Church, and Nestorian in its beliefs and practices […] There is not the slightest doubt that the Christian Church of Malabar was a Nestorian Church from the 6th to the 16th century A. D. and no satisfactory evidence has yet been adduced as to the existence of an earlier Christian Church in this coast" (Agur 1990: 21-22 & 25).

Christians gained a superior status, which contributed to their authority among the Christians in Kerala and their co-equal relationship with upper caste Hindus and the state.

The superior status mentioned above of Syrian Christians is mainly about their situation in the modern period. Historical records from the early and medieval period very rarely say about their presence as a dominant group. Therefore, it is not wrong to assume that the emergence of Syrian Christians as one of the dominant groups in Kerala is more recent, and it is associated with state power consolidation in Travancore and Cochin. About their early history, C. V. Cheriyan says this. "We have absolutely no information about Christianity in Kerala during the first one hundred years or so following the martyrdom of St. Thomas. History is silent about the infant Church in India founded by St. Thomas until it records the name of one Pantaenus" (Cheriyan 1973: 54).

The Portuguese' expedition to Kerala was very significant to the history of Christians. They were the first Europeans who tried to extend influence upon the traditional Christian churches. In fact, the churches and the groups of Syrian Christians lived in Kerala in those times were not a well organised group and they were very few. The caste relations were a significant factor in their religious worldviews and the practices embedded in the local culture and traditions. Agur says, "When the Portuguese arrived in Malabar in 1498 they were quite surprised to find a numerous body of Christians, Nestorian in belief and ignorant alike of the Latin tongue and the Roman Pontiff. The Portuguese tried to bring this body of Christians under the Papal authority. But the Syrian Christians, on the other hand, discarded all allegiance to Rome, opposed every effort of the Roman Catholic missionaries to bring them under the Papal yoke" (Agur 1990: 41-42). It was at the initiative of Portuguese, many of the traditional Syrian Christians received Catholicism. Also, those Syrian Christians, who were not willing to become Catholics, remained as Syrian Christians, and later divided into Jacobite and Orthodox Churches and Mar Thoma Church.

Traditional Syrian Christian Churches was less interested in conversion of lower castes to Christianity until the arrival of Protestant missionaries. It seems Syrian Churches have not taken much effort to spread Christianity among lower castes. There are no missionary groups also from among the traditional Syrian Christian Churches to carry out a large-scale conversion. St. Paul's Mission of India is the only one missionary organisation under the

Jacobite Syrian Christian Church.[3] The organisation was founded on 26th March 1994. The official website of the organisation says that "our missionaries serve in Indian villages where the Gospel haven't reached yet while we have another group of people working in parishes across India. The main aim of this ministry is to preach the Gospel of our Lord Christ in its true form. Mission is mainly working amidst those who are illiterate and poor, enriching them with The Gospel." The organisation started working among the tribes in Attappady in 1996. Metropolitan Mar Geevarghese Coorilos is the major hand behind this and he started the mission activities aiming at evangelizing the Dalits and Adivasis. Today, there are almost 15000 converts among them to the Church.[4] The group behind the organisation says that the upper caste claim of the traditional Syrian Christians is the main reason why the church has not been active in the missionary field. It does not mean that this is the first attempt on the part of Syrian Churches to take the lower caste to the Church. There are many Dalits who were converted to the traditional Churches in the earlier period. At the beginning of the 1880s, St Gregorios of Parumala and Mar Osthatheos Petros have worked among the lower castes converting many to the Syrian Orthodox Church.

Mar Thoma Church also has taken steps to convert Dalits to Christianity. After the formation of a missionary society, the Malabar Mar Thoma Syrian Evangelistic Association, in 1888, the Church started working among Dalits community in Kerala, especially in central Travancore (Thomas 2007: 35-36). The work of Evangelistic Association was undertaken in four divisions. These were the Central Travancore Mission (1889), the North Travancore Mission (1902), the South Travancore Mission (1905), and the Sea-Coast Mission (1911). The Central Travancore Mission was also known as the *Sadhu Jati Mission*. *Sadhu Jati* is another term used to refer the people of lower castes in Kerala (Thomas 2007: 36). They converted *Pulaya, Paraya,* and *Kurava* communities. They lived among the Christians as their agricultural labourers or slaves. They had no social interaction with their Christian owners (Thomas 2007: 36). The evangelistic work among them started in 1889 at a place named Othara. The work began with the co-operation of a new convert, Thomas, from the *Vetton* (Thomas 2007: 37).

At that time CMS missionaries were imparting education among lower castes. The CMS missionaries' efforts in giving education to Dalits encouraged the Evangelistic Association

[3] See the official website (www.stpaulsmission.org) of the organisation for more details in this regard.
[4] Metropolitan Geevarghese Mor Coorilos is the bishop of the Niranam Diocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Kerala.

also to move in the same direction. Along with spreading the gospel among the Dalits, the Mar Thoma Church gave attention to their educational uplift (Thomas 2007: 37). The revival movement in Kerala in 1896 accelerated the work among the Dalits. During this period new congregations and schools were established in various places. In 1910, there were 23 Mar Thoma congregations with 2543 members. Owing to the persistent caste consciousness of the Syrian Christians within the Mar Thoma Church, it was not possible to incorporate the Dalit Mar Thoma members into the existing Mar Thoma parishes (Thomas 2007: 38). By 1938, the number of schools run by Evangelistic Association increased to 40 with a total of 4714 students. Out of these, 610 were *Cheramar* and *Sambavar* Christians (Thomas 2007: 39).

It is important to note that their continued affinity with tradition, allowed them to gain proximity and recognition vis-à-vis the upper castes. It is also imperative that these churches did not show interest in spreading Christianity through mass conversion. In this sense, they resembled a caste-like group, rather than a Semitic religious group. Since they treated conversion as one's own privileged choice and due to the passive role that their churches played in this, the converts from lower castes to these churches cannot expect equal treatment in social matters. Therefore, the rate of conversion of lower castes into these denominations was very less. It resulted in a growing distance between the Syrian Christians and the marginalised social groups. Mostly they were opposed to the conversion at the initiative of the Protestant missionaries.

Traditional churches were apprehensive about the growth of Protestant churches in Kerala through extensive conversion from the 19th century. The social distance between these churches and the upper caste groups in Kerala was very thin. However, the gap between the traditional churches and the lower castes was further widening, and the latter treated them on par with any other oppressive upper caste group. They are in an antagonistic relationship with Dalits, especially Christian Dalits. From the vantage point of Dalit Christians, Syrian Christians are the groups perpetuating caste hierarchy within the churches.

Catholic Churches

With the impact of doctrinal changes, which the Portuguese brought into the traditional Syrian Churches, a large number of Syrian Christians of Kerala gradually received Roman

Catholicism. Thus the uses of the 'seven sacraments' [5] as interpreted by Rome were acknowledged by the Syrians (Visvanathan 1993: 3). The doctrinal changes that the Portuguese brought into the traditional Syrian Churches are necessary to understand the development of Roman Catholicism as a distinctive denomination in Kerala.

There are three rites within the Catholic Church in Kerala - Syro Malabar Church, Latin Catholic Church and the Syro Malankara Church. Each rite has its dioceses also. Out of these three rites, Latin Catholic Church and Syro Malabar Church were established in the 16th century itself. Some members of the traditional Syrian Christian Churches received Catholicism in the 20th Century and created a separate Catholic Church. They tried to maintain some traditions that they followed. This newly built Catholic Church with eastern tradition is known as the Syro Malankara Church. Latin Catholic Church is the biggest among the Catholic Churches in Kerala followed by Syro Malabar.

The pioneers of the conversion of Dalits into Syro Malabar Church also, like the case of traditional Syrian Christians, were encouraged by the activities of the British Protestant missionaries in this regard. The history of Dalit conversion to Catholic Church began in 1856 with the conversion at Nedumkunnam. Palakkunnel Vellyachan is one who has taken the initial steps in this regard. In the year of 1858, people from *Ezhava*s and *Pulaya*s were prepared to baptism. Palakkunnel Vellyachan erected temporary structure for the new converts in his ancestral property because of the bitter opposition of the Christians. Some of them went away from the Mass (Qurbana) as they came to know that the Pulayas had entered the Church. Some others went to faraway places in search of water to cleanse themselves of the pollution. A few others went to the Hindus and tried to instigate them against this movement. Bishop Bernardinos was another person who took Dalits to Catholic belief. Father Elias Chavara started his involvement in this matter in 1964. It was in Mannanam near Kottayam. In the 19th century, Thevar Parampil Kunjachan started his effort in this regard, and it was in Ramapuram in the present Kottayam district. About 5000 people are said to have been baptised by Kunjachan (Palakkappillil 2009: 107-110)

At present, a large number of Dalit Christians are followers of Catholic Churches. Particularly the Latin Catholic Church makes claims about more followers from the lower caste background. The converts to this church are from the fisher folks, *Ezhavas, Nadars,* and

[5] The worship of images, the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, the doctrine of real presence, purgatory, and invocation of saints, indulgences, and veneration of relics are the seven sacraments.

Dalits. In Vijayapuram Diocese (Kottayam), Punalur diocese (Kollam), and in the diocese of Kannur, Dalits are more in number. Even though in the Latin Catholic Church the lower castes have a numerical majority, Dalits are less in number than others. There are also Latin Catholics claiming upper-caste status. The same is also the case in Syro Malankara Church.

Many members of Syro Malabar Church are from traditional Christian families. There are only very few Dalits within this Church, though they are more in number in a few parishes. The Church maintains some of its parishes exclusively for Dalits.[6] Spatial migration of the members of this Church into hill areas from the plains in the 20th Century has made some changes in its social composition. It also led to the incorporation of more followers from different castes, especially Dalits. For example, in Idukki district and the hilly regions of north Kerala where a large number of people migrated from the plains live, there are Dalits in the parishes of Syro Malabar Church. In some parishes of these regions, Dalits are relatively a larger group. Among the Catholic Churches, it is in Syro Malankara, the lower castes (especially Dalits) are very insignificant in number. It shows that while the two denominations of Catholicism in Kerala are giving space to Dalits, only one among them still resembles the same social composition of the traditional Syrian Christian Churches. Though a Catholic rite at present, it is a traditional Syrian Christian Church since it still keeps traditional Syria Church's liturgy and identity.

Protestant Churches (Episcopal)

The Protestant churches in Kerala are several centuries younger than the Syrian and Catholic churches. However, their presence was very significant, which hardly confine to their theological impact on the Christianity in Kerala. The denominational division among the Protestant Churches is more numerous than Catholic churches, and each of them follows a distinctive version of theology and practice. Broadly, the Protestant Churches shall be classified into Episcopal Churches and non-Episcopal Churches. The churches governed by bishops are known as Episcopal Churches. The churches, which are not governed by bishops, are the non-Episcopal Churches. The priesthood is more compact within Episcopal Churches, but it is absent in non-Episcopal Churches. Pentecostal and charismatic movements are the main non-Episcopal Churches. Each of the non-Episcopal church is following different theologies.

[6] For example, St. Joseph's Monastery Church at Mannanam (near Kottayam town) under the diocese of Changanassery archdiocese is exclusively for Dalits.

The Protestant denominations are less unified than the Catholics. For example, the three Catholic rites in Kerala (Syro Malabar, Syro Malankara, and Latin rite) owe their affiliation to Catholic Church at the global level led by Pope of Vatican. The Catholic Churches have a hierarchical structure with Pope at its top at international level and the clergyman at its bottom in the parishes. However, each Protestant Church has its head, and there is no universal authority to hold them together at the international level like the Pope. The main reason behind this is that every Catholic rite follows same theology and there are no significant differences between them in this regard, except minor changes in some rituals. The Protestant Churches are different from Catholic churches regarding theology and the difference among them in this regard is also sometimes very sharp. Protestant Churches are more autonomous and independent than the Catholic churches. Their existence as smaller units and the absence of hierarchy (ordained from a single authority at the apex having a global presence) allow them to show greater flexibility.

Even though the Syrian Orthodox church resembles the Catholic churches in many ways, it is not truly a global church. Syrian Orthodox church has its bishop in Kerala. However, as an organisation, it exists as a centralised entity like the Catholic churches. Patriarch of Syria governs the Syrian Jacobite Church at the apex level, which resembles the international leadership of Pope in the case of the Catholics. In comparison with these churches, the Protestant churches are much more autonomous, decentralised and less hierarchical entities.

Protestant and Pentecostal Churches in Kerala other than the Church Missionary Society (CSI) are tiny. In all of them, the numerical strength of Dalits is significant, and in some of them, they are the majority and sometimes the most influential social groups. Some of these churches in their social composition appear as exclusively comprised of Dalits. The Protestant churches having a large membership originated in the 19th century. The British Government of India extended their political patronage to them. Many of the small Protestant Churches emerged mainly in the post-independence period. Therefore, it is wrong to assume that all the Protestant churches in Kerala equally and uniformly enjoyed the state patronage in their history. The three major Protestant churches emerged in the colonial period were London Mission Society (LMS), Church Mission Society (CMS) and Basel Mission. The list of Protestant Churches in Kerala is very long while considering the number of churches that emerged in the post-independence period. Therefore, here the description focuses only on the major ones.

A) London Missionary Society (LMS)

LMS is the first British Protestant missionary group which came to Kerala for the propagation of Christianity in the early 19th century. Before the British, Danish Protestant missionaries also had arrived in Kerala. According to some scholars, Danish missionaries invited the British missionaries to South India to work in cooperation with them. "The [LMS's] desire to send missionaries to South India (Tamil and Telugu areas in particular) was on the invitations received from the eminent missionaries of the Danish Mission […] On 20th April 1804, a Party of six missionaries was sent out to establish mission stations in South India and Ceylon. The names of the missionaries were: Ringletaube, Desgranges, Cran, Voss, Erhardt and Palm" (Jacob 1959: 19-20). The first missionary of the LMS to enter Travancore was Rev. William Tobias Ringletaube, a native of Prussia. In 1806, he visited Trivandrum, the capital city of Travancore (Esquire 1999: 221).

The LMS missionaries had concentrated their activities among the lower castes in south Travancore. As part of their propagation of faith among the native people, they intervened in the social practices of the region and offered some social services as well. The people from the lower caste groups like *Shannars* (or *Nadars)* and *Ezhavas*, and other untouchable castes like *Parayas* (or *Sambavas*) and *Pulayas* were suffering from the oppressive caste practices by the upper caste groups like *Nairs* in Travancore. The conversion to Christianity helped them to resist the oppression. Conversion also encouraged the development of social movements among the lower caste groups. The teachings of missionaries also made them change their lifestyle (food habits and dress code) imposed by the caste system. The upper castes of the region resisted the struggles of the lower castes and their elevation up the social ladder. Series of movements led by the *Shannars* occurred between 1813 and 1859 to protect the rights of their women to wear upper clothes. It was a movement by the lower castes with the help of the missionaries to secure dignity in their social life. John A. Jacob (1959) describes the situation as follows:

> "Nadars and other low caste women were forbidden to wear upper clothes or ornaments. When Missionary ladies came to work in South Travancore, they did not like Christian women move about with their bodies exposed. So they devised plain loose jackets for them" (Jacob 1959: 68).

But the *Nairs* in many localities prevented them by force. It took about four decades to secure this right.[7] The princely ruler of Travancore at the direction of British Resident issued an order to protect their dignity. It shows that the arrival of Protestant Christianity was a much more liberating force for the lower castes, though the Christianity as a religion existed in Kerala long back. The reformist pledge of Protestantism was very pro-active and lively in comparison with other churches. Upper castes' resistance to it implied the fact that it began to cause severe damage to their social power more decisively than the traditional forms of Christianity.

When the missionaries arrived, slavery and slave trade were prevalent in Travancore. Slaves were transferred and sold like cattle at the choice of their owners. LMS missionaries pointed their attention to this also. John A. Jacob writes:

> "In 1847 the CMS missionaries of Travancore approached the Travancore Government with a memorial pleading for the entire emancipation of the Slaves in Travancore and Cochin. As a result of all these efforts, all the slaves in Travancore were set free in two phases. In 1853 as a first step, the Government slaves were set free. The government relinquished all connection with the perpetuation of slavery. They and their posterity were given freedom. In 1855, *Private Slavery* was [discontinued], and a proclamation was issued liberating *all* slaves, Government and Private. At this time it was estimated that 136,000 slaves were set free" (Jacob 1959: 119-120).

In the sphere of education, LMS designed a modern curriculum. It brought about an idea of standardised and universal training to all students irrespective of their different caste background.

B) The Church Missionary Society (CMS)

The CMS began missionary activities in the central and northern areas of Travancore in 1816, ten years after the commencement of the LMS in the South (Mateer 1991: 253). The principal station of the CMS was Kottayam, which later became the headquarters of the Mission. Thomas Norton was the first missionary of English Church sent to the CMS in India in 1815. Others who came in quick succession include Benjamin Baily, Joseph Fenn, Henry Baker, Samuel Ridsdale, and Joseph Peet remained in India for a longer period. Benjamin Bailey

[7] There were three phases of the Upper Clothe Riots or Upper Clothe Agitation, which started in 1922, lasted for about four decades and ended up in 1859. Its second phase started in 1928. During this period also the lower caste people especially *Shannars* faced brutal physical attacks from the part of upper caste people. Even the government officials of Travancore Maharaja appeared against the *Shannars* or *Nadars*. The third phase of riots occurred under the above-mentioned conditions. The higher caste Hindus continued their attacks in the 1850s. The missionaries made complaints before the Maharaja. However, the result was not satisfactory. At last, the missionaries with the help of colonial administration intervened in the issues of persecution of Christians and they succeeded in their efforts (Jacob 1959).

spent 34 years, Henry Baker 47 years, and Joseph Peet 32 years in Travancore (Chatterton 1924: 275-276). During the initial phase, the activities of Anglican missionaries in Travancore did not focus on Dalits and other lower castes. It is in contrast with the LMS missionaries. CMS's propagation of faith and efforts for reforms confined to the Syrian Christians. Eyre Chatterton (1924) says this.

> "Thomas Norton's visit to the region was as the result of an urgent appeal by Colonel Munro, the British Resident of Travancore. He intended to help the Syrian Christians to break away from their association with native customs. He promised them to secure both religious and civil benefits. At this time, no Syrian Christian was connected with the [British] administration of the country" (Chatterton 1924: 275-76).

There was also a strategic interest in the CMS's plan for gaining hold among the Syrian Christians. They felt that it is better to approach the traditional Syrian Christians than the oppressed castes for spreading Protestantism in central Travancore because they were a more powerful group and influential to society. Kawashima (2000) points out this as follows.

> "The attitude of the missionaries was largely a result of their strategy of winning the high castes first [to] win over the entire population. They knew very well that admitting the lowest castes might be a grave obstacle in their aim" (Kawashima 2000: 167).

Though the Syrian Christians co-operated with Anglican missionaries in the earlier phase, later they began to look upon Protestantism with suspicion. Archbishop of the Church of Antioch visited the traditional Syrian Christians in Kerala during this period, and after this, the Syrian Church changed its attitude towards the English missionaries. Instead of friendly co-operation, they began to look upon the efforts of the English missionaries with suspicion and even accused them of desiring to seduce them from their ancient allegiance. The Syrian Christians refused to accept the reformative practices that the Anglican missionaries tried to teach them. It compelled the missionaries working in the Kottayam region to change the focus group in the propagation of faith (Chatterton 1924: 277-278). Subsequent to the disagreement of Orthodox churches, the CMS missionaries changed their scheme of activities and began to concentrate on the non-Christians for conversion. Bishop Daniel Wilson (the first Metropolitan of India and the fifth Bishop of Calcutta) issued directions in this regard. After a series of discussions, the CMS decided that it must in future be a mission to non-Christians rather than Syrian Church (Vattappara 1989: 60-64).

Samuel Mateer (1991) also says in detail about the growing disagreement between the traditional Syrian Churches and the CMS.

> "For some time the Syrian *metran* and priesthood worked cordially with the English missionaries, admitting them to preach in the Syrian churches and to instruct candidates for the ministry. Considerable reforms were thus effected, and much light infused into the Syrian Church. But in 1838 a change took place. The *metran* then ruling discouraged the preaching and efforts of the missionaries amongst his people, and ultimately dissolved all union with the Church missionaries. It was then decided by the missionaries that their work should be carried on as a mission of the Church of England and that proselytes from the corrupt Syrian Church, as well as converts from heathenism, should be received into their communion" (Mateer 1991: 253-54).

The records support the fact that the conversion of Dalits into Protestant Christianity in the central and northern areas of Travancore started after 1838 or in middle of the 19th century.

> "The movement towards Christianity amongst the slave castes [central Travancore] commenced in 1852, and it rapidly spread. Many of these poor people have exhibited in a striking degree the renewing power of the Gospel, and have proved devout, earnest, and simple-minded believers, zealous also for the spread of knowledge and truth amongst their people" (Mateer 1991: 264).

As a result of the efforts made by the CMS missionaries among the traditional Syrian Christians to take them into Protestantism and convert other non-Christians into Christianity, the Protestant Christians in the region became multi-caste in composition. Samuel Mateer's accounts says that the converts consisted of

> "Syrians who have renounced either the Romanist or Jacobite communions, a few converts from the *Nairs*, Brahmans, and some other castes, with a large proportion of *Chogans*[8] (a class similar in standing to the Shannars) together with some increasing bodies from the slave castes and the Hill Arrians" (Mateer 1991: 254).

Chatterton also make a similar observation. The Anglican Communion is composed broadly of three groups. "(a) those whose ancestors were amongst comparatively few people of the old Syrian church who pressed for admission into the Anglican Communion; (b) converts from amongst the Hill Tribes; (c) people from the depressed classes, who have been coming forward in significant numbers for some years past" (Chatterton 1924: 279).

The CMS missionaries also tried to uplift the poor by means of economic programmes. Education was the most important means. The lower castes, such as the *Ezhavas*, *Pulayas* and *Parayas* were denied admission in the government schools. However, this exclusion increasingly became a reason for the political mobilisation of *Ezhavas*, and other lower castes from the 1890s onwards. Kawashima states that the government made efforts to impart education to its subjects, but the missionaries were more to meet the growing demand from the lower castes. It was challenging to open government schools to the 'polluted castes' because of the opposition from the higher castes. (Kawashima 2000: 108-09).

[8]Chogan/Chovan is a traditional name of people equivalent to *Ezhavas* in Kerala.

The CMS's interventions in education were also satisfying the needs of a cross-section of all castes in the central Travancore region. It started institutions for primary, secondary and higher education. The missionaries were willing to take the lower caste pupils to those schools. After the split between CMS and the Syrian Church in 1837, the CMS missionaries established a new college called the CMS College in Kottayam (Kawashima 2000: 88). In this college, the missionaries enrolled students from all classes and creeds alike. Nevertheless, it was not easy for the CMS to avoid the opposition to this from the part of Syrian Christians.

Though the missionaries were aiming at giving education to the lower castes, they intended to make Christianity reach the upper castes also. Therefore, as the CMS documents are showing the mission treated higher education as one of the best means of making Christianity reach the upper castes (CMS Archives quoted in Kawashima 2000: 89). The CMS established a Grammar School at Kottayam for education at the secondary level. Its curriculum included learning of the three languages (English, Malayalam, and Sanskrit) to cater the preferences of both the Syrian Christians and the upper caste Hindus (CMS Archives, quoted in Kawashima 2000: 89). The CMS schools for primary education were named as Parochial Schools or Parish Schools. The missionaries of CMS also opened 'Nayar Schools' in two places in response to the request by *Nairs* (Hunt & Eapen, quoted in Kawashima 2000: 89). The Mission also made some arrangements to provide medical care to the people (Kawashima 2000: 137).

The missionaries of CMS were relatively reluctant to address the caste related practices within the Church because of the influential presence of followers converted from the Syrian Churches into the new faith. Therefore, the role of LMS and CMS are incomparable in this regard. Koji Kawashima observes that the CMS's approach to caste-related issues changed only after the increase in the strength of the lowest castes in the Church. It is the awakening of the oppressed classes that compelled the CMS missionaries and not the vice versa. However, the CMS had been more reluctant than the LMS to renounce the caste system in its churches, and therefore it faced greater protests from low-caste Christians (Kawashima 2000: 166-67). The missionary activities of the CMS were always oriented to strike a compromise with the interests of the upper caste Syrian Christians rather than the church becoming an agency of radical intervention in the caste structure by representing the bottom groups of the converts.

C) The Basel Evangelical Mission

In Malabar, the Basel Evangelical Mission (BEM) started their work in the second half of the 19th century.[9] The first Basel missionary who came to Kerala was Herman Gundert, and his mission area was Nettoor near Thalassery. In Nettoor the Mission started its activities in 1839 (The Malabar Church Council 1934: 17). The Mission propagated its faith among the different caste groups in Malabar including *Thiyyas* and *Nambiars* (or *Nairs*) in addition to Roman Catholics and Syrian Christians. However, the relative strength of the lower castes in the Mission was higher than other protestant churches (The Malabar Church Council 1934: 139).

The conversion caused some trouble for the natives. They had to face alienation from their caste groups and denial of employment. Many converts to Christianity could not claim inheritance to their family property. To solve the problems and make them firm in their Christian faith, the Mission actively engaged in their economic life. Basel Mission established small-scale weaving industries to meet their subsistence needs. It also bought agricultural land for farming, and provided alternative employment opportunity to the converts. Many of the converts, especially from the lower castes got training in the handicrafts firm run by the Mission (The Malabar Church Council 1934: 79-80, 179-180). E. J. Edona also narrates the same story of the converts. He says:

> "The narrow exclusiveness of the caste system as it is practised in Malabar made it impossible for a convert to continue in the [community] to which he belonged. Converts have been regarded in Malabar as outcastes, and even the nearest relatives gave up all intercourse with [those who] embraced Christianity. Thus whether it was the oppressed *Cheruma* or the aristocratic *Brahmin*, to all conversion meant a break with their social and economic past" (Edona 1940: 29-43).

The missionary activities of the Basel Mission in the British Malabar region was decidedly more comprehensive in its coverage. Compared with the Protestant churches in the south and central Travancore, the caste discrimination against Dalits was not prevalent in the churches of the Basel Mission. The Malabar Church Council, Centenary, 1934, states that the Basel Mission had taken some steps to wipe out caste discrimination and to uplift the

[9] In Malabar, the areas where the Mission extended its activities were Tellicherry (Nettoor), Kannur (Chowa), and Calicut (Puthiyara, Chombal, Kodakkal, Pappinissery, Challissery, Palakkadu, Vaniyamkulam, and Mancheri). For more details see, The Malabar Church Council, Centenary 1934. For an account of Basel Mission activities in Malabar, see The Malabar Church Council, Centenary (1934), Edona (1940), and Raghaviah (1990).

socio-economic status of lower castes (The Malabar Church Council 1934: 185-86). Jaiprakash Raghaviah also agrees with this claim. He says,

> "Basel Mission is known to have taken an uncompromising stand against the caste system, from the very beginning of their missionary activities. [It] was evidently a natural position in the light of their understanding of the Christian teaching on the basic equality of human beings. Socially imposed stratification by birth was held obnoxious by the missionaries" (Raghaviah 1990: 26).

Apart from the stubborn stand of the Basel Mission towards the caste-based discrimination and oppression, there were some other reasons for the better condition of lower castes within the Church. In Malabar, the Syrian Christians were an insignificant group. The economic role by the Misson helped all the converts, both lower castes, and upper castes, to meet their financial needs when they lost their occupations or means of income due to the excommunication by their communities of origin or by any other reason. All of them, irrespective of caste difference, came together and did their job in the Basel Mission's new workplaces. According to Raghaviah,

> "Basel Mission's success in eradicating caste barriers can partly be ascribed to the relatively smaller portion of upper caste converts, at least in Malabar, and partly to the impersonal industrial environment created by them, under which converts from different castes worked side by side, performed similar type of work and received the same wages. The strong stand, the Mission took against caste and the inter-marriage the missionaries arranged between converts with different caste backgrounds must have further facilitated such a synthesis. It must have also shattered the concept of caste-related occupation" (Raghaviah 1990: 58).

E. J. Edona also shows the social environment, which helped the Church to eradicate caste discrimination. He says,

> "On account of its isolation from the environment, the Basel Mission Church in Malabar has remained singularly free from this taint. Though drawn from many mutually exclusive castes in the most caste-ridden district in India, the members of the Church have been welded by common tribulation and a common faith into a homogeneous brotherhood" (Edona 1940: 43).

The initiative by Basel Mission for the conversion of lower castes to Christianity is unique for moderation of caste differences among the converts. Unlike the case of the oppressed castes in the CMS, the more depressed castes in the Basel Mission could attain a new Christian identity and gave up caste-based occupation. As Edona (1940) argues, "The social standards set by the Church were moreover calculated to banish from the convert's mind even a recollection of the past" (Edona 1940: 41). Such a conclusion is impossible to write about the CMS, and Basal Missions' activities for the lower castes were more comprehensive than the LMS as well.

However, as Raghaviah (1990) points out all the lower caste converts did not benefit from the assistance of the Mission equally. The Basel Mission's experiment of a casteless group helped the *Thiyas* and *Billavas* (the middle castes) to seek an existence outside their caste-based occupations. The consequences of conversion for the *Cheruma* caste in Malabar and its equivalent *Holeya* caste in South Canara region sacrificed a lot more after the conversion than the other lower castes (Raghaviah 1990: 59).

Protestant Churches (Pentecostal and other non-Episcopal)

Pentecostalism as one of the Protestant denominations making a presence in Kerala since the early half of 20th century at the initiative of the American Pentecostal missionaries - George Berg, Robert F. Cook etc. They formed a distinctive group within the Protestant churches. Among the Pentecostals, there are numerous sub-denominations also. They are mainly noted for enrollment of believers mainly from Dalits in large number. However, they also attempted to draw members from many other denominations who are Syrian Christians (for more details about origin and growth of Pentecostalism in Kerala see John 2005, Burgess 2001, Pulikkottil 2002, Das 2001 and Saju 2007).

The Anglican missionaries and the Pentecostals approached the Dalits living in two different periods in Kerala. The Dalits who were converted to Pentecostalism were different from those Dalits who adopted Christianity from Anglican missionaries. Many Dalits baptised by the Anglican missionaries later received Pentecostal faith due to the caste discrimination within the other Protestant Churches. By the time when Pentecostalism came to Kerala, Dalits started resistance to their continuing discrimination based on caste within the Protestant denominations. The theological thinking of Dalit Christians also was matured when they met the new Protestant group, the Pentecostals.

The Role of American Missionaries

It is a fact that the activities of missionaries like George Berg, Robert F. Cook etc. have contributed a lot to the emergence, growth, and development of Pentecostalism in India. These missionaries have played a significant role in establishing Pentecostalism as a well-organised Church in Kerala. However, it is not entirely accurate to exaggerate the role of foreign missionaries in spreading the faith. According to some of the writers like Gary McGee, some 'Pentecostal-like spiritual revivals' (Holiness and Higher Life currents) existed in South India even before the arrival of American Pentecostal missionaries (McGee 1999:

651-3, G. McGee 1996, Burgess 2001, Pulikkottil 2001, and Saju 2007). Gary McGee says, "Despite claims that Pentecostalism first sprouted in America, the fact that Holiness' seed had been scattered on the soil of India [should not be] overlooked" (G. McGee 1999: 653).[10] Later this indigenous Pentecostal-like spiritual revival with the support of American Pentecostal missionaries emerged as a Pentecostal movement among the Christians in Kerala (Pulikottil 2001: 85-98). Stanley M. Burgess says,

> "South India has been more responsive than the North [India] to Pentecostalism. A robust Christian presence had been there for centuries with Marthoma Syrian and Assyrian branches coexisting until the arrival of Roman Catholicism in 1600. [Also,] the people of Travancore were the most literate in all of India, and eager to read [the Pentecostal literature]" (M. Burgess 2001: 90).

There are differences of opinion about the pioneers of Pentecostalism in Kerala. According to a source, George Berg is the first Pentecostal missionary came to Kerala. Pandalam Mathai Upadesi, a travelling preacher, accepted the Pentecostal faith from him. Saju, the author of *Kerala Penthekosthu Charithram* (Kerala Pentecostal History), supports this view and says that Berg reached Kerala in 1909. He was not a member of any missionary organisation at that time (Saju 2007: 44). According to this, Pentecostalism arrived in Kerala before it became a strong current of faith in the USA.[11] Some other sources say that Thomas Barrett was the first Pentecostal missionary to South India (www.cogkerala.org).

Robert F. Cook (Pastor Cook) is another missionary of the Pentecostals who was very active in Travancore (George 2001: 225). However, Pastor Cook is the most significant among of all the missionaries who came to Kerala in contributing to the emergence and growth of Pentecostalism. While working with George E. Berg, Cook joined the Assemblies of God and moved to Kottarakkara in Travancore. Several years later, Cook founded Mt. Zion Bible Institute in Chengannur in 1927 (Burgess 2001: 91). He came to Kerala in 1914 and then visited Chaliekkara, Punaloor, Kottarakkara, Vellikkara, Kumbanadu, Ezhumattoor, Perumpetty, Ranni, and Mavelikkara (Saju 1994: 35-52). George Berg and Robert F. Cook worked in India for an extended period, the former for 25 years and the latter for 37 years

[10] Some of the historians also say that the American origin of Pentecostalism is not convincing to understand its development in India. Paulson Pulikkottil points out the ever-growing evidence of pre-twentieth century Pentecostal occurrences, and such incidents were plenty outside the United States of America (Pulikottil 2001: 86).

[11] Actually, he came to Kerala to participate in a Brethren convention at Thrikkannamankal near Kottarakkara. But later due to the disagreement with Brethren mission he conducted independent Christian meetings at places Kottarakkara, Adoor etc. These are the first independent Pentecostal meetings in Kerala.

(Saju 1994: 78). The first missionary from the Assemblies of God[12] to South India was Mary Weems Chapman. She visited Travancore also (Burgess 2001: 90). In 1922, Spencer May, a preacher from British Assemblies of God, came to Thiruvananthapuram and together they led the activities. They started the first Malayalam Pentecostal magazine, *Pentecostal Trumpet* (Burgess 2001: 90).

The Role of Natives

People from the natives also contributed towards the emergence and growth of Pentecostalism in Kerala. They propagated the faith and assisted the missionaries in some ways in spreading Pentecostalism.[13] The native leaders who became Pentecostals in the very beginning belonged to different socio-religious backgrounds such as Syrian Christians from Orthodox and Marthoma Churches, Dalits, and a small number of other Hindu caste groups. It means that along with Syrian Christians, Dalits have also played their active role in spreading Pentecostalism in Kerala. But most of the literatures available on the emergence and growth of Pentecostalism in Kerala are partisan to their role. That means such writings either become silent or slightly mention the role of Dalits in this regard and mainly describe the initiative of Syrian Christians (Das 2001and Rennymon 2007).

The Pentecostal history often views Pentecostalism in central Kerala as merely an extension of the religious revivals that took place in the mainline Churches devoid of any social content (John 2005: 82-3). It rarely explains the attraction of Dalits to Pentecostalism as a culmination of the resistance to caste-related practices in their churches. Attempts to project Pentecostalism a Syrian Christian initiative is not very different from the history writing by other Protestant churches. The idea hiding behind this type of narration is revealing the caste-based privilege of the Syrian Christians to know the wisdom of God better than the lower castes. The role of Dalit Christians in the propagation of the faith in Kerala is not available in the documents of the mainline Pentecostal churches. S. K. John apprehends it as a deliberate

[12] 'Assemblies of God' (AG) is the first Pentecostal organisation formed as an association of independent Pentecostal groups in the U. S. in 1914. AG was formed in the initial stage of Pentecostal awakening, as there was not any organisation for coordinating various missionary and Pentecostal campaign activities. The same was the situation of indigenous Pentecostalism in various parts of the world. This was the context of the formation of A G and the visit of Mrs. Chapman to India.

[13] The natives who associated with the missionaries helped them in a variety of ways: as translators, managers, editors of magazines, supervisors of constructions, and above all as evangelists, pastors, and co-workers. Pentecostal churches started mushrooming in all places wherever they laboured in association with the missionaries or independently (George 2001: 230).

strategy of the upper caste Christians to underestimate the role of Dalits in pioneering the movement (John 2005: 68).

The Syrian Christian writers like Saju and Paulson Pulikkottil, who are often critical of the Syrian Christian prejudices, also try to portray the Pentecostal movement in Travancore mainly as a result of the spiritual revival among same group. Saju (2007) hardly does any search for spiritual improvement among the Dalits who were part of other non-Protestant denominations at that time. Paulson Pulikkottil also accounts Pentecostalism as a movement that culminated in the formation of Churches among the natives, and "the members of the Syrian Christian community was gaining this first" (Pulikkottil 2009: 72). He says that the three stalwarts of native Pentecostalism in Kerala, and a host of their leaders and laypersons, were Syrian Christians.[14] It shows that while the Pentecostal writers sketch the history of this church in Kerala and making a serious effort to ward off the assumption about it as a gift of foreign missionaries, rarely do they present the native initiatives for revival more inclusive of different social strata of the believers. The caste-based prejudices and denial of recognition to Dalit Christians is also a feature of Pentecostalism, the latest incarnation of the Protestant church in Kerala.

Even after the last two episodes of conversion of Dalits to Christianity, the caste among the Christians continues. The caste-based pride and prejudices did not spare Pentecostalism, the newest version of Protestant Christianity. There is an argument by Dalit Christians that the Syrian Christians try to propagate Pentecostalism in Kerala as a "Syrian Christian phenomenon". Official stories of Pentecostalism are proud of the Pastor K. E. Abraham, the founder of IPC, for giving a "Syrian colour" to the Pentecostalism in Kerala. Pastor K.C. John, the former General Secretary of Indian Pentecostal Church of Kerala, acknowledged this. He says "it was Pastor K.E. Abraham, the founder of IPC, has contributed a Syrian colour to Pentecostalism" (Das 2001: 67). This "Syrian-ness" is evident in various auto-ethnographic remarks found in some of the narratives, especially in the autobiography of Pastor K. E. Abraham. He asserts his Syrian Christian identity through the description of his birth, his education, his brother's marriage, and of his own. In all these, the leaders of native Pentecostalism affirm that they are Syrian Christians. A Syrian Christian historical consciousness was dominant for many pastors even after they became Pentecostals, and after

[14] In this account, Pastor K. E. Abraham (co-founder and the President of the IPC) was raised to become a Syrian Orthodox priest. Pastor P. M. Samuel who was the co-founder and the first president of the IPC, received training to become a priest in the Syrian Orthodox seminary. Pastor K. C. Cheriyan, (another co-founder of IPC) was a teacher in the church-run school and active in church activities (Pulikkottil 2009: 72-73).

renouncing their Syrian Christian ecclesiastical, theological, and ritual traditions (Pulikkottil 2009: 78). Yesunatha says this by quoting Samuelkutty,

> "It seems to the writer that Pastor Abraham, an ardent Syrian Christian, except in his new faith and practices of Pentecostalism was not completely free from his Syrian prejudice and even worried about the future influence of his denomination if the majority were from the Dalit communities" (Das 2001: 57).

Some of the Pentecostal writers who criticise the caste prejudices and oppose the efforts to give a 'Syrian colour' to Pentecostalism have never attempted to bring to the light the distinctive nature of Dalits' spiritual revival. They underplay the continuity of caste relation and caste-based discrimination suffered by the Dalits in other churches. The writers opposed to the Syrian character of Pentecostalism also are ignoring the caste relations and discrimination creeping to the Pentecostal churches. Their narration also leads to the growing invisibility of Dalit pastors, and it becomes a denial of positive recognition of their role.

In the case of bifurcation of the Church of God (Full Gospel) in India into two along caste line, Saju (2007) criticises the attitude of the Syrian Christians against Dalits within the Church administration (Saju 2007: 382-5). Saju says that it is because of the position of the Syrian Christians towards backward people that many of them kept a distance from Pentecostalism (Saju 2007: 74-76). But the Dalit Pentecostal writers are not satisfied even with this kind of criticism made by the Syrian Christian writers. Yesunatha Das further goes to criticise Saju for his efforts to fight against caste without giving recognition to the identity of Dalits. In the opinion of Das, the attempts to construct a universal religious identity by the progressive sections of Syrian Christians indirectly imply a denial of recognition to Dalits, but it permits the presence of Syrian Christian character as a diffused one (Das 2005: 58).[15]

Two facts are taken here for understanding the role of Dalits in the origin and development of Pentecostalism in Kerala. The first one is that there is a general agreement among all the Pentecostal writers in Kerala that the major contributor towards the origin and growth of Pentecostalism in Kerala is none other than Robert F. Cook. He is the prominent figure of all the Pentecostal missionaries who came to Kerala from abroad. The second one is that he concentrated his work among Dalits and other lower castes. The writers of Pentecostalism

[15] He says, "Saju in his work, set apart an introspective write-up on "why did the backwards become indifferent towards Pentecostalism?" where he repeatedly mentions "we", "our" or "us", referring as Syrians as if Pentecostals are Syrians alone."

from both Syrian Christian and Dalit background agree to these two points.[16]It also shows the centrality of Dalits as a group for the spread of Pentecostalism in Kerala since its beginning.

Interpretation of Pentecostalism as native to Kerala is an argument which also brings about some tensions between the different social groups. Though it is a step for denial of the criticism of its foreign origin in the USA, the native source fails to become socially inclusive. Mainly the believers from Syrian Christian background among the Pentecostals use this as a claim to gain parity with Syrian Christians of the other denominations. However, the contention about the native or foreign origin of the church evades discussion about the social contradictions between the Dalits and others though they share a common religion. Dalit Christians' perspective about the birth of Pentecostalism may be different from the perspective of those from an upper caste (Syrian Christian) background. Dalits were seeking dignity and equality, and they found a place for these values in Pentecostalism. Therefore, it is their aspiration for equality, dignity, and justice, which led them to Pentecostalism. The choice of Pentecostalism as a new faith was both a spiritual and a political question for Dalits. Simon K. John argues from a Dalit perspective and says:

> "It arose from their search for dignity, equality and more freedom both in social and in spiritual aspects, which they strive for after having spent many years in the mainline Churches. This aspect of the Dalit Christian experience lacks in the writings of the Syrian Christian Pentecostals" (John 2005: 82-3).

In the narratives by Syrian Christians, Pentecostalism was a result of their self-revival, but for Dalits, it was through evangelism by Western missionaries. Therefore, in their view self-made efforts to move into Pentecostalism was a possibility only to the socially superior groups. Paulson Pulikkottil also says that the work of western missionaries was mainly evangelism. They reached out to non-Christians (mostly low caste Hindus) and to the Christians who were merely the products of western missionary efforts during the colonial period. However, the progressive influence of the western missionaries on the Syrian Orthodox Christians was shallow, in his view (Pulikkottil 2009: 74). Pulikkottil points out

[16] Paulson Pulikkottil, a Syrian Christian writer, says, "Cook was able to establish many Churches, particularly among the low caste Hindus and Christians in Kerala" (Pulikkottil 2009: 74). "Though the fire of Pentecostalism sparkled in different parts of the country, Robert F. Cook was the person who, according to Samuelkutty, shaped it in Kerala. However, his ministry was mainly among the Dalits and they supported his missionary endeavor" (Yesunatha Das 2001: 71). "Robert F. Cook first arrived in India in 1913 and he set out to evangelise the Dalit people, the first Pentecostal missionary to do so. The majority of the Dalit Christians are incorporated into the Pentecostal Churches because of his mission work. It is my contention that it was through his missionary efforts that the Dalit Pentecostal Christians found acceptance, freedom for emotional and ecstatic expression in worship, and participation in evangelistic activities […] His missionary strategy was to spread the gospel and established churches among the Dalits" (John 2005: 47). "When Cook joined the Church of God in 1936, around forty-three of his Churches were Dalit Churches. This explains the intention of Cook to work among the Dalits even after he had received many Syrian Christians with him" (Samuelkutty, quoted in John 2005: 69).

that the Syrian Christians were not in much need of 'spiritual gift' from the West as they already had a capacity for achieving that, whereas in the case of Dalits, though they were eager to accept the gospel, they needed the support of American missionaries. Twenty years after the foundation of the Indian Pentecostal Church, Pastor K. E. Abraham asserted that his denomination existed before the Pentecostal preachers from the west established Pentecostal Churches in India. In his view, it is a native development which shows its distinctiveness and strength (Pulikkottil 2009: 85).

Dalits' Contributions to Pentecostalism in Kerala

Yesunatha Das gives a detailed account of the Dalit Pentecostals in Kerala. He emphasises their contribution to the emergence and growth of Pentecostalism. He mentions about the eminent Dalit Church workers who were pioneering the movement in its beginning (Das 2001: 79-88). Yesunatha Das says that the Dalits spread the new faith to the northern part of Travancore. They also took the missionary to their kin and people from their community to preach the gospel (Das 2001: 80). Simon K. John says,

> "The contribution of the Dalits in the pioneering and establishing of the Pentecostal Churches were far greater than the Syrian Christians when we take into consideration the socio-economic situation of the Dalits. The Dalits were committed and sincere that they thought Pentecostalism would serve as a true means of uplifting in the spiritual, social and economic aspects" (John 2005: 85).

Dalits' contributions to Pentecostalism include their role in founding and leading a Church. At the beginning of Pentecostalism Dalits were appearing as the prime focus group of conversion in establishing the Church in various parts of Travancore, especially in central Travancore. They conducted a lot of convention meetings and open-air prayer meetings as part of spreading the gospel among the non-believers. Besides, they conducted house to house prayer meetings in various parts of Travancore. 'Gifted' pastors from Dalits were invited by some people, even by Syrian Christians, for prayer. As healing ministry was given much importance at that time, those who are believed to be gifted with healing power got much attention. There were a lot of Dalit pastors who were believed to be gifted with healing at that time. M. M. John, P. D. Chacko, and K. S. David were some of such persons who were working for the growth of Pentecostalism (John 2005: 82-5).

Saju says that Pastor M. M. John (Pariyapuram John Upadeshi) was instrumental in establishing many Churches in central and northern Travancore since 1924. He was a good orator. Even Syrian Christians invited him to their prayer meetings. He enrolled many people

in the Church. He was working mainly among the backward social groups (Saju 2007: 138). Pastor C. S. Mathew, who is also a Dalit, is one of the prominent Pentecostal leaders at the beginning of Pentecostalism. He became famous among the Pentecostals belonging to backward castes. He established a Church called *India Swathanthra Daiva Sabha* (Indian Independent Church of God) in 1947 (Saju 2007: 295). He extended his activities in the 1950s to the new regions where more socially backward groups were living. He was also a renowned lyricist.

Vellikkara Chothi and Poikayil Yohannan were the two other eminent Dalit pastors who deserve special mention in this regard. They had close relations with Robert Cook, and in 1923, they invited him to speak to their people. (Saju 2007: 76 & John 2005: 77-82). Robert Cook visited places such as Vennikkulam, Ezhumattoor, Valakotukavu near Ranni, Kollooppara, Pariyaram near Mallappally etc., and preached the gospel (Abraham 2001: 95).

Mainline Pentecostal Churches in the Beginning

Pentecostalism was more unorganised and scattered in the beginning. Brethren Mission in Travancore was a base, and many of the first generation pastors hailed from this. Many of the pastors were also from traditional churches like Mar Thoma or Jacobite. Pentecostal leaders from Dalit communities were mainly Brethrens and Anglicans. By 1930s, three different and independent Pentecostal churches emerged in Malankara. 1)The AG under the American General Council, 2) the Malankara Full Gospel Church under the leadership of Pastor Cook, but free from the foreign mission, and 3) the Thennindia Daiva Sabha (South India Church of God) led by K. E. Abraham (Saju 2007: 172-3). At present, there are four major Pentecostal churches in Kerala - Assemblies of God, Church of God, Indian Pentecostal Church of God and Ceylon Pentecostal Mission (Saju, quoted in Rennymon 2007). These four are considered as mainline churches of Pentecostals.

Dalit Christian-Syrian Christian Relation in the early Pentecostal Churches

The writers of Pentecostal history suggest that there was a higher degree of harmony between the Syrian Christians and Dalits at the beginning of Pentecostalism. The Pentecostal spirituality became helpful in making a fellowship among all. As mentioned earlier, the Dalit pastors known for their healing power were considered as gifted, and the believers including Syrian Christians invited them for prayers. Contrary to this, in those days, priesthood and respect for priests in other denominations were restricted by the caste and family background

of the priests. Pentecostalism also provided an equal platform for both Dalits and Syrian Christians, to point out and fight caste discrimination prevailing in other churches (John 2005: 68).

However, the fusion of caste groups within the Pentecostals is not complete, and the difference in this respect with other denominations is only a matter of degree. In IPC for the gospel among different social groups, a division of work based on the social background of pastors existed. Initially it was for convenience and later it became a norm. The Pentecostals belonging to Syrian Christian groups preferred to work among themselves and the Dalit Christians confined their activities among Dalits. The common ascribed social identities also motivated the formation of informal groups among the believers, which fostered more caste-based solidarities. The social alignment of the Pentecostals simulated the caste-like relations alien to their theology. Gradually, the social background of members became a criterion for Pentecostals in their preference to take membership in a Church. Syrian Christians preferred church units where they are a significant group, and the Dalits were confined to churches made for themselves.

Though the intentions and reasons were different, and perhaps necessary, the way of decentralised planting of churches (an initiative by Pastor Robert Cook) indirectly gave way to the social segregation of Pentecostals into ecclesiastical units based on their castes. However, it was not so inimical in the beginning and sometimes even appeared as warmth. Later it affected the unity of members and the proximity between the Syrian Christians and the Dalit Christians.

In the early years, Dalits experienced warm welcome by the converts from Syrian Christian churches. The converts from Syrian churches to Pentecostalism were considered as deviants by all the Syrian Christians. It might have prompted the converts from Syrian Christians to find a rational equation with the Dalit Pentecostals at large (John 2005: 69-70). However, gradually when more Syrian Christians joined the Pentecostal Churches, and they grew in number, new elite formation based on the sameness of social background also developed. Ironically, the display of a distance between Dalits and upper caste Christians within the Church became a necessity to attract more followers from the traditional churches. It was evident in the IPC formed at the initiative of K.E. Abraham.

The church tried to attract many more members from the Syrian Christian churches. Robert Cook was more attentive to organise churches for Dalits. Both Cook and Abraham also

severed their relationship. Later Cook retired from his work and returned to the US. When he was in Kerala, the representation of Dalits in the church administration was also better. After he returned to the US, Syrian Christians regained their dominance in IPC (John 2005: 68).

The methods of propagation of the Pentecostal faith in Kerala deserve a special mention. The mission methods of Robert F. Cook were very crucial to incorporate Dalits. His primary mission method was holding conventions. In conventions, he included preaching and healing.[17] His long-term goal was to establish an indigenous base for Pentecostal Church. Therefore, he adopted Indian culture in his ministry. He encouraged the appointment of natives as pastors. Robert F. Cook's mission methods mainly focused on church planting (John 2005: 56). It led to the emergence of Pentecostal churches at the initiative of many marginalised communities in their area of living. Though the Syrian Christians had the upper hand in Pentecostalism at the state level, the spread of units of the church was more decentralised which helped the Dalits to become the founders of church units in many places. Therefore, in the history of Dalit Christians in Kerala Dalit Pentecostals managed to make their space through the works of Cook and his methods of mission. The method of Cook was mainly based on healing ministry. Still, this method is relevant as many of the newly emerged Pentecostal Churches established by Dalits and Dalit Pastors. The leaders of the Church succeeding Cook also continued this method.

Anglican Churches did not provide many of the advantages that Dalits gained from Pentecostalism under the leadership of Robert Cook. However, his efforts had a shortcoming in comparison with Anglican missionaries. While Anglican Christian missionaries were aiming at both material and spiritual wellbeing of Dalits, Cook's mission was mainly spiritual. Therefore, its effect on the social and political consciousness of the converts was not very evident (John 2005: 90).

Non-Episcopal Churches other than Pentecostals

The Salvation Army is an evangelical church. In India, the Salvation Army is registered as a Guarantee Company under the Indian Companies Act 1913. Major Tucker (later Commissioner Booth-Tucker, and then Fakir Singh) and started Salvation Army's work in Bombay on 19 September 1882. The adoption of Indian food, dress, names and customs gave

[17] Robert Cook adopted some methods from the other churches but the methods of his ministry such as Conventions, Preaching, Healing, Dialogue, and Enculturation were original and innovative. Through these methods, he propagated the gospel of Christ. These methods actually facilitated the conversion of Dalits (For more details of Cook's mission method see, John 2005: 56-65).

the pioneers of the Church access to the people. In addition to evangelistic work, the Church engaged in various social programmes for the relief of distress from famine, flood and epidemic. The church provided educational facilities such as elementary, secondary and industrial schools, cottage industries and settlements to the depressed classes. Apart from this, the Church started medical service also. Salvation Army started its activities in Kerala (in the erstwhile Travancore) on 18th March 1894 at the leadership of Captain Yesudasen Sanjivi. Gradually its work spread to other parts of the state. India South Western Territory, the administrative region for Kerala, came into being on 1st October 1970 with the bifurcation of the Southern India Territory, having Thiruvananthapuram (for more details, see The History Writing Committee (1998) and https://www.salvationarmy.org/india)..

The Brethren Mission started its activities in Kerala in 1896. In the beginning, the members of traditional Syrian Churches like Mar Thomas received Brethren faith (see keralabrethren.net for more details). Later Dalits also in large number embraced Brethren faith in the first half of 20th century. The Seventh Day Adventist Church started its activities in 1914 in Kerala. Dalits were taken in large number to this Church also.

The Churches after 1947 and Dalits

Majority of the Dalit Christians in Kerala are concentrated in the Catholic and Protestant Churches. There are only a less number of Dalits in traditional Syrian Christian Churches. The details of Dalits distributed in both Catholic and Protestant Churches are given in this section. The information about membership of the major Churches is mainly from central Kerala.

Catholic Churches

There are five archdioceses and 29 dioceses of Syro Malabar Church in Kerala. Out of the 30 dioceses, only eight are there in Kerala. Out of the rest 26 dioceses 22 are outside the state but within the country and four are outside the country. Changanassery, Ernakulam-Angamaly, Kottayam, Tellichery and Trichur are the five archdioceses, and Idukki, Irinjalakkuda, Kanjirappally, Kothamangalam, Mananthavady, Palghat, Palai, and Thamarassery are the eight dioceses within Kerala. The entire Kottayam district is under Changanassery archdiocese and Kanjirapplly and Pala dioceses (See www.kcbcsite.com, www.syromalabarchurch.in, and www.archdiocesechanganacherry.org for more details).

Most of the Dalits in the Syro Malabar Church are found in Changanassery archdiocese and Pala and Kanjirappally dioceses, especially Pala diocese (interview with P. O. Peter, T. J. Abraham, C. C. Kunjukochu, and James Elavumkal).

There are 12 dioceses and one archdiocese of Latin Church in Kerala. The archdiocese is Trivandrum, and the dioceses are; Alleppey, Calicut, Cochin, Kannur, Kottapuram, Neyyattinkara, Punalur, Quilon, Sultanpet, Verapoly, and Vijayapuram. Alappuzha, Kollam, Punalur and Neyyattinkara are the suffragent dioceses Trivandrum Archdiocese (See www.kcbcsite.com for more details). Almost all the members in all the Latin dioceses belong to backward caste groups, especially fisher-folks. A significant number of Dalits are also concentrated in Latin Church. Majority of the members in Punalur, Vijayapuram and Kannur dioceses belong to Dalits. Vijayapuram diocese of Latin Church, which covers many of the parts of central Kerala, is almost entirely comprised of Dalits (interview with P. O. Peter, T. J. Abraham, C. C. Kunjukochu, and James Elavumkal).

Of all the Dalit Christians in Kerala, majority of the Dalits are concentrated in two Catholic rites; Syro Malabar and Latin (interview with P. O. Peter and C. C. Kunjukochu). They say that there are around six lakh Dalits in both these rites. There are only a less number of Dalits in Syro Malankara Church (interview with Father John Areeckal).

Episcopal Protestant Churches

Protestant churches in the 20th century underwent some transformations. When India got independence, foreign missionaries of the LMS, CMS and Basal Mission gradually left the country. It also led to some changes in the structure of Protestant churches. Some of them merged, and some new churches came into being. The major Episcopal Protestant churches formed in the post-independence period in Kerala are Church of South India (CSI), Church Missionary Society-Anglican Church of India (CMS-ACI), Believers' Eastern Church, and Bible Faith Mission.

Church of South India (CSI)

Church of South India (CSI) was emerging because of the unification of CSI, LMS and Basal Mission by the end of colonial rule. The CSI was established in 1947. CSI has its dioceses in all South Indian states. In Kerala, at present, it has six dioceses. Dalits are in all the six dioceses, but their number differs.

Within the CSI, there are members from Syrian Christians, *Pulayas*, *Parayas*, *Mala Arayas* (Scheduled Tribes) *Nadars*, *and Ezhavas*. The prominent caste group in its South Kerala diocese is *Nadars*, a lower caste group. In some parishes majority of the members are Dalits. In Kollam-Kottarakkara Dioces Dalits are the majority. In the Madhya Kerala Diocese (central Kerala diocese), both Syrian Christians and Dalit Christians are more or less equal in number. There are some *Ezhava* converts also within this diocese. However, the Syrian Christians dominate this Diocese. In the East Kerala Diocese, the majority of the members belong to *Mala Arayas*, and the diocese has a small number of Dalits. Both Syrian Christians and Dalits are in the Cochin Diocese. In north Kerala, CSI has members from various caste groups. As the Basel Mission was dominant in north Kerala, it is difficult to see caste-based segregation within the CSI in the northern Kerala diocese. Dalits are present in all dioceses of CSI. Even though specific communities or caste groups have numerical advantage at the diocesan level, no single caste group is influential to exert dominance at the state level.

In the CSI, Dalits are relatively powerless in the parish/diocese where members having a Syrian Christian background are strong and have a good number. However, unlike the case of Catholic Churches, Dalits are more capable of resisting the caste discrimination within CSI. There are instances of Dalits overpowering the Syrian Christians against casteist remarks. The caste related conflicts sometimes made a split in the church. The total Dalit population of CSI comes around 1.5 lakh.

Of the total six CSI dioceses in Kerala, CSI Madhya Kerala Diocese is the one where a significant number of Dalits are members, apart from Kollam-Kottarakkara diocese. When the Church of South India was formed on 27 September 1947, it was called the Diocese of Central Travancore and was later renamed the Diocese of Madhya Kerala. The diocese stretches over three districts in central Kerala. It covers the entire parts of Kottayam and Pathanamthitta districts and certain parts of Alappuzha. The diocese has 12 district councils and 338 local parishes (See http://csimkd.net/csi-madhya-kerala/ for more details). Dalit Christian leaders and activists like Simon John and Shibi Peter say that 60 percent of its members are Dalits (interview with Simon John and Shibi Peter)

Kollam-Kottarakkara diocese was formed on 9 April 2015, at a special synod held in Chennai. Geographically, this diocese lies between the two dioceses of South Kerala and Madhya Kerala. It spans between Mangalapuram, near Attingal on the South and Ayiranelloore, near Punalur on the North. At present, the diocese consists of 60 parishes

spread across 12 Church Districts, divided into four areas (for more details, see http://kollamkottarakkara.csi1947.com/)

Church Missionary Society- Anglican Church of India (CMS-ACI)

It is an Anglican Protestant Church in Kerala (See Vattappara 1999, Raj 2010, and Yesudasan 2010). A section of Dalits from the Madhya Kerala Diocese of CSI split from the Church in protest against caste discrimination by the Syrian Christians and founded the CMS-ACI in 1966. In this church, the members are exclusively Dalits. All the priests, bishops, archbishops, and the moderators are from this group. Its head office is in Kurichy in Kottayam district. According to the Church authority, there are fifty thousand Dalits as members in the CMS-ACI. Majority of the Dalits are *Pulayas*, and the rest is mainly *Parayas*. The Church has dioceses in some areas of Tamil Nadu and some other parts of India.

Believers Eastern Church and Bible Faith Mission[18]

Some non-episcopal churches were later transformed into non-episcopal churches. Bible Faith Mission located at Thiruvananthapuram is an example. It is exclusively a Dalit Christian Church. Majority of its members are from *Paraya* community. Dalits are not in majority in the Believers Eastern Church, but their number is significant. The head office of this Church is in Thiruvalla in Pathanamthitta district.

Non-Episcopal Protestant Churches

Non-Episcopal Protestant Churches in Kerala cover Pentecostal and the Churches like Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist Church and Brethren Church.

Mainline Pentecostal Churches

Indian Pentecostal Church, The Pentecostal Mission, Church of God in (Full Gospel) in India-Kerala State, Assemblies of God and Sharon Fellowship are the major mainline Pentecostal Churches in Kerala. The Indian Pentecostal Church of God (IPC) is the most significant Pentecostal organisation in India. Its centre of operation is in Kumbanadu, in the Pathanamthitta district. It has about 800 local churches spread over all states of India, besides the Middle East, America, Europe, Australia and Africa (see http://ipc.international for more

[18] For more details about Believers Eastern Church, visit www.believerschurch.com and for Bible Faith Mission, see: Swamidas (2001).

details). In Kerala, Syrian Christians constitute the dominant group, but there is a strong presence of Dalits within the Church.

The Pentecostal Mission (TPM), formerly known as Ceylon Pentecostal Mission, is a Pentecostal denomination which originated in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka. The international headquarters is now situated in Chennai, Tamil Nadu (see, http://wordwillsave.com/cpm/ for more details).

The Assemblies of God and Sharon Fellowship in Kerala are also similar to that of the mainline Pentecostal Churches mentioned above. In Kerala, the caste composition of this Church is similar to that of IPC. Church of God (Full Gospel) in India is a part of The Church of God International with her international Head Quarters at Cleveland, Tennessee, USA (see http://cogkerala.com/state-headquarters/ for more details). Dalits constitute a minority within the Church.

Other Mainline Pentecostal Churches

World Missionary Evangelism, Church of God (Full Gospel) in India- Kerala Region, and United Pentecostal Church, New India Church of God and New India Bible Church are the other major Pentecostal Churches. These Churches show the characteristics of both mainline and independent Pentecostal movements. The second and third are the part of globally spread Pentecostal Churches. WME was previously the part of global Pentecostal Church. The fourth and fifth, though indigenous, are not smaller and weaker Churches regarding the membership, number of parishes and assets. The first three Churches are comprised of Dalits. In the fourth and fifth Churches, Dalits have a significant presence.

Certain Pentecostal churches frequently align and merge with international churches and disconnect from them. Churches like WME are examples of such Churches. The present WME started as an indigenous Church in 1949 under the name India Independent Church of God and then merged to an international Church called WME in a later period. Therefore, the Church became the part of a global Pentecostal movement. However, later WME was organizationally dissociated from the American centred WME. But it retains the name. C. S. Mathew, a Dalit Pentecostal leader, established this church. It existed as a church exclusively for Dalits. WME is financially very sound also. However, none of the Pentecostal churches is as economically powerful as traditional Syrian Christian dominated Pentecostal Churches

(see Perumpetty (1999) and http://wmeministries.com/ for more details). More about Church of God (Full Gospel) in India- Kerala Region are given in Chapter 4.

Independent Pentecostal Churches

All the new Pentecostal Churches founded after the 1950s, as independent from the mainline Pentecostal Churches shall be classified as a separate group. Most of them have some connection with international faith groups. The difference between the mainline and independent Churches has nothing to do with theology. (Saju 2007: 289). The earlier Pentecostal Churches, which were formed at the beginning of Pentecostal movements in Kerala, are called mainline Churches. In this sense, all those newly emerged Churches, which are not considered as mainline Churches, are regarded as independent Pentecostal Churches.

Mainline Pentecostal Churches accuse their standalone policy and reluctance to join mainline Churches because of personal motives of their leaders. However, the mainline churches are more coordinated, and power is concentrated at the top. The independent churches stand alone, and would not join the mainline churches because of their fear of loss of autonomy (Saju 2007: 309). Independent Pentecostal Churches have a tiny following, an insignificant number of local parishes and institutions, limited economic resources, and only a few eminent and famous leaders to show (Pastor K. J. Mathew in Iype 2001: 12). Pastor K. A. Iype makes a six-fold classification of Pentecostalism according to its nature in India (Ipe 2001: 42).[19] Rather than sociological, his classification is administrative, based on the organisational set-up of the Churches.

There was a significant growth for the independent Churches in 1960s. Saju gives a list of 34 new Churches in this regard.[20] Many of them have a considerable number of members from

[19] I) The churches, which function as the national component under the international leadership, II) he churches established under the national leadership, III) he churches, which emerged nationally, then merged with international movements and functioning as their national components, IV) the churches, which are organised under the national leadership but give coordination only in those things related to spiritual fellowship, cooperation among member churches etc., V) the churches, which depend only on national leadership for their survival and Christian campaigning, and VI) the churches, which do not have any organisational form and claiming total independence of indigenous churches.

[20] Sharon Fellowship Church, World Missionary Evangelism Fellowship, *Daiva Sabha* Kalayapuram, *Penthekosthu Daiva Sabha*, New Indian Church of God, New India Bible Church, Free *Penthekosthu Daiva Sabha*, Church of God (Kallumala), The Pentecostal Gospel Church, Mannamvila Daiva Sabha, Church of God (Evening Light), Church of God in India Trust, Indian Church of God, Bethel Gospel Assembly, The New Testament Church of God in India, Indian Apostolic Church of God, Full Gospel Pentecostal Church, The South India Apostolic Church of God, Fellowship of Independent, Full Gospel Church of India, Mount Sinai Holy Church of India, At Any Cost Jesus Movement India, Malankara Christian Church, *Sathya Daiva Sabha*, Apostolic Pentecostal Church, Punnamoodu *Daiva Sabha*, Church of God Mulavana, Zion Sangham,

Syrian Christian background (Saju 2007: 289 & 292-4). The Churches like Sharon Fellowship has become a mainstream Pentecostal Church, though it does not come under the category of generally believed mainline Churches. Its organisation and functioning are similar to that of those four mainline Churches in some ways. It is a well-established Church with many local parishes and under the leadership of Syrian Christians.

Apart from these, there are some very small Pentecostal Churches. The number of the parishes of such Churches may fall below twenty or ten. A total number of members may be below 1000 or 500. The pastors, including the head of the Church, may be less educated. In addition, their financial capacity is low. Many of them are Dalit Churches. K. A. Ipe (2001) gives a list of 100 such independent Churches. Many of such tiny Pentecostal churches are existing in the areas where Dalit Pentecostals are living.[21] However, exact numerical distribution of Dalits in the Pentecostal churches is not available.

Other Non-Episcopal Churches

Salvation Army, Seventh Adventist Church and Brethren Mission have a significant number of Dalits. Except a minority of Syrian Christians, all others in the Salvation Army belong to Dalits (interview with George K. M.). Most of the members of the Seventh Day Church are Dalits (interview with Pastor K. J. Mathew). Today there are nearly 37,000 members in the state (https://news.adventist.org). Brethren Church is composed of Syrian Christians and Dalit Christians in equal number. All these Churches have its parishes across the State. Baptist Mission is a small Church, which has a few parishes in Kottayam and Pathanamthitta. Its members are entirely from Dalit Christians. Lutheran Church is mainly located in Thiruvananthapuram and its units are in the surrounding areas. Both Syrian Christians and Dalit Christians are members (Interview with Shibi Peter).

Denominational and caste-based differences mainly determine the heterogeneity of Kerala Churches. Dalit Christians are distributed in all the Christian denominations in Kerala. Dalits were converted to Protestant Churches in the second half of the 19th century. Following this both Catholic and traditional Syrian Churches started conversion. Out of all the Churches,

---

Philadelphia *Daiva Sabha*, Full Gospel Assembly, India Independent Church of God, Independent Assemblies of God International, and *Poornna Suvishesha Penthekosthu Sabha*.

[21] 'Mukkada', near Erumely town in Kottayam district, is such a place where both Dalit Hindus and Dalit Christians are concentrated in large number. There are many such areas are in Kottayam district. In all these areas traditional mainline Churches, other mainstream Churches, and the small independent Churches have their units.

most of them are concentrated in Catholic Churches. While they constitute a minority in Syro Malabar rite of Catholic Church, there is a significant strength of Dalit Christians in the Latin rite of Catholic Church. Unlike the case of all other Churches, Dalits constitute a significant strength in all the Protestant Churches, both episcopal and non-episcopal.

Chapter 3

Caste Related Practices within the Church and Dalit Christians

Though Christianity preaches equality, its practice reflects hierarchical social relationships prevailing in the society. Indian society is not free from caste-based hierarchical relationships. The influence of the traditional social system became important in practising and maintaining the caste even within the Church. Dalit Christians are discriminated within the Church by the Syrian Christians and others including the Christians belonging to the OBC groups. This chapter looks at the caste discrimination within the churches in Kerala by focusing on different denominations.

Caste Discrimination within the Church

Christianity as a modrn religion proposes equality to all its believers both in the worldly and otherworldly affairs. Being a modern religion, Christianity is supposed to hold the values such as liberty and equality. The Protestant missionaries preached such values in colonies as part of propagating their faith. It is one of the reasons for the Christianity's strength among social groups. One of the reasons for conversion of Dalits to Christianity was their quest for equality and justice. Missionaries also preached such values to them.

However, even after the conversion the Dalits are facing a continuity of discrimination based on caste. Adherence to a monotheistic and egalitarian religion is not enough, even after several generations, to lead to the disappearance of the fundamental attitudes on which caste system is based (Dumont 1970: 205). K. C. Alexander says that even after the conversion to Christianity the lower castes are treated as Harijans (Alexander 1971: 553). What Alexander said was the condition until the 1960s in Kerala. But still, it continues to exist in all the churches irrespective of denominations. Since equality is a modern value and Protestant Christianity is a modern religion, it is very relevant to ask why Dalits are not treated equally by non-Dalit Christians and how they are vulnerable to discriminations based on caste. It is possible to agree that the benefits of modernity are not accessible to all or are not distributed equally among all.

Many studies regarding this say that various social groups of Christians in Kerala resemble caste. The Syrian Christians, the Latin Catholics and the neo Christians can be considered as three castes or clusters of castes among Kerala Christians (Tharamangalam 1997: 270). This configuration of different Christian groups reflects the caste hierarchy found in Kerala's social system. The Syrian Christians, non-Dalit Latin Catholics, and neo-Christians (newly converted

Christians from among ex-untouchables) are treated as upper castes, Other Backward Castes, and Dalits respectively within contemporary social system of Kerala.

> The population of Kerala, where the Syrian Christians constitute a considerable part of the population, would be good example of their internal subdivision into groups strongly resembling castes…. The Syrian Christians, whose legendary origin goes back to Thomas, Christ's disciple, are divided, as a result of colonial history, into several persuasions which, while authorizing commensality with each other, are mostly endogamous… Christians originating from the Untouchables seem to have their own Churches (Dumont 1970: 203).

There are studies, which show that in Kerala Churches Dalits are mainly discriminated by the Syrian Christians (for more details see, Koshy 1968, Alexander 1971 and Fuller 1976). The same situation still continues to exist in Kerala Churches (for more details see Chirakkarode 1990, Abraham 2003, and Palakkapillil 2009). Paul Chirakkarode says this in a general context of Dalit Christians, but the focus on Protestant Churches. P. G. Abraham says about the caste practices within Pentecostal Churches. Johnson Palakkappillil says about the caste discrimination within the Syro Malabar Church. The Syrian Christians considered themselves as an upper caste group and the division between Dalits and the Syrian Christians affected the churches in Kerala. C. J. Fuller, after detailing the social status of both Syrian Christians and Dalit Christians, says that empirically both of them can be regarded as castes (Fuller 1976: 58).

The method of practicing caste is different in various denominations. In many Churches, Dalits are not so able to fight against it, but in some, they can resist it to a certain extent. In some of the smaller Churches all members are Dalits. They are not facing any discrimination there and the Churches are entirely under the control of them.

The Case of Catholic Church

According to John C. B. Webster practising caste discrimination against Dalit Christians in its extreme form is found in Catholic Churches (Webster 1992). Though he evaluates the caste discrimination within the Church in a larger Indian context, it is very much applicable to Kerala's situation also. In fact, his observation is more appropriate to churches in Kerala than any other States. The reason behind this is that traditional Syrian Christians dominate and discriminate Dalits based on caste in the churches in Kerala. The oldest Christian community in the country, according to some myths converted to Christianity in the first century AD from indigenous people, is only in Kerala. They claim that they are the descendants of Brahmins. Moreover, this belief of Syrian Christians that they are the high castes persuades them to discriminate the Dalits.

But the cases are not same in all Catholic Churches. There are three Catholic rites in Kerala - the Syro Malabar, Syro Malankara, and the Latin Catholics - the majority of the members in the first two rites belong to Syrian Christians, and so caste discrimination is severe there. However, the condition of Dalits within the Malankara Church is not as worse as in the case of Dalits within the Syro Malabar Church. In Malankara Church, some Dalits could become priests.[1] Because of the presence of a majority of members from backward communities and the rest are from Dalits, caste discrimination is not much severe in Latin Catholic Church. In this respect, it seems better than the other two Catholic rites. In some of the Latin Catholic Churches, the Dalits' situation is slightly better. In those, the Dalits are in majority. However, even in Latin rite, the conditions of Dalits are worse than their conditions in Protestant Churches.

Sometimes, the Syrian Christians have tried to take over some churches and their institutions from Dalits. The case of St. Joseph's Monastery Church of Mannanam in Kottayam district under the Changanassery diocese of Syro Malabar Church is an example. The Syrian Christians have strategically made some attempts to take over this Church by excluding the Dalits. In the beginning, Dalits failed in sensing the strategies and methods of Syrian Christians. However, later they came to know about the Syrian Christians plan to extend control over their church.[2] The Dalit Christians massively campaigned against the move. Dalit intellectuals and activists from various parts of the State also supported the Dalits of the Church and raised their voice against the Syrian Christians. The efforts of the Syrian Christians were unsuccessful.[3]

Still the Church is with the Dalits. Mannanam Church is essential for the Catholic believers as Chavara Achan (a priest known for his holiness among the believers) had served the Church as a priest.[4] So the Church has been a famous pilgrim centre of the Catholics in Kerala

[1] Interview with Fr. John Areekkal

[2] It is a common practice among the believers that they participate in the Sunday worship or Holy Qurbana in the nearby parishes instead of their own because it is far away from their place of residence. Dalits are following this practice. However, in the essential ritual matters concerning their religious life such as marriage, mammodeesa, death and such other things the believers resort to their church and parishes. All churches make it mandatory. However, in the case of believers belonging to Mannanam church, the churches of their nearby parishes also entertain them to conduct the rituals. According to Dalit Christians, this new practice aim at the gradual displacement of Dalit believers their mother parish and the Mannanam Church. The Church authority thought that the Dalits could be separated from their parish by allowing them to become members of their nearby parishes and making them the members of those parishes later. In this way the Syrian Christian leadership of the church hope for gaining a decisive control in the Mannanam Church, Dalits say.

[3] Dalits say that later they understood the strategy of the Syrian leadership and they opposed and defeated it. They got state-wide support from Dalit activists and intellectuals. Finally, the Syrian Christian Church authority withdrew from their effort.

[4] Chavara Achan (Father Chavara) is the popular name of Saint Kuriakkose Elias Chavara, a Catholic priest from Syro Malabar Church who is blessed and later canonised by the Vatican. The church recommended for Canonisation of Saint Kuriakkose Elias Chavara to the Rome in 1980. Rome elevated his name to the position of 'Venerable' in

for long. Chavara Achan is the second canonised saint of the Syro Malabar Catholic Church[5] After his canonisation in 2015; the Church became more a centre of attention of Catholic community. Many people visit the Church every year. In this kind of a context, it is disquieting for the Syrian Christians that the Church belongs to the Dalit Christians. However, the Syrian Christians are taking the lead in organising the celebration of the special day of the Church in commemoration of Chavara Achan. As a Catholic pilgrim centre, the Church gets a massive amount of money every year. However, Dalit Christians are getting alienated when the church is growing financially.

Chavara Achan is known for his sympathetic approach towards Dalits during his lifetime. A lot of *Pulaya* families were living in Mannanam and the surrounding areas during his term of service in the Church. The priest took a reasonable effort to convert these people to the Catholic faith and to rehabilitate them both socially and economically. That means, besides leading them to a new religion, he aimed to uplift them financially and socially. At that time, the Dalits settled in the said areas, were facing exploitation and caste-based oppression by the wealthy Syrian Christians. Chavara Achan was against such attitude of the Syrian Christians towards Dalts.[6] Still, while giving messages to the believers or delivering a speech, the priest used to send signals against the exploitation of the Dalits by the wealthy Syrian Christians.[7] He took the Pulayas to the Church and made a separate parish for them. This separate parish is the present Mannanam Church. Dalits, especially *Pulayas*, have been the members of the Mannanam Church from that time onwards. As the members were only Dalits, Syrian Christians did not take any interest in joining the Church.

Even though the members of the Church are Dalit Christians, the control of the Church is still with the Syrian Christians. Priest in Church also is always a Syrian Christian. The Church

---

1984. Moreover, 1986 Pope John Paul II on his visit to Kerala elevated him to the position of 'Blessed'. Finally, his canonisation came in 2014 by the Pope.
See, Madathikkam http://www.Saintkuriak oseeliaschavara.org/the_acts_of_canonization.pdf, retrieved on 04-06-2015.

[5] The first is the Sister Alphonsa who was canonised in 2008 by Pope Benedict XVI at Vatican. http://www.saintalphonsamma.org/St_Alphonsa.html, retrieved on 04-06-2015.

[6] All the available data from internet and other records say that he was very much sympathetic towards the poor. However, the present members of the Church and others say that he was very much sympathetic towards the Pulayas of his time because of their caste oppression. Most of the mainstream accounts hide the context of caste relations prevailing in Mannanam against which the priest echoed his voice. Their general description about his 'gracious sympathy for the poor' conceal his critical stand against the caste practces of the Syrian Christians of the area by a giving (Interview with Binoy A. A.)

[7] At the time of Sunday Mass the priests of the church also occasionally remember Chavara Achan for his mercy on poor against the exploitation by the rich. Here also caste character of that exploitation does not get any mention. Remembrance of Chavara Achan in this way is quite convenient to Syrian Christians' interest. (Interview with Binoy A. A.)

owns two colleges (Kuriakkose Elias Memorial College and Kuriakkose Elias Memorial B. Ed. College) and a school (Kuriakose Elias English Medium High School) at Mannanam. All these institutions are under the Changanassery Archdiocese of Syro Malabar Church. The management body is governed by the Syrian Christians and Dalits have no role in administering these institutions.

Another case similar to that of Chavara Achan is the controversy and conflicts related to a priest namely Augustine, popularly known as Thevarparambil Kunjachan. He had served his own parish (St. Augustines Church at Ramapuram in Kottayam district) as assistant priest and priest for about 40 years.[8] The Ramapuram Church is under the Pala diocese of Syro Malabar Church. Father Augustine was called 'Kunjachan' (in Malayalam) which means 'little father', by the Church members as he was a short man. He was also very sympathetic towards the Dalits in the Church and dedicated his life to the socio-economic and spiritual wellbeing of Dalits. Still, the people from Dalit communities in the region, who had direct contact with Kunjachan, say that he was very sympathetic towards them.

During his term of service in the Church, the Syrian Christians called him *Pulayanachan*, (Father of Pulayas) as he had shown his concerns to *Pulayas*. The priest would fondly call Pulayas 'my people'. Dalits of the old generation says that he was showing more concerns about the issues of *Pulayas* than the issues of Syrian Christians. Due to this, the Syrian Christians called him *Pualayanachan*. They say that he was a hearing impaired also. That means he had suffered from some physical difficulties. His marginality, being short and a hearing impaired, in certain ways might have prepared him to stand with Dalits. He was declared 'Venerable' by the Pope John Paul II in 2004 at the Vatican and declared blessed at Ramapuram in 2006.[9]

Like Mannanam Church, Ramapuram Church also became the centre of attraction of Catholic community, and it became a famous Catholic pilgrim centre in Kerala. Dalits in the region say that the Syrian Christians appropriated Kunjachan after he was blessed, though they were not showing respect when he was a priest. Later when he was elevated as a blessed one by the Pope, they came in praise for him. Subsequent to this, they took over the charge of commemoration of the Holy Day in his name in the Church.

[8] Researcher got the information in this regard from a group discussion with the Dalits from old generation living around Ramapuram Church. Many of the participants in the discussion had direct contact with Kunjachan.
[9] http://www.guidinglight.com/encyclopedia/S/SyroMalabar_Catholic_Church/#Saints.2C_Blesseds.2C_Venerables.2C_Servants_of_God, retrieved on 04-06-2015

The two cases mentioned above show the ways by which the Syrian Christians are alienating Dalit Christians from their space within the churches. Chavara Achan and Kunjachan had extended their concerns towards the cause of Dalits. However, the Syrian Christian leadership of the Church tries to decontextualise the efforts of both these priests and portray their efforts as just a matter of sympathy towards the poor. They do not mention anything regarding the caste oppression, which the Dalits had experienced from Syrian Christians during that period. The two priests had to come for helping the Dalits because of caste discrimination by Syrian Christians. Instead of telling the truth, the Syrian Christian leadership tries to show only the rich-poor divide between Dalits and Syrian Christians and the consequent sufferings of Dalits. Caste question and oppression are entirely ignored. They want those priests to be portrayed as the Holy figures never disturbed the caste prejudices of the Church.

The Case of Traditional Syrian Christian Churches

Caste-related practices are plenty in Orthodox, Jacobite and Mar Thoma Churches, and the Dalits constitute only a minority group of believers. In the case of Orthodox, Jacobite and Marthoma Churches Dalit parishes are also a few. Some historical reasons are underlying this difference between the Catholic churches and the Syrian Churches.[10]

The Case of Protestant Churches

Caste discrimination against Dalits is comparatively less severe in Protestant Churches as Dalits are mainly concentrated in those Churches. Both Syrian Christians and Dalits were converted to Protestant faith by the British missionaries almost in a similar period. In the case of Catholic denominations, Dalits were taken to the Church by Syrian Christians, and the Church was solely under their control and leadership. British missionaries mainly took the lead in conversion of Dalits to the protestant churches. The missionaries have done many things for uplifting Dalits; they educated them, liberated them from slavery and so on. It is this historical context and reasons that made the conditions of Dalits in Protestant Churches better. Both Dalit Christians and Syrian Christians share an almost same period of history within the Protestant Churches. Therefore, the Syrian Christian domination or caste discrimination against Dalit

[10] There was no mass conversion of lower castes into the traditional Syrian Christian Churches (Orthodox,Jacobites and Marthoma). Catholic Church was more active in conversion, and Latin Church created some dioceses mainly for Dalits. Some of the parishes of Syro Malabar Church also are exclusively for Dalits, and in some of those, Dalits are the majority of believers.

Christians in Protestant Churches is not as hard as it is in Catholic Churches or the Syrian Christian Churches.

There are many caste groups and communities like Syrian Christians, *Pulayas*, *Parayas*, *Mala Arayas*, *Ezhava*s, and *Nadar*s within various dioceses of CSI. All major caste groups are sharing more or less same power in CSI as a whole. Dalits also have a significant presence. Dalits are facing discrimination in the parishes and dioceses (for example, the Central Kerala Diocese) where the Syrian Christians are strong.

The bifurcation of CMS Anglican Church of India from the CSI shows the conflict between Dalit Christians and Syrian Christians within the Protestant Church along caste line. Dalit Christians within the Madhya Kerala Diocese of CSI have been being discriminated against their caste by the Syrian Christians for long. From the 1940s onwards there was a tension between the Dalit Christians and Syrian Christians within the Church. Bifurcation of the Church along caste line can be found among Pentecostals also. The emergence of Church of God in India (Full Gospel-Kerala Region) tells the story of a caste-based conflict between Dalit Christians and Syrian Christians within a Pentecostal Church. Both these cases will be discussed later.

Syrian Christians within the Pentecostal Churches always try to give a Syrian Christian colour to their churches. Such attempts meet with resistance by the Dalit Christians. It is challenging for the Syrian Christians to reproduce their supremacy in the Protestant Churches. Unlike the Syrian Christian Churches and the Catholic Churches, all believers belonging to various castes share the legacy of Protestant Christianity. Therefore, the attempt by the upper caste Christians to impose their cultural pride on the Church and the rest of believers may not succeed very quickly. However, the Syrian Christians distorted the Church history of Protestantism. Resistance to this move is evident among the Dalit Christians. For example, Yesunatha Das says,

> Historical accounts of the Pentecostal church in the state indicate, a communal polarisation, revolved around the Syrian Christian community, and Pentecostal writers have generated the idea that Kerala Pentecostalism has Syrian predominance. They have completely marginalised others, the Dalits in Particular (Das 2001: 57).

The Syrian Christian writers of the history of Pentecostalism in Kerala share the prejudices that the growth of Pentecostalism in Kerala is only the contribution of Syrian Christians and the Dalit had nothing to do with it. They are silent or unclear about Dalits while writing Pentecostal history (Das 2001: 65-67).

Multiple Methods of Discrimination

Dalit Christians are facing discrimination in the fields of the priesthood, Church administration, employment in the institutions run by the Church, and even in the matters of worship. Sometimes Syrian Christians do not prefer inter-dining with Dalits. Syrian Christians fail to give recognition and dignity to them. Even in the burial ground (cemetery) also Dalit Christians were discriminated. Different forms of social discrimination faced by the Dalit Christians in the Christain Churches are detailed in the following.

A. The Naming of Dalit Christians by Caste

Even though an individual becomes a Christian by profession and practice of Christianity, Dalit Christians have to bear many forms of degrading names and titles in the language of their church and the Syrian Christians. A few such titles they get are somewhat neutral and secular in connotation. *Puthu Christhyanikal* (New Christians) and *Avasa Chraisthavar* (weak Christians) are such titles. However, some are directly denoting their caste name as a qualifier. Still in some Syrian Christian dominated Churches Dalits are remarked as *Pulaya Christhyani* (Pulaya Christian) or *Paraya Christhyani* (Paraya Christian) denoting their caste more directly. In their parlance, only the Syrian Christian can claim a title, *Sathya Christhyani* (True Christian). They rarely agree that the Dalits can become a *Sathya Christhyani*. Interestingly, the theological term based on faith is almost becoming an indicator of the social identity based on birth. It seems that only the traditional Syrian Christians from Syro Malabar Churches are eligible to become *Sathya Christhyani*.

Even in the Pentecostal Churches, a believer/member from a Dalit community is remarked as a *Sadhu Sahodharan* (poor brother) or a *Sadhu Sahodhari* (poor sister) by the Syrian Christians. Here the usage *Sadhu* denotes their caste, though literally, it means poor. All these ways of naming indicate the marginalised status of Dalits within the Church and society. “Dalit Christian” is a term showing a self-definition by the group, but very rarely, it appears in the official communique of many of the churches.

B. Dalit Parishes

The Christian denominations have parishes exclusively for Dalits in the regions where they are concentrated or numerically strong. The historical context of the emergence of Dalit parishes was a point of discussion in the previous chapter. It gives the Dalits some autonomy in the affairs of the church units. However, the Syrian Christians usually avoid a church (or parish) having a

large number of Dalits. They have the choice to attend prayers in churches where their community members are dominant. However, Dalits in the Syrian churches are in a dilemma. They have to become members of Syrian Christian dominated Churches/parishes, but discrimination is the result. Sometimes the Protestant denominations have created even some dioceses and centres solely or mainly for Dalits. Syrian Christian churches also earmark some separate parishes exclusively for Dalits. As already mentioned in the chapter, St. Joseph's Monastery Church, Mannanam near Kottayam under the diocese of Kottayam Arch eparchy is such a Church. In the case of Latin rite, there are some dioceses like Vijayapuram in Kottayam district, Punalur in Pathanamthitta district, and Kannur exclusively or mainly for Dalits. In the case of CSI many of the parishes, which are solely for Dalits, are in the Madhya Kerala Diocese (MKD). Syrian Christians in the CSI usually do not go to those Churches even for the Sunday worship.

In all the denominations mentioned above, Syrian Christians do not prefer the parishes in which Dalits are concentrated even if those parishes are near their residence. Instead of that, they prefer the Syrian Christian dominated parishes even though those parishes are far away. Dalits also sometimes show the same attitude towards the Syrian Christians, and they also prefer Dalit parishes or Dalit Christian dominated parishes. However, it is worth noting that there are some CSI and Pentecostal Churches in which Dalits and Syrian Christians are almost equal in number.[11] However, the parishes having an equal membership for Dalits and others are not seen in the traditional Syrian Christian Churches and Catholic Churches including Syro Malabar Church.

C. Discrimination during Worship

Apart from researchers' life-experience, during the fieldwork for this study also many of the members from various Churches have shared their experiences about caste discrimination within the Church. It is happening in the Churches where Syrian Christians are dominant, or they are numerically strong. Dalit Christians have noticed that the Syrian Christians do not prefer to sit with them during worship on Sundays in some Churches. It seems, at the time of Holy Communion, Syrian Christians are not willing to share the glass from which Dalits sip wine. Syrian Christians take some precautionary measures to avoid such an opportunity by using

[11] While the Dalits and the Syrian Christians are more or less equal in number, the converts from *Ezhava* caste are perhaps one of the largest non-Dalit and non-Syrian Christain group in some of the parishes. It brings about a balance between the social groups and different groups become equally prominent in the affairs of the church. The priests appointed in the church are also from different castes including Dalits (Interview with Anil P C on 05-07-2014).

different means. As part of this, just before the rituals of Holy Communion starting, the Syrian Christians move forward from their sitting positions and try to have the bread and wine from the pastors or priests before Dalits. A close observation of the assembly of believers in the churches reveals this well. Many Dalit Christians say that the Syrian Christians pretend to be unintentional while doing such things. The respondents also say that it is sometimes in their knowledge. Even in some seminaries and Bible colleges, the same they noticed (Interview with Pastor C. J. Thomas and Binu Pappachan).

The discriminations mentioned above were prevalent in the Syro Malabar Churches until recently. The Syrian Christians of the Syro Malabar Churches, were doing it openly. In all the Syrian Churches, including Syro Malabar Church, Dalits were hardly able to do anything effective against these kinds of caste practices. However, in Protestant Churches (including Pentecostals) Dalits can fight against these kinds of caste-based practices and effectively prevent it from repeating. Therefore, in Protestant Churches, the caste hardly sneaks its head in matters of worship. In the Syrian Churches, the Church leadership is not that tough in dealing with the issues of caste discrimination. In the case of Protestant Churches, as Dalits have a role in the leadership, they can intervene better.

Even though the Syro Malabar Churches are vulnerable to caste practices, there are regional variations also. Dalit Christian members in the churches under the dioceses of Pala, Kanjirappally, and Changanassery in Kottayam district have shared such experience with the researcher. In other areas like Idukki, where the Syrian Christians are migrant settlers from different regions of Kerala, these kinds of discriminations are not very visible. Even in some localities under the dioceses mentioned above in Kottayam district also, where people in various caste and communities are equal in membership and the Syrian Christians are comparably not so wealthy or they constitute a lower class, the incidence of caste discrimination is rare.

D. Priesthood

It was difficult for Dalits to become priests of Syro Malabar Church. However, now the approach shows some change, and Dalits are encouraged to join the seminaries (Interviews with P. O. Peter, T. J. Abraham, and C. C. Kunjukochu).[12] The discriminations regarding the eligibility of a believer to become priest vary with denominations. The priests belonging to Dalit community are very few in Syro Malabar Church. The same is the condition of Dalits in

[12] Interview with P. O. Peter, T. J. Abraham, and C. C. Kunjukochu

Orthodox, Jacobite and Mar Thoma Chuches. Even when a Dalit becomes a priest, the church will appoint them in Dalit parishes only. Many Dalit believers may not be very optimistic about priesthood as their career in the Syrian Christian dominated churches, so the applicants for admission in seminaries will also be very less.

Many Dalits have become priests in Latin Rite, probably because the lower castes have a majority in the Church membership (Interview with Fr. Saviour Cherunellady). However, there also Dalit priests are mainly appointed in Dalit parishes. In Jacobite, Orthodox and Mar Thoma Churches it is hardly possible to find out even a single Dalit priest. Regarding priesthood, Dalits' situation is worse in these Churches than the Catholic Churches. Syrian Christians from these Churches show strong prejudice against Dalits regarding their eligibility and capability to become priests. Syrian Christians say, "Dalits are not fit for the priesthood" or "they do not have the call of God to become a priest". The traditional Syrian Christian Churches may not even apponit Dalit priests to the parishes where Dalits and Syrian Christians are equal. If they nominate a Dalit as a priest in such a Church, his caste becomes an obstacle to deal with believers from other castes. Fr. Y. T. Vinayaraj, a Dalit priest from Marthoma Church narrated an incident (Interview with Fr. Y. T. Vinayaraj). Given this, searching for a Dalit among the bishops or assistant bishops in these churches have no sense. These higher positions are only for Syrian Christians.

However, as far as priesthood is concerned, Dalits are in a better position in Protestant and Pentecostal Churches. In the Churches like CSI, Dalits are powerful and influential, and there is an adequate number of Dalits as priests in all the six dioceses. Though the number of Dalits in the central diocese is almost equal to that of the Syrian Christians, the majority of the priests in the diocese belong to the latter (Interviews with Simon John, T. J. Peter, Shibi Peter and Justin T Varghese). CSI mostly appoint a Dalit priest in a Dalit Church and in those where both the communities are equal in number. However, very rarely the CSI appoints Dalit priests in the churches where the Syrian Christian are in majority (Interviews with Simon John, T J Peter, Shibi Peter, Justin T Varghese and Anil P C). However, if it happens, he may also be discriminated. Such an incident has occurred in the Assumption CSI Cathedral, Kottayam; a Syrian Christian dominated Church (Interview with Anil P. C.).

In CSI, the cases different from this are very exceptional. For instance, the church appointed T. S. Joseph as the first Dalit bishop of the Madhya Kerala Diocese (MKD) in 1972. Before appointed as the bishop, he was the assistant bishop of the diocese. This was following a

conflict between Dalit Christians and Syrian Christians.[13] He was also the last Dalit Christian appointed in the higher positions in CSI.

Similar cases are also evident in the Pentecostal Churches like IPC, Church of God, AG, TPM and Sharon Fellowship controlled by the Syrian Christians. Some pastors from Dalit communities are in these Churches also. The situation of Dalit priests in CSI is better as compared to Dalit pastors in the mainline Pentecostal Churches. Unlike the case of the Pentecostal Churches dominated by Syrian Christians, CSI does not officially name/declare any particular diocese or parish exclusively for any particular community or caste though in some of its dioceses the members from a community may have a majority.

In the Pentecostal Churches like IPC, the centre pastor and all other pastors at local parishes are Dalits, if the Dalits are in majority. Syrian Christians do not prefer a pastor from a Dalit community as a centre pastor (head pastor for many parishes) in the centres where most of the believers are Syrian Christians. When a Dalit becomes the senior most pastor in a centre (a geographical area or region of many parishes) in which the majority of believers are Syrian Christians, the Church will divide the centre into two separate centres for the Syrian Christians and Dalits (Interview with Shins Peter). There was an incident of this kind in IPC to satisfy the requirement of the Syrian Christians.

Shins Peter says about a bifurcation of Pampady centre in Kottayam. Actually, before the division the centre, a Dalit Pastor came in seniority to become the centre's Pastor. As per the rules and regulations of the Church, he was eligible to the post. However, the Syrian Christians concentrated in the Pampady region of the centre opposed this. Finally, the Church leadership resolved their concerns by dividing the centre into two (Pampady and Kanam), and the Dalit Pastor was given the charge of Kanam where they are more in number. (Interview with Shins Peter).

The Churches like CMS-ACI, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist Church, BFM, and Pentecostal Churches like WME, UPC, CGI (FG) and KR are under the control of Dalits and they are Dalit majority churches. In some of the Independent Pentecostal Missions (IPMs) Dalits are only the believers. Leadership issues and discrimination to priests based on caste are also quite unlikely in those churches.

[13] When Dalits started a protest against caste discrimination and raised some demands, the Church authority tried to sort out the problem by promising certain positions to them. Thus it appointed T. S.Joseph as the Assistant Bishop of the Central Diocese of the Church and later he became the Bishop of the Church.

E. Church Administration

Apart from the priests and other ecclesiastical leaders, every church forms some committees by incorporating the representatives of the believers to carry out administrative works and any other matters. It came to the notice that the caste background of believers determines the chances of their selection to the church committees. Syrian Christians can occupy the key positions in the church committees. Dalits and other groups are rarely nominated to the committees in the churches and parishes dominated by the Syrian Christians. Catholic Church follows some reservation system in selecting the members of various committees. Some seats are reserved for Dalits in the committees managing the affairs of the Churches and the dioceses (Interviews with P. O. Peter, T. J. Abraham, C. C. Kunjukochu and James Elavumkal).[14] Without the support of this kind of reservation, they would not get any position in the committees (Interview with P. O. Peter). Some churches have formed separate organisations for Dalit Christians, for example, the Dalit Catholica Mahajana Sabha (DCMS) of Catholic Church.[15] Most often, the affiliates of the DCMS becomes the representatives of Dalits in the committees.

The Churches dominated by Syrian Christians do not grant any representation to Dalit believers in the committees, and it is not based on any rules. CSI's Madhya Kerala Diocese (MKD) is an example. Even though the number of Dalits and Syrian Christians is almost equal in the MKD, Syrian Christians hold control over the administration of the church. There are also some technical reasons behind this.

Though the number of Dalits within the Church is almost equal to Syrian Christians, the voters eligible to elect the Church committee members from Dalits will be very less. The criteria stipulated by the church such as regular payment of membership fee, regular attendance in all functions and prayers of the church etc., to confer voting power are some times difficult for the Dalits. Simon John says that only the 'confirmed'[16] members of the Church have voting rights. He says that proportionately Syrian Christians have more confirmed members than Syrian Christians. Another thing is that a member or his/her family should clear all the dues to the

[14] Interviewees say that in the institutions run by the church ten percent of the total seats is reserved for Dalits belonging to Changanassery Archdiocese. However, the total number of Dalits within the Church as a whole is only 5.5 percent. He says that more than about a hundred Dalits got employment in a teaching post in various schools run by the Church. In Saint Burkeman's College at Changanassery also ten Dalits were appointed as non-teaching staff. (Interview with P. O. Peter, T. J. Abraham , C. C. Kunjukochu, and James Elavumkal).

[15] The organisation founded in 1955 as Avasha Catholic Mahajana Sabha (ACMS), was later known as Harijan Catholic Mahajana Sabha (HCMS). From 22nd August 1993, the organisation was renamed as Dalit Catholic Mahajana Sabha. (http://www.dcmspalai.com/history.php retrieved on)

[16] Confirmation is a religious ritual in the Protestant Churches like CSI. See Chapter 4 for more details.

Church, if he/she wants to cast his/her vote. (Interview with Simon John). The Syrian Christians who are better off than Dalits have no such handicaps. Apart from this, the Syrian Christians in the diocesan leadership can divide and reconstitute the administrative areas of the diocese ensuring their adequate representation in voting (Interview with Shibi Peter). It increases their power to elect their representatives, and most often disproportionate to their real numerical size. The same problem is also visible in some Pentecostal Churches like IPC. The majority of the members of the central committee or the executive committee of the Church are Syrian Christians despite there are many Dalit believers in the church (Interview with Shaji Alimukku). As a result, the policy decisions of the highest body of these Churches may not reflect the interests and concerns of the Dalits.

As the Pentecostal Churches in Kerala are heterogeneous and divided into numerous sub-denominations, the Dalit Christians' representation in Church administration varies in them. In the mainline Pentecostal Churches (Indian Pentecostal Church of God, Sharon Fellowship, The Pentecostal Mission, Church of God in India- Full Gospel- Kerala State) in which the Syrian Christian are a dominant group, the Dalits are not in the crucial positions of the committees. A Dalit pastor has never become a president or secretary of these churches at the state level. However, in some regions, where the Dalits are in good number, they may get a chance to become centre pastor or district minister.[17]

In IPC, most of the committee members at State level are Syrian Christians. There are only less number of Dalits in the committees functioning at the state level. The General Council has 63 members including Pastors and laity almost equal in number. However, there are only *seven* Dalits in the committee comprised of *four* pastors and *three* from the laity. All other members are Syrian Christians. Dalits from the Church are aware of this, and they have taken efforts to resolve the problem. However, Syrian Christians try to avoid Dalits from holding various positions very strategically and covertly. Therefore, the success of Dalits in this regard is very moderate. (Interview with Shaji Alimukku).

There are large number of tiny Pentecostal Churches called Independent Pentecostal Movements (IPMs) in Kerala (See chapter 2 for more details of IPMs). Even in those IPMs where Syrian Christians are also present, the visibility and level of discrimination against Dalits are comparatively less severe. In those Churches, the condition of Dalits is better than the IPC

[17] Since the Churches such as WME, UPC, and CoG- KR are exclusively for Dalits the issue of caste discrimination is not prevalent.

and CSI. IPMs' smaller size and tiny membership perhaps makes it more democratic. Such Churches are not wealthy as compared to the mainline Pentecostal Churches. As the IPMs have a small membership, caste-based hostility among the members is minimal.

F. Representation in Church Institutions

The churches in Kerala own a large number of institutions such as schools and colleges, hospitals, banks, cooperative societies, plantations and many other small and large economic firms. Believers can become the managers and employees in them. The traditional churches own a large number of such institutions in which the Syrian Christians are enjoying the benefits of education, employment, finance and control. Among the Protestant Churches, the CSI has only a better network of such institutions. Even though the Dalits in CSI have significant strength, and they are powerful also in some ways to influence the Church's administration, their role in administering such institutions is the less. In the Madhya Kerala Diocese of CSI the majority of employees in the educational institutions, hospitals, and other institutions run by the Church are not Dalits.[18] The chances of getting employment in the lower grade posts such as peon or attender are also less. The CSI, the only Protestant church in Kerala owning some educational institutions and hospitals, is far regressive than the Catholic Churches in extending the benefits of education and employment to Dalits.

Catholic Churches (mainly Syro Malabar and the Latin Catholic Church) reserve 10 percent of the vacancies for Dalits in employment in the aided educational institutions (Interview with P. O. Peter, T. J. Abraham, C. C. Kunjukochu, and James Elavumkal). Marthoma, Orthodox and the Jacobite churches give some preferential treatment to Dalits. An important point is that the numerical strength of Dalits in CSI has not enabled them to bring about a mandatory reservation in the institutions of the church.

The Syro Malabar church seems to be more generous than the CIS in respect of the preferential treatment to Dalit Christian candidates in education and employment, probably

[18] Mostly the traditional Syrian Christian Churches like Syro Malabar and Syro Malankara, Orthodox and Jacobite, and Marthoma appoint staff in their institutions only from their believer groups. Appointments are based on paying money (in the name of 'donation') to the Church. Therefore, very rarely Dalits of these churches also can get a job. There are a few instances of selection of Dalit believers also without caring their inability to pay a 'donation'. However, in the institutions of CSI, members from other Churches, and sometimes from other religions, also get jobs in its institutions. 'Donation' is mandatory in the CSI Church also. Dalit Christians being economically weak may not have much a chance. However, even when the people outside the Church get an appointment based on 'donation' the eligible candidates from Dalits are becoming the most suffering group. Discrimination based on caste is also apparent in the selection. There are instances of selection of candidates from other communities when there is no Syrian Christian or non-Dalit Christian candidates belonging to the believer group of the church for a post, but there were competent candidates from Dalits, and some were ready to pay the 'donation'.

because they have a larger number of educational institutions than CSI. Latin Catholic Church is also following this because of more or less same reason. Moreover, the Latin Church has the most considerable portion of its members from the lower caste groups.

The Christian churches from the time of British missionaries have the credit of opening the educational institutions to the lower castes and the poor. However, their successors in the CSI are violating the tradition even in the institutions where the employees' salary is paid by the government. Lack of any consideration to Dalits is evident in the case of self-financing colleges run by all the churches for which the CSI is not an exception. The Catholic churches (mainly the Syro-Malabar) own a large number of self-financing schools and colleges. In such institutions, they hardly prefer Dalit Christian students for admission in either the slots available to the management (management's quota) or in the seats reserved for the members of the church (community's quota). However, it is also not willing to extend reservation to jobs, and therefore, the Dalit Christians are not very hopeful about employment opportunities in the institutions including hospitals.

In Madhya Kerala Diocese of CSI, the competition between the Syrian Christians and the Dalits for getting appointment in the church's institutions is very intensive. (Interview with Simon John, T. J. Peter, Shibi Peter and Justin T. Varghese). Since the majority of Dalits in the CSI are mainly concentrated in this diocese, they expect a better treatment by the church in education and employment. Interestingly, the Syrian Christians are also the largest in this diocese more than elsewhere in CSI. The discrimination against Dalits resulting in their underrepresentation in employment and education is a reason for the conflict between the two communities in this diocese.

However, in the schools run by this diocese, the employment opportunity for Dalit candidates is relatively becoming better. From the time of the formation of the Church, Dalits were preferred as teachers and non-teaching staff in schools, especially under the Madhya Kerala Diocese. The personal narration of many respondents to the researcher also shows that when Dalit candidate is meritorious and financially sound to pay the required amount of donation to the church for getting a job, the Syrian Christians are gaining the upper hand in final selection because of their caste.

Apart from CSI, other Protestant Churches like Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist Church and Bible Faith Mission also own some educational institutions. However, most of them are self-financing English Medium Schools in the unaided sector. Among them, the Salvation

Army only have some schools in the aided sector and a few private hospitals.[19] Since these churches are mainly comprised of Dalits, other social groups have little chance to affect their selection. Many of the small Pentecostal Churches do not run any institutions to generate large-scale employment, and most of them only have charitable institutions. Therefore, the majoritarian presence of Dalits in these Churches need not help them in education and employment.

While the representation of Dalit Christians in the formal employment is still an issue, the Churches are using them as casual workers and menials. Still, Syro Malabar Church in Pala and surrounding areas employ Dalits in some menial jobs. The responsibility of digging burial ground will always be upon them.

G. Matrimonial Matters

In matters regarding marriage, Christians in Kerala mostly resemble caste groups. The denominational difference is coming as a hindrance. However, caste can sometimes overcome that. An arranged marriage between a Dalit Christian and a Syrian Christian is the rarest in Kerala. Neither a Syrian Christian nor a non-Dalit Christian prefers a partner from Dalit Christians. There is no difference between denominations in this regard.

Some Christian denominations, which share same or similar theology, permit the members for inter-denominational marriage. Marriage with the members of Orthodox, Jacobite and Mar Thoma Churches is permissible for CSI Church members. The church is willing to officiate the inter-denominational marriage note also. The CSI and Mar Thoma Churches follow variants of Protestantism. However, the theology of Orthodox and Jacobite Churches are different from that of CSI. Though their theologies are different, it hardly prevents their church authorities from coming an agreement for the marriage between the members of these churches.

Caste is also a factor when we look into the details behind the flexibility shown by the churches in the case of inter-denominational marriages. All these non-Catholic Churches have a

[19] Salvation Army has some educational institutions and hospitals under its control. It is perhaps the only church within the group of Dalit Churches owning such institutions and property. In Thiruvananthapuram, the Church has an aided higher secondary school, and it had owned certain hospitals also in the past. In other some regions, the church has founded primary schools also. In Ernakulam, the Church runs a Leprosy Sanatorium. In the city of Thiruvananthapuram, the Church owns some significant buildings which the church gives to others on rent. Christin Solomon, (a member of the church) says that the number of institutions that the Church had owned in the past and its strength regarding ownership of assets is coming down. He says that though the Dalits are the significant majority of the believers, at the top leadership at the state level, there are some Syrian Christians who have some influence in the appointment to the institutions run by the Church.

common Syrian Christian group. Even though CSI is Protestant, in its Madhya Kerala Diocese, many believers are Syrian Christians.[20] More importantly, the understanding between the churches mostly secures the shared interest of the Syrian Christians to get a partner from the same social background (or caste) irrespective of the denominational differences. Rather than helping inter-caste marriage between the believers of the different denominations, the role of these churches regarding inter-denominational marriage is indirectly fortifying the endogamous relation between the same caste groups.

The CSI and CMS-ACI follow same theology, and both are Protestant Churches with Anglican tradition, but there is no such an agreement regarding marriage. Even while conceding to the argument that the CMS-ACI is formed after a split in CSI, and it is the reason for the lack of a formal understanding between them, the CSI has never agreed with any other Protestant churches for inter-denominational marriage. For example, Salvation Army follows Protestant theology, but there is no formal permission by the CSI regarding the marriage between the believers of the two. The reason is that all of them, including CMS-ACI, are Dalit Churches.

Therefore, the four churches - CSI, Orthodox, Jacobite and Mar Thoma - are overcoming the denominational differences in the marriage of believers mainly to serve the interest of the Syrian Christians and due to their control over the four churches. However, when the church is willing to compromise its doctrine to support marriage alliances with believers of other churches, the interest of the Syrian Christians are the motivating force.

---

[20] The Christian Churches all over the world broadly belong to either western or the eastern tradition. CSI in Kerala has a typical western tradition due to its foundation in connection with the activities of the Protestant Missionaries from England. Both the London Missionary Society (in south Kerala) and the Church Missionary Society (in central Kerala) were the initiatives of British Protestant Christian missionary groups, but the Basel Mission (in north Kerala) was the initiative of the Protestant Christian Missionary group came from Austria. At the end of the colonial rule in Kerala, it was decided to establish a new Indian Church under the auspices of these missionary groups by combining the Churches under them, and the foreign missionaries left the country. CSI was the culmination of the merger of the three. The Marthoma Church (Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church/*Malankara Mar Thoma Suriyani Sabha*), traces its tradition to Eastern Church, and only in the early 18th century the Church came into contact with the British Protestant Missionaries and got reformed in Protestant line. Still the Church claims the Saint Thomas tradition of the Syrian Churches. According to this, the Marthomites are followers of Saint Thomas, the disciple of Jesus Christ. They also believe that Saint Thomas came to Muziris on the south-west coast of India in AD 52 and laid the foundations of Christianity in this part of the world (http://marthoma.in/overview). Palakkunnathu Abraham Malpan from Maramon and Kaithayil Geevarghese Malpan from Kottayam spearheaded the reformation movement in the Church, and they never wanted to start a separate Church. Later on, Abraham Malpan decided to take action in his parish of Maramon which was sympathetic towards his ideas of reform. He translated the liturgy of the Holy Qurbana into local language Malayalam from Syriac and also eliminated from it the prayers for the dead and invocation of saints. He celebrated Holy Qurbana in his church using the revised St. James liturgy on a Sunday in 1836 (http://marthoma.in/heritage).

The denominational differences based on theology also affect the consent of the church for marriage. For example, none of the Syrian Christain churches or the CSI agrees for a marriage of their believers with members of the IPC despite the later also have a significant number of Syrian Christians.

Caste and denominational differences are essential factors in marriage between the Pentecostals also. The Pentecostal Churches in Kerala, except United Pentecostal Church (UPC) and The Pentecostal Mission (TPM) share similar or almost same theology.[21] They officially allow the believers to seek marriage alliance from any Pentecostal Church other than the UPC and TPM. Even though the TPM follows the UPC's doctrine only in some aspects, its theology is not very different from other Pentecostal Churches. Therefore, believers of TPM can make a marriage alliance with other Pentecostal denominations. TPM, IPC and the Church of God in India (Full Gospel-Kerala State) have a formal agreement to this. Despite the theological differences between the TPM and other two churches, Syrian Christians persuaded the churches for such a covenant. It shows that in Pentecostal Churches also, Syrian Christians are interested in endogamy. Doctrinal differences are rather unimportant. So it is the caste that is more important than the Church and its doctrines. Moreover, neither the IPC nor Church of God in India is interested in permitting inter-denominational marriage with the UPC. They usually cite doctrinal difference as the reason, but the UPC is mainly a Dalit church.

Though a formal agreement for inter-denominational marriages has been serving the interest of the Syrian Christians, and at their initiative, the Dalit Christians are facing the problem differently. Such an agreement is not in force between all the denominations where the Dalits are the members. The churches arrive at some informal understanding in matters related to the marriage of Dalit believers of different denominations. The Catholic Church never raises any objections if a Dalit believer marries one from the Protestant or Pentecostal denomination. Marriage note is an endorsement given by a Church to another Church showing that a person who wants to marry and his family belong to the Church. Usually, the exchange of marriage

[21] UPC may be the only Church of the Pentecostals having a theological difference from others. Instead of treating three in the Trinity as different the UPCI takes the oneness of it. That is why the Church itself consider it as a 'Oneness Pentecostal organisation'(http://www.upci.org/about/about-the-upci). It says, "There is one God, who has revealed Himself as our Father, in His Son Jesus Christ, and as the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is God manifested in the flesh. He is both God and man." (Visit, http://www.upci.org/about/our-beliefs).
TPM does not follow any doctrines different from other Pentecostal groups. What makes it different from other Pentecostal groups is that it follows a practice of 'consecrated ministry'. (Visit, http://wordwillsave.com/cpm/). According to this, the Pastors of the Church are not allowed to get married. The women who are the part of ministry must also follow this rule. No other Pentecostal group follow 'consecrated ministry' in Kerala. Some of them hardly regard UPC as a Pentecostal Church. For others, even though instructions like 'consecrated ministry' and 'principle of celibacy' are not acceptable, they TPM is a Pentecostal Church because there is no other theological difference.

notes happens only between the Churches which are in a formal alliance. The Catholic Churches can, therefore, officially send a Marriage Note only to other Catholic denominations. However, they agree to send it to the churches belonging to Protestant and Pentecostal groups only for the Dalits as an exception (Interview with P O Peter and T J Abraham).

The leaders of the DCMS say that the Church is aware of the fact that it is sometimes difficult for a Dalit to find out a suitable partner from the same church. Therefore, the Church does not make any objection in handing over the Marriage Note to other Churches or denominations. The leaders of the DCMS opine that, if the Church does not allow Dalits to make marriage alliances with other denominations, the burden regarding finding a suitable alliance will be upon the Church. As part of avoiding such practical difficulties, the Church concedes Dalits to find partners from other denominations. The church is also careful about another consequence if the alliance does not occur between two families from the same denomination. The groom's denomination would convert the bride, and the church will lose a member. The bride's Church rarely raises any problem if the man is from any of the Christian denominations.

Even among Dalit Christians also, Pentecostals and other Protestants prefer the intra-denominational marriage. However, the denomination is not a significant criterion of marriage in the case of the Catholic Dalits. Since they are living in some specific regions in a large number, they usually get married among themselves. For example, in Pala and surrounding regions the Church is influential, and it has a good number of Dalits. Catholic Dalits from the particular region commonly seek alliances from the same region. If they cannot find suitable alliances, they are willing to seek from outside their church.

Though every social group of Christians prefers same denominations in marriage, inter-denominational marriages are more prevalent among Dalit Christians than others. Pentecostal Dalits are more concerned about the denomination of the partner. The most compelling factor behind the readiness of Dalit Christians to ignore denomination in marriage is subcaste. Dalit believers of various churches commonly prefer marriage relation from the same subcaste. They are ready to ignore the denominational differences in so far as sub-caste.

H. Inter-dining

Caste-based taboos are affecting the social interaction between Dalits and Syrian Christians. The priests and the laity from Syrian Christian background usually do not prefer food prepared by Dalits at their homes. Strategically they try to avoid having food prepared by Dalits. A number

Dalit Christians have shared their experience in this regard with the researcher. They pointed out that by anticipating the reluctance on the part of invitees, they arrange food from outside for the reception. The food prepared and served by the catering groups are acceptable for Syrian Christians instead of the food prepared by the Dalit Christians at their home. However, such a judgemental behaviour based on caste was mainly prevailing within the traditional churches and in those areas where the Syrian Christians are socially and numerically powerful.[22] Some have the same complaint about the Syrian Christians who became pastors and believers in Protestant and Pentecostal churches. In the regions like Pala and its surrounding areas where traditional and wealthy Syrian Christians are dominant, and the conditions of Dalit Christians are very pathetic. Still, some of them are staying in the wasteland on the roadside, and they do not have proper housing and sanitation facilities. Socially and economically the conditions of some of the Dalit Christians in Pala and the surrounding areas are vulnerable. Besides the caste, class and other factors are also raised by some scholars to explain the taboo in inter-dining. They focus on the aspects of cleanliness and discipline of Dalits and their surroundings (see Alexander 1977).

I. Calling by Name and Individual Dignity

Until the recent past, the younger Syrian Christians addressed the elders among the Dalit Christians by their name. Generally, in Kerala, an elder male member is called *chettan* or *Annan,* and female member is called *chechi* or *Akka* by the youngsters. However, in case of the relation between the Syrian Christians and Dalits caste status is stronger and it overpowers the necessity of showing some respect for one's age. However, Dalits did never call an elder Syrian Christian

[22] In Pala and its surrounding areas in Kottayam district, are the areas known for the highest concentration of wealthy and traditional Syrian Christians as a single largest group. The rich and traditional Syrian Christians living there are openly very proud of their aristocracy. They are marking their identity as a Christian as the members of a traditionally aristocratic Catholic family (*Athi Purathana Catholica Kudumbam*). Dalit Christians living in this area are facing this group of Syrian Christians as a dominant group. The researcher has observed the status of Dalit Christians in those areas. They are economically very poor. They do not have land or well-maintained houses. The attitude of Syrian Christians towards them are ridden with caste prejudices. Dalits are the labourers working in the land of Syrian Christians, and therefore they have a dependent and exploitative relation. It is prevailing in the social life and interactions. Syrian Christians will not eat from the houses of Dalit Christians. However, in the researcher's native village, Pakkanam near Mundakkayam in Kottayam district caste prejudices towards Dalits from the Syrian Christians are not very explicit. Syrian Christians living there are not as prejudiced towards Dalits like the Syrian Christians in Pala. Even if they hold a prejudice, there are constraints because in this area various caste groups and communities live apart from the two. It is a difference from the social composition of Pala. Syrian Christians living in Prakkanam are not very wealthy as the Syrian Christians in Pala. They openly do not claim any 'aristocracy'. Many of the Syrian Christians were the daily wage labourers until the very recent past, and therefore, a story about ancient aristocratic lineages holds no water. In education also they are not advanced than others. However, the new generation of Syrian Christians are becoming prosperous, and they are getting salaried employment in the state or abroad. Nursing profession helped the Syrian Christian women for migration to Europe and the Middle East. Despite their achieved mobility, the Syrian Christians can hardly appear as a dominant social group in the locality to assert their caste-based prejudices against Dalits. The power balance between various caste groups and communities is a factor in making the people more musical to each other.

by his/her name. There is a gradual, but significant change in this behaviour Syrian Christians. The common names (*chechi*, *akka*, *chettan*, *amma*, *ammachi*, uncle etc.) showing some respect to the age of the addressed become universal irrespective of caste in public communication. However, still, in some areas, where traditional and wealthy Syrian Christians are living as an influential group (for instance, Pala in Kottayam) the old practice of calling all Dalits by their name persists.

These discriminatory practices of caste are mainly prevailing in localities where the population is composed of Syrian Christians and Dalits. The local demography provides the former with a unique opportunity to appear as the only superior sections above the Dalits. However, there are also many localities in which both Dalit Christians and Syrian Christians are living together along with people from various castes and religions. Here the Syrian Christians constitute only one of the many caste groups and communities. In such localities, the complaints about very open forms of discrimination by the Syrian Christians are less. The class composition of Syrian Christians is also an influential factor in affecting the discrimination towards Dalits.

In some regions, marriage between Dalit Christian men and Syrian Christian women happens. Some parts of Idukki, Thrissur and Palakkad are such areas where migrants of Syrian Christians and Dalit Christians from central Travancore live together. However, even in such areas inter-caste marriage between a male of Syrian Christian and a female Dalit Christian is not very common.

Inter-Religious Marriage and Dalit Christians

Among the Dalis in Kerala, broadly divided into Christians and Hindus, inter-religious marriages are also not so unusual. Gender is important in the case of inter-religious marriages. Dalit Christians may permit marriage between their male and a Hindu female, probably due to the possibility of a woman to adopt the faith of her husband. However, they rarely prefer a female of the community to marry a Hindu male. Dalit Hindus are more flexible about the religion of the male than the Dalit Christians. It is also same about their religiosity also. Among Dalits in Kerala, some people are Hindus as per government records while remaining as Christians by faith. However, a Christian as per the government record may not be a believer of Hinduism. This dual status is mainly because of the rewards for the caste identity and claims for reservation. It is also an influential factor for the Christain Dalits to choose between two religions while searching for a marriage alliance. Different individuals from a single family also sometimes get married people from both religions. It is sure that the official stand of the Church

is always against inter-religious marriages. Many Churches are very strict in following its rule in this regard. Some Dalit Christians seem to be liberal in the case of inter-religious marriages. Though the marriage can happen between the people from two religions, it usually will be between the people from two castes or sub-castes. The next chapter will discuss these issues in detail.

Chapter 4

Dalit Christians Engaging the Church

Introduction

The engagement of Dalit Christians with the Church is a two way process. On the one way, the Church reforms them. On the other way, they try to change the Church. In the first case, the Church as a modern disciplining mechanism influences the religious and social life of Dalit Christians. Through its rituals, practices, faith system, and rules and regulations the Church tries to discipline the life of Dalit Christians. In other words, Church and Christianity impart some modern values upon Dalit Christians. In the second case, they try to react to the Church by struggling against caste discrimination within it. Being Christians the primary reaction to the Church is resistance against caste system. Here they directly confront the Church. Apart from this, they try to understand and interpret Christianity in their own way. This may not be a direct confrontation with the Church. In the light of their own experience, they understand Church and Christianity and try to reform it.

Christianity appeared to Dalits in Kerala as a modern religion. It has played a significant role in introducing a modern way of life to Dalits, especially Dalit Christians. As every community and caste groups in Kerala, Dalits have benefitted from colonial modernity. However, the values of modernity are not inclusive of all, and the marginalised social groups are face difficulty in sharing its benefits. In MSS Pandian's words, "they are one step outside the modernity" (See Pandian 2002). Aditya Nigam also observes how the values of Modernity excluded the marginalised (Nigam 2000: 4256-4268). This dual nature of modernity regarding the life of Dalits determines the way of their engagement and disengagement with modernity. In the case of Christian Dalits, this process of engagement and disengagement happens both within and outside the Church. Within the Church, they try to find their space and standing upon which they try to fight the caste discrimination and oppose the Church authorities. Within their everyday social life also they engage and disengage with the values of modernity.

One of the main criticisms of modernity in Kerala is about its limitations in addressing the issues of caste-related practices. Though Christianity claims to be egalitarian, cannot claim a difference. The caste-related practices affect the life of Dalit Christians in two ways. In the first case, plays a in the relation with non-Dalit Christians (mainly Syrian Christians) within the religion and the church. The second is, the prevalence of sub-caste among the Dalit

Christians affecting their relations with each other. The Dalit Christians take into account the first very seriously, but the resistance against the second is weak. In short, both Christian values and the traditional social values outside the Church form them, and within this sphere, they try to articulate their interests and assert their voice against the problems they face within the Church.

Discipline by Church

Modernisation by the Church began in the colonial period. Protestant Christianity was a new religion for Dalits. It promised a new life different from the past. This new life has both spiritual and material dimensions. The most important contribution of the Church and Christianity is the social and spiritual disciplining of the life of Dalit Christians. Here the Church acts as a disciplining mechanism. The Church has its mechanism to impart discipline among the believers in their religious and social life. The Church does it in two ways. On the one hand, the Church can control the religious life, and sometimes even the social life, of its members through its rules and regulations. On the other hand, the Church can do it through its rituals and belief system. However, the power of the church to discipline the matters regarding caste is limited, and sometimes the caste can dictate rules to the church.

Faith, Belief Systems, and Rituals

There are some standard practices in the belief system and rituals of Christians in Kerala. They are as follows. The difference between denominations in following these rituals are also important.

1. *Child Baptism*: This ritual is practised mostly in the Episcopal (both Catholic and Protestant) Churches. Baptism of children below the age of four or five is as part of the Church. Pentecostals and other non-Episcopal Churches are against practising this ritual, and their theology or Biblical teaching opposes it. They argue that, the children at the age mentioned above are not growing upto understand Christian faith.
2. *Mammodeesa*: Catholic Churches mostly have this. It is meant for boy/girl at the age of 10-12. At the time of *Mammodeesa,* they receive the first Holy Communion (*Qurbana* in Malayalam) from the priest in the Church. The family of the child celebrates this event with special reception and invitees. Pentecostals argue that this is also not Biblical as the individuals in their adolescence are not mature enough to become Christians.

3. *Confirmation*: Anglican Protestant Churches such as CSI and CMS-ACI stipulate this to the young. At the age of 14-15, they receive the first Holy Communion (*Thiruvathazham* in Malayalam) from the priest in the Church. Pentecostals argue that this is also not Biblical.
4. *Baptism*: This is mostly the ritual in Pentecostal and other non-Episcopal Churches. In a matured age (as per the Church norms) a man or woman is baptised in water in Pentecostal Churches. According to Pentecostals, only those who became matured enough to be aware of faith in Jesus Christ and His Father (God) is eligible for this. With this only, an individual can formally join the Church, and henceforth he/she will be eligible to receive Holy Communion.
5. *Sunday School and other Classes*: In every Christian denomination the boys and girls up to the age of 15-17 are taught the stories and subjects from the Bible in the local parishes on every Sunday morning before the time of Sunday worship. The parents enrol their children in standard I, and they can move up to standard X or XII over time.

   Some churches are conducting this regularly, and some are not. Denominational differences also influence the pattern, curriculum and class arrangement of the school. The size of the Church, its theology, and caste, play a vital role in this regard. In all Catholic Churches, sending children to Sunday school, is mandatory for the believers. Most of the Catholic Churches have big size of membership, and naturally, a good number of children are also available. Other Syrian Churches also it is more organised. Among the Protestant groups, CSI Church is more serious about this. In the case of Pentecostal Churches, even though they have less members in each units, the parents are very conscious about sending their children to Sunday school regularly. The Church is also very vigilant in this regard. However, the tiny Pentecostal Churches are facing a common difficulty due to the lack of sufficient number of students. Some of the local parishes of the CMS-ACI comprised of Dalit believers are quite unable to assure regularity. Apart from Sunday school, there are Bible classes for students during the time of their mid-summer vacation. Not all churches are equally capable of conducting this.

6. *Sunday Worship*: Sunday worship is the most important and regular ritual of all Christians.[1] Every Church directs all members to attend the Sunday worship. However, only in Pentecostal and other non-Episcopal Churches, the believers follow this without fail. Most of the believers of Pentecostal and non-Episcopal churches attend the prayer regularly. However, even in Pentecostal Churches, women are more regular than the men. This difference is common in other churches also. The duration of the time of the Sunday worship is different in different denominations. It takes less time in Catholic Churches than Protestant Churches. In Pentecostal Churches, it is quite lengthy which can last for 3 to 4 hours.
7. *Confession*: Confession (*Kumbasaram* in Malayalam) is a system exists only among Catholics. Confession is a system of practice in which the believers confess or reveal before the priest about their mistakes and request forgiveness. This practice increases the emotional attachment of the believers to the Church.
8. *Sunday Messages*: Every Church gives Sunday messages to its members. There can be two types of messages. The first one is more a formal one, which is already fixed by the diocese or the centralised Church leadership. The second is not formal, and mostly the pastor/priest gives it in a Church at his discretion. The first type of Sunday Messages is more prevailing in the Episcopal churches than non-Episcopal Churches. However, this does not mean that the priests always address the members of Episcopal Churches only on fixed themes. The priests can give some informal advice to its members as a Sunday message. In non-Episcopal Churches and Protestant Episcopal Churches, the messages are very long. In Catholic Church, it is very brief.
9. *Holy Communion*: In most of the churches, Holy Communion[2] is part of Sunday worship. In Catholic Churches every day there is Holy Communion. It is not compulsory for all members or all the believers to receive Holy Communion. They are free to receive it or not. In Pentecostal Churches, most of the participants in the worship receive Holy Communion. In Catholic Churches and the big and established Protestant Churches like CSI also many of the participants receive the Holy Communion. However, in the smaller Protestant Churches like CMS-ACI, though they consider it as most important, those who receive Holy Communion on Sundays are few. Another thing is that in many of the non-Catholic Churches it is not observed

[1] Seventh Day Adventist Church takes Saturday for its weekly worship in the Church. As Saturday is the seventh day in a week, this Church is called Seventh Day Adventist Church.
[2] It is generally called *Thiruvathazham* (in Malayalam). Many of the Protestant Churches call it *Vishuddha Samsargga Shusroosha* Catholic Churches call it *Vishuddha Qurbana*.

on every Sunday.[3] The Pentecostal Churches consider it as the most important, though they do not observe it on all Sundays.

10. *Other Special Worships and Prayer Meetings in the Church*: Apart from the Sunday worship, every Church fixes some special days also for worship. Protestant Churches like the CMS-ACI and some Pentecostal Churches conduct monthly prayer meeting on Saturdays in the local parishes.[4] Some Churches conduct weekly prayer meetings also in the parish.[5] Prayer with fasting is a ritual conducted at recurring intervals in some of the churches. Pentecostal Churches are very active in organising such prayers. Women are mainly the participants in all these kinds of worships, irrespective of denominational differences.
11. *Special Prayer Meetings at Home*: Apart from the prayer meetings in the church, there is a weekly meeting at the homes of the members of every Church.[6] They conduct prayer meetings for specific purposes in which the participants will be on fasting.[7] It is a practice mainly among the Protestants, especially the Pentecostals. Sometimes such prayer meetings at home may last for a whole day or more.
12. *Evening Prayers at Home*:[8] Evening prayer in the home is a familiar ritual for all Christians. There is no denominational difference in this regard. The way of conducting it and its time (duration) may be different.[9] However, the Church has a

[3] In many of the non-Catholic Churches, including Pentecostal, the Holy Mass is only on certain Sundays of a month. In some Churches, it is once in two weeks. In some other Churches, where one priest appointed for more than a Church, Holly Mass is only on a Sunday when the priest can visit the particular church. Again in some other Churches, it is held on every Sunday.

[4] A denomination is divided into many regional administrative provinces and sub-provinces in every Church. The names of these geographical units are different in various churches, for example, denomination; diocese, district, centre, commanding office, and so on. In the units mentioned above, members from all the local parishes in a sub-province come together in any one the Church and conduct the worship. As per the rotation in every Church of the provinces, the worship is conducted in each month.

[5] Some of the Protestant and Pentecostal Churches conduct both ordinary and fasting prayers on certain particular days in every week. Among these, some are for all believers, and some others exclusively for women.

[6] As per the rotation, they plan the prayer meeting in every home. The priest or the catechist of the local parish leads the prayer meetings. However, in individual Roman Catholic Churches where many members are there from hundreds of families from many adjacent local regions, the meetings are conducted by grouping them into different areas. Then, the Priest cannot attend all the meetings.

[7] It is mainly happening in Pentecostal Churches. The prayer meetings are meant for various purposes like the healing of persons, debt relief of families, and peacefulness in the families and so on. In the Protestant Churches also, prayer meetings with a particular purpose are very usual. Pentecostal pastors are sometimes welcome to other Protestant Churches also. Such prayer meetings in a home are sometimes conducted for many days continuously.

[8] Like evening prayer, morning prayers are also there for some Christian believers. Most of them belong to Pentecostal Churches and rest of them belong to other Churches, but who might be ardent believers.

[9] In the houses of Pentecostal believers, it takes a long time to conduct evening prayer meetings. However, in other Protestant and Catholic Churches comparatively, it takes less time. Moreover, there is a difference between various denominations in the number of homes regularly conducting the evening prayers. It is more routine among the members of Pentecostal Churches and many of the Catholic Churches than others.

role in assuring that all believers are practising it regularly. For example, the Catholic Church seems keen in prayer related affairs of its members including evening prayers. It is common that the neighbours of the same parishes mutually cross-check the regularity and the priests gets to know about any default. The organisational strength of the Church is evident here. Pentecostals and the members of other non-Episcopal Churches are keen in conducting evening prayer at home.[10] Dalit Christians from other Protestant Churches seem not as strict as those from the Catholic, Pentecostal, and other non-Episcopal Churches.

13. *Conventions and Prayer Meetings*: The churches hold conventions in specific places where the believers come together and listen to the speeches of pastors or priests. There will be prayers and singing. There are conventions at local levels and state level. Every Church conducts centralised annual conventions at the state level. Apart from this, at the diocesan level or local/parish level also they hold conventions. Protestants are pioneers in this regard. The Pentecostal and other non-Episcopal Churches are mainly organising conventions.[11] People from other Churches or denominations attend the convention meetings.[12] Even the non-Christians participate in conventions and prayer meetings conducted by Pentecostals. Dalit Christians are interested in participating in conventions meetings. Conventions and prayer meetings were the means used by the Pentecostal Churches to reach Dalits. Irrespective of denominational differences it is common that many Dalit Christians participate in the local Pentecostal convention meetings. Among Dalit Christians, especially Dalit Pentecostals, conventions constitute a crucial factor in their religions life. Among various Pentecostal groups, there are special teams to work among the non-Christians and for preaching the gospel among them. Such groups conduct special convention

[10] Pentecostals and the members of other non-Episcopal Churches showing high interest in practising these rituals without any direct influence by their Church or Church authorities. It is the interest and concern of the members of the Church seems more evident in this, than the Church's administrative strength or the size.

[11] Convention meetings are mainly held by the Protestant and Pentecostal Churches as it is one of their principal means of preaching and spreading Christianity. Apart from this, in many areas of Kottayam and Pathanamthitta districts, more numbers of conventions are at the leadership of Pentecostal Churches, because they have more denominations in these districts than others.

[12] Most of the non-Pentecostal Dalit Christians, who participate in these meetings, belong to Protestant Churches. Majority of the Catholic Dalit Christians in Kottayam and Pathanamthitta districts belong to some particular regions like Pala, Erattupetta and Vijayapuram. Most of the Protestant and Pentecostal Churches belong to other areas where Catholic Dalit Christians are decidedly less in number. Therefore, Catholic Dalit Christians can hardly participate in the convention meetings of other Christian denominations. Another exciting thing is that though some non-Pentecostal Christians are attending Pentecostal convention meetings, Pentecostal believers never attend any convention meetings held by Episcopal Churches.

meetings with specific objectives. Prayer meetings with specific purposes such as healing have gained particular attention among the Pentecostal believers.

14. *Dhyanas* (Retreats): The Catholic Charismatic groups mainly conduct the prayer meetings called Dhyanas. It is similar to the convention by the Protestants. Catholic churches have also come up with some charismatic groups to conduct prayer meetings with specific purposes such as healing. In this also they copied the method of the Protestants. Many of the Catholic believers, and sometimes even non-Christians, attend *dhyana* centres. However, the Protestants avoid the *dhyana* centres run by the Catholic groups.
15. *Special Days*: Episcopal Churches celebrate many special days like Christmas, Good Friday, Easter and other occasions like New Year with prayer meetings.[13] There will be a celebration of these days in the home also. Pentecostals and other Episcopal Churches do not celebrate any of such special days, except New Year.[14]

    There are other special days identified by each of the churches with some particular purpose. For example, in some Churches, one Sunday in every year is for women and another one for youth to train them to lead Sunday service. They have to conduct all the rituals and ceremonies related to the worship, except a few on that particular Sunday.[15] It is a practice in the CSI and CMS-ACI.
16. *Pilgrimage*: Religious pilgrimage is common among Catholics.[16] The Protestant or Pentecostal Churches have no pilgrim centre. The Church and believers consider certain local churches as essential, and they become pilgrim centres. **B**elievers on a particular day or for all the time in a year visit such pilgrim centres and offer their prayers. People from the Protestant Churches very rarely visit the pilgrim centres run by the Catholic Church or other traditional Syrian Christian Churches.
17. *Observation of Saints' Days*: The Catholic Church and some traditional Syrian Churches have their saints.[17] The Churches mentioned above find divinity within

[13]Saint Thomas Evangelical Church of India, a Syrian Christian Episcopal Church, which originated from the Marthoma Church, is against in celebrating such days. In some instances, its systems and methods are similar to that of the non-Episcopal Churches like Pentecostal Churches. Some new Episcopal Churches like BFM and Believers' Church also do not observe such special days as they were non-Episcopal Churches until the recent past. However, all these Churches are not against conducting prayer meetings on the New Year Day.

[14]For all non-Episcopal Churches celebrating such days is against Biblical teaching.

[15] Ceremonies like Holy Mass are only at the initiative of the priests or the pastors of the Church.

[16] Traditional Syrian Christian groups such as Jacobites and Orthodox also have such pilgrim centres. Parumala Church is a pilgrim centre of Syrian Orthodox church.

[17] St. Thomas, St. George, St. Sebastian and St. Francis Assisi are the famous of Catholic saints. Some Churches named after them celebrate their foundation day or some special day in commemoration of the saints. St.

every saint and through their mediation the believers offer prayer to the God. That is why the saints are officially commemorated by the Church every year on a particular day. Conventionally, the Protestant theology is resistant to this, and they do not have any saints. However, recently some Protestant groups like CSI and CMS-ACI showed a change[18] These Churches celebrate St. Habel Day. However, it is different from the case of Catholics as both CSI and CMS-ACI do not see any divinity within the Saint. The significance of Habel is because he is the first convert from the ex-untouchables to Protestant Christianity.

18. *Church Festivals*: Catholic Churches and some other traditional Syrian Christian Churches gave importance to festivals. Some Protestant groups like CSI and CMS-ACI also have started to hold the Church festivals, but they cannot spend as much as the Catholic churches on these festive occasions. Every major Christian denomination in Kerala will have a unique festival exclusively meant for its followers. In the case of Catholic and traditional Syrian Christian Churches, the festival is mostly probably be held on the saint's day.[19] However, in the case of CSI and CMS-ACI, some other days are selected as they do not have saints.[20] Catholic Churches colourfully celebrates the festivals by spending a tremendous amount of money. They conduct some popular cultural programmes in the night as part of church festivals. *Aruvithura Perunal*, commemorating Saint George, is a famous festival celebrated by the Syro Malabar Church in Kottayam District.
19. *Collectives*: In every Church youth and women have their separate organisations and committees. Some Churches, especially Catholics have students' wing also.[21] Certain Protestant Churches like CSI also collaborate with Christian students' wings comprised of members from different churches.[22] The organs of the youth and women conduct their spiritual and cultural programmes. In certain Churches, there are even

---

Thomas Day is celebrated by every Catholic Churches and that day is a holiday for the educational institutions run by the Church.

[18] Saint Alphonsamma, Chavarayachan (Saint Kuriakkose Elias) and Thevarparambil Kunjachan are some of the new saints. Celebrations on particular day are devoted to them.

[19]Every Church is named after a saint. Therefore, the festival (*perunnal* in Malayalam) is celebrated and the related rituals are performed as part of observing the saints' day.

[20]Both CSI and CMS-ACI observed St. Habel day. As stated earlier, Habel is the first person who got converted to Christianity by the Anglican Protestant Christian missionaries. Though both CSI and CMS-ACI observe this day, it is different from the case of Catholic Churches theologically. Both CSI and CMS-ACI celebrate *perunnal* (festival) also, but it is not related to St. Habel as Catholic Churches observe saints' days as *perunnal*. In the case of these Churches, *perunnal* is the day of the establishment of those parishes. Moreover, as part of *perunnal*, there are not any special rituals also in these Churches. Both *perunnal* and St. Habel Day are different things for these Churches.

[21]Kerala Catholic Students' League (KCSL) is the student organisation for Catholic students.

[22]'Campus Crusade for Christ' is an organisation functioning among students from the Protestant groups.

special prayer groups also for women. They get together in the local parish hall or the home of any of the members and conduct the prayer.

20. *Church Committees*: Every Church has some committees. Both priests/pastors and laities are the part of the committees. There are general Church committees and committees for specific groups such as youth or women.
21. *Marriage*: Religious institutions have a significant role to play in maintaining marriage as a social institution. Denominations have separate laws relating to marriage and divorce. Every member of the Church is supposed to agree with such laws. The Church officiates the marriage of a believer. The Church has its specific norms for the marriage which are applicable for all its members. The State also recognises the personal laws of the Church.

    Most of the Churches do not promote divorce cases. Rarely the Churches allow divorce. Remarriage for the divorced individuals is also a difficult task as per the Church.[23] However, in tiny Churches, sometimes, marriage, divorce, and remarriage are somewhat flexible.[24] The flexibility and rigidity of the Church laws/norms also depend on some factors. The above mentioned smaller Dalit Churches are flexible in following the laws/norms. The reason behind this is that many of the Dalits in the church are neither Christians nor Hindus as per the existing social and religious norms. The Church has to scrutinise and verify specific things related to the religious life of the person who is going to be married. Apart from this, the members or their family has to clear all his/her/their financial dues to the Church before the marriage. If they did not receive confirmation as a believer by the church, they should do it first. Before the marriage, in some Churches, brides and bridegrooms have to attend pre-marital counselling courses.
22. *Premarital Courses*: Premarital course conducted by the Church is a recent practice in Kerala. The premarital course is a three-day class conducted by the Church on marriage and family life for both brides and bridegrooms. Until the completion of the course, both of them have to stay in a place as decided by the church to attend the classes. Only the wealthy churches or wealthy families can afford the cost conduct premarital courses. Catholic Churches, traditional Syrian Churches, and CSI from

[23]Recently CSI has changed its earlier stand on remarriage of the divorcees.

[24]For example, in Pulikkunnu CMS-ACI such a marriage was held in 2008 and in which a widow from the Church married to a widower from another Church (Koovappally CMS-ACI). The members of the Pulikkunnu Church say that the then priest of the Church held the marriage without following proper procedures. In many of the smaller Churches, similar kinds of instances can be found.

among the Protestants are active in this regard. Without attending the course and securing the course certificate, the Churches will not sanctify a marriage.

23. *Funeral*: The Churches scrutinise the relationship of the deceased or the family with the Church before performing the death rituals. The family of the deceased has to clear all their financial dues to the Church before the funeral. If the deceased was not confirmed as a member of the church, usually the church will not allow cremation in its cemetery and the priests will not perform any ritual. In many of the cases, gets solved in some way. In the Protestant Churches where the Dalits are the majority believers, the rules seem to be slightly flexible. The proof of religion and church affiliation is a persisting problem of Dalit Christians in many mainstream churches. Economically they are not very sound, and therefore clearance of dues are difficult.

Apart from the role of Church in rituals as mentioned above, every Church has its own rules and regulations (bye-laws) for the organisational matters and discipline. All are supposed to obey the rules and regulations to continue as members. In case of violation, the result will be a punishment or expulsion. It is the way in which the Church controls its members. However, all the churches are not equal in power to control the believers. Even if the rules are the same, all the Churches cannot implement them in the same manner for all the believers. It is due to the differences between denominations, theology, size of the membership, economic background of the Church, and the caste of the members.

All Churches are strict about rules and conventions regarding *Mammodeesa*, confirmation, marriage, and the funeral ceremonies. Except for the Pentecostals, all these are meaningful rituals for the churches in Kerala. Even the Pentecostals having objections about Mammodeesa and confirmation, they also follow the church law in the case of marriage and funeral. The rituals mentioned above become so important in the lifetime of the members or even posthumously. Without *Mammodeesa* or confirmation, the church will not officiate one's marriage or funeral. Besides this, clearance of one's financial due to the church (mainly any default in the payment of membership fee) are mandatory. Though this system is very rigid, the Church members seeks for concessions in many instances. Some Churches are liberal and flexible in dealing with such issues in certain circumstances. CMS-ACI is an example of such a Church. Many of the independent Pentecostal movements are liberal and flexible in this regard. Most of these are Dalit Churches.

Besides the rules and regulations, and rituals, the churches use the charitable actions as a means in their relation with the believers. Church assures some special assistance to the needy in certain emergencies. The wealthy Churches can often employ the material rewards to the believers and subsequently it creates a dependence. Catholic Churches are very much using this than others. Among the Protestant churches, the CSI has the power. The Pentecostal Churches also have started to engage in charitable activities. However, when compared to the wealthy Churches their material assistance to the poor is very negligible. The churches comprised mainly of Dalits cannot have the financial base to help their believers.

Traditional Social Practices and the Church

Though Christianity has tried to carry out modern reforms for Dalits, the values of traditional caste related practices haunt their churches. As mentioned earlier, Dalit Christians have been suffering from the problems of caste in their inter-group and intra group relations within the churches. This section looks at these two aspects of the caste problem mainly focusing on the religious life of Dalit Christians.

Being a modern institution, the Church is supposed to address the issues of discrimination and injustice done to Dalits within the Church against their caste identity and eradicate pre-modern caste related practices which exist among the christians. However, the caste related practices affected the Churches and denominations. Dalits are already a marginalised group in their social life. Here the problem is that the Dalits are compelled to hold on to the same Dalitness within their religious life. That means instead of Christians; they become Dalit Christians. Here both ‘Dalit’ and ‘Christian’ constitute their identity.

Discrimination based on the caste and denial of justice are against the modernity. However, a notable point is that caste is not all about discrimination, but it is also about making sense of one's immediate community. Here instead of the pre-modern role, caste persuade the Dalits to find out a new role which makes possible a new communitarian life. That is why Dalit Christians are fond of maintaining their distinctive caste identity, in their intra-group relations. In this sense, modernity makes a compromise with caste, and the caste is seeking a way for modernisation.

Caste Discrimination within the Church

Since the time of mass conversion of Dalits into Protestant Christianity, the Church has been experiencing practical difficulties in dealing with the complaints about caste discrimination. In Central Travancore, the Syrian Christians' support was essential for the protestant missionaries to spread their activities among the natives. In such a context, the CMS group of missionaries had to make compromise with some of the caste relations between them and the Dalits. It is true that the Syrian Christians benefited from the training imparted by missionaries in the economic realm but the influence of protestant missionaries upon their social values rooted in caste was unshakable.

In the case of Protestant Christians in Kerala, especially in central Travancore, though colonial modernity has played a role in liberating Dalits from their socio-economic sufferings in specific ways, it could not become a means for inculcating the ideals of modernity such as equality and justice among the Syrian Christians. Though the Syrian Churches made an effort among themselves to disengage from many of the traditional practices in the realm of ritual,[25] they failed to detach the believers from their caste practices, which they continued even after their contact with Protestant missionaries.

According to some studies (See Abraham 2003), Syrian Christians believe that Dalits are by their birth itself not virtuous to hold any administrative and spiritual positions within the Church. They say that the God will never call them for fulfilling any of His responsibilities. Some of them go further to say that a Dalit can never be a virtuous (or right) person. Since they gave such an importance to their status as a dominant social group, a homogenous group of Christians cutting across the barriers of caste differences never emerged in the Central Kerala.

Sub-Caste Differences among Dalit Christians[26]

Caste is not an alien phenomenon among the Dalit Christians. Before conversion they were divided into numerous sub-castes. After conversion also this form of caste remained as strong among them. Dalit themselves discriminate or differentiate each other based on sub-caste. Of all the sub-caste groups among Dalit Christians, *Pulayas* and *Parayas* are the two

[25] Anglican missionaries became instrumental in reforming a group from *Yakobaya* Church, and due to the influence of missionaries the said group abandoned many of its traditional rituals and founded the Marthoma Church.

[26] Divisions, though not similar to that of the sub-caste differences among Dalits Christians, can be found among Syrian Christians also. Knanaya Christians constitute a separate sect in Syro Malabar Church.

majorgroups in population. *Pulayas* are again divided into two groups of sub-castes such as *Kizhakka Pulayas* (Eastern Pulayas) and *Padinjara Pulayas* (Western Pulayas). After the conversion, much like the Syrian Christians, the Dalits also did not forgo their sub-caste differences. C. J Fuller's observation on sub-caste differences among Dalit Christians comes false here. He says that:

> Many of my New Christian informants' families had been converted four or five generations previously and they claimed not to know from which caste they came, although they agreed that it was probable that they were from either the Pulaya or Paraya castes, the two largest Harijan castes in Travancore. But, they insisted, their caste of origin did not matter and they would marry any other New Christian.

Sub-caste differences among them hardly become an obstacle for them to identifying as Christians. Keeping the sub-caste identity is important for their practical family life. So they may not feel that none of these identities (castes and sub-castes) are contradictory or incompatible to their Christian faith. It shows that sometimes many of them place the caste and sub-caste identity over and above the common identities of Christians and Dalit Christian types.

The Church administration is affected by both the caste difference and the sub-caste division among Dalits. The parishes and its members prefer persons from their caste or sub-caste groups to be appointed as a priest or pastor or catechist in their parishes. If there is more than one caste or sub-caste within in a single parish, a person from the majority groups gets appointed to the said post. Caste and sub-caste have a role in the case of other Dalit Christian dominated Protestant Churches and Pentecostal Churches.

In the case of CMS-ACI, there is only one priest for all the four or five local parishes together. Four or five Churches together can be considered as a small diocese (*idavaka* in Malayalam). Here also the caste and sub-caste differences plays its role as mentioned in the case above. Caste and sub-caste considerations come to the forefront in the appointments of pastors to the local parishes of Pentecostal Churches. Sometimes, the positions are handed over in the rotation based on caste and sub-caste considerations. There are many cases in which two caste or sub-caste groups have turned into warring groups. Each group makes their campaign openly and secretly when there are conflicts between two groups regarding distribution of positions in the church. Sometimes straight fight may also occur. Once, an open fight also occurred, and broader campaigning took place within the Church of God in India (Full Gospel-Kerala Region) between *Kizhakka Pulayas* and *Padinjara Pulayas* relating

to the election of the overseer of the Church.[27] Caste/sub-caste division is a determinant factor in the selection of committee members.

Even though Dalit Christians are trying to articulate their voice against Syrian Christian domination, they are also very much enmeshed in caste related practices. The caste and sub-caste divisions lead them to make superiority claims. Numerous myths are taking round among these groups about this. Even though Dalits embraced Christianity, many of them uphold traditional values in following caste. That means they are neither within the Christianity's folder nor entirely within the traditional caste system. When the groups are suffering from the caste they will come to oppose caste. But whenever it places them superior to other groups they become resistant. It is true to all the castes and communities irrespective of their hierarchical position. It does affect their religious and social life also. In the context of Dalit Christians in Kerala when they face a threat from the Syrian Christians or face discrimination against their caste, they are eager to fight caste. While doing this, many of them are remaining enclosed in respective castes and sub-caste groupings.

As discussed in the second chapter, every caste group has its associations in Kerala. Among Dalits, Dalit Hindus have those in plenty. Dalit Christians have no membership in caste organisations. Dalit Christians' organisations give membership to all Dalits irrespective of their caste. However, there may be the influence of caste in selection of leadership and policy decisions. In the smaller organisations, caste/sub-caste considerations get much importance since they confine to some local areas or regions. Most of the smaller Churches are found in a particular region or adjacent regions and in most of such regions the Church members are likely from the same caste. It is because of this reason that the members of the smaller Churches belong to a particular caste.[28] Apart from their concentration in some regions, they concentrate in some specific denomination also. Here also caste/sub-caste plays some significant roles in the organisation and administration of the Church.

[27] There is an informal understanding between both these sub-caste groups in the selection of the overseer of the Church. Overseer is the head of the Church. He is selected based on rotation from both these sub-caste groups each time. In a year, there was friction between them. The *Pandinjara Pulayas* alleged that their candidate was discriminated in selection for the post. Moreover, they started a poster campaign on the walls of the head office of the Church in Pakkil nearby Kottayam.

[28] It is a general picture of the Kerala society that a particular caste or community or religious group is concentrating in a particular region or area and this is evident in the Church membership also. It is quite natural that the majority caste group or community in an area constitutes the members of the church in that particular area. In the case of some Churches in some regions of Kottayam and Pathanamthitta districts majority of the believers are *Pulaya*s. In other regions, *Paraya*s form the largest group. In some areas of southern districts of Kerala, *Kurava*s are in large number.

Dalit Christians Identifying their Problems

It is a fact that every Dalit Christian, irrespective of sub-caste differences, denominations, and theology is found to be worrying about the problems that they face within the Church. The caste-based discrimination is an integral part of their feeling. However, the experience is different for different individuals and different sections of Dalit Christians. The way in which they address the problems are different for different categories of Dalit Christians. Some of them, it seems, identify the problems and try to address them and some others do not. There are different opinions among them in identifying and addressing the problems. Another thing is that some are not interested in identifying and addressing the problems.

Here the effort is to analyse how various sections of Dalit Christians deal with the issues. They are classified into three groups. a) The ordinary Church members (laities), b) Dalit Christian leaders and of organisations, and c) the Church workers (priests, pastors, and the catechists).

a) The Ordinary Church Members

From the discussion by the researcher with the ordinary members of the Church and observation, the data shows that Dalits feel discriminated based on caste in their churches. Moreover, they say that their primary problem within the Church is the domination and discrimination by the Syrian Christians. Other than a very few of the Dalits from all the denominations,[29] all the respondents say that there is caste difference against Dalits within the Church. Some people give the details regarding this and make some analysis also.

There is an inverse relationship between the caste discrimination within the Church and the awareness level of Dalit Christians about this discrimination. It means those who are in the churches where the discrimination is prevailing are less sensitive to it, and those who are facing comparatively lesser discrimination than the former are more sensitive to it. Therefore, the Dalits from the Protestant Churches, including Pentecostals, are more aware of caste discrimination. In fact, get more space within the Church. Even though Dalits have less space within the Church, the Catholic and other traditional Syrian Christian Churches are less aware of caste discrimination.

[29]Some say that there is no caste discrimination within the Church. A CSI member and a party leader of Kerala Congress (M), says that there no caste discrimination within CSI. It seems he is trying to manipulate as he was not able to produce any concrete arguments to substantiate his points.

The denomination and theology of the Churches also affect the perception of Dalits. The interaction with them shows that members of Protestant Churches are more aware of the caste discrimination within the Church. There are many reasons. First, historically the Syrian Christians have no clear dominance in Protestant Churches. Syrian Christians constitute one of many social groups. Second, Dalit Christians are not a minority group in Protestant Churches. Third, unlike other traditional churches, Protestant Churches do not stand as a single Church, and they are not centralised entities. There are numerous denominations within the Protestant Church. This diversity of the Protestant denominations makes it more democratic. Fourth, some of the Churches are exclusively for Dalits, and they enjoy more freedom and opportunity in Churches.

Dalits from the Pentecostal Churches show a difference from the Dalits of other Protestant Church in this regard. Some of the Dalit Pentacostals are against telling anything about caste discrimination within the Church. They claim that they are not concerned about such things. Theology is the primary reason behind this kind of an opinion. This kind of a stand of Pentecostals prevents them from becoming aware of the caste discrimination within the Church. However, Dalits from the Pentecostal Church are more alert about the caste discrimination than the Dalits belonging to the Catholic Churches.[30]

Among the Dalits from Catholic Church and other traditional Syrian Christian Churches, some of them are less aware of caste discrimination within the Church. In such Churches, the majority of the members are from the Syrian Christians, and the Dalits constitute only a minority group. Even though the backward caste groups and Dalits constitute the majority in Latin rite, the whole Catholic Church is under the control of Rome, and no Catholic rite is autonomous in Kerala. The Catholic Church, whether it is Roman rite or Latin or Malankara, cannot become a Church of Dalits. Some Dalits have a smaller space within these Churches. The scope for active deliberations on caste problem will be limited.

Even in Biblical line, some of the Dalit Christians are trying to understand the problems related to the caste discrimination within the Church. Many Protestant and Pentecostal Dalits say that there is no difference between the Greek and the Jew for the Christ. "Before Jesus

[30]K. Yesunatha in his thesis titled 'An Evaluation of the History of Pentecostal Dalits in Kerala', shows one of such examples from Kannur district. In that incident, a Pentecostal pastor from a Dalit community says that he had not experienced this kind of severe discrimination when he was in the Catholic Church. However, here the thing is that Kannur Diocese is a Latin diocese, and there eighty percent of the members are from Dalit communities, and so naturally caste discrimination might be less severe there. However, that may not be the case of Syrian dominated Pentecostal Churches in Kannur. However, in central Kerala, things are very different, and it is in Catholic Churches Dalits are severely discriminated against their caste.

Christ is born, the Jews were the selected people for the Jehovah, the God. However, after the Jesus Christ was born and sacrificed his life for the sinners, Jews are not a continuing as the chosen people for the God. All are one before the eyes of God." It is the opinion shared by the Protestant and Pentecostals. The Catholic Dalits also share a similar opinion that they are not drawing much from the Bible. They also say that all are equal before the God. For them, the caste superiority of the Syrian Christians are meaningless. Dalit Christians do not perceive themselves as lesser beings.

On an inquiry about the sub-caste system among Dalit Christians, a significant majority of the interviewees said that they prefer their sub-caste. They think that a partner from their sub-caste is "good for healthy family life". At the same time, they repeat, "Bible never supports caste system" and "Biblically the caste system is evil", and so on. They vehemently criticise caste discrimination within the Church against them by the Syrian Christians. The incompatibility is that they want to preserve their sub-caste identity, while imagining the Christian Church as a caste-free community in making. They want to be 'good Christians' within the Church.

However, one cannot conclude that they strictly hold on to the traditional caste system in their reference to the significance of sub-caste. What they try to give is a new interpretation and meaning to their caste-self. They look at their caste and even sub-caste through a logic different from the traditional caste system's logic. Their defense for retaining caste and sub-caste resort to modern reasons. Almost all Dalit Christians retain a caste and sub-caste logic in this way, irrespective of denominational and theological differences.

On their interaction with the researcher, the Dalit Christians across the denominations express togetherness and solidarity as Dalits in some moments. For example, a group of women from the Pentecostal denomination easily identified the researcher as one among them and shared their views by referring themselves as Dalit Christians. They forget all the caste, sub-caste difference for moments. They expressed grave worries about "our people (Dalit Christians) are not engaging in the Church affairs properly". They raised the concerns adding, "*Mappilas*[31] (Syrian Christians) are different from our people". The women raised their despair and anger about Dalits not attending Sunday worship regularly, and not interested in

[31]In the old central Travancore regions, the Syrian Christians are colloquially called *Mappilas*. It is not a formal caste name at present. In the government records, they give caste name as Syrian Christian now. Though the term is not formal one at present, it was a formal usage in the past. For example, the name of the founder of Malayala Manorama, a leading vernacular daily in Kerala, is Kandathil Varughese Mappilai.

evening prayer. They went on to say that "almost all men, especially youngsters, are not attending evening prayers and only on the days of Christmas and Good Friday some of them participate in the Church worship." That means Dalit Christians think that their community is religiously not disciplined. They try to compare them with Syrian Christians. From the comparison, they conclude that many of the Syrian Christians are more disciplined in religious matters than the Dalit Christians. Actually, the Dalit Christians identity surpass all its internal division on this ground.

The previous chapter has discussed the discrimination towards the Dalit Christians by the Syrian Christians in their spiritual life. Syrian Christians keep their prejudices against Dalits, and they say that Dalits are not fit for the priesthood and cannot become the selected people of the God. However, Dalit Christians never think of themselves in this manner. That is why they prefer a Church worker from their community in their Churches. They are proud of their Churches also. They do not think that their Church in any way is inferior to Syrian Churches. Though they have denominational differences, among themselves they are able to identify the common identity of organisations.

Dalit Christian Leaders and Activists of Organisations

Compared to ordinary Church members, leaders and activists, irrespective of denominations are more aware of the problems of Dalit Christians within the Church. When compared to Catholic and Pentecostal Churches, more activists or leaders are goes to the Protestant Churches.

The Case of Church Workers

It is very natural that the Church workers (priests, pastors and catechists) become more aware of the problems of Dalit Christians than the laity. They try to share their opinions on this with the Church members also. The formal messages by priests or pastors on various occasions both within and outside the Church are critical in this regard.

Though the speeches and messages of the priests/pastors/catechists and Church leaders within the Church (on Sundays) or in the public meeting mainly reflect the Biblical themes and Church-related matters, it gives them an opportunity to mention many things in the laity's daily life. Therefore, the speeches and messages of church workers are important to look at their understanding and the perception about various issues.

The researcher attended various church meeting in different units for this purpose. For many of the Dalit Church workers caste is an essential factor and they turn their the believers' attention to that when giving a message or a speech on theological subjects and other church matters. In most of the Churches, except Pentecostals, the topics of the Sunday messages are already fixed and it will be common to all units. The pastors/priests/catechists are supposed to give messages based on those fixed topics. However, in Dalit Churches, which are not centralised one like episcopal churches the church workers can deliver a speech more freely. The pastors often can refer to caste related problems while giving Sunday messages by interpreting the topics drawn from the Bible.

However, even caste related issues can be related to the fixed topic of the Sunday messages it may not happen in every Church. Here an attempt is made to analyse how caste becomes a significant factor combining with rest of the factors in different church units and denominations.

Syrian Christians and Dalits are members in CSI and other Pentecostal Churches. In such Churches, the speech or message may not reflect Dalit issues always. It becomes a frequent topic of the speech or message in some CSI parishes where Dalits are concentrated. In the CSI parishes under the domination of Syrian Christians or in those where they are numerically equal to Dalits, priests and pastors refrain from discussing caste in the speech or messages by the church workers. The situation in mainstream Pentecostal Churches is the same. In the case of mainstream Pentecostal Churches, apart from the influence by the Syrian Christians their theology also prevents the pastors to take up a topic pertaining caste for speech and message.

In Catholic Church, the by priests hardly speak out caste. In both Syro Malabar and Syro Malankara Churches delivering a speech or giving a message specifically on (or inclusive of) Dalit issues is unusual. Since the as the Syrian Christians are strong in their following. There are some priests from Dalit communities in Latin Catholic rite, they also rarely speak about caste to the believers. Even in the Latin Catholic Churches, Dalit priests are not interested in giving messages independent of the one received from the central authority (Interview with Fr. Saviour Cherunellady).[32]

[32] He says that most of the Dalit priests from the Latin Churches are not interested in talking about caste related issues. He has taken some efforts to deal with the caste issues. However, others were not supporting him.

All Catholic rites observe a day in a year as 'Justice Sunday', which is meant for the Church to express its concern officially over the sufferings and socio-economic problems of Dalit Christians. Since 1986, the first Sunday after 15 August is in all the parishes in Kerala to promote the cause of the Dalit Catholics in Kerala.[33] There will be some meetings and seminars in various Churches on Dalit issues, and some special guests are invited to give special lectures on Dalit issues. Apart from this, churches never thought about the necessity of bringing caste related problems as an integral part of routine messages to followers by the priests.

In the Protestant Churches, messages and speeches address the Dalit issues quite often especially in those where the Dalits are in good number. Dalit Church workers use their discretion allowed by the church to decide the theme of the message are enjoys some freedom. In this sense, their speeches and messages tend to become political in spirit. During Sunday worship, the Church workers always advise the members to bring in Christian discipline to their life. The message giving starts with the interpretation and explanation of the Biblical themes and it is supposed to be a spiritual one. In every Sunday, the priest/pastor identifies some particular themes, subjects, or verses from the Bible for giving the message. However, after completing the formal message, the pastors turn the attention of believers to Dalit issues and narrate the poor condition of their social life (Interview with Fr. Baby Pallipparambil and Fr. K P Samuel).[34] In the Churches like CMS-ACI and Salvation Army, and in the Dalit parishes of the Churches like CSI they adopt this method for giving messages. Some Church workers try to interpret Biblical themes in the context of Dalits in India and thus try to emphasise on the spiritual and the social aspects of Dalit life. They mean that the Christianity must help them in both these realms.

Dalit Christians are always advised, required and exhorted by the Church workers to lead a disciplined life both in spiritual and material terms. Church workers are always complaining in their Sunday speech about the irregular attendance of believers. In most of the Dalit Protestant Churches while giving messages, the Church workers are continually talking about the daily social life of Dalit Christians in general and the members of the Church in particular. They also raise a complaint regarding the habit and behaviour of both men and women in the Church. They caution the male members about drinking alcohol and exhort

[33]http://www.dcmspalai.com/history.php retrieved on 16-06-15

[34] The researcher has observed this in many CMS Churches such as Pulikkunnu, Koovappally, Anjoottinal, and Panakkachira. Believers from many other churches also confirm this.

them to avoid it and save money for future needs. They reprimand the members for avoiding daily evening prayer at home and their lack of attention to the laziness of children in their studies. For the last two problems, and sometimes even for drinking habits of men, women are mainly accused by the Church workers.

The church workers always compare Dalit Christianity with other castes and communities, especially with the Syrian Christians. They condemn Dalit Christians for not having the quality/habit of earning and saving money, and in this connection, again a comparison with the Syrian Christians becomes necessary. The speeches and messages substantively focus on the problems of Dalit Christians' material life. They argue that Dalit Christians are always lazy and indisciplined and they have to come out of these problems. (Recall here what the researcher heard from the laity. Both seem to be the same.) During the 'time of notice' in the CMS Church,[35] the Church worker also advises the members and caution them regarding their habits, laziness and other drawbacks. The Church workers sometimes remind them about the importance of unity to fight casteism within and outside the Church and pressurise the government for getting more rights for Dalit Christians.

However, as far as Dalit Pentecostals are concerned things are appearing differently. Pentecostal theology and the structure of some Pentecostal Churches prevent the pastors from making any remarks about caste while giving Sunday messages. When compared to the episcopal Protestant Churches, the messages given in the Pentecostal Churches are more flexible as themes or the subjects of the messages are not fixed from above. However, because of both the theology and the Syrian Christians hesitation, Pentecostal pastors are reluctant to include other subjects in their speeches. The messages are given mostly on Biblical themes, and the members are advised by the pastors to be truthful in their faith. Political exhortation by the pastors are not very common in Pentecostal Churches. Some speakers belonging to some Pentecostal Churches from Kottayam and Pathanamthitta districts are excellent in their oratory skills, and they are attractive to Dalit Christians also. However, they too are focusing only on Biblical themes.[36]

[35] The time of notice is actually supposed to inform the people about various official matters and decisions of the Church. At the time of notice the catechist read out the details. This is happening in the case of CMS Church.

[36] Lazar V. Mathew, Anil Kodithottam and Raju Poovakkala are some of the eloquent speakers on conventions. Among them, Lazar Mathew, who is from *Paraya*, is concerned about Dalit issues though he may not make any remark on this issue publicly. Anil Kodithottam is said to be not interested in talking about caste issues (Interview with Shaji Alimukku). The researchers have also listened to their speeches. They were focusing only on Biblical themes.

Struggle against Caste Discrimination within the Church

The protests and struggle against caste discrimination within the Church have started in the colonial period itself. The first recorded incident is the protest of Poykayil Appachan in the Marthoma Church. Poykayil Appachan with his followers later came out of the Church and started a separate spiritual movement. Pamapady John Joseph and P. J. Joseph in Kottayam also contributed to the struggle against caste discrimination within the Church at the beginning of the 20th century.

In the CSI, such a protest broke out in the 1940s against the dominant group of Syrian Christians. They had an eye on the land and other properties attached to some Churches which had a large number of Dalit believers (see Raj 2010: 52-59 for more details). Again the Dalit Christians reacted against the discrimination by the Syrian Christian Church leadership in appointments to various posts in the institutions.The vast majority of job vacancies in those institutions went to the Syrian Christians and other non-Dalit Christians (For more details of this, see Raj 2010, Chirakkarode 2000, Vattappara 1989 and Yesudasan 2010). These events inspired the Dalits within the Church as a protest group fighting both the dominance of Syrian Christians and the Church leadership.

The protests gradually led to the formation of Separate Administration Movement within the Church, and in the 1960s, the struggle reached its culmination (see Raj 2010: 68-94 for more details). However, a section of the Dalits were interested in forming a new Church and another one decided to continue in the Church by fighting against the caste discrimination within it. In 1966, a new Church called CMS Anglican Church of India was formed under the leadership of Rev. Stephen Vattappara. He became its first bishop. He was the first Dalit becoming bishop of a Church in Kerala. The CSI appointed Rev. T S Joseph, who is from the group that wanted to continue in CSI, as an Assistant Bishop of the Madhya Kerala Diocese. In 1972, he became the bishop of the same diocese. He was the first Dalit bishop of a CSI diocese in Kerala.

Still within CSI Church, especially in MKD, struggle against caste discrimination is more intensive than any other churches in Kerala (Yesudasan 2010: 120).[37] As per the available data, CSI is the second Church regarding the membership of Dalits. The Catholic Church (three rites together) stands first in the number of Dalit believers. Several Dalits are scattered

[37] The formation of People's Liberation and Faith Movement within CSI by a group of Dalits was a milestone in continuing their struggle against caste discrimination within the Church.

in the Pentecostal Churches also. Of all these Churches, the CSI can show the highest number of Dalits in a single church. Even though the incidence of caste discrimination and Syrian Christain's dominance in Protestant churches are far below than the Catholic churches, the events of protests are more frequent in the Protestant churches. It is pertinent to look at this contrast by taking into consideration the perceptions of Dalit Christian leaders of the Catholic churches.

They have a different story to say. Though there are Dalit Christians in the Catholic Churches in large numbers, they cannot make a firm voice against the Church authorities. In other words, they are not an independent group in raising their voice against the Church authorities since their organisational freedom is limited in the Church. They have an organisation called *Dalit Catholica Mahajana Sabha* (DCMS), and it is working under the auspices of the Church. In fact, it is an official organisation of the Church. The Church tries to direct the activities and operations of DCMS against the policies of the government. By doing so, the Church indirectly tries to convince the Dalit believers that it is not responsible for any of their socio-economic problems. It gives them an idea that their sufferings are due to the unsympathetic attitude of various governments at central and state level. However, it is a fact that despite within all its limitations DCMS also tries to raise their voice against the Church authorities.

DCMS mainly demand representation for Dalit Christians in the appointments in the institutions owned by the Church. Their demands never became a claim for equality with the Syrian Christians within the Church. Their fight against the Church authority is mainly to secure some concessions and minimum benefits to the members. They mostly behave like an insider pressure group capable of exerting some influence upon the Church. Even then the Church sometimes neglects their demands. The Church cannot deny all of their demands. The Church fears that Dalits will go out of it and join other Churches if it entirely dismisses their concerns (Interview with P. O. Peter). Recall here the agitation by Dalit Christians against the Syrian Christians in the case of Mannanam Church. (See the third chapter for details) At last the Syrian Christians made a retreat by leaving the Church for Dalits.

The case of addressing caste related problems are different in Pentecostal Churches as compared to other Protestant Churches. As there are numerous denominations in Pentecostalism, a case by case analysis is not very easy. Pentecostals in Kerala are many, and they vary in social composition, and this makes it impossible for a researcher to make a

universal conclusion about them. In general the Dalits in Pentecostal Churches are very much adherent to the theology. The Churches do not openly recognise the problems of Dalits though caste related issues and struggles are visible in Pentecostal Churches.

The mainstream Pentecostal groups like Indian Pentecostal Church of God (IPC), The Pentecostal Mission (TPM), The Church of God in India (Full Gospel-Kerala State), Assemblies of God (AG) and Sharon Fellowship have an influential group of Syrian Christians. These churches are not at all interested in recognising the caste relation prevailing among the members and affecting the operation of the church. Even though Pentecostals used to cite theology as the most important determinant in their religious and social life, caste is an unavoidable factor in the life of Dalit Pentecostals. The Syrian Christians from all Christian denominations (Catholics, traditional Syrian Christians, Protestants, and Pentecostals) never recognise the existence of caste-related practices within the Church.

Different from the case of above mentioned mainline Pentecostal Churches, in some other Pentecostal Churches Dalits are the majority of believers. World Missionary Evangelism (WME), United Pentecostal Church (UPC) and Church of God in India (Full Gospel-Kerala Region) are the examples (Interview with Nibu Alexander and Saji Varghese). However, these Churches also do not try to raise any collective voice for Dalits, except some individual attempts (Interview with Pastor Sunny Varkey). Many other Pentecostal churches comprised of Dalits as believers are tinier in comparison with those mentioned above (Rennymon: 2007). They are known as Independent Pentecostal Movements (IPMs). Unlike the case of mainline Pentecostal Churches, independent Churches are more democratic and inclusive of the marginalised since they are neither big nor well-organised. The independent Churches are economically not as sound as the mainline Churches. The economic inequality between the Syrian Christians and Dalits in these Churches are rather low. Moreover the presence of Syrian Christians in their Churches are not adequate to bring about dominance.

There are a few examples of Dalits raising caste as an issue in the Pentecostal churches. Following a caste-based division among the believers, the Church of God in India (Full Gospel) got divided into two - Church of God in India (Full Gospel-Kerala State) and Church of God in India (Full Gospel-Kerala Region). At the state level Syrian Christians are the leading group in the first and Dalits are in the second. The Church of God in India (Full Gospel-Kerala State) in some areas have parishes comprising Dalit believers as the majority. Church of God in India (Full Gospel-Kerala Region) have very few parishes (in Idukki)

having a sizeable number of Syrian Christians (Interview with Dinu Monachan). It means, this is completely a Dalit Church.

The formation of CMS Anglican Church of India and the Church of God (Full Gospel-Kerala Region) was in fact the result of caste-based splits. There is a proliferation of IPMs in Kerala, of which many have majority of believers from Dalits. Caste is not the single factor to split the churches. The growing dissent among the believers towards the central authority of the church and their demand for autonomy are also the reasons. Many Dalits of the Madhya Kerala Diocese remained with CSI church after a split in 1960's. They also more regularly involve in protests against the church authorities. There was a protest by Dalits that came in news in the recent times. A candidate from Dalit Christian community was denied selection to the post of assistant professor in the CMS College governed by the Madhya Kerala Diocese of the church. The church selected a non-Dalit candidate belonging to another diocese to the post. Jentle Varghese, the Dalit Christian candidate was from the Madhya Kerala Diocese. According to the rules and conventions the Diocese must give preference to a candidate from the same diocese.

Following this incident, Dalits of MKD started a social media page in Facebook, namely *Aneethikkethire Oru CSI Koottayma* (a CSI collective against injustice), and later its name was changed to *Social Justice for CSI-MKD*. Through this page, they started a more comprehensive campaign against the caste discrimination within CSI-MKD. Though its initial attempt was to raise the issue of Jentle Varghese, later on, it extended the campaign on many forms of caste discrimination within the diocese. In this page, debates are going on between those who stand for the group and the others.

Pentecostals' are not interested in addressing caste related problems because they are not well aware of the caste discrimination within the Church. (Interview with Joseph Mathew) Many of the Dalit Christians from the Pentecostal churches were not interested in revealing their caste identity. Some others said that they had no occasion in their life to conflict with the Syrian Christians. For the others, they are wary of theology to think about caste because thinking along the caste is a sin. However, the researcher noted that even those who are citing theology as a reason to prevent them from thinking about caste, are also considering caste in seeking marriage alliances. Some of them are claiming economic and other concessions based on caste criteria from the government. Even though some of them are aware of the issues, they are not willing to say about caste. They, in actual practice, try to normalise the

discrimination within the Church. They neither justify it nor oppose. (Interview with Pastor E J Chacko).[38] Even the Dalits from the Pentecostal Churches who are ready to identify caste practices within the Church, and vehemently criticise the Syrian Christians for discriminating Dalits. They never involved in any protest.

However, now some individual leaders from Pentecostal Churches appear to be active and involved in the protest against caste discrimination. Some of them try to address caste related issues even intellectually by interpreting theology in favour Dalits and by criticising the prevalent trend among Pentecostals for the neglect towards the persistant problem of caste. Some others are social and political activists.

George V. J. from IPC is the convenor for National Council for Dalit Christians (NCDC), and a veteran leader of Council for Dalit Christians (CDC) is from IPC. He has a lot to say about caste discrimination within the Church (Interview with V. J.George).[39] He is taking up the cause of Dalits and raising his voice in favour of them. Church of God in India (Full Gospel-Kerala Region)'s overseer Sunny Varkey is a campaigner for Dalit Christians. He has associated with other Dalit Christian activists and Church leaders. (Interview with Pastor Sunny Varkey).[40] Dr. M Stephen, a writer on theological matters and issues of Dalit Christians teaches at Faith Theological Seminary, Manakkala, near Adoor in Pathanamthitta district. He is not a Dalit but an active campaigner for the cause of Dalits (Dr. M. Stephen).[41] He has written extensively on caste related issues within the Church. Also, he has made attempts to re-read theology in the context of Dalits within the Church. Shins Peter, a member from IPC, is a political activist raise a critical voice against the discrimination in the IPC (Interview with Shins Peter). Besides them, many of the activists and pastors from

[38] He says that caste discrimination is there in the Church. IPC is Syrian Christians' Church. So their domination is very natural in the Church. No need to question such kind of issues within the Church. He is 92 now has served the Church as a pastor more than sixty years. The honoured him for long years of service. He takes it as a proper recognition on the part of Church. He says that if he were raising caste issues within the Church, he would not have been rewarded by the Church.

[39] He is the grandson of Vettamala Philippose *Upadeshi* (catechist). Vettamala Philippose *Upadeshi* is a respected figure in Dalit Christian circles. He has composed some Christian songs in Malayalam which are still famous and are popular across the Protestant Churches. V. J. George says that caste issues within the Church need serious attention. He is cooperating with other Churches in addressing caste issues. As a leader of CDC and NCDC, he has taken many efforts in this regard.

[40] He says that he has a good relationship with the leaders of other Churches. He keeps relationships not only with Pentecostal leaders but with the Episcopal Church leaders including Stephen Vattappara, the moderator and bishop of CMS Anglican Church of India. He says that the caste discrimination within the Church needs serious attention and in this connection, he can give all his support to the Dalit cause. He says that within his Church most of the people and other pastors may oppose his views, and he cannot make his Church members convinced of it, even though he is one of the senior most leaders of the Church.

[41] He belongs to Nadar community, an Other Backward Caste.

Pentecostal Churches are aware of and interested in Dalit and caste-related issues. Some of are active in Dalit Christian organisations like CDC.[42]

However, the resistance by Dalits against caste discrimination hardly confines to the problem in the church. In their everyday socio-religious life also they raise voice against it. That means one's resistance against caste discrimination may not always manifest as a direct, or open fight against it within an institutional space. Therefore, the lack of awareness about caste discrimination in their church or making theology as resort to overcome the caste question hardly help them to become blind towards caste in the daily life.

Role of Dalit Christian Intellectuals in Resisting Caste Discrimination

There are some serious intellectual efforts by the Dalit Christians as part of their resistance against caste discrimination. At times, it culminates in the form of active social movement also. Earlier Dalit Christian leaders like Pampady John Joseph, V. D. John, and Paul Chirakkarodu were not merely campaigning for Dalit Christians. They were trying to build up a Dalit identity as a vantage point of activism. Many of the Dalit Christians, especially from Protestant Churches, have become the part of various Christian intellectual groups and organisations. Besides working as a group of crusaders against the dominant social forces within and outside the church, they developed alternative conceptions about conversion, the Church, and the Bible. Their intellectual efforts contributed to the emergence and coincidence of a Dalit Christian identity. Re-reading and re-interpretation of the Bible is very relevant in this context. Most often it happens in small group of Dalit Christians, and there is no big organisation to lead them in this regard. The books and articles written by the intellectuals of Dalit Christian community and their life and mission also become a catalyst in this regard. However, famous writers from among the Dalit Christians in Kerala are very few. It is one of the significant challenges faced by the Dalit Christians in Kerala in their struggle against caste discrimination. Dalit Hindus have not been facing this disadvantage. They are plenty in number.

[42] Researcher met some of them, and they have shared their views in this regard. It was at the occasion of a public march organised by CDS at Thiruvananthapuram related the Dalit Christian issues. More details on this march are part of the next two chapters. Some of the pastors told that they felt the issues of caste very seriously at the time of the admission of their children for higher learning. They criticise other pastors who opine that dealing with the issues such as caste discrimination is not Biblical.

Pampady John Joseph was a pioneer among the Dalit Christian intellectuals. His book in Malayalam, *Savarna Kraisthavarum Avarna Kraisthavarum* (Savarna Christians and Avarna Christians) was very critical about caste in the Christian church. He is also the author of *Cheramar Balante Kadha* (The Story of a Cheramar Boy) (T. H. P. Chentharassery 1989: 54 and 76). Pampady John Joseph attempted to rename *Pulayas* as *Cheramar*. The meaning of the new name – descendants of *Chera*s - involves a claim about a glorious past and created a myth for the untouchable castes. He meant that once the *Pulayas* were the owners of the land and so they are descendants of Cheras, the rulers of ancient *Chera* kingdom. He tried to find a new history also for them (See THP Chentharassery 1989).

P. J. Joseph, companion of John Joseph, started a monthly journal namely *Sadhujanadoodan* (messenger of the poor) in 1919 (THP Chentharassery 1989: 31). He was a Catholic Dalit and who took particular attention to organise them. Kaviyoor K. C. Raj was a catechist and member of various committees in the CSI. His book *Chennaykkalude Idayile Kunjadukal* is a critical account of the caste discrimination against Dalits within CSI and how the Church authority looted the property of Dalit parishes. He later converted to Hinduism protesting against the caste discrimination within CSI, and he wrote the book after leaving the Church.

V. D. John, the critic fought for the cause of Dalit Christians in Kerala in the post-independence period. His biography titled *Ente Jeevithavum Kalavum* (My Life and Time), was only published only in 2014. The book discuss the socio-political issues of Dalit Christians in general rather than the caste discrimination within any particular Church (See John 2014). Paul Chirakkarodu is a famous writer and activists of Dalit Christians in Kerala. He wrote a book on the history of Dalit Christians in Kerala, *Dalit Kraisthavar Keralathil* (See Chirakkarode 2000). He also wrote short stories and poems depicting the plight of Dalit Christians.

Pastor C. S. Mathew established a Church for Dalits in 1949, and now it is known as World Missionary Evangelism (WME). He was a lyricist and an excellent orator. The song *en priyaneppol sundaranaayi* composed by Mathew is one of the most famous devotional songs appealing to all Protestant Christians in Kerala (Saju 2007: 297). Another notable lyricist is Vettamala Philippose, who was a catechist in St. Thomas Evangelical Church of India (a Syrian Christian Evangelical Protestant Church). His *en priya rakshakan neethiyin sooryanai*.. is a famous devotional song. Its verses, for example, *neethisooryan varumbol than prabhayin kanthiyalen irulniram mareedume* highlight the compassion of Jesus Christ

for the dark-skinned Dalits (see Paul 2012: 50-57 for details about the Christian devotional songs composed by Dalits). Stephen Vattappara (The Archbishop of CMS Anglican Church of India) wrote a two-volume history of CSMS-ACI (*CMS Sabha Charithram*). This book also gives the details of caste relations and Syrian Christain dominance in CSI, the protest of Dalits against it, and the emergence of CMS-ACI in 1966.

TKC Vaduthala was a short story writer, and one of his stories, *Achante Venthinga Inna* (Father, here's your Scapular) threw light on the deplorable condition of Dalits in the Catholic Church. S. Joseph teaching at Maharaja's College Ernakulam is a famous Malayalam poet and the themes are pertaining to the socio-economic problems of Dalit Christians. His poems have translations in English. *Pengalude Bible* (My Sister's Bible) reflects the dilemma of Dalit Christian social life. Baby Thomas is a short story writer. Recently he has directed a film in Malayalam called *Maramkothi*.

Y. T. Vinayaraj, a clergy from the Mar Thoma Church, is a prominent Dalit theologian in Kerala. He has published books and articles both in English and Malayalam. Thampi Manarcadu, a member of Church of God in India (Full Gospel Kerala Region), retired as a class I state government employee, is also a writer. He has written some books on Biblical subjects, which deal with caste issues also. Jaise Pandanadu, a Dalit pastor from Church of God in India (Full Gospel Kerala State), is a writer and critic of caste relations in the Pentecostal Churches in Kerala. Sunil Raj Philip, a clergy from CSI is also a critic.

T. M. Yesudasan from CSI wrote a critical work about Dalit Christians, *Baliyadukalude Vamshavali* (Genealogy of Scapegoats). Vinil Baby Paul, a Doctoral Student in Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi) is a member of CSI. He is an emerging writer on Dalit Christians and other problems. Stanley Patrick, a Dalit Catholic from Kannur, is the author of a book on the issues of Dalit Christians in North Malabar, *Malabarile Dalit-Dalit Kraisthava Charithravum Vathamanavum* (The Past and Present of Dalits and Dalit Christians in Malabar). It is the only study about the problems of Dalit Christians living in North Kerala.

Dalit Christians in the Christian Intellectual Collectives

Some intellectual groups or collective from the Dalit Christians in Kerala also needs an analysis. Dynamic Action Group is such a group founded by M. J. Joseph (a Syrian Christian clergy) from CSI Madhya Kerala Diocese. He started a magazine, *Dynamic Action*. As a

leftist among the theologians, he strove for the cause of Dalits, and stood with them in their conflicts with Syrian Christians. He was one of the pioneers of Peoples' Movement for Faith and Liberation, organised for Dalit Christians within the CSI in the 1970s. It attracted many of the Dalit youth. His intellectual motivation was its strength. Rather than resorting to usual methods of agitations, the group aimed at encountering the Church authority more intellectually.

Pennamma Bhavanam, an organisation for supporting the poor and the oppressed, was also formed in the 1970's. M. M. Thomas, an eminent liberation theologian from Mar Thoma Church, was its founder. Like M. J. Joseph of CSI, he was a great supporter of Dalits. Dynamic Action Group has overlapping membership with the other two organisations mentioned above. These are mainly intellectual forums for Dalit Christians.

Students' Christian Movement (SCM), was an organisation formed for non-Catholic students, in the 1970s. It was left of the centre in ideological orientation and attracted progressive Christain students from traditional Syrian Christian Churches like Orthodox/Jacobite and Mar Thoma and even from Pentecostal Churches.

Dalit youth from CSI-MKD have been active members of the all intellectual and student organisations mentioned above. These intellectual forums have critical role in the first by Dalit Christians.

Dalit Christians and the Role of Contextual Theologies

As said earlier in this chapter, there is an attempt across the Christians to interpret and re-read the Bible relating to the marginalised groups and to find out new emancipatory message from it. Lourdino A. Yuzon calls it as contextual theology. He says that the contextual theology is an umbrella term which involves many, not one. Black theology, feminist theology, Minjung theology (Korea), Dalit theology (India), the theology of struggle (Philippines), Latin American liberation theology are the examples. All these have emerged out of particular historical realities. The liberating ideals of the Christian message must address these social/historical realities adequately. (Yuzon: Towards a Contextual Theology).

Arvind P. Nirmal (a faculty of United Theological College, Bangalore) is the pioneer of Dalit theology. Though there are a many in this group, there is none from Kerala. In Kerala, vast majority of Dalit Church workers, including clergies and senior pastors do not know about it.

When the researcher tried to introduce Dalit theology to many of the interviewees, most of them were not agreeing with its idea. They viewed Christian theology as something which is pure, and they believe that talking about a new kind of theology like Dalit theology is divisive or partisan.

Father Valsan Vattappara, a clergy from CMS Anglican Church of India, and many others have opined that it is divisive to talk about Dalit theology. They say that the Church needs only one theology and it should not be classified along caste line. Most of the church workers have just completed their school education. Only a very few of them have attended colleges and graduated in any discipline. Some of them have completed certificate courses in theology. The Churches send them to Bible Colleges for training in church service. These institutes or colleges have no affiliation with any recognised universities. As part of the course, they learn Bible. Dalit Churches are economically very poor, and so they cannot send their people to get trained in theology from reputed institutes. Most of the Churches, especially independent Dalit Pentecostal Churches, do not have any training institutes for the pastors. In researcher's interview with Fr. Valsan Vattappara from CMS-ACI, he said that he is not aware of contextual theologies. He is a graduate in Chemistry. He has completed B. Th. (Bachelor of Theology) course also, though not from a recognised university. As this is the condition of an average Dalit pastor or priest, it is tough for the Dalits to come into contact with contextual theologies. However, in the case of Churches like CSI, the candidates get the opportunity to get trained in theologies. However, that happens only in the case of priests. Catechists are not adequately trained. Even in the Churches like CSI, except some from the present generation, most of the priests are not aware of contextual theologies.

The reason partially lies in the history of conversion in Kerala and its agents, and in the structure of curriculum for training the church workers by the contemporary churches. During the colonial period, British missionaries had a monopoly in the propagation of Christianity among the natives. Their influence continued in the Protestant churches and the training. Regarding the problem of caste, the British missionaries were preaching only a liberal humanist agenda for the converts. Y. T. Vinayaraj says that the liberal humanist agenda of the western enlightenment project framed the theoretical and theological base of the universal Christian mission in the modern period (Vinayaraj 2008: 38) Christianity is an evangelical

religion for almost all Dalits in the Protestant Churches in Kerala rather than theological.[43] If this is a fact, the problems of Dalits to evolve a contextual theology is related to the drawbacks of their churches.

However, a version of liberation theology got some prominence in Kerala since the early 1980s. In the absence of Dalit theology, liberation theologians were only trying to address the problems of Dalits within the Church for some time. Father S. Kappen, Bishop Paulose Mar Paulose, M. M. Thomas, Ninan Koshy and Father M. J. Joseph were the eminent liberation theologians in this group. Liberation theology has tried to theorise the problems of the oppressed and declared its solidarity with them.[44] The liberation theologians above belong to different Christian denominations. Father S. Kappen belongs to Catholic Church, Bishop Paulose Mar Paulose belongs to East Chaldean Church (a traditional Syrian Christian Church), M. M. Thomas belongs to Mar Thoma Church, and Ninan Koshy and Father M. J. Joseph belong to CSI. There was a network in Kerala at the initiative of these theologians. However, none of them has succeeded in finding a legitimate space in their respective Churches. The primary reason behind this is that the Syrian churches do not provide any space for a parallel theology. In the Syrian Churches, the Syrian Christians determine the approach of the church towards the marginalised people.

Even though the liberation theology declared solidarity with Dalits, Dalit theology was argues that liberation theology not be adequate to address the problems of Dalits in the Indian context. Dalit theology is critical of both classical Indian Christian theology and Liberation theology (Nirmal 1991). A. P. Nirmal says about liberation theologians in India:- [t]hey gave a very sober picture of particularly the economic condition of rural Christians. It also became clear that depressed class converts continued to complain of indifference and neglect. All this, however, did not make any change to Indian Christian theology's obsession with the Brahminic tradition. It had no time or inclination to reflect theologically on the Dalit converts who formed the majority of the Indian Church.... The socio-economic realities in India are of

[43] The Churches in Kerala preaches evangelism. They mainly take efforts to add more members and maintain the strength. As part of spreading Christianity, the Church workers preach Jesus Christ and from the verses of Bible. They campaign for it using various media. The Bible is rarely interpreted in the context of the people here. That means teaching Bible in Kerala aim at a universal group. Againts this, the contextual theologies are coming up.

[44]Liberation theologians in Kerala have made their efforts to approach the problems of all oppressed in a theoretical manner. Like Marxism, liberation theology is praxis inspired and praxis-oriented in terms of class struggle and Marxism is not merely a tool of analysis for liberation theologians sic social institutions: the joint family and caste. They are both frankly based on the principle of inequality between man and woman and between man and man. Moreover, the outcastes, the tribals and women were in the margins of society, outside its power structure without participation in its decision-making processes (Thomas 1978: 5).

a different nature, and the traditional doctrinaire Marxist analysis of these realities is inadequate in India. It neglects the caste factor which adds to the complexity of Indian socio-economic realities (A. P. Nirmal 1991: 139).By criticising liberation theology, he talks about Dalit theology. Dalit theology and other liberation theologies grounded their theological affirmations in people's experiences.

Dalit theology wants to assert that at the heart of the Dalit people's experience is *pathos* or suffering. This *pathos* or suffering or pain is prior to their involvement in any activist struggle for liberation (A. P. Nirmal 1991: 141). So for Nirmal, it is not the theoretical exercise, but the experience matters. Here the experience is the sufferings of Dalits. He again says that the question of Dalit theology is linked with the identity of Dalits. It could be argued that all people's theologies are in fact theologies of identity. Dalit theology, tribal theology, black theology, African theology, all these different theologies are seeking to express the distinctive identities of these people (A. P. Nirmal 1991: 143).

In Kerala, theologians like Y. T. Vinayaraj, M Stephen, and others try to interpret Bible in the context of Dalits drawing upon the Dalit theology put forward by the eminent figure like A. P. Nirmal. Vinayaraj, a Dalit clergy of Marthoma Church, has published two books on Dalit theology in which, apart from elaborating on Dalit theology in general, he tries to trace out the root of Dalit theology in Kerala in Poikayil Appachan. The books are, *Reimagining Dalit Theology: Post Modern Readings* (2008) and *Revisiting the Other: Discourses on Post Modern Theology* (2010). According to Sanal Mohan and Vinayaraj, Poikayil Appachan is the first Dalit theologian in Kerala (Interview with Sanal Mohan and Vinayaraj).[45] An issue on Dalit theology was published by the journal *Faith Theological Review* edited by M. Stephen, a faculty from Faith Theological Seminary at Manakkala. Four writers, including him, have contributed to the said issue of the journal. Some of the unpublished dissertations in Christain theological studies, occasionally mention Dalit theology, without serious attention and details. In short, the contribution to Dalit theology on the part of Dalit Christians from Kerala is very minimal.

The Protestant churches such as CSI has tried to develop a distinct theology. However, there is no serious effort for innovation and updating of the theology of Pentecostalism in Kerala.

[45]Vinayaraj says that Poikayil Yohannan initiated to establish a Dalit community experience of spirituality. For him, the absence of the history of Dalits was the fundamental reason for their marginalisation and slavery. Thus he followed a liturgical method of retreating to the past of Dalits as a political/theological strategy (Y. T. Vinayaraj 2008: 46).

Both Protestant and Catholic theologies have been developed and enriched by the Europeans in various stages of their history in Kerala. Pentecostalism as a theology lacks such an experience also. It is common to them at the global level also. Against this background, efforts by the christian churces in Kerala to develop a Dalit Theology or any other contextual theologies would be limited. In the Churches like CMS-ACI, Salvation Army and some Pentecostal Churches comprised mainly of Dalits; there is no believer or church leader representing any theology most authentically.

Towards an Informal Contextualisation of Theology

Usually, the Churches read the Bible and apply it to the belief system of the Church and social life of Dalits along the line of Christian ethics and morality. The attempts to contextualise it to the social need of the marginalised groups are sporadic. The Church and theology sometimes appear as two different things for most of the Dalit Christians in Kerala. That is why they are responding to the Church as part of their protest, but not trying to respond to the theology/Bible. Of course, Bible is a sacred book for them, and so no question will be raised against it as they are believers. However, they are questioning caste discrimination within the Church, and their experience makes them capable of agitating against the Church administration. However, their experience does not make them capable of questioning the Bible. That is why a new Dalit theology is not originated in Kerala Churches.

As stated earlier, the vast majority of the Dalit Church workers in Kerala do not have any idea about Dalit theology or any other contextual theology. However, the moment they face questions on Dalit issues the Church workers in Kerala have answers to them mainly pointing out the Church as a reason. So it is correct to say that Dalit Christians in Kerala try to understand the Church in their socio-religious context. The attitude of the Church towards Dalits makes them rethink the caste discrimination within the Church. Theology had become a big concern for them while addressing the caste question, and it is not developing as a means to fight against it.

Some of them say that the Jesus Christ is the Saviour of Dalits in Kerala as British Christian missionaries tried to address caste oppression experienced by Dalits in colonial Kerala and made them Christians. Dalits also believe that God has sent the British missionaries to their place to save them from caste sufferings and slavery. Therefore, the Dalit interpretation is that they are a ‘chosen people’ of the God. In this way, Dalits are trying to understand the Christianity in their social context. Dalit Christians attempt to understand the Jesus Christ and

Christianity in their own historical and social context, though often unknowingly. The Sunday messages of the Church workers reflect this, and an ordinary believer talks in support of this.

However, denominational differences are evident in the perception of Dalits about Christianity. Responses from the Catholics, Protestants, and Pentecostals are different. Protestant Christians from the Churches like CMS Anglican Church of India and CSI are making holding this perception as mentioned above. Among Pentecostals especially for the Dalits converted from Protestant churches it is the prevailing opinion. For those who are in the Pentecostal Churches, where they are a majority and taking a leadership role, the confidence behind this perception is high. The researcher never came across any Dalit from Catholics saying this. It means that the tendency to approach the Church and Bible separate/different each other is more evident among Catholic Dalits than the Dalits from other Churches.

There are some historical reasons for this.[46] The Syrian Christians converted Dalits within the Catholic and other traditional Syrian Christian Churches for their own sake, and it was not for the welfare of Dalits. Those Dalits who are now in these Churches were once the tillers of the lands of Syrian Christians, and later they were converted into Christianity being the labourers of the said Syrian Christians. They were somewhat made obedient labourers than Christians. It is an extension of the observation made by Dick Kooiman about the activities of the LMS missionaries among the lower caste converts in southern Travancore. He claims that Shannars in the plantation sector were converted into Protestant Christianity to assure the supply of obedient labourers to the plantation sector (See Dick Kooiman 1991: 57-71).

The noted point here is that though Dalit Church workers are not trained in Dalit theology, and most of them have not even heard about it, from their experience they have tried to make a critical consciousness. They try to find their self. The consciousness of self is, in fact, the result of a long process. In Kerala's situation, it starts from colonial administration, grows with the efforts made by the Anglican missionaries and reaches at a concrete form with the efforts made by Dalit leaders like Ayyankali, Poykayil Yohannan, and Pampady John Joseph etc. (Sanal Mohan 1999: 1-24).

[46] For Dalit Catholics learning Bible is not as important as the case of Protestants, especially of Pentecostals. Reading Bible was not common among the believers for a long time in Catholic Churches. So the Church, not the Bible was the embodiment of religion. Whatever the Church preaches was taken for granted by them. It means that Dalit Catholics do not try to understand Bible in their context. As the Church is rather important, they cannot come out of the Church with the same Bible.

Chapter 5

Social Life of Dalit Christians

Introduction

Christianity has a significant influence on the socio-economic life of Dalits in Kerala. Their faith in Christianity and membership in Church have contributed to creating a separate social identity for them. At the same time, Dalit Christians' caste identity makes them a critical group within the Church. Its reflections in their religious life were the primary focus of analysis in Chapter 4. Even though they have a religious identity they are engaging with the society not entirely as a religious group. Both the Church and the society, in different ways, are under the influence of dominant social values and caste is a common factor to both. The Dalit Christians are under the influence of caste-based cultural and social values prevailing in Kerala society and also resisting its hegemony. It is through their dual engagement with the church and the society that they define their space as a unique social group. This chapter looks at the important aspects of Dalit Christians' social life in detail.

The Socio-Economic Conditions of Dalit Christians in Kerala

Conversion to Christianity has not resulted in a drastic change in the economic conditions of Dalit Christians to make them very different from other Dalits. Studies are rare to depend on for measuring the economic status of Dalit Christians in Kerala. Based on the available literature and from the field data, Dalit Christians' economic condition seems not to be different from other Dalits.

During the colonial period, the Dalits converted to Christianity might have enjoyed a slightly superior status in comparison with other Dalits because of the chances for the former to receive support from the missionaries and the colonial power to meet their aspirations for education and jobs. In the initial period, conversion gave them a hope to overcome the barrier of caste restrictions. Therefore, the opportunity structure of the colonial period slightly favoured them. Nevertheless, the colonial rule did not help them to improve economic life substantially. There is no clear evidence regarding a drastic change in the economic status of the converts, even though the missionaries helped them in education. In the post-independence period, the opportunity structure in India (and in Kerala) favoured the Dalits from Hindu religion over and above the Dalit Christians. Though there is no more difference in the class position of both these groups and the caste discrimination is a defining factor in

their life, the Dalit Christians receive no equal support from the state. They remain as a smaller group compared to the Hindu Dalits. State and the political parties may not take them as seriously as Hindu Dalits. Moreover, Dalit Christians are not eligible for reservation in the electoral system. The superior status of Dalit Christians over other Dalits hardly survived the transition from the colonial period to post-independence.

Sivanandan says that the economic situation of the Christian converts from among the Harijans is in no way different from that of the non-converts (Sivanandan 1976: 5). He says that though the state of Kerala has made commendable achievements in matters of aggregate social development, the pattern of distribution of social and economic opportunities between different social groups the state's population is highly inequitable. In this regard, there is a sharp contrast between the Harijans and the rest of the population. The Harijans face a considerable disadvantage in respect of all those aspects of income-earning opportunities like landholding, employment, and education (Sivanandan 1976: 3). He tries to analyse economic opportunity of various communities in Kerala in a caste-class relationship based on the data available until 1968. The data show that the economic life of various communities by comparing the landholding patterns, educational status, employment opportunities and income distribution. He demonstrates the case of socially backward groups including converted Christians from SC and ST categories the caste-class relations show a positive correlation. (also see Sivanandan 1979: 475-79). Sivanandan argues that the identical status of class and caste is an inherent feature of the socio-economic reality of Kerala, although it has now a certain level of interpenetration because of the influence of social movements, political forces and administrative reforms (Sivanandan 1979: 480).

Location of Living

Spatial distribution of the habitats may be sometimes helpful to measure the social status and economic power of a social group. However, Kerala has not a clear-cut rural-urban demarcation, and it prevents one to look at the location of living of a social group to understand their social status or economic power.[1] Besides this, neither the Government nor

[1] T.T Sreekumar says, Logan had remarked that towns and towns' life are not congenial to the tastes and habits of the people. The various historical processes had ultimately created a situation where the emerging spatial form is neither rural nor urban. They can be either described as 'urban' or semi-urban. Kerala is characterised by a high spatial dispersal of towns. The level of population concentration is only very moderate. The dispersal of towns appeared to be confined to the narrow coastal strip. Majority of the towns are clustered in the lowland. The towns in the coastal strip, in fact, form a continuous belt making the rural-urban distinctions almost nill. (Sreekumar 1993: 1989&1986).

the churches have the data regarding the distribution of habitats of Dalit Christians in Kerala to show their numbers in urban and rural areas. However, the researcher could observe that most of them are living in localities away from the towns and main roads. Only a less number of habitats have direct access even to the small roads, which leads to the main roads. Some are staying in the habitats called colonies where they have direct access to the small roads, which leads to the main roads. In the case of both Vakkadu and Mukkada, both of them have direct access to such small roads.

Dalit and Dalit Christians are living in same and different spaces in the two localities (Vakkadu and Mukkada) in Kottayam District where the researcher conducted the fieldwork. It came to the notice that while some Dalit Christians are living in more independent habitats mixed with other castes and communities, most of them are living in the colonies exclusively for them. Both the Dalits and Dalit Christians who have separate house plots also do not have direct access to the roads. Among the landless, some Dalit Christians, who are the members of Mannanam Church, are staying in the roadsides in temporary houses. Like some other Dalits, they also do not own house plots. They inhabit the *purambokku* land, and the property belongs to the government. In other places, they are staying away from the roads, and small pathways or the mud paths lead towards their habitats.

The economic situation of Dalits and Dalit Christians regarding the location of habitat or land ownership are indicating shared concerns for both. They are living in colonies and independent house plots. The fundamental drawbacks of their independent habitats are common. There is also a group of landless among the Dalits and Dalit Christians. Vinil Paul (Paul 20013: 40-48) shows the life sketch of a Dalit Christian habitat, called Manchadikkari, in Kottayam district. Manchadikkari is a remote location where people struggle for their daily life.

Land Ownership

Dalits possess small pieces of land. In the past, they were hutment dwellers. Still, a vast majority of Dalits have only some pieces of land attached to their home (the homestead) unlike many of the non-Dalits. However, many of the non-Dalit and upper caste people own enough land in comparison with Dalits. The landless labour and small peasant classes are mainly of lower castes, while the landowning cultivator classes are from the traditionally

privileged castes (Sivanandan 1979: 476). Regarding possession and ownership of the land, there was a regional disparity among various social groups living in the Travancore, Cochin and Malabar regions. However, in the case of Dalits, their share in land ownership was the same all over Kerala. [2] Sivanandan goes on to say that the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes converted to Christianity have not benefited in respect of land ownership and possession (Sivanandan 1976: 18).

Referring to the "Report on the Sample Survey on Socio-Economic Conditions of Caste/Communities in Kerala" (1968) by the Bureau of Economic and Statistics, Government of Kerala P. Sivanandan gives the details, which shows the percentage distribution of households in each caste/community based on land ownership. It is shows as Table 5:1

Table 5.1

Percentage Distribution of Households in Each Caste/Community according to Land Owned, Kerala 1968

Sl. No.	Community and Land Size	No Land	Below 0.5 Acre	0.5 to 2.0 Acres	2 to 5 Acres	Above 5 Acres
1	Brahmin	28.4	28.2	17.9	26.6	13.0
2	Nair	16.2	33.4	33.4	12.4	4.7
3	Syrian Catholic	27.7	22.7	23.9	17.8	6.8
4	Jacobites	13.4	26.5	36.5	18.4	5.4
5	Ezhava	33.4	39.0	21.2	5.1	1.4
6	Muslim	32.6	35.5	23.1	6.9	1.9
7	**Scheduled Caste**	**53.2**	**40**	**5.9**	**0.7**	**0.1**
8	Scheduled Tribe	57.7	20.4	11.0	6.7	3.1
9	**SC Converts to Christianity**	**51.6**	**37.9**	**9.8**	**0.5**	**0.2**
10	ST Converts to Christianity	92.1	--	2.6	2.6	2.6
11	All Communities	32.8	34.8	21.9	7.7	2.8

Source: Sivanandan 1979

The Table shows a slight difference between the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Caste converts to Christianity (Dalit Christians) regarding the possession of the land.

[2] He points out that the percentage of cultivating households possessing land from private sources on payment of rent is the highest in Malabar and Cochin, while in Travancore the ownership holders are more numerous and most of them belong to the small-holders' category compared to Malabar and Cochin. This phenomenon is universal among the Harijans as well as the rest of the population, with the only difference that the Harijan cultivating households are concentrated in the smallest-size group everywhere. Compared to the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes have a higher percentage of them landowners, especially in the bigger size land categories. It may be mainly because about 70 percent of the scheduled tribe population is living near the hilly region of the Western Ghats where the problem of holding large tracts of land is not very difficult and even necessary for the pattern of agriculture they usually follow, namely slash-and-burn shifting cultivation. (Sivanandan 1976: 18).

However, the data informs the situation of the 1960s mainly before the finalisation of land reform legislation in the 1970s. Still, it seems the case of Dalit Christians is not different. There are many Dalit Christians as landless and living in smaller and homesteads. In the field, except in Vakkadu Dalit Christian habitat,[3] no Dalit Christians have more than half an acre of land. Hilly areas like Idukki District and similar areas, where the settlers are migrants from the plains, some Dalit Christians owning a considerable amount of land are few. Many of them still live in the colonies where they have below ten cents of land.[4] Many are still landless.

Another study by Raju John published in 2017 also shows the problems of Dalit Christians in land ownership. This study shows that the mean landholding of Dalit Christians is 19 cents, whereas it is 78 for the Syrian Christians. Table 5.2 shows the data for comparison. There is a huge difference between the two communities regarding the land above 30 cents.

Table 5.2

Percentage of the Extent of Land Holding by Dalit Christian and Syrian Christian Households (in Cents)

Land Held (Cents)	Dalit Christians	Syrian Christians
0–5	43.24	21.91
5–10	28.38	15.09
10–15	6.76	7.75
15–20	8.11	5.71
20–30	9.46	7.61
30–50	0	10.68
50–100	0	12.44
100–200	1.35	8.82
200–300	1.35	4.69
300–400	1.35	1.81
400–500	0	1.35
500–1,000	0	1.76
1,000–1,500	0	0.28
1,500–2,000	0	0.09

Source: John 2017

Occupation

Traditionally Dalits were poor agricultural labourers. Dalit Christians moved to the unorganised sector for jobs. The upward occupational mobility among them is less when

[3] There is a Dalit Christian habitat (it is called 'colony') in Vakkadu near Kuravilangadu in Kottayam district. There the people possess more quantity of land. Some households in the said habitat possess 50 cents to one acre of land.

[4] However, in the colonies in Mukkada near Erumely in Kottayam district, most of them possess below ten cents of land. They are not the colonies exclusively for Dalit Christians. Dalit Christians are staying there along with other Dalits. Non-Dalits are also living there. Socio-economic status of both Hindu and Christian Dalits are more or less equal there.

compared to other caste/community groups. The number of Dalits sharing a lower class position constitutes a significant majority. The vast majority of *Pulaya* or *Cheruma* communities were agricultural labourers who depend on the daily wage as the only source of income. The Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and their converts to Christianity, who have endured in the past the most severe forms of social and economic disabilities, have poor representation in the more remunerative occupations (Sivanandan 1979: 479). The following Table gives more details in this regard.

Table 5.3

Percentage Distribution of Earners in Major Categories of Employment, 1968								
Sl. No.	**Community**	**Technical, Professional and Administrative**	**Trade and Sale**	**Farming**	**Craft**	**Services, Transport, and Communications**	**Agricultural, and Allied Labour**	**Unskilled Labour**
A	Brahmin	46.2	15.5	22.4	4.5	7.6	2.7	1.2
	Ambalavasi	29.0	10.7	17.0	3.3	22.5	16.9	0.6
	Nair	14.0	6.8	35.2	9.1	11.8	20.4	2.7
B	Christian (Total)	10.4	8.6	29.7	14.3	6.4	26.2	4.4
	Marthomites	17.5	7.5	42.2	6.8	4.6	19.5	1.9
	Jacobites	13.6	10.2	37.0	5.3	5.8	25.2	2.9
	Syrian Catholics	8.4	8.2	37.6	6.9	6.7	28.0	4.2
	Latin Catholics	7.0	9.0	8.3	40.6	7.8	21.6	5.7
C	Ezhava	5.3	6.7	14.1	21.2	7.2	40.4	5.1
	Kammala	3.4	1.6	3.3	72.3	3.6	12.2	3.6
	Other Hindu	4.4	4.2	8.0	29.5	9.2	39.8	4.9
D	Muslims	4.1	17.5	20.8	10.2	8.3	33.6	5.4
E	**Scheduled Castes**	**1.6**	**1.3**	**8.1**	**10.9**	**6.4**	**66.3**	**5.4**
	Scheduled Tribes	0.7	0.5	11.2	2.6	2.3	81.4	1.3
	SC & ST Converts to Christianity	**2.2**	**1.1**	**3.1**	**7.0**	**3.0**	**80.0**	**4.6**
All Communities		6.9	8.1	19.8	16.0	8.1	36.7	4.4
Source: Sivanandan 1979								

Table 5:3 shows that like Scheduled Castes most of the Dalit Christians were agricultural labourers. The number of technical, professional and administrative employees and employed in trade and sales are small from the two groups.

Table 5:4 compares the employment pattern of workforce of Dalit Christians and Syrian Christians. Syrian Christians retain their superiority. There are more of them in government, government aided and private sectors. Their superior endowment of productive resources like land also enabled more among them to take up self-employment more than the Dalit Christians (John 2017).

Table 5.4		
Nature of Employment: A Comparison of Dalit Christians and Dali Christians		
Employment	Syrian Christians (%)	Dalit Christians (%)
Government job	3.16	2.70
Job in Govt. - aided sector	0.84	0
Private sector job	5.52	1.35
Self-employed	16.43	12.16
Unpaid family work	3.39	4.05
Agricultural labourer	13.51	17.46
Non-agricultural labourer	8.26	35.14
Source: John (2017)		

However, as per the researchers' observation, still, a large number of Dalit Christians from Kottayam district are agricultural labourers. The younger generation has migrated to the non-agricultural sector as unorganized workers recently. In the government sector, the Dalit Christians are not getting the same benefits of reservation available to the SC. Now, in both state and national level, they come under the category of OBC and face more severe competition with candidates from other better-off communities.[5] Table 5.5 shows the unemployment among different social groups.

Table 5.5				
Selected Employment Statistics by Community, 2014				
Various Communities	**Unemployment Rate (% of LF)**	**Percent Employed in (% of LF)**		
		Govt.	**Semi Govt.**	**Both**
Hindus	6.7	7.7	2.9	10.6
Christians	7.3	6.7	2.8	9.5
Muslims	9.3	2.9	0.8	3.7
KERALA	7.3	6.5	2.4	8.9
Syro-Malabar Catholics	5.7	6.6	3.0	9.6
Syro-Malankara Catholics	6.9	5.5	2.9	8.4
Latin Catholics	6.4	8.0	2.8	10.8
Jacobite Syrians	5.7	6.2	1.4	7.6
Orthodox Syrians	10.3	6.1	2.3	8.4
Mar Thoma Syrians	13.6	8.0	3.2	11.2
Church of South India	7.6	8.1	3.8	11.9
Dalit Christians	**5.2**	**2.1**	**4.2**	**6.3**
Pentecost /Brethren etc.	11.5	4.4	1.6	6.0
SC/ST	**5.1**	**5.5**	**1.2**	**6.7**
Source: Zachariah (2006: 40)				

Justice Narendran Commission Report (2002) gives the data of the representation of Dalit Christians in the government employment. The Table 5: 6 shows the details of employment of various communities in government.

[5] More details in this regard are in the next chapter.

Table 5.6												
Category-wise Details of Employees as on 01-08-2000 in Percentage												
E	**M**	**N**	**V**	**D**	**LC**	**OX**	**OBC**	**TBC**	**SC**	**ST**	**O**	**GT**
Staff of Group I: Government Departments												
20.41	10.45	1.90	2.91	1.18	3.14	0.78	7.46	48.3	11.78	1.26	38.73	100
Staff of Group II: Public Sector Undertakings												
24.40	8.67	1.22	3.72	0.67	3.02	0.85	5.84	48.38	13.34	1.44	36.84	100
Staff of Group III: Staff of Universities												
18.76	11.15	1.48	2.91	1.07	3.19	0.80	5.61	44.98	8.71	0.45	45.86	100
Staff of Group IV: Staff of Autonomous Institutions Constituted by the State Government												
19.95	7.18	1.79	2.41	1.28	2.36	0.69	5.79	41.45	7.03	0.42	51.09	100
E- Ezhava, M- Muslim, N- Nair, V- Viswakarma, D- Dheevara, LC- Latin Catholic/Anglo Indian, OX- Scheduled Castes Converted to Christianity, OBC- Other Backward Classes, TBC- Total for Backward Communities, SC- Scheduled Castes, ST- Scheduled Tribes, O- Others (forward community), GT- Grand Total												
Source: Narendran Commission Report, 2002												

The Table 5.6 gives the picture of the deficiency of Dalit Christians (OX) in the four categories of government jobs.

Unlike the traditional churches, Dalit Christians' Churches are not prosperous to provide them employment. The churches having strong institutional networks in Kerala appoint members from their community who are not Dalits. Moreover, caste discrimination can also exist against a Dalit Christian. When the private institutions of the elite Christian churches allow the selection of candidates from other communities based on donation, the Dalit Christians are not able to fare because of poverty and lack of assets. Recently, the Catholic Churches and some traditional Syrian Christian Churches started reservation of seats for Dalit Christians in the educational institutions run by those Churches. Interestingly, the CSI which many educational intuitions, does not have a provision for reservation for Dalit Christians. The position of Dalit Christians in the caste hierarchy is the primary factor that determines their income and opportunity.

Economic Rationality of Dalit Christians

The absence of entrepreneurs among the Dalit Christians and their lack of economic assets are interconnected. Even though the Protestant religion can encourage entrepreneurial qualities, Dalit Christians could not make any benefit. They face the tensions between the caste system and modern rationality in their economic life. Being Dalits, they cannot be entirely within the paradigm of modern economic rationality and being protestant Christians they are acquainted with it. It is visible on a close examination of their lifestyle and their perspectives. In fact, the caste location largely moderates their economic rationality. It also makes them diametrically different from other Syrian Christians. They were facing many more challenges than the superior social group to overcome the constraints of tradition, and

their economic assets were inadequate to help them to become entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurial class of Syrian Christians emerging from the traditional churches and Protestant Churches in Kerala hardly faced caste as a barrier in their economic life. Therefore, the effect of modernity on all the Christians in Kerala is not the same.

In the traditional economy, the Syrian Christians had an influential group of wealthy merchants and landlords. The transition of the economy under the colonial rule helped the consolidation and enlargement of this group. The economic rationality of capitalism, induced by the Protestant missionaries worked better among the Syrian Christians than Dalit Christians. However, the Protestant Christianity in Kerala could not make any drastic change in the economic life of Dalits. It might have imparted the same economic rationality to the Dalits as well, but it did not bring any economic assets to the Dalits to become entrepreneurs, and the mode of education was not immediately making them an entrepreneurial class.[6] The economic rationality of colonial modernity, in fact, sidestepped both the Dalit Hindus and Dalit Christians alike. However, the Christianity educated the Dalit Christians more in economic discipline, which many of them cherish in personal life.

Modern economic rationality is a common principle advocated by all Protestant denominations. However, there are differences in its publicity by the Pentecostals and others. The former gives more importance to economic rationality and discipline in their preaching than other Dalit churches. In Dalit Churches, the catechists/priests always talk about the economic indiscipline or improvident spending by Dalits and compare them with Syrian Christians.[7] The pastors, priests and the catechists of these Churches are the ardent advocates and practitioners of modern economic rationality in comparison with the ordinary laity. There is also a class difference in the laities adherence to rationality. Across the denominations, the economically well off Dalit Christians are showing more affinity to this as a principle of life. By noting all these social variations, the high value for economic rationality in their social and personal life becomes a general marker of the distinction of Dalit Christians from other Dalits. They are a more disciplined group in their lifestyle. The role of religion in creating a value orientation was more important in the past rather than in the present. Gradually, the

[6] The researcher came across only one entrepreneur (Sunny Thannippara) from among the Dalit Christians. He had a saw-mill at that time and was engaging in timber business also.
[7] The researcher has observed this kind of a tendency of Dalit priests/catechists in many Dalit Churches, especially the CMS-ACI Pulikkunnu.

Hindu Dalits have also been learning and preaching financial discipline and rationality without citing the protestant religion as a source.

Educational Status of Dalit Christians

Kerala achieved a complete literacy by 1990s. However, in the field, the researcher has come across some Dalit Christians from the old generation, who are illiterate. The data computed by P. Sivanandan is helpful to look at the educational status of various communities. Table 5.9 shows this.

Table 5.9

Percentage Distribution of Persons (of all ages) according to General and Technical Education, 1968

	Cate/Community	Literates	Literates below Primary	Primary and below SSLC	SSLC and Under-Graduate	Graduate and Post-Graduate	Technical Education
1	Brahmin	85.0	21.2	37.2	22.2	4.4	4.5
2	Nair	72.3	30.4	37.6	9.2	1.1	2.3
3	Ezhava	67.2	32.7	30.2	4.0	0.3	0.9
4	Jacobite Christian	80.3	32.1	36.8	9.4	2.0	2.5
5	Syrian Catholics	79.3	34.2	36.0	7.5	0.6	1.2
6	**SC Converts to Christianity**	**65.5**	**36.5**	**26.2**	**2.6**	**0.2**	**1.2**
7	Muslims	55.3	33.1	20.3	20.3	0.2	1.2
8	**Scheduled Castes**	**47.1**	**28.5**	**17.0**	**1.5**	**0.1**	**0.3**
9	Scheduled Tribes	36.1	22.7	12.8	12.8	Nil	Nil
10	All Communities	66.2	32.0	28.7	28.7	0.5	1.3

Source: Sivanadan (1979)

Table 5.10 shows a comparison of the educational attainment of both Dalit Christians and Syrian Christians. The proportion of illiterates among Dalit Christians is more than three times than among Syrian Christians. There are more Dalit Christians among those who are educated up to 10th standard and less of them among those who have more than 10th standard education. The proportion of degree holders among Syrian Christians is approximately five times higher than among Dalit Christians. Table 5.10 brings a comparison between the two groups

Table 5.10		
Educational Attainment of Dalit Christians and Syrian Christians: A Comparison		
Educational Attainment	**Dalit Christians (%)**	**Syrian Christians (%)**
Illiterate	6.76	2
<10th Class	58.11	45.31
10th Class	24.32	30.08
+2	2.7	7.94
11th Class	16.3	24.3
ITI	5.41	2.09
Diploma	0	11
Degree	1.35	6.36
PG Diploma	0	0.7
Professional Degree	0	0.88
P.G	0	0.84
Professional PG	0	0.84
PhD/MPhil	0	0.09
Source: John 2017		

Table 5.11 shows the educational attainment Index of various Christian groups and Scheduled Castes in Kerala.

Table 5.11		
Educational Attainment Index of Various Communities		
Community	**Average Years of Schooling**	**Percent with 10+ Standard**
Hindus	8.9	50.8
Christians	9.0	54.5
Muslims	7.5	38.7
Kerala	8.5	48.4
Syro-Malabar	9.1	54.6
Syro-Malankara	8.3	47.3
Latin Catholics	8.5	48.8
Jacobite	9.2	59.4
Orthodox	9.6	64.7
Mar Thoma	9.2	59.6
Church of South India	10	59.4
Dalit Christians	**8.5**	**48.4**
Tribal Christians	7.6	39.5
Pentecost	8.8	52.1
Other Christians	9.4	60.7
Scheduled Castes	**8.3**	**45.5**
Source: Zachariah (2016)		

The Tables 5.9 and 5.11 show that, the literacy rate and access to education of Dalit Christians are slightly higher than that of Scheduled Castes. In the field, the researcher also noticed that the Dalit Christians and Dalit Hindus have more or less same status in higher

education. In Vakkadu, the Dalit Christian habitat, there are only a few professional degree holders and postgraduates from the community. In Mukkada where Dalit Christians are living along with Dalit Hindus face the same problem.

Caste and Christianity: Social Identity of Dalit Christians

The quest for distinctive identity is inseparable from claiming dignity in social life. Dalit Christians in Kerala are in search of an identity both in Church and society. Here they want to address the question of caste discrimination within the Church and seek a dignified status in the society. For Dalits, the quest for identity necessarily brings in the question of caste. Identity is concerned with the self-esteem and self-image of a community (real or imaginary) in dealing with the existence and role. They all have unity in the quest for equality, self-dignity and eradication of untouchability, and these collective goals have a decisive role in making their identity (Shah 2001: 195). Dalit Christians bear the elements of their caste and religion in making the identity.

Towards a New Social Identity: Dalits Being a Christian Community

The experience of Dalits within the Church and the approach of their Church towards Dalits influence their social life. To the mainstream society, the Church is personified in a Syrian Christian form. For example, in common parlance 'Church' refers to the strongest denomination among the churches, like Roman Catholic Church. Likewise, as a social group the Syrian Christians only appear as 'Christians' for the mainstream Kerala society. The term 'Christian' in this sense is not inclusive of all the believers of Christianity. In other words, it does not cover all Christians from various Christian denominations and social groups equally. A Dalit Christian cannot be a 'Christian' in the mainstream perceptions about a Christian in Kerala. That means a Dalit Christian is always a 'Dalit' though s/he is a Christian by faith. Dalit Christians always need the prefix 'Dalit' before the term 'Christian'. Though they are Christians, the Church also view them as Dalits. Therefore, it is an interesting point that the society hardly regards Dalit Christians primarily as Christians because Syrian Christians are the dominant representative of Christain. Dalit Christians' socio-economic conditions intertwine with the disadvantages of their caste identity, and it affects their daily life. As they are Christians, the system of religion and faith also influence their social life and their perceptions about the self.

As a social category Dalit Christians form their identity at the interstices of caste, socio-economic conditions and the religion. All these factors prepare them for social interaction. However, this does not mean that the common features have made the Dalit Christians in Kerala a homogeneous community. As mentioned earlier, Dalit Christians constitute a heterogeneous category due to the presence of various groups among them based on caste, sub-caste and denominational differences. Their way of engagement with the society is different from that of other Dalits. Again, the heterogeneity that exists among them makes their ways of engagement with the society different for each Dalit Christian group. Their engagement with the society in different ways, which is also different for each Dalit Christian group, constitutes the focus of inquiry in this chapter. In their engagement with society, caste, religion, and their socio-economic conditions are essential.

The community formation of Dalit Christians needs a proper analysis in this context. It seems that Dalits cannot quickly evolve as a community like many other caste and religious groups. Here the problem of lacking a common name to denote the community is emerging as a problem for defining the identity. It has similarity and difference from using the term 'Dalit' to denote all the ex-untouchable castes. 'Dalit' is an inclusive term for all the ex-untouchable caste groups irrespective of their religious differences. Instead of using separate caste/sub-caste names, all of them together constitute a community of Dalits. However, 'Dalit Christians' – the term - poses more difficult and complex issues. Dalit Christians are being part of Dalits but with differences.

The splintering of identity for a Dalit Christian has many dimensions, which is perhaps much larger than the Hindu Dalits in Kerala. For example, as a Christian, a Dalit Christian can be a Catholic, Protestant, or a follower of any other Christian sect. Those Dalits, who are Protestants by sect, are members of CMS-ACI or CSI or Salvation Army or Pentecostal Church. By their caste (and sub-caste), a Dalit can be a *Pulaya* or *Paraya* or *Kurava* or any other such group. Apart from all these, politically a Dalit Christian can be partisan, economically Dalit Christian can be a wealthy, a poor, or a middle class, and educationally s/he can be an uneducated, less educated, or highly educated. Despite all these divisions who is a Dalit Christian? Caste-based discrimination is the most decisive factor that shapes the identity of Dalit Christians. Its influence on them is more distinctive and complex in comparison with other Dalits.

Many Dalit Christians in Kerala are living in a rural background. They are less educated, and economically poor. Politically, many of them have affinity with the Left, but now it is changing. Their affiliation with a denomination need not be very stable because of more frequent migration of believers between the different churches. Viewed thus, the only element of their identity which is more enduring and stable is their caste. By caste, most of them are *Pulayas*. Numerically more significant number of Dalits in Kerala are from this caste, and it is same to Dalit Christians. Here the researcher tried to give the general picture of Dalit Christians in Kerala. The inquiry leads to the conclusion that an average Dalit Christian gives more importance to his/her caste.

The question of religion along with caste question makes the identity of Dalit Christians more complicated. The search for a new religion by the Dalits is supposed to address the caste related injustice. Christianity for Dalits is appearing in this way. B. R. Ambedkar's views on religion are significant here. He said the following to the Indian Christians at Sholapur in a speech:

> "From the available religions and personalities in the world, I consider only two – Buddha and Christ for conversion. We want a religion, which teaches equality and freedom among men, and how man must behave with men and God, how a child should behave with father etc."[8]

Ambedkar also made a distinction between the religion of rules and the religion of principles. In his 'Annihilation of Caste', he argues that Hinduism is a religion of rules. He wished to replace the religion of rules with a religion of principles. In his view liberty, equality and fraternity must be the principles of such a religion. He found these principles in Buddhism (Chandra & Mittra 2003: 249). In Kerala, Poykayil Yohannan, the founder of Prathyakha Raksha Daiva Sabha tried to construct a Dalit identity for his followers in the early half of the 20th century. The PRDS's search for a new Dalit identity gave importance to the necessity of a new religion (Mohan 2005: 58). It was rather different from the religion of the Syrian Christians.

Malayalis' Cultural Identity and Dalit Christians

Apart from the case of caste and religion, region and language are essential in determining the social and cultural identity. All these factors constitute the construction of the modern

[8] The speech was first published in 'Janata' on 5-02-1938, reproduced from 'Dyanodaya' (a Marathi Magazine) (http://velivada.com/2017/08/26/dr-babasaheb-ambedkars-advice-christians-india-ignored/).

cultural identity of *Malayali*,[9] and that is a significant factor in the cultural life of Kerala. The relation between *Malayali* identity and the Dalit is worth for a critique.

Dalits were leading a vulnerable life for centuries. In a later period, the British Protestant missionaries came to Kerala and converted them to Christianity. Subsequently, they received a dual identity of Dalits and Christians. The socio-religious reform movements provided them with a new life at the beginning of twentieth century Kerala. Again, in the post-independent period, they became the part of a liberal democratic socio-political system. The state of Kerala came into being in 1956 by the unification of the people living in the Malayalam speaking regions – Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. The linguistic identity backing the existence of the new state placed Dalits in a new socio-cultural sphere. A new cultural politics following the states' reorganization had severe implications for the identity and community making of Dalits and Dalit Christians. They are also different groups in the degree of assimilation to the new cultural identity of 'Malayali'.

Festivals are essential in determining the cultural identity of a region. *Onam* is a cultural festival of Kerala. Malayalis celebrate *Onam* as their national festival. In comparison with many other cultural fests, *Onam* achieved a secular character in the popular parlance.[10] However, the story behind *Onam* is from Hindu mythology which shadows its presentation as a secular festival inclusive of the people of all the faiths. However, the celebration of *Onam* cut across the social divisions of caste and religion. Nevertheless, it is wrong to assume that the non-Hindus are as interested as Hindus are in celebrating *Onam* in all regions. However, there is no significant opposition against *Onam*. Since the story behind *Onam* is rooted in a Hindu myth, it hardly nurtures the same emotive and religious fervour among the non-Hindus. Hindus, including Dalits, in Kerala, are showing more significant interest in celebrating *Onam*.

Dalit Christians, living in Kottayam district, like other Dalits, are interested in celebrating *Onam*. In the case of the cultural events sharing the rituals of Hinduism, Dalit Christians, (except some Pentecostals) actively participate. In dealing with these types of cultural

[9] *Malayali(s)* in the vernacular language denote the people of Kerala speaking a language, Malayalam.

[10] According to the myth, Mahabali, the Asura king, who once ruled the land of Kerala in the past, visits the present Kerala every year in a particular day. Mahabali was a good ruler, who ruled the country in a good manner, and so the Devas become envious of Mahabali and consequently they sent Mahavishnu to the land of Kerala. Mahavishnu took the avatar of Vamana and took him to *Pathala*. Before taking him to *Pathala* Vamana promised him that he will be allowed to visit his people every year and that particular day is celebrated as *Onam*.

.

symbols, the denominational differences affect the attitude of Dalit Christians. The Pentecostals are theologically rejecting all the festivals in their practice of Christianity. "Festivals are dragging the believers more into the worldly affairs", in their view. They do not celebrate even Christian festivals. It shows that different groups within the Dalit Christians have differences in their approach to the 'common cultural forms' that underlines the process of making a *Malayali* identity.

Caste Discrimination and its Social Implication for Dalit Christians

Caste practices within the Church have severe implications for the caste identity of Dalit Christians in Kerala society. Is the caste discrimination within the Church and the society interrelated? There is a link between the two, and the caste discrimination within the Church further strengthens caste discrimination outside the Church. However, it hardly implies that the caste discrimination within the Church is the only reason behind the caste discrimination, against Dalit Christians in the society at large. The conversion of Dalits to Christianity has not helped them to overcome caste discrimination. If the Church had treated them as equally as with the Syrian Christians or at least if it did not stigmatise them on the grounds of their caste, the society would not have treated them as lower castes. The church is reflecting the hierarchical relationships of a caste-based social system towards the Dalits. Christianity does not consider them as 'real' Christians. The dominant Churches treat a Dalit Christian only as a *Pulaya* Christian or a *Paraya* Christian, and the society also treats them like that. Syrian Christians in Kerala seem to reproduce some of the Hindu caste practices within their religion. Even after the conversion to Christianity, *Pulayas* or *Parayas* continue to be the same within the Church. In the parlance of the Churches and a dominant section of traditional Christians, the Dalit Christians are Christians with a lower caste identity. As stated in a previous chapter, Dalits could not become a 'new people' within Christianity. Instead of becoming 'new people', they became 'new Christians' or *Puthu Christhyanikal* (in Malayalam) within the Church. It is the nomenclature found in the traditional Christian Churches (Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Jacobites, and Marthomites).

Even in Protestant denominations, which claims to make all their believers as 'real Christians' a Dalit believer is only a *Pulaya* or *Paraya* Christian. The historical process of the emergence and expansion of Protestant churches in Kerala throw some lights on the reasons of this peculiar condition of Dalit Christians. The British missionaries initially aimed at the conversion of Syrian Christians into Protestantism. Dalits were not the focus group of

missionary activities in its beginning. In short, the British Protestant missionaries were at first trying to make a new Christian community from among the traditional Syrian Christians without attempting for a change, especially in the remnants of casteism among them. They incorporated Syrian Christians into a new faith without challenging their social worldview. Only when the traditional Syrian Churches protested against the reforms by the Protestant missionaries in a later period, the missionaries turned towards Dalits and converted them to Protestant Christianity. However, by that time the early converts from the traditional churches have become an established group within the Protestant churches. Protestant believers hailing from the Syrian Christian background dominated the Churches, and they discriminated Dalits against their caste. Thus, the casteism of Hindus continued among the Syrian Churches, and Protestant Christianity also carried this baggage.

Caste in Hinduism's social worldview and has drastically influenced other religions like Islam and Christianity in India. Though the religions are different in their faith in God, Hinduism influenced their social practices. In Kerala, more than Islam, Christianity seems to be vulnerable to the influence of caste more directly drawn from Hinduism. History shows that Islam and Christianity existed as religions in Kerala even before the emergence of Brahminical Hinduism in AD 800. It was after the consolidation of Hinduism in a Brahmanical form, the caste system by drawing theological approval from Brahminical Hinduism became typical in the life of other religions also. Islam and Christianity in Kerala have some differences in incorporating the caste values and practices.

Unlike among the Christians, caste is not very evident among the Muslims in Kerala. The social background of the majority of the converts may be a reason. The expansion of Christianity among the lower castes was comparatively less than Islam until the European expeditions to Kerala. Therefore, Christianity retained an influential group of believers claiming an upper caste background and the Islam grew mainly by its expansion among the lower castes. On the conversion to the Islam in Malabar Stephen F. Dale observes, "[t]he great majority of conversions must have come from the lower castes, who most strongly felt the 'inconvenience' of their subordinated degraded status" (Dale 2003: 60). Apart from the difference in their approach to egalitarianism, the degree of social diversification of the believer group was crucial to make Christianity in Kerala more vulnerable to the prevalence of caste. There are 'Dalit Christians', but there is no 'Dalit Muslim'. The caste discrimination within the Church is well in tune with the caste practices prevailing among the Hindus. The

prevailing social practices of caste might have affected both Islam and Christianity. However, Christianity could copy caste from Hinduism more than Islam.

Modern Kerala, with the advent of colonialism, have made some changes in both the religion and caste. Christianity recast its appearance as a modern religion of the Protestants. The Christians living in Kerala as followers of the traditional churches also faced some changes. However, Christians facing the pressure of modernity and western influence were not a homogenous group. Protestant Christianity became the harbinger of the values of colonial modernity and Catholicism faced a challenge by missionary activities. The lower castes became the focus of missionaries, and the Dalits mainly met the modern protestant version of Christianity during this period. The Catholicism in Kerala also was subject to the modernisation of religious practices under the influence of the Protestants. Earlier the Portuguese had attempted to make them 'true Christians'. However, the Protestant missionaries during the British period were of different types who were upholding the values of modernity, and their preaching was in a liberal democratic language emphasising on the principles of individual equality and social justice. The promises of Protestant Christianity to the marginalised caste groups were so high, and it gave them newer expectations about status and progress that a new religion can bring to their lives.[11] In the modern discourse about religious conversion, the Protestant Christianity became a source of attraction. It gained more followers from the Dalits, and therefore, the contrast between religious principles and caste practices within the Protestant churches is more evident for analysis. Moreover, the role of Protestant Christianity to change the caste system in Kerala needs critical scrutiny.

Sub-Caste Differences among Dalit Christians and its Social Implications

The previous chapter has discussed in detail how their sub-caste affects the life of Dalit Christians within the Church. In this chapter, the researcher is looking at the prevalence of sub-caste practices among the Dalit Christians based on more empirical evidences. The restrictions on marriage alliances among Dalit Christians are due to the impact of sub-caste practices. It has some implications for the construction of the community as Dalit Christians. Sub-caste affects their organisation for common causes. Denominational differences also matter. It overshadows their similarities in the socio-economic conditions, though both the church and society consider them as a whole as ex-untouchables, and they are not on par with

[11] Changes were also visible in the Islam of modern Kerala, but its expansion was constrained by several other reasons, which is not within the scope of this study.

other higher caste communities regarding social status. Despite this, among the Dalits, status competition is visible according to sub-caste.

In fact, some contradictions exist between the Dalit intellectuals' imagination of Dalit as a single group and the non-Dalit perceptions of community. It is also evident in the self-perception by the Dalits as a community. Dalit activists and Dalit intellectuals prefer to imagine all ex-untouchable castes as a community and take efforts for their unity. At times, by surpassing all these differences, Dalits from different caste groups also tend to cultivate an emotive brotherhood and concern with each other. It is very evident in the day-to-day life of Dalits in Kerala. They, irrespective of religious, caste and sub-caste differences, like and respect the persons such as Ambedkar, Ayyankali, Poyikayil Kumara Guru Devan, K. R. Narayanan as reputed figures from the Dalits without seriously thinking about the sub-caste of each of them. Also, when it comes to their love for some celebrities hailing from the Dalit background, for instance, the football player, I. M. Vijayan and the late film Malayalam actor, Kalabhavan Mani sub-caste or religious differences hardly matter for Dalits. These icons play a role in cultivating a new brotherhood among the Dalits in Kerala.

Among Dalit Christians, it is their caste and sub-caste rather than religion seems to assume a dominant role in family life and kinship relations. Like many examples in the fieldwork show, it is because of this reason that a Christian *Pulaya* tries to prefer a Hindu *Pulaya* to a Christian *Paraya* in marriage alliances. It means that caste, sub-caste can appear as the first criterion of choosing the partner, and the religion does not carry much weight. The implication of sub-caste in constructing their Dalit identity is affecting their social relations irrespective of having a common religion. Already such a division exists among the Christians between the upper castes and the lower castes. The religion fails to unite both. In the case of the Dalit Christians, their sub-caste identity prevents their unity. Dalit Christians are not feeling part of the collective religious community in their inter-group relation with Syrian Christians and the intra-group relations because of caste sub-caste. They can never identify themselves with Syrian Christians, but by citing this group as their 'common other' within the religion, they can unite. In fact, the sub-caste seems like a hindrance.

In Kerala, some Dalits are Hindus as per records but Christians by their faith. There are also Dalits, who are Hindus as per records but having a Christian parent. Some of them seem to be neutral in their religious belief, or they follow both. It means that in their religious life they are neither Hindus nor Christians or both. However, in certain situations, they have to prefer

either one. It shows the problem to categorisation of all Dalits as followers of a particular religion because of their faith, which is unstable and mixed. Against these facts, some of the Dalits define their identity more as Dalits than referring to any religion. For Dalit Christians also, it is not the Christianity but rather 'Dalitness' is giving a meaning to their identity. The uncertainty and ambiguity in self-definition are emerging out of their 'Dalitness'.

Even though the Dalit Christians are making use of their particular caste categories in their social and family relations, when they need to transform these they resort to 'Dalitness' and extend their brotherhood towards Dalits in other religion. However, they mainly consider caste in their kinship relations. Religion also can splinter this unity especially when the state catalogues them for positive discrimination, for example, reservation in education and jobs and financial entitlements through welfare programmes. Dalit Hindus and Dalit Christians are getting divided apart on the criteria for reservation for the latter, and in turn, it affects the realisation of the collective community. Dalit Christians are not Scheduled Castes. Therefore, they are not eligible for reservation for this category. While the caste causes Dalit Christians' exclusion from their religion dominated by the upper castes, their religion also divides them from the Hindu Dalits.

None of the Christian Churches in Kerala sanctifies inter-religious marriage. At the same time, their theology has no reason to oppose inter-caste marriages.[12] All Christians are equal before the Jesus Christ and Church. Caste, race or wealth cannot stand in between the believers in their marriage. All the Christians are, in theory, eligible for marrying each other. Nevertheless, in practice, their division based on denominations does not make the marriage between all the Christians a reality. Inter-denominational marriages, especially between the believers of two denominations professing diametrically opposite doctrines are not encouraged. Each sect, in this case, exists as an endogamous group. In addition to this, contradictory to the instructions of Christianity the Christians in Kerala consider the social location of individuals (caste) in marriage. Therefore, what is evident in practice is opposite of the theory.

[12] Among the Christians in Kerala, only the Knanaya Catholics officially practice endogamy sanctified by the Church. Knanaya Christians among Catholics are the part of Syro Malabar Rite. Out of the five Syro Malabar dioceses in Kerala, Kottayam diocese formed in 1911 at the time of Pope Pius XII, is exclusively for Knanaya Christians. Their endogamous culture is preserved and officially supported by the Kottayam diocese. There is no conversion to this church. Hence, a marriage with the members of other denomination leads to the excommunication.
.

Syrian Christians and Dalit Christians are used to this disjuncture between theory and practice in marriage, but there are differences in their criteria of choice and outcome. While seeking marriage alliances the Syrian Christians give more importance to denomination and family background. Family implies the lineage of caste. A traditional Syrian Christian family is co-equal with upper caste. However, among the Dalit Christians, criteria such as denomination and religion are not much necessary, but the sub-caste is gaining significance.

By giving importance to sub-caste, the Dalit Christians often ignore denominational differences and even religion in marriage. Inter-caste marriage (between different sub-castes of Dalits and between Dalits and other castes) is rare among the Dalit Christians, but the inter-denominational and inter-religious marriages are common. In marriage, what the Christianity permits for a believer hardly happens and what it forbids become a practice even among Dalit Christians. The practices visible in the marriage help the continuity of caste among the Dalit Christians. No Dalit Church is strict in checking the members' 'violation' of the norms of the Church regarding inter-religious marriage except some Pentecostal Churches. Dalit Churches like CMS (Anglican Church of India) may ask the families for explaining their action. Hardly have they taken any action against believers for violation of norms because of marriage. The attitude of the churches is also more or less same regarding the sub-caste preferences of the believers. It is never willing to crack the whip.

The Pentecostals very rarely tolerate inter-religious and inter-denominational marriages for Dalits. Their believers voluntarily follow the norms of the Church in this regard without much compulsion. The theology of the Church and the belief of the members are the primary factors, which prevent the Dalit Pentecostals from making marriage alliances with the Dalits from other religions. However, at the same time caste and sub-caste are essential even for the Pentecostals while seeking marriage alliances. Among Pentecostals *Pulayas* choose only *Pulayas* and *Parayas* choose only *Parayas*. Within the *Pulaya* community itself, *Padinjara Pulayas* choose only *Padinjara Pulayas,* and *Kizhakka Pulayas* choose only *Kizhakka Pulayas*. Even though they are staunch followers of Pentecostal theology and prefer marriage from the same denominations, caste is unavoidable. Still, the folktales describing the rivalry between various castes/ sub-castes are alive in the memory of Dalit Christians even among the Pentecostals.

Dalit Hindus seem to be more willing to make marriage alliances with Dalit Christians. Dalit Christians also agree to marry Dalit Hindus. The alliance between Dalit Christian man and

Hindu Dalit woman gains more acceptance among the Dalit Christians than the one between Dalit Christian woman and Hindu Dalit man. In their view, the women of their community married to a person from different religion may be unable to continue her faith. Interestingly, they believe that most likely a Hindu woman married to a Christian Dalit shall convert to Christianity.

Material benefits are also the foreseeable reasons in planning a marriage. Caste is an essential determinant of the livelihood needs of the Dalits. The state's policy has already distinguished the Dalit Christians from Hindu Dalits in its affirmative action programmes. Hindu Dalits are more conscious of their caste identity in marriages by taking into consideration the consequences of an inter-religious marriage for such entitlements. For example, if the woman from a Hindu Dalit family is a government employee or a person with educational qualification and hoping for a job, she may not be married to a person from Christian family because conversion to Christianity (if it is the case) may affect her Scheduled Caste status. Without conversion, the Church cannot officiate their marriage ceremony. Therefore, they have to marry according to the provisions of the Special Marriage Act, Government of Kerala.

Christianity, especially its Protestant versions appeared in Kerala as a solution to the caste question. Nevertheless, the above analysis shows the persistence of caste practices among the converts. It is not possible to make a marriage alliance with upper caste Christians or upper caste Hindus. Inter-caste marriage is not prevailing among the Dalit Christians. Being this is the case, sub-caste is becoming a more important criterion in marriages. The upper castes seldom prefer a Dalit, and Dalit Christians are also apprehensive about alliance with an upper caste family. All Dalit Christians irrespective of their denomination have justifications for this. One of the common justifications is that an inter-caste marriage would cause problems to the family of both the partners.

Regarding sub-caste also, they think that marriage between the people from the same group is more comfortable and suitable for 'healthy family life'. The religion and the denomination are amenable to change after marriage, but caste is not. Caste prejudices which the different caste or sub-caste groups maintain about each other are a significant problem. Many of the interviewees in the fieldwork for the study revealed more or less same reasons and justifications. Each caste and the sub-caste group keeps some prejudices against others and consider them as different and unequal.

For example, there is a saying among *Kizhakka Pulayas* that "*parayanu koduthalum patinjaranu kodukkilla*" which means (We shall let our girl get marry a *Paraya*, but not a Patnjara *Pulaya*). Also, *Patinjara Pulayas* say that *Kizhakka Pulayas* were meat eaters of dead cattle in the past, and so they were an inferior *jati*. Similar to this, there is an antagonism between *Pulayas* and *Parayas* also.

Some of the Dalit activists try to justify holding sub-caste identity. For example, one of the leaders of a Dalit Christian movement, who belong to Pulaya, told the researcher that "*Pulayas* never surrender their self-dignity to anybody else, and so they are not like Parayas". In certain other cases, the same person expressed his opinion categorically against the dominant values (including caste) prevalent in the social system. He went to an extreme in this regard to support pre-marital sex and said that it is not a sin and there is nothing mentioned in the Bible against this. His view is against the dominant moral values prevailed in the social system. However, even a person of this kind never compromises his pride about his caste identity. In support of caste, they, say that marrying from one's sub- caste is good for healthy family life. It means that they support it for some practical reasons. It derails the attempts to form a collective social identity among the Dalit Christians and other Dalits. It seems that the conversion hardly prevented marriage between the Dalits of Hindus and Christians, but their preference to caste and sub-caste as a criterion stands more indomitable. The role of sub-caste in the personal and familial life of Dalit Christians is a hindrance to making a community.

Dalit Christians being the Part of Peer Groups

As stated earlier in this chapter, quite often, religion, caste, class, gender, age, education, occupation and some other factors like political ideology and party affiliation have a role to play in the formation of peer groups. Dalits (both the Christians and the Hindus) are also very active in forming such peer groups. However, caste and religion sometimes assume overwhelming importance in the formation of peer groups. It comes true for both Dalit Christians and Dalit Hindus also. Dalit Christians like to be the part of Dalit groups, which includes both Christians and Hindus. So, rather than religion, caste takes a significant role in the context of Dalits. Dalit Christians do not show any unusual affinity or concern to the Syrian or any other Christians, even though the Syrian Christians are from their denominations. For Dalits caste sometimes overrides political and religious considerations in

their choice of a peer group. Though the factors such as age and class are important in the formation of the peer group, even within itself, caste plays a significant role.

Women and men of the community form separate peer groups. Patriarchy domesticates the women, and so they are excluded from the public sphere of men. Dalit Christian women also face the problem. Sara Abraham states this point.

> "Religiously, Christianity demands Dalit Christian women to be submissive to men in all situations. The Apostle Paul's teachings are a problem within the Christian churches in Kerala State because Christian men from Kerala expect Christian women to obey and to be submissive to men in the public, private and religious spheres and Christian leaders and churches are imposing this teaching on Dalit Christian women" (Abraham 2003: 95).

Against this background, the researcher made an inquiry into the peer groups formed among Dalit Christian women who are part of some women's collective at the local level. The Kerala Government in the last one and half decade has become instrumental in developing and forming women collectives based on micro-finance schemes, and this has turned to be a new forum for the public sphere and peer groups of the women in Kerala. In the occasions of the meetings of women collectives such as Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) and Self Help Groups (SHGs) Dalits irrespective of their religion are members, and they are intimate to each other.[13] It provides a forum for women from both *Pulaya* and *Paraya* communities to come together. Some of them have prayer meetings for women once in every week at the local level. The women are also getting some employment under the MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantees Programme). The work site of MGNREGA is also a meeting place for the Dalits from different groups. Women are mainly the beneficiaries of jobs through this, and its worksite turns to be a forum for them.

The researcher has observed their discussion and found interacted with them. Caste comes in various ways. They evaluate the behaviour and deeds of people from other castes and communities based on caste. They consider Syrian Christians as hard-working people and knowing how to make money. They perceive upper social groups like Syrian Christians, *Ezhavas*, and *Nairs* as crooked in their dealings with Dalits. In their view, the Dalits must be vigilant against getting deceived by the people of the above-said groups.

Most of the topics coming for a discussion among these women might not be social and political; it can be family issues, women related issues, other local issues and so on.

[13] Apart from this kind of collectives at the initiative of government, there are other also some run by community organisations. For example, SNDP runs its micro-finance schemes for *Ezhava* women. CSDS also has formed its microfinance scheme, known as CHESAM (Cherama Sambava Micro Finance) for Dalits.

However, the caste is a permanent point of reference of the topic. Interestingly, the Dalit Christian women are showing more concern towards Hindu women from their sub-caste than others. When two or more women from the same caste (though they are with different religious background) talk each other, they use the term 'we' considering both of them as belonging to the same group. While probing this by the researcher, some of the women opined that there exists a peculiar kind of intimacy among all Dalit women though there are some problems based on sub-divisions of sub-caste and religious background.[14] The instances make it clear that apart from personal reasons, factors such as caste/community also determine the sociability.

Among the men from Dalit Christians also, this kind of concern is more evident. One reason is that their public sphere and peer group is broader than that of Dalit Christian women. Unlike the case of women's public sphere and peer group, they discuss many social and political issues. Like the people from any other caste group, Dalit Christians are also very active in public sphere discussions. In many other social and political forums, Dalits can form their informal groups. Even in the absence of any formal organisation which coordinates a particular caste group from Dalit community cutting across the barriers of religion, the people who belong to that particular caste group form and share a mutual empathy or common concern with each other among them.

Usually, this informal concern and empathy do not cross caste barriers. However, in some occasions, the commonness as Dalits gain a preference over and above the particular caste or religion. For example, almost all Dalits irrespective of their caste and religion show their respect towards the celebrities from Dalits. In this way, they respect the former President of India K. R. Narayanan and former Supreme Court Chief Justice K. G. Balakrishnan. As stated earlier, they have shared a concern about Kalabhavan Mani (a famous Malayalam movie star who met with a tragic death) and I. M. Vijayan (a veteran former Indian footballer from Kerala). The heinous murder of a Dalit girl by a rapist evokes more or less same response from Dalits from various caste and religions. Certain agitations by Dalits, for example, the struggle for land in *Chengara* also get the support of Dalits irrespective of their caste and religion. Though caste and religious considerations are important in their private life and the public sphere, a common Dalit cause at times surpasses all such considerations.

[14] Interview with Santhamma George Kadankulam,

The discussions also cover the caste and religious issues both at national and state level as well as the local issues. Local caste issue is more critical for them than the case at national or state level. An important thing that has come to the notice of the researcher is that caste issues are coming up frequently for discussions in the public sphere and peer groups of males. Discussion on a particular sub-caste or religion rarely occurs in public sphere discussions. Sometimes it happens in the absence of the people from that particular caste or religion. When the members of the group are absent in a peer group, the remarks about them by others become negative and open. In some other cases, only within the discussion group of a particular caste, the issues about the sub-caste are discussed. The Dalit Christians and Dalit Hindus are also interested in discussing their particular issues within their respective peer groups.

Among the Dalit Christians, discussion on caste related practices within the Church occurs mainly in their private circles, i.e., within an informal group exclusively for Dalit Christians and sometimes among the believers of a particular church.

Engagement with Cultural Sphere

In a previous section of this chapter, the researcher has looked into the emergence of the social and cultural leadership among the Dalit Christians. The cultural life of Dalit Christians here means arts and aesthetics. History shows that the Dalits had their cultural art forms, but now it is extinct. These cultural forms known as folk arts are related to the day-to-day life of Dalits. Now there are some efforts to rejuvenate various kinds of folk art forms of Dalits. There are regional differences among Dalits regarding their interest in developing and maintaining folk cultural art forms. There are notable difference between Dalit Hindus and Dalit Christians. Due to the impact of Christianity Dalit Christians were served from many of their customs and beliefs, and many of the folk arts were part of their old traditions and rituals.

Though their continuity in their own cultural field is limited, they have increasingly emerged in many forms of culture and entertainment. They can make a mark in the emerging forms of art and culture. Nevertheless, the cultural life of Dalit Christians is a complicated one. Still, their access and presence in the cultural sphere are more inadequate than the Dalit Hindus. Christianity can limit their engagement in art and culture. Mainly it affects their exposure to the realm of art and culture as a social group. It also affects their participation in the cultural events and cultural production.

Therefore Dalit Christians rarely come in contact with various cultural forms. There are very few from among the community engaging in art and culture due to many reasons - religious, economic, caste-related etc. The details of contributors in this field are already given in the previous chapter.

In Dalit Christians' case, their break from the traditional art forms might have affected the possibility to expand their contact with the emerging forms of art and aesthetics. Different denominations provide varying possibility for Dalit Christians in this regard. The Pentecostals are more hostile towards particular kind of art forms, for instance, they are reluctant to even watching movies, or enjoying other popular art forms. Pentecostal Churches were officially against their believers participating in any cultural events or watching it. Watching movies or any entertainment programmes in TV channels or participating in other cultural events at present is becoming common among the young generation of the Pentecostals. Some of the old generations are also showing a new interest especially in watching TV programmes. This change has occurred due to the impact of media boom and spread of Television. No denomination took the initiative. However, It seems that music is the only art form more popular among Dalit Christians. Their affinity is because music is very much the part of Christian worship and prayer. In Protestant Churches such as CSI, every local Church has choir groups, which are supposed to sing Christian songs during Sunday service and other special occasions. In the Protestant Churches having an Anglican background such as CSI and CMS-ACI, the prescribed songs, which the believers sing during Sunday service, are composed in Western and Carnatic tunes. Many of Dalit Christians are getting chances to be the part of the music troupes. Music, in the form of devotional songs, is promoted even by the Pentecostals. All the Churches irrespective of denominations release musical albums with devotional songs. There are certain writers and singers from among Dalit Christians. Many of them are trained in playing western musical instruments like violin and using the keyboard.[15] Also, in some regions where the Dalits are concentraed, some professional music band teams[16] are formed by themselves. They are talented in playing musical instruments and beating drums. This is a means of livelihood for some of them.

[15] They are using such instruments for the programmes conducted in the Church or other Church-related programmes held in public places.

[16] Such musical band troupes among Dalit Christians do not use sophisticated instruments for their programme. They are mainly using drums and the instruments like a clarinet. Their programmes are not in connection with Church-related activities. The interested parties book their troupes, and they perform for anyone who invites them. Such troupes are existing in various parts of Kottayam and Pathanamthitta districts, especially in the areas where Dalit Christians are large in number. Dalit Christians have a high concentration in Ranni and the

Apart from their Christian background, caste also plays a vital role in affecting the exposure to the cultural field. They rarely get a chance to come into contact with the classical music and in the other fields of classical art forms. Caste-related economic backwardness also plays a significant role in this regard.

The Church in the Public Life of Dalit Christians

Chapter 4 analysed the influence of Church as a modern disciplining mechanism in the religious life of Dalit Christians. This disciplining extend to their presence in the public realm. As the institutional medium of mobilisation, churches in Kerala are on par with Hindu caste organisations. Though there are denominational differences, Church is the standard medium for all the Christians for their motivation and representation in the public realm as a group. However, the every Church cannot represent all the groups of believers equally and adequately in the public realm. The Dalit Christians seek for articulation by incorporating members from diverse churches. Therefore, any denomination and its church cannot solely represent all Dalit Christians in Kerala. Besides this, among the denominations, the traditional churches are stronger than the Dalit churches. It makes the Churches as a medium of engagement in the public realm for Dalit Christians as a necessity but every Church may not stand for them. Therefore, the role of Church as an institution for Dalit Christians in shaping their articulation and presence in the public realm is essential for analysis. The following section is about it.

The Church as an Institution in Social Matters

The Church's engagement in social matters through its organisations has a dual effect. First, the Church makes some social interventions seeking to protect its interests in the name of the believers. Second, the Church can act in pursuit of more extensive public interests. The Churches run the educational educations and hospitals. The Churches engage in charity activities among the weaker sections such as Dalits and Adivasis, women, diseased and orphans aiming at their welfare. In doing so, the economic capacity of the Church is vital. Besides economic factors, theological or doctrinal and denominational differences also have its role in determining the nature and objectives of social intervention and social role of the Church.

---

surrounding areas of Pathanamthitta district where such troupes are also many more. Such a troupe is shown in a *Malayalam* movie named *Amen*, though the troupe members are not directly remarked as Dalit Christians. However, in the movie, it is understood that they are Dalit Christians.

In the public realm, Christians belonging to different social and economic background and denominations articulate their interests by using Church as their immediate social institution. Apart from theology and doctrines and economic interest, the caste background of its followers affects the degree of social intervention by the churches.

The Syrian Christian Churches are more capable of making social intervention through its institutions. They are economically sound and politically more powerful also. It helps them in making more visibility in the public realm. Besides articulating the demands of their denominations and the believers, they own a variety of institutions such as educational institutions, hospitals, NGOs and charitable institutions like orphanages and nursing homes for the elderly. It means that their institutions meeting the daily needs of a wider spectrum of a people other than the believers enhance their legitimacy before others. The Syro Malabar Church is very actively involved in educational, social and health-related fields. The Church runs 4860 educational institutions, 262 ecclesiastical institutions and 2614 health and charitable institutions.[17] Other two Catholic rites (Syro Malankara Church and Latin Catholic Church) have such institutions. Traditional Syrian Christian Churches like Orthodox, Jacobite, and Mar Thoma are also active. Among the Protestants, CSI only have large number of institutions.[18] They also can appear in the public realm as the caretakers of the needs of the broader public. These churches can influence the society and politics and exert their power.

CSI has established some forums and organisations in a way similar to that of Catholic Church and different from all other Protestant Churches. BPDC and SEDC are such organs. At present BPDC only is functioning and the church dissolved the SEDC later. CSI is a well-organised Church in India, and after the Catholic Church, this is the largest also in India. This Church is economically powerful to establish wide network of restrictions.

The Churches, which are exclusively for Dalits and those in which majority of the members are Dalits do not possess assets and institutions such as banks, cooperatives, schools, colleges and hospitals. CMS Anglican Church of India is a Church, which exists exclusively for Dalit Christians. Even though it is interested in engaging the public realm and active in mobilising the believers on matters of social issues, it suffers from the lack of resources.[19] That is why

[17] http://www.syromalabarchurch.in/syro-malabar-church.php, retrieved on 10/12/2017.
[18] Data is available in the website of the churches, for example,
http://www.latinarchdiocesetrivandrum.org/directory/institutions/http://verapoly.in/institutions/
http://marthoma.in/institutions/- http://mosc.in/institutions-
[19] Some Churches, like Syro Malabar Church, run even NGOs for engaging in the civil and social issues. Some Churches, mainly Syrian Churches, run educational institutions, hospitals and such other institutions through

they are unable to engage in any charity works or any other kind of social activities. It also means that they are unable to give adequate financial support to the believers. A large number of independent Pentecostal Churches also share this problem. Due to these reasons, even though they are interested in intervening in the social issues for believers, especially the Dalits, they are helpless.

Among the Dalit Churches, Salvation Army has an aided higher secondary school in Thiruvananthapuram city. The Church owns some buildings and other assets in the same city. Apart from this, it runs a leprosy sanatorium at Puthencruz in Ernakulam. Another Church (Seventh Day Adventist Church) also have number unaided English Medium Schools in many areas of the state. These two Churches are the part of international Churches. Therefore, they are benefited by foreign donors.

Though the Salvation Army, the Dalit Church has a number of institutions, the Church faces some limitations in efficiently engaging in social service. Though the Salvation Army is a Dalit Church it is part of an international network. Therefore, the Dalits of the Church have no big autonomy and discretion in managing the institutions. The Bible Faith Mission (Thiruvanathapuram District) and the Baptist Mission Church (in Pathanamthitta District) are the two local Churches which owns and administer educational institutions. However, as compared to these Dalit Churches and other smaller Churches, Syrian Christians dominated Churches are capable of intervention in the public realm through their institutions. They have schools one each. The economic background of every Church determines its capacity to engage in the social activities, apart from the social background of the believers.

However, within the wealthy Churches also, there are underprivileged people. The educational and medical institutions help the poor and socially marginalised groups of the believers. For example, the Catholic Church runs educational, health-related and charitable institutions and through them, the Church can extend its support to both the poor within and outside the Church. However, in the case of Dalit Churches, they are not even serving the insiders. The Churches such as CMS-ACI and numerous Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, which are exclusively for Dalits or under the control of Dalits, are examples of such weak Dalit Churches.

---

which they engage in civil and social matters. However, due to lack financial stability, the Churches such as CMS-ACI cannot intervene in such fields, though some of these Churches are interested in engaging in the social service field. However, it can be critical towards the social system and its problems in the context of Dalits.

Much like being introverts in the public realm, the Pentecostals do not have any interests in establishing assets and institutions. When we take the case of Pentecostal Churches, their theology put some constraints regarding civil, social engagement. It also has an effect visible from the lowest number of institutions under their control. However, they believe that charitable activities are the only means for social engagement (For more details of Pentecostal Theology, see the part which deals with the Pentecostal theology in Chapter III). In short, for the Pentecostal Dalits, it is the theology, and the drawbacks in economic power are crucial in matters regarding their social activity. The denouncement of public action by the Pentecostal churches affects the social behaviour of its followers. Their invisibility in the public realm and the hesitation of the church to represent them in the public realm has some consequences. These churches have many more Dalit believers. The lack of interest on the part of the Pentecostal churches to make a presence in the public realm and to engage in public action results in depriving these Dalit Christians an effective institutional base in comparison with other Christians.

Though most of the Pentecostal denominations officially share a similar attitude regarding their social outreach and building institutions, the members of some of these churches are raising demands for active intervention in the public realm. They argue that there is nothing against social intervention by the church and the believers in Pentecostal theology. However, here the fact is that the operation of Pentecostal activities is more religious than public. Excessive engagement in 'worldly affairs' is not promoted in Pentecostal Churches.

Unlike the Episcopal Churches, the non- Episcopal Churches have a more decentralized organizational set up. The former are fairy better than the latter in the ownership of institutions due to the organizational capacity also. The organized Episcopal Churches can mobilize more resources and manpower to administer the large number of institutions.

Chapter 6

Engaging Political Sphere: The Church, Politics and Dalit Christians

In the post-independent Kerala, the Dalit Christians' engagement in politics is influenced by their religion and caste. The Dalit Christians as a community and in alliance with other Dalit groups are gradually becoming an articulate group. An inquiry into the collective and particular interests of the Dalit Christians as a social group is relevant for analysis to assess their political assertion.

Dalit Christians' engagement with the political system of Kerala is in three ways. First is through their relationship with political parties. They are voters and members of political parties. Second is through their community organisations as a pressure group. The third is an independent political assertion. In the third case, they may ally with other Dalits and participate in larger Dalit movements. The chapter looks at the first and second type of political assertion in detail to analyse the compelling reasons for Dalit Christians to proceed with an independent political assertion. Why were remaining as a weak social group vis-à-vis political parties in Kerala politics? What are the features of their independent political assertion? How do they become 'a part apart' in the Dalit Movements in Kerala?

First, this chapter examines the case of Dalit Christians as a lower caste group within the minority religion. *Second*, it explains the relative bargaining power of various Christian churches as pressure groups and the place of Dalit Christians in the community-based bargaining prevalent in Kerala politics. It helps to look at the reasons for the continuing neglect towards Dalit Christians even though the political parties are very cautious to address the demands of the churches. *Third*, it analyses their participation in the state's political process by looking at their role as voters and party affiliation. *Fourth*, the chapter examines the attempts for assertion by Dalit Christians as an independent group. It also focusses on the newest form of the assertion by Dalit Christians through larger Dalit collectives. It critically examines the emerging trends in the field of movements in handling the inner-divisions of the group based on castes, sub-castes and denominations and their efforts in making a collective political community of Dalits.

The Caste and Minority Status

Hindu Dalits in Kerala can quickly focus on their caste to raise their claims. However, the Dalit Christians in Kerala are sharing the two premises of identity, religion and caste. The

Indian constitution recognises them only as Christians. As per the provisions of the Constitution of India, linguistic and religious minorities are eligible to enjoy certain special rights. Therefore, the religious minorities have the right to establish, own and administer educational institutions. The state must restrain from intervention and control vis-à-vis these institutions. Dalit Christians being a religious minority group are eligible to enjoy this right. However, because of the caste, poverty and the weak resource base of the individuals and their churches, Dalit Christians in Kerala are not on par with the upper caste Christians to establish and control such institutions. Therefore, this right becomes practically redundant in their case. It shows that the minority status hardly gives equal benefits to the Syrian Christians and the Dalit Christians though both are belonging to the same minority religion.

Since the constitution primarily defines them as citizens of minority religious groups, Dalits Christians are not entitled to bear any other social title as the primary base in their demand vis-à-vis the state and political parties. It places them in striking contrast with the Scheduled Tribes. Irrespective of their religion, all tribes are eligible for special protection according to the constitution. In the social life, the implicit constitutional description of Dalit Christians as a part of religious minority hardly elevate their social status. Since they appear in the social milieu carrying the dual identity of Dalits and Christians, their caste identity gains a negative weight. The constitution can protect their claim for minority status. However, within the churches and in the society they can make any significant gain only in competition with other Christians who are claiming an upper caste background and members of elite churches. In the previous chapters, the researcher discussed the grave inequalities regarding social status and resources between the Dalit Christians and the Syrian Christians in Kerala. This difference is also visible in their political bargaining power.

In addition to this, the Churches consider them mainly as a degraded group among the lower castes. It places them in a paradox. In society, they can claim a status of minority groups in political demands. However, it is not as strong as by non-Dalit Christians because the Dalits do not gain an equal recognition based on their religion. Even if they tend to present themselves as Christians to the outside world, the prevailing caste consciousness of the society would also cloth them only in caste. The constitution, state and the political parties are treating them legally as a minority religious group. Nevertheless, while facing many disadvantages of the denial of their caste identity and the economic condition by the constitution and the state, the Dalit Christians are not gaining a benefit in their social, political and economic life for any other identity that the constitutional provisions confer on

them. The existing legal and constitutional definition of Dalit Christians further disempower them as a marginalised group. While politicising their identity, they are fighting against all the available and imposed definitions and the prime denominators of such definitions. Therefore, self-definition by Dalit Christians becomes the first task they try to carry out while looking for a political option. Caste is gaining significance for them, more than the religion.

In this sense, they are mainly Dalits. The discourse of Dalit Christian politics revolves mainly around their caste status and caste-related issues, both inside and outside the churches. While making claims for a share in reservation and other social and political rights, they raise the issues of their socio-economic marginality regarding caste in support of their demands. Their social status based on caste is invariably coming in. Even though the religion has a role to give them an identity, caste is always the problem in their social life, and it becomes the base for their separate political assertion as a group.

After the implementation of the recommendation of Mandal Commission Report in 1993, Government of India included Dalit Christians within the category of Other Backward Class (OBC).[1] At the national level, it was a relief to them because they became eligible for reservation in jobs and education in the public sector. Before this, only in 12 Indian states, Dalit Christians were a group eligible for reservation (Deshpande & Bapna 2008: 13). In Kerala, Latin Catholics, *Nadar*s belonging to Christian religious denominations other than SIUC, and the Scheduled Caste converts to Christianity were the groups eligible for a certain percentage of reservation in jobs in the government sector (Deshpande & Bapna 2008: A-40)

In this chapter, the researcher analyses the political engagement of Dalit Christians in Kerala. Even though for Dalit Hindus and Dalit Christians, Kerala society and politics appear more or less as a realm of exclusion based on caste, there are significant similarities and differences in the mode, objectives and outcome of the political engagement by the two groups. Dalits in

[1] The central government implemented reservation for OBCs in 1993 considering the judgment of the Supreme Court in 1992 in the case of Indira Sawhney and Others Vs. Union of India and others for 27% reservation in civil posts and services under the Government of India for Other Backward Classes OBCs. As per the order, it was decided to take the castes and communities which are common to both the lists in the report of the Mandal Commission and the State Governments' Lists to the category of OBC. The Expert Committee on 'Creamy Layer' headed by Justice (Rtd.) RN Prasad prepared the Common Lists in respect of the 14 States: (1) Andhra Pradesh, 2) Assam, 3) Bihar, 4) Goa, 5) Gujarat, 6) Haryana, 7) Himachal Pradesh, 8) Karnataka, 9) Kerala, 10) Madhya Pradesh, 11) Maharashtra, 12) Punjab, 13) Tamil Nadu, 14) Uttar Pradesh) which had notified the list of OBCs for the purpose of reservation in State Services. The Government has accepted the Common Lists prepared by the Committee. The Government has decided in notify the annexed list of the Other Backward Classes. The lists shall be deemed to have taken effect from 8th September 1993 (For more details, see National Commission for Backward Classes, www.ncbc.nic.in)

pre-modern Kerala (the then untouchable castes) were not at all free to lead an active political life due to the rigorous nature of the caste-based social system. Influence of the values of colonial modernity and the worldview of socio-religious reform movements during that time in Kerala shaped the articulation of their interests and assertion as a distinctive social group. All these set the background of Dalit politics in Kerala, and their contemporary movements realise the significance of past resistance and revival in making their identity.[2]

The Churches as Pressure Groups

The Churches in Kerala as religious institutions have a strong presence in civil society. The political interests of the Churches reflect their economic and religious interests. They take the role of pressure group vis-à-vis the state and political parties and try to influence the government. Different Christian denominations have a particular and general interest. The difference in the economic capacity of the churches, the numerical strength of their membership and caste background of the members are the factors that determine the bargaining power of various churches vis-à-vis the state. A comparison between the three groups of churches in Kerala - the Catholic Church, Protestant Churches and the Pentecostal Churches – would help to understand the difference in their bargaining power and bring out the reasons.

Syro Malabar Church

The Syro Malabar Church is politically the most influential Catholic Church in Kerala due to the large membership of believers and the social power of Syrian Christians as the most decisive group among the believers. Economically, it is one of the wealthiest religious institutions, and there is an influential group of the wealthy among its members. Socially, the power of the church is an outcome of the dominance of Syrian Christians, claiming an upper caste legacy while leading and representing the church before the state and political parties. Politically and economically, they are one of the most influential Christian social group in Kerala.

As stated earlier, a considerable number of Dalit Christians in the Church has only a very marginal influence on its organisation and leadership. They were able to gain some

[2] Dalit Christians were exposed to colonial modernity at the initiative of Anglican Christian missionaries more directly than any other social group in Kerala. The researcher has explained this in detail in the previous chapters.

concessions from the church, but their ability to stand alone and against the church is limited. Also, their alliance with other Dalit movements is weak. Therefore, the Dalit Christians of the Syro Malabar church are competing with the more influential social groups to gain attention from the church without a level playing ground. Apparently, the Church is under the control of the Syrian Christians, and most often, it represents their interests as the common interest of the Church in politics. However, there is a gross difference between the Dalit Christians and Syrian Christians in sharing the benefits from the interaction between their church and the state.

The Church runs many educational institutions, hospitals, and other institutions in Kerala. The church enjoys the special privileges and rights, sanctioned by the Constitution. However, the representation of Dalits in these institutions is minimal, and they do not have a role in controlling them. The disparity between the social groups within the church in gaining access and establishing control over the institutions run by the church is the most glaring. Therefore, the distribution of the outcome of the bargaining by the church with state and political parties is unequal for the Dalits and the non-Dalits. It leads to the argument from Dalit Christians that the Church is trying to protect only the interests of Syrian Christians in the name of minority rights.

However, it does not mean that all the non-Dalit members of the Church are equally satisfied.[3] The economically deprived class of the Syrian Christians may also stand as one of the least beneficial groups. Nevertheless, the underrepresentation of the economically weaker sections of the Syrian Christians and their lack of control over the institutions of the church never make their status on par with Dalit Christians. The Church culturally represents the values of Syrian Christians in society and politics. Even the non-influential groups of the Syrian Christians, which may constitute the majority of all Syrian Christians, can receive some compensatory treatment, morally or socially, from the Church unlike the case of Dalit Christians. Even though the Church supports the Dalit Christians' demand for constitutional

[3] In every Church, a minor influential group has the upper hand in the administration and the management of the Church. This small influential group may be wealthy, politically influential and so on. This group gets more benefits from the Church. Apart from this, all the Syrian Christian members of the Church do not possess equal access and control over the institutions and assets of the Church. In both the cases, some are getting entirely sidelined, some get little benefits, and some others are more benefited.

reservation, it never adequately used its power as an influential pressure group to realise this objective in the past.[4]

The Church can influence the state politics and administration through its members placed in positions of political parties' leadership and bureaucracy. Thus, the Church can influence the policy-making and programmes of the government. Syrian Christians in the Syro Malabar Church are mainly living in the districts of Kottayam and Idukki. In some regions in the districts of Wayandu, Kannur, and Kozhikkod also they have a numerical strength. In all these districts, they are supporters of Indian National Congress or Kerala Congress. Kerala Congress parties in Kerala have the nickname of 'Christian political parties.' Syrian Christians from Syro Malabar Church are holding leadership positions in these parties. Therefore, the Kerala Congress as a group of parties can represent Syrian Christians' interest in politics. The Kerala Congress parties were part of the two coalitions in Kerala, and they fielded Christians as candidates in the election, with minor exceptions.

The support of Syro Malabar Church is very decisive in elections in various constituencies where the Christians have concentrated at large. Through their vote bank, the Church can exert pressure on political parties and the government. Before every election, the priests give directions to believers regarding voting. Always they exhort the believers to cast votes by taking into consideration the interest of the church. Even the candidates contesting in those constituencies from the Communist parties cannot ignore the church. The Roman Catholic Church has a stable political friendship in state politics with Congress and the Kerala Congress parties. Mainly the Syrian Christian members follow the church in their political affiliation and voting.

However, the Dalit Christians show some divergence from Syrian Christians, and they may not always follow the directions of the Church in voting in elections. During the interaction with the Dalit believer groups of the Church, the researcher came across the peculiarity of their voting behaviour. For example, Dalit Christians are not interested in joining Kerala Congress except in the Party's stronghold areas. Kerala Congress becomes a political choice for many Dalit Christians in Kottayam mainly because of its strength as the most influential political party in their locality. Dalit Christians in those areas would also join Kerala Congress, but not strictly because of the directions of their church (Interview with P. O.

[4] Even though the church agreed for 10 percent reservation to Dalit Christians in education and employment in the institutions, its implementation is faulty. While selecting the candidates, the church can use a discretion convenient to its interest.

Peter).[5] The Dalit Christians in such areas are compelled to depend on such parties and their local level leaders for their needs and for that, they cannot depend on left parties or Congress, which are so weak there. In this way, some of the Dalit Christians are the supporters of Kerala Congress. In comparison with the Syrian Christians' show uniformity of political preferences almost across the state, the party affiliation and voting behaviour of Dalit Christians vary significantly in different regions.

Latin Catholic Church

Even though the Latin Church is different in the social composition from the Syro Malabar Church, it hardly enhances the opportunity of Dalit Christians as a social group within the church. Being part of the universal Catholic Church and as part of sharing its substantive concerns, the Latin Church in Kerala has to function in cooperation with other Catholic rites. In this sense, the Latin Church follow the religious, cultural and political interests of the universal Catholic Church. As a result, Latin Church shares the interests of Syro Malabar and Syro Malankara Churches. In short, they form a common interest or attempt for a reconciliation of their diverse interests while bargaining with political parties and the state. Such a common interest is suffering from the problems of inadequate representation of social diversity, and the churches tend to become partisan against the weaker social groups among the followers. Mostly the pressure for a common interest in pursuing politics by the Catholic Churches underplays the specific problems of Dalit Christians.

Also in the Latin Church, Dalits are suffering from discrimination through the dominant social groups in the church may not be the Syrian Christians. While the discrimination in the Syrian Church is by the upper castes, the caste discrimination in Latin churches is at the initiative of the other backward communities. Compared to all other lower caste groups in Latin diocese, the Dalit Christians avail only marginal benefits from the Church and its strategies as a pressure group in state politics bypass the Dalits' interests.

Latin Catholic Church also has the power to influence electoral competition in many constituencies. However, unlike the Syro Malabar Church, the Latin Church has no stable

[5] In some areas of Kottayam district like Pala, the Kerala Congress is the stronger than the Congress and CPI (M). In such circumstances, it is very natural for the Dalit Christians to support it. Direction by the church is less a reason, because Dalits in many other regions do not uniformly associate with Kerala Congress. This is a difference from the Syrian Christians' political affiliation. They are more uniformly the supporters of Kerala Congress and/or Congress.

relationship with any political parties. All major political parties much more evenly share the followers of Latin Catholic Church than the Syro Malabar Church. However, with the help of believers in the leadership positions of political parties the church also tries to influence the governments.

The Protestant Churches: CSI and CMS-ACI

Protestant Churches also try to pressurise the political parties and governments for safeguarding their interests. However, they lack many advantages of Catholic churches in this regard. Protestants in Kerala are not under a single Church, and the denominations are more numerous than the Catholics. None of these denominations alone can appear as a strong pressure group. Unlike the case of Catholic churches, there is no international authority over them for coordination and cooperation.

CSI has the largest number of followers among the Protestant churches, but its membership is smaller than Syro Malabar or Latin Catholic Church. Protestant Churches are not very wealthy in their resource base also. In this respect, they are less powerful than the Syro Malabar Church. However, Dalit Christians claim better space in the Protestant Churches. They also frequently fight the Church authority for protecting their interests. The CSI owns some educational institutions and hospitals. In this regard, they are ahead of other Protestant churches in Kerala. Even though there is a continuing complaint by the Dalits about discrimination and their underrepresentation in employment and educational opportunities in the institutions of CSI, the church sometimes succeeded to win their support to protect its interest. Such an instance is worth mentioning here.

In 2010, there was statewide agitation organised by Student Federation of India against the anomalies of self-financing colleges in Kerala. It affected the functioning of many colleges in the state. The administration of CMS College (Kottayam) under the CSI church suspended some students for their involvement in the agitation and the subsequent clashes with the college staff. The organisation mobilised students in large number against the decision, and the college remained closed for some days. The affiliating University also instructed the Principal to withdraw the suspension. The CPI (M) was ruling the state. In retaliation, the Madhya Kerala Diocese of CSI, Kottayam, mobilised its believers against the Left government's position on this issue and conducted a rally by highlighting the issue as a matter of concern for the religious minorities and their constitutional rights to manage educational

institutions. Interestingly, many Dalits from the youth wing of the Diocese also participated in the rally and made it a success.

It is interesting to see that the Church won the support of Dalits by convincing them that the government and the left political organisations were trying to interfere with the common property of the believers. The Church's intention was actually to protect its financial interest in running self-financing colleges, and the student agitators were, in fact, representing the interest of students including the Dalits.[6] In fact, the Dalits can hope for little benefits from the self-financing institutions, which demand a tremendous amount of capitation fee, and a donation from the applicants. Despite this is the reality, the Dalits of the church came in solidarity with their church.

Even though the Dalits of the church came for helping it in a critical encounter with the government and student organisations, the same concern from the side of the church about the issues of the Dalits is conspicuous by its absence. Many times the Dalits in general and the Dalit Christians of the CSI, in particular, have come up with protests and agitations. The church never addressed their issues and called for solidarity of other believers with their cause. The Church hardly engaged in any bargaining with the government for the Dalit groups. Like the denominations of Catholic Church, the CSI Church also supports the Dalit Christians in their demand for reservation in jobs and education in the public sector. While Catholic Church provides the Dalits with ten percent reservation in the educational institutions, the CSI has not conceded to this so far.

Much like the Latin Catholic Church, CSI also did not develop a stable affinity with any political parties. Some members of the CSI have become political leaders and members of political parties. Political parties also appeal to the church leaders of the CSI in elections, but the church cannot offer them a vote-bank. The social division between the Dalit Christians and Syrian Christians in the central Kerala diocese is very loud, which block a call for unity in voting and political choice by the church. The differentiation based on caste exist in other dioceses of CSI also, but it is sharper in the CSI-MKD. Broadly, the Syrian Christians of the church support the INC or the Kerala Congress in the elections. Therefore, the Church led by Syrian Christians can influence the United Democratic Front (UDF) in state politics.

[6] The Church runs a certain number of self-financing educational institutions also. SFI's struggle was not against any particular issue in the college, and it was in the more massive interest of poor and socially marginalised students represented by the organisation on self-financing college issues in Kerala.

However, the benefits from that relation mainly favour the interests and demands of the elite groups of the CSI.

CMS-ACI is a Church exclusively for Dalits. Therefore, unlike in the case of CSI, there is no scope for caste-based division among its members. For more than a decade since the 2000s, the Church under the leadership of Arch Bishop Stephen Vattappara has been trying to become a pressure group in state politics. The leaders of the Church try to raise the issues of Dalit Christians of all denominations. Since the Church claims about a different perspective on Dalit question, demand for reservation is receiving very lower attention. As a result, in representing the interest of Dalit Christians before the state, reservation has not become a primary demand by the Church. The Church is fighting for the cause of Dalit Christians almost alone among other denominations. It has no collaboration with Dalit Christian organisations also. One reason for this is the differences of opinion regarding the nomenclature - 'Dalit Christians'. The Church does not like the word Dalit as a suffix; it officially addresses them as 'Converted Christians' (*Parivarthitha Chraisthavar*). The Church leaders say that the term 'Dalit' is derogatory and it is not good to use this term for the people who embraced Christianity from the ex-untouchable castes. In the view of the church, the suffix 'Dalit' attributes a lower status. However, the Church has no objection to its members joining any Dalit Christian organisations or organisations for all Dalits in general.

CMS-ACI does not own any institutions. Therefore, the Church is free from the compulsions and demands related to education or employment by the members. The resource base of the Church is weak. Such a church need not meet the state with any demand regarding ownership and control of the property. Therefore, the Church is not participating in the critical fights between the Christian churches and the governments regarding their property and institutions. The numerical strength of the Church is also weak as compared to some other Episcopal Churches. All these show the reason to say that the CSI-ACI was an insignificant player among the church-based pressure groups in Kerala.

Recently, the Church has shown its presence in the public realm through mobilising their believers in large number with demands. The Church tries to influence the government by conducting protests, marches and rallies, and by holding meetings of the believers in public places. In recent times, the Church has succeeded in influencing certain political parties, especially CPI (M). The church leadership claims that it was after a believer's rally organised

by the CMS-ACI in Kottayam town; the party became attentive to the Dalit Christians' issues. The rally showed the numerical strength of Church, and there was a political declaration of rights of Dalit Christians in a public meeting followed by the rally. The speeches in the meeting reflected the Church's support for Dalit Christians and Dalits.

The top leadership explained in an interview about its ability and connections to influence the political leadership. The Bishop of the church frequently meets various political party leaders for deliberations.[7] While attending the programmes of the Churches, the political leaders also try to emphasise on their connections with the Church leaders. The Church leaders also do the same by recollecting their old days as members of organisations linked to political parties. Arch Bishop Stephen Vattappara has a good relationship with various political leaders, and he has secured an important space in the political realm as a Dalit Christian leader and Dalit bishop. Thus, he plays a role in bringing the Church closer to political parties. However, the ability of the church to become an active constituent of the church-based pressure group is still facing with some limitations. The most important drawback is its 'stand-alone' approach in fighting for the Dalit Christians. However, it is very active in sharing space of protest with other Dalit organisations in issues concerning Dalits and Dalit Christians.

The Pentecostal Churches

Pentecostal Churches of Kerala hardly involved in politics directly or indirectly. They tend to stand as a faith-based group of non-political believers. Pentecostals are often against the political engagement by the members as they think that it is like indulging in worldly affairs. Believers refrain from the public and political activities because they regard anything outside the believers' group and their church as spiritually incorrect and morally corrupt. Therefore, acting as a pressure group in a socio-political system is against their belief. Many pastors of these churches were unequivocal in their opposition to the churches' involvement in politics. However, there are some pastors and Pentecostal theologians sharply critical about the conventional position of the church in this regard.

[7] Bishop Vattappara says that Ommen Chandy, the former Chief Minister of Kerala and the INC leader, is one of his friends and they are classmates. He said that Ommen Chandy, when he was the Chief Minister, offered an art and science college to the Church as part of considering major Dalit groups in Kerala and he denied the offer due to the lack of sufficient land. While conversing with him, the researcher came to understand that, he has connections with CPI (M) leaders like Vaikkom Viswan also (Interview with Stephen Vattappara on 20-07-2016).

The political leaders like Shins Peter, and community leaders like V. J. George, theologians like M. Stephen, the writers and activists like Pastor K. Yesunantha Das and Pastor Jaise Pandanadu, have made it clear in their interviews that campaigning for the rights of the Dalits and social action against the caste-related discrimination are not antithetical to Bible or Pentecostal theology. In this sense, becoming the part of politics and being political is also not against Biblical teaching. Among the people mentioned above, Shins Peter is a leader in Indian National Congress. He was the President of Kerala Students Union (KSU), the student wing of INC in Kottayam district. He also officiated as the secretary of District Congress Committee of Kottayam. The Congress-led UDF government (2011-16) nominated him as the Chairman of the Dalit Christian Cooperative Society in Kottayam. Shins Peter belongs to *Paraya* community, and he is the member of IPC.

V. J. George is also close to the INC, though he is not a formal member of the party. When M. A. Kuttappan, a leader of INC who belongs to Scheduled Caste, was the Minister for SC & ST Welfare in the UDF led State government of Kerala, V. J. George was his private secretary. He is a member of IPC and belongs to *Pulaya* community. People like M. Stephen have written about the socio-political engagement of Dalit Pentecostals.

Pentecostals keep diverse opinion regarding the necessity of socio-political engagement. It is not the denominations' leadership, but the Dalit theologians and some pastors and activists from the Pentecostals demand more socio-political engagement of the believers and the Church. In the Pentecostal Churches such as IPC, Church of God, and Assemblies of God Syrian Christians are the dominant group. These denominations are more discouraging the believers' engagement in politics and social activism. Many of the independent Churches established in Kerala have a sizeable number of Dalits, but all these are not equally interested in politicising the believers. Those interested in their role in social and political activism are small in numerical strength, and their units are disconnected from each other because of geographical dispersion and lack of sufficient coordination at the state-level. As a result, they are becoming far incompetent to represent the Dalit Christians vigorously in the state politics.

The Church of God in India (Full Gospel Kerala Region) is an important case of Pentecostal Church for analysis. It is a Church with Dalit leadership, and Dalits have strong representation in both the membership and leadership. Except for some of its units in Idukki district, Syrian Christians are very few in this church. They are rich, but their influence and

control over the Church are confined to the particular locality only (Interview with Dinu Monachan) Like in the case of mainline Pentecostal churches, the Dalit leaders of this Church also are not so interested in allowing believers for political and social actions. However, some of the pastors from the Church are showing some difference, and they mobilise the believers and claim socio-political rights. One of its former overseers,[8] pastor Sunny Varkey, says that he never discouraged the socio-political engagement of the believers. In the interview, he expressed all his solidarity with the cause of Dalits and Dalit Christians. Varkey has a cordial relationship with many Dalit Christian activists. He is willing to fight for the cause of Dalit Christians. However, he admits that most of the people from the Church, including a majority of the pastors, still keep a conventional approach towards politics. He adds that it is difficult to make them aware of Dalit issues (Interview with Pastor Sunny Varkkey). It shows a common problem of the Dalit Pentecostals and their churches. Even though their churches are free from Syrian Christians' domination and the Dalits are relatively autonomous in taking a decision, the impact of theology is a constraint. Also, the other factors like the weak economic power, lack of institutions and numerous divisions into sects also prevent them from becoming political.

While their theology may not approve any political and social engagement of the Pentecostals, there are some instances to show that these Churches and believers are gradually overcoming this constraint. The differences of opinion prevailing among them are an indication of such a change. Sometimes the organisational weakness and absence of central authority may help them to react more freely about Dalits' issues. The weak organisational and institutional power of these churches enhance the believers' autonomy in planning their political and social actions. Some Pentecostal theologians, pastors and community leaders more openly state that there is nothing wrong in engaging society and politics. They garner support for their view by interpreting the Bible and theology differently from the conventionalists. They cannot expect complete support from the Church leadership, but the churches never reprimand them for their interest in social activism and politics. In fact, the silence of the Church gives them the freedom to engage in socio-political issues. Despite carrying a theology against political activities, the organisational weakness of the church may allow the members for more socio-political engagement.

[8] The person who holds top most administrative position of the Church at state level is called 'Overseer'.

The Pentecostal Churches have not yet become a pressure group vis-à-vis political parties and the state. The first reason for this is the nature of their theology. The second is the social composition of believers giving a majority to Dalit Christians in many of the weaker denominations. The third is the lack of financial resources and institutions to develop an economic interest to bargain with the government. The fourth reason is their inability to foster a stable affiliation with any of the political parties. They are not a vote-bank in elections. Finally, the Pentecostals are divided into numerous sects.

There are some particular reasons, which compelled the Pentecostals to revisit their reluctance to build up strong connections with political parties in recent times. The Pentecostals in Kerala face the brunt of Hindu hardliners for their more active role in conversion. Certain Hindu political outfits unleashed violence against the pastors of these denominations, which occur sporadically in many parts of Kerala. They also face isolation from the mainstream churches, and they receive no support in times of attacks by the Sangh Parivar. Facing this as a problem, they seek help from the government and political leadership and submit memoranda to the government.[9] At no time, they were able to organise any massive demonstration or public protest. It shows that their ability to protect their believers is also lesser than the established churches in Kerala.

Against this background, the Pentecostals since the early 2000s have been revisiting their prolonged isolation from politics. As an effort in this regard, they have started inviting political leaders and people's representatives to attend their spiritual conventions. Sometimes they invited the political leaders even from the BJP. In the annual convention of World Missionary Evangelism, Raju Abraham, the MLA from Ranni Legislative Assembly constituency who belongs to CPI (M) is a regular invitee. [10]

Another fact, which deserves mention here, is that many of the Pentecostal churches cannot stand alone as a strong contender in pressure group politics due to the lack of economic resources, numerical strength and socio-cultural power. Therefore, there is an attempt on the part of various independent Pentecostal movements to form a collective and become a

[9] To raise a complaint, some Pentecostal leaders and pastors met the then Chief Minister Oommen Chandy. Mr Chandy conveyed them the fact that Pentecostals are not an influential pressure group unlike the case of many other Christian groups. Numerous groups are there among Pentecostals, and that is why they cannot become a single force. He advised them to become a pressure group by uniting all the Pentecostal groups together (Interview with Shaji Alimukku).

[10] This is one of the biggest annual conventions of Dalit Pentecostals held at Kariamplavu near Ranni Town in Pathanamthitta district.

pressure group (Rennymon 2007). Pentecostal Churches led by Dalit pastors are taking the initiative.

Dalit Christians in the Mainstream Political Process

More than the Church (or religion), the caste can be a decisive factor in shaping the involvement of Dalit Christians in Kerala politics. The logic behind this argument is that their socio-economic deprivation and marginality linked with the caste drove many of them to embrace Christianity. Their main problem after conversion is also the caste-based discrimination by the churches and the society. At present, Dalit Christians in central Kerala support several political parties, mainly the CPI (M) and the Indian National Congress since they are the leading political parties in Kerala.[11] They are also members of CPI, BSP, and various Kerala Congress Parties.

Elections: Candidates and Winners

For many of the Dalit Christians, voting is the major way of participation in the political process. Though Dalit Christians are members of various political outfits, the mainstream political parties rarely field them as candidates in the elections. Sometimes, the political parties field Dalit Christians as candidates in elections to local self-government institutions, but rarely in the elections to parliament or legislative assembly. Dalit Hindus' opportunity to contest in the elections is higher than that of Dalit Christians because of reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes. So far, in the history of Kerala, only two Dalit Christians became members of the legislative assembly and nobody to the parliament.

Before the reorganisation of Kerala, in Travancore-Cochin state two Dalit Christians contested the election as the candidates from Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and Congress and became MLAs in the assembly. However, there was no available evidence to show any pressure by their churches on political parties to secure the seats for their members. The Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and Congress considered them as candidates because of some electoral arithmetic went in favour of them. At first, only PSP was willing to give a seat to a Dalit Christian candidate, and it was in the Ettumanoor Legislative Assembly. Later Congress

[11] According to political leaders, social activists, community leaders, and church workers, the majority of the Dalit Christians are with Left political parties. However, some of the people, the researcher met as part of interviews and field visit, are from the Left background, some are from Congress, and others belong to some other political parties. Moreover many have no such an affiliation and preference. It is because of this reason that it is challenging to say that most of the Dalit Christians belong to Left political parties in present Kerala's political context.

Party strongly felt that the PSP would take political benefits out of its link with the Dalit Christians and so it managed to give a seat to a Dalit Christian in Changanassery (John 2016 and Chirakkarode 2000).

Dalit Christians are not enjoying the benefits of any reservation to any political institutions. They are only voters. As we have already seen, Dalit Christians have not become an influential social group, like Syrian Christians, *Ezhavas* or *Nairs*, and so the mainstream political parties need not regard them as a significant factor. In the large-sized electoral constituencies very rarely the Dalit Christians become a critical force. Even though the Dalit Hindus are also facing similar constraints; they are numerically more critical for the political parties than the Dalit Christians. Moreover, reservation to Scheduled Castes is mandatory.

Besides the denial of candidature to Dalit Christians in the elections, political parties rarely consider them in non-elected positions in universities, boards, commissions and corporations. According to a political convention, after their victory in assembly elections, political parties in power nominate persons to such offices mentioned above, by taking into consideration the claims of different communities and caste groups. The researcher during the study period has come across only one Dalit Christians holding such a position.

Some Dalit organisations contend that it is because of the caste prejudices of the mainstream political parties in Kerala their members are not becoming candidates in the elections. It can be one of the many reasons, but this is not the primary reason. Many other lower castes can force the political parties to choose their members as candidates in elections. Therefore, the main reason is that Dalit Christians cannot constitute a vote bank unlike other lower caste and socially backward communities. It results in their weak bargaining power vis-à-vis the political parties in the state. Another point is that when the political parties consider a person as a candidate in a constituency, they give preference to the people from the majority community or a community showing a critical number in that particular constituency. Dalit Christians are much suffering in this regard. Out of the total 140 constituencies of Kerala Legislative Assembly, Dalit Christians have some strength only in one constituency - Kaduthuruthi in Kottayam district.[12] However, even in that constituency, the major political parties have not fielded a Dalit Christian candidate.

[12] Kaduthuruthi Legislative Assembly Constituency in Kottayam district has a good number of Dalit Christians. The numerical strength of Dalit Christians is enough to make political bargaining for getting a Dalit Christian candidate. However, so far the Dalits in this constituency have not taken any step in this regard.

Party Affiliation

As stated earlier, the Dalit Christians are scattered in various political parties. Denominational differences among Churches do matter here even in the case of direct affiliation of Dalit Christians with the political parties. While Pentecostals have insufficient membership in political parties, others are different from this. As we have already seen, Pentecostals consider direct engagement of believers in the political parties as involvement in politics, and therefore it is a deviation to worldly affairs. The Dalit Christians show some regional differences in their preference to political parties. More than following the directions of their churches, the Dalit Christians tend to stand with a political party that is more powerful in their locality. This situation leads to the fragmentation of Dalit Christian voters in elections between different political parties.

In the last two decades since 2000, there is a decrease in membership of Dalit Christians in political parties. This fact is visible more among the supporters of Left political parties.[13] Now, it seems a significant number of Dalit Christian supporters of left parties either shifted their affiliation to parties like BSP or remained as inactive. However, it does not mean that all Dalit Christians were the sympathisers of the Left Parties.

A majority of Dalit Christians may be sympathisers rather than formal members of political parties. In the researcher's interview with them, all Dalit Christian activists, priests, and pastors opine that there was excellent support from the Dalit Christians to the left political parties. However, it is not possible to get any quantitative data from the field regarding Dalit Christians' political affiliation with the left parties. Therefore, it is impossible to say that most of the Dalit Christians in all the regions were with left political parties. However, there were many with the left political parties. The rest of them were with the Congress and Kerala Congress. Many Dalit Christians have an affiliation with Kerala Congress in Pala, Erattupetta and Kaduthuruthi in Kottayam district. The denomination also plays a role in this. Dalit living in these areas are mainly Catholics.[14] Apart from all these, some Dalit Christians have found an interest in the parties like BSP, which stands for Dalit Politics.

---

[13] Providing adequate data in this regard is difficult. Some Dalit movements and organisations have also emerged in Kerala in a later period. It can be assumed from all these that a considerable number of Dalits might have left the communist parties, especially CPI(M).

[14] Interview with P.O. Peter, CC Kunjukochu, James Elavunkal, TJ Abraham and Augustine

Many Dalit Christians are continuing as strong supporters of CPI (M). K. M. John was the branch secretary of the party in Pakkanam for one term and a member of CMS-ACI church in Pulikkunnu. He is an arch defender of the Party. Though John holds a robust Dalit spirit, he even went to the extent of alleging the Dalits for their mistakes in Chengara land struggle. Interestingly, as a firm Christian believer, he says, "There are only two books in this world with no errors; the Bible and the Communist Manifesto" (interview with K. M. John).

Joseph Murikkel of St. James CSI Church in Vakkadu is a member of Kerala Congress (M). He disregards the opinion that Dalit Christians are discriminated in the Church against their caste background. He also says that Kerala Congress is inclusive of Dalit Christians also.

Some are cherishing personal benefits while being the part of any political party. Augustine of Catholic Church in Ramapuram is a member of Indian National Congress. He says, "We should be cautious about ourselves while working in any political parties." It implies that Dalit Christians as members of a political party have to be cautious about their stand and support to their community.

Babu Joseph Pulprayil living in a Dalit Christian habitat in Vakkadu is a BSP worker. He vehemently criticises all other political parties, including the left, for their anti-Dalit attitude. In his opinion, BSP is the only one party, which gives political space to Dalits.

Majority of the Pentecostals are against their church joining hands with political parties. They think that it is like indulging in worldly affairs and thereby it is materialistic. However, some of the Pentecostals show the preference for particular political parties or political ideals. Moreover, many of the Dalit Christian activists from Pentecostal Churches also opine that most of them have sympathy for the left political parties.

However, a general trend that came to the notice of researcher while analysing their response was the growing apathy to political parties. It means that many of them do not have any permanent political relationship with any political parties and they cast their votes according to the circumstances. However, some are very pragmatic and critical in their approach to political parties. For example, Johnson of CMS-ACI church in Anjoottinal, says, "We [Dalit Christians] don't want to be with any political parties permanently and being ideal is not practical, and it is not good for us, and it is nothing but slavery" (interview with Johnson on). Even the supporters and sympathisers of political parties also expressed more or less the same view. Some of the left sympathisers also agreed with Johnson, the Congress supporter. Now

they see party politics as a degenerated affair, even though they support some political parties and vote in elections. Their transition from active party members to sympathisers or apathetic individuals substantiate this point. It affects the left parties more than others because many of those expressed their apathy or opposition to the left parties were their former members or sympathisers.

A few respondents say a political point, standing on the borderline between opportunism and pragmatism. "We (Dalit Christians) have to make use of political parties." Babu from CMS-ACI church in Anjoottinal said this to the researcher. He clarified this based on his personal experience. He had been with CPI (M) for many years, and later he quit the party due to some disagreements with party's local level leadership. The local unit of the party turned against him. Later the local leadership of the Congress Party offered him a house through *Janakeeyasoothranam*[15], and he joined the party. He added that if there any other party comes with any new offers he would join that party also. After telling this, he made his final point in the form of a question and exclamation. "All are using us, and then what is wrong with us to use them" (interview with Babu).

After leaving the formal association with political parties, some of the Dalit Christians became more active in the affairs of churches. K. M. Chacko of CMS-ACI church in Pulikkunnu is such a person. In his youth, he was an active member of organisations affiliated to CPI (M). He decided to quit the party in 1996, and later he fully involved in Church affairs. K. M. Chacko served as secretary of the local parish for two consecutive terms and later elevated to the esteemed position of *kaikkaran*. In the local self-government elections held in 2015, he campaigned for an independent Dalit candidate. However, Chacko supports the policies and programmes of left political parties. Interestingly, he is critical of the leaders of the party. (Interview with K. M. Chacko on).

One of the noted points is that active political party leaders from among the Dalit Christians are very less. There is not even a single state-level leader in any political parties from the community in Kerala. Both CPI (M) and INC have a very less number of influential local level leaders from the community. Their representation in the local level leadership is very less in the Kerala Congress. It is not the case of Dalit Hindus. The group has more state-level leaders in Indian National Congress and the CPI (M). Their weight due to their identity as

[15] *Janakeeyasoothranam* (in Malayalam) or People's Planning is a programme designed by the LDF Government in Kerala (1996-2001) for eradicating poverty and empowerment of people through participatory local development programmes.

Scheduled Castes also helped their better representation in the party organisations and leadership.

P. J. Varghese is a leader of the CPI (M) from Kottayam at the District level. He was elected as the Chairperson of Kottayam Municipality. He is *Pulaya* by caste and a Dalit Catholic. T. P. Thommy is another local level leader of the Party from Kottayam district. He was the secretary of Erumely local committee and member of Kanjirappally area committee for a lengthy period. He is a trade unionist and an office bearer of CITU at the district level. It is true that he is not active in Church affairs and he affirms that he does not belong to any Church. However, he followed Christian rituals in his daughters' marriage, and they got married to grooms from the same sub-caste.

Shins Peter belongs to *Paraya* caste and a member of IPC. By party affiliation, he is with Congress. Peter was the secretary of the Kerala Students' Union (KSU), in Kottayam District, and later became the secretary of District Congress Committee. He is in close contact with state-level leaders of the Congress. He was the chairperson of Dalit Christian Cooperation during the period UDF government (2011-16).

The Left and Dalit Christians

A considerable number of Dalits, irrespective of their religious background, were directly or indirectly associated with the communist party immediately after the formation of the state in 1956. In every part of Kerala, this was true in the case of Dalit Christians though there are some regional variations.

There are historical accounts about the interrelationship between Dalit Christians and the party. Sanal Mohan (2009) writes about some incidents in the 1950s in this regard. He that the Syrian Christians in Kannur (a district in north Kerala) attacked Dalit Christians during the period of communist government because they were communists. The landlords, the Catholic Church and the dominant social groups' caste organisations allied against the Communist government in a liberation struggle. Dalit Christians in the said area stood with the party and faced attacks from the Syrian Christians who were one of the pioneering social groups leading the liberation struggle against the government.

Among the interviewees, some of the relatives of late Vellikkara Chothi recollect some events from the past and say about the active support of Dalit Christians in south Kerala to

Communist party. In the case of central Kerala, many of the interviewees also recollect the narration by their ancestors regarding this (interview with Byju M. Thampi). The communist parties also mentioned some of the Dalit Christians in the epic class struggles by workers and peasants in the 1940s. In the well-acclaimed Punnapra-Vayalar struggle, one of the heroes, 'Kunthakkaran Pathrose' was a Dalit Christian. He has an esteemed place in the party's memoirs and among its followers in the region.

It is mainly the caste related socio-economic marginality of Dalits prompted them to join or cooperate with the communist party. The party was able to attract the Dalit Christians because of their deprived socio-economic conditions. The party at that time stood firmly against the caste practices that were deep-rooted in the social system. The first ministry of the State led by the Communist Party brought some legislation to address the landlessness and labour problem, and the Dalits were among the anticipated groups of beneficiaries. Many of the Dalits became party members, and this process continued for three or four decades. There was no separate political party for Dalits in Kerala, and even now, such parties are not very strong. In such a context, many of the Dalit Christians might have regarded the left parties as more responsive to their economic demands. However, from the 1980s and 90s onwards the situation began to change. The Dalits' dispersion in different political parties became a reality. The left could claim only a section of the Dalit Christians. Also, the CPI (M) and CPI were reluctant or ambivalent in their approach towards Dalit Christians and their social identity. The party's categorisation of the group as a part of the working class became less appealing to them. Many of the new generations of Dalit Christians are suffering from continued caste-discrimination. Therefore, like Dalits at large, the Dalit Christians also started drifting away from left parties.

After some significant struggles by the Dalit Christians since 1990s, the CPI (M) started attending their case more carefully. In January 2011, CPI (M) organised a convention in Kottayam for Dalit Christians in which the party declared its support to their struggle for socio-political rights. Pinarayi Vijayan, state secretary of CPI (M) inaugurated the meeting. The Hindu reports:

> "Communist Party of India (Marxist) State secretary Pinarayi Vijayan has called for initiating measures for solving the problems faced by the Dalit Christian community who despite being at the receiving end of social and economic backwardness on account of being Dalits have found themselves without any social or economic support for being Christians […] Mr. Vijayan pointed out that a section of the Dalit community had converted to Christianity on the basis of the ideals propounded by

> missionaries as they were fed up with the untouchability practised in the Hindu society at an earlier period. While they could get over the problem of untouchability, their social backwardness continued as the Christians who had earlier converted from 'Savarna' communities continued to discriminate against them, he said. "While they are Christians in terms of religion, they remain Dalits socially," Mr. Vijayan said. Since the reservation provisions in the Constitution keep them out of the quota net, they find themselves without any support system to come out of their social and economic backwardness. It is proved by their abysmal lack of representation in the administrative system and their continued failure to come out of the economic backwardness, he said. The CPI(M) leader called for a two-pronged strategy to change the plight of the Dalit Christians; one in which a series of remedial and social welfare measures which could be initiated without delay, and two, commencement of a comprehensive discussion with all stakeholders for expanding the reservation net so that the Dalit Christians could also be included in it. The measures to enhance their material conditions include providing land and shelter for the landless and the homeless under special schemes. Programmes for enhancing their social status, like training programmes for those who appear in competitive examinations, schemes to meet the expenses for higher education, an extension of loans at subsidised rates for entrepreneurs and those engage in self-employment schemes, etc., he said. The Dalit Christian community enjoys a nominal reservation of one percent now. To enhance the benefits under the reservation system, a discussion should be initiated among all concerned so that a solution could be reached through consensus, he added." (The Hindu, 03-02-2011)

The CPI (M) has also made its stand clear in favour of Ranganatha Mishra Commission Report, which recommended for reservation to the Dalits belonging to all the minority religions. In the State Conference of CPI (M) held in Thiruvananthapuram and the Party Congress in Kozhikode, the party affirmed its support to the recommendation of the commission. The 20th Party Congress in Kozhikkode held in 2012 resolved in favour of implementation of the recommendations. Excerpts of the party's resolution under the title 'For Implementation of the Ranganath Mishra Commission Report' states this explicitly as follows.

> "The 20th Congress of the CPI(M) protests against the deliberate delay on the part of the Central Government to initiate steps for the implementation of the Ranganath Mishra Commission report. While there are several positive recommendations for the advance of the status of minorities, this Party Congress draws attention specifically to two of the recommendations. The first is for reservation of jobs for Muslims on the grounds of the social and economic backwardness of the vast majority of the community. It has recommended 10% of reservation in jobs and education for backward sections of the Muslim minority and 5% for other minorities. This will require a law to end the present limitation of 50 percent on the total reservations arbitrarily imposed by the Supreme Court […] The second significant recommendation of the Commission is to include Muslim and Christian Dalits in the Scheduled Caste lists. The 1950 Presidential Order and the further amendments to it were discriminatory against Scheduled Castes who had converted to either Islam or Christianity while recognising the rights of those who had converted to Buddhism or Sikhism. The Ranganath Mishra Commission has sought to make it religion neutral and recommended the amendment to the Order to end this injustice […] It also demands inclusion of Dalit Christians and Muslims in the SC list. The percentage of

> reservation for SCs must be suitably increased to include these sections […] The 20th Party Congress calls on all Party units to actively champion the cause of the minorities against discrimination and for equal rights for employment and education as recommended by the Ranganath Mishra Commission" (CPI(M) 2012).

Independent Political Assertion by Dalit Christians

The engagement of Dalit Christians in the political process is evident from their limited participation in the political system and weak influence on political parties, which this chapter has discussed in detail. By realising the small political space for Dalit Christians within the major political parties and their limitations and reluctance to pay due to recognition to their social identity and group-based demands, sections of Dalit Christians went with new organisations, which regard their independent political assertion more seriously.

Many of the Dalit Christians have developed an apathy regarding the major political parties in Kerala, which is a driving force for them to think about the new way. The number of Dalit Christians began to decrease even in the communist parties since the 1990s. Some of them joined other political parties, and the rest remain without any affiliation to any political party. The declining interest and the rift with political parties drive them to form and strengthen caste-community organisations. For many of them, caste is becoming a central issue in channelising their mode of political assertion.

There was a significant socio-economic change in Kerala in the 1980s and 90s. Many of the Dalits were gradually moving out of traditional occupations, though many of them continue to record their occupation as agricultural labourers. It hardly means that the change of occupation helps them to overcome caste based socio-economic deprivations and achieve social and economic mobility. The caste also began to appear in some new forms in the new socio-economic system different from caste as ritual. It is this new form of caste, in a changed context, plays a different role in making a new identity for Dalit Christians. It facilitated the possibility of a new Dalit Christian politics. They redefine their community as unique inside the churches. The caste-based discrimination and the obstacles raised by Syrian Christians against their aspirations in the churches became a valid reason for their protest. The churches fail to support Dalit Christians. In this context, the Dalit Christians are becoming more serious about the necessity of forums and organisations at their initiative, for which their religious and caste identity become a base.

Dalit Christians are getting organised without the support of any external agency. Some Dalit Christian movements have emerged quite independently from the church authorities. Many of such new organisations incorporated Dalit Christians as members regardless of their caste background, Church or denominations. Since the 1950s onwards, the attempts in this regard were visible. However, the Church had a disciplinary role vis-à-vis them. Since the 1980s and 1990s, there is a proliferation of independent movements and organisations among the Dalit Christians in Kerala.

Dalit Christians' engagement with the society and politics hardly confines to activism and mobilisation. It has an intellectual dimension also. Their religious and social life as Christians of a church/denomination is the epicentre of both social activism and intellectual encounter. In the case of Dalit Christians, unlike the case of Dalit Hindus, intellectual encounters are primarily with their religious institutions. The main reason behind this is that they face caste discrimination within the Church. This kind of discrimination mediated through a religious institution is not applicable to the life of Dalit Hindus. Therefore, the Dalit Hindus can bypass their religion in their engagement as a social group. As discussed in the last Chapter, Dalit Christians' experience of caste-based discrimination in society has a constant relation to the caste discrimination in Church. Therefore, Dalit Christians' fight against the caste discrimination is always twofold. Interestingly it affirms their religious identity along with caste as a marker of the group. Unlike Dalit Hindus, they cannot quickly strip their religion.

The efforts made by Dalit Christians in fighting against caste discrimination within the Church and their search for equal status in the society receives the negligible attention of the political parties and the civil society. Their religious institutions are cloistering their issues from the reach and intervention of political parties. The churches have the constitutional right to safeguard their institutional life from any political intervention by the state. Notwithstanding this, when the most prominent churches and the mainstream political parties interact with each other, their prime concern is to protect the interest of the dominant social groups and classes within the churches. The churches using the rules and conventions confine the Dalit Christians within its authority. Dalit Hindus, in Kerala, hardly face an institutionalised religion or a church in their life as formal apparatuses to prevent their socio-political activities.

The pattern of the socio-political interference by Dalit Christians is affected by the confinement strategies of the churches. The constitution, which is denying them an identity

independent from their religion, is also responsible for their detention within the churches. Once they decide to leave the church, their life is not becoming more meaningful than before. The way out is reconversion to gain the SC status, but it may be against their freedom of religion. Therefore, the Dalit Christians' first and foremost struggle is against the Church in matters relating to caste discrimination.[16] Most of the independent Dalit Christian movements are primarily the exemplars of their assertion in the church and religion. Their prime activism concerning the inter-group inequality within the church might have affected their degree of presence in the general society or at least delayed it. Therefore, their efforts to join the broader Dalit platform become an important area of analysis. The following sections give a detailed account of major Dalit Christian movements in Kerala.

Major Dalit Christian Organisations

Backward Converted Christian Federation (BCCF) is the first Dalit Christian organisation in the post-independent Kerala common for all Dalit Christians, which was fighting for the legal rights of Dalit Christians. The organisation was formed on 24th March 1952 in Kottayam under the leadership of V. D. John (Chirakkarodu 2000: 197). The organisation was exclusively for Dalit Christians.[17] Before this organisation there were three Dalit Christian organisations; 1) Cheramar Christian Association, 2) Sambavar Christian Association, and 3) Kurvar Christian Maha Sabha functioning among *Pulayas*, *Parayas*, and *Kuravas*

[16] About the limitations of Christianity Paul Chirakkarodu, the writer of *Dalith Kraisthavar Keralathil* (Dalit Christians in Kerala), said the following.

> "The Christianity is supposed to unite Dalit Christians in a sacred manner by surpassing the caste and sub-caste divisions. They are under the rules of caste and Christianity simultaneously since they are not free from traditional caste influence and not abandoning caste customs while representing Christianity. In other words, the Christianity of Dalit Christians is imperfect due to the existence of caste-related customs, which are pagan in nature, among them" (Chirakkarodu 2000: 195).

He says about the case of Dalit Christians living in Kerala in the 1950s. Decades after his writings, the situation has changed a lot. However, his observations about some other aspects of the life of Dalit Christians are still very relevant. For example, he says:

> "More clearly, the Dalit Christians who are the members of the Church are still compelled to say in their minds that they are *Pulayas*, *Parayas* and *Kuravas*. Christianity could not enable them to come out of this problem" (Chirakkarodu 2000: 195-96).

It means that Christianity reproduces their marginality and discriminate them against their caste background. It is this discrimination and the marginality within the Church and the society that led them to form independent movements and organisations.

[17] The term 'Dalit' had not been in prevalence in Kerala during that period among them. "Backward converted Christains" is referring to the Dalit Christians (See V. D. John 2014 and Chirakkarodu 2000).

respectively. BCCF was formed combing all these three organisations together (John 2014: 36).[18]

The Dalit Christian leaders at that period were willing to co-operate with Dalit Hindu organisations also. Pampady John Joseph was a Dalit Christian leader worked for uplifting both Christian *Pulayas* and Hindu *Pulyas*. V. D. John also took his efforts seeking the welfare of both Christian and Hindu Dalits (see Chentharassery 1989, Chirakkarode 2000, and Jacob 1988: 48-69 for more details in this regard).

BCCF was mainly interested in dealing with the problems of Dalit Christians outside the Church, mainly in society. V. D. John and other founding leaders of the organisation took some efforts to make Dalit Christians aware of their political rights (Chirakkarodu 2000: 197-98). BCCF intended to incorporate Dalit Christians from all denominations but almost all its leaders were from CSI. While the Church of God (Full Gospel) in India was facing a conflict between Syrian Christians and Dalits, the Dalit Christians from the Church had approached BCCF for its support. The BCCF stood with them (George 2018). The organisation did not continue in strength after the demise of its founding leaders.

Another significant Dalit Christain platform, which came into being on a later period, is the Council for Dalit Christians (CDC). It is the state unit of National Council for Dalit Christians (NCDC) in India. This organisation is still functioning in Kerala. CDS also focuses on the political rights of Dalit Christians of various denominations. However, the CDC mobilises the Dalit Christians with their demands against the state, not the churches.

Dalit Catholic Mahajana Sabha (DCMS) is an organisation of Dalit Christians of the three major Catholic churches. DCMS take up the issues of Dalit Catholics within the churches also. The DCMS had its beginning in 1955 as *Avasha Catholic Mahajana Sabha* (ACMS) and renamed later as *Harijan Catholic Mahajana Sabha* (HCMS). It adopted the present name in 1993.[19] The Catholic Church was the force behind the creation of DCMS, and it is still functioning under the auspices of the church. It is not an entirely autonomous body of Dalit Christians, and the rules of DCMS prevent its members from becoming participants in other Dalit Christian organisations.

[18] Earlier, some other movements were also functioning in Travancore for Dalit Christians. Pampady John Joseph formed a movement called Cheramar Karayogam in 1920 (see Jacob 1988: 48-69 for more details about such movements and the activities).
[19] http://www.dcmspalai.com/history.php retrieved on 16-06-15.

The organisations founded by the believers of Protestant Churches have a more flexible attitude regarding the believers' overlapping membership in the church and Dalit organisations. Many of their organisations are autonomous from their churches, and the members are free to join and work with any other Dalit Christian organisations, at their will. They have also campaigned sometimes against the official decisions of the Church.

Contrary to organisations of Protestant Christians, the DCMS though it has a history of hard bargaining with the Church, it never went against the final decision their Churches. Its line of activities, strategies, policies, and programmes was mostly in agreement with the larger interest of the Church. In other words, DCMS should get the prior approval of the Church for its every activity. While planning its activities and strategies and formulating the policies and programmes, DCMS used to consult with the Church authority.

While the Dalit Christian movements led by Protestants are remaining active campaigners for Dalit Christians, the case of Pentecostals is again different. It is the command of theology instead of the dictates of the church matters in their members' lesser involvement in social and political organisations.

Even though the Dalits of Catholic and many Protestant churches have founded organisations to address the questions of Dalit Christians, Pentecostals known for their reluctance also showed some changes later. Now there are social, and community activists from these churches and even some members are becoming active in political parties. They join hands with social activists for the cause of Dalit Christians and other Dalits. For example, George V J, convenor of National Council for Dalit Christians (NCDC) and a veteran leader of Council for Dalit Christians (CDC), which is the state-wing of NCDC, is a member of IPC. Church of God in India (Full Gospel Kerala Region)'s former overseer Sunny Varkey is in support of addressing Dalit Christian issues and joining other Dalit Christian activists and Church leaders for the cause of Dalit Christians. He says that most of the pastors and the members of his Church do oppose him for his advocacy for Dalit Christians. He is willing to cooperate with any other Dalit Christian organisation for the cause of Dalits. He has a good relationship with many of the Dalit Christian activists and the pastors and priests who belong to Dalit Christian communities from other churches including Episcopal Churches, for example, CSI-ACI (Interview with Sunny Varkey).

M. Stephen, a writer on Dalit Christian and theological issues, is also a Pentecostal believer who is teaching at Faith Theological Seminary, Manakkala near Adoor in Pathanamthitta district of Kerala. He observes that Pentecostals seem averse to address socio-political issues (Stephen 2002).[20]

Political leaders from the Pentecostal churches also lend their support to the independent assertion by the Dalit Christians. For example, Shins Peter, a member from IPC, is a political party leader of Congress. He says that caste discrimination is high in Pentecostal circles, especially in IPC, by pointing out the case of Kanom centre, an administrative region of the Church, which was formed specifically for Dalit Christians by the Church leadership due to the pressure by Syrian Christians. Peter says that Dalit Christians are still a marginalised community, and their problems have to be addressed by themselves. He is one of the key figures who took part in the formation of Cherama Sambava Development Society (CSDS), though at present he does not have any connection with the organisation. He says that being a political leader, he stands not only for the cause of Dalit Christians but all groups of Dalits also (interview with Shins Peter). Jaise Pandanad, a pastor from the Church of God in India (Kerala State) and a famous writer on Dalit and Pentecostal issues and a preacher, is very critical about the Syrian Pentecostals' claim for Brahman tradition. He says that Pentecostalism is a new life and experience and mixing it with upper caste claim is not welcoming (interview with Jaise Pandanadu).

The Pentecostal churches keep themselves away from the social issues, but it does not mean that their members are not under the influence of the dominant social values. Many of their practices and preferences in their life are contradictory to their teachings of Bible. It means that even though the Pentecostals claim that they follow life according to Biblical teaching, they cannot come out of the traditional social values and customs even in their religious life. The social life of Dalit Pentecostals and their Pentecostal theology are contradictory to each other. However, a large number of the respondents choose a practical socio-religious life by separating the two rather than solving the contradiction.

Unity/Disunity among Dalit Christian Organisations

Even though there are some efforts by the leaders of various Churches and the Dalit Christian activists to establish a joint organisation to take up the problems of Dalit Christians, the

[20] M. Stephen has extensively written on Dalit Christian issues.

trends of disunity are also very much evident. The denominational, theological, caste and sub-caste differences make them heterogeneous. Some Churches are always cautious to maintain denominational interests while forming organisations for the cause of Dalit Christians and co-operating with other denominations and organisations. Dalit Catholica Mahajana Sabha (DCMS) is an organisation exclusively for Dalit Catholics, though it cooperates with CDC for the common cause of Dalit Christians.

According to the conventional Pentecostal interpretation of Bible and theology, socio-political engagement is tantamount to satisfy the 'worldly needs', and most of the collaboration necessary in such engagement with non-believers and believers from other religions and denominations leads its followers to mental corruption and spiritual loss. That is why they show some reluctance to form Dalit Christian organisations and collaboration with the emerging ones. Some Churches like CMS-ACI does not like using the term 'Dalit' for the ex-untouchable castes. The CMS Church leadership insists on using the terms 'converted Christians' for 'Dalit Christians'. Therefore, the Church is disinterested in cooperating with all those movements, which use the term 'Dalit'. Majority of Dalit Christians in Kerala come under two castes namely *Pulayas (Cheramas)* and *Parayas (Sambavas),* and there are other castes like *Siddhanar (Kuravar),* and *Aiyyanavas*. Among Pulayas, *Kizhakka* (Eastern) *Pulayas* and *Padinjara* (Western) *Pulayas* are there. These kinds of caste differences also severely affect the unity of Dalit Christians and their fight for social and political rights.

Dalit Christian Movements and Dalit Christian Struggles

In the post-independence period, only very rarely the Dalit Christians have engaged in any significant struggles against the government or public policies in Kerala. Since they were not an influential social group, their demands can carry little weight in the political system. The central demand of their struggles in the past was regarding the inclusion of Dalit Christians within the SC category. They were continually raising the demand for extension of all rights including reservation available to the Scheduled Castes to Dalit Christians. The agitation led by V. D. John under the banner of BCCF in the 1950s is one of the significant struggles they have ever organised. In the 1960s they organised peaceful protests, dharnas and demonstrations as part of their struggle for educational assistance to the Dalit Christian students and their inclusion in the Scheduled Caste.

NCDC organise a protest in Delhi in every year since 2006 demanding SC status to Dalit Christians. NCDC says that even though India is a secular country, its constitution denies SC status to Dalit Christians based on religion. It is discrimination. NCDC, adding to this, says that in a secular country like India everyone has the right to choose one's religion. Viewed against this, the denial of one's right for protection against caste discrimination is an injustice. Various print and online media highlight this point raised by the Council. The NCDC observe August 10 as Black Day. It was the date of the Presidential Order of 1950, which denied Scheduled Caste status to Dalit Christians.

The researcher participated in a protest organised by the NCDC in Delhi in 2011. One of the significant demands was equal rights for Dalit Christians on par with the Scheduled Castes. The march started from Ramlila ground and ended in front of the Parliament. After the march, the participants assembled in Jantar Mantar and sat in the *dharna*. The *dharna* continued till late evening. Even though the NCDC invited to many political leaders, only D. Raja of CPI participated and explained his party's stand. Dalit Christians from across the country participated in the protest. From Kerala V. J. George, the national convenor of NCDC spoke to the participants in Jantar Mantar. Father John Areekkal (former Director of DCMS), Father Sunil Raj Philip (Chairman of National Council of Churches in India), the state-level leaders of CDC and DCMS and many pastors and priests participated in the protest. Dalit Muslims also joined hands with the Dalit Christians.

In Kerala, the CDC (the state unit of NCDC) in co-operation with DCMS also organised protest march and demonstration in the state's capital. In every year, they mobilise Dalit Christians from different denominations in a march to Governor's residence in Thiruvananthapuram followed by a gathering in public ground. The researcher participated in a protest in 2010. People from various denominations, including Pentecostal Churches, joined the march. Though people from many denominations came for the march, officially many denominations, for example, CMS-ACI and many other Pentecostal Churches were not the members of CDC. Though some Churches were not officially part of CDC, they can never prevent their members from participation in such programmes. In the case of some Pentecostal Churches, its leadership was entirely against it, but the believers did not care about the official opinion of their churches. Interestingly, some Pentecostal pastors also attended the protest.

The Hindu reports that in December 2017 thousands of Dalit Christians took out a rally organised by CDC demanding 5% reservation in Central government jobs and 4% in states. The protestors also demanded 10% quota for Dalit Christian students in higher educational institutions. The rally, organised by the Council of Dalit Christians, began from the Museum junction and concluded at the Secretariat. "This is not merely a community issue, but a church issue as 95% of Indian Christians are Dalits", Church of South India Kollam-Kottarakara (a Dalit Christian majority diocese) Bishop Oommen George (but the bishop belong to Syrian Christians) said. Thomas K Oommen, the Moderator of CSI and the bishop of CSI Madhya Kerala Diocese, said discrimination of people in affirmative action based on their religion was a violation of the Constitution. Representatives of Council of Dalit Christians and Church of South India later met Pinarayi Vijayan, the Chief Minister and submitted a memorandum of their demands. The representatives said the Chief Minister had agreed to consider their demands (The Hindu, December 17, 2017).

Apart from these larger forums mentioned above, there are also some churches, individuals and activists in smaller groups working hard for the cause of Dalit Christians.

Individuals, Independent Churches and Smaller Groups

On the problems of Dalit Christians, some of the Dalit Churches like CMS-ACI hold an independent viewpoint different from many Dalit Christian organisations and other churches. The church mobilised the believers for public demonstrations for the cause of Dalits. On 4th May 2010, the CMS Anglican Church conducted a rally (Rally for the Declaration of Dalit Christian Rights) in Kottayam town to show its strength. About five thousand people participated in this rally. The number was huge given the role of a single Dalit church in this regard. This kind of a big rally organised by any single Dalit Church was the first time in the history of Kerala. In the public meeting after the rally, Archbishop Stephen Vattappara made a declaration of Dalit Christian rights. In his speech of declaration, he affirmed support to all Dalit Christians in their struggle for rights. The message of his speech manifested the CMS-ACI's regard for all Dalits irrespective of their religion and caste. At the same time, the CMS-ACI's pledge for the unity of all Dalit Christians is not corresponding the hesitation of the church to be the part of a joint organisation or movement for all Dalit Christians. Some Church members also alleged that the activism mainly serves the personal political interest of the Bishop. Regardless, after this event, the CPI (M) leadership has begun to consider the case of Dalit Christians more seriously.

Without being part of any organisations such as CDC and DCMS, some Dalit Christian activists are working in a more individual capacity. Some others make a small group and engage in social action. Some took the initiative to organise some provisional movements with specific purposes. Therefore, some of the initiatives by individuals and small intellectual groups are equally important and vibrant. CSI-MKD for Social Justice is such a movement.

Many of the individuals taking up the cause of Dalit Christians are critical about many of the Dalit Christian collectives and their limitations. For example, Shibi Peter, one of the independent activist hold a sharp criticism against the leadership of CDC and DCMS and their public demonstrations. He says that such movements are functioning under the patronage of the Churches. Though CDC is not functioning under a particular Church, it acts as a buffer zone between the Church and Dalits and dilutes the radicalism of Dalit Christians. In his view, small groups and independent activists can create an autonomous space for Dalit Christians in church and take up many diverse issues rather than the usual topics. To substantiate this, he cited one of the seminars that he organised in July 2016, in Thiruvalla as an example. The researcher was a participant of the seminar.[21]

Differences among Dalit Christian Movements

There are differences between the Dalit Christian movements which are independent and others which are functioning under the auspices of the Church or keep in touch with the Church. The movements which are independent have broader aims and interests. The earlier movements like BCCF were independent, and they had worked in cooperation with other Dalit movements. At present, the individual and group efforts outside the formal movements also show wider objectives. Apart from this, they fight the caste discrimination by the Church also. Though in early period reservation was one of their main demands, at present the efforts in this kind do not focus on reservation issues. Some of the activists are not at all focusing on reservation issues. However, the movement which has the link with the Church focus on SC status and another quota system for Dalit Christians. They cannot raise their voice against Church. They are not interested in cooperating with Dalit movements with more substantial interests cutting across the barrier of sub-caste differences and religion.

[21] It was a three-day colloquium on Protestant Mission and Multiple Social Locations held in 2016 July from 15 -17, in Eco-Spirituality Centre, Othara, Thiruvalla organised by Socio-Economic Development Service (SEDS) In association with Interuniversity Centre for Social Science Research and Extension- MG University, TSCS and Dynamic Action.

Sunil Koyilerian, former chairman of CDCYM (Council for Dalit Christians Youth Movement) and a Dalit activist, says that he is willing to work in cooperation with all other Dalit movements and he is interested in working towards building a Dalit Bahujan movement. However, the leadership opposes his move towards this end (Interview with Sunil Koyilerian). Simon V. S., a member of the CDCYM, says that a leader of CDC advised him not to be the part of the movements like CSDS. Therefore it can be assumed that CDC leadership is not much interested in cooperating with other Dalit movements.

Dalit Christians, Dalit Hindus and Dalit Organisations

The divisions in the relationship between Dalit Christians and Dalit Hindus is primarily due to the attachment of each group towards the distinctive religious institutions and the religious way of life. The caste organisations and the churches also consolidate this division.

There are four types of movements or organisations among the Dalits in Kerala.

The **first** one is for particular caste groups of Dalit Hindus. For example, KPMS and KSS. Only Hindu *Pulaya*s will be accommodated in KPMS and Hindu *Paraya*s in KSS.

The **second** type is also for a particular caste, but it cuts across the barrier of religion. For example, AKCMS (All Kerala Cheramar Maha Sabha), which is an organisation for Pulayas from both Hindu and Christian religions. CSDS (Cherama Sambava Development Society) is also an example of this type of organisation, which is giving membership to people from *Pulaya* and *Paraya* castes from the two religions.

The **third** type is the organisations for different Dalit caste groups, but membership is only for Dalit Christians. For example CDC, where Dalit Christians irrespective of their caste background are the members.

The **fourth** one is for all Dalits cutting across the barriers of religion and caste among Dalits. For example, in KDP (Kerala Dalit Panthers) all Dalits can become members. However, regarding the numerical strength of members, the KDP is the weaker than many other sub-group organisations of Dalits.

In the first one, Dalit Christians cannot become members since KPMS, and KSS only accommodate Hindus. In the second type, Dalit Christians from a particular caste group can only become members along with Dalit Hindus from the same caste group. In AKCMS, both

Hindu and Christian Pulayas have accommodation, but not for the members of other castes. In the third, all Dalit Christians can become members irrespective of caste and denominational differences, but not the Dalit Hindus. In the fourth type of organisations, all Dalit Christians are admitted and all Dalit Hindus.

Much like caste as a criterion of membership, the preference to religion by many of the organisations is also a problem. However, their organisations particular about the significance of religious affiliation of a Dalit in membership hardly see the reality of their life world. Several Dalit families have people from both the religions. Therefore, the family relations of Dalits is an essential site in which the religious divisions are more moderate and blurred. Conversion of Dalits to Christianity in Kerala was gradual and more piecemeal. Therefore, many of them have close or distant family relatives following Hindu religion. It is difficult to find out a Dalit Christian family in Kerala, which does not have at least a single close/distant relative from the Dalit Hindu background. In some cases even within a single family itself, the siblings may follow two religions. In such cases, both of them can have only a moderate attitude towards religion and its directions regarding the scope of social relations. However, here also Dalit Christians sometimes seem to be more attached to the Church and Christianity than the Hindu family member is towards his/her religion. It is more evident among the Pentecostals than others. For many Dalit Hindu families, their religion is not an impediment to ally with their relatives following Christianity. Some of them are neutral in religious matters, or they may adopt elements of faith from both Christianity and Hinduism.

In central Kerala, many of the Dalit Hindu families have a Christian past. Many might have moved back and forth between Christianity and Hinduism. In some localities in Kottayam and Pathanamthitta districts, a large number of Dalits reconverted to Hinduism, and now they are under SC category. Interestingly after reconversion, there are many Dalits following Christian faith and practices. It is also a reason for Dalits to preserve their religious faith and affiliation in a more flexible form. As mentioned earlier, marriage between families of Dalit Christians and Dalit Hindus is also possible. The family-wise connections between the Dalits of two religions come in handy for the organisations such as CSDS to persuade them for unity. Many Dalits also gradually moved in this direction. It shows that religion is less a hindrance than caste and sub-caste differences for uniting Dalits.

Dalit Christian and Dalit Hindus: The Conflicts and Cooperation

Dalit Hindus are the Scheduled Castes, while the Dalit Christians are not. The demand by Dalit Christians for their inclusion within the same constitutional category (SC) faces stiff resistance from the organisations of Dalit Hindus. However, the hostility found at the level of their organisations hardly developed as a rivalry between the two groups. So far, the two have not engaged in any large-scale mobilisation for a community centred confrontation. Apart from the question of reservation, other economic benefits available to the Scheduled Castes from the welfare programmes of the government also make their situation different from Dalit Christians. Therefore, the viewpoints and the propaganda of Dalit Hindu organisations are worth for analysis. The KPMS is a case in point.

The support from KPMS for reservation to Dalit Christians is conditional. It argues for an increase in the share of the reservation for SC before including the Christian Dalits in this category.[22] It means that the inclusion of Dalit Christians in the category of SC should not affect the existing quota of Dalit Hindus. Some of the leaders of KPMS used to say that they are not against the inclusion of Dalit Christians within SC, and they only oppose the present plan for the extension of Scheduled Caste status to Dalit Christians without increasing the quota of reservation for the SCs. Many other caste organisations of Hindu Dalits also held the same view.

However, the caste organisation of Hindu *Pulayas* hardly maintained the same stand. Recently, the KPMS organised agitations against the extension of SC status and reservation

[22] T. V. Babu, the leader of one of the two splinter groups of KPMS, says, "we are worried about Justice Ranganatha Misra Commission Report. The report says that the reservation for Dalit Christians has to be given out of the proportion of reservation given to us. If they want to be given reservation, it should be given separately. We welcome BJP's stand which opposes giving reservation to Dalit Christians." T. V. Babu said this at the occasion of centenary celebrations of *Kayal Sammelanam* (a Pulaya meeting held 100 years back) held in Kochi. (S. Kalesh, 'Kayal Sammelanathe Kaavi Uduppikkumpol', Samakalika Malayalam Varika, February 28, 2014, http://malayalamvaarika.com/inside.asp). The Hindu (Thiruvananthapuram, October 4, 2010) reports that "The Kerala Pulayar Mahasabha (KPMS), led by T.V. Babu and N.K. Neelakantan has come out strongly against the recommendation made by the Ranganath Mishra commission to include converted Christian and Muslim Dalits on the Scheduled Caste list […]Mr. Babu and Mr Neelakantan said reservation continued to be a major issue for the Scheduled Castes, the weakest community even after 60 years of the Constitution, which provided them special privileges and reservation for them, came into being […] The commission's recommendation, if implemented, would dislodge the foundation stone of reservation, which was to uplift the weakest sections of society that had suffered centuries of exploitation and untouchability […] They said the KPMS was now attempting to chart an independent course of action to ensure that the Scheduled Castes, as defined by the Constitution, fully enjoyed the benefits of reservation […] If converted communities needed a helping hand, separate reservation could be made for them…."
http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-kerala/KPMS-sees-move-to-tinker-with-quota/article15768328.ece (retrieved on 28/01/2018)

to Dalit Christians.[23] Sections of leaders of KPMS are gaining the support of Hindu outfits in the state such as *Hindu Aikya Vedi* in this matter.[24] KPMS has two factions led by T. V. Babu and Punnala Sreekumar. T. V. Babu moved closer to Sangh Parivar. These churnings show that an alliance between the KPMS and Dalit Christians for a common cause is becoming increasingly difficult.

Apart from the organisations based on caste, there are many other types of organisations founded by the Dalits in Kerala. Their approach to this problem is also worth for an analysis.

In 1984, Kerala Harijan Federation (KHF) organised a protest demonstration in Thiruvananthapuram demanding more socio-political rights for Dalit Christians. Their demand was the provision of all the benefits, which are available to the Scheduled Castes to Dalit Christians. Apart from that, the group demanded a share in Church's resources. In the agitation, both Dalit Christians and Dalit Hindus participated. Kallara Sukumaran was the principal organiser of the agitation. He joined hands with Dalit Christian leaders like V. D. John and Paul Chirakkarode for protecting the rights of Dalit Christians (Jayakukumar 2000: 67-72).

IDF (Indian Dalit Federation) is an organisation addressing all Dalits in the state irrespective of their caste and religious background. It has organised many meetings across Kerala on Dalit Christians' issues and demand for conferring the SC status. The researcher also participated in one of its meetings.[25] P. Ramabhadran (the State leader of IDF) inaugurated the meeting chaired by Bishop Geevarghese Mar Coorilos (Metropolitan, Niranam Diocese of Jacobite Syrian Christian Church). Father John Areekkal (priest in Sacred Heart Malankara Catholic Church, Adoor and patron of DCMS) delivered the keynote speech. The notice for

[23] The Hindu (Thiruvananthapuram, October 4, 2010) reports that "The Kerala Pulayar Mahasabha (KPMS), led by T.V. Babu and N.K. Neelakantan has come out strongly against the recommendation made by the Ranganath Mishra Commission to include converted Christian and Muslim Dalits on the Scheduled Caste list. […] They organized a vehicle procession from Thrissur on September 15 to highlight the demand culminated in a rally and a meeting at Thiruvananthapuram
http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-kerala/KPMS-sees-move-to-tinker-with-quota/article15768328.ece (retrieved on 28/01/2018)

[24] In 2014, KPMS invited Mr. Narendra Modi (before he became the prime minister) to the centenary celebrations of *Kayal Sammelanam* (in commemoration of a Pulaya meeting held 100 years back in Kerala against caste discrimination) in Kochi, and he delivered a speech (S. Kalesh, 'Kayal Sammelanathe Kaavi Uduppikkumpol', Samakalika Malayalam Varika, February 28, 2014, http://malayalamvaarika.com/inside.asp). One of the meetings held Thiruvananthapuram by KPMS against the reservation of Dalit Christians was inaugurated by O. Rajagopal, Bharatiya Janata Party leader and MLA. C.N. Chandran (CPI) and Kadakampally Surendran (CPI(M)) also attended the meeting.
http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-kerala/KPMS-sees-move-to-tinker-with-quota/article15768328.ece (retrieved on 28/01/2018)

[25] Meeting organised by the IDF at Adoor, Pathanamthitta District, on 12-03-2015

the meeting explicitly stated that there would be a discussion on the Dalit Christians' rights. Nevertheless, only a less number of people attended the meeting because the organisations like IDF have a small rank-and-file compared to the caste organisations like KPMS and KSS.

Only twenty-one people attended the meeting, and there was a Pentecostal pastor among the four on the Dias. The IDF's leader assured that the organisation would conduct similar meetings across the state in future. Since a large number of leaders from Hindu Dalit background IDF is interested in expanding its reach among the Dalit Christians. P. Ramabhadran's inaugural speech also indicated this well. IDF and its leaders are in support of giving SC status to Dalit Christians.[26] Some of the Dalit Christians are active members of this organisation. IDF aims at mobilisation of Dalits cutting across castes, sub-castes and religions.

A state-level discussion on Ranganatha Mishra Commission Report on Religious and Lingustic Minorities (2007) held at Kottayam Public Library Auditorium on 12th June 2010, was another event. After a welcome speech by M. B. Manoj (Dalit writer, poet and an activist, and teaching in University of Calicut), Sunny M. Kapikkadu (Dalit writer and activist) introduced the topic. The discussants were from various organisations of Dalits, Adivasis and religious minorities. The representatives of Dalit students' organisations and Dalit women's movements also participated in the meeting and the discussion. As the organisers declared, the meeting was seeking reconciliation between different groups, organisations and individuals on the issue of reservation for Dalit Christians. At the same time, the organisers of the meeting were in favour of giving SC status to Dalit Christians. Their aim was also to restrain the opposition on the part of Hindu Dalits to reservation for Dalit Christians. At the meeting, some people openly took their stand against the Report. According to them, the Dalit Christians are not eligible for the SC status. Mostly, at the meeting, the discussions converged in favour of the interest of Dalit Christians regarding reservation and their claim for inclusion in SC. Apart from the deliberation, the meeting could not find out a practical solution to the contention between Dalit Christians and Dalit Hindus on reservation.

Dalit Christians and Dalit Organisations

[26] KPMS demands an increase in quota of reservation as a precondition for the inclusion of Dalit Christians in SC Category. However, there is no such a clear suggestion by KDP, except extending their support to Dalit Christians in matters related to SC status.

In Kerala, even though many of the Dalits share a common concern or community feeling among each other irrespective of religion and sub-caste, this has not culminated in the form of a joint organisation for all Dalits. Interestingly, the social group, which finds out more or less the same objectives, common opponents, and persistent opposition to the caste system, are highly divided into many organisations. There are many social and political movements, organisations, and religious institutions for Dalits in Kerala. The Dalit movements are gaining strength, but they always represent diverse interests, different orientation and ideologies. In short, in the realm of movements and organisations, the presence of a common interest among Dalits is not visible. Dalit Christians' interaction with the variety of Dalit movements in Kerala needs analysis in this context.

Role of Caste-based Organisations among Dalits

The caste organisations have an enduring presence among Dalits because they also provide some necessary service like verification of one's caste identity. Caste is an ingredient in the social relations of Dalits and for claiming various entitlements from the state. Dalits need the support and help of caste organisations or religious institutions for securing a caste certificate from a governmental authority. Most often, the applicants are required by the concerned officers to produce a certificate issued by any of the caste organisations (in the case of Dalit Hindus) or religious institutions (in the case of Dalit Christians) to prove their caste. Evidence of their affiliation with either a caste organisation or a church decides their category as SC in the case of Dalit Hindus, and OBC/OEC in the case of Dalit Christians.[27]

As a result, some individuals, even though they were not interested in carrying a connection with any caste organisations or religious institutions, have to contact them for a proof of identity. It means that Dalits, sometimes contrary to their genuine interests have to take membership in such organisations. Thus, the organisations get some power over the Dalits. There are also complaints about smaller caste organisations trying to extract money for giving a certificate. They receive a nickname among the Dalits as 'paper organisations'

[27] The organisations of castes and communities are informally authorised to give a proof that a person belongs to a particular caste or community or both caste and religion. SNDP, KPMS, PRDS, KSS, AKCHMS and such other organisations give its certificate of proof to its members stating that he/she belong to a particular caste and religion. Now CSDS is also authorised to give such certificates to its members. In the case of Dalit Christians, the Church gives such certificates. It is the reason why every person who belongs to any of the categories such as SC, ST, OBC eligible for reservation and other benefits are compelled to be the part of such organisations against their will. The priests or pastors or the authorised persons from the Church give the certificate to its members stating that those who need it belong to a particular Dalit community and the Church.

(*Kadalasu sanghatanakal* in Malayalam). It shows that while some of the smaller caste based organisations have only limited functions, the organisations as KPMS has a more significant role to play in the lives of Dalits.

Dalit Christians and Caste-based Organisations I

As mentioned earlier, there were three Dalit Christian organisations for three different caste groups in Travancore before the formation of BCCF. Now Dalit Christians are less inclined to associate with caste organisations. In the contemporary situation, there are some reasons behind the apathy of Dalit Christians towards caste-based Dalit movements and organisations. Christianity is providing an institutional and organised way of life to Dalits, and so they need not become the part of any other caste organisation. To a certain extent, it is a reason for their dissociation with organisations like SJPS, which was mobilising Pulayas since 1907 in Kerala. Even though its founder, Ayyankali intended to organise all Dalits irrespective of their caste and religious background, most of the members were Hindu *Pulayas*.[28] The activities of SJPS came to an end. Travancore Pulayar Maha Sabha was formed in 1937, and it became an organisation for Hindu *Pulayas*. In the post-independent period, Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha was formed exclusively for Hindu *Pulayas*.

Parayas in central Travancore were members of PRDS established by Poyikayil Appachan. The PRDS aimed at the material and spiritual needs of the downtrodden people based on a contextual theology of Christianity. Therefore, in the case of *Parayas,* many of the Christians became members of PRDS. The rest of them remained as Hindus, and later they joined Kerala Sambavar Society (KSS) after the formation of the state of Kerala. Among the *Parayas*, Christians cannot become members of the caste-based organisation like KSS.[29]

The churches have a strong bearing on the Dalit Christians' social and personal life. Christianity has disciplined the way of life of Dalit Christians. Churches have an essential role to play in the life of an individual, i.e., from his/her birth to death. Since the Church has a role in both religious and community functions for its members, it can easily extend the influence more than an average caste organisation of Hindu Dalits can do for their members.

[28] However, it is a fact that Ayyankali supported the Dalit Christians like Pampady John Joseph and Vellikkara Chothi. He recommended both Pampady John Joseph and Vellikkara Chothi to the Sree Moolam Praja Sabha as representatives of Pulayas. Vellikkara Chothi's name was Vellikkara Mathai. He was Dalit Christian, but later changed his name to Vellikkara Chothi to become a member of the Assembly.

[29] As in the case of *Pulayas*, Christian *Parayas* also mainly confine themselves to their Church rather than becoming members of caste organisation.

.

Even in the case of social and community life, the Church has more influence on Dalit Christians than caste-based organisations on Dalit Hindus. The wealthy Churches satisfy some of the material needs of its members, but in the case of Dalit Hindus, no caste organisation can meet the economic needs of their members. It means that the Churches, especially the richer ones, can give financial assistance and spiritual guidance to its members. In the case of *Parayas*, PRDS also, like the church, takes the role of religion and make them a separate sect. However, no caste organisation of Hindu Dalits in Kerala has become the pioneer of a separate religion. Mostly they are remaining as caste organisations.

Dalit Christians and Caste-based Organisations II

Dalit Christians depend on their Church in matters regarding their religion but seeking non-religious platforms to raise their concerns as Dalits. Since their Churches fail to address their socio-cultural and economic concerns related to their identity as Dalits, some caste organisations become a necessity. However, unlike the Hindu Dalits, the Dalit Christians have less interest in particular caste organisations. Their admission to the existing ones (dominated by Hindus) is not that easy. Therefore, they tend to prefer the larger platform for all Dalits of different castes and religions. Cherama Sambava Development Society (CSDS) is an example of such an organisation.

Cherama Sambava Development Society was established in 2013 for the members of two castes – *Pulaya*s and *Paraya*s - belonging to both Hindu and Christian religions.[30] CSDS' members are mainly from Kottayam and its adjacent districts. Its membership is exclusively for *Pulayas* and *Parayas*, but religion does not matter. Different from many other Dalit organisations, CSDS is a development society striving for the economic betterment of the members. Now it is one of the critical Dalit platforms in Kerala claiming a broader membership and organisational strength.[31]

There was mass participation in its first state-level public meeting called 'CSDS *Samsthana Kudumba Sangamam*' (state level family meet) held at Kottayam town in 2015. The organisation reports that there were around one lakh and thirty thousand people participated in the rally. After the rally, there was a public meeting at Nagampadam stadium, and the

[30] CSDS was formed in 2013 in Kottayam followed by an incident in which some Syrian Christians killed a nineteen years old Pulaya youth in Pulickal Kavala, a place 20 km away from Kottayam town. *Pulayas* and *Parayas* in the surrounding area belonging to Hindus and Christian religions strongly held a protest. It culminated in the formation of CSDS for both the groups.

[31] Earlier the KPMS was the leading Dalit organization in number and strength. It lost its unity after factionalism led by two leaders - Punnala Sreekumar and T. V. Babu.

venue became fully crowded with the participants of the meeting. Tribal leader C. K. Janu inaugurated the meeting. Other than Jose K. Mani (Member of Parliament) from Kerala Congress, there was none else from the mainstream political parties on the dais. The researcher was a participant in the meeting. The leaders in their address stated that it was only once before this meeting Nagampadam became fully crowded with the people. They were comparing the crowd with a big meeting convened on Pope John Paul II's visit to Kerala in 1995.

CSDS, as its name indicates, is not formally on behalf of all Dalits in Kerala. Since most of the Dalit Christians in Kerala are Pulayas and Parayas and a significant number of Dalit Christians in Kerala are living in Kottayam and the adjacent districts, the organisation's claim to represent a considerable number of Dalit Christians in Kerala, is coming true. In comparison with IDF, CSDS' membership is more abundant, and Dalit Christians have a more extensive representation in it.

CSDS' activities and campaign reflect the socio-political angst and insecurity feeling of Dalits. The organisation takes up the issues of *Pulayas* and *Parayas*. So far, it has not initiated any deliberations on the question of reservation for Dalit Christians. Therefore, there is no action also. CSDS also feel that the conflict over reservation would cause disunity among its members.[32] Its interventions outside the member groups are mainly in the social security problems and the caste discrimination and atrocities faced by Dalits in common. The organisation has conducted protests, rallies and meetings. One the CSDS also successfully resisted the arrest of Dalit leaders by the police for participating in an agitation (Interview with Anil P. C.). It also received proper media attention.

There are many Dalit organisations in Kerala based on particular caste, religion and, a collective identity of Dalits.[33] Dalit organisations based on particular caste and religion have

[32] There is Facebook account for CSDS namely Cherama Sambava Development Society. It is a closed group formed exclusively for the members of CSDS's family units. The researcher has been a member of the group since 2014. In the Facebook account it has been mentioned in various discussions and posts on Dalit issues that the subjects that may lead to conflict between Dalit Hindus and Dalit Christians are not entertained or taken for discussion.

[33] There are various kinds of Dalit organisations. Some are for all Dalits irrespective of caste and religious background. KDP is an example to this. Some are exclusively for a particular caste from a particular religion. KPMS and KSS are such organisations. KPMS is exclusively for Hindu *Pulayas,* and KSS is exclusively for Hindu *Parayas*. Some others are for a single caste, but religion does not make any barrier. AKCS is an example of such an organisation. It is an organisation only for *Pulayas,* and their religious background does not matter in giving membership. Again some others are for all Dalits, but members will be of a particular religion. Such organisations are mainly among Dalit Christians, and these are not organisations for Dalit Hindus belonging to different castes. Dalit Christian movements are examples of such organisations. The case of CSDS is a

only some minimal functions. Though the caste organisations like Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha (KPMS), Kerala Sambavar Society (KSS), and All Kerala Cheramar Hindu Maha Sabha (AKCHMS) have broader aims and objectives concerning the socio-economic upliftment of the respective caste groups, they cannot mobilise the Dalits as a whole. In comparison with this, CSDS is an assemblage of two significant caste groups from the two religions. It has some economic programmes for the benefit of its members. The Society runs a microfinance scheme known as CHESAM (Cherama Sambava Micro Finance Scheme). A family needs to pay a certain amount every week towards it as a deposit. For women also, the CSDS formed separate collectives. The Society operates ambulance service for its members. It also runs a college.[34] It is not against any of the caste associations of Dalits or any Dalit organisation. Its members are free to join any other Dalit movements or organisations at their will.[35] The CSDS explicitly states this in their constitution.

The Dalit Christians and their particular social positioning sometimes necessitate joint forum for all Dalits. They expect that such a broader and inclusive platform for Dalits like CSDS would promote mutual trust and help them to gain social security.[36] It would also liberate them as Dalits and unite both Hindus and Christians in their fight against caste-based social discrimination. Many members of CSDS are also hopeful that the organisation would help

borderline case. It does not cover all caste and religions. However, it covers the two caste groups belonging to both the religions.

[34] The researcher came across this information while participating in various meetings of Pakkanam Kudumba Unit (Pakkanam Family Unit) of CSDS, and its meeting of Kanjirappally Taluk Unit held in Mundakkayam on 03-07-2014. In the Taluk Unit meeting, its state-level leaders also spoke to the delegates.

[35] Apart from CSDS, there are organisations such as AKCMS (All Kerala Cheramar Maha Sabha) and KDP (Kerala Dalit Federation), which stand for protecting the interests of both Dalit Christians and Dalit Hindus. Among them, if AKCMS stands only for the interests of *Pulayas* or *Cheramas*, KDP stands for common interests of all Dalits irrespective their religious and sub-caste backgrounds.

[36] The researcher participated in various meetings of CSDS Kudumba unit (CSDS Family Unit and noticed the members' insecurity feeling about being Dalits and their aspiration for a movement of their own. They used to say, "we do not have any strong organisations; ours are splintered organisations; our people are scattered; there is no unity among us; there is nobody else if anything bad happens to us; look at the NSS and SNDP Yogam, they are disciplined." Also, they remarked the Dalit youth who was killed by the Syrian Christians which eventually led to the formation of the movement. The speeches delivered by the state-level leaders in some of the meetings also reflected on this. In the state-level family meet (Samathana Kudumba Sangamam) held in Kottayam in 2015 M.O. Sajan and K.K. Suresh (state President and Secretary of CSDS respectively) said, "no state-level political party leader has come to our meeting. We invited Chief Minister Oommen Chandy to inaugurate our programme, we approached the CPI(M) leaders like V.S. Achuthanandan also, but nobody was willing to participate in our programme. [it] means that there is not any mainstream political party with us. The major political parties in Kerala think that ours is a small organisation being it relatively a newer organisation". At last, in the absence of Oommen Chandy, C.K. Janu was invited to inaugurate the programme. M.O. Sajan, while delivering his speech, ridiculed Oommen Chandy by saying that "*Oommen Chandy irikkendidathu Oommen Chandy irunnillenkil CK Janu kayari irikkum*", which means if Oommen Chandy does not take over his chair, CK Janu will take over it. The researcher participated in the programme, and there were no political party leaders even from Kottayam present on the dais, except Jose K. Mani, a Kerala Congress (M) party leader and Member of the Parliament

them to influence the state government for protecting their interests and rights. The CSDS tried to overcome the differences among the members of two castes from both the religions to form a collective. Its members hardly see it just as an organisation for satisfying their needs based on the immediate identity based on particular caste or religion. It gives them the feeling that they are the part of a noteworthy movement, which is in the making.

Even though the Churches of Dalit Christians also have a role in bringing together the Dalits of various castes under a single platform of religion, the objectives of CSDS are more political. It imparts an ideological orientation to members to consider Dalit as an identity above caste and religion. Any church cannot become as much political and social as the CSDS is. The Church acts as a common platform for the Dalit Christians who are its believers. A Church can do for its members all that the caste-based organisations can do for Dalit Hindus. However, the caste associations cannot do all that the Church can do for its members. CSDS is different from church and particular Hindu caste organisations for Dalits.

The Church and Dalit Organisations

It is challenging a Church to be the part of any of the Dalit movements directly or indirectly. CMS-ACI may be the only exception in this regard. It appreciates the necessity of such movements.[37] It is difficult for other Churches to make this kind of a declaration due to the presence and influence of Syrian Christians and some theological reasons. In many of the churches, though the Church officially remains very passive towards the concerns of Dalits the Dalit believers are showing some assertion. CMS-ACI can express their opinion openly on Dalit issues and mobilise the Dalits for a demonstration. Archbishop Stephen Vattappara is the sole leader of CMS-ACI and there is no other higher authority for the Church. It is not the part of any international or global forum for Churches. Second, the Church is exclusively for Dalits. Third, the theology of the Church never prevents it from engaging in social problems. However, the things are different in many other Churches including those in which the Dalits are the majority of believers.

[37] The Church has its role in the formation of CSDS. Archbishop Stephen Vattappara, Church's moderator and metropolitan, was the principal speaker at the inaugural session of the formation of the organisation. However, now the Church does not have any connection with CSDS. The Church was in supportive of Chengara land struggle of Dalits (Interview with Bishop Stephen Vattappara). The Church officially sent a pastoral letter to every local parish in matters relating the murder of the Dalit youth, which eventually leads to the formation of CSDS and the relevance of having a Dalit consciousness (Interview with K. M. Chacko).

Conclusion

The politics of assertion of Dalit Christians in modern Kerala's social system happens in a broader realm, and the study is an enquiry into that. Dalit Christians in Kerala constitute a marginalised group with limited resources and power. Apart from this limitation, there are some other factors, which also adds to their marginality in the society and politics of Kerala. They are a heterogeneous group, and there is no unity among Dalit Christians. They are scattered in various denominations and caste and sub-caste groups.

Though they embraced Christianity in pursuit of social justice, still their socio-economic status is almost equal to that of Dalit Hindus. Perhaps their condition is worse than that of Dalit Hindus in some ways. Dalit Christians are not getting the protection and concessions, which are available to the Scheduled Castes as per the Constitution of India. Dalit Hindus and the Dalits who belong to other Indian religions only are considered as Scheduled Castes. This discrimination is based on Dalit Christians' religious background. Both Central government and many state governments regard Dalit Christians as OBC. However, the Government of Kerala has made some extra efforts to consider them. Under the scheme of State Government, Dalit Christian students are eligible to avail almost all welfare grants on par with the SC/ST students in their education. Even though the government extend its economic help, the political system of Kerala is most often caste-blind in treating the Dalit Christians. Caste is still a problem among the Dalit Christians.

Extensive conversion of Dalits to Christianity in Kerala began in the second half of 19th century at the initiative of the Anglican Protestant missionaries. Initially, the activities of Anglican missionaries were among the traditional Syrian Christians, and later only they moved towards Dalits. Influenced by the Protestant missionaries' efforts, the traditional Syrian Churches and the Catholic Churches also started to convert Dalits to Christian faith. Therefore, the Dalit Christians became members of various denominations of Christianity in Kerala. Within each of these denominations, Dalits are acquainted with different types of theologies, organisational structure and social milieu. The Dalits are dispersed in the traditional Syrian Christian, Catholic, and both Episcopal and non-Episcopal (including Pentecostal) Protestant Churches in Kerala. Majority of the Dalit Christians are in Catholic and Protestant denominations including Pentecostal Churches. Geographically most of the Dalit Christians are concentrated in the central part of Kerala, especially in Kottayam and Pathanamthitta districts.

Within the Catholic Church, more Dalits are members of Latin Church. In the Syro Malabar Church, they constitute a minority group; though a significant portion of the total Dalit Christians in Kerala are members of this church. Their numerical strength in Protestant Churches is commendable, and some of the Protestant denominations are exclusively for Dalits. Due to a large number of Christain denominations and churches in Kerala, the Dalit Christians can change their affiliation with churches and denominations. Inter-denominational and inter-church migration is more common among the Dalits of the Protestant churches than Catholic churches. The increase in the number of Dalits in Pentecostal Churches, especially in Independent Pentecostal Movements, is mainly from the other Protestant Churches. Apart from theology, caste-based problems become a significant reason for this.

Dalits are facing caste discrimination in all the Churches, notwithstanding denominational differences. Caste discrimination is very severe in Syro Malabar Church and then in traditional Syrian Churches than in Protestant Churches. There are some historical reasons behind the degree of differences in caste discriminations in both Catholic and Protestant Churches. Both Dalits and Syrian Christians converted to the Protestant belief almost in a similar period (Syrian Christians in the first half and Dalits in the second half of the 19th century). Both the groups were converted by Anglican missionaries. In the Catholic Church, the Syrian Christians (in Syro Malabar Church) were the socially influential group. When the church also started the conversion of Dalits the individuals and priests of Syrian Christians took the initiative. It shows that the Dalits in Catholic churches faced a very dominant group of Syrian Christians at the helm of the Church. The history and the social composition of the Protestant churches were different. Therefore, the churches either provided an equal opportunity to different social groups or enhanced the scope of the assertion by the marginalised sections of the converts including Dalits.

Dalit Christians' relation with the Church and Christianity involves both compliance and resistance. The Church tries to discipline the religious and social life of Dalit Christians through its belief system, rituals and disciplining mechanism. In this way, they are under the influence of the Church. They try to fight against the caste related practices and caste discrimination within the Church and try to understand Christianity in their way as part of their resistance. In this way, they are in pursuit of an emancipatory space within the Church.

The disciplining process within the Church happens in two ways. First, the Church controls the religious and social life Dalit Christians through its rituals and belief system. Second, the Church formulates the rules and regulations for its members. The resistance by the Dalit Christians towards the Church also occurs in two ways. First, they try to address the caste discrimination within the Church through their fight against it. Second, they try to understand and interpret the Bible and Christianity in their way as part of taking up the caste question. Their approach is radically different from merely a pro-poor interpretation of the Bible by the Churches and the dominant social groups. The centrality of caste problem is the defining feature of Dalits' approach to theology, church and the other social groups.

The politics of assertion of Dalit Christians start within the Church through their resistance to caste discrimination. Being Dalits their prime and foremost struggle is against caste discrimination within the Church. It has a broader realm, and its implications can go beyond the Church. Their resistance becomes the part of the Dalits' struggle for equality and justice. Their discrimination in the Church has much more meaning when they encounter the society. Mere conversion hardly helped them to remove their caste-based social status in society. The approach of their churches to their caste-based problems is more decisive to help them in their fight against caste in society. However, the caste of the Dalit Christians is a more a reality when compared with the lower castes converted to Islam. It leads to a conclusion that there is a gross difference between the two in Kerala in copying the caste from brahminical Hinduism. Probably one reason is the powerful presence of Syrian Christians nurturing a mythical lineage from upper castes in many Christian churches; such a group is absent among the Muslims. In a nutshell caste discrimination within the Church against Dalit Christians cannot be reduced to the religious realm alone. It is because of this reason that their fight against caste discrimination within the Church has broader implications for the life of Dalit Christians in the socio-political system of Kerala.

Their effort to address caste discrimination within the churches and society mainly helps to look at one side of the problem. Caste can appear in their life in the form of sub-caste. Their reaction to both is important in this study. Apart from being discriminated by the non-Dalit Christians, they discriminate among themselves based on caste. A community tries typically to identify its problems and limitations while trying to address them. In this regard, Dalit Christians are supposed to identify sub-caste differences among them as a problem. However, they cannot check sub caste differences among them effectively. Still, they keep brotherhood and intimacy to each other based on caste and sub-caste. They keep caste and sub-caste intact

in their kinship relations. They overcome caste mainly when they face caste discrimination by the upper castes. Though there is not any hierarchical relationship between various the caste and sub-caste groups among them comparable to one between them and the Syrian Christians, many individuals are proud of their immediate identity based on caste and sub-caste and claim superiority over the other. While fighting against caste discrimination against them, they uphold the values of modernity like equality. However, at the same time, they cannot find equality between different subgroups. In this sense, they are a failure in imbibing the values of modernity, or the modernity helped them to use the caste as an identity of recognition. Some of them say that the question of sub-caste differences among them are not opposed to equality. Moreover, preference to caste and sub-caste serve some practical purposes in life. Another thing is that they try to put the question of sub-caste preference in the cultural context. Cultural differences between different castes still exist, they say. In this sense, they try to make a persuasive reason to support their sub-caste preference.

Another aspect of their politics of assertion within the Church starts from their way of understanding and interpreting Bible and Christianity. Though Dalit theology is in the infancy in Kerala and the Christain Churches are failing to develop any contextual theology, informally Dalit Christians try to understand the Bible and Christianity in their way. Regarding Dalit issues and caste in their churches, the Church workers and even some of the ordinary Church members quickly respond to the questions. It shows that in the absence of a formal initiative from their churches the Dalit Christians are forming their public sphere groups and collectives to debate and discuss the problem of caste.

Dalit Christians hold multiple social identities in Kerala. Mainly they are identified as Dalits and Christians. This constitutes the question of their dual identity. Apart from this, they shall be categorised as classes and status groups based on economic power and entitlements such as employment and education. The study mainly looked at their identity following their religion and caste. Dalit Christians identify themselves more as Dalits than Christians. Since all the Dalits in Kerala constitute an oppressed social group based on their castes, it applies to the Dalit Christians also. Another thing is many of the Dalit Christians in Kerala wish to identify themselves with other Dalits and not with upper caste Christians. Instances of their forgetting about the religion and even caste differences in the study indicate the feeling of brotherhood among them. The study also pointed out the dilution of religious difference in family relations between Dalit Christians and Dalit Hindus.

The social system of Kerala and its socio-cultural power relations are relevant to understand the location of Dalit Christians and their space. Their question of identity is unavoidable in this regard. As a group of people living in Kerala, the question of Malayali cultural identity also becomes vital for them. In their engagement with this identity, the Dalit Christians are sharing many problems with the Dalits.

Their making of a community is also important in understanding their space in Kerala's social system. While facing the question of community formation, they are becoming self-critical. They try to compare themselves with other dominant communities in Kerala like *Ezhavas*, *Nairs* and Syrian Christians. While doing so, they think that those communities are disciplined and they are not disciplined. They say that all Dalits, irrespective of their caste and religious background, are not disciplined in their social and religious life. They criticise themselves for lack of economic discipline. The self-criticism shows their urge for self-correction or their longing for a disciplined social life equal to other social groups. This self-criticism is an attempt towards their self-assertion.

Its socio-political interests define the politics of a community. Every Dalit Christian group may not similarly hold Dalit Christian interests. The reason behind this is that there are so many denominations and each of them have different perspectives. In the same way, there are numerous Dalit Christian organisations and movements also. Apart from this, there are various caste groups also. Here some groups have particular interests. Some do not have any interests. Some groups can raise their voice, and some others are not able to raise their voice, though they have their interests. Some others are opposing to have any political interests and to fight for protecting it.

Different Dalit Christian groups (various Churches and denominations, organisations and movements, and caste groups) represent different interests. One of the significant demands made by the Dalit Christians before the state is to treat them as SCs. However, this does not mean that all their efforts are focused on demanding reservation from the government. They have more political demands regarding socio-political rights, and they make efforts to materialise them. Their demands cover other significant areas such as education and land rights. Specific attempts have been made to reconcile the diverse interests of different sections of Dalit Christians to make it a shared interest. The efforts in this regard were in the 1950s. However, due to the heterogeneity of the group; such efforts were not very impressive.

When we talk about the political affiliation of Dalit Christians in central Kerala, now they mainly belong to the CPI (M) and the Indian National Congress since they are the major political parties in Kerala. Others are scattered in other political parties such as CPI, various Kerala Congress parties, BSP and so on. Most of the Dalit Christians were the part of undivided Communist Party in Kerala, either as its sympathisers or as its members. Caste-related socio-economic marginality led them to join the party or cooperate with the communists. At that time the party was also able to attract the Dalit Christians on their deprived socio-economic conditions. From the beginning of the 1950s, most of them have been working with the Communist Party, either as its sympathisers or as its members. In a later period, many of them showed disinterest in left parties and migrated to others. Dalit Christian leaders and Church workers opine that still, a good number of Dalit Christians (in Kottayam) are supporters of the Left political parties.

Dalit Christians' role in state politics is mainly as voters. They are not gainful candidates in the elections to Parliament and Legislative Assembly. They are getting some chances to contest in Local body elections, that too is rare and below the Scheduled Castes. There is no reservation to help them in this regard. Some Dalit organisations allege that it is because of the caste prejudices of the political parties Dalit Christians are not getting any chance to contest in the elections. They cannot a form a consolidated and robust vote bank unlike the case of Syrian Christians. In this regard, Dalit Christians are much less capable in comparison with many other Hindu lower caste groups.

The political party leaders from among the Dalit Christians are also very few. There is not even a single state-level political leader from among the community in any of the major political party. It is very different from the case of Dalit Hindus. Though there is no reservation in party positions the benefits of token representation also hardly reaches the Dalit Christians.

Dalit Christians in Kerala make two types of political interventions. In the first instance, they try to influence political parties by directly approaching them. In the second, they try to make their political intervention without the support of any political parties. In the case of Dalit Christians, their self-assertion as a political group occurs in a second way. Various Dalit Churches, movements and organisations for Dalit Christians and other individual groups gradually becoming active.

By using Church as an institution various caste groups and communities try to articulate their socio-political interests. The interests of the Dalits are not protected in the Syrian Christian Churches. Here the Church acts as a pressure group for the interests of the dominant community. Dalit Churches are not able to make any strong intervention in the political system of Kerala through these churches. Here Dalit Churches cannot become an influential pressure group. In the last ten years, there are some changes. It is evident from the fact that the mainstream political parties give attention to the Dalit Churches and Dalit Christian movements. In some Churches, Dalit Christians have become an articulate group against the Syrian Christians.

Nowadays Dalit Christians are becoming apathetic towards party politics. They do not expect much from mainstream parties. That is why most of them remain only as party sympathisers instead of active workers. Some of them take a timely political stand according to the changing political situation. They do not give any permanent support to any particular political parties. Some of them join or support Dalit political parties like BSP. By leaving party politics, some others are joining Dalit movements and caste associations. It affects even the Left parties. Now, it seems, the Left Parties also lost a considerable number of supporters.

However, the preference to join caste based associations is fewer among Dalit Christians than Dalit Hindus. Caste is very important for the politics of Dalit Christians in Kerala. The reason behind this is that caste is important than the Church in determining the socio-economic conditions of Dalit Christians. Christians are a minority religious group as per the Constitution of India, and the constitution assures certain special privileges and rights to the religious minorities. In this way, Dalit Christians are also eligible to enjoy such special privileges and rights as members of the religion. However, in actual practice, their share in this is below the dominant social groups. They embraced Christianity in pursuit of social justice. In this sense conversion was a political act. Apart from this in their interaction with political parties also caste is a decisive factor. CPI (M) has started considering Dalit Christians' problems more seriously after a series of activism by the Dalit Christians as a demonstration of their strength.

They cannot make use of the benefits, special privileges and rights available to religious minorities since they do not possess adequate resources and materials. For example, Dalit Christians cannot enjoy the rights of minorities to establish, own and administer their educational institutions. Unlike the socially and politically influential Churches the Dalit

Churches in Kerala is not owning any educational institutions or hospitals. Though being treated as a religious minority as per the provisions of the Constitution, the social status and economic capacity of Dalit Christians are different from that of Syrian Christians. If Dalit Christians are an oppressed group, Syrian Christians are a dominant group in Kerala. Both cannot enjoy the auxiliary benefits of minority rights equally.

One of the characteristics of their politics of assertion is that it is not a unified effort. Since they constitute a heterogeneous group, it is not possible for them to take a well organised and united effort in articulating their interests. There are many organisations and movements among them. Each of them, though they are sometimes hostile to each other, has a role in building up the movements. Sometimes some Dalit Churches without being the part of any organisations and movements also take the initiative. Sometimes it can occur as the individual effort of a community leader or small groups of activists. It may also take the form of an intellectual effort through the writings and interpretation of theology by the members of the community.

The affinity of Dalit Christians towards large-scale mass movements was not very strong until recently. Therefore, many Dalit Christians were not the part of Dalit movements. Only a minority of them were the part of specific Dalit Christian movements. Among Dalit Hindus, there are many caste organisations to mobilise them for action. Most of the Dalit Hindus are the part of these caste organisations. There have been some Dalit Christian organisations functioning among Dalit Christians also since the first half of the 20th century. However, as compared to the case of Dalit Hindus, the number of Dalit Christian organisations is very minimal. In the case of Dalit Christians, the Church itself has been playing the role of an organisation. While Dalit Hindus are organised under the banner of their caste associations, Dalit Christians are organised mainly under the banner of the Church, and there were only a few independent organisations.

Nowadays Dalit Christians depend on their Church in matters regarding their religion but seeking for non-religious platforms to raise their concerns as Dalits. Since their Churches fail to address their socio-cultural and economic concerns related to their caste identity, some new organisations become a necessity. However, unlike the Hindu Dalits, the organisations for a single caste group are not there among Dalit Christians, and they are not in need of such organisations. Such organisations do not make them meet their social needs. Therefore, they tend to prefer the larger platform for all Dalits by clubbing members of different castes and

religions. CSDS is an example of such an organisation. Now they are interested in some movements which can accommodate both Dalit Hindus and Dalit Christians. The formation of CSDS in Kerala and the flow of Dalit Christians into that organisation in a large number indicate this. CSDS has a large number of units in the districts where the Dalit Christians are concentrated.

Though Dalit Christians constitute a heterogeneous group, a unity can also be found among them cutting across the barriers of denominational and caste differences. This unity sometimes crosses even the religious line. That means a universal brotherhood among all Dalits can be found surpassing caste and religious differences. 'Dalitness' is the factor playing here. The emergence of organisations like CSDS becomes relevant in this context too. Such organisations and intellectuals interconnect the Dalit Christian politics with the more massive politics of Dalits. In a broader socio-political matrix of Kerala Dalit Christians identify their problems with non-Christian Dalits since both of them share similar socio-economic conditions and try to address their socio-economic problems. In a nutshell, the politics of assertion of Dalit Christians started within the Church, and it spread out to the society at large.

References

Books and Articles

A Member of the Church in India, *The Heritage of the Indian Christian: The Story of the Christian Church and the Relation to it of the Church in India*, Madras, SPCK, 1938

Abraham, P. G., *Caste and Christianity: A Pentecostal Perspective*, Kumbazha, Crown Books, 2003

Agur, C. M., *Church History of Travancore*, Madras, Asian Educational Services, 1990

Ahmed, Bashiruddin, 'Communist and Congress Prospects in Kerala', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 6, No. 7, Jul. 1966, pp. 389-399

Alexander, K. C., 'Caste and Christianity in Kerala', Social Compass, Vol. 18, Issue: 4, December, 1971, pp. 551-560

Alexander, K. C., "Changing Status of Pulaya Harijans of Kerala", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 3, No. 26/28, July 1968, pp. 1071-1074

Alexander, K. C., 'Neo Christians of Kerala', in Michael Mahar (ed.), *The Untouchables in Contemporary India*, Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1972

Alexander, K. C., "The Problem of Caste in the Christian Churches of Kerala", in Harjinder Singh (ed.), *Caste among non-Hindus in India*, New Delhi, National Publishing House, 1977, pp. 50-65

Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London & New York, Verso, 2006

Aziz, M. Abdul, *Rise of Muslims in Kerala politics*, Trivandrum, CBH Publications, 1992

Cairo, Gemma, 'State and Society Relationships in India: Explaining the Kerala Experience', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 41, No. 4, Jul.-Aug. 2001, pp. 669-692

Chatterjee, Partha, "On Civil and Political Society in Post-Colonial Democracies", in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (ed.), *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 165-178

Chatterjee, Partha, *Our Modernity*, Rotterdam, *Issue 1 of SEPHIS-CODESRIA lecture*, Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa , 1997

Chatterton, Eyre, *A History of the Church of England in India: Since the Early Days of the East India Company*, Newyork and Toronto, London Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, The Mc Millan Co., 1924

Cheriyan, C. V., *A History of Christianity in Kerala: From the Mission of St. Thomas to the Arrival of Vasco Da Gama, A. D. 52-1498*, Kottayam, Kerala Historical Society, 1973

Chiriyankandath, James, 'Communities at the Polls: Electoral Politics and the Mobilisation of Communal Groups in Travancore', *Modern Asian Studies*, 27, 3, (1993), pp. 643- 665

Clarke, Sathianathan, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998

Cooiman, Dick, 'Conversion from Slavery to Plantation Labour: Christian Mission in South India (19th century)', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 19, Nos. 8-9, Aug-Sep 1991

Cooiman, Dick, 'The Gospel of Coffee: Mission, Education and Employment in 19th Century Travancore', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 19, No. 35, Sep. 1, 1984

Dabhi, James, "Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin- Social and Psychological Perspective", in R. R. Patil and James Dabhi (ed.), *Dalit Christians in India*, New Delhi, Manak Publications, 2010, pp. 40-72

Dale, Stephen F., 'Trade, Conversion and the Growth of the Islamic Community in Kerala' in Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke (ed.), *Religious Conversion in India: Modes, Motivations and Meanings*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 54- 74

Daniel, Jose, "Towards Ending Apartheid Policy Against the Dalits in India", in R. R. Patil and James Dabhi (ed.), *Dalit Christians in India*, New Delhi, Manak Publications, 2010, pp. 194-218

Desai, Manali, 'Party Formation, Political Power, and the Capacity to Reform: Comparing Left Parties in Kerala and West Bengal, India', The University of North Carolina Press, *Social Forces*, Sept. 2001, 80 (1), pp. 37- 60

Desai, Manali, 'The Relative Autonomy of Party Practices: A Counterfactual Analysis of Left Party Ascendancy in Kerala, India, 1934–1940', *AJS*, Vol. 108 No. 3, Nov. 2002, pp. 616–657

Deshpande, Satish, and Geetika Bapna, *Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities: A Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge*, New Delhi, National Commission for Minorities, Delhi, Government of India, 2008

Devika, J., 'Contemporary Dalit Assertion in Kerala: Governmental Categories vs. Identity Politics', *History and Sociology of South Asia*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2013, pp. 1-17

Devika, J., 'Egalitarian Developmentalism, Communist Mobilization, and the Question of Caste in Kerala State', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 69, No. 3, Aug. 2010, pp. 799-820

Devika, J., and V. J. Varghese, 'To Survive or to Flourish: Minority Rights and Syrian Christian Community Assertions in 20th Century Travancore/Kerala', *Working Paper*, No. 427, Thiruvananthapuram, CDS, March 2010

Dirks, Nicholas B., 'The Invention of Caste: Civil Society in Colonial India', *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, No. 25, September 1989, pp. 42-52

Doss, M. Christhu, *Missionary Insurgency and Marginality of Modernity in Colonial South India*, Sage: South Asia Research, Vol. 33(3): 223–244, 2013

Dube, Saurabh, and Ishita Banerjee Dube, 'Introduction: Critical Questions of Colonial Modernities', in Saurabh Dube and Ishita Banerjee Dube (ed.), *Unbecoming Modern: Colonialism, Modernity and Colonial Modernities*,' New Delhi: Social Sciences Press, 2006, pp. 1-31

Dube, Saurabh, 'Introduction: Colonialism, Modernity, Colonial Modernities', *Nepantla: Views from South*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, 2002, pp. 197-219

Dube, Saurabh, "Introduction: Enchantments of Modernity", *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 101, No. 4, Fall 2002, pp.729-755

Edona, E. J., *The Economic Condition of the Protestant Christians in Malabar with Special Reference to the Basel Mission Church*, Calicut, Empire Press, 1940

Fic, Victor M., *Kerala: Yenan of India: Rise of Communist Power, 1937-1969*, Bombay, Nachiketa Publications, 1970

Forrester, Duncan B., *Caste and Christianity: Attitudes and Policies on Caste of Anglo Saxon Protestant Missions in India*, Curzon Press: London, 1980

Fuller, C. J., 'Kerala Christians and the Caste System', *Man*, Vol. II., No. 1, Royal Anthropological Institute of Ireland and Great Britain, (March 1976), pp. 53-70

George, A. C., 'Pentecostal Beginning in Travancore, South India', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, July 2001, http//:www.apts.edu/ajps, pp. 215-237

George, Sobin, 'Dalit Christians in India: Discrimination, Development Deficit, and the Question for Group Specific Policies', *Working Paper Series*, Vol. VI, No. 2, New Delhi: Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, 2012

Government of Kerala, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, V. Nagam Aiya, Thiruvananthapuram, Gazetteers Department, 1999.

Guru, Gopal, 'Citizenship in Exile: A Dalit Case', in Rajeev Bhargava and Helmut Reifeld (ed), *Civil Society, Public Sphere and Cituizenship: Diaglogues and Perceptions*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2005, pp. 260- 276

Guru, Gopal, "Dalits in Pursuit of Modernity", in Romila Thapar (ed.), *India: Another Millennium?*, New Delhi, Viking, 2000, pp.123-136

Gurukkal, Rajan, 'Development Experience of Colonial Keralam', in M. A. Oommen (ed.), *Rethinking Development: Kerlala's Development Experience*, Vol. I, New Delhi, Institute of Social Sciences, 1999

Hartmann, Horst, 'Changing Political Behaviour in Kerala', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 3, No. 1/2, Jan. 1968, pp. 163+165+167+169+171+173+175+177-178

Hasan, Zoya, *Politics of Inclusion: Castes, Minorities and Affirmative Action*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2009

Hefner, Robert W., 'Multiple Modernities: Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism in a Globalizing Age', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 27, 1998, pp. 83-104

Herring, Ronald J., 'Abolition of Landlordism in Kerala: A Redistribution of Privilege', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 15, No. 26, June 28, 1980, pp. A59-A61+A63-A69

Hill, Polly, 'Kerala Is Different', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 4, 1986, pp. 779-792

Hourtart, Francois and Lemercinier, Genevieve, 'Socio-Religious Movement in Kerala: A Reaction to the Capitalist Mode of Production' (Part I), *Social Scientist*, Vol. 6, No. 11, Jun. 1978, pp. 3-34

Hourtart, Francois and Lemercinier, Genevieve, 'Socio-Religious Movement in Kerala: A Reaction to the Capitalist Mode of Production' (Part II), *Social Scientist*, Vol. 6, No. 12, Jul. 1978, pp. 25-43

Ipe, K. A., "Dalits and their Struggle: A Historical Perspective", in Stephen M. (ed.), *Faith Theological Review*, Vol. IV, No. 2, 2003, pp. 2-22

Isaac, T. M. Thomas, 'From Caste Consciousness to Class Consciousness: Alleppey Coir Workers during Inter-War Period', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XX, No. 4, January 26 1985, pp. PE5-PE18

Isaac, T. M. Thomas, 'The National Movement and the Communist Party in Kerala' *Social Scientist*, Vol. 14, No. 8/9, Aug. - Sep. 1986, pp. 59-80

Isaac, T. M. Thomas, and Tharakan, Michael, 'Kerala: The Emerging Perspectives: Overview of the International Congress on Kerala Studies', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 23, No. 1/3, Jan. - Mar. 1995, pp. 3-36

Jacob, John A., *A History of the London Missionary in South Travancore, 1806-1959*, Trivandrum, Diocean Press, 1990

Jacob, T. G. and Bandhu, Prananjaly, *Reflections on the Caste Question: The Dalit Situation in South India*, Bangalore, NESA Publications, 2002

Jeffrey, Robin, ''Destroy Capitalism!' Growing Solidarity of Alleppey's Coir Workers, 1930-40' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 19, No. 29, July 21 1984, pp. 1159-65

Jeffrey, Robin, 'Matriliny, Marxism and the Birth of the Communist Party in Kerala, 1930-1940', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1, Nov. 1978, pp. 77-98

Jeffrey, Robin, 'Temple-Entry Movement in Travancore, 1860-1940', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 4, No. 8, Mar. 1976, pp. 3-27

Kandasamy, Meena, and M. Nisar, *Ayyankali: A Dalit Leader of Organic Protest*, Calicut, Other Books,2007

Kawashima, Koji, *Missionaries and a Hindu State: Travancore 1858-1936*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2000

Keller, Rudolph, 'Degrees of Democracy: Some Comparative Lessons from India', *World Politics*, Vol. 52, No. 4, Jul. 2000, pp. 484-519

Kottukappally, J., *The Hope We Share: A New Christian Approach to Marxism with a Study on Karl Marx the Man*, Barrackpore, Dialogue Series Publications, 1983

Krishnaji, N., 'Agrarian Relations and the Left Movement in Kerala: A Note on Recent Trends', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 14, No. 9, March 3 1979, pp. 515-521

Kumar, G. Gopa, 'Defensive Left and Divided Congress', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 36, No. 19, May 12-18 2001, pp. 1581-1584

Kumar, R. K. Suresh and P. Suresh Kumar, *Development, Politics and Society: Left Politics in Kerala: A Disinterested Perspective*, New Delhi, APH Publishing Corporation, 2009

Lieten, George Kristoffel, *The First Communist Ministry in Kerala 1957-9*, New Delhi, K. P. Bagchi & Company, 1982

Lieten, Georges Kristoffel, 'Progressive State Governments: An Assessment of First Communist Ministry in Kerala', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Jan. 6, 1979, pp. 29-39

Lobo, Lancy, 'Visions, Illusions and Dilemmas of Dalit Christians in India' in Ghanshyam Shah (ed.), *Dalit Identity and Politics*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2001, pp….

Louis, Prakash, "Caste-Based Discrimination and Atrocities on Dalit Christians and the Need for Reservations", *Working Paper*, New Delhi, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, 1996

Louis, Prakash, 'Dalit Christians: Betrayed by State and Church', *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 21, 2007, pp. 1404-1408

M. Burgess, Stanley, 'Pentecostalism in India: An Overview', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, 4/1, 2001, pp. 85-98

Mankekar, D. R., *The Red Riddle of Kerala*, Bombay, Manaktalas, 1965

Massey, James, "An Analysis of Dalit Christian Issue with Special Reference to 1950 Presidential Order", in R. R. Patil and James Dabhi (ed.), *Dalit Christians in India*, New Delhi, Manak Publications, 2010, pp. 73-97

Massey, James and T. K. John, *Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin in India: A Study of their Socio-Economic, Cultural and Political Status*, New Delhi: Centre for Dalit/Subaltern Studies, 2013

Mateer, Samuel, *The Land of Charity: A Descriptive Account of Travancore and its People*, New Delhi & Madras, Asian Educational Services, 1991

Mathew, E. T., 'Growth of Literacy in Kerala: State Intervention, Missionary Initiatives and Social Movements', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, No. 39, Sep. 25 - Oct. 1 1999, pp. 2811-2820

Menon, A. Sreedhara, *Kerala and Freedom Struggle*, Kottayam, D. C. Books, 1997

Menon, Dilip M, 'Conjunctural Community: Communism in Malabar, 1934-1948' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 27, No. 51/52, Dec. 19-26 1992, pp. 2705-2707+2709-2715

Menon, Dilip, 'Religion and Colonial Modernity: Rethinking Belief and Identity', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 17, Apr. 27-May 2002, pp. 1662-1667

Michael, S. M., "Dalit Encounter with Christianity: Change and Continuity", in Rowena Robinson and Marianus Kujur (ed.), *Margins of Faith: Dalit and Tribal Christianity in India*, New Delhi, Sage, 2010, pp. 51-74

Mohan, P. Sanal, 'Dalit Discourse and the Evolving New Self: Contest and Strategies', *Review of Development and Change*, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Vol. IV, No. 1, Jan-June 1999. pp. 1- 24

Mohan, P. Sanal, 'Imagining Equality: Modernity and Social Transformation of Lower Castes in Colonial Kerala, Kottayam: M. G. University, 2005

Mohan, P. Sanal, Dalit Discourse and the Evolving New Self: Contest and Strategies', *Review of Development and Change*, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Vol. IV, No. 1, Jan-June 1999. pp. 1- 24

Mohan, P. Sanal, 'Narrativizing Oppression and Suffering: Theorizing Slavery', *South Asia research*, Vol. 26(1), 2006, pp. 5-40

Mohan, P. Sanal, 'Religion, Social Space and Identity: The Prathyakha Raksha Daiva Sabha and the Making of Cultural Boundaries in Twentieth Century Kerala', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2005, April, pp. 35-63

Mohan, P. Sanal, *Modernity of Slavery: Struggles Against Caste Inequality in Colonial Kerala*, New Delhi, OUP, 2015

Mungekar, B. L., 'State, Market and Dalits: Analytics of New Economic Policy', in S. M. Michael (ed.), *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, New Delhi, Vistaar Publications, 1999, pp. 287- 302

Nair, R. Ramakrishnan, *How Communists Came to Power in Kerala*, Trivandrum, The Kerala Academy of Political Science, 1965

Namboodiripad, E. M. S., 'Castes, Classes and Parties in Modern Political Development', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 6, No. 4, Nov. 1977, pp. 3-25

Namboodiripad, E. M. S., 'Economic Backwardness of Harijans in Kerala', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 4, No. 12, Jul. 1976, pp. 62-68

Namboodiripad, E. M. S., 'The Struggle for the Proletarian Hegemony: A Short Note on Freedom Struggle in Kerala', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 12, No. 9, Sept. 1984, pp. 33-34

Nigam, Aditya, 'Secularism, Modernity, Nation: Epistemology of the Dalit Critique', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 35, No. 48, Nov. 25 - Dec. 1 2000, pp. 4256-4268

Nirmal, A. P., 'Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective' in A. P. Nirmal (ed.), *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, Madras, Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1991, pp. 139- 144

Nirmal, A. P., "Introduction", in A. P. Nirmal (ed.), *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, Madras, Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1991

Oommen, George, 'The Case of the Malayarayans ant the Pulayas of Kerala: Re-reading Tribal and Dalit Conversion Movements', http://www.religion-online.org

Oommen, T. K. "India's Religious Minorities and State policy", in R. R. Patil and James Dabhi (ed.), *Dalit Christians in India*, New Delhi, Manak Publications, 2010, pp. 17-39

P., Sunny, "Presenting Christ in Today's Context: A Critique", in Stephen M. (ed.), *Faith Theological Review*, Vol. IV, No. 2, 2003, pp. 55-74

Pandian, M. S. S., 'One Step Outside Modernity: Caste, Identity Politics and Public Sphere', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 18, May 4-10 2002, pp. 1735-1741

Pandian, M. S. S., 'State, Christianity and Scheduled Castes', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 20, No. 42, Oct. 19 1985, pp. 1776-1777

Perumalla, Praveen P. S., "Christian Dalit Identity Denied", in R. R. Patil and James Dabhi (ed.), *Dalit Christians in India*, New Delhi, Manak Publications, 2010, pp. 179-193

Pillai, K. Raman. (Oct.-Dec. 1987). "Politics in Kerala", *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 48 (4), pp. 597-606

Pillai, Kainikkara Padmanabha, *The Red Interlude in Kerala*, Trivandrum, The Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee, 1959

Pulikottil, Paulson, 'As East and West Met in God's own Country: Encounter of Western Pentecostalism with Native Pentecostalism in Kerala', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, 5:1, 2002, pp. 5-22

Radhakrishnan, P., 'Land Reforms in Theory and Practice: The Kerala Experience', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 16, No. 52, Dec. 26 1981, pp. A129-A131+A133+A135-A137

Raghaviah, Jaiprakash, '*Basel Mission Industries in Malabar and South Canara, 1834-1914: A Study of its Social and Economic Impact*', New Delhi, Gian Publishing House, 1990

Rajan, S. I., and K. S. James, 'The Interdependence of Vital Events: Twentieth-Century Indian Kerala', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 31, No. 1, Summer 2000, pp. 21-41

Rajendran, G., *The Ezhava Community and Kerala Politics*, Trivandrum, The Kerala Academy of Political Science, 1974

Rajkumar, Peniel, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation: Problems, Paradigms and Possibilities*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2010

Krishnakumar, K., 'A History of Reservation', *Frontline*, 2004, Vol. 21, Issue 17, Aug. 14-27, 2004

Thomas, Alex, *A History of the First Cross Cultural Mission of the Mar Thoma Church, 1910-2000*, New Delhi: ISPCK, 2007

John, Raju, 'Regional Socio-economic Scenario and Economic Upliftment of Dalits in India: What Does Contemporary Evidence Say?', *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, 9(1), pp. 13–18, 2017

Robinson, Rowena and Sathianathan Clarke, *Religious Conversion in India: Mode, Motivations and Meanings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2003

Rudolph, Lloyd I. and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, I967

Sivanandan, P., 'Caste, Class and Economic Opportunity in Kerala: An Empirical Analysis', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 14, No. 7/8, Feb. 1979, pp. 475-480

Sivanandan, P., 'Economic Backwardness of Harijans in Kerala', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 4, No. 10, May 1976, pp. 3-28

Sreekumar, T. T., 'Neither Rural nor Urban: Spatial Formation and Development Process', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.25, No.35/36, Sept. 1-8, 1990, pp. 1981-1983+1985- 1987+1989

Stephen, M., 'An Ethical Critique of Pentecostal Spirituality in India', *Asian Pentecostal Society*, http://www.asianpentecostal.org/2002-india.htm, retrieved on 03 February 2002

Stephen, M., "A Dalit Christology", in Stephen M. (ed.), *Faith Theological Review*, Vol. IV, No. 2, 2003, pp. 23-33

Swamidas, Moses, *Conversion and Reconversion in India: A Study of the Experience of Dalit Christians in the Context of the Ministry of the Bible Faith Mission*, Thiruvananthapuram, Bible Faith Mission, 2001

Tharamangalam, Joseph, 'Caste among Christians in India', in M. N. Srinivas (ed.), *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar*, New Delhi, Penguin Books India, 1997, pp. 263- 291

Thomas, Cyriac, 'The Church and the Elections', in N. Jose Chander (ed.), *Dynamics of State Politics: Kerala*, New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1986, pp. 87- 104

Thomas, E. J., *Coalition Game Politics in Kerala*, New Delhi, Intellectual Publishing House, 1985

Thomas, M.M., *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, New Delhi, Forum for Christian Concern for People's Struggle, 1978.

Thomas, Manoj, "Logos, An Image of Christ for the Liberation of Dalits", in Stephen M. (ed.), *Faith Theological Review*, Vol. IV, No. 2, 2003, pp. 35-54

Varghese, Nitson K., 'Pentecostal Theology as an Emerging Stream in the Indian Theological Scenario', *Gurukul Journal of Theological Studies*, Chennai, Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, Vol. XVII, No. 1, 2006 January

Velayudhan, R., *Kerala: The Red rain Land*, New Delhi, Indian Institute of Social Affairs, 1958

Vinayaraj, Y. T., *Reimagining Dalit Theology: Post Modern Readings*, Thiruvalla, CSS Books, 2008

Vinayaraj, Y. T., *Revisiting the Other: Discourses on Post Modern Theology*, Thiruvalla, CSS Books, 2010

Visvanathan, Susan, *The Christians of Kerala: History, Belief and Ritual among the Yakoba*, Madras, Oxford University Press, 1993.

Webster, John CB, 'The Dalit Situation in India Today', *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 18:1 Spring 2001, pp. 15-17

Webster, John C. B., 'Who is a Dalit?', in S. M. Michael (ed.), *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, New Delhi, Vistaar Publications, 1999, pp. 76- 90

Webster, John C. B., *The Dalit Christians: A History*, New Delhi, Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1992.

Wilson, K., *The Twice Alienated: Culture of Dalit Christians*, Hyderabad, Booklinks, Corporation, 1982

Zachariah, K. C., 'Religious Denominations of Kerala', Working Paper, No. 468, CDS, April 2016

Zachariah, K. C., 'The Syrian Christians of Kerala: Demographic and Socio-Economic Transition in the Twentieth Century', *Working Paper*, No. 322, Thiruvananthapuram, CDS, November 2011

Malayalam Sources

Abraham, K. E., *Yesukristhuvinte Eliya Dasan* (autobiography), Kumbanadu, K. E. Abraham Foundation, 2001

Chacko, K. M., P. Thomas and M. Kurian, *Dalithar Vimochana Pathayil* (Dalits on the Road to Liberation), Kottayam: KCC-BPDC, 1988

Chirakkarode, Paul, *Dalit Chraisthavar Keralathil*, Thiruvalla, Kraisthava Sahithya Samithy, 2000

Chentharassery, T. H. P., *Pampady John Joseph* (Malayalam), Thiruvalla, BPDC, 1989

Ganesh, K. N., *Keralathinte Innalekal*, Thiruvananthapuram, Department of Cultural Publications, Government of Kerala, 1990

George, Raison V., *Charithra Vazhikalil Daiva Sabha* (The Church of God in the Routes of History), Chingavanam: Published by the Author, 2018

Ipe, K. A., *Bharathathile Daiva Sabhakal: Samkshiptha Charithram* (Malayalam) (Churches in India: An Abridged History), Kottayam, FIC Publishers, 2001

Isaac, Thomas, *Keralam: Mannum Manushyanum* (Kerala: Land and the Man), Trichur, Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad, 1987

Jayakumar, Elikkulam, *Kallara Sukumaran* (biography), Ambedkar Publications, Peerumedu, 2000

John, V. D., *Ente Jeevithavum Kalavum* (Autobiography), Thodupuzha, V. D. John Darsana Kendram, 2014

Kalesh, S., Kayal Sammelanathe Kaavi Uduppikkumpol', *Samakalika Malyalam Varika*, February 28, 2014

Mohan, P. Sanal and Vinil Baby Paul, *Viswasavum Vimochanavum: Kaippatta Habel* (Faith and Liberation: Kaippatta Habel), Thiruvalla: CSS, 2015

Mohan, Sanal, ‘‘Vimochana Samaravum’ Keraleeya Civil Samoohathinte Adheeshavathkaranavum (‘Liberation Struggle’ and the Hegemonisation of Kerala Civil Society), *Unpublished Manuscript*

Namboodiripad, E. M. S., *Kerala Charithram Marxist Veekshanathil*, Thiruvananthapuram, Chintha Publishers, 1997

Namboodiripad, E. M. S., *Keralathile Communist Prasthanam: Udhbhavavum Valarchayum*, Thiruvananthapuram, Chintha Publishers, 2008

Panickar, K. N., *Sambhashanangal* (Conversations- Malayalam), Calicut, Mathrubhoomi Books, 2010

Patrick, Stanley, *Malabarile Dalit- Dalit Chraisthava Charithravum Varthamanavum*,

Paul, Vinil, ‘Manchadikkariyude Kadha’ (The Story of Manchadikkari), *Samakalika Malayalam Varika*, Jan. 25, 2013, pp. 40-48

Paul, Vinil, ‘Than Prabhayin Kanthiyalen Irul Niram Mareedume’, *Samakalika Malayalam Varika*, September 28, 2012, pp. 50-57

Perumpetty, Vijoy Skaria, *Pastor C. S. Mathew: Mochanathinte Soorya Mukham*, Kariamplave, Hebron Nagar, W. M. E. State Council, 1999

Peter, Jose, *Kalahikkunna Charithram: Malayarayarude Mathaparivarthanam Oru Punaranweshanam*, CSS, Thiruvalla, 2003

Raj, Kaviyoor K. C., *Chennaikkalude Idayile Kunjadukal*, Kottayam, Centre for Social Studies and Culture, 2010

Saju, *Kerala Penthekosthu Charithram*, Kottayam, Good News Publications, 1994.

Sreekumar, T. T., *Civil Samoohavum Edathupakshavum* (Civil Society and the Left), Kozhikkode, Olive Publications, 2007

The Malabar Church Council Centenary, *Malayala Basel Mission Sabhayude Charithra Samkshepam*, Calicut, Malabar Church Council, 1934

Vattappara, Stephen, *C. M. S. Sabha Charithram* (Vol. I), Kottayam, Anglican Publications, 1989.

Yesudasan, T. M., *Baliyadukalude Vamshavali: Separate Administration Movementinte Vamshavum Avirbhavavum* (Malayalam) (Genealogies of Scapegoats: Origin and Evolution of Separate Administration Movement), Thiruvananthapuram, Prabhat Book House, 2010

Manarcadu, Thampi, *Suvisheshathinte Puthiya Pariprekshyangal* (Malayalam), Thiruvalla, Readers Publication, 2011

The History Writing Committee, *Kerala Raksha Sainya Charithram: Porattathinte Nooru Varshangal (1896-1996)* (Malayalam), Thiruvananthapuram, 1998

Vinayaraj, Y. T., *Dalithanubhavangalude Daiva Sasthram* (Malayalam) (Theology of the Dalit Experience), Thiruvalla, CSS Books, 2000

Dictionaries and Encyclopaedias

The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, Stanley M. Burgess (ed.), Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2001

Religious Text

Holy Bible (New King James Version), Secunderabad, Gideons International India, 1999

Unpublished Theses

Abraham, Sara, *An Ethnographic Study of Violence Experienced by Dalit Christian Women in Kerala State, India and the Implications of this for Feminist Practical Theology*, Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, The Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Glasgow, 2003

Das, Yesunatha, *An Evaluation of the History of Pentecostal Dalits in Kerala*, Unpublished M. Th. Thesis, South Asian Institute of Advanced Christian Studies, Bangalore, 2001

De, Ria, 'Developing the Dalit Christian: Identity, Discourse and the State', Unpublished MPhil Thesis, Hyderabad, EFLU, 2010

John, Simon Karingottazhikathu, *The Origin and Development of the Pentecostal Churches among the Dalits in Kerala: A Critical Evaluation of the Missionary Methods of Robert F. Cook (1913-1950)*, Unpublished M. Th. Thesis, Pietermaritzburg, School of Religion and Theology: University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2005

K. C., Rennymon, *Engaging Civil Society from the Margins: Dalits in Independent Pentecostal Movements in Kerala*, Unpublished M. Phil. Thesis, Kottayam: Mahatma Gandhi University, 2007

Lakshmi, K. Rajya, 'Minority within a Minority: Aspirations and Experiences of Dalit Christians in India', Unpublished MPhil Thesis, Hyderabad: EFLU, 2014

Mathew, Reju George, *Dalit Engagement with Missionaries and Syrian Christianity: A Study of Caste Conversion and Modernity in Kerala*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Hyderabad: EFLU,2014

Mohan, P. Sanal, *Imagining Equality: Modernity and Social Transformation of Lower Castes in Colonial Kerala*, Kottayam, School of Social Sciences: Mahatma Gandhi University, 2005

Varghese, Jestin T., *Between Faith and Self Affirmation: The Problems of Dalit Liberation in the Church*, Unpublished M. Phil. Thesis, Kottayam: Mahatma Gandhi University, 2012

Palakkappillil, Johnson X, *Dalits of Syrian Catholic Church in Keralam*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Kottayam: Mahatma Gandhi University, 2009

Interviews appeared in Print/Online Media

Interview with K. K. Suresh (Kerala State President, CSDS) by Pratheesh Rema, February 22, 2018, *Narada News*, ml.naradanews.com

Interview with Sunil Koyilerian (State Secretary of CDCYF and Dalit activist) by Maya Pramod, *Onnippu Masika*, Vol. 2, No. 12, Feb. 1, 2017, pp. 8-11

Government Reports

Ranganatha Misra Commission Report/ National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities, 2007, New Delhi: Government of India.

Narendran Commission Report, 2000, Thiruvanathapuram: Government of Kerala

Websites

www.kscbc.kerala.gov.in (Kerala State Commission for Backward Classes)

www.Saintkuriakoseeliaschavara.org (Father Chavara Kuriakose Elias)

www.saintalphonsamma.org (Sister Alphonsamma)

chavarayachan.blogspot.in (Blog for Father Chavara Kuriakose Elias)

www.dcmspalai.com (Dalit Catholica Mahajana Sabha)

marthoma.in (Mar Thoma Church)

www.upci.org (United Pentecostal Church in India)

http://csimkd.net/csi-madhya-kerala/ (Church of South India- Madhya Kerala Diocese)

http://kollamkottarakkara.csi1947.com/ (Church of South India- Kollam Kottarakkara Diocese)

http://vijayapuramdiocese.org/diocese-at-a-glance/ (Vijayapuram Diocese of Latin Catholic Church in Kerala)

www.syromalabarchurch.in (Syro Malabar Church in Kerala)

www.archdiocesechanganacherry.org (Changanassery Archdiocese of Syro Malabar Church in Kerala)

www.palaidiocese.com (Pala Diocese of Syro Malabar Church in Kerala)

https://www.salvationarmy.org/india (Salvation Army Church, India)

http://ipc.international (Indian Pentecostal Church of God)

http://wordwillsave.com/cpm/ (The Pentecostal Mission)

http://cogkerala.com/state (Church of God in India-Full Gospel-Kerala State)

http://www.assembliesofgod.in (Assemblies of God in India)

http://www.cogkeralaregion.org/ (Church of God in India-Full Gospel-Kerala Region)

http://wmeministries.com/ (Word Missionary Evangelism, India)

www.adventistdirectory.org (Seventh Day Adventist Church)

List of Selected Interviewees

Bishop Stephen Vattappara, Moderator and Matropolitan, CMS Anglican Church of India, Kurichy, Kottayam (4-5-2013, Bishop House, Kuricy)

Bishop Selvadas Promoth, Bishop, Bible Faith Mission, Parasuvakkal, Thiruvananthapuram, (3-5-2013, Bishop House, Parasuvaikkal)

Father Xavier Cherunellady, Priest, St. Johns Baptist Chuch, Veloor (4-6-2013, Kottayam)

Father Valsan Vattappara, priest, St. Paul's CMS-ACI, Pulikkunnu, (5-5-2013, Bishop House, Pulikkunnu)

Father Y. T Vinayaraj, Dalit Theologian and Mar Thoma priest (2-3-2014, Trivandrum)

Father John Areeckal, former Director, DCMS (10-1-14, Adoor)

Father Baby Pallipparambil, Priest, St. Paul's CMS-ACI, Vakkadu (3-3-2013, Vakkadu)

P. O. Peter, former State President, DCMS, (3-2-14, Pala)

T. J. Abraham, former State Scretary, DCMS (4-2-15, Kanjirappally)

C. C. Kunjukochu, former State President, DCMS (3-8-18, Changanassery)

James Elavumkal, St. Paul's CMS-ACI, Vakkadu (3-8-18, Changanassery)

Joseph Pulprayil, St. Paul's CMS-ACI, Vakkadu

Shibi Peter, Dalit Christian activist (3-12-24, Hydearabad)

T. J. Peter, former CSI Catechist (2-10-14, Kottayam)

George, St. Paul's CMS-ACI, Pulikkunnu (3-12-14, Pulikkunnu)

Babu, St. Paul's CMS-ACI, Pulikkunnu (3-12-14, Pulikkunnu)

K. M. Chacko, St. Paul's CMS-ACI, Pulikkunnu (8-12-14, Pulikkunnu)

K. M. John, St. Paul's CMS-ACI, Pulikkunnu (8-12-14, Pulikkunnu)

Santhamma George, member, St. Paul's CMS-ACI, Pulikkunnu (3-12-14, Pulikkunnu)

Sunil Koyilerian, former Secretary, CDSYF (Telephone Interview, 3-10-2017)

Anil P. C., CSDS Member, Chathunnippara Kudumba Unit (3-12-12, Kottayam)

Chacko Mannanam, Mannanam Church, (3-12-12, Kottayam)

P. T. Varkey, Mannanam Church, (3-12-12, Kottayam)

Binoy A. A., member, Mannanam Church, (3-12-12, Kottayam)

Justin Varghese, Group member, CSI-MKD for Social Justice (5-12-12, Kottayam)

Simon John, Treasurer, CSI-MKD (5-12-12, Kottayam)

Simon V. S., CDS Youth Wing Member (5-12-12, Kottayam)

Rosamma Varghese, former member, CMS-ACI, Vakkadu (5-11-12, Vakkadu)

Joy P. John, former Pastor, Israel Penthekosthu Daiva Sabha, Punchavayal (5-10-12, Vakkadu)

Baby Kunnelpparambil, Pator, Israel Penthekosthu Daiva Sabha, Punchavayal (5-10-12, Vakkadu)