

ABRAHAM'S CROSSINGS TO EGYPT AND GERAR AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR DALIT THEOLOGY

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Jobymon Skaria

Abraham's Crossings to Egypt and Gerar and its Implications for Dalit Theology

Dalits are members of the lowest level of the Indian caste system. They are considered unclean, polluting and untouchable. Some of them joined Christian Churches in search of liberation. However, Christian denominations and Indian Christian theology failed them, and Dalit Theology emerged from that historical and theological contexts. However, Dalit theology followed the hermeneutical examples of Latin American and African American theologies and overlooked the subversive voices in Dalit contexts. It placed the hermeneutical examples developed in alien contexts at the centre of Dalit theology as a dominant self and the longing for a liberated-reconciled society connected through mutual partnerships, embedded in the subversive voices, as a dominated self at the periphery of Dalit theology. This dissertation seeks to redress this drawback and proposes that a reading from the margins, concentrating on Dalit religious and cultural foundations, can liberate Dalit theology from its alienation from Dalit contexts. From such a perspective, this research evaluates the paradigms of Dalit theology and suggests how a postcolonial reading of Abraham's cross-religious, cross-cultural and cross-ethnic trips to Egypt (Genesis 12: 10-20) and Gerar (Genesis 20:1-16) can reorient Dalit theology.

Abraham's crossings are the product of an editor, lived in Achaemenid Yehud, who rescripted Israel's ancient traditions to address his political and religious situation. Abraham's encounters highlight God as a liberator and an author of reconciliation, morality and piety among outsiders and Sarah as God's covenant partner and a mediator of God's mission. Such imperatives sought to subvert the concept of Egyptian and Philistine outsiders that Persian bureaucrats had popularised in Yehud.

This dissertation suggests that a similar attempt can help Dalit theology redefine the agency of God in liberating Dalits and reconciling Dalits with non-Dalits and rediscover the role of Dalit women as participants in God's mission for the entire creation. Further, it will assist Dalit theology in empowering Dalits and Syrian Orthodox Christians to continue God's mission by crossing the boundaries of the caste system. It will also help them appreciate their counterparts to realise liberated-reconciled Church and society, connected through partnerships, as envisioned in the liberative voices in Dalit contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

A. 0. Introduction

This research emerges out of my own journey as well as my own engagement with and learning from Dalits and the caste system. As a Syrian Orthodox Christian, born and raised in Kerala, India, I have been aware of some of the caste assumptions, and prejudices from my childhood. For example, I knew how to decline an invitation to eat together with my dominated caste friends (without hurting them). This was the usual practice among us. A Bachelor of Divinity course at Serampore University, however, introduced me to the seriousness of the caste system. Mathews Mor Aphrem Metropolitan, one of my lecturers, for instance, explained to us about various mechanisms of the caste system and its impacts upon Dalits, informing that Dalits were also called *Asuras* and *Rakshasas* in some Indian classical literature and Hindu religious texts like the *Puranas*. Mor Aphrem's comments haunted me because *Mahabali*, the great mythic king of Kerala, whose memory we cherish during our national festival called Onam, was an Asura King.¹ Such a connection radically reframes the identity of the Kerala people as a community ruled by a Dalit king. Further, Mor Aphrem Metropolitan explained various caste discriminations that persist in the Churches. For example, he told us that an upper-caste priest stopped a Dalit Christian from reading during mass, asking who had allowed a Dalit to do a reading in the Church. Such information provoked me to read more about the caste system, which is a scheme of social stratification, and its impacts upon the Dalits.² This dissertation emerges out of such interrogations.

¹ Please read 5.0. for more information on the festival of Onam and the identity of Mahabali.

² K. L. Sharma, "Social Stratification and Change in Contemporary India," in *Handbook on Social Stratification in The Bric Countries: Change and Perspective*, eds. Li Peilin, Gorshkov Mikhail K. and Scalon Celi (Singapore: World Scientific, 2013), 45.

A. 1. The Caste System

Caste is a social practice in India that regulates social interactions and functions as a hierarchical social order.³ The caste system is an institutionalised inequality, which many social and religious reformers have sought to end.⁴ Caste is marked by hereditary membership, occupations, endogamy, purity and pollution.⁵ The earliest reference to the caste system can be traced to the *Rig Veda*, one of the ancient Indian Scriptures.⁶ The *Rig Veda* decrees that four castes (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra)⁷ originated from Brahma, the supreme God in the Hindu pantheon.⁸ As Sunder John Boopalan, Jai B.P. Sinha and Nicholas B. Dirks affirm, caste is a deeply embedded element in the Indian psyche and social structure.⁹ It is one of the primary identities of almost all Indians.¹⁰

³ Pradeep K. Chhibber, Sandeep Shastri, *Religious Practice and Democracy in India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 8, Gautam Sharma, *Valour and Sacrifice: Famous Regiments of the Indian Army* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Limited, 1990), 151, Adrian C. Mayer, *Caste & Kinship in Central India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 92.

⁴ Vijai P. Singh, *Caste, class, and democracy* (London: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 25.

⁵ Lakshmidhar Mishra, *Human Bondage: Tracing its Roots in India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2011), 128, B. R. Ambedkar, "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development," accessed on 3rd June 2019, www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/txt_ambedkar_castes.html, Rajendra K. Sharma, *Indian Society, Institutions and Change* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2004), 63, Michael Ray Lemons, *Cush to Mysterious Babylon: Africa and the Covenant People* (Pittsburgh: Dorrance Publishing, 2014), 10.

⁶ Jeremy A. Rinker, *Identity, Rights, and Awareness: Anticaste Activism in India and the Awakening of Justice through Discursive Practices* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 5, Arvind Sharma, Ray Bharati, *Classical Hindu Thought: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 134, David Keane, "Why the Hindu Caste System Presents a New Challenge for Human Rights," in *Religion, Human Rights and International Law: A Critical Examination of Islamic State Practices*, ed. Javaid Rehman and Susan C. Breau (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2007), 288.

⁷ The *Rig Veda* mentions Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas frequently while Sudras are mentioned only once. Please see, C. Dwarakanath Gupta, *Socio-cultural History of an Indian Caste* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1999), 1.

⁸ Craig Jeffrey, John Harriss, *Keywords for Modern India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 19, George M. Williams, *Handbook of Hindu Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 97.

⁹ Sunder John Boopalan, *Memory, Grief, and Agency: A Political Theological Account of Wrongs and Rites* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 11, Jai B.P. Sinha, *Psycho-Social Analysis of the Indian Mindset* (New Delhi: Springer, 2014), 203, Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3.

¹⁰ M. E. Prabhakar, "The Search for a Dalit Theology," in *Indigenous People: Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate*, ed. James Massey (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 213, Israel Selvanayagam, "Waters of Life and Indian Cups," in *Christian Theology in Asia*, ed. Sebastian C. H. Kim (Cambridge: Cambridge University

The term 'caste,' however, is not Indian.¹¹ Nor is it originally an English word.¹² It derives from the Portuguese and Spanish word *casta*, signifying breed, race or kind.¹³ The etymology of *casta* is often disputed.¹⁴ The dominant view claims that the word derived from *castus*, a Latin word which means 'pure,' 'unpolluted,' or 'chaste.'¹⁵ Another competing tradition suggests that *casta* derived from the Gothic word *kasts*, which mean "a group of animals" or "a brood of hatchlings."¹⁶ Whatever be its etymology, a dominant section in the Iberian Peninsula used *casta* as a term for "species of plants and animals."¹⁷ For them, *casta* signified the concept of pure or true strains and breeds.¹⁸

Casta acquired new meaning with Iberian expansionism.¹⁹ The Spanish and Portuguese used *casta* to categorise the conquered peoples into corporate groups –

Press, 2008), 61, S. R. Sankaran, "Social Exclusion and Criminal Law," in *Challenging the Rule(s) of Law: Colonialism, Criminology and Human Rights in India*, eds. Kalpana Kannabiran and Ranbir Singh (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2008), 123, Surinder S. Jodhka, "Caste in India: Constructs and Currents," in *Routledge International Handbook of Diversity Studies*, ed. Steven Vertovec (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 112, V. Devasahayam, "Conflicting Roles of the Bible and Culture in Shaping Asian Theology," in *Christianity and Cultures: Shaping Christian Thinking in Context*, eds. David Emmanuel Singh and Bernard C. Farr (Cumbria: Regnum Books, 2008), 71, Mathew Paikada, "Memory of Suffering: A Theological Investigation from the Subaltern Perspective" in *Indian Theology Seeking New Horizons*, eds. Kuncheria Pathil and Mathew Paikada (Mumbai: Mumbai St. Paul's Society, 2007), 275.

¹¹ N. Jayaram, "Caste, Corporate Disabilities and Compensatory Discrimination in India: Colonial Legacy and post-colonial Paradox," in *Colonialism and Welfare: Social Policy and the British Imperial Legacy*, eds. James Midgley, David Piachaud (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011), 87.

¹² Alan Dundes, *Two Tales of Crow and Sparrow: A Freudian Folkloristic Essay on Caste and Untouchability* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 1.

¹³ Azra Khanam, *Muslim Backward Classes: A Sociological Perspective* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2013), 22, Axel Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present*, trans. Barbara Harshav (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 161, S. Shankar, *Flesh and Fish Blood: Postcolonialism, Translation, and the Vernacular* (California: University of California Press, 2012), 31.

¹⁴ David Kazanjian, *The Brink of Freedom, Improvising Life in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 114.

¹⁵ David Keane, *Caste-based Discrimination in International Human Rights Law* (London: Routledge, 2016), 37.

¹⁶ Michaels, *Hinduism*, 161.

¹⁷ Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi, *German Soldiers in Colonial India* (London: Routledge, 2014), 70, Julian Pitt-Rivers, "On the Word 'Caste.'" in *The Translation of Culture: Essays to E E Evans-Pritchard*, ed. T. O. Beidelman (London: Routledge, 2001), 234.

¹⁸ Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 106.

¹⁹ Sumit Guha, *Beyond Caste: Identity and Power in South Asia, Past and Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 22

Spanish, Indian and Black, each with associated rights, privileges and obligations in post-conquest South America.²⁰ They applied *casta* extensively to any person of mixed European and Amerindian descent.²¹ In such contexts, *casta*, with some exceptions as clarified by Laura A. Lewis,²² referred to various mixed races like *Mestizo* (a person of Spanish and Indian parentage), *Mulatto* (a person of Spanish and Black parentage), *Castizo* (a person of Spanish and *Mestizo* parentage) and *Morisco* (a person of Spanish and *Metatto* parentage).²³ Such instances show that the Iberians used *casta* as an umbrella term in their colonies to designate the mixed descent born out of the circumstantial unions between the colonisers and the colonised.²⁴ One's location in the *casta* ladder, as Lori L. Tharps and Christian Büschges note, defined one's access to education and other community resources.²⁵ The *casta* designations became part of the

²⁰ Irene Silverblatt, *Modern Inquisitions: Peru and the Colonial Origins of the Civilized World* (Durham: Duke University, 2004), 17, Daniel Nehring, Ken Plummer, *Sociology: An Introductory Textbook and Reader* (London: Routledge, 2013), 393.

²¹ Matthew Restall, *The Black Middle: Africans, Mayas, and Spaniards in Colonial Yucatan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 91, Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*, trans. Mark Sainsbury, Louis Dumont and Basia Gulati (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 21, Jacqueline Suthren Hirst, John Zavos, *Religious Traditions in Modern South Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 142, Ruth Hill, *Hierarchy, Commerce and Fraud in Bourbon Spanish America: A Postal Inspector's Exposé* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), 206, Xochitl Leyva Solano and Christopher Gunderson, "The Tapestry of Neo-Zapatismo: Origins and Development," in *Movements of Movements: Part 1: What Makes Us Move?*, ed. Jai Sen (Oakland: PM Press, 2017), 262, Kathryn A. Sloan, *Women's Roles in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Oxford: Greenwood, 2011), xvi, Francis Andrew McMichael, *Atlantic Loyalties: Americans in Spanish West Florida, 1785-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 40.

²² Laura A. Lewis, "Between Casta and Raza: The Example of Colonial Mexico," in *Race and Blood in the Iberian World*, eds. María Elena Martínez, David Nirenberg, Max-Sebastián Hering Torres (Zurich: Lit Verlag GmbH & Co., 2012), 100.

²³ Mey-Yen Moriuchi, "From *Casta* to *Costumbrismo*: Representations of Racialized Social Spaces," in *Envisioning Others: Race, Color, and the Visual in Iberia and Latin America*, ed. Pamela P. Patton (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 214. This list is not final. As Rosaura Sánchez notes, a variety of categories distinguished up to fifty-two different ethnic groups, cataloguing various combinations of Spanish, Indian and Black. Please see, Rosaura Sánchez, *Telling Identities: The Californio Testimonios* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 56.

²⁴ Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 162.

²⁵ Lori L. Tharps, *Same Family, Different Colors: Confronting Colorism in America's Diverse Families* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017), 68, Christian Büschges, "Ethnicity," in *The Routledge Handbook to the*

local vernacular in the Iberian colonies, where the people with the least amount of Spanish blood were treated the worst in society, paying higher taxes to the government and more money to the church.²⁶

The situation in the Indian subcontinent, however, was different. The Portuguese used *casta* as “an ambiguous term for the community”²⁷ to describe the social groupings which already existed in India, known as *Varna*.²⁸ The English borrowed the term and changed it into “caste” though there were some English equivalents like people, race, tribe and ethnic group.²⁹ They incorporated “caste” into their legal documents and census reports.³⁰ British Indian courts decreed separate rules of succession, adoption and marriage for various castes, and imposed severe restrictions on commensality between castes.³¹ Over the years, as Anderson H. M. Jeremiah notes, the term caste “evolved and became synonymous with the Varna system” in popular minds.³²

History and Society of the Americas, eds. Olaf Kaltmeier, Josef Raab, Mike Foley, Alice Nash, Stefan Rinke, Mario Rufer (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 263.

²⁶ Tharps, *Same Family*, 68.

²⁷ Bayly, *Caste, Society* 106.

²⁸ Gerald James Larson, "Hinduism in India and America," in *World Religions in America*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 188, Jeremy A. Rinker, *Identity, Rights, and Awareness: Anticaste Activism in India and the Awakening of Justice through Discursive Practices* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018), 5.

²⁹ Morton Klass, *Caste: The Emergence of the South Asian Social System* (Delhi: Manohar, 1998), 25-26.

³⁰ Manilal Bose, *Social and Cultural History of Ancient India* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 1998), 39, Timothy H. Parsons, *The British Imperial Century, 1815–1914: A World History Perspective* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 63, Niels Brimnes, *Constructing the Colonial Encounter: Right and Left Hand Castes in Early Colonial South India* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999), 20, N Jayaram, “Caste, Corporate Disabilities and Compensatory Discrimination in India: Colonial Legacy and Post-Colonial Paradox,” in *Coonialism and Welfare: Social Policy and the British Imperial Legacy*, ed. James Midgley, David Piachaud (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2011), 86, James R Lehning, *European Colonialism since 1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 124, K A Geetha, *Contesting Categories, Remapping Boundaries: Literary Interventions by Tamil Dalits* (Newcastle Upon Tyne, Cambridge Publishing House, 2014), 18.

³¹ Shazia Ahmad, ""Migration" as a Metaphor for Religious Conversion: A Reinterpretation of Freedom of Conscience and Belief in Colonial India and Pakistan," in *Human Rights in Translation: Intercultural Pathways*, ed. Michal Jan Rozbicki (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018), 96.

³² Anderson H. M. Jeremiah, *Community and Worldview among Paraiyars of South India: 'Lived' Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 1.

A. 2. The Indian Caste System (Varna System)

The Varnas were determined not on the basis of worth but of birth.³³ The exact origins of the Varna system, however, lie in obscurity.³⁴ There are two dominant views about the possible origins of the caste system among academics.³⁵ The dominant view understands it as a set of practices that characterise Indian social organisation, which may be recognised and analysed from historical, pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods.³⁶ This view understands caste as one of the oldest surviving hierarchical segregations of society.³⁷ Such a view draws on divine origin theory,³⁸ race theory,³⁹ occupational theory⁴⁰ and evolutionary theory,⁴¹ to explain the emergence of the caste system in India. There are also a few scholars who interpret the caste system as a colonial construct. According to this view, British officials, missionaries and orientalist transformed caste from an existing sacred order into an imposed rigid social structure.⁴²

³³ C. Dwarakanath Gupta, *Socio-cultural History of an Indian Caste* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1999), 2.

³⁴ K. N. Dash, *Invitation to Social and Cultural Anthropology* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2004), 213, Abraham Eraly, *The First Spring: The Golden Age of India* (London: Penguin Books, 2011) 263.

³⁵ Robin Coningham, Ruth Young, *The Archaeology of South Asia: From the Indus to Asoka, c.6500 BCE–200 CE* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 57.

³⁶ Ibid. 57-58, G. Aloysius, "Caste in and above History," in *Nation and National Identity in South Asia*, eds. S. L. Sharma, T. K. Oommen (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2000), 151.

³⁷ Rosemary Colgrove, *Eye on the Sparrow: The Remarkable Journey of Father Joseph Nisari, Pakistani Priest* (Minneapolis: Mill City Press, 2010), xxi-xxii, B. S. Cohn, "Notes on the History of the Study of Indian Society and Culture," in *Structure and Change in Indian Society*, eds. Milton Singer and B. S. Cohn (Chicago: Aldine Press, 1968), 3-28.

³⁸ Divine origin theory postulates that the varnas were created from the four parts of Brahma. Please see, Christopher V. Hill, *South Asia: An Environmental History* (California: ABC Clio, 2008), 38.

³⁹ The racial theory was promoted by H. H. Risley. Risley was the Commissioner for the 1901 Indian census. Racial theory suggests caste as an Aryan construct designed to maintain the purity of their blood and race. Please see, Bayly, *Caste, Society*, 137.

⁴⁰ Occupational theory hypothesises that occupational classification is the root of caste system. The tribes following different occupations, this theory postulates, created different castes. Please see, Rajendra Kumar Sharma, *Rural Sociology* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2003), 153.

⁴¹ Evolutionary theory suggests that caste in contemporary times, is the product of various process of social evolution. Please see, Gupta, *Socio-cultural History*, 3.

⁴² Coningham, Young, *The Archaeology*. 58.

The caste system functions as a classificatory unit.⁴³ It divides Indian society into four divinely ordained and functionally differentiated classes, with Brahmins (priests and men of learning) at the top, Kshatriyas (rulers and warriors), Vaisyas (traders and merchants) and Sudras (lower occupational groups) at the bottom.⁴⁴ The caste divisions, however, are not homogenous categories since they are further divided into thousands of sub-groups called *jatis*.⁴⁵ A fifth category, traditionally called untouchables, who assertively call themselves Dalits as a positive identity ascription and a symbol of change and revolution, falls outside the caste system.⁴⁶

Dalits were believed to have originated outside the physical structure of Brahma. This creation myth has several implications for Dalits. This theory promotes the view that Dalits are ontologically separate and distinct from the divine and restricts Dalits from making any claims of being part of the Hindu community and establishes Brahminic supremacy.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Hindu philosophers used this myth to marginalise Dalits. For example, Hindu philosophy, as Vinayaraj notes, considers the Dalit body as an untouchable "self-enclosed body, which is denied of transcendence."⁴⁸ Such denials are

⁴³ Jeremiah, *Community and Worldview*, 1, Boopalan, *Memory, Grief, and Agency*, 30, Arvind Sharma, *Reservation and Affirmative Action: Models of Social Integration in India and the United States* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005), 136.

⁴⁴ Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1970), 21, Vijai P. Singh, *Caste, class, and democracy* (New Brunswick, 2009), 21, Romila Thapar, *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 63.

⁴⁵ Lynne Gibson, *Hinduism* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 2002), 26.

⁴⁶ Joseph Mundanikkal Thomas, "Subalternity, Language and Projects of Emancipation: An Analysis of Dalit Literature," in *Language, Identity and Symbolic Culture*, ed. David Evans (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 161, Anna Runesson, *Exegesis in the Making: Postcolonialism and New Testament Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 113, Mark S. Weiner, *The Rule of the Clan: What an Ancient Form of Social Organization Reveals About the Future of Individual Freedom* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2013), 102, Boopalan, *Memory and Grief*, 26, Anderson, *Community and Worldview*, 2.

⁴⁷ Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 32-33.

⁴⁸ Y. T. Vinayaraj, *Dalit Theology after Continental Philosophy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 91.

crucial for Dalits, and they condition their societal fate. *The Manusmriti*, the Lawbook of Hinduism, which prescribes the social place of each caste and the culturally ingrained social, behavioural rules, suggests the behavioural pattern of Dalits as follows.⁴⁹

But the dwellings of 'Fierce' Untouchables and 'Dog-cookers' should be outside the village; they must use discarded bowls, and dogs and donkeys should be their wealth. Their clothing should be the clothes of the dead, and their food should be in broken dishes; their ornaments should be made of black iron, and they should wander constantly. A man who carries out his duties should not seek contact with them; they should do business with one another and marry with those who are like them. Their food, dependent upon others, should be given to them in a broken dish, and they should not walk about in villages and cities at night.⁵⁰

Such sanctioned delegation of roles, living spaces and body dispensation, Boopalan and Roja Singh rightly observe, establishes a difference, enacts inferiorisation, and seeks to keep Dalits “apart socially along with denying their human and civil rights.”⁵¹ So too, they resulted in structural inequalities and pushed Dalits to the margins of society forcing them to live a life in ghettos, engaging in the most demeaning and stigmatised occupations, and enslaved Dalits to the dominant castes in perpetual bondage. Such practices, as will be seen, continue even today.

A. 3. Situating Dalits in Today’s Contexts

The caste system is an existential reality, and it affects most of the unconscious assumptions of the Indian psyche, irrespective of caste orientations.⁵² However, Dalits

⁴⁹ Roja Singh, *Spotted Goddesses: Dalit Women's Agency-Narratives on Caste and Gender Violence* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2018), 23.

⁵⁰ *Manusmriti* 10:51-54,

⁵¹ Boopalan, *Memory, Grief, and Agency*, 46. Singh, *Spotted Goddesses*, 23.

⁵² J S Dosanjh & Paul A S Ghuman, *Child-Rearing in Ethnic Minorities* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1996), 136, Rasna Warah, *Triple Heritage: A Journey to Self-Discovery* (Nairobi: R. Warah, 1998), 49, Dharendra Singh, *Indian Heritage and Culture*, (New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, 2000), 299, S. N. Sadasivan, *Social History of India*, (New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing, 2000), 229, Opinderjit Kaul Takhar, *Sikh Identity: An Exploration of Groups Among Sikhs* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 95, Mulchand S. Rana, *Reservations in India: Myths and Realities*, (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 2008), 347, H.C. Sadangi, *Dalit: The Downtrodden of India* (Delhi: Isha books, 2008), 138, Sebastian Velassery, Reena

are the worst victims of the caste system because of their social location and thus remain economically weak, politically powerless and socially marginalised.⁵³ The caste system, as Vinayaraj rightly asserts, relegates the Dalit body as an 'untouchable' and irredeemable body.⁵⁴ Yashpal Jogdand, who researches on the phenomenology of humiliation in Dalit contexts, highlights the deplorable situation of the Dalits further.

Even animals like dogs, cows, and buffalos could drink water from the common resource without fear. Despite being human, Dalits were incapable even to touch the water. The dehumanising message of this custom clearly indicated that Dalits are worse off than four-legged animals.⁵⁵

In May 2015, Sagar Shejwal, a 24-year-old Dalit nursing student was brutally assaulted and killed in Shirdi,⁵⁶ allegedly over his mobile phone playing the ringtone venerating Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, an icon of Dalit resistance.⁵⁷ Dr M Mariraj, a Dalit, attempted suicide because of casteist abuse while pursuing a postgraduate degree at

Patra, *Caste Identities and The Ideology of Exclusion: A Post-Script on the Humanization of Indian Social Life* (Irvine: BrownWalker Press, 2018), 33..

⁵³ M. E. Prabhakar, "Christology in Dalit Perspective," in *Frontiers of Dalit Theology*, ed. V. Devasahayam (Delhi: ISPCCK, 1997), 222, P. S. Krishnan, "Theme Paper on Caste System and Dalits," in *Dalit and Minority Empowerment*, ed. Santhosh Bhartiya (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2008), 109, Peniel Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation: Problems, Paradigms and Possibilities* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 170, Y. T. Vinayaraj, "Envisioning a Postmodern Method of Doing Dalit Theology," in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*, eds. Sathianathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala and Philip Vinod Peacock (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 93, Mulchand Savajibhai Rana, *Reservations in India: Myths and Realities* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2008), 97, Anand Teltumbde, *Dalits: Past, Present and Future* (London: Routledge, 2017), 1, Sukhadeo Thorat, *Dalits in India: Search for a Common Destiny* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009), 132, Chakravarthy R. Zadda, "Shoemaker and Missionary, William Carey: A Dalit Christian Perspective," in *Expect Great Things, Attempt Great Things: William Carey and Adoniram Judson, Missionary Pioneers*, eds. Allen Yeh and Chris Chun (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 28.

⁵⁴ Y. T. Vinayaraj, "Dalit Body without God: Challenges for Epistemology and Theology," in *Body, Emotion and Mind*, eds. Martin Tamcke and Gladson Jathanna (Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2013), 27, 88.

⁵⁵ Yashpal Jogdand, "Humiliated by Caste: Understanding Emotional Consequences of Identity Denial," accessed on 05th June 2019. <http://www.ispp.org/ecc/blog/humiliated-by-caste-understanding-emotional-consequences-of-identity-denial>.

⁵⁶ Shirdi is a city in the Indian state of Maharashtra, a state in the western peninsular region of India.

⁵⁷ BBC News, "Caste Hatred in India - What it Looks Like," accessed on 06th June 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-43972841>, Rahi Gaikwad, Dalit Youth Killed for Keeping Ambedkar Song as Ringtone, accessed on 06th June 2019. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/dalit-youth-killed-for-ambedkar-song-ringtone/> article 7232259.ece.

Ahmedabad's BJ Medical College.⁵⁸ Similarly, an eight-year-old boy, belonging to the *Matang* community (a scheduled caste in Maharashtra), was stripped naked and forced to sit on hot, burning tiles at noon for entering a temple space. The attacker allegedly first ruffled the child up and then pushed him onto a heated tile. The burning tiles have left grave burn injuries on the child's buttocks and back.⁵⁹ Likewise, in April 2019, a group of eight dominant caste men beat up and killed a 21-year-old Dalit man for sitting on a chair and eating in front of them at a wedding party.⁶⁰

These examples highlight the fact that caste follows Dalits wherever they go.⁶¹ Similar experiences have wounded Dalit psyches and tempt Dalits to view themselves as an inferior race born only to serve.⁶² Autobiographies by Dalit writers further explain how the caste system accompanies Dalits and demeans them from an insider's (emic) perspective.⁶³ As my awareness of the Dalit situation emerges mostly from an outsider's (etic) perspective, I will analyse Dalit autobiographies, which I hope will complement and correct my etic perspective significantly and place this dissertation in its proper context.

⁵⁸ Poornima Murali, *This Dalit Doctor from Tamil Nadu Survived Casteism, and a Suicide Attempt, in Medical College*, accessed on 30th September 2019, <https://www.news18.com/news/india/this-dalit-doctor-from-tamil-nadu-survived-casteism-and-a-suicide-attempt-in-medical-college-2167521.html>

⁵⁹ Sukanya Shantha, *Wardha: Caste Hindu Strips Dalit Boy, Forces Him to Sit on Hot Tiles for Entering Temple*, accessed on 25th June 2008, <https://thewire.in/caste/wardha-caste-hindu-dalit-boy-strip-entering-temple>

⁶⁰ Vineet Khare, *The Indian Dalit Man Killed for Eating in Front of Upper-caste Men*, accessed on 30th September 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-48265387>

⁶¹ Poornima Murali, "This Dalit Doctor from Tamil Nadu Survived Casteism, and a Suicide Attempt, in Medical College." accessed on 06th June 2019. <https://www.news18.com/news/india/this-dalit-doctor-from-tamil-nadu-survived-casteism-and-a-suicide-attempt-in-medical-college-2167521.html>

⁶² John C B Webster, *Religion and Dalit Liberation: An Examination of Perspectives* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2002), 95, Felix Wilfred, *Dalit Empowerment*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), 173-174, Ambrose Pinto, "Culture, Values and Dalits in Higher Education," in *Education and the Disprivileged: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century India*, ed. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2002), 183, V Mohini Giri, *Deprived Devis: Women's Unequal Status in Society* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2006), 27, Devasahayam, "Conflicting Roles of the Bible," 65, Sanjay Paswan, Paramanshi Jaideva (Eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Dalits in India Struggle for Self Liberation*, (Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2004), 171.

⁶³ Rosemary Marangoly George, *Indian English and the Fiction of National Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 124-125.

A. 3. 1. Dalit Sufferings in Dalit Autobiographies

Autobiographies recount events that the narrator has personally experienced.⁶⁴ They bring personal accounts of life to the public domain.⁶⁵ Therefore, I expect some reservations against appropriating autobiographies as possible statements of historical 'truths.'⁶⁶ However, Dalit autobiographies are more than individual discourses. As Surekha clarifies, marginalised groups like Dalits, who did not find proper representation in dominant caste discourses, embraced autobiographies as a "tool for presenting an alternative view of history by theorising the relation between the self and its context."⁶⁷ Such autobiographies narrate everyday experiences that bind Dalits together and can offer important insights if we navigate carefully through the text and its representations.⁶⁸ Hence, we must read them not only as subjective experiences but also as atrocity narratives by victims.⁶⁹ They seek to narrate trauma, pain, resistance, protest and social change.⁷⁰ Bama's *Karukku*, translated from Tamil, is one of the first non-Marathi Dalit autobiographies available in English.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Tilmann Habermas, *Emotion and Narrative: Perspectives in Autobiographical Storytelling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 23.

⁶⁵ Kathrine Hodgkin, "Autobiographical Writings," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion*, eds., Andrew Hiscock, Helen Wilcox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 209.

⁶⁶ J. Lenore Wright, *Philosopher's "I": The Autobiography and the Search for the Self* (Albany: State University of Albany Press, 2006), 114.

⁶⁷ Surekha Nelavala, "Inclusivity and Distinctions: The Future of Dalit Feminist Biblical Studies," in *New Feminist Christianity: Many Voices, Many Views*, eds. Mary E. Hunt, Diann L. Neu (Woodstock: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2010), 105.

⁶⁸ Kathryn Hansen, *Stages of Life: Indian Theatre Autobiographies* (London: Anthem Press, 2013), 308, Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, "Texts of liminality: Reading Identity in Dalit Autobiographies from Bengal," in *Memory, Identity and the Colonial Encounter in India: Essays in Honour of Peter Robb*, eds. Ezra Rashkow, Sanjukta Ghosh and Upal Chakrabarti (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 150.

⁶⁹ Peter Admirand, *Amidst Mass Atrocity and the Rubble of Theology: Searching for a Viable Theodicy* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), 1-38.

⁷⁰ Pramod K. Nayar, *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* (Delhi: Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd., 2008), 109.

⁷¹ Eleanor Zelliot, "Dalit Literature, Language, and Identity," in *Language in South Asia*, eds. Braj B. Kachru, Yamuna Kachru and S. N. Sridhar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 454-455.

Bama is the pen-name of Faustina Mary Fatima Rani.⁷² She was born in 1958 in Puthupatti village in Tamilnadu.⁷³ She belongs to an ex-untouchable community converted into the Roman Catholic Church.⁷⁴ She became a Dalit Catholic nun to alleviate the sufferings of Dalit children after resigning from her job as a teacher. However, she was shocked to note caste discriminations in the convents, where Tamils were considered inferior. A Tamil Parayar was the lowest among the nuns.⁷⁵

Bama published *Karukku* in 1992.⁷⁶ *Karukku* means Palmyra leaves, which have serrated ends on both sides, like double-edged swords.⁷⁷ This metaphor suggests, among other things, the sufferings of the Dalits in inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit interactions. *Karukku* exposes the oppression of the Dalits by the Church and by dominant caste communities.⁷⁸ It illustrates some double-edged discriminations against the Dalits. Bama explains her exit out of the convent through a series of metaphors. She found herself as a bird with broken wings and a fish that has been returned to the water.⁷⁹ Who might have

⁷² Nishal Haider, "Translating Power, Gender and Caste: Negotiating Identity, Memory and History: A Study of Bama's Sangati," in *The Language Loss of the Indigenous*, eds. G. N. Devy, Geoffrey V. Davis and K. K. Chakravarty (London: Routledge, 2016), 122.

⁷³ M. Koteswar Rao and Uttam Bhagavan Ambhore, "Quest for Integrity: A Reading of Bama's *Karukku*," in *Shodh, Samiksha aur Mulyankan* (International Research Journal), Vol. II, Issue-7 (August 2009), 245.

⁷⁴ Somdatta Mandal, "Debating, Challenging or Accepting Patriarchy? Assessing Indian Women's Role in Society and Creative Writing," in *The English Paradigm in India: Essays in Language, Literature and Culture*, eds. Shweta Rao Garg and Deepti Gupta (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 66, Maura Pala, "Hegemony and Conscious-building Processes in Dalit Literature," in *The Political Philosophies of Antonio Gramsci and B. R. Ambedkar: Itineraries of Dalits and Subalterns*, ed. Cosimo Zene (London: Routledge, 2013), 153, Anand Teltumbde, "Dalits, Dalit Women and the Indian State," in *Dalit Women: Vanguard of an Alternative Politics in India*, eds. S. Anandhi and Karin Kapadia (Routledge: London, 2017), 69.

⁷⁵ K. A. Geetha, *Contesting Categories, Remapping Boundaries: Literary Interventions by Tamil Dalits* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 78.

⁷⁶ Maria Preethi Srinivasan, "A Dalit and a First Nations Canadian Speak of the Women in their Bones," in *Indigenous Biography and Autobiography*, eds. Peter Read, Frances Peters-Little and Anna Haebich (Canberra: Anu E Press, 2008), 109.

⁷⁷ Sara Sindhu Thomas, "Witnessing and Experiencing Dalitness: In Defence of Dalit Women's Testimonies," in *Dalit Literatures in India*, eds. Joshil K. Abraham and Judith Misrahi-Barak (London: Routledge, 2016), 239.

⁷⁸ Keith Hebden, *Dalit Theology and Christian Anarchism* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 122.

⁷⁹ Bama, *Karukku*, trans. Lakshmi Holmstrom (Chennai: MacMillan, 1992), 103-104.

hurt the bird? Who might have taken the fish out of the water? *Karukku* implies that the Church wounded her and had taken her out of the water. However, Bama does not blame the Church as the only oppressor:

In this society, if you are born into a low caste, you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death. Even after death, caste difference does not disappear. Wherever you look, however much you study, whatever you take up, discrimination stalks us in every nook and corner and drives us into a frenzy. It is because of this that we are unable to find a way to study well and progress like everyone else.⁸⁰

Thus, the caste system has many implications.⁸¹ It accompanies Dalits from birth to death and influences their relations, social interactions and political alignments.⁸² *The Policy of Dalit Empowerment in the Catholic Church in India: An Ethical Imperative to Build Inclusive Communities*, published by the Indian Catholic bishops, in 2016, notes that a crime is committed against a Dalit every eighteen minutes. Similarly, three Dalit women are raped, two Dalits are murdered, eleven are beaten, and two Dalit houses are burnt every day.⁸³ Harassment of a Dalit professor in the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, shows how the caste system continued to operate in 2018.⁸⁴ The systemic

⁸⁰Ibid. 26.

⁸¹ J. S. Dosanjh and Paul A. S. Ghuman, *Child-Rearing in Ethnic Minorities* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 1996), 136, Rasna Warah, *Triple Heritage: A Journey to Self-Discovery* (Nairobi: R. Warah, 1998), 49, Dharendra Singh, *Indian Heritage and Culture*, (New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, 2000), 299, S. N. Sadasivan, *Social History of India*, (New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, 2000), 229, Rana, *Reservations in India*, 347, H. C. Sadangi, *Dalit: The Downtrodden of India* (Delhi: Isha books, 2008), 138.

⁸² Ghanshyam Shah, "Untouchability in Rural Gujarat: Revisited," in *Dalits and the State*, ed. Ghanshyam Shah (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2002), 141, K. Babu Joseph, "The Contours of my Socialization" in *Caste in Life: Experiencing Inequalities*, eds. D. Shyam Babu and R. S. Khare (New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley, 2011), 130, Sebastian, Reena, *Caste Identities and The Ideology of Exclusion*, 92..

⁸³ Cardinal Baselios Cleemis, "Policy of Dalit Empowerment in the Catholic Church in India An Ethical Imperative to Build Inclusive Communities," accessed 29th April 2018, www.cbci.in/Policies/Policy922172823534.pdf.

⁸⁴ Sandip Roy, "Harassment of Dalit Professor in IIT Kanpur Exemplifies the Subtle Ways of Caste Discrimination in India Today," accessed on 24th April 2018, https://www.firstpost.com/india/harassment-of-dalit-professor-in-iit-kanpur-exemplifies-the-subtle-ways-of-caste-discrimination-in-india-today-4417_983.html.

oppression has wounded the Dalit psyche.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, the caste mentality has permeated the Church also and, as Anderson recognises, "continues to dictate terms in the subsistence of the churches in South India."⁸⁶

A survey done by the Madurai province of the Jesuits also acknowledges the sufferings of Dalit Christians within the churches. The random sampling, which included 9,000 respondents, found that Dalit Christians suffer discrimination in the Catholic Church.⁸⁷ Likewise, Cardinal Oswald Gracias, the Archbishop of Bombay, while participating in the annual gathering of the National Council of Dalit Christians, which took place on March 2017, acknowledged the same.⁸⁸ So too, Tamilnadu Untouchability Eradication Front conducted a public hearing on March 16, 2017, on the alleged atrocities against Dalit Christians in Sivagangai Diocese of the Catholic Church, and reported that discrimination against Dalits and caste practices are rampant within the Church.⁸⁹

A. 4. The Caste System and Christian Churches

As noted, Dalits suffered many cases of systemic human rights violations. Most Dalits live on the outskirts of the villages.⁹⁰ So too, the dominant caste discourses, most

⁸⁵ John C. B. Webster, *Religion and Dalit Liberation: An Examination of Perspectives* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2002), 95, Felix Wilfred, *Dalit Empowerment* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), 173-174.

⁸⁶ Andrew Wyatt, "Dalit Theology and the Politics of Untouchability among Indian Christian Churches," in *From Stigma to Assertion: Untouchability, Identity and Politics in Early and Modern India*, eds. Mikael Aktor and Robert Deliege (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press and the Authors, 2010), 120, Anderson, *Community and Worldview*, 35.

⁸⁷ P. Antoniraj, *Discrimination Against Dalit Christians* (Madurai: IDEAS Centre, 1992), 256.

⁸⁸ Nirmala Carvalho, "Indian Church admits Dalits Face Discrimination," accessed 30th April 2018, <https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2017/03/24/indian-church-admits-dalits-face-discrimination/>.

⁸⁹ STAFF REPORTER, "Dalit Christians still Trapped in Caste," accessed on 22nd April 2018, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/dalit-christians-still-trapped-in-caste/article23486251.ece>.

⁹⁰ Akepogu Jammanna and Pasala Sudhakar, *Dalits' Struggle for Social Justice in Andhra Pradesh (1956-2008): From Relays to Vacuum Tubes* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 233, K. E. Rajpramukh, *Satellite Castes and Dependant Relations: Dalits in South India* (New Delhi: Patridge India, 2013), 1, Rowena Robinson and Joseph Marinus Kajur, "Introduction," in *Margins of Faith: Dalit and Tribal Christianity in India*, eds. Rowena Robinson and Joseph Marinus Kajur (New Delhi: Sage

often, designate Dalits as untidy, dark and 'animalistic.' Similarly, Dalits have unequal access to services and employment opportunities.⁹¹ Hostilities from mainstream society further endanger their prospects.⁹² In response, Dalits challenge caste hegemony in many ways, including conversion to well-established religions.⁹³ They embraced Christianity in large numbers as part of such manoeuvres.⁹⁴

However, conversion did not help Dalits significantly, and they remain as outsiders in Indian Christian churches, suffering multiple discriminations in inter-denominational and intra-denominational relations. The sufferings of Dalit Christians began right from the time of their conversion. For example, there was an unwritten convention in the Catholic Church that no untouchable should be ordained to priesthood except under extraordinary situations.⁹⁵ It introduced the law to limit the priesthood to Brahmins in 1613.⁹⁶ The Dalit converts were forced to reject their cultural and religious practices. For instance, Dalit converts were required to break their drum before baptism.⁹⁷ Christian denominations

Publications, 2011), 93, Surinder S. Jodhka, *Caste in Contemporary India* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 28.

⁹¹ John Mohan Razu, "'Human Corporate Family' Demystified: Interrogating the Phenomena of Poverty and Social Exclusion in a Globalised World - Liberating Mission from an Indian Perspective," in *News of Boundless Riches: Interrogating, Comparing, and Reconstructing Mission in a Global Era*, eds. Max L. Stackhouse and Lalsangkima Pachuau (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), 20, Sebastian, Reena, *Caste Identities and The Ideology of Exclusion*, 92.

⁹² K. P. Kuruvila, *The Word Became Flesh: A Christological Paradigm for Doing Theology in India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002), 171, Avaneesh Maurya, "Reservations in the Panchayati Raj Institutions and Empowerment of the Dalits in Uttar Pradesh: Achievements and Limitations," in *Democratic Decentralization in India: Experiences, Issues and Challenges*, ed. E. Venkatesu (London: Routledge, 2016), 66-70.

⁹³ Please see 1. 2. 4. 1. for more information.

⁹⁴ Augustine Kanjamela, "Redemptoris Missio and Mission in India," in *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation*, ed. William R Burrows (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 201.

⁹⁵ G. Prakash Reddy, "Caste and Christianity: A Study of Shudra Caste Converts in Rural Andhra Pradesh," *Religion and Society* (1987), 119.

⁹⁶ Walter Fernandes, "Conversion to Christianity, Caste Tension and Search for an Identity in Tamilnadu," in *The Emerging Dalit Identity: Re-assertion of the Subalterns*, ed. Walter Fernandes (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1996), 144-145

⁹⁷ Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 12. Drum is a musical instrument. It has been associated with Dalits.

only began to denounce such discriminations in the last few decades.⁹⁸ The Catholic Bishops' Conference stated in 1982 that caste discrimination should not have a place in the Church and formally instituted an office for the development of the Dalits in 1986.⁹⁹ So too, Pope John Paul II, while addressing Catholic bishops from India, denounced the caste system and declared:

Any semblance of a caste-based prejudice in relations between Christians is a countersign to authentic human solidarity, a threat to genuine spirituality and a serious hindrance to the Church's mission of evangelisation. Therefore, customs and traditions that perpetuate or reinforce caste division should be sensitively reformed so that they may become an expression of solidarity of the whole Christian community.¹⁰⁰

I appreciate similar initiatives. However, it is inexcusable that the caste system remains active within the Churches and the power of dominant-caste Christians has sidelined Dalit Christians.¹⁰¹ Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon, in her 2009 book, observed that only 4 percent of the parishes are entrusted to Dalit priests.¹⁰² There are no Dalits among thirteen Catholic Bishops of Tamilnadu. The case is the same with the Vicars-generals and rectors of seminaries and directors of social assistance centres as well.¹⁰³

The situation, however, has slightly improved recently. The first Dalit Archbishop was installed in the Catholic Church in April 2000. Marampudi Joji of Vijayawada was

⁹⁸ Katharine Adeney and Andrew Wyatt, *Contemporary India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 61.

⁹⁹ Catholic Bishops Conference of India, "Statement of the of the General Body Meeting of the CBCI, Tiruchirapalli, 1982," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 46 (1982), 149, Catholic Bishops Conference of India, *CBCI Office for Schedule Castes/Backward Classes*, accessed on 23rd July 2018, <https://www.cbci.in/all-Commissions/Sc-st-bc.aspx>.

¹⁰⁰ Address of John Paul II to the Bishops of India on their "ad Limina" visit, dt. 17th November 2003.

¹⁰¹ Michael Amaladoss, "A New Way of Being Christian in India Today: Theological Reflections," in *Church's Engagement in Civil Society*, eds. Anthony Kalliath and Francis Gonsalves (Bangalore: ATC, 2009), 147, Prem Kumar Shinde, *Dalits and Human Rights: Dalits: Security and Rights Implications* (Delhi: Isha Books, 2005), 113.

¹⁰² Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon, "Liberation Hermeneutics and India's Dalits," in *The Bible and the Hermeneutics of Liberation*, eds. Alejandro F. Botta and Pablo R. Andiañach (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 200, 210.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* Please see Chapter 1 and 2 for more information.

selected as the successor to Archbishop Samineni Arulappa in Hyderabad. The retiring Archbishop openly criticised the Vatican's choice of a Dalit. Nevertheless, the consecration went on smoothly.¹⁰⁴ Tamilnadu followed Andhra Pradesh and got two bishops consecrated.¹⁰⁵ According to the Policy of Dalit Empowerment in the Catholic Church in India, released by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India on 8th December 2016, there are 12 Dalit bishops in the Catholic Church in India: two in Tamilnadu, five in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, one in Gujarat, three in Odisha, and one in Maharashtra. Among the Major Superiors, twelve out of 822 are from the Dalit community. Priests from the Dalits are only 1,130 (4.2 percent) out of 27,000, and religious are only 4,500 (4.5 percent) out of 100,000.¹⁰⁶ Likewise, *Thadam Thedi* (In search of the path), a report on the status of Dalit Christians, attests that Dalit Christians have not been given any prominent positions in Church administration.¹⁰⁷

Similarly, Jeremiah, in his book published in 2013, clarifies that the leaders and officials of the Church of South India, the largest Protestant denomination in India, were always elected from dominant caste Christians. Such discriminating practices, Jeremiah explains, created a hierarchy mainly controlled by non-Dalits. He notes that the situation has changed demographically. However, the plight of Dalits has not improved substantially even though half of the bishops in the Church of South India are Dalits since

¹⁰⁴ Peter C. Phan, "Living for the Reign of God," in *Movement Or Moment?: Assessing Liberation Theology Forty Years After Medellin*, ed. Patrick Claffey (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 78, Z. Devasagayaraj, "Archbishop Arulappa Condemns Vatican For Promoting a Dalit Bishop as his Successor in Hyderabad, India," accessed 25th April 2018, <http://www.dalitchristians.com/html/arulappa.htm>.

¹⁰⁵ Pon Vasanth, "Acknowledgement of Bias Raises Hope for Dalit Christians," accessed on 22nd April 2018, www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/acknowledgement-of-bias-raises-hope-for-dalit-christians/article16895188.ece1.

¹⁰⁶ Cleemis, *Policy of Dalit Empowerment in the Catholic Church*.

¹⁰⁷ Special Correspondent, Discrimination within the Church, accessed on 22nd April, 2018, www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/Discrimination-within-the-Church/article14388130.ece.

the new bishops represent the affluent urban Dalit communities while the larger Dalit communities who live in the rural parts continue to be neglected.¹⁰⁸

The caste system is alive in Syrian Churches as well.¹⁰⁹ A survey done by Ninan Koshy uncovers the tendency of Syrian Christians to designate non-Syrian Christians by their caste names—such as “Pulayan Christians” or “Nadar Christians.” The Syrian Christians also opposed inter-dining with dominated caste members.¹¹⁰ Koshy’s survey may be outdated, but Susan Viswanathan, a professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, notes more recently, caste practices among Syrian Christians like prohibiting low castes from entering Syrian Christian houses.¹¹¹ Syrian Christians continue to function as a dominant caste endogamous group. Note also, there are Syrian Christians who will not receive communion with Dalits or from a Dalit priest.¹¹²

My Syrian Christian upbringing convinces me that similar practices continue among us. Recently, a cousin of my friend was expelled from her house for marrying a Dalit Christian. Moreover, almost all matrimonial advertisements by Syrian Christians establish their caste preferences in matchmaking. Likewise, an alleged honour killing in Kerala in May 2018 highlights how dangerous would be the marriage between Dalit

¹⁰⁸ Anderson H. M. Jeremiah, *Community and Worldview Among Paraiyars of South India: 'Lived' Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 31, 32.

¹⁰⁹ Syrian Christians spread across Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant traditions. The Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara and Knanaya Syrian churches belongs to the Roman Catholic Church. The Jacobite Syrian church, the Knanaya Jacobite Syrian church, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian church, the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian church and the St. Thomas Evangelical church profess (more or less) Oriental orthodox faith. There is a section of Syrian Christians in the Church of South India also.

¹¹⁰ Ninan Koshy, *Caste in the Kerala Churches* (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1968), 39-42.

¹¹¹ Susan Viswanathan, *The Christians of Kerala: History, Belief and Ritual among the Yakoba* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 34.

¹¹² Philip L. Wickeri, "The Marthoma Christians of Kerala: A Study of the Relationship between Liturgy and Mission in the Indian Context," in *Christian Worship Worldwide: Expanding Horizons, Deepening Practices*, ed. Charles E. Farhadian (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 91.

Christians and Syrian Christians.¹¹³ Geevarghese Mor Coorilos, the Bishop of Niranam Diocese, has also noted the dominant caste tendencies among us.¹¹⁴ Thus, as will be clarified further, the conversion did not improve the Dalit social situation significantly, and Dalits continue to suffer within the churches because of purity and pollution claims.¹¹⁵

The failure of the Church in accommodating Dalit Christians and the insensitivity of Indian Christian theology to the Dalits frustrated the pioneers of Dalit theology. They acknowledged Indian Christian theology as a counter-theology, having emerged out of the discontent toward a Eurocentric theology that the missionaries had brought to the Indian subcontinent.¹¹⁶ However, the contributions to Indian Christian Theology came significantly from the dominant caste converts.¹¹⁷ They used Hindu philosophical terms and *Vedantic* categories from their varying perspectives to liberate Indian Christian theology from its European captivity.¹¹⁸ Such an extreme form of uncritical inculturation and adaptation, as Anderson rightly argues, resulted in “compromise and conciliatory incorporation of discriminatory power structures.”¹¹⁹ The founders of Dalit theology were not satisfied with this phenomenon and accused such academics as being “deaf, dumb and blind to Dalits’ sufferings.”¹²⁰ Scholars like Massey call this phenomenon the

¹¹³ Gita Aravamudan, "Honour killing' in Kerala: Kevin-Neenu Case Indicative of a Bigger, More Frightening Trend," accessed on 5th June 2018, <https://www.firstpost.com/life/honour-killing-in-kerala-kevin-neenu-case-indicative-of-a-bigger-more-frightening-trend-4491953.html>.

¹¹⁴ Thufail P. T. Bishop Demolishes The Biggest Conversion 'Myth' of Kerala, accessed on 30th April 2018, <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/bishop-demolishes-the-biggest-conversion-myth-of-kerala/310974>.

¹¹⁵ Fernando Franco and Jyotsna Macwan, *Journeys to Freedom: Dalit Narratives* (Kolkata: Samya, 2004), 82.

¹¹⁶ Hubert Manohar Watson, *Towards a Relevant Christology for India Today: An Appraisal of the Christologies of John Hick, Jurgen Moltmann and Jon Sobrino* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2002), 52ff.

¹¹⁷ Arvind P. Nirmal, *Heuristic Explorations* (Madras: CLS, 1990), 27.

¹¹⁸ Kuruvila, *The Word Became Flesh*, 197.

¹¹⁹ Anderson, *Community and Worldview*, 35.

¹²⁰ A. P. Nirmal, "Toward a Christian Dalit Theology," in *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends*, ed. R. A. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 30, see also A. P. Nirmal, "Towards a Christian

'Sanskritic captivity.'¹²¹ Indian Christian Theology, according to Dalit researchers, is a move from Western captivity to Sanskritic captivity.¹²²

A. 5. The Emergence of Dalit Theology

Nirmal, Massey, Prabhakar, Azariah, Wilson, Devasahayam and Balasundaram are regarded as the pioneers of Dalit theology.¹²³ Although offering distinct perspectives, they believed that Indian Christian theology failed to represent the lives of the Dalits because of Sanskritic obsession and demanded a change in the theological agenda.¹²⁴ Their call began to influence Indian theological enquiries by the 1980s and, as will be clarified, Dalit theology emerged from that background. Dalit theology, as Ashok Kumar and Sunder John Boopalan clarify, revisits the Bible from a Dalit perspective, focussing on the experiences of the Dalits and their significance for theologising in Dalit contexts.¹²⁵

The movement from philosophical explanations to the experience of the Dalits was vital in Indian contexts, and Dalit theology has already established itself as one of

Dalit Theology," in *Emerging Dalit Theology*, ed. Xavier Irudayaraj (Madras: The Jesuit Theological Secretariat, 1990), Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion*, 42, Arvind P. Nirmal, "Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective", in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, ed. Arvind P. Nirmal (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1991), 140.

¹²¹ James Massey, "Ingredients for a Dalit Theology," in *Indigenous People: Dalits: Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate*, ed. James Massey (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 338-43, Kirsteen Kim, "India," in *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, ed. John Parratt (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004), 54, David Mosse, "The Politics of Religious Synthesis: Roman Catholicism and Hindu Village Society in Tamil Nadu, India," in *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*, eds. Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart (London: Routledge, 2005), 73.

¹²² This discussion does not mean that the Dalit theologians dismissed the Indian Christian Theology entirely. Arvind P. Nirmal, for instance, praised the pioneering works of Indian Christian theologians. Please read Nirmal, "Towards A Christian Dalit Theology," 54 -55 for more information.

¹²³ A. P. Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology" in *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends*, ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll: Orbis books, 1994); 28-31

¹²⁴ R. S. Sugirtharajah, Cecil Hargreaves, *Introduction to Readings in Indian Christian Theology* (London: SPCK, 1993), 2, V. Devasahayam, 'Doing Dalit Theology: Basic Assumptions,' in *Frontiers of Dalit Theology*, ed. V. Devasahayam (Delhi: ISPCK, 2008), 274.

¹²⁵ Ashok Kumar M, Sunder J. Boopalan, "Indian Christians in Conflict: Dalit Christian Movement in Contemporary India," in *Handbook of Global Contemporary Christianity: Themes and Developments in Culture, Politics, and Society*, ed. Stephen Hunt (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 318.

the significant contributions of Indian theological explorations.¹²⁶ Dalit pathos, caste-based oppression, God as a suffering God and Jesus as a Dalit are some of the essential theoretical premises of Dalit theology. The following section traces the development of Dalit theology, which hopes to situate this dissertation in its context.

A. 5. 1. The Development of Dalit Theology

James Massey considers Nirmal's paper "Towards a Sudra Theology," presented at the Carey Society of the United Theological College as the inauguration of Dalit theology.¹²⁷ Nirmal's paper, as Schouten notes, challenged the Dalit academics and exhorted them to develop a theological response to the renewed self-consciousness among the Dalits.¹²⁸ Nirmal, often recognised as the predecessor of Dalit theology, however, did not use the word Dalit in this paper.¹²⁹ Nevertheless, Nirmal's paper functioned as a catalyst, providing a strong foundation for Dalit theology.¹³⁰ Scholars like Clarke and Rajkumar rightly understand Nirmal's paper as a watershed event and a clarion call that demanded Dalit Christians to give up their theological passivity.¹³¹

Kothappalli Wilson's book *The Twice Alienated* was another groundbreaking publication in Dalit theology. Wilson highlighted how Indian Christian theology impacted Dalit Christians negatively and called for a shift from supernatural and otherworldly

¹²⁶ Felix Wilfred, *Margins: Site of Asian Theologies* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2008), 60.

¹²⁷ James Massey, "A Review of Dalit Theology," in *Dalit and Minjung Theologies: A Dialogue*, ed. Samson Prabhakar, Jinkwan Kwon (Bangalore: Sathri, 2006), 3. A revised version of Nirmal's lecture appeared with the title: "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, ed. Arvind P. Nirmal (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological Institute and Research Institute, 1991), 53-70.

¹²⁸ Jan Peter Schouten, *Jesus as Guru: The Image of Christ among Hindus and Christians in India* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 240.

¹²⁹ For a review of Nirmal's contribution, see Franklyn J. Balasundaram, "The Contribution of A. P. Nirmal to Theology and Especially to Dalit Theology," *Religion and Society* 45 (1998), 85-100.

¹³⁰ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 39.

¹³¹ Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern religion and Liberation Theology in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 45, Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 39.

concerns to the daily sufferings of the Dalits.¹³² Wilson used the term Dalit in his book. *The Twice Alienated*, as John Webster and Dionysius Rasquinha observe, was more a critique of Indian Christian theology than the presentation of a Dalit alternative and it marked a transition from Indian Christian theology to Dalit theology.¹³³

M. Azariah brought the term Dalit theology to an international forum in 1984.¹³⁴ The emergence of organisations like the Christian Dalit Liberation Movement and Dalit Liberation Education Trust also triggered the gradual development of Dalit theology.¹³⁵ Three successive seminars at Guntur (1986) and Chennai (1986 and 1988) further assisted Dalit academics to assess and study the outlook of Dalit theology.¹³⁶ The conference held in Guntur explored the concept, content and direction for Dalit theology.¹³⁷ "Towards a Dalit theology" was the theme for the conferences held in Chennai.¹³⁸ The publication of the papers presented in these conferences was another epoch-making event.¹³⁹ As John Paratt remarks, the book marked the beginning of serious theologising by Dalit academics.¹⁴⁰ Nirmal, in his article, clarified that the aim of Dalit theology is not only gaining rights and privileges but also the realisation of "full

¹³² Kothappalli Wilson, *The Twice Alienated: Culture of Dalit Christians* (Hyderabad: Booklinks Cooperation, 1982).

¹³³ John C. B. Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 234, Dionysius Rasquinha, 'A Brief Historical Analysis of the Emergence of Dalit Christian Theology', in *VJTR*, Vol. 66, May 2002, 363.

¹³⁴ Zoe C. Sherinian, *Tamil Folk Music as Dalit Liberation Theology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 129.

¹³⁵ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 39.

¹³⁶ Massey, "A Review of Dalit Theology," 3.

¹³⁷ Anuparthi John Prabhakar, *Preaching Contextually: A Case with Rural Dalits in India* (Chennai: Notion Press, 2016), 30.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ M. E. Prabhakar (ed.), *Towards a Dalit Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998).

¹⁴⁰ John Paratt, "Recent Writing on Dalit Theology: A Bibliographic Essay," in *International Review of Mission*, April 1994, volume 83, 329.

humanness or conversely our full divinity, the ideal of the imago dei in us."¹⁴¹ Such publications and seminars helped to affirm the vision of Dalit theology.¹⁴²

A. 5. 2. Development of Dalit Theology in the 1990s

Emerging Dalit theology, edited by Xavier Irudayaraj, opened the Dalit theological explorations in the 1990s.¹⁴³ This book, as Rajkumar notes, is one of the important publications in Dalit theology, and it can orient a reader towards much of the core principles of Dalit theology.¹⁴⁴ Nirmal, in his classic essay in this volume, compares Dalits embracing Christianity with the exodus experience.¹⁴⁵ *A Reader in Dalit Theology* and *Heuristic Explorations* followed Irudayaraj's publication.¹⁴⁶ Paratt describes *A Reader in Dalit Theology* as "an invaluable sourcebook."¹⁴⁷ It also contains Nirmal's "two foundational papers."¹⁴⁸ *A Reader in Dalit Theology* and *Heuristic Explorations*, as Webster argues, further mark the transition from experimental approaches to articulating a more robust conception of what Dalit theology is.¹⁴⁹

Massey's book *Towards a Dalit Hermeneutics* is another important milestone in the 1990s. Massey advises the Dalits to reconstruct their identity and assert their agency in redressing the Dalit situation.¹⁵⁰ Two edited works, clarifying the outlook of Dalit

¹⁴¹ A.P. Nirmal, "A Dialogue with Dalit Literature," in *Towards a Dalit Theology*, ed. M.E. Prabhakar (Delhi: ISPCK, 1988), 79.

¹⁴² Massey, "A Review of Dalit Theology," 3.

¹⁴³ Xavier Irudayaraj (ed.), *Emerging Dalit Theology* (Madras: Jesuit Theological Secretariate, 1990).

¹⁴⁴ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 39.

¹⁴⁵ Arvind P. Nirmal, "Towards a Dalit Theology," in *Emerging Dalit Theology*, ed. Xavier Irudayaraj (Madras: Jesuit Theological Secretariate, 1990), 123-142.

¹⁴⁶ Arvind P. Nirmal (Ed.), *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1991), A. P. Nirmal (ed.), *Heuristic Explorations* (Madras: CLS, 191).

¹⁴⁷ Paratt, *Recent Writings on Dalit Theology*, 29.

¹⁴⁸ Please see Nirmal's papers at pages 53-70 and 139-144.

¹⁴⁹ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 294.

¹⁵⁰ James Massey, *Towards Dalit hermeneutics: Rereading the Text, the History and the Literature* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994).

theology (*Indigenous Peoples: Dalits and Dalit Issues in Today's Debate* and *Frontiers of Dalit Theology*) were also published during this period.¹⁵¹ *Indigenous Peoples* included articles from Nirmal,¹⁵² Prabhakar,¹⁵³ James Theophilus Appavoo,¹⁵⁴ Abraham Ayrookuzhiel¹⁵⁵ and Massey.¹⁵⁶ Nirmal, in his article, clarifies that Jesus encountered rejection, contempt and death as a prototype of Dalits.¹⁵⁷ Prabhakar defined Dalit theology as a political theology demanding social praxis and transformation of undemocratic and oppressive structures.¹⁵⁸ *Frontiers of Dalit Theology* includes the papers presented at the Gurukul Summer Institute.¹⁵⁹ It consists of essays on revelation, hermeneutics, Christology and anthropology.¹⁶⁰ This book highlights the fact that the Dalits are deprived of human dignity that are being enjoyed by non-Dalits.¹⁶¹

The scholarly discussions during the 1990s, as Massey observes, concentrated on the role of Dalit theology and its sources.¹⁶² So too, Dalit academics began to focus on the Dalit's religio-cultural resources.¹⁶³ Some of the important issues considered

¹⁵¹ James Massey (ed.), *Indigenous People: Dalits, Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), V. Devasahayam (ed.), *Frontiers of Dalit Theology* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1997).

¹⁵² A.P. Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," in *Indigenous People: Dalits, Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate*, ed. James Massey (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998).

¹⁵³ M.E. Prabhakar, "The Search for a Dalit Theology," in *Indigenous People: Dalits, Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate*, ed. James Massey (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998).

¹⁵⁴ James Theophilus Appavoo, "Dalit Religion," in *Indigenous People: Dalits, Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate*, ed. James Massey (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994).

¹⁵⁵ Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, "Dalit Theology: A Movement of Counter-Culture," in *Indigenous People: Dalits, Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate*, ed. James Massey (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994).

¹⁵⁶ James Massey, "Historical Roots," in *Indigenous People: Dalits, Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate*, ed. James Massey (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994).

¹⁵⁷ Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 227.

¹⁵⁸ Prabhakar, "The Search for a Dalit Theology," 211.

¹⁵⁹ Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute is an ecumenical seminary in Tamil Nadu, India.

¹⁶⁰ V. Devasahayam (ed.), *Frontiers of Dalit Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997).

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* 18.

¹⁶² Massey, "A Review of Dalit Theology," 6.

¹⁶³ Bernhard Ortmann, "Contextual Theologies and Missionary Representation: The Impact of the Emerging Dalit Theology on the Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Lower Saxony, Germany," in *Construction of the*

pertinent in this period were the engagement of the Church in the struggle of the Dalits, critique of Brahminic modes of Indian Christian theology, a call for the Dalit concerns and their full humanisation, the Dalit experiences to become foundations for Dalit theology and a call for a theology concerned with human struggles.¹⁶⁴ Some emerging Dalit Christian academics, as will be clarified, had already suggested some modifications to some of these proposals, based upon the changed circumstances of the twenty-first century.

A. 5. 3. Development of Dalit Theology in the 2000s

Frontiers in Dalit Hermeneutics,¹⁶⁵ *Breaking Theoretical Grounds for Dalit Studies*,¹⁶⁶ *Dalit Tribal Theological Interface*,¹⁶⁷ *Dalit Empowerment*,¹⁶⁸ *The Quest of Method in Dalit Theology*,¹⁶⁹ and *Re-imagining Dalit Theology: Postmodern Readings*¹⁷⁰ are some of the publications during this period. However, the most significant event during this period is an international conference on Dalit theology held in Kolkota in 2008.

The conference deliberated on the theme 'Dalit Theology in the 21st Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways.' It revisited "the ways in which Dalit realities are imagined, interpreted, and circulated in different ecclesial communities across

Other, Identification of the Self: German Mission in India, eds. Martin Tamcke, Gladson Jathanna (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2012), 282.

¹⁶⁴ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 39-40.

¹⁶⁵ James Massey, Samson Prabhakar (ed.), *Frontiers in Dalit Hermeneutics* (Delhi: Sathri, 2005).

¹⁶⁶ James Massey, S. Lourunathan and I. John Mohan Razu (eds.), *Breaking Theoretical Grounds for Dalit Studies* (New Delhi: Centre for Dalit/Subaltern Studies, 2006).

¹⁶⁷ James Massey and Shimreingam Shimray (eds.), *Dalit-Tibal Theological Interface: Current Trends in Subaltern Theologies* (New Delhi: Tribal Study Centre/Women Study Centre, Eastern Theological College and Centre for Dalit/Subaltern Studies, 2007).

¹⁶⁸ Felix Wilfred, *Dalit Empowerment* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 2007).

¹⁶⁹ Charles Singaram, *The Question of Method in Dalit Theology: In Search of a Systematic Approach to the Practice of an Indian Liberation Theology* (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2008).

¹⁷⁰ Y. T. Vinayaraj, *Re-imagining Dalit Theology: Postmodern Readings* (Thiruvalla: CSS, 2010).

India,"¹⁷¹ and advocated "new frameworks and methodologies for understanding Dalit Theology."¹⁷² It further suggested how and why Dalit theology needs to revisit some of its theoretical premises to become a theology of life in the 21st century.¹⁷³ This seminar was a significant milestone and a game-changer.¹⁷⁴

The presentations were published in 2010, entitled as *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*. The book tracks the development of Dalit theology from the 1980s, and revisits Nirmal's methodological formulations, Massey's historical reconstructions, Devasahayam's biblical interpretations, Prabhakar's Christological reflections, Ayrookuzhiel's appropriation of Dalit religio-cultural foundations, Webster's construction of Dalit Christian histories and Appavoo's reclamation of Dalit folklore and liturgy against the changed circumstances in the twenty-first century.¹⁷⁵ Such daring attempts, as will be explained further, seem to have inspired some Dalit academics who suggested new avenues for Dalit theology.

A. 5. 3. 1. Emerging Trends in Dalit Theology

Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century inspired some Dalit academics, and they began to question some of the dominant proposals of Dalit theology, believing that such interrogations would make Dalit theology more relevant to the Dalit communities. Such scholars, while accepting the radicalism of Dalit theology, critically revisit Dalit theology

¹⁷¹ Amazon.in, *Dalit Theology in the 21st Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*, accessed on 02nd July 2019, <https://www.amazon.in/Dalit-Theology-21st-Century-Discordant/dp/0198066910>.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 2.

¹⁷⁴ World Council of Churches. *Re-inventing Dalit Theology for the 21st Century*, accessed on 02nd July 2019, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/re-inventing-dalit-theology-for-the-21st-century>

¹⁷⁵ Sathianathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala, and Philip Vinod Peacock, "Introduction: Enflamed Words, Engaging Worlds, Embryonic Word-Worlds," in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-First Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*, eds. Sathianathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala, and Philip Vinod Peacock (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6.

from its inception. Peniel Rajkumar's work, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation* (2010), *Community and Worldview among Paraiyars of South India* by Anderson H. M. Jeremiah (2013), *Dalit Theology after Continental Philosophy* by Y. T. Vinayaraj (2016) and Sunder John Boopalan's book *Memory, Grief, and Agency: a Political Theological Account of Wrongs and Rites* (2017) emerged out of this context. Such publications advanced Dalit theology by revisiting some dominant proposals of Dalit theology, and noting continuity and negotiation in Dalit contexts. Further, they clarify the necessity for appreciating Dalits resistance, Dalits' agency, and utilising European models in redressing the Dalit situation.

A. 5. 3. 1. 1. Continuity and Negotiation in Dalit Contexts

The dominant outlook among the Dalit academics, as will be further clarified in chapter 3, included that the Dalits forsake their cultural and religious belongings entirely. Such a perspective began to be challenged after 2010 when some Dalit academics started to acknowledge religious and cultural continuity and negotiation in the Dalit contexts. Jeremiah, for example, based upon his fieldwork among the Dalits in Thulasigramam, a village situated 120 km west of Chennai, the capital city of the state of Tamilnadu in India, notes the process of religious and cultural continuity and negotiation among the Dalits.¹⁷⁶ Following similar routes, Joshua Samuel warns against overlooking Dalit cultural and religious foundations.

Self-righteous, Christian-centric attitudes of Dalit theologians that claim the gospel of Jesus Christ as the only means of liberation while simultaneously juxtaposing the Dalit religious values (now within Hinduism) as completely evil have had, I am afraid, reverse effects on the Christian Dalit communities by alienating them from the rest of the community.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Jeremiah, *Community and Worldview*, 75.

¹⁷⁷ Samuel, "Practicing Multiple Religious Belonging for Liberation," 82.

Besides alienating the Dalits, neglecting Dalit culture, as Vinayaraj and Rajkumar suggest, can relegate the Dalits as a memory-less/ past-less/ history-less people and can disempower Dalit theology significantly.¹⁷⁸ Further, such misappropriations can restrict the Dalits from celebrating the legacy of their responses to historical Dalit sufferings, embedded in their resources. Joshua's proposal that "multiple religious belonging could become an important tool for the Dalits to reconnect with their past"¹⁷⁹ can help Dalit theology reclaim Dalits' agency envisioned in Dalit contexts in empowering the Dalits.¹⁸⁰

A. 5. 3. 1. 2. Appreciating Dalits' Agency

A dominant section of Dalit academics, as will be further clarified, depended significantly on the pain and pathos of the Dalits.¹⁸¹ *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century* challenged such theoretical premises, and consequently, some scholars, while acknowledging the particularity of pathos, note that Dalit contexts involve more than just pathos. Deenabandhu Manchala, for instance, reviews the excessive focus on suffering, pain and pathos in Dalit theology and suggests a way forward by focussing not only on pathos but also on Dalits' agency in overcoming their sufferings.¹⁸²

There is an urge to expand the horizons of Dalit theology in order to include allies, to expand its ambit and relevance to wider realities, to affirm their identity of protest against an oppressive social system, and to move beyond a victim mindset. Therefore, it is not suffering, Dalit pathos alone but also their experience of struggle to overcome suffering and their determination to risk themselves for the sake of liberation and justice that now needs to be considered as the subject matter of theological reflection.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁸ Y. T. Vinayaraj, *Re-Visiting the Other: Discourses on Postmodern Theology* (Tiruvalla: Christava Sahitya Samithi, 2010), 72, Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 170.

¹⁷⁹ Samuel, "Practicing Multiple Religious Belonging for Liberation," 80.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 82.

¹⁸¹ Anderson, *Community and Worldview*, 5.

¹⁸² Deenabandhu Manchala, "Expanding the Ambit: Dalit Theological Contribution to Ecumenical Social Thought," in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-First Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*, eds. Sathianathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala, and Philip Vinod Peacock (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 41.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

Advancing on similar routes, Rajkumar noted that the Dalit Christological formulations developed under the epistemological premises of pathos can disempower Dalits' agency and may operate only "as a palliative inuring the Dalits to their existing suffering through marginalization and make the Dalits masochistic in their attitude towards suffering."¹⁸⁴ This dissertation follows similar paths and seeks to move beyond pathos without minimising the extent of real, felt suffering and concentrates on Dalit resistances, whose active memory, as Boopalan rightly highlights, can promote Dalits' agency.¹⁸⁵

A. 5. 3. 1. 3. Appreciating European Models and Proposals

A majority of Dalit academics, as will be explained further, depended excessively on the theoretical and hermeneutical premises of Latin American and African American theologies. Such scholars, with very few exceptions, overlooked the philosophical and sociological contributions of the European scholars substantially. However, a new trend, which dialogues with European scholars and their proposals began to emerge among the Dalit academics in this period. Jeremiah's article "Dalit Christians in India: Reflections from the 'Broken Middle'" seems to be one such example. Jeremiah initiates a dialogue with the socio-political concept of Gillian Rosemary Rose, a British scholar, and suggests how the proposals of Rose can advance Dalit theology.¹⁸⁶ Jeremiah's article in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century* accelerated this trend and further clarified how and why he suggests such an interdisciplinary interaction:

¹⁸⁴ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 115.

¹⁸⁵ Sunder John Boopalan, *Memory, Grief, and Agency A Political Theological Account of Wrongs and Rites* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

¹⁸⁶ Andersen H. M. Jeremiah "Dalit Christians in India: Reflections from the 'Broken Middle.'" *Studies in World Christianity* 17.3 (2001): 258-274.

With the exception of a few works, we can tentatively conclude that Dalit theology in general, and Christology in particular, display a certain shallowness and apathy in terms of resourcing and adapting interdisciplinary approaches to learning from the vast strides made in biblical research, practical theology, and socio-anthropological studies rendering it ineffective and stagnated.¹⁸⁷

From such a perspective, Anderson revisits the Dalit Christological discourse based upon the proposals of John Dominic Crossan, an Irish-American scholar. Appropriating Crossan's observations on Historical Jesus of the Greco-Roman history, as "an artisan and a member of the exploited community," Anderson explains that Dalits' claim to ownership of their lands resonates with Jesus' own time of class-ridden society.¹⁸⁸ Following a similar course, Y.T. Vinayaraj, based upon the traditions of postcolonial theory and continental philosophers¹⁸⁹ such as Gilles Deleuze, Giorgio Agamben, Catherine Malabou, and Jean-Luc Nancy, suggests how continental philosophies can advance Dalit theology.¹⁹⁰

The attempts of scholars like Anderson, which demand sensitivity to interdisciplinary approaches, I think, prepare those who engage in Dalit theology in exploring the abundant resources in other theological and sociological traditions. Following their undertakings, I will use recent developments in postcolonial biblical studies in this research. Such an undertaking, as will be further examined in

¹⁸⁷ Anderson H. M. Jeremiah, "Exploring New Facets of Dalit Christology: Critical Interaction with J. D. Crossan's Portrayal of the Historical Jesus" in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways* eds. Sathianathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala, and Philip Vinod Peacock (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 153-154.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 155.

¹⁸⁹ Continental philosophy designates a large number of philosophies emerged on the European continent since the work of Immanuel Kant. Please see, Robert C. Solomon, "Introduction," in *The Blackwell Guide to Continental Philosophy*, eds. Robert Solomon, David Sherman (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 1-2. Vinayaraj also offers a detailed introduction to continental philosophy, please see, Vinayaraj, *Dalit Theology*, 3.

¹⁹⁰ Vinayaraj, *Dalit Theology*, 2.

chapter 4, needs some clarifications since it does not follow the Dalit hermeneutics suggested by the dominant section of Dalit academics.

A. 5. 3. 1. 4. Situating This Research

This dissertation seeks to collaborate with the dissenting voices, which emerged after 2010 and questions the attempts of the pioneers of Dalit theology to depend heavily on Latin American and African American hermeneutical examples and concepts. Such an interrogation, let me clarify, does not seek to discredit the lived experiences of the founders and their impacts upon the Dalit hermeneutics. Instead, this research, as will be further clarified, acknowledges that the pioneers of Dalit theology also shaped their proposals out of their lived experiences. However, the Latin American and African American conceptual and hermeneutical influences, unfortunately, created an imbalance in Dalit hermeneutics, which is evident in some proposals of the pioneers. This research, therefore, without denying or challenging the credibility and contributions of the pioneers, will critically evaluate some of their proposals, which I think, impose Latin American and African American viewpoints and suggest how a hermeneutic of return to Dalit resources can liberate Dalit theology out of this imbalance.

A. 6. Liberating Dalit Theology

As will be clarified in chapters 1 and 2, Dalit theology, though emerged out of the lived experiences of the Dalits, owes much to the insights of Latin American and African American theologies.¹⁹¹ Those contextual theologies helped Dalit academics to propose

¹⁹¹ Scholars use "African American theology" and "Black theology" interchangeably to denote the Black theology developed by African Americans in the United States of America. However, there are some notable distinctions between these two terminologies. Black theology responds to the oppression of African descendants in the Diaspora and in the African continent while African American theology revisits African lives in the United States alone. I will follow this distinction and will use African American theology to denote

Dalit theology in radical discontinuity with Indian Christian theology. The methodological and ideological indebtedness of Dalit theology to liberation theologies, however, was not without consequences. The methodological framework of Dalit theology, as will be illustrated in chapter 3, overlooked Dalit culture substantially, injected biblical messages formed in Latin American and African American contexts extensively into the Dalit religio-cultural world, promoted Christian identity and imposed their biblical worldview and history considerably into Dalit contexts. Such a one-sided theological interpretation from an outsider's perspective, as will be clarified, estranged the theoretical and methodological framework of Dalit theology from the counter-formulations and alternative moral visions of Dalit religious and cultural contexts significantly.¹⁹²

Further, such a colonial imposition of misplaced biblical messages and their worldview upon Dalit theology often overlooked the diverse religious and cultural traditions of Dalits. It further displaced Dalit traditions to the periphery of Dalit theology, degraded the Dalit religio-cultural world as a dark world to be conquered and suppressed liberative voices in the Dalit culture. It also marginalised Dalit culture and neglected the emancipatory potential in Dalit culture. Such unintended outcomes are alarming since Dalit culture, as Devasahayam explains, is vital to Dalits, and it forms Dalits as a community developing their collective consciousness and memory.¹⁹³ Therefore, the colonial imposition of biblical messages and worldviews developed in Latin American and African American contexts upon Dalit contexts necessitates scholarly intervention and

theological responses from African Americans, even though the authors use the term Black theology. Please see, M. Shawn Copeland, "African American Theology," in *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies*, eds. Orlando O. Espín, James B. Nickoloff (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2007), 19 for more information.

¹⁹² Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 62.

¹⁹³ Devahayam, "Conflicting Roles of the Bible," 71.

further interrogation by turning to and giving voice to the suppressed voices in the Dalit culture. Such a listening to the liberative voices in Dalit culture and learning from them would be rewarding to Dalit theology, and it can liberate Dalit theology out of the colonial imposition of misplaced biblical messages and worldviews. Perhaps, analysing how African American theologians responded to the comparable situation would assist in reclaiming suppressed voices. Victor Anderson, for instance, summarises similar attempts of African American theologians:

Some black church theologians questioned whether black theology could be a theology of the black churches, if it disentangled itself from the creeds, confessions, and liturgical practices of the traditional churches. Others asked in what sense black theology could be black, if its theological method was derived from white, European theologians, such as Karl Barth and Paul Tillich, and European philosophers, such as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. Still, others wondered how black theology could be relevant to a culture of black radicalism and revolution and remain theologically and morally Christian.¹⁹⁴

Appropriating similar African American attempts could be relevant in Dalit contexts also. For instance, a discussion on whether Dalit theology could be a theology of the Dalits if it is disconnected from the counter-ontology and the epistemology of the resistance in Dalit culture and religion is worth pursuing. However, such a unilateral attempt might undermine the significance of the Dalit Exodus from Hinduism to Christianity.¹⁹⁵ Similarly, questioning Latin American and African American influence upon the Dalit hermeneutics, as noted, would help Dalit theology redefine its methodological approaches. However, such a discussion, I contend, should lead to the third approach, which combines Dalits' counter-caste Hindu Vedic worldview with

¹⁹⁴ Victor Anderson, "Critical Reflection on the Problems of History and Narrative in a Recent African-American Research Problem," in *A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on America from the Margins*, eds. Eleazar S. Fernandez and Fernando F. Segovia (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 38.

¹⁹⁵ Nirmal, *Heuristic Explorations*, 148.

Christian messages. Similarly, Devasahayam suggests that the gospel and culture are to be related in a theologising endeavour and suggests a tension between gospel and culture, which affirms the liberative elements in Dalit culture and rejects the demonic elements in Dalit culture.¹⁹⁶

I have some reservations against Devasahayam's master-slave or superior-inferior perspective. It is a colonial view from above, and it relegates Dalit culture and implies a top-down intervention, which, neglects the role of the beneficiaries in identifying and solving the difficulties and could be disruptive to Dalit culture. What I prefer is a constructive dialogue that anticipates willingness from participants to be modified and updated. K. Renato Lings, for instance, notes an often-neglected aspect in biblical hermeneutics and argues that the picture of the Canaanites presented in the Bible could be political and inaccurate.¹⁹⁷ From a similar perspective, Pablo Richard, while addressing the Latin American situation from a bottom-up hermeneutic, reminds us that the Bible must participate in the dialogue between the Bible and culture with humility since the indigenous people have lived thousands of years without the Bible. Likewise, there is a profound and significant revelation of God in the indigenous cultures and, therefore, evangelisation, if it wishes to be liberative and not to follow the conquest model, Pablo suggests, must begin by listening, discerning, and interpreting the presence and revelation of God in indigenous religion and culture.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Devasahayam, "Conflicting Roles of the Bible," 77.

¹⁹⁷ K. Renato Lings, "Culture Clash in Sodom: Patriarchal Texts of Heros, Villains and Manipulation," in *Patriarchs, Prophets and Other Villains*, ed. Lisa Isherwood (London: Routledge, 2014), 204.

¹⁹⁸ Pablo Richard, "Biblical Interpretation from the Perspective of Indigenous Cultures of Latin America (Mayas, Kunas, and Queschuas) in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, eds. Mark G. Brett (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 297.

Jwanza Eric Clark, in a similar but African American context, clarifies that "exploring the rich theological and philosophical legacy of indigenous African religious systems and affirming their legitimacy and priority for black Christian theological construction, discourse and practice" can help African American theology to overcome its estrangement from Black contexts.¹⁹⁹ The same is true with Dalit theology. A hermeneutic of return to Dalit resources and dialogues between the Bible and the values submerged in Dalit resources, I hope, will liberate Dalit theology out of its alienation from Dalit contexts. However, what is proposed is not a borrowing of certain externals of culture such as dress, diet, gestures in worship and techniques of mediation but appropriating values submerged in the Dalit cultural and religious resources.²⁰⁰ Such a conscious blending, I think, honours the revelatory value of Dalit culture and the Christian message. It seeks not to conquer one or the other but to complement each other through creative tensions. Such listening and learning would be radical for Dalit theology. It would empower Dalit theology to be an authentic theology of Dalit Christians by analysing how the Dalit Christian worldview goes through a process of negotiation and continuity.²⁰¹

From such a context, I will analyse the dominant paradigms of Dalit theology through Dalit contexts. Such an exploration might verify my claim that Dalit hermeneutics overlook liberative voices in Dalit culture significantly and the subversive voices in Dalit contexts demand a reading from the margins and a biblical paradigm that respects Dalit cultural resources. From such a context, I will suggest Abraham's crossings to Egypt (12:10-20) and Gerar (20:1-18), read through the postcolonial optic, as a paradigm to

¹⁹⁹ Jwanza Eric Clark, *Indigenous Black Theology: Toward an African-centred Theology of the African-American Religious Experience* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 101-102.

²⁰⁰ Devasahayam, "Conflicting Roles of the Bible," 78.

²⁰¹ Jeremiah, *Community and Worldview*, 75.

liberate Dalit theology out of its cross-cultural disconnects. Such an undertaking hopes to help Dalit theology promote the agency of God in liberating dominated castes and reconciling them with dominant castes, restore the humanity of dominated castes as well as dominant castes by facilitating cross-cultural appropriation and reinvent the role of Dalit women in participating God's mission for the universe.

A. 7. Methodological Intentions

Contra Locke, none of us is a clean slate. We have been guided, often without much conscious awareness, toward various understandings.²⁰² Therefore, I will make my methodological intentions clear before moving further. I belong to the Syrian Orthodox Church, thought to be the descendants of the dominant caste converts of St. Thomas.²⁰³ Clarifying my background is significant since Dalit academics propose a methodological exclusivism and may categorise my intervention as a top-down approach.

A. 7. 1. Methodological Exclusivism in Dalit Theology

Dalit academics were concerned about theological co-option and ideological subjugation.²⁰⁴ Consequently, they proposed the caste-outcaste dichotomy as a methodological framework for Dalit theology. They defined Dalit theology as a theology of the Dalits, by the Dalits and for the Dalits.²⁰⁵ Hence, Dalit hermeneutics is explained as

²⁰² Rufus Burrow, *James H. Cone and Black Liberation Theology* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 1994), 39.

²⁰³ Sanjay Paswan, Paramanshi Jaideva (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Dalits in India Struggle for Self-Liberation* (Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2004), 306, Benedict Vadakkekara, *Origin of Christianity in India: A Historiographical Critique* (Delhi: Media House, 2007), 43, Duncan B. Forrester, *Forrester on Christian Ethics and Practical Theology Collected Writings on Christianity, India and the Social Order* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), 41-42.

²⁰⁴ Nirmal, "Towards A Christian Dalit Theology," 172.

²⁰⁵ M. E. Prabhakar, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," in *Indigenous People: Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate*, ed. James Massey (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 210.

Dalit context-specific.²⁰⁶ This methodology may have strengthened Dalit theology politically. It does not imply community exclusivism as well. Dalit researchers wanted Dalits to promote community relationships.²⁰⁷ However, it must be acknowledged that their proposal has some limitations. For instance, it restricts dominant caste researchers from doing Dalit theology.²⁰⁸ Such an argument has some defects. It challenges the contributor's caste orientation while saying practically nothing about their argument.

Admittedly, there were empathetic people from dominant caste communities who tried to empower dominated castes. Telugu Bhakti poet Vemana who lived in the 17th century is such an example. He belonged to the Reddy community.²⁰⁹ Vemana challenged the caste system in the following song. He says that food, caste or place of birth cannot alter human dignity and worth. Furthermore, Vemana philosophically analyses the situation of the Paraiyars who are one of the Dalit communities in Tamilnadu.

If we look through all the earth
Men, we see, have equal birth.
Made in one great brotherhood,
Equal in the sight of God.
Food or caste or place of birth
Cannot alter human worth
Why let caste be so supreme?
It is but folly's passing stream
While the iron age doth last,
Men are, good in every caste
Blustering fools all men despise;
None are good in such men's eyes.
Viler than the meanest race
Is the man before whose face
Others only Sudras are.
Hell, for him shall need unbar

²⁰⁶ K. Jesurathnam, "Towards a Dalit Liberative Hermeneutic: Re-reading the Psalms of Lament," in *Bangalore Theological Forum*, June 34.1 (2002), 2-3.

²⁰⁷ Mani Chacko, "The One and the Many: Emerging Christology in an Indian Context," in *Discovering Jesus in Our Place: Contextual Christologies in a Globalised World*, ed. Sturla J. Stålsett (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003), 54.

²⁰⁸ Paikada "Memory of Suffering," 94.

²⁰⁹ Jammanna and Sudhakar, *Dalits' Struggle for Social Justice*, 69.

Empty is the caste-dispute:
All the castes have but one root
Who on earth can ever decide
Whom to praise and whom to deride?
Why should we the pariah scorn,
When his flesh and blood were born
Like ours? What caste is
He Who doth dwell in all we see?²¹⁰

Vemana narrates the world of the Paraiyars community. He notes that men are born equal in one great brotherhood and suggests that flesh and blood of the Paraiyars and the dominated caste Hindus are the same. These claims demonstrate that there were sympathetic people among the dominant castes who challenged the caste system.

Similarly, the tendency to challenge the arguer's caste orientation has another serious potential. Craig A. Lockard, for instance, argues that British policies to emphasise caste distinctions in India sharpened caste identity automatically.²¹¹ Similarly, T Scarlett Epstein, based on her fieldwork in two Karnataka villages in 1955 and 1970, recounts how the interventionist activities of the Indian Social Welfare Department intended to help the Scheduled Castes in Karnataka missed the goal. She clarifies:

the activities of the Social Welfare Department, though intended to help Scheduled Castes, in fact may harm their status: with a view to providing more educational facilities to the Scheduled Castes, welfare maintains 13 hostels in Mandya where needy Scheduled Caste students can get free board and lodging. Though this is a laudable exercise in one sense, it reinforces the caste barrier at the same time.²¹²

The book may be outdated. However, the message it conveys is relevant. Venkata Mohan, in a book published in 2017, argues that the Indian government's attempts to

²¹⁰Ibid. See also Grover (trans.), *The Folk-Songs of Southern India*, 275.

²¹¹ Craig Lockard, *Societies, Networks, and Transitions: A Global History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008), 669.

²¹² T. Scarlett Epstein, *South India: Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow: Mysore Villages Revisited* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1978), 74-75.

develop a caste-free society by providing caste-based reservations strengthen caste identities.²¹³ Hence, emphasising caste distinction can be counterproductive. The same is a possibility, however, remote it might be, if Dalit theology classifies contributors according to the Dalit/non-Dalit dichotomy.²¹⁴ Likewise, we need to be cautious about the danger of absolutising Dalit contexts.²¹⁵ Promoting an exclusive Dalit identity, as Forrester cautions, may compromise Dalit theology.²¹⁶ So too, methodological exclusivism disregards the complex and diverse composition of Indian Christian Churches. While it is true that more than 70% of Christians in India are Dalits, we should be aware that the Church in India has non-Dalit converts as well.²¹⁷ Noting such sentiments, K. C. Abraham suggests, how solidarity between Dalit Christians and Dalits of other religious backgrounds will further Dalit theology based on the vision of a pluriform community allowing different identities to flourish.²¹⁸

Thankfully, there is an emerging tendency among Dalit Christian scholars who advance theological inclusivism. Sathianathan Clarke, for instance, acknowledges Christian communitarian interrelatedness in overcoming Dalit sufferings, if such contributions do not hijack Dalit concerns.²¹⁹ So too, Rajkumar acknowledges (with some reservations) the contributions of non-Dalit theologians to Dalit theology. He praises the

²¹³ Venkata Mohan, *Sociological Thought: In the Light of J. Krishnamurti's Philosophy* (Chennai: Notion Press, 2017), 105.

²¹⁴ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 171.

²¹⁵ Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Theology* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1998), 63.

²¹⁶ Forrester, *Forrester on Christian Ethics*, 210.

²¹⁷ Sadangi, *Dalit: The Downtrodden of India*, 98, Oliver D'Souza, *Truth about Dalits: Caste System and Untouchability* (Dusky River Publications, 2009), 115.

²¹⁸ K. C. Abraham, "Dalit Theology: Some Tasks Ahead," in *Bangalore Theological Forum*, Vol. XXIX, Nos 1 and 2, March and June 1997, 46.

²¹⁹ Sathianathan Clarke, "Dalit Theology: An Introductory and Interpretative Theological Exposition," in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*, eds. Sathianathan Clarke Deenabandhu Manchala and Philip Vinod Peacock (New Delhi: Oxford Press, 2010), 20-22.

attempts of Dr K. P. Aleaz, an Indian Christian theologian and a Syrian Christian priest, who explored the possibility of the convergence of Dalit and Advaitic perspectives.²²⁰ Geevarghese Mor Coorilos, a Syrian Christian bishop, has been a contributor to the Dalit cause. One of his articles, published in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*, discusses the future course of Dalit theology.²²¹ Similarly, Adrian Bird substantiates how non-Dalit theologian M. M. Thomas' proposals were pertinent to Dalit theology.²²² This dissertation wishes to follow theologians like Aleaz, Coorilos and Thomas. It believes that dialogue between Indian theologians, irrespective of their caste affiliations, will be mutually enriching. Likewise, this research does not aim to hijack Dalits' concerns but to offer some guidelines on how to enhance the witnessing potential of Indian Christians, irrespective of denominational and ecclesiastical affiliations.

A. 8. The Road Ahead

This dissertation has eight chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 function as two sides of the same coin and they provide background information on the emergence of Dalit theology. Chapter 1 analyses how Dalit assertions, insensitivity of Indian Christian theology to the violence against the Dalits and the failure in accommodating the Dalit converts in Indian Christian churches convinced the founders of Dalit theology on the urgency to liberate Dalits. From such a background, Chapter 2 discusses how the conceptual examples of Latin American Liberation theology and African American theology helped the founding

²²⁰ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 174.

²²¹ Geevarghese Mor Coorilos, "Dalit Theology and its Future Course," in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*, eds. Sathianathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala and Philip Vinod Peacock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010),

²²² Adrian Bird, *M. M. Thomas and Dalit Theology* (Bangalore: BTESSC and SATHRI, 2008), 18.

fathers in proposing Dalit theology in radical discontinuity with Indian Christian theology. Chapters 1 and 2 hopes to clarify the outlook and vision of Dalit theology.

Chapter 3 builds upon the observations of chapters 1 and 2 and claim that the methodological examples of Dalit theology constructed the biblical paradigms developed in Latin American and African American contexts as the dominant self at the centre and the liberative voices in Dalit traditions as the dominated self at the periphery of Dalit theology and alienated Dalit theology from the counter-assertions in Dalits' worldview and epistemology of resistance. After validating the said proposal in chapter 3, chapter 4 will suggest why Dalit theology requires a hermeneutical switch and a reading from the margins respecting the thrust towards a liberated-reconciled society connected through mutual partnerships, envisioned in the subversive voices in Dalit contexts, and how it would liberate Dalit theology out of excessive Latin American and African American influence. Further, I will propose how an intertextual reading of the counter-colonial assertions in Abraham's cross-cultural crossings and Dalits' counter-caste movements can bridge cross-cultural disconnects in Dalit theology along the lines of Dalits' resistances.

Chapter 5 clarifies the relevance of a postcolonial reading of the Abrahamic narrative and will affirm the legitimacy of analysing Abraham's encounters against Persian contexts. It will also suggest how a postcolonial reading of Abraham's cross-cultural journeys can revitalise Dalit theology. Chapter 6, based on the findings of chapter 5, will evaluate Abraham's journeys to Egypt and Gerar as attempts to subvert the ethnocentric policies of the Persian governors of Yehud by suggesting God as liberator and the source

of reconciliation between the oppressor and the oppressed, morality and piety beyond Yehud and Sarah as a participant in God's mission.

Chapter 7 recapitulates the thesis and suggests how Abraham's crossings will help Dalit theology reimagine the agency of God in liberating Dalits and reconciling Dalits with outsiders, reorient inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit solidarity in continuing God's mission and redefine the role of Dalit women as participants in God's mission. Chapter 8 hopes to offer some concluding remarks by highlighting the questions that have arisen as a result of this research as well as those questions that could not be addressed during the thesis. These emerging questions will provide future opportunities for ongoing study and inquiry. Ultimately, it is hoped that the problems resolved in this dissertation will reorient Dalit theology along the lines of the counter-ontology and epistemology of Dalits' resistance.

Each chapter of this dissertation offers a further piece regarding how Dalit theology emerged, how Dalit theology can benefit from a hermeneutical switch and how an intertextual reading of Abraham's crossings would complement the subversive voices in Dalit contexts to liberate Dalit theology out of undue Latin American and African American influences. Read as a whole; the representation verifies the thesis that an intertextual reading between Dalits' counter formulations expressed through the subversive voices and the assertions of the Second Temple community narrated through Abraham's postcolonial crossings will offer rich possibilities for both Dalit and non-Dalit Christians. Such an analysis, while suggesting a way forward for Dalit theology out of its alienation from Dalit contexts, would be rewarding across ecclesiastical and denominational affiliations, including Syrian Orthodox Christians. It would also promote inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit dialogue and appreciation.

Chapter 1

The Emergence of Dalit Theology

1. 0. Introduction

Omprakash Valmiki was a prominent Dalit writer and poet.¹ He lived in the village of Barla in the Muzaffarnagar district of Uttar Pradesh in India.² *Joothan*, his autobiography, describes his experience as an untouchable. *Joothan* denotes the food scraps left on a plate, doomed to the litter or animals.³ The book clarifies how the Chuhras, the Dalits in Barla, lived the life of a *Joothan* in the 1950s. It describes a Brahmin family from Maharashtra who became very close to Valmiki. They thought that he was a Brahmin. They allowed him to visit their household frequently. Savita, the daughter of the family, had even fallen in love with Valmiki. A lengthy but enlightening exchange between Valmiki and Savita uncovers how untouchability impacts the day-to-day lives of Dalits. So too, it informs the ironic turn in their relationship after Valmiki discloses his caste.

Then I asked her, 'What do you think of me?' 'Aai and Baba praise you. They say you are very different from their preconceptions about U.P. people,' Savita cooed. 'I had asked for your opinion.' 'I like you.' She leaned on my arm. I pushed her away and asked, 'Ok...would you like me even if I were an SC?'⁴ 'How can you be an SC?' she laughed. 'Why not, what if I am?' I had insisted. 'You are a Brahmin,' she said with conviction. 'Who told you that?' 'Baba.' 'He is wrong. I am an SC.' I put all my energy into those words. I felt that a fire had lit inside me. 'Why do you say such things?' She said angrily. 'I am telling you the truth. I won't lie to you. I never claimed that I am a Brahmin.'

¹ Toral Jatin Gajarawala, *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 132.

² Omprakash Valmiki, *Joothan: An Untouchable's Life*, trans. Arun Prabha Mukherjee (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) 3.

³ Ibid. xxxix.

⁴ SC stands for Scheduled castes, an official term for designating historically disadvantaged group in India.

She stared at me, totally shocked. She still thought I was joking with her. I said plainly as I could that I was born in a Chuhra family of U.P. Savita appeared grave. Her eyes were filled with tears, and she said tearfully, 'You are lying, right?' 'No Savi...it is the truth...you ought to know this.' I had convinced her. She started to cry, as though my being an SC was a crime. She sobbed for a long time. Suddenly the distance between us had increased.⁵

The encounter between Valmiki and Savita reveal some of the practices and prejudices based on purity and pollution. Savita, for instance, refers to Professor Kamble with contempt because of his Dalit origin. Her parents offered him tea in a cup exclusively reserved for Dalits and Muslims. However, Savita and her family treated Valmiki with respect since they did not know his caste. Similarly, Savita's response to Valmiki's disclosure is striking. Her violent response suggests how deep-rooted was her reservations against Dalits. As Valmiki notes, she started to cry as though he's being a Dalit is a crime. This incident communicates the taboos a Dalit may encounter in daily life. As seen, Dalits suffer enormously. Their situation is very close to "destitution and dehumanisation."⁶

Society attributes some derogatory and patronising names to Dalits.⁷ Hindu Scriptures call them *Panchamas* (the fifth caste).⁸ They were also designated *Avarnas* (without caste) because of their position outside the caste system.⁹ The British

⁵ Ibid. 97-98.

⁶ Prabhakar, "The Search for a Dalit Theology," 206.

⁷ Naveen Rao, "Decolonizing the Formulation of Scripture: A Postcolonial Reading of Genesis 12, 20, and 26," in *Decolonizing the Body of Christ: Theology and Theory after Empire?* eds. D. Joy and J. Duggan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 54, Aloysius Irudayam S J and Jayshree P. Mangubhai, *Dalit Women Speak Out: Caste, Class and Gender Violence in India* (New Delhi: Zubban, 2011), 60.

⁸ Augustine Kanjamala, *The Future of Christian Mission in India: Toward a Paradigm for the Third Millennium* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 83, Rupa Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India* (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2014), 267, Sambaiah Gundimeda, *Dalit Politics in Contemporary India* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 220.

⁹ James Elisha Taneti, *Caste, Gender and Christianity in Colonial India: Telugu Women in Mission* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 23, Ajay S. Sekhar, *Representing the Margin: Caste and Gender in Indian Fiction* (Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2008), 128, Frank Whaling, *Understanding Hinduism* (Edinburgh:

administration named them Depressed classes in 1919.¹⁰ The Census Commission of India called them the exterior castes in 1931.¹¹ Later in 1935, the imperial administration renamed them scheduled castes.¹² Breaking away from this long history of humiliation, Gandhiji (1869-1948) designated them *Harijans*. He believed that Dalits were dearest to God because of their deplorable situation.¹³ Harijan means the people of god.¹⁴

Gandhiji tried to popularise Harijan, hoping that this title would elevate the social standing of Dalits. Dalits, however, did not welcome Gandhiji's attempts.¹⁵ Ambedkar,¹⁶ one of the icons of Dalit resistance, for example, opposed this title. He thought that Gandhiji's title would not challenge the caste structure.¹⁷ Ambedkar designated Gandhiji as a Bania¹⁸ who had become a Brahmin.¹⁹ So too, most of the Dalits denounce this

Dunedin Academic Press, 2010), 84, John B. Carman and Chilkuri Vasantha Rao, *Christians in South Indian Villages, 1959-2009: Decline and Revival in Telangana* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 68.

¹⁰ Geetha, *Contesting Categories*, 1, Antonisamy Maria Francis, "The Church and Dalit Liberation," in *Building Solidarity: Challenge to Christian Mission*, eds. Joseph Mattam and Joseph Valiyamangalam (Delhi: ISPCK, 2008), 203, Sadangi, *Dalit: The Downtrodden of India*, 60.

¹¹ Anuparthi John Prabhakar, *Preaching Contextually: A Case with Rural Dalits in India* (Chennai: Notion Press, 2016), 53, Geetha B. Nambissan, "Equity in Education? The Schooling on Dalit Children in India," in *Dalits and the State*, ed. Ghanshyam Shah (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2002), 121.

¹² David Keane, *Caste-Based Discrimination in International Human Rights Law* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2007), 1, Jammanna and Sudhakar, *Dalits' Struggle for Social Justice*, 2.

¹³ Uma Majumdar, *Gandhi's Pilgrimage of Faith: From Darkness to Light* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 205, Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany, *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3.

¹⁴ William Sax, "A Himalayan Exorcism," in *Studying Hinduism in Practice*, ed. Hillary P. Rodrigues (London: Routledge, 2011), 146, Manuela Ciotti, *Retro-modern India: Forging the Low-caste Self* (London: Routledge, 2010), 1, Cosimo Zene, "Self-consciousness of the Dalits as 'subalterns': Reflections on Gramsci in South Asia," in *Rethinking Gramsci*, ed. Marcus E Green (London: Routledge, 2011), 101.

¹⁵ Sara Singha, "Dalit Theology: An Indian Christian Response to Religious Pluralism," in *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths: A Reader*, eds. Paul Hedges and Alan Race (London: SCM Press, 2009), 160.

¹⁶ Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (14 April 1891–6 December 1956), was an Indian jurist, economist, politician and social reformer. He was the first law minister of Independent India. He is the principal architect of the Constitution of India. He was a Dalit. He campaigned against the Caste system.

¹⁷ R C Tripathi, "Violence and Other: Contestations in Multicultural Societies," in *Perspectives on Violence and Othering in India*, eds. R C Tripathi and Purnima Singh (New Delhi: Springer, 2016), 22.

¹⁸ Bania is one of the lower Castes in Gujarat. It did not have higher status in caste hierarchy.

¹⁹ Carey M. Watt, "Philanthropy and Civilizing Missions in India c. 1820-1960: States, NGOs and Development," in *Civilizing Missions in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia: From Improvement to Development*, eds. Carey Anthony Watt and Michael Mann (London: Anthem Press, 2011), 289.

title.²⁰ They observe it as a paternalistic and condescending term since it implies a top-down intervention from dominant castes.²¹ Hence, Dalits found that this term was insufficient for their liberation.²² Besides this drawback, as Boopalan notes, this title was an attempt to spiritualise a social problem, and therefore, it deflected a critique of the caste system.²³ As seen, Dalits did not approve of Gandhian Harijan ideology.²⁴ Whatever be the case, these titles highlight the social, economic, cultural and political discrimination against Dalits.²⁵ Despite the titles the society has attributed to 'the former untouchables,' they prefer to be called Dalits. It is a self-attributed name.²⁶

There are some scholarly disagreements on who coined the term Dalits. Scholars like C. D. Naik, Vasant Brave, S. R. Medhe and James Elisha Taneti suggest that Jyotiba Phule (1827-1890) coined this term.²⁷ However, Clara Nubile, John Farndon, Kalpana Kannabiran and Debjani Ganguly propose that Ambedkar used this term first.²⁸ This term,

²⁰ Majumdar, Gandhi's Pilgrimage, 205, Makarand R. Paranjape, *Making India: Colonialism, National Culture, and the Afterlife of Indian English Authority* (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2012), 241.

²¹ Paul Ghuman, *British Untouchables: A Study of Dalit Identity and Education* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), 1.

²² Rosemary Marangoly George, *Indian English and the Fiction*, 110.

²³ Sunder John Boopalan, *Memory, Grief, and Agency: A Political Theological Account of Wrongs and Rites* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 26.

²⁴ Gundimeda, *Dalit Politics in Contemporary India*, 55.

²⁵ Shailaja Paik, *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India: Double Discrimination* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 2, Michael Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom: Liberation Theologies from Asia* (Eugene, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 23.

²⁶ Richard Sorabji, *Opening Doors: The Untold Story of Cornelia Sorabji, Reformer, Lawyer and Champion of Women's Rights in India* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2010), 348, Mark W. Muesse, *The Hindu Traditions: A Concise Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 197.

²⁷ C. D. Naik, *Thoughts and Philosophy of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2003), 359, Vasant Brave, S. R. Medhe, "Agenda for Emancipation and Empowerment of Dalits in India," in *Dalits and Tribes of India*, ed. J. Cyril Kanmony (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2010), 52, Taneti, *Caste, Gender and Christianity*, 23.

²⁸ Clara Nubile, *The Danger of Gender: Caste, Class and Gender in Contemporary Indian Women's Writing* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2003), 75, John Farndon, *India Booms: The Breath-taking Development and Influence of Modern India* (London: Virgin Books, 2008), 75, Kannabiran, *Tools of Justice*, 149, Debjani Ganguly, "Dalit Life Stories," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Indian Culture*, eds. Vasudha Dalmia and Rashmi Sadhana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 145.

as will be seen, came into popularity only after the 1970s as a title to affirm the identity of the Dalits. In the present context, it communicates the political, cultural and social situation of the Dalits and expresses their anger, dissent, anti-caste objectives and political consciousness.²⁹

Scholars trace the etymology of Dalits to both Sanskrit and Hebrew.³⁰ Oliver Mendelsohn, Marika Vicziany, Sathianathan Clarke, M. Stephen, Devadasan N. Premnath and Himansu Charan Sadangi maintain that Dalit means “crushed” in Sanskrit.³¹ The Hebrew word *Dal* means physical weakness (Gen 41:19) as well as a pathetic social or economic situation (Exodus 30:15, Leviticus 14:21, Ruth 3:10).³² All these meanings have implications for Dalits.³³ As this title communicates, Dalits have been the most degraded, downtrodden and exploited in Indian society.³⁴ They have been forced to do unclean tasks.³⁵ The social, political and economic subjugation reduced them

²⁹ Wilfred, *Dalit Empowerment*, 9, H C Sadangi, *Emancipation of Dalits and Freedom Struggle* (Delhi: Isha Books, 2008), 130.

³⁰ Devadasan N Premnath, “Biblical Interpretation in India: History and Issues,” in *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Mary F Foskett and Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan (Missouri: Chalice Press, 2006), 7, C I David Joy, *Mark and Its Subalterns: A Hermeneutical Paradigm for a Postcolonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 50.

³¹ Mendelsohn and Vicziany, *The Untouchables*, 4, Sathianathan Clarke, “Viewing the Bible through the Eyes and Ears of Subalterns in India,” *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches*, 10 (2002): 246, M Stephen, *Human Rights: Concepts and Perspectives* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2002), 80, Premnath, “Biblical Interpretation in India,” 7, Sadangi, *Dalit the Downtrodden of India*, 25.

³² Bruce V Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 13, Naveen Rao, *The Formulation of Scripture: Liberative Hebrew Paradigm for Dalit Scripture* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2010), 282.

³³ Keith Hebden, *Dalit Theology and Christian Anarchism*, 110.

³⁴ Clarinda Still, *Dalit Women: Honour and Patriarchy in South India* (London: Routledge, 2017), 65, George J. Kunnath, *Rebels from the Mud Houses: Dalits and the Making of the Maoist Revolution in Bihar* (London: Routledge, 2017), 63, Eamon Murphy, “‘We have no Orders to Save You’: State Terrorism, Politics and Communal Violence in the Indian State of Gujarat, 2002,” in *Contemporary State Terrorism: Theory and Practice*, eds. Richard Jackson, Eamon Murphy and Scott Poynting (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 93.

³⁵ Martin Fuchs, “Recognition Across Difference: Conceptual Considerations Against an Indian Background,” in *Transnational Struggles for Recognition: New Perspectives on Civil Society since the 20th Century*, eds. Dieter Gosewinkel and Dieter Rucht (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 254.

to a state of no people.³⁶ They remain as the most oppressed community in India.³⁷ A total of 90,925 crimes against them, for instance, were reported from 1995-1997.³⁸ Similarly, 47,064 cases of Crimes against Dalits were registered in 2014.³⁹

Amnesty International reports more than 40,000 crimes against Dalits in 2016.⁴⁰ The suicide of Rohit Vemula, a Dalit research scholar in the University of Hyderabad, due to discrimination by the dominant caste establishment in January 2016, is another instance.⁴¹ A recent BBC report on 31st March 2018 about a Dalit farmer killed by dominant caste men for owning and riding a horse is another example.⁴² Likewise, *The Times of India* reports on 29th April 2018 about an assault on Sitaram Valmiki, a Dalit farmer, by dominant caste men for refusing to harvest crops in Uttar Pradesh's Badaun village.⁴³ According to *NDTV* and the *International Business Times*, the victim was not

³⁶ Raj Kumar, "Caste and the Literary Imagination in the Context of Odia Literature: A Reading of Akhila Nayak's Bheda," in *Dalit Literatures in India*, eds. Joshil K. Abraham and Judith Misrahi-Barak (London: Routledge, 2016), 144, K. V. Kuruvila, "Dalit Theology: An Indian Christian Attempt to Give Voice to the Voiceless," in *World Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A Reader*, eds. Noel Davies and Martin Conway (London: SCM Press, 2008), 132, Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom*, 28.

³⁷ Ghuman, *British Untouchables*, 3, Keane, *Caste-Based Discrimination*, 1, Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert and Nina Shea, *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 102, Zadda, "Shoemaker and Missionary," 29, Lucy Debochet, *Making Post-2015: Matter for Socially Excluded Groups in India* (Oxfam India, 2013), 3, P Sinha, *Psycho-Social Analysis of the Indian Mindset* (New Delhi: Springer, 2014), 204, R. S. Sugirtharajah, "The Bible in Asia," in *The New Cambridge History: The Bible from 1750 to the Present*, ed. John Riches (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 485, Teltumbde, *Dalits: Past, Present and Future*, 40.

³⁸ Chandran Paul Martin, "Globalisation and its Impact on Dalits: A Theological Response," in *Globalisation and its Impact on Dalits: A Theological Response*, ed. James Massey (New Delhi: Centre for Dalit/Subaltern Studies, 2004), 21-24.

³⁹ Simon Chauchard, *Why Representation Matters: The Meaning of Ethnic Quotas in Rural India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 60.

⁴⁰ Amnesty International, "INDIA 2017/2018," accessed on 27th April 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/india/report-india/>.

⁴¹ Bhattacharjee, Manash. "The Clarity of a Suicide Note," accessed on 21st February 2018, <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/dalitscholar-rohith-vemulas-suicide-letter-clarity-of-a-suicide-note/article8130703.ece>.

⁴² BBC News, Indian Lowest-caste Dalit Man Killed 'for Owning Horse,' accessed on 19th April 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-43605550>.

⁴³ Priyangi Agarwal, "Dalit Assaulted, Humiliated in Badaun Village," accessed on 1st May 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bareilly/dalit-assaulted-humiliated-in-badaun-village/articleshow/63964413.cms>.

only humiliated but also forced to drink urine.⁴⁴ Such incidents show that Dalits still suffer enormously and, as will be explained, they remain at the periphery of the Church also.

Dalit theology emerged to challenge the injustices against Dalit Christians.⁴⁵ It revisits Indian Christian theology from the perspective of the Dalits and their suffering that has been depleting, impoverishing and disempowering them.⁴⁶ It functions as the Dalits' advocacy theology from the margins and challenges what Devasahayam narrates as their "pollution, poverty and powerlessness."⁴⁷ The call for Dalit theology as a "theology from below" appreciating "the oppressed people as the subjects of theology" did not develop out of nothing.⁴⁸ Ely Aaronson, Karl Mannheim, Saturnino M. Borrás, Jennifer C. Franco, Christian Smith, Abdelrahman and Tore Bjorgo had already explained how social and political change emerges out of a long process of mobilisation and networking.⁴⁹ Their

⁴⁴ *Forced To Drink Urine For Refusing To Harvest Crops, Alleges UP Dalit Man*, accessed on 01st May 2018, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/a-dalit-man-in-uttar-pradesh-beaten-forced-to-drink-urine-cases-filed-against-4-1845164>, Sripama Ghosh, *Farmers Force Dalit Man to Drink Urine for Refusing to Harvest Crops*, accessed on 01st May 2018, <https://www.ibtimes.co.in/farmers-force-dalit-man-drink-urine-refusing-harvest-crops-768159>.

⁴⁵ Peniel Rajkumar, "Christian Ethics in Asia," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Robin Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 138, Michael, *Dalits in Modern India*, 35.

⁴⁶ James Massey, *Dalits in India: Religion as a Source of Bondage or Liberation with a Special Reference to Christians* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1995), 169, 173, James Massey, *Downtrodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 48.

⁴⁷ V. Devasahayam, "Pollution, Poverty and Powerlessness: A Dalit Perspective," in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, ed. A. P. Nirmal (Madras: Gurukul, 1991), Prabhakar, "The Search for a Dalit Theology," 213, Hans Schwarz, *Theology in a Global Context: The Last Two Hundred Years* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 529, Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 22.

⁴⁸ V. Devasahayam, *Doing Dalit Theology in Biblical Key* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997), 16.

⁴⁹ Ely Aaronson, *From Slave Abuse to Hate Crime: The Criminalization of Racial Violence in American History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 10, Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 71, Maha Abdelrahman, *Egypt's Long Revolution: Protest Movements and Uprisings*. (New York: Routledge: 2014), 50. Cecelia Lynch, in a similar context, yet regarding law, notes that "...legal norms do not arise in a vacuum, but are socially contested, promoted, and legitimized (Cecelia Lynch, "Political Activism and the Social Origins of International Legal Norms," in *Law and Moral Action in World Politics*, eds. Cecelia Lynch and Michael Loriaux (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 142. Tore Bjorgo, while discussing about terrorism, maintains that "terrorism does not arise in a vacuum. Social and political conditions can provide fertile ground for the growth of terrorism." (Tore Bjorgo, *Strategies for Preventing Terrorism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2013), 39).

proposal is right with Dalit theology also.⁵⁰ Therefore, analysing the historical and theological contexts in India and abroad is necessary to place Dalit theology in its context. This chapter will review the immediate historical contexts and the lived experiences which could have prompted the Dalit academics to propose Dalit theology. The next chapter will survey the theological background.

1. 1. Early Beginnings of Dalit Theology

The pioneers of Dalit theology, as will be seen, were discontent with Indian Christian theology. They accuse Indian Christian theology of failing to address the sufferings of Dalits.⁵¹ They advanced Dalit theology in “radical discontinuity” with Indian Christian theology, combining theological reflection with theo-political action.⁵² Their reservations against Indian Christian theology did not develop overnight. It was the result of various, long-term social and cultural advances. An awareness of that process is essential to clarify the outlook, vision and impetus of Dalit theology.

1. 2. Historical Context

The causes and conditions that motivated Dalit academics have a context, history and urgency. Prabhakar specifies some of them and clarifies their significance. The Dalit

⁵⁰ Adrian Bird, “Caste and Christianity since Gandhi and Ambedkar,” in *Forrester on Christian Ethics and Practical Theology: Collected Writings on Christianity, India and the Social Order*, ed. Duncan B Forrester (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), 83, Leonard Fernando and G Gispert-Sauch, *Two Thousand Years of Faith: Christianity in India* (London: Penguin Books India, 2004), 199-200, Bernhard Ortmann, “Contextual Theologies and Missionary Representation: The Impact of the Emerging Dalit Theology on the Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Lower Saxony, Germany,” in *Construction of the Other, Identification of the Self: German Mission in India*, eds. Martin Tamcke and Gladson Jathanna (Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2012), 281.

⁵¹ S.K. Chatterji, “Why Dalit Theology,” in *Indigenous People: Dalits- Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate*, ed. James Massey (Delhi: ISPCK, 2006), 179-200, Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 38-41.

⁵² Nirmal, “Towards a Christian Dalit Theology,” 59, Y T Vinayaraj, “Envisioning a Postmodern Method of Doing Dalit Theology,” in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*, eds. Sathianathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala and Philip Vinod Peacock (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 93, Peniel Rajkumar, “In Witness to God’s “with-ness”: Dalit Theology, the God of Life, and the Path Towards Justice and Peace,” *Ecumenical Review* 64, No. 4 (2012): 546-558.

liberation movement informed the founders of Dalit theology some of the shortcomings of Indian Christian theology and the failure of the Church in addressing the Dalit cause. Violence against Dalits and the Churches' failure in accommodating Dalit Christians annoyed them.⁵³ Fernando and Gispert–Sauch classified these contexts as two or three traditions. They named the Dalit Panther movement as the first among them.⁵⁴ Prabhakar and Sadangi, however, include the Dalit Panther movement among Dalit liberation movements.⁵⁵ This dissertation considers the Dalit Panther movement not in isolation, but as part of Dalit liberation movements. The Dalit liberation movement is one of the immediate causes behind the emergence of Dalit theology.⁵⁶

1. 2. 1. Dalit Liberation Movement

The Dalit movement is a band of political and cultural mobilisations for social reform and aims to support Dalits' identity affirmations.⁵⁷ It counters the socio-cultural hegemony of the dominant caste Hindus. Dalit movement and Dalit theology are intrinsically intertwined.⁵⁸ This intimate bond has confused some scholars who claim that Dalit theology is not exclusively a Christian movement but only a minor variant within a

⁵³ M. E. Prabhakar, "Introduction," in *Towards a Dalit Theology*, ed. M. E. Prabhakar (Delhi: The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1989), 1-2.

⁵⁴ Fernando and Sauch, *Two Thousand Years of Faith*, 199.

⁵⁵ Prabhakar, "Introduction," 2, Sadangi, *Dalit: The Downtrodden of India*, 25.

⁵⁶ Prabhakar, "The Search for a Dalit Theology," 201, Melanchthon, "Liberation Hermeneutics," 200.

⁵⁷ Ashok Kumar M. and Sunder J. Boopalan, "Indian Christians in Conflict Dalit Christian Movement in Contemporary India," in *Handbook of Global Contemporary Christianity: Themes and Developments in Culture, Politics, and Society*, ed. Stephen Hunt (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 310, Neelam Srivastava, "A Multiple Addressivity: Indian Subaltern Autobiographies and the Role of Translation," in *Indian Literature and the World: Multilingualism, Translation, and the Public Sphere*, eds. Rossella Ciocca and Neelam Srivastava (London: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers, 2017), 109, Jean-Luc Racine and Josaine Racine, "Dalit Identities and the Dialectics of Oppression and Emancipation in a Changing India: The Tamil Case and Beyond," in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, 1998, 11.

⁵⁸ Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions: The Anti-Caste Movement and the Construction of an Indian Identity* (New Delhi: Orient Longman Private Limited, 2006), 8, Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon, "Liberation Hermeneutics and India's Dalits," 200, Felix Wilfred, *On the Banks of Ganges: Doing Contextual Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 132, Mosse, "The Politics of Religious Synthesis," 93.

broader Dalit movement.⁵⁹ This proposal seems to be an oversimplification. Wilfred, however, has clarified how Dalit theology and the Dalit movement cooperate as two interconnected but independent movements.⁶⁰ Dalit theology has received some of its tools of analysis from Dalit movements; however, Dalit theology operates on Christian principles while Dalit movements are a secular mobilisation.⁶¹ Hence, Dalit theology and Dalit movements are two separate organisations, even though there are many connecting links between them.

Why did Dalit movements emerge in India? Political parties adopted a top-down approach to Dalit predicaments.⁶² Such an intervention has many defects. For example, it constructs "clients" of bureaucratic provisions or "targets" of social work interventions. It is a perception from above.⁶³ It limits the participation of the recipients. The beneficiaries have minimal roles in identifying problems and have no voice in proposing solutions. The policymakers may incorrectly identify glitches and resolutions based on their ideas and values.⁶⁴ It makes policymakers-beneficiaries cooperation unequal, places the former at the centre of society and marginalises the latter to the periphery of society.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ K. Steenbrink, "Seven Indonesian Perspectives on Theology of Liberation," in *Liberation Theologies on Shifting Grounds*, ed. G. De Schrijver (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), 380.

⁶⁰ Wilfred, *Margins: Site of Asian Theologies*, 62.

⁶¹ Ibid. Rāmacandra Kshīrasāgara, *Dalit Movement in India and Its Leaders, 1857-1956* (New Delhi: MD Publications, 1994), 422-423, Ghanshyam Shah, *Social Movements in India: A Review of Literature* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004), 135.

⁶² Smita Narula, *Broken People: Caste Violence against India's "untouchables"* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999), 34.

⁶³ Janki Andharia, "Reconceptualizing Community Organisation in India: A Transdisciplinary Community Partnership to Address Domestic Violence," in *Interdisciplinary Community Development: International Perspectives*, eds. Alice K. Johnson Butterfield and Yossi Korazim-Körösy (New York: Routledge, 2007), 96, Dick Schoech, "Managing Information for Decision Making," in *The Handbook of Social Welfare Management*, ed. Rino J. Patti (London: Sage Publications, 2009), 329.

⁶⁴ Ed Carson and Lorraine Kerr, *Australian Social Policy and the Human Services* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 98.

⁶⁵ Roberto Belloni, *State Building and International Intervention in Bosnia* (London: Routledge, 2007), 122.

The same happened in Dalit contexts also. Indian political parties promised loans and proper implementation of the reservations as compensation for past mistreatments.⁶⁶ Such top-down undertakings often were not realised or properly administered. It infuriated some Dalits who have been living at the margins, and they expressed their agitations through a plethora of booklets, newspapers and magazines, which initiated Dalit movements.⁶⁷ Hence, Dalit movements were agitations from the margins of society. Explorations in other parts of the world like the African American struggle for dignity and freedom influenced this movement.⁶⁸ Modern education, industrialisation, land reform, the democratic process and the communication revolution also helped them.⁶⁹ Drawing inspiration from above, the Dalit Panther Movement, The Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, the Bahujan Samaj Party, the Dalit Sena, the Dravida Movement, the Scheduled Caste Federation and the Indian Dalit Federation emerged to mobilise Dalits.⁷⁰

There are more than 5000 Dalit liberation groups in India although there is not a consensus as to when the Dalit movement formally began.⁷¹ Scholars like Suresh and Beth Hunt claim that the Dalit movement originated from the mid-nineteenth century

⁶⁶ Narula, *Broken People*, 34.

⁶⁷ Shweta Majumdar, "Challenging the Master Frame through Dalit Organizing in the United States," in *Living Our Religions: Hindu and Muslim South Asian-American Women Narrate Their Experiences*, eds. Anjana Narayan and Bandana Purkayastha (Sterling: Kumarian Press, 2009), 267.

⁶⁸ Faye V. Harrison, "What Democracy Look Like: The Politics of a Women-Centred, Antiracist Human Rights Coalition," in *Resisting Racism and Xenophobia: Global Perspectives on Race, Gender, and Human Rights*, ed. Faye Venetia Harrison (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2005), 237, Gyanendra Pandey, *A History of Prejudice: Race, Caste, and Difference in India and the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 6.

⁶⁹ Kshirasagar, *Dalit Movement in India*, 423.

⁷⁰ Keith Hebdon, *Dalit Theology and Christian Anarchism*, 113. S. M. Michael lists Indian Dalit Federation in Kerala among Dalit movements. See S. M. Michael, "Dalit Visions of a Just Society," in *Untouchable Dalits in Modern India*, ed. S. M. Michael (Colorado: Lynne Reineer Publishers, 1999), 37.

⁷¹ Surinder S. Jodhka, "Sikhs Today: Development, Disparity and Difference," in *Religion, Community and Development: Changing Contours of Politics and Policy in India*, eds. Gurpreet Mahajan and Surinder S. Jodhka (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 179, Rowena Robinson, *Christians of India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), 193.

onwards.⁷² Appraising, all of them is beyond the scope of this chapter. Therefore, I will only evaluate movements which might have contributed to Dalit theology significantly. Andrew Wyatt maintains that the Dalit Panthers popularised the term Dalit in the 1970s. The broader use of this phrase helped to develop Dalit consciousness. Dalit consciousness promoted a growing interest in their identity among Dalit Christians and inaugurated the beginning of an innovative approach to theology.⁷³ Some scholars consider Nirmal's lecture entitled "Towards a Shudra Theology" at the United Theological College, in April 1981, as the dawn of Dalit theology.⁷⁴ This dissertation, therefore, will only analyse the Dalit liberation movement originating between these two events. Such a limitation does not mean that Dalit liberation movements emerged at this time. Instead, a review of such movements, I hope, will clarify the outlook of Dalit theology.

1. 2. 1. 1. The Dalit Panther Movement

The Dalit Panther movement emerged in Maharashtra as an agitation from the margins. It offered new avenues of liberation for Dalits, who have been living at the periphery of society for many centuries.⁷⁵ Atrocities by the dominant castes, failure of the Republican Party⁷⁶ to fulfil the expectation of Dalits and the Naxalbari insurrection⁷⁷

⁷² Suresh V. "The Dalit Movement in India," in *Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India*, ed. T. Sahityamurthy (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 355-87, Sarah Beth Hunt, *Hindi Dalit Literature and the Politics of Representation* (London: Routledge, 2014), 4.

⁷³ Wyatt, "Dalit Theology and the Politics," 119.

⁷⁴ Schouten, *Jesus as Guru*, 240.

⁷⁵ Sadangi, *Dalit: The Downtrodden of India*, 25, W. N. Kuber, *Ambedkar: A Critical Study* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 2001), 329-331, Subrata K. Mitra, *The Puzzle of India's Governance: Culture, Context, and Comparative Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 131.

⁷⁶ B R Ambedkar founded Republican Party of India in 1957.

⁷⁷ The Naxalbari movement originated in Naxalbari, one of the villages in West Bengal. The violence escalated on May 24, 1967 when landlords attacked a peasant. Peasants joined together and retaliated by attacking the landlords.

fuelled its development.⁷⁸ Panthers held their first meeting on 9th July 1972 in Bombay.⁷⁹ The Black Panthers inspired the Dalit Panthers.⁸⁰ They called themselves Dalit Panthers because they were supposed to fight for the rights of Dalits like the Black Panthers.⁸¹ They promoted the term 'Dalit.'⁸² They defined Dalit identity and self-respect through this title, and criticised the caste as an evil that reduces them to a state of "being no people."⁸³

Unfortunately, the Panthers movement did not last long because of factional disputes.⁸⁴ We cannot, however, underestimate its contributions since Panthers helped to unite Dalits, particularly Dalit youths and students.⁸⁵ So too, Panthers stimulated "a new sense of Dalit identity, pride and protest against their oppressed condition."⁸⁶ They united Dalits in Maharashtra under one organisation and helped Dalits go beyond their

⁷⁸ Gail Omvedt, "The Anti-Caste movement and the Discourse of Power," in *Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India*, ed. T. Sahityamurthy (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 422.

⁷⁹ Prahlad Gangaram Jogdand, *Dalit Movement in Maharashtra* (New Delhi: Kanak Publications, 1991), 71, Hugo Gorringer, *Untouchable Citizens: Dalit Movements and Democratisation in Tamil Nadu* (New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2005), 53.

⁸⁰ Michael L. Clemons and Charles E. Jones, "Global Solidarity: The Black Panther Party in the International Arena," in *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, eds. Kathleen Cleaver and George N. Katsiaficas (New York: Routledge, 2001), 24, Maia Ramnath, "No Gods, No Masters, No Brahmins: An Anarchist Inquiry on Caste, Race, and Indigeneity in India," in *No Gods, No Masters, No Peripheries: Global Anarchisms*, ed. Barry Maxwell (Oakland: PM Press, 2015), 55, Ciotti, *Retro-modern India*, 110.

⁸¹ Lata Murugkar, *Movement in Maharashtra* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1991), 64.

⁸² Francis, "The Church and Dalit Relation," 203, Samuel Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion: Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 5.

⁸³ Rattan Singh and Mamta Mehmi, "Constitutional Protection to the Dalits: A Myth or Reality?" in *Dalit and Minority Empowerment*, ed. Santosh Bhartiya (New Delhi: Raj Kamal Prakashan., 2008), 230, Massey, *Down Trodden*, 2.

⁸⁴ Stephen Jacobs, *Hinduism Today: An Introduction* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 63, Gopal Guru and Anuradha Chakravarty, "Who are the Country's Poor? Social Movement Politics and Dalit Poverty," in *Social Movements in India: Poverty, Power, and Politics*, eds. Raka Ray and Mary Fainsod Katzenstein (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 144.

⁸⁵ Sunmeet Mhaskar, "Locating Caste in a Globalising Indian City: A Study of Dalit Ex-millworkers' Occupational Choices in Post-industrial Mumbai," in *Dalits in Neoliberal India: Mobility or Marginalisation?* ed. Clarinda Still (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014), 111.

⁸⁶ Don Schweitzer, "Two Theological Movements in India That Complicate Western Reformed Identities," *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 28/2 (2012): 228, Gail Omvedt, *Reinventing Revolution: New Social Movements and the Socialist Tradition in India* (New York: An East Gate Book, 1993), 74.

denigrated identity to establish a new collective identity as Dalits.⁸⁷ Their activities, as Azariah, Sadangi and Mosse suggest, facilitated Dalit Christian academics to comprehend the potential for a theology that highlights Dalit sorrows.⁸⁸ Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, which originated in Karnataka, is another catalyst for the formation of Dalit theology.

1. 2. 1. 2. The Dalit Sangharsh Samiti

The Dalit Sangharsh Samiti is an 'umbrella' association of different Dalit groups. It seeks to mobilise Dalits in Karnataka.⁸⁹ It is related to the Dalit Panthers movement; however, their association is not organisational but is ideologically interrelated. The activities of the Panthers inspired the founders of the Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, which formally began in 1977.⁹⁰ Its slogan is "Reject Caste, Reject Religion, and Give Life to your Humanity."⁹¹ A speech delivered in 1974 by Basavalingappa, an untouchable and a minister in the Congress Government of Karnataka, inspired this movement. It organised protest marches and arranged conventions for Dalit students and activists.

1. 2. 1. 2.1. Origin of Dalit Sangharsh Samiti

The 'Boosa' (Cattle fodder) event triggered the formation of Dalit Sangharsh Samiti. Basavalingappa was the chief architect of the "Boosa" event. He was a minister in Karnataka and a spokesperson of Dalits in Karnataka in the 1970s. The social

⁸⁷ Uma Chakraborty, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens* (Calcutta: STREE, 2003), 142.

⁸⁸ M. Azariah, "Christ and Dalit Liberation," in *A Pastor's Search for Dalit Theology*, ed. M. Azariah (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 137-151.

⁸⁹ Mendelsohn and Vicziany, *The Untouchables*, 215.

⁹⁰ Teltumbde, *Dalits: Past, Present and Future*, 99, Mangala Subramaniam, *The Power of Women's Organizing: Gender, Caste, and Class in India* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), 57.

⁹¹ Paswan and Jaideva (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Dalits*, 280.

teachings of Ambedkar influenced him.⁹² He exhorted Dalit youth to recognise the suffering of Dalits narrated in literature. While attending a function at Mysore organised by Dr Ambedkar Vichara Vedike and the Backward Class Students Forum of the University of Mysore (November 19, 1973), he emphasised the dominant caste hegemony in Kannada literature.⁹³ He categorically labelled the literature of Kannada as “boosa” that had nothing for Dalits.⁹⁴ His “allegation” caused a major political crisis. Prof D. Javaregowda, then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mysore, and Opposition Party leader H.D. Devegowda criticised him. Rashtrakavi Kuvempu, Dr U. R. Ananthamurthy and former Chief Minister J. H. Patel, on the other hand, supported Basavalingappa.⁹⁵

Basavalingappa’s comments generated widespread and violent protests, and he was forced to resign. The progressive thinkers came together and organised a conclave of Dalit writers, poets and artisans. This gathering paved the way for Dalit Sangharsh Samiti. It functioned as a forum to “educate, organise and lead the Dalits in their agitation against their oppressors and the exploitative system”⁹⁶ and became one of the strongest and enduring Dalit movements in India.⁹⁷ Dalit Sangharsh Samiti opened branches in many villages in Karnataka. Its members composed new revolutionary songs and

⁹² Mary F. Katzentein, Kothari S. and Mehta U., "Social Movement Politics in India: Institutions, Interests, and Identities," in *The Success of India's Democracy*, ed. Atul Kohli (New Delhi: Cambridge University, 2001), 260.

⁹³ Subramaniam, *The Power of Women's Organizing*, 57.

⁹⁴ Ibid, Mendelsohn and Vicziany, *The Untouchables*, 215.

⁹⁵ M. H. Prahalladappa, "Impact of DSS and Dalit Movement on Emerging Dalit Leadership in Karnataka," in *Research Directions*, Volume 1, Issue 2 / Aug 2013, 1.

⁹⁶ Manohar Yadav, "Career of Dalit Movement in India," *Journal of Social and Economic Development*, Vol. I, No. 1, (Jan-June 1998): 107-127.

⁹⁷ Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1994), 337.

mobilised and instructed Dalits. Through these branches and literature, Dalit Sangharsh Samiti generated intellectual and social awakening among Dalits.⁹⁸

Dalit Sangharsh Samiti challenged dominant caste hegemony upon Dalits, their mindset and culture and provided a new orientation for Dalits. It played a significant role in Dalit conscientisation in Karnataka.⁹⁹ Though it succeeded at the initial stages, like its predecessor in Maharashtra, Dalit Sangharsh Samiti failed to realise most of its goals since it split over the issue of leadership. However, as seen, it helped Dalits and operated as an umbrella organisation of Dalits and conscientised Dalits in Karnataka.¹⁰⁰ This movement found dominant caste hegemony in Karnataka literature. Critique of mainstream Kannada literature as upper caste hegemony and the proposal that the experiences of Dalits should be a subject matter for literary expressions share the basic presuppositions of Dalit theology. Thus, Dalit Sangharsh Samiti seems to be one of the forerunners of Dalit theology. The same is true with Dalit literature.

1. 2. 2. The Dalit Literature Movement

The Dalit Panther movement and Dalit Sangharsh Samiti stimulated many writers and journalists from a Dalit background. These writers and journalists, through their publications, alerted Dalits to the atrocities against them.¹⁰¹ They noted that traditional

⁹⁸ Mumtaz Ali Khan, "Legal Enactments and the Status of Dalits," in *Policing India in the New Millennium*, ed. P. J. Alexander (Mumbai: Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2002), 506.

⁹⁹ Manohar Yadav, "Dalit Movement: A Critical Analysis of its Current Realities in Karnataka," *Contextualising Dalit Movement in South India: Selfhood, Culture and Economy* (Vikalp Alternatives, 2005), 114, Dr. J. Somashekar, "Dalit Movement in Karnataka: A Historical Perspective," *Contextualising Dalit Movement in South India Selfhood, Culture and Economy*, *Vikalp Alternatives*, August 2005, 71-78.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Uttara Shastree, *Religious Converts in India* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1996), 102, Asha Kasbekar, *Pop Culture India: Media, Arts, and Lifestyle* (California: ABC-Clio, 2006), 14, Eva-Maria Hardtmann, "In Touch with Politics: Three Individuals in the Midst of the Dalit Movement," in *Contesting 'Good' Governance: Crosscultural Perspectives on Representation, Accountability and Public Space*, eds. Eva Poluha and Mona Rosendahl (London: Routledge, 2012), 139, Mendelsohn and Vicziany, *The Untouchables*, 215.

Indian literature overlooked the problems of Dalits, their culture, their practices and their outlook.¹⁰² For instance, Dalits often regard Ambedkar as an icon of Dalits. He fought for the political rights for Dalits and affirmative action in favour of Dalits in education and government employment.¹⁰³ However, mainstream literature and historical discourse in India often overlooked Ambedkar's attempts to liberate Dalits and highlights Ambedkar only as the author of the Indian constitution. Therefore, Arundhati Roy, the Booker prize winner, claims that history has been unkind to Ambedkar.¹⁰⁴ The Dalit literature challenges similar neglects to Dalits and their cause.¹⁰⁵ It encapsulates the pain, humiliation, and poverty of Dalits and narrates the world differently from a Dalit outlook. Its main objective is the Dalit emancipation.¹⁰⁶ It is a Dalits' counter-discourse against the oppression by dominant caste Hindus.

1. 2. 2. 1. Critique of Mainstream Indian Literature

As an undertaking from the margins, Dalit literature has been the most powerful literary expression of Dalits' daily struggle for human dignity.¹⁰⁷ It challenges conventional literary theories in India and the dominant caste ideologies submerged in them. It asserts that Dalits and their sufferings should be an important source for literature.¹⁰⁸ It blames the mainstream authors for ignoring Dalits. Paul, for instance, claims that this movement

¹⁰² Darshana Trivedi, "Literature of Their Own: Dalit Literary Theory in Indian Context," in *Dalit Literature: A Critical Exploration*, ed. Amar Nath Prasad and M. B. Gaijan (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2007), 3-5.

¹⁰³ Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 8.

¹⁰⁴ Arundhati Roy, "Arundhati Roy's Preface to BR Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste," accessed on 24th July 2018, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/arundhati-roys-preface-to-br-ambedkars-annihilation-of-caste/news-story/8f7eb291a6e916ee686e098466cf16e7?sv=eced52f1527dbf0abe7cf98765b5bf3c>

¹⁰⁵ Razi Abedi, "Dalit Literature: The Voice of the Downtrodden," in *The Best of Gowanus: New Writing from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean*, ed. Thomas J. Hubschman (New York: Gowanus Books, 2001), 85.

¹⁰⁶ T K Halli Gopal Krishna, *Dalit Worship English Goddess* (Bangalore: Lulu.com, 2012), 40.

¹⁰⁷ Paswan, Jaideva, *Encyclopaedia of Dalits*, 321.

¹⁰⁸ Trivedi, "Literature of Their Own," 3.

questioned traditional forms of literary expression in all Indian languages.¹⁰⁹ However, it is not a naming and shaming movement. Rather, it seeks the liberation of all humanity and acknowledges the greatness of human beings. It functions as an agency to fight against the superiority of race, Varna and caste.¹¹⁰ So too, Valmiki designates it as “the literature of the masses,” narrating Dalit pathos.¹¹¹ This literature has its limitations as well. Bharti, an Indian Dalit writer, explains that Dalit literature helps Dalits to narrate their pain.¹¹² Therefore, Dalit literature is the literary undertakings of Dalits alone.¹¹³ Non-Dalit writers have often challenged this aspect. Bharti clarifies that there is not any restriction to write Dalit problems.¹¹⁴ However, what is called Dalit literature is the work of Dalits only since they have experienced Dalit problems. This explanation seems tricky. Nonetheless, this dissertation intends to respect the rights of Dalits to write their experiences.

Widespread interest in Dalit literature increased considerably in the 1960s.¹¹⁵ Shankarrao Kharatt, Baburao Bagul, Annabhau Sathe, and Bandhu Madhav were prominent Dalit writers in Maharashtra. They wrote extensively on Dalit experiences.¹¹⁶ They informed society, both within and beyond the Indian subcontinent of the sufferings of Dalits. They presuppose that traditional Marathi literature¹¹⁷ is superficial and distorted. They allege that it was dominant caste oriented and has failed miserably to narrate Dalit

¹⁰⁹ S. K. Paul, “Dalit Literature and Dalit Poetry,” in *Dalit Literature: A Critical Exploration*, eds. Amar Nath Prasad and M. B. Gaijan (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2007), 60.

¹¹⁰ Baburao Bagul. *Dalit Sahitya: Ajche Kranti Vigyan* (Nagpur: Buddhist Publishing House, 1980), 259.

¹¹¹ Omprakash Valmiki, *Dalit Sahitya Ka Saundaryashashtra* (Delhi: Radhakrishnan, 2001), 15.

¹¹² Kanwal Bharti, “The Concept of Dalit Literature.” Quoted from Hunt, *Hindi Dalit Literature*, 218.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Naik, *Thoughts and Philosophy*, 390.

¹¹⁶ Debjani Ganguly, *Caste, Colonialism and Counter-Modernity: Notes on a Postcolonial Hermeneutics of Caste* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 179.

¹¹⁷ Marathi is a language spoken mainly in the Indian state of Maharashtra. The literature composed in this language is known as Marathi literature.

sufferings.¹¹⁸ Mistry, for instance, narrates an event during the 1970s when the dominant caste people punished three Dalits for taking part in an election campaign. They hanged these men naked by their ankles from a Banyan tree and flogged them throughout the day. The dominant caste collaborators also urinated on the inverted faces of their victims, held burning coals to the three men's genitals and stuffed the burning coal into their mouths. Their cries of Dalits were heard through the village until their lips and tongues melted away. The dominant caste men displayed the dead bodies in the village square.¹¹⁹

Sadly, traditional Marathi literature failed to narrate the dark side of Dalit life as narrated by Mistry. Why did it happen? Wankhade, a famous Marathi Dalit writer, has already clarified that a dominant caste Marathi writer's understanding of life is insufficient. Such a writer has never really seen Dalit suffering and has not experienced the effects of Dalit suffering in its fullness.¹²⁰ Valmiki also joins with Wankhade. He emphasises the importance of Dalit suffering in literary undertakings. Valmiki dismisses the possibility of non-Dalit writers narrating the Dalit experience. He claims that mainstream literature is superficial, born out of pity and sympathy, and not out of a desire for change. Therefore, Valmiki maintains that a non-Dalit narrating Dalit experience will be far from reality.¹²¹ *Kanyadan* ('Marriage'), a Marathi play written in 1983 is worth mentioning.¹²² Tendulkar narrates the story of an inter-caste marriage between Arun Athawale, a Dalit man and Jyoti Devlalikar, a Brahmin woman. Tendulkar depicts Arun as a wife-beater, drunkard,

¹¹⁸ Harish Mangalam, "Gujarati Dalit Poetry: Origin and Development," in *Dalit Literature: A Critical Exploration*, eds. Amar Nath Prasad and M. B. Gaijan (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2007), 193-195.

¹¹⁹ Rohinton Mistry, *A Fine Balance* (New Delhi: Rupa and Company, 1996), 146.

¹²⁰ M. N. Wankhade, "Friends, the Day of Irresponsible Writing is Over," in *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*, ed. Arjun Dangle, trans. Maxine Berntsen (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1992), 316.

¹²¹ Omprakash Valmiki, *Dalit Sahitya Ka Saundarya Sasthra* (Aesthetics of Dalit Literature) (Delhi: Radhakrishna Prakashan, 2001), 34.

¹²² Vijay Tendulkar, *Kanyadan*, trans. Gowri Ramnarayan (New Delhi: Oxford India Paper Backs, 1996).

manipulator and blackmailer. Arun's alcoholism and his rude behaviour quickly worsen into physical violence after marriage.

Notwithstanding this suffering, Jyoti remains with her husband. Many Dalit writers accuse this drama of enforcing and circulating a distorted Dalit image.¹²³ Ania Loomba, to quote one of them, reviews *Kanyadan*:

Shanta Gokhale points out that Tendulkar offered various arguments in defence of his portrayal of Arun, arguing that "in giving as much space as was required to delve into Nath's character, there simply wasn't sufficient space to devote nuancing Athavale's character." At one point he admitted that he didn't know more than a couple of Dalits personally. That was nearer to the truth. Then the Dalit argument was why write about something you don't know? To which Tendulkar replied by saying a writer needn't personally know the people and places he writes about. The Dalit argument seemed to suggest to him that only Dalits could write about Dalits because only they knew themselves. This was a solipsistic argument that couldn't hold water. But this was not what the Dalits meant. There are ways and ways of knowing people. Tendulkar had never met *Sakharam Binder* or anyone like him. But in imagining him into being, Tendulkar managed to create a full-blooded character with shades of grey. So clearly, Arun Athavale was not accorded that kind of personal interest by the writer.¹²⁴

Sadly, mainstream literature, most often, depicts a distorted image of Dalits. Kumar, a well-known Marathi poet and literary critic, acknowledges that traditional literature narrates a distorted Dalit image.¹²⁵ Trivedi, similarly, differentiates between traditional and Dalit literature. He clarifies that mainstream Marathi authors use metaphysical, philosophical, symbolic and imaginative language, depicting physical beauty and heroic qualities of their characters. Hence, Trivedi argues, their language is complex and far from reality. They describe a God-man relationship or a man-nature

¹²³ Gangadhar Pantawane, "Evolving a New Identity: The Development of a Dalit Culture," in *Untouchable! Voices of the Dalit Liberation Movement*, ed. Barbara R. Joshi (New Delhi: Select Book, 1986), 85.

¹²⁴ Ania Loomba, "Marriage and the Liberal Imagination: Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*," in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume XLVII No 43, October 26, 2013.

¹²⁵ Sharan Kumar Limbale, *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* (New Delhi: Orient Longman Pvt. Limited, 2004), 92.

relationship in a poetic way. Dalit writers, Trivedi clarifies, express their experiences more realistically. Their language and images come from their experiences. Hence, mainstream literature presents a romantic way of life, while Dalit literature represents the realistic way of Dalit life.¹²⁶ The principal themes of Dalit literature are the hopes and aspirations of Dalits, 'untouchability,' and the exploitation of Dalit women by upper-caste men.¹²⁷

Waman Nimbalkar, for instance, expresses the shame generated by caste hierarchy:

When I knew nothing, I knew
My caste was despised (low, despicable?)
The Patil had kicked my father,
Cursed my mother.
They did not even raise their heads
But I felt this 'caste' in my heart
When I climbed the step to school
Then too I knew my caste was low
I used to sit outside, the others inside.
My skin would suddenly shiver with little thorns,
My eyes could not hold back the tears.
Our lips must smile when they cursed...
How is caste? Where is it?
It isn't seen, so does it live inside the body?
All the questions float like smoke.
And the wick of thought is sputtering.
But when I knew nothing, then I knew
My caste was low.¹²⁸

This song is an assault on the hierarchy of the caste system. It highlights how the Dalits' psyche internalises the shame of being a Dalit, which follows Dalits wherever they go and disempowers them from resisting any abuses. Daya Pawar, another Dalit writer from Maharashtra, critiqued the upper caste hegemony that divides Indian society:

One day someone dug up a twentieth-century city

¹²⁶ Trivedi, "Literature of Their Own," 6.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 4.

¹²⁸ Quoted from Julius Lipner, *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge, 1994), 96, John Maliekal, *Caste in Indian Society* (Bangalore: CSA Publications, 1980), 100, Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom*, 24, Anna Rodríguez Casadevall, *Life Satisfaction, Empowerment and Human Development among Women in Sex Work in the Red-Light Area of Pune (Maharashtra, India): The Case of Saheli HIV/AIDS Karyakarta Sangh* (València: Universitat de València, 2015), 24.

And, ends with this observation.
Here's an interesting inscription:
'This water tap is open to all castes and religions'
What could it have meant:
That this society was divided?
That some were high while others were low?
Well, all right, then this city deserved burying
Why did they call it the machine age?
Seems like the Stone Age in the twentieth century.¹²⁹

This poem is straightforward. Pawar describes the miserable life of the Dalits. He recounts how the Dalits continued to be oppressed and discriminated in villages irrespective of material progress and mocks at the economical and mechanical developments of the twentieth century. The developments that disregard the Dalits have failed to break the barriers of the caste system. Hence, the poem criticises caste supremacy and the development models that disregard the sufferings of Dalits. Another poem further expresses their insecurity and the harsh realities of Dalits' life.

Oh cloud, do not leave rain here too
Our streets too are a part of this country
Do not let anyone cover a shroud on the memories of the past
Having got up now and then, they are frightening us
In our country, we are victimised by your colonial invasion
We remained refugees, and you the citizens
We too have asked for entry into the hearts of the temple but
Not only to the gods, to the human beings too distant we became
Rented houses also have rejected us
Choultries too have honoured us by throwing out
Let the tap water flow onto the drainage
It would be an offence if we collect it in our hands
When spat upon the cheek, we showed another cheek
But, we show cyclone in the silence blasted now!¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Daya Pawar, "The City." Quoted in Razi Abedi, "Dalit Literature: The Voice of the Downtrodden," in *The Best of Gowanus: New Writing from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean*, ed. Thomas J. Hubschman (Brooklyn: Gowanus Books, 2001), 89.

¹³⁰ K. Purushotham, "Resisting Assimilation: A Reading of Daniel Fuchs' *Summer in Williamsburg*," *Kakatiya Journal of English Studies*, Vol. 21 (2001).

This poem echoes the feelings of Dalits. It depicts the pathetic situation of Dalits and acknowledges that such circumstances force them to live as refugees in their country. However, the poem does not idealise Dalits' sufferings or their silence. Instead, it compares the hidden potential of Dalits' silence with the power of a cyclone, a large-scale air mass, that could be highly disruptive. Hence, Dalit literature challenges the caste system and is an inseparable part of the Dalit protest movement.¹³¹ So too, Dalit literature protests the inequalities attached to the established system.¹³² However, it does not spread hatred. It is not a literature of vengeance. As Arvind Nirmal clarifies, it is "an instrument of social change"¹³³ and promotes "man's greatness and man's freedom."¹³⁴ Moreover, Dalit literature communicates the hopes and ambitions of Dalits about a reformed society and imparts a counter-ideology that contests caste and its implications.

As explained, Dalit literature, as a social critique from the margins, has challenged the Brahminic hegemony in Indian literature. There are many parallels between Dalit literature and Dalit theology such as criticising mainstream literature and its disregard for Dalit suffering and the centrality of Dalit experience and the focus on "this world.". Thus, Dalit literature has influenced Dalit theology. However, it is not the case of the Dalit literature movement alone. As noted, the Dalit Panther movement, Dalit Sangharsh Samiti and Dalit literature have also inspired Dalit theology. Nirmal, one of the founding fathers of Dalit theology, has already acknowledged this idea. He clarifies how his encounter with

¹³¹ Aravindra Kumar Varma, *Political Science* (New Delhi: Rahul Jain, 2011), 137, Hardtmann, "In Touch with Politics, 139, Zelliott, "Dalit Literature," 451.

¹³² L. S. Deshpande, *Makers of Indian Literature: Narhar Kurundkar* (New Delhi: Akademi, 2005), 34ff.

¹³³ Arvind Nirmal, "A Dialogue with Dalit Literature," in *Towards a Dalit Theology*, ed. M E Prabhakar (Delhi: The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1989), 73.

¹³⁴ Baburao Bagul, "Dalit Sahitya: Man's Greatness, Man's Freedom," *Asmitadarsh*, Vol. I, (1973):56-57.

the Dalit Panthers and the Dalit literature motivated his theological task. As Nirmal implies, Dalit theology as it is known today would have been a Shudra theology or Harijan theology if he had not encountered the Dalit Panther movement and the Dalit literature movement.¹³⁵ Nirmal's interaction with Dalit movements convinced him of the urgency to propose Dalit theology. Like Dalit Movements that challenge caste and its influence upon traditional Indian literature, Dalit theology questions the dominant caste hegemony upon Indian Christian theology. Moreover, following the proposals of the Dalit movement, Dalit theology affirms the centrality of Dalits and their experiences in doing theology in India. Therefore, Dalit theology is a theological appropriation of Dalit movements. So too, some other contextual factors also motivated the founders of Dalit theology. Indian Christian theology's neglect of Dalits was one such catalyst, which provoked Dalit academics to search for a theological alternative for the Indian Christian theology.

1. 2. 3. The Indian Christian Theology and the Dalits

The dominant caste people have been mistreating Dalits for many centuries. Dalits have been discriminated against, denied access to land, and routinely battered and killed on an on-going basis. Outrages against them surfaced as a significant issue, particularly in the 1970s.¹³⁶ Hostility against Dalits takes many forms. It varies from insults to rape, the forced consumption of human excreta and urine, denial of access to amenities such as drinking water, public ponds, roads, bus stops, markets and temples, denial of civil rights, physical harm and social and economic boycotts.¹³⁷ Even though the violence

¹³⁵ Nirmal, "A Dialogue with Dalit Literature," 66.

¹³⁶ K. S. Subramanian, *Political Violence and the Police in India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd., 2007), 116.

¹³⁷ Rita Manchanda, *The No Nonsense Guide to Minority Rights in South Asia* (New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2009), 193.

against Dalits has been in practice for many centuries right to the present day, this dissertation will focus predominantly on the period between 1970 and 1980.¹³⁸

1. 2. 3. 1. Violence Against Dalits

The dominant castes used to target Dalits for breaching caste regulations. However, there was a change in dominant caste tactics against Dalits in the 1970s. The dominant castes began to target Dalits as a group even if only an individual transgressed caste boundaries. As Gundimeda acknowledges, violence against Dalits occurred not because of their collective wrongdoing, but only because of their collective identity.¹³⁹ There were caste struggles in Belchi, Bihar in 1977, Agra, Bishrampur and Villupuram in 1978, Pipra in 1980 and Kanjhawala near New Delhi.¹⁴⁰

Krishna Murthy, in a debate in the Indian Parliament, recounted many atrocities against Dalits. The dominant castes, for instance, killed a Dalit named Baleshar in Meerut for growing wheat on the land, the Government had allotted to him. The crowd then attacked Dalit women to terrorise them and deprived 92,000 Dalits of their allotted land because of Baleshar. Another Dalit man was killed in China Ogirala in Krishna district in July 1977. The dominant castes invaded the village when Dalit agricultural labourers demanded increased wages. They tore off the sarees and blouses of Dalit women. Dalits were brutally murdered and thrown into the river Ganga.¹⁴¹ In Belchi, Dalits were dragged out of their huts and shot dead in cold blood and burnt.¹⁴² Mass rape, mass loot and mass

¹³⁸ Please see section 1. 2. 1 for the reasons behind this focus.

¹³⁹ Gundimeda, *Dalit Politics in Contemporary India*, 80.

¹⁴⁰ Stuart Corbridge and John Harriss, *Reinventing India: Liberalisation, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2006), 217.

¹⁴¹ A. Satyanarayana, *Dalits and Upper Castes: Essays in Social History* (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 2005), 210.

¹⁴² Manchanda, *The No Nonsense Guide*, 193, Ashwani Kumar, *Community Warriors: State, Peasants and Caste Armies in Bihar* (London: Anthem Press, 2008), 104.

arson occurred in Jamatara. Raiders raped six Dalit women. They tortured Dalit women by burning their thighs and breasts.¹⁴³ As seen, Dalits suffered brutal attacks, including massacres and rapes in many parts of India. They faced the same within Indian Christian Churches also. Parratt, for example, argues that Dalit Christians are twice alienated. The Church and the society discriminate against them.¹⁴⁴ Massey claims that Dalits suffer threefold discrimination from the society, the government and fellow Christians.¹⁴⁵ Robinson and Kujur note that Dalit Christians suffer from the government of India, the caste Hindus, Hindu Dalits, dominant caste Christian community and the subgroups of the Dalit Christians.¹⁴⁶ Unfortunately, as will be clarified, Indian Christian theology failed to note and respond to the sufferings of Dalits in the 1970s.

1. 2. 3. 1. 1. The Indian Christian Theology and the Dalit's Lived Experiences

As indicated, the discrimination of the Dalits within and beyond the Indian Christian Churches is a well-documented fact. A majority of the Indian Christian theologians, however, overlooked the aggression against Dalits. Sebastian Kappen, for instance, published *Jesus and Freedom, Jesus and the Cultural Revolution and Liberation Theology and Marxism*.¹⁴⁷ Following the same course, Mar Osthathios suggests the possibilities of God's universal saving potential.¹⁴⁸ Dalit academics denounced such

¹⁴³ Kusuma Krishna Murthy, "Ineffective Control of Violence Against Harijans," in *Untouchable! Voices of the Dalit Liberation movement*, ed. Barbara Joshi (London: Zed Books Ltd. 1986), 118-121, Boopalan, *Memory, Grief, and Agency*, 36.

¹⁴⁴ John Parratt, "Recent Writing on Dalit Theology: A Bibliographical Essay," *IRM*, 83/329 (1994): 329-37.

¹⁴⁵ James Massey, "An Analysis of the Dalit Situation with Special Reference to Dalit Christians and Dalit Theology," in *Religion and Society*, vol. 5, no .3-4, 2007, 74.

¹⁴⁶ S. M. Michael, "Dalit Encounter with Christianity: Change and Continuity," in *Margins of Faith: Dalit and Tribal Christianity in India*, eds. Rowena Robinson and Joseph Marianus Kujur (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010), 71.

¹⁴⁷ Sebastian Kappen, *Jesus and Freedom* (New York: Orbis Books, 1977), Sebastian Kappen, *Jesus and the Cultural Revolution: An Asian Perspective* (Bombay: Build Publications, 1983), Sebastian Kappen, *Liberation Theology and Marxism* (Puntamba: Asha Kendra, 1986).

¹⁴⁸ Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, *Theology of a Classless Society* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1980).

interpretations and alleged that Indian Christian theology ignored the Dalits' sufferings.

Nirmal, for example, clarifies:

It was in the seventies that Indian theologians began to take questions of socio-economic justice more seriously. The Indian theological scene thus changed considerably, I felt that liberation *motifs* in India were of a different nature, the Indian situation was different and that we had to search for liberation *motifs* that were authentically Indian.¹⁴⁹

Perdue and Irudayaraj also noted that Indian Christian theologians discounted the brutal attacks against Dalits and their continuing sufferings within Indian Christian Churches.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, the Church, as will be explained below, also failed to accommodate the Dalits and Dalit theology emerged as a counter-discourse to Churches' failure to accommodate the Dalits.

1. 2. 4. Dalit Mass Conversion

Religious conversion has been an ongoing phenomenon in India because of its multi-religious setting.¹⁵¹ Many of the Dalit conversions to other religious traditions, took place as massive group movements.¹⁵² Dalits converted to Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and other religions at various times. Conversion to well-established religions was one of their primary strategies to fight the caste system. Large Muslim populations in some parts of India also attest to this social reality. The members of the dominated castes

¹⁴⁹ Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 539.

¹⁵⁰ Leo G. Perdue, *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology: After the Collapse of History* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 333, Xavier Irudayaraj, *Emerging Dalit Theology* (Madras: Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, 1990), 126.

¹⁵¹ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to A.D 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 137-144, Prakash Louis, "Liberative Mission among the Marginalised and the Oppressed," in *Prophetic Dialogue: Challenges and Prospects in India*, eds. L Stanislaus and Alwyn D'Zousa (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003), 49, Eliza F Kent, "Mass Movements" in South India, 1877-1936," in *Converting Cultures: Religion, Ideology and Transformations of Modernity*, eds. Dennis Washburn and A. Kevin Reinhart (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 367, Arvind Sharma, "Hinduism and Conversion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 429.

¹⁵² Hans Ucko, *The People and the People of God: Minjung and Dalit Theology in Interaction with Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (Hamburg: LIT Verlag Münster, 2002), 104.

began to join Christianity with the advent of the Europeans.¹⁵³ Hence, Dalits embracing Christianity is not an isolated phenomenon.¹⁵⁴ How the church received the new converts is an important question to follow.

1. 2. 4. 1. Mass Conversions to Christianity: Search for Liberation

Tens of thousands of Dalits joined Christianity when they heard missionaries preaching equality, freedom and human dignity. The *Paraiyars* from the south-eastern tip of India (1535-37) and *Mukkuvars* of the south-western parts of India (1544) joined Christianity after responding to Portuguese missionaries.¹⁵⁵ Paraiyans in Salem, Attur, Coimbatore and Erode converted to Christianity through the activities of the London Missionary Society.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, Pulayans in Kerala, Tigalas in Karnataka, Malas and Madigas in Andhra Pradesh, Chamars in Madhya Pradesh, Utter Pradesh and Bihar, Churhas from Punjab, Vankars from Gujarat and Mahars from Maharashtra embraced Christianity.¹⁵⁷ The Dalits initiated the conversion to acquire equality and respect.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ Gyanendra Pandey, "The Time of the Dalit Conversion," *Economic and Political Weekly* (2006): 1779-1788, Vishav Raksha, "Excluded and Marginalized: Patterns of Deprivation of the Scavengers," in *Mapping Social Exclusion in India: Caste, Religion and Boarderlands*, ed. Paramjit S. Judge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 156.

¹⁵⁴ G. Aloysius, *Religion as Emancipatory Identity* (New Delhi: New Age International Publishers, 1998), 18.

¹⁵⁵ Dionysius Rasquinha, "A Brief Historical Analysis of the Emergence of Christian Theology", in *VJTR*, Vol. 66, May 2002, 354.

¹⁵⁶ Raj Sekhar Basu, *Nandanar's Children: The Paraiyans' Tryst with Destiny, Tamil Nadu 1850-1956* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2011), 96.

¹⁵⁷ Prakash Louis, "Caste Based Discrimination of Dalit Christians and the Demand for Reservation," in *Dalit and Minority Empowerment*, ed. Santosh Bhartiya (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2008), 367-368.

¹⁵⁸ John C. B. Webster, "From Indian Church to Indian Theology: An Attempt at Theological Construction," in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, ed. Arvind P. Nirmal (Chennai: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, 2007), 97, K. C. Das, *Indian Dalits, Voices, Visions and Politics* (Delhi: Global Vision Publishing House, 2004), 65-66, David Blake Willis and J Rajasekaran, "Dalit Entrepreneurs on the Edges of Caste and Class, Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship in India," in *Handbook of Research on Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship A Co-Evolutionary View on Resource Management*, ed. Leo Paul Dana (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2007), 602, J.. Aruldoss, "Mission of the Church: Dalits and Salvation," in *Anglicanism: A Global Communion*, eds. Andrew Wingate, Kevin Ward, Carrie Pemberton and Wilson Sitshebo (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1998), 297, Yoginder Sikand, *Muslims in India since 1947: Islamic Perspectives on Inter-Faith Relations* (London: Routledge, 2004), 122, Chad M. Bauman,

1. 2. 4. 2. Churches' Failure in Accommodating Converts

Dalits believed that conversion would improve their social status.¹⁵⁹ However, their status did not improve substantially after conversion.¹⁶⁰ Paulson narrates an event¹⁶¹ that confirms the point. Charles Mead, a missionary of the London Missionary Society, married an educated woman from the Paraya caste (one of the lowest castes) in 1850. Mead's fellow evangelists opposed the marriage because of his wives' lower caste origin. They feared that the marriage would be most injurious to the cause of Christ in Travancore. Mead was forced to leave the LMS.¹⁶² Mead's incident does not necessarily mean that the missionaries came to India with caste reservations. Instead, it suggests that they were concerned about hurting the sentiments of dominant caste Hindus. They might have worried that this marriage would hinder dominant caste Hindus from converting to Christianity.¹⁶³ Their hesitation, however, helped the survival of the caste system.

Robert de Nobili (1577-1656) represents another instance of this accommodative approach.¹⁶⁴ He established a Catholic mission centre in Madurai in 1606 and modelled

Christian Identity and Dalit Religion in Hindu India, 1868-1947 (Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2008), 4, Ashgar Ali Engineer, *Muslim Minority: Continuity and Change* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2009), 137, S. Johana Thamayanthi, "Conversion of Dalits in India –a Blessing or A Curse," in *Dalits and Tribes of India*, ed. J. Cyril Kanmony (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2010), 203, Emma Tomalin, *Religions and Development* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 353, P. A. Augustine, "Conversion as Social Protest," *Religion and Society* XXVIII/4 (December 1981): 51, Sebastian C. H. Kim, *Theology in the Public Sphere: Public Theology as a Catalyst for Open Debate* (SCM Press: London, 2011), 101.

¹⁵⁹ Louis, "Caste Based Discrimination," 368.

¹⁶⁰ Paulson Pulikottil, "Ramankutty Paul: A Dalit Contribution to Pentecostalism," in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, eds. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2005), 249 ff, Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 234, Singha, "Dalit Theology: An Indian Christian Response," 158.

¹⁶¹ This event might be outdated. But it will help readers to understand how the caste system influenced the missionaries.

¹⁶² Pulikottil, *Ramankutty Paul*, 250.

¹⁶³ Ucko, *The People and the People of God*, 105.

¹⁶⁴ Vincent Cronin, *A Pearl to India: The Life of Robert de Nobili* (New York: Dutton, 1959), S. Arokiasamy, *Dharma, Hindu and Christian According to Roberto de Nobili* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1986). Francis X. Clooney, "Christ as the Divine Guru in the Theology of Robert de Nobili," in *One Faith, Many Cultures*, ed. Ruy Costa (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), 25-40.

himself as a dominant caste Hindu sage.¹⁶⁵ He followed dominant caste mannerisms and distanced himself from dominated caste Hindus.¹⁶⁶ He believed that conversion to Christianity does not force one to denounce their caste, nobility, or usages.¹⁶⁷ The Protestant missionaries also followed a programme of accommodation. They permitted the converts to retain their caste identity. They accepted caste distinctions within their Church.¹⁶⁸ Such techniques helped the survival of the caste system in the Indian Churches. Nevertheless, I do not intend to overstate the missionary factor either. Converts from dominant castes had formed the Caste Christian Associations in some parishes. They resisted the attempts of the missionaries to enforce social interaction between the Dalit converts and the dominant caste converts.¹⁶⁹ They argued that the missionaries have no rights to interfere with local practices, tradition and caste observances.¹⁷⁰ Because of the opposition from Caste Christian Associations, most of the missionaries left the caste system untouched.

Similarly, as Webster acknowledges, the Catholic missionaries did not view caste as a religious institution. They approached it as a system of social stratification and chose to work within this system.¹⁷¹ The Protestant missionaries also permitted their converts to retain their caste practices.¹⁷² Thus, caste continued to function in the Indian Churches

¹⁶⁵ Joanne Punzo Waghorne, "Chariots of the God/s: Riding the Line Between Hindu and Christian," in *Popular Christianity in India: Reading between the Lines*, eds. Selva J Raj, Corinne G. Dempsey (Albany: State University of New York, 2002), 17.

¹⁶⁶ P. Radhakrishnan, *India, the Perfidies of Power: A Social Critique* (Delhi: Vedams, 2002), 137.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 13.

¹⁶⁸ L. Stanislaus, *The Liberative Mission of the Church among Dalit Christians* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 127-128.

¹⁶⁹ Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem*, 49.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 35.

¹⁷² Stanislaus, *The Liberation Mission*, 127, 128.

because of the adaptive policies of the missionaries and the attitudes of the dominant caste converts. It is evident from the report of the Dalit Christians to the Simon Commission (1929). It states that they remain what they were before they became Christian untouchables.¹⁷³ Their self-designation does not necessarily disown Christian spirituality. It expresses their discontent with the presence of caste within the Church. The exploitations of Dalits continued even after Indian independence. Thus, hierarchical thinking is deeply rooted in Indian society. It has infiltrated the Church as well.¹⁷⁴

Consequently, 85% of Dalit Christians continue to live in the same segregated place after becoming Christians and Dalits continue to live the life of an “oppressed majority” within Indian Christian churches.¹⁷⁵ Their conversion has not changed their social condition.¹⁷⁶ The failure of the Church is a grave mistake. James Theophilus Appavoo (also known as Parattai), voices the failure of the Church:¹⁷⁷

You make us your flock of sheep,
but they cut us up and make biriyani. (rice and lamb dish)
They fry us like a side dish and recklessly eat us.
Oh, father, you are the only true shepherd.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Jammanna and Sudhakar, *Dalits' Struggle for Social Justice*, 121.

¹⁷⁴ Franco, Macwan and Ramanathan, *Journeys to Freedom*, 96.

¹⁷⁵ Sadangi, *Dalit: The Downtrodden of India*, 134-135.

¹⁷⁶ Jayachitra Lalitha, “Postcolonial Feminism, The Bible and the Native Indian Women,” in *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakening in Theology and Praxis*, eds. Kay Higuera Smith, Jayachitra Lalitha and L. Daniel Hawk (Downers Grove, Intervarsity Press, 2014), 78, Zadda, “Shoemaker and Missionary,” 29, Douglas Jacobsen, *The World's Christians, Who They are, Where They are, and How They Got There* (Grantham: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 128, Michael Dusche, *Identity Politics in India and Europe* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010), 338, Saluddin Khan, “Globalisation, Dalits, Adivasis and Naxalite Movement,” in *Dalits and Tribes of India*, ed. J. Cyril Kanmony (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2010), 78, Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2002), 168, George M. Soares-Prabhu, “Exodus 20:1-17: An Asian Perspective,” in *Return to Babel: Global Perspectives on the Bible*, eds. John R. Levison and Priscilla Pope Levison (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1999), 49ff.

¹⁷⁷ James Theophilus Appavoo (1940-2005) was a presbyter of CSI Madras Diocese. He was a faculty member of the Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary, Arasaradi, Madurai.

¹⁷⁸ Quoted from Sherinian, *Tamil Folk Music*, 230, *Oh Mother and Father Tayi Tagappanare*, accessed on 16th July 2018,

[https:// www.episcopalchurch.org/files/AGR_SixteenSongs.pdf](https://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/AGR_SixteenSongs.pdf).

As George Oommen and Lancy Lobo further note, the Church failed to understand the expectations of the Dalits who had flocked to Christianity in search of freedom.¹⁷⁹ Such failures in the 1980's alarmed the Dalit researchers and, as will be clarified in the next chapter, prompted them to search theological answers to redress Dalit situation.

1. 3. Conclusion

The present chapter evaluated historical contexts and lived experiences behind the emergence of Dalit theology as a counter-discourse to the dominant caste hegemony in the Indian Christian Churches. As noted, Dalit theology did not develop overnight out of a vacuum. Instead, Dalit theology emerged out of historical necessities. Dalits have been living the life of a Joothan, suffering multiple discriminations socially, economically, culturally and politically. Some of them thought that the conversion to Christianity would free them from caste oppression and joined Christian Churches. However, the conversion failed the Dalits since it did not change their social status substantially. The Dalits continued to live a life of destitution as an oppressed majority at the periphery of the Church.

Secular mobilisations, which emerged from the margins of the Indian subcontinent, like Dalit Panther movement, Dalit Sangharsh Samiti and the Dalit literature movement highlighted the precarious situation of Dalits, united Dalits and promoted Dalit consciousness. Further, they inspired the Dalit Christian academics to evaluate the situation of the Dalit Christians within and beyond the boundaries of the Indian Christian

¹⁷⁹ George Oommen, "Majoritarian Nationalism and the Identity Politics of Dalits in Post-Independent India," in *The God of All Grace: Essays in Honour of Orgien Vasantha Jathanna*, ed. Joseph George (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation and the United Theological College, 2005), 339-340, Lancy Lobo, "Visions and Illusions of Dalit Christians in India," in *Dalit Identity and Politics*, ed. Ghanshyam Shah (Delhi; Sage Publications, 2001), 252.

Churches. The Churches' failure in facilitating the Dalits, assuring their freedom and the insensitivity of Indian Christian theology to the Dalit concerns, infuriated the Dalit academics and convinced them the need to offer a theological alternative to complement secular movements to redress the Dalit situation. They searched for new avenues to solve their religious and cultural struggles. As will be explained in the next chapter, they found Latin American liberation and African American liberation movements as their dialogue partners.

Chapter 2

Theological Contexts Behind the Emergence of Dalit Theology

2. 0. Introduction

Badri Narayan recounts the story of Ekalavya, a tale from *The Mahabharata*, an ancient Indian epic.¹ According to this story, Dronacharya was a Brahmin archery tutor and the instructor of Pandavas and Kauravas.² He refused to accept Ekalavya as his student because Ekalavya was a boy from the tribal community. Dronacharya had reservations against Ekalavya's lower caste origin.³ Ekalavya went back to the forest. He fashioned a clay image of Dronacharya and practised archery before that statue.⁴ When Dronacharya learned that Ekalavya became a highly skilled warrior, he asked Ekalavya for his right thumb as gurudakshina.⁵ Ekalavya, without hesitation, chopped off his thumb for Dronacharya. There have been some attempts to idolise Ekalavya and his *gurudakshina*.⁶ Modern Dalit scholars, however, denounce such initiatives.⁷ They identify the influence of the caste system in this episode. Shashikant Hingnekar, one of the prominent Dalit poets, disapproves of Ekalavya and his sacrifice:

¹ Badri Narayan, *Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India: Culture, Identity and Politics* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), 67, Kamlesh Kanpur, *Portraits of a Nation: History of Ancient India* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 2010), 209.

² R. Venkataraman, *Power Thyself: Strive for Excellence and a Better Future* (New Delhi: SKM Consultants, 2004), 70. The Pandavas are the five sons of Pandu, by his two wives Kunti and Madri. The Kauravas are the 100 sons of Dhritarashtra and his wife Gandhari. Pandavas and Kauravas had a significant role in the Indian epic, *the Mahabharata*.

³ George Zachariah, *Alternatives Unincorporated: Earth Ethics from the Grassroots* (London: Routledge, 2011), 71.

⁴ Jeffery D. Long, *Historical Dictionary of Hinduism* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 112.

⁵ Eleanor Zelliot, "Stri Dalit Sahitya: The New Voice of Women Poets," in *Images of Women in Maharashtraian Literature and Religion*, ed. Anne Feldhaus (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 89. Gurudakshina is a teacher's tribute. The classical Indian tradition allows a teacher to demand his gurudakshina from his student. It is the duty of the student to give gurudakshina to a teacher.

⁶ Amrita Narlika and Aruna Narlikar, *Bargaining with a Rising India: Lessons from the Mahabharata* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 33, Narayan, *Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion*, 67.

⁷ Wendy Doniger, *On Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 554.

Oh Ekalavya,
If you had kept your thumb,
history would have happened somewhat differently,
But you gave your thumb,
and history also became theirs.
Ekalavya, since that day they have not even given you a glance.
Forgive me, Ekalavya, I won't be fooled now by their sweet words.
My thumb will never be broken.⁸

Some researchers, however, underpin the influence of caste in this narrative. Arun Prabha Mukherjee, Roy Moxham, Amrita Narlikar and Aruna Narlikar find favouritism in this story. They suggest that Dronacharya feared that Ekalavya would surpass Arjuna, Drona's favourite dominant caste student.⁹ There is some truth in their claim. However, their suggestions do not recognise how caste system functions in this story. Dronacharya declined to accept Ekalavya not because of his preference for Arjuna, but because of his caste reservations. Similarly, Uma Chakraborty, Thummapudi Bharathi and Badri Narayan interpret this story as an instance of an Upper caste conspiracy to wipe out the tribals.¹⁰ Whatever be the case, the life of Ekalavya narrates the systematic oppression of the Dalits who dared to challenge the caste system. The plight of the Dalits like Ekalavya, as seen, is not a memory narrated in Indian classical literature alone.¹¹

Dalits remain the most oppressed community in the present also.¹² Ram Niwas Jatav, a Dalit farmer, for example, was murdered and his wife and daughter were critically

⁸ Shashikant Hingnekar, "Ekalavya," Quoted by Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions*, 98.

⁹ Arun Prabha Mukherjee, "Introduction," in *Joothan: An Untouchable's Life*, Omprakash Valmiki, trans. Arun Prabha Mukherjee (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003). XLII, Roy Moxham, *Outlaw: India's Bandit Queen and Me* (London: Rider, 2010), 90, Narlikar and Narlikar, *Bargaining with a Rising India*, 33-35.

¹⁰ Chakraborty, *Gendering Caste*, 19-20, Thummapudi Bharathi, *A History of Telugu Dalit Literature* (Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2008), 35-36, Narayan, *Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion*, 67.

¹¹ Keane, *Caste-Based Discrimination*, 1, Marshall, Gilbert and Shea, *Persecuted: The Global Assault*, 102, Zadda, "Shoemaker and Missionary," 29, Debochet, *Making Post-2015*, 3, Sinha, *Psycho-Social Analysis*, 204, Sugirtharajah, "The Bible in Asia," 485.

¹² Ghuman, *British Untouchables*, 3.

injured by dominant caste villagers in Kannuj Village, Uttar Pradesh in April 2018.¹³ Similar incidents are noted globally and nationally. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, for instance, in his annual report and oral update on 7th March 2018 to the United Nations Human Rights Council, noted that he is disturbed by discrimination and violence directed at Dalits.¹⁴ Similarly, Dr Manmohan Singh, former Prime Minister of India, while delivering the first S. B. Rangnekar Memorial lecture at Punjab University, in Chandigarh, on 11th April 2018, lamented that atrocities against Dalits are increasing steadily.¹⁵ Hence, Dalits continue to be the worst victims of the caste system.¹⁶ Indian Churches and Indian theologians neglect them.

Dalit theology, as clarified, emerged from that historical and social context. It addresses the Dalits' longing for a new heaven and a new earth, and as will be clarified, owes much to the family of liberation theologies. The proposals of liberation theologians were a strong point of departure for the Dalit academics. They developed the concepts and interpretative styles based on Latin American and African American liberation hermeneutics.¹⁷ Scholars like Robinson, Dance, Lundblad, Carman, Rao, Antonio,

¹³ Faiz Siddiqui, Dalit Farmer Beaten to Death, Wife and Daughter Critically Injured in UP's Kannauj, accessed on 03rd May 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kanpur/dalit-farmer-beaten-to-death-wife-and-daughter-critically-injured-in-ups-kannauj/articleshow/63683409.cms>.

¹⁴ United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, *High Commissioner's Global Update of Human Rights Concerns*, accessed pm 03rd May 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22772>.

¹⁵ Hindustan Times, Atrocities against Minorities, Dalits Increasing: Former PM Manmohan Singh, accessed on 12th October 2018, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/atrocities-against-minorities-dalits-increasing-former-pm-manmohan-singh/story-9IMgjqKzmqrqLhmwiGFY8L.html>.

¹⁶ Selvanayagam, "Waters of Life and Indian Cups," 61, Sadangi, *Dalit: The Downtrodden of India*, 225, Monica Melanchthon, "The Grace of God and the Equality of Human Persons," in *The Gift of Grace: The Future of Lutheran Theology*, ed. Niels Henrik Gregersen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 51-52, V. R. Gomala, "Self-Help Groups and Economic Empowerment of Dalit Women," in *Dalits and Tribes of India*, ed. Jebaganam Cyril Kanmony (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2010), 163.

¹⁷ Thanzauva and R. L. Hnuni, "Ethnicity, Identity and Hermeneutics: An Indian Tribal Perspective," in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. Mark G. Brett (New York: E. J. Brill, 1996), 350.

Haokip, Susan and Raymond, hint how such insights helped Dalit theologians.¹⁸ Thus, Dalit theology is an Indian variety of liberation theology proposed in the Dalit context.

However, Dalit theology is not a carbon copy of liberation theologies.¹⁹ Certainly, the Indian context has played a significant role in formulating Dalit theology. The founders developed Dalit theology as a theological alternative to complement Dalit movements. It, as will be seen, disapproves of the philosophical and Vedantic influence upon Indian Christian theology.²⁰ It establishes that theology in India should not be relegated to abstract enterprises.²¹ It demands people and praxis-oriented theology in India.²² From such a perspective, Dalit theology, as will be clarified, seeks to find out what the Bible has to say about Dalit sufferings.²³ The present chapter examines how the concepts of the liberation theologies motivated Dalit academics, who were discontented with the failures of the Indian Christian Churches and the Indian Christian theology. Such a study seeks not to discredit Dalit theology or its founders but to clarify the outlook of Dalit theology.

¹⁸ L. Janelle Dance and Johannes Lunneblad, "Bush, Volvos, and 50 Cent: The Cross-National Triangulation Challenges of a "White" swede and a "Black" American," in *Rethinking Race and Ethnicity in Research Methods*, ed. John H. Stanfield II (London: Routledge, 2011), 304, Edward P. Antonio, "Black Theology and Liberation Theologies" in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, eds. Dwight N Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 34, Jangkhoham Haokip, *Can God Save My Village?: A Theological Study of Identity among the Tribal People of North-East India with a Special Reference to the Kukis of Manipur* (Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2014), 249, Susan Abraham, *Identity, Ethics, and Nonviolence in Postcolonial Theory: A Rahnerian Theological Assessment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 36, Raymond Brady Williams, *Christian Pluralism in the United States: The Indian Immigrant Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 184.

¹⁹ Fernando and Sauch, *Christianity in India*, 200.

²⁰ Rachel Fell McDermott, "From Hinduism to Christianity, from India to New York: Bondage and Exodus Experiences in the Lives of Indian Dalit Christians in the Diaspora," in *South Asian Christian Diaspora: Invisible Diaspora in Europe and North America*, eds. Knut A. Jacobsen and Selva J. Raj (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), 244.

²¹ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology* (Madras: University of Madras, 1995), viii, Franklyn J. Balasundaram, "Dalit Theology and Other Theologies," in *Frontiers of Dalit Theology*, ed. V. Devasahayam (Chennai: GLTCRI, 1996), 252.

²² Duncan B. Forrester, *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 2000), 23, Prem Kumar Shinde, *Dalits and Human Rights*, 99.

²³ R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 216.

2. 1. Indian Christian Theology

Christianity has an oral tradition in India which extends to 52 CE.²⁴ According to this tradition, St. Thomas, the Apostle, brought Christianity to India.²⁵ However, Christianity did not develop as an Indian phenomenon.²⁶ It was associated with western imperialism from the 17th century onwards because of western missionary activities.²⁷ Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-84), for example, criticised the 'foreign' nature of Christ. He accuses the missionaries of bringing a "Western Christ" to India.²⁸ So too, Kappen, Wilson and Pieris note that the Christ of theology and popular devotion bears the marks of his origin in the west.²⁹ Similarly, John Mansford Prior observes:

Whatever the nuances, however great the social contributions of the mission Churches in the past, however, heroic sacrifices of cross-cultural missionaries over the centuries, the fact remains in stark clarity: the Latin Churches of Asia are a foreign presence. They are alien in the official dress of their rituals (despite use of the mother tongue); alien in their formation of cultic and community leaders in foreign thought patterns in seminaries whose professors are foreign-educated; alien in its large, often rich, institutions among people who are generally poor; above all alien in that Christians have had to uproot themselves from their own cultural identity in order to claim a "hybrid" Christian one.³⁰

²⁴ Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1975), 7-11, Ian Gilman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia before 1500* (London: Routledge, 2006), 155ff, Peter Jackson, "Christians, Barbarians and Monsters: The European Discovery of the World Beyond Islam," in *The Medieval World*, eds. Peter Linehan and Janet L. Nelson (London: Routledge, 2001), 93.

²⁵ Alison Thomas, "Apologetics and Race," in *Apologetics for a New Generation*, ed. Sean McDowell (Eugene: Harvest House Publications, 2009), 189, Selva J. Raj and Corinne G. Dempsey, "Introduction: Between, Behind, and Beyond the Lines," in *Popular Christianity in India: Reading between the Lines*, eds. Selva J. Raj and Corinne G. Dempsey (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 1.

²⁶ Paul M. Collins, *Christian Inculturation in India* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 27, Hans J. Hillerbrand, *A New History of Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 255.

²⁷ Bede Griffiths, *Christ in India* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 54.

²⁸ Keshab Chandra Sen, *India Asks-Who is Christ?* (Calcutta: The Indian Mirror Press, 1879), 3.

²⁹ Sebastian Kappen, "Jesus and Transculturation," in *Asian Faces of Jesus*, ed. R S Sugirtharaja (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 173, Kothappalli Wilson, *The Twice Alienated: Culture of Dalit Christians* (Hyderabad: Bookings Cooperation, 1982), 59, Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 112.

³⁰ John Mansford Prior, "Unfinished Encounter: A Note on the Voice and Tone of Ecclesia in Asia," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 37 (2000), 261.

Such reservations against European influences inspired some scholars, who began to explain Christian principles using Indian categories of thought.³¹ They wanted to represent Christianity intelligibly and commendably to Hindus.³² Keshab Chandra Sen, for instance, suggested that the Trinity could be expounded based on the Hindu concept of Brahman as Sat-Cit-Ananda.³³ Indian Christian theology presents Jesus in an inculturated and indigenised manner using Hindu philosophical systems.³⁴ Nevertheless, Indian Christian theology is more than drawing parallels between Christianity and Hinduism.³⁵ It restates theological propositions pertinent in India.³⁶ It also seeks a dialogue between Christ and Indians.³⁷ Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907),³⁸ Vengal Chakkarai (1880-1958),³⁹ Pandipeddi Chenchiah (1886-1959)⁴⁰ and Bishop A. J.

³¹ Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 2-3, Watson, *Towards a Relevant Christology for India*, 52.

³² Jan van Lin, *Shaking the Fundamentals: Religious Plurality and Ecumenical Movement* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 173, Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 12, V. C. Rajasekharan, *Reflections on Indian Christian Theology* (Madras: CLS, 1993), 100.

³³ Yung Hwa, *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1997), 139. The validity of Sen's proposal is hotly debated. Samartha however clarifies that the statements that "Brahman is sat-cit-Ananda" and "God is triune" could be regarded as two responses to the same Mystery in two cultural settings and one cannot be used as a norm to judge the other (S. J. Samartha, *One Christ--Many Religions: Toward a Revised Christology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), 83).

³⁴ Anne Dondapati Allen, "No Garlic, Please, We are Indian: Reconstructing the De-eroticized Indian Woman," in *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion & Theology*, eds. Rita Nakashima Brock, Jung Ha Kim, Kwok Pui-Lan and Seung Ai Yung (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 191, Augustine Kanjamala, *The Future of Christian Mission in India*, 158.

³⁵ Yung Hwa, *Mangoes or Bananas?* 139.

³⁶ Watson, *Towards a Relevant Christology for India*, 52.

³⁷ M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 316.

³⁸ Bob Robinson, *Christians Meeting Hindus: An Analysis and Theological Critique of the Hindu-Christian Encounter in India* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2004), 18, Sean Doyle, *Synthesizing the Vedanta: The Theology of Pierre Johannes, S.J.* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006), 113, Andreas Anangguru Yewangoe, *Theologia Crucis in Asia: Asian Christian Views on Suffering in the Face of Overwhelming Poverty and Multifaceted Religiosity in Asia* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), 59.

³⁹ Schouten, *Jesus as Guru*, 118

⁴⁰ Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism: Third Edition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 388, Nigel Ajay Kumar, *What Is Religion? A Theological Answer* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 41.

Appassamy (1891-1975)⁴¹ were prominent figures in its early phase. Brahmabandhab, for instance, did not renounce Hinduism after his baptism.⁴² He wanted to live as a Catholic without ceasing to be a Hindu by culture.⁴³ Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the first non-European Nobel Prize laureate in literature, described him as “a Roman Catholic ascetic yet a Vedantin.”⁴⁴

Brahmabandhab sought to win over Hindu philosophy to the service of Christianity.⁴⁵ He followed Hinduism as his set of social obligations but Christianity as his way of salvation and religious life.⁴⁶ He used Hindu categories, especially those of Sankara extensively.⁴⁷ Scholars like Chakkarai, Chenchiah and Appassamy followed similar routes. Thus, Indian Christian theology attempted to liberate Indian Christianity from Western influence. However, Dalit theologians have some reservations against it. Prabhakar, Nirmal, Lancy Lobo and Clarke accuse that it failed to include the Dalits.⁴⁸

⁴¹ Brian Philip Dunn, *A. J. Appasamy and His Reading of RāMāNuja: A Comparative Study in Divine Embodiment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 25, Sean M. Doyle, "Reading John Through Bhakti Eyes: The Hermeneutic of A. J. Appasamy," in *World Christianity in Local Context: Essays in Memory of David A Kerr*, ed. Stephen R. Goodwin (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), 178-189, Joshua Broggi, *Diversity in the Structure of Christian Reasoning: Interpretation, Disagreement, and World Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 145ff.

⁴² Ananta Kumar Giri, "The Multiverse of Hindu Engagement with Christianity: Plural Streams of Creative Co-Walking, Contradictions, and Confrontations," in *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, ed. Felix Wilfred (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 396.

⁴³ Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ*, 107.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Julius J Lipner, *Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya: The Life and Thought of a Revolutionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xv.

⁴⁵ Timothy C. Tennent, *Building Christianity on Indian Foundations: The Legacy of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 18.

⁴⁶ Mario I. Aguilar, *Christian Ashrams, Hindu Caves and Sacred Rivers: Christian-Hindu Monastic Dialogue in India 1950-1993* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006), 37, J. Lipner "A Modern Christian Response," in *Modern Indian Responses to Religious Pluralism*, ed. Harold Coward (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 307

⁴⁷ B. Upadhyaya, "An Exposition of Catholic Belief as Compared with the Vedanta," *Sophia*, Vol. V, No. 1, Jan. 1898, 10, Robinson, *Christians Meeting Hindus*, 18, K. P. Aleaz, "The Theological Writings of Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya Re-Examined," *Indian Journal of Theology* 28.2 (April-June 1979): 55-77.

⁴⁸ Prabhakar "The Search for a Dalit Theology", 213, Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 141, Lancy Lobo, "Dalit Religious Movements and Dalit Identity", in *The Emerging Dalit Identity: The Re-Affirmation of the Subalterns*, ed. Walter Fernandes (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1996), 170, Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 42.

Dalit academics, as will be explained, also found Indian Christian theology as an articulation of philosophical and theological constructs.⁴⁹

2. 1. 1. Dalit Critiques of Indian Christian Theology

Indian Christian theologians mostly come from elite backgrounds.⁵⁰ They used Hindu categories to explain Christian faith.⁵¹ Appasamy, for instance, elucidates Jesus' claim that He and His Father are one (John 10:30).⁵² He worried that Jesus' assertion would mislead some Hindus to interpret it based on the *Advaitic* assertion that 'I am Brahman.'⁵³ Appasamy ruled out the dualistic reading based on Jesus' claim and suggested (using Ramanuja's Vishista Advaita // Qualified Non-Dualism) that the oneness between Jesus and his Father was moral.⁵⁴ It is a union of love and work. It is not an identity in their essential nature.

⁴⁹ Bendangjungshi, *Confessing Christ in the Naga Context: Towards a Liberating Ecclesiology* (Zurich: Lit Verlag GmbH, 2011), 4, Gene L. Green, Stephen T Pardue, K. K. Yeo, *The Spirit over the Earth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2016), 44.

⁵⁰ Massey, Dalits in India, 169, Nandini Chatterjee, "The Political Theology of Indian Christian Citizenship: An Instance of Secularism as Culture," in *Confronting Secularism in Europe and India: Legitimacy and Disenchantment in Contemporary Times*, eds. Brian Black, Gavin Hyman and Graham M. Smith (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 84-85.

⁵¹ Wyatt, "Dalit Theology and the Politics of Untouchability," 128, K. C. Abraham, "Re-Interpretation of Christian Tradition in Contemporary India," *Asia Journal of Theology*, 9 (1995), 269.

⁵² Doyle, "Reading John Through Bhakti Eyes, 184.

⁵³ *Advaita* is a Sanskrit term. *Advaita* means "not duality." *Advaita* implies there are not two things. It suggests that Brahman (the Supreme Being) is the only reality. The world is not real. The individual self is not different from Brahman. In other words, the individual self and Brahman are the same. Please see Dennis Waite, *Advaita Made Easy* (Winchester: O-Books, 2012), 1-5 for more details.

⁵⁴ Ramanuja, the eleventh-century Vedantic scholar, interpreted Ancient Hindu Scriptures as teaching qualified non-dualism. It suggests that Brahman, the ultimate reality, is not distinct from the world (John M. Koller, *Asian Philosophies* (London: Routledge, 2017), 271). However, he did not agree with the teachings of Advaita. He believes that the Brahman and the world (matter, souls etc) exists. Brahman is not identical to the world. However, Brahman is not ontologically separate from the world either. Brahman is the Creator of the world and stands above and beyond the world (Charles Taliaferro, Chad Meister, *Contemporary Philosophical Theology* (London: Routledge, 2016), 122). He compares the relationship between God and humans to that between the body and soul. He claims that just as the body and soul (even though distinct entities) act on one another and cannot exist without one another, so too God, souls, and matter are all one in creation, and no one component can exist without the other (Christian D. Von Dehesen, "Ramanuja: Founder of Vishishtadvaita Vedanta," in *Philosophers and Religious Leaders*, eds. Christian D. Von Dehesen and Scott L. Harris (Arizona: The Oryx Press, 1999), 160).

We can, therefore, say that 'I and the Father are one' did not refer to any oneness or identity in the real nature of God and Jesus. The relation between God and Jesus as a personal one. God was his Father and Jesus was His Son. He loved his Father; he realised his entire dependence on Him.⁵⁵

Thus, for scholars like Appasamy, Jesus' claim implies that Jesus was completely submissive to the Father's will, loving what the Father loved and carried out the Father's intentions.⁵⁶ Dalit theologians disapproved such interpretations, based on sophisticated Sanskritic vocabularies since they feared that the philosophical readings could alienate the Dalits and strengthen the interests of the caste communities.⁵⁷ They noted that Sanskritic obsession reduced Indian Christian theology to an academic discipline and an intellectual activity and accused that it failed to represent the Dalit Christians and made no effort to relate the Christian faith to Dalits.⁵⁸ From such a background, Dalit academics turned to other contextual theologies. Latin American theology was their first dialogue partner. It provided them with the hermeneutical principles and ideological background.

2. 2. Latin American Liberation Theology

Liberation theology emerged in the 1960s.⁵⁹ It is a Christian response to the Latin American situation.⁶⁰ It emerged from the context of extreme poverty and political

⁵⁵ A. J. Appasamy, *The Gospel and India's Heritage* (London: ISPCK, 1942), 36.

⁵⁶ Doyle, "Reading John Through Bhakti Eyes," 184.

⁵⁷ Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 42.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 213, Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 65-69, V. Devasahayam, "Doing Dalit Theology: Basic Assumptions," CTC Bulletin, 15, Number 1 (June 1998), 31, James Massey, *Towards Dalit Hermeneutics: Re-Reading the Text, the History and the Literature* (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1994), 58.

⁵⁹ Darcie Fontaine, "North African Decolonization and the Shifting Nexus of Christian Power and Social Thought in Europe and North Africa," in *North Africa and the Making of Europe: Governance, Institutions and Culture*, eds. Muriam Haleh Davis and Thomas Serres (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 93, Thia Cooper, "Liberation Theology: A How-to Guide," in *The Routledge Companion to the Practice of Christian Theology*, eds. Mike Highton and Jim Fodor (London: Routledge, 2015), 363, Thomas Lynch, "Making the Quarter Turn: Liberation Theology after Lacan," in *Theology after Lacan: The Passion for the Real*, eds. Creston Davis, Marcus Pound and Clayton Crockett (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014), 213.

⁶⁰ Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 86, Marshall C. Eakin, *Brazil: The Once and Future Country* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 192, Smith, *The*

turmoil.⁶¹ It responds to the unjust situation of the millions of Latin Americans in poverty. They have been living with starvation wages, unemployment and underemployment, malnutrition, infant mortality, lack of adequate housing, health problems and labour unrest.⁶² Further, Liberation theology counters some of the failures of the Catholic Church also. The collaboration between the Catholic Church and the corrupt political regimes provoked discontent among believers and some clergy.⁶³ They felt that traditional Catholic theology and its conciliar and dogmatic definitions were inadequate to address the economic and political situation in Latin America.⁶⁴ They began to associate with secular and political ideologies to redress their situation.⁶⁵ It resulted in an ecclesiastical and political division.⁶⁶ Theologians like Father Ernesto Cardenal and Miguel d'Escoto became ministers in the revolutionary government of Daniel Ortega.⁶⁷ It needs to be emphasised, though, that the teachings of Vatican II (1962-65), deeply inspired Liberation theology.⁶⁸ Gutiérrez clarifies:

Emergence of Liberation Theology, 145, Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: Essential Facts about the Revolutionary Movements in Latin America and Beyond* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 4.

⁶¹ Gilbert R. Cadena and Lara Medina, "Liberation Theology and Social Change: Chicanas and Chicanos in the Catholic Church," in *Chicanas and Chicanos in Contemporary Society*, ed. Roberto Moreno De Anda (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 161.

⁶² Quoted from Pope John Paul II's (1920-2005) address at the Third CELAM meeting in Puebla, Mexico, in 1978, Teresa A Meade, *History of Modern Latin America: 1800 to the Present* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 291.

⁶³ Najeeb Jung, "Religion and State Formation," in *South Asia 2060: Envisioning Regional Futures*, eds. Adil Najam and Moeed Yusuf (New York: Anthem Press, 2013), 73.

⁶⁴ John Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 40-41.

⁶⁵ Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname*, trans. Donald D. Walsh (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1976), 267-71.

⁶⁶ Roberto Oliveros, "History of the Theology of Liberation," in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, eds. Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989), 18.

⁶⁷ Craig L. Nesson, *The Vitality of Liberation Theology* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 54.

⁶⁸ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Thiselton Companion to Christian Theology* (Michigan: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), 356, Michael Ian Bochenski, *Transforming Faith Communities: A Comparative Study of Radical Christianity in Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism and Late Twentieth-Century Latin America*, (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 33, Sylvester L. Steffen, *What Self-Donation Is: Kenosis, Eucharist & Green*

Liberation theology (which is an expression of the right of the poor to think out their own faith) has not been an automatic result of this situation and the changes it has undergone. It represents rather an attempt to accept the invitation of Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council and interpret this sign of the times by reflecting on it critically in the light of God's word.⁶⁹

Similarly, David G. Timberman, Simone Lindorfer and Joseph F. Eagan claim that Latin American theology is the continuation of the Vatican Council.⁷⁰ Latin American theology emerged out of religious, political and social necessities.⁷¹ It is a theology for Latin Americans and by Latin Americans.⁷² It interprets the Bible through the eyes of the victims in Latin America.⁷³ It is a movement of the lost and the least.⁷⁴ It approaches poverty and other social misappropriations as a manifestation of structural sin, emphasises social praxis over dogma and envisions a restructuring of Latin American society.⁷⁵ As Mario I. Aguilar clarifies, Latin American theology evolved through a rereading of theological paradigms associated with traditional dogmatic statements.⁷⁶

Religion (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2010), 70, Simone Lindorfer, *Sharing the Pain of the Bitter Hearts* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2007), 243,

⁶⁹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), xxi.

⁷⁰ David G. Timberman, *A Changeless Land: Continuity and Change in Philippine Politics, Continuity and Change in Philippine Politics* (London: Routledge, 2015), 132, Joseph F Eagan, *Restoration and Renewal: The Church in the Third Millennium* (Maryland: A Sheed & Ward Book, 1995), 311.

⁷¹ Curt Cadorette, "Liberation Theology: Context and Method," in *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Reader*, eds. Curt Cadorette, Marie Giblin, Marilyn J. Legge and Mary H. Snyder (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1992), 5.

⁷² Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith," in *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*, ed. Rosino Gibellini, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979), 17.

⁷³ Hendrik J. C. Pieterse, "South African Liberation Theology," in *Desmond Tutu's Message: A Qualitative Analysis*, ed. H. J. C. Pieterse (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 29, David B. Morris, *The Culture of Pain* (California: University of California Press, 1991), 147, Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 4.

⁷⁴ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 90, J. David Turner, *An Introduction to Liberation Theology* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994), 14.

⁷⁵ Camilo Pérez Bustillo, Karla Hernández Mares, *Human Rights, Hegemony, and Utopia in Latin America: Poverty, Forced Migration and Resistance in Mexico and Colombia* (Brill: Leiden, 2016), 36, Devin Singh, "Liberation Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, eds. William J. Abraham, Frederick D. Aquino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 555, Arthur F. McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics: Toward an Assessment* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), x, Paul E. Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads: Democracy Or Revolution?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 97.

⁷⁶ Mario I. Aguilar, Church, *Liberation and World Religions* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2012), 36.

Base communities, small groups of Christians, perhaps fifteen to thirty people, who get together about once a week, played a significant role in developing Liberation theology.⁷⁷ Lay members interpreted the Bible according to their local situations in such gatherings.⁷⁸ Through similar initiatives, liberation theology empowers Latin Americans to affirm their cultural and religious identity.⁷⁹ It works from the bottom-up.⁸⁰ It explains mundane realities from the underside of history.⁸¹ It challenges domination and suppression, imperialism and colonialism, undernourishment and shortage, power and powerlessness, frustration and despair. Its insights come from small communities of the poorest and least literate men and women in Latin America.⁸² It affirms that the poor get an unfair share of the world's wealth.⁸³

Latin American liberation theology, as will be clarified below, guided the Dalit academics, who imported some conceptual and hermeneutical insights from Latin America to respond to the anguished cries of Dalits.⁸⁴ Indeed, scholars like Mukti Barton has already suggested that Dalit theology shares the Latin American critique of western

⁷⁷ Robert McAfee Brown, *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 74.

⁷⁸ Joshua Prokopy and Christian Smith, "Introduction," in *Latin American Religion in Motion*, eds. Christian Smith, Christian Stephen Smith and Joshua Prokopy (New York: Routledge, 1999), 13, J. Darling, *Latin America, Media, and Revolution: Communication in Modern Mesoamerica* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 15-16.

⁷⁹ Ana Maria Diaz-Stevens, "Liberation Theology," in *Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopaedia*, eds. Vicki L. Ruiz, Virginia Sánchez Korrol (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 390.

⁸⁰ Arturo Arias, "Cultural Studies," in *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy*, eds. Susana Nuccetelli, Ofelia Schutte and Otávio Bueno (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 2013), 431.

⁸¹ Alfred T. Hennelly, *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books 1990), xvii.

⁸² Orlando Coastas, "Evangelism and the Gospel of Salvation," *International Review of Mission*, 63, no. 249 (1974): 25, xiii.

⁸³ Brown, *Liberation Theology*, 32, Claudio Carvalhaes, *Eucharist and Globalization: Redrawing the Borders of Eucharistic Hospitality* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 166.

⁸⁴ Samuel J. Kuruvila, *Radical Christianity in Palestine and Israel: Liberation and Theology in the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tautis & Company Ltd, 2013), 123, Tim Grass, *Modern Church History* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 345, Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counselling* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd., 2003), 113-114.

theology.⁸⁵ This dissertation will now explain some possible points of conceptual contacts between them, and such a study hopes to place Dalit theology in its ideal setting. Following chapter will explain hermeneucial influences.

2. 2. 1. Critique of Traditional Theology

Latin American academics were discontent with traditional Western theology.⁸⁶ They found traditional theology as an ideology for the bourgeois, securing freedom as individual and ahistorical.⁸⁷ From such a background, liberation theology demands a solid commitment to historical transformation in theological interpretations.⁸⁸ It includes a hermeneucial switch from western theology to a theology of the poor.⁸⁹ Likewise, it affirms that theological endeavours should not begin from the head and theologians should be in touch with human experiences.⁹⁰ Liberation theology reflects the experiences of the ordinary believers.⁹¹ It is a theology for and by the losers of the world.⁹²

⁸⁵ Mukti Barton, "Race, Gender, Class and the Theology of Empowerment: an Indian Perspective," in *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Ursula King and Tina Beattie (London: Continuum, 2005), 226.

⁸⁶ McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics*, 23, Angie Pears, *Doing Contextual Theology* (London: Routledge, 2010), 64-65.

⁸⁷ Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Liberation Theologies* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 26, McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics*, 44-45, Theodore Runyon, *Exploring the Range of Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 213, John R. Pottenger, *The Political Theory of Liberation Theology: Toward a Reconvergence of Social Values and Social Sciences* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 92.

⁸⁸ Ibid. Charles Davis James, *Indian Liberation Theology: A Critique* (Norderstedt: BoD – Books on Demand, 2009), 10-11, Samuel A. Paul, *The Ubuntu God: Deconstructing a South African Narrative of Oppression* (Eugene: Pickwick Publication, 2009), 98.

⁸⁹ Turner, *An Introduction to Liberation Theology*, 14.

⁹⁰ Eileen Flynn and Gloria Thomas, *Living Faith: An Introduction to Theology* (Oxford: Sheed & Ward, 1995), 260.

⁹¹ Wilder Robles, "Liberation Theology, Christian Base Communities, and Solidarity Movements: A Historical Reflection" in *Capital, Power, and Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean*, eds. Richard L. Harris and Jorge Nef (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 225.

⁹² Philip Kennedy, *A Modern Introduction to Theology: New Questions for Old Beliefs* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd. 2006), p. 193.

Further, liberation theology is theology on behalf of the stigmatised.⁹³ Dalit theology, as clarified, shares Latin American theology's critique of western theology.⁹⁴ It critically revisits traditional Indian Christian theology from a Dalit outlook.

2. 2. 2. God as Liberator

Traditional theology explains God's essence, nature, attributes and existence in philosophical terms.⁹⁵ It narrates God as the uncaused cause of all things which exists.⁹⁶ It affirms that God is the ultimate origin and sovereign governing principle of all that exists.⁹⁷ It emphasises God's sovereignty, majesty and glory.⁹⁸ It places God beyond whatever human beings can imagine.⁹⁹ Further, it suggests that God is one (Deut. 6:4-6; 1 Cor. 8:4-6), unique (Isa. 40:13-28), transcendent (Num. 23:19; Ps. 50:21) eternal, uncreated and changeless.¹⁰⁰ It celebrates many more attributes of God.¹⁰¹ Latin American liberation theology challenges such philosophical and monarchical

⁹³ Ibid., Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Jennifer Scheper Hughes, "The Conversion of Francis: The First Latin American Pope and the Women He Needs," in *Global Latin America: Into the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Matthew C. Gutmann and Jeffrey Lesser (California: University of California Press, 2016), 38-39.

⁹⁴ Dalit critique on Traditional theology may seem superficial. Note, however, that the critique is provided elsewhere in the dissertation. Please see pages 74-77 and 88-92 for more information on the Dalit critique of the Indian Christian theology.

⁹⁵ R. Douglas Geivett, *Evil and the Evidence for God: The Challenge of John Hick's Theodicy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 113, Jean-Luc Marion, "The Idea of God," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-century Philosophy*, Volume 2, eds. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 265, Jon M. Isaak, *New Testament Theology: Extending the Table* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011), xvi.

⁹⁶ Hans Gustafson, *Finding All Things in God: Pansacramentalism and Doing Theology Interreligiously* (Eugene: Pickwick Publishers, 2016), 109.

⁹⁷ John Lawson, *Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1986), 10-11.

⁹⁸ Richard Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, eds. Clark H. Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker and David Basinger (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 11.

⁹⁹ D. Brockman, *No Longer the Same: Religious Others and the Liberation of Christian Theology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 11.

¹⁰⁰ Stephen T. Davis, *Christian Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 37-38, Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, *Sex, Race, and God: Christian Feminism in Black and White* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 62.

¹⁰¹ John H. Leith, *Basic Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 50ff.

proposals.¹⁰² It approaches God from the perspective of the poor and seeks to redefine the image of God popularised by dogmatic theology.¹⁰³

Latin American theology highlights that God sides with the poor and the oppressed. He acts concretely to deliver them from oppression.¹⁰⁴ It depicts God as a liberator more than anything else.¹⁰⁵ The Exodus narrative helped liberation theology for developing such an image.¹⁰⁶ It claims that God, narrated in the Exodus narrative, identifies with the dispossessed. God aids them in their struggle against their oppressors.¹⁰⁷ Gutierrez, for instance, remarks that the God of the Bible is a liberating God, a God who destroys myths and alienations. God intervenes in history to break down structures of injustice. He raises the prophets to point out the way of justice and mercy. Furthermore, God liberates slaves (Exodus) and causes empires to fall and raises the oppressed.¹⁰⁸

Dalit theology has appropriated the Exodus paradigm. It has incredible implications for Dalit theology.¹⁰⁹ James Massey, for instance, notes that the Exodus event communicates God's solidarity with the oppressed, including the Dalits.¹¹⁰ Dalit theology

¹⁰² Jonathan R. Wilson, *A Primer for Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 32, Justo L. González and Ondina E. González, *Christianity in Latin America: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 256.

¹⁰³ Gustavo Gutierrez, "Theology and the Social Sciences," in *The Truth Shall Make You Free: Confrontations*, trans. Matthew O'Connell (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 56, Judith Ann Brady, *A Place at the Table: Justice for the Poor in a Land of Plenty* (New London: Twenty-Third Publications, 2008), 160, John Dear, *The God of Peace: Toward A Theology of Nonviolence* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005), 144-145, Manfred K. Bahamann, "Liberation Theology: Latin American Style" *Lutheran Quarterly* 27, no.2 (May 1, 1975):147.

¹⁰⁴ Brantley W. Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 204.

¹⁰⁵ Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering*, 24.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Michael R. Candelaria, *Popular Religion and Liberation: The Dilemma of Liberation Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), xi.

¹⁰⁸ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Ina and John Eagleson (London: SCM Press, 1974), 116.

¹⁰⁹ Robinson, *Christians of India*, 201.

¹¹⁰ Massey, *Downtrodden*, 76.

redefines God's initiative in liberating Israel as God's call and willingness to redeem the Dalits. It suggests that the God of the oppressed will liberate Dalits from all forms of dominance.¹¹¹ However, as will be clarified, there are some challenges to the use of the Exodus narrative in Dalit theology.

2. 2. 3. Jesus as Liberator

Christology, as developed by European Catholic missionaries, dominated Latin America for more than 470 years.¹¹² They concentrated on epistemological issues.¹¹³ They stressed the "divinity of Christ rather than his real and lived humanity."¹¹⁴ They highlighted an image of a suffering, dying Jesus, a helpless infant, or Jesus as a divine monarch.¹¹⁵ Latin American theology challenges such Christological formulations and demands a hermeneutical switch since they do not help the suffering Latin Americans to overcome their present situations.¹¹⁶ It suggests that Christology cannot be done in a vacuum, and Christological formulas must attend to the realities of Latin American life.¹¹⁷ Sobrino, for instance, criticises the Chalcedonian Christological affirmation for being too abstract and failing to resonate with people's experience of Jesus.¹¹⁸

What is innovative with Latin American Christology? Latin American Christology uses the same information about Jesus as classical Christology. However, it interprets

¹¹¹ M. Stephen, *Christian Ethics: Issues and Insights* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2007), 35.

¹¹² Rosemary Radford Reuther, "Is Christ White? Racism and Christology," in *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?* ed. George Yancy (London: Routledge, 2012), 109.

¹¹³ Colin J. D. Greene, *Christology in Cultural Perspective: Marking Out the Horizons* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 198-199.

¹¹⁴ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 11.

¹¹⁵ McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics*, 82.

¹¹⁶ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 40.

¹¹⁷ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 208, George C. L. Cummings, *A Common Journey: Black Theology (USA) and Latin American Liberation Theology* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1990), 70.

¹¹⁸ Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin America Approach*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978), 3-5.

traditions differently. Instead of spiritualising biblical information, it interprets the Bible to suggest how Jesus may empower the poor in Latin America.¹¹⁹ Similarly, Latin American theology projects Jesus as "part of the ongoing dialogue between the oppressed and oppressors."¹²⁰ From such a perspective, Latin American academics highlight Jesus as one amidst the rejected and the 'nobodies.'¹²¹ They claim that the most suitable image of Jesus in Latin America is that of a Liberator who saves the oppressed from slavery.¹²² He breaks down the obstacles that had limited human potential and empowered the disadvantaged.¹²³ Further, he proclaims God's preferential option for this sector of society. He died as one of them because of his clash with the established structures of power.

Dalit theology developed this concept. For Dalit theologians, Jesus is more than a liberator of Dalits. He is a God who became a Dalit. Dalit academics assert Jesus' Dalitness as one of the principal keys to understand Jesus' divine-human unity. Dalit theology uses Jesus' mixed ancestry implied in the Matthean genealogy, as one of the clues to his Dalitness.¹²⁴ Dalit theology elaborates Jesus' association with impure sections of society like tax collectors, prostitutes and lepers.¹²⁵ He stood with the Samaritans – the Dalits – of his time. They were the nobodies in his society.¹²⁶ Hence,

¹¹⁹ Thomas Bohache, *Christology from the Margins* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 88.

¹²⁰ Lisa Isherwood, *Liberating Christ* (Ohio: Pilgrims Press, 1999), 49.

¹²¹ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 201, See also, Michael Prior, *Jesus the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4:16-30)* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

¹²² Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical – Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 12.

¹²³ Brown, *Liberation Theology*, 64.

¹²⁴ Prabhakar, "Christology in Dalit Perspective," 414-417.

¹²⁵ Daniel C. Arichea, "Reading Romans in Southeast Asia: Righteousness and Its Implications for the Christian Community and Other Faith Communities," in *Navigating Romans Through Cultures: Challenging Readings by Charting a New Course*, ed. Khiok-khng Yeo (New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 213.

¹²⁶ Steven Potts, *The Heart of Heaven* (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2012), 68, Richard Scott Thornton, *Inclusive Christianity: A Progressive Look at Faith* (Pasadena: Hope Publishing House, 2008), ix, Dean

Jesus is a friend of the Dalits who suffered like the Dalits. P. K. Kuruvila, for example, notes that Jesus was the hungry one, the thirsty, the naked and the unwanted one in his society. He had a shameful death like most of the Dalits.¹²⁷ After recognising such similarities, Martien E. Brinkman suggests that Jesus became a Dalit:

If God wants to be present in Jesus' earthly life, with the "impure" family tree containing two prostitutes (Rahab and Tamar), four 'foreign' women (Rebecca, Rachel, Rahab and Ruth), someone who committed adultery (Bathsheba), a mother who had a child out of wedlock, a father belonging to the working class, whereas Jesus himself led a life filled with 'impure' contacts with Samaritans, adulterous women and tax collectors, he would all the more want to be present among the Dalits.¹²⁸

As seen, Dalit theology, along with Latin American liberation theology, believes that Jesus is a liberator. However, for Dalit theology, Jesus is not or an external empathetic supporter. He is a Dalit who fights for their rights together with them.

2. 2. 4. Preferential Option for the Poor

Latin American Liberation theology focusses on the cry of the poor and functions as the authentic source for understanding Christian practice in Latin American political and economic assertions.¹²⁹ It affirms that God has a preferential option for the poor.¹³⁰ Further, God's preferential option, as Latin American academics understand, is not an

Flemming, *Recovering the Full Mission of God: A Biblical Perspective on Being, Doing and Telling* (Downers Grove, Intervarsity Press, 2013), 74.

¹²⁷ Kuruvila, *The Word Became Flesh*, 178.

¹²⁸ Martien E. Brinkman, "The Reciprocal Relation Between Anthropology and Christology," in *Strangers and Pilgrims on Earth: Essays in Honour of Abraham van de Beek*, eds. Paul van Geest, Eduardus van der Borgh (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 212.

¹²⁹ Denis Carrol, *What is Liberation Theology?* (Dublin: The Mercier Press, 1987), 26, John R. Potteenger, *The Political Theory of the Liberation Theology: Toward a Reconvergence of Social Values and Social Science* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1989), 59, J Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor*, trans. M. O'Connell (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984), 93.

¹³⁰ Dorothee Soelle, *Thinking About God: An Introduction to Theology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 39, Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), 81, Gustavo Gutierrez, "Liberation Theology for the Twenty-First Century," in *Romero's Legacy: The Call to Peace and Justice*, eds. Pilar Hogan Closkey and John P. Hogan (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 53.

abstract theological concept.¹³¹ It demands that theology must begin from below with the sufferings and distress of the insignificant.¹³² It invites the Church and society to respond to the cry of the needy by changing the structures that enslave the poor and limit their potential.¹³³ It, as Ethna Regan and Virgilio Elizondo have rightly observed, is one of the most significant contributions of liberation theology.¹³⁴

However, God's option for the disadvantaged is not exclusive, but God opts preferentially. This option does not mean that God's love is not universal.¹³⁵ Gustavo Gutierrez clarifies:

God's love is universal. At the same time, God clearly prefers the least, the abandoned, the insignificant person. The preference is a manifestation of the universality of God's love. There is no contradiction between universality and preference... One is not the negation of the other.¹³⁶

As seen, Latin American liberation theology emphasises God's option for the poor. Dalit theology appropriated this imperative from liberation theology and develops it as suggesting God's preferential option to the Dalits. Dalit theologians Victor, Wilfred, Gnanavaram and Jesuratnam, for instance, propose that God's preferential option manifested through the life and death of Jesus suggest an option for the Dalits.¹³⁷

¹³¹ G. Michael Zbaraschuk, *The Purposes of God: Providence as Process-Historical Liberation* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 140.

¹³² Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 205.

¹³³ Hugo Magallanes, "Preferential Option for the Poor," in *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 619.

¹³⁴ Ethna Regan, *Theology and the Boundary Discourse of Human Rights* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 151, Virgilio Elizondo, "Editorial: Theology from the Viewpoint of the Poor," in *Option for the Poor: Challenge to the Rich Countries*, ed. Leonardo Boff and Virgilio Elizondo (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986): ix.

¹³⁵ Ryan LaMothe, *Care of Souls, Care of Polis: Toward a Political Pastoral Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017), 85.

¹³⁶ Gutierrez, "Liberation Theology for the Twenty-First Century," 51.

¹³⁷ T Victor, "Christian Commitment and Subaltern Perspectives," *Religion and Society*, Vol. 49, Nos. 2 and 3, (June and September 2004):103, Felix Wilfred, On the Banks of Ganges, 133, M. Gnanavaram, "Dalit Theology and the Parable of the Good Samaritan," *JSNT* 50 (1993): 59, Jesuratnam, "Towards a Dalit Liberative Hermeneutic." 2-3.

2. 2. 5. Dalit Appropriation of Latin American Theology

The emergence of Dalit theology owes much to Latin American theology. However, it is not a duplicate of liberation theology. Dalit theology appropriated the call for a contextual theology because of historical necessity. It adopted insights from liberation theology and applied them to Dalit contexts. However, there are many notable differences between Latin American and Indian contexts. Dictatorship and a predominantly Christian culture characterised the former while the latter is democratic, multi-religious and multicultural. Moreover, Dalit culture and spirituality, as will be explained in the next chapter, is radically different from the Latin American context. However, Latin American theology is not the only theological impetus behind Dalit theology. Rajkumar, James Deotis Roberts and David Joy, for example, have already hinted how African American theology has also impacted Dalit theology.¹³⁸

2. 3. African American Theology

The descendants of enslaved Africans proposed African American theology during the late 1960s and the 1970s.¹³⁹ It counters racial segregation and discrimination of more than 20 million African Americans.¹⁴⁰ African American theology promotes the

¹³⁸ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 62, James Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), xiv, Joy, *Mark and Its Subalterns*, 51.

¹³⁹ Dwight N. Hopkins, "General Introduction" in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins, Edward P. Antonio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 13, Hans A. Baer, Merrill Singer, *African American Religion: Varieties of Protest and Accommodation*, Second Edition (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 281, Dwight N. Hopkins, "A Transatlantic Comparison of a Black Theology of Liberation," in *Freedom's Distant Shores: American Protestants and Post-colonial Alliances with Africa*, ed. R. Drew Smith (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), Baer, Singer, *African American Religion*, 281, Anthony G. Reddie, *Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 84.

¹⁴⁰ James Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 73, Harry H. Singleton, *Black Theology and Ideology: Deideological Dimensions in the Theology of James H. Cone* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2002), 115.

African American struggle for a better world in the present.¹⁴¹ Its roots go back to the early slave days.¹⁴² The slave trade had dislocated millions of Africans.¹⁴³ While estimates vary, approximately twenty million Africans were transported to America.¹⁴⁴ The slave trade was a horrific and brutal system.¹⁴⁵ Women and men were chained together and kept in dirty on the slave ships.¹⁴⁶ Malnutrition and disease were part of the life of the slaves.¹⁴⁷ Slave women also faced rape and sexual abuse.¹⁴⁸ Their troubles did not end in the slave ships if they survived the journey. Their masters in their new world mistreated them.¹⁴⁹ The slaves were labelled infidels, pagans, heathenish, nonbeing, primitive, barbarians and without a soul and feelings.¹⁵⁰ The contempt, mistreatment and segregation resulted in the structured political alienation of African slaves. Their descendants continued to be

¹⁴¹ Anthony G. Reddie, *Black Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2012), 12.

¹⁴² Josef Sorett, "African American Theology and the American Hemisphere," in *The Oxford Handbook of African American Theology*, eds. Katie G. Cannon and Anthony B. Pinn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 419, Alistair Kee, *The Rise and Demise of Black Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2008), xiii.

¹⁴³ Curtis A. Keim, "Africa and Europe Before 1900," in *Africa*, Third Edition, ed. Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O' Meara (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 116, Sharla M. Fett, *Recaptured Africans: Surviving Slave Ships, Detention, and Dislocation in the Final Years of the Slave Trade* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 3.

¹⁴⁴ Francis C. L. Rakotsoane, "Major Themes in Black Theology," in *Biblical Studies, Theology, Religion and Philosophy: An Introduction for African Universities*, eds. J. N. Amenze, F. Nkomazana, O. N. Kealotswe (Eldoreff: Zapf Chancery Research Consultants and Publishers, 2010), 201-202.

¹⁴⁵ Justin Roberts, "The Development of Slavery in the British Americas," in *The World of Colonial America: An Atlantic Handbook*, ed. Ignacio Gallup-Diaz (New York: Routledge, 2017), Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial America, 1619-1776* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 24, Shaka Saye Bambata Dolo, *The Genesis of the Bible* (Bloomington: Author house, 2012), 176, Clement Eaton, *The Civilization of the Old South: Writings of Clement Eaton* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1968), 107.

¹⁴⁶ Howard Zinn, *A Young People's History of the United States: Columbus to the War on Terror* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2009), 31, Kevin Shillington, *History of Africa* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 176-177.

¹⁴⁷ Andrew F. Pearson, *Distant Freedom: St Helena and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1840-1872* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 177.

¹⁴⁸ Terri L. Snyder, *The Power to Die: Slavery and Suicide in British North America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 33.

¹⁴⁹ C. Eric Lincoln, *Race, Religion, and the Continuing American Dilemma* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1984), 42.

¹⁵⁰ R. A. Milwood, *British Churches Enslaved and Murdered Black Atlantic Slaves: Contextualization and De – contextualization of British Slave -Trade: 17th – 19th Century: A Critical Socio – theological Study*, (Bloomington: Author House, 2014), 34, John Henrik Clarke, *African People in World History* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1993), 56.

oppressed and encountered racial inequalities because of their skin colour. They have been the American outcasts par excellence like Native Americans.¹⁵¹ They have been the “permissible victims” of American society.¹⁵²

African American theology emerged from that historical contexts when a group of African American priests began to reinterpret the Christian faith from the standpoint of black sufferings.¹⁵³ It applies the power of the Gospel to African Americans who live under white oppression.¹⁵⁴ It is a religious counterpart of the secular movement called Black power.¹⁵⁵ African American theology responds to the suffering and alienation of African Americans.¹⁵⁶ It is a radical response from the underside of American religious history.¹⁵⁷ It interprets the socio-historical experiences of the African Americans in the light of the revelation of Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁸ It attempts to reinterpret biblical texts in the context of human striving for African American emancipation. Therefore, many scholars describe it as

¹⁵¹ Ibrahim Sundiata, “The Stollen Garment” Historical Reflections on Blacks and Jews in the Time of Obama” in *Race, Color, Identity: Rethinking Discourses about Jews in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Efraim Sicher (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 57.

¹⁵² Frances Woods uses this term to denote persons or groups whose life and dignity can be dishonoured with little or no consequences. Frances Woods, “Take My Yoke Upon You,” in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 39-41.

¹⁵³ James H. Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984), 5.

¹⁵⁴ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 31, Warren McWilliams, *The Passion of God* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 55, Dwight N. Hopkins, “More Than Ever: The Preferential Option for the Poor,” in *Opting for the Margins: Postmodernity and Liberation in Christian Theology*, ed. Jeorg Rieger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 132.

¹⁵⁵ Allison Calhoun-Brown, “What a Fellowship: Civil Society, African American Churches, and Public Life,” in *New Day Begun: African American Churches and Civic Culture in Post-Civil Rights America*, ed. R. Drew Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 49.

¹⁵⁶ Burrow, *James H. Cone and Black Liberation Theology*, 146.

¹⁵⁷ Gayraud Wilmore, “A Revolution Unfulfilled, But Not Invalidated,” in *A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary Edition*, ed. James H. Cone, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 147.

¹⁵⁸ Kelly Brown Douglas, “Homophobia and Heterosexism in the Black Church and Community,” in *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology*, ed. Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude Jr. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 999.

“people’s theology,” “theology of the streets,” and “an earthly theology.”¹⁵⁹ James Cone is the chief architect of African American theology.¹⁶⁰

African American theology and Dalit theology have some points of contacts. African American theology focuses on African Americans, while Dalit theology concentrates on the Dalits.¹⁶¹ Oppression and suffering characterise the status of the Dalits and the African Americans in their respective contexts.¹⁶² Further, Shetty and Rashidi call Dalits “the Black Untouchables of India.”¹⁶³ Scholars like Schouten acknowledge the influence of African American theology upon Dalit theology.¹⁶⁴

2. 3. 1. The Black Panther Movement and Dalit Theology

The Black Panther movement was organised in America in 1966.¹⁶⁵ It emerged as a protest of African Americans against their treacherous living conditions.¹⁶⁶ It was one of

¹⁵⁹ Burrow, *James H. Cone and Black Liberation Theology*, 146.

¹⁶⁰ Terrence L. Johnson, “Reason in African American Theology” in *The Oxford Handbook of African American Theology*, eds. Katie G. Cannon, Anthony B. Pinn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 102.

¹⁶¹ Wati Longchar, “Indigenous Peoples in Asia: Theological Trends and Challenges,” in *Shaping a Global Theological Mind*, ed. Darren C. Marks (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2008), 95.

¹⁶² K. P. Singh, “Liberation Movements in Comparative Perspective: Dalit Indians and Black Americans” in *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, ed. S. M. Michael (New Delhi/California/London/Singapore: Sage Publications, 2007), 162-163, Gerald D. Berreman, *Hindus of the Himalayas: Ethnography and Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 405, Sidney Verba, B. Ahmad and Anil Bhatt, *Caste, Race and Politics: A Comparison of India and the United States* (Beverly Hills; Sage Publications, 1971), Earnest N. Bracey, *Fannie Lou Hamer: The Life of a Civil Right Icon* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company Publishers, 2011), 44, Pandey, *A History of Prejudice*, 197-198.

¹⁶³ Y. Rajshekhar Shetty, *Dalit: The Black Untouchables of India* (Atlanta: Clarity Press, 1987), Runoko Rashidi, “Dalits: The Black Untouchables of India” in *Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture*, ed. Carole Boyce Davies (California: ABC –Clio, Inc, 2008), 354-355.

¹⁶⁴ Schouten, *Jesus as Guru*, 241, Robets, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, xiv, James H. Cone, “The Vocation of a Theologian,” in *Living Stones in the Household of God: The Legacy and Future of Black Theology*, ed. Linda E. Thomas (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 210, Volker Kuster, *The Many Faces of Jesus Christ: Intercultural Christology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 163-167.

¹⁶⁵ Donald J. Green, *Third Party Matters: Politics, Presidents, and Third Parties in American History* (California: ABC –CLIO, LLC, 2010), 145, Bob Blauner, *Still the Big News: Racial Oppression in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 133.

¹⁶⁶ Thuy Nguyen, *The Importance of the Black Panther Party for the Emancipation of the Afro-Americans in the 1960/70ies* (Waldshut-Tiengen: GRIN Verlag GmbH, 2008), 2-3.

the most significant revolutionary organisations developed in America.¹⁶⁷ Its followers perceived black communities as colonies occupied by white police.¹⁶⁸ The Panthers aimed at empowering Black people. It attempted to liberate Black people from White racist oppression. It also influenced the Dalit Panther movement in Maharashtra.

The name of the Dalit Panther Movement echoes the 'Black Panther' Movement.

Their manifesto, written in 1973 highlight the relationship with Black Panthers:

Due to the hideous plot of American imperialism, the Third Dalit World, that is, oppressed nations, and Dalit people are suffering. Even in America, a handful of reactionary whites are exploiting blacks. To meet the force of reaction and remove this exploitation, the Black Panther movement grew. From the Black Panthers, Black Power emerged. The fire of the struggles has thrown out sparks into the country. We claim a close relationship with this struggle.¹⁶⁹

Scholars like Deo, Chakravarti, Harrison, Guru and Chakravarty, Ogbar, Kasbekar, Reddy, Tyner, Ciotti, Hebden, Slate and Waghmore suggest that Black Panthers inspired the Dalit Panthers.¹⁷⁰ Dalit Panthers, as seen, have influenced Dalit theology. The concept of a Dalit Christ seems to be another example of African American influence.

¹⁶⁷ George Katsificas, "Introduction," in *Liberation, Imagination and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, ed. Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsificas (New York: Routledge, 2001), vii.

¹⁶⁸ Joshua Bloom, Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *The History and the Politics of the Black Panther Party: Black Against the Empire* (London/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013), 2, Floyd W. Hayes III, Francis A. Kiene, "All Power to the People: The Political Thought of Huey P. Newton and the Black Panther Party," in *A Turbulent Voyage: Readings in African American Studies*, Third Edition (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 547.

¹⁶⁹ Lata Maurugkar, *Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra: A Sociological Approach* (London: Sangam Books, 1991), 237.

¹⁷⁰ Veena Deo, "Dalit Literature in Marathi" in *Handbook of Twentieth-century Literatures of India*, ed. Nalini Natarajan (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 370, Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens* (Calcutta: Stree, 2003), 142, Faye V. Harrison, "What Democracy Looks Like: The Politics of a Women –Centered, Antiracist Human Rights Coalition," in *Resisting Racism and Xenophobia: Global Perspectives on Race, Gender, and Human Rights*, ed. Faye V. Harrison (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2005), 237, Guru and Chakravarty, "Who are the Country's Poor?", 146, Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, "Rainbow Radicalism: The Rise of the Radical Ethnic Nationalism," in *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights –Black Power Era*, ed. Peniel E. Joseph (New York: Routledge, 2006), 228, Kasbekar, *Pop Culture India*, 14, Deepa S. Reddy, *Religious Identify and Political Destiny: Hindutva in the Culture of Ethnicism* (Oxford: Altamira Press, 2006), 87, James Tyner, "Black Power Movement," in *Encyclopedia of Social Problems*, ed. Vincent N. Parrillo (California/London/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2008), 86, Ciotti,

2. 3. 2. Black Christ and Dalit Christ

African American theology considers theological undertakings in the United States before its emergence as a “theology of the white oppressor.”¹⁷¹ It has been conditioned and distorted by white supremacy.¹⁷² They have created a White Christ as a real and genuine picture of Jesus. African American theology disowns such images since white hegemony had corrupted them.¹⁷³ It claims that Jesus, as seen in the biblical narratives, was not a romantic hero. He was involved in the sufferings of the destitute.¹⁷⁴ For them, “Jesus was the non-white leader of a non-white people struggling for national liberation against the rule of a white nation, Rome.”¹⁷⁵ So too, Douglas claims that Jesus has black skin and features and is committed to the Black community’s struggle.¹⁷⁶ Noting the unfailing preference of Jesus for the oppressed, Cone had already explained Jesus’ preference for the black people in his groundbreaking work *God of the Oppressed*. For him, Jesus Christ enters the world where the poor, the despised and the black are, disclosing that he is with them, enduring their humiliation and pain.¹⁷⁷ He explains:

Retro-modern India, 122, Hebden, *Dalit Theology and Christian Anarchism*, 113, Nico Slate, “The Dalit Panthers: Race, Caste, and Black Power in India,” in *Black Power Beyond Borders: The Global Dimensions of the Black Power Movement*, ed. Nico Slate (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 127, Suryakant Waghmore, *Civility Against Caste: Dalit Politics and Citizenship in Western India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2013), 31,

¹⁷¹ Samuel Wells, *Christian Ethics: An Introductory Reader* (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2010), 137.

¹⁷² James H. Cone, “Jesus Christ in Black Theology,” in *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Reader*, eds. Curt Cadorette, Marie Giblin, Marilyn J. Legge and Mary Hembrow Snyder (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 143.

¹⁷³ Julian Kunnie, “Jesus in Black Theology: The Ancient Ancestor Visits,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, eds. Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 99.

¹⁷⁴ Anthony B. Pinn, “Black Theology,” in *Liberation Theologies in the United States: An Introduction*, eds. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, Anthony B. Pinn (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 21.

¹⁷⁵ Albert B. Cleage, *The Black Messiah* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 3.

¹⁷⁶ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 106-107.

¹⁷⁷ James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1975), 125-126.

(Jesus) meets the blacks where they are and becomes one of them. We see him there with his black face and big black hands lounging on a street corner... For whites to find him with big lips and kinky hair is as offensive as it was for the Pharisees to find him partying with tax-collectors. But whether whites want to hear it or not, Christ is black, baby, with all the features which are so detestable to white society.¹⁷⁸

Thus, for African American Theology, Jesus is a companion of the oppressed. He fights against the entire structures of injustice that dehumanises those who live on the brink of existence.¹⁷⁹ This portrait has influenced Dalit theological undertakings. Dalit theology perceives Jesus as a Dalit because of his birth and vocation.¹⁸⁰ Kalliyath, for instance, acknowledges that “Jesus had a Dalit birth, Dalit life, a Dalit death, and a Dalit burial.”¹⁸¹ Similarly, Jesus works with Joseph, a carpenter. He had been employed as a manual labourer like the Dalits.¹⁸² Moreover, Jesus had identified himself with the outcasts of his day like lepers, tax-collectors and Samaritans.¹⁸³ He had touched the sick and the dead. Hence, Jesus was a Dalit of his day. Thus, Dalit theology proposes the Dalitness of Jesus based on his birth and his identification with the voiceless community.

Dalit theologians were likely influenced by African American theology to designate Jesus as a Dalit. Like African American theologians who assert the blackness of Jesus, Dalit theologians claim that Jesus is a Dalit because of his birth and identification with the poor. Kuruvila had already suggested that the affirmation “Dalit Christ” might have been

¹⁷⁸ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 68-69.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 38.

¹⁸⁰ Don Schweitzer, *Jesus Christ for Contemporary Life: His Person, Work and Relationships* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 254, Lella Karunyakara, *Modernisation of Buddhism: Contributions of Ambedkar and Dalai Lama –XIV* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2002), 12.

¹⁸¹ Antony Kalliyath, “Re-cognizing Christ in Asia,” in *Sharing Diversity in Missiological Research and Education*, ed. L. Stanislaus, John F. Gorski (Delhi: ISPCK, 2006), 139.

¹⁸² M. R. Arulraja, *Jesus, the Dalit: Liberation Theology by Victims of Untouchability, an Indian Version of Apartheid* (Secunderabad: Published by the Author, 1996), 66-117.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

inspired by the concept “Black Christ” or “Black Messiah” of African American theology.¹⁸⁴ He substantiated his claim by noting that James Cone, in an interview with the Advisory Board of *Dalit International*, appreciated the Dalit appropriation of African American theology.¹⁸⁵

2. 3. 3. Black Experience and Dalit Experience

African American theology, as seen, counters White hegemony. It accuses White Christianity of failing to address the African American situation. The theological undertakings in America before the emergence of African American theology neglected the deplorable situation of African Americans as illegitimate and inauthentic.¹⁸⁶ It recommends that theology which overlooks the experiences of African Americans is only an alienated and abstract discourse.¹⁸⁷ Cone clarifies:

Theology [in America] is largely an intellectual game unrelated to the issues of life and death. It is impossible to respond creatively and prophetically to the life-situational problems of society without identifying with the problems of the disinherited and unwanted in society. Few American theologians have made that identification with poor blacks in America but have themselves contributed to the system which enslaves black people.¹⁸⁸

Cone alleges that White theologians marginalised the Black experience.¹⁸⁹ He criticises them for neglecting Black suffering. However, Cone does not claim that such neglect is intentional. He clarifies that White theologians overlook Black Experience because they

¹⁸⁴ Kuruvila, *The Word Became Flesh*, 193. Please read Cone, *The God of the Oppressed*, 131ff for more information on “Black Christ” or “Black Messiah.”

¹⁸⁵ Kuruvila, *The Word Became Flesh*, 193.

¹⁸⁶ James H. Cone, “A Black Theology of Liberation,” in *Readings in Christian Ethics: A Historical Sourcebook* eds. J. Philip Woaman, Douglas M. Strong (Westminster John Knox Press, Kentucky, 1996), 359.

¹⁸⁷ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 1.

¹⁸⁸ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 13.

¹⁸⁹ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 52.

live in a racist society. The oppression of African Americans does not occupy a significant item on the agenda of white academics.¹⁹⁰ From such a background, Cone questions the relevance of the theology in America shaped by white supremacy.¹⁹¹ He proposes that a theology developed for white oppressors cannot represent African Americans. Cone demands African Church leaders to create a theology relevant to their experience.¹⁹² Further, he suggests that theology in America must address the distressing situation of African Americans, their tears and sorrows. There can be no theology relevant to African Americans, which disregards the black experience. It must be the point of departure for theologising in America.¹⁹³ Thus, African theology presses the primacy of Black experience for theologising in America.

As noted, Dalit theology has benefited from the Black experience. Dalit theology, as seen, is a theology articulated by the Dalits on behalf of Dalits.¹⁹⁴ It maintains that dominant caste converts produced Indian Christian theology.¹⁹⁵ It believes that Indian Christian theology ignored Dalit experience.¹⁹⁶ Dalit theology, as clarified, emphasises the importance of Dalit experience. Wilfred, K. V. Kuruvilla, P. K. Kuruvilla and Nirmal rightly affirm that Dalit experience is a primary source for doing theology in the Indian subcontinent.¹⁹⁷ It seems that African American theology's emphasis on African American

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Cone, *For My People*, 13-14.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ James H. Cone, *A Theology of Black Liberation, Twentieth Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 23.

¹⁹⁴ Hans Schwarz, *Theology in a Global Context*, 529.

¹⁹⁵ Selvanayagam, "Waters of Life and Indian Cups," 61.

¹⁹⁶ Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 141, 144, Jeremiah, *Community and Worldview Among Pariyars of South India*, 35, Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 36, Prabhakar, "The Search for a Dalit Theology," 203.

¹⁹⁷ Wilfred, *Margins: Site of Asian Theologies*, 61, Kuruvila, "Dalit Theology," 132, Kuruvila, *The Word Became Flesh*, 168, Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 219.

experience has helped Dalit theologians to develop their insistence on Dalit experience. Like African American theologians who criticised White theologians and White theology, Dalit theologians condemn non-Dalits and Indian Christian theology.

2. 3. 4 Dalit Appropriation of African American Theology

Dalit theology, as seen, appropriated the concepts of African American theology. It used them to articulate a theology relevant for the Dalits. Dalit theology and African American theology, as clarified, developed out of the discontent toward Western Christianity and Traditional theology in their non-western contexts. The Black Panther movement influenced Dalit theology also. Furthermore, African American theology came into being in the 1960s. Dalit theology, on the other hand, was proposed only in the 1980s. It seems that the two intervening decades might have helped Indian theologians to read the insights of African American theology.

As seen, the Dalit academics were discontent with the Dalit situation. Their association with Latin American theology and African American theology provided them with new subjects and contexts for theologising. They helped Dalit academics to affirm the legitimacy of doing theology based on Dalits' experiences. So too, liberation theology empowered Dalit theologians to advocate the primacy of their experiences for their theological reflection. From such a perspective, they proposed Dalit theology in radical discontinuity with Indian Christian theology.

2. 4. Conclusion

Dalit theology did not emerge overnight, and one single moment that constitutes the inauguration of Dalit theology does not exist. It is the product of multiple, long-term historical and theological developments. The period between 1970 and 1980, as seen,

was a time of great revolutionary ferment for Dalit theology. During these formative years, a growing sensitivity to the political disregard for the problems of Dalits, violence against Dalits, the formation of Dalit movements for promoting Dalit struggles against casteism and the Dalit literature movement to educate Dalits and the Church's failure in accommodating Dalit Christians informed Dalits of their deplorable situation. Further, those movements convinced the Dalits of the need to engage in the process of liberation from the caste system. This conviction, in turn, evoked a sense of urgency to respond theologically to the caste system which dehumanises and enslaves Dalits. Dalit consciousness further prompted the founding fathers of Dalit theology to search resources for their response. Moreover, contacts with contextual theologies like Latin American liberation theology and African American theology further convinced the pioneers of Dalit theology that Indian Christian theology, with its Sanskritic obsession and upper-caste inclination, failed to recognise the Dalit pathos and the negative impact of caste upon Dalits. It was striking for them that the horrid condition of these victims, their sorrows and their daily exclusion did not influence theological expressions in India substantially.

Such a dangerous situation convinced the first-generation Dalit theologians that there is 'a vacant space' to be explored for a theology that recognises that Dalits are disenfranchised in Indian society. From this background, they proposed Dalit theology in radical discontinuity with Indian Christian theology. Dalit theology attempted to articulate principles that are underappreciated by Indian Christian Theology. This attempt has been innovative in the Indian theological scene. However, as will be argued in the next chapter, the relevance of such an attempt in Dalit contexts need to be established. Many present

generation Dalit theologians, for instance, have already criticised Dalit theology's dependence upon Latin American and African American theologies.¹⁹⁸ The next chapter, therefore, will analyse the paradigms of Dalit theology and will propose why Dalit theology needs a hermeneutical switch and a paradigm that is more sensitive to Dalit contexts.

¹⁹⁸ Chapter 3 will explain this argument.

Chapter 3

Interrogating Dalit Theology: Revisiting Hermeneutics

3. 0. Introduction

Bede Griffiths (1906-1993) was a British Benedictine monk who lived in South India as a Guru named Swami Dayananda ("bliss of compassion"). His book published in Brazil recounts his cross-religious encounters as a Western Christian with the Indian spiritual and cultural resources:

Besides being a Christian, I need to be Hindu, Buddhist, Jainist, Zoroastrian, Sikh, Muslim and Jew. Only in this way will I be able to know the truth and encounter the point of reconciliation of all religions. This is the revolution that has to happen in the mind of Western peoples. For centuries now, this has been cast aside, lost in outer space.¹

Building inspirations from his associations with outsiders in India's pluralistic contexts, Griffiths demands a similar initiative from Western Christians. He wanted them to open their doors for their religious others. Griffiths' call was crucial in Latin America in the 1990s since Latin America has been homogenous to a considerable extent because of the overwhelmingly Catholic population.² With some exceptions, like the Jewish community in Argentina, Latin America did not have significant and organised non-Christian religions.³ Religious pluralism and ecumenism,³ therefore, had not been a priority there.⁴

¹ Bede Griffiths, *Retorno ao Centro* (Ibrasa: São Paulo 1992), 9.

² Jonathan Fox, *A World Survey of Religion and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 290.

³ Sergio Torres, "A Latin American Perspective," in *Third World Theologies: Commonalities and Divergences*, ed. K. C. Abraham (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 124, José C. Moy, Adriana Brodsky, *Raanan Rein The Jewish Experience in Argentina in a Diaspora Comparative Perspective, in The New Jewish Argentina: Facets of Jewish Experiences in the Southern Cone*, eds. Adriana Brodsky, Raanan Rein (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 114.

⁴ Edward L. Cleary, "The Catholic Church," in *Religious Freedom and Evangelization in Latin America: The Challenge of Religious Pluralism*, ed. Paul E. Sigmund (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), 26, Jürgen Moltmann, "Political Theology and Theology of Liberation," in *Liberating the Future: God, Mammon, and Theology*, ed. Joerg Rieger (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 74, Paul S. Chung, *Martin Luther and*

Such contexts influenced liberation theologians, and they tend to neglect the diversity and the liberative potential of non-Christian traditions by implicitly promoting a theological camp mentality.⁵ Michelle A. Gonzalez, for instance, notes:

Liberation theologies have historically ignored the substantial influence of non-Christian religions on Christianity, instead arguing for a biblically based liberationist message that is revealed in the concrete religious practices of marginalised communities. In addition to relying heavily on the Christian bible, some liberation theologians draw from the theology revealed in the popular religious practices of Christian communities, particularly in their understanding of Jesus and in Catholic circles, Mary.⁶

The same is true of African American theology also. Gonzalez, for example, argues that even though African American theologians speak of the Black Church and Black experience as though their research addresses Black community, what they really mean is Christian (overwhelmingly Protestant) African American religious experience. They overlook the diversity of Black religion in the United States and ignore non-Christian religions.⁷ Similarly, Delroy A. Reid-Salmon clarifies:

African American theology neither considers the Caribbean Diasporan experience as an appropriate starting point for theological inquiry nor does it address the issues and concerns of the Caribbean Diaspora despite this phenomenological entity being in existence in America for just over a little more than one hundred years.⁸

Buddhism: Aesthetics of Suffering (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 108, Peter C. Phan, "A Common Journey, Different Paths, the Same Destination: Method in Liberation Theologies," in *A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on America from the Margins*, eds. Eleazar S. Fernandez and Fernando F. Segovia (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 135, Marcelo Barros, "Cultural and Religious Pluralism: A Pivotal Point for Liberation Theology," in *Along the Many Paths of God*, ed. José María Vigil, Luiza E. Tomita ((Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008), 96-97.

⁵ Chris Shannahan, *Voices from the Borderland: Re-Imagining Cross-Cultural Urban Theology in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2016), 239, Paul O. Ingram, *Theological Reflections at the Boundaries* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), 132, Michelle A. Gonzalez, *A Critical Introduction to Religion in the Americas: Bridging the Liberation Theology and Religious Studies Divide* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 105, Deane W. Ferm, *Third World Liberation Theologies: An Introductory Survey* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1986), 76.

⁶ Gonzalez, *A Critical Introduction to Religion in the Americas*, 105.

⁷ *Ibid.* 59, Frederick L. Ware, *Methodologies of Black Theology* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 15.

⁸ Delroy A. Reid-Salmon, *Home Away from Home, The Caribbean Diasporan Church in the Black Atlantic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2014), 34.

The founders of Dalit theology, as argued, were influenced by Latin American and African American theology and they followed Latin American and African American conceptual background. So too, they adopted Latin American and African American hermeneutics significantly. For example, they proposed the wandering Aramean in Deuteronomy 26:5-9 and the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:3-12 as two fundamental paradigms for Dalit theology.⁹ Nirmal, for instance, discusses how the Deuteronomic creed can advance Dalit theology. Nirmal's proposal shows Latin American and African American influence also upon his methodological framework since the Deuteronomic creed is a proclamation of the Exodus narrative, which is one of the primary motivations behind Latin American and African American theologies.¹⁰ Using the Deuteronomic retelling of the toil, affliction and oppression of Israel's ancestors, Nirmal narrates Dalits' movement from "no people" to "God's people."¹¹

Nevertheless, Nirmal was not satisfied with the pathos submerged in the Deuteronomic creed. The historical Dalit consciousness, Nirmal clarifies, depicts greater and deeper pathos than is found in the Deuteronomic creed.¹² Dalits have been denied

⁹ Michelle Voss Roberts, *Tastes of the Divine: Hindu and Christian Theologies of Emotion* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 124.

¹⁰ Thomas B. Dozeman, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 295, David Tonghou Ngong, "Theological Significance of Africa and Africans in the Bible," in *A New History of African Christian Thought: From Cape to Cairo*, ed. David Tonghou Ngong (New York: Routledge, 2017), 36, Walter Earl Fluker, "Shape-Shifting: Cultural Hauntings, Contested Post-Racialism, and Black Theological Imagination," in *Contesting Post-Racialism: Conflicted Churches in the United States and South Africa*, eds. Drew Smith, William Ackah, Anthony G. Reddie and Rothney S. Tshaka (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 47. It is to be noted, however, that there have been some dissenting voices from emerging African American theologians who review how the Exodus narrative may promote an anti-Egyptian and therefore anti-African bias. See Randall C. Bailey, "Is That Any Name for a Nice Hebrew Boy? Exodus 2:1-10: The De-Africanization of a Biblical Hero," in *The Recovery of the Black Presence in the Bible*, ed. Randall C. Bailey and Jacquelyn Grant (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 25-36.

¹¹ Nirmal, "A Dialogue with Dalit Literature," 201.

¹² Nirmal, "Toward a Christian Dalit Theology," 33.

their basic humanity and the nomadic freedom of the wandering Aramean for many centuries, and, therefore, Nirmal suggests that the goal of Dalit theology is the "realisation of our full humanness or conversely, our full divinity, the ideal of the *imago Dei*, the Image of God in us."¹³ Similarly, Balasundaram explains:

the goal of Dalit theology is the liberation of the Dalits and their empowerment, i.e., strengthening Dalits, providing comfort to them, the good news that God is with them in their struggle, that they are God's children and that they have their own God-given identity and that they are people with worth and dignity. That is, human dignity is more important than the question of economic emancipation.¹⁴

Scholars like Nirmal often move from Dalit consciousness to a biblical paradigm without inquiring Dalits' contexts sufficiently, which, as Boopalan notes, have incredible resources to subvert the caste; making fun of its cruel presuppositions; and imagining ways of being and doing that envision a just world.¹⁵ Nirmal, as will be explained, limits his discussion to the biblical contexts substantially; and identifies features of the Deuteronomic creed, explicates their implications, and integrates them to the Dalit contexts.¹⁶ Similar attempts may have some advantages in predominantly Christian contexts like Latin America. However, such undertakings, which Christianises Dalits' worldview significantly, have a dangerous possibility in Dalits' contexts. For example, superimposing such hermeneutical examples can overlook how Dalits' worldview and counter-formulations underpins the caste hegemony.¹⁷ Likewise, Dalits' resources become objects, and biblical understandings are injected into them.¹⁸

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ F. J. Balasundaram, 'Dalit Struggle and its Implications for Theological Education', in *Bangalore Theological Forum*, Vol. XXIX, Nos 3 and 4, September and December 1997, 89– 90.

¹⁵ Boopalan, *Memory, Grief, and Agency*, 35

¹⁶ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 50.

¹⁷ Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 45.

¹⁸ Viji Varghese Eapen, "Christ in 'Theyyam': Performative Word - Further an Exploration into the Subaltern Cultural Christology," in *The Yobel Spring: Festschrift to Dr Chilkuri Vasantha Rao*, eds. Praveen P. S.

Such a colonial imposition may override the counter formulations in the liberative voices in Dalits' contexts; marginalise Dalits' identity envisioned in Dalit contexts; implant Christian identity as it is developed in Latin American and African American contexts; and imposes a different worldview onto the Dalit historical-cultural world.¹⁹ This superimposition may marginalise the subversive voices in Dalits' resources into the further periphery of Dalit theology.²⁰ Similarly, as Anderson notes, it may reduce the possibility of Dalit Christians continuing their pre-Christian worldview.²¹ Such a cross-cultural and cross-religious discontinuity in Dalit hermeneutics, as mentioned, necessitates further interrogation; and; therefore, this chapter will question Latin American and African American hermeneutical influences upon some of the proposals of the founding fathers of Dalit theology.

Perhaps, the proposal of some African American theologians who suggest the hermeneutics of return to black resources like African traditional religions, slave narratives and folklore to help African American theology overcome its alienation from Black contexts can reorient Dalit theology.²² A hermeneutics of return to the Dalit religio-cultural worldviews, similar to African American undertakings, will assist Dalit theology if we take the counter ontology to the dominant culture and the epistemology of resistance

Perumalla, Royce M Victor and Naveen Rao (Hyderabad: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and Andhra Christian Theological College, 2014), 626.

¹⁹ Jeremiah, "Dalit Christians in India," 258-274.

²⁰ Ibid, Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 62. Let me clarify that Dalit theology addresses the Dalit situation and helped Dalits ascertain their identity. What I suggest are some unintended outcomes which disconnected from Dalit religio-cultural context.

²¹ Anderson, *Community and Worldview*, 75.

²² Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 91-93, Victor Anderson, "Theorizing African American Religion," in *African American Studies*, ed. Jeanette R. Davidson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 270.

embedded in Dalit culture and religion seriously.²³ Sathianathan Clarke, for instance, cautions against Dalits turning their backs completely on their religious and cultural foundations and proposes that Dalit culture and religion are not vacant spaces. He reminds us that Dalit culture and religion have abundant resources to further Dalit theology by interrogating, challenging, rejecting and deconstructing the caste discourses and advises the Dalit academics to explore the lived experiences narrated through the cultural and religious symbolism and their impacts upon the Dalits.²⁴

Admittedly, Clarke's demand is a wake-up call for the Dalit academics to reclaim the liberative voices in Dalits' worldview by attending the neglected voices in Dalit culture and spirituality. So too, I acknowledge the implications of such proposals for Syrian Christian academics like me also. A crossing into Dalit contexts, as will be clarified further, can unpack some of my caste prejudices, improve my cross-cultural adaptability, develop my awareness of the surprises, confusions, and, sometimes, tensions of the Dalit world and empower me to connect with the Dalit ethos profoundly. It is to be noted, however, that my attempt is not entirely new. Some Syrian Christians like Aleaz and Coorilos, as clarified earlier, had already attempted similar undertakings. The Dalit academics, as noted, have already accepted them, though with some reservations. This research seeks to join such Syrian Christian academics who share my social location, in pursuing further dialogue within and between these traditions which may make Dalit theology more relevant to Dalit contexts and advance Dalit-Syrian Christian dialogues.

²³ Kimberly Rae Connor, *Imagining Grace: Liberating Theologies in the Slave Narrative Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 58, Vinayaraj, *Dalit Theology after Continental Philosophy*, 88.

²⁴ Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 40, Nirmal, "Toward a Christian Dalit Theology," 28f.

This research, however, is not proposing any romantic nostalgia but a conscious attempt to rediscover, rehabilitate and rehumanise Dalit religious and cultural values to promote a continuous dialogue between the Bible and Dalit culture. In a related but African context, Luke Mbefo suggests that African American ancestors had their view of their world and their place within it. They had their lifestyle and religious upbringing. Further, they possessed a self-contained and independently developed cultural integrity. From such a context, Mbefo demands to resurrect the culture of African ancestors to establish an authentic theology.²⁵ Mbefo's proposal is an urgent demand in Dalit contexts also. Joshua Samuel, for instance, clarifies how similar attempts can benefit Dalits:

Dalit communities have had their own distinct worship, theology and metaphysics throughout history. Ostracized from main society as untouchables and outcastes, (whenever that originated in history), they were pushed and forced to evolve their own religious practices. And scholars are strongly convinced that these religious faiths, no matter how illogical and irrational it might have appeared for the caste communities and the European colonizers, must have been and indeed continue to be meaningful and empowering for the Dalits.²⁶

My engagement with Dalit contexts, as will be further explained, have convinced me that Dalits' culture and religion are important locations to identify the assumptions, values, judgements and commitments underlying Dalits' understanding of reality; their ethical and ontological choices; and their responses to some of the absolutist claims of the caste hegemony. Such culturally structured and sanctioned elements have incredible resources to challenge the caste discourses, reimagine the world and seek redress; and Dalit theology should develop its theoretical premises along the lines of Dalit contexts. Nevertheless, I do not suggest a unilateral borrowing of Dalit culture either. What I

²⁵ Luke Mbefo, "Theology and Inculturation: Problems and Prospects – The Nigerian Experience," *The Nigerian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 1, No. 1, December 1985, 55.

²⁶ Samuel, *Practicing Multiple Religious Belonging*, 80.

propose, as clarified, is a deliberate attempt to listen to the subversive voices in Dalits' culture and learn from the resistance to socio-political humiliation and marginalisation internalised in them, which I believe, will help Dalit theology develop and mature as an authentic Indian theology. So too, my attempt aims not to discredit Dalit theology or its paradigms but to offer new avenues for Dalit liberation. From such a background, the present chapter will question the dominant paradigms of Dalit theology based upon Dalits' resistance to the caste-based discriminations and injunctions. Such an interrogation might identify some limitations of the dominant paradigms of Dalit theology and may offer new perspectives for Dalit theology.

3. 1. The Paradigms of Dalit Theology

The Wandering Aramean in Deuteronomy 26:5-9 and the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:3-12 are two fundamental paradigms of Dalit theology.²⁷ The Deuteronomic creed describes God as the "God of the Dalits" by invoking parallels between God's activities among the Jews and God's continuing mission among the Dalits. Nirmal expounded the Deuteronomic account because it depicts the very nature of the Dalit life. He believed that it would help the Dalits to reflect upon their experiences. However, a reinterpretation of this creed is not without problems and, as will be argued, it has only limited potential in Dalit contexts.

3. 1. 1. The Deuteronomic Creed and Dalit Contexts

The Deuteronomic creed is a confession of faith; the Israelites were obliged to profess, while offering first-fruits at the sanctuary.²⁸ It recalls their past, their migration to

²⁷ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 50, Kuruvila, "Dalit Theology," 134.

²⁸ Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 358.

Egypt, their sufferings in Egypt and their miraculous escape.²⁹ The Dalit appropriation of the creed shows Latin American and African American influence since it emphasises the Exodus event, which is central to Latin American and African American theologies.³⁰

Gerhard von Rad explained the Deuteronomic creed as “an ancient credo,” confessing the most authentic core of Israel’s faith.³¹ Van Seters, however, noted that this creed does not recognise the Patriarchal sojourn in Canaan, which is evident in Genesis.³² His proposal has influenced some scholars. Ernest Nicholson and Norbert Lohfink, for instance, claim that this passage was most likely to be a Deuteronomic composition of the late pre-exilic or exilic period.³³ Whatever be the composition history, the creed affirms that the Lord “who revealed his name to Moses is the same Lord whose mighty acts had freed the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt and led them into the promised land.”³⁴ It clarifies the identity of the Lord as well as the identity of Israel.³⁵ Lohfink recognises it as “the quintessence of Israel’s faith.”³⁶ Similarly, the creed begins

²⁹ Keith L. Eades, “Divine Action and Human Action: A Comparative Study of Deuteronomy 26:1-11 and Haggai 2:10-19,” in *Reading the Hebrew Bible for A New Millennium: Form, Concept and Theological Perspective*, eds. Wonil Kim, Deborah Ellens, Michael Floyd and Marvin A. Sweeney (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 106.

³⁰ Ikenna U. Okafor, *Toward an African Theology of Fraternal Solidarity: Ube Nwanne* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 27, Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 61, Margaret Barker, *The Mother of the Lord: The Lady in the Temple* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 183.

³¹ Gerhard von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken (London: SCM Press, 1966), 3ff.

³² John Van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 216.

³³ Ernest Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Julius Wellhausen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 89, Norbert Lohfink, *Theology of the Pentateuch: Themes of the Priestly Narrative and Deuteronomy*, trans. L. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 265-89.

³⁴ Richard N. Soulen, *Sacred Scripture: A Short History of Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 5.

³⁵ Lawrence M. Wills, *Not God’s People: Insiders and Outsiders in the Biblical World* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 27.

³⁶ Norbert Lohfink, *Option for the Poor: The Basic Principle of Liberation Theology in the Light of the Bible* (Berkeley: BIBAL, 1987), 36.

with an affirmation of the roots and identity of the Jews, their concept of God, their sufferings and their liberation from slavery.³⁷ This creed is part of the Jewish Scripture.³⁸

Dalit theology takes Hebrew cultural and religious consciousness in the Deuteronomic creed as a model for its theological base.³⁹ This confessional formula, as Dalit theology rightly interprets, combines both the issue of the identity of Israel as well as their liberation and speaks to the Dalit experience and situation as well.⁴⁰ Nirmal, as seen above, describes how the historical consciousness envisaged in God's actions in Israel's history can help the Dalits to understand their historical consciousness and to celebrate their new existence as Christian Dalits.⁴¹ He emphasises that the wandering Aramean, the uprooted ancestor, becomes a mighty nation despite their sufferings and modest beginnings. Nirmal finds inspiration from this upbringing that changed the fate of the descendants of the wandering Aramean.⁴²

From such a background, Nirmal suggests that the Dalits should be aware of the historical Dalit consciousness and the present Christian consciousness. He expounds further that Dalit Christians are "not just Dalits," but "are Christian Dalits" and clarifies that Dalits' exodus from Hinduism to Christianity (Jesus Christ) is a valuable experience.⁴³ He compares Dalit consciousness with the sufferings of the wandering Aramean and highlights the redundancy of the Deuteronomic creed in describing Dalit pathos. From such a perspective, Nirmal claims that pathos in the Deuteronomic creed is not enough

³⁷ George Mathew Nalunnakkal, 'Search for Self-Identity and the Emerging Spirituality: A Dalit Theological Perspective,' in BTF, Vol. XXX, Nos. 1 and 2, March and June 1998, 30-31.

³⁸ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 49.

³⁹ Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 567.

⁴⁰ Wilfred, *On the Banks of Ganges*, 132.

⁴¹ Nirmal, "A Dialogue with Dalit Literature," 80.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

since Dalit suffering is more profound than the pathos of the wandering Aramean. Dalit ancestors did not have the nomadic freedom of the wandering Aramean.

When my Dalit ancestor walked the dusty roads of his village, the Sa Varnas tied a tree-branch around his waist so that he would not leave any unclean foot-prints and pollute the roads. The Sa Varnas tied an earthen pot around my [D]alit ancestor's neck to serve as a spittle. If ever my Dalit ancestor tried to learn Sanskrit or any sophisticated language, the oppressors gagged him permanently by pouring molten lead down his throat. My [D]alit mother and sisters were forbidden to wear any blouses, and the Sa Varnas feasted their eyes on their bare bosoms. The Sa Varnas denied my Dalit ancestor any access to public wells and reservoirs. They denied him the entry to their temples and places of worships. My Dalit consciousness, therefore, has an unparalleled depth of pathos and misery.⁴⁴

Further, Nirmal suggests that the pathos, misery and Dalit consciousness should inform Dalit theology.⁴⁵ His claim is profound and challenging. However, without elaborating the claim, Nirmal goes back to discussing how the Deuteronomic creed may further Dalit theology. He proposes that the creed informs that "signs and wonders" are not enough for Dalit liberation and clarifies that Dalits need a "mighty hand" and an "outstretched arm."⁴⁶ Such a methodological orientation, while offering a sound biblical model, overlooks the richness and wisdom of Dalits' heritage; how Dalits' resisted caste hegemony and maintained an alternative worldview, counter-ontology, the epistemology of resistance, Dalits' agency in Dalits' worldview; and their relevance to Dalits' liberation significantly. Also, it elevates the biblical paradigms developed in Latin American and African American contexts as the dominant self and relegates the subversive voices in Dalits' resources as the dominated self in Dalit theology. This chapter, as suggested, seeks to redress this drawback and will approach Dalits not only as victims but also as agents of resistance and transformation. Further, it will evaluate the Deuteronomic creed

⁴⁴ Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 221- 222.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

and suffering servant paradigms against the counter formulations; alternative moral visions; and the liberation and reconciliation ethic in Dalits' worldview and their proposals for orienting Dalits in ethical and ontological choices and overcoming Dalits' pathos.

3. 1. 1. 1. Critique of the Deuteronomic Creed

There have been some challenges to the Dalit appropriation of the Deuteronomic creed. Hebden and Thumma, for example, lament that Dalit theologians continue to explore the Deuteronomic creed and the Exodus background even after liberation theology has moved away from it.⁴⁷ Clarke and Rajkumar challenge it because of the creed's incompatibility with Dalit backgrounds. Unlike Nirmal, Clarke and Rajkumar move from pathos to Dalit religion and culture before arriving at Dalit theology. By incorporating a journey through Dalit worldviews, cultural symbols and religious practices, they argue that Dalit culture and religion, though highlighting Dalit pathos, have more to offer than just pathos. Clarke, for instance, cautions that Dalit theology failed to take seriously the symbolism of pathos manifested in the Dalit religion and culture.⁴⁸ From this context, Clarke further analyses how the image of God submerged in the Exodus narrative conflicts with the image of God in Dalit thinking. Clarke notes that the picture of an omnipotent God who reconfigures the world with a "mighty hand" and an "outstretched arm" (as demanded by Nirmal) does not find a principal place in Dalit religion. In Dalit contexts, Clarke explains, 'the mighty acts of God,' which deliver the oppressed have either changed their aim or exhausted themselves. Therefore, Clarke demands Dalit

⁴⁷ Hebden, *Dalit Theology and Christian Anarchism*, 16, see also P. Arockiadoss, "The Significance of Dr. Ambedkar for Theologizing in India," *Frontiers of Dalit Theology*, ed. V. Devasahayam (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997), Antony Thumma, *Springs from the Subalterns: Patterns and Perspectives in People's Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997).

⁴⁸ Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 47.

scholars to revisit the nature of God suggested by Dalit theology against the contextual realities of the Dalit world.⁴⁹ So too, Rajkumar suggests how the image of God in the Deuteronomic creed contradicts the Dalits' contexts.⁵⁰ The deities of Dalits in Tamilnadu, for instance, are not masters. They are servants of Master Gods, and like their devotees, they serve the deities of the dominant castes. The temple authorities place them outside the temple wall.⁵¹ Thus the image of God that emerges out of the creed seems to be incompatible with Dalits' experiences. Devotion to Pochamma is another instance.

3. 1. 1. 2. Dalit Worship of Pochamma Devi

The Dalits of Andhra Pradesh worship Pochamma Devi.⁵² She is supposed to take care of everyone in the village.⁵³ She is gender-neutral, class-neutral and caste-neutral in her dealings with human beings.⁵⁴ The devotees can talk to Pochamma as they speak among themselves. They may call their Goddess as "Mother." The prayer to Pochamma seems like dialogue as they say, "we have seeded the fields, now you must ensure that the crops grow well, one of our children is sick it is your bounden duty to cure her." This dialogical nature indicates a close relationship between the deity and the worshippers.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Sathianathan Clarke, "Dalits Overcoming Violation and Violence: A Contest between Overpowering and Empowering Identities in Changing India," in *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 54, No. 3, July 2002, 285-286.

⁵⁰ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 63, Kancha Illaiah, *Why I am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy*, (Calcutta: Samya, 2005), 101, Kancha Illaiah, 'Dalitism vs Brahmanism: The Epistemological Conflict in History', in *Dalit Identity and Politics: Cultural Subordination and the Dalit Challenge*, ed. Ghanshyam Shah (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001), 114.

⁵¹ Eveline Masilamani-Meyer, *Guardians of Tamilnadu: Folk Deities, Folk Religion, Hindu Themes* (Halle: Frackesche Stiftungen zu Halle, 2004), 97.

⁵² Kancha Illiah, "Hindu Gods and Us: Our Goddesses and the Hindus," in *Perspectives on Modern South Asia: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation*, ed. Kamala Visweswaran (Chichester: John Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 42, K. P. Kumaran, *Migration, Settlement and Ethnic Associations* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1992), 117.

⁵³ Leela Prasad, "Hinduism in South India," in *Hinduism in the Modern World*, ed. Brian A. Hatcher (New York / London: Routledge, 2016), 23.

⁵⁴ Illiah, "Hindu Gods and Us," 43.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Pochamma understands all languages and dialects and people can talk to her in their words. For example, a Brahmin can speak to Pochamma in Sanskrit, and an English person can pray to her in English. The spirituality that emerges around Pochamma, therefore, does not divide the people nor does it create conditions of conflict.⁵⁶ Dalit spirituality, as evidenced in the worship of Pochamma, does not make one person a friend and another an enemy. Also, there are no restrictions of religion in Pochamma temple. People can go to the temple irrespective of their religious orientations. So too, Pochamma does not specify what should be offered to her since offerings depend on the economic conditions of the devotees. The rich may offer a sari and blouse while the destitute can go to her without anything.⁵⁷ Similarly, Dalit Deities do not exploit a section of the community.⁵⁸ They create a shared cultural ethic which would re-energise the whole community.⁵⁹ Dalit deities project a stable social structure that respects the dignity of every person. They promote an intimate relationship between the gods and worshippers. Such a shared social ethic demands further research since the Deuteronomic creed has an unhealthy us/them opposition, which, as will be explained, is alien to Dalit contexts.⁶⁰

3. 1. 1. 3. Deuteronomic Creed and Dalit Culture

The Deuteronomic creed and the underlying Exodus motif has a binary opposition between Israel and Egypt. Egypt is given a negative valence in it.⁶¹ It demonstrates Egypt and Israel as two categories, structurally distinct and unbridgeable.⁶² Appropriating such

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Illiah, *Why I am Not a Hindu*, 91.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 64.

⁶¹ F. V. Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map: Constructing Biblical Israel's Identity* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 55.

⁶² Seth Daniel Kunin, *We think What We Eat: Structuralist Analysis of Israelite Food Rules and other Mythological and Cultural Domains* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 147.

a model can create an imbalance between Dalits and non-Dalits like Syrian Christians since they are mutually exclusive in this representation as falling along bipolar dimensions. Rajkumar has already noted that theological articulations based on this binary opposition model can be counterproductive and might hinder mutual collaborations between Dalits and non-Dalits.⁶³ The present section seeks to listen to Dalit contexts to clarify how Dalit contexts approach binary opposition models.

The following poem, written by Kapila who lived in the Sangam age, for instance, endorses an essential unity of humanity and oneness of God:⁶⁴

Do rain and the wind avoid
some men among the rest
Because their caste is low?
When such men tread the earth
Hast saw it quake with rage?
Or, does the brilliant sun
Refuse to them its rays?
Oh, Brahmans has our God
E'er bid the teeming fields
Bring forth the fruit and flowers
For men of caste alone?
Or, made the forest green
To gratify the eyes
of none but Pariahs?
Oh Brahmans, list to me!
In all this blessed land
There is but one great caste,
One tribe and brotherhood
One God doth dwell above,
And he hath made us one
In birth and frame and tongue.⁶⁵

⁶³ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 64, 16.

⁶⁴ The Sangam was a college of Tamil poets who composed 2279 poems. The rest are considered to be the works of 473 poets. Please see, Sadasivan, *A Social History of India*, 309. The Sangam age was a period of great literary glory. The Sangam age can be dated between 500 BCE and 500 CE. Sailendra Nath Sen, *Ancient Indian History and Civilization* (New Delhi: New Age International Publications, 1998), 204.

⁶⁵ Charles E. Grover (trans.), *The Folk-Songs of Southern India* (London: Forgotten Books, 2013), 168-169.

Kapila notes that the wind, rain, earth and sun do not discriminate because of caste preferences and concludes that there is only one caste, one tribe and brotherhood. Similarly, the fields bring fruits and flowers for the entire creation, without any caste discrimination. Kapila further asks, "when shall our race be one great brotherhood Unbroken by the tyranny of caste?"⁶⁶ Hence, Kapila promotes universal brotherhood and oneness of God. Such an understanding of human relationships, emerged from the margins of society, which envisions universal fraternity and cross-cultural partnerships, communicates an essential aspect of Dalits' worldview and challenge the Deuteronomic creed and the binary opposition implied in it.

Indian pluralistic contexts also challenge dominated castes to work for their full humanisation as well as that of the dominant castes since India is a cradle of world religions like Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism.⁶⁷ Indian cultural diversity is also well acknowledged.⁶⁸ Linguistic and ethnic diversity is another issue. India has more than 1,652 languages, 47 used in education as a medium, 87 in the press, 71 in radio, 13 in cinema and 13 in state-level administration.⁶⁹ Large numbers of different regional, social and economic groups live together in India.⁷⁰ Learning from outsiders and engaging with

⁶⁶ Ibid. 159.

⁶⁷ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 64, Arul M. Varaprasadam, "Inculturation: The Crucial Challenges in the Indian Situation," in *Building the Church in Pluricultural Asia, Inculturation: Working Papers on Living Faith and Cultures-VII*, ed. Arij A. Roest Crolius (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1986), 43, B. J. Prashantham, "Asian Indians: Cultural Considerations for Disaster Workers," in *Ethnocultural Perspectives on Disaster and Trauma: Foundations, Issues, and Applications*, eds. Anthony J. Marsella, Jeanette L. Johnson, Patricia Watson and Jan Gryczynski (New York: Springer, 2007), 175.

⁶⁸ D. Basu, A. Ghosh, B. Patra and B. N. Subhodh, "Addiction Research in India," in *Developments in Psychiatry in India: Clinical, Research and Policy Perspectives*, eds. Savita Malhotra, Subho Chakrabarti (New Delhi: Springer, 2015), 365.

⁶⁹ Viniti Vaish, *Biliteracy and Globalization: English Language Education in India* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd. 2008), 9.

⁷⁰ James Heitzman and Robert L. Worden, "India: Country Profile," in *India: Issues, Historical Background, and Bibliography*, ed. John N. Mayor (Hauppauge: Nova Publishers, 2003), 66.

them are significant in such contexts. The binary opposition has limitations in promoting cross-cultural equality, and therefore, it needs to be resolved.

Scholars like Rajkumar have also challenged the liberation potential of the triumph of God in the Deuteronomic creed because such an image of God has only limited potential to enhance Dalit emancipation.⁷¹ So too, Rajkumar rejects Nirmal's emphasis on Israelite liberation based on the critique of Robert Allen Warrior and challenges the Dalit appropriation of the Exodus motif since the indigenous Dalits identify neither with Egypt nor Israel but with Canaan.⁷² Rajkumar further concludes that the "Deuteronomic paradigm would serve more the interests of the Aryan invaders than the Dalits" since Dalits were the original inhabitants.⁷³ So too, I have reservations against using the "wandering Aramean" since the identity of the Aramean has confused some scholars.

3. 1. 1. 4. The identity of the Wandering Aramean

Jacob was traditionally acknowledged as the wandering Aramean.⁷⁴ A. D. H. Mayes, however, suggests why the scholarly attempts to identify the Wandering Aramean with Jacob are not convincing.⁷⁵ The Vulgate renders it as *Syrus persequatur patrem meum* (A Syrian persecuted my father). The Septuagint, on the other hand, reads Συριαν απεβαλεν ο πατηρ μου (My father abandoned Syria). This clause in the Septuagint might have referred to Abraham's migration from Harran to Canaan and to Egypt.⁷⁶ Jewish

⁷¹ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 172.

⁷² Robert Allen Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys and Indians," in *Native and Christian Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada*, ed. James Treat (London: Routledge, 1996), 95, Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 64.

⁷³ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 64.

⁷⁴ Volker Glissmann, *Out of Exile, not out of Babylon: The Diaspora Theology of the Golah* (Luwanga: Mzuni pres, 2011), 311.

⁷⁵ A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 334-35.

⁷⁶ Edward Lipinski, *The Arameans: Their Ancient History, Culture, Religion* (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters and Department Oosterse Studies, 2000), 55.

Rabbinic interpretation reads Deuteronomy 26:5 as “An Aramean tried to destroy my father,” which complicates the attempts to identify the wandering Aramean as Jacob.⁷⁷

This Jewish interpretation is based on the ambiguity of *arami oved avi*. *Oved* usually means perish or destroy. It can also mean lost or strayed (1 Samuel 9:3 and 20). However, this usage is not popular in the Pentateuch. Genesis does not use *Oved* to describe the wanderings of the ancestors.⁷⁸ Jewish interpreters read *oved* in the creed as a piel form and vocalise it as *ibed*.⁷⁹ It is not easy to neglect the validity of this vocalisation since biblical texts were not vocalised at the time of early rabbinic literature. *Ibed* as a piel form means “to destroy.”⁸⁰ Deuteronomy 26:5, according to this interpretation, is “An Aramean tried to destroy my father.” The Aramean mentioned in this verse, Midrash and Haggadah explain, is Laban, the Syrian.⁸¹ The Scripture uses Aramean only to Laban and Bethuel, Jacob’s maternal uncle and grandfather (Gen. 25:20, 28:5, 31:20, 24).⁸² Hence, “My father,” according to this interpretation, is not Jacob.⁸³ From such a context, Passover Haggadah instructs:

Go and learn what Laban the Aramean attempted to do to our father, Jacob!
Pharaoh decreed only against the males, but Laban attempted to uproot

⁷⁷ Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy* (Bloomington / Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 97.

⁷⁸ Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch’s Ideological Map*, 201.

⁷⁹ Alison Salveson, “Keeping It in the Family? Jacob and his Aramean Heritage according to Jewish and Christian Sources” in *The Exegetical Encounter Between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity*, ed. E. Grypeou and H. Spurling (Boston: Brill, 2009), 213.

⁸⁰ Lieve M. Teugels, *Bible and Midrash: The Story of ‘The Wooing of Rebekah’ (Gen. 24)* (Leuven/ Paris/ Dudley: Peeters, 2004), 116.

⁸¹ Shlomo Riskin, *The Passover Haggadah with a Traditional and Contemporary Commentary by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1983), 73. A. Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Liturgy and its Development* (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), 181, S. T. Lachs, “Two Related Arameans: A Difficult Reading in the Passover Haggadah,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, 17 (1986), 65-69.

⁸² Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch’s Ideological Map*, 201.

⁸³ David Instone Brewer, “Balaam-Laban as the Key to the Old Testament Quotations in Matthew 2,” *Built Upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Mathew*, eds. Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 215.

everything, as it is said, An Aramean destroyed my father. Then he went down to Egypt (Deut. 26:5).

Thus, the wandering Aramean, according to Passover Haggadah, is not an ancestor to be venerated but an archenemy who tried to annihilate the Jews. The Targum tradition to Deuteronomy 26:5 also provides a similar interpretation.⁸⁴ R. Menahem Kasher explains why Midrash portrays Laban, as a villain. For Kasher, Jacob would have married Rachel if Laban had not tricked him. Joseph, Jacob's son through Rachel, would have been the firstborn and Leah's children would not have been born to Jacob. Kasher assumes that there would not have been any siblings' rivalry between Leah's and Rachel's children. Thus, Joseph would not have ended up in Egypt, and Jacob's family would not have followed him. So, Laban initiated the oppression.⁸⁵ From such a context, Deuteronomy 26:5 may remind some Jews about the treachery of Laban, who tricked Jacob into marrying Leah before Rachel and tricked him into twenty years of servitude. Therefore, Laban was crueller than Pharaoh. This demonising of Laban does not mean that Pharaoh is not cruel. Instead, it suggests that Laban initiated the sufferings under Pharaoh. Moreover, Laban attempted to kill Israel's male and female children, not only male children like the Pharaoh.⁸⁶

There is also an alternate understanding of the identity of the Aramean which emerged after the war against the Roman Empire. Based on the ambiguity of the word *arami*, Lawrence A. Hoffman explains that the Hebrew script of this term would have appeared consonantly as *RMI*. After the war with the Romans, Jews were reading *RMI*

⁸⁴ Salveson, "Keeping It in the Family?" 214.

⁸⁵ Menahem Kasher, *Haggadah Shelemah* (Jerusalem: Torah Shelemah Institute, 1967), 125.

⁸⁶ Calum Carmichael, "The Passover Haggadah," in *The Historical Jesus in Context*, eds. Amy-Jill Levine, Dale C Allison Jr. and John Dominic Crossan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 345.

not as *Arami* but as *Romi*, a Roman.⁸⁷ Thus *RMI* might have acquired new meaning after the Roman invasion. The meaning which emerged out of this context, Hoffman explains, is that the Roman emperor who attempted to wipe out the Jews entirely is worse than the Pharaoh. In all these scenarios, *Arami* is not a hero to be acknowledged but a villain who plotted against Jews. How can Dalit theology that seeks to assert Dalits' right to speak for them disregard how Jews interpret their Scripture and history?

3. 1. 1. 5. Problems with Emphasising Pathos

As noted, Nirmal argues that Dalit suffering is higher and more profound than that of the wandering Aramean. It is true that Dalit suffering is unique. We need to affirm its particularity as well. However, a hierarchical explication of pathos is problematic and, as will be seen, it contradicts some of the basic principles of Dalit culture and spirituality. The present section discusses some of the risks associated with emphasising Dalit pathos while section 3.1.2. 2 will evaluate how this trend contradicts Dalit contexts.

Graded understanding of pathos may discourage Dalits from forming broader solidarity with others who share the same situation in various parts of the globe. Dalit suffering, as recognised, is unique. However, they are not the only suffering community. The Rwandan refugees, for instance, who fled the genocide in 1994, still suffer from lack of food, clean water and basic sanitation.⁸⁸ Similarly, Philip Connor, a senior researcher focusing on demography and migration studies, estimates that about six in ten of Syria's

⁸⁷ Hoffman, *Beyond the Text*, 99-100.

⁸⁸ Cristiano d'Orsi, *Asylum-Seeker and Refugee Protection in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Peregrination of a Persecuted Human Being in Search of a Safe Haven* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 213ff, Angi Beuttner, *Holocaust Images and Picturing Catastrophe: The Cultural Politics of Seeing* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), 88ff, Thomas Streissguth, *Rwanda in Pictures* (Minneapolis: Twenty-First Century Books, 2008), 44.

pre-conflict population are displaced internally as well as globally.⁸⁹ Syria's children continue to suffer from brutal violence, which impairs their well-being.⁹⁰ What is needed in such a context, as Vine Deloria explains, is not a hierarchical understanding of contextual suffering but a web of suffering communities.⁹¹ Such partnerships would be liberating. Richard Thomas Eldridge, for instance, rightly proposes how the Holocaust might function as a bridging metaphor for understanding the extermination of the Herero people, the evil of Stalin's gulags, and the Armenian, Cambodian and Rwandan genocides.⁹² Similarly, it would be liberating if Dalit theology develops Dalit suffering as a metaphor to understand the empirical realities of other suffering communities also.

As noted, emphasising Dalit suffering as profound and deeper, as suggested by Dalit theology, might discourage some Dalits (however minute it might be) from forming global partnerships with other suffering communities. Moreover, any attempt to describe the caste context exclusively regarding the Dalit context endangers the fundamental premises of Dalit theology itself. How can we justify such an undertaking when we note that Dalit theology emerged out of the discontent toward the attempts of caste communities to describe the Dalit contexts in their terms? Thus, despite their popularity among Dalit theologians, the Exodus narrative read through liberation lenses does not do enough justice to Dalit contexts.

⁸⁹ Phillip Connor, *Most Displaced Syrians are in the Middle East*, and about a million are in Europe, accessed on 8th May 2018, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/29/where-displaced-syrians-have-resettled/.

⁹⁰ UN Children's Fund. "UNICEF Syria Crisis Situation Report - 2017 Humanitarian Results," accessed on 8th May 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/unicef-syria-crisis-situation-report-2017-humanitarian-results>.

⁹¹ Vine Deloria, *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 100.

⁹² J. M. Bernstein, "Tragedy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Richard Thomas Eldridge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 90.

3. 1. 2. The Suffering Servant and Dalit Contexts (Is 53:3-12)

Suffering, as noted, is the starting point of Dalit theology and it rejects gods that endanger Dalits. For example, Dalit academics reject Rama, one of the popular gods, who had killed Shambuka, a Dalit, for undertaking a life of prayer and asceticism.⁹³ From such a context, Dalit Christians began to search for a God who shares their pathos. They analysed the person and work of Jesus through the epistemological lens of the suffering and their dehumanised status.⁹⁴ They proposed the Suffering Servant in Isaiah as another paradigm of Dalit theology to complement the Deuteronomic creed.

It is to be noted, however, that the suffering servant is a recurring theme in Liberation theologies. Thomas Hanks, for example, notes that the servant has striking similarities with the poor in Latin America.⁹⁵ Cone remarks that "God in Christ became the suffering servant and thus took the humiliation and suffering of the oppressed."⁹⁶ Dalit theology appropriated the servant song and suggested that the God revealed in the servant is a Dalit God and so found Jesus as a prototype of the Dalits.⁹⁷

Dalit theology claims that Jesus shared the Dalitness of the Dalits of his time and elaborates the sufferings of Jesus to the present, suggesting that Christ is a co-sufferer of the Dalits.⁹⁸ Further, Jesus participates in Dalits' pathos, and Dalits continue Jesus' pathos-filled ministry. Rajkumar, for example, has rightly pointed out that Dalit Christology

⁹³ Nirmal, "Toward a Christian Dalit Theology," 34.

⁹⁴ Prabhakar, "Christology in Dalit Perspective 402.

⁹⁵ Thomas D. Hanks, *God So Loved the World: The Biblical Vocabulary of Oppression*, trans. James C. Dekker (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 73.

⁹⁶ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 160.

⁹⁷ Wilfred, *Margins: Site of Asian Theologies*, 223.

⁹⁸ Veli-Matti Karkkainen, J. Levison and P. Pope-Levison, "Christology," in *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church*, ed. William A. Dyrnes and Veli-Matti Karkkainen (Nottingham: Inter Varsity Press, 2008), 184.

and the issue of Dalitness are inseparably connected.⁹⁹ Dalit theology relates God's saving acts through Jesus with Dalits' dehumanised social existence.¹⁰⁰ It affirms that the God revealed in Jesus is a Dalit God since he encountered rejection, mockery, contempt and death like the Dalits.¹⁰¹ Dalit theology elaborates the presence of Tamar (Gen. 38:1-30) and Rahab (Josh. 2:1-21) in Jesus' genealogy as suggesting Jesus' intimate relation to the historical Dalits.¹⁰² Similarly, it holds that the nuances of the word Dalit blend well with the passages describing the crushed and suffering servant (Is 53:3-12).¹⁰³ Nirmal suggests how Jesus identifies with the servanthood of Dalits:

God whom Jesus Christ revealed and about whom the prophets of the Old Testament spoke is a Dalit God. He is a servant God—a God who serves. Services to others have always been the privilege of Dalit communities in India. The passages from Manu Dharma Sastra says that the Shudra was created by the Self-existent (Svayambhu) to do servile work and that servitude is innate in him. Service is the Sva-dharma of the Shudra. Let us remember the fact that in Dalits we have peoples who are avarnas – those below the Sudras. Their servitude is even more pathetic than that of Shudras. Against this background, the amazing claim of a Christian Dalit Theology will be that the God of the Dalits, the self-existent, the Svayambhu does not create others to do servile work, but does servile work himself. Servitude is innate in the God of the Dalits. Servitude is the sva-dharma of the God; and since we the Indian Dalits are this God's people, service has been our lot and our privilege.¹⁰⁴

Moving forward from Nirmal, Samuel Rayan interprets Jesus' participation in Dalit suffering based on Jesus' suffering and death outside the gates of Jerusalem. He explains why Hebrews 13:11-13 can be used as a paradigm for interpreting how God participates in Dalit suffering.¹⁰⁵ Hebrew 13:11-13 reads:

⁹⁹ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 51.

¹⁰⁰ Prabhakar, "Christology in Dalit Perspective," 405.

¹⁰¹ Felix Wilfred, *Dalit Empowerment*, 160, Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 66-67.

¹⁰² Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 31.

¹⁰³ Wyatt, "Dalit Theology and the Politics of Untouchability," 135.

¹⁰⁴ Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 224.

¹⁰⁵ Samuel Rayan, "The Challenge of the Dalit Issue," in *Dalits and Women: Quest for Humanity*, ed. V. Devasahayam (Madras: GLTCRI, 1992), 117-37.

The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

This passage is relevant in traditional Indian contexts also. Dalits were forced to live in a separate place outside the villages.¹⁰⁶ Analysing against this background, Rayan explains how Jesus' suffering outside the gate of Jerusalem immerses the Godhead in "the Dalitness of the oppressed to rescue its victims and plant them in the realm of freedom, dignity and creative living."¹⁰⁷ The invitation to share Jesus' humiliation shows that the content of discipleship is not in sharing Jesus' throne but in sharing his cup of suffering. Hebrews 13 invites believers to participate in Jesus' humiliation. This sharing, he explains, extends to the suffering servants of our times, including the Dalits. Rayan's proposal does not intend to romanticise Dalitness. Instead, it seeks to empower them to assert equality and freedom. Further, Rayan's call to share Jesus' degradation implies a socio-cultural revolution that might liberate the Dalits out of their present sufferings.¹⁰⁸

Hence, Dalit theology, as noted, promote a God who reveals Godself through God's deliberate sharing of Dalit pathos. This deliberate reimagining of God as a suffering servant has many positive aspects. It may help Dalits to identify Jesus as one who has endured the same sufferings and rejection like them. Clarke clarifies:

The deliberate reimagining of the Divine from being a killer-God to servant God valorizes Dalits and repositions their agency. Related to this reconstruction of a majestic and violent God into one who serves human society, there is also the resolve of Dalit theology to remove the distance and aloofness of God from the toiling people and bring the divine close to what was thought to be polluting locations. God becomes so identified with "polluting" professions (that is, scavengers and the washerman, who epitomise polluting occupations, become

¹⁰⁶ Wilfred, *On the Banks of Ganges*, 155.

¹⁰⁷ Rayan, "The Challenge of the Dalit Issue," 121.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

images of the Divine in the world) that encountering God and embracing Dalits become synonymous.¹⁰⁹

However, the Dalit appropriation of Isaiah 53 raises a few questions since Jews do not recognise Jesus as Messiah. Their understanding had not been Messianic.¹¹⁰

3. 1. 2.1. The identity of the Suffering Servant

Christians understood Isaiah 53 as a Christological prophecy.¹¹¹ However, scholars like Joseph A. Fitzmyer, for instance, argue that the servant narrated in Isaiah 53 is not a Messianic figure.¹¹² They understand the suffering servant as a symbol of the people of Israel.¹¹³ Isaiah 52:13-53:12, for example, does not mention the term, Messiah. Advancing further, David A. de Silva explains that the servant represents either Israel's sufferings on behalf of the Gentiles or the plight of a remnant within Israel for the whole nation.¹¹⁴ George A. F. Knight regards the servant as a personification of exilic Israel.¹¹⁵

There are also alternate proposals. Mordecai Schreiber and Joseph Alobaidi claim that Isaiah 53 is a coded biography of the prophet Jeremiah.¹¹⁶ Christopher R. North

¹⁰⁹ Sathanathan Clarke, "Dalit Theology: An Introductory and Interpretive Theological Exposition," in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*, eds. Sathanathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala and Philip Vinod Peacock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 30.

¹¹⁰ Michael L. Brown, "Jewish Interpretations of Isaiah 53," in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, eds. Darrel L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2012), 164.

¹¹¹ Mitch Glaser, "introduction," in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, eds. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2012), 21, Joel E. Rembaum, "The Development of a Jewish Exegetical Tradition regarding Isaiah 53," *The Harvard Theological Review* 75, no 3 (1982): 289.

¹¹² Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The One Who is to Come* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 40.

¹¹³ Leo Trepp, *A History of the Jewish Experience* (New Jersey: Behrman House, 2001), 42.

¹¹⁴ David A. DeSilva, *The Jewish Teachers of Jesus, James and Jude: What Earliest Christianity Learned from the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 171.

¹¹⁵ George A. F. Knight, *Servant Theology: A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 40-55* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 171.

¹¹⁶ Mordecai Schreiber, *The Man Who Knew God: Decoding Jeremiah* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 1, Joseph Alobaidi, *The Messiah in Isaiah 53: The commentaries of Saadia Gaon, Salmon ben Yerubam and Yefet ben Eli on Is 52:13-53:12* (Bern: Lang, 1998), 18-19.

suggests that the suffering servant is a symbol for exiled Jehoiachin.¹¹⁷ James L. Crenshaw argues that the suffering servant could be either Second Isaiah or King Josiah.¹¹⁸ Gerhard Von Rad maintains that the servant is a second Moses.¹¹⁹ C. Begg suggests that the suffering servant is Zedekiah.¹²⁰ Ulrich Berges clarifies that the servant could be any prophet who suffers on behalf of Yahweh.¹²¹ Advancing from there, Berges proposes that the servant could be Job, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or David.¹²²

Hence, scholars identify the servant as representing Israel or an individual (either prophet or king), but not Jesus. Christians, however, often interpret him as symbolising Jesus. I contend that the Christian interpretation of the Jewish Scripture must respect how Jews understand their scripture. Similarly, Christian interpretation must also abide by the differences in scholarly interpretation. From such a context, Dalit theology can only agree with Jewish and scholarly interpretations while confessing that the claim is mainly the case of one Israelite in particular. Such an openness to recognising the multiple scholarly interpretations is not a threat but a reality to be respected. Similarly, uncritical acceptance of a pathos-filled identity has another risk. It may idealise suffering as a virtue.

3. 1. 2. 2. The Limitations of the Suffering Servant Paradigm

The Deuteronomic creed, as seen above, has an internal binary opposition and highlights Dalits' suffering as paramount. Such a position, as clarified, may hinder Dalits

¹¹⁷ Christopher R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah: An Historical and Critical Study* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 61.

¹¹⁸ James L. Crenshaw, *Defending God: Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2005), 144.

¹¹⁹ Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (London: SCM Press, 1975), 259-62.

¹²⁰ C. Begg, "Zedekiah and the Servant," *Ephemerides Theologiae Lovanienses* 62 (1986), 393-98.

¹²¹ Ulrich Berges, "The Literary Construction of the Servant in Isaiah 40-55: A discussion about individual and collective identities," in *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2010, 37.

¹²² *Ibid.*

from developing intra-Dalit solidarity. So too, the servant nature of God and God's participation in suffering can idealise suffering and reinforce low self-esteem among Dalits. The following poem by F. M. Shinde, for instance, implies that idealising suffering may persuade Dalits to endure pain and suffering without seeking justice in this world.¹²³

Once you're used to it
You never afterwards
feel anything;
your blood nevermore
congeals
nor flows
for wet mud has been slapped
over all your bones.
Once you're used to it
even the sorrow
that visits you
sometimes, in dreams,
melts away, embarrassed.¹²⁴

So too, Mary Daly clarifies:

The qualities that Christianity idealises, especially for women, are also those of a victim: sacrificial love, passive acceptance of suffering, humility, meekness, etc. Since these are the qualities idealised in Jesus "who died for our sins," his functioning as a model reinforces the scapegoat syndrome for women.¹²⁵

Though Daly is concerned with the freedom of women, her proposal can be applied to any context where virtues like sacrificial love, passive acceptance of suffering and humility are glorified. Similarly, passive acceptance of suffering may reinforce the scapegoat syndrome among Dalits. In a similar but foreign context of patriarchy, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza questions the potential of passive acceptance of injustice. She says:

If one extols the silent and freely chosen suffering of Christ, who was 'obedient to death' (Philippians 2:8), as an example to be imitated by all those victimised by

¹²³ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 67.

¹²⁴ F.M. Shinde, 'Habit', in *No Entry for the New Sun: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Poetry*, ed. Arjun Dangle, trans. Priya Adarkar (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1992), 69.

¹²⁵ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 77.

patriarchal oppression, particularly by those suffering from domestic and sexual abuse, one not only legitimates but also enables acts of violence against women and children.¹²⁶

Likewise, Rajkumar believes that the suffering servant paradigm can reinforce the inferiority of the Dalits, rather than helping the Dalits to transcend their Dalitness. Dalitness is not a virtue to be venerated, but the status to be transformed.¹²⁷ Hence, the emancipatory potential of pathos-based Christologies needs to be established since they may idealise pain as one which God shares.¹²⁸ Balasundaram also critiques Dalit appropriation of Isaiah's suffering servant:

We may accept suffering to the extent that suffering helps to overcome the suffering inflicted on us by others. Thus, in preaching, projecting and emphasising the servant image, we need to be careful. This means that we should not romanticise the concept of suffering.¹²⁹

As noted, promoting a pathos-filled identity might halt Dalit liberation by idealising present suffering. This study will now analyse how the Bhakti movement, the *kummi* songs, Pottan Theyyam and Dalit reformers like Narayana Guru respond to Dalits' sufferings. Such a study might further clarify if Dalits ever accepted pathos like Isaiah's servant and how hierarchical understanding of pathos contradicts Dalit contexts.

3. 1. 2. 2.1. Idealising Suffering and Bhakti Movement

The Bhakti movement was one of the earliest challenges to Brahminic dominance.¹³⁰ The Bhakti movement is understood as a historical antecedent of the Dalit

¹²⁶ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus, Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 106.

¹²⁷ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 67.

¹²⁸ Peniel Rajkumar, "How does the Bible mean? The Bible and Dalit Liberation in India," *Political Theology* 11, No:3: 417.

¹²⁹ Balasundaram, "Dalit Struggle and Its Implications for Theological Education," 90.

¹³⁰ Ashwini Deshpande, "Casting off Servitude: Assessing Caste and Gender Inequality in India," in *Feminism and Antiracism: International Struggles for Justice*, eds. Kathleen M. Blee, France Winddance Twine (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 341.

literature movement. It spread much of India from the 12th century onwards.¹³¹ It emphasised that there is only one God and the best way to please God is total submission to His will and chanting Mantras.¹³² Dnyaneshwar and Eknath, saint poets from dominant castes, were its chief exponents. Dalits, who were excluded from worshipping in Hindu temples were inspired by this message, and some of them joined the movement.¹³³ Such members included Mahar saints Chokhamela, Karmamela, Banka and Nirmala as well as non-Brahmin saints Namdev, Gora, Sawata, Sena and Tukaram. Many *abhangs* (religious poems) of these poets, especially those composed by the poets from the Mahar caste, challenge the inequalities and injustices that limited Dalit life.¹³⁴ Some academics, however, do not approve of the Bhakti movement and maintain that it was not radical enough to challenge the caste structure. Narendra Jadhav, for instance, argues:

Even the most compassionate saint-poets tended to uphold the divisive caste system in the social realm. While the Bhakti movement raised awareness, it was not radical enough to challenge the social system in daily life.¹³⁵

However, there is an alternative view that upheld the spirit of protest in the Bhakti tradition. George Oommen and Rajkumar, for instance, accept the Bhakti movement as a socio-religious protest movement.¹³⁶ Following their lead, I will analyse some Bhakti poems to identify the counter-assertions and alternative moral visions in Dalits worldview.

¹³¹ Sebastian Velassery, Reena Patra, *Caste Identities and The Ideology of Exclusion: A Post-Script on the Humanization of Indian Social Life* (Irvine: Brown Walker Press, 2018), 31.

¹³² Ghuman, *British Untouchables*, 14-15. Mantra is a word, sound, statement, solgan or a motivating chant repeated to aid concentration in meditation, often practiced in Hinduism.

¹³³ Ibid. 15.

¹³⁴ Jayashree B and Gokhale-Turner, "Bhakti or Virodha: Continuity and Change in Dalit Sahitya," in *Tradition and Modernity in Bhakti Movements*, ed. Jayant Lele (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 29.

¹³⁵ Narendra Jadhav, *Untouchables: My Family's Triumphant Escape from India's Caste System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 5.

¹³⁶ George Oommen, *The Emerging Dalit Theology: A Historical Appraisal*, accessed on 25th July 2018, <https://www.religion-online.org/article/the-emerging-dalit-theology-a-historical-appraisal/>., Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 33.

3. 1. 2. 2. 1. 1. Idealising Suffering and Chokhamela

Chokhamela lived in the 13th-14th century. He is one of the most celebrated lower caste saint-poets in the bhakti tradition.¹³⁷ Chokhamela belonged to the Mahar caste.¹³⁸ Mahars were the traditional inhabitants of Maharashtra.¹³⁹ They were one of the untouchable castes and Chokhamela followed duties of Mahar obediently.¹⁴⁰ He did not dare to enter the temple even. So too, his wife Soyrabai was reluctant to feed a Brahmin.¹⁴¹ However, there is a competing tradition which claims that Lord Vitthal took Chokhamela by the hand and led him into the shrine in Phadharpur. A Brahmin priest overheard Chokhamela talking to Lord Vitthal and asked Chokhamela to go to the other side of the Chandrabhaga river. Chokhamela left the temple and worshipped from afar.¹⁴²

The Lord Vitthal, however, came to Chokhamela and dined with him. The tradition goes on to say that Chokhamela's wife spat some food on the God and a Brahmin heard Chokhamela talking to God about the accident. The Brahmin slapped Chokhamela on the mouth, who later found food scraps and a swollen cheek on the image of the Lord. The Brahmin repented and took Chokhamela by the hand to the temple.¹⁴³ Brahmin taking an untouchable by hand and God dining with him would have been revolutionary in the caste-ridden society. It would have served as an anti-caste counter-discourse among Mahars.

¹³⁷ Chakraborty, *Gendering Caste*, 98.

¹³⁸ Joseph Mundananikkal Thomas, "Subalternity, Language and Projects of Emancipation: An Analysis of Dalit Literature," in *Language, Identity and Symbolic Culture*, ed. David Evans (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 172.

¹³⁹ Sharmila Rege, *Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonies* (New Delhi: Subaan, 2013), 183.

¹⁴⁰ Sadangi, *Emancipation of Dalits*, 42.

¹⁴¹ Irina Glushkova, "Norms and Values in the Varkari Tradition," in *Intersections: Socio-cultural Trends in Maharashtra*, ed. Meera Kosambi (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2000), 48.

¹⁴² Eleanor Zelliott, "The Early Voices of Untouchables: The Bhakti Saints," in *From Stigma to Assertion: Untouchability, Identity and Politics in Early and Modern India*, eds. Mikael Aktor and Robert Deliège (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2010), 77.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Most of Chokhamela's poems express his deep devotion and concern to Lord Vitthal.¹⁴⁴

However, there is a subversive voice in his *abhangs* that challenges the Lord for creating dominated castes: The following poem, for instance, asks:

You made us low caste.
Why don't you face that fact, Great Lord?
Our whole life-left over food to eat.
You should be ashamed of this.¹⁴⁵

Hence, there is a dissenting voice in Chockamela's poems that challenge the concept of purity and pollution.¹⁴⁶ Reclaiming them might uncover the spirit of protest among Mahars and Mahar's vision for their agency in redressing Mahar's deplorable situation. Such a limitation does not seek to underestimate Chokhamela's devotion to Lord Vitthal.

3. 1. 2. 2. 1. 1. 1. Anti-caste Discourse in Chokhamela

As noted, Chokhamela's poems have an anti-caste discourse in them. Concentrating on them may help us reclaim the counter assertions against the caste hegemony and the quest for liberation that exist among Mahars since literature, as Massey clarifies, "is the mirror of a society in which it is born" and represents the people in a particular societal context.¹⁴⁷ Hence, the poems of Chokhamela, including his challenges to purity and pollution, can offer clear insights into the counter-worldviews and alternative moral visions among the Mahar community. The following poem is one such instance:

¹⁴⁴ B. S. Nimavat, "Chokhamela: The Pioneer of Untouchable Movement in Maharashtra," in *Dalit Literature: A Critical Exploration*, eds. Amar Nath Prasad, M. B. Gaijan (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2007), 11.

¹⁴⁵ Zelliott, "Chokhamela: Piety and Protest," 215.

¹⁴⁶ Eleanor Zelliott, "Chokhamela: Piety and Protest," in *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action*, ed. David N. Lorenzen (Albany: State University of New York, 1995), 213.

¹⁴⁷ James Massey, *Towards Dalit Hermeneutics* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 69.

The only impurity is in the five elements;
the same impurity pervades the whole world.
Then who is pure and who is impure?
The cause of pollution is the creation of the body.
In the beginning, at the end, there is nothing but pollution.
No one knows anyone who was born pure.
Chokha says, in wonder, who is pure.¹⁴⁸

The poem implies how deeply Chokhamela was troubled by his social location.¹⁴⁹

Chokhamela reconstructs and philosophises the concept of purity and pollution and depicts a polluted world. His questions “who is pure and who is impure?” are ontological and communicate counter assertions among Mahars. They also project a casteless society, where everyone is equal. Chokhamela further remarks that everyone is born out of impurity and there is no one beyond impurity. Such a daring comment would have been radical in Chokhamela’s historical context, and it witnesses the element of protest in Mahars’ counter-worldview. Chokhamela further critiques the essentials of Hinduism:

The Vedas are polluted, the Shastras are polluted;
the Puranas are full of pollution.
The soul is polluted; the oversoul is polluted;
the body is full of pollution, Brahma is polluted,
Vishnu is polluted, Shankar is full of pollution
Birth is polluted; death is polluted.
Chokha says: there's pollution at the beginning and at the end.¹⁵⁰

Chokhamela designates the Vedas, Shastras and Puranas, which are the primary sources of Hinduism, as polluted. Veda means word. There are four Vedas, namely Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda. Rig Veda is the most ancient one.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Zelliott, "The Early Voices of Untouchables:" 77-78.

¹⁴⁹ Sadangi, *Emancipation of Dalits*, 43.

¹⁵⁰ Zelliott, "The Early Voices of Untouchables:" 77-78.

¹⁵¹ Amulya Mohapatra, Bijaya Mohapatra, *Hinduism: Analytical Study* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1993), 5.

The Shastras are the textbooks of Hinduism.¹⁵² The Dharma Shastras, the Artha Shastras and Kama Shastras are the prominent ones.¹⁵³ Puranas are one of the primary sources for studying the development of Hinduism.¹⁵⁴ Hence, criticising the Vedas, Puranas and Shastras as polluted challenges the fundamental premises of Hinduism.

Chokhamela asserts further that the soul and oversoul are polluted. Oversoul or Brahma, according to Hinduism, is the essence of the universe, immaterial, uncreated, limitless and timeless.¹⁵⁵ Lord Vishnu, the Lord of preservation, is believed to be the transcendental Lord, who watches the universe and would manifest in the world to restore righteousness.¹⁵⁶ Hence, Chokhamela's poem seems to be an assault on Hinduism and further reveal Dalits' epistemology of resistance and the quest for liberation and empowerment in Dalits' worldview. Some Mahars, therefore, consider Chokhamela as a symbol of their assertions and call themselves as Chokhamelas.¹⁵⁷ Saint Karmamela, another poet from the bhakti tradition, also communicates the spirit of protest:

3. 1. 2. 2. 1. 2. Idealising Suffering and Karmamela

Karmamela, Chokhamela's son, was a fourteenth-century poet. The following poem communicates his protest. He challenges the Lord for the "impurity" of Dalits.

You made us impure
I don't know why Lord
We've eaten leftovers all our life
Doesn't that trouble you

¹⁵² Wendy Doniger, *Textual Sources for the Study of Hinduism* (Manchester: Oxford University Press, 1988), 91.

¹⁵³ Ashok S. Chousalkar, *Revisiting the Political Thought of Ancient India: Pre-Kautilyan Arthashastra Tradition* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2018), 47.

¹⁵⁴ Rajendra Chandra Hazra, *Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1987), xiii.

¹⁵⁵ Michael R. Leming, George E. Dickinson, *Understanding Dying, Death, and Bereavement* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2011), 129.

¹⁵⁶ Hiro G. Badlani, *Hinduism: Path of the Ancient Wisdom* (New York: iUniverse, 2008), 88.

¹⁵⁷ Zelliott, "Chokhamela," 217.

Our house is stocked with rice and yoghurt
How do you refuse it?
Chuka's Karma Mela asks
why did you give me birth?¹⁵⁸

Karmamela questions the Lord for being silent when Dalits continue to eat leftovers. His question "why did you give birth?" is piercing and highlights God's role in creating Dalits as untouchables. Such a daring question is a cry for deliverance and highlights the Mahars urge for liberation and empowerment. They were not passively accepting the dominant caste hegemony, as Isiah's suffering servant may suggest in Dalits' context. The same is evident in the songs of Ravidas, another poet from the Bhakti tradition, known as an icon of Dalit consciousness.¹⁵⁹

3. 1. 2. 2. 1. 3. Idealising Suffering and Ravidas

Ravidas was born near Varanasi to an untouchable family.¹⁶⁰ He was a poet and a singer. He is one of the best-known untouchable saint-poets.¹⁶¹ Some Dalits still identify him as a model and call themselves as Ravidasis.¹⁶² He challenged the caste system and anyone who treated another person with disgust and disrespect.¹⁶³

An episode often narrated from Ravidas' life clarifies his discontent to the caste hegemony. A Rajasthani princess wanted to be Ravidas' disciple, and the princess invited

¹⁵⁸ Quoted from Vijay Mishra, *Devotional Poetics and the Indian Sublime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 40.

¹⁵⁹ Joseph Schaller, "Sanskritisation, Caste Uplift and Social Dissidence in the Sant Ravidas Panth," in *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action*, ed. David N. Lorenzen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 94, G.S. Chauhan, *Bani Of Bhagats* (New Delhi: Hemkunt Publishers, 2006), 41, Ronki Ram, *Ravidass Deras and Social Protest: Making Sense of Dalit Consciousness in Punjab (India)*, *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 67, 1344.

¹⁶⁰ Lockard, *Societies, Networks*, 298.

¹⁶¹ Zelliott, "The Early Voices of Untouchables:" 86.

¹⁶² James G. Lochtefeld, *The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Hinduism: N-Z* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2002), 569.

¹⁶³ Neeti M. Sadarangani, *Bhakti Poetry in Medieval India: Its Inception, Cultural Encounter and Impact* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2004), 72.

Ravidas to visit her and arranged a feast in his honour at her palace. The Brahmins objected and demanded that she should honour the caste stipulations and treat Brahmins first accordingly. The princess yielded to Brahmins' demand. However, when the Brahmins sat down to eat, they found a miraculous manifestation of Ravidas in between every two Brahmins. They were humbled and humiliated by Ravidas' magical power and invited him to the feast with them.¹⁶⁴ Such an instance, though its historicity needs to be established further, would have challenged Brahminic hegemony. One of his poems rebukes the Brahmins who tried to sideline him:

Oh well-born of Benaras, I too am born well-known:
My labour is with leather. But my heart can boast of the Lord.¹⁶⁵

Ravidas asserts his dignity even though he belongs to the family of cobblers and attempts to separate caste from birth.¹⁶⁶ He further suggests that caste and occupation do not hinder one from devotion to the Lord. It is to be noted, however, that Ravidas abandoned neither his religion nor his occupation. Perhaps, he considered every caste and occupation as equally dignified. He used Bhakti to challenge the caste system.¹⁶⁷

Hence, Dalits were not accepting suffering like Isaiah's servant. Instead, they used their culture and spirituality as essential locations for constructing and communicating their discontent and their longing for liberation and empowerment. A Kummi song¹⁶⁸ from Tamilnadu folklore tradition also critiques the social structure.

¹⁶⁴ Peter Friedlander, "The Struggle for Salvation in the Hagiographies of Ravidas," in *Myth and Mythmaking: Continuous Evolution in Indian Tradition*, ed. Julia Leslie (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), 111.

¹⁶⁵ Sheela Devi, "Ravidas," in *Poet Saints of India*, eds. M. Sivaramkrishna, Sumita Roy (New Delhi: Sterling Paperbacks, 1998), 85.

¹⁶⁶ Bellwinkel-Schempp, Maren, "From Bhakti to Buddhism: Ravidas and Ambedkar." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2007, June 9, 2182.

¹⁶⁷ Ram, "Ravidass Deras and Social Protest," 1344.

¹⁶⁸ Kummi is a folk dance, popular in Tamil Nadu and Kerala in India.

3. 1. 2. 2. 2. Idealising Suffering in a Kummi Song

Kummi is a folk-dance famous in Kerala and Tamilnadu, danced by women. The term *Kummi* is derived from the word 'Komma,' which means to 'dance with clapping of hands'.¹⁶⁹ This folk dance is thought to have originated when there were no musical instruments.¹⁷⁰ The essential themes in *Kummi* songs are related to the day to day life of Dalit villagers. One such *Kummi* song reads:

A cartload of plantains
Comes from the North
Are we, women
Destined only to cook them?
A cartload of coconuts
Comes from the south
Are we, women
Ill-fated just to cook them¹⁷¹

This song narrates the insecurity and helplessness of women, who lived under the yoke of patriarchy. However, the song, as it stands now does not portray a sense of masochistic acceptance. Instead, it dares to question the practices that dehumanise women. The Pulaya version of the Pottan Theyyam further highlights how Dalits appropriated culture and spirituality as important locations for countering the attempts to reduce them according to caste hierarchy.

3. 1. 2. 2. 3. Idealising Suffering in Pottan Theyyam

The Pulayas are one of the Dalit communities from Kerala. They have worshipped Pottan Theyyam from ancient times.¹⁷² The hymn sung during the worship of

¹⁶⁹ S. C. Bhatt, Gopal K. Bhargava (eds.), *Land and People of Indian States and Union Territories*, Vol. 25 (Dlehi: Kalpaz Publications, 2006), 464.

¹⁷⁰ Carman, Rao, *Christians in South Indian Villages*, 147.

¹⁷¹ James Theophilus Appavoo, *Forklore For Change* (Madurai: T. T. S. Publications, 1986), 66.

¹⁷² Theyyam (Teyyam, Theyyattam or Thira) is a popular ritual form of worship of North Malabar in Kerala, India. This performance is predominant in Kasargod, Kannur, Wayanad and Kozhikode districts of Kerala.

Pottan Theyyam is known as Tottam. The song is a conversation between Chinnappulayan and a Chovar.¹⁷³ This Tottam reaches its climax when Chovar, the taskmaster asks the Chinnappulayan to give way to a dominant caste man.¹⁷⁴ However, the Chinnappulayan hesitated because he had his child on his arm and a pot of toddy on his head. The thorns on the other side of the road prevented him from giving way to the dominant caste traveller.¹⁷⁵ Theophilus Appavoo translates Pulayan's reaction.

“What is that called a Brahmin Women
What is that called an Outcaste
“Is there any number marked
On the skin, On the flesh?
Or on the bones?”
“Is there any difference
Between Brahmin women and Outcaste
During sexual intercourse.”¹⁷⁶

Chinnappulayan criticises the social structure that legitimises Dalit suffering. He further asks why to quarrel over the caste because the same blood gushes out when the body is wounded.¹⁷⁷ Chinnappulayan's critiques are reasonable. He argues that the Pulayan and Chovar may have diverse ways of doing things, but they are both human beings, and they have the same red blood, and they eat the same rice. Pulayan

¹⁷³ Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, “Chinna Pulayan: The Dalit Teacher of Sankaracharya,” in *Doing Theology with the Poetic Traditions of India: Focus on Dalit and Tribal Poems*, ed. Joseph Patmury (Bangalore: PTCA/SATHRI, 1996), 63. Chovar was task master of Dalits during ancient times. Please note that there is a Brahmanized version of this Theyyam where the argument is between a Lord Siva, disguised as Pulayan and Sankarachryan. The Pulayas do not recognise the Brahmanised version.

¹⁷⁴ When the Upper caste nobles came out in public roads, one of their attendants preceded them shouting “Po, Po” (get away, get away) so that they would not be polluted by a lower caste member even by a chance of encounter within the suggested distance. This idea of pollution led to many behavioural patterns. When a lower caste man happens to interact with an Upper caste, they had to observe certain rules like keeping aloof at the prescribed distance in order not to pollute the superior person, removing the clothes covering shoulders or head, using in conversation self-demanding forms of speech with the special expressions and assuming bodily postures.

¹⁷⁵ Ayrookuzhiel, “Chinna Pulayan,” 68.

¹⁷⁶ Appavoo, *Forklore For Change*, 78. I did few editing to make it more appealing. The original translation of Appavoo reads Pennathi for Brahmin women and Parachchi for outcaste women.

¹⁷⁷ Ayrookuzhiel, “Chinna Pulayan,” 69.

further reminds the Chovar how his community has been serving the dominant caste men by supplying them fruits, leaves and flowers.¹⁷⁸

Chinnappulayan claims further that the dominant caste people offer their Deity from the same *Thulsi* planted by the Pulaya community. Chinnappulayan highlights the hypocrisy that relegates a dominant caste person as untouchable but considers his labour as acceptable to the dominant caste gods.¹⁷⁹ Chinnappulayan's philosophical approach to life and criticism against irrational religious practices were part of Dalit life.¹⁸⁰ The Theyyam concludes with an appeal to the Chovar to let the Pulayan live in peace in Wayanadu. The Pottan, the god, is pleased to protect the Pulaya community.¹⁸¹

This study shows that Chinnappulayan was a humanist of Dalits. His arguments were logical, sharp and convincing. Hence, they will penetrate the minds of the hearer. Many more protest movements, which further clarify the element of protest in Dalit contexts and Dalits' counter-assertions against caste hegemony, emerged out of the Dalit community in Kerala. They challenged any model that could promote passive acceptance of suffering. In 1859, the Shanars (Nadars) revolted for the right to cover the bosom of their women like dominant caste women.¹⁸² Later in 1891, Dalits submitted a memorandum to the King of Travancore against systematic exclusion from higher grades of service.¹⁸³ Again in 1896, a mass memorandum signed by 13,176 Ezhavas was

¹⁷⁸ A. Ayyappan, *Social Revolution in a Kerala Village: A Study in Culture Change* (New Delhi: Asia publication house. 1965), 85.

¹⁷⁹ Ayrookuzhiel, "Chinna Pulayan," 68.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. 71.

¹⁸² Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, (Chennai: S. Viswanathan Printers and Publishers, 2005), 396.

¹⁸³ P.K.K. Menon, *The History of Freedom Movement in Kerala (1885- 1938)*, (Thiruvananthapuram: Department of Cultural Publications, 2001), 13.

presented to the King of Travancore, demanding employment for their community in government services and admission for their children in state schools.¹⁸⁴ Such movements further suggest the spirit of protest and longing for liberation and empowerment in Dalits' worldview. The social critique of Narayana Guru, a Dalit reformer of Kerala, is also an essential episode in Dalit assertions.

3. 1. 2. 2. 4. Narayana Guru: A Dalit Social Reformer

The Ezhavas are the most significant Dalit community in Kerala. The dominant castes considered them as untouchables. Narayana Guru (1856 - 1928) was one of the most famous ascetics who emerged from the Ezhavas in the last 100 years. He started his career as a traditional schoolmaster. He taught that there is only one caste and all men belong to the same rank. Further, he asserted that human society is one:

One Caste, One Religion, One God for man
One Womb, One Form, difference herein none.¹⁸⁵

This sweeping statement declares that the men and women of the whole universe belong to the same species and are only different manifestations of one God. The Brahmin and untouchable lower caste, Guru understood, are one in social content, which was a blow to the *Rig Vedic* creation narrative that disconnects Dalits from Brahma and disempowers them in India's caste-ridden society. From such a context, Guru stipulated that "Ask not, speak not, think not of caste."¹⁸⁶ He asserted further that the caste out-caste dichotomy is artificial:

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 17-19.

¹⁸⁵ Quoted from Ravindran, T. K. *Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala: A Study of His Assembly Speeches*, (Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society, 1972), XLIX, See also Nataraja Guru, *Life and Teachings of Narayana Guru* (Sreenivasapuram, India: East-West University Publication, 1990), 273.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

Human nature is essentially one and fundamentally of one single sameness. The idea of dualism or plurality in the nature and race of man is a superimposition on reality by interested parties. Thus, the terms 'Pariah' and 'Brahmin' exist only in imagination. In the light of reason, they are bound to disappear.¹⁸⁷

Narayana Guru further critiqued the caste system based on birth and claimed that birth was not a hindrance in the way of Parasara or Vyasa in their reputation as great sages and teachers.¹⁸⁸ Nataraja Guru, one of the famous disciples of Narayana Guru, explains that Guru wanted to inform the people that Parasara and Vyasa are Pariahs by their birth. However, every Hindu family, irrespective of their caste orientation, celebrates them as ancestors. Nataraja Guru, a prominent disciple of Narayana Guru, explores further and comments that this phenomenon challenges the very notion of the caste system because Parasara and Vyasa come from the much-abused and misunderstood Pariah community and not from the Brahmin stock at all.¹⁸⁹ Nataraja Guru emphasises the ultimate contradiction in adopting the Pariah on the first pedestal as a sage and concludes that "all caste prejudices based on heredity, dynasty and blind tradition must be dispelled and the social atmosphere of the present ultimately and finally cleared of this significant caste-impediment."¹⁹⁰ John Spiers clarifies Guru's conviction further:

as there being only one External Reality, dedicated service to that is the true religion: and since all men are capable of that service, and since all people, all life and all things move and have their existence by that One, all separateness and division into race, caste, colour and creed are nothing but illusion foisted on the minds of men by ignorance and forgetfulness of this sole Universal.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. *Mahabharata*, the great epic of India states "Ekavarnam Idam purvam viswam asid yudhistira Karmakriya viieena caturva-yam pratiathitam." It means that the whole world was originally of one class but later it became divided in to four divisions on account of the specific duties. Please read Servedy Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavat Gita* (Bombay: Blackie and Son Ltd, 1970), 160ff.

¹⁸⁸ Guru, *Life and Teachings of Narayana Guru*, 273.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. 291.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ John Spiers "A Warrior Rshi." *The Life and Teaching of Sree Narayana Guru* (Colombo: Sree Narayana Guru Celebration Committee-1947), 9.

Guru installed a Siva idol at Aruvipuram near Trivandrum for the lower caste people in 1978 to break the religious monopoly of the Brahmins. The inscription in Malayalam in that temple reads:

This is the ideal house
Where all live-in full fraternity
Without distinction of caste or prejudice of creed.¹⁹²

This revolt against Brahmin supremacy in religious and social practices and the practice of not permitting lower caste people to enter and worship in Temples threatened the very foundations of the caste system in Kerala. Such a daring revolt showed that Dalits could not only make offerings to the deity but also consecrate the same god worshipped by dominant caste Hindus. Therefore, this event was challenged by Orthodox Hindus. Guru responded that "I installed not a Brahmin Siva, but an Izhava Siva."¹⁹³

Narayana Guru further instructed that "money received as offerings from devotees should be utilised for the benefit of the poor."¹⁹⁴ The temple envisaged by Narayana Guru was not only spiritually enriching but also was culturally and financially beneficial. Moorkoth Kumaran, a long-time associate of Guru, once commented that the "temples as envisaged by Swami should be such as would enrich the people culturally and financially through their groves, libraries, lecture halls, educational institutions and industrial centres."¹⁹⁵ Guru's contribution is not limited to temple consecration and teaching. He started schools and libraries and admitted pupils irrespective of caste orientations. Speaking at a meeting in Cherai, he remarked in 1912:

¹⁹² G. Priyadarsan, (ed.), *S. N. D. P. Yogam Platinum Jubilee Souvenir* (Quilon: Jubilee Celebration Committee, 1978), 15.

¹⁹³ Balachandran Nair (Ed.), *In Quest of Kerala* (Trivandrum: Access Publications, 1974), 129.

¹⁹⁴ M. K. Sanoo, *Narayana Guru* (Bombay: Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, 1978), 83.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 85.

In our community, only a few have higher education. During the last few years, members of our community have turned their attention to education. This is indeed heartening. Education leads any community to higher standards and therefore if we are interested in the welfare of the community, we have to encourage it. The importance of Sanskrit education is declining gradually. The chief language now is English. Therefore, our attention has to turn towards English. Women also should be educated. They should not be left in the lurch. After education comes industry.¹⁹⁶

Together with education, Guru was alert to the possibilities of industrialisation. He felt that industrialisation is the best option for improving social status and asked the rich to explore the potential of manufacturing and wanted them to go ahead learning new machinery. If they cannot do it alone, he urged them to do so as a company.¹⁹⁷ All these movements, including Chinnappulayan's protest and Guru's reformation attempts –as noted – appropriated culture and spirituality as important locations for Dalits' resistance. Such assertions resisted every form of social exclusion and challenged the attempts to divide the society as friends and foes based upon purity and pollution. It is to be noted that the scholars like Felix Wilfred have also noted similar instances among the subaltern communities like Dalits:

The subalterns who are oppressed and marginalized have always sought in their religious experience and symbols an important means to counter the domination they suffer. In fact, revolutionary and subversive elements are built into their tradition. At particular historical junctures, the energies for the liberation of the subalterns from the dominant religious tradition and its ideological legitimation of power and control are released and set in motion. The subaltern religion goes even further to challenge the cultural, social, political and economic structures.¹⁹⁸

Such instances which narrate Dalits agency, their counter-worldviews, their proposals for an alternative, yet empowering, moral visions and Dalits' willingness to risk their lives in

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. 113.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Felix Wilfred, *The Sling of Utopia* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 147.

fighting for their human rights, have overturned my cultural presuppositions. Also, they offer immense possibilities to undermine, challenge and change the dominant caste history, ethics and worldview. So too, they highlighted some limitations of the dominant paradigms of Dalit theology, which necessitates further interrogation and a hermeneutical switch in Dalit theology along the lines of Dalits' resistance and their counter ontology to the dominant culture, by suggesting a united society bridged through mutually enriching partnerships.

3. 2. Conclusion

Dalit theology, as seen, is a people's theology. It was proposed out of the lived experiences of the pioneers of Dalit theology. However, excessive influence of Latin American and African American theologies upon the conceptual and hermeneutical proposals of the founders of Dalit theology has also estranged the theoretical content of Dalit theology from the Dalit worldview, the counter ontology and epistemology of resistance embedded in the subversive voices in Dalit contexts. From such a background, the present chapter, following the dissenting voices emerged in Dalit theology after 2010, examined the dominant paradigms of Dalit theology, proposed by the founders, to make Dalit theology more relevant to Dalit contexts.

Such an undertaking clarified that the theological content, based on the methodological examples formed in Latin American and African American contexts, does not adequately promote social transformation in the Indian subcontinent. The graded understanding of Dalit pathos, as mentioned, limits the potential of this theology to build broader solidarity with other suffering groups in India and abroad. Furthermore, the image of God suggested by the Deuteronomic creed and Suffering servant paradigms does not

agree with Dalit contexts. So too, Dalits' worldview does not promote binary opposition and Dalits were not accepting sufferings like Isaiah's servant. Some of them, who were compromised by the caste hegemony, as seen, challenged the caste system, which relegated their humanity and used their culture and spirituality as essential locations for constructing and communicating Dalits' counter-history, counter-ethics and counter-worldview. Such instances, which are evident in Dalits' religion, culture and history are minimal in the pathos filled paradigms of Dalit theology. It necessitates further interrogation and a hermeneutical switch along the lines of the subversive voices in Dalit contexts to make Dalit theology more relevant to Dalit contexts. The following chapter will explain how my crossings to Dalit contexts and a biblical paradigm along the lines of the subversive voices in Dalit contexts may open new avenues for Dalit theology.

Chapter 4 My Crossings and Dalit Theology

4. 0. Introduction

Walt Harrington, an award-winning American journalist, is a White man married to a Black woman and father of two mixed-race children. One day, while in a Dentist's surgery, Harrington overheard a casual racist joke. Harrington was disturbed by his own race's misunderstanding of the Blacks and their culture. Harrington decided to travel through "America's parallel black world" to educate himself on America's racial conundrums. *Crossings: A White Man's Journey into Black America* narrates Harrington's 25,000-mile journey through Black America.¹⁹⁹

The present research is a similar enterprise. Its seeds, as clarified in the introduction, were planted in my classroom at the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary. Mor Aphrem's lectures, as indicated, touched me, and I was humbled and humiliated by my misunderstanding of the Dalits' world. It further convinced me that my eyes were not fully opened, and I did not have significant awareness of the Dalit contexts. Therefore, I began to read more about the caste system and its impacts upon the Dalits to educate myself. What I developed, unfortunately, was not a reflective knowledge well informed by an internal dialogue but only a passive awareness of the Dalit contexts.

My encounters with the subversive voices in Dalits' worldview, as will be clarified further, provided an opportunity for an internal dialogue, which advanced my cross-cultural competence, educated me about various mechanisms included in Dalits'

¹⁹⁹ Walt Harrington, *Crossings: A White Man's Journey into Black America* (New York: Harpre Collins Publishers, 1993).

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encounters with and resistance against Hindu Vedic worldview, and guided me through a process of active learning, unlearning and relearning. Further, these experiences have convinced me that Dalits' resistance expressed in cultural ways and historical events highlight Dalits' counter ontology and epistemology of resistance. So too, as seen, there is a dialectical relationship between the dominant caste Hindu Vedic ontology and epistemology, which have been regulating most of the social interactions in the Indian subcontinent, and Dalits' attempts to develop a counter-hegemonic ontology and epistemology. Such instances and undercurrents, however, have played only a minimal role in the pathos-filled paradigms of Dalit theology and such paradigms, therefore, do not attend the liberative voices in Dalits' culture, their spirituality and their hope for a life with dignity. From such a background, this dissertation proposes that Dalit theology needs to develop a paradigm that listens to and learns from Dalits' counter-hegemonic worldview and my encounters with the subversive voices can add another constructive element to the diverse and vibrant field of Dalit theology.

As seen, the subversive voices are important spaces to identify Dalits' epistemology of resistance, counter-worldview and alternative moral visions. Such subjugated knowledges, which had gone unnoticed and unremarked in most cases, demand not only the liberation of Dalits but also reconciliation between Dalits and non-Dalits, aimed at peaceful co-existence as manifestations of every human being. From there, the present chapter proposes that Dalit theology requires a hermeneutical switch that is more sensitive to the epistemology of resistance embedded in the subversive voices in Dalits' contexts and an intertextual dialogue between Dalits' resistance to the caste hegemony and the resistance of the Second Temple community against the

imperial ambitions of the Persian administration narrated through Abraham's crossings can advance Dalit theology. My proposal, however, does not include a one-way affair, from the Bible to the Dalits or the Dalits to the Bible. Instead, it acknowledges the Bible and Dalits' resources as two independent dialogue partners, working together to advance Dalit theology and Dalit Syrian Christian dialogues.

Admittedly, the intertextual reading I am proposing is not entirely new to Dalit theology. Maria Arul Raja, for instance, has already undertaken an inter-textual study of biblical texts and the Dalit world when he juxtaposes two murdered warriors, the Markan Jesus and the South Indian legend, Madurai Veeran,²⁰⁰ who were later transformed into weapons by which the weak could fight their cause.²⁰¹ So too, Rajkumar's proposal for a Dalithos (Dalit ethos) reading of the Markan exorcism narrative (Mark 5:1-20) is another attempt in this direction. Though Rajkumar does not use the term intertextual reading, he appropriates the Markan narrative through some features of Dalits' ethos like pragmatism, the primacy of community and emancipatory demythologisation. Such a conversation between the Dalit ethos and the biblical passage, as Rajkumar highlights, can assist the Dalit theology.²⁰² The intertextual reading I am proposing undertakes a similar task and offers proposals that may advance Dalit theology and Dalit Syrian Christian dialogues.

4. 1. Dalit Theology Based on Dalits' Epistemology of Resistance

Dalit theology addresses the sufferings of the Dalits. However, Dalit theology, as seen, has tended to overlook Dalits' contexts substantially and sought out the biblical

²⁰⁰ Madurai Veeran is a Tamil folk deity popular in southern Tamil Nadu, India.

²⁰¹ A. Maria Arul Raja, "Breaking Hegemonic Boundaries: An Intertextual Reading of the Madurai Veeran Legend and Mark's Story of Jesus," in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the World*, ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), 108.

²⁰² Peniel Rajkumar, "A Dalithos Reading of a Markan Exorcism: Mark 5:1-20" *The Expository Times* 118, No. 9 (2007): 428-435.

paradigms developed in Latin American and African American contexts for inspiration. Such attempts placed the biblical paradigms developed in alien contexts as the dominant self and marginalised the liberative voices in Dalits' worldview, how Dalits' worldview comprehends the world, Dalits, non-Dalits, and underpins the absolutist claims of the caste hegemony to the periphery of Dalit theology. Therefore, I suggest an ongoing dialogue between the Bible and Dalits' counter-formulations to liberate Dalit theology from its alienation from Dalits' worldview and epistemology of resistance. As noted, Dalits' worldview and their epistemology of resistance, aims neither at an isolated Dalit existence nor their dominion over the dominant castes. The poems written by Kapila and Chokhamela, as noted, dreams of a casteless society in communal solidarity, where everyone is equal. Narayana Guru projects oneness of God and oneness of humanity. The following section will further review the subversive voices in Pottan Theyyam, Kabir's poems, Ravidas' poems and the ballad on Nandanar, hoping such reviews might direct this dissertation towards a biblical paradigm relevant to Dalits' counter-formulations and alternate moral visions.

4. 1. 1. Liberative Voices in Pottan Theyyam

The Pottan Theyyam, as we have seen, was a protesting voice from the dominated castes. The introductory prayer in Pottan Theyyam clarifies Dalits' the social vision imagined in Dalits' worldview:

Let the village prosper, the world prosper,
Let the state prosper, the city prosper
Let this one Pandal and the Gate prosper
Let house and pedestal prosper
Let the hall of Ganapathy prosper
Let the four bulls for Saraswathy prosper
Let Ponnar and Poliyan, Manian and Manikandan prosper.²⁰³

²⁰³ Ayrookuzhiel, "Chinna Pulayan," 66.

The prayer is self-explanatory. The prayer, though stems from the perspective of the dominated caste worldview, does not condemn dominant castes. The verb prosper is used seven times in this prayer. However, it is not used in the narrow sense denoting Dalits' prosperity alone. Instead, it envisions the prosperity of the whole universe. The greetings to Saraswathy, for example, are significant. Saraswathy is the goddess of knowledge, music, art, wisdom and learning, venerated by dominant castes. Her name derives from two Sanskrit words *Sara* and *swa*, which mean essence and self, respectively. Hence, *Saraswathy* is the essence of self. The four bulls of Saraswathy are her four hands, which implies the four aspects of human learning namely mind, alertness, ego and intellect.²⁰⁴

The radicalism in the wish “Let the four bulls for Saraswathy prosper” will be apparent if we note that Hindu Vedic epistemology excluded Dalits from learning. Manusmriti, the law book of Hinduism, for instance, decrees that if a dominated caste person “intentionally overhears the Veda chants, he shall have his ears filled with molten tin and dark red pigment.”²⁰⁵ How radical would it be when a dominated caste community who have been systematically refrained from learning wishes prosperity for the goddess of wisdom, worshipped by their oppressors? Such contestations, which highlight some essential features of Dalits' worldview and epistemology of resistance like their courage, openness and their longing for a reconciled society convince me that pathos and victimhood were not the only elements of Dalits' worldview. Instead, they are only two

²⁰⁴ Lasara Firefox Allen, *Jailbreaking the Goddess, A Radical Revisioning of Feminist Spirituality* (Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications, 2016), 152.

²⁰⁵ Quoted from Paswan, Jaideva (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Dalits*, 16.

aspects and Dalits had an alternative, yet empowering, moral visions, which ensured the prosperity of the human race. A similar ethic is evident in the poems of Kabir also.

4. 1. 2. Liberative Voices in Kabir's Poems

Kabir has been one of the revolutionary persons in Indian history.²⁰⁶ He was born in Varanasi into dominated caste weavers. The following passage demonstrates Kabir's absolute commitment to the idea of human equality.²⁰⁷

Pandit, look in your heart for knowledge.
Tell me where untouchability
came from, since you believe in it.
Mix red juice, white juice and air—
a body bakes in a body.
As soon as the eight lotuses
are ready, it comes
into the world. Then what's untouchable?
Eighty-four hundred thousand vessels
decay into dust, while the potter
keeps slapping clay
on the wheel, and with a touch
cuts each one off.
We eat by touching, we wash
by touching, from a touch
the world was born.
So, who's untouched? Asks Kabir.
Only he who has no taint of Maya.
And
It's all one skin and bone
One piss and shit
One blood, one meat
From one drop, a universe.
Who's Brahmin? Who's Shudra?²⁰⁸

The poem is presented as a conversation between Kabir and a Pandit. A Pandit is a Hindu scholar learned in Sanskrit, Hindu philosophy and religion. Kabir's request to

²⁰⁶ Rakesh K. Mittal, *The Power of Positive Words* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 2008), 188.

²⁰⁷ Mendelsohn, Vicziany, *The Untouchables*, 33.

²⁰⁸ Quoted from Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), 193-4, Paul Ghuman, *British Untouchables: A Study of Dalit Identity and Education* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 14.

answer from the heart is nothing but an invitation to denounce Hindu scriptures and knowledge system that communicate dominant caste Vedic worldview, limiting Dalits' life and relegates Dalit body. From such a context, Kabir, using some examples from day to day life, demonstrates the illusoriness of untouchability. He clarifies that all bodies are made from the same essential substances and notes that everything humans do is by touching. Such a daring remark is another instance from Dalits' worldview that challenges the Vedic epistemology and Rig Vedic creation narrative, that relegates Dalit's body and denies transcendence to Dalit body. The questions who is Brahmin and who is Shudra are piercing. They remind collective individual identity and interconnectedness of humanity.

Kabir also uses the word *chutti*, which means, touch, eight times. *Chutti* can also suggest "defiled touch" and untouchability in common usage. Kabir employs all the possible meanings of *Chutti* and suggests that "everything is made in the same way from the same stuff, and Shudras are therefore not polluted in relation to Brahmins."²⁰⁹ Hence, Kabir establishes radical equality, not only of all people but of all substances and interactions.²¹⁰ A Similar openness and an invitation to a shared cultural existence, which are essential aspects of Dalits worldview and ethics, are evident in Ravidas also.

4. 1. 3. Liberative Voices in Ravidas' Poems

As noted, Ravidas challenged the social structure that dehumanises the dominated castes. *Adi Granth*, a poem by Ravidas, challenges the caste system. The poem claims:

A family that has a true follower of the Lord
Is neither high caste nor low caste, lordly or poor.

²⁰⁹ Linda Hess, "Kabir's Rough Rhetoric," in *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*, eds. Karine Schomer, W. H. McLeod (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), 156-157.

²¹⁰ David C. Scott, "The Rough Rhetoric of Kabir," in *Doing Theology with the Poetic Traditions of India*, ed. Joseph Patmury (Bangalore: PTCA, 1996), 49.

The world will know it by its fragrance.
Priests or merchants, labourers or warriors,
halfbreeds, outcastes, and those who tend cremation fires -
their hearts are all the same.
He who becomes pure through the love of the Lord
exalts himself and his family as well.²¹¹

Ravidas challenges the caste system and argues that a person can transcend the limitations of the caste system by following the Lord. He implies that the dominated castes and the dominant castes are all, but the same and the world would know a person who follows the Lord irrespective of his caste. Ravidas further preaches a religion of love which would unite the entire humanity. Hence, Ravidas' challenge did not aim at an isolated existence of the dominated castes or their dominion over the dominant castes but a union between dominated castes and the dominant castes. Such a shared cultural ethic, as noted above, is crucial to Dalits' worldview and it demands not only the liberation of dominated castes but also reconciliation between dominated castes and dominant castes. *The Ballad on Nandanar*, a Saivite saint from Tamilnadu, also highlights that everyone receives God's grace irrespective of caste distinction.

4. 1. 4. Liberative Voices in the Ballad on Nandanar

The Ballad on Nandanar is an elaborate story of Nandanar based on *Periyapuranam*, which was composed in the 12th century AD. Nandanar belonged to the Paraiya caste, categorised as untouchable in Tamilnadu, India. The poem is a self-recollection. The ballad asks:

Will even the Paraiyan Nandanar receive *mukthi*?
Four Vedas and Sastras do not say that low caste will not receive mukthi!
Body which roasted and ate, crabs and snails
Wants to have the vision of Siva who dances
Which is the path to be followed?
Only the Lord Siva knows the path.

²¹¹ Quoted from Zelliott, "The Early Voices of Untouchables," 92.

Soul who does not long to go to Chidambaram is a sinner
Now my soul is placeless without seeing the Lord!²¹²

Nandanar examines his worthiness to attain *Mukthi* (salvation).²¹³ Nandanar worries whether a Paraiyan can attain *mukthi*. As Annie notes, Nandanar has internalised the caste system and did not question it in the beginning. However, he gradually dares to question it because his soul is restless without having a vision of Siva, and he questions the religious system because of his spiritual aspirations.²¹⁴ Nandanar finds that four Vedas and Sastras do not deny *mukthi* to the dominated castes. Such a conviction is liberative, and, it can empower dominated castes to fight against the caste system.

There is a transition from particularity to universalism in this poem. The poem starts with the suffering of Paraiyars. However, Nandanar transcends the boundaries of the caste structure and concludes that the soul which does not desire for the Lord is the sinner. The soul is an inclusive term, not limited to a caste order. It can denote dominant castes and dominated castes. What Nandanar attempts, I think, was to unite the society through devotion to the Lord and to envision a society reconciled through the Lord.

Perhaps, drawing inspirations from the counter-formulations against dominant caste ontology and epistemology expressed through the inclusive voices in Dalit contexts and their counter-hegemonic worldview and the epistemology of resistance may help Dalit theology. Such voices, as seen from the noted examples, clarify that Dalits are not mere victims and they have more to offer than just pathos. For example, as seen, Pottan Theyyam narrates the story of Dalits' resistance and remains as an active account of

²¹² Quoted from W. S. Annie, "Nandanar: The Dalit Martyr," in *Doing Theology with the Poetic Traditions of India: Focus on Dalit and Tribal Poems*, ed. Joseph Patmury (Bangalore: PTCA, 1996), 173.

²¹³ Ibid. 172.

²¹⁴ Ibid. 175.

Dalits' recalcitrance, offering an alternative worldview that challenges the caste system. Kabir and Ravidas, as clarified, suggest radical equality of all people and substances, while Nandanar attempts to unite society through devotion to the Lord. They call not only for the liberation of Dalits but also suggest a radical reconciliation between Dalits and non-Dalits. Such an orientation can advance Dalit theology and develop Dalit and Syrian Christian dialogues.

In a similar but African American context, Dwight N. Hopkins explains that the liberation of Black people as a stepping-stone to reconciliation with White people. Liberation of Blacks, Hopkins clarifies, should serve as an intermediate measure toward reconciliation.²¹⁵ Hopkins clarifies further that, reconciliation in African contexts means, that Black freedom does not deny White humanity but meets Whites on equal grounds.²¹⁶ My encounter with the Dalits' contexts, as noted, convinced me that a similar demand is evident in Dalit culture and spirituality. It challenges the Dalit researchers developing a biblical paradigm, that respects Dalits' subversive manoeuvres, their assertions against unjust social structures expressed in cultural ways and historical events, their worldviews and counter- formulations.

4. 1. 5. Moving Forward Searching Reconciliation

As seen, there are multiple layers of thought, resistance, pathos, agency and social vision carefully crafted, often subversively, into Dalits' counter-worldviews and epistemology of resistance. Such undercurrents are significant directives and demand

²¹⁵ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Black Theology USA and South Africa: Politics, Culture, and Liberation* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 48.

²¹⁶ Dwight N. Hopkins, "A Dialogue in Black Theology: Black Theology of Liberation," in *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies*, eds. David Lamont Paulsen and Donald W. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007), 354.

that the liberation of the Dalits and the reconciliation between liberated Dalits and non-Dalits should be the twin goals of Dalit theology. The reconciliation, Dalits' worldview and epistemology of resistance propose, is not an alternative to liberation or pursuing justice. So too, the reconciliation does not mean compromise that distracts from true liberation or passive acceptance of suffering.²¹⁷ What Dalits' context suggests is not a dichotomy (liberation or reconciliation) or a hierarchical explication between liberation and reconciliation also, but a conscious blending between liberation and reconciliation, where Dalits liberated from caste oppression engage in mutually enriching partnerships with non-Dalits, as two dignified communities.²¹⁸ There could be some reservations against such a proposal. The following section clarifies further that Dalit contexts demand such an openness realised through mutually enriching partnerships.

4. 1. 5. 1. Liberation and Reconciliation in Dalit Contexts

As noted, my encounters with the subversive voices have been liberating. They, as will be clarified further, convince me that liberation and reconciliation are important aspects of Dalits' worldview. The conversation between Chinnappulayan and the taskmaster, for example, clarifies:

We planted a plantain tree
In the rubbish heap
With the fruit thereof
You make offering to god.
Yes, we planted a Tulasi
In the rubbish heap
With the same Tulasi
You make offerings to god.
Why then distinctions

²¹⁷ David Tombs, "The Theology of Reconciliation and the Recovery of Memory Project in Guatemala," in *Explorations in Reconciliation: New Directions in Theology*, eds. David Tombs and Joseph Liechty (London: Routledge, 2016), 97.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.* 98.

Between us.²¹⁹

Chinnappulayan accuses the dominant caste taskmaster. His arguments, as seen, echoed his longing for freedom from exploitation. However, Chinnappulayan is not merely ridiculing his opponent or suggesting an isolated Dalit existence. Instead, Chinnappulayan, based on his reasoning, questions the legitimacy of caste distinctions. Pulayan's question "why then distinctions between us?" was not a threat or a compromise but an invitation to come together in peace and harmony, denouncing differences. So too, Chinnappulayan reminds some mutually enriching partnerships existed previously:

We ploughed seven times
With the yoke that is Ganapathy
And plough-shaft that is Saraswathy
We sowed the wet land Vayanadon,
No seed is needed, no nurture needed
The wet lands yield a good crop
By itself.²²⁰

The poem denotes an agricultural society, where different people have different roles. The images of Ganapathy and Saraswathy, dominant caste Deities, as the yoke and ploughshare were significant since they were essential tools in ancient agricultural societies. The symbolism of Ganapathy and Saraswathy working together with dominated castes suggests collaborations between deities of the dominant castes and the dominated caste people. Chinnappulayan narrates the vitality of such associations and comments further that no seed was needed, and no nurture was needed. The wet lands, Pulayan clarifies, yield good crops by themselves. Such extraordinary results, when analysing against the social contexts of Pottan Theyyam, illustrates Dalit visions of a liberated-

²¹⁹ Ayrookuzhiel, "Chinna Pulayan," 69.

²²⁰ Ibid. 67.

reconciled society connected through mutually enriching partnerships. The following section explains how my crossings can benefit this research.

4. 1. 5. 1. 1. My Crossings: Another Path for Dalit Theology

The Dalits' worldview and epistemology of resistance, as seen through the subversive voices, include liberation and reconciliation in the fragile caste contexts. As a Christian, I have been aware of liberation and reconciliation, which are central to Christian theology, from my early childhood. However, my understandings, unfortunately, overlooked the horizontal dimension of reconciliation and emphasised vertical dimension (God-Human/Jesus-Christian). Such overlooking failed me considerably and, as clarified, there were instances when I neglected my Dalit friends. For example, one of my Dalit classmates accidentally took my lunchbox and opened it, when I was a schoolboy. After realising the mistake, he handed over the lunchbox instantly without eating from it. Though I accepted the lunchbox, I chose not to eat from that lunchbox anymore and forced my Dad to buy me another lunchbox.

To be frank, this incident did not bother me much in my school life. However, my encounters with the liberation and reconciliation ethics along the horizontal axis in Dalits' assertions, which emphasise Dalits and non-Dalits like Syrian Christians as agents and messengers of liberation and reconciliation, influenced me much and I began to ask further questions. Such internal dialogues proved my cruelty to an innocent classmate. Perhaps, drawing imperatives from similar instances, which clarify the thrust towards liberated-reconciled society, bridged through mutually enriching partnerships, embedded in Dalit contexts, may reorient Dalit theology and Dalit Syrian Christian partnerships. Partnerships have incredible potential to reconcile Dalits with non-Dalits, including Syrian

Christians. James H. Olthuis, for instance, explains how associations can facilitate attunement of expression and recognition using the diverse needs of each people.²²¹ The aim of such relationships, Olthuis suggests, “is not to eradicate, accommodate, suppress, or repress difference, but to allow contact with a difference to move, enhance, and change.”²²² This openness is vital in Dalit contexts also. Dalits belong to various religious affiliations since India has an extraordinary heterogeneity.²²³ In such a context, mutual partnerships will help Dalits and the dominant castes to work together for a liberated-reconciled Church and society.

Nevertheless, I foresee some reservations to my proposal from Indian academics, who are sensitive to the Dalit concerns. For example, Reverend Fr Shibu Cherian, my professor at Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary and a student of Arvind Nirmal, after reading the draft form of this dissertation, expressed his reservations to the proposed cross-cultural partnerships.

The cross-cultural relationship you propose is something very difficult to achieve and the dominant caste people won't accept such a collaboration. The dominant caste people are very rich and powerful. The Dalits, on the other hand, are weak, poor and downtrodden. How can there be a meaningful relationship between them?

Fr. Shibu's concerns are valid, and they represent the dominant view among Dalit theologians. However, my crossings to Dalits' contexts through the subversive manoeuvres, convince me that the subversive voices require an openness to diversities

²²¹ James H. Olthuis, “Face to Face: Ethical asymmetry or the Symmetry of Mutuality?” in *Knowing otherwise: Philosophy at the threshold of Spirituality*, ed. James H. Olthuis (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 147.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Vasuki Nesiah, “Federalism and Diversity in India,” in *Autonomy and Ethnicity: Negotiating Competing Claims in Multi-Ethnic States*, ed. Yash Ghai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 53, Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 157, Pradeep Sharma, *Human Geography: The Land* (New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 2007), 12-13.

and envision a liberated-reconciled society bridged through mutually enriching collaborations. My crossings to Dalit contexts, which, began in my Seminary influenced me significantly and the epistemology of resistance and protest among Dalits and their longing for a casteless society, I believe, have much to offer to Dalit theology and developing Syrian Christian interactions.

From such a context, this dissertation proposes an intertextual dialogue between the resistance of the Second Temple community to the imperial ambitions of the Persian empire and the resistance of the Dalits against caste hegemony. Such a move acknowledges the spirit of resistance and protest among Dalits expressed in cultural expressions and historical events and the protesting spirit among the Second Temple community, expressed through various narratives like Abraham's crossings to Egypt and Gerar. Such a conversation, it is hoped, can help Christians living in India's pluralistic society to build up new relationships with their neighbours of other faiths.

4. 2. Abraham's Postcolonial Crossings as a Paradigm

As seen, Dalit culture and Dalit spirituality have been important locations for developing and transmitting Dalits' resistance and counter-ontology. The richness and wisdom embedded in such subjugated knowledges are incredible, and they offer clues to challenge and subvert the caste discourses. The liberation and reconciliation ethic in Dalit resources do not divide the society but demand the liberation of Dalits from the dominant castes and reconciliation between Dalits and dominant caste people. The epistemology of Dalits resistance does not include the attempts to reduce their oppressors according to Dalit categories. They envisioned a society that promotes liberation and reconciliation. Reconciliation, however, was not a compromise, but a conscious attempt towards a social

order in great brotherhood. Such a spirituality and culture submerged in the subversive voices in Dalits' contexts, as illustrated, necessitates further interrogation in developing a biblical paradigm that respects Dalits' assertions for a liberated-reconciled society, bridged through mutual partnerships. Such an approach can offer a constructive element within Dalit contexts, with the possibility of bridging the liberative voices in Dalit contexts with Dalit theology.

From such a background, I will analyse how an intertextual dialogue between the counter-colonial hegemony in Abraham's crossings to Egypt (Genesis 12:10-20) and Gerar (Genesis 20) and the counter-caste hegemony in the subversive voices in Dalits' contexts offer fresh, dialogical perspectives.²²⁴ However, this does not mean that Abraham is without blemishes. There are some episodes in his life that narrate his indifference to the least and the lost. The moral and ethical issues in how he used Hagar, an innocent foreign maid, as a surrogate mother after yielding to Sarah's persuasion, for instance, is questionable (Gen. 16:1-4). His rejection of Hagar without any compelling reason narrates his moral weakness (Gen. 16:5-6). The near-sacrifice of Isaac is also perplexing (Gen. 22). There may be other instances of failures in Abraham's life. However, those blemishes in his life do not invalidate the vitality of his virtues and Abraham's crossings, as will be explained, will help Indian Christian denominations to overcome the barriers that exist in inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit relationships.

The image of God who emerges out of the Abraham narrative is more in line with the image of God this dissertation identified in the worship of Pochamma Devi. Abraham's dialogue with Yahweh (Gen 19:30-38) and, Yahweh's dining at Abraham's tent (Gen 18:1-

²²⁴ Chapter 4 will explain how this paradigm suits Dalit theology.

15), for example, narrates how Yahweh is intimately bonded to Abraham. Yahweh's apparition before Pharaoh (Gen 12:10-20) and Abimelech (Gen 20:3), as will be explained later, show that Yahweh was available to all irrespective of their national and tribal associations. Similarly, Abraham's crossings, as will be clarified, highlight Yahweh as a liberator and an author of reconciliation, which would be liberating in Dalit contexts, recognising how the subversive voices in Dalit contexts envision a liberated-reconciled society. Furthermore, Abraham narrated, in the book of Genesis, was like most of the Dalits, a landless man who had no burial ground for his wife. I will make my arguments further in the following chapter.

4. 3. Conclusion

The present chapter analysed how my crossings to Dalit contexts can offer fresh perspectives to Dalit theology. As seen, Dalit culture and spirituality demand a hermeneutical switch and a biblical paradigm that is more sensitive to Dalits' worldview, their pathos, ethos, vision and discontent towards Brahminic hegemony and the concepts of purity and pollution. Chokhamela, Karmamela, Ravidas, Pottan Theyyam, Kummi song and Narayana Guru, as seen, communicate some essential aspects of Dalits' worldview like longing for unity, liberation, empowerment and reconciliation.

Such dissenting voices demand a biblical paradigm that suits the liberative voices in Dalit contexts, empowering Dalits to break the barriers of the caste system and provide a vision for a liberated reconciled society in pluralistic contexts. Therefore, I suggest an intertextual dialogue between the counter-colonial formulations in Abraham's crossings and the counter Hindu Vedic hegemony in the subversive voices in Dalits' contexts to redress cross-cultural disconnects in Dalit theology. My proposal, however, needs further

clarifications, and therefore, chapter 5 will propose how and why Abraham's postcolonial crossings can be an essential paradigm for Dalit theology.

Chapter 5 Abraham's Postcolonial Crossings as a Paradigm

5. 0. Introduction

During a visit to Peru, Pope John Paul II received an open letter from various Peruvian indigenous movements, which stated:

John Paul II, we, Andean and American Indians, have decided to take advantage of your visit to return to you your Bible, since in five centuries it has not given us love, peace or justice.

Please, take back your Bible and give it back to our oppressors, because they need its moral teachings more than we do. Ever since the arrival of Christopher Columbus, a culture, a language, religion and values which belong to Europe have been imposed on Latin America by force.

The Bible came to us as part of the imposed colonial transformation. It was an ideological weapon of this colonial assault. The Spanish sword which attacked and murdered the bodies of the Indians at night became the cross which attacked the Indian soul.¹

What was their problem? Why did they propose to return the Bible? Indeed, the indigenous delegation was not questioning the Bible. They knew that the values of the Bible could transform their colonisers. Ultimately, they were challenging how the Bible had been interpreted by their colonisers to justify the post-Columbus (1492) settlements and mass killings of the native populations in Latin America.²

What has this to do with Dalit theology? The delegation was challenging the discursive and cultural formations of colonialism that had superimposed European culture, language, religion and worldview upon Peruvian indigenous communities, which displaced indigenous culture and worldview to the margins. So too, they were demanding

¹Pablo Richard, "1492: The Violence of God and the Future of Christianity," In *1492-1992: The Voice of the Victims*, eds. Leonardo Boff and Virgilio Elizondo (London: SCM, 1990), 66.

² Ibid, Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching: Decolonizing Preaching the Pulpit as Postcolonial Space* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014), 109, Willard M. Swartley, "The Bible in Society," in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible: Volume 4, From 1750 to the Present*, ed. John Riches (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 636.

a reading from the margins that promotes a more humane and cross-cultural hermeneutic, recognising the brother and the neighbour in the religious, cultural and ethnic others. A similar discontent, as observed, was one of the main reasons for the emergence of Dalit theology. Dalit Christian academics, who were dissatisfied with caste hegemony, perceived that Indian Christian theology and the Church did not address the caste system from a Dalit perspective, but instead re-affirmed the ideologies of the dominant caste Indian Christians through various compromises.³ Therefore, Dalit researchers demanded a hermeneutical switch from Sanskritic obsession to Dalit pathos that could transcend the caste hegemony in Indian Christian theology. However, their move had some limitations since Dalit theology followed the hermeneutical examples of liberation theologies that had developed in predominantly Christian contexts.

The methodological and conceptual dependence upon liberation theologies, as seen, alienated Dalit theology from the alternative moral visions, the liberation and reconciliation ethic in the subversive manoeuvres in Dalits' worldview; and injected a predominantly biblical worldview developed in Latin American and African American contexts as a dominant self at the centre of Dalit theology. This dissertation, therefore, suggests a hermeneutical switch and a reading from the margins, which honours Dalits' counter-formulations, longing for a liberated-reconciled society, envisioned in Dalits' worldview, to bridge the cross-cultural and cross-religious divides in Dalit theology. From such a background, I argue that an intertextual reading of Dalits' counter formulations against caste hegemony and the counter-assertions of the Second Temple community to the Persian empire narrated through Abraham's postcolonial crossings can liberate Dalit

³ Surekha Nelavala, *Liberation Beyond Borders: Dalit Feminist Hermeneutics and Four Gospel Women*, (New Jersey: Drew University, 2008), 9.

theology out of its cross-cultural discontinuities. A postcolonial reading of the Abraham narrative, however, needs further clarification since there is a long gap between the Abraham narrative and the emergence of postcolonial theory. Therefore, the present chapter will clarify the basic premises of postcolonial criticism, hoping to establish the validity of the proposed reading and how such a reading can uncover the resistance of the Second Temple community.

5. 1. Postcolonial Criticism

Postcolonial criticism is an intellectual response from the formerly colonised communities out of their sufferings under the continuing effects of colonialism.⁴ It surveys various social and ideological mechanisms of the colonialists and interrogates how colonialism has reshaped the coloniser as well as the colonised.⁵ Postcolonial studies were popularised after the publication of Edward Said's (1935-2003) critique of the Western representations of the East as depicted in his book *Orientalism*.⁶ In this influential work, the Palestinian author unmasks how the colonial discourse constructs Europe as the dominant self at the centre and the colonised as the dominated self at the periphery. This reality of colonialism and its continuing impact on the perceptual framework of subjugated cultures and peoples are primary resources for postcolonial inquiry.⁷ Likewise,

⁴ Chris Shannahan, *Voices from the Borderland: Re-Imagining Cross-Cultural Urban Theology in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2016), 37, Zuzana Klimova, "The Social Function of Postcolonial Theories," in *Cultural Difference and Social Solidarity: Solidarities and Social Function*, eds. Scott H. Boyd, Mary Ann Walter (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 80, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 2002), 2.

⁵ Stephen D. Moore, "What is postcolonial studies? Paul after empire," in *The Colonized Apostle: Paul through Postcolonial Eyes*, ed. Stephen D. Moore (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 4.

⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin Books, 1978).

⁷ Bill Ashcroft, "Post-colonial Horizons," in *(In)fusion Approach: Theory, Contestation, Limits: (In)fusionising a Few Indian English Novels*, ed. Ranjan Ghosh (Lanham: University Press of America, 2006), 73-76.

it attempts to ensure that the sufferings of the poor take primacy over the interests of the wealthy and highlights the resistance of the colonised towards the colonising strategies of Britain, France, and America.⁸ This reading strategy searches textual indications for colonial ideologies and investigates how these texts approve or disapprove of the establishment.⁹ Further, it examines various associations between the insider and outsider and societies and cultures, wrestling with questions of identity and representation.¹⁰ Such an optic uncovers some of the underrepresented voices from the margins, unmasking colonial epistemological frameworks and decodes Eurocentric logics and interrogates stereotypical cultural representations.¹¹

Postcolonial criticism, as noted, is a literary critique of Western Imperialism. When aligned against British expansionism, it has been called Commonwealth study also.¹² The Eurocentric view of postcolonial criticism can challenge my attempt to read Abraham narrative through a postcolonial optic if the postcolonialism is defined in historical terms referring only to the societies liberated from European governance.¹³ Can we explain the

⁸ R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Biblical Studies in India: From Imperialistic Scholarship to Postcolonial Interpretation," in *Teaching the Bible: The Discourses and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy*, eds. F. F. Segovia and M. A. Tolbert (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 283, John McLeod, "Introduction," in *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. John McLeod (London: Routledge, 2007), 10.

⁹ Ibid., See also Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia, "Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Beginnings, Trajectories, Intersections" in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, ed. Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 1-22; R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: History, Method, Practice* (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012); R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006).

¹⁰ R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 123.

¹¹ Matthew Liebmann and Uzma Z. Rizvi, *Archaeology and the Postcolonial Critique* (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2008), 9, Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2005), 2.

¹² Stephen Selmon, "The Scramble for Post-Colonialism," in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 2004), 51.

¹³ Susan VanZanten Gallagher, "Mapping the Hybrid World: Three Postcolonial Motifs", *Semeia* 75, 1996, 230.

Abrahamic narrative using the tools developed for studying modern empires?¹⁴ What does the “postcolonial” in “postcolonial biblical criticism” mean? The Eurocentric and Anglocentric aspect of postcolonialism, however, is not an uncontested position. Timothy Brennan, for instance, clarifies that the Persians, Macedonians, Romans, Mongols, Mughals and Ottomans had great empires.¹⁵ Ultimately, there were many ancient empires, and it is not reasonable to limit postcolonial studies to the modern era alone.

5. 1. 1. “Postcolonial” in Postcolonial Criticism

As noted, the Postcolonial study is commonly understood methodologically and conceptually as either a Eurocentric or Anglocentric reading strategy. However, colonisation is not a modern phenomenon and colonialism, and deterritorialization has existed throughout history.¹⁶ Sadly, as Warren Carler and others remark, postcolonial scholars have often overlooked the colonial strategies of the ancient empires and limited the scope of their studies to European expansions.¹⁷ Such a situation requires scholars to redress the mistake by attending to ancient kingdoms and their colonial manoeuvrings in Africa, Asia and the Americas.¹⁸ Further, as John Marshall warns, the narrative of the

¹⁴ John W. Marshall discusses the relevance of studying ancient empires using the tools developed by postcolonial studies. See John W. Marshall, "Postcolonialism and the Practice of History," in *Her Masters Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse*, ed. Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 98.

¹⁵ Timothy Brennan, "From Development to Globalisation: Postcolonial Studies and Globalisation Theory" in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, ed. Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 135.

¹⁶ Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 48.

¹⁷ Warren Carler, "Postcolonial Biblical Criticism," in *Recent Approaches to Biblical Criticism and their Applications*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and John Kaltner (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2013), 101. Fernando F. Segovia, "Mapping the Postcolonial Optic in Biblical Criticism: Meaning and Scope," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, eds. Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia, (London: Clark, 2005), 23-78; R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Empire: Postcolonial Explorations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁸ Jeremy Punt "Discerning Empire in Biblical Studies: Tools of the Trade," *The New Testament in the Graeco-Roman World: Articles in Honour of Abe Malherbe*, eds. Marius Nel, Jan G. van der Watt and Fika J. van Rensburg (Zurich: Lit Verlag GmbH & Co. KG Wein), 213; Barbara Bush, *Imperialism and*

birth of postcolonial analysis should not set the limit on the theory's application.¹⁹ Thus, the postcolonial in postcolonial studies does not exclusively mean western empires only but includes the ancient empires and present ongoing injustices linked with colonial time.

Such openness to diverse possibilities reoriented biblical hermeneutics. Musa W. Dube and others, for instance, suggest that Israel's subjugation by the Babylonian, Persian, Syrian, Greek and Roman empires was part of colonial expansionism.²⁰ Similarly, Sugirtharajah, after inquiring into the impacts of colonialism upon the composition of biblical narratives, claims that the military interests of Israel and the need to respond to the military demands of Egypt, Assyria, Persia, and Rome shaped the biblical narratives.²¹ Hence, biblical texts can be a resource for studying nationalism, ethnicity, deterritorialization, multiple identities and citizenship.²² From such a background, scholars analyse the Bible as a work of literature, noting how many of its authors lived under the influence of colonial strategies.

5. 1. 2. Postcolonial Biblical Criticism

Postcolonial studies began to inspire biblical scholars in the 1990s.²³ It concentrates on rereading biblical texts against their colonial contexts by questioning the

Postcolonialism (London: Routledge, 2014), 6, Jean-Pierre Ruiz, "An Exile's Baggage: Toward a Postcolonial Reading of Ezekiel," in *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period*, ed. Jon L. Berquist (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 124.

¹⁹ Marshall, "Postcolonialism and the Practice of History," 98.

²⁰ Theodore W. Jennings, Jr. and Tat -Siong Benny Liew, "Narrativizing Empire in the Biblical World," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 509, Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 48.

²¹ R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Post Colonialism: Contesting Interpretations* (Mary Knoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 19.

²² Ibid, R. S. Sugirtharajah, "A Brief Memorandum on Postcolonialism and Biblical Studies," *JSNT* 73 (1999), 5.

²³ Jeremy Punt, *Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation: Reframing Paul* (Boston: Brill, 2015), 1, Ingeborg Mongstad-Kvammen, *Toward a Postcolonial Reading of the Epistle of James: James 2:1-13 in its Roman Imperial Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 5, Uriah Y. Kim, "Postcolonial Criticism: Who is the Other in the Book of Judges?" in *Judges and Methods: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale H Yee (Minneapolis:

role of the Bible in the imperial cause and the extent to which biblical narratives communicate colonial assumptions.²⁴ Such a reading provides the theoretical and conceptual framework within which the originating colonial contexts of the biblical writings can be studied.²⁵ There are two essential proposals in postcolonial biblical studies. One of them analyses how the Bible has been interpreted to support or challenge the ideology, activities, and institutions of colonialism.²⁶ Musa Dube, Pui-lan Kwok, Janet Wooten, Sarah Travis and Uriah Y. Kim, for example, convincingly argue that the Bible had authorised the subjugation of foreign nations and lands historically down to the present.²⁷ The Exodus-conquest account, among other texts in the Bible, has been used to legitimise the "barbaric behaviour" of colonisers over the past 2,000 years.²⁸ Such is not, however, the entire story. There are many instances of the formerly colonised people interpreting the Bible to challenge the legacy of colonialism, too.²⁹

The second approach evaluates how the colonialism influenced the composition, editing, and transmission of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.³⁰ This reading is a

Fortress Press, 1995), 165, Kwok Pui-lan, "Making the Connections: Postcolonial Studies and Feminist Biblical Interpretation" in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 46.

²⁴ R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: History, Method, Practice* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 171, Eryl W. Davies, *Biblical Criticism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 82.

²⁵ Louis C. Jonker, *Defining All-Israel in Chronicles* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 36.

²⁶ Christopher D. Stanley, "Introduction," in *The Colonized Apostle: Paul through Postcolonial Eyes*, ed. Christopher D. Stanley (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2011), 4.

²⁷ Musa W. Dube, "Toward a Post-Colonial Feminist Interpretation," in *Semeia* 78 (1997), 11-25:15, Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 61, Janet Wooten, "Who's Been Reading MY Bible? Post-Structuralist Hermeneutics and Sacred Text," in *Post-Christian Feminisms: A Critical Approach*, ed. Dr Kathleen McPhillips, Professor Lisa Isherwood (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), 80-81, Uriah Y. Kim, "Is There an "Anticonquest" Ideology in the Book of Judges," in *Postcolonialism and the Hebrew Bible: The Next Step*, ed. Roland Boer (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 112-113.

²⁸ Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, 287, Kim, "Is There an "Anticonquest" Ideology," 113.

²⁹ See Robert Beckford, *Jesus Dub: Theology, Music and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2006), 83ff.

³⁰ Stanley, "Introduction," 5.

historical-critical enterprise, which considers how the social and cultural environment of empires work within the biblical compositions and evaluate the colonial contexts of the biblical narratives.³¹ Hence, biblical narratives, according to postcolonial biblical studies, are not neutral or disinterested objective or aesthetic discourses, but instead, are narratives immensely influenced by the imperial contexts of their composition.³² So too, Carolyn J. Sharp and Dube, clarify that the scribes of Israel and Judah, whose national interests were compromised by either the threat of military subjugation or colonisation by Assyria, Babylon or Persia, produced the Hebrew Scriptures, and such narratives could be impregnated with colonialist rhetoric and fantasies of empire, reflecting the pressure experienced by Israel to endorse, resist or accommodate imperial powers.³³ Hence, a reading from the margins on the production of the biblical texts can help to reclaim many of the subversive voices in them. Without denying the validity of the former reading, I believe an unveiling of the colonising techniques narrated in the biblical texts makes a postcolonial reading of Genesis 12:10-20 and Genesis 20 relevant to contemporary readers in India.

Thus, a postcolonial reading of Abraham's boundary crossings is a legitimate task.³⁴ It will help to understand how Genesis 12:10-20 and Genesis 20 have been interpreted to support or challenge colonialism and how the colonialism of the ancient world might have shaped these narratives. These narratives might have been misused to support colonialism, and so, a critical evaluation of the history of abuse is worth pursuing.

³¹ Bradley L. Crowell, "Postcolonial Studies and the Hebrew Bible," *Currents in Biblical Research* 7:2 (2009): 220.

³² Simon Samuel, *A Postcolonial Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (London: T & T Clarke, 2007), 10.

³³ Carolyn J. Sharp, *Wrestling the Word: The Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Believer* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2010), 126-127, Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 48.

³⁴ Jean-Pierre Ruiz, "Exile's Baggage, 124.

However, I suggest that a postcolonial reading of its imperial context of composition, editing and transmission of Abraham's crossings may be more illuminating to the Dalit background since such a strategy will help us uncover the resistance to colonial hegemony and alternative moral visions, skilfully embedded in these narratives.

5. 2. Postcolonial Reading of the Abraham Narrative

Many postcolonial interpretations have already projected Abraham as a coloniser.³⁵ Certainly, there are traits of a coloniser within the character of Abraham.³⁶ What else can designate a person who was entrusted to go to unknown territory to inherit it? Israel Kamudzandu, for example, named "Abraham as a coloniser who believes he may rightly travel to, enter, kill, and possess resources and lands that belong to foreign nations."³⁷ Similarly, the characterisation of Abraham, especially the promises to him, has been extensively used to support modern colonialism. As Obvious Vengeyi notes, some colonisers understood themselves as actualising the promise given to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3).³⁸ Therefore, peripheral and thematic interpretations of the Abraham narrative, as noted above, may invalidate any attempt to find anti-colonial elements in this document.

However, as argued in the previous chapter, such blemishes in his life do not comprehensively refute the vitality of the virtues in his life. Further, studying this narrative against its composition and transmission history, as explained above, might uncover the anti-colonial elements submerged in this narrative. Such an undertaking will help us to

³⁵ Yvonne Sherwood, "The Hagaramic and the Abrahamic; or Abraham the Non-European," in *Reading the Abrahamic Faiths: Rethinking Religion and Literature*, ed. Emma Mason (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 30.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Israel Kamudzandu, *Abraham as Spiritual Ancestor: A Postcolonial Zimbabwean Reading of Romans 4*, 146

³⁸ Obvious Vengeyi, *Aluta Continua Biblical Hermeneutics for Liberation: Interpreting Biblical Texts on Slavery for Liberation of Zimbabwean Underclasses* (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2013), 23.

place this episode in its colonial context. My attempt to reread the Abraham narrative does not discredit other reading strategies. As a complex text, the Abraham narrative can be studied from various angles, depending on the choices and convictions of the interpreter. My recent article published in *Vidyajyoti Journal*, for instance, discusses the promises to Abraham against the bureaucratic policies of the Persian governors of Ezra and Nehemiah while another one published in *Hekamtho* discusses how Genesis 19:30-38 subverts the concept of the Moabite other and Ammonite other popularised by the Persian empire.³⁹

5. 2. 1. Composition History of the Abraham Narrative

Diachronic reading dominated Abrahamic studies at an earlier stage.⁴⁰ This reading, as Julius Wellhausen explains, underestimates the historicity of the Abrahamic narratives and interprets Abraham as an invention of an unconscious art.⁴¹ From such a background, Wellhausen claimed that a modern reader could not obtain any historical information on the patriarchs from these narratives since the historical context of the period of the composition was most likely projected back into hoary antiquity.⁴² Likewise, Gunkel considered the Patriarchs as personified tribes instead of historical figures.⁴³ Later, archaeological discoveries shifted the focus and convinced some scholars about

³⁹ Jobymon Skaria, "Reading the Promises to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 through the Post-Exilic Deuteronomistic Eyes," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol. 81/9, September 2017, 25-40, Jobymon Skaria, "Reimagining Moab and Ammon: Genesis 19:30-38 through Persian Imperialism," *Hekamtho: Syrian Orthodox Theological Journal*, Vol. 3, November 2017, 23-44.

⁴⁰ The Diachronic way explained this document as a composite, drawn from various sources and edited over many centuries. See also, Terence E. Fretheim, *Abraham: Trials of Family and Faith* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), James K. Bruckner, *Implied Law in the Abraham Narratives: A Literary and Theological Analysis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

⁴¹ Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, trans. J Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies, (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1885), 331.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Hermann Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis*, trans. W. H. Caruth (New York: Schocken, 1964), 1-19.

the substantial historicity of the Abraham narrative.⁴⁴ They suggested that the names and customs in the Abrahamic narrative reflect the second millennium BCE genuinely.⁴⁵ This proposal, based upon archaeological discoveries, began to be challenged when scholars started to analyse the language and rhetorical features of the Abrahamic narrative, which highlighted some anachronistic references, like Ur of the Chaldeans (Genesis 11:28, 31 & 15:7), Philistines (Genesis 21:34) and Abraham as Father of the Arabs (Genesis 25:1-5).⁴⁶ T. L. Thompson (1974), for instance, showed that the attempts to locate the patriarchal age around the second millennium based on the historical, archaeological evidence and literary inquiry on the present text of Genesis are without substance.⁴⁷ J. Van Seters (1975) carried the debate further in his *Abraham in History and Tradition* and advocated that the names, customs, and institutions in the Abrahamic narrative have their closest parallels in the Ancient Near Eastern societies of the first millennium.⁴⁸ For him, the Abrahamic tradition reflects "only a late date of composition."⁴⁹

The new insights, as mentioned, that began to emerge in the 1970s reoriented Abrahamic studies.⁵⁰ They led to a paradigmatic shift in the literary reading of the

⁴⁴William F. Albright, *The Archeology and the Religions of Israel* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1956), 176, See also, John Bright, *A History of Israel* (SCM Press, London: 1972), 94-95.

⁴⁵ John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 79, John H. Salihamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Illinois: IVP Academic, 2009), 71, G. E. Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 40.

⁴⁶ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 120-21, Rainer Albertz, "Religion in Israel During and After the Exile", in *The Biblical World*, Vol. II, ed. John Barton (London: Routledge, 2002), 110-112, Philip R Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 84, John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 94-95.

⁴⁷Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*, (Berlin: Walter d Gruyter, 1974), 328.

⁴⁸J. Van Seters., *Abraham in History and Tradition*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 309.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 121-122.

⁵⁰ Synchronic ways of reading have challenged the proposals of the diachronic understanding, requesting a revision of earlier positions. Terence E. Fretheim, *The Pentateuch* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1996), 33. See also, Byron Wheaton, *Focus and Structure in Abraham Narratives*, TRINJ 27 NS (2006), 143-162, David, W Cotter. *Genesis* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2003), Jerome T. Walsh, *Style and Structure of the Old Testament* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2001), Paul Carlton Borgman, *Genesis: The Story We*

narrative and challenged some scholars to reread the Abrahamic narrative through the political, social and religious conflicts of Achaemenid Yehud. According to this trend, this narrative informs more about the time of its final editing, the Persian Yehud, than some pre-exilic 'past' as narrated peripherally in the text.⁵¹ Further, this hypothesis suggests that the political and social conflicts of Persian Yehud are the clues for interpreting the Abraham narrative. A modern scholar, therefore, may not decipher many historical data from the Abraham narrative as actual history.⁵² This narrative, on the other hand, informs the ideologies of their editors who lived in Yehud. Hence, the Abrahamic narrative may not be a reliable source for reconstructing the historical period it seems to narrate.

However, we can identify the concerns of its authors (editors) by studying the function of the Abrahamic narrative against the historical reconstructions of the Persian period. Mario Liverani's *Israel's History and the History of Israel* is one of the attempts in this direction.⁵³ This book tries to separate the history of ancient Judah and Israel from the story in the biblical text that reflects a later historical context and agenda. Liverani suggests that the returning Judean exiles rewrote the available traditions to create a temple-city Jerusalem on a Babylonian model. This history, Liverani suggests, became the founding narrative of Israel.⁵⁴ This document attempted to normalise the social

Haven't Heard, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), J P Fokkelmann, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Scholeksterstraat: Deco Publishing, 1995), Anthony Abela, *The Themes of the Abraham Narrative*, (Malta: Studia Editions, 1989), Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1986), Yehuda T. Radday in "Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative," *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, ed. John W. Welch (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 50-117, W McKane, *Studies in the Patriarchal Narratives* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1979), J Morgenstern, *The Book of Genesis*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1965).

⁵¹ Philip R. Davies, *The Origins of Biblical Israel* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 4.

⁵² William H. Stiebing Jr., *Ancient Near Eastern History and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2009), 255ff.

⁵³ Mario Liverani, *Israel's History and the History of Israel*, trans. Chiara Peri and Philip R. Davies (London: Equinox, 2005).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* xv-xvi.

circumstances by reinterpreting paradigmatic situations from the past.⁵⁵ Similarly, Mark G. Brett, R. C. Dodd, and Naveen Rao suggest that Genesis is related to the politics of the Persian period.⁵⁶ Following this lead, some scholars began to decode the Abraham narrative through Persian eyes.⁵⁷

5. 2. 2. Postcolonial Context of the Abraham Narrative

As indicated, some scholars interpret the Abrahamic narrative as a late composition.⁵⁸ The references to 'Ur of the Chaldeans' in Genesis 11:28, 31 and 15:7, such scholars claim, show that this narrative might be a late composition since Chaldeans did not appear on the historical scene until the 9th century BCE.⁵⁹ The frequent references to Abraham in exilic and post-exilic writings (Isaiah 41:8f, 51:2, Ezekiel 33:24, Isaiah 63:16) are further clues. Norman Whybray, for instance, notes that such references imply that the stories used by the editor of the Abraham narrative were highly unlikely to be much earlier than the Babylonian exile.⁶⁰ Similarly, the geographical and historical references in this narrative call for a post-exilic composition.⁶¹ Yahweh's command to Abraham to leave Mesopotamia and to go to the land that Yahweh would show him might

⁵⁵ James M. Trotter, *Reading Hosea in Achaemenid Yehud* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 10.

⁵⁶ Mark G. Brett, "Reading the Bible in the Context of Methodological Pluralism: The Undermining of Ethnic Exclusivism in Genesis," in *Rethinking Contexts, Reading Texts: Contributions from the Social Sciences to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. M. Daniel Carroll R. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 51, R. C. Heard, *The Dynamics of Dislocation: Ambiguity in Genesis 12-26 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-Exilic Judah* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2001), 8-16 and 171-184, Rao, "Decolonizing the Formulation of Scripture," 59.

⁵⁷ John Kessler, "Persia's Loyal Yahwists: Power Identity and Ethnicity in Achaemenid Yehud," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 91.

⁵⁸ Cynthia Edenburg, *Dismembering the Whole: Composition and Purpose of Judges 19-21* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 185.

⁵⁹ Gosta W. Ahlstrom, *The History of the Ancient Palestine from the Palaeolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest*, ed. Diana V. Edelman (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 182.

⁶⁰R. Norman Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 49ff.

⁶¹S. David Sperling, *The Original Torah: The Political Intent of the Bible's Writers* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 44.

be an exilic composition when part of the Jewish population resided in Mesopotamia.⁶² Moreover, the character of Abraham migrating from Ur of the Chaldeans to become a blessing for the nations would have appealed to post-exilic Judah.⁶³ Similarly, the “figure of a faithful and obedient Abraham who observes the Torah and teaches all his sons to do the same comes, in all probability, from a composition or a series of post-exilic readings.”⁶⁴ Thus, there seems to be an emerging scholarly consensus about the post-exilic dating and appeal of the Abraham narrative, which claims that the Abraham narrative in its final form might have been penned in Babylon to exhort the Judean exiles that they are not in an alien land but in the very land of their ancestors.⁶⁵

Some interpreters, based on the post-exilic appeal of the Abraham narrative, interpret it against Persian policies.⁶⁶ Stavrakopoulou, for instance, proposes that the Abraham narrative is a Persian period manifesto, promoting a peaceful, cooperative relationship between returning members of the Golah community and the indigenous communities who remained in Jerusalem.⁶⁷ Thomas Römer suggests that Genesis 11:27-32 constructs Abraham as an identity maker for the Babylonian Golah community.⁶⁸ So

⁶²Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century BCE*, trans. David Green (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 249.

⁶³Israel Finkelstein, “Patriarchs, Exodus, Conquest: Fact or Fiction,” in *The Quest for the Historical Israel*, ed. Brian B Schmidt (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 51.

⁶⁴Jean-Louis Ska, in *The Exegesis of the Pentateuch: Exegetical Studies and Basic Questions* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 38.

⁶⁵Norman C. Habel, *The Land is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies* (Augsburg: Fortress Press, 1995), 117-118.

⁶⁶Gard Graerod, *Abraham and Melchizedek Scribal Activity of Second Temple Times in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110* (Berlin: Walter D. Gruyter, 2010), John Ha, *Genesis 15* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter & Co., 1989), Gershom Hepner, *Legal Friction, Law, Narrative, and Identity in Biblical Israel*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010), Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *The Land of Our Fathers the Role of the Ancestor Veneration in Biblical Land Claims*, (London: T & T Clark International, 2010).

⁶⁷ Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 29.

⁶⁸ Thomas Römer, “Conflicting Models of Identity and the Publication of the Torah in the Persian Period,” in *Between Cooperation and Hostility: Multiple Identities in Ancient Judaism and the Interaction with Foreign Powers*, ed. Rainer Albertz and Jakob Wöhrle (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 45.

too, Blenkinsopp, Dijkstra and Michael conclude that Abraham is a model for those who returned from Babylon.⁶⁹ Thus, the Abrahamic narrative is likely to be a product of Persian Yehud. The same is evident from the rhetorical features of this narrative.

5. 2. 2. 1. Rhetorical Features and Context of the Abraham Narrative

The rhetorical/stylistic features in the Abraham narrative also point later editing or composition. The universal blessing found in Genesis 12:1-3 is one such indication since this theme does not appear again until Deutero-Isaiah.⁷⁰ F V Winnett, therefore, claims that an exilic and post-exilic context is the most natural background to explain Genesis 12:1-3.⁷¹ Admittedly, there are some objections to such a claim. Ska, for instance, states that the text says nothing about a universal blessing; instead it mentions the universal renown that Abraham will acquire. However, Ska also dates this text to the late postexilic period.⁷² Lot's separation from Abram (Gen. 13:7-12) is another instance.⁷³ Similarly, the affinity of Genesis 14 to Jewish stories in the Persian period is well known and therefore, scholars like Westermann, Gunkel and Van Seters suggest that Genesis 14 is a post-exilic composition.⁷⁴ Seters explains Genesis 15 as a post-exilic composition since it

⁶⁹ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Judaism, the First Phase: The Place of Ezra and Nehemiah in the Origins of Judaism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 38, Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Continuity-Discontinuity in Isaiah 40-66: Issue of Location," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Chronological and Thematic Development in Isaiah 40-66*, ed. Hans M. Barstad, Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 87, Meindert Dijkstra, "The Valley of Dry Bones: Coping with the Reality of the Exile in the Book of Ezekiel," in *The crisis of Israelite religion: transformation of religious tradition in exilic and post-exilic times*, ed. Bob Becking, Marjo Christina Annette Korpel (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 124, Matthew Michael, *Yahweh's Elegant Speeches of the Abrahamic Narratives: A Study of the Stylistics; Characterizations; and Functions of the Divine Speeches in Abrahamic Narratives* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2014), 74-75.

⁷⁰ Frederick V. Winnett, "Re-Examining the Foundations," in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 84, No. 1 (March 1965), 1-19.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 4, 11.

⁷² Jean Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, 203.

⁷³ Hepner, *Legal Friction: Law*, 5.

⁷⁴ Israel Finkelstein, Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Sacred Texts* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 42, Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*,

shares the worldview of Deutero-Isaiah.⁷⁵ Likewise, Genesis 17 is interpreted as a post-exilic document since it portrays the hopes and fears of the exilic period.⁷⁶ So too, Paul R. Williamson suggests Genesis 18-21 as a post-exilic composition.⁷⁷ Hepner argues that Lot's exodus from Sodom (19:1-29) might have been written for a post-exilic audience.⁷⁸ Scholars like Tracy Maria Lemos note that Genesis 24 may be a post-exilic document.⁷⁹ Thus, there are plenty of scholarly proposals that suggest the post-exilic appeal of Abraham narrative. There are also frequent references to the character of Abraham in the post-exilic texts which necessitates further interrogation.

5. 3. 2. 2. References to Abraham in the Hebrew Scripture

Abraham, the first among the Patriarchs, is also the main character in Genesis 12-25. However, he plays an insignificant role outside the Pentateuch. Abraham is mentioned only 23 times, including Josh. 24:2-3, 1 Kgs 18:36, 2 Kgs 13:23, 1 Chr.1:27-28, 32, 34; 16:16; 29:18; 2 Chr. 20:7; 30:6; Neh. 9:7; Ps. 47:10; 105:6, 9, 42; Isa. 29:22; 41:8; 51:2; 63:16; Jer. 33:26; Ezek. 33:24; and Mic. 7:20 in the Hebrew Scriptures.⁸⁰

trans. David E. Green (London: T & T Clarke, 2004), 189-93, Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997) 189-190, 283-85, J. A. Soggin, "Abraham and the Eastern Kings: On Genesis 14," in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield*, eds. Zinoy Zevit, Seymour Gitin and Michael Sokoloff (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 283-91, Mark W. Bartusch, *Understanding Dan: An Exegetical Study of a Biblical City, Tribe and Ancestor* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 25.

⁷⁵ Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 292.

⁷⁶ Heerak Christian Kim, *Nuzi, Women's Rights and Hurrian Ethnicity and Other Academic Essays* (Cheltenham: The Hermit Kingdom Press, 2006) 1, Martin A. Sweeney, "Form Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, eds. Stephen R. Haynes, Steven L. McKenzie (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1999), 82, Matthew Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 40.

⁷⁷ Paul R. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and its Covenantal Development in Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000)59.

⁷⁸ Hepner, *Legal Friction*, 5.

⁷⁹ Tracy Maria Lemos, *Marriage Gifts and Social Change in Ancient Palestine: 1200 BCE to 200 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 60.

⁸⁰ Granerod, *Abraham and Melchizedek*, 48.

5. 3. 2. 3. Abraham in Joshua

Joshua 24 mentions Abraham retrospectively. The text establishes Israel's salvation history, starting with Terah and Abraham.⁸¹ This document, as Römer understands, has some parallels with Nehemiah 9, which may indicate a post-exilic dating.⁸² Joshua 24 mentions Abraham as an exemplary person who comes from an idolatrous family. The narrator asks his readers to put away such gods as Abraham did.⁸³

The Narrator's appraisal of Abraham in Joshua 24, especially when reading against Nehemiah 9, is vital. It is reasonable to assume that Joshua 24 might have functioned as a paradigm for the ethnocentric policies of the Achaemenid Yehud. Thus, Joshua 24 has a post-exilic implication. Further, as Römer and Granerod note, Joshua 24 combines the patriarchal narratives with the Exodus tradition.⁸⁴ Such a merging is another clue since Schmid had already suggested that the Patriarchal and the Exodus narratives existed as two independent traditions until the exilic period and a Priestly source combined them in the exilic period to form a single narrative. A post-Priestly redactor combined the P source with two non-priestly sources in the post-exilic period.⁸⁵ Joshua 24 was one of Schmid's important clues to advance this hypothesis.⁸⁶ Similarly, Seters, Mayes, Popovic and Macchi suggest that Joshua 24 is a post-exilic text.⁸⁷

⁸¹Ibid. 49.

⁸² Thomas Römer, "Deuteronomy in Search of Origins," in *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History*, ed. Gary N. Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 135.

⁸³ Fretheim, *Abraham*, 149.

⁸⁴ Römer, "Deuteronomy in Search of Origins," 135, Granerod, *Abraham and Melchizedek*, 49-50.

⁸⁵ Please see Konrad Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible*, trans. James Nogalski (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010) for more details.

⁸⁶ Linda M. Stargel, *The Construction of Exodus Identity in Ancient Israel: A Social Identity Approach* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018), 39.

⁸⁷ J Van Seters, "Joshua 24 and the Problem of Tradition in the Old Testament," in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G.W. Ahlström*, eds. W. B. Barrick and J. R. Spencer (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 139-58, A. D. H. Mayes, *The Story of Israel between Settlement*

5. 3. 2. 4. Abraham in Kings

Scholars like Rodney A. Werline and Jesse C. Long suggest that the books of Kings are post-exilic composition.⁸⁸ There are only very few references to Abraham in them (1 Kings 18:36, 2 Kings 13:23). 1 Kings 18:36 mentions the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. The tradition which Elijah invokes in 1 Kings 18:36, Roger Toms clarifies, is not the Exodus tradition but that of the Patriarchs and reference to Yahweh as “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel” is rare and found only in the late post-exilic books (1 Chr. 29: 18, 2 Chr. 30: 6).⁸⁹ After noting this affinity to post-exilic books, Jyrki Keinänen suggests that this terminology appears to be late.⁹⁰ Likewise, R. N. Whybray claims that 1 Kings 18:36 is highly unlikely to be a pre-exilic text.⁹¹

The second passage, 2 Kings 13:23 refers to the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Abrahamic covenant has an exilic and post-exilic implication. The promise of land and progeny (Genesis 15:18-20; 17:3-8) would console a nation that had lost its sovereignty and faced an uncertain future.⁹² Thus, the references to Abraham in the book of Kings have post-exilic significance.

and Exile: A Redactional Study of the Deuteronomistic History (London: SCM, 1983), 51, Malden Popovic, “Conquest of the Land, Loss of the Land,” in *The Land of Israel in Bible, History, and Theology: Studies in Honor of Ed Noort*, eds. Jacques Van Ruiten and J. Cornelis de Vos (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 97, Thomas Römer and Jean Daniel Macchi, “Luke, Disciple of the Deuteronomistic School,” in *Luke’s Literary Achievement*, ed. C. M. Tuckett (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 185.

⁸⁸ Rodney A. Werline, *Pray Like This: Understanding Prayer in the Bible* (New York: T & T Clarke International, 2007)14, Jesse C. Long, *The College Press New Commentary: 1 & 2 Kings* (Joplin: College Press Publishing Company, 2002), 17.

⁸⁹ Roger Toms, “1 and 2 Kings,” in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, eds. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 262.

⁹⁰ Jyrki Keinänen, *Traditions in Collision: A Literary and Redaction-Critical Study on the Elijah Narratives: 1 Kings 17-19* (Helsinki: The Finnish Exegetical Society, 2001), 85.

⁹¹ R. N. Whybray, “Genesis,” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary: The Pentateuch*, eds. John Muddiman and John Barton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 57.

⁹² Richard J. Bautch, *Glory and Power, Ritual and Relationship: The Sinai Covenant in the Postexilic Period* (New York: A&C Black, 2009), 44.

5. 3. 2. 5. Abraham in Chronicles

1 and 2 Chronicles are often understood as post-exilic compositions.⁹³ They address the post-exilic community and assure them that God is still with them.⁹⁴ Abraham is mentioned frequently in them (1 Chr.1:27-28, 32, 34; 16:16; 29:18 and 2 Chr. 20:7; 30:6). Thus, it seems that the figure of Abraham resurges in the post-exilic period.⁹⁵

5. 3. 2. 6. Abraham in Prophetic Literature

The ancestral traditions receive little attention in the literature of the pre-exilic prophets.⁹⁶ The pre-exilic prophets seldom refer to Abraham even though they address events like Sodom and Gomorrah (Hosea 11:8; Amos 4:11; Isa 1:9; Zeph 2:9) from the life of Abraham.⁹⁷ However, Abraham is frequently mentioned in exilic and post-exilic prophetic writings (Isaiah 41:8f, 51:2, Ezekiel 33:24, Isaiah 63:16).⁹⁸

The Exile is the first time that Abraham is mentioned as a major figure (Ezekiel 33:24, Isaiah 41:8, 51:2).⁹⁹ Abraham became a symbol of Yahweh's promise to the displaced people during this time.¹⁰⁰ Some scholars connect this exilic and post-exilic

⁹³Mark A. Throntveit, "Chronicles," in *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 126-127, John Mark Hicks, *The College Press NIV Commentary: 1 & 2 Chronicles* (Joplin: College Press Publishing Company, 2001), 20-21, Werline, *Pray Like This*, 14, James McKeown, *Genesis* (Michigan: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 364.

⁹⁴ Paul S. Evans, "Worship that Fulfills the Law: The Book of Chronicles and Its Implications for a Contemporary Theology of Worship," in *Rediscovering Worship: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. Wendy J. Porter (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 33.

⁹⁵ Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 127.

⁹⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and the Christian Imagination* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2003), 47.

⁹⁷ Hepner, *Legal Friction*, 104, Fretheim, *Abraham: Trials of Family*, 149.

⁹⁸R. Norman Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 49ff.

⁹⁹David M. Carr, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: Sacred Texts and Imperial Contexts of the Hebrew Bible* (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 191.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

preference to the composition of the narrative and claim that the Abrahamic narrative can be dated to the post-exilic period.¹⁰¹

The post-exilic appeal of the Abrahamic narrative does not mean that there were no written or oral traditions behind it. Instead, I believe that the traditions associated with Abraham existed before the Babylonian exile. However, as will be seen, those traditions were carefully edited to address the needs of the post-exilic community. In my argument, how the post-exilic community rescripted the pre-exilic material for the theological and existential purposes of the postcolonial context, as will be suggested in chapter 6, can be a significant resource for Dalits to advance Dalit theology. As noted, Dalits have been living the life of a displaced community. The dominant caste people denied their basic human rights for many centuries in their home country. Therefore, the historical and theological responses of the post-exilic community to their traumatic experiences could be a valuable resource for Dalits who have been living the life of an exiled people in their land. This dissertation will now study the Abrahamic narrative before the exile to clarify the function of the postcolonial attempt of the Second Temple community.

5. 4. Abraham Narrative before the Exile

Abrahamic traditions existed in some form before the Babylonian exile.¹⁰² Römer, for example, based upon the reference to Abraham in Ezekiel 33:24 assumes that

¹⁰¹ R. Norman Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 49ff, Philip F. Esler, *Sex, Wives and Warriors: Reading Old Testament Narrative with its Ancient Audience* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2011), 23, Danna Nolan Fewell and R. Christopher Heard, "The Genesis of Identity in the Biblical World," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 110.

¹⁰² Thomas Römer, "Conflicting Models of Identity and the Publication of the Torah in the Persian Period," in *Between Cooperation and Hostility: Multiple Identities in Ancient Judaism and the interaction with Foreign Powers*, eds. Rainer Albertz and Jakob Wohrle (Göttingen: V & R, 2013), 42, H. G. M. Williamson, "Abraham in Exile," in *Perspectives on Our Father Abraham: Essays in Honor of Marvin R. Wilson*, ed. Steven A. Hunt (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 78.

Abraham was a well-known figure for the exilic community and suggests that the traditions about Abraham existed in some form before the Babylonian exile.¹⁰³ Such a claim does not include that there was an Abraham narrative as a single document before the Exile either. Instead, as Whybray clarifies, Abrahamic traditions had not been incorporated to form a record of Abraham and Sarah as we have it today in the book of Genesis before the Exile.¹⁰⁴ The exiled Judeans edited those traditions during and in response to Exile and diaspora.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, some scholars read the Abraham narrative against the post-exilic context.¹⁰⁶ Most of such scholars understand Genesis as an anti-colonial text resisting the socio-economic program propagated by the Persian colonial Empire.¹⁰⁷ Mark Brett, for example, claims that the book of Genesis is a critique of the ethnocentric policies of Ezra and Nehemiah.¹⁰⁸ So too, Moberly notes that Genesis looks to be a text more for marginal imperial subjects than for powerful imperial rulers.¹⁰⁹

There are alternative proposals as well. Roland Boer, for instance, clarifies that the dominant position of Genesis is like the one we find in Ezra and Nehemiah.¹¹⁰ Indeed, Boer does not disregard the dissenting voices in the narrative. He designates the opposing voice as quieter and subversive, challenging the policies of Ezra and Nehemiah.

¹⁰³ Römer, "Conflicting Models of Identity and the Publication of the Torah in the Persian Period," 42.

¹⁰⁴ R. Norman Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 104.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Prior CM, *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique*, 222, Martien A. Halvorson - Taylor, "Displacement and Diaspora in Biblical Narrative," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 498.

¹⁰⁶ James McKeown, *Genesis* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 10.

¹⁰⁷ Rao, "Decolonizing the Formulation of Scripture," 59.

¹⁰⁸ Mark Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁰⁹ R. W. L. Moberly, "Abraham and Aeneas: Genesis as Israel's Foundation Story," in *Genesis and Christian Theology*, eds. Nathan MacDonald, Mark W. Elliot, Grant Macaskill (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 303.

¹¹⁰ Roland Boer, "Marx, Postcolonialism and the Bible," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, eds. Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia (London: T & T Clarke, 2005), 176.

This subversive voice, Boer clarifies, is from an editor who might have worked carefully through the material of Genesis to voice his anti-colonial sentiments, always seeking to avoid the heavy hand of the censors.¹¹¹ After recognising the clash of interests between colonial and anti-colonial elements, Yee and Brett claim that Genesis is the product of Postcolonial Hybridity.¹¹² The elites governing Yehud had a unique social location since they were Persian agents with Jewish ethnicity.¹¹³ They share the ethos of the coloniser and the colonised simultaneously. This postcolonial hybridity, Yee proposes, influenced the text, and the text itself is a hybrid, codifying the ancient stories and laws of Israel, which provided a sense of ethnic identity but also advanced the interests of the empire.¹¹⁴

The pre-colonial and anti-colonial elements are significant. However, a postcolonial reading of Abraham's encounters will be more illuminating to this research since it will help us identify the resistance to colonial hegemony in these narratives. Similarly, Abraham has many striking resonances with Dalits' contexts.

5. 5. Abraham and Dalits' Contexts

Abraham has many parallels in his life with Dalits. He is reminiscent of a Dalit ancestor, narrated by Nirmal. God called Abraham out of his comfort zones, away from his language and the security of his father's house. Abraham, like Dalits, remained as a landless man, pressed by famine and nomadic life.¹¹⁵ He lived as an alien in the land,

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Gale A. Yee, "Postcolonial Biblical Criticism," in *Methods in Biblical Interpretation: Methods for Exodus*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 213, Mark G. Brett, "Reading the Bible in the Context of Methodological Pluralism: The Undermining of Ethnic Exclusivism in Genesis," 70.

¹¹³ Yee, "Postcolonial Biblical Criticism," 213.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Thalia Gur-Klein, *Sexual Hospitality in the Hebrew Bible: Patronymic, Metronymic, Legitimate and Illegitimate Relations* (London: Routledge, 2014), 91.

which God had promised to his descendants. Abraham, like Dalits, acts as a "helpless pawn in the clutches of ruthless landholders" (Gen. 23:1-4).¹¹⁶ Similarly, there is a clash of interests in Abraham. He shares the ethos of a coloniser and a colonised simultaneously. Dalits also share the same characteristics. They are oppressed by the dominant castes and, unfortunately, some Dalits, as will be further explained, mistreats fellow Dalits. Likewise, Abraham functioned as an identity maker for the Golah community, which shares many ethos with Dalits. Like the Golah community who lived away from their homeland, Dalits live as aliens in their homeland, oppressed by the dominant caste members. Hence, Abraham, as an identity maker, could appeal Dalits. Further, Joshua 24 depicts Abraham as an exemplary person coming out of an idolatrous family. Such an image would inspire Dalits because of their pre-conversion religious orientations. Such contextual similarities invite scholarly interrogation, and as proposed, I will analyse Abraham's crossings as a postcolonial anticolonial voice in the Abrahamic narrative. The delimitation to Abraham's crossings, however, does not mean that they are the only relevant resources for Dalit theology in the Abrahamic narrative.

5. 5. 1. Abraham Narrative and Dalit Theology: Further Possibilities

As indicated in chapter 3, there are more instances in the Abraham narrative, which may further Dalit theology. Genesis 19:30-38, for instance, is one such example. Of course, it is an infamous account. However, as Musa W. Dube identifies, there are multiple similarities between Abraham and Genesis 19:30-38. For instance, Abraham and Lot are involved with two women who bear them children. Sarah and Lot's daughters are concerned with descendants, but Lot and Abraham remain silent. The daughters, like

¹¹⁶ Borgman, Genesis, 121.

Sarah, plot and bring forth two sons. Lot, like Abraham, seems to be a victim of two women.¹¹⁷ A careful reading of the literary structure of this narrative reveals the potential of this narrative further. J. A. Loader has suggested that Genesis 19:30-38 is part of a concentric structure:¹¹⁸

A 18:1-16 Three men visit Abraham
 B 18:17-33 Abraham's question about Sodom
 C 19:1-26 God's wrath over Sodom
 1-11 Two messengers visit Lot
 12-22 Rescue from Sodom
 23-26 Destruction of Sodom
 B' 19:27-29 Abraham Witnesses the destruction
A' 19:30-38 Lot and his daughters

The outer layers of a concentric structure are particularly important, and they hold opposing ideas in tension with one another.¹¹⁹ As the concentric structure shows, Genesis 18:1-16 and Genesis 19:30-38 are the outer layers, and they present opposing ideas in tension.¹²⁰ Genesis 18:1-16 is commonly understood as an instance of a formal annunciation delivered to Abraham and Sarah that guarantees the end of Sarah's barrenness.¹²¹ If that is the case, Genesis 19:30-38 could well be a narrative about Abraham's relatives acquiring their offspring in a challenging situation.¹²² So too, the text

¹¹⁷ Musa W. Dube, "Religion, Race, Gender and Identity," in *Biblical Studies, Theology, Religion and Philosophy: An Introduction for African Universities*, eds. Fidelis Nkomazana, Obed N. Kealotswe (Eldoret: Zapf Chancery Research Consultants and Publishers, 2010), 113.

¹¹⁸ J. A. Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities: Sodom and Gomorrah in the Old Testament, Early Jewish and Early Christian Traditions*, (Kampen: Peters Publishers, 1990), 15.

¹¹⁹ Casey W. Davis, *Oral Biblical Criticism: The Influence of the Principles of Orality on the Literary Structure of Paul's Epistle to the Philip [?]* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 100.

¹²⁰ Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 44.

¹²¹ Susan Ackerman, "The Blind, the Lame, and the Barren Shall not Come into the House," in *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*, eds. Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 36, Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 208, Robert Ignatius Letellier, *Day in Mamre, Night in Sodom: Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18 and 19* (Brill: Leiden, 1995), 33, George W. Coats, *Genesis, with an Introduction to Narrative Literature* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 127, Jerome T. Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 65..

¹²² Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 16.

clarifies that Lot's daughters acted not out of lust but of the desire to fulfil their womanly destiny and preserve their lineage.¹²³ There would have been no Moab, Ruth, or David without the incest of Lot.¹²⁴ Therefore, the text designates Lot's daughters as proud "royal ancestresses" because of the connection between Genesis 19:30-38 and the Davidic lineage.¹²⁵ Hence, there is no stigma attached to the action of the mothers and Genesis 19:30-38 treats Lot and his daughters as members of the family of promise.¹²⁶

Such a reading can open avenues for appropriating Genesis 19:30-38 in Dalit theology, especially since Dalits have many matriarchal deities. Similarly, the suffering, rejection and divine intervention to save Hagar would be another resource for Dalit theology. There could be many more instances in Abraham's life, which demands further research and appreciation from Dalit theologians. Let me clarify that my focus on Abraham's crossings does not discredit other incidents in his life. Instead, I wish to invite scholarly attention to the possibilities in the Abrahamic narrative for theologising in Dalit contexts. The following section hints how Abraham's encounters may assist Dalit theology in actualising a liberated reconciled society and Church, as envisioned in Dalit contexts.

5. 5. Conclusion

Traditions about Abraham are not an invention of the postexilic period. They existed in some form before the exile. However, the post-exilic community reinterpreted and reimagined their historical traditions when the community encountered the disruptive

¹²³ Benno Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Thora: Genesis* (Berlin: Schocken, 1934), 464. Quoted in Johanna Stiebert, *Fathers and Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 134.

¹²⁴ André Lacocque, *Ruth: A Continental Commentary*, trans., K. C. Hanson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 119.

¹²⁵ Esther Marie Menn, *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis: Studies in Literary Form and Hermeneutics* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 100.

¹²⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 176, 177.

policies of the Persian empire. Therefore, Abraham narrative reflects colonialist rhetoric and imperial ambitions of Persian Yehud. As a product of postcolonial hybridity, this narrative has both colonial and anti-colonial interests skillfully embedded in it. I will, however, concentrate on the subversive voices that challenge the colonial propaganda and will study the boundary crossings of Abraham as a post-exilic counter-metaphor amidst the ethnocentric programs of Achaemenid Yehud. Such a study might uncover the elements of protest embedded in these narratives and offer some praxis-oriented guidelines to highlight the brother and the neighbour in the colonial, cultural and religious other.

This dissertation will follow the significance of these postcolonial tactics and will explore its implications for Dalits. As noted, caste influences Dalits and non-Dalits. They are unconsciously imprisoned by the sociological, religious and cultural boundaries defined by the caste system, which is deeply embedded in their psyche. The caste system also regulates many of the behavioural patterns, even though it is not always visible in postcolonial India. Therefore, as argued, Dalit theology needs a paradigm that breaks the walls which reinforce the sociological, religious and cultural boundaries set by the caste system and reconciles Dalits with non-Dalits. The cross-cultural, cross-religious and cross-ethnic encounters of Abraham have immense potential for facilitating cross-cultural exchanges and appropriation in this context. Also, it can promote liberating mutual partnerships in India's multi-cultural contexts. Furthermore, it will help Dalit theology to build bridges across the gulf that separates Dalit Christians and non-Dalit Christians.

Admittedly, such an attempt is in line with the message of Jesus and the praxis of the early Church. The mission of Jesus is nothing but crossing borders and breaking

through the walls of separation. Jesus crossed the boundaries to be available to the marginalised of his day. Similarly, the story of the early Church, as we know, is a story of crossing boundaries. Acts of the Apostles narrates the movement of the Gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the Earth (1:8). Philip's encounter with an Ethiopian official (Acts 8:26-39) is another example of the Gospel crossing another boundary. The vision of Peter (Acts: 10: 9-16) challenges the definition of boundaries. Thus, the mission of Jesus, the history of the early Church and the cross-cultural encounters of Abraham invites us not into life within boundaries and distinctions and borders and differences but to celebrate unity in diversity. Hence, this dissertation, as proposed in the previous chapters, will explore the boundary crossings of Abraham as a paradigm for Dalit theology. Such an undertaking was the real request of the Peruvian indigenous movement to John Paul II. It might help Dalit theologians to develop a theology that seeks piety in the religious and cultural other.

Chapter 6

Abraham's Encounters in Achaemenid Yehud

6. 0. Introduction

Onam is the national festival of Kerala, India.¹²⁷ It is a harvest festival celebrated in August-September and recalls the defeat of Mahabali by Lord Vishnu. There is a dominant caste as well as a Kerala version of this festival. The dominant caste people celebrate it as the victory of Vamana or the birth of Lord Vishnu who liberated Kerala from the rule of Mahabali.¹²⁸ Kerala, with its compelling anti-caste assertions, does not accept this dominant caste version and celebrates Onam annually to venerate the legendary king, Mahabali.¹²⁹ The myth says that Mahabali visits his people briefly on the day of the Onam celebrations. The theme song shows how the people of Kerala challenged the dominant caste Hindu Vedic worldview that relegates Dalits as untouchables.

*Maveli nadu vaneedum kalam
manusharellarum onnupole
amodhathode vasikkum kalam
apathangarkkumottillathanum
kallavum illa chathiyumilla
ellolamilla polivachanam
kallapparayum cherunazhiyum*

¹²⁷ The legend connected to Onam says that Mahabali was a wise and generous king who ruled Kerala. The gods became jealous of Mahabali's just rule. So, Lord Vishnu disguised as a poor Brahmin boy called Vamana and came to Mahabali. Vamana asked for three footlongs of land. The king obliged. Soon after Mahabali agreed, Vamana began to grow. Vamana covered the whole earth with his first step. He covered the whole skies with his second step. Vamana then asked the king for space for his third foot. Mahabali bowed before Vamana and asked him to place the third step on his head. Vamana placed his foot on the head of the King, which pushed him to the netherworld. Mahabali was granted a return to his land once a year. The people of Kerala celebrate Onam to welcome their king on his homecoming. Please see, Rich Freeman, "Onam," in *South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopaedia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka*, eds. Peter J. Claus, Sarah Diamond, Margaret Ann Mills (New York: Routledge, 2003), 454.

¹²⁸ Constance A. Jones, "Vamana Jayanti," in *Religious Celebrations: An Encyclopaedia of Holidays, Festivals, Solemn Observances, and Spiritual Commemorations [2 volumes]: An Encyclopaedia of Holidays, Festivals, Solemn Observances, and Spiritual Commemorations*, ed. J. Gordon Melton (California: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 900.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

kallatharungal mattonnumilla
adhikal vyadhikalonnumilla
*balamaranangal kelppanilla*¹³⁰

This song projects Mahabali as a humanist and socialist; and imagines a casteless society where everyone has his or her rights without any impediments. “*Manusharellarum onnupole*” in Malayalam means that the people were equal in all aspects of life, and there were no social, economic or caste barriers under Mahabali. Similarly, “*apathangarkkumottillathanum*” indicates that people were free from every form of harm. So too, the people were happy. There were neither sickness nor anxiety among the people. Hence, the song imagines a liberated-reconciled society under Mahabali. Surprisingly, that such assertions and counter-formulations from the dominated castes do not name or demonise either Vamana or the dominant castes. The song indicates that Dalits’ resistance to and protest against the dominant-caste hegemony was more than an act of exclusion and envision solidarity between the oppressor and the oppressed in an inter-connected world. This vision of bridging the gap by suggesting a casteless society connected through mutually enriching partnerships has immense potential for liberation in Dalits’ contexts. Moshé Machover, Raymond Allen Morrow and Carlos Alberto Torres have already suggested that the oppressed cannot regain their humanity by merely repressing their oppressor.¹³¹

¹³⁰ This is a Malayalam (one of the regional languages in India) folk song from Kerala. According to the song “when Maveli ruled the land, all the people were equal. People were joyful and merry; They were all free from harm. There was neither anxiety nor sickness, and no one heard of children’s deaths. No wicked person was in sight anywhere. All the people on the land were right. There was neither theft nor deceit and no false words or promises. Measures and weights were right. There were no lies, No one cheated or wronged his neighbour. When Mahabali ruled the land, all the people formed one casteless race. Please see, Prabhakaran Paleri, *National Security: Imperatives and Challenges* (New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited, 2008), 26 for a translation of this song.

¹³¹ Moshé Machover, *Israelis and Palestinians: Conflict and Resolution* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 50, Raymond Allen Morrow, Carlos Alberto Torres, *Reading Freire and Habermas: Critical Pedagogy and Transformative Social Change* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002), 135.

The vision of shared responsibility and interconnectedness are not particular to Dalits in Kerala alone. As seen by noted attempts in Dalits' spirituality and culture, Dalits' worldview and epistemology of resistance envision a casteless society connected through cross-cultural, cross-ethnic and cross-religious partnerships irrespective of caste orientation. Such openness to diversity is pertinent to bridge the gap between various castes in India's multicultural and multireligious contexts also. However, I have noted that the paradigms of Dalit theology overlook the foundational differences in worldview presuppositions between Latin Americans and Dalits, Dalits' counter-hegemonic worldview, the epistemology of Dalits' resistance and alternative, yet empowering moral visions. Therefore, I have suggested that Dalit theology needs a hermeneutical switch and listening to the subversive voices in Dalits' contexts and learning from them would be liberative in Dalits' contexts. From such a context, I proposed that an intertextual reading between the Second Temple community's resistance to the Persian empire narrated through Abraham's inter-tribal and intercultural crossings and Dalits' assertions against Hindu Vedic worldview expressed through Dalits' subversive voices can empower Dalit theology to appreciate religious, cultural and ethnic others and advance Dalit Syrian Christian dialogues. The present chapter will explain the communicative contexts of the proposed paradigm and the next chapter will suggest how an intertextual reading of the proposed paradigm and Dalits' assertions may help Dalit theology develop and mature.

6. 1. Abraham's Crossings in Genesis

Abraham's encounters with Egyptians and Philistines are part of the wife-sister/ endangered ancestress narratives which occur in Genesis 12:10-20, 20:1-18 and 26:1-11. These stories depict a patriarch (Abraham / Isaac) passing his wife off as his sister to

avert a perceived danger.¹³² This triplet narrates a typical story with differing specifics.¹³³ Those similarities signal historical or literary dependency.¹³⁴ Source critics, therefore, suggest that this is an example of multiple versions of the same story and assign 12:10-20 and 26:1-18 to the Yahwist and 20:1-18 to the Elohist.¹³⁵ Form critics, on the other hand, search their transmission history based on their similarities, and accordingly, David W. Baker, Bill T. Arnold, Jean Louis Ska, Kenneth A. Mathews, Mark E. Biddle and John Van Seters claim that Genesis 12:10-20 is the earliest episode.¹³⁶ However, there is an alternate proposal which argues that the Isaac version is the original one.¹³⁷

The attempts to understand wife-sister narratives diachronically, as noted, have helped biblical scholars abundantly. However, as clarified in the previous chapter, I will not analyse the sources of these stories or their transmission history. Such a reservation is not to underpin or challenge their composition history. These stories, as explained, might have an oral or literary history. Nevertheless, this research seeks to analyse the present version of these narratives as an ancient document composed during

¹³² Cornelis Houtman, "Between Stigmatising and Idolising the Bible: On the Reception of Genesis 12:10-20; 20; 26:1-11" in *Tradition and Innovation in Biblical Interpretation: Studies Presented to Professor Eep Talstra on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, eds. Wide Th. Van Peursen, Janet Dyk (Leiden: IDC Publishers, 2011), 155.

¹³³ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50* (Michigan: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 190-191, Diana Lipton, *Revisions of the Night: Politics and Promises in the Patriarchal Dreams of Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 35.

¹³⁴ John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis-Leviticus*, eds. Tremper Longman III, David E Garland (Michigan: Zondervan, 2009), 37.

¹³⁵ Niels Peter Lemche, *The Old Testament Between Theology and History: A Critical Survey* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 66, Susan Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore: Underdogs and Tricksters* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 23.

¹³⁶ John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 37, Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 190-191, T. D. Alexander. "Are the Wife/Sister Incidents of Genesis Literary Compositional Variants?" *Vetus Testamentum* 42, no. 2 (1992): 145-53, David W. Baker, Bill T. Arnold, *The Face of Old Testament Studies* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 1999), 123, Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, 57, Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26* (Nashville: Boardman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 124, Mark E. Biddle, "The "Endangered Ancestress" and Blessing for the Nations." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109, no. 4 (1990), 611, Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 167-248.

¹³⁷ Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall 1972) 102-9,

Achaemenid Yehud (probably incorporating many of the existing traditions). The anti-colonial faction among the Post-exilic community, as noted in the previous chapter, might have reinterpreted and reimagined the available traditions to communicate many of the ideologies of its authors who lived in that historical context.

6. 2. Communicative Contexts of Abraham's Encounters

Scholars often highlight communicative contexts of biblical narratives. Roy B. Zuck, for instance, notes that the Bible has a communicative intent and the textual indications in the Bible are part of a carefully crafted narrative.¹³⁸ Building upon similar presuppositions, Meir Sternberg, Adele Berlin and Jeannine K. Brown advise readers to make purposive sense of the communicative context of biblical narratives.¹³⁹ Following such proposals, I will analyse Abraham's crossings as a communication between an anonymous author who lived in the Achaemenid Yehud and his intended readers. Such an analysis might inform us about the function of Abraham's crossings and will help us clarify how an intertextual reading between Abraham's crossings and the subversive voices in Dalits' contexts could redirect Dalit theology.

6. 2. 1. Abraham and Sarah Crossing the Egyptian Border

Genesis 12:10-20 is an independent narrative unit.¹⁴⁰ It begins with the report that there was famine in Canaan and Abraham went down into Egypt. *וַיֵּרָד* (*way·hî*) in 12:10

¹³⁸ Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1991), 61.

¹³⁹ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 1, Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake: 2005), 21, Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2007), 14.

¹⁴⁰ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 126, Jon D. Levenson, "The Conversion of Abraham," in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honour of James L. Kugel*, eds. James L. Kugel, Judith H. Newman, Judith Hood Newman (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 4.

("and it came to pass") marks the beginning of a new narrative.¹⁴¹ This unit ends with the notice of the narrator¹⁴² that Pharaoh let Abraham and Sarah go out of Egypt. There are alternate proposals also. Sailhamer, for instance, argues that the narrative continues to 13:4 where the story returns to the original point of departure.¹⁴³ However, the report of the narrator, as mentioned above, is the boundary of this narrative since it has a meaning of its own in this pericope. Similarly, it is more natural to view the journey out of Egypt as marking the conclusion of Genesis 12:10 because the episode has started with an inward journey.¹⁴⁴ So too, the final verb in Genesis 12:20, "sent away," does not mention Abraham. Genesis 13:1, on the other hand, reintroduces Abraham. Thus, the voyage to the Negev is the beginning of a new episode.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, scholars like Jon D. Levenson, Walter Brueggemann, W. Lee Humphreys, George W. Coats, and Jean Louis Ska understand Genesis 12: 10-20 as a unit.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Janet W. Dyk, Percy.S.F. van Keulen, *Language System, Translation Technique, and Textual Tradition in the Peshitta of Kings* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 402, Paul S. Evans, *The Invasion of Sennacherib in the Book of Kings: A Source-Critical and Rhetorical Study of 2 Kings 18-19* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 89.

¹⁴² The narrator is one of the principal structural components of a narrative (Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 13). This is an unknown voice that tells the stories (Hillel I. Millgram, *The Elijah Enigma: The Prophet, King Ahab and the Rebirth of Monotheism in the Book of Kings* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2014), 22, Jean-Louis Ska, *The Exegesis of the Pentateuch: Exegetical Studies and Basic Questions* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 225). However, as J. P. Fokkelman explains, he is not the author (J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Ineke Smit (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 55). The narrator is the voice of the author's *persona* (Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 55. *Persona* is a latin word. It means "mask."). The narrator stands outside the story and reports events that may be beyond ordinary human knowledge (Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, "Torah as Narrative and Narrative as Torah," in *Old Testament Interpretation: Past, Present and Future*, eds. James Luther Mays, David L. Petersen, Kent Harold Richards (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 15.). However, he is not reporting whatever is available to him. He is reporting what is essential to his story. Fokkelman explains this careful editorial process (Fokkelmann, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 55). Thus, the narrator controls the reader's perception and communicates the authorial intent (Lyle Eslinger, "Viewpoints and Point of View in 1 Samuel 8-12," *JSOT* 26 (1983): 68). He conveys the point of view of the story or the specific purpose of the narrative (Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 116-17).

¹⁴³ Sailhamer, "Genesis," 158.

¹⁴⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 285-287.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Levenson, "The Conversion of Abraham," 126, W. Lee Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 86, Coats, *Genesis*, 189,

A peripheral reading shows that Genesis 12:10-20 manifests fear and distrust towards Egyptians. Abraham fears that the Egyptians would kill him to get his wife.¹⁴⁷ He imagines Egypt as alien in values (Genesis 12:11-13). Abraham's prejudice, as will be explained, distorts the truth and triggers poor judgements.¹⁴⁸ The fear and Abraham's reaction to this dilemma are driving forces behind this narrative. However, it is not clear why Abraham thought that the Egyptians would kill him and take Sarah.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, his subsequent actions question his moral standing as well, which demands further scrutiny.

6. 2. 1. 1. Fear and Distrust towards Egypt

There are many inconsistencies with Abraham's fear. As we are aware, Abraham had not encountered Egyptians before. Egypt was known as a land of plenty in the book of Genesis.¹⁵⁰ The Joseph narrative, for example, presumes Egypt as a symbol of safety and provision for the Patriarchs (Genesis 42:1-5; 43:1; 47:4). As Hamilton rightly observes, Egypt is the oppressed in the Abraham narrative.¹⁵¹ It is Sarah who mistreated Hagar, an Egyptian maidservant and urged Abraham to "cast out" Hagar.¹⁵² Similarly,

Jean Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, trans. Sr. Pascale Dominique (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 56, Walsh, *Style and Structure*, 89.

¹⁴⁷ J. Ellsworth Kalas, *Genesis* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 53, Susan Niditch, "Genesis," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1992), 18, Steven L. McKenzie, *All God's Children: A Biblical Critique of Racism* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) 15.

¹⁴⁸ Michael Harvey, *Creating a Culture of Invitation in Your Church* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2015), 54.

¹⁴⁹ Victor P. Hamilton also asks this question. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1 - 17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 380.

¹⁵⁰ The understanding of Egypt is complex in Genesis. The Abraham and Joseph traditions display an overwhelmingly positive attitude to Egypt. However, liberation theologians like Gustavo Gutierrez and James Cone, based on the Exodus paradigm, highlight Egypt as the archetypal oppressor. Please see, Theodore Hiebert, "Genesis," in *Theological Bible Commentary*, ed. Gail R. O'Day, David L. Petersen (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 24 for more details.

¹⁵¹ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1 – 17*, 294.

¹⁵² *Ibid.* The Hagar story narrates the Exodus experience of an Egyptian. Please see David M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 194 for a comparison between Hagar's story in Genesis 16 and Genesis 12: 10-20.

Abraham is the oppressor in Genesis 12:10-20.¹⁵³ Sarah, Pharaoh and his household are the victims of Abraham's deception.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, it is Pharaoh who recognises the status of the couple.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, Pharaoh's question "What is this you have done to me?" is almost a repetition of the accusatory question that Yahweh asks Adam and Eve after their disobedience (Genesis 3:13).¹⁵⁶ However, Abraham perceives Egypt as a threat. This attempt to demonise Egypt without any basis, especially seen through the Second Temple context, is striking. Why the post-exilic community imparts a compromised image of Egypt at the beginning of this narrative is one of the essential questions to follow. I will answer this matter against the communicative context of the Abrahamic narrative.

6. 2. 1. 2. Abraham's Fear and Postcolonial Representation of Egypt

Abraham's fear and distrust, as noted, triggers Genesis 12:10-20. His value judgements based on this presupposition lead him to deception. Despite many positive attributes, Abraham's behaviour in this narrative raises many questions about his character, conduct and moral standing.¹⁵⁷ Clare Amos, for example, clarifies:

Abram's next actions do not cover him with glory either. He is selfishly far more concerned with his own safety (they will kill me) than with protecting his wife Sarai or preserving her dignity. Abram acknowledges that her life would never have been in danger: they will let you live. Sarai is treated merely as a chattel to be traded for Abram's own advantage.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ Brett, *Genesis: Procreation*, 52.

¹⁵⁴ Dianne Bergant, *Genesis: In the Beginning* (Minnesota: Collegeville Press, 2013), 66, Imtraud Fischer, *Women who Wrestled with God: Biblical Stories of Israel's Beginnings*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2005), 12.

¹⁵⁵ Bergant, *Genesis: In the Beginning*, 66.

¹⁵⁶ Phyllis Trible, "Ominous Beginning for a Promise of Blessing," in *Hagar, Sarah, and their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russel (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 37.

¹⁵⁷ Houtman, "Between Stigmatising and Idolising the Bible," 167, Herbert Lockyer, *All the Miracles of the Bible* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1961), 36, Jack W. Vancil "Sarah –Her Life and Legacy," in *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Carroll D. Osburn (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1993), 49.

¹⁵⁸ Clare Amos, *The Book of Genesis* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2004), 79.

Similarly, some scholars interpret this narrative against Abraham's fear. Cheryl Exum and Shula Keshet, for instance, reading through a psychoanalytic literary approach, propose that this narrative encodes unthinkable and unacknowledged sexual fantasies of Abraham.¹⁵⁹ They interpret it as a symptom of patriarchal fear of losing his wife as a sexual object and the desire of sharing that very possession with another man.¹⁶⁰ This interpretation does not seem to do justice to the character of Abraham. Abraham, for instance, was not uneasy about travelling to Canaan with his wife (Genesis 12:1-3).¹⁶¹ He had not made similar plans while leaving Ur of the Chaldeans or Haran. There is an alternate proposal which considers this story as part of a series of episodes from the life of Abraham, who feared to encounter the "other" and responded with deceit and trickery.¹⁶² However, there are also exceptions to this fear of meeting the 'Other.' For instance, Abraham was not afraid to encounter Canaanites (chapter 12), mighty kings (chapter 14), Melchizedek (chapter 14) and three visitors (18:1-15). Thus, there might be something more fascinating about Abraham's fear of Egypt, and uncovering them might help us place this narrative in context.

6. 2. 1. 3. Abraham's Crossings and Anti-Imperial Worldview

Abraham's crossings to Egypt and Gerar, especially when studied through the political and religious contexts of Achaemenid Yehud narrated in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, seems to be an anti-imperial construct of an anonymous author (editor). Such an editor, I think, attempted to reframe, reconstruct and subvert the fear of encountering

¹⁵⁹ J. Cheryl Exum, "Who's Afraid of 'The Endangered Ancestors,'" in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Alice Bach (New York: Routledge: 1999), 144, Shula Keshet, *Say I Pray Thee, Thou Art My Sister: Intertextual Narrative in Jewish Culture* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2003), 47-60.

¹⁶⁰ Exum, "Who's Afraid of 'The Endangered Ancestors,'" 146ff, Keshet, *Say I Pray Thee*, 47-60.

¹⁶¹ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 380.

¹⁶² McKenzie, *All God's Children*, 13.

the Egyptians included in the Persian colonial worldview propagated by the pro-Persian Achaemenid regime, represented by Ezra and Nehemiah. This claim might look like an exaggeration. However, I note that scholars often interpret Genesis 12:10-20 against the sending away of wives recommended by Ezra and Nehemiah.¹⁶³

Matt Waters and Rainer Albertz explain the return of the exilic community as a military strategy of the Persians. Cyrus might have been establishing a military base for his intended operations against Egypt.¹⁶⁴ The Persians were anxious that the Egyptians would become powerful and would make alliances with the enemies of Persia.¹⁶⁵ Persia's fear of Egyptian expansionism enhanced Judah's strategic value.¹⁶⁶ Consequently, Ezra was appointed as a Persian official in 458 BCE when Persia was fighting against Athens in Egypt.¹⁶⁷ Robert J. Littman, Franz V. Greifenhagen, Michael David Coogan and Samuel Eugene Balentine suggest that Ezra's selection was part of the imperial policy to strengthen Yehud as a military outpost for ongoing wars against Egypt and Greece.¹⁶⁸ The fortification of Yehud might have been an attempt to counter an Egyptian attack.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ Charles E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 39, Megan Bishop Moore and Brad E. Kelle, *Biblical History and Israel's Past: The Changing Study of the Bible and History*, (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 407, H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 48.

¹⁶⁴ Matt Waters, *Ancient Persia: A Concise History of the Achaemenid Empire, 550–330 BCE* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 162.

¹⁶⁵ Yee, "Postcolonial Biblical Criticism," 27.

¹⁶⁶ Michael David Coogan, *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 8.

¹⁶⁷ Othniel Margalit, "The Political Background of Zerubbabel's Mission and the Samaritan Schism." *Vetus Testamentum* 41, no. 3 (1991): 312, Robert J. Littman, "Athens, Persia and the Book of Ezra." in *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-) 125 (1995), 251.

¹⁶⁸ Littman, "Athens, Persia and the Book of Ezra.", 223, Coogan, *The Oxford History*, 8, Samuel Eugene Balentine, *The Torah's Vision of Worship* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 46.

¹⁶⁹ Rao, "Decolonizing the Formulation of Scripture:" 60. Gerrie F. Snyman, "A Possible World of Text Production for the Genealogy in 1 Chronicles 2.3-4.23," in *The Chronicler as Theologian*, eds. M. Patrick Graham, Gary N. Knoppers and Steven L. McKenzie (New York: T & T Clark, 2003), 52.

As seen, Ezra was a pro-Persian Jew, who suspected the Egyptians because of their rebellion against the Persians.¹⁷⁰ Ezra's reservation against Egyptians is a much-explained topic. Many scholars have already noted the anti-Egyptian policy in Ezra's divorce policy. For example, Ezra had commanded Israelite husbands to divorce and expel their Egyptian wives and their children (Ezra 10:3). Donald P. Moffat and Eve Levavi Feinstein remind us that Deuteronomy 23 excludes Egyptians and Edomites for three generations but allows their descendants to become members of the assembly (*qəhāl* 'Yahweh // בְּקִהְלֵי יְהוָה).¹⁷¹ The precise meaning of the "assembly of the Lord," as Robert R. Duke notes, is often debated.¹⁷² Many modern commentators interpret it as a reference to intermarriage or physical entry into the Tabernacle / Temple. Whatever the possibilities of interpretation, Deuteronomy 23 provided Second Temple community with a theological basis for their endogamous perspectives.¹⁷³ However, Deuteronomic prohibition includes both sexes, while Ezra challenges marriage with foreign women only.¹⁷⁴ Therefore, Ezra's instruction to the post-exilic community to divorce their Egyptian wives is confusing.¹⁷⁵ It could have been a political conspiracy of the colonial regime, which he represents.

Ezra might have projected Egypt as a colonial other to the Persian empire. Ingeborg Mongstad-Kvammen, for example, clarifies that an imperial power requires 'the Other' as someone to subjugate and serve as the negative contrasts to the colonial

¹⁷⁰ Donald P. Moffat, *Ezra's Social Drama: Identity Formation, Marriage and Social Conflict in Ezra 9 and 10* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 76.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 76, Eve Levavi Feinstein, *Sexual Pollution in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 148.

¹⁷² Robert R. Duke, *The Social Location of the Visions of Amram (4Q543-547)* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 52-53.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1988), 59.

¹⁷⁵ Feinstein, *Sexual Pollution in the Hebrew Bible*, 148.

master.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, Wietske de Jong-Kumru, Shaun L. Gabbidon and Jane M. Jacobs contend that colonialism tends to portray other cultures and peoples negatively.¹⁷⁷ Thus, Achaemenid Yehud under the Persian Empire might have vilified, demonised, trivialised, exoticised, mystified and represented Egypt as vicious and seductive.¹⁷⁸ Such representations might have impacted the lives and identities of the Second Temple community considerably.¹⁷⁹ This phenomenon has many parallels in modern colonial contexts as well. In a similar but Indonesian context, Abidin Kusno explains how a national culture of fear formed in the urban spaces of postcolonial Indonesia.¹⁸⁰ This postcolonial apprehension, Kusno explains, is not merely bewilderment against the state, but a sense of fear in regards to other groups with whom they live side-by-side.¹⁸¹

Similarly, the imperial representation of Egypt may have influenced the socio-political aspects of Yehud.¹⁸² Furthermore, such traumatic experiences impacted the Second Temple community considerably and, subsequently, forced the members to reshape their worldview according to the colonial agenda, internalising an anti-Egyptian perspective. Such a change in worldview divided the class layers sharply and deeply

¹⁷⁶ Kvammen, *Toward a Postcolonial Reading of the Epistle of James*, 216.

¹⁷⁷ Wietske de Jong-Kumru, *Postcolonial Feminist Theology* (Berlin: Lit Verlag Dr. W. Hopf, 2013), 83, Shaun L. Gabbidon, *Criminological Perspectives on Race and Crime* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 179, Jane M. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (London: Routledge, 1996), 2.

¹⁷⁸ Igor Maver, "Post-Colonial Literatures in English ab origine ad futurum," in *Critics and Writers Speak: Revisioning Post-colonial Studies*, ed. Igor Maver (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 11, Marek Tesar, *Te Whāriki in Aotearoa New Zealand: Witnessing and resisting neo-liberal and neo-colonial discourses in early childhood education*, ed. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Africa Taylor (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 100, Tezenlo Thong, *Progress and Its Impact on the Nagas: A Clash of Worldviews* (London: Routledge, 2016), 156, Tan Chung, *Across the Himalayan Gap: An Indian Quest for Understanding China* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1998), 85.

¹⁷⁹ Bush, *Imperialism and Postcolonialism*, 155.

¹⁸⁰ Abidin Kusno, *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space and Political Cultures in Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2014), 165.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Coogan, *The Oxford History*, 8.

within Yehudites and strengthened hostility and intense opposition to an internal minority such as foreign wives.¹⁸³ Similarly, this policy created "outsiders" within Yehudites.¹⁸⁴ Thus, the anti-Egyptian policy of Ezra forced a change in worldview and implanted a predominantly colonial worldview, which created internal as well as external outsiders in Yehud. Many religious movements emerged in Yehud to counter this colonial hegemony and their reservations to Ezra is evident in the Bible. Mary Douglas, for instance, suggests that Leviticus and Numbers respond to the exclusivist policy of Ezra.¹⁸⁵ Third Isaiah (Isaiah 56-66) also criticises the ethnocentric policies, while the book of Ruth is another example of an inclusive voice of the Post-exilic Yehud.¹⁸⁶ Abraham's crossings, which offers an alternative, yet empowering, moral visions, could also be part of this movement. The following section will clarify how Abraham's crossings undermine colonial worldview.

6. 2. 1. 4. Reimagining the Egyptian Other

As noted, Abraham acts according to the colonial worldview that imagined the "Egyptian Outsider" as a vicious other. As will be further explained, there appears to be a conflict between Abraham's worldview and the text, though there is no comment from the narrator that disapproves of Abraham.¹⁸⁷ The text, for example, highlights Pharaoh's innocence through many textual indications.¹⁸⁸ Yahweh's presence in Egypt and His

¹⁸³ Yoon Kyung Lee, "Postexilic Jewish Experience and Korean Multiculturalism," in *Migration and Diaspora* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 12.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Mary Douglas, "Responding to Ezra: The Priests and the Foreign Wives," *BibInt* 10/1 (2002): 1– 23.

¹⁸⁶ Wes Howard-Brook, "*Come Out My People!*": *God's Call Out of Empire in the Bible and Beyond* (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 264, Caroline N. Mbonu & Ngozi N. Iheanacho, "Women & Intercultural Communication," in *Intercultural Communication and Public Policy*, ed. Iheanacho, Ngozi (Port Harcourt: M & J Grand Orbit Communications, 2016)177.

¹⁸⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically* (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 2000), 94.

¹⁸⁸ Please see the discussion on Pharaoh as a better behavioural model below for more information. This research acknowledges that there are biblical passages that depict Pharaoh as a cruel and wicked monarch. This study, however, without challenging the validity and credibility of such representatons,

dialogue with an outsider is an important theme in this direction. Yahweh's intervention to help Sarah is also remarkable. Such indications challenge Abraham's actions and his worldview indirectly. They question the taboos of Abraham and narrate morality and piety among Egyptians. Such a narrative strategy raises further questions. What did it mean to the worldview of the Second Temple community? What are the narrators' viewpoints, communicated through Abraham's crossing? For my purposes, moreover, how will this interpretation help Dalit theology? Answering these questions will position this dissertation to propose a cross-cultural theology in Dalit contexts.

6. 2. 1. 4. 1. Outsider (Pharaoh) as a Behavioural Model

Genesis 12:10-20 emphasises Pharaoh, the outsider, as a better behavioural model than Abraham, the insider. The text accomplishes this task through many indications. The text further clarifies that Abraham's fear has nothing to do with Egypt or Egyptians. As Orlinksy explains, הקריב לבוא (hiq-rîḇ lā-bō-w) in Genesis 12:11 does not refer to a place but to time.¹⁸⁹ Genesis 12:11 informs not about the couple's proximity to Egypt, but it points out that they are yet to arrive. So, Abraham planned the deception, not in Egypt, but when the couples were about to enter into Egypt. Therefore, Abraham's mendacity is entirely predetermined, in no way prompted by factors related to their life in Egypt.¹⁹⁰

The text also highlights that Abraham's fear was unfounded. Abraham worries that Egyptians will kill him for their sexual gratification. The passive formulation in Genesis

analyse the assertions of Second Temple community skilfully embedded in Abraham's crossings. The emphasise of this study is not on Pharaoh but on the Second Temple community and their anti-Persian assertions.

¹⁸⁹ Harry M. Orlinsky, *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), 85.

¹⁹⁰ Daniel Gordis, "Lies, Wives and Sisters: The Wife-Sister Motif Revisited," in *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought*, Vol. 34, No. 3, Summer Issue 1985, 352.

12:15 and 16, however, show that Sarah was not abducted.¹⁹¹ The text uses לָקַח (laqach) to denote Pharaoh's action (12:15). This verb usually translates "take," can also mean "accept" or "receive."¹⁹² It denotes the formal taking of a wife and is distinguished from sexual intercourse (Genesis 20:2-4; 34:2; Deut. 22:13-14).¹⁹³ Mosaic law uses this term for a man getting married (Leviticus 21:13).¹⁹⁴ Thus, Pharaoh was marrying Sarah.¹⁹⁵ He takes Sarah with full honour and gives Abraham rich gifts as bride-price also (12:16).¹⁹⁶

The text emphasises Pharaoh's innocence.¹⁹⁷ The monarch states that he would not have taken Sarah if he had known she was Abraham's wife (12:19). Pharaoh sounds genuinely shocked. He returns Sarah and lets the couple go even after finding out their trick. Pharaoh permits Abraham to keep all the gifts he had given him.¹⁹⁸ Nothing in Genesis 12: 10-20, therefore, implies that Abraham was in any way realistic in his fear.¹⁹⁹ The text favours Pharaoh and noting the text's option for Pharaoh, many commentators have rightly observed that Pharaoh is a better behavioural model than Abraham.²⁰⁰ Another indication, the structure of this narrative, going a step further, depicts a close

¹⁹¹ Fischer, *Women who Wrestled with God*, 10.

¹⁹² L. Robert Arthur, *The Sex Texts: Sexuality, Gender, and Relationships in the Bible* (Pittsburgh: Dorrance Publishing, 2013), 90.

¹⁹³ Terry Puett, *The Book of Genesis* (Pueblo: P & L Publications, 2013), 192.

¹⁹⁴ Arthur, *The Sex Texts*, 90.

¹⁹⁵ Francis D. Ritter, *Sex, Lies and the Bible: The Controlling of Human Sexual Behavior Through the Corruption of the Bible* (Oceanside: Diverse Publications, 2006), 29-30.

¹⁹⁶ Fischer, *Women who Wrestled with God*, 10.

¹⁹⁷ Margaret Nutting Ralph, *And, God Said What? An Introduction to Biblical Literary Forms* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 60.

¹⁹⁸ Fretheim, *Abraham: Trials of Family*, 52, Fischer, *Women who Wrestled with God*, 11.

¹⁹⁹ It might seem that Pharaoh's act of taking Sarah justifies Abraham's fear. However, Pharaoh rebuking Abraham clarifies that he would not have married Sarah if he knew that she was Abraham's wife.

²⁰⁰ Iain Provan, *Discovering Genesis: Content, Interpretation, Reception* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 136, Alan Segal, *Sinning in the Hebrew Bible: How the Worst Stories Speak for Its Truth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 33-34, Eugene March, *The Wide, Wide Circle Of Divine Love: A Biblical Case for Religious Diversity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 49, Fischer, *Women who Wrestled with God*, 11, James A. Sanders, *God Has a Story Too: Sermons in Context* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 35.

relationship between Abraham and Pharaoh. The structure is an internal arrangement and an essential aspect of biblical narratives.²⁰¹

6. 2. 1. 4. 1. 1. The Structure of Genesis 12:10-20

As noted, Abraham's encounter with Egyptians starts in Genesis 12:10 and ends at 12:20. The synchronic approaches propose that this narrative has a concentric structure.²⁰² Gordon J. Wenham, for instance, proposes a concentric structure as follows:

- A. Exposition: Entry (v. 10)
 - B. First Scene: Abram's Speech (vv. 10 –13)
 - C. Second Scene: The Ruse at Work (vv. 14 –16)
 - B1. Third Scene: Pharaoh's Speech (vv. 17–19)
- A1. Conclusion: Exit (v. 20)²⁰³

Genesis 12: 14-16, the central element, is significant to interpret Abraham's crossings.²⁰⁴ According to this passage, the Egyptians whom Abraham encountered were not the ones that he had anticipated. Abraham imagined that the Egyptians would kill him upon seeing Sarah (11-12). However, 12:14-16 does not depict any contacts between Pharaoh's officials and Abraham. They did not attempt to kill him. Nor did Pharaoh's officials try to take her by force.²⁰⁵ They praised her beauty to Pharaoh.²⁰⁶ Pharaoh, as noted, took her as his wife and treated Abraham well for her sake. The verb (הִיטִיב /

²⁰¹ Marvin A. Sweeney, "Formation and Form in Prophetic Literature," in *Old Testament Interpretation: The Past, Present, and Future, Essays in Honour of Gene M. Tucker*, ed. J. L. Mays et. al (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 116, Simon Bar-Efrat, "Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative," VT 30 (1980), 172, The central part in a concentric structure would be of fundamental importance. Please see, Davis, *Oral Biblical Criticism*, 154.

²⁰² The structural lines surround the centre in regular layers in a concentric structure. It arranges concentrically around a centre, reversing the order of the elements after the central element. Please see Wucius Wong, *Principles of Form and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1993), 51, Robert L. Cohn, David W. Cotter, Jerome T. Walsh and Chris Franke, *2 Kings* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 10.

²⁰³ Wenham, Genesis 1–15, 286.

²⁰⁴ Richard N. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 188.

²⁰⁵ The Egyptians and the Princes of Pharaoh saw Sarah. But they did not approach her (12: 14-15).

²⁰⁶ Fischer, *Women who Wrestled with God*, 10.

hēyṭiyb) used in 12:16 to denote how Pharaoh treated Abraham is the hyphal perfect third person masculine singular of בט (yawtab). As W. L. Moran notes, בט (yawtab) is very significant in interpreting this passage.²⁰⁷ The Hebrew Scriptures usually use this verb to denote a covenantal relationship between God and Israel as well as between Israel and Kenites.²⁰⁸ Thus, בט (yawtab) in 12:16 indicates Pharaoh's intention to establish a close bond with Abraham. So too, Gerard Gertoux and J. Rosalie Hooge argue that the Pharaoh wanted to establish an alliance with Abraham by marrying his sister.²⁰⁹

Hence, it is clear that Pharaoh was not after sexual gratification. He was trying to establish a close relationship with Abraham. Similarly, the text narrates morality and piety in Pharaoh and his subjects through many textual indications. Genesis 12:10-20, for example, presents Abraham as a man acting out of his self-interests and Pharaoh as a man with a divine commission. This narrative strategy undermines the colonial worldview of the Second Temple community, highlighting how Abraham misreads the Egyptians, and, invites scholarly attention to Yahweh's injustice to Pharaoh. How can Yahweh plague an innocent Egyptian ruler? Why did Yahweh bless the liar? What is the point of view of the narrator here? Margaret Nutting Ralph also asks these questions.²¹⁰ However,

²⁰⁷ W.L. Moran, 'A Note on the Treaty Terminology of the Sefire Stelas', *JNES* 22 (1963), 174–6.

²⁰⁸ James K. Hoffmeier, "The Wives' Tales of Genesis 12, 20 & 26 and the Covenants at Beer-Sheba," in *Tyndale Bulletin* 43.1 (1992), 93. Hoffmeier provides following references for more information : R. Hillers, "A Note on Some Treaty Terminology in the Old Testament," *BASOR* 176 (1964), 46–7; A. Malamat, "Organs of Statecraft in the Israelite Monarchy," *BA* 28.2 (1965), 34–64; T.N.D. Mettinger, "King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings;" *Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament Series, No. 8* (Lund, 1976) 147. D.J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament* (Rome, An Bib. 21, 1978); idem "Ebla, orkia temnein, tb, slm: Addenda to Treaty and Covenant," *Bib* 60 (1979), 247–53.

²⁰⁹ Gerard Gertoux, *Abraham and Chedorlaomer: Chronological, Historical and Archaeological Evidence* (California: Lulu.com, 2015), 45, J. Rosalie Hooge, *Providential Beginnings* (Longwood: Xulon Press, 2003), 167.

²¹⁰ Ralph, *And, God Said What*, 60.

because of some unknown reasons, she does not answer them.²¹¹ Abraham's question "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" is relevant here as well (18:24).

6. 2. 1. 4. 2. Yahweh as Liberator and Author of Reconciliation

The image of God narrated in Genesis 12:10-20 is very important. Yahweh, as will be clarified, is the liberator of the endangered couple. However, Yahweh frees Sarah from Pharaoh's harem by informing Pharaoh about Sarah's status. The Hebrew verb נגג(*naga*) used in 12:17 is significant to this reading. The term *naga* means "touch".²¹² It denotes the state of ongoing contact between inanimate objects (1 Kings 6:27, 2 Chronicles 3:11f).²¹³ It could also mean a simple contact with an inanimate object (2 Kings 13:21), a dead body (Isaiah 6:7), glowing coal (Ezekiel 17:10) or with an animal (Daniel 8:5). Further, *naga* denotes a physical contact with a person (2 Samuel 23:7; Job 6:7, Daniel 8:18; 10:10, 16, 18) or God's messenger (Judges 6:21; 1 Kings 19:5, 7).²¹⁴ Genesis 32:25 uses *naga* to denote the touch of the angel of the Lord upon Jacob's thigh. So, what the text says is that Yahweh touched Pharaoh with His great touches (strokes).

Genesis 12:10-20 does not explain what this great touch was. Generations of translators as well as commentators, however, have interpreted 12:17 as Yahweh plagued Pharaoh. Such a reading questions the morality of Yahweh. Perhaps, analysing how the exilic and post-exilic texts use *naga* might offer another perspective. The exilic and post-exilic texts, for instance, use *naga* against the vision and commission of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Both prophets receive God's touch. Jeremiah 1:9, for instance, reads

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Munster L. Schwienhorst, "נגג *naga* touch afflict reach," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Volume 9*, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 204.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

“Then the Lord put forth His hand, and touched (*naga*) my mouth.” Yahweh is the subject of Jeremiah’s call. Jeremiah 1:9 goes on to say that the Lord has put His words in Jeremiah’s mouth. Similarly, Isaiah 6: 6-7 reports:

One of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: ‘Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.’

Thus, exilic and post-exilic texts use *naga* as a means of revelation and communication. Further, the prophetic call narratives in Isaiah and Jeremiah depict the divine hand as the 'key' principle in the prophetic opening of the mouth and the resolution of the objection against the call.²¹⁵ So too, as Jonathan Macy notes, *Naga* could also mean the life-giving touch that heals, comforts and strengthens.²¹⁶ Hence, *naga* in Genesis 12:10-20 can suggest a dialogue, Yahweh’s healing touch and conflict resolution (like Isaiah and Jeremiah). Indeed, Genesis 12:10-20 does not narrate a dialogue between Yahweh and Pharaoh. However, as *naga* implies, it is probable that Yahweh informed Pharaoh about Sarah’s status through this vision. Though the narrator does not explain, I think, there was a dialogue between Yahweh and Pharaoh.

Hence, the anonymous author (editor) who had lived in Achaemenid Yehud chose to work silently behind the curtain and used *naga* to indicate not only Sarah’s liberation but also to suggest Yahweh’s dialogue with Pharaoh and His magic touch that heals, comforts and empowers Pharaoh. Such a possibility is evident from Genesis 12: 18-20.

²¹⁵ Gregory Glazov, *The Bridling of the Tongue and the Opening of the Mouth in Biblical Prophecy* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 328-329, Avrahām Malāmāṭ, *Mari and the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 148-149, Michael A. Fishbane, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Haftarah* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 77, Victor H. Matthews, *Judges and Ruth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 84.

²¹⁶ Jonathan Macy, *In the Shadow of His Wings: The Pastoral Ministry of Angels: Yesterday, Today, and for Heaven* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2015), 118.

Pharaoh does not claim that plagues have afflicted him. Instead, as the text suggests, Pharaoh was fully aware of Abraham's deception. For example, Pharaoh asks Abraham "What is this that thou hast done unto me? Why didst thou not tell that she was thy wife?" We do not know how Pharaoh knew that Sarah is Abraham's wife.²¹⁷ It seems, as suggested that Yahweh had informed Pharaoh that Sarah is Abraham's wife. This appraisal will bridge the gap in the narrative also. Once Yahweh told Pharaoh the truth, he called Abraham and questions him. So too, the interrogation did not last long since Pharaoh knew the truth and Yahweh had already resolved the crisis with Yahweh's healing touch. Hence, Pharaoh lets Abraham go out of Egypt, with his wife and all that he had. Probably, "all that he had," indicate a peaceful sending away, and there was no chasing like the Exodus narrative. Hence, Genesis 12:10-20 highlights Yahweh as a liberator and an author of reconciliation. Such an image of God, as will be clarified in chapter 6, is significant to Dalit theology since Dalit contexts require a liberated-reconciled society connected through partnerships. Besides these thematic suggestions, the text narrates Yahweh's preferential option for Sarah and Sarah as an agent of God's liberation. It is especially relevant in Dalit contexts. The Dalit women, who are socially ostracised by the social structure, are the victims of class and sex.

6. 2. 1. 4. 3. Sarah: The Dalit Woman

Many scholars believe that Sarah participated in cheating Pharaoh. Hermann Gunkel, for instance, believes that Genesis 12:10-20 glorifies the intelligence of Abraham and the self-sacrifice of Sarah.²¹⁸ Similarly, Claus Westermann, after elaborating the

²¹⁷ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Abraham: The Story of a Life* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 48.

²¹⁸ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 173.

speech in 12:11-13, suggests that Abraham's deception is a joint venture of the couple.²¹⁹ Following Westermann, many scholars interpret Sarah's silence as agreement.²²⁰ There are alternative proposals as well. S. P. Jeansonne claims that Sarah's silence shows her powerlessness.²²¹ I have reservations against questioning the morality of Sarah based on her silence since she is a silent character throughout the Abrahamic narrative. Jon L. Berquist had already that the text does not allow her to speak at any of the critical moments in her life with her husband.²²² Naomi Steinberg, from a feminist perspective, offers another interpretation.²²³ She imagines that Abraham was trying to get rid of a barren wife to get another wife for himself, and Sarah could not resist because of her precarious position as a barren woman.²²⁴ Thus Sarah was a powerless victim in Egypt. Similarly, Tribble and William E. Phipps rightly note that Sarah is the object of her husband's calculation and Pharaoh's pleasure in this narrative.²²⁵ She is a manhandled woman.²²⁶ She has no name at the place of betrayal.²²⁷

This discussion does not mean that Sarah has accepted her fate in Pharaoh's harem. There is an important clue that many commentators had left out in 12:17. Most

²¹⁹ Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 163.

²²⁰ J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), 240. See also Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 382; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 288.

²²¹ S. P. Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 17.

²²² Jon L. Berquist, *Reclaiming Her Story: The Witness of Women in the Old Testament* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 48.

²²³ Naomi Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis: A Household Economics Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 53.

²²⁴ *Ibid.* 54.

²²⁵ Tribble, "Ominous Beginning for a Promise of Blessing," 36, William E. Phipps, *Assertive Biblical Women* (London: Greenwood Press, 1992), 10.

²²⁶ Tribble, "Ominous Beginning for a Promise of Blessing," 36.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

translations read the final clause in 12: 17 as "on account of" or "because of Sarai."²²⁸ Such translations drop the term דבר (*dabar*) at 12: 17.²²⁹ The Hebrew word דבר (*dabar*) has an extremely complex meaning. The King James Version, for instance, translates *dabar* by seventy-five different words.²³⁰ However, the usual translation is to speak, to tell and a word.²³¹ Thus the final clause in 12:17 could also mean because of the word of Sarah.²³² This reading suggests that Sarah did not accept Abraham's plan. She was communicating with Yahweh.²³³ Perhaps, Sarah's word to Yahweh might have been a plea for deliverance. Whatever be the case, Yahweh did not abandon her. He is her refuge. He intervenes to save the abandoned wife out of her troubled situation because of her word (12:17). After noting this fundamental reality, Irmtraud Fischer claims that Yahweh takes the side of the abandoned spouse - not to return Abraham his wife, but to rescue the victim of Abraham's prejudices.²³⁴ This divine initiative, as will be explained in the coming chapter, has tremendous implications for Dalit theology.²³⁵

This chapter has analysed the textual indications in Genesis 12: 10-20, which questions the dominant worldview of the Second Temple community that relegated internal and external outsiders. The narrative condemns how Abraham misreads Egyptians. Furthermore, the textual indications depict Yahweh's proximity to the outsiders, be it Pharaoh or the helpless Sarah and highlight Yahweh as a liberator as well

²²⁸ Ibid. Please see *New Revised Standard Version, New American Bible, Revised English Bible and New Jerusalem Bible*.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Roger Ferlo, *Opening the Bible* (Lanham: A Cowley Publications Book, 1997), 51.

²³¹ Robert Letellier, *Creation, Sin and Reconciliation: Reading Primordial and Patriarchal Narrative in the Book of Genesis*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 201.

²³² Tribble, "Ominous Beginning for a Promise of Blessing," 37.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Fischer, *Women who Wrestled with God*, 11.

²³⁵ I will elaborate on the plight of Dalit women in the coming chapter.

as a reconciling force. These narrative techniques, as suggested, have a communicative intent. The communicative intent will clarify the perspective of the narrator.

6. 2. 1. 5. The Function of Abraham's Journey to Egypt

As noted, Genesis 12:10-20 narrates morality and piety in Egypt. It reinstates that the Pharaoh was not the one that Abraham was expecting.²³⁶ This story highlights Yahweh's initiative to save Sarah, who was abandoned by her husband and depicts Yahweh as a liberator as well as an author of reconciliation. Furthermore, it implies Yahweh's presence beyond Canaan. Genesis 12: 10-20 also shows that Abraham and Pharaoh established a close relationship.

What did Abraham's crossing journey communicate to the intended readers living in Achaemenid Yehud? As clarified, the Achaemenid Yehud under the Persian Empire vilified and demonised Egypt and Egyptians because of political reasons. Furthermore, Ezra's command to divorce and expel Egyptian wives created "an outsider" within Yehud and affected Inter-Yehud and intra-Yehud relationships. Such colonial undertakings forced the Second Temple community to reformulate their dominant worldview along the lines of Persian colonial agenda, which displaced a significant portion of the community to the margins of society. Such outsiders and their empathisers, who were critical of Ezra's pro-Persian worldview and its impacts upon Yehud, crafted Genesis 12:10-20 to undermine colonial agenda. They challenged the imperial attempts to demonise the Egyptians by offering an alternative moral outlook, highlighting how Abraham's crossing to Egypt and Yahweh's initiatives to liberate the endangered couple subvert the Persian representation of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Thus, Genesis 12:10-20 might have been

²³⁶ Ibid.

an attempt to destabilise and undermine the colonial worldview and the postcolonial representation of Egypt, and to promote, a counter colonial worldview filled with liberation and reconciliation through cross-cultural undertakings.

This model is relevant in Dalits' contexts also. The dominant Hindu Vedic worldview, for example, dissociates Dalits from the divine and dehumanise them. Further, the Indian caste system, as noted, compartmentalises different castes. Each caste has its prejudices against the other. There are also inter-Dalit as well as intra-Dalit misreadings. Furthermore, such preoccupations, as noted, are present within Indian Christian churches also. Dalits' experience has not always been positive within Indian Christian churches. They face discrimination from their fellow Christians. This historical and sociological hegemony, as noted, has tempted Dalit theologians to propose Dalit identity. Such attempts, as suggested, overlooked Dalits' counter-hegemonic worldview, and did not respect the subversive voices in Dalit culture, which highlights liberated-reconciled society, connected through mutual associations. The crossing journey of Abraham, which offers a counter-colonial worldview, projecting liberation, reconciliation and cross-border relations envisioned by the anti-imperialists in Achaemenid Yehud, is relevant in Indian Dalit contexts. It, as will be explained in chapter 7, will help Dalit theology to revisit the concept of the Dalit / non-Dalit other embedded within the Dalits as well as the non-Dalits. The same insight is true with Abraham's encounter with Abimelech.

6. 2. 2. Abraham and Sarah Crossing the Philistine Border

Abraham's relocation to the Philistine's land might be an alternate version of Genesis 12:10-20.²³⁷ Westermann suggests that Genesis 20 is unintelligible without

²³⁷ Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation*, 177.

Genesis 12:10-20.²³⁸ However, I will study this narrative as an independent unit. Such an undertaking is not to deny their historical or literary interdependence. It seems that there are some differences between these two events in their present context.²³⁹ For instance, the former took place in Egypt, while Genesis 20 is in Gerar. Abraham encounters Pharaoh in 12:10-20. He meets Abimelech in this narrative. Abraham was fleeing from famine in Genesis 12: 10-20. He was moving freely, without any compulsion in Genesis 20.²⁴⁰ The text does not inform why Abraham goes to settle in Gerar. Also, the text does not explain why Abraham presents Sarah as his sister to Abimelech.²⁴¹ Genesis 20 explains Abimelech's encounter with God in detail.²⁴² Genesis 12:10-20 does not object to the possibility that Pharaoh had sexual relations with Sarah. Genesis 20, on the other hand, clarifies that Abimelech had not touched her. Abraham gets gifts from Pharaoh after Sarah had been taken over by him. Abimelech gives gifts to Abraham after discovering the deception. Thus, these stories vary in their present literary context.

Moreover, the final editor found each narrative as different episodes so that he could include them without any fear of narrative or historical contradiction.²⁴³ So too,

²³⁸ Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 161-62, 318-21.

²³⁹ Robert Alter and D. J. A. Clines explain that Genesis 20 shares many concerns of the type scenes (Gen. 12:10-20; Gen. 20; Gen. 26:1-12). However, they suggest that these stories can be analysed as three different stories in their present context. Please see Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 49ff and D. J. A. Clines, "The Ancestor in Danger: But not the Same Danger," in *What Does Eve Do to Help? and Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 67-84. Bradford Anderson has summarised their studies. Please see Bradford A. Anderson, *An Introduction to the Study of the Pentateuch*, 2nd Edition (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017), 101.

²⁴⁰ Barnabe Assohoto, Samuel Ngewa, "Genesis," in *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars*, ed. Tokunboh Kdeyemo (Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2006), 40.

²⁴¹ Jean Louis Ska, *Reading the Pentateuch*, 57.

²⁴² This text introduces God as Elohim. This dissertation, because of its preference for the present text and convenience, will just translate it as God.

²⁴³ Joel S. Baden, *J, E, and the Redaction of the Pentateuch* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 214, See also Marc Zvi Brettler, *How to Read the Bible* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2005), 54.

Genesis 12:10-20 and Genesis 20 have their own life and meaning. Joel S. Baden, Kenneth A. Mathews and D. L. Petersen, for example, have already noted that these narratives might not necessarily be different versions of the same story.²⁴⁴ Each narrative can be an independent episode composed around the topic of the patriarch who lies about his wife to save himself.²⁴⁵ Furthermore, as Clines clarifies, each narrative has its purpose.²⁴⁶ Therefore, we will analyse Genesis 20 as a stand-alone narrative to identify its purpose.

6. 2. 2. 1. Fear and Distrust towards Philistines

Genesis 20 begins with Abraham's journey towards Gerar, a Philistine city (implied by Gen 21:32, 34).²⁴⁷ The change in place and new characters indicate the beginning of a new narrative. The story ends at 20:18. There was neither famine nor divine commission. We do not know what caused Abraham's movement. Perhaps, it might be a voluntary movement.²⁴⁸ However, Abraham avoids telling the Philistines that Sarah is his wife.²⁴⁹ What might have prompted Abraham to hide such a crucial information again? Perhaps, as he explains later, Abraham worried that there is no fear of God in Gerar (20:11). He thinks that the Philistines would endanger him to get his wife. The text does not provide any reasons for Abraham's prejudices. How did Abraham know that there is

²⁴⁴ Joel S. Baden, *J, E, and the Redaction of the Pentateuch*, 214, Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 247, D. L. Petersen, "A Thrice-Told Tale: Genre, Theme and Motif," *BR 18* (1973), 30-43.

²⁴⁵ Petersen, "A Thrice-Told Tale," 30-43, Yehoshua Gitay, *Methodology, Speech, Society: The Hebrew Bible* (Sellenbosch: Sun Media, 2011), 30.

²⁴⁶ Clines, "The Ancestor in Danger," 67-84.

²⁴⁷ David L. Petersen *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David L. Petersen* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 29.

²⁴⁸ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 251.

²⁴⁹ Steven L. McKenzie, John Kaltner, *The Old Testament: Its Background, Growth, & Content* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 88.

no fear of God among Philistines? As the tale stands now, Abraham had not had any conflicts with them so far.

There are many proposals on Abraham's possible fear of the Philistines. Moberly proposes that Abraham's unsupported position as a sojourner might have caused his anxieties about Abimelech and the people of Gerar.²⁵⁰ This argument is unconvincing. Indeed, the events in this chapter start after the couple began their sojourn in the land of the Philistines.²⁵¹ However, the text does not narrate any difficulty that might have challenged Abraham's life in Gerar. Furthermore, unlike Genesis 12:10-20, Abraham had no compelling reasons for his relocation. Why the editor narrates this cross-cultural journey remains puzzling. I will analyse this narrative as a document composed in Yehud to clarify such riddles. The historical and political realities of Yehud might have also influenced this narrative. I will analyse this narrative against Nehemiah's hostility with the Philistines of Ashdod (Nehemiah 4:1; 13: 23-24).²⁵²

6. 2. 2. 2. Abraham's Fear and Postcolonial Representation of Philistines

Ashdod was one of the five Philistine cities that the Persians incorporated into their Empire.²⁵³ It was the most famous town in Philistia at the time of Nehemiah.²⁵⁴ The Babylonians had reassigned some parts of Judah to Ashdod to reduce Judean territory.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁰ R. W. L. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 93.

²⁵¹ John H. Salihamer, "Genesis," in *Genesis-Leviticus eds. Tremper Longman*, trans. David E. Garland (Michigan: Zondervan, 2009), 203, Jean Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, 57, McKenzie, Kaltner, *The Old Testament*, 88.

²⁵² Peter Machinist, "Biblical Traditions: The Philistines and Israelite History," in *The Sea Peoples and Their World: A Reassessment*, ed. Eliezer D. Oren (Philadelphia: The University Museum, 2000), 56.

²⁵³ Denzil Chetty, *Divorce Discourses: A Biblical Dilemma* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2007), 69.

²⁵⁴ Machinist, "Biblical Traditions," 56, Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), 247.

²⁵⁵ Niels Peter Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israel* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015), 183, Robert H. Kennett, *The Composition of the Book of Isaiah in the Light of History and Archaeology: The*

This land remained with Ashdod during the time of Nehemiah. Indeed, Nehemiah does not use the label "Philistine" either for Ashdod or independently.²⁵⁶ However, as Eve Levavi Feinstein notes, the Philistines continued to live in Ashdod during Nehemiah's time.²⁵⁷ Moreover, an association of Ashdod with various national/ethnic groups might suggest many possibilities. Benedikt Otzen, for instance, suggests that such an association shows that Ashdod represents more than a city in the book of Nehemiah.²⁵⁸ Robert H. Kennett and Kermit Zarley have rightly remarked that Ashdod could mean Philistines in general or a significant portion of Philistines.²⁵⁹ Similarly, Andrew Knowles, Paul Heger and Kermit Zarley argue that the women of Ashdod imply Philistine women in general.²⁶⁰ Thus, Ashdod continued as a Philistine city during Nehemiah's time.

As we know, the Philistines were a traditional enemy of the Jews.²⁶¹ However, the Deuteronomic stipulations do not include the Philistines with Ammonites and Moabites. Deuteronomy prohibits the Ammonites and Moabites from the assembly of the Lord forever (Deuteronomy 23: 3-4). They are the only groups who are permanently excluded from Israel.²⁶² Deuteronomy does not provide any such prohibitions against the

Schweich Lectures 1909 (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 19, Benedikt Otzen, "Israel Under the Assyrians. Reflections on Imperial Policy in Palestine," in *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute*, Vol. XI (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 106.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Feinstein, *Sexual Pollution in the Hebrew Bible*, 148.

²⁵⁸ Benedikt Otzen, "Israel Under the Assyrians," 106.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, Kermit Zarley, *Palestine Is Coming: The Revival of Ancient Philistia* (Hannibal: Hannibal Books, 1990), 38.

²⁶⁰ Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide: An all-in-one introduction to the book of books* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 2001), 209, Paul Heger, *The Three Biblical Altar Laws: Developments in the Sacrificial Cult in Practice and Theology, Political and Economic Background* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter GmbH & Co., 1999), 341, Kermit Zarley, *Palestine Is Coming: The Revival of Ancient Philistia*, 38.

²⁶¹ Machinist, "Biblical Traditions, 56. Ashdod was one of the principal cities of Philistine Pentapolis (Jonathan Michael Golden, *Ancient Canaan and Israel: New Perspectives* (California: ABC - Clio, 2004), 158).

²⁶² Jacob Milgrom, "Religious Conversion and the Revolt Model for the Formation of Israel." in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982): 173.

Philistines. Moreover, Ezra had not included the women of Ashdod in his marriage ban. Nehemiah, deviating from the Deuteronomic stipulations and Ezra's prohibition, linked Ashdod together with the Ammonites and Moabites because of some unknown reasons. After responding to this inconsistency, Rainer Albertz suggests that Nehemiah's ban had included Ashdod only.²⁶³ Ammon and Moab were added to the list at a later stage.²⁶⁴

What might have prompted Nehemiah to isolate Ashdod? Nehemiah's updating of the Deuteronomic ban might be a response to the political and social life in Yehud. The book of Nehemiah narrates two events that alarmed him. The Philistines of Ashdod plotted together with Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs and the Ammonites to fight against Jerusalem (Nehemiah 4:7). The enemies surrounded the Jews from the East (Ashdod), the West (Ammon), the North (Sanballat of Samaria) and the South (Geshem the Arab).²⁶⁵ This coalition started a propaganda campaign to discredit the Jews and incite violence or anger against them (4:7).²⁶⁶ The text does not explain how they attempted to accomplish this. Therefore, we do not know whether this took the form of infiltrating the citizenry of Jerusalem, or agitating throughout the surrounding regions, or trying to discredit the Jews at the Persian court.²⁶⁷ Nehemiah responds to their threat with prayer and a military watch (4:9). Perhaps, Nehemiah might have also initiated some form of counter-propaganda against his enemies. The book of Nehemiah does not narrate any

²⁶³ Rainer Albertz, "Purity Strategies and Political Interests in the Policy of Nehemiah," in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honour of William G. Dever*, eds. S. Gittin, J. E. Wright, J. P. Dessel (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 199-206.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Fredrick Carlson Holmgren, *Israel Alive Again: A Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 107.

²⁶⁶ Knute Larson, Max Anders, Kathy Dahlen, *Holman Old Testament Commentary - Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2005), 172.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

such events. Such enterprises, as noted in Ezra's anti-Egyptian policy, is common in colonial contexts. Nehemiah might have projected the Philistines of Ashdod as a vicious outsider. This historical and political reality is one of the crucial clues in interpreting Nehemiah's attempts to discredit the intermarriage between Jewish men and women from Ashdod (13:23).²⁶⁸

This discussion does not mean that Nehemiah had no other reasons to challenge the intermarriage with the Philistine women from Ashdod. Nehemiah, for instance, reminds his fellow Jews that Jewish children born out of marriage with the women from Ashdod spoke the language of Ashdod (13: 23-24). This reality might have alarmed Nehemiah. He fears that these unions might destroy the purity of the Jews and their faith.²⁶⁹ Therefore, Nehemiah rebukes them and warns the Judahites against marrying the women of Ashdod (13: 25-27). He imposes an oath based on Deuteronomy 7:3 (Nehemiah 13:25) that requires the Jews to avoid marriage with outsiders either for themselves or their children.²⁷⁰

There are striking alternate proposals as well. Yee, for instance, links the intermarriage ban in Nehemiah with socioeconomic life.²⁷¹ Nehemiah fears that the Jews were in danger of losing their political existence and religious identity because of intermarriages with the women from Ashdod.²⁷² Such intermarriages might have alarmed Nehemiah against the possibility of foreign influence on Judah's internal affairs.²⁷³

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., K. L. Noll, *Canaan and Israel in Antiquity: An Introduction* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 296.

²⁷⁰ Blenkinsopp, *Judaism, the First Phase*, 70-71.

²⁷¹ Gale A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 146.

²⁷² Chetty, *Divorce Discourses*, 71.

²⁷³ Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 146.

Moreover, Nehemiah might have feared that the land could be transferred from the Jerusalem elite into outsiders through marriage with foreign women. Furthermore, Yee notes that intermarriage with foreign women among the priestly class could lead to external influences on the affairs of the Jerusalem Temple.²⁷⁴ Thus Nehemiah had many reasons to update the Deuteronomic stipulations to include the Philistines of Ashdod. Such programmes might have aimed at maintaining Jewish ethnic identity by clear and dogged boundary maintenance.²⁷⁵ However, what might have caused Abraham's reservations, I believe, needs to be clarified further.

6. 2. 2. 3. Abraham's Prejudice as a Postcolonial Construct

As noted, Nehemiah had political, sociological and religious reasons for limiting contacts with the Philistines of Ashdod. This enterprise had far-reaching consequences. It established a barrier of separatism and hostility between Judea and Ashdod.²⁷⁶ Furthermore, as suggested, it projected the Philistines of Ashdod as an outsider. Likewise, such a ban interrupted the normative order by changing the nature of the social, political and economic relations which until that point were part of the social structure, and forced the Second Temple community to reframe their worldview significantly. Consequently, the institutions began to be informed by and built around the central ideas of Persian hegemonic worldview. This emerging worldview might have influenced the Second Temple community, their thinking patterns, and how they perceive themselves

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Peter H. W. Lau, *Identity and Ethics in the Book of Ruth: A Social Identity Approach* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., 2011), 182.

²⁷⁶ Aryeh Kasher, *Jews and Hellenistic Cities in Eretz-Israel: Relations of the Jews in Eretz-Israel with the Hellenistic Cities During the Second Temple Period (332 BCE - 70 CE)* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), 27.

and others. It might have resulted in many personal tragedies since it affected many Jewish families, consciously and unconsciously.²⁷⁷ It might have split family bonds between husband and wife and father and children.²⁷⁸ Further, it seeded a culture of suspicion within and beyond Yehud.²⁷⁹ The economic and social prospects for a divorced foreign woman and her children must have been practically nil.²⁸⁰ Thus, the anti-Ashdod policy of Nehemiah disrupted the normal life in Achaemenid Yehud and created outsiders in inter-Yehud and intra-Yehud relationships.

The so-called outsiders in Yehud, who were critical of the Persian hegemony in Nehemiah's policies, challenged the colonial ontology and epistemology circulated under Nehemiah. I suggest that they crafted Genesis 20:1-18 subversively as a counter-colonial discourse to destabilise the Persian empire and legitimise counter-colonial formulations. This narrative, therefore, was a response to the political and religious worldview of a dominant section of Achaemenid Yehud and functioned as a dissenting voice of the outsiders. If so, what might have been the communicative intent of these outsiders?

6. 2. 2. 4. Reimagining the Philistine Other

As noted, Abraham worries that there is no fear of God in Gerar. The text, however, casts doubt on Abraham through many textual indications. The text, as will be seen, highlights that the Philistine outsider is a better behavioural model than Abraham, the insider. Furthermore, the text implies God's presence among the Philistines as well as

²⁷⁷ Jeremiah W. Cataldo, *Biblical Terror: Why Law and Restoration in the Bible Depend Upon Fear* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017), 85-86.

²⁷⁸ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 46.

²⁷⁹ There might have been many innocent victims like Abimelech and Sarah, who were affected by the culture of suspicion.

²⁸⁰ Nehemiah, unlike Ezra, did not ask the Jews to divorce their Ashdodite women.

their fear of God. The text also shows how Yahweh intervenes to save Sarah whom Abraham had abandoned for his safety.

6. 2. 2. 4. 1. Abimelech as a Behavioural Model

Abraham's migration, as seen, was not a forced displacement. He opted to live the life of a sojourner in the land of the Philistines because of some unknown reasons, although Abraham may have had some justification for this choice. In Gerar, as in Egypt, Abraham, however, fails to foresee the effects of his action. The story does not imply that Abimelech took Sarah forcefully after exploiting the vulnerability of the sojourner. The text uses *נִקַּח* (*laqach*) to denote his action. As explained previously, it most likely means that Abimelech was marrying Sarah.²⁸¹ It is also probable that Abraham initiated the marriage by implying Sarah as his sister. Similarly, Abimelech might have wanted Abraham as an ally to increase his political power.²⁸² This discussion does not claim that Abraham had no reservations against Philistines.

Admittedly, Abraham had reasons to worry (20:11). However, those reasons had nothing to do with his life in Gerar. The text as it is available now does not share any reservations against Abimelech or the people of Gerar. It, as will be explained, narrates morality and piety in Abimelech and shows that Gerar was not a place where people kill husbands to get their wives.²⁸³ The textual indications show that Abimelech is innocent, and there was fear of God in Gerar.

²⁸¹ Please read 5.2.1.4.1. for more information on *laqach*.

²⁸² J. G. Vos, *Genesis* (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2006), 295.

²⁸³ David VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 157.

First and foremost, God speaks only to Abimelech in this chapter.²⁸⁴ Abraham acts without divine commission in this narrative. Abimelech designates Gerar as צַדִּיק-תְּהָרֹג (tsaddiq Tahárog) in 20:4. Some translations read it as an innocent nation. However, it is apt to translate *tsaddiq Tahárog* as a righteous nation. Such a reading reminds Abraham's request to God not to punish the righteous ones with the wicked ones in Genesis 18:25. It is remarkable that Yahweh also acknowledges Abimelech's claim (20:6ff). God agrees with Abimelech's self-defence that he was 'pure in heart' when he took Sarah (20:5-6). The Hebrew word for 'pure' here is תָּם (tom).²⁸⁵ This word is related to *Tamim*. Genesis 6:9 uses this term to describe Noah's integrity and perfection. Thus, the text presents Abimelech as a man like Noah and clarifies that there were no compelling reasons for Abraham to assume that his life would have been in jeopardy had his real relationship to Sarah been made public.

This narrative technique is innovative. It narrates that outsiders may have greater integrity before God than insiders.²⁸⁶ Moreover, this episode clarifies that revelation is possible to outsiders.²⁸⁷ Hence, the text, together with Yahweh, informs readers that Abimelech and his servants were not the ones that Abraham had expected.²⁸⁸ Moreover, Abimelech did not defend his right to Sarah when God confronted him.²⁸⁹ His response suggests that he would not have married Sarah if he knew that she was Abraham's wife.

²⁸⁴ Terence E. Fretheim, *Abraham: Trials of Family and Faith*, 53.

²⁸⁵ Brett, *Genesis: Procreation*, 52.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50*, 50.

²⁸⁸ Gonzales, *Where Sin Abounds*, 136, Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, 58.

²⁸⁹ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order*, 157.

Abimelech's willingness to be open and share the truth with his officials contrasts with Abraham and his subterfuge.²⁹⁰ Abimelech was also quick to correct his fault (20:8).²⁹¹ He bestowed presents upon Abraham and Sarah. He permitted them to live wherever they wanted even after recognising their fault (20:14-16).²⁹² Thus, the text shows how wrong Abraham's assessment of Gerar had been.²⁹³ Further, it might confirm that Abraham's prejudices might have been pure fictions.²⁹⁴ Hence, the image of the Philistines narrated in the Abraham narrative, as will be further explained, is contrary to the Philistines we see in other parts of the Bible.

6. 2. 2. 4. 1. 1. The Philistines in the Abraham Narrative

We encounter Philistines in the books of Genesis, Judges, 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel and Nehemiah. We have detailed information about the group we find in Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel and Nehemiah from extra-Biblical sources. However, we have no information about the Philistines in the Abraham narrative (20: 1-18, 21:32, 34 and 26:1). Moreover, the Philistines in Judges and beyond are bellicose, hostile and live under "lords."²⁹⁵ The Philistines in Genesis, on the other hand, are peace-loving and live under a king.²⁹⁶ Many scholars explain this discrepancy as an anachronism penned at a later stage.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁰ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 67.

²⁹¹ James E Smith, *The Pentateuch* (Joplin: College Press Publishing Company, 2006), 155, Vos, Genesis, 297.

²⁹² Lockyer, *All the Miracles*, 42.

²⁹³ Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 90.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 94.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Kermit Zarley, *Palestine is Coming*, 226

However, Hamilton clarifies that if it is an anachronistic projection by someone, it would be improbable that he would create Philistines which were antithetical to his stereotype of the Philistines.²⁹⁸ This argument is valid. However, it seems to limit the freedom of the final composer (editor). The composer might have his intentions for such a presentation. Based on the analysis so far, I contend that one possibility is that this was an innovative attempt to reimagine the Philistines of Ashdod. The structure of this narrative, as will be seen, also highlights how this narrative endeavours to reimagine the Philistines.

6. 2. 2. 4. 1. 2. The Structure of Genesis 20:1-18

As suggested, the structure of the narrative might help us clarify its communicative intent. Bruce K. Waltke proposes the following concentric structure for this narrative:

- A. Abimelech takes Sarah into his Harem (20:1-2)
- B. God Sues against Abimelech (20:3-7)
- X. Abimelech and Officials become afraid (20:8)
- B'. Abimelech Sues against Abraham (20: 9-13)
- A'. Abimelech compensates Abraham and Sarah, and Abraham prays for Abimelech²⁹⁹

Genesis 20:8 is the centre of the concentric structure. As noted, this verse is crucial to explain this narrative. 20:8 emphasises how Abimelech and his officials responded to God's communication. The verb used here to describe their fear is *יָרָא* ("yir'ah or "yare"). The semantic range of *yare* is quite broad. It ranges from a fear of animals, enemies, punishment, sickness and death, to the fear of God.³⁰⁰ This verb is found approximately

²⁹⁸ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 94.

²⁹⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 280. For an alternate proposal, please see, Abraham Kuruvilla, *Genesis: A Theological Commentary for Preachers* (Eugene: Resource Publications, 2014), 237. According to Abraham, the centre of the concentric structure is Genesis 20:8 itself.

³⁰⁰ Tremper Longman III, Peter Enns (eds), *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 930.

330 times throughout the Old Testament.³⁰¹ Its object is God in almost 80% of such occurrences. It implies reverential awe when a person is in God's presence (Exodus 1:17; 1 Sam. 12:14, 18; 2 Sam. 6:9; 2 Kgs 17:28, 35-39; Pss. 33:8; 102:15; Jer. 5:22, 24; Jon. 1:16).³⁰² Thus the text points to the reverence of God among the Philistines of Gerar.

Furthermore, Genesis 20:8 had another function in Yehud under Nehemiah. The same word *yir'ah*, which is predominantly used to show the fear of God, is used to describe Nehemiah's fear of the Persian King Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2:2). Could it be that comparison between Nehemiah's imperial association and Gerar's fear of God? Such a reading might suggest that the text wishes to place Abimelech and Gerar above Nehemiah and the Jews. Yahweh's dialogue with Abimelech also supports this reading.

6. 2. 2. 4. 2. Yahweh as Liberator and Author of Reconciliation

Unlike, Genesis 12:10-20, Genesis 20 elaborates Yahweh's apparition and revelation to Abimelech, who is a non-Israelite king from an unchosen line, in detail.³⁰³ So too, Genesis 20:3-8 presupposes that Abimelech is familiar with God.³⁰⁴ There are no questions of uncertainty, such as "Who are you?" from Abimelech.³⁰⁵ Instead, he answers God with a reverential address. Abimelech's response further suggests his familiarity with God.³⁰⁶ The encounter between God and Abimelech introduces an essential

³⁰¹ Steven Lawson, *Holman Old Testament Commentary - Psalms* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2003), 130.

³⁰² Ibid, Michelle Pesando, *Why God Doesn't Hate You* (Bloomington: Balboa Press, 2014), 10.

³⁰³ Joel N. Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen: Conceptions of Election in the Pentateuch and Jewish-Christian Interpretation* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 99.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., Shaul Bar, *Daily Life of the Patriarchs* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2014), 79.

³⁰⁵ Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen*, 99.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

characteristic of God's liberation.³⁰⁷ God reveals Godself directly in a dream.³⁰⁸ Similarly, God listens to the foreign king's plea.³⁰⁹

Genesis 20 also highlights Yahweh as a liberator and depicts an extreme example of conflict resolution (which is absent in a peripheral reading of Genesis 12:10-20), which did not end in liberating Sarah, but culminates in reconciling the couple with Abimelech. Abimelech, for example, gave cattle and slaves to Abraham after returning Sarah and permitted Abraham and Sarah to live in Gerar. Abraham, in turn, prays for Abimelech. Such an instance of helping each other is an essential model in liberating the oppressed.³¹⁰ Yahweh's concern for Sarah is, again another important theme.

6. 2. 2. 4. 3. Sarah: The Dalit Woman

Genesis 20 places Sarah in Abimelech's harem. As noted, Abraham hides crucial information, and Abimelech takes Sarah. Sarah remains a voiceless character in this narrative also. However, there is a hint in Abimelech's defence to God that Sarah participated in carrying out Abraham's plan (20:5). Again, does it mean that Sarah was a willful participant in Abraham's plot? The text does not say anything about it. Perhaps, she might have trusted Abraham's words that there is no fear of God in Gerar. However, Yahweh intervenes to save her before Abimelech approaches her (20:4). This incident shows Yahweh's concern for Sarah's dignity and well-being. This divine initiative, as will be explained in the next chapter, can have tangible implications for Dalit theology.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid. See also Brett, *Genesis: Procreation*, 52.

³¹⁰ Ibid, See also Brett, *Genesis: Procreation*, 52.

6. 2. 2. 5. The Function of Abraham's Crossing to Philistia

Genesis 20, as seen, projects Yahweh as a liberator as well as the source of reconciliation. Further, the narrative reiterates that Abimelech is not the one that Abraham had suspected. He has morality and piety. According to the narrative, Abimelech was marrying Sarah without knowing that she is Abraham's wife. Moreover, Genesis 20 narrates the fear of God among the people of Gerar. What did Abraham's crossing journey communicate to the intended readers living in Achaemenid Yehud? And again, how will this model help Dalit theology? As clarified, the Achaemenid Yehud under Nehemiah vilified the Philistines of Ashdod because of political, religious and economic reasons. Nehemiah's reservations to intermarriage with the women of Ashdod could be another factor as well. Such preoccupations, as seen, forced Second Temple community to alter its worldview significantly. The emerging worldview impacted the institutions of the Second Temple community, and consequently, the members began to pattern their behaviours according to the colonial worldview, knowingly and unknowingly. It created "an outsider" within Yehud and affected inter-Yehud and intra-Yehud relationships. These outsiders and their sympathisers composed Genesis 20 as a counter-colonial formation with a set of suggested societal practices, challenging and unmasking the attempts to demonise the Philistines by narrating a crossing journey. Such a crossing, as noted, depicts God as the source of liberation and reconciliation and shows that Abimelech and the Gerarites are not the ones that the Persian regime forecast. Thus, the crossing of Abraham functions as an inversion.

This new understanding might have helped the Second Temple community to reimagine, reinterpret and reframe the concept of the Philistines. Furthermore, this

narrative highlights God a source of liberation and reconciliation and God's preferential option for Sarah. Likewise, this tale projects dialogue as God's methodology. This model has tremendous potential to subvert Nehemiah's representation of the Philistines. It might have helped the Second Temple community to revisit their concept of the Philistine other. Similarly, this story should have invited the post-exilic community to promote dialogues within and beyond the borders of Canaan. Likewise, it should have helped them to reflect on the fate of the internal minorities within Yehud like the women of Ashdod. This model is relevant in the Dalit context also. The Indian caste system, as noted, is a system of segregation. It compartmentalises different castes. Each caste has its prejudices against the other. Such preoccupations, as indicated, influence inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit contacts. Therefore, this paradigm might help Dalit theology to reimagine the concept of the Dalit / non-Dalit other embedded within the Dalit psyche. Such attempts to re-imagine the Other might promote inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit partnerships. Similarly, it will help the Dalits to understand the sad fate of internal minorities like Dalit women.

6. 3. Abraham's Crossings and Dalit Theology

The pro-Persian regimes of Ezra and Nehemiah, we have seen, dehumanised the Egyptian and the Philistine Outsiders because of political, religious and social reasons. Exclusivity became the mode of operation in Jerusalem.³¹¹ Such attempts forced the Second Temple community to reformulate their worldview and the members began to conceptualise, produce, and imagine individual and collective identities in an included/excluded space, creating many barriers within Achaemenid Yehud.³¹² It created a polarisation against a minority like Egyptian and Philistine women. Such practices

³¹¹ Aaron Koller, *Esther in Ancient Jewish Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 25.

³¹² *Ibid.*

created an outsider within and beyond the boundaries of Achaemenid Yehud and constructed the followers of Persian governors as a dominant group at the centre of Yehud and Egyptian and Philistine outsiders at the periphery of Yehud, and it halted inter-Yehud and intra-Yehud dialogues.

After analysing how Abraham's crossings in Genesis 12:10-20 and 20:1-18 represent the Egyptian and the Philistine outsider against this historical context, this chapter has suggested that these narratives have been the dissenting voices in Achaemenid Yehud, challenging the attempts to demonise and expel the internal and external Outsiders. This discussion does not intend to discredit the historicity of the traditions associated with Abraham's crossings to Egypt (12:10-20) and Gerar (20:1-18) either. Such traditions, as explained in the previous chapter, existed before the exile. However, the final composers (editors) who lived in Achaemenid Yehud reinterpreted, reframed and reconstructed the available traditions to express their discontent with the way in which the Persian regime and its representatives characterise the Egyptians and the Philistines. Nevertheless, these narratives are more than a voice of dissent. They invited the intended readers to a crossing journey beyond the borders set by the political and religious authorities of the Achaemenid Yehud by narrating morality and piety among the Egyptians and the Philistines. Such a model might have promoted the liberation of Egyptian and Philistine outsiders, reconciliation between Jews and their religious, cultural and ethnic outsiders, and inter-Yehud and intra-Yehud participation and dialogue.

The proposed paradigm is significant in Dalit contexts, since an invitation to a crossing journey, the liberation of the dominated castes and reconciliation between the dominant castes and the dominated castes are part of the subversive voices in Dalit

culture and spirituality.³¹³ However, as noted, Dalit theology has overlooked such inclusive voices submerged in Dalit culture and spirituality. From such a background, this research proposes an intertextual reading between the counter-assertions of the Second Temple community against the disruptive policies of the Persian empire narrated through Abraham's crossings, and the counter-formulations against the dominant Hindu Vedic worldview expressed through the subversive voices in Dalits' contexts, to redirect Dalit theology in actualising liberated-reconciled Church and society, connected through partnerships.

6. 4. Conclusion

This chapter has analysed Abraham's crossings to Egypt and Philistia as documents composed in Achaemenid Yehud. These narratives, as noted, seek to reimagine the outsider by highlighting the God of Israel as the liberator of the oppressed and an author of reconciliation between the oppressor and oppressed, morality and piety among Yehud's colonial others, and God's preferential option for Sarah, who functions as an agent of God's liberation. Such undertakings have great potential in Dalit contexts. For example, God narrated in Abraham's crossings, does not participate in sufferings but liberates the endangered couple out of their mess through peaceful intervention. Such an aspect may reorient how Dalit theology approach God's mission. Further, Abraham's crossings highlight God as a source of liberation and reconciliation, God's presence beyond the boundaries of the promised land and His dialogue with outsiders. Yahweh informs Pharaoh and Abimelech that Sarah is Abraham's wife (12:17 // 20:3-7).³¹⁴ The

³¹³ Chapter 3 and 4 discuss the importance of the crossing journey beyond the boundaries and mutual partnerships in Dalit culture and spirituality.

³¹⁴ This dissertation, as explained above, does not accept the absoluteness of the interpretation that Yahweh plagued Pharaoh.

text narrates that Yahweh is the God of Dialogue who comes down to help the oppressed (12:17 // 20:3-7). The dialogues have great possibilities in India's multireligious context. The image of Yahweh as the God who settles the disputes with an Outsider through dialogue will guide Dalit theology in promoting inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit dialogues. The next chapter will clarify how these imperatives might help Dalit theology.

Similarly, Abraham's trips highlight morality and piety among outsiders and outsider as a behavioural model than an insider. Such imperatives can be liberative in Dalit contexts since the Dalits and the non-Dalits, as noted, imagine the Other to be alien in values.³¹⁵ The proposed paradigm would help the Dalits as well as the non-Dalits to seek the best in their religious, cultural and caste other. Such a radical re-orientation, as will be explained in the next chapter, can help Dalit theology overcome the caste-outcaste dichotomy and methodological exclusivism, promoting a liberated-reconciled society, connected through mutual partnerships. Moreover, it will guard Dalit theological deliberations against the danger of absolutising Dalit experiences, which, as Duncan B. Forrester cautions, can lead to poor theological reflection.³¹⁶ Furthermore, as will be explained, the proposed model will empower Dalit theology with a willingness and readiness to listen to the religious, cultural and ethnic other as fellow human beings with dignity and learn from them.³¹⁷ Thus, my reading of Genesis 12: 10-20 and 20: 1-18 will help Dalit theology come out of its present alienation from Dalit culture and religion.

³¹⁵ Dalit experience is starting point for Dalit theology. It is the experience of oppression, discrimination, suffering and pain. Haokip, *Can God Save My Village*, 257. Please see introduction, chapter 1, 2 and 3 for more details.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Eric J. Sharpe, "The Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue," in *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions: Conflicting Truth Claims*, ed. John Hick (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 83. Let me clarify that this dissertation does not intend to identify Abraham or the outsiders in Indian contexts. On the other hand, we will propose how the attempts to reimagine the Egyptians and Philistines might help Dalit theology.

Sarah's trauma is also relevant in the Dalit context. Abraham neglects Sarah. Pharaoh and Abimelech abuse her (unknowingly).³¹⁸ She endures the sufferings and rejections silently. However, she did not remain silent before Yahweh. She communicated her deplorable situation with Yahweh and Yahweh intervenes to help her. She appears to be of particular concern to Yahweh.³¹⁹ This intervention is relevant in Dalit contexts. Indeed, Dalit theology is ideologically pro-women. Dalit spirituality has matriarchal deities as well.³²⁰ However, caste, class and gender have alienated Dalit women.³²¹ Surekha Nelavala, a Dalit feminist theologian, laments that Dalit theology "has failed to debate and discuss the issues of Dalit women."³²² Therefore, she calls for a Dalit feminist standpoint to examine the issues of Dalit women.³²³ Thus, Yahweh's initiative in Genesis 12 and 20 might inspire theological discussion on the sufferings of Dalit women.

³¹⁸ This does not mean Sex as the only means of abusing a woman. Taking a married woman to a Harem could be an abuse.

³¹⁹ Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis*, 87.

³²⁰ Please see chapter 3.

³²¹ This dissertation will study the impact of the proposed paradigm to Dalit women in the next chapter.

³²² Nelavala, *Liberation Beyond Borders*, 23.

³²³ Ibid.

Chapter 7

Reimagining the Other: Liberating Dalit Theology

7. 0. Introduction

The Ramayana is an Indian epic.¹ It narrates the life of Rama, a dominant caste king.² Valmiki, its author, is supposed to be a dominated caste man called Ratnakar.³ Some Dalit communities venerate him as their ancestor.⁴ He was a hunter and a robber in his early life. He used to rob the travellers.⁵ The course of his life changed after his encounter with the sage Narada.⁶ The sage convinced Ratnakar of his faults, and so Ratnakar became an ascetic. Ratnakar started chanting 'Rama' in the reverse order, as suggested by Narada.⁷ He kept on doing this without moving from his posture, and his whole body was covered by an anthill. Narada returned to Ratnakar after a long time and took Ratnakar out of the anthill. Narada renamed Ratnakar as Valmiki.⁸ Valmiki started living near the river Tamasa.⁹

¹ Ramesh Menon, *The Ramayana: A Modern Retelling of the Great Indian Epic* (New York: North Point Press, 2001).

² V. S. Lalrinawma, *Major Faith Traditions of India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), 141, Mahendra Singh, *Dalit's Inheritance in Hindu Religion* (Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2009), 75.

³ Shyamlal, *The Bhangi: A Sweeper Caste, Its Socio-economic Portraits: with Special Reference to Jodhpur City* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1992), 20, R. K. Narayan, *Gods, Demons, and Others* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 125.

⁴ Wilfred, *Dalit Empowerment*, 133, Dr. Anita Ghosh, "Dalit Feminism: A Psycho-Social Analysis of Indian English Literature," in *Dalit Literature: A Critical Exploration*, eds., Amar Nath Prasad and M. B. Gaijan (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2007), 50.

⁵ Dinkar Joshi, *Glimpses of Indian Culture* (New Delhi: Star Publications, 2005), 39.

⁶ Usha Devi Shukla, *Ramacaritamānasa in South Africa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas Publishers, 2002), 10. An alternative version informs that Ratnakar met Brahma, the God in Hindu mythology, instead of Narada. Please see, Shyamlal, *The Bhangi: A Sweeper Caste* 20.

⁷ Lochtefeld, *The Illustrated Encyclopaedia*, 736, Bishṇupada Cakrabartī, *The Penguin Companion to the Ramayana* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2006), 220.

⁸ Joshi, *Glimpses of Indian Culture*, 39, Manish Verma, *Fasts and Festivals of India* (Delhi: Diamond Books, 2007), 51, Suresh Chandra, *Encyclopaedia of Hindu Gods and Goddesses* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2001), 263, Swami Mukundananda, *Saints of India* (Plano: Jagadguru Kripalu Yog, 2010), 16.

⁹ P. K. Bhattacharyya, *Historical Geography of Madhyapradesh from Early Records* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1977), 102.

The tradition behind the composition of The *Ramayana* narrates Valmiki's confrontation with a hunter. He saw a hunter's arrow killing a male bird while a pair of Krauncha birds (water birds) were mating.¹⁰ He became very dejected at the sorrow of the female bird.¹¹ A few words came out of his mouth, spontaneously. It began with *Ma Nishada* (No, oh, hunter, no).¹² There have been some attempts to glorify Valmiki's distress.¹³ Ramesh Menon, for instance, recounts:

Valmiki himself could not forget the morning. Again, and again he heard the rapturous song of the birds, the evil hum of the arrow, the cry of the male Krauncha and the soft sound of his small body striking the ground.¹⁴

However, most of the modern Dalit scholars do not acknowledge Valmiki. They challenge how Valmiki glorifies Rama, noting that Rama had committed a crime against dominated castes since he had killed Shambuka, a Dalit.¹⁵ The caste system had denied the right to pray to Dalits.¹⁶ Shambuka, however, defiled the caste system and Rama killed Shambuka because of Shambuka's spiritual aspirations.¹⁷ Daya Pawar, one of the prominent Dalit poets, questions Valmiki's morality:

¹⁰ G. B. Kanuga, *Immortal Love of Rama* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1993), 10.

¹¹ Joanna Gottfried Williams, *The Two-headed Deer: Illustrations of the Rāmāyaṇa in Orissa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 22.

¹² T. Nanjundaiya Sreekantaiya, *Indian Poetics*, trans., N Balasubrahmanya (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 2001), 37, Jay Goswami, "No, O Hunter, No!" in *Out of the Nuclear Shadow*, ed. Smitu Kothari, Zia Mian (London: Zed Books, 2001), 471.

¹³ Nilanshu Kumar Agarwal, "An assessment of Northeastern Sensibility in Kiran Desai's The Inheritance of Loss and Mamang Dai's River Poems," in *Emerging Literatures from Northeast India: The Dynamics of Culture, Society and Identity*, ed. Margaret Ch Zama (New Delhi: Sage Publications India, 2013), 126, Simona Sawhney, *The Modernity of Sanskrit* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 185, Pandurang Vaman Kane, *History of Sanskrit Poetics* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas Publishers, 1994), 364.

¹⁴ Menon, *The Ramayana: A Modern Retelling*, 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, XII.

¹⁶ Kumar and Boopalan "Indian Christians in Conflict Dalit Christian, 319.

¹⁷ Manusmriti prescribes cutting off the tongue or pouring off molten lead in the ears of the lower caste, who recites or hears the Holy Scriptures of Hindus. Please read Suruchi Thapar-Björkert, "Gender and Caste Conflicts in Rural Bihar: Dalit Women as Arm Bearers," in *The Situated Politics of Belonging*, eds. Nira Yuval-Davis, Kalpana Kannabiran and Ulrike Vieten (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 134, Patrick Claffey, *Movement or Moment? Assessing Liberation Theology Forty Years After Medellín* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 82. Paula Richman retells the story of Shambuka as follows. The whole episode starts when

Oh Valmiki
Should you sing the praises of Ramarajya
Because you are the great poet of poets?
Seeing the heron's wounded wing
Your compassionate heart broke out in lament.
You were born outside the village
In a shunned neighbourhood
where misery itself was born
Never festooned with fruit or flower
The dejected faces... furrowed with care
Is it true you never heard?
Their lament as they cried for liberation?
One Shambuk of your own blood
Caught fire, rose in anger.
Oh, the great poet,
Singing the praises of Ramarajya,
Even there the icy cliff of humanity towered up!
Oh, great poet,
How then should we call you a great poet?¹⁸

The poem challenges Valmiki's indifference to his dominated caste neighbours. Pawar asks how a "tender-hearted" Valmiki who lamented at the sight of a heron's wounded wing could leave the anguished cries of Dalits unnoticed. Pawar also wonders, how a Dalit poet could praise Rama who had killed a Dalit and designates Valmiki as a

a Brahmin arrives at Rama's court carrying the body of his dead son, a virtuous child who had never deviated from dharma. The father declares that an undeserved death never occurs in a kingdom where a just ruler ensures that each citizen performs varnashrama-dharma (duty enjoined according to one's social rank and stage of life). When Rama consults his ministers about the state of the kingdom, they pinpoint a single deviation from dharma: the Shudra Shambuka has been performing tapas. Since Tapas is a form of ascetic-self-discipline reserved by the orthodox exclusively for "twice-borns," members of the upper three varnas, Rama's ministers urge him to slay Shambuka. Rama mounts his celestial chariot, speeds to the forest where Rishi (Sage) Shambuka dwells and interrogates him. Upon confirming that he is indeed a Shudra by birth, Rama draws his gleaming stainless sword and cuts off his head. "Well done!" shout the gods in praise. The Brahmins son returns to life and fragrant flowers rain-down from the sky, a sign of celestial approbation," Paula Richman, *Ramayana Stories in Modern South India: An Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 111, B. R. Ambedkar, "Caste in India," in *Caste and Democratic Politics in India*, ed. Ghanshyam Shah (London: Anthem Press, 2004), 72, Velcheru Narayana Rao, "The Politics of Telugu Ramayanas: Colonialism, Print Culture, and Literary Movements," in *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition*, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 161, Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 249.

¹⁸ Eleanor Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 1998), 320-21.

traitor. Dalit theology, as noted, emerged to voice a theological response to similar assertions. It is also a product of many religious and secular movements, which inspired the Dalit academics, who revisited traditional Indian Christian theology from a Dalit perspective. They found that Indian Christian theology, as well as Indian Christian churches, overlooked the lived experiences of the Dalits.¹⁹ Chatterji, for example, clarifies:

The perceptions that creep into and finally dominate theological education, ministerial training, and Church perspective, are conducive to the maintenance of the status quo...the official theology of the churches tends to be influenced by the ideology of these higher castes trained in the climate of indifference to the realities of the socio-cultural factors.²⁰

From such backgrounds, Dalit theology emerged as an Indian variation of liberation theology to respond to the lived experiences of the Dalits. It was innovative, and Dalit theology highlights the faults in Indian Christian theology as well as Indian Christian churches. Dalit theology interprets Scripture through the optic of the lived experiences of the Dalits. It transformed theological thinking in India and placed the Dalits at the centre of theology. It also provided praxis-oriented guidelines to the Dalits and empowered them to address their survival, liberation and developing. However, there is much to explore, and there was an unforeseen danger in the way in which Dalit theology appropriated the methodological principles of Latin American and African American theology.

7. 1. Revisiting the Research Problem

Liberation theology, as seen, is one of the significant Roman Catholic innovations.²¹ The Second Vatican Council and the Second General Conference of Latin

¹⁹ Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 217

²⁰ Chatterji, "Why Dalit Theology," 28.

²¹ Stephen Bevans, "What Does Rome Have to Do with Pasadena?" in *The State of Missiology Today: Global Innovations in Christian Witness*, ed. Charles E Van Engen (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2016), 156.

American Bishops at Medellin inspired it.²² It emerged in predominantly Christian cultures and amid the political tensions of Latin America.²³ Liberation theology has become an essential aspect of the political life in many Latin American countries. It has contributed to severe changes in countries like Nicaragua, El Salvador and Haiti.²⁴ Liberation theology has had worldwide reverberations and influenced other contextual theologies like African American theology and Minjung theology that emerged in similar situations to demand radical structural changes.²⁵ Consequently, as clarified in chapters 2 and 3, it has inspired Dalit theology also.

This dissertation, following recent attempts to make Dalit theology more relevant to Dalits' contexts and the changed circumstances of the 21st century, revisits the influence of Latin American and African American conceptual and methodological proposals upon some proposals of the pioneers of Dalit theology, and how such proposals overlooked the contextual differences between India and Latin America. The concept of multiculturalism and religious pluralism, as seen, were not substantial concerns in Latin

²² Rosemary Ruether, *Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972), 176, Daniel Bell, *Liberation Theology After the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering* (London: Routledge, 2001), 53, Simon C. Kim, *An Immigration of Theology: Theology of Context as the Theological Method of Virgilio Elizondo and Gustavo Gutierrez* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publications, 2012), 24, Enrique Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America*, trans. Alan Neely (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 147, Vigil, "Liberation Christology and Religious Pluralism," 175.

²³ Samuel Cueva, *Mission Partnership in Creative Tension: An Analysis of Relationships within the Evangelical Missions Movement with Special Reference to Peru and Britain from 1987-2006* (Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2015), 55, Jyri Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion? Raimon Panikkar's Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 4, Elizabeth Phillips, *Political Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clarke, 2012), 45-47.

²⁴ Richard J Payne, Jamal Nassar, *Politics and Culture in the Developing World* (London: Routledge, 2016), 53, Steve Ellner, "Concluding Observations: The Twenty-First-Century Radical Left and the Latin American Road to Change," in *Latin America's Radical Left: Challenges and Complexities of Political Power in the Twenty-first Century*, ed., Steve Ellner (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 75.

²⁵ Steven Felix-Jager, *With God on Our Side: Towards a Transformational Theology of Rock and Roll* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 116, Nessian, *The Vitality of Liberation Theology*, 149, Cathy Ross, *Mission in Context: Explorations Inspired by J. Andrew Kirk* (London: Routledge, 2012), 63.

America in the 1970s.²⁶ The Indian subcontinent, on the other hand, is multi-religious and multi-cultural.²⁷ It is a land of many religious traditions.²⁸ Further, India has welcomed various religious traditions. Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Muslims, Parsees and Sikhs live together with Christians in India.²⁹ Christians are only a minority among other religions.³⁰ Hence, Dalits live together with people of other faiths, cultures and races. So too, Dalits have a rich cultural heritage.

Dalit theology, while adopting the methodological principles of Latin American and African American theologies, unfortunately, missed the contrasts noted above, and suggested how biblical paradigms and their derivatives, proposed in predominately Christian cultures in Latin American and African American contexts could redress Dalit situation. Such attempts, as argued in chapter 3, overlooked the contrasts in worldview presuppositions between Latin Americans and Dalits, Dalits' counter-hegemonic worldview and alternative, yet empowering moral visions. It created an imbalance in Dalit theology, and reduced Dalit traditions as objects and hermeneutical examples developed

²⁶ Alan LeBaron, "The Creation of the Modern Maya," in *The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism: The Nation-state at Bay?* ed. Crawford Young (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 266. Chapter 5 also discusses this concept in detail.

²⁷ A. K. Srivastava, "Multilingualism and School Education in India: Special Education in India: Special Features, Problems and Prospects," in *Multilingualism in India*, ed. Debi Prasanna Pattanayak (Clevendon: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 1990), 37.

²⁸ K. S. Singh, "The People of India: Diversities and Linkages," in *The Indian Human Heritage*, eds., D. Balasubramanian, N. Appaji Rao (Hyderabad: Universities Press (India) Limited, 1998), 89, Lalrinawma, *Major Faith Traditions of India*, 314.

²⁹ Ruma Pal, "Religious Minorities and the Law," in *Religion and Personal Law in Secular India: A Call to Judgment*, ed. Gerald James Larson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 24, Marshall, Gilbert, Shea, *Persecuted: The Global Assault*, 94, K. Jaishankar, "Communal Violence and Terrorism in India: Issues and Introspections," in *The Ethics of Terrorism: Innovative Approaches from an International Perspective*, eds., Thomas Albert Gilly, Yakov Gilinskiy, *Vladimir Sergevnin* (Springfield: Charles C Thomas, 2009), 21.

³⁰ Judith M. Brown, "Indian Christians and Nehru's Nation-State" in *India and the Indianness of Christianity: Essays on Understanding -- Historical, Theological, and Bibliographical -- in Honor of Robert Eric Frykenberg*, eds. Robert Eric Frykenberg, Richard Fox Young (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 218, M. T. Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights: A Christian Reponse* (Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2017), 266, Donald Eugene Smith, *India as a Secular State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 43.

in alien contexts and their derivatives were injected into Dalit contexts. Such undertakings alienated Dalit theology from the liberative voices and the counter-hegemonic formulations in Dalits' contexts. So too, it constructed the biblical messages developed in Latin American and African American contexts as the dominant self at the centre and the subversive voices in Dalits' traditions as the dominated self at the margins of Dalit theology. Such a situation is alarming, and this dissertation seeks to redress this situation by analysing how a hermeneutic of return to Dalits' resources, like the proposal of some African American academics, who advocate a return to Black religious and cultural resources, can harmonise Dalit theology with Dalit contexts.

7. 2. Revisiting the Questions and Answers

This research, as clarified, seeks to suggest some guidelines to redeem Dalit theology out of its alienation from Dalits' worldview, counter-assertions and counter-ontology. Such a discussion in chapters 3 and 4, highlighted how and why Dalits' traditions could reorient Dalit theology. Dalits are culturally rich people with their views and values. The oral traditions of the Dalits, in particular, transmit their cultural and spiritual heritage.³¹ Their cultural heritage has an inalienable dignity and has incredible resources to redeem Dalit theology out of excessive Latin American and African-American influence.³² In a similar context, Sharon Welch notes that liberation theology is an insurrection of subjugated knowledges.³³ Scholars like James Cone, Cornel West, Dwight N. Hopkins and Anthony B. Pinn, likewise, designate black culture as an

³¹ Please see chapter 3 for more information.

³² D. McGavaran, *The Clash Between Christianity and Cultures* (Washington: Canon Press, 1974), 2.

³³ Sharon Welch, "Dangerous Memory and Alternate Knowledges," in *On Violence: A Reader*, eds., Bruce B. Lawrence, Aisha Karim (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 366.

embodiment of black genius. For them, rhythmic singing, swaying, dancing, preaching, talking and walking are God-given resources for furthering African American theology.³⁴ The same is correct within Dalits' contexts as well. Bama, a famous Dalit author, asserts that Dalits' contexts have abundant resources. Dalit communities have a vibrant cultural heritage, a folk tradition of tales, songs and performing arts, a fantastic variety of practices in their daily life and craftsmanship. Similarly, they also have a highly developed world of gods, goddesses and devils.³⁵

Hence, Dalit religious and cultural contexts are not vacant spaces. Dalits' folk literature, performing arts and spiritual traditions have resources to counter the caste system.³⁶ The Dalit cultural legacy is an epithet of Dalit intellectual gifts. They are important locations to identify Dalits' resistance to dominant Hindu Vedic worldview and communicate the essential aspects of Dalits' counter-hegemonic worldview, which can remodel authentic living in the Indian subcontinent. This claim, as clarified in chapter 4, seeks to endorse neither an idealistic sentimentality nor an uncritical acceptance of the sources. Instead, this dissertation assumes that a critical rereading of the particularities of Dalits' contexts and the counter-assertions in them, expressed through the subversive voices, is vital for theologising in Dalits' contexts.

Such an attempt demands Dalit theology develop its theoretical premises along the lines of Dalits' epistemology of resistance. Therefore, this dissertation assessed the

³⁴ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 23-35, Dwight N. Hopkins, *Black Theology USA and South Africa: Politics, Culture, and Liberation*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1989), 89, Anthony B. Pinn, *Embodiment and the New Shape of Black Theological Thought* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 44, Emilie M. Townes, "Cultural Boundaries and African American Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of African American Theology*, ed., Katie G. Cannon, Anthony B. Pinn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 483.

³⁵ Bama, *Sangati: Events*, trans., Lakshmi Holmstrom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 14.

³⁶ Sathianathan Clarke, "Subalterns, Identity Politics and Christian Theology in India," in *Christian Theology in Asia*, ed. Sebastian C. H. Kim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 284.

compatibility of the paradigms of Dalit theology against Dalits' counter-hegemonic worldview and alternate, yet challenging moral visions, embedded in the liberative voices in Dalits' contexts and this enterprise, as seen, uncovered some limitations of the methodological proposals of Dalit theology. From such a context, I suggested that a biblical paradigm, which, respects Dalits' counter-assertions and their visions of a liberated-reconciled society connected through partnerships is essential to reorient Dalit theology and suggested that an intertextual reading between Dalits' counter-assertions communicated through the subversive voices and the counter-formulations of the Second Temple community expressed through Abraham's crossings will liberate Dalit theology out of any excessive Latin American and African American influence. My proposal, as will be explained in this chapter, can advance Dalit theology as a source of liberation and reconciliation for Dalits and non-Dalits.

7. 2. 1. Revisiting the Paradigms of Dalit Theology

As seen, the founders of Dalit theology followed biblical themes developed in Latin American and African American contexts. Such attempts alienated Dalit theology from the counter-assertions and counter-worldview submerged in the subversive voices in Dalits' contexts and the counter-asserions in them. For example, the subversive voices in Dalits' contexts, as noted, acknowledge the presence of the caste system. They narrate the vulnerability of the Dalits and their sufferings also. However, they do not divide the members of the society based on the injustices done to Dalits. Instead, they remain as symbols of resistance and envision a liberated-reconciled society connected through mutual partnerships. Praveen Gadhvi, one of the Dalit poets, also reflects the same concern:

Let us say farewell to arms,
Hold a round-table conference.
No country have we,
No field to plough, no home to stay.
From the age of Aryavart³⁷ till today,
Not a blade of grass have you left for us.
Yet we are prepared to forget everything.
Are you ready to pull down walls you've built?
Like sugar in the milk are we willing to merge.
Would you endure if your Draupadi
Garlands are Galiya in Swayamvar?
Come, let us take turns in disposing the dead cattle.
Do you agree?

...
Let us say farewell to arms,
Plough the country's rich soil together,
Will you give us our share of the harvest?'³⁸

Gadhvi proposes to give up weapons. He suggests a round-table conference between the dominated castes and the dominant castes. Round-table conferences are significant in India. There were a series of round-table conferences between British members of Parliament and Indians held in London in three sessions between 1930 and 1932.³⁹ Those meetings discussed various outlooks on the constitutional and political future of India.⁴⁰ Here, Gadhvi is proposing similar enterprises between dominated castes and dominant castes. His proposal for conversation is pertinent to the epistemology of resistance in Dalits' contexts. It envisions a greater union between Dalits and non-Dalits. The Dalits, he says, are willing to merge with dominant castes like sugar in the milk. Gadhvi's invitation alludes to a narrative of the Parsees (Persians -i.e., Zoroastrians). When they landed in India, the local Hindu king sent them a full glass of milk, indicating that the town was full. The Parsee leader added some sugar to the glass and returned it,

³⁷ *Aryavrat* means the land of Aryans.

³⁸ Praveen Gandhvi, *The Voice of the Last* (Delhi: Yash Publication, 2008), 17.

³⁹ Mohinder Singh Pannu, *Partners of British Rule* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2005), 468.

⁴⁰ Surjit Mansingh, *Historical Dictionary of India* (Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 545.

suggesting that the Parsis could mix among the Hindus. This metaphor suggests an extreme example of communal integration, liberation and reconciliation in which an individual or group change the society by melting into it, flavouring it with their essence.⁴¹

Gadhvi's use of the Parsee narrative is significant to Dalits' resistance. It recommends an ultimate union (liberation and reconciliation) between Dalits and the non-Dalits. Further, Gadhvi invites the dominant castes to a cross-cultural journey beyond the walls of separation that they had built. He suggests some joint ventures like ploughing the country's fields and disposing of the dead cattle. The caste system reserves such menial jobs to Dalits. Thus, Gadhvi invites dominant castes to a partnership in undertaking the menial jobs reserved for Dalits. Similarly, Chandrabahen Shrimali, another Dalit poet, highlights the potential of loving Dalits.

With a sincere heart
And without expectation,
When man will love man
The hell will no more be in sight,
The paradise will just be at a stone's throw away.
But the paradise will turn into heaven
If man remembers That there is a man called Dalit
Waiting to be loved.⁴²

Shrimali's concept of heaven, hell and paradise are not otherworldly. They are praxiological and intimately related to the troubles of the Dalits upon this earth. Shrimali advises the benefits of loving a Dalit in the present. He suggests that the mutual love between Dalits and non-Dalits can offer avenues for them to work together for establishing an entirely new world. He designates such an existence as heaven. Perhaps, what Shrimali suggests could be a liberated-reconciled casteless society connected

⁴¹ Doniger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History*, 48.

⁴² Chandrabahen Shrimali, "Paradise, at a Stone's Throw Distance," *Valonum*, Gandhinagar, 2007, 3.

through mutual partnerships, as envisioned in Dalits' worldview and epistemology of resistance. So too, Shrimali highlights an initiative to remodel intra-Dalit relations and demands a crossing journey that advances partnerships. Such partnerships, as clarified, have incredible potential to liberate Dalits. It can challenge the barriers that reinforce the sociological, religious and cultural boundaries of the caste system. Mutually enriching corporations, as noted, nurture contacts with a difference to move, enhance and change. This openness is vital in Dalit contexts. It will help the Dalits and the non-Dalits to work together. Abraham's cross-cultural journeys which transcend the limitations of the Second Temple ideology, as demonstrated, are significant in this scenario.

7. 2. 2. Abraham's Crossings as a Paradigm

Abraham's boundary crossings, as elucidated in chapter 5 and 6, were postcolonial counter-metaphors amidst the ethnocentric policies of the Persian empire. They were part of the subversive voices in Genesis, which are one of the important locations to identify the counter-assertions of the Second Temple community, and they challenge the imperial propaganda of the empire. The traditions behind those narratives, as clarified, might have existed before the exile. However, the post-exilic community living under the yoke of the Persian empire edited them to respond to their existential realities. Such counter-assertions expressed in Abraham's postcolonial crossings, as explained, are in harmony with Dalits' counter-formulations and, hence, they have great potential for facilitating cross-cultural exchanges and appropriation in Dalits' contexts. From such a background, this dissertation proposed an intertextual reading of the counter-assertions of the Second Temple community and the counter-hegemonic assertions of the subversive voices in Dalits' contexts to advance Dalit theology. Such an undertaking, as will be clarified further,

can offer praxis-oriented guidelines to realise a liberated-reconciled Church and society, bridged through mutual partnerships. A poem published by the Dalit Panthers suggested a similar enterprise:

we can love each other,
if you can shed your orthodox skin.
come and touch, we will make a new world-
where there won't be any
dust, dirt, poverty, injustice, oppression.⁴³

Dalit Panthers request the dominant castes to a crossing to touch Dalits to form a new world of partnerships. Such a voyage, Panthers envision, will realise a world without any inequalities, connected through collaborations. A similar journey, as clarified, will help Indian Christian churches to move beyond sociological, racial, cultural and geographical limitations in search of morality and piety in the religious, cultural, ethnic and gender other. This model will assist the Dalits and non-Dalit Christians to focus not on the prejudices against each other but on breaking barriers, crossing boundaries and bridging differences. Abraham's crossings, which question the preoccupations with Egypt and Gerar are ontological in such contexts. They highlight God as a liberator and an author of reconciliation and narrate morality and piety beyond Yehud. Such a paradigm, like the proposal of the Dalit Panthers, will help Dalit theology promote a crossing to develop partnerships across the gulf that separates Dalit Christians and non-Dalit Christians.

Such an attempt, as noted, is in line with the message of Jesus also. Jesus often crossed the borders to undertake his mission.⁴⁴ This research, however, concentrates on

⁴³ Neerav Patel, *Burning at Both the Ends* (Ahmedabad: Dalit Panthers, 1980). Also, reproduced in Kim Knott, *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 83.

⁴⁴ Rajkumar has suggested how Jesus' crossings to outsiders narrated in synoptic healing narratives can advance Dalit theology. Please see, Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation* for more information.

Abraham's crossings since much work has already been done on how Jesus' mission impacts Dalit theology. There are also some reservations about the use of the Christological paradigms in Indian pluralistic contexts.⁴⁵ K.C. Abraham, Stanley J. Samartha and I. John Mohan Razu, for example, claim that Indian contexts necessitate a paradigm shift from Christian exclusivism to Liberative ecumenism, which affirms God's work without relying entirely on Christological formulations.⁴⁶ Such remodelling is radical indeed. Although, I do not subscribe to their position entirely, I believe, an empathetic understanding of other religious traditions is vital to Dalit theology. Felix Wilfred, for example, clarifies:

Reducing other religions (without attempting to enter into the world of their experience) into our theological categories and condemning them (without giving them an opportunity to explain themselves) would be an *epistemological naïveté and an ethical impropriety*. Our cognitive efforts should be such that they respect the self-understanding of these religions and cultures. By forcing other religions into our mould, we would, apart from missing what is valuable in them, fail, more basically, in fidelity to truth.⁴⁷

Thus, Dalits' counter-hegemonic worldview, moral visions and Indian religious pluralism require developing an openness to diversities. Abraham's sojourns can help Dalit theology advance an openness to diversities, which, as clarified, will reconnect Dalit theology with Dalit contexts.

⁴⁵ Christopher McMahon, *Jesus Our Salvation: An Introduction to Christology* (Winona: St. Mary's Press, 2007), 217, Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 44ff, David S. Nah, *Christian Theology and Religious Pluralism: A Critical Evaluation of John Hick* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2012), 2.

⁴⁶ K.C. Abraham, "Paradigm Shift in Contemporary Theological Thinking", in *Prejudice: Issues in Third World Theologies*, ed., Andreas Nehring (Chennai: Gurukul Theological College and Research Institute, 1996), 40, 47, Stanley J. Samartha, "The Cross and the Rainbow," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, eds., John Hick, Paul F. Knitter (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1987), 75, I. John Mohan Razu, *Globalization and Dalitho-Ethics: Interrelationships between Homoeconomics and Homo-hierarchicus* (New Delhi: Centre for Dalit/Subaltern studies, 2004), 33-36.

⁴⁷ Felix Wilfred, *Sunset in the East? Asian Challenges and Christian Involvement* (Madras: University of Madras, 1991), 149.

7. 3. Abraham's Crossings and Dalit Theology

The counter-assertions embedded in Abraham's crossings, as noted, offer counter-colonial rhetoric, reimagining the outsiders of the Second Temple community, whom the Persian empire had maligned because of political, religious and social reasons. The Persian governors introduced a divorce policy to accomplish their imperial goals. Such undertakings disturbed the social harmony in Yehud and forced the Second Temple community, to reshape their worldview, which created barriers in inter-Yehud and intra-Yehud relations. The final editor who lived in Yehud revised pre-exilic traditions about Abraham to challenge the colonial hegemonic worldview and the attempts to demonise the internal and external outsiders. These narratives sought to subvert the concept of the outsiders constructed by the Persian administration by offering a counter-colonial discourse, which acknowledges God as a source of liberation and reconciliation, outsiders as behavioural models, morality and piety among outsiders and God's preferential option for Sarah.

These imperatives, as will be seen, will reconnect Dalit theology with the counter-hegemonic worldview in Dalits' contexts by advancing the agency of God in initiating the process of liberation and reconciliation, and the agency of the Dalits in actualising a liberated-reconciled society, connected through mutual partnerships with outsiders, as envisioned in Dalit contexts.

7. 3. 1. Image of God in Dalit Theology

Dalit theology affirms God as liberator and redeemer of Dalits. Some Dalit Christian academics, however, are discontented with God's image submerged in the dominant paradigms of Dalit theology because it conflicts with Dalit contexts. The image of God in

Dalit contexts, as seen, envision a shared cultural ethic. Similarly, venerating God's participation in Dalits' suffering may not help the Dalit emancipation. So too, the image of God who liberates the Dalits and redesigns the world with mighty hands does not have a principal space in Dalits' contexts. From such a background, I will explain how the image of God in Abraham's crossings can offer an alternate understanding, along the lines of Dalits' contexts.

7. 3. 1. 1. Reimagining God's Image in Dalit Theology

Abraham's crossings narrate God as a source of liberation and reconciliation, who inaugurates the process of liberation and reconciliation not through mighty hands, as implied by the Deuteronomic creed, but peacefully by informing the emporors that Sarah is Abraham's wife (12:17 // 20:3-7) and through a process of dialogue and negotiation. Such initiatives will help Dalit theology reimagine the agency of God in liberating Dalits and reconciling them with outsiders, as envisioned in Dalit contexts.

7. 3. 1. 2. God's Participation in Dalit Suffering

Dalit theology, as seen, affirms Jesus' association with the "Dalits" of his time, Jesus' participation in their sufferings and emphasises Jesus as a prototype of the Dalits. Such undertakings, as seen, may idealise suffering. The image of God in Abraham's crossings would help Dalit theology revisit its concept of God's response to the Dalit suffering. As seen, God is not a suffering God in Abraham's crossings, and God does not share the suffering of the endangered matriarch. God, as narrated in Abraham's crossings, is not a mighty warrior also. Instead, God intervenes and convinces the monarchs to liberate Sarah through dialogues and negotiations. Such a model can empower Dalit theology to break the barriers of the caste system without idealising the

Dalit sufferings, by emphasising God's agency in liberating the endangered couple. So too, God in Abraham's crossings is not dichotomous, but, as will be clarified, was available to the insiders and outsiders, like Pochamma Devi.

7. 3. 1. 3. God's Presence in Alien Territories and Dalit Theology

Abraham's crossings depict God's activities in Egypt and Gerar. They use languages similar to prophetic commissions with foreign monarchs.⁴⁸ God's presence in foreign lands and association with outsiders suggest that God exists independently of human beliefs.⁴⁹ The same God, who is active in Israel is active all over the world.⁵⁰ God is working within varying cultures, worldviews and individuals. Isaiah and Jeremiah also highlight God's sovereignty over the earth. God chooses non-Jewish leaders like Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 27:6) and Cyrus (Is. 45:1).⁵¹ Such projections are vital in caste contexts, and they can break caste enclosure by challenging exclusive claims.⁵² Further, they can empower Dalit theology to move beyond sociological, cultural and geographic boundaries, searching morality and piety among outsiders.

Perhaps, the proposal of John Hick will help us clarify our claim. Hick designates a similar transition as a "Copernican revolution," adopting this term from astronomy.⁵³ It suggests a shift from the belief that the earth is the centre of the universe to the proper

⁴⁸ Hemchand Gossai, *Power and Marginality in the Abraham Narrative - Second Edition* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 89.

⁴⁹ Rafael Domingo, *God and the Secular Legal System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 51.

⁵⁰ John W. Miller, *How the Bible Came to be: Exploring the Narrative and Message* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 40.

⁵¹ Gerrish Brian Albert Gerrish, *Christian Faith: Dogmatics in Outline* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 209.

⁵² Michael Morwood, *Tomorrow's Catholic: Understanding God and Jesus in a New Millennium* (Mystic, Twenty-Third Publications, 2004), 48.

⁵³ John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, 69ff.

understanding that the sun is at the centre of the solar system.⁵⁴ Hick's argument also involves a shift from the traditional belief that Christianity is at the centre of theological formulations. He advocates that God should be at the centre and all religions, including Christianity, should revolve around God.⁵⁵ Such a re-orientation demands Christianity to drop some of its historical claims of offering the best way to salvation and recommends that pluralism is part of the divine plan.⁵⁶ It necessitates a positive assessment of outsiders, acknowledging God's activities among outsiders. This platform is relevant to Dalit contexts, and Abraham's crossings will empower Dalit theology to celebrate God's presence and morality and piety among religious, cultural and ethnic outsiders.

Further, Hick's proposal, which demands a movement from Christocentrism to theocentrism.⁵⁷ While Christocentrism has so many advantages in predominantly Christian cultures like Latin American and African American contexts, it has some limitations in pluralistic contexts like the Indian subcontinent since religious pluralism demands an openness to diversity. The same is true in Dalit contexts also since Dalits cut across various religious faiths. Note, however, that I have some reservations against such absolute claims. J. Peter Schneller, one of the proponents of such a transition, for instance, suggests that Jesus' mediation is non-constitutive and non-normative to achieve salvation.⁵⁸ I acknowledge Jesus' mediation as normative and constitutive for Christians. However, I believe that emphasising Jesus' role should not deter Dalit Christians from

⁵⁴ Copernicus is the first modern scientist who claimed the heliocentric astronomical theory. He suggested that the sun is at the centre of the planetary orbit.

⁵⁵ Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 121.

⁵⁶ David M Elcott, "Meeting the Other: Judaism, Pluralism, and Truth," in *Criteria of Discernment in Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009), 27.

⁵⁷ Gavin D'Costa, "John Hick and Religious Pluralism: Yet Another Revolution," in *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion: Critical Studies of the Work of John Hick*, ed. Harold Hewitt Jr (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 4.

⁵⁸ J. Peter Schneller, "Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views," *Theological Studies* 37 (1976): 552-53.

openness to diversities. In such a context, the image of God in Abraham's crossings can complement Christological formulations in developing an openness to diversity by redefining the agency of God in liberating Dalits and reconciling them with non-Dalits.

7. 3. 1. 4. God as a Source of Liberation and Reconciliation

Abraham's crossings highlight God as a liberator and a source of reconciliation. Such an emphasis is ontological in Dalit contexts, which, as seen, demand a liberated-reconciled society. As noted, Yahweh liberates Sarah and reconciles the couple with Pharaoh and Abimelech. Liberation, as narrated, was not the end of the journey but an intermediate step before reconciliation. So too, reconciliation was not a compromise, but a possibility to accept each other as persons with dignity. Abraham and Sarah did not lose any of their privileges or possessions after liberation but were treated with dignity. Such an orientation can empower Dalit theology to reimagine itself as a source of liberation and reconciliation, which are essential to Dalit contexts. The reconciliation, I am proposing, is not a sacrifice, but a courageous attempt to advance mutually enriching partnerships, as suggested in Dalit contexts.

Abraham's crossings, as seen, envision God as responding to the words of the oppressed, and initiates a process of liberation and reconciliation, without participating in their sufferings. Further, God acts peacefully through dialogues. God's activities in alien territories and dialogue with outsiders demand greater sensitivity to outsiders and necessitate inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit dialogues. Such an image can break the barriers of the caste system, promote cross-cultural crossings and bridge the gap between various castes and sub-castes. Similarly, Abraham's crossings highlight morality and piety among Yehud's outsiders and suggest that the monarchs were not the persons that Abraham

was anticipating. Such a perspective can help Dalit theology to empower the Dalits and the non-Dalits to participate in God's mission through developing mutually enriching partnerships.

7. 3. 2. Inter-Dalit and Intra-Dalit Partnerships

The caste system categorises the Hindus into four groups.⁵⁹ As explained, it is one of the central symbols in India.⁶⁰ It has far-reaching implications.⁶¹ It regulates social interactions and political alignments and restricts inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit associations.⁶² It also dehumanises Dalits considering even their shadow as contaminating.⁶³ It deliberates them as ritually impure and disconnects Dalits from the divine.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, the caste system has intruded into the churches as well.⁶⁵ It distorts the balance of power in some parishes.⁶⁶ The Dalits and the non-Dalits, as seen, function as two factions in the Indian Churches, as explained in the introduction. The following section explains how my study of Abraham's crossings can reimagine this messy reality.

⁵⁹ Arup Maharatna, *India's Perception, Society, and Development: Essays Unpleasant* (New Delhi: Springer, 2013), 142.

⁶⁰ Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3.

⁶¹ Stephen C. Levinson, "Caste Rank and Verbal Interaction in Western Tamilnadu," in *Caste Ideology and Interaction*, ed. Dennis B. McGilvray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 166.

⁶² Ronki Ram, "Caste and Marginality in Punjab: Looking for Regional Specifications," in *Rethinking State Politics in India: Regions Within Regions*, ed. Ashutosh Kumar (London: Routledge, 2011), 384, Indrajit Roy, *The Politics of the Poor in Contemporary India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 185, Sadasivan, *Social History of India*, 229, Opinderjit Kaul Takhar, *Sikh Identity: An Exploration of Groups Among Sikhs* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), 95, Sadangi, *Dalit: The Downtrodden of India*, 138.

⁶³ Anupama Rao, *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India* (London: University of California Press, 2009), 1, Tamara Enhuber, "Bonded Labor," in *Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization: Human Dignity Violated*, eds. Paulus Kaufmann, Hannes Kuch, Christian Neuhaeuser, Elaine Webster (London: Springer, 2011), 196.

⁶⁴ Bauman, *Christian Identity*, 32.

⁶⁵ Wyatt, "Dalit Theology and the Politics of Untouchability," 120, Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ*, 256.

⁶⁶ George Koliparampil, *Caste in the Catholic Community in Kerala* (Kochin: CISRS, 1982), 154-168, Satya Pal Singh, *My Take: A Prediction*, (Pennsylvania: Rose Dog Books, 2010), 134.

7. 3. 2. 1. Caste in Indian Christian Churches

The conversion, as observed, did not improve the social situation of the Dalits considerably.⁶⁷ They remain as an oppressed majority. They do not have full rights in some parishes and do not get their feet washed on Maundy Thursday.⁶⁸ The dominant caste Christians also do not allow decorated cars through the streets of Dalit Christians during parish festivals.⁶⁹ There are only a few Dalit priests.⁷⁰ The dominant caste Christians do not welcome Dalit priests to serve communion or perform marriage rites.⁷¹ The Dalits are poorly represented in the parish councils, pastoral councils and social service societies.⁷² There are separate seating arrangements for the Dalits in some parishes.⁷³ There are different chapels for the Dalits, and some Parishes conduct liturgical services separately.⁷⁴ Such exclusions, unfortunately, do not end with death. For example, some parishes have distinct graveyards for the Dalits.⁷⁵ Also, the dominant

⁶⁷ Jammanna, Sudhakar, *Dalits' Struggle for Social Justice*, 121.

⁶⁸ Wilfred, *On the Banks of Ganges*, 130, Sherinian, *Tamil Folk Music*, 21.

⁶⁹ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 21.

⁷⁰ David Mosse, *The Saint in the Banyan Tree: Christianity and Caste Society in India* (California: University of California, 2012), 211, Elizabeth Koepping, "India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma / Myanmar," in *Christianities in Asia*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 29.

⁷¹ Philip L. Wickeri, "The Mar Thoma Christians of Kerala: A Study of the Relationship between Liturgy and Mission in the Indian Context," in *Christian Worship Worldwide: Expanding Horizons, Deepening Practices*, ed. Charles E. Farhadian (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 90.

⁷² David Mosse, "Dalit Christian Activism in Contemporary Tamil Nadu," in *Ethnic Activism and Civil Society in South Asia*, ed. David Gellner (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009), 183, Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 136.

⁷³ John C. B. Webster, "Christians in India: Living on the Margins with a Diverse and Controversial Past," in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary India*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (London: Routledge, 2016), 418, Sabareesh G, "Problems of Dalits," in *Social Issues of India*, ed. Smarak Swain (New Delhi: New Vishal Publications, n.d), 202.

⁷⁴ Prema A. Kurien, *Ethnic Church Meets Megachurch: Indian American Christianity in Motion* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 74, Sadangi, *Dalit: The Downtrodden of India*, 136.

⁷⁵ Ashok Kumar M, Sunder J. Boopalan, "Indian Christians in Conflict: Dalit Christian Movement in Contemporary India," in *Handbook of Global Contemporary Christianity: Themes and Development*, ed. Stephen Hunt (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 316, Mosse, *The Saint in the Banyan Tree*, 2, Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 21, Please read the BBC news about the same at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-11229170>.

caste Christians do not permit the dead bodies of the Dalits into the church for funeral masses.⁷⁶ Such mistreatments reduce the Dalits as passive members in the local parishes.⁷⁷ Hence, caste dictates the everyday exclusion of the Dalits in Christian denominations in India.⁷⁸ In short, caste is institutionalised in Indian Christian churches, and the Dalits remain as the outcasts in them.⁷⁹ Note, however, as will be explained, the Dalits are not entirely free from the influence of the caste system, and it dictates inter-Dalit relations, which complicates the situation further.

7. 3. 2. 2. The Caste System in Inter-Dalit Relations

The notions of purity and pollution have penetrated Dalits' psyches, and as Anderson and Surekha rightly caution, Dalits are not a homogenous category.⁸⁰ They are divided into hundreds of sub-castes.⁸¹ There are separate endogamous groups among them, who do not intermarry, not because of their preference for their spouses but because of their caste prejudices.⁸² The worst victims of this internal stratification among Dalits are Dalit women. Caste and patriarchy continue to influence the lives of Dalit

⁷⁶ Mosse, "Dalit Christian Activism," 182.

⁷⁷ Wilfred, *On the Banks of Ganges*, 130.

⁷⁸ Wyatt, "Dalit Theology and the Politics of Untouchability," 120.

⁷⁹ Siddharth Kara, *Bonded Labour: Tackling the System of Slavery in South Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 79, Zadda, "Shoemaker and Missionary," 28, Samson K. Ovichegan, *Faces of Discrimination in Higher Education in India: Quota Policy, Social Justice and the Dalits* (London: Routledge, 2015), 1. Carman, Rao, *Christians in South Indian Villages*, 171.

⁸⁰ Paul, "Dalit Literature and Dalit Poetry," 67, Anderson, *Community and Worldview*, 3, Nelavala, "Inclusivity and Distinctions," 104.

⁸¹ S. P. Srivastava, "Unravelling the Dynamics of Dalit Oppression," in *Social Exclusion: Essays in Honour of Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak*, ed. A. K. Lal (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2003), 228, Jagdish Kumar Pundir, "Dalits in India: Past Identities and Present Scenario," in *Emerging Social Science Concerns: Festschrift in Honour of Professor Yogesh Atal*, ed. Surendra K. Gupta (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2007), 367, Jeremiah, *Community and World View*, 3, S. M. Michael, *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2007), 174, Tamsin Bradley, *Religion and Gender in the Developing World: Faith Based Organizations and Feminism in India* (London: IB Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011), xi, Ornit Shani, *Communalism, caste and Hindu Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 28.

⁸² Paswan, Jaideva (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Dalits*, 288.

women negatively. They are placed at the absolute bottom of the caste hierarchy.⁸³ A recent study by a faculty member at the Central University of Karnataka among Dalit families in Puducherry shows how Dalit women are prone to multiple forms of discrimination in inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit relations. All the respondents had undergone minor and major forms of violence regularly in their family. 56% had experienced marital rape more than once, 30% had faced forced sexual relations, 73% had verbal abuse from their husband and their in-laws and 53% experienced sexual harassments and were bullied by Dalit and Upper caste members in their villages.⁸⁴

As seen, Dalits replicate the concept of purity and pollution among themselves.⁸⁵ Dalits in Hirapur village, for example, observe purity and impurity among themselves.⁸⁶ The ongoing tension between the Malas and the Madigas is another instance.⁸⁷ Segregation exists among them.⁸⁸ Sadly, Dalit men share the characteristics of patriarchy.⁸⁹ Caste and patriarchy continue to influence the lives of Dalit women. Such influences place Dalit women at the absolute bottom of the caste hierarchy.⁹⁰ This messy

⁸³ Michael, "Dalit Visions of a Just Society,"³⁶ Also refer 6.3.3 for more information.

⁸⁴ Divya K., "Domestic Violence Induced Social Exclusion of Dalit Women: Evidence from Puducherry," *International Journal of Innovative Research & Development*, November 2015, 221.

⁸⁵ Michael Moffatt, *An Untouchable Community in South India: Structure and Consensus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 98.

⁸⁶ Ramesh P Mohanty, *Dalits Development and Change: An Empirical Study* (New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 2003), 49.

⁸⁷ N Sudhakar Rao, "A Reconsideration of the Structural Replication in the Tamil Untouchable Castes in South India" *Religion and Society*, 45/3 (1998), 12.

⁸⁸ Moffat, *An Untouchable Community in South India*, 290ff, Barbara Joshi, "Introduction," in *Untouchable! Voices of the Dalit Liberation Movement*, ed. Barbara Joshi (London: Zed Books, 1986), 4, Gorringer, *Untouchable Citizens*, 115, Forrester, *Forrester on Christian Ethics*, 95, Ovichegan, *Faces of Discrimination in Higher Education in India*, Geetha, *Contesting Categories*, 93.

⁸⁹ Israel Selvanayagam, "People of God and Peoples of God: Asian Christian Discussions," 76, Karin Kapadia, "Introduction: We Ask You to Rethink: Different Dalit Women and their Sublateral Politics," in *Dalit Women: Vanguard of an Alternative Politics in India*, ed. S. Anandhi, Karin Kapadia (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 17, Nubile, *The Danger of Gender*, 78.

⁹⁰ Michael, "Dalit Visions of a Just Society," 36.

reality, along with intra-Dalit stratification, remains one of the significant issues and invites further interrogation and a crossing beyond one's religious, cultural and ethnic boundaries. Abraham's encounters, as will be explained, can offer some guidelines to reconnect these disconnects by promoting inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit partnerships.

7. 3. 2. 3. Dalit Theology and Mutual Partnerships

As seen, Dalit theology is an advocacy theology for the Dalits. It challenges the injustices against them.⁹¹ However, as clarified, it has an unhealthy binary opposition model.⁹² It names and shames the dominant caste Christians for the presence of the caste in the Indian churches.⁹³ It argues that the dominant caste people cannot understand Dalit sufferings. I have reservations against such exclusive claims. The polarisation between the Dalits and non-Dalit Christians as insiders and outsiders within Indian Christian churches is inadequate for Dalit liberation. Such hermeneutics, as seen in chapters 3 and 4, contradicts Dalits' worldview and disempowers Dalit theology considerably in Indian pluralistic contexts.

My proposal, however, does not seek to discredit the particularity of the Dalit suffering. This research, as clarified, is aware of the Dalits and their sufferings. They have been suffering for many centuries. However, the attempts to compartmentalise the Dalits' suffering and emphasise it as the principal element in Dalits' contexts, as seen, disregard the counter-ontology and epistemology of resistance expressed through the subversive

⁹¹ Haokip, *Can God Save My Village*, 248, V. Devasahayam, "The Nature of Dalit Theology as Counter Ideology," in *Frontiers of Dalit Theology*, ed. V. Devasahayam (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1997), 53-67, Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 65.

⁹² Prabhakar, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 210, Jesurathnam, "Towards a Dalit Liberative Hermeneutic," 1-34, M Azariah, "The Church's Healing Ministry to the Dalits," in *Indigenous People: Dalits, Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate*, ed. James Massey (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), 316-323.

⁹³ Hebden, *Dalit Theology and Christian Anarchism*, 2, Jammanna, Sudhakar, *Dalits' Struggle for Social Justice*, 121.

voices in Dalits' contexts and ignore the heterogeneous composition of the Dalits and the Christian churches in India.⁹⁴ Further, it may hinder the Dalits from developing local and global partnerships with other suffering communities.

Similarly, a wounded psyche is not a Dalit problem alone. It is a dominant caste issue as well.⁹⁵ The concept of untouchability exists among the dominant caste Christians.⁹⁶ It controls their attitudes and manipulates them to imagine Dalit Christians as an inferior other.⁹⁷ Therefore, Dalit Christians and non-Dalit Christians need liberation and reconciliation to promote a liberated-reconciled Church connected through mutually enriching partnerships. Paulo Freire, in a similar but foreign context, cautions against the binary opposition model.⁹⁸ Reversing the roles of oppressor and oppressed, he warns, will not help liberation. Instead, the oppressed should try to restore the humanity of the oppressor as well as the oppressed.⁹⁹ Such an enterprise, Freire expected, will liberate the oppressed as well as the oppressor.¹⁰⁰ In a similar, but African context, Ezigbo notes that God does not identify with the poor any more than he identifies with the rich. He does not criticise the rich any less than He criticises the poor. Similarly, the rich and the poor can be oppressors. The rich people, for example, who exploit the poor, who use their wealth to perpetuate injustice and who refuse to use their resources to help the least and the lost are oppressors. Similarly, poor people, who steal, kill and engage in some

⁹⁴ D'Souza, *Truth about Dalits Caste System and Untouchability*, 115.

⁹⁵ Peter Coleridge, *Disability, Liberation and Development* (Oxford: Oxfam GB, 2006), 153.

⁹⁶ V. K. Agnihotri, S.V. Subramanian "Andhra Pradesh," in *Socio Economic Profile of Rural India: South India*, ed. V.K. Agnihotri (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2002), 8.

⁹⁷ V. Mohini Giri, *Deprived Devils: Women's Unequal Status in Society*, (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2006), 27, Rana, *Reservations in India*, 347.

⁹⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury, 1968).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 61.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 29-30.

appalling acts to improve their conditions are also oppressors. From such a context, Ezigbo clarifies that theology must define sin to include all peoples - the poor and the rich, white and black, oppressors and the oppressed.¹⁰¹ Dalits' worldview and epistemology of resistance warrant a similar openness to dialogue partners from outsiders.

Nevertheless, as seen, the openness is needed not only in intra-Dalit relations alone. Some Dalits, as seen, oppress their fellow Dalits and internal stratification prevents Dalits from joining together to fight for their common interests.¹⁰² Unfortunately, Dalit theology has disregarded the internal stratification substantially. Dalit theologians like Nelavala, Rajkumar and Melanchthon have already critiqued this neglect. They want Dalit theology to address the internal stratification seriously.¹⁰³ The strategies of the Second Temple community to subvert the colonial representation of outsiders might contribute to such demands, and, as will be seen, advance inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit associations.

7. 3. 2. 4. Reimagining Intra-Dalit and Inter-Dalit Partnerships

Abraham's encounters, as noted, contest the Persian administration. Officials of Yehud had demonised Egyptians and Philistines because of colonial interests. It compelled the Second Temple community to reformulate their worldview, which disrupted normal life in Achaemenid Yehud eventually and created outsiders within and beyond Yehud, halting inter-Yehud and intra-Yehud contacts. Abraham's trips challenged such colonial tactics by providing a counter-colonial worldview and ontology, highlighting the

¹⁰¹ Victor I. Ezigbo, *Re-imagining African Christologies: Conversing with the Interpretations and Appropriations of Jesus in Contemporary African Christianity* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), 86.

¹⁰² Tariq Thachil, *Elite Parties, Poor Voters: How Social Services Win Votes in India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 44.

¹⁰³ Nelavala, *Liberation Beyond Borders*, 23, Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 182, Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon, "Towards Mapping Feminist Biblical Interpretations in Asia," in *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement*, ed. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 113.

couple and the monarchs as representing two legitimate sides, morality and piety among the outsiders, an outsider as a behavioural model, monarchs listening to Yahweh and Abraham, God's dialogues with the emperors and liberation and reconciliation through God's interventions. Such initiatives can empower Dalit theology to foster inter-Dalit and Intra-Dalit contacts.

The Dalits and the non-Dalits, it is to be noted, observe their counterparts to be alien in values. So too, both sides have sceptics who indicate some barriers that may hinder interactions. How the assertions of the Second Temple community narrated through Abraham's crossings subvert the colonial worldview can inform Dalit theology how to promote inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit partnership. It would help Dalit theology empower the Dalits as well as the dominant caste Christians to develop mutual understanding, and endorse respect, sympathy and appreciation toward outsiders. Such undertakings, I think, can help Dalit theology to encourage an enterprise similar to the Oasis of Peace Village founded in *Neve Shalom*.¹⁰⁴

Neve Shalom, a shared Israeli-Palestinian village situated some 30 kilometres west of Jerusalem, responds to the tensions between Israel and Palestine.¹⁰⁵ Bruno Hussar (1911-96), a Dominican friar, founded it in a demilitarised zone in 1972. It promotes peaceful reconciliation between Jews, Muslims and Christians and facilitates

¹⁰⁴ A. Christian Van Gorder, *Islam, Peace and Social Justice: A Christian Perspective* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2014), 204. The name derives from Isaiah (32,18): 'My people shall live in an oasis of peace'. Please see Bruno Hussar, *When the Cloud Lifted: Peace is Possible: The Testimony of an Israeli Priest* (Dublin: Veritas, 1989), 111.

¹⁰⁵ Grace Feuerverger, *Oasis of Dreams: Teaching and Learning Peace in a Jewish-Palestinian Village in Israel* (London: Routledge, 2013), xv, Sylvia Lafair, *Don't Bring It to Work: Breaking the Family Patterns That Limit Success* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 138, S. Silberstein, "Dis-covering Peace: Dominant and Counter Discourse of the Middle East," in *Examining Education, Media, and Dialogue Under Occupation: The Case of Palestine and Israel*, eds., Ilham Nasser, Lawrence N. Berlin, Shelley Wong (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2011), 178..

an intercultural understanding between them.¹⁰⁶ Children in Neve Shalom celebrate each others holidays and make friendships, irrespective of ethnic differences.¹⁰⁷

Neve Shalom, as Ronald J. Fisher has rightly clarified, offers an alternative model for living, based on co-operation and equality.¹⁰⁸ Ellie Wiesel, a Nobel peace laureate, acknowledged it as follows: "When Jews and Arabs get together, live together - they create their own miracle; Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam is such a miracle."¹⁰⁹ It has inspired many similar movements. Bishop Paride Taban, for instance, created Kuron village in Kauto county of South Sudan in 2004.¹¹⁰ It is a model for warring tribes to live together in peace.¹¹¹ It offers the possibility of living beyond tribalism. Abraham's crossings can empower the Dalits and non-Dalit Christians to promote a shared existence connected through partnerships, similar to Neve Shalom and Kuron village.

7. 3. 2. 4. 1. Redefining Inter-Dalit and Intra-Dalit Encounters

Abraham and the rulers, seen from their perspectives, represent two legitimate sides. Abraham had some reasons to doubt the integrity of the kings. The monarchs had justifications for taking Sarah also. Such a situation, as noted, requires a shift in focus from categories like Abraham, Sarah, Pharaoh and Abimelech to an understanding of the

¹⁰⁶ Edward Kessler, *Jews, Christians and Muslims in Encounter* (London: SCM Press, 2013), 58, Michelle I. Gawerc, *Prefiguring Peace: Israeli-Palestinian Peacebuilding Partnerships* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 22.

¹⁰⁷ H. Svi Shapiro, "All We Are Saying: Identity, Communal Strife, and the Possibility of Peace," in *Examining Social Theory: Crossing Borders/reflecting Back*, ed., Daniel Ethan Chapman (New York: Peter Lang Publications, 2010), 104, Zehavit Gross, "Israel: State Religious Education in Israel," in *International Handbook of Jewish Education*, eds., Helena Miller, Lisa D. Grant, Alex Pomson (New York: Springer, 2011), 1245.

¹⁰⁸ Ronald J. Fisher, *Interactive Conflict Resolution* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 125.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted from Feuerverger, *Oasis of Dreams: Teaching and Learning*, 115.

¹¹⁰ Laura C. Wunder and Kennedy Mkutu, "Policing Where the State Is Distant Community Policing in Kuron, South Sudan," in *Security Governance in East Africa: Pictures of Policing from the Ground*, ed., Kennedy Agade Mkutu (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018), 3.

¹¹¹ John Ashworth, "The Attempts of Dialogue in Sudan," in *Dialogue and Conflict Resolution: Potential and Limits*, eds. Pernille Rieker and Henrik Thune (London: Routledge, 2015), 178.

internal processes, which generate categories and this research found postcolonial tactics against the Persian colonial-worldview working subversively in these narratives. In a similar but Middle Eastern point of view, Marc Gopin, John Valk, Halis Albayrak and Mualla Selçuk undertook a similar task. They clarified that right and wrong are culturally and socially constructed concepts.¹¹² Likewise, Hick has suggested that different religious traditions are alternative paths.¹¹³

A similar approach will help Dalit theology break the barriers of the caste assumptions by concentrating on the process of categorisation functioning in the Indian Churches. Perhaps, the proposal of Thomas J. Fararo and Kenji Kosaka, though in a different context, will further clarify the situation. They note that the categories are "the panoply of images or representations of actors within a stratified space."¹¹⁴ Such a reappraisal will help Dalit theology revisit the dominant view among Dalit theologians that the Dalits and the non-Dalits represent two unbridgeable categories, by noting how such representations emerge out of the stratification processes. It will reorient Dalit theology to discover the categorisation processes as the subject and the categories like the Dalits and the non-Dalits as the products of these processes. Such a perspective will help Dalit theology promote a shared responsibility of Dalit Christians and non-Dalit Christians in overcoming the difficulties of the Indian Christians through listening and learning, as narrated in Abraham's crossings.

¹¹² Marc Gopin, *Holy War, Holy Peace: How Religion Can Bring Peace to the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 109, John Valk, Halis Albayrak, Mualla Selçuk, *An Islamic Worldview from Turkey: Religion in a Modern, Secular and Democratic State* (Cham: Springer, 2017), 84.

¹¹³ John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 240.

¹¹⁴ Thomas J. Fararo, Kenji Kosaka, *Generating Images of Stratification: A Formal Theory* (Dordrecht: Springer Science + Business Media, 2003), 108.

7. 3. 2. 4. 2. Listening, Healing and Reconciliation

Genesis 12:10-20 and Genesis 20 depict that the kings listened to God's communication, which inaugurated a process of liberation and reconciliation. Pharaoh seems impatient in his dealings with Abraham after the plot was uncovered. However, he lets Abraham leave without any harm. Abimelech starts a lengthy conversation and allows Abraham to explain his situation. Gods' initiatives and the monarch's responses to them can inspire Dalit theology to empower the Dalits and the non-Dalits to be active listeners.

A similar process will help the Dalits and the non-Dalits to identify the context, process, or experience that puzzles Indian Christians through a deliberate and careful listening. Listening, as Yael Petretti acknowledges from the perspective of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has healing potential also.¹¹⁵ Listening to other people's convictions can eliminate bias and will lead to an empathic condition that transcends most of the differences.¹¹⁶ For example, as clarified, I was ignorant of the Dalit situation to a great extent. However, my education and encounters with the subversive voices helped me to understand Dalits' worldview, which improved my cross-cultural adaptability and made me reflect on my own theological context and assumptions. Hence, listening can help the Dalits and the non-Dalits to understand each other and heal their wounds by participating in God's call for reconciliation. So too, the dialogue as a path to knowing each other and resolve conflicts, as narrated in Abraham's crossings, can help Dalit theology advance the process of reconciliation.

¹¹⁵ Yael Petretti, "Listening out Way to Peace," in *Making Peace with Faith: The Challenges of Religion and Peacebuilding*, eds. Michelle Garred, Mohammed Abu-Nimer (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 82.

¹¹⁶ Parichart Suvanbubha, "Dialogue in Buddhism: A Case Study in Addressing Violence in Southern Thailand," in *Religions and Dialogue: International Approaches*, eds. Wolfram Weiße, Katajun Amirpur, Anna Körs, Dörthe Vieregge (Munster: Waxmann, 2014), 308.

7. 3. 2. 4. 3. Dialogue: an Opportunity to Know Each Other

Abraham's trips recount God's conflict resolutions through dialogue, which ends not in liberating Sarah, but in reconciling the couple with the monarchs. As the narratives recount, the emperors did not know Sarah's marital status and God informs them of her status through constructive dialogues. So too, they narrate how Abimelech uses dialogue as a tool to understand unrevealed facts about the couple.

Such instances will help Dalit theology reimagine the Dalits and the non-Dalits as potential knowers who understand some truths and are ignorant of others.¹¹⁷ The central question in this undertaking is what can the Dalits/non-Dalits learn from their counterparts?¹¹⁸ Perhaps, Felix Wilfred's proposal for an ongoing inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit dialogue are pertinent in this context.¹¹⁹ It can lead the Dalits towards mutual understanding and enrichment and can promote justice, peace and harmony in society and Church.¹²⁰ Similarly, the inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit dialogue are more than an exchange of ideas.¹²¹ It redresses inequalities and promotes inter-group and intra-group relations.¹²² The partnership is God's will and purpose for God's people. Abraham's crossings can empower Dalits and non-Dalits to partake in the essence of God's mission.

¹¹⁷ Diemut Bubeck, "Feminism in Political Philosophy: Women's Difference," in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, eds. Miranda Fricker, Jennifer Hornsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 193, A. Poruthur, "A Decade of Dialoguing: A Non-Elitist Approach", in *Mission Today*, II (2000), 490.

¹¹⁸ Paul Murray, "Preface" in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, ed. Paul Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ix.

¹¹⁹ Wilfred, *On the Banks of Ganges*, 95.

¹²⁰ Gerald K. Tanye, *The Church-as-family and Ethnocentrism in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2010), 408.

¹²¹ Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue*, 97.

¹²² Kelly E. Maxwell, Biren (Ratnesh) Nagda, "Deepening the Layers of Understanding and Connection: A Critical-Dialogic Approach to Facilitating Intergroup Dialogues," in *Facilitating Intergroup Dialogues: Bridging Differences, Catalyzing Change*, eds. Kelly E. Maxwell, Biren Ratnesh Nagda, Monita C. Thompson (Quicksilver Drive: Stylus Publishing, 2011), Patricia Gurin, Biren (Ratnesh) A. Nagda, Ximena Zuniga, *Dialogue Across Difference: Practice, Theory, and Research on Intergroup Dialogue* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2013), 43.

Likewise, the attempt of the Second Temple community to rescript ancient traditions to undermine colonial worldview is another catalyst for promoting inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit partnerships.

7. 3. 2. 4. 4. Rescripting Traditions to Enhance Partnerships

An anonymous editor, as seen above, rescripted pre-existing Abrahamic traditions to challenge the ethnocentric policies of the Persian empire. Their model can revitalise inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit understandings and partnerships. A conscious and radical retelling of ancient narratives might help the Dalits and the dominant castes to seek more avenues of co-existence. Such an adventure does not imply agreement to all proposals and narratives. It does not underestimate the sufferings of a particular group or participant as well. On the other hand, it provides a framework within which acceptance can take place.¹²³ It assists in analysing individual narratives and their traditional interpretations as stories compromised by theological, cultural, ethnic and religious positions.

In a similar but Vietnamese context, Laurel B. Kennedy and Mary Rose Williams note how the Vietnamese tourism industry rescripted its image in Western popular consciousness to counter the overwhelmingly negative picture of the Vietnam War. It narrated Vietnam as a nation of picturesque and quiet rural villages, as a nation growing beyond the wounds of conflict and a nation proliferating toward modernity and industrialisation.¹²⁴ Such a reinterpretation evoked the days before the troubles began. It

¹²³ Paul Scham, Walid Salem, Benjamin Pogrund, "Introduction," in *Shared Histories: A Palestinian-Israeli Dialogue*, eds. Paul Scham, Walid Salem, Benjamin Pogrund (Walnut Creek, Life Coast Press, 2005),

¹²⁴ Laurel B. Kennedy and Mary Rose Williams, "The Past without the Pain: The Manufacture of Nostalgia in Vietnam's Tourism Industry," in *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam*, ed. Hue-Tam Ho Tai (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 136.

softened the memories and mood of the international community, which revitalised the tourism industry in Vietnam.¹²⁵

The model of the Second Temple community and the Vietnamese Tourism can reorient the Dalit academics. As we know, the Dalits and the non-Dalits have many narratives. Such narratives have been formed from different historical experiences. Some of them could be mutually exclusive, as well. However, a conscious retelling of such narratives can promote inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit partnership. The *Manusmriti* (the Law code of Manu),¹²⁶ for instance, indicates that the four castes were born from different parts of Brahma, the supreme being and implies Dalits as outcastes.¹²⁷ Brahmins, the priestly class, were born from the mouth. The rulers (kshatriyas) were born from the arms. Vaishyas, the merchant class, were born from the thighs and the servant class (Sudras) were born from the feet.¹²⁸ This theory has many implications. It highlights that Brahmins were the lords of all creations.¹²⁹ The Brahmins used the divine origin theory to maintain their power over the dominated castes and maintained that they are the highest caste with a pure origin because they are born straight from the mouth of Brahma.¹³⁰

The claims of the Brahmins, unfortunately, overlooked specific facts. For instance, Manusmriti implies that the four castes are not separate entities. Their ancestor Brahma

¹²⁵ Ibid. 136-139.

¹²⁶ The Manusmriti is an ancient text of Hinduism. It is dated between 100 and 200 AD. It is a manual for codes of conduct. It specifies protocols of marriage, dietary regulations, judicial matters and relations upper and lower Castes.

¹²⁷ Jasbir Jain, "Negotiations with Faith: Conversion, Identity and Historical Continuity," in *Dalit Literatures in India*, eds. Joshil K. Abraham, Judith Misrahi-Barak (London: Routledge, 2016), 93.

¹²⁸ George M. Williams, *Handbook of Hindu Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 91.

¹²⁹ Urmila Sharma, S.K. Sharma, *Indian Political Thought* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1996), 44.

¹³⁰ Douglas A. Phillips, Charles F. Gritzner, *India* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publications, 2003), 68, Candrakīrti, *Four Illusions: Candrakīrti's Advice for Travelers on the Bodhisattva Path*, trans. Karen C. Lang (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 69, Paul Kuritz, *The Making of Theatre History* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1988), 70.

connects them. A similar rereading of Dalit and non-Dalit narratives that develops mutual partnerships are possible. It will foster inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit partnerships. As we know, the partnership is one of the fundamental dynamics of God's mission.¹³¹ It, too, can promote inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit partnerships. For Christians, Muslims and Jews, the partnership is God's will and purpose for God's people. So too, my proposals for bridging the inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit divides are significant for Syrian Orthodox Christians also.

7. 3. 3. Abraham's Crossings and the Syrian Orthodox Church

As clarified, the caste system is one of the most persistent and intractable evils in the Indian subcontinent. It is ingrained in the social mores and cultural practices, and it regulates most of personal relations, social interactions, political alignments and economic planning.¹³² It implants a sense of low esteem on some Dalits.¹³³ Ramendra Naresh, who topped the MCA programme in the Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University in 2017, alleges:

I am pained to see Dalit students and faculty members being harassed in state and central universities. Being Dalits, we are forced to live with low self-esteem. Dalits in general are still being treated as low caste and are subjected to mental torture and physical assaults across the country.¹³⁴

This situation tempts Dalits to view themselves as an inferior race born to serve.¹³⁵

Similarly, caste and its assumptions control who can be touched, married or otherwise

¹³¹ Sherron Kay George, *Called as Partners in Christ's Service: The Practice of God's Mission* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2004), 1.

¹³² Joseph, "The Contours of my Socialization," 130.

¹³³ Devasahayam, "Conflicting Roles of the Bible," 65, Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro, *The Jesus of Asian Women*, (New Delhi: Logos Press, 2010), 15.

¹³⁴ Amita Verma, "UP: Dalit topper won't take medal from President," www.asianage.com/india/all-india/141217/up-dalit-topper-wont-take-medal-from-president.html, accessed on 12/06/2018.

¹³⁵ Ambrose Pinto, "Culture, Values and Dalits in Higher Education," in *Education and the Disprivileged: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century India*, ed. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2002), 183, V. Mohini Giri, *Deprived Devis: Women's Unequal Status in Society* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2006), 27, Devasahayam, "Conflicting Roles of the Bible," 65.

associated.¹³⁶ Hence, the caste system imposes a social boundary with the cultural, religious, ethnic and gender other.¹³⁷ These barriers prohibit most of the direct and indirect interactions across various caste divisions, and their violations can be met with violent and murderous consequences.¹³⁸ A nine-month pregnant Dalit woman, for example, was brutally beaten to death for accidentally “polluting” (touching) a garbage bin in October 2017.¹³⁹ Similarly, dominant caste men hacked two Dalits to death and attacked several others in Tamilnadu for failing to present temple honours to a caste Hindu family and sitting cross-legged in the presence of a caste Hindu in May 2018.¹⁴⁰ Such instances challenge Dalits significantly. Rajbala, a 28-year-old Dalit woman from Haryana, for instance, told a CNN reporter that “I wish I wasn't born as a Dalit woman. We are the easiest targets for any sexual or physical abuse in our society.”¹⁴¹ So too, a forty-eight-year-old Dalit woman was attacked in Gujarat for sitting on a chair. The accused asked the victim how she dared to sit on a chair, being a Dalit.¹⁴² Such incidents show how caste negatively impacts intra-Dalit contacts.

The caste system has intruded into the Indian Christian churches, and Dalit Christians and non-Dalit Christians live in parallel Christian realms. Such a caste divide

¹³⁶ Subrata K. Mitra, *Politics in India: Structure, Process and Policy* (London: Routledge, 2011), 49.

¹³⁷ Hasan Ali, “Mirpur: A Village in Eastern Uttar Pradesh,” in *Anthropology of Weaker Sections*, ed. Surajit Chandra Sinha (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1993), 388.

¹³⁸ Evan S. Lieberman, *Boundaries of Contagion: How Ethnic Politics Have Shaped Government Responses to AIDS* (Princeton: Oxford University Press, 2009), 196.

¹³⁹ Sandeep Rai, “Beaten up for polluting garbage bin, dalit dies,” [https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/meerut/beaten-up-for-polluting-garbage-bin-dalit-dies/](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/meerut/beaten-up-for-polluting-garbage-bin-dalit-dies/articleshow/61191230.cms) articleshow/61191230.cms, accessed on 12/06/2018.

¹⁴⁰ Special Correspondent. “Two Dalits Killed in Attack on Sivaganga Village.” [http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/two-dalits-killed-in-attack-on-sivaganga-village/](http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/two-dalits-killed-in-attack-on-sivaganga-village/article24025723.ece) article24025723.ece, accessed on 18/06/2018.

¹⁴¹ CNN Staff, *Sexually Abused and Seen as the Lowest of the Low: life as an 'Untouchable' Dalit Woman*, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/07/25/asia/india-dalit-caste-women/index.html>, accessed on 27th July 2016.

¹⁴² The Telegraph, *Dalit beaten for sitting on chair in Gujarat*, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/dalit-beaten-for-sitting-on-chair-in-gujarat-236531>, accessed on 13-06-2018.

is one of the greatest contradictions in the Indian churches. The plight of the Dalit Christians in Kerala had not been different. Susan Bayly, for instance, while surveying Kerala society from 1750-1850 notes the influence of purity and pollution among Syrian Christian families until the nineteenth century:

There is abundant evidence to show that Syrians recognized the concepts of ritual purity and pollution during this period and well into the nineteenth century. Syrians observed the same rules of ritual purity as the upper Nayar subdivisions and were accorded precisely the same position within the elaborate gradations of caste rank and purity which operated in Kerala.¹⁴³

Such instances still continue. Shins Peter, former chairman of the Kerala Converted Christians Development Corporation, for example, notes that the Dalit Christians feel that they are being treated as second-class members, including the Syrian Christian Churches in Kerala. Syrian Christian members, for example, seldom make any matrimonial alliance with the Dalits, and the number of Dalit priests is also less. There are also many instances of parishioners resisting Dalit priests.¹⁴⁴

Unfortunately, the caste system has infected the Syrian Orthodox Church, which is one of the Syrian Christian churches in Kerala. It is to be noted, however, that the caste system does not control inter-church relations in this church since it does not have Dalit converts. Nevertheless, the caste assumptions regulate Syrian Orthodox attitudes to the Dalits significantly, viewing the Dalits as inherently inferior. Kerala's Pulaya Christians, for example, were not given food inside the houses of the Syrian Orthodox Christians in our neighbourhood, up until the 1980s. Admittedly, such practices have reduced considerably

¹⁴³ Susan Bayly, "Hindu Kingship and the Origin of Community: Religion, State and Society in Kerala, 1750-1850," *MAS* 18 (1984), 183-184.

¹⁴⁴ M. S. Vidyanandan, "Dalit Christians take the 'ghar wapsi' way after discrimination in Kerala, in www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2016/aug/20/Peeved-Dalit-Christians-return-to-Hinduism-1511152.html, accessed on 03/07/2018.

in the last few decades. Nevertheless, this discussion does not mean that the caste influence has been successfully eradicated from Syrian Orthodox Christians. Instead, caste assumptions continue to shape and reshape Syrian Orthodox psyches subversively. Similarly, Syrian Orthodox believers have been silent about the sin of casteism and Syrian Orthodox academics, with very few exceptions like Eliaz and Coorilose, do not attend seriously to caste discriminations. This dissertation seeks to join such dissenting voices and understands the silences and indifferences as products of institutional sins, which assist the perpetuation of the caste system. Perhaps, the proposal of Deenabandhu Manchala, who advocates “a movement of churches together for life of all, countering the forces that deny and abuse life, and offering and holding forth alternative visions of the world” can be an eye-opener for Syrian Orthodox academics in developing proposals for countering the caste system, offering a counter-ontology.¹⁴⁵ The present section will address this mistake, and my proposals to redress inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit disconnects, it is hoped, can serve as a point of departure for healing the caste assumptions among Syrian Orthodox Christians and building a bridge between Syrian Orthodox Christians and Dalit Christians.

7. 3. 3. 1. Listening to Bridge the Gap

As noted, the Syrian Orthodox Christians and Dalit Christians are often understood as miles apart. There are some sceptics on both sides of the divide who emphasise that the Dalits and Syrian Orthodox Christians can never coalesce. However, there are few connecting links between them, which might help them move forward with dialogues. First

¹⁴⁵ Deenabandhu Manchala, "Migration: An Opportunity for Broader and Deeper Ecumenism," in *Theology of Migration in the Abrahamic Religions*, ed., Elaine Padilla, Peter C. Phan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 156.

and foremost, the subversive voices, as seen, envision a conversation between dominant caste Christians like Syrian Orthodox Christians and the Dalit Christians. Likewise, they have co-existed in India for many centuries. So too, they are members of the Indian churches and united through their faith in Christ. Such associations, though often overlooked, call for further research to bridge the gap, empowering the Dalit and Syrian Orthodox Christians to work in dialogical and non-hierarchical collaboration as communities united through their faith.

Monarchs' careful listening to God's communication and their willingness to listen to Abraham and Sarah explain their version, even after the couple's plots were uncovered, can help Syrian Orthodox and Dalit Christians travel the extra mile to bridge the gap, reimagining the other as a partner in dialogue. As Tracy Davis and Laura M. Harrison rightly observe, listening is an essential element in crossing the thresholds of differences, and there is no substitute for listening in furthering associations through dialogues.¹⁴⁶ The listening and subsequent dialogues seeks not to conquer the other but, as in Abraham's crossings, seek to explain the individual situation, which will promote further dialogues, mutual co-operation and appreciation, suspending prejudices. Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, for example, clarifies how listening can advance dialogues and mutuality:

If sharing and witnessing to our faith is important in interfaith dialogue, so is receiving and learning. Both parties in dialogue will have to be open to not only hearing what the other has to say but also to listening sincerely and attentively. Interfaith dialogue is premised on the hope that people are willing to open their eyes and minds as well as their hearts and souls to receive what the other has to offer. The process of listening requires that we suspend or bracket our previous understandings of what we think we know of the other is sharing with us. Such courtesy facilitates authentic and respectful listening.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Tracy Davis and Laura M. Harrison, *Advancing Social Justice: Tools, Pedagogies, and Strategies to Transform Your Campus* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 96.

¹⁴⁷ Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, *World Christianity Encounters World Religions: A Summa of Interfaith Dialogue* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2018), 51.

Similarly, Ralph Underwood rightly clarifies that listening promotes mutuality and helps persons to move beyond prejudices and interact constructively with outsiders as partners in dialogue.¹⁴⁸ Such a radical listening, which opens the eyes, minds, hearts and souls of the dialogue partners, suspending presuppositions, would be liberating to the Syrian Orthodox Christians and Dalit Christians. For example, my own attempts to listen to Dalits' subversive voices, as indicated, educated me about the alternate, yet empowering, moral visions of Dalits' culture and spirituality. Such a new orientation further reframed me as a dissenting voice, seeking to bridge Syrian Orthodox Christians with Dalit Christians and join scholars like Eliaz and Coorilose.

What is needed in Syrian Orthodox and the Dalit Christian interactions, I think, is not a "chosen-subaltern" language, affirming the superiority or inferiority of one the dialogue partners, but to emphasise how constructive listening may enrich both partners to understand the other as "other" (with some differences) and live Christian life authentically in the subcontinent, overcoming caste barriers. Edmund Emeka Ezegbobelu, in a different but related field of interreligious dialogue between Christians and Muslims, has argued similarly:

Interreligious dialogue has nothing to do with previous attitudes towards those who are different from us and is not there for us to trounce the opponent or learn about an opponent but is in place so that we may deal more effectively with them.¹⁴⁹

Such a dialogical and non-hierarchical listening is not an easy task. It demands "intellectual, moral, and, at the limit, religious ability to struggle to hear another and to

¹⁴⁸ Ralph Underwood, *Empathy and Confrontation in Pastoral Care* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 57.

¹⁴⁹ Edmund Emeka Ezegbobelu, *Challenges of Interreligious Dialogue: Between the Christian and the Muslim Communities in Nigeria* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009), 93.

respond."¹⁵⁰ As John C. Cavadini and Donald Wallenfang note, what David Tracy suggests is a struggling experience. It may even hurt the listener, allowing listener's personal convictions to be challenged, rebuked, humiliated and stretched in every act of listening.¹⁵¹ Similarly, there could be some surprises and puzzles to Syrian Orthodox and the Dalit listeners. However, a deliberate listening and subsequent dialogues, despite the difference in caste, as will be further clarified, might clear the surprises and puzzles gradually and will open a new ground where the Syrian Orthodox and Dalit Christians can celebrate their equality, amidst their differences. So too, Yahweh's dialogues with the emperors and emperors' dialogue with the couple, as narrated in Abraham's crossings, can help Dalit Christians and Syrian Orthodox Christians.

7. 3. 3. 2. Dialogue: An Opportunity to Learn

As explained, Abraham's crossings highlight God's dialogue with the emperors to inform them about Sarah's status and kings' dialogues with the couple to understand more about the couple. A similar undertaking, which emphasises dialogue as a way to bridge the gap, can facilitate a constructive dialogue between the Syrian Orthodox and the Dalit Christians. What I propose is not a one-way affair from the Syrian Orthodox Church to the Dalits or from the Dalits to the Syrian Orthodox Church. Neither do I wish to idealise dialogues. As Julia T. Wood rightly cautions, the "search for (and belief in) common ground may thwart, rather than facilitate, genuine dialogue, because almost inevitably the dominant culture defines what ground is common or legitimate."¹⁵² She

¹⁵⁰ David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1990), 4.

¹⁵¹ John C. Cavadini, Donald Wallenfang, "Introduction," in *Evangelization as Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. John C. Cavadini, Donald Wallenfang (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2019), xxvii.

¹⁵² Julia T. Wood, "Forward: Entering into Dialogue," in *Dialogue: Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies*, eds., Rob Anderson, Leslie A. Baxter, Kenneth N Cissna (London: Sage Publications, 2004), xvii.

proposes a kind of dialogue which allows differences to exist among the dialogue partners.¹⁵³

Such a dialogue which embraces and learns from conflicts and differences, as Cervenak, Cespedes, Souza and Staub clarify, can open new avenues for mutuality and unity may become less critical in such instances.¹⁵⁴ Hence, I am not suggesting any organic unity. Instead, what I propose, is a willingness to ensure that the Dalits and the Syrian Orthodox Christians have unique right to live in freedom and dignity, recognising the present gap between the Syrian Orthodox Christians and the Dalit Christians as a reality, begging to be bridged as much as possible through reciprocal dialogues. From such a context, I believe that there should be mutual learning and teaching between these dialogue partners, which will allow learning about each other and entering each other's worldview. It will also provide a basis for a reciprocal recognition of each other, informed by the counter-hegemonic language of the subversive voices in Dalits' contexts, expressed in cultural ways and historical events.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, Abraham's crossings can help Dalit theology reimagine the concept of Dalit women, along the lines of Dalits' worldview and the epistemology of resistance.

7. 3. 4. Reimagining the Role of Dalit Women

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Sarah J. Cervenak, Karina L. Cespedes, Caridad Souza, and Andrea Straub, *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, eds. Gloria Anzaldúa, AnaLouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2002), 352.

¹⁵⁵ Barbara C. Wallace, Robert T. Carter, Jose E. Nanin, Richard Keller, and Vanessa Alleye, "Identity Development for 'Diverse and Different Others': Integrating Stages of Change, Motivational Interviewing, and Identity Theories for Race, People of Color, Sexual Orientation, and Disability," in *Understanding and Dealing With Violence: A Multicultural Approach*, eds., Barbara C. Wallace, Robert T. Carter (California: Sage Publications, 2003), 85, William B. Gudykunst, *Bridging Differences: Effective Intergroup Communication* (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 347.

The treatment of Dalit Women in India is an extremely explosive and delicate issue. Ali Riaz and Subho Basu, Anoop Kumar Singh and Shailaja Paik explain that Dalit women have been subjected to double patriarchy. Dominant caste men and Dalit men oppress Dalit women.¹⁵⁶ Paswan, Jaideva, Radhika Chandiramani and M Elavarasi claim that the Dalit women are thrice alienated. The class, caste and gender oppress them.¹⁵⁷ Their dignity is compromised very often. So too, Muriel Orevillo- Montenegro argues that Dalit women are deemed to be the most impure of the impure.¹⁵⁸ Bama explains:

The position of women is both pitiful and humiliating really. In the fields, they have to escape from upper caste men's molestations. At church, they must lick the priest's shoes and be his slaves while he threatens them with tales of God, Heaven, and Hell. Even when they go to their own homes, before they have had a chance to cook some kanji or lie down and rest a little, they have to submit themselves to their husband's torment.¹⁵⁹

Dalit women are confronting significant discrimination, exclusion and violence more than Dalit men.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, Ruth Manorama designates the Dalit woman as the "Dalit among the Dalits" and "downtrodden among the downtrodden."¹⁶¹ N. G. Prasuna comments that the Dalit men follow the principles of Manu Dharma Sastra in oppressing

¹⁵⁶ Ali Riaz, Subho Basu, *Paradise Lost?: State Failure in Nepal* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), 138, Anoop Kumar Singh, "Defying the Odds: The Triumphs and Tragedies of Dalit and Adivasi Students in Higher Education," in *Beyond Inclusion: The Practice of Equal Access in Indian Higher Education*, eds. Satish Deshpande and Usha Zacharias (New Delhi: Routledge, 2013), 183, Paik, *Dalit Women's Education*, 339.

¹⁵⁷ Paswan, Jaideva (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Dalits*, 261, Radhika Chandiramani, "Mapping the Contours: Reproductive Health and Rights and Sexual Health and Rights in India," in *Where Human Rights Begin: Health, Sexuality, and Women in the New Millennium*, eds. Wendy Chavkin and Ellen Chesler (New Brunswick/ New Jersey/ London: Rutgers Press, 2005), 131, M. Elavarasi, "Dignity of Dalit Women," in *Human Rights: Challenges of 21st Century*, ed. V. N. Viswanathan (Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2008), 289.

¹⁵⁸ Montenegro, *The Jesus of Asian Women*, 63.

¹⁵⁹ Faustina, *Sangati: Events*, 122.

¹⁶⁰ Ucko, *The People and the People of God*, 103.

¹⁶¹ Ruth Manorama, "Dalit Women in Struggle: Transforming Pain into Power," in *Life as a Dalit: Views from the Bottom on Caste in India*, eds. Subhadra Mitra Channa and Joan P Mencher (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2013), 258.

the Dalit women.¹⁶² S. Anandhi and J. Jeyarajan recount further that Dalit men do not share domestic labour. They leave the household duties to the absolute responsibility of a wife. Further, 94% of Dalit men, they note, expect that providing sexual needs to the husband is an exclusive responsibility of the wife. Similarly, they leave childcare entirely to their wives. Dalit men also claim a share from the earnings of their wives.¹⁶³

After noting similar situations, Prasuna describes society as “eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Dalit women”.¹⁶⁴ This quotation echoes the Eucharistic formula of Jesus. The churches in India need to explore Prasuna’s words further.¹⁶⁵ This formula suggests that the believers unite with the historical Jesus and participate in his mission through eating and drinking in the Eucharist.¹⁶⁶ Thus, Prasuna invites Dalit women to identify themselves with the mission of Jesus. The marginalised, as we know, were the epicentre of Jesus’ mission.¹⁶⁷ Participating in the mission of Jesus, therefore, demands a change in priorities and a commitment to suffering humanity. Thus, Prasuna asks Dalit women to model their lives as a saving presence of Jesus’ mission. They, as participants of Jesus’ mission, are expected to bring liberation to the less fortunate in society. The same is true with Sarah, the endangered ancestress. As will be clarified, she was an agent of God’s saving presence for Abraham in Egypt and Philistia.

¹⁶² N. G. Prasuna, “The Dalit Woman,” in *Frontiers of Dalit Theology*, ed. V. Devasahayam (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996), 103. Manusmriti is one of the ancient legal texts of Hinduism. It is a discourse given by Manu. It was one of the first Sanskrit texts translated during British colonialism.

¹⁶³ S. Anandhi and J. Jeyaranjan, “The Abusers,” in *Men of the Global South: A Reader*, ed. Adam Jones (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2006), 66.

¹⁶⁴ N. G. Prasuna, “The Dalit Woman,” 111.

¹⁶⁵ Montenegro, *The Jesus of Asian Women*, 63.

¹⁶⁶ Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 186.

¹⁶⁷ L Stanislaus, “A Christian Response to Hindutva,” in *Nationalism and Hindutva: A Christian Response: Papers from the 10th CMS Consultation*, ed., Mark T. B. Laing (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 192

7. 3. 4. 1. Sarah's Trauma and Dalit Women

Sarah's trauma is relevant to Dalit women. She is a powerless victim like Dalit women.¹⁶⁸ Abraham's actions landed her in trouble. Naomi Steinberg is critical of Abraham's actions. She claims that Abraham abandons Sarah so that he can get another wife instead of Sarah, who is barren.¹⁶⁹ While such a reading has some merits, the text does not support her hypothesis entirely. Similarly, Pharaoh and Abimelech abuse her (unknowingly).¹⁷⁰ Sarah, as seen in Genesis 12 and 20, is highly compromised by the powers of the patriarchy and the empire. She endures the sufferings and rejections silently. However, her silence deserves further studies. As seen, she did not remain silent before Yahweh. She communicated her deplorable situation with Yahweh and Yahweh intervenes to help her.¹⁷¹ She appears to be of particular concern to Yahweh.¹⁷² Yahweh acts as Sarah's covenant partner.¹⁷³

Analysing God's intervention in liberating Sarah and reconciling the couple with foreign monarchs can offer some imperatives to uplift Dalit women. Such a claim does not seek to discredit Dalit theology. Indeed, Dalit theology is ideologically pro-women. Dalit spirituality has matriarchal deities as well. However, caste, class and gender -as seen - have alienated Dalit women. Surekha Nelavala, a Dalit feminist theologian, laments that Dalit theology "has failed to debate and discuss the issues of Dalit

¹⁶⁸ Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis*, 53.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 54.

¹⁷⁰ This does not mean Sex as the only means of abusing a woman. Taking a married woman to a Harem could be an abuse.

¹⁷¹ F. van Dijk-Hemmes, "Sarai's Exile: A Gender-Motivated Reading of Genesis 12: 10-13:2," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed., A. Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 231.

¹⁷² Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis*, 87.

¹⁷³ Dijk-Hemmes, *Sarai's Exile*, 232.

women."¹⁷⁴ She calls for a Dalit feminist standpoint to examine the issues of Dalit women.¹⁷⁵ Her proposal is vital in Dalit contexts since Dalit women are repeatedly raped and abused. *The Times of India*, for instance, reports an alleged rape of a Dalit woman by six men on 3rd April 2018.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, In December 2017, a 30-year-old Dalit woman, committed suicide after her family was repeatedly threatened by two men who barged into her home in July and gang-raped her.¹⁷⁷ Sad to say, the list is infinite. A sixteen-year-old Dalit girl was sexually assaulted and killed in Odisha in March 2018. The decomposed body was found in a paddy field.¹⁷⁸ Such events show that Yahweh's initiatives are vital in Dalit contexts. They might inspire theological discussion on the long-enduring sufferings of the Dalit women. Further, they might help a re-reading of the scriptures from a Dalit feminist point of view. Genesis 12:10-20 and Genesis 20 are relevant to Dalit contexts and the question of Dalit women.

7. 3. 4. 2. Dalit Women: Participants in God's Mission, Mediators of God's Liberation

God, as seen in Abraham's crossings, is a liberator. God came down to rescue Sarah, who had been abandoned by her husband and abused by colonial powers, not by mighty hands but peacefully through dialogues. God's actions in Genesis 12:10-20 and Genesis 20 are in line with the message of the Hebrew Scriptures. It acknowledges God's

¹⁷⁴ Nelavala, *Liberation Beyond Borders*, 23.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ The Times of India. "6 Booked for Dalit Woman's Gang-rape." Accessed on 04/04/2018. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/6-booked-for-dalit-womans-gang-rape/articleshow/63587285.cms>..

¹⁷⁷ The Times of India, Witness in Gang-rape, Suicide of Dalit Woman Attacked, Accessed on April 4, 2018. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/jaipur/witness-in-gang-rape-suicide-of-dalit-woman-attacked/articleshow/63372363.cms>

¹⁷⁸ Debabrata Mohanty, "Three Arrested for Rape and Murder of Minor Dalit girl in Odisha," accessed 04th April 2018 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/three-arrested-for-rape-and-murder-of-minor-dalit-girl-in-odisha/story-FBeWWrLELzj5yzNnYmzyMM.html>.

preferential option for the oppressed.¹⁷⁹ The Exodus event, for example, depicts God as the one who listens to the cry of the people to set them free.¹⁸⁰ The prophets, similarly, portray God as the one who defends the oppressed. They developed their vision of God's preferential option for the oppressed and hoped for liberation in the context of the socioeconomic oppression of the poor by the wealthy and a small colonised nation by the great empires of antiquity.¹⁸¹ God's preferential option for the less fortunate is one of the features of Dalit deities as well. In praise of Ellaiyamman, the goddess of the Dalit communities in Tamilnadu, we read.¹⁸²

You are the deity who expels our troubles; come rid us of evil.
You are present in the neem leaves used for driving out women's afflictions.
You are present in the fire, the head of our religion.
You have lived with fame in our village, Malaipallaiyani.
In Padavethi a buffalo was sacrificed to You, even in Poothukaadu;
A sacrifice to inspire You, our goddess, to destroy evil.
You are the goddess who guards our boundaries:
You protect with your spear;
You will protect us from 4408 diseases;
You will protect the Harijans from the torture of the High caste.¹⁸³

This song shows that the concept of God as the liberator is appealing. However, emphasising God's role in Abraham's crossings should not direct us to discredit Sarah's role in Abraham's encounters. Sarah displays moral and spiritual integrity in these

¹⁷⁹ Miguel A. De La Torre, "Liberation Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Political Theology*, eds., Craig Hovey, Elizabeth Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 31, Simon S. Maimela, "Black Theology," in *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives*, eds., Karl Muller, Theo Sundermeier, Steven B. Bevans, Richard H. Bliese (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 51.

¹⁸⁰ Andrea Fröchtling, *Exiled God and Exiled Peoples: Memoria Passionis and the Perception of God During and After Apartheid and Shoah* (Hamburg: Lit Verlag Münster, 2002), 116.

¹⁸¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Women and Interfaith Relations: Toward a Transitional Feminism," in *Women and Interreligious Dialogue*, eds. Catherine Cornille, Jillian Maxey (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 13.

¹⁸² Pupul Jayakar, *Earth Mother: Legends, Ritual Arts, and Goddesses of India* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1990), 43ff.

¹⁸³ Quoted from Sathianathan Clarke, "Paraiyars Ellaiyamman as an Iconic Symbol of Collective Resistance and Emancipatory Mythography" in *Religions of the Marginalised: Towards a Phenomenology and the Methodology of Study*, ed., Robinson Gnana (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), 43.

narratives. God is intimately related to her and saved the endangered couples because of her words. God liberates them because of a woman compromised by patriarchy and empire. Accordingly, Abraham amassed wealth because of Sarah. Hence, Sarah seems to be the real hero in these narratives.

Hence, Sarah acts as a participant in God's mission for Abraham and a mediator of liberation. Sarah, as the mediator of God's liberation and His covenant partner, would provide theological orientations to reimagine the role of Dalit women in a society dominated by the oppressive structures of caste and patriarchy. Her model can inspire Dalit women to reinvent their role as participants in God's mission for the voiceless and mediators of God's liberation. However, I do not wish to idealise Sarah since she had her own flaws as well. Her indifference to Hagar, a weak and destitute slave woman from Egypt, for example, is questionable.¹⁸⁴ Similarly, Sarah betrayed Hagar as an abusive slave mistress by giving Hagar to Abraham for sex and causing Hagar to lose her status in the household.¹⁸⁵ Nevertheless, Yahweh comes to her rescue. As Hemchand Gossai observes, unlike Moses, who called out to Yahweh for water, Yahweh provided Hagar water without her calling. Yahweh helps her in her abandonment. It seems that Yahweh, is the refuge of the oppressed, be it Sarah, Hagar, Israel or anyone it might be.¹⁸⁶

7. 5. Conclusion

Dalit theology is an advocacy theology for the Dalits, which seeks to subvert the

¹⁸⁴ Amanda W. Benckhuysen, "Reading Hagar's Story from the Margins: Family Resemblances between Nineteenth - and Twentieth-century Female Interpreters" in *Strangely Familiar: Protofeminist Interpretations of Patriarchal Biblical Texts*, eds. Nancy Calvert-Koyzis, Heather E. Weir (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 25.

¹⁸⁵ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll: Orbis books, 2013), 17-18.

¹⁸⁶ Gossai, *Power and Marginality in the Abraham Narrative*, 14.

influence of the caste system. The counter-discourse which it offers is filled with an elevated level of Latin American and African American influences. It constructed biblical themes developed for Latin American and African American contexts as the dominant self, alienated Dalit theology from the counter-ontology and the epistemology of resistance in Dalits' worldview, pushed Dalit culture into the periphery and overlooked the liberative vision in Dalit contexts. This dissertation addresses such imbalances and suggests how a methodological switch and an intertextual reading, respecting the counter-worldview and the epistemology of resistance communicated through the subversive voices in Dalits' contexts and the counter-colonial worldview narrated through Abraham's crossings can liberate Dalit theology out of the elevated level of Latin American and African American influences.

From such a background, I suggest the counter-assertions of the Second Temple community narrated through Abraham's postcolonial crossings as a paradigm to redress discontinuities in Dalit theology. The proposed paradigm will help Dalit theology revisit its image of God along the lines of Dalit contexts. As seen, the Dalit contexts demand liberation and reconciliation. The image of God who emerges from Abraham's crossings is in line with this requirement. It will empower Dalit theology to affirm that the liberator of the Dalits is not dichotomous but an author of reconciliation between the Dalits and non-Dalits. Further, the suffering image of God advanced by Dalit theology, as clarified, has limitations to liberate the Dalits. The image of God in Abraham's crossings is not a suffering God, but a God who is sensitive to the sufferings. God responds to the sufferings peacefully and liberates the oppressed and reconciles the oppressed with the oppressor, without compromising the freedom and dignity of the oppressed. Such an image can help

Dalit theology develop cross-cultural fertilisations.

Similarly, Abraham's crossings will facilitate inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit relations. As seen, the Dalits remain as an oppressed majority in Indian Christian churches. They are poorly represented, and caste controls church practices significantly. Dalit theology challenges such injustices. However, the hermeneutical examples of Dalit theology, especially the binary opposition inherent in them, disempowers Dalit theology considerably. Abraham's crossings, especially the counter-colonial worldview in Genesis 12:10-20 and Genesis 20, which subvert the prejudices of the Second Temple community, can offer praxis-oriented guidelines to promote a crossing to appreciate the best in outsiders like similar examples at Neve Shalom and Kuron village. Such initiatives will help Dalit theology concentrate more on the process of categorisation in Indian Christian Churches, empower the Dalits and non-Dalits to be active listeners and learners, promote dialogue as an opportunity to know outsiders and rescript ancient traditions to develop dialogues and collaborations with other religious traditions and suffering communities. So too, the proposed paradigm can empower the Dalits and the Syrian Orthodox Christians to know each other as "others with some differences" and join together in living Christian life authentically.

Further, the proposed paradigm would help Dalit theology to rescript the role of Dalit women. As seen, they suffer multiple discriminations. Sarah's trauma and God's reaction to her sufferings suggest that God is intimately related to her and God saved the couple because of Sarah's words. Sarah, therefore, acts like a partaker in God's mission for Abraham and a mediator of liberation. Such a paradigm could inspire Dalit theology to reimagine the role of the Dalit women as mediators and participants in God's mission.

Hence, the proposed paradigm would be radical in Dalit contexts.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

8. 0. Introduction

Michelangelo was born on March 6, 1475, in Caprese, Italy.¹ He was a sculptor, painter, architect and poet. He is recognised to be one of the greatest artists of all time. He believed that every stone has a statue submerged in it, and his task was to liberate the image sleeping inside the stone. The famous quotation, usually attributed to him, "I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free" reveals his mind. The present research is a similar task. It is a discovery. The driving force behind this research is Dalits' resources and their counter-formulations. I am only a facilitator, who helps the liberative vision already submerged in the Dalits' contexts to speak. My claim, however, does not include that this dissertation is entirely free from my value judgements. My religious and social location, as a Syrian Orthodox priest born and brought up in Kerala, as clarified, has undoubtedly impacted the study, and therefore, I welcome further exchanges and updating from the Dalit academics.

As clarified, this dissertation proposes an alternate path for Dalit theology based upon Dalits' assertions and their counter-caste worldview expressed through the subversive voices in Dalits' contexts like Chokhamela and others. Though such assertions reflect Dalits' life and their epistemology of resistance authentically, they are often overlooked and relegated into the margins because Dalit theology follows the hermeneutical examples developed by Latin American and African American academics in predominantly Christian contexts. Such pathos filled paradigms, as clarified, alienated

¹ Shelley Swanson Sateren, *Michelangelo* (Mankato: Bridgestone Books, 2002), 7.

Dalit theology from the counter-caste Hindu hegemonic worldview and alternate moral visions among Dalits. From such a background, I suggest a hermeneutics of return to Dalits' resources and an intertextual reading between Dalits' counter-worldview and the counter-colonial assertions of the Second Temple community narrated through Abraham's crossings can liberate Dalit theology out of its alienation from the liberative voices and Dalits' counter-formulations. The present chapter reviews the dissertation, suggests avenues for further research and some concluding remarks.

8. 1. Review of Dissertation

Dalits have been the Indian suffering servants for many centuries. Some of them joined Christianity to counter the caste system. However, conversion did not change their social situation considerably, and the Dalits continued to suffer multiple discriminations in the Churches. Secular assertions like the Dalit Panther movement, *Dalit Sangharsh Samiti*, the Dalit literature movement as well as the Churches' failure in facilitating the Dalits and the insensitivity of Indian Christian theologians to the lived experiences of the Dalits convinced the Dalit Christian academics of the need to offer a theological alternative to complement secular movements to redress the Dalit situation. They found Latin American theology and African American theology as their dialogue partners, which further convinced them that Indian Christian theology failed to recognise the Dalit pathos and the negative impact of caste upon the Dalits. Dalit theology emerged as an Indian form of liberation theology from such contexts.

The proposals of liberation theologians were a strong point of departure for the Dalit academics, who were discontent with their lived experiences, and depended heavily on Latin American and African American conceptual and hermeneutical examples. Such

an undertaking created an imbalance in Dalit theology and suggested how biblical paradigms and their worldviews, proposed in predominately Christian cultures could redress the Dalit situation. It reduced Dalit traditions as objects, and hermeneutical examples developed in alien contexts and their derivatives were injected into Dalit theology. It alienated the pathos filled hermeneutical examples of Dalit theology from Dalits' counter-assertions against dominant Hindu Vedic worldview expressed through the liberative voices in Dalits' contexts and constructed the biblical messages developed in alien contexts as the dominant self at the centre and the subversive voices in Dalit traditions as the dominated self at the margins of Dalit theology. This dissertation seeks to redress this unintended outcome and liberate Dalit theology from undue Latin American and African American influences.

Liberating Dalit theology, of course, is an ambitious term and it can be approached from various perspectives. This dissertation is not the only solution to the problem and suggests only one of the avenues to liberate Dalit theology out of its alienation from Dalit contexts through constructive dialogues between the Bible and Dalit traditions. As suggested, what I propose is a not a conquest model but an ongoing dialogue between the Bible and Dalit contexts which requires a willingness from both participants to be modified and updated. From such a background, this dissertation examines the dominant paradigms of Dalit theology against Dalit cultural and religious traditions and argues that they can be counterproductive in Dalit contexts; and initiates a process of listening to and learning from the pathos, ethos and vision submerged in Dalit culture and spirituality, expressed through some of the untouchables. Such a listening and learning, as argued

in chapter three, clarify how and why Dalit contexts require a hermeneutical switch and further interrogation in Dalit theology.

The liberative voices in Dalit contexts and their counter-caste assertions, as seen, aim neither at an isolated Dalit existence nor their dominion over the dominant castes. Instead, they demand the liberation of Dalits and reconciliation between Dalits and non-Dalits. This dissertation proposes that Dalit theology should honour this contextual reality and liberation of the Dalits and reconciliation between the Dalits and non-Dalits should be the goals of Dalit theology. Reconciliation, which Dalit contexts require, is not a compromise but a conscious move towards a liberated-reconciled society connected through partnerships, irrespective of caste orientations. From such a background, this dissertation, adding to the existing research, proposes the counter-colonial assertions of the Second Temple community express through Abraham's crossings to Egypt and Gerar as a paradigm to complement the subversive voices in Dalit contexts.

Indeed, Abraham was not literally a Dalit and had no association, whatsoever, with Dalits or to the Indian caste system. However, as clarified, Abraham has some striking similarities with Dalit contexts. He is like a Dalit ancestor envisioned in the Deuteronomic creed. So too, Abraham was a landless man like most of the Dalits. Similarly, he lived as an immigrant on the promised land like most of the Dalit agricultural labourers, who work for wages on land they do not own.² Likewise, his role as an ecumenical ancestor of the Jews, Christians and Muslims is crucial since Dalits cut across various religious affiliations. Abraham's proposed association to the Babylonian Golah

² Harry Stevens, Seven Decades after Independence, Most Dalit Farmers Still Landless, accessed on 19th July 2018, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/interactives/dalit-farmers-landless-agricultural-labourers-minimum-support-price>.

community, which shares the ethos of the Dalits, also enhances his appeal to the Dalits. Further, Abraham's non-Jewish background described in Joshua 24, may remind the Dalits of their pre-conversion religious orientations. Hence, the person and work of Abraham, interpreted through a postexilic optic, could appeal to Dalits.

Abraham's crossings, as seen, are not an invention of the postexilic period. They existed in some form before the exile. However, the post-exilic community reformulated such traditions amidst the ethnocentric policies of the Persian empire, which, as seen, divided the class layers sharply and deeply within Yehudites. This policy strengthened hostility and intense opposition to internal minorities such as foreign wives and created internal as well as external outsiders in Yehud. The anti-imperialists living in Achaemenid Yehud responded to this crisis and rescripted the pre-exilic traditions about Abraham to voice their discontent. As the products of postcolonial hybridity, Abraham's crossings counter the colonialist rhetoric and the imperial ambitions of Persian Yehud and their impacts upon the lives and identities of the Second Temple community, who had married Egyptian and Philistine women. They challenge the attempts to demonise the Egyptians and Philistines by narrating how Abraham's crossings and Yahweh's initiatives to liberate the endangered couple subvert the Persian representation of the Egyptians and the Philistines. They highlight God as a source of liberation and reconciliation, God's association and revelation to outsiders, outsiders as behavioural models and God's concern for the endangered matriarch.

After identifying how the counter-assertions in Abraham's crossings reimagine the colonial worldview and its representation of outsiders, this dissertation proposes that an intertextual reading between the responses of the Second Temple community to their

traumatic experiences and Dalits' assertions against dominant Hindu Vedic worldview could help Dalit theology to develop and mature as a source of liberation and reconciliation. The Indian caste system, for example, compartmentalises different castes and creates insiders and outsiders. Further, each caste has its prejudices against the other. There are also inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit misreadings and, as seen, Dalits are not a homogenous category. Such preoccupations are present in Indian Christian churches as well, and they influence inter-church and intra-church relations and practices negatively. Abraham's crossings, which project liberation, reconciliation and cross-border relations, are relevant in such a context. They will help Dalit theology to develop and mature as a source of liberation and reconciliation by:

- Reimagining God as a source of liberation and reconciliation, who inaugurates the process of liberation and reconciliation.
- Revisiting the nature of God's agency in liberating the Dalits and reconciling the Dalits and the non-Dalits.
- Redefining God's response to the Dalit suffering, not by participating in the Dalit suffering but peacefully initiating the process of liberation through dialogues and negotiations.
- Developing a positive assessment of outsiders by acknowledging God's activities among outsiders and learning from them.
- Moving from Christocentrism to theocentrism (with some reservations)
- Breaking the barriers of the caste system that generate categories like the Dalits and non-Dalits in Indian Christian Churches and society.
- Empowering the Dalits and the non-Dalits to be active listeners and learners.

- Promoting ongoing inter-Dalit and intra-Dalit dialogues, negotiations and mutually enriching partnerships.
- Rescripting ancient traditions to promote peace and harmony in Indian Christian Churches and society.
- Promoting the Syrian Orthodox-Dalit Christian dialogues, appreciation and reciprocal recognition.
- Reinventing the role of Dalit women as God's covenant partners, mediators of God's liberation and participants in God's mission.

Such imperatives in Abraham's crossings will assist Dalit theology to focus on breaking barriers, crossing boundaries and bridging differences by redefining the agency of God in liberating Dalits and reconciling the liberated Dalits with non-Dalits, and empowering Dalits and non-Dalits to continue God's mission by crossing the boundaries of the caste system to appreciate the best in their religious, cultural and gender outsiders, as envisioned in the subversive voices in Dalit contexts. They can help Dalit theology mature and develop as a source of liberation and reconciliation for entire Indian Christian Churches. The present research, as noted, can help the Syrian Orthodox Church in Kerala to develop mutually enriching dialogues with Dalits also. However, this dissertation is not entirely free from certain limitations, which, as will be explained, necessitates further interrogation.

7. 2. Recommendations for Further Research

This dissertation has analysed Dalit movements that emerged after the Dalit Panthers movement only. While I have valid reasons for such a delimitation, further research on Dalit movements from their early beginnings may help to clarify further how

and why Dalit theology was proposed. Similarly, Dalit contexts have abundant resources, and this dissertation has only analysed a representative few. Studying further sources may further clarify the spirit of protest and the longing for liberation and reconciliation among Dalits. So too, this dissertation interpreted the subversive voices in Dalit contexts only. However, as noted, there were some dominant caste humanists like Vemana, who were discontented with the caste system. Analysing such dissenting voices and their implications for a casteless society may offer further perspectives on advancing Dalit theology, from another point of view.

Similarly, this dissertation has only suggested how Abraham's crossings may reorient Dalit theology. As clarified, there are other instances in the Abrahamic narrative, which may empower Dalit theology. Genesis 19:30-38, as clarified, is one such example. So too, Abraham's life as an immigrant in the promised land, suffering, rejection and divine intervention to save Hagar, God's bond with Abraham and Abraham's dialogue with God and Sarah's silence may also help Dalit theology develop and mature. Such deficiencies, however, do not invalidate the proposals of this dissertation anyway.

7. 3. Conclusion

This dissertation recognises Dalits as a protesting category with alternate moral visions and attempts to reposition the counter-ontology and the epistemology of resistance in Dalits' contexts from the periphery of Dalit hermeneutics to the centre as a dominant self. It suggests how an ongoing dialogue between the alternate moral visions submerged in the counter-formulations in Dalits' contexts and that of the Bible would reorient Dalit theology. Such an attempt, as clarified, is one of the options to liberate Dalit theology from excessive Latin American and African American influence. From such a

context, this dissertation proposes the counter-colonial assertions of the Second Temple community narrated through Abraham's postcolonial crossings to Egypt and Gerar as a paradigm, which agrees with Dalits' epistemology of resistance and counter-caste Hindu hegemonic worldview. Such a proposal, as indicated, reframes Dalits' identity not as a victimised category resigned to their dehumanised status like Isaiah's suffering servant; but as a community with alternate moral visions. It adds to existing scholarship and opens avenues for ongoing research, and will help Dalit theology in challenging the caste system, respecting the shared cultural ethic envisioned in the liberative voices in Dalit contexts. It will further assist Dalit theology in actualising a liberated reconciled Church and society, connected through mutually enriching partnerships, along the lines of Dalits' counter-worldview and the epistemology of resistance.

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