

CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: AN APPROACH TO INVESTIGATE AND
ADDRESS DIVISION WITHIN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF TWO
HOLINESS GROUPS IN THE VIDARBHA REGION OF INDIA

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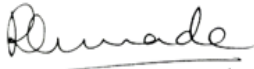
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ABSTRACT

This research investigated the possibility of misplaced social motivations of Christians within select holiness groups in the Vidarbha region of India. Guided by Paulo Freire's "Critical Consciousness" theory, this research examined the causes for social conflicts within two holiness groups in Vidarbha. This research involved four pastors from the holiness groups and forty members from their congregations as research participants. Following the "Critical Consciousness" theory, the action-reflection conceptual model was used for this research. Data was collected through the interviews with four pastors and group discussions with their forty church members. Four major themes and thirty-eight subthemes emerged from the data. Major themes included: Dalit motivations for embracing Christian faith; evidence of social conflicts within congregations; causes of divisions within congregations; and strategies to resolve conflicts. This research contributes to a study on Dalit Christians within the holiness groups in Vidarbha region of India.

CERTIFICATION OF PROOFREADING

I, Prakash Nemade, certify that this dissertation has undergone proofreading and editing by Prof. Marie Osborne, an authorized proofreader of the Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminar



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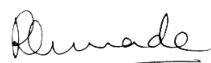
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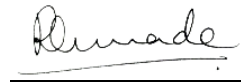
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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my parents

Mr. Wamanrao Nemade and Mrs. Kaveribai Nemade

in loving memory of my grandmother

Shevantibai Nemade

And

To my Guru

Dr. Floyd T. Cunningham

for investing his entire academic career as a missionary to the Asia

through the Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary

Manila, Philippines

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Colossians 3:12-14).

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(2 Corinthians 12:9).*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FCON	First Church of the Nazarene
SCON	Second Church of the Nazarene
FFMC	First Free Methodist Church
SFMC	Second Free Methodist Church

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND ITS BACKGROUND

Introduction

My paternal grandmother was the first family member who willingly accepted the Christian faith. As I was growing up, I heard many stories from her about her life before and after her conversion. One of those experiences she shared always haunted me. She would recall one particular experience describing how the senior pastor of our holiness church in the village would not allow her to fetch water from the well on the church premises. My grandmother had to go through this experience simply because she was from a different caste background from that of the pastor's. Incidentally, like my grandmother, the pastor had also belonged to an outcaste group but not the same as hers.

Many years later, as I was growing up in a Christian boarding school, I too experienced division between two groups of people belonging to different outcaste backgrounds. Subsequently, I too personally experienced and witnessed many instances of division within the church leadership as they aggressively fought for leadership positions. Likewise, I observed Christian parents inspecting caste identities of prospective brides and grooms for their children and, without hesitation, rejecting marriage proposals when caste identities did not match.

These experiences and observations, to name a few, created a desire to investigate the root cause or causes for caste discrimination among Christians and to find answers to

the problems arising within the Christian community in the Vidarbha region of India in Maharashtra State.

Background of the Problem

Historically, the social structure of Indian society is based on a culturally imposing socio-religious caste system as prescribed by the Hindu religious system. This system divides society into four hierarchical castes,¹ allotting specific occupations and resulting social positions to each of them. This practice, found in history, is observed even today. Referring to allocation of working according to caste even in the contemporary context, Human Rights Watch (HRW) report says, “Caste-based occupational distribution is reinforced in reserved government employment, with Dalits assigned primarily to the posts of sweepers.”²

Interestingly, the Hindu system fails to identify, recognize and incorporate certain groups which do not fall under the four caste categories, resulting in them being called outcastes or untouchables, and considered less than human.³ These “sub-human” groups were further divided into sub-castes or *jatis*.⁴ These *jatis* are small independent groups, but not all are practicing Hindus. Many of them identify with other religious and faith systems such as Buddhism, Christianity, Sikhism and Islam.

Earlier, for many centuries, these independent people groups outside the Hindu caste system did not have an identity of their own. For this very reason, Mohandas

¹ Robert Pen, *Social Humanism: Dr. Ambedkar's Social Philosophy in Reference to the Dalit Christians* (New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2018), 18.

² Human Rights Watch, Hidden Apartheid: Caste Discrimination against India's “Untouchables.” <https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/02/12/hidden-apartheid/caste-discrimination-against-indias-untouchables>

³ Raj Kumar, *Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation and Identity* (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2017), 121.

⁴ Pen, *Social Humanism*, 25.

Gandhi, attempted to give some identity and called them Harijan, meaning, children of God. Nevertheless, the intended groups disliked this title as the original usage was derogatory, being a title given also to children of temple prostitutes.⁵

Prior to Gandhi, Jyotiba Phule had already recognized the need for an identity for these outcaste groups. He suggested that they be identified as Dalits. He believed that this identity gave them the opportunity to become identified as a larger group that remains discriminated against and oppressed, exploited fragments living on the fringes of society. Therefore, the term Dalit provided them with the opportunity to associate with other people groups with similar struggles.⁶ This title aptly expresses their true social status in society. And probably this was the reason why Dalit found acceptance.⁷

The extension of the term Dalit to numerous groups with similar struggles is probably the cause for conflict. There are innumerable groups that number more than a thousand out of which only a few dominating groups receive government benefits under the Reservation policy. It is known to all Indians that in the reservation or quota policy, only a few dominating Dalit groups receive most of the benefits and the others continue to struggle in poverty and unemployment. This results in conflicts among the Dalits themselves. Describing this, Sanjay Kumar Chaudhary notes, “Among the Dalits, a few caste groups appear to be benefitting disproportionately from the reservation policy. This has escalated internal conflict among Dalits in recent times, particularly in Andhra

⁵ Anderson H. M. Jeremiah, “Dalit Christians in India: Reflections from the Broken Middle,” *Studies in World Christianity* 17, no. 3 (2011): 272, accessed August 3, 2016, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

⁶ The Indian Census identifies and lists more than 1000 different small and large groups referred to as Scheduled Caste, earlier called Dalit.

⁷ Nevertheless, the government advises against the use of the term Dalit and instead use “Scheduled Caste.” [Letter-dated-15032018.PDF \(socialjustice.nic.in\)](#).

Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab and Bihar.”⁸ As noted in his article, Maharashtra is one of the four states that witness internal conflict. This research explores the question whether internal conflicts exist among the holiness groups in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra.

Incidentally, Chaudhary comments on the Indian Census report of 2001, recording 1208 groups that are considered Dalit. He observes,

By and large, Dalits have suffered immensely at the hands of Brahminical and feudal forces, but the general practice of untouchability and discrimination exists among them also. As per the 2001 Census, the population of Scheduled Castes was 166 million. They are officially classified into 1208 castes as on 23.09.2008, as notified by the President of India under Article 341(1) of the Constitution of India. While very limited social interaction takes place among the different Dalit castes, prohibitions regarding norms of inter-dining and inter-caste marriage prevail among them too.⁹

It is not surprising to find internal conflict where certain groups seek to dominate other groups vying for recognition and benefits. As observed, it percolates down to many social interactions which include prohibition of inter-caste marriage. Another personal observation is that individual groups separate themselves and live in distinct areas of villages and towns encouraging loyalties and zeal for their own group, motivating each group to fight for their rights.

Constant conflict within the Dalit community has compelled many groups to seek better identity in other religions such as Christianity, Islam and Sikhism.¹⁰ When Christian missionaries arrived in the Indian sub-continent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they may have witnessed the conflicts among the Dalits as caste system was very strong that era. Webster observes that the missionaries “chose not to

⁸ Sanjay Kumar Chaudhary, “Sub-Classification of Dalits: Law and Politics,” *Countercurrents.org*. <https://www.countercurrents.org/chaudhary160811.htm>.

⁹ Chaudhary, “Sub-Classification of Dalits.”

¹⁰ John C. B. Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2009), 40.

work within the caste system but to condemn it and replace it with something better, probably a class system based on achieved rather than ascribed status.¹¹ They reached out to these groups, resulting in mass conversions. However, the main social motivation of Dalits was to find release from caste slavery.¹² Probably this is the reason why they carry the baggage of conflicts and divisions among themselves.

Statement of the Problem

Does the misplaced social motivation of Christians cause division within the local church?

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to inquire into the possibility of misplaced social motivation of Dalit Christians within select holiness groups in the Vidarbha region of India.

Research Objectives and Questions

The objectives of this research were:

1. To find out from select pastors and their select church members, whether social motivations of Christians caused division within the Christian community in the select holiness groups in the Vidarbha region of India
2. To find out from select pastors and their select church members, whether conflicts existed within their congregations are related to social castes.

¹¹ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 45-46.

¹² Lancy Lobo, "Dalit Religious Movements and Dalit Identity," in *The Emerging Dalit Identity: The Re-assertion of the Subalterns* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1996), 171.

3. To find out from select pastors and their select church members, what caused social conflicts within their congregations.
4. To find out from select pastors and their select church members, what strategies they thought could help resolve social conflicts within their local congregations.

This research was conducted among two groups of research participants:

1) Two pastors from each of the two holiness groups in the Vidarbha region, and 2) Ten church members from each of the four congregations represented by the pastors of the two holiness groups in the Vidarbha region. Research questions were divided according to the research subjects. The following research questions in this study focused on investigating the issues related to caste division, inequality and discrimination among Dalit Christians in the holiness groups in the Vidarbha region of India. The detailed questionnaire is found in Appendix A. The research questions are as follow:

1. What is the caste background represented by the research participants from the holiness groups in the Vidarbha region of India?
2. Are there divisions within the holiness groups in the Vidarbha region and what are the reasons thereof?
3. What are the evidences of caste discrimination, if any, within the holiness groups in the Vidarbha region?
4. What are the challenges and issues self-identified by each group?
5. What are actionable solutions they would suggest during the group discussions facilitated by the researcher?

6. What spiritual insights might be gained for creating a more equitable community of Christians?

Theoretical Framework

Critical Consciousness Theory by Paulo Freire

The concept of critical consciousness was developed by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). The socio-economic and political situation of Brazil during the mid-twentieth century was challenging, because of the domination of the elite over the masses. It was a closed society.¹³ In his book, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, Freire describes the economic status of a closed society as “whose raw material export economy was determined by an external market, whose very center of economic decision was located abroad—a ‘reflex’ and ‘object’ society, lacking a sense of nationhood. Backward. illiterate. anti-dialogical. elitist.”¹⁴ He mentions that Brazil had embraced an alienated culture in that “The elite lived ‘superimposed’ upon that reality; the people, submerged within it. To the elite fell the task of importing alien cultural models; to the people, the task of following, of being under, of being ruled by the elite, of having no task of their own.”¹⁵ He continues to reiterate that for Brazil to move toward becoming a homogeneously open society, the correct perception of a new aspiration and a new perception of old themes, such as democracy, popular participation, freedom, property, authority, and education were essential.¹⁶

¹³ “Minority” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Accessed on April 19, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/minority>. The editors of the article “Minority” in *Encyclopedia Britannica* define, “A closed society is one in which an individual’s role and function can theoretically never be changed, as in the traditional Hindu caste system.”

¹⁴ Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1974), 8.

¹⁵ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 7.

¹⁶ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 7.

According to Freire, the Brazilian transition from the closed society to an open society, started with a split in the Brazilian society. He believed that the democratic salvation of the Brazilian Society was possible only through a homogeneously open society. During the transition phase for the effective participation of the citizens, education became an important task.¹⁷ He mentions, “Men and institutions began to divide into two general categories—reactionaries and progressives; into those men and institutions which were in the process of transition and those which were not only in, but of transition. The deepening of the clash between old and new encouraged a tendency to choose one side or the other; and the emotional climate of the time encouraged the tendency to become radical about that choice.”¹⁸

The beginning of an open society also witnessed tension between the elite and the masses. Freire mentioned that the beginning of an open society was a step to democratization. He says, “During the phase of the closed society, the people are submerged in reality. As that society breaks open, they emerge. No longer mere spectators, they uncross their arms, renounce expectancy, and demand intervention. No longer satisfied to watch, they want to participate. This participation disturbs the privileged elite, who band together in self-defense.”¹⁹ This shows that, when people become aware of their situation and participate to change it, tensions within the society are sure to develop. Emphasizing the concept of critical consciousness, Freire mentions that the role of the mediator or the facilitator is crucial. It is a role to help people to help themselves.²⁰

¹⁷ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 7-8.

¹⁸ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 8-9.

¹⁹ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 11.

²⁰ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 13.

Base Ecclesial Communities

During Freire's days, the closed society's characteristics were also reflected in the Church in Latin America. Enrique Dussel describes that the Church in Latin America was predominantly directed by the professional clergymen. The laity had no voice. They were there just as observers or auditors. The tension between the laypersons and the hierarchy was increased. The government was accused for claiming to be Christian, but not following the word of Jesus, nor the doctrine of the Church.²¹

The tension between the laypersons and the hierarchy gave rise to small groups in which, the members enjoyed the interpersonal relations and, lived a life according to the gospel. Dussel observes that this became the norm in the basic Christian communities in Brazil.²² He further mentions that, the Second Vatican Council that met in Medellin formulated the statement:

The Christian ought to find the living of the communion, in which he has been called, in his 'base community,' that is, in a community, local or environmental, which corresponds to the reality of a homogeneous group and whose size allows for personal fraternal contact among its members.... Thus, the Christian base community is the first and fundamental ecclesiastical nucleus.²³

This statement gave approval to the norms of the basic communities in Latin America. The establishment of the base communities was the beginning of change in the religious communities. Dussel mentions that movements such as the Christian Family and the Basic Education Movement initiated by Freire, was utilized by many base

²¹ Enrique Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation (1492-1979)*, translated and revised by Alan Neely (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), 212-213. Some call these groups as "basic Christian communities," whereas others call them as "base ecclesiastical communities."

²² Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America*, 215.

²³ Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America*, 215.

communities in Chile. He says that such movements become instruments for the Church to “transition from Christendom to religious communities in a pluralistic society where existential faith will prepare the Christian for daily, practical living.”²⁴ Nigel W. Oakley observes that in the 1960s and 70s, Paulo Freire’s work among the ‘Base Ecclesial Communities’ achieved prominence. He says, “It is these small groups of Christians who have sought to empower the oppressed within their communities.”²⁵

Madeleine Cousineau observes that within institutional Catholicism, there was a shift of focus on “the encouragement of new pastoral initiatives among poor people and advocacy for social justice,”²⁶ which gave rise to the base ecclesial communities. She describes the base ecclesial communities as, “Small groups, mainly subdivisions of parishes, that come together to celebrate liturgies, prepare people for sacraments, and study the Bible. Because Bible discussions include critical reflection on people’s experiences of poverty, they sometimes lead to community action and the formation of social movements.”²⁷

Freire’s educational model was well accepted by the masses in Brazil and beyond. Charles E. Self observes, “The literacy campaigns of Freire in Brazil and elsewhere began an awakening of the impoverished masses. This awakening he called ‘conscientization’ (a term difficult to translate, but best understood as consciousness-

²⁴ Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America*, 215.

²⁵ Nigel W. Oakley, “Base Ecclesial Communities and Community Ministry: Some Freirean Points of Comparison and Difference,” *Political Theology* 5 (4), 2004, 449. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001653350&site=ehost-live>. Accessed April 21, 2023.

²⁶ Madeleine Cousineau, “The Alleged Decline of Liberation Theology: Natural Death or Attempted Assassination?” *Religions* 13: 1181. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13121181>. Accessed April 20, 2023.

²⁷ Cousineau, “The Alleged Decline of Liberation Theology: Natural Death or Attempted Assassination?” 2.

raising or awakening.) ”²⁸ As the educational model of conscientization became popular, Freire had to face criticism from the government. Describing this, Self says, “Equipping the poor with tools for reflection and action was revolutionary and viewed by the government elites as subversive. Freire was accused of indoctrinating the masses and fomenting political rebellion. He saw his task in a radically different light; as part of his service to God.”²⁹ In spite of the accusation and opposition from the government, Freire continued his education mission.

Freire realized that inequity was sustained when people most affected by it are not able to change their social condition. He proposed a cycle of critical consciousness development that includes “gaining knowledge about the systems and structures that create and sustain inequity (critical analysis), developing a sense of power or capability (sense of agency), and ultimately committing to take action against oppressive conditions (critical action).”³⁰ Thus, critical consciousness is a key for positive behavior change.

To discover the positive effects of critical consciousness on the students, Alajlan and Aljohani used critical consciousness theory. They wanted to discover undergraduate students’ perceptions about the practice of critical consciousness. They also wanted to discover if there is a difference by gender among the students’ perception of the practice of critical consciousness in the classroom. Critical consciousness includes three elements:

²⁸ Charles E. Self, “Conscientization, Conversion, and Convergence: Reflections on Base Communities and Emerging Pentecostalism in Latin America,” *Pneuma* 14 (1), 1992, 64. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000877427&site=ehost-live>. Accessed April 20, 2023.

²⁹ Self, “Conscientization, Conversion, and Convergence: Reflections on Base Communities and Emerging Pentecostalism in Latin America,” 64.

³⁰ Daren Graves, et al., “Critical Consciousness: A Key to Student Achievement,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 98, no. 5 (2017): 20, accessed August 18, 2021, ACADEMIA.

critical thinking, dialogue, and problem-solving. Lack of use of these three elements of critical consciousness leads to empowerment issues.³¹ This is expressed in the following figure:

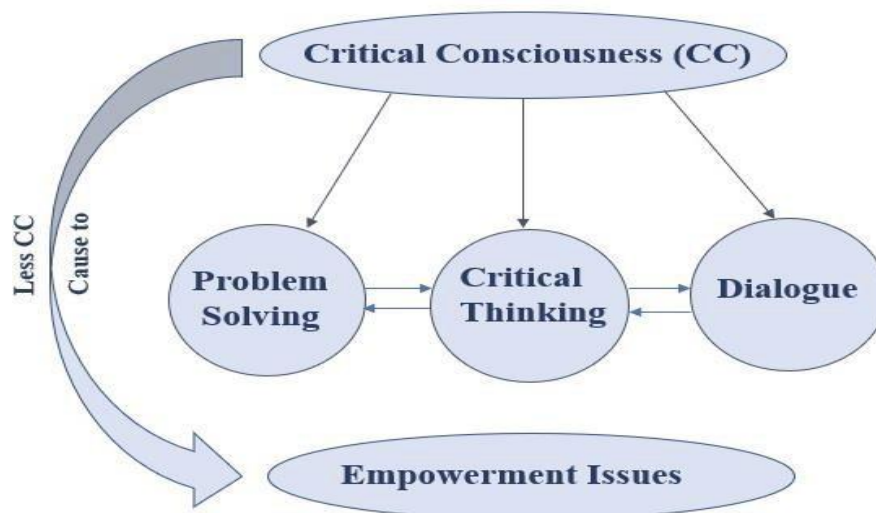


Figure 1. The Theoretical Framework of Critical Consciousness³²

Systemic inequity in the communities continues from one generation to another. Jemal and Bussey explain the systemic inequity that is present in both casual social practices and formal legal systems. This allows the privileged to oppress the disadvantaged individuals and groups for self-benefit. Thus, “Marginalized populations contend not only with the current day-to-day discrimination and inequity, but also with the cumulating impact of inequity stemming from the past.”³³ Jemal and Bussey’s observation is relevant to the Indian context where accumulated negative experiences of

³¹ Sarah M. Alajlan and Obaidalah H. Aljohani, “Critical Consciousness and Empowerment Issues in Undergraduate Classrooms: A Study at Taif University in Saudi Arabia,” 27, 30. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED597483.pdf>.

³² Alajlan and Aljohani, “Critical Consciousness,” 30.

³³ Alexis Jemal and Sarah Bussey, “Transformative Action: A Theoretical Framework for Breaking Ground,” *eJournal of Public Affairs* 7, no. 2 (2018): 38. Accessed August 15, 2021, <http://www.ejournalofpublicaffairs.org/transformative-action/>.

the past affect the responses of the oppressed, marginalized and exploited groups in the present. Even though the effects of a troubled past are quite visible through the conflicts and divisions, the causes remain undiscernible unless and until they are carefully investigated.

Individual and social dysfunctions are the results of systemic inequity. This includes structural as well as interpersonal oppression and privilege. Jemal and Bussey elaborate, “The term ‘inequity’ encompasses such phenomena as racism, sexism, and heterosexism, which include components of both majority group privilege and marginalized group oppression.”³⁴ Inequity in the Indian context is rife with examples of marginalization of the oppressed by those who enjoy privileges as a majority even among those who share the same experiences of discrimination and oppression by others.

Liberation can be achieved neither by propaganda nor by implanting a freedom belief in the oppressed. Rather, liberation is achieved through dialogue. Freire observes that the conviction of the oppressed that requires them to fight for their liberation is the result of their own conscientization.³⁵ Freire is right in his observation that the oppressed can only be liberated from their shackles when they themselves choose it. However, this is only possible when they are made aware through dialogue and gently guided towards finding their own solutions.

Critical consciousness consists of both reflection and action. Freire notes that action is the result of true reflection. He elaborates that people change their practices only when they become convinced of the positive outcome of their critical reflection. Nevertheless, he believes that those who are helping such groups must “trust in the

³⁴ Jemal and Bussey, “Transformative Action,” 38.

³⁵ Jemal and Bussey, “Transformative Action,” 67-68.

oppressed and in their ability to reason.”³⁶ He is convinced that those who do not trust the ability of the oppressed to find their own solution, “will fail to bring about (or will abandon) dialogue, reflection and communication, and will fall into using slogans, communiqués, monologues, and instructions. Superficial conversions to the cause of liberation carry this danger.”³⁷ Thus, “the relationship between reflection and action is a reciprocal and dynamic process, whereby reflection leads to informed action, which subsequently strengthens reflection.”³⁸ This can be visualized in the following figure:

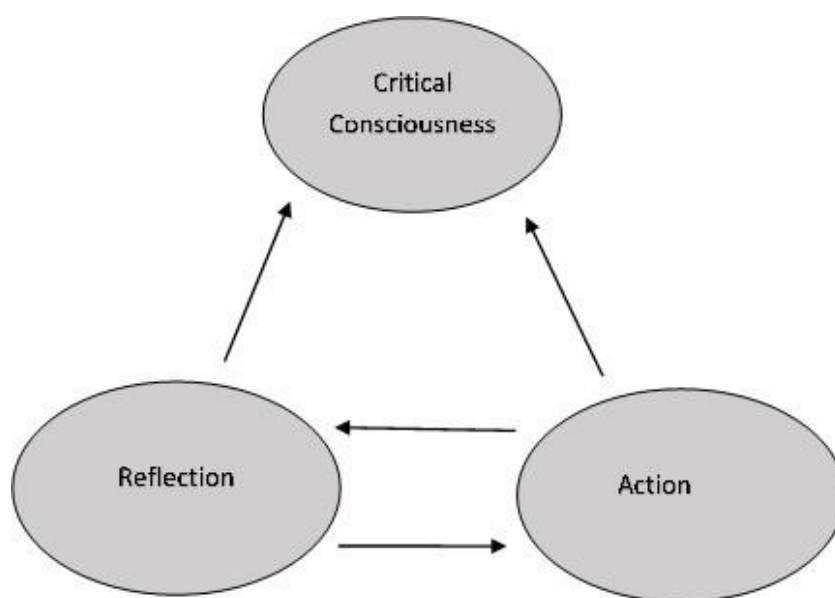


Figure 2. Reflection and Action in Critical Consciousness

While considering Freire’s emphasis on reflection-action-critical consciousness, it is important to understand the nature of critical reflection. Brian Christens and colleagues describe critical reflection as “the ability to analyze inequities and injustices connected to one’s social conditions. It involves critical analysis of social, political, economic, and

³⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos and Donald Macedo, 30th Anniversary Edition (New York: Continuum, 2001), 66.

³⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 66.

³⁸ Maru Gonzalez, et al., “Critical Positive Youth Development: A Framework for Centering Critical Consciousness,” *Journal of Youth Development* 15, no. 6: 28. DOI 10.5195/jyd.2020.859.

race or gender-based inequities as well as an endorsement of egalitarian social and political arrangements.”³⁹ It is important to help those in the midst of a conflict to be critical, to gain and practice skills of critical reflection and analysis of their own situation which is quite multifarious in nature. Hence, critical reflection must become an integral part of any attempt to find solutions to all social issues.

Reflection must lead to awakening and awakening to action. An awakening is useless without action and action is almost impossible without collective effort. Thus, describing how critical actions occur, Graves and his colleagues observe, “Critical consciousness of oppressive social forces can replace feelings of isolation and self-blame for one’s challenges with a sense of engagement in a broader collective struggle for social justice....”⁴⁰ They continue to observe, “Critical action occurs when individuals actively seek to change their unjust conditions through policy reform, practices, or programs.”⁴¹ They also observe that racial injustice is exposed through critical consciousness and the use of associated language.⁴² Graves and colleagues rightly point out that change is possible only through a will to act. And this will to act must be through consensus of a larger group. Only then can there be an expected change in thinking, behavior, practices and policies.

To combat systemic inequity, Jemal and Bussey suggest, “Critical consciousness is foundational for understanding and to combat systemic inequality. The lack of critical consciousness in a community creates an environment conducive to oppression that

³⁹ Brian D. Christens, Lawrence T. Winn, and Adrienne M. Duke, “Empowerment and Critical Consciousness: A Conceptual Cross-Fertilization,” *Springer* 1 (2016): 17. DOI 10.1007/s40894-015-0019-3.

⁴⁰ Graves, et al., “Critical Consciousness,” 20.

⁴¹ Graves, et al., “Critical Consciousness,” 20.

⁴² Graves, et al., “Critical Consciousness,” 23.

spreads throughout and impacts systems from the individual to the macro level.”⁴³ Jemal and Bussey make this observation regarding the need for critical consciousness in society: “A community’s failure to practice to be critical about their condition and environment makes them victim of external exploitation and internal strife.”⁴⁴ While observing its benefits, they note, “Critical consciousness mitigates the destructive impact of oppression and promotes social action against sources of oppression.”⁴⁵ It is true that when an individual or a group becomes critically aware of their oppression and oppressors, an appropriate response to change their situation is sure to be found.

Critical Consciousness can be an effective training tool to transform communities. Rachael Goodman and Cirecie West-Olatunji use critical consciousness theory as a training tool to provide effective, culturally competent counseling services to disaster-affected communities. They have observed that critical consciousness can serve as a vehicle for the development of empowerment and cultural competence. The dialogue with other members of the group enhances the cultural experience that results in critical consciousness.⁴⁶ Goodman and West-Olatunji rightly propose using critical consciousness as a tool through dialogue between those affected to effectively transform cultures and to help develop and strengthen the community from the inside-out.

Conceptual Framework

⁴³ Jemal and Bussey, “Transformative Action,” 41.

⁴⁴ Jemal and Bussey, “Transformative Action,” 41.

⁴⁵ Jemal and Bussey, “Transformative Action,” 41.

⁴⁶ Rachael D. Goodman and Cirecie A. West-Olatunji, “Applying Critical Consciousness: Culturally Competent Disaster Response Outcomes,” *Journal of Counseling and Development* 87 (Fall 2009): 458. Accessed August 15, 2021, ACADEMIA.

This is a participatory action research [PAR] in that the researcher seeks to find information through a survey questionnaire, interviews and group discussions. Alison Mountz and colleagues describe that, in PAR, participants are “learning to know and recognize themselves as a means of creating people’s power, and the internal and external mechanisms of countervailing power. PAR therefore entails an iterative process of action and reflection, one that challenges the participants to reflect critically on their awareness of self while engaging collectively in action to transform broader social relations.”⁴⁷ They further describe that the researchers are also co-investigators with local community groups.”⁴⁸ Cathy MacDonald defines participatory action research (PAR) as “a subset of action research, which is the ‘systematic collection and analysis of data for the purpose of taking action and making change’ by generating practical knowledge.”⁴⁹

The theoretical framework of critical consciousness reflects the action-reflection theory. This study included three steps to inquire about social motivation causing division within the select holiness groups in the Vidarbha region of India: 1) A survey questionnaire for all research participants, followed by personal interviews with four pastors and separate group discussion with ten members from each congregation represented by them (reflection); 2) A workshop on biblical perspectives of building a spiritual community followed by four individual group discussions with each respective pastors and his ten church members (action); 3) A common forum for all four groups to

⁴⁷ Alison Mountz, et. al., “Participatory Action Research as Pedagogy: Boundaries in Syracuse,” *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 7, no. 2 (2008): 219-220.

⁴⁸ Alison Mountz, et. al., “Participatory Action Research as Pedagogy,” 220.

⁴⁹ Cathy MacDonald, “Understanding Participatory Action Research: A Qualitative Research Methodology Option,” *Canadian Journal of Action Research* 13, no. 2 (2012): 35.

suggest solutions for the problem of division within the local church (critical consciousness - solutions).

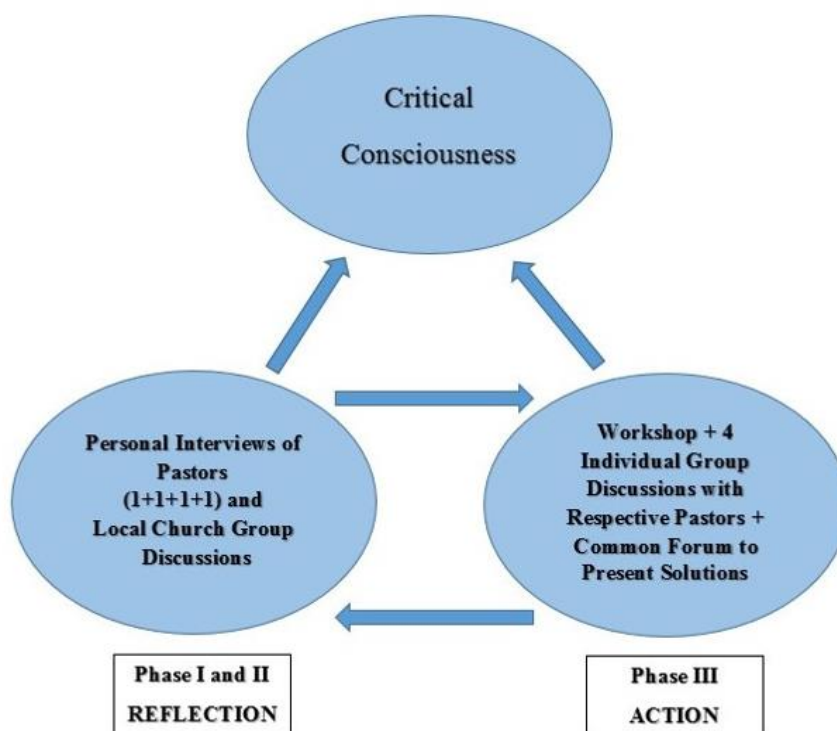


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework

Brief Description of the Research Design

In this study, pastors and members of the congregations of select holiness groups in Vidarbha were the research subjects. This study engaged a qualitative research methodology. Relevant interview protocols and guide questions were followed for personal interviews and group discussions (Appendix A).

This study was conducted in three phases. In Phase I, a survey questionnaire was distributed to pastors who were then interviewed individually. In Phase II, a questionnaire was distributed to ten members, meeting predetermined criteria, of each church. Research questions were discussed with them in small groups. In Phase III, all four groups along

with their pastors were invited to attend a workshop on biblical perspectives of building a spiritual community. After the workshop, groups were dispersed to prepare a plan of action that could be implemented by them to solve internal issues of disunity in their congregations.

Significance of the Study

Division and conflicts among Christians are often witnessed in the local groups in the Vidarbha region of India.

This research found that there is no data indicating any previous study conducted enquiring if there is a division that causes inequality within the local church, especially among the holiness groups in the Vidarbha region.

This research is significant for the holiness groups in the Vidarbha region in that it initiated an inquiry into the inequality, discrimination, and conflicts within.

This research may lay a foundation for others to build on strategies to deal with the issues of division, conflicts, and inequality within Christian communities in India and beyond.

It may initiate further study on the issues faced by Dalit Christians and prompt church leaders to find solutions and prevent resistance among the church members.

Thus, this research is an important step towards laying a pathway to resolve conflicts and divisions within the Church of the Nazarene and the Free Methodist Church, starting with the Vidarbha region.

Assumptions of the Study

This research study assumes the following:

1. It is assumed that a few research participants may hesitate to share issues that might create conflict and arguments in the forums.
2. It is assumed that they may be able to identify issues.
3. It is assumed that they may be able to address the issues identified.
4. It is assumed that they may be able to resolve the issues.
5. It is assumed that the Church of the Nazarene and the Free Methodist churches are similar as both belong to the holiness tradition.

Definition of Terms

Caste-System- It is a hierarchical system with four classes in the Indian society.

From top to bottom: The *Brahmins* (priests), the *Kshatriyas* (warriors), the *Vaisyas* (merchants), and the *Sudras* (laborers).⁵⁰

Conscientization- It is “the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence.”⁵¹ By emergence, Paulo Freire means a step to come out of the situation that exploits or dehumanize people.

Critical Consciousness- It is “the ability to evaluate, reflect, and challenge the oppressive social forces shaping their life and community.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 4.

⁵¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 109.

⁵² Melissa Peterson Schneider, “Critical Consciousness of Educators: The Development and Psychometric Validation of a Measure Using Structural Equation Modeling” (2019), 12. Electronic Theses and Dissertations. 1616. <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/1616>.

Dalits- The etymological root of the word Dalit originally comes from a Marathi word *dal* which means broken, oppressed, crushed,⁵³ or burst, split, torn asunder, downtrodden, scattered, destroyed,⁵⁴ or broken victims.⁵⁵

Dalit Christians- Dalit Christians are the Dalits who have been converted to Christianity from several groups.⁵⁶ Even after conversion, they are tagged as Dalit Christians in order to discriminate against them and deny their dignity and identify them as backward people.

Dalit Theology- It is a theology that uses “Dalit peoples’ language and expressions, their stories and songs of suffering and triumphs, popular wisdom including their values, proverbs, folk lore myths and so on to interpret their history and culture, and to articulate a faith to live by and to act on.”⁵⁷

Dehumanization- It is “a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human.”⁵⁸

Indian Christian Theology- The term “Indian Christian Theology is typically used to refer to the theological writings of upper-caste Indians who sought to interpret Christianity through the religious and philosophical concepts of classical Hinduism.”⁵⁹

⁵³ Dionysius Rasquinha, *Towards Wholeness from Brokenness – The Dalit Quest: A Historical Analysis and Theological Response* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2013), xxxiii.

⁵⁴ James Massey, “Dalits: Historical Roots,” *Indigenous People: Dalits* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 6.

⁵⁵ M. E. Prabhakar, “The Search for a Dalit Theology,” *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, ed. Arvind P. Nirmal (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1991), 41.

⁵⁶ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 33.

⁵⁷ Prabhakar, “The Search for a Dalit Theology,” 47.

⁵⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 44.

⁵⁹ Andrew Ronnevik, “Dalit Theology and Indian Christian History in Dialogue: Constructive and Practical Possibilities,” *Religions* 12, no. 180 (2021): 3. Accessed November 7, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12030180>.

Jati: Jati- It means sub-caste.⁶⁰ *Jatis* are small groups within each caste. They can be referred as clans.

Sanatana Dharma- Hinduism is called “Sanatana Dharma, a religion coming down to people through eternity.”⁶¹

Social Motivations- “Motives that operate in social contexts and satisfy basic, often universal, goals and aspirations, such as to affiliate or to achieve dominance.”⁶²

Transformation- “A change into someone or something completely different, or the process by which this happens.”⁶³

Untouchables- These are the same group of people called Dalits, meaning the oppressed and broken victims of Hindu society.⁶⁴ They have been considered as impure or polluted people because of their dirty jobs as scavengers, cleaners, tanners etc. They were not supposed to physically touch the caste Hindus.

Varnashrama dharma- *Varna* means castes or class, *ashrama* means stage of life, and *dharma* means moral duty.⁶⁵

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

The study is focused on the division and inequities among Dalit Christians in the holiness groups in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, India (see Appendix B for the location map). Vidarbha is situated in the eastern part of Maharashtra State. This study

⁶⁰ Pen, *Social Humanism*, 25.

⁶¹ Kedar Nath Tiwari, *Comparative Religion* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997), 8.

⁶² David M. Amodio, “The Neuroscience of Prejudice and Stereotyping” *Nature Reviews: Neuroscience* September 4 (2014), 670. Accessed April 15, 2023. doi:10.1038/nrn3800, 670-682.

⁶³ “Transformation,” <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/transformation>. Accessed November 7, 2021.

⁶⁴ Prabhakar, “The Search for a Dalit Theology,” 41-42.

⁶⁵ Raj Kumar, *Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation and Identity* (Hyderabad, IN: Orient BlackSwan, 2017), 122.

discussed caste conflicts, inequality and discrimination experienced within the Dalit Christian community in the select holiness groups in Vidarbha. A majority of Christians in this region who accepted the Christian faith came from different groups of Hinduism as a result of mission work during the nineteenth and early twentieth Century.⁶⁶

This study has the following limitations:

First, the study will be limited to the select groups from two holiness denominations present in Vidarbha, namely, the Church of the Nazarene, and the Free Methodist Church, which are the only two holiness groups in the region.

Second, the selection of research participants will be limited to the geographical area.

Third, the selection of research participants will be limited to four pastor leaders and forty church members.

Last, translating and transcribing data from Marathi to English and Hindi to English might not precisely and completely express the personal feelings of the participants to the fullest. In this scenario the researcher will ask clarifying questions to ensure clarity in expression.

Outline of the Dissertation

Chapter I describes the problems experienced by members of the congregations of the select holiness groups in Vidarbha. This includes the background of the members of the congregations, a theoretical framework, a conceptual framework, and a brief description of the research methodology.

⁶⁶ Lobo, "Dalit Religious Movements and Dalit Identity," 171.

Chapter II deals with the review of related literature. This includes the review of existing studies on the historical background of the Caste System and the problem of caste discrimination in India. Different sub-topics are studied, such as the place of Dalits in the Caste System; Caste Discrimination in India; the Impact of the Caste System in the Life of Dalits; the Origin of Dalit Theology; and Caste Discrimination against Christians.

Chapter III focuses on the research design and research methodology used in collecting data from the selected participants, i.e., a questionnaire, interviews, forums, and a pilot study. This enable the study to collect real life experiences of Christians in the holiness groups in the Vidarbha region of India.

Chapter IV presents the analysis of the data. This includes the social issues of Christians in Vidarbha; discussions of findings; and a summary.

Chapter V presents the conclusions and recommendations for resolving conflicts.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

Introduction

Caste discrimination continues to be prevalent in Indian society and is practiced primarily by followers of Hinduism. The untouchables who belong outside of the caste system are called Dalits. They face ongoing humiliation and discrimination from people within the caste.

In this chapter issues mentioned in the purpose statement are discussed. The historical background of caste discrimination is reviewed. This includes the caste system in India and the exclusion of the Dalits from the caste system. It also explores the discrimination faced by Dalits and how it affects their life.

In this chapter, the mass conversions of Dalits into Christianity in India are discussed. This leads to an investigation of the discrimination against the Dalit Christians both in Indian society as well as in the groups. This is followed by a study on Dalit Theology which has been developed by the Dalit scholars to find liberation from the discrimination by caste Christians as well as to gain socio-economic support from the government.

The biblical foundations for spiritual community are explored. These foundations will enable Dalit Christians as well as caste Christians to enjoy equality. This leads to an exploration of strategies the church can use to empower Dalits in their struggles to regain their identity and dignity.

Historical Background of Caste Discrimination in India

In order to understand the root causes of present issues faced by Dalits in Indian society, it is essential to look at the historical background of the caste system in India. In the following section, related literature will be discussed under different sub-topics.

The Origin of the Caste System in Indian Society

Religious pluralism is one of the distinct features of Indian society. It is common knowledge that Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism originated in India. On the other hand, Christianity and Islam were introduced in the Indian subcontinent by various conquerors and occupiers. According to census data of 2011 in India, Hinduism in all its various forms constitutes more than 80 percent of the population.⁶⁷ The populations of Hinduism in comparison with other religious groups can be seen in the following diagram:

⁶⁷ “India Has 79.8 percent Hindus, 14.2 percent Muslims, Says 2011 Census Data on Religion,” August 26, 2015, accessed November 18, 2021, <https://www.firstpost.com/india/india-has-79-8-percent-hindus-14-2-percent-muslims-2011-census-data-on-religion-2407708.html>.

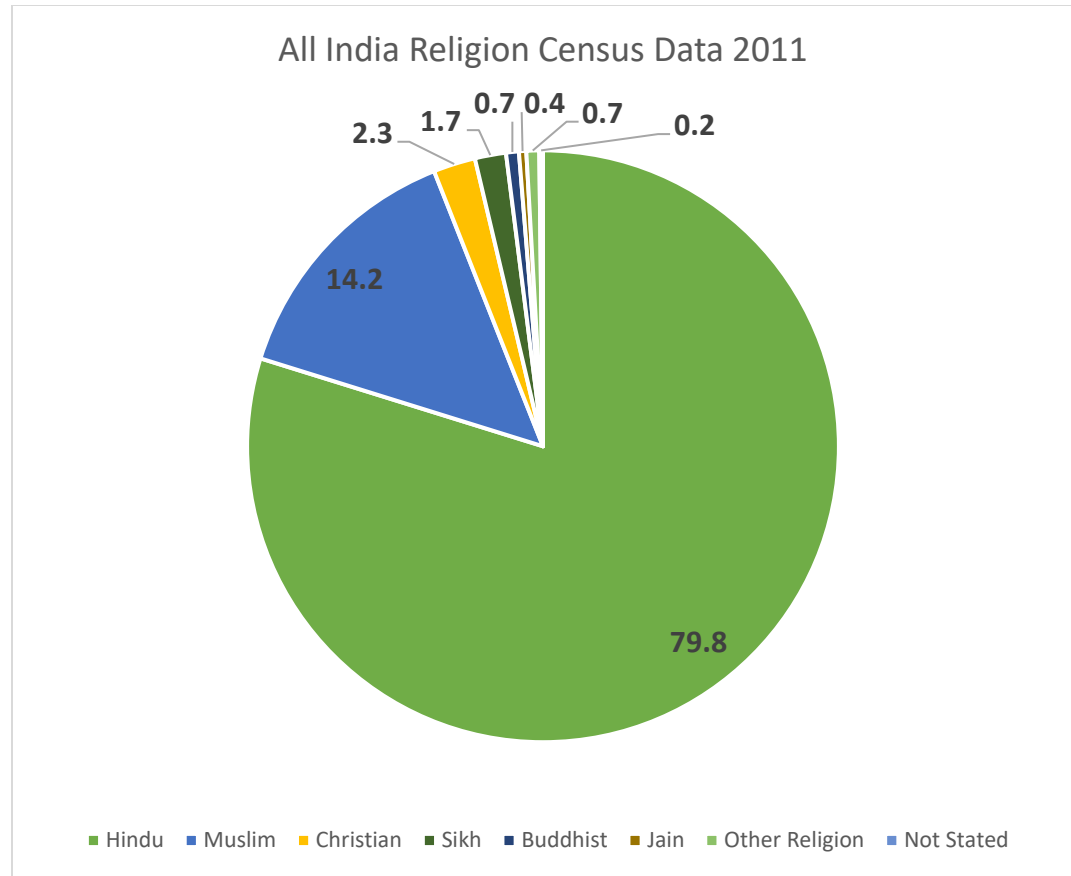


Figure 4. All India Religion Census Data 2011

Kedar Nath Tiwari claims that Hinduism is “the oldest of all religions. It has neither any definite date of its origin nor has it any definite founder associated with it. It is called *Sanatana Dharma*, a religion coming down to people through eternity. It is thus a unique religion in one very important sense.”⁶⁸ Many world religions have founders or spiritual leaders or gurus. Tiwari goes on to say,

Hinduism is not only a religion, but also a social system and a tradition too. The most obvious and important mark of this social system has been its *varna dharma*. As a matter of fact, traditionally, only he has been able to be a Hindu who has belonged to any of the four *varnas* present in Hindu social system.... One may have any kind of belief regarding God etc. and one may follow any kind of religious practice of his choice. That will not check anyone from being called a Hindu. But he cannot be a Hindu unless he belongs to one or other class or Varna. Formerly, the classification seemed more based upon the aptitude and worth that

⁶⁸ Tiwari, *Comparative Religion*, 8.

one had, but in course of time birth became the only criterion of distinction. It may be said here that in spite of all the varieties of beliefs and practices that a Hindu has, belongingness to one or other of the four *varnas* has been an essential mark of someone being a Hindu.⁶⁹

This shows that in the Indian socio-cultural context, all who belong to any of the four castes are Hindus. Those who do not belong to any of the four castes or classes, cannot be called Hindus. Raj Kumar describes the origin of the caste system in Indian society. He says that with the four castes or classes order, “The Indian caste system gradually came to be established in between 500 BC – AD 500 period. It is during this period that many caste laws and restrictions were made for the *shudras* to keep them permanently away from the so-called *dwija* society and degrade them to the position of virtual slaves without rights of citizenship.”⁷⁰ Thus, the origin of the caste system is traced to 500 BC – AD 500. All who did not belong to the four *varnas* were not considered part of the Indian caste system, and could not be Hindu. Raj Kumar further notes, “In the Varna scheme of the Vedas there are only four orders and there is no mention of the untouchables....”⁷¹ This shows that in the Hindu societal structure, only four castes or classes constituted the social order. Those outside the four castes had no place in constituting the society.

On the other hand, Raj Kumar points out that in the Vedic literature there were other groups who were not part of the four castes and who were referred to with degrading names and were despised by the caste Hindus. He continues, “Over the centuries the hierarchy continued so that, at the bottom of the caste gradation, such

⁶⁹ Tiwari, *Comparative Religion*, 10.

⁷⁰ Raj Kumar, *Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation and Identity*, 121. Here *dwija*, in Sanskrit means twice born. The three upper castes of Hindus were known to be twice born, i.e. physically and spiritually and the fourth caste, Sudras were not part of the twice born group.

⁷¹ Kumar, *Dalit Personal Narratives*, 121.

marginal groups became identified as *asprushyas*, the untouchables, with the lowest ritual standing. Usually, they also had the lowest economic positions and were traditionally subjected to onerous social and civil disabilities.”⁷² Though they were not part of the four Varnas, these untouchables still existed in the society and were considered as defiled or unclean, and even their touch would defile those who belonged to the caste system.

Raj Kumar observes that the practice of untouchability began during the rule of Pushyamitra Sunga’s rule (187 BC onwards). He narrates that Pushyamitra was a Brahmin king who had killed Bruhadatra, a shudra commander-in-chief, and established Brahman rule. Pushyamitra feared that the shudras would revolt against his action, so he appointed Manu, a Brahmin pundit to suppress the potential revolt from the shudras.

Following Pushyamitra’s request, as Raj Kumar states,

Manu codified all inhuman and unethical laws against the shudras in the name of religion. His work was later known as the *Manushastra* or *Manusmriti*. It is with the Manusmriti that the full elaboration of the caste hierarchy can be seen. This was the beginning of Brahmanism. During this time brahmans were given the highest status in society and caste divisions were enforced by the kings. The role of the king was seen to be in protecting dharma and dharma was now interpreted as varnashrama dharma or the law of the castes (and ashrama or stage of life).⁷³

Thus, Brahmins became the upper caste or class, the wise rulers over the three other castes, namely, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra. The varnashrama dharma forced caste distinctions in the Indian society.

Socially, Indians aspire for “unity in diversity,” proclaiming their desire for collective solidarity. Not only is Indian society multi-religious, it is multi-cultural and

⁷² Kumar, *Dalit Personal Narratives*, 121-122.

⁷³ Kumar, *Dalit Personal Narratives*, 122.

multi-linguistic, as people in each state speak a different language and celebrate their unique culture.

The Indian constitution provides rights to every citizen of the country. These rights are: 1) Right to Equality; 2) Right to Freedom; 3) Right against Exploitation; 4) Right to Freedom of Religion; 5) Cultural and Educational Rights; 6) Right to Constitutional Remedies.⁷⁴ However, due to the majority Hindu population, in practical life, Hindu principles dominate others in Indian society.

According to the Hindu ideology, the caste system is essential to the formation of a peaceful society. A. C. Bhaktivedanta translates the claim of the Hindu deity Lord Krishna in the Bhagavat-Gita, who says, “According to the three modes of material nature and the work associated with them, the four divisions of human society are created by Me. And although I am the creator of this system, you should know that I am yet the nondoer, being unchangeable (4:13).”⁷⁵ Since the hierarchy of the caste system was created by the Hindu deity Lord Krishna, the followers accept the caste system in which each caste alludes to specific designated occupations. People identified with one caste were prohibited from seeking the occupation of those in the other castes. Caste gave its members their unique identity. Through one’s traditional occupation, one’s caste could easily be identified. However, these restrictions are relaxed as the reservation or quota policy for government jobs is being implemented.

Webster describes the hierarchical structure of the society that is designed on the pattern embodied in the Brahman (Divine One). In this structure, there are four classes,

⁷⁴ “Constitution of India,” 25-33, accessed on October 5, 2020, <https://www.india.gov.in/my-government/constitution-india>.

⁷⁵ A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, *Bhagavad-Gita as It Is* (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1998).

starting from top to bottom: (1) The *Brahmins* (priests) – who correspond to the head of Brahma, the Creator; (2) The *Ksatriyas* (warriors) – who correspond to the chest of Brahma; (3) The *Vaisyas* (merchants) – who correspond to the stomach; and (4) The *Sudras* (laborers) – who correspond to the feet of Brahma.⁷⁶ Once a person is born into a particular caste, he or she cannot change his or her caste and occupation⁷⁷ but will be frozen in the same caste and profession all their lives.⁷⁸ Figure 5, below, illustrates this concept.

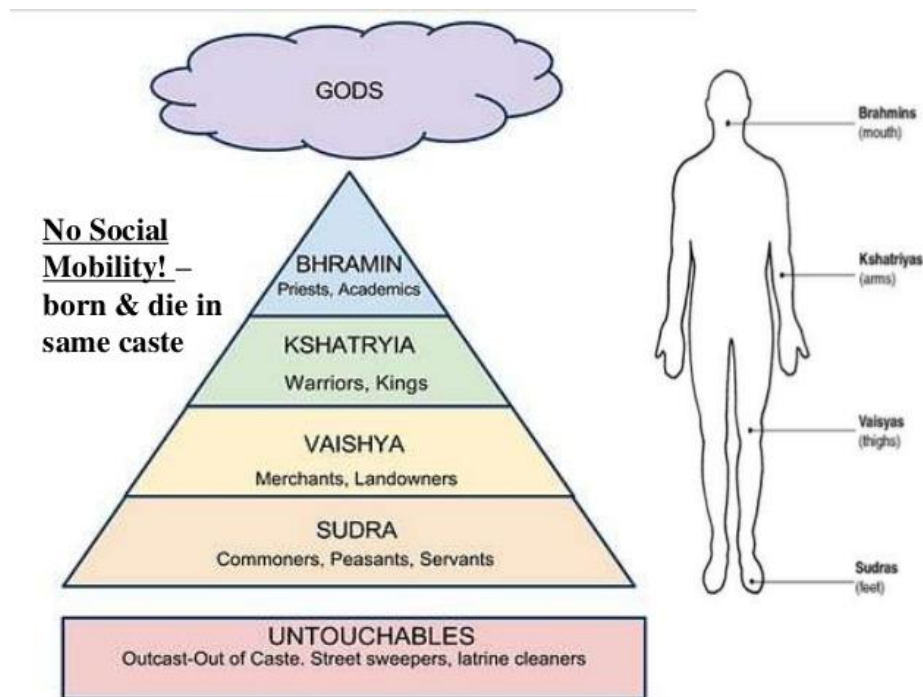


Figure 5. Indian Caste System

⁷⁶ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 4.

⁷⁷ Sukhadeo Thorat, "Ambedkar and the Economics of the Hindu Social Order: Understanding its Orthodoxy and Legacy," in *The Emerging Dalit Identity: The Re-assertion of the Subalterns* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1996), 19.

⁷⁸ "India Caste System," <https://www.google.com/search?q=caste+system+based+on+the+body+parts+of+brahma>. Accessed October 5, 2020.

In the 21st century, although individuals may change their occupation, the hierarchical caste distinctions still remain and individuals are tagged by them as they go about doing their daily routines. This leads to abuse and invites corruption and discrimination, bringing exploitation and inhumane treatment to the lower castes.⁷⁹

The Exclusion of the Untouchables from the Caste System

In reality, there are five classes of hierarchical structure of the Indian Society. Numerous groups of people who do not belong to the caste system are considered outcaste, even below the *Sudras*.⁸⁰ That means they have no relationship with the caste groups.⁸¹ These outcastes comprise hundreds of small groups who nurture a variety of religious beliefs. These many small groups have self-identity in the same way as the groups belonging to the caste system.⁸² These outcastes are treated as sub-human as they do not belong to the caste system of Hinduism.⁸³ They are tragically further divided among themselves. These numerous groups of people together are known as Dalits, meaning, broken, oppressed, or crushed.⁸⁴ They are also known as downtrodden, scattered, and destroyed,⁸⁵ and as broken-victims of Hindu society.⁸⁶

These outcaste groups are further degraded as they are called by various malicious names such as *Dasa* (servant), *Dasyu* (servant), *Raksasa* (demons), *Asura* (demons),

⁷⁹ P. Kesava Kumar, "Liberation Theology of Dalit Literary Narratives: A Study of Madduri Nagesh Babu's *Naraloka Prartana*," *Scholar Critic* 1, no. 1 (April 2014): 89.

⁸⁰ Peniel Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation: Problems, Paradigms and Possibilities* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 5.

⁸¹ Harshil Sharma, "Dalits in India: Discrimination and Development," *International Research Journal of Human Resources and Social Sciences* 1, no. 3 (August 2014): 3.

⁸² Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 5.

⁸³ Walter Fernandes, "The Emerging Dalit Identity: An Introduction," in *The Emerging Dalit Identity: The Re-Assertion of the Subalterns* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1996), 1.

⁸⁴ Rasquinha, *Towards Wholeness from Brokenness – The Dalit Quest: A Historical Analysis and Theological Response*, xxxiii.

⁸⁵ Massey, "Dalits: Historical Roots," 6.

⁸⁶ Prabhakar, "The Search for a Dalit Theology," 41-42.

Awarna (outcaste), *Nisada* (degraded caste), *Panchama* (outcaste - fifth caste), *Mletcha* (barbarians), *Svapaca* (narcotics), *Chandala* (untouchable), and *Achuta* (untouchable).

Panchamas refers to the fifth caste. However, they have no connection with the four-fold caste system.⁸⁷ All these derogatory and disparaging names indicate how lowly the Dalits are considered and treated in the Indian society.

These groups of people labelled Dalits share a common history and identity.⁸⁸ In his attempt to give some dignity to these outcaste groups, Mohandas Gandhi called them as *Harijans*, meaning, the children of gods (children of temple prostitutes). However, these outcaste people did not like this title.⁸⁹ This identity is even more degrading, as children born to prostitutes are considered as polluted. All this shows the unfathomable extent to which this hideous inhumane treatment, received throughout many centuries, has negatively affected the lives of millions of people.

In the nineteenth century, some social reformers sought social justice for the outcaste or untouchable groups by defending their dignity in society. One of the lower caste social reformers, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule (1827-1890) designated the word Dalit to all people groups who were not part of the Hindu caste system. As mentioned before, Dalit means broken or oppressed, and many groups found this title derogatory. However, in the end they accepted this label because it gave them identity and dignity as humans, even though it refers to their historical background.⁹⁰

Yet, even these reformers did not transform the attitudes of the caste people towards Dalits. Still today, discrimination and violence against the Dalits continues. They

⁸⁷ Massey, "Dalits: Historical Roots," 7.

⁸⁸ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 19.

⁸⁹ Jeremiah, "Dalit Christians in India: Reflections from the Broken Middle," 272.

⁹⁰ Massey, "Dalits: Historical Roots," 7.

are denied human dignity. For instance, Dalit girls and women are occasionally raped and men periodically killed in many parts of the country. The *Swabhiman Society and Equality* report states, “Dalit women, in particular, face intersecting forms of gender, caste and class discrimination. Violence, including rape and gang rape, has been systematically utilized as weapons by dominant castes to oppress Dalit women and girls and reinforce structural gender and caste hierarchies.”⁹¹

V. Devasahayam describes Dalits as a group of castes or sub-castes who share common features: i) The Dalits are a distinct group who bear the stigma of untouchability due to their polluting professions such as leather works, skinning, moving carcasses and other dirty jobs; ii) The Dalits are the most disadvantaged people – due to poverty; iii) The Dalits are a protected group – they get preferential support by the government as they receive certain quota seats for employment; and iv) The Dalits are a stagnated group – there is no improvement in their status; moreover there is an increase of assaults on the Dalits by other castes.⁹²

Inequality Caused by Caste System in the Indian Society

The caste system based on one’s occupation has created a social status inequality. Suraj Yengde observes, “Caste is an anti-fellowship institution. It does not encourage the sentiments of commonality, of fellow feelings; rather, it encourages belonging to distinct, individual hierarchical groups.”⁹³ In other words, caste divides, rather than unites people.

⁹¹ Swabhiman Society and Equality, “Justice Denied: Sexual Violence and Intersectional Discrimination: Barriers to Accessing Justice for Dalit Women and Girls in Haryana, India,” *Equality Now* (November 2020), 3, <https://www.equalitynow.org/justicedenied>. Accessed October 5, 2020.

⁹² V. Devasahayam, “Pollution, Poverty and Powerlessness,” in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, ed. Arvind P. Nirmal (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1991), 1-3.

⁹³ Suraj Yengde, *Caste Matters* (Gurgaon: Penguin Viking, 2019), 42.

Dalits are socially disadvantaged people. Socially and economically they are broken, even while striving for wholeness. They do not belong to any particular class or caste.⁹⁴ They are victims of social inequality which has its roots in the caste system of Hinduism. Caste identities are related to religious as well as social categories.⁹⁵ Arundhati Roy calls the practice of caste “one of the most brutal modes of hierarchical social organization that human society has known.”⁹⁶

The rights to equality vary from one group to another and also outside the caste system. The inequality is an injustice to disadvantaged groups. As a result of this systematic discrimination created by the social order of the caste system, the Dalits saw it as a sinful and evil social structure and choose to protest and revolt against it.⁹⁷

Caste is birth-based—preordained, whereas, class is associated with a socio-economic category—which can be changed.⁹⁸ Socio-economic conditions can be changed and one can move from lower class to upper class in social structures. In today’s context, a shift from caste related occupation to birth related caste status can be seen in determining the identity of a person.⁹⁹ Now due to the reservation or the quota policy, people can qualify for any occupation they want to. Occupation does not determine the caste of a person. Caste is determined according to the caste a person is born. India has

⁹⁴ Josfin Raj S. B., *Inclusive Christ and Broken People: Towards a Dalit Christology in the Light of the Early Church Faith Confession* (New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2018), 9.

⁹⁵ Etic Lott, *Religious Faith, Human Identity: Dangerous Dynamics in Global and Indian Life* (Bangalore: ATC, 2005), 325.

⁹⁶ Arundhati Roy, *The Doctor and the Saint: The Ambedkar-Gandhi Debate—Caste, Race and Annihilation of Caste* (Gurgaon: Penguin Books, 2019), 6.

⁹⁷ Joseph D’Souza, *Dalit Freedom Now and Forever: The Epic Struggle for Dalit Forever* (Secunderabad: Dalit Freedom Network, 2004), 63.

⁹⁸ D. Shyam Babu, “Caste and Class among the Dalits,” *Dalit Studies*, eds. Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 233.

⁹⁹ R. Vaidyanathan, *Caste as Social Capital: The Complex Place of Caste in Indian Society* (Chennai: Westland Publications, 2019), x.

witnessed two Presidents of the nation who came from a Dalit background. However, they are still called Dalit Presidents. The stigma continues even after achieving social and economic upper class.

Inequality and injustice are forms of social discrimination and dehumanize people. Conspicuously, Christian Dalits also fall into this category. Barbara Harriss-White and Aseem Prakash observe, “Social discrimination takes several forms. Discrimination can be either direct or indirect. Direct discrimination describes a phenomenon where there is a deliberate and explicit policy to exclude a specific individual or a social group from some possible opportunities.”¹⁰⁰ They further observe, “Indirect discrimination occurs when supposedly neutral provisions, criteria or practices disadvantage individual(s) due to their social status or due to capabilities derived from a socialization differentiated by social status.”¹⁰¹ Both kinds of discriminations are experienced by Dalit Christians.

The constitution of India sets reservations¹⁰² or quotas for each caste group to maintain privileges in the employment and educational institutions. The status is determined on the basis of their allegiance to Hinduism. Antoniraj Thumma describes that the upper caste, i.e., Brahmins, get priority in employment. On the other hand, the lower castes get rights in the quota system. They are considered scheduled castes within the Hindu caste system. All other religious groups have few rights within the quota system. Although the upper caste Brahmins constitute only 5 percent of the Indian

¹⁰⁰ Barbara Harriss-White and Aseem Prakash, “Social Discrimination in India: A Case for Economic Citizenship,” *Semantic Scholar* (2010): 2, <https://www.semanticscholar.org>. Accessed May 10, 2020,

¹⁰¹ Harriss-White and Prakash, “Social Discrimination in India,” 2-3.

¹⁰² In the Indian constitution, the term reservation is understood as a quota.

population, they hold about 70 percent of all Class I/ First Class assignments. Thus, they take control of the political power and the community resources.¹⁰³

Those who fall outside the caste system are assigned menial work, in violation of the dignity of labor in the Hindu caste system. Richard Gnanakan observes, “All kinds of work should be given dignity and due recognition. But the Varna system gives high dignity to the work of Brahmin priests and low dignity to manual labor, like cleaning or scavenging, and consequently assigned such tasks to the low caste people. This kind of Varna system creates a hierarchy of labor and, as a result, certain types of work lose their dignity.”¹⁰⁴

Mass Movements and Caste Discrimination in the Church

In the history of Christianity in India, mass religious movements have been a significant factor. The mass movements were not forced on the Dalits; instead, they were the initiatives by Dalits themselves against the oppression of the caste Hindus. Webster observes, “There now appears to be a scholarly consensus that the underlying motivation was the search for improved social status, for a greater sense of personal dignity and self-respect, for freedom from bondage to oppressive land owners.”¹⁰⁵

Moreover, the history of mass movements plays a significant role in the study of caste discrimination from outside and from within the Church. Mass movements occurred when group decisions were taken after being convinced by the head of the family, clan,

¹⁰³ Anthoniraj Thumma, *Marching with the Marginalized: March to Parliament* (Hyderabad: Jeevan Print, 2012), 18.

¹⁰⁴ Richard S. Gnanakan, “Work: Contemporary Christian Interpretations,” in *Work, Worship and Witness: Essays Dedicated to a Vision and a Visionary*, ed. Brian Wintle et al. (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 2003), 48.

¹⁰⁵ Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History*, 70.

caste, *jati* or even a village to accept Christian faith. In this group decision, individual decision was given insignificant priority, as everyone accepted the group decision. Through the evangelism by the missionaries, the converts accepted the Christian faith and, as Webster states, “Upon baptism the converts left the old *jati* community with its social hierarchical system and entered into a new ‘mixed’ community of unclear social status.”¹⁰⁶ Webster makes an interesting observation saying, “that not all mass movements were Dalit movements and not all Dalits were involved in the mass movement.”¹⁰⁷ It shows some Dalit groups chose to remain in their situation rather than joining other religions such as Christianity, Islam or Buddhism.

The question of the motivations or intentions of mass movements is crucial.

Webster notes the five motivations observed by the South Indian Missionary Conference in 1990 for the mass movements embracing Christianity: i) The conviction that Christianity is the true religion; ii) A desire for protection from oppressors and material aid; iii) The desire for education for their children; iv) The quest for improved knowledge both in character and condition; and v) The influence of Christian relatives.¹⁰⁸

After their conversion to Christian faith, Dalit Christians continued social integration as a community. Living in a Hindu community, they continued to follow the social order of the Hindu society and this brought more oppression than liberation from the oppressors. Initially, the Christian community continued to grow in their new identity as the Body of Christ, encouraging each other. The inner transformation of Dalits enabled them to enjoy the new identity which allowed them to respect each other within the Body

¹⁰⁶ Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History*, 45.

¹⁰⁷ Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History*, 48.

¹⁰⁸ Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History*, 63.

of Christ. This gave them courage to withstand persecution from outside the Christian community. They also gave more importance to education, and that proved them to be superior in academics to the caste Hindus.¹⁰⁹ However, eventually, conflicts between different groups within the Dalit Christian community grew.

The mass movements were the work of the Spirit. However, as Saral K. Chatterji points out, the movement failed due to the lingering attachment of Dalit converts with their past. For example, continuing their professions to make a living and “subservient dependency on alien missionary structure of Church ideology and religious pietism.”¹¹⁰ It must be observed here that not all Dalit Christians experienced real inner transformation when they accepted Christianity through mass movements. That is why there were still conflicts and competitions and the residue of old beliefs in the spirit-world among the converted Dalit Christians.

Addressing this challenge in the Church, Webster states, “For the Dalits, therefore, conversion to Christianity did not lead to a total break from the past. Not even large-scale conversion could overturn either the caste system or the agrarian system, even if here and there it did provide added resources with which to withdraw certain forms of oppression.”¹¹¹ Webster further observes, “There is, nonetheless, a scholarly consensus not only that *jati* membership is basic to every Dalit Christian’s identity, at least in rural areas, but also that inequalities based on *jati* membership continue to exist in virtually all

¹⁰⁹ Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History*, 79.

¹¹⁰ Saral K. Chatterji, “Why Dalit Theology?,” in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, ed. Arvind P. Nirmal (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1990), 37.

¹¹¹ Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History*, 85.

aspects of Dalit Christian life.”¹¹² This shows the failure of the Dalit converts and missionaries to discern the proper strategies of being in the world but not of the world.

The very emergence of Dalit Theology indicates that discrimination is faced by Dalit Christians not only from outside, but also from within the Church. This will be documented in chapter four. It raises several concerns and questions about the failure of the Church as a community. What were the intentions of the Dalits in embracing Christianity? What discrimination did the Dalit Christians face from outside as well as from within the Christian community? What identity did the Dalits receive after embracing Christianity? How did the Dalit Christians react to caste discrimination from outside and from within the Christian community? All these questions will help in understanding the problem discussed in this study.

Caste discrimination within the Church denotes that, even after conversion, Dalits continued to face discrimination either from caste-Hindus or caste-Christians or even from other groups within the Church. It is essential to investigate root causes of the failure of the Church in addressing discrimination within the Church and the failure to offer hope of true inclusion as members of the Body of Christ who are created in the image of God Himself.

Chatterji invites attention to two passages from the Pauline Epistles for the Dalit concerns in India: i) 1 Corinthians 7:20, “Everyone should remain in the state in which he was called,” and ii) 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.”¹¹³ This needs to be understood and practiced by the Dalit Christians enjoying a new life in Christ.

¹¹² Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History*, 222.

¹¹³ Chatterji, “Why Dalit Theology?,” 38-39.

Addressing the issue of caste mentality within the Church, Chatterji says, “The earlier missionaries, Catholics and Protestants, did not expect the converts to leave their castes behind. On the other hand, the converts themselves, especially of the upper castes, were not prepared to accept the new egalitarian dispensations implicit in the Christian faith.”¹¹⁴ When confronted, many times the existence of caste in the Church is denied by Christians. K. Wilson observes, “In the matter of caste, Dalit Christians have deceived themselves enough and still do so by hypocritically declaring that they ceased to belong to any caste the moment they became Christians. This is nothing but a white lie. Dalit Christians do scrupulously practice sub-casteism in their daily lives.”¹¹⁵ He further points to another self-deception of the Dalit Christians as they develop a false superior attitude toward the non-Christian Dalits by virtue of their faith.¹¹⁶ Thus, the Dalit Christians continue the caste orientations in the Church, not necessarily only against the caste Hindus, but also against the other sub-caste Dalits who are converted to Christian faith.

Chatterji refers to some of the events that he himself witnessed among the groups in Kerala and Tamilnadu, such as division of the cemetery for the upper caste and the untouchables. Another example of discrimination among the untouchable Christians themselves was when there was no place for untouchable Christians within the cemetery. Even the number of priests and theological students in seminaries were well represented by the caste Christians, so untouchable Christians could find only limited opportunities there.¹¹⁷ This could mean that not only the financial backing, but also the educational and

¹¹⁴ Chatterji, “Why Dalit Theology?,” 26-27.

¹¹⁵ K. Wilson, “Towards A Humane Culture,” *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, ed. Arvind P. Nirmal (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1990), 163.

¹¹⁶ Wilson, “Towards A Humane Culture,” 163.

¹¹⁷ Chatterji, “Why Dalit Theology?,” 27-28.

social upbringing gave advantage to caste Christians even when they entered the seminaries.

Pointing to the discrimination from both outside the Church and from within the Church, Chatterji says, “The Christian Dalits are ‘twice-alienated.’ They are regarded by the society’s non-Dalits, whether rich or poor, in the same way as are the Dalits and tribal and they suffer from the same economic, social, and educational disparities as the other Dalits. In addition, the hope of the Dalit converts for a better life, free from stigma and humiliation appears not to have been fulfilled for the bulk of them within the groups.”¹¹⁸ From outside the Church, the Dalit Christians are regarded as inferior and are discriminated against in the economic, social, and educational spheres. Prabhakar also discusses about how Dalit Christians “suffer caste oppression or discrimination by the so-called upper caste Christians, and other socio-economic disabilities within the Church(es), besides the social discrimination or marginalization suffered in common with all Dalits, in the wider society. Casteism within the Christian fellowship is a theological contradiction and a spiritual problem.”¹¹⁹

Johnson Petta points out, “In Andhra Pradesh the caste discrimination is particularly seen among the two predominant Dalit Communities: Malas and Madigas. These two communities, much like the caste communities, maintain social and spatial distance from each other.”¹²⁰ He feels that the church has neglected the issue of caste conflicts within it. He says, “Rather than being an agent of liberation, the church has become complicit in incorporating the Dalit Christians within the existing caste

¹¹⁸ Chatterji, “Why Dalit Theology?,” 29.

¹¹⁹ Prabhakar, “The Search for a Dalit Theology,” 43.

¹²⁰ Johnson Petta, “In Search of a Contextual Pastoral Theology for Dalits in India,” (PhD diss., University of Denver, 2012), Electronic Theses and Dissertations. Accessed February 5, 2022.

ideologies, values and structures . . . The Dalit Christians represent a deep contradiction in the moral life of the Church.”¹²¹ Christopher Robert Conway suggests that for achieving their liberation, Dalits need to overcome challenges on their own. He observes, “As caste oppression and economic exploitation have made them object of history, the assertion of their agency in the process of overcoming these structures is necessary for liberation to be authentically actualized.”¹²²

Prabhakar further discusses a four-fold alienation that the Dalit Christians suffer as the result of double oppression: i) they are denied favors from the Government for receiving economic assistance or political representation as the Scheduled Caste community; ii) due to the association with the missionaries, when Dalit Christians seek government assistance, the other Dalits look upon them with disfavor; iii) the so-called upper caste Christians treat the Dalit Christians as low caste people; and iv) due to the divisions among themselves that are formed on a sub-caste, regional, or linguistic basis, the Dalit Christians are at odds with themselves.¹²³

Anderson H. M. Jeremiah notes that there is two-fold oppression of Dalit Christians in India at the hands of society and the institutionalized Church. He points to Dalit Christians switching back and forth between their local Dalit and Christian identities. However, between the two identities, the local Dalit identity dominates as they continue to hold to their previous mindset.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Petta, “In Search of a Contextual Pastoral Theology for Dalits in India,” 3.

¹²² Christopher Robert Conway, “Liberative Services: A Comparative Theological Reflection on Dalit Theology’s Service and Swami Vivekananda’s Seva,” (PhD diss., University of Denver, 2014), Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation. Accessed February 5, 2022.

¹²³ Prabhakar, “The Search for a Dalit Theology,” 43.

¹²⁴ Jeremiah, “Dalit Christians in India,” 260.

Interestingly, Jeremiah points to the fact that in the Dalit Christian congregation in India, leaders produce hierarchical structures similar to the caste system by dominating the affairs of the congregations through nepotism, giving preference to their own relatives. He further observes that the Dalit Christians still struggle to access the resources that would contribute to their transformation.¹²⁵ Thus, Jeremiah rightly observes, “The Dalit Christian community has internalized the structure of the caste system, which excludes them from the rest of the society, categorizing them as impure and untouchable.”¹²⁶ He suggests that Dalit Christians need to develop relationships among the members by finding creative ways to be united in Christ as one body. The Church has to provide the needed resources and ministry that will help in fostering relationships where egalitarian society will be established.¹²⁷ Although he identifies the broken middle issue of the church, he does not provide insights about spiritual nurturing of relationships that would bring reconciliation and healing.

Paul Bubash points out the problem of social discrimination within the church as upper caste clergy and church members continue to discriminate against the Dalit Christians. The upper caste Christians blame the Dalit Christians for converting to Christianity for material benefits rather than true faith.¹²⁸ He rightly suggests that, within the institutional Church, there is a need to develop an incarnational spirituality that will enable Christians to live a holy life as we all reflect the image of God.¹²⁹

The Emergence of Dalit Theology

¹²⁵ Jeremiah, “Dalit Christians in India,” 262-263.

¹²⁶ Jeremiah, “Dalit Christians in India,” 265.

¹²⁷ Jeremiah, “Dalit Christians in India,” 289.

¹²⁸ Paul Bubash, “Dalit Theology and Spiritual Oppression: A Call to Holiness in a Universal Church,” *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa* 38, no. 2: 38-39.

¹²⁹ Bubash, “Dalit Theology and Spiritual Oppression,” 48-49.

Dalit Christians could not tolerate the dominance of the upper caste clergy and Church members. The upper caste Christians had developed Indian Christian Theology based on meeting the needs of the upper caste people in India. This prompted Dalit Christians to develop a Dalit Theology in which they wanted to make theology relevant to their struggles.

Discussing the struggles of Indian Dalits for liberation, A. P. Nirmal declares that both the traditional Indian Christian theology and the Third World Theology, which was to reflect the ideology of the Liberation Theology, failed to address the struggles in the theological formulations.¹³⁰ Prabhakar explains,

The point of departure for Dalit theology is the liberation of the Dalits from their socio-economic and political bondage. It is not only a prophetic theology for identification with the oppression of Dalits and their struggles for equality and justice, but also it is a political theology for social action toward the transformation of unjust, undemocratic and oppressive structures. It is doing theology in community within the context of the sufferings and struggles of Dalits through dialogue, critical reflection and committed action for building a new life order.¹³¹

Prabhakar talks about the integral part of Dalit Power as “*Dalit consciousness*, which consists in becoming aware that Dalit humanity is constituted by their *Dalitness* . . . The focus on Dalitness affirms their Dalit Power not only for self-definition and theologizing, but also for their involvement in social change of systems and patterns in society which oppress or give rise to the oppression of Dalit people.”¹³²

Prabhakar observes, “The Dalit situation would emphasis the essential *community nature of the Church, the Koinonia, a ‘community of the faithful and a community of*

¹³⁰ A. P. Nirmal, “Towards A Christian Dalit Theology,” in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, ed. Arvind P. Nirmal (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1990), 57.

¹³¹ Prabhakar, “The Search for a Dalit Theology,” 48.

¹³² Prabhakar, “The Search for a Dalit Theology,” 48.

love’ wherein each member and all members together, priests and people alike live the Gospel and fulfil in word and deed the mission of the Church, which is to witness to the love and liberating power of God in Jesus Christ in the contemporary society– to respond to the cry of the poor and the oppressed.”¹³³

Webster references John Subban’s address to the Dalit leaders, acknowledging that it was strongly influenced by the theology of the social gospel. The emphasis was less on the need for transformation of individuals and more on “the reconstruction of society in general, and of the Depressed Classes in particular.”¹³⁴ Both the individual as well as social regeneration were to enable people to realize the Kingdom of God upon earth. Webster continues to describe how Subban saw this as a “new order characterized by love, sharing, good will, cooperation and brotherhood breaking into the old order, “cleansing, purifying, changing, and regenerating it.”¹³⁵ Webster continues to observe that through his teachings and relationships, Christ proclaimed equality for citizens in the Kingdom of God. Irrespective of the state of a person, the image of God is stamped on each individual. It is only through the experience with Christ that individuals develop self-respect.¹³⁶

In regard to the role of the Church in the Dalit struggle for justice, Webster refers to M. A. Azariah saying, “The central concern of the God of the Bible is for justice and righteousness to prevail among men and women.”¹³⁷ Furthermore, as observed by Azariah, even Jesus had to deal with the issue of discrimination in the New Testament

¹³³ Prabhakar, “The Search for a Dalit Theology,” 48-49.

¹³⁴ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 275.

¹³⁵ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 276.

¹³⁶ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 220-221.

¹³⁷ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 231.

Church.¹³⁸ For example, Jesus always cared for and had compassion on the poor who were discriminated against by the rich and the religious leaders. Through Jesus' concern for the poor and oppressed, we see God's concern for the oppressed and mistreated.

Webster explains M. E. Prabhakar's emphasis on the Church, that, as a reflection of Israel, was to express the idea of God creating a shalom community through Jesus Christ. The Church, as the people of God, is required to shun caste oppression. The initiative of developing theological perspectives needs to start from the bottom up rather than from the top down,¹³⁹ such as seen in the Latin America base community movement.

Webster describes that in the era of the mass movements, Dalits came to the realization of themselves "as beloved of God and precious in God's sight."¹⁴⁰ This further gave Dalits the hope of better-quality life not only in the present but also in eternity. Entering into the new community of the people of God, there was no place for *jati*. The Dalit Christians were no longer Dalits.¹⁴¹

Prabhakar observes about Dalit theology, "It is a people's self-affirmation of doing their own theology from within their own situations, for transforming them, with an alternative consciousness of the economics of equality, politics of justice, and religion of God's freedom . . . Dalit theology is an attempt towards an authentically Indian liberation theology."¹⁴²

Webster says that many Dalits remained Dalits even after their conversion. The Dalit God shares the pathos of His people and provides them healing so that they can

¹³⁸ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 290-291.

¹³⁹ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 294-295.

¹⁴⁰ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 313.

¹⁴¹ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 314.

¹⁴² Prabhakar, "The Search for a Dalit Theology," 50.

realize their full humanity. However, God calls them to participate in the liberation of all Dalits. The Church has failed in this mission due to internal caste oppression.¹⁴³ To be victorious in liberating the Dalits from oppression, the Church is asked to “repent and become the shalom community God created it to be, living and acting in solidarity with all Dalits.”¹⁴⁴

Describing one of the implications of the creed found in Deuteronomy 26:5-12 for developing Dalit theology, Nirmal observes that God identifies the struggles of the oppressed and delivers them from their oppressors. Liberation Theology in Latin America gives the idea of the Exodus experience. In this the Dalits will experience, “Once we were no people, but now we are God’s people.” Thus, it gives a sense of realization of human dignity as people created in the image of God.¹⁴⁵

Nirmal says that the Dalit Christians must realize their change of status after conversion. It is an exodus from Hinduism to Jesus Christ. It is a liberating experience.¹⁴⁶ Talking about the liberating God, Nirmal refers to God as a Dalit God, a servant God.¹⁴⁷ Discussing Jesus Christ, Nirmal says that Jesus Himself was a Dalit – despite His being a Jew and calls for “His humanity and divinity to be understood in terms of His Dalitness.”¹⁴⁸

To support this claim, Nirmal talks about the genealogy of Jesus in which the references to Tamar’s illegal relationship (Gen 38:1-30); Rahab, who was a harlot (Joshua 2:1-21); Solomon, who was an illegitimate child of David; Jesus Himself, a

¹⁴³ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 315.

¹⁴⁴ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 315,

¹⁴⁵ Nirmal, “Towards a Christian Dalit Theology,” 60-61.

¹⁴⁶ Nirmal, “Towards a Christian Dalit Theology,” 63.

¹⁴⁷ Nirmal, “Towards a Christian Dalit Theology,” 63.

¹⁴⁸ Nirmal, “Towards a Christian Dalit Theology,” 65.

carpenter's son and the Son of Man who has nowhere to lay his head; Jesus' suffering and death (Mark 8:31; 9:12; 10:45); His identification with the Dalits of His day, such as the Samaritan woman (Mark 2:15-16); the Nazarene Manifesto (Luke 4:16-29); and so on.¹⁴⁹

Nirmal talks about the Dalitness of Israel depicted in the picture of the "Valley of Dry Bones" (Ezek. 37). Here he points to the work of the Holy Spirit to revive the dry bones. This is compared with the situation of the Dalits, and that the Holy Spirit is the life-giver, unifier and empowerer for the liberation of Indian Dalits. Furthermore, that in the liberation struggles, the Holy Spirit is the comforter. Together with Jesus, the Holy Spirit gives power, does miracles and heals the oppressed (Acts 10:38).¹⁵⁰

Peniel Rajkumar analyses the role of the Bible in Dalit liberation. But he sees the failure of the Dalit theologians to develop practical strategies to enable Dalits to overcome struggles caused by caste discrimination. Through the healing stories from the Synoptic Gospels, he suggests a viable biblical paradigm for the liberation of Dalits from discrimination. He observes that for the ordinary Dalits, the Bible is the paramount source for seeking justice and reclaiming their dignity and identity as human beings in society.¹⁵¹ For Dalit Christians, the Bible has magical power to help them become liberated from oppression. While being part of the Hindu caste system, Dalits had no access to the Holy Scriptures. But after conversion, the Bible became their source of

¹⁴⁹ Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 65-67.

¹⁵⁰ Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 69.

¹⁵¹ Peniel Rajkumar, "How Does the Bible Mean? The Bible and Dalit Liberation in India," *Political Theology* 11, no. 3: 411.

knowledge and strength. Thus, for them, the Bible has an empowering identity which no scriptures in Hinduism could have.¹⁵²

Rajkumar points out the way the Dalits appropriate the Bible in the context of their struggles. Examples like Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus (Jn. 3:1-21) and St. Thomas' experience of placing his fingers into the wounds of Jesus connect to the notion of pollution at night time and touching wounded flesh (Jn. 20: 26-29) in contrast to the practice of high caste Hindus. Rajkumar notes that the Dalits want to identify themselves with Jesus, who was also Dalit because of his lowliness.¹⁵³

Rajkumar further presents how Dalit theologians appropriate the Bible in developing Dalit theology. Discussions are focused on two biblical paradigms: one, the Deuteronomic Creed (Deut. 26:5-12) that talks about the Exodus paradigm of liberation; and, two, Jesus Himself – the suffering servant image – the Dalit Christ. Rajkumar observes that the Exodus paradigm emphasizes the “victor-ization” of God and the suffering servant paradigm emphasizes the “victim-ization” of God, both of which lay foundations for the Dalit Theology. However, both paradigms suggested by Dalit theologians lack connective tissue between theory and praxis.¹⁵⁴ Rajkumar rightly observes that re-creating God and Jesus in the image of the Dalits does not necessarily bring transformation; rather it could continue to maintain the status quo of their suffering.¹⁵⁵ To overcome this challenge, as Rajkumar says, “There is a need for a Biblical paradigm that will both offer a critique of casteism within the Church as well as

¹⁵² Rajkumar, “How Does the Bible Mean?,” 412.

¹⁵³ Rajkumar, “How Does the Bible Mean?,” 413.

¹⁵⁴ Rajkumar, “How Does the Bible Mean?,” 414-415.

¹⁵⁵ Rajkumar, “How Does the Bible Mean?,” 418.

enable the Church, which is predominantly Dalit, to participate more effectively in the task of Dalit liberation.”¹⁵⁶

Strategies need to be developed to help converts enjoy mutual identity with each other that results in joy. Prabhakar quotes, “The oneness of humanity, particularly the suffering humanity and their fellowship without the boundaries of religion, and Christ-centered fellowship without barriers in which groups (social) activists and the oppressed people participate together for total liberation, are inherent and essential goals in the ministry of the Church for fulfilling Christ’s mission on earth.”¹⁵⁷

Prabhakar further quotes, “The Church is the body of Christ. Dalit theology involves the idea of the *Church of the Poor and the Servant Church* . . . The servant of God is the righteous one who accepted humiliation and suffering for God’s sake . . . POWER IS SEEN IN LOVE AND ACTS OF LOVE, NOT IN STATUS . . . To be Son of God is to be dedicated totally to the purpose of God, even unto death on the Cross.”¹⁵⁸

Rajkumar thinks that making the synoptic healing stories the biblical paradigm could help in eliminating caste discrimination within the Indian Church. They offer ethical critiques of the notions of purity and pollution which constitute the main practical concepts of caste discrimination in India.¹⁵⁹ Thus, Rajkumar gives a warning that there should not be misappropriation of the Bible for seeking emancipation from the caste discrimination.

¹⁵⁶ Rajkumar, “How Does the Bible Mean?,” 419.

¹⁵⁷ Prabhakar, “The Search for a Dalit Theology,” 49.

¹⁵⁸ Prabhakar, “The Search for a Dalit Theology,” 49. The capitalization as it is in the original quotation.

¹⁵⁹ Rajkumar, “How Does the Bible Mean?,” 420.

On pointing to Dalit discrimination within the groups in South India, Rajkumar observes, “The fact that Dalits are given separate seating arrangements in groups, are given separate cemeteries, and are served communion wine in different chalices are a few examples of the ways in which notions of pure and impure operate today even within the groups.”¹⁶⁰

Rajkumar points out that the gap between Dalit theology and praxis through reconfiguration of Dalit theology by using synoptic healing stories, does not provide solutions to the widening gap between the Dalits Christians themselves within the Church. He too supports Dalit theology from an alternative perspective by adding an element of praxis to the liberation ideology.¹⁶¹

M. Gnanavaram describes the hermeneutical basis of Dalit Theology saying, “The Biblical God is the God of the oppressed, and Jesus Christ is the supreme reference for God’s preferential option for the poor and the oppressed through his life, death and resurrection.”¹⁶² Gustavo Gutierrez the basic circle of hermeneutics as,

This is the basic circle of all hermeneutics: from the human being to God and from God to the human being, from history to faith and from faith to history, from love of our brothers and sisters to the love of the Father and from the love of the Father to the love of our brothers and sisters, from human justice to God’s holiness and from God’s holiness to human justice, from the poor person to God and from God to the poor person.¹⁶³

Gnanavaram suggests that the Indian Christian biblical interpreter needs to take responsibility “to interpret the Word of God so as to lead people to hope and work for a

¹⁶⁰ Rajkumar, “How Does the Bible Mean?,” 422.

¹⁶¹ Rajkumar, “How Does the Bible Mean?,” 422.

¹⁶² M. Gnanavaram, “Dalit Theology and the Parable of the Good Samaritan,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 50 (1993), 61.

¹⁶³ Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, translated from the Spanish by Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 15.

new humanity whose hallmarks are Christian love, equality and justice, these finding concrete expressions in the life of church and society.”¹⁶⁴

Gustavo Gutierrez observes, “Salvation—the communion of men with God and the communion of men among themselves—is something which embraces all human reality, transforms it, and leads it to its fullness in Christ.”¹⁶⁵ He further describes that theology needs to include action in all spheres of social life, “If theological reflection does not vitalize the action of the Christian community in the world by making its commitment to charity fuller and more radical..., then this theological reflection will have been of little value, and ... all the political theologies, the theologies of hope, of revolution, and of liberation, are not worth one of genuine solidarity with exploited social classes.”¹⁶⁶

John Webster proposes five suggestions that offer hope to the oppressed within the Church as well as to those outside the Church: i) Relying on the sovereignty and love of God – God is more powerful than the demons, spirits and human beings who oppress people; ii) Knowing that God has shown His love for us in our history – The ancestors have experienced it when they were oppressed and despised; iii) Acknowledging that God has made us His people – Through His grace, God has given us dignity, purpose and identity; iv) Recognizing that we are precious to God and that He loves us in the midst of others hating and persecuting us; and v) Affirming that we are on our way out of our

¹⁶⁴ Gnanavaram, “Dalit Theology and the Parable of the Good Samaritan,” 65.

¹⁶⁵ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*. Translated and edited by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), ix; T. Howland Sanks, “Liberation Theology and the Social Gospel: Variations on A Theme,” *Theological Studies* 41, no. 4 (1980): 670, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials. Accessed July 15, 2020.

¹⁶⁶ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 307; Sanks, “Liberation Theology and the Social Gospel,” 672.

bondage.¹⁶⁷

Labelling people can either uplift or destroy the identity of people. It can give a hope for the future or discourage people to continue to struggle in their present status. The Bible talks about God giving a new name to the righteous. A new name or label denotes hope and blessing (Isaiah 62:2). The new name or identity depends first upon the personal experience with God Himself and then as a community or people of God.¹⁶⁸ Self-identification is crucial to know self-worth and self-esteem. It enhances one's perspective about self at the same time it changes his/her behavior with others.¹⁶⁹ Dalits have hope if they are helped to realize their God given identity as created in the image of God Himself (Genesis 1:27, "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them").

Transformational development is possible through recovering the identity, discovering vocation and living in just and peaceful relationships.¹⁷⁰ In Indian society, the biggest problem is that a majority of people do not know their real identity and hence they are misled about their understanding of their vocations. There are basically two groups of people, poor and non-poor.¹⁷¹ Both are the victims of their identity and hence their behavior changes towards self as well as towards each other. This ignorance is

¹⁶⁷ 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 (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1990), 120-122.

¹⁶⁸ Michael Amaladoss S. J., "Hindu and Christian: Conflict or Challenge?" *Indian and Christian: Changing Identities in Modern India* (Bangalore SAIACS Press, 2011), 148.

¹⁶⁹ Ravi David, "Identity and Conflict: A Pastoral Response," in *Indian and Christian Changing Identities in Modern India: Papers from the First SAIACS Annual Consultation 9-12 November 2010* (Bangalore: SAIACS Press, 2011), 292.

¹⁷⁰ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 234.

¹⁷¹ Myers uses this term "non-poor" to denote people who either belong to the caste system and are socially and economically secured as opposed to the Dalits who are socially as well as economically poor.

reflected in their belief and behaviors based on the web of lies that form their worldviews. Both need to realize that they are made in the image of God with the same identity; equal dignity with different skills that contribute to the well-being of themselves and their community. When people experience transformation, they become agents of transformation in the society. They help others discover their true identity in Jesus Christ.¹⁷²

Discrimination against Christians in the Workplace

In Indian society, converts to Christianity and Islam are considered as non-Hindus. Dalit Christians are treated differently. They cannot participate in Hindu ceremonies. In society, they are not granted human rights privileges. They are not even considered in the quota of scheduled castes.¹⁷³ This shows that discrimination in the Indian society is based on religion.

When the untouchables convert to Christianity, they lose their status as scheduled castes mainly because Christianity does not, in theory, practice the caste system of Hinduism. Yet ironically, they are still called Dalit Christians or Christian Dalits¹⁷⁴ because of their Dalit status even after their conversion to Christianity.¹⁷⁵ However, in many Christian groups, casteism is deeply rooted. Church politics are based on casteism in the Church. In the employment sector, high-caste Hindus are reluctant to hire

¹⁷² Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 115-117.

¹⁷³ Kumuda Chandra Panigraha, "Human Rights and Dalit Christians in India," *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences* 8, no. 1 (2018): 889, <https://www.indianjournals.com/ijor.aspx?target=ijor:ijrss&volume=8&issue=1&article=064>. Accessed July 10, 2020.

¹⁷⁴ Some scholars prefer to use the term Dalit Christians which denotes the social and economic status of the Dalit converts to Christianity. On the other hand some scholars like Elze Sietzema-Riemer use the term Christian Dalits to explain how the Indian government continues to emphasize that after the conversion, the Dalits are first Christians and then comes their socio-economic status.

¹⁷⁵ Elze Sietzema-Riemer, *Christian Dalits: A Research on Christian Dalits in India* (Actie: Mission Department ICCO and Kerk, 2009), 6.

converted Dalit Christians in the higher posts due to conflicts within the Christian community. Conflicts within the Christian community were based on the social motivations of Dalit Christians. The stigma of Dalit background continues to fester. In the employment sectors, Dalit Christians are discriminated against while the Dalits of other religions are given priority over the Dalit Christians. This is the general practice of marginalization and exclusion of Dalit Christians.

This discrimination shows the existing inequality between manual work allocated to the Dalits and mental work that is allocated to the caste Hindus in society.¹⁷⁶

According to the data presented to the Indian Parliament (2017-18) in a nationwide Labor Force Survey, the unemployment rate was the highest among Christian men and women in India.¹⁷⁷

Inequality is reflected not only in the government sectors, but also in private employment sectors. On every work application, the applicant's caste and religion is asked. The final employment decisions are made on the basis of one's intellectual skills as well as religious affiliation. This process disqualifies most Christians from securing higher positions in the workplaces.

In rural areas, Dalit Christians are viewed and treated no differently from the Dalits of other religions. They do not own land for lack of capital. Sobin George observes

¹⁷⁶ Vedamani Hans, "Dalits in India: From Marginalization to Inclusion," *Jai Maa Saraswati Gyandayini, International Multidisciplinary e-Journal* 1 (2016): 449, ResearchGate. Accessed July 5, 2020.

¹⁷⁷ Staff Reporter, "Unemployment Rate Among Christian Men Highest in India," *Justice and Peace*, July 10, 2019. Accessed July 15, 2020, <https://zenit.org/2019/07/10/unemployment-rate-among-christian-men-highest-in-india/>. This report gives the statistics of the unemployment among different religions in two categories, rural and urban areas. In rural areas: Hindu men – 5.7%, Muslim men – 6.7%, and Sikh men – 6.4%. In urban areas: Hindu men – 6.9%, Muslim men – 7.5% and Sikh men – 7.2%. Furthermore it is observed that the unemployment rate among women in rural areas is: Hindu women – 3.5%, Muslim women – 5.7%, and Sikh women – 5.7%. In the urban areas: Hindu women – 10%, Muslim women – 14.5% and Christian women – 15.6%.

that almost all of them work in agriculture as laborers, scavengers and doing menial jobs. Furthermore, in spite of being treated like other Dalits, priority is always given to the Hindu Dalits over the Christians. The discrimination faced by Dalit Christians in rural India is found in the spheres of socio-cultural activities, public functions, different payment structures for the same work, non-payment of the minimum wages, and derogatory remarks to humiliate them.¹⁷⁸ Archbishop Thomas Menamperampil views that mass migration due to poverty or to escape hunger and religious persecution aggravates cultural as well as social tensions.¹⁷⁹ George states that discrimination against the poor originates in rural India. When the impoverished Dalits move to the urban cities and towns in search of work, they again face the same kind of discrimination and abuse from their employers. Dalit Christians who had migrated many years ago to the urban cities could get better education and employment.¹⁸⁰ However, the present situation exposes the sad reality that Christians are unable to find jobs.

Conversion to Christianity does not change the status of Dalits in Indian society. They are still considered as Dalits. Caste Hindus continue to oppress them so that they will not be tempted to convert to other religions. If they do convert, the Caste Hindus continue to bring obstacles to the upward socio-economic mobility of Dalits. They want to limit Dalits so that they will continue to do menial jobs with cheap and sometimes,

¹⁷⁸ Sobin George, "Dalit Christians in India: Discrimination, Development Deficit and the Question for Group-Specific Policies," *Indian Institute of Dalit Studies* 6, no. 2 (2012): 13-14, https://www.academia.edu/6819127/Dalit_Christians-in-India_Discrimination_Development_Deficit_and_the_Question_for_Group_Specific_Policies. Accessed July 15, 2020.

¹⁷⁹ Archbishop Thomas Menamperampil, "Learning to Live in a Pluralistic Society," in *Pluralism of Pluralism: A Pluralistic Probe into Philosophizing*, ed. Johnson J. Puthenpurackal (Bangalore: ATC, 2006), 353.

¹⁸⁰ George, "Dalit Christians in India," 21.

unpaid or underpaid labor.¹⁸¹ This behavior is further reflected in the groups as the caste Christians¹⁸² appreciate Dalit Christians and rarely help them by offering better jobs.¹⁸³ Thus, the discrimination is twofold: from the Hindu Community as well as from the Caste Christians.¹⁸⁴ The situation is more dire as the Hindu Dalits accuse Dalit Christians of being infidels who have embraced a foreign religion for the sheer purpose of receiving financial support. They also discriminate against Dalit Christians with fear of losing their benefits.¹⁸⁵

In addition, Hindus accuse Christian missionaries that they spiritually blackmail the Dalits and forcibly convert them to Christianity.¹⁸⁶ The discrimination towards Dalits is not limited to religious circles; it is also practiced in the socio-economic and political circles.¹⁸⁷ The social, economic, and educational discrimination against Dalit Christians is common in the Indian society.¹⁸⁸ This has made them powerless in all spheres of life.

Casteism within the groups has divided the Christian communities. Anthoniraj Thumma observes that discrimination against Dalit Christians within the Christian community is “inhuman, unchristian and un-ecclesial.”¹⁸⁹ This is the result of conversion

¹⁸¹ S. Yesu Suresh Raj, “A Study on Socio-Economic Status of Dalit Christians in Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu,” *International Journal of Research* 1, no. 11 (2014): 715.

¹⁸² Caste Christians are the Christians who were converted from the Hindu caste background. They continue to hold on to their previous social status.

¹⁸³ Panigrah, “Human Rights and Dalit Christians in India,” 900.

¹⁸⁴ Chatterji, “Why Dalit Theology?,” 29.

¹⁸⁵ Raj, “A Study on Socio-Economic Status of Dalit Christians in Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu,” 715.

¹⁸⁶ A. Gangatharan, “Castes of Mind and the Culture of Conversion: A Study of Indigenous Church Movements in Contemporary Eastern Uttar Pradesh,” in *Indian and Christian Changing Identities in Modern India*, 204.

¹⁸⁷ Prabhakar, “The Search for a Dalit Theology,” 43.

¹⁸⁸ Chunnu Prasad, “Exclusion and Caste Based Discrimination on Dalit Christians in India,” *Academia* (2020): 13-17, accessed July 15, 2020, <https://www.academia.edu/2064898/>.

¹⁸⁹ Thumma, *Marching with the Marginalized*, 26.

from Dalit communities into Christian faith without spiritual transformation. It further results in social inequality, the absence of “inclusivistic social change.”¹⁹⁰

Webster observes that the behavior, worldview, and lifestyle of Dalits do not change soon after conversion. Because of this, in the community, they are always identified as Dalits, or even as Hindu Dalits. He further observes that, even though they have stood firm in the persecutions after their conversions, the Dalits continued to cling to their old beliefs in demons, evil spirits and village deities.¹⁹¹ This lack of worldview change is mainly because of their socio-cultural situation.¹⁹² On the other hand, there is little hope even from within the Christian community for Dalit Christians to prosper. Anderson H. M. Jeremiah states that this forces Dalit Christians to maintain a threefold identity as, Dalits, Christians, and Dalit Christians to gain favor from the majority population as the situation could arise.¹⁹³ John Arun Kumar rightly says, “Indians choose and possess multiple identities as a continuous process of change.”¹⁹⁴ Changing identities is also considered as conversion. In different circumstances, the Dalits change their identity.

Joshua Iyadurai observes that to avoid conflicts after conversion to Christianity, Dalits maintain dual identities by retaining their socio-religious identity as Hindus or Muslims and a spiritual identity as Christians.¹⁹⁵ This confusion of their status continues to bring more discrimination and misery upon Dalit Christians. They are not only

¹⁹⁰ Thumma, *Marching with the Marginalized*, 27-28.

¹⁹¹ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 81.

¹⁹² George, “Dalit Christians in India,” 11.

¹⁹³ Jeremiah, “Dalit Christians in India,” 259-260.

¹⁹⁴ John Arun Kumar, “Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism in India: Conversion and the Hindutva Challenge to Indian Identity,” in *Indian and Christian Changing Identities in Modern India*, 176.

¹⁹⁵ Joshua Iyadurai, “Religious Conversion and Dual Identity: A Phenomenological Perspective,” in *Indian and Christian Changing Identities in Modern India*, 268.

discriminated against in education, employment and politics, but also in basic living circumstances.¹⁹⁶ Even the Christian educational institutions prioritize high caste Hindus and Christians. The children of Dalit Christians are dis-enrolled from these schools once they come to the high school level. The fees are so high that the poor families cannot afford the higher tuition costs. Unfortunately, “the Church has made them *ayas*,¹⁹⁷ butlers, cooks, drivers, daily *coolies* and industrial laborers.”¹⁹⁸ These result in a forced form of poverty among the Dalit Christians.

Spiritual Considerations for a Biblical Community

Right understanding of a Biblical community is demonstrated through the transparent spirituality in the community. Scott Peck says that many communities are pseudo-communities and to create a genuine community, it is necessary that the community pass through four stages: 1) admitting that you are a pseudo-community (In other words, Peck suggests a process of intimate emptying as a precondition for the creation of the egalitarian community), 2) emptying i.e. confessing, 3) chaos, and 4) intimacy.¹⁹⁹ He describes that generally people resist change. However, when the healers or converters persistently pressurize people to be healed or converted, those people in return want to see change in the healers or converters. He goes on to observe, “Chaos is not a state, it is an essential part of the process of community development.”²⁰⁰ This indicates that in true community, transformation is expected in both parties. It is not a

¹⁹⁶ Panigrah, “Human Rights and Dalit Christians in India,” 902.

¹⁹⁷ *ayas* is a common designation given to the babysitters and household maids in India.

¹⁹⁸ Raj, “A Study on Socio- Economic Status of Dalit Christians in Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu,” 712.

¹⁹⁹ Scott Peck, *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace* (London: The Random House, 1990), 86-106.

²⁰⁰ Peck, *The Different Drum*, 91.

one-way system. Both bring change in each other. This kind of transformation stays longer.

The other important aspect of community development, as Peck mentions, is emptiness. He observes, “Emptiness is the hard part. Yet, it is the most crucial stage of community development. It is the bridge between chaos and community.”²⁰¹ He continues to describe that the process of emptiness can be very painful. He says, “It is not easy to confess your weaknesses when others are apt to try immediately to change you or else behave as if you haven’t said anything worth listening to.”²⁰² When people learn about the weaknesses of their leaders, they hesitate to accept their leadership and tend to ignore them.

Acceptance of others as equal human beings is essential for building relationships. Dehumanizing others creates conflicts, discrimination, unrest and inequality. Unfortunately, in many parts of the world, dehumanization has resulted in wars and conflicts. Discrimination based on color, caste, culture, gender, and ethnic background has affected the lives of people who have been suffering for generations. Such people after years of continuous struggle with few results are still longing and hoping to be accepted as equal human beings by the controlling classes and those who consider themselves superior.

Freire discusses this issue of dehumanization and says that not only the oppressed, but also the oppressors become dehumanized and that this is a “distortion of becoming more fully human.”²⁰³ He continues to say that this can result in the oppressed revolting

²⁰¹ Peck, *The Different Drum*, 95.

²⁰² Peck, *The Different Drum*, 101.

²⁰³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 56.

against the oppressors and in turn oppressing the oppressors. Instead, the oppressed need to restore the humanity of both.²⁰⁴ When this happens there will be mutual respect and acceptance of each other. This transformation eventually results in the individuals realizing each other's roles in the community.

For people to realize their responsibility toward a peaceful community, all forms of education are essential as it changes our perspectives.²⁰⁵ Freire calls this conscientization. For him "conscientization is the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence,"²⁰⁶ wherein we become more aware of the truth. It transforms us and thus our behavioral attitudes towards others change. Guillermo Cook observes, "In the process of conscientization persons are led to discover, through interpersonal dialogue, the meaning of their own humanity and worth."²⁰⁷

Parker Palmer perceives that instead of dehumanizing others, we must learn to accept our fellow human beings as equal. Thus, conscientization heals the minds of people and draws them together, resulting in transformation within the larger society.²⁰⁸ L. Stanislaus describes the importance of education in liberation of society: "An authentic and enduring liberation of society is not imposed from above. It presupposes the stirrings of the problems, and the participation of the oppressed people themselves in the process

²⁰⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 56.

²⁰⁵ There are three kinds of education: i) Formal education – attending classes, doing homework assignments, ii) Informal education – reading books, watching television, having conversations, and iii) Non-formal education – seminars, training sessions, mentoring etc.

²⁰⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 109.

²⁰⁷ Guillermo Cook, *The Expectation of the Poor: Latin American Base Ecclesial Communities in Protestant Perspective*, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 9 (New York: Guillermo Cook, 1985), 266.

²⁰⁸ Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, 20th Anniversary ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2017), 165.

of their emancipation, and this is not possible without their coming to an awareness of the situation of injustice in which they live.”²⁰⁹

Palmer further states that in order to understand others, dialogue is essential as it allows us to embrace others and know them more intimately. In the process of dialoging with others, we learn more about ourselves.²¹⁰ Hopefully, as we enter into relationship with others, we grow in mutual respect and acceptance. Receiving and giving mutual access and support from each other enables us to experience personal growth.

By accepting others as created in the image of God, our behavior changes. We value and support each other for the betterment of the community of which we are a part. Every person needs to ponder on how he or she could contribute to peaceful relationships in the community. Without a biblical perspective, accepting every person as created in the image of God is not possible. The Prophet Micah declared true religion as: “He has shown you O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (6:8). This fulfils the prayer for “God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:6-13). When this is practiced, the Kingdom of God will be established on earth.

The impact of spiritual education brings transformation in the community. Ignatius of Loyola emphasized on the transformational education which result in accepting and serving others. He founded the Society of Jesus as the Jesuit order. Ignatius and his six students took vows of poverty and chastity. The constitution of the Society of Jesus states that the aim of the Jesuit schools was “to improve living and learning for the

²⁰⁹ L. Stanislaus, *The Liberative Mission of the Church Among Dalit Christians* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 340.

²¹⁰ Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 166.

greater glory of God and the common good of all.”²¹¹ Every believer is expected to be at the service of others for the praise, reverence, and service of God.²¹² The Jesuits emphasized compassion for others in the face of egoism, and simplicity in the face of consumerism. Much emphasis was laid on promoting the cause of the poor in the face of social injustice.²¹³

Jesuits are known for their three vows, namely: a vow of poverty, a vow of chastity and a vow of absolute obedience to the Pope’s orders. These three vows are fulfilled with six values, namely: 1) striving for excellence, 2) no gender discrimination, 3) care for the individual person, 4) a holistic emphasis on development, 5) seeking the glory of God, and 6) forming and educating agents of change.²¹⁴ These accentuated marks of the Jesuits created a community of faith where members could accept and serve each other and live in harmony. If Dalit Christian community follows the principles of Jesuits, it will help them forget internal differences and live in peaceful relationships.

Thomas Merton says that even the Church in such communities tolerates evil practices such as corruption and immoral practices and therefore is not capable of influencing the community to be transformed.²¹⁵ Similarly Henry Nouwen observes that living in community has opened him up to real spiritual combat—there is a struggle to keep moving forward in adverse situations.²¹⁶

²¹¹ Ignatius Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Anthony Mottola (New York: Image, 1964), 74.

²¹² Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, 18.

²¹³ Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, 31.

²¹⁴ Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, 14.

²¹⁵ Thomas Merton, *Life and Holiness* (Garden City, NJ: Image, 1962), 20.

²¹⁶ Henry Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (New York: Image, 1994), 136.

Stanley Hauerwas says that in the Protestant groups, misconceptions of true spirituality or holiness lead people towards individualism or a spirit of individualism that may incline them toward separation from the larger community and cultural events.²¹⁷ The Church as the Body of Christ is often divided by its own members. There is a need to understand that it is not the different parts that make the body; rather “the Church is the body from which we learn to understand our particular bodies.”²¹⁸ This should help believers to live in harmony because our source of existence is from the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12). Our lives and identity depend upon our belonging to the social community in which we live. Without community, we cannot exist as persons.²¹⁹ We all are responsible and have an obligation to each other.

For the children of Israel, living in beloved community²²⁰ was a sign of God’s presence among them. (Exod. 19:4-6; John 8:31). Palmer maintains that people are bound together in a covenant relationship which engages mutual accountability that results in transformation, even in the face of unknowable risks.²²¹

Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes the characteristics of Christian fellowship in terms of ministry. To maintain peace and avoid a spirit of animosity, one should avoid evil talk among the brethren (James 4:11-12; Eph. 4:29). Instead of judging, graceful talk and service strengthen the community life. Meekness is a sign of the experience of

²¹⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, “The Sanctified Body,” in *Embodied Holiness: Toward a Corporate Theology of Spiritual Growth*, eds. Samuel M. Powell and Michael E. Lodahl (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1999), 23.

²¹⁸ Hauerwas, “The Sanctified Body,” 26.

²¹⁹ Parker Palmer, *To Know as we are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1993), 57.

²²⁰ “Beloved Community” is Martin Luther King, Jr.’s expression.

²²¹ Palmer, *To know as We are Known*, 31.

forgiveness of sin in Jesus Christ (Rom. 12: 16; John 5:44). Meekness leads us to be listeners.²²²

According to Bonhoeffer, listening is the first service we offer to others in the fellowship. Secondly, active helpfulness allows us to proclaim the message of God's love and mercy. Thirdly, the ministry of bearing and upholding others allows us to be forbearing and sustaining (Eccles. 4:19; Col. 3:13; Eph. 4:2). This is the expression of the work of Jesus Christ for us (Isa. 53: 4-5). Fourthly, the ministry of sharing the Word of God to one another is very important in the fellowship of the believers. Sharing the Word of God protects everyone in the fellowship, especially when it is shared with meekness. And, lastly, is the ministry of authority in terms of serving one another in the fellowship. It is through service to others that we are lifted up by the Lord (Mark 10:43). Faithful servanthood is dependent on obedience to the Word of God.²²³

Seeking equal rights and privileges does not mean that everyone would possess the same set of skills. Instead, as Dennis Bakke observes, "fairness or justice means treating everyone differently."²²⁴ This definition expresses the amazing concept of unity in diversity, as each person is unique with different gifts and skills. When they are appreciated for the value they bring to the workplace or in the society, there will be acceptance of each other, irrespective of their color, race or religion. This is transformation in that we share our personal values with the organizational values.²²⁵ The

²²² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), 91-97.

²²³ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 97-109.

²²⁴ Dennis W. Bakke, *Joy at Work: A Revolutionary Approach to Fun on the Job* (Seattle: PVG, 2005), 29.

²²⁵ Bakke, *Joy at Work*, 33.

worldview changes from personal to the organizational or from individual to societal betterment.

Hans observes that to overcome marginalization and exclusion, the church needs to plan strategies for social inclusion which will allow and unite people who feel excluded.²²⁶ Here the goal of social inclusion, is to unite people to build a community in which everybody is empowered, and treated with equality and dignity.²²⁷ Each person needs to realize his/her own identity as a dignified human being irrespective of what other people think.

A Wesleyan Perspective of Social Religion

Early in his ministry, John Wesley saw the importance of small groups and was nurtured by his association with what they called the holy club. Theodore Runyon explains that after Wesley's conversion, the early Methodists were organized into three different kinds of groups: i) Bands, ii) Societies, and iii) Classes.²²⁸

Wesley preached about Christian holiness as perfect love: love for God and love for neighbor. Love for God enables us to love our enemies and those at enmity with God. This is an expression of purity of heart, which in turn implies that "no wrong temper, nothing contrary to love with our thoughts, words, and actions is governed by pure love."²²⁹ Michael T. Burns elaborates Wesley's definition of perfect love as "the reflection and expression of God's unconditional love and it embraces all humanity in a

²²⁶ Hans, "Dalits in India," 3.

²²⁷ Hans, "Dalits in India," 7-8.

²²⁸ Theodore Runyon, "Holiness as the Renewal of the Image of God in the Individual and Society," in *Embodied Holiness*, 81-82.

²²⁹ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1993), 36-37.

community of love and acceptance that is free from any form of exclusionary practice. Further it refutes any attempt to diminish or disregard the dignity and worth of any human being that is derivative of creation in the ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ of God.”²³⁰

David N. Field quoted Wesley, “Holy solitaries is a phase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social, no holiness but social holiness.”²³¹ Our love for God is expressed through our love for others. Bryan P. Stone observes that even a poor church can be “rich in compassion” when it demonstrates solidarity, vulnerability, empowerment, and justice.²³² Compassion that sprouts out of our spirituality neither distinguishes nor discriminates. John Wesley talks about the “disinterested love.” In that he means that we express love regardless of the status or the benefits that we receive in return.²³³ It is expressed to all. Jonathan S. Raymond describes the inclusiveness of social holiness by saying,

In practice, then, social holiness by its very nature celebrates the inclusiveness of community.... The inclusiveness of social holiness would resonate with a free and full salvation which emphasizes a holistic restoration of body, soul, and spirit carried out in the context of a consecrated, sanctified community and the potential for all, no matter how deeply immersed in sin and degradation, to progress in their faith journey with Christ and with each member of the faith community.²³⁴

²³⁰ Michael T. Burns, “John Wesley’s Doctrine of Perfect Love as a Theological Mandate for Inclusion and Diversity” (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2009), 15.

²³¹ David N. Field, “Holiness, Social Justice and the Mission of the Church: John Wesley’s Insights in Contemporary Context,” *Holiness* 1, no. 2 (1990): 183. doi:10.2478/HOLINESS-2015-0005.

²³² Bryan P. Stone, *Compassionate Ministry: Theological Foundations* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 141.

²³³ John Wesley, “A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity,” *Selections from the Writings of the Rev. John Wesley*, compiled and arranged with a Preface by Herbert Welch (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1901), 236.

²³⁴ Jonathan S. Raymond, “Social Holiness: Journey, Exposures, Encounters,” in *The Holiness Manifesto*, edited by Kevin W. Mannoia and Don Thorsen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 183.

Matthew Alan Mobley describes Wesley's "no holiness, but social holiness" saying, "if it is to be pursued, must be pursued in community – in the context of other Christians pursuing the same goal. The common goal creates the community. Apart from the goal, there is no community."²³⁵ Thus, believers become agents of God's grace to each other in the spiritual community where healing is experienced by each member. Becoming agents of God's grace allows us to render selfless service to others. Instead of us focusing on our own interests, we focus on the betterment of others. It is a loss of the "self" for the building of the body of Christ with the work of the Holy Spirit.²³⁶ Knowing that we are weak in different areas of life, accepting each other and strengthening each other through prayer, love, sharing and serving creates an atmosphere of mutual growth as a spiritual community.²³⁷

Conscientization through Dialogue

In a society where there are social, cultural, political and religious issues that hinder holistic growth, some awareness of worldview change, political engagement, a prophetic voice, or a rereading of the scripture needs to take place to trigger social transformation. Education is an important tool to help people understand their situation. Furthermore, it offers a way to escape from an oppressed poverty-stricken situation. The oppressors, who have power and advantage in society, continue to dehumanize the poor. The oppressed believe they have no access and no voice to articulate their concerns.

²³⁵ Matthew Alan Mobley, *Common Bound: The Small Groups of Methodism* (DMin project, Divinity School of Duke University, 2016), 55.

²³⁶ Hauerwas, "The Sanctified Body," 20.

²³⁷ The influence of Wesley in his philosophy of small groups has created this movement around the world that is known as "The 12 Step Program – A Therapeutic Community."

Paulo Freire suggests that the oppressed need to have the right to voice their concerns and reclaim the right to be themselves.²³⁸ This process of conscientization requires dialogue through which the oppressed are made conscious of their innate power. Just providing education to the children of the oppressed is not the ultimate solution. Giving the oppressed the right to be themselves, that is, that they have identity and capacity to overcome their situation through hard work and unity liberates them from oppression. These who are oppressed sometimes themselves become oppressors through acts of retaliation or rebellion. In this sense, they share the same judgment as those who oppress them.

On the other hand, the oppressed can exercise positive influences that can change the ways their oppressors treat them. They possess an awareness that helps them think and act critically. Both the oppressors and the oppressed need to go through a process of conscientization.²³⁹ Thus, as Stone observes, the transformation of their oppressed situation is possible only through a new self-awareness that they have the right to their own identity. They have the capacity to see their reality into a superior state.²⁴⁰ Echoing Jotiba Phule's emphasis on education,²⁴¹ Raj Kumar notes, "Phule considered that the main instrument for awareness and anti-caste consciousness among the people of the lower caste was education."²⁴² Thus, education plays an important role in creating awareness and anti-caste consciousness among Dalits. Education becomes a channel for growth if healthy dialogue takes place.

²³⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 50th Anniversary Edition (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 16.

²³⁹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 50th Anniversary Edition, 75.

²⁴⁰ Stone, *Compassionate Ministry*, 112.

²⁴¹ Jotiba Phule, *Sum and Substance of Slavery* (New Delhi: Samyak Prakashn, 2019), 53.

²⁴² Kumar, *Dalit Personal Narratives*, 137.

Dialogue is essential to strengthen inter-personal relationships. Roy Lazar emphasizes, “The need of the hour is an effective and engaging dialogue among the various religions in defense of human dignity and building up communal harmony. The search for developing a meaningful and fruitful culture of peace, open dialogue has to be part of the praxis of all the religions.”²⁴³ He thinks that people need to be educated to realize the need for dialogue for peaceful relationships. He quotes Pope Francis saying, “Interreligious dialogue is the necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities.”²⁴⁴ He further says, “Dialogue needs courage to counteract the cultural hegemony of fundamentalism and it should encounter the ideologies that attempt to perpetuate the enslaving practices of unjust and inhuman marginalization through casteism.”²⁴⁵

Thumma observes that the need to educate all Christians in both medical as well as educational services in India has always been considered of high standard. The opportunity to provide these services could help in creating employment opportunities for the Christians as well as for qualified people from other religions. Christians represent only 2 percent of the total Indian population; however, they contribute 20 percent of the services in the field of education.²⁴⁶ These endeavors can build a better image of Christians in Indian society so that their services would be sought by different employment agencies. Not only the academic, but the Christian educational services can provide a foundation for building virtues and right perspectives in people.²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Roy Lazar, “Religion and Human Dignity Inter-Faith Pastoral Praxis against Discrimination” (paper presented at the Biannual Conference of International Academy of Practical Theology, University of Pretoria, South Africa, July 16-20, 2015), 10, Academia. Accessed May 10, 2020.

²⁴⁴ Lazar, “Religion and Human Dignity Inter-Faith Pastoral Praxis against Discrimination,” 10.

²⁴⁵ Lazar, “Religion and Human Dignity Inter-Faith Pastoral Praxis against Discrimination,” 10.

²⁴⁶ Thumma, *Marching with the Marginalized*, 33.

²⁴⁷ T. Raju, “Religion and Human Dignity Inter-Faith Pastoral Praxis Against Discrimination,” 9.

In Indian society, there is so much imbalance of life based on the religious as well as social status of people. Sharma suggests that to correct the imbalances, it is essential to create an awareness among people that it is through united efforts among the small groups that employment opportunities can be created.²⁴⁸ Harriss-White and Prakash observe that practicing the concept of economic citizenship among all groups of people can provide the equal and substantive claims to public and social resources. Thus, equality of opportunity would help in ensuring non-discriminatory practices in Indian society.²⁴⁹

Harriss-White and Prakash further observe that the work opportunities in the informal sectors are based on the Hindu hierarchical social order in which class, caste, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, and locality are taken into consideration. In the private sectors, similar patterns are followed which determine the wage structure based on the same Hindu hierarchical social order. This needs to be supervised by the government as well as the private sector to ensure non-discrimination by giving equal opportunity to all sectors of society.²⁵⁰ The absence of powerful political voices among the disadvantaged groups of Dalits needs to be given serious thought. Without a political voice there is no opportunity to demonstrate strength against the dominant political parties or groups. It is social movements that can raise a voice and create pressure for fair practice of economic citizenship. The social movements of the Dalits can create an atmosphere so that they are considered as essential partners in the welfare of all, including the dominant classes.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ Sharma, "Dalits in India: Discrimination and Development," 13.

²⁴⁹ Harriss-White and Prakash, "Social Discrimination in India," 2-3.

²⁵⁰ Harriss-White and Prakash, "Social Discrimination in India," 24.

²⁵¹ Harriss-White and Prakash, "Social Discrimination in India," 24-25.

Gustavo Gutierrez expresses that in salvation experience, relationship with God and men are transformed.²⁵² The caste mentality needs to be disempowered so that all Dalits have wide opportunities and are treated with respect and equality. Thumma suggests that for Dalits to be their own masters and to positively respond creatively to the unjust situation, they need to be empowered in psycho-spiritual aspects through, “instilling faith, hope and love, courage and self-confidence, positive self-image, self-respect and dignity, will power and motivation, and equality and identity.”²⁵³ When this happens, Dalits will be able to enjoy peace and continue to strive for justice with dignity.

The caste system does not give the liberty to achieve beyond the limits of the occupations assigned to people. Dalits are relegated to remain Dalits. They have no hope to overcome this stigma. After, and as a result of, the social reforms instigated by Mahatma Jyotirao Phule,²⁵⁴ there has been more freedom to select one’s occupation. However, the stigma of Dalitness remains till death. The malignant forces keep the poor under bondage to poverty and its vices. They are made to think themselves helpless and incapable of overcoming their poverty. Removing this misunderstanding can help them transform their situation.²⁵⁵

Empowerment gives dignity and humanity to people; they regain self-respect and confidence. In contrast, dehumanization is violence against the poor and helpless, who are victims of evil social and religious systems.²⁵⁶ Dehumanization is a bondage to an

²⁵² T. Howland Sanks, “Liberation Theology and the Social Gospel: Variations on A Theme,” *Theological Studies* 41, no. 4 (1980): 670, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials. Accessed July 15, 2020.

²⁵³ Thumma, *Marching with the Marginalized*, 33.

²⁵⁴ Massey, “Dalits: Historical Roots,” 6. Mahatma Jyotirao Phule was a social reformer and a revolutionary who fought for the rights of Dalits in India. He described the outcastes and the untouchables as the oppressed and broken victims of the caste system in India.

²⁵⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary Edition, 49.

²⁵⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary Edition, 44.

unjust system for both the oppressors and the oppressed poor. The oppressed need to realize that they have power to change their oppression into opportunity. This is the only way for them to be liberated from dehumanization and enjoy their work and life.²⁵⁷ Thus, the liberation of both the oppressors and the oppressed begins within the oppressed.²⁵⁸

Gustavo Gutierrez describes the biblical foundations of liberation by saying, “In the Bible, Christ is presented as the one who brings us liberation. Christ the Savior liberates man from sin, which is the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustice and oppression. Christ makes man truly free, that is to say, he enables man to live in communion with him; and this is the basis for all human brotherhood.”²⁵⁹

A Summary of Literature Review

In this discussion, it has become evident that the issues of the caste system and caste discrimination have greatly affected Indian society and especially the Church in India. Caste conflicts are prevalent in the Indian Christian community. Thus, the Hindu tradition of a caste system has its influence not only in Hinduism, but also in other religions in India including the Christian groups in India.

The caste system has caused an inequality in Indian society. Upper caste people enjoy privileges, while the Dalits struggle for equal rights. Inequality has resulted in injustice, poverty and oppression of the marginalized groups. They are dehumanized due to discrimination in everyday life. Although the constitution of India provides equal rights to all citizens, in practice, the marginalized people are discriminated against. Dalits are considered impure and subhuman as they are expected to do menial jobs. The

²⁵⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary Edition, 66.

²⁵⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary Edition, 44.

²⁵⁹ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 37.

marginalized groups are forced to live in poverty because they do not have access to higher education.

In the search for human dignity and social upliftment, mass conversions of Dalits into Christianity and other religions took place. However, they have often experienced the same power structures in their newly adopted religions. Caste conflicts have divided Dalit converts even in the church. Dalit thinkers developed Dalit theology to find solace in the suffering of Jesus Christ. Dalit theology became more of a social and political agenda than a spiritual guide for peaceful relationships.

The church is the body of Christ, in which each member has an important place. The church is a spiritual community. Christians are expected to accept each other and love each other. Social relations are very important for any society to survive.

This research intended to seek answers to research questions regarding the effects of discrimination within select holiness groups. Chapter III discusses the research methodology in detail.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Overview

This research was conducted among two holiness groups, namely, the Church of the Nazarene and the Free Methodist Church in the Vidarbha region of India.

Research participants from the above two groups were as follows:

- 1) Two pastors from each of these two groups, and
- 2) Ten church members from each of the congregations led by the above.

Selection of research participants was done in consultation with two District Superintendents of the Church of the Nazarene and two of three⁴³ Conference Superintendents of the Free Methodist Church in Vidarbha. The following were criteria for selection of research participants for the study:

1) Churches: One church from each denomination was the first church in the district of that denomination. The second church would be at least 100 kilometers from the first church.

2) Pastors: The two pastors from each denomination were from the denominational groups as described above.

3) Members of Congregations: The selection of ten members from each local church was from various categories within the church. From among the participants, fifty

percent of the members were invited from the leadership team. Up to thirty percent were reserved for women and twenty percent for youth leaders.

Description of Research Methodology

To seek to understand whether there is a conflict among Dalit Christians that causes division, inequality and discrimination, and to suggest solutions, the researcher chose a participatory action research methodology. Chareewat Thawinwong & Wirot Sanrattana describe a participatory action research, “A participator action research methodology allows the researchers and the research participants collaboratively participate in the research; everyone has equal status in planning acting, observing, and reflecting in a spiral cycle pattern.”²⁶⁰ Cathy MacDonald describes, “The roots of PAR can also be traced to Paulo Freire, who believed that critical reflection was crucial for personal and social change.”²⁶¹

A qualitative research method was the chosen technique preferred in this research. John Creswell says, “Qualitative methods demonstrate a different approach to scholarly inquiry than methods of quantitative research. Although the processes are similar, qualitative methods rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse designs.”²⁶² He further states,

Writing a methods section for a proposal for qualitative research partly requires educating readers as to the intent of qualitative research, mentioning specific designs, carefully reflecting on the role the researcher plays in the study, drawing from an ever-expanding list of types of data sources, using specific protocols for recording data, analyzing the information through

²⁶⁰ Chareewat Thawinwong and Wirot Sanrattana, “Teachers and Participatory Action Research for Developing Learning Environments,” *World Journal of Education* 12 (3): 2022, 24.
<https://www.sciedu.ca/journal/index.php/wje/index/>. Accessed April 20, 2023.

²⁶¹ Macdonald, “Understanding Participatory Action Research,” 37.

²⁶² John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2014), eBook.

multiple steps of analysis, and mentioning approaches for documenting the accuracy—or validity—of the data collected.²⁶³

He further observes, “The historic origin for qualitative research comes from anthropology, sociology, the humanities, and evaluation.”²⁶⁴ Jessy Jaison further explains the advantages of the qualitative research methodology. She says that the qualitative method helps researchers gain an understanding of a particular group, community, or issue through different approaches like ethnography (case study, participant observation, and action-reflection), cultural analysis, narrative analysis, autobiography and historical research through library research.²⁶⁵ It is true that the qualitative research methodology aids in a better understanding through multiple aspects provided for analysis.

Research Design

The research design sets a roadmap for the necessary steps to be taken to carry out the research. The important step in this research was to pose relevant questions which would bring valid, objective, accurate and efficient responses.²⁶⁶ Similarly, this research was to pose relevant questions to the pastors and church members of two holiness groups in the Vidarbha region to understand whether there is division, inequality and discrimination in the local church. Based on their finding, they respond by preparing a plan of action to solve their problems.

²⁶³ Creswell, *Research Design*.

²⁶⁴ Creswell, *Research Design*.

²⁶⁵ Jessy Jaison, *Enjoy Your Research: A Manual for Theological Students* (Trivandrum: New India Publications, 2000), 16.

²⁶⁶ Ranjit Kumar, *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners*, 3rd ed. (New Delhi: Sage, 2011), 94.

This study was conducted in three phases. In Phase I, a survey questionnaire was distributed to pastors, and one-to-one interviews were conducted with them. In Phase II, a survey questionnaire was distributed to ten selected members of each church and research questions were discussed with them in a group. In Phase III, all four groups, along with their pastors, were invited to attend a workshop on the characteristics of a biblical community. After the workshop, all four groups were dispersed to prepare a plan of action for consideration and reflection leading to the possibility of initiating critical consciousness in the participants. This process reflects Freire's framework of conscientization in which communities identify their problems and develop a plan of action to resolve those problems.

This research includes cultural analysis. In such analysis, case studies are critical in examining how a particular therapeutic response could be offered. Initially, this response could be a useful trial in one setting before applying it broadly. Stand-alone case studies can be informative, but comparing and contrasting their information is more effective. In case study research, anecdotal data is only confirmed when it appears multiple times.²⁶⁷ Accordingly, the researcher engaged with four local groups for a more effective cultural analysis.

To optimize an understanding of the behavioral patterns or attitudes of castes towards each other, this research collected data through a survey questionnaire, personal interviews, and group conversations (refer Appendix A for the list of questions). Observations were made using a form (refer Appendix C). The researcher correlated

²⁶⁷ Linda Kalof, Amy Dan, and Thomas Dietz, *Essentials of Social Research* (New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill, 2010), 144.

answers provided by research participants with data collected through the survey questionnaire.

Recruitment of Research Assistant

A research assistant was recruited and hired to assist in making logistic arrangements for conducting research in the Vidarbha region. Since the researcher is located more than 1000 kilometers away from Vidarbha, a research assistant was needed to connect locally. Selection criterion for the research assistant were as follow:

- 1) Gender: Since the research assistant was required to travel with the researcher to four different locations, a male was preferred.
- 2) Research experience: A research assistant with experience in conducting research in the Vidarbha region was preferred.
- 3) Communication and relational skills: Since this research project required engagement of pastors and church members, it was necessary to select a research assistant who could connect, communicate, and make presentations.

Selection of Subjects: Dealing with Sample and Population

I chose Vidarbha as I was born and brought up there. I chose the holiness church groups, namely, the Church of the Nazarene and the Free Methodist Church due to my long-term affiliation with these groups. Hence, I sought to understand the contemporary issues within the two holiness groups in Vidarbha.

Sampling Strategy for Research Participants

For this research study, I employed a purposeful sampling strategy to investigate a specific issue, collecting data from a homogenous population, belonging to two specific

denominational groups found within a particular geographical region. Supporting the specificity of purposeful sampling, Michael Patton says, “The purpose of the purposeful sampling is to focus case selection strategically in alignment with the inquiry’s purpose, primary questions, and data being collected.”²⁶⁸ He continues to emphasize the significance of “strategically selecting information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated.”²⁶⁹ In this study, the research participants represent those who have experienced the same issue over many centuries within the Indian sub-continent and who are now part of the Christian community.

Purposeful sampling requires a set of precise cases which make data gathering insightful. Speaking on the particularity of sampling, Patton observes, “One important purposeful sampling strategy is to create a group of cases that provide information-rich data-gathering and analysis possibilities.... If you are interested in a particular type of person, organization, or place, you would create a homogeneous sample.”²⁷⁰ Thus, for this research study, I selected a homogenous sample comprised of research participants who are from a Dalit background, having identified themselves with two holiness groups having an identical history found within a specific geographical region.

The above homogenous group was made up of four focus groups. Referring to the methodology concerning homogenous sampling, Patton notes, “Sampling for focus group typically involves bringing together people of similar backgrounds and experiences to

²⁶⁸ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2015), 402.

²⁶⁹ Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 402.

²⁷⁰ Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 428.

participate in a group interview about major issues that affect them.”²⁷¹ Thus, in the focus groups, research participants coming from similar background and experiences contributed immensely to the investigation.

Selection Criteria for Groups from Holiness Groups in the Vidarbha Region

Establishing the selection criteria was simple as there were only two holiness denominational groups existing in Vidarbha. Nevertheless, the researcher developed selection criteria to select the local groups within each denominational group. They were as follows:

- 1) First church: One of the two groups would be the oldest church in each district.
- 2) Administration: Each church must have their own board of administration.
- 3) Second church: The second church would be from another district having at least fifty percent of the number of members as the oldest church in that denominational district or conference. In addition, the distance between the oldest church and the second church in each denomination must be at least 100 kilometers away from each other or belonging to a different language or cultural group. This was to ensure diversity.

The Selection Process: In order to determine and establish the identity of the two groups, and in an attempt to ensure that the above criteria were met, I contacted two District Superintendents of the Church of the Nazarene from their two respective districts and three Conference Superintendents of the Free Methodist Church from their three conferences in Vidarbha by email and phone.

Selection Criteria for Pastors and Their Church Members

²⁷¹ Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 429.

1) Pastors: Two pastors were selected from each denominational district or conference in Vidarbha.

2) Members of Congregation: Ten members were selected from the congregations of each of the four pastors. The selection of these members was from various categories within the local church. Of these ten members, fifty percent were invited from the leadership team. Out of the remaining fifty percent, at least thirty percent females and twenty percent youth leaders were invited.

A) Age Profile: The age profile of the senior church members was in the range of forty to sixty years. The age profile of younger members was in the range of thirty to forty years.

B) Years of Church Membership: All research participants were expected to have been members in their local church for not less than ten years. This was to make sure that they were well aware of the social issues within their congregations.

C) Mixed Gender Participation: The research participants constituted the ratio of at least 70:30 male to female.

Development of Instruments

In this research study, data was gathered through three different methods:

- 1) Survey questionnaire
- 2) Personal interviews
- 3) Group discussions (forums).

A survey questionnaire was used which included both close-ended and open-ended questions. Describing the unstructured format, Catherine Dawson finds it suitable to investigate life histories of the participants. She reasons, "In this type of interview, the

researcher attempts to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewees' point of view or situation."²⁷² Moreover, the free format nature of such a survey questionnaire encourages conversation which is rich in content and information regarding the issue being discussed. It gives a free hand to the researcher to delve deeper into the subject.

Through a semi-structured format, more information about the motivations, behaviours, attitudes and beliefs, and some significant experiences of life can be gathered.²⁷³ Sinha and Dhiman rightly mention that interviewing is fundamentally a dynamic process of social interaction, so special attention will be given to both verbal and non-verbal cues while interacting with the interviewees.²⁷⁴ I recorded my observations on both verbal and non-verbal communication while conversing with the participants.

Pilot Study

A good research process tests the instruments through a pilot study. A pilot study ensures that the survey questions are understood and interpreted as intended. It helps a researcher to correct any anomalies found in the instruments. Jaison recommends a pilot study that allows the researcher to pre-test instruments with individuals who are considered as representative of the actual respondents.²⁷⁵

A pilot study for this research was conducted through online interviewing one pastor and one church member from each denomination. However, those selected to be

²⁷² Catherine Dawson, *Practical Research Methods: A User-Friendly Guide to Mastering Research Techniques and Projects* (New Delhi: UBSPD, 2002), 27.

²⁷³ Martin Walsh, ed., "Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews," *Oxfam Research Guidelines*, 2019, <https://www.academia.edu/6004764/>. Accessed October 10, 2021.

²⁷⁴ Suresh C. Sinha and Anil K. Dhiman. *Research Methodology 1* (New Delhi: Ess Ess Publications, 2002), 241.

²⁷⁵ Jaison, *Enjoy Your Research*, 63.

part of the pilot study did not belong to the local groups selected for the actual research. The pilot study was conducted on the Zoom platform. Since there was no feedback given by the interviewees, no modifications were made in the interview and group discussion approach. The feedback received from the pilot study is not included in the main research document.

Field, Classroom or Laboratory Procedures

All the research participants were oriented regarding the purpose and procedure of the study (Appendix A). The research assistant was given clear instructions on his or her role in the research procedure (Appendix D).

Since this research study took place within the jurisdiction of two groups, necessary permissions were sought from the respective leadership (Appendix E). This was done to ensure that the respective leaders wholly understood and supported the researcher in order to fulfil the requirement of conducting research in the local groups within their jurisdiction.

Data Collection and Recording

Data in this research was collected through multiple means which included a survey questionnaire (on paper) to gather basic demographic and background data. In addition, personal interviews and group discussions (forums) recorded data in audio format. Moreover, forms created for the purpose recorded necessary verbal and non-verbal communication.

In Phase I, the researcher conducted personal interviews with the four pastors at their locations, three in Marathi and one in Hindi. Each interview started with a written

survey questionnaire and then personal responses to the four semi-structured interview questions. Each interview duration was between 60 and 90 minutes. Responses from each pastor were recorded with their consent.

In Phase II, the focus group discussions were held with ten church members from the congregations of the four pastors. The discussions took place in the church buildings of each group. Three group discussions were held in Marathi and one in Hindi. Each focus group discussion lasted between 90 and 120 minutes. Focus group discussions were recorded with the consent of the participants.

Ethical Considerations

This research study followed a voluntary participation criterion. All the participants were adults. There was no risk of abuse or discrimination among the research participants. However, precautions were taken to safeguard each participant from abuse or humiliation in privacy and in public. Creswell observes, “Ethical issues in research command increased attention today. The ethical considerations that need to be anticipated are extensive, and they are reflected through the research process. These issues apply to qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research and to all stages of research.”²⁷⁶

Informed Consent

Before commencing the interviews and focus group discussions, participants were informed about the nature and subject of the research. This precaution was taken in order to avoid confusion and conflicts during the interviews and focus group discussions. The University of Oxford defines informed consent as, “one of the founding principles of

²⁷⁶ Creswell, *Research Design*.

research ethics. Its intent is that human participants can enter research freely (voluntarily) with full information about what it means for them to take part, and that they give consent **before** they enter the research.”²⁷⁷ This protocol was followed as presented in Appendix H and Appendix I.

Inducement for Research Participants

Since the participation was voluntary, all participants came on their own for the interview and focus group discussions. Nobody demanded reimbursement or incentive for spending their precious time during this research. To create an atmosphere of freedom and fellowship among the participants, meals were provided for all. The researcher also contributed toward the gas expenses and food fellowship when groups had to travel for the combined forums. However, no monetary compensation was demanded nor given to any research participant.

Confidentiality and Privacy

This research dealt with a sociological phenomenon that is considered a sensitive issue in the Indian social context. Discussions on caste issues are not appreciated by people. They can be offended when asked about their caste background. In such situations, conducting research that highlights caste conflicts can be a challenge. Hence, confidentiality and privacy need to be provided.

In the beginning of each interview and focus group discussion, participants were assured of confidentiality of information shared by them. They were informed that the

²⁷⁷ “Informed Consent.” *Informed Consent* | Research Support (ox.ac.uk).

recorded responses were for my personal research purposes and that their names would not be mentioned in the research. Each one of the participants were given pseudonyms. Without the assurance of confidentiality, the research participants could not have expressed their feelings. Emily Danvers and Riti Desai explain that in ethical research the identity of the participants needs to be protected and the information gathered must be respected. They refer to the rights to confidentiality covered by the Data Protection Act of 1998 and suggest five things to consider for maintaining confidentiality:²⁷⁸ a) Privacy and confidentiality should always be respected; b) personal data should always be stored securely; c) any potential threats to privacy and confidentiality should be addressed in the research plan, and steps taken to minimize the potential; d) participants must be informed in full about how their data will be used and who will have access to it; e) in addition to legal requirements, organizational policy should also be followed.

Validity and Reliability of the Research Study

In qualitative research, validity and reliability of findings are important factors. Helen Nobel and Joanna Smith observe, “Qualitative research is frequently criticised for lacking scientific rigour with poor justification of the methods adopted, lack of transparency in the analytical procedures and the findings being merely a collection of personal opinions subject to researcher bias.”²⁷⁹ Nobel and Smith describe different

²⁷⁸ Emily Danvers and Riti Desai, *Research Ethics*, Research Ethics - Table of Contents (cardiffmet.ac.uk).

²⁷⁹ Helen Noble and Joanna Smith, “Issues of Validity and Reliability in Quantitative Research,” *Evidence-based Nursing* 18 (April 2015): 34.

biases to which researchers can fall prey. For example, design bias, selection or participant bias, data collection bias and measurement bias, analysis bias, and publication bias.²⁸⁰

Data Processing and Analysis

Interviews and group discussions were conducted in Marathi for three pastors and their church members, and in Hindi for one pastor and his church members. Hindi and Marathi are the local languages of the research participants. Keeping in view the criteria of selecting the second church, there was a possibility of having different language groups such as Hindi and Telugu. However, translations were not needed as most of the participants knew Marathi, Hindi and English. After repeated listening to the recorded data, it was transcribed into English. The transcribed data was shared with a peer to validate its accuracy.

The transcribed data from interviews and focus group discussions was shared with the data analyst to jointly analyze the same. A confidentiality agreement was signed by the data analyst to protect collected data (Appendix F). The transcribed raw data was analyzed through the QSR NVIVO 12 software. Data was processed through open coding. Corbin and Strauss describe open coding, “Open coding is the interpretive process by which data are broken down analytically. Its purpose is to give the analyst new insights by breaking through standard ways of thinking about or interpreting phenomena reflected in the data.”²⁸¹ They further explain, “In open coding,

²⁸⁰ Joanna Smith and Helen Noble, “Bias in Research,” *Evidence-based Nursing* 17 (2014): 17. 10.1136/eb-2014-101946.

²⁸¹ Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, “Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons, and Evaluative Criteria,” *Qualitative Sociology* 13, no. 1 (1990): 12. Accessed December 12, 2022. Also see “Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons, and Evaluative Criteria” (ubc.ca).

events/actions/interactions are compared with others for similarities and differences.

They are also given conceptual labels. In this way, conceptually similar

events/actions/interactions are grouped together to form categories and subcategories.”²⁸²

In this study the qualitative research method was employed. Qualitative data is processed thematically. Data gathered through a survey questionnaire was compared with the themes identified through the conversations with the research participants. While measurement of quantitative data is simple and straightforward, qualitative data requires a lot more effort in gathering, measuring, reasoning, and analysis of the data collected through personal interviews and group discussions. In this matter, Jaison agrees that qualitative data processing involves thinking, judging, interpreting the data and taking all information through a template process of analyzing the data.²⁸³ Hence, the researcher formulated necessary forms, templates, and tables to collate and analyze the diversity of data collected.

Summary

Competent methodology is critical in creating quality outcomes. The research design lays out the direction for the research methods to be employed. Since the study involves a qualitative method, the primary research tools were interviews and focus group discussions. Designing appropriate questions is critical for this research as caste conflict is a sensitive issue, especially among the Christians in Indian cultural context.

²⁸² Corbin and Strauss, “Grounded Theory Research,” 12.

²⁸³ Jaison, *Enjoy Your Research*, 120.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the research data on the phenomenon of division within the Christian community of two holiness groups in the Vidarbha region of India. The research data is divided into three phases. In the first two phases, there are two different groups of participants from the two holiness denominations in Vidarbha. In the beginning of each of these two phases, I first present the demographic characteristics of the participants in each phase, followed by data analysis and interpretation. The demographic characteristics will help understand the personal as well as the church context of the participants. Research participants were divided into two categories: (1) Phase I, four pastors from two holiness denominations; (2) Phase II, forty church members from the four churches represented by the four pastors.

In phase I, I discuss the data collected through the interviews of four pastors. In phase II, I discuss the data collected from the four focus group discussions with the forty church members. The major themes emerging from the interviews and focus group discussions are discussed in the summary sections of each of the two phases.

In phase III, two combined forums were organized in which all research participants were brought together for a workshop to propose actionable solutions to the problems identified in their congregations.

Two separate forums were held because of the travel distance between the locations of the churches. So, a combined forum was organized for the two Nazarene churches in one center known as a spiritual life center by all Nazarene churches in Vidarbha. The second combined forum was organized in the Gandhi Ashram, which was a central location for the two Free Methodist churches. In both cases, participants chose to meet for the combined forums. This will be explained more fully in the Phase III discussion. All three phases were designed after the Critical Consciousness theory proposed by Paulo Freire.

The primary research question was, “Does the misplaced social motivation of Dalit Christians cause divisions within the local church?” To delve into this primary question, I had six guiding sub-questions:

1. What is the caste background represented by the research participants from the holiness groups in the Vidarbha region of India?
2. Are there divisions within the holiness groups in the Vidarbha region and what are the reasons thereof?
3. What are the evidences of caste discrimination, if any, within the holiness groups in the Vidarbha region?
4. What are the challenges and issues self-identified by each group?
5. What are actionable solutions they would suggest during the group discussions facilitated by the researcher?
6. What spiritual insights might be gained for creating a more equitable community of Dalit Christians?

Phase I: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

The demographic information of four pastors was collected through individual responses to a survey questionnaire that was given to them before the in-person interviews. Four pastors from two holiness denominations were selected to be participants in this study. The two holiness denominations were: 1) The Church of the Nazarene, and

2) The Free Methodist Church.

From each of these two denominations, a pastor of the first church (mother church), and another pastor from another church which was at least 100 kilometers away from the first church was selected. The reason for selecting the second pastors and congregations from a distance was to see how they differ in their responses.

Table 1. Demographic Information

Denomination	Church	Pastor	Age	Original Caste Background	Years of Ministry Experience	Language
Church of the Nazarene	First Church	Samuel Gorde	41-60	Dalit	30	Marathi
	Second Church	Jacob Lal	41-60	Dalit	43	Marathi
Free Methodist Church	First Church	Shailesh Ubale	41-60	Maratha (Vaishya)	30	Marathi
	Second Church	John Gajjala	41-60	Dalit	40	Telugu/ Hindi

All four pastors are ordained ministers in their respective denominations. All have been in the pastoral ministry between thirty and forty-three years. This shows that they have enough ministerial experience of the challenges and successes in the congregations that they have been pastoring. Three of the four pastors are from Dalit backgrounds,

whereas one pastor is from the Maratha caste background (*Vaishya*). Three of the pastors are pastoring Marathi speaking churches, whereas, one pastor is pastoring a Telugu speaking church. All four pastors are males. The original names of the research participants are replaced with pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

Phase I: Presentation of Data, Analysis and Interpretation

In the following sections, I describe the interviews of each of the four pastors separately, followed by the summary section and interpretation. The summary section presents comparisons and contrasts found during the interviews. The narratives include direct quotes to express the authentic expressions of each participant. Each interview description begins with an introduction of each pastor and the interview setting.

In order to find answers to the research questions, I asked the following four semi-structured questions as a guide to collect the data from the participants:

1. What is your caste background and what caste groups are you primarily ministering to?
2. What are the evidences of caste discrimination, if any, within the congregation? What challenges do they bring to the ministry?
3. Are there divisions within the congregation and, if yes, what are the causes for these divisions?
4. How do you resolve conflicts within your congregation?

Interview One: Pastor Samuel Gorde – The First Church of the Nazarene

Pastor Samuel Gorde is in his early fifties and is an ordained minister of the Church of the Nazarene in Vidarbha. He has been in the pastoral ministry for the last 21-30 years. He has been pastoring the present church for the last five and half years.

I contacted him several weeks before the actual interview for his consent to participate in the personal interview. Personally, I have known him for 30 years. This enabled us to be transparent with each other. When I reached his home, he welcomed me with warm

greetings. He was neatly dressed and ready for the interview. He is known to be a punctual and well-organized pastor. Prior to my arrival, he had set a room with a table and a couple of chairs facing each other at it. This was done so that we could see and hear each other clearly. He also made sure that no one would disturb or listen to our conversation. The setting of the room was pleasant and comfortable.

After settling down, I placed a voice recorder on the table and informed him that I needed to record the interview so that I would not miss important information shared by him. I assured him that the recording would be confidential for my personal use only. I also assured him that I did not have to risk hurt his feelings by asking some personal information, as people can be offended if asked about their caste. When we settled down, I began the interview.

Question One: What is your caste background and what caste groups are you primarily ministering to?

Pastor Gorde replied, “I do not follow caste mentality. Now we are the third generation Christians.” Regarding social status he said that his family considers themselves to be a middle class. He recounted that his ancestors belonged to a lower caste. However, he was born in the middle class. According to him, the conversion of his ancestors to Christianity changed the social status of the next generations. Without conversion to Christianity, they would have stayed outcastes like others. So, he at present, does not focus on his caste background.

Regarding his ministry, he has been ministering to people from all castes and religious backgrounds. He has seen people coming to Christ from different castes. To

reach out to the different caste groups, he had to identify them based upon their surnames so that it would be easy for him to focus on a particular group.

He also mentioned that his ministry was mostly done among the Dalits, or low castes, namely, the Matang, Mahar, Neo-Buddhist, sweeper communities, and the Waddar community.

These people groups were responsive to the gospel. They were reached through the distribution of Christian literature, school tuition classes, Christmas programs, and prayers for the needy. He observed that there were very few converts from the Maratha caste background. Moreover, there were no converts from the Brahmin or high castes.

I asked Pastor Gorde the reasons why mostly the Dalits converted to Christianity. He responded, “Yes, that is a reality. Firstly, the low caste people do not get a proper identity in the community they live in, as they are considered backward. Secondly, their economic and social status is not of a high standard in the community. That is why they feel humiliated. They are mentally frustrated because of the everyday struggles they face in their community and that is why they always seek peace.” He continued to describe that when people with better appearances, including the foreigners, approach the low caste people, they feel good. They feel that they are not being treated as second-class citizens. They enjoy being treated with dignity. This attracts them to Christianity as they find peace and equality in the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In addition, Pastor Gorde mentioned that the lower caste people were attracted to Christianity because they saw miracles happening among their own relatives who came to the Christian faith. So, they came hoping for miracles to continue to happen in their own lives. Since low caste people do all kinds of menial work, they often move to different

places in search of work. They seek to move to the cities so that they can be away from the discriminating social culture found in their villages.

In cities, they feel the freedom from the social pressures they faced in their villages, the pastor said. The pastor further continued to describe that when the low caste people come in contact with Christians, they are attracted to the Christian faith. However, when they moved to the cities, they tend to live in the slums where most of the inhabitants are migrants from rural areas. So, even in these slums, a divide within these migrants can be seen on the basis of their original caste background.

In the Vidarbha region, a majority of the conversions to Christianity took place from two Dalit groups, the Matang and the Mahar. Pastor Gorde explained that traditionally, people from these two groups responded positively and so they formed the majority in the churches. The positive side was that from these two groups emerged more trainers. He made a very important observation saying, “People who followed those who had similar surnames or family names could connect to their own caste groups that came from the same background.” Further, he mentioned that historically, until the educational system developed in India, even after becoming pastors and growing in Christ and having their social status being uplifted to some extent, they still could not access other regions or people due to the stigma of their surnames.”

He mentioned that, even after reaching out to the high caste people with the gospel, they remained mostly unresponsive to the gospel.

Pastor Gorde further explained the reasons for the two low caste groups embracing the Christian faith. He said that these two groups were completely neglected and humiliated because of their low caste status as untouchables. Caste people did not

allow untouchables even to stand nearby. The discrimination was so severe that even the shadows of the untouchables were not allowed to fall on the caste people.

In such a situation, when a Westerner comes and serves them, hugs them or holds them close to themselves and provides their needs, these outcaste people feel accepted.

He also mentioned that the untouchables were attracted to Christianity because their children were provided with education and medical services. The medical services saved the children of the Dalits and the Dalit women who were dying during their pregnancies. During epidemics, foreigners, especially Christian missionaries, provided medical services and taught the locals how to live. He said, “So education and medical services, and more importantly the love shown by the missionaries, were the two most important factors that drew the Dalits to the Christian faith” This shows us that it was the social acceptance and identity as human beings given to the Dalits that attracted the Dalits to Christianity.

Question Two: What are the evidences of caste discrimination, if any, within the congregation? What challenges do they bring to the ministry?

Pastor Gorde replied by saying that the caste issue was a big problem before the 1980s and that nowadays people do not discuss it openly. He said that there is no caste discrimination in his congregation. He observed that the caste issues do exist in the rural churches, especially in the tribal areas. He further mentioned that in the neighboring districts, caste issues are prevalent even among the believers.

Pastor Gorde acknowledged that there was a division between the old Christians and the new believers. The old Christians take pride in the fact that they have known Christ for many years. And so, they look down on the new believers. They think that they

are always right when it comes to making decisions related to the church activities. He further explained that the old Christians feel comfortable mingling within their own groups and they sort out disputes and issues among themselves. He said, “However, it becomes difficult for old Christians to deal with new believers as their mindset is not completely changed. As mentioned earlier, new believers keep holding to the traditions from their old religious background.” This is one evidence of division within the congregation. While talking and sharing about the divide between the old and the new believers, he recalled hearing that in some South Indian churches, converts from outcaste backgrounds were made to sit at the back of the churches during worship services. However, this is not practiced in his congregation. New believers were welcomed and are addressed by their names. They are encouraged to share any prayer requests that they want to be prayed for. After these prayers, the new believers feel happy and comfortable and inspired to come again to the church worship services.

Question Three: Are there divisions within the congregation and if yes, what are the causes for these divisions?

In response to this question, Pastor Gorde replied that in his ministry he has not come across any division among the believers in his congregation. He also asserted that he does not tolerate issues that bring divisions among the church members. However, he mentioned that, while seeking marriage alliances for their children, parents desire spouses for their children from their own caste background. Parents think and feel that it is easier to sort out family problems among the relatives if they come from the same background. They can even find out one’s caste background just from their surnames. He acknowledged, “So caste feelings are still there to some extent. Thus, sometimes people

do follow a caste mentality. However, many others who were educated and well settled in their social life do not follow a caste system. Mainly, those who are rooted in Christ do not entertain a caste system. Moreover, they go for mixed marriages.” He emphasized that in the modern days, although caste mentality is slowly disappearing, caste mentality still exists among the Christians even after knowing Christ for centuries. He said that the reason for this lies in the family and community’s pressure to follow caste traditions, especially in the rural areas.

Pastor Gorde mentioned a few more causes for division among the believers. He said, “The desire to maintain social status in the community, and the ambition for leadership in the church causes division among the believers.” He mentioned that some influential personalities in the congregation form their own groups. They dominate the activities in the church. Furthermore, it is the financially well-off members who dictate church activities. He further said that the low income of pastors makes them depend on these members for their support. These members dominate the financial decisions without the consent of the church board. This creates conflicts among the church leaders. And such conflicts affect the entire church congregation. He pointed out that the misappropriation and misuse of church money creates more conflicts. The encroachment on the church properties by church leaders, church members, and even by the non-Christians also creates divisions among the believers.

In addition to all the above, Pastor Gorde observed, “In such situations, when pastors take sides with certain people, more conflicts emerge.” He continued, “Lack of proper ministerial education of pastors is one of the major issues that has created

problems in the churches.” He agreed that most of the pastors deny the existence of such conflicts in their congregations.

Question Four: How do you resolve conflicts within your congregation?

Restating the problem of the lack of ministerial preparation among some of the pastors, Pastor Gorde suggested that improved ministerial training of pastors is a key factor in resolving conflicts within one’s congregation. Such training would also help in preaching, teaching, and independent mentoring to resolve conflicts within the congregation. He said that Christian education and spiritual maturity changes the mentality and behaviors of people. He pointed out that the millennial, those who are educated, do not follow a caste mentality. It is their parents who bring up the subject of caste when looking for marriage alliances. Till then, they are ignorant of the caste issues. When young people move to cities, they do not even bother to think about the caste backgrounds of their prospective life-partners.

Pastor Gorde mentioned that he always encourages church members to be united. He ensures that equal opportunities are given to all in the church activities. This assures church members of their individual importance and the value their participation adds within the congregation. It gives them confidence to get more involved in the fellowship. He suggested that pastors need to be intentional in making church members feel that they have something to contribute in the church activities. He also suggested that pastors need to realize that they too have something to learn from their church members. This can create a learning community among the believers.

Pastor Gorde explained how he resolves conflicts among the church members. When he started the pastoral ministry in the present church, he made an appeal to the

church members not to gossip about each other. During his pastoral visits, he did not want to hear gossip. Instead, he asked them to share what good they had contributed towards the betterment of the congregation. At times, he randomly changed the discussion topics in order to stop gossips. Whenever he observed conflicts between two families, as a first step, he said that he visited both the families and listened to them and their side of the story. He further gave personal attention to both the parties and tried to find out the reasons for the conflicts. He said, “In most cases, misunderstandings create conflicts based on certain issues. And the forgiveness process was not being initiated by anyone.”

He encouraged both the parties to forgive each other and forget the misunderstandings. He also shared with them his own personal experiences of him forgiving others and trying to resolve conflicts. He also emphasized that everybody in the church was a part of the body of Christ and that there should not be conflicts within the body of Christ. He recommends, “In this process, pastors should not take sides with certain members. The spiritual integrity of pastors can be a great spiritual influence on the church members while resolving conflicts.”

Pastor Gorde believes that the early missionaries were aware of the divisions and conflicts among the new believers. He said, “One of the ways they tried to solve the issue was by intentionally arranging mixed marriages among the new believers who came from two different caste backgrounds.” He emphasized that mixed marriages could bring unity among believers. For the younger generation, caste background is not important. They look for good education, employment, and financial stability in their prospective life-partners.

With this we ended the interview session. Pastor Gorde expressed, “I really liked this interview. There are a lot of reminders to myself of things that I need to continue in my ministry.”

Interview Two: Pastor Jacob Lal – The Second Church of the Nazarene

Pastor Jacob Lal is in his mid-sixties and is an ordained minister in the Church of the Nazarene International in Vidarbha. He has been in the pastoral ministry for more than 40 years. He has been pastoring his present church for the last thirty-one years. I had contacted him several weeks before the actual interview for his consent to participate in the personal interview. Personally, I have known him for the last thirty years as we worked together in the same district. This allowed us to be transparent with each other during the interview. I travelled by car to his town, which is about 211 kilometers from the First Church of the Nazarene. I reached pastor Lal’s home on a Sunday afternoon. As a cultural practice to treat visitors, he offered me snacks and a hot cup of masala chai. He was dressed neatly and looked pleasant.

We then moved to the church hall where he had set a table and a couple of chairs facing each other so that we could hear and see each other. Since it was Sunday afternoon, there were no disturbances from other people during the interview. I placed the sound recorder on the table and informed him that I needed to record the interview so that I would not miss any important information shared by him. I assured him that the recording would be only for my personal use and that it would not be shared with anyone else. Meeting in the church hall gave us a sense of the presence of God. I requested Pastor Lal to pray before we could begin the interview.

Question One: What is your caste background and what caste groups are you primarily ministering to?

Pastor Lal answered saying, “Originally, I came from a Dalit background. But after becoming a Pastor, I left the caste mentality. Even after that, people--including some pastors--used to address me with my caste background. But now these things are changing. The non-Christians look at us differently because we are Christians.”

Like Pastor Gorde, Pastor Lal also said, “People can guess our caste background based on our surnames. But they cannot do that now because of our life style. They identify us as Christians, i.e., better than Dalits. They think that the Christian community has high standards. They believe that education in Christian institutions is of a high standard and that there is hope for a better future.” He believes that because of the good reputation of Christian institutions, many non-Christian parents send their children to Christian schools. He said that sometimes those parents have brought their children to church for career guidance.

Pastor Lal mentioned that he had been ministering to various different caste groups of Dalits like tribal, Banjara, Matang, Mahar, and Waddar. He is also ministering among a couple of Hindu castes like Maratha and Lingayat. Several of them contact him and come to his church. He mentioned that in the surrounding villages, he has started small prayer groups among the non-Christians. Due to the lack of worship places and the opposition from villagers, Pastor Lal invited these people to his church for worship on Sundays. He pointed out that in one of the groups, there were thirty-five members belonging to the Lingayat caste group. He is also ministering to another group consisting of forty-five members from four different caste groups, namely, Matang, Waddar,

Buddhist, and Banjara. Like Pastor Gorde, Pastor Lal mentioned that most of the new believers come to church for prayers, especially for miracles. They come to church because they wanted to be healed from sicknesses and find freedom from family problems. He said that these people did not think about issues related to caste background. They came just for the healing and miracles. When the people hear testimonies of healing and miracles, more people start coming to church for prayers.

Question Two: What are the evidences of caste discrimination, if any, within the congregation? What challenges do they bring to the ministry?

Pastor Lal answered, “In the new congregations, there are no caste problems. It was a big problem before 1995 and, to some extent, till 2004. Now, because of education, caste conflicts have disappeared. However, a few old people still follow the caste mentality and groupism in the church.” He mentioned that although the Lingayats came from the Hindu caste system, they still mingled with the other caste groups in the church. As a result of their association with the people of other caste groups, they faced opposition from their own relatives; however, being strong believers in Christ, the new converts from the Lingayat background did not focus on their past caste identity.

Pastor Lal mentioned that although there are no caste conflicts among his church members, there still is groupism and it creates problems in the church. Resonating with Pastor Gorde, Pastor Lal said that the main reason for groupism is the craving for power and leadership in the church. When some members do not get elected to church leadership, they started to blame the pastor for creating his own group. For him, every pastor seeks to run the church smoothly without creating problems. This is possible only when all church members cooperate with the pastor and the church leadership.

Sharing about his own congregation, he said that since he started the pastoral ministry in the present congregation, there has been a problem of non-cooperation from the church members. He said, “But once they are given some responsibility, they change their stance. They expect respect. When they do not get it, they create problems for the pastor.” He recalled the times when some members abused and opposed him in the ministry because of his caste background. Yet, he tolerated it and continued his ministry by visiting their homes and praying for them. At times he had to put some members under church discipline according to the church *Manual*. He mentioned that when the treasurer and other church board members mismanaged church funds, they did not like him taking disciplinary action towards them. So, they went against him and tried to vote him out. However, the majority of the church members did not listen or adhere to the treasurer and his group who sought to vote him out.

While discussing the problem of groupism in his church, I again asked him if caste mentality was the reason behind it. He reaffirmed that at present there are no caste issues in his present congregation. However, he shared some of his experiences from earlier congregations that he had ministered to. In one congregation, all church members were from the same caste background and he, as the pastor, was the only one from a different caste background. Here, although all the congregation were from the same caste, two groups were bitter enemies of each other because they were located in two different locations in the village. Each one of those groups considered themselves higher than other just because of their location.

Each group wanted their preferred pastor to be posted in that congregation. When pastor Lal was assigned to this congregation by the District Superintendent, both groups

were unhappy with his appointment and him. He said, “They blamed me by saying that I was part of the caste conflicts in the district and that I was a close aide of the District Superintendent who was from my caste background. In spite of the accusation, I continued to serve faithfully as a pastor with no such caste feelings. I mingled with both the groups.”

He narrated another experience, “On the other hand, in one congregation all members were from the same caste background and I the pastor was the only one from a different caste background. Yet, they surprisingly preferred for me to be their pastor. They did not want a pastor from their own caste group.” He explained that the members of this congregation refused to be baptized and even to be married by a pastor from their own caste group because of the conflicts among themselves. The bitterness was so much that they furthermore did not want to eat with the other caste group during social occasions like marriage receptions. He continued, “The worst thing, moreover, was that they did not want the pastor from the other group to eat food at the marriage reception.”

Pastor Lal shared one observation of discrimination against new believers in his present congregation. He said that new believers always sit at the back of the church and at times they even stand outside of the church, primarily because they do not feel welcomed by the old Christians. Unlike Pastor Gorde’s church, where new believers are welcomed by addressing them by their names and are encouraged to participate in the worship, the old Christians in Pastor Lal’s church do not even respond to the greetings of the new believers. He said, “Unfortunately our old believers do not even look at the new believers when they are greeted by them. This is the real situation in our church. When the new believers leave, they tell me about this unfortunate experience.”

This problem of a divide between the old and the new believers was also exposed when old believers sought marriage alliances for their children. Like Pastor Gorde, Pastor Lal pointed out that the old believers do not accept marriage proposals from the new believers. Also like Pastor Gorde, Pastor Lal mentioned that the old believers think that the new believers are not yet matured in Christian faith and that their mentality is still non-Christian. He further said that during community programs, the old Christians prefer fellowshiping within their own group, and they neglect the new believers.

Question Three: Are there divisions within the congregation and if yes, what are the causes for these divisions?

I asked Pastor Lal the root causes behind the issue of groupism, the prejudiced attitudes shown by the old Christians towards new believers, and the division within his congregation. He replied, “Some of the old church members have pride, a self-righteous feeling, and a sense of being at a higher level than the others. The old church members look down on new believers.” He further explained that, due to the humiliating experience, new believers prefer to sit in the back benches. Spiritually, they feel inferior to the old Christians. So, they do not even want to talk to the old believers. As mentioned earlier, for the lust of leadership in the church, some old church members created separate groups. They even went against the pastor.

Old Christians seeking marriage alliances from old Christians only create division within the congregation. Pastor Lal observed that the new believers face problems when they seek marriage alliances among the Christians. Since they are new to the church, they do not know believers from other congregations. And so, they struggle to find suitable spouses within the congregation.

Like Pastor Gorde, Pastor Lal mentioned that one of the causes for division within the congregation is when the pastor takes the side of one group of people. In order to please the old Christians, who support the church and the pastor financially, sometimes pastors give them more attention and participation in the church activities over and against the newer converts.

Also like Pastor Gorde, Pastor Lal spoke about the financial mismanagement and control of the finances by some of the members in the church. He said that this issue has created enmity between the pastor and the other church members. When some members were put under disciplinary action because of their non-cooperation or immoral practices, they rebelled and created a group, comprised primarily of their own relatives and friends, against the pastor and the church board.

Question Four: How do you resolve conflicts within your congregation?

I asked Pastor Lal how he resolves the conflicts within his congregation. He explained some of the steps he has taken to resolve conflicts among the believers. Like Pastor Gorde, Pastor Lal says, “In spite of some church members hating me and opposing me in the ministry activities, I continue to visit them and try to work with them. Without any hesitation, I always make myself available to minister to them in their difficult times. By God’s grace, I have been successful so far in resolving most of the issues of our church members, irrespective of their caste backgrounds.”

Pastor Lal mentioned that when some church members wanted to vote him out as pastor due to church politics, he did not resign. So, they stopped coming to church for the next 8-9 months. Yet, eventually they again started attending the church services. At that point in time, the church board put those members under discipline according to the rules stated in the church *Manual*.

Pastor Lal expressed that there is a need for prayer in every challenging situation. He feels that the church members needed to be united in prayer and remove internal misunderstandings. He opined that all members need to feel that they are a part of the family of God. He said, “This is possible through a dialogue and fellowship among the believers to create a harmonious community. Giving priority to others and respecting and accepting them is very much needed in the church family.”

Interview Three: Pastor Shailesh Ubale –
The First Free Methodist Church

Pastor Shailesh Ubale is in his mid-fifties. He is an ordained minister in the Free Methodist Church in Vidarbha. He has been in the pastoral ministry for the last twenty-

one to thirty years. He has been pastoring his present church for fifteen years. I had contacted him, several weeks before the actual interview, for his consent to participate in the personal interview. I met him in person for the first time during the one-on-one interview. Prior to our first meeting, we had a few telephone conversations. He was happy to hear about my research study. When I reached his place, he welcomed me and offered me snacks and a nice hot chai. We talked about our ministry experiences and also about some mutual friends who are ministering in Vidarbha. This helped us get to know each other and be transparent during our conversations. I was impressed by his humility and simplicity. He was neatly dressed for the interview. Prior to my arrival, he had made the necessary arrangement for both of us to sit in the church hall.

The church building is almost a hundred years old. In the church hall, there was a table and two chairs for both of us. We sat around the table so that we both could hear each other clearly. He also made sure that there was no disturbance from outside during the interview. After settling down, I placed a sound recorder on the table and informed him that I needed to record the interview so that I would not miss the important information shared by him. I assured him that the recording was for my personal use and that it would not be shared with anyone else. Pastor Ubale prayed for God's presence and wisdom before I started the interview.

Question One: What is your caste background and what caste groups are you primarily ministering to?

Pastor Shailesh Ubale started by sharing about his caste background. He said, "I come from a higher caste group called Maratha-Kunbi, or Vaishya. (The Vaishya caste falls after the *Brahmins*, and *Kshatriyas* [warriors].) Thus, we belong to the third category

of castes, which is a high caste in Indian society.” Unlike Pastor Gorde and Pastor Lal, Pastor Ubale was not from the Dalit background. He continued, saying, “Now personally, I feel that I am not a Dalit. Today, my social status is high. I feel that I am higher than all others.” He was proud of his caste background because, unlike Dalits, he was not looked down on by others.

Regarding the background of people he primarily ministers to, Pastor Ubale said that he has worked among several backward classes of people like the Banjara, Tribal, Kolam, Waddar (who make stone-work), the Nomadic groups, and also among the Hawkers. Kolam tribal people are a majority in eastern Vidarbha. Sharing about his perspective of Christian community before his conversion, he expressed, “I had many misconceptions about the Christian community. I thought it was a foreign religion that belonged to a low caste people. And during communion, the Christians ate beef and drank the blood of cows. But when I became a Christian, accepted Jesus, and started studying the Bible, a few of my misconceptions were corrected. Then, when I went to the Bible School, all my doubts were cleared. And I learned that the non-Christians consider Christians as Dalits or backward people. I realized that the status of the Christian religion was higher than all other religions or castes in the world, because we are directly connected to the heavenly Kingdom of God. This is what I came to in conclusion: that we are not Dalits, but we have high status in the world.”

Pastor Ubale continued to share about the general perspective of non-Christians about Christians. He said that, in the eyes of non-Christians, all Christians are Dalits or backward class people. Whenever possible, he told non-Christians that, before becoming a Christian, he was a Kunbi (Maratha). Then their perspective about him changed. They

did not look at him as a Dalit. I asked him whether people think that, after becoming Christian, his social status had become low. He replied, “Yes, people belonging to Hindu castes look at Christianity as a very low-caste religion. So, whoever becomes Christian, even from a Brahmin background, other people look at him or her as a Dalit or as a low-caste person.” He mentioned that the majority of the converts to Christianity are from Dalit background. Very few from Hindu caste groups convert to Christianity. They are a minority. That is why the general perception is that all Christians were from Dalit background.

Question Two: What are the evidences of caste discrimination, if any, within the congregation? What challenges do they bring to the ministry?

I asked Pastor Ubale whether he had observed any incidences of caste discrimination within his congregation and, if so, what challenges they brought to his ministry. Like Pastor Gorde and Pastor Lal, Pastor Ubale mentioned that in his church, caste conflicts are not shown openly. According to him, in his congregation there is a mixed group of people from different caste backgrounds. The majority of them are from the Dalit background. According to him, there is no one from the Brahmin background.

He observed that in his congregation, he has not seen any fights based on caste background. However, like Pastor Gorde and Pastor Lal, he mentioned that when it comes to looking for marriage alliances for their children, parents in his congregation prefer someone from the same caste group. According to him, this is the only time when people expressed their caste mentality. He said that apart from this issue, there are no other issues related to caste background in church activities.

Pastor Ubale observed that caste-based conflicts do not exist in most of the Free Methodist Churches. He mentioned that in the Free Methodist Church, discipline is very strong. He said, “When we call ourselves Free Methodist, we strictly follow denominational discipline or rules. This discipline tells us that when we become Christians, we become members of one family of the Lord Jesus Christ. And there should not be any division.” He acknowledged that there does exist a division between the old and new Christians based on church politics and not on caste issues in the Free Methodist denomination. Again, he admitted that the caste issue comes up only when one is seeking marriage alliances. On the other hand, all three Pastors acknowledged that there have been political divisions for the leadership positions in their congregations and that the caste issue pops up when one seeks marriage alliances.

Like Pastor Gorde and Pastor Lal, Pastor Ubale described the issue between the old and the new believers about spiritual maturity. They all expressed that the old Christians believe that the new believers are not mature in the Christian faith. The old Christians fear that the new believers might backslide at any time if something goes wrong in the family or due to outside pressures. Pastor Ubale shared about such incidents in his church. He said, “It has happened a couple of times in our church, and even in other churches. So, when something like this happens, these issues are highlighted in the media or television news. Actually, such things happened due to love affairs. That is why people prefer alliances from the old Christians.” It is only the old Christians who expressed such concerns. The new believers were not aware of such concerns. He said, “So this kind of division of old and new Christians still exists in the church. Again, it is not caste based.”

I asked Pastor Ubale whether the new believers take such experiences as discrimination by the old Christians. He said, “Unlike old Christians who claim to be mature Christians, new believers feel insecure and inferior because they are still learning about Christian faith. They feel isolated. According to him, new believers never have an attitude of division when they come to church.”

Question Three: Are there divisions within the congregation and if yes, what are the causes for these divisions?

I asked Pastor Ubale about other causes for divisions among the believers. He said that one of the reasons for divisions among the people is one's eating habits. It is generally believed that all Christians eat beef. Yet, it is believed by caste Hindus that only untouchables eat beef. Pastor Ubale shared that after becoming a Christian, everyone in his village, including his family and relatives, thought that he had become an untouchable. They believed that all Christians ate beef. He described that a cow was worshipped by the Hindus as *Mata* (mother). After their human mother, they consider the cow as the holy mother. He said, "Their perception is that all Christians are defiled because they eat cow and drink her blood." On this basis, he said, "So even if a high caste Brahmin becomes Christian, people will call him a Dalit."

Pastor Ubale mentioned some of the Dalit groups, especially a Dalit group called Matagi, who used to skin dead animals and eat their meat. He said, "Matagi is one of the lowest sub-castes that used to carry dead animals outside the village and skin them and eat their flesh and bones. It was their original profession." He stated that not all Dalits were involved in that profession. Hindus consider all such Dalit practices like this as dirty and impure work. According to him, when new believers learned that some of the members in the church ate beef, they tried to keep away and avoid any participation in the community meals. After becoming a Christian, Pastor Ubale tried eating beef a couple of times, but after that he never touched it. Unlike Pastor Ubale, Pastor Gorde and Pastor Lal did not mention this issue as a cause for division among believers.

Pastor Ubale further mentioned that the Free Methodist Church follows a democratic system of administration. He said, "Due to the democratic system, politics

have entered in the Church. And, because of politics, there is competition for power and leadership positions. That result in party spirit or groups. So, this kind of division still exists in our church.” However, he clearly stated that the division in the congregation was not caste based. He pointed out that in his church there were people from several caste groups, and that none of them could form a political group by themselves. Caste spirit is shown only when one seeks marriage alliances. He further mentioned that when it comes to church politics, different groups support their own group candidates.

Question Four: How do you resolve conflicts within your congregation?

I asked Pastor Ubale about his strategy in resolving conflicts among his church members. He shared that he focuses on the biblical and practical point of view. He said, “I try to use different ideas, for example preaching and teaching from the Word of God on unity. I preach on accepting each other.” He further said that, from the biblical references it is evident that when people from all walks of life join the church, they come with different baggage. So, it becomes the pastor’s responsibility to help both groups in a conflict to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pastor Ubale also said that when people come for personal guidance, he helps them through counseling and teaching from the Bible. Like Pastor Gorde, he encourages mixed marriages. He said that he counsels young people from both the two different caste groups who intend to get married. When there is opposition from the parents, he calls the parents and counsels them too. He teaches them from the Bible that, through accepting Jesus Christ, all believers are equal. All believers become members of the family of Jesus Christ. In this way he encourages mixed marriages. Pastor Lal did not mention his approach to the mixed marriages.

Interview Four: Pastor John Gajjala –
The Second Free Methodist Church

Pastor John Gajjala is in his mid-fifties. He is an ordained minister in the Free Methodist Church in India. He has been in the pastoral ministry for the last thirty-one to forty years. He has been pastoring the present church for more than twenty years. I had contacted him several weeks before the actual interview for his consent to participate in the personal interview. I met him in person for the first time during the one-on-one interview. Prior to our first meeting, we had a few telephone conversations. He was happy to hear about my research study. When I reached his place, he welcomed me into his home. His family offered me *poha* (flat rice), a north-Indian traditional snack, and hot chai. We talked about our ministry experiences and also about some mutual friends who are ministering in Vidarbha. This helped us get to know each other and be better acquainted and transparent during our conversations. I was impressed by his humility and simplicity. He was a very soft-spoken person. He was neatly dressed for the interview. Since his church building was under construction, he arranged two chairs in the front hall of his house. There was a small table for the chai cups. Since it was a small hall, we could hear each other clearly. There was no disturbance from his family members.

After the snacks and tea, I placed a sound recorder on the small table and informed him that I needed to record the interview so that I would not miss the important information shared by him. I assured him that the recording was for my personal use and that it would not be shared with anyone else. Our conversation was in English and Hindi. I do not know his language Telugu. I prayed before we started the interview.

Question One: What is your caste background and what caste groups are you primarily ministering to?

I began the interview by asking Pastor John Gajjala about his caste background and the caste background of the people he primarily has ministered to. He narrated his caste background by saying, “Our ancestors were from a scheduled caste. As a scheduled caste, our ancestors used to skin dead animals and eat the flesh. They used to dry and treat the skin to make footwear and ropes. They also had skills to make different artifacts.” This is why they were labelled as untouchables by the caste Hindus. He was very open in describing his social background and the profession of his ancestors. He continued to recount the situation in which he grew up. He said that, in the rural area, the upper caste people and the low caste people lived in separate areas. The upper caste people treated other caste people as servants or slaves. He remarked, “The sad thing is that they keep reminding these poor people of their low caste status. Even today we see this discrimination in our society.”

Describing the caste background of the people he is primarily ministering to, he listed different scheduled castes like the Madhvi, Mannewar, Buddhists, Dhangars (Shepherds), and also the Teli. He mentioned that most of the local people were from scheduled castes. They were poor and weak. When he visited them, they shared their difficulties, sicknesses, family needs, idol worship, and the bad effects of witchcraft. They felt the need for deliverance from witchcraft. They wanted someone to guide them. They felt the need for God. He counsels them, guides them and shares the gospel with them. Some of these people have accepted the gospel and joined his church. On the other hand, he said, the high caste people do not respond to the gospel. It seems like they do not need God.

Like Pastors Gorde, Lal, and Ubale, Pastor Gajjala shared the reasons why mostly the scheduled caste people come to church. He said, “These days, most of the people want healing, miracles and quick-fix answers to their problems. They are looking for something that will benefit them. They want deliverance from sicknesses. But very few people strongly believe in the gospel and become true believers. A majority of the people believe that by accepting Jesus Christ they will receive healing from their sicknesses.” He continued to explain that in recent days, people are influenced by healing activities. So, while reaching out to the low-caste people, he focuses on healing more than the message of salvation. He said that people do not want to hear about salvation, instead they want to hear about healing. During Christmas, he invited a few people for a meal. He expressed love and care towards them. He said that those people were not interested in hearing the gospel. He said, “Spiritual change is not their primary expectation. Most people come to get something other than that from the church. They come for healing and freedom from witchcraft. Some also think that the church is involved in social work, so they come to receive help.”

Question Two: What are the evidences of caste discrimination, if any, within the congregation? What challenges do they bring to the ministry?

I asked Pastor Gajjala whether he had observed any evidences of caste conflicts within his congregation. He emphatically replied, “Yes, there is casteism in our church.” Unlike Pastors Gorde, Lal, and Ubale, he did not deny the existence of a caste mentality in his congregation. He explained that his congregation is of a mix of several caste groups. Members come from Mannewar, Teli, Buddhists, Madhvi, and other scheduled caste groups. A majority of the church members are from the Dalit background. He

pointed out that the Mannewar consider themselves as people who belong to an upper caste. Yet, in fact they are also from the Dalit background, as they belong to scheduled tribes in Vidarbha. He said, “They are from a lower casteism but among the lower castes, they think they are higher than others. Even in lower castes there is casteism.” He said that in his church they do not follow caste-based division. He does not allow it. However, he said that church members follow caste mentality in their homes. According to him, people have their caste mentality but they do not show it in front of him. So, there is no caste division within the church.

Pastor Gajjala said that the division among the believers is not caste based. Rather, it is based on church politics. There are two major groups, one against the pastor and the other for the pastor. One group supports the pastor in the ministry, while the other group seeks to do things according to their own wish. He explained that some people call themselves righteous. They regularly attend church and take part in the prayers. They show that they are better than others. Then, there are others who show that they are talented in music and other activities. So, they in such ways create their own groups. These are not people who belong to a single caste group, they are mixed groups. He further mentioned his observation that in church people sit separately according to their group. He said, “Some sit according to their castes. They sit in one corner. Some sit with friends. Others form another group and sit according to their political motives. As soon as they enter the church, you can identify their groups and intentions. Young boys and girls sit with their friends.” He also noticed that some people sit in front because they honestly want to clearly and without any distraction hear the Word of God.

Like the other three pastors, Pastor Gajjala mentioned that the caste issue in the church comes up while one seeks marriage alliances. People prefer marriage alliances from the same caste background. He said, “They still follow the caste mentality. Their mind is not transformed. Jesus sacrificed Himself on the cross for all. Knowing this, still many Christians live like the unbelievers.”

Question Three: Are there divisions within the congregation and if yes, what are the causes for these divisions?

After hearing about the existence of different groups in his congregation, I asked Pastor Gajjala the main causes for divisions in his congregation. He pointed out that some people from low castes behave as if they were from upper castes. He mentioned two Teli families, belonging to low caste backgrounds, acting like they belong to an upper caste. They want to dominate the church activities. Another group of Munnewars also show that they are upper caste. Since they form 20% of the congregation, they want to dominate the church activities. Pastor Gajjala said that he ensures that this group does not dominate church activities. So, they cooperate with him and mingle with others. He treats the Munnewars as equal with the others even though they are a majority in the congregation. According to him, those who show superiority want to lead and teach other caste people. The low caste people generally don’t talk much and accept every decision made by the others.

Like Pastor Gorde, Pastor Gajjala mentioned that the economic status of people also creates a division in the church. He observed, “Always there has been a class division among rich and poor in society and churches. We also have it in our church.” He pointed out that a very few well-to-do people help the needy in the church. Other well-to-

do people mingle only with those who are rich. They do not treat the poor in the same way that they treat their rich friends. He said, “The upper caste people are generally rich. Because they are educated and have money, they do not listen to us. Thus, it is difficult to instruct them in the right path. Friendships are also based on the financial status of others. Rich people relate with rich people and poor people only have the company of other poor. This happens in our church, but I treat them all equally.”

Pastor Gajjala mentioned another reason for division. He said that ego plays a major role in groupism. Because of ego and personal ambition, some people want to see things happen according to their wishes. The cause for this kind of attitude is the lack of spirituality. He said that because of the lack of spirituality, people do not know whether they are right or wrong. The spiritual people in the church try to help people who create problems. He commented, “Due to a lack of the salvation experience, some members do not follow the Word of God. They just follow their minds. This is how church politics works.” According to him, church board members have also been responsible for the division in the church. He said, “Even though they cooperate in some church activities, they continue to have a negative impression about the pastor.” According to him, during pastoral visits, church board members misunderstand him and surmise that he receives monetary gifts during such visits. Since they also expect gifts, the church board members act like pastors and try to gain something from the church members.

Question Four: How do you resolve conflicts within your congregation?

I asked Pastor Gajjala how he resolves conflicts in his congregation. Like Pastor Ubale from the First Free Methodist Church, Pastor Gajjala mentioned that on the basis of a Book of Discipline of the Free Methodist Church, he counsels the members who

create problems in the church. When they do not correct themselves, then a disciplinary action is taken against them. He said that the church board committee members themselves at times create problems. They go against the pastor and try to dominate the church activities. In such situations, he said, he tries to be good to everyone in the church, and especially to the church board committee members. Still, they oppose him. He observed, “Like the majority of the church members, these committee members have never experienced transformation in their spiritual life. However, there are a few good and spiritual members. Since the spiritual people are few in number, the unspiritual dominate them. They don’t listen to the few spiritual people.” He continued to describe how, during the church elections, the unspiritual members come together and support each other. However, even though they are few, the committed believers support church ministry wholeheartedly. This division of spiritual and unspiritual church members did not appear in the interviews with Pastors Gorde, Lal, and Ubale.

Pastor Gajjala said that he teaches church members from the *Book of Discipline* and that this helps people improve their lives. He also takes suggestions from the committed believers while handling the issues related to the problematic members. Sufficient time is given to the problematic members for correction. When he does not see improvement in those church members, he decides to train other people for church leadership. He encourages them not to get involved in church politics with the secular mind and behavior. So he gives them enough time to prove themselves to be committed church leaders. Once he is confident of them, then he gets them involved in church ministry activities. He also mentioned that when removed from the church board committee, the non-working members react and create problems. Then he confronts them

and tells them that, due to their inactive status, for the sake of the church ministry, others are given the opportunity to help in church ministry. So, this solves the issue.

Pastor Gajjala mentioned that through preaching, he tries to educate the church members. Sermons are prepared according to the needs of the church members. He said that people come to church with different intentions and personal issues, such as addictions, immorality, and political intentions. Through preaching he tries to help them to understand that they need to correct their behavior. He said some members accuse him of taunting them, while others follow the Word of God. Committed believers help the problematic people to follow what the pastor preaches. Through preaching he encourages church members to be united. He said, “I tell my congregation that we all are equal. We should not have a caste mentality and discriminate or mistreat each other. I tell people that Christ died for us so that we may believe and become one. We all are the same and I treat them equally.”

Summary, Major Themes and Interpretation

In this section, the major themes that emerged from the interview data are presented. The major themes along with the sub-themes help in the search for answers to the main research question: “Does the misplaced social motivation of Dalit Christians cause divisions within the local church?” As discussed in the previous chapter, the process of coding and re-coding was done through the NVIVO software. The codes naturally aligned with the research questions. And from the interview descriptions, codes and sub-codes, emerged the major themes and sub-themes. In total, I identified four major themes and twenty-one sub-themes (See Table 2). The sub-themes represent the comparison and contrast from the responses received from the participants.

Table 2. Major Themes and Sub-themes

Major Themes	Similarities (Sub-themes)	Differences (Sub-themes)
Dalit Motivations for Embracing Christian Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acceptance; - Healing; - Social Identity; - Miracles; - Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal Spiritual Experience
Evidences of Caste Attitudes among the Christians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of Education - Low Income for Pastors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conflicts within a Caste
Causes for Divisions within a Congregation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Caste System; - Inequality; - Discrimination; - Leadership Ambitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No Caste within the Church; - Corruption; - Lack of Spirituality
Resolving Conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equal Opportunities - Christian Education - Prayer Groups - Mixed Marriages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dialogue

Dalit Motivations for Embracing Christian Faith

As observed in the demographic information about the four pastors, two of the Nazarene pastors came from the Dalit background. Among the Free Methodist pastors, one came from the Maratha (Hindu caste) background, while the other from a Dalit background. In the following discussion, this observation of the background of all four pastors helps illuminate their approaches to ministry among the people they primarily minister to. Based on the four interviews, the following discussion is focused on the Dalit motivations behind embracing Christian faith.

Acceptance: The social status of the Dalits keeps them isolated and discriminated against by the caste Hindus. Dalits are known to be the outcastes. They are treated

inhumanely because of their dirty professions.²⁸⁴ They are not given a human identity. When they were given the title of Dalits by the reformers,²⁸⁵ they received a human identity. However, the stigma of Dalitness remains with them till their death.²⁸⁶ Dalits long for acceptance and equality. All four pastors identified that the need for acceptance motivated Dalits to come to church. With this expectation, the Dalits still come to church.

Healing: In general, Dalits are poor. They try to find different ways to treat their sicknesses. Many churches conduct health camps and healing meetings. These poor people hope that they will experience healing through prayers offered in the church. Pastor Lal said, “The main reason for them to come to church is for healing.” When they witness some of their relatives or friends getting healed because of prayer, they are attracted to the church.

Social Identity: Dalits are treated as untouchables and as people without human identity.²⁸⁷ In the social structure of the Indian society, the untouchables do not have a social identity. The Dalit stigma remains with them forever. Lobo states that the main social motivation of Dalits is to find release from caste slavery.²⁸⁸ As in the past, Dalits continue to search for better social identity in other religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism.²⁸⁹

Miracles: Dalits struggle with spiritual warfare. They are victims of witchcraft and spirit possession. Pastor Gajjala expressed that many people came and still come to

²⁸⁴ Devasahayam, “Pollution, Poverty and Powerlessness,” 1-3.

²⁸⁵ Massey, “Dalits: Historical Roots,” 7.

²⁸⁶ Chatterji, “Why Dalit Theology?,” 27-28.

²⁸⁷ Kumar, *Dalit Personal Narratives*, 121.

²⁸⁸ Lobo, “Dalit Religious Movements and Dalit Identity,” 171.

²⁸⁹ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 40.

his church to experience miracles. When people hear stories of miracles happening in the churches, they go to such churches to seek deliverance from witchcraft.

Education: Dalits are not given priority in high-standard educational institutions in India. The Christian educational institutions are known for quality education. Dalits believe that through quality education they can lift themselves up in society. They realize that the Christian schools and educational institutions provided cheaper but good quality education. So, parents attach themselves to churches so that they can secure admissions in schools for their children.²⁹⁰

Personal Experience: When people hear the gospel, some of them seek truth by learning about Christian faith.²⁹¹ Apart from the social motivations, some people want to experience truth by attending worship in the church.²⁹² Unlike the other three pastors, Pastor Ubale, who came from a high caste, accepted Christian faith after a personal experience in the Church. As stated earlier, after he became a Christian, his relatives thought that he had become a Dalit.

Social Conflicts within the Congregations

Lack of Education: Most of the Dalits who come to church are poor and lack education. Due to poverty, they cannot send their children to high standard schools. This creates an inferiority among them. Pastor Lal pointed out that since the Dalits felt inferior because they were not educated, they chose to sit at the back or stand outside the church. They also felt inferior because they were not educated in the biblical doctrines. This led to discrimination by the educated people even within the congregation. Jamal and Bussey

²⁹⁰ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 63.

²⁹¹ Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 60-61, 63.

²⁹² Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 220-221.

suggest that through critical consciousness people overcome the oppression against them.²⁹³

Low Income for Pastors: In the modern society people earn big salaries. Pastor Gorde mentioned that, due to the low income of pastors, they stretch their hands out in front of the other church members. When some members financially support the pastor, they dominate the church activities. This is a reality in most of the rural churches. Pastors depend on the support from the church. And due to their financial constraints, they cannot provide quality and high-standard educational opportunities for their children.

Conflicts within a Caste: Conflicts between different castes have always been discussed. However, discussion on conflicts within a caste group is not common. Pastor Lal shared an experience within one of his previous congregations, that on the basis of location in the village, a caste group was divided. This shows that differences of opinion creates divisions even with a caste group.

Causes for Divisions within the Congregation

This section discusses the central phenomenon discussed in this research. The discussion shows that different factors cause divisions within a community and shows the categories of motivations of the Dalit Christians.

Caste System: Even after embracing the Christian faith, people still cling to their original caste mentality. Chaudhary observed, “While a very limited social interaction takes place among the different Dalit castes, prohibitions regarding norms of inter-dining and inter-caste marriage prevail among them too.”²⁹⁴ Caste mentality does not allow

²⁹³ Jemal and Bussey, “Transformative Action,” 41.

²⁹⁴ Chaudhary, “Sub-Classification of Dalits.”

people to fellowship with other castes.²⁹⁵ All the pastors stated that, when seeking spouses for their children, parents insist on finding someone from the same caste background. In spite of this being the reality, the pastors deny that there is caste distinction within their congregations.

No Caste within the Church: During the interviews, three pastors stated that there was no caste system problem in their congregations. They said that the caste system was a problem of the past and that it does not exist presently in the churches. However, Pastor Gajjala revealed that there is a caste problem in his church. He said that caste attitudes are secretly followed in the homes and not publicly in the church activities.

Inequality: Believers who have been in Christian faith for generations feel privileged over the new believers. They ignore new believers. Marriage alliances are not sought from the new believers because of the fear that they might backslide anytime. When a group develops this attitude, it results in divisions.²⁹⁶ All pastors expressed this phenomenon existing in their congregations. Division among the Christians has been an ongoing issue for centuries.²⁹⁷ Economic status creates inequality among the church members. The rich and the poor are divided into two separate groups. Because of the groupism, the rich do not mingle with the poor. Most of the Dalits face inequality in their workplace due to their social status.²⁹⁸ Their low income causes them to go through many struggles.²⁹⁹ D'Souza points out that the inequality is an injustice to disadvantaged groups.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁵ Yengde, *Caste Matters*, 42.

²⁹⁶ Jemal and Bussey, "Transformative Action," 38.

²⁹⁷ Chatterji, "Why Dalit Theology?," 37.

²⁹⁸ Hans, "Dalits in India," 449.

²⁹⁹ George, "Dalit Christians in India," 21.

³⁰⁰ D'Souza, *Dalit Freedom Now and Forever: The Epic Struggle for Dalit Forever*, 63.

Discrimination: Discrimination within the church affects the faith of new believers. Dalit Christians have been discriminated against by the old believers, upper caste believers, and the rich in the church. New believers coming from Dalit backgrounds should not be blamed for converting to Christianity for the material benefits.³⁰¹ They are discriminated against socially and economically.³⁰²

Leadership Ambitions: Church politics determines the unity or division of the congregation. All the pastors highlighted that the ambition for leadership in the church made selected church members create divisions. Pastor Gorde mentioned that sometimes pastors show favoritism towards influential members. People belonging to a certain caste group support leaders from the same caste. The hierarchical structures in the Christian community create competitions among the believers. Jeremiah rightly observed, “The Dalit Christian community has internalized the structure of the caste system, which excludes them from the rest of the society, categorizing them as impure and untouchable.”³⁰³ Pastor Ubale mentioned that the higher church leaders also create groupism within the denominations. One group supports a particular pastor or bishop, while the other group opposes them. This kind of groupism is not necessarily based on one’s caste background.

Corruption: Financial misappropriation and misuse by the church leaders results in corruption. Both Pastor Lal and Pastor Gajjala mentioned that, in their congregations, church board members go against the pastors and make their own decisions on finances. These church board members desire to continue to be in the leadership so that they may

³⁰¹ Bubash, “Dalit Theology and Spiritual Oppression,” 38-39.

³⁰² Raj, *Inclusive Christ and Broken People*, 9.

³⁰³ Jeremiah, “Dalit Christians in India,” 265.

continue to dominate church finances. Again, to remain in leadership, they furthermore create their own groups who support them during the church elections. Dalit Christians experience discrimination due to corruption in the workplaces.³⁰⁴ And they sadly also witness the same discrimination in the church. The evil practices such as corruption cannot bring transformation within and outside the church.³⁰⁵

Lack of Spirituality: As a researcher I assumed that conflicts within congregations arise due to the lack of spirituality. So I expected that all pastors would share this as a main cause for conflicts in the church. However, among all four pastors, only Pastor Gajjala mentioned this as being a cause for division in the church. Lack of spirituality is one of the main causes for division within the church. The old Christians think that they are more spiritual than the new believers. Yet, through their discriminatory behaviors it becomes obvious that they still lack spirituality. A false spirituality has a harmful and hazardous impact and influence on people's attitudes towards self as well as others. Hauerwas explains that misconceptions of true spirituality or holiness lead people toward isolation from the larger community.³⁰⁶

Resolving Conflicts

Pastors were asked to share their strategies for resolving conflicts. Each of the four pastors shared about strategies they have used and also proposed the same for others to use. The following were the strategies.

Equal Opportunities: Pastor Gorde shared that he gave all the church members an equal opportunity to participate and lead in worship. This is an excellent strategy, as

³⁰⁴ Kumar, "Liberation Theology of Dalit Literary Narratives," 89.

³⁰⁵ Merton, *Life and Holiness*, 20.

³⁰⁶ Hauerwas, "The Sanctified Body," 23.

everyone will feel part of the worship. This ensures that each one is valued in the church. It also avoids jealousy and hatred among the believers. Giving equal opportunities also helps in ensuring non-discriminatory practices.³⁰⁷ Pastors should not show favoritism. They are called to minister equally to each and every member of the church community as well as to those who do not know Christ.

Christian Education: Christian education is a great need in the churches. Christian education changes the perspectives of church members. Their worldviews change. Pastor Ubale shared his own experience of how, after knowing the Word of God, his misconceptions about Christianity were corrected. Christian education changes the behaviors of church members. Discipleship training and counseling sessions help resolve conflicts. As Pastor Gorde observed, Christian education leads people to spiritual maturity.

Prayer Groups: Prayer is the backbone of every church. All four pastors mentioned that prayer is the solution to every situation. There is a need to educate church members about prayer so that it becomes their lifestyle. Prayer unites people. Prayer groups enable people to carry others' burden. Pastor Lal shared his view that when people heard others praying for them, they forgot all the misunderstandings and conflicts. Through prayer mobilization, church members experience care and they develop positive attitudes towards others.

Mixed Marriages: Conversions from different caste groups to Christianity creates a "mixed community of unclear social status."³⁰⁸ Different caste groups maintain their separate identities within the church. They prefer marrying within the same caste group.

³⁰⁷ Harriss-White and Prakash, "Social Discrimination in India," 2-3.

³⁰⁸ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 45.

Missionaries used the mixed marriage strategy to bring two Dalit caste groups together although they did not address the issue of caste conflicts among the Dalit converts in other ways. Pastor Gorde shared a few examples of mixed marriages that the early Nazarene missionaries had arranged. He has also arranged a couple of mixed marriages in his area. The other three pastors did not mention any efforts to arrange mixed marriages in their congregations. These days, several marriage bureaus and online dating services are available. In the application forms, candidates are required to mention their caste background. So, arranging mixed marriages is not an easy task. Counselling young people is easy, however, convincing their old parents is difficult. Traditionally, in the Indian culture, it is not a decision of the two people. Families and relatives from both parties make the marriage decisions and, in times of crisis, both families intervene and solve marriage-related issues.

Dialogue: Dialogue brings people to the table with equal opportunity to share their feeling and thoughts to resolve conflicts. Facilitating a dialogue between two parties can bring peace and harmony in the community.³⁰⁹ Dialogue helps remove misunderstandings.³¹⁰ Pastor Lal expressed his thought, “This is possible through a dialogue and fellowship among the believers to create a harmonious community. Giving priority to others and respecting and accepting them is very much needed in the church family.” Dialogue unites people and helps create equality in the community.

Conclusion

³⁰⁹ Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 166.

³¹⁰ Lazar, “Religion and Human Dignity Inter-Faith Pastoral Praxis Against Discrimination,” 10.

Dalits were and are still attracted to Christianity with several motivations. Discussions with the four pastors revealed that the Dalits do not generally come to church seeking spiritual truth. They come with the social motivation of being accepted, for healing, miracles, and to gain a better social status as they are discriminated against in society. All the pastors claimed that there are no caste conflicts within their congregations. However, all the pastors mentioned that the believers prefer same-caste marriages. This contradicts their claim of there being no caste problems within their congregations. The causes of divisions identified by the pastors were based on social issues. Aside from Pastor Gajjala, none of the other pastors mentioned any doctrinal or spiritual issue that divided the church. He pointed out that a lack of spirituality was one of the prominent causes for divisions within his congregation. Christian education provides the foundation to help people change their perspective and behavior with and towards others. Dialogue enables people to share feelings with each other and resolve internal issues. It brings peace and harmony in the community.

Phase II: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

The demographic information of forty church members from four holiness churches in Vidarbha was collected through individual responses to a survey questionnaire that was given to them before the group discussions. Ten church members from each of the four churches represented by the four pastors were selected to be participants in this study. These four groups belonged to the following two holiness denominations: 1) The Church of the Nazarene, and 2) The Free Methodist Church.

Table 3. Demographic Information of Church Members

Denomination	Participants	Age/ Gender	Original Caste Background	Years of Church Member ship	Language
Church of The Nazarene First Church (FCON)	Ashish	41-60 M	Do Not Care	31-40	Marathi
	Bipin	41-60 M	Dalit	21-30	Marathi
	Girish	41-60 M	Dalit	31-40	Marathi
	Satish	41-60 M	Dalit	31-40	Marathi
	Aradhana	41-60 F	Do Not Care	21-30	Marathi
	Seema	41-60 F	Do Not Know	31-40	Marathi
	Kalpana	31-40 F	Dalit	31-40	Marathi
	Vandana	31-40 F	Kshatriya	21-30	Marathi
	Stuti	41-60 F	Dalit	31-40	Marathi
	Arpana	41-60 F	Do Not Care	31-40	Marathi
Church of The Nazarene Second Church (SCON)	Naveen	20-30 M	Dalit	1-10	Marathi
	Pratik	31-40 M	Do Not Know	21-30	Marathi
	Ravish	41-60 M	Do Not Know	31-40	Marathi
	Pranav	41-60 M	Do Not Know	21-30	Marathi
	Vikas	41-60 M	Dalit	11-20	Marathi
	Sachin	41-60 M	Do Not Know	31-40	Marathi
	Ajit	41-60 M	Dalit	31-40	Marathi
	Shobhana	20-30 F	Do Not Care	1-10	Marathi
	Kavita	41-60 F	Do Not Care	31-40s	Marathi
	Jyoti	41-60 F	Do Not Care	31-40	Marathi
Free Methodist Church First Church (FFMC)	Roshan	41-60 M	Kshatriya	11-20	Marathi
	Sanjay	41-60 M	Do Not Care	31-40	Marathi
	Amit	41-60 M	Kshatriya	31-40	Marathi
	Gaurav	41-60 M	Do Not Care	31-40	Marathi
	Stavan	41-60 M	Dalit	31-40	Marathi
	Sameer	41-60 M	Dalit	31-40	Marathi
	Anjali	41-60 F	Do Not Know	31-40	Marathi
	Suchita	41-60 F	Do Not Know	31-40	Marathi
	Smita	41-60 F	Do Not Know	31-40	Marathi
	Anupama	41-60 F	Dalit	31-40	Marathi
Free Methodist Church Second Church (SFMC)	Arun	41-60 M	Do Not Care	31-40	Telugu/Hindi
	Hemant	31-40 M	Do Not Care	11-20	Telugu/Hindi
	Sumit	31-40 M	Dalit	31-40	Telugu/Hindi
	Rahul	31-40 M	Dalit	1-10	Telugu/Hindi
	Anil	41-60 M	Dalit	11-20	Telugu/Hindi
	Virat	41-60 M	Dalit	1-10	Telugu/Hindi
	Alka	20-30 F	Dalit	1-10	Telugu/Hindi
	Pratibha	41-60 F	Dalit	11-20	Telugu/Hindi
	Deepika	20-30 F	Dalit	11-20	Telugu/Hindi
	Sayali	41-60 F	Sudra	11-20	Telugu/Hindi

Phase II: Presentation of Data, Analysis and Interpretation

In the following sections, I describe the group discussions with each of the four groups separately, followed by the summary section and interpretation. The summary section presents a comparison and contrast found during the group discussions. The narratives include direct quotes to express the authentic expressions of each participant. Each group description begins with an introduction to the settings in which that group discussion was held.

In order to find answers to the research questions, I asked the following four semi-structured questions as a guide to collect the data from the four focus groups:

1. What are the social motivations of different caste groups represented within your local congregation?
2. What are the evidences of caste distinctions, if any, within your congregation?
3. What are the causes of divisions within your local congregation?
4. What are the solutions for the factors causing divisions in your local congregation?

Focus Group 1: The First Church of the Nazarene (FCN)

This focus group belonged to a local church that I have known since my childhood. Several weeks before meeting the participants, I contacted Pastor Samuel Gorde to get permission to meet ten of his church members. Since I come from the same denomination, I personally knew most of the participants. This allowed us to be transparent during the discussions. After reaching the venue for our meeting, I was welcomed by the group. It was so wonderful to meet some of them after several years. Pastor Gorde had arranged our group meeting in a local church, which was known as the

revival center. This church was built by the early Nazarene missionaries. For many years, all spiritual life conferences for the denomination were conducted in this church. I had been to this church many times to attend conferences and district camps. So, meeting in this old church building was an emotional moment for me as it refreshed my memories.

As we were getting ready for our meeting, I also learned that there were some property disputes due to encroachment on the church property by some church members as well as outsiders. That broke my heart. However, I focused on my purpose for being there. All participants sat close to the table that I was standing near. As is traditional, men and women sat separately. I placed the voice recorder on the table and informed the participants that I needed to record the discussions so that I would not miss the important information gathered from them. I assured them that their real names would not be published in any document. Surprisingly, they had no objection for me to mention their real names. However, I told them that, as a researcher, I would be using pseudonyms to be consistent with the other groups. I requested one of the participants to open in prayer for our meeting. I began the group discussion with the first question.

Question One: What are the social motivations of different caste groups represented within your local congregation?

I asked this question to know more details of the caste groups within the congregation and their motivations for embracing Christianity. Stuti started sharing about the newcomers and their motivations in attending the worship. She said, “They come primarily for prayer. They have not taken baptism and membership in the church.” She mentioned that the church members have evangelized different communities, including the Banjara tribal, Scheduled Castes (Dalits), and Rajasthani communities. From those

contacts, two or three Hindu families were attending the Sunday service. In congruence with Pastor Gorde, Stuti observed that the purpose of those people's attendance at church was to seek prayer for their difficult situations.

Stuti shared about another situation related to the newcomers in the church. She described that during the Christmas dinner, a lot of people from the surrounding slums came to eat. It was difficult to handle them. They were not interested in Christ; they came just for the free food. Aradhana said that on those occasions the church refused to welcome the slum people.

I asked the group what ministry the church does among the slums throughout the year. Stuti replied, "Most of the people living in slums are Dalits. And to evangelize in slums is very difficult. We try to sow seeds wherever possible, but the Buddhist people are very dangerous. They do not believe in God. We tried to share the gospel with them, but they did not accept it." She meant that Buddhist people are not open to hear about Christianity. Like Pastor Gorde, she also expressed that working among other Dalit groups is easier than working among the Buddhists. Unlike Pastor Gorde, church members did not mention that the caste Hindus were being reached through the church ministry. They only spoke about reaching out to the Dalits and not even to the Buddhists.

Stuti further mentioned that those who came during Christmas time came only for food. Those who come regularly for worship, come out of their spiritual hunger for Christ. She mentioned that the local church had been supporting a Rajasthani family who came to church regularly.

Question Two: What are the evidences of caste distinctions, if any within your congregation?

Bipin replied that at least fifty percent of the members have relatives within the congregation. Stuti agreed with Bipin and said that the majority of church members are related to each other. Girish and Kalpana observed that, in their congregation, people do not discuss caste issues, but that in their minds and behaviors, the caste mentality exists.

Like Pastor Gorde, Stuti mentioned that twenty to twenty-five years ago, people openly discussed caste background during marriage proposals. Parents always discussed the caste background of others. Bipin agreed with Stuti and said that without matching the caste background, parents did not allow marriages. Stuti said that the practice of getting married within the same caste had stopped and that caste is not talked about openly. Aradhana spoke up and said, “I do not agree with this completely. When it comes to marriage, not all, but many people do look for a bride or groom from their own caste background. This happens only during marriage talks and at no other times.”

Like Pastor Gorde, Aradhana observed that the newcomers are neglected by the church members. Agreeing with Aradhana, Stuti explained that due to the negligence by the church members, the newcomers are discouraged: “So they do not continue their faith and eventually never come back to church. We bring them to the church but nobody ministers to them in the church. Nobody educates them in the Christian faith. Nobody enquires about the purpose of their visit. That is why they go back to their own religion.” Aradhana and Bipin expressed their concern that church leaders do not take feedback from the newcomers about their experience of being in the church service. Bipin said that no follow-up is done with the newcomers.

Girish commented that the church members do not have any burden for the newcomers. They are busy with their own relatives and friends. Bipin agreed with Stuti,

Aradhana and Girish. Like Pastor Gorde, Bipin said that when new people come to church for the first time, they are welcomed by clapping of hands. They feel happy. But, after that, nobody communicates with them. Satish explained that the newcomers feel isolated. So, they try a different church, yet experience the same treatment.

Question Three: What are the causes of divisions within your local congregation?

I asked this question to find out the real causes of divisions within this local congregation. Stuti instantly replied that the craving desire for leadership position was the main reason for divisions in their local congregation. She said with a strong expression, “There are different leadership positions in the church board. The election of church board members involves dirty politics.” According to her, the fights or competitions to get elected create division in the church. Once people are elected to the board, they feel special and think that they have a better status in the church. They forget that they were elected to serve the Lord.

Aradhana replied by saying that the main reason for divisions in the church is differences of opinion. Differences of opinion cause clashes and arguments among the members. Stuti agreed with Aradhana. She said that since everyone is different, their thinking is different and that is why people do not accept each other’s thoughts. She continued, saying that some members think too highly of themselves. They think they are better than others. This is because of their egos. Seema agreed with Stuti, and observed that those who think they are better than others do not behave well with others. They always long for priority in church activities. I asked the group if the church politics is based on the caste system. Like Pastor Gorde, Seema replied, “No, there are no caste

conflicts in our church.” Satish said that it is not caste conflicts but differences of opinion that cause divisions in the church.

Bipin shared another reason. He said that some members expect the pastor to give them more opportunities in the church activities. When only selected people receive priority in the activities, other members do not appreciate it. Thus, it creates conflicts in the congregation. He also mentioned another cause for conflicts. Like Pastor Gorde’s observation about some pastors, Bipin said, “The pastor always spends time talking or visiting selected families. Pastor takes only the secretary and the treasurer along with him for house visitation. Other church board members are neglected, so they got hurt and started conflicts.”

Aradhana further described that there is not equal treatment of church members and not even of the church board members. Bipin agreed with Aradhana and said that sometimes church leaders share important information to selected members only and not to the whole congregation. It creates misunderstandings and conflicts. Stuti commented that the church leaders take advantage of their designation in the church board. Ashish agreed with Stuti and said that the church leaders feel proud of themselves. After being elected, their attitudes change. Stuti expressed that the church leaders need to serve all members with equality.

Bipin, Stuti and Aradhana mentioned that when the church board members were voted out, they stopped attending the church services. Yet, strangely, after two or three months, they came back and started groupism in the church to get re-elected for the next year. Like Pastor Gorde’s concern, Bipin shared that those people used Hindu friends who had political influence to influence a few church members. That created more

conflicts in the church. Stuti said that sometimes church board elections were manipulated by one group of people. Bipin observed that the competition between the two groups continued. They always found fault with each other. This affected the church members and they lost interest in the church activities.

Bipin shared that groupism caused more divisions in the church. He said that the relatives grouped together and tried to dominate other groups. Relatives supported each other. Stuti observed that there was a division among the relatives themselves, yet, when needed, they came together to avoid conflicts within their families.

Question Four: What are the solutions for the factors causing divisions in your local congregation?

After hearing about the causes for divisions within their congregation, I asked the group to share what solutions they could think of to solve the problems. Like Pastor Gorde, Stuti observed, “Christian education is important, especially immediately after we accept Christ.” Bipin agreed with Stuti and emphasized that Christian education, especially in Sunday School, is the foundation for Christian life. He said that proper Christian education to children changes their behavior as they grow up. Satish mentioned that better education changes the behavior of people not only in the church, but also in the workplace. He further said that better education makes people think differently.

Bipin observed that due to the lack of education, talent, and confidence, some members do not participate in the church activities. Stuti and Vandana expressed the need to encourage such inactive members. Like Pastor Gorde, Vandana commented, “There are not many people in the church who would encourage these members who are shy and on the sidelines. They need to be encouraged to feel that they also are important members

in the church. When they come in the church, they sit in that same particular place.”

Like Pastor Gorde, Aradhana mentioned that the local pastor has to take initiative to encourage inactive church members. She said that the pastor needs to visit those members and inquire about their situation and encourage them. Stuti suggested that it is necessary for the church leaders to accompany the pastor while visiting church members.

Like Pastor Gorde, Aradhana suggested, “The church members should also visit each other, share their burdens, pray for them and encourage each other. It should not be the sole responsibility of the pastor or church board members.” She shared her experience of visiting other church members and how it helped clear up misunderstandings. According to her, church members need to dialogue with each other to solve problems. Stuti mentioned that a group of women visited other members who had stopped attending church due to conflicts. She said that after encouraging them and clearing their misunderstandings, those members started to come back to church. Aradhana said that dialogue among the family members during meals helps solve conflicts within the families.

Focus Group 2: The Second Church of the Nazarene (SCON)

The second Church of the Nazarene (SCON) in Vidarbha was one of the first daughter churches from the FCON that was discussed earlier. I have known Pastor Jacob Lal for many years. When I contacted him and asked his permission to meet with ten of his church members for group discussions, he happily arranged my meeting with the group. He chose the ten church members according to the criteria I had given to him. The group meeting was arranged in the church hall. The church building is almost eighty years old. However, some renovation work has been done to maintain the building. Since

the church building is surrounded by people of different religions, there was some noise from outside. However, we were able to carry on our discussions without a major disturbance. As per the tradition, men and women sat separately. They all were able to hear each other. I, too, was standing close enough so that I could hear them all. This also helped me to record the discussions.

I placed the voice recorder on the table and informed the group that I needed to record discussions for my personal use. I assured them that I was not going to share their real names in my research. After we all introduced ourselves to each other, I began the group discussions by asking the first question.

Question One: What are the social motivations of different caste groups represented within your local congregation?

I asked this question to know the social motivations of new believers and also the old church members for embracing the Christian faith. Sachin, one of the most senior church members replied that sometimes more non-Christians come to church than regular church members. He said that this was because of the evangelism done by the local pastor. Like Pastor Lal, Sachin said, “People know that prayers are offered in the church for all kinds of problems. They also realize that prayers bring healing. Their problems and difficulties are solved because of prayer.” Vikas agreed with Sachin and said that the newcomers seek healing and miracles through prayers in the church.

Sachin mentioned that in the Dalit communities, many women struggle with their drunkard husbands. Furthermore, some of these women are divorced by their husbands. They go through many difficulties, so those women come to church. He mentioned that, furthermore, women who cannot conceive come to church for prayers hoping that the

prayers will be answered. He also said that women who are mistreated by their in-laws also come for prayers to the church. He mentioned that through the prayers of the local pastor, healing and miracles have happened. When other women hear the healing stories, they also come for prayers. Jyoti observed that when women feel accepted in the church, they continue to come back to the church.

Unlike the other three groups, members of this group were hesitant to share the details of different caste groups within the congregation. It gave me an impression that they wanted to show that everything was good in their church. They spoke about their pastor evangelizing and bringing in new believers. However, none of the group members shared his or her own personal experience of evangelism. They could not even name the caste backgrounds of the church members.

Question Two: What are the evidences of caste distinctions, if any within your congregation?

I realized that the members of this group were not open to discuss the caste background of the church members. However, I asked them what signs they could identify that demonstrated the existence of caste distinctions within their congregation. Sachin reacted by saying, “Most of your questions regarding caste distinctions are not applicable to our church although the question may be important for your study. Our church is a living model for others. There is no place for caste conflicts in our church.” Contradicting Pastor Lal’s comment on non-cooperation of old Christians, Sachin said that everything is fine in their church. Christ is the head and so they do not focus on other things.

Ajit said, however, that differences of opinion are seen among the believers on many occasions. He mentioned that when there are divisions, church members point to the mistakes of the pastor and other members. I asked him whether he meant to say that there was groupism in the church. Like Pastor Lal, Ajit said that there is indeed groupism in the church. Ravish said that although there is groupism in the church, there are no opposition groups in their church.

Jyoti said that divisions exist in every church. Vikas agreed with Jyoti and said that divisions exist because the thoughts of people did not match with each other's. Jyoti continued to say, "Some of those signs of division are obvious and some hidden. As long as they are hidden in our minds, we cannot be liberated." Pratik observed that the bigger congregations have more groups and more conflicts among the church members. Jyoti mentioned that the church members need to liberate themselves from the issues related to divisions. She continued, "At least we do not have caste conflicts."

I asked the group members on what occasions they see divisions or groupism in the church. Pratik replied that during church elections divisions can be seen. Ravish agreed with Pratik and said that during church elections, divisions are very obvious. Vikas also agreed. He said that groupism is also seen during church activities. The likeminded people group together. He believes that taking ideas from various groups and continuing to work together is necessary to keep people united.

I asked the group if there was a division among the church board members. Sachin replied, "No, not in our church." Shobhana disagreed with Sachin and observed that groupism exists in every church. She further observed that division is needed in the church. When asked to explain her views, she replied, "Because we do not realize our

own mistakes. But others can notice them. They would not ignore our mistakes. They would and should clearly and honestly point out those mistakes.” Pranav commented that, in order to correct each other, each member’s faith and prayer needs to be strong. Jyoti added that the pastor need not be the target of criticism.

I asked the group if caste issues are discussed during the formation of marriage alliances. Unlike Pastor Lal, Vikas and Sachin expressed that those issues do not exist in their church. However, Vikas did not deny the existence of such issues in other congregations. Sachin explained that the caste tradition was strictly followed by the older generation. After surrendering everything to Christ, these issues did not have any place in the minds of the believers. He strongly felt that those who follow caste mentality, need to go back to their original castes and not to continue in the church.

I realized that the group members were trying to present a positive picture of their congregation, as for every question they expressed that they did not have problems. However, when I asked them if other congregations have issues related to castes, most of them agreed. However, they denied caste conflicts within their own congregation.

Question Three: What are the causes for divisions within your local congregation?

I realized that the group did not want to talk about caste problems within their congregation. So, I asked them to share causes for divisions within their congregation. Ravish replied, “The main problem for division in the church is based on groups among the church members.” He explained that during the church elections, people who did not get elected created groups and blamed the pastor and found faults in his ministry. Unlike Pastor Lal, Sachin said that there was no groupism during their local church elections.

Vikas explained that, due to depression, people had lost their interest in church activities. He added that people are busy with their jobs and, as a result, they became inactive in the church. Eventually they became depressed. Sachin added that because of their different personalities, people did not agree with each other. So, due to the differences of opinion, some people withdraw themselves from church activities. He said that the church members need to work together. He observed, “Groupism is okay, but when it comes to church activities, all should come together and not withdraw themselves. Cooperation and unity is needed. Groupism or division will not do any good.”

Jyoti mentioned that misunderstanding is the main cause for divisions in the church. She said that the differences of opinion affect interpersonal relationships. She continued, “It is only through Jesus that we can come together, love each other, and leave aside our differences. Jesus teaches us to love our enemies. We need to have passion and compassion for each other. Unless and until we leave all our differences, we cannot go into the presence of God.”

Like Pastor Lal, Sachin mentioned that the failure to rehabilitate new believers in the church also creates divisions among the believers. He shared his experience with several Dalits. When he invited them to accept the Christian faith, their response was, “The Dalit converts from our background who accepted Christianity are somehow staying back in Christian community. Our problem now is that we are not able to be accepted and rehabilitated in your people.” He wanted to say that his relatives embraced Christian faith, hoping to get material help as well as employment. He added, “Your people do not accept us. At that given point in time it was their responsibility to do

something for us. Now, if we try to do something or accept your religion, then it creates the question of our origin and people hesitate to give their daughters or sons in marriage.” He explained that the new believers felt insecure in the Christian community. They felt unaccepted by the old Christians, especially while seeking marriage alliances. Contrary to his earlier statement that everything was fine in the congregation, he said that there were no efforts taken by mature Christians to remove the insecure feelings of the new believers.

Question Four: What are the solutions for the factors causing divisions in your local congregation?

The group denied the existence of caste conflicts within their congregation. However, they shared other factors that cause divisions among the believers. So, I asked them to share what they thought were the solutions to the problems existing among the believers. Pranav replied that the faith and prayer life of believers needs to be strong. Jyoti mentioned that no one person, like the pastor, should be targeted.

Sachin said that the inactive members need to be encouraged to participate in the worship services. They could be given opportunities to pray or read scriptures during worship services. He observed, “When they participate in such different activities, their feeling of inferiority or shyness will slowly disappear.” He also suggested improvement in the logistical arrangements, such as seating, and sound systems, so that the congregation can clearly hear the pastor preach the Word of God. He also suggested that the new believers need to be welcomed and made to feel at home. This is the way to encourage them to grow in the Lord. Jyoti also mentioned that new believers who are unhealthily shy need to be encouraged.

Like Pastor Lal, Sachin affirmed that every family needs to start encouraging each other. He said that love and respect for each other within the family could strengthen each one's faith. This would help each one to be better prepared to serve in the church. He mentioned that, rather than condemning, each member needs to encourage others and share their burdens and difficulties. He mentioned an important aspect of rehabilitating new believers in the church so that the division between the old Christians and the new believers would disappear. He hopes that by the church doing this, the Dalit community could be attracted to Christianity. He made a strong statement, "If people still hold on to the caste mentality, then they should go back to those caste groups, and not be in the church." This shows that, according to him, caste divisions have no place among the believers.

Jyoti suggested that by overcoming differences through love, going into the presence of God was possible. Ajit observed that all groups within the congregation need to work together. He suggested that the congregation should not target the pastor, but instead members need to respect the pastor and support him in his ministry.

Focus Group 3: The First Free Methodist Church (FFMC)

I contacted Pastor Shailesh Ubale several weeks before my visit to his church for the focus group discussion with ten members from his congregation. He happily welcomed my request to meet with his church members. He also contacted the ten church members and invited them to participate in the focus group discussions based on the selection criteria sent to him. This was my first visit to this church. I had known a couple of the church members for many years. This was also my first visit to a non-Nazarene

congregation in the Vidarbha region after many years. So, I was excited to learn from the participants. Most of the participants were either retired or were about to retire. Most of them worked in government health, education, or medical departments in their city. So, their responses were from their experiences within the church as well as from their workplaces.

Pastor Ubale made all the necessary arrangements in the church hall for our group discussions. Men and women sat separately. Since it was an evening meeting, we had no other members disturbing our group discussions. All participants were mature and had been in the local church for many years. This was helpful because they could actively and authentically participate in the discussions and share their past and present experiences. I stood near the table so that I could hear the responses of all the participants clearly. After placing the voice recorder on the table, I informed the participants that the recording of their responses was mainly for my personal use. I also assured them that their names would be kept confidential. I began the group discussion with the first question.

Question One: What are the social motivations of different caste groups represented within your local congregation?

I asked the above question to know the representation of different caste groups within the local Free Methodist Church. Gaurav, Smita, Sameer and Amit replied that church members come from several caste backgrounds. Most of them come from scheduled castes and nomadic tribes such as the Banjara tribe. Some people come from the *Teli* community too. The *Teli* community is also a Dalit group.

I asked the group if there were any people from high castes who were attending their church. Gaurav and Roshan said that there are a very few from the high castes, such

as Brahmins who were attending the church. Anjali added, “Most of the people come from slum areas.” She meant that people living in slums are basically poor and from Dalit backgrounds. Samaresh, iterating with Anjali, said that the scheduled caste people come from slum areas only.

Samaresh continued by pointing out that, from the time of the British rule, “Dalits have been victims of atrocities. They were given inhumane treatment. So those past experiences and treatments have been rooted in the minds of the Dalits. Even today, people have not changed their perspective about the Dalits in the society.” He continued to describe that the perspective about Dalits had been inscribed on the minds of people and that it had passed on unchanged to the next generations. He said that every day the atrocities against Dalits are highlighted by the media. These atrocities against Dalits make them come to church for peace and protection. In contrast, other caste people are not attracted to the church because they do not face such atrocities in the community.

Gaurav mentioned that other religions despise and distance Dalits, but the Christian community welcomes and embraces the Dalits with love. This attracts Dalits to the Christian community and that is why they come to church. Smita agreed, saying that the Christian community never distances Dalits. The church reaches out to the poor with love and provides medicine to the sick. They also pray for their healing. After experiencing healing, the poor peoples’ faith increases and then they are attracted to the church. Samaresh added to Smita’s words, saying that several Dalits, especially women who regularly come to church, are strong believers in Christ.

Anjali also agreed with Smita, saying that Dalits come to church for two things: first, spiritual growth; and second, healing. However, she observed that some new

believers went back to their past life and never came back to church. She also mentioned, “In the case of the high caste people like the Brahmins, nobody went to evangelize them because they would not even listen to them.” She continued to describe that the faith of the new believers was based on the material help they received during their difficult times. She believes that because Brahmins and others do not need any help, nobody went to evangelize them.

Smita observed that because the Christians do not discriminate against anyone, the Dalits were attracted to church. Anjali agreed, and quoted Matthew 10:14, saying that the Christians’ responsibility was to go to all, and if they did not respond, then to leave them alone. She also expressed that the rich and high-caste people do not entertain Christians and so nothing could be done among them. Sameer said that the high-caste people always want to maintain their high position in society. Agreeing with Sameer, Smita said that the high-caste people do not want to give up their social status for the sake of Christianity. Amit said that the high-caste people could be ministered to through fellowship.

Samaresh jumped into the conversation and said that when the high-caste or rich people do not get healing from regular medications, they lose hope. Then they come to the church and request the pastor to pray for their healing. He continued, “Yet, after they got healed, they never came back to church. They went back to their regular life because of their attachment with their own community.” Gaurav agreed with Samaresh and mentioned that Dalits come for prayer seeking healing and deliverance from other problems. Yet after being healed, due to family and community pressures, they never come back to church, and they could not be forced to come back to church. Anupama

agreed with Gaurav, saying that the Dalits could not leave their community relationships. Smita commented that even the village chiefs request Christians to pray for the sick people and, when people were healed, the chiefs informed the Christians about it.

Sameer observed that in the slums, a few Western organizations have worked among the poor and distributed funds, food and other necessary items. He said that when local Christians went to the same place, the Dalits were not interested because the visitors did not distribute any of the things the Western organizations had distributed. Smita agreed with Sameer when he said, “Thus, the poor always expect something from any organization that wants to work in those localities.”

Roshan mentioned that when there are sickness or disasters in families, irrespective of their castes or status, people come to church for prayer. Their goal is to receive healing and freedom from their problems. He continued to describe that some people have experienced miracles but they did not convert to Christianity. They continued to follow their religion or caste. However, they did believe in God and in the power of prayer; they brought their concerns about education, children, sickness, or their helplessness. All kinds of people come, rich, poor, high caste, Dalits, and also other backward classes.

Roshan and Anjali shared the perspective that, to establish their own work, some Christian organizations and churches provide different kinds of help to people. Regarding this issue, Anjali observed that there is a competition among different church denominations and Christian organizations. However, Amit objected, saying that not all come to receive help. Some come to church without any expectation. Samaresh and Gaurav observed that some people come for healing and prayers and fellowship because

it makes them feel good.

Pastor Ubale, in his interview, did not clearly mention Dalit motivations for embracing Christian faith. He did not mention healing, miracles, material help, social identity, or educational help for which the Dalits were attracted to Christian faith. He, coming from a Hindu caste, emphasized his spiritual experience as the motivation for embracing Christian faith.

Question Two: What are the evidences of caste distinctions, if any within your congregation?

I asked the group to share about the signs of caste distinctions that they had experienced within their congregation. Like Pastor Ubale, Gaurav denied the existence of caste distinctions, saying that there had never been any discussion about caste issues in their congregation. However, he continued to say, “If any arises, we manage it by not allowing it in the church.” This reveals that there had been instances where the issue of caste distinctions existed in their congregation. Smita joined Gaurav in saying that in their church nobody speaks about caste issues. Samaresh reiterated that caste feelings are not allowed in the church.

Samaresh expressed his thought that, even though nobody speaks about caste feeling in the church, there are instances of the same, which are dealt with by the church. He said, “Even though we do not have caste problems in our church, we experience that people are influenced by different groups from outside and then bring those influences in the church and become problematic in the church.” This expression itself gave a hint that there are caste issues in the local congregation. However, Gaurav said that caste issues are never a topic of discussion in the church. Moreover, he said that many non-Christians

attend the Sunday worship service. The non-Christians are accommodated and welcomed in the church.

Question Three: What are the causes of divisions within your local congregation?

Smita mentioned that there were no caste issues in their congregation, instead, she said that they had the problem of rich and poor among the church members. Gaurav acknowledged that the division within their congregation was based on differences of opinions. On the contrary, Samaresh said, “There are differences of opinions but no division in our church.” Smita continued to observe that different personalities had difference of opinions. Gaurav reiterated that there was no major issue of division in their church. He said that the disagreements among people soon disappeared. Amit commented that in times of disagreements or misunderstandings, the church leaders solved the issues.

The above responses from the group showed that they denied the existence of caste divisions within their local congregation. On the other hand, they admitted that there were differences of opinions, disagreements and influences of some personalities. As mentioned above, Gaurav mentioned that the division within the congregations was based on difference of opinions. Unlike Pastor Ubale who mentioned that the division among the old and new Christians was based on church politics, Anjali did not mention the political issues. She put forth her views saying that the differences in beliefs between the regular church members and the new believers was also a reason for division. She said that according to the Bible, “there is only one life and one death, while in Hinduism, the soul goes through transmigration.” She expressed that due to the doctrinal differences, convincing Hindus to accept Christ was very difficult.

Like Pastor Ubale, Samaresh mentioned that the church politics created misunderstandings. He said, “So church politics is the main cause of division or misunderstanding in our church.” Smita observed that the desire for leadership positions and control of church activities resulted in divisive politics. Smita and Gaurav agreed with Samaresh that church politics created misunderstandings and division within their congregation. Sandesh expressed that a few influential people dominated the church politics. Anupama commented, “Sometimes, pastors play a role in church politics.”

Gaurav agreed with Anupama and said that sometimes the local church pastors created divisions during the church elections. Gaurav observed, “A pastor has to continue to be in the church so he is sandwiched between the congregation and the higher authorities.” He believed that the higher church authorities used pastors during the church elections for their personal motives. He said, “The leaders need to focus on ministry. Many times, they misguide a group of church members. Thus, when they fail in their role in ministry, it results in problems in the local church.” He continued to mention that once the church elections were over, they all worked together. Samaresh shared about his experience in the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church saying, “There were caste conflicts, which resulted in the splitting of the local churches into different church groups.”

The responses from the group members indicated that the main causes of divisions were: misunderstanding, differences of opinions, rich and poor, faulty pastoral or church leadership, and church politics that divided people.

Question Four: What are the solutions for the factors causing divisions in your local congregation?

I highlighted the causes of divisions shared by the group and asked them to share what they thought might be the best solutions for the problem of divisions. Gaurav, being the secretary of the church board, started responding by saying, “Proper leadership is essential to see unity in the church. We have a titled *Book of Discipline* and if we all followed it, then there would not be many problems in the church. But when and if the rules are different for leaders and the members, then there are problems. There are hindrances in the church activities.” He emphasized that in the Free Methodist Churches, the *Book of Discipline* is central to maintain unity in the local congregations. The same rules are to be followed by members, pastors and higher authorities.

Anupama expressed that the pastor needs to play a positive role and not take sides with a higher authority just to safeguard his appointment in the church. Gaurav and Roshan expressed a need for church leaders to focus on ministry rather than misguiding a particular group of members during church elections. Gaurav further stated that giving the lay preachers opportunity to preach on Sundays helps maintain fellowship in the church. He also mentioned that the pastor needs to focus on pulpit ministry rather than getting into administrative activities. He described that the board, on one hand, in principle should not interfere with and control the pulpit ministry, and, on the other hand, neither should the board expect the pastor to get into administrative conflicts.

Focus Group 4: The Second Free Methodist Church (SFMC)

The focus group members of the SFMC were from Telugu speaking families. Most of them were migrants from the neighboring State of Andhra Pradesh. Some of them were born and raised in Vidarbha. They maintain the Telugu culture and always communicate with each other in Telugu and sometimes in Hindi. I had communicated

with their pastor John Gajjala about the group discussions several months before my visit. This was my first visit to their town. The town is on the border of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh States. The town is mostly influenced by the Andhra culture, language, food and accent. The group members were educated, well dressed and yet simple. They were respectful and humble. Furthermore, their Christian spirit was high, as they all gave priority to God and the church in their responses. Since I do not know their language, I had to use both English and Hindi, with which they all were comfortable to communicate in.

Pastor Gajjala had organized a hall for our meeting in the under-construction church hall. The church neighborhood consists mostly of Hindu and Muslim families. We sat in such a way that we all could hear each other without much disturbance from the outside. I placed the voice recorder on the table to record our discussions. I assured the group that the recording was for my personal use. I also assured them that their real names will not be mentioned in my research. With their approval I began to ask the first question for discussion.

Question One: What are the social motivations of different caste groups represented within your local congregation?

The demographic information of the ten participants indicated that eight of the ten participants were Dalits. Two participants did not disclose their caste identity. I asked the above question to know the motivations of Dalits in embracing Christian faith. I also wanted to understand the reaction of the participants to the question of caste discussion. Unlike the reply from the members of the FFMC, Arun answered, “We have not kept a caste record and never thought about this. But our pastor must know about it.” He went

on to state that several people have come into the church but the members do not differentiate the newcomers from each other based on their caste background.

Shweta said that the believers do not target reaching out to any particular caste group with the gospel. She also said that the believers never mention the caste group of the people they work among. Like the FFMC members, Pratibha mentioned that the church members do not reach to the high castes or Brahmins because they are rich and non-responsive. Pastor Ubale had also mentioned this issue.

However, Shweta shared about her reaching out to the children of all castes through tutoring classes that provide extra guidance to students. When she taught moral stories from the Bible, the parents of Brahmin children appreciated it. Children always asked her about Jesus and the reason why He was crucified. That gave her an opportunity to tell them about Christ. Apart from her, none of the other church members has reached out to people of the high castes.

Unlike the FFMC members, the SFMC members have not made efforts to know the motivations of the Dalits for embracing Christian faith. The background records of the newcomers are known only to the local pastor. The church members are not aware of caste background and with what motivations the Dalits have embraced the Christian faith. Since the rest of the group did not comment further, I had to move on to the next question.

Question Two: What are the evidences of caste distinctions, if any within your congregation?

Arun reiterated that the church members do not keep records of what castes are represented in their congregation. Accordingly, there is no particular observation on how

different castes behave in the church. Like the FFMC members, the SFMC expressed that there are no caste conflicts within their congregation. Pratibha added, “In our church we all live in unity. We fellowship with each other. We have one pastor and so there are no problems in our church.” When I asked how the new believers are treated in the church, Deepika and Shweta said that they welcome newcomers. They sit together in the church without any distinction.

Yet, strangely, Hemant shared his experience that when he went to the pastor to register his name for a Christian matrimonial, the pastor asked him his caste. The pastor then explained to him the caste question was asked because the parents of girls wanted to know the caste background of the boy. Hemant said that he knew about some mixed marriages who had discussed their caste backgrounds before getting married. He continued, “Pastors and matrimonial sites match boys and girls based on the caste background.”

Arun commented that, in order to avoid problems after marriage, it is necessary to look into the caste background of the prospective spouse. Hemant said, “Sometimes it is not in their hearts, but it comes on their lips.” He continued that some people agree to marry someone of a different caste merely due to the fear of not finding a match. But others remain firm in their desire to marry in the same caste. Shweta agreed with Arun when he said that in their part of Vidarbha, especially in their church, there is no caste problem.

Arun mentioned that caste problems are prevalent in the South Indian States. Deepika, Hemant and Pratibha agreed that in their towns in Andhra Pradesh, caste problems are everywhere among the Christians. Arun shared his observation, “In

Marathi-speaking churches in Vidarbha, caste is not discussed openly; but in Telugu-speaking churches, people ask about one's caste background."

On the other hand, Sumit shared that people in Maharashtra subtly first ask about one's native place and then the caste background. Bhaskar mentioned that the caste of people can be known by just hearing their surnames. Agreeing with Bhaskar, Hemant said that the caste of people can be known by the district and native places they came from. As a result, the Dalit caste stigma will always remain. Pratibha declared, "We are proud of our caste. It is our right and pride." Agreeing with her, Anil added, "We cannot forget our caste background."

These explanations from the group indicate that they know the caste backgrounds of each other within the congregation.

Arun shared another cause of division within the congregation. Like Pastor Gajjala, he observed that, "While the upper caste people maintain their status, the lower caste people compete among themselves." He continued by explaining that the government had put all lower castes or Dalits in the same categories as *Scheduled Castes* and *Scheduled Tribes*. He said that even though the Government put all Dalit groups at one level, they surprisingly still compete with each other within that same level. They do not compare themselves with the upper castes. Instead, they compare themselves within the scheduled castes and, very strangely, some call themselves higher than others. Pratibha and Shweta pointed out that the present younger generation does not know these caste issues. Students only study these issues in schools.

Question Three: What are the causes of divisions within your local congregation?

I realized that the group members were firm in saying that there were no caste issues in their congregation. Then I asked them to share about the causes of divisions within their congregation. Deepika replied that if there are any conflicts in their church, they are caused by different thinking. She asserted that those different ways of thinking are good for growth. She believes that everything happens according to the will of God. I asked her if fights or conflicts are good, to which she replied that conflicts are not good. Still, the differences of opinion is good, as people have different assumptions.

Arun agreed with Deepika, saying that it is common to have differences of opinion in families, churches and communities. He shared that from his childhood he had observed that the main reason for the conflicts within the congregation was a desire to control church activities. According to him the elderly think that they know everything and that everything has to happen according to their will. They want to hold on to authority in the church. He said that, when things do not happen according to their will, they create misunderstandings which result in conflicts. Like Pastor Gajjala, Arun mentioned that when people think of themselves as higher, and that they can do things better than others, they take control of everything. On the other hand, others get frustrated with the given status quo and start to think differently. They go to any level to get into church leadership. They think of different ways to enter into the church leadership, even if it means that they have to insult or fight with others. They do the same with the pastors also.

Hemant agreed with Arun and shared his observation that a desire to hold a leadership position in the church is one of the major causes of conflicts. Like Pastor Gajjala, Hemant observed that, depending on their political intentions, some members

create their own groups. He further mentioned another cause for conflict saying, “The main reason for the differences of opinion or arguments is when people do not accept that they are wrong.”

Hemant also said that ego causes more conflicts in the congregation. When the responsibilities of some church board leaders were taken away due to their failure, their ego was hurt. In response, they started groupism and spread rumors about others. They even found ways to fight against the local pastor. They forgot their spirituality and got into conflicts. He said, “And I have observed that the conflicts in different churches happen mainly between the low class people and those who are affluent. This is mainly because of different thinking and leadership positions.”

According to Shweta, the root cause of conflicts is selfishness, seeking vain popularity and leadership positions in the community. She continued to stress that there are no caste discussions in their congregation. While agreeing with Shweta, Arun also mentioned that there are no caste conflicts discussed openly. However, like Pastor Gajjala, he stated, “During marriage proposals, caste discussions come up. People prefer alliances from the same castes. But it is not discussed in the congregation. We cannot say that all follow casteism. But some definitely follow caste mentality.” Expressing her disagreement with Arun, Shweta said, “No, in our church we do not discuss caste issues. I have never heard about caste problems in my church in my entire life.” Agreeing with Shweta, Hemant said, “I agree with her. I have not seen this in our church. Because when people come together, they meet with love and appreciation towards each other. Their conversations are based on life issues. But I have never heard a caste-related word in this church.” Sumit also agreed with Shweta and Hemant that caste distinctions do not exist in

their local congregation.

Deepika had a mixed opinion. She said that, in their church, caste conflicts do not exist. However, like Pastor Gajjala, she said that sometimes caste issues can be felt during marriage proposals. Shweta and Arun mentioned that the caste issues were seen in the previous generations. Arun described that his grandparents influenced his parents and they shared it with him and his siblings. He said that his generation never discussed caste issues at home. Hemant mentioned that since nobody in the church asks about the caste background of others, the younger generation did not experience it in the church. Again, Arun mentioned that caste issues are not discussed openly. Caste mentality is demonstrated only with the desire of the same caste for marriage alliances. Like Pastor Gajjala, he said that more than the caste issues, it is the groupism for leadership positions that causes divisions in the congregation.

Question Four: What are the solutions for the factors causing divisions in your local congregation?

After discussing the causes of divisions within a congregation, it was necessary to ask them what steps they can and should take to solve the problem of divisions. Alka believes that the caste mentality is so strong that people could not overcome it. Arun expressed that there is no other remedy for the problems of conflict other than prayer. He expressed that prayer is required among the believers for repentance and for unity. He further said, “If the pastor initiates *dialogue* with each person or those groups separately, not in front of the congregation, it will be easy to bring reconciliation among the two groups. It is important to know the feelings of people and help them overcome those issues. But our main focus is on prayer for all this.” He believes that the prayer approach

can always get a positive response from people who have conflicts. Unlike Pastor Gajjala's views, Arun said that the church board members are working on using the prayer approach and hopes that through prayer everything would be possible. He believes that groupism does not necessarily mean people are against each other. He said that dialogue is the best strategy to bring reconciliation among the believers.

Like Pastor Gajjala, Hemant believes that education is the only remedy for divisions within the congregation. He said, "If you don't have a good education, you won't get a better job." He elaborated that without better educational qualifications, believers have to depend on the government reservation quota. To qualify for government scholarship job reservations, people have to produce their caste certificates. He pointed out that to receive benefits from the government, many believers change their documents to show that they belong to the Dalit caste.

Hemant further said that this process has renewed the caste mentality among the believers. So, he suggested that better educational qualifications could help believers to not depend on the reservation quota for the Dalits. He believes that to maintain higher educational standards, believers have to work hard. Arun expressed that being people of God, Christians need to overcome the caste mentality. He said that casteism is not biblical. He observed that those who are not willing to remove the social stigma of casteism are not true Christians. He registered his children's religion and caste as Christians on their school documents. He believes that being a Christian is the highest identity, higher than any caste identity.

Like Pastor Gajjala, Shweta suggested that the focus of believers needs to be on the Word of God. She quoted from Ezekiel 2:4 and said that the people of God need to

give up their stubbornness. It is only through prayers and fellowship that conflicts can be resolved. Arun agreed with Shweta, and said that, due to stubbornness, people do not want to change their attitudes. He said that when the church leaders observe such stubborn behaviors among their members, they keep the problematic people away from participating in church discussions. According to him, keeping the problematic people away from participating in church discussions softens them. He mentioned that giving opportunities to such problematic people to speak in the church gives them more courage to behave differently and causes more problems.

Summary, Major Themes and Interpretation

In this section, the major themes that have emerged from the focus group discussions are presented. The major themes along with the sub-themes help to provide answers to the main research question: “Does the misplaced social motivation of Dalit Christians cause divisions within the local church?” As discussed in the previous chapter, the process of coding and re-coding was done through the NVIVO software. The codes aligned with the research questions. From the interview descriptions, codes and sub-codes emerged the major themes and sub-themes. In total, I have identified four major themes and fifteen sub-themes (See Table 3). The sub-themes represent the comparison and contrast from the responses received from the participants.

Table 3. Major Themes and Sub-themes Emerged from the Group Discussions

Major Themes	Similarities (Sub-themes)	Differences (Sub-themes)
Dalit Motivations for Embracing Christian Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deliverance through Prayer - Material Help - Acceptance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spiritual Hunger - Rehabilitation
Evidences of Caste Attitudes among the Christians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Same Caste Marriages - Inequality between Old and New Believers - Status-quo among the Rich the Poor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Denial of Caste Distinctions
Causes for Divisions within a Congregation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leadership Ambitions - Difference of Opinions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incompetent Leadership
Resolving Conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prayer Unites - Education / Christian Education - Dialogue brings Reconciliation 	

Dalit Motivations for Embracing Christian Faith

As observed, in the demographic information about the forty participants in the focus group discussions, only three indicated that their caste background was Kshatriya, belonging to the Hindu Caste System. Nineteen participants indicated that they were Dalits, ten said that they did not care about knowing their background, and eight did not know their original caste background. According to the Indian culture, generally caste people express pride in belonging to the caste system. In the following discussion, this observation of the background of all forty participants helps illuminate their responses to the main research question. Based on the four focus groups, the following discussion exposit the Dalit motivations for embracing Christian faith.

Deliverance through Prayer: In Indian society, due to their social status, in the past as well as in the present, Dalits have been the victims of atrocities.³¹¹ As Sameer observed, the impact of the inhumane treatment has been rooted in the minds of the Dalits. Due to the atrocities faced every day, Dalits seek peace and security in churches. They desire to be delivered from atrocities and inhumane treatment.³¹² Thumma describes the process of “instilling faith, hope and love, courage and self-confidence, positive self-image, self-respect and dignity, will-power and motivation, and equality and identity.”³¹³ Since Dalits are helpless, they hope that they will be liberated from the atrocities through prayers in the church.

Dalits also seek deliverance from sicknesses, witch-craft, and social evils. Due to poverty, they cannot afford expensive medical treatments. They therefore hope that the prayers offered in the churches will bring healing. They also hope that miracles will

³¹¹ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 63.

³¹² Lobo, “Dalit Religious Movements and Dalit Identity,” 171.

³¹³ Thumma, *Marching with the Marginalized*, 33. See also Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 70.

happen and that all their problems will be solved through prayers. As noted by Anjali and Samaresh, when Dalits see that their relatives or neighbors have been healed through prayers, they become attracted to the Christian faith. Samaresh mentioned that when the high caste and rich people could not be healed through medications, they then requested the pastor to pray for healing. Roshan observed that even after experiencing healing and miracles, many people do not convert to Christianity and neither do they come back to the church.

Material Help: Dalits live in the slums due to their poverty. They struggle to make ends meet as they depend on meagre wages. As Sameer observed, the Dalits in the slums always expect material help from Western visitors or any other organization that wants to work in the slums. Stuti mentioned that a few Dalits from the slums came for food during the Christmas celebrations. Since many Christian organizations and churches provide charity through social work, Dalits are attracted to the churches. When the poor embrace the Christian faith for material benefits, they are often accused of being rice-Christians.

Acceptance: The social status of Dalits in Indian society, says Devasahayam, is the lowest because of the menial jobs they are assigned to.³¹⁴ As the result of inhumane treatment, atrocities, and low social status, Dalits long for acceptance. When they learn about the possibility of being accepted with human dignity in the Christian faith, they embrace Christianity. This being so, it is no wonder that Gaurav, a member of the First Free Methodist church focus group, mentioned that the Christian community welcomes and embraces Dalits with love. Furthermore, Smita said that the Christian community

³¹⁴ V. Devasahayam, "Pollution, Poverty and Powerlessness," 1-3.

never distances or discriminates against Dalits. Sachin and Jyoti expressed that when prayers are offered for the Dalits in the church, the Dalits feel accepted in the Christian community. They feel encouraged to come back to church for prayers.

Spiritual Hunger: In the pluralistic Indian context, all worship places are revered by all. Hinduism being a polytheistic religion, this allows Hindus to worship all gods. And so, for a Hindu, going to church is not a problem. When Dalits go to church for prayers, it is an indication of their religiosity.³¹⁵ This does not mean that all those who go to church seek spiritual growth. The spiritual growth factor is determined only after seeing those people attend church services regularly, continuing to genuinely seek truth. Like Webster, Smita and Anjali agree that Dalits come to church for spiritual growth and for healing. Smita observed that some new Dalit believers never came back to church. She said that the faith of these new believers was based solely on the help they received during their difficult times. In recent years, anti-conversion activities and re-conversions of Dalits, especially tribal Christians, are witnessed in India. This raises a question as to their genuine spiritual hunger when they embraced Christian faith years ago.

Rehabilitation: Dalits are born in poverty. Due to social reforms, their living conditions have improved. They have access to education under the reservation or quota designated for them. However, a majority of them do not qualify for this due to their financial or educational standing, and the limitations of the reservation policy for the Schedule castes. As a result, they continue to find low-income jobs for their survival. Many of them migrate to the cities for better jobs and living condition.³¹⁶ Due to poverty or to escape hunger and religious persecution, mass migrations of Dalits take place

³¹⁵ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 63; Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 60-61, 63.

³¹⁶ George, "Dalit Christians in India," 21.

towards cities.³¹⁷ Similar instances happen when Dalits embrace the Christian faith to escape poverty, social stigma, non-identity, and unemployment. The general understanding of Dalits is that, if they embrace Christian faith, they will be provided with jobs, material help, a better life, education, and western connections. When this does not become a reality, they become frustrated and backslide.

Sachin shared about his interactions with several Dalits while sharing the gospel with them. The Dalits expressed their disappointment with the Christian community, stating that those who had embraced the Christian faith were not rehabilitated in the Christian community. To quote, “Those people from our background who accepted Christianity are somehow managing there. Our problem now is that we are not able to be rehabilitated in to your people. Your people do not accept us. At that given point in time, it was their responsibility to do something for us. Now, if we try to do something or accept your religion, then it creates the question of our origin and people hesitate to give their daughters or sons in marriage.” This is one of the demotivating factors for Dalits not embracing the Christian faith.

Social Conflicts within the Congregations

Denial of Caste Distinctions: It was important to ask all participants to share their observations and experiences about social conflicts in their congregations. Generally, people do not want to expose their social conflict problems. Instead, they present a positive picture about their congregations. They deny the existence of conflicts within their congregation. K. Wilson calls the denial of existence of caste distinctions among Dalit Christians as hypocrisy. He calls it a white lie based on the sub-casteism practiced

³¹⁷ Menampampil, “Learning to Live in a Pluralistic Society,” 353.

in their daily lives.³¹⁸ Eventually, these groups shared how caste mentality is demonstrated in several occasions in their congregations.

The participants from all four churches do not agree with Wilson. They denied the existence of caste distinctions within their congregations. However, as Samaresh acknowledged, while living in the secular community, church members are influenced by the caste mentality. In addition to their affiliation to their old caste, the outside influence makes the Dalit Christians compete among themselves.³¹⁹ The same is followed by those who consider themselves higher than the other Dalit groups. So, caste distinctions remain among most of the Dalit Christians. For example, along with other participants from the Second Free Methodist Church, Pratibha and Anil denied existence of the caste conflicts within their congregation. Yet, both expressed that they were proud of their caste and that they could not forget their caste background.

Similarly, participants from both the Nazarene churches denied the existence of caste distinctions within their congregations. However, Bipin, Girish and Kalpana acknowledged that in their congregation, even though caste issues are not discussed openly, caste mentality exists in the minds and behaviors of church members. Due to this caste mentality, Dalits compete among themselves. This has been the major problem in Christian communities in India.³²⁰ This suggests that the caste mentality remains even after embracing the Christian faith. It also reflects the reality that the Dalits have restrictions for mixed marriages.³²¹ Casteism within the Christian community is

³¹⁸ K. Wilson, "Towards A Humane Culture," in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, ed. Arvind P. Nirmal (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1990), 163.

³¹⁹ Jeremiah, "Dalit Christians in India," 265.

³²⁰ Prabhakar, "The Search for a Dalit Theology," 43; Jeremiah, "Dalit Christians in India," 260.

³²¹ Chaudhary, "Sub-Classification of Dalits."

“inhuman, unchristian and un-ecclesial.”³²² Conversions without spiritual transformation result in social inequality, the absence of an “inclusivistic social change.”³²³

Same-Caste Marriages: It was important to ask all participants to share their observations and experiences about social conflicts in their congregations. Generally, people do not want to expose their problems. Instead, they present a positive picture about their congregations. Unlike their pastors, participants from all four churches denied caste conflicts within their congregation. However, participants Hemant, Arun, and Shweta admitted that when it came to seeking marriage alliances, same-caste marriages were preferred. Arun supported same-caste marriages, reasoning that same-caste marriages help avoid problems after marriages. The logic was that when problems arise, these problems can be better sorted out if they arise among people belonging to the same caste. As stated earlier, the influence of caste distinction remains so strong that even without discussing it openly, people follow it.³²⁴

Inequality between Old and New Believers: In their interviews, all four pastors expressed the phenomenon of inequality between the old and new believers within their congregations. Old believers keep a distance from the new believers. This eventually results in divisions.³²⁵ New believers struggle to adjust in the new community which they thought was a welcoming community. As stated earlier, D’Souza points out that the inequality is an injustice to disadvantaged groups.³²⁶

³²² Thumma, *Marching with the Marginalized*, 26.

³²³ Thumma, *Marching with the Marginalized*, 27-28.

³²⁴ Chaudhary, “Sub-Classification of Dalits.”

³²⁵ Jemal and Bussey, “Transformative Action,” 38.

³²⁶ D’Souza, *Dalit Freedom Now and Forever*, 63.

When old believers show superiority over the new believers, they show this because they think and feel that their roots are deeper in the Christian faith. This creates an unhealthy ego within them. Arun and Deepika observed that the old believers always wanted to control the church activities in their congregation. The new believers are not given an equal opportunity to participate in church activities. Thus, the divide widens between the old and the new believers, who happen to be mostly from the Dalit castes, and new believers experience an inequality and discrimination within the congregation.³²⁷ Aradhana and Stuti mentioned that in their congregation, new believers are neglected by the old church members. The new believers feel isolated and discouraged. The new believers stop coming back to church.

Status-quo among the Rich and the Poor: The economic disparity between the rich and poor is obvious when rich people exhibit their superiority over the poor. Smita said that there was a problem of division and discrimination between the rich and the poor among the church members in their congregation. The same phenomenon is echoed between the high caste and the low caste people. As participants Anjali, Pratibha and Sameer asserted, the rich and high caste people do not entertain Christians because they feel they do not need any help from others. They maintain their high status. The same attitude is seen among the rich and those who consider themselves better than others in the Christian community.³²⁸ They feel self-sufficient. This is reflected in their treatment of the Dalits and poor church members.³²⁹ They do not want to lower their status by mingling with the Dalits or the poor.

³²⁷ Jemal and Bussey, "Transformative Action," 41.

³²⁸ Walter Fernandes, "The Emerging Dalit Identity: An Introduction," in *The Emerging Dalit Identity: The Re-assertion of the Subalterns* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1996), 1.

³²⁹ Chatterji, "Why Dalit Theology?," 27-28.

Causes for Divisions within the Congregation

This section discusses the central phenomena discussed in this research. The discussion reveals that different factors cause divisions within a community. These include:

Leadership Ambitions: Leadership ambitions of certain church members cause divisions within the congregations. Stuti expressed that the church board elections involve dirty politics in their congregation. Pastor Ubale, Samaresh, Smita, Sandesh, and Gaurav expressed that church politics have created misunderstandings. Gaurav said, “So, church politics is the main cause of division or misunderstanding in our church.” Pastor Gajjala, Hemant, and Arun mentioned that misconceptions about self, of being higher than the others, make people ambitious for leadership positions in the church. They want to control church activities and to show their superiority over others. As Shweta observed, “Selfishness, vain popularity and leadership position in the community” make people create divisions among the believers.

Incompetent Leadership: Incompetent pastoral leadership keeps the congregation divided. Anupama observed, “Sometimes, pastors themselves play a role in church politics.” Echoing this, Gaurav said that sometimes the local church pastors create divisions during the church elections. The hierarchical structures in the congregations, similar to the caste system, involve the misuse of leadership authority, which results in divisions.³³⁰

Gaurav pointed out that sometimes pastors are sandwiched between the higher leaders and the congregation. This makes it difficult for them to please both the parties.

³³⁰ Jeremiah, “Dalit Christians in India,” 262-263.

He mentioned that the higher church leaders use the local pastor to achieve their agendas. And, because the pastor wants to continue to minister in the local congregations, he succumbs to the pressure from the higher leaders. Sometimes the administrative structures or involvement cause pastors to neglect their spiritual ministry to the church members. This creates unhappiness against the pastor and results in negative church politics.

According to Samaresh, caste conflicts result in the splitting of the local church. Gaurav observed that proper leadership keeps the congregation united. The denominational discipline-guides, such as the *Manual* in the Church of the Nazarene and the *Book of Discipline* in the Free Methodist Church help maintain unity at every level of membership and leadership. But, when there are manipulations of rules by the leaders, division take place within local congregations as well as at the higher levels. In such situations, as Anupama expressed, pastors need to be impartial and play a positive role.

Differences of Opinion: Most participants expressed that difference of opinion is one of the main causes of divisions among the believers. It gives rise to groupism and, groupism divides church members. Both Gaurav and Satish acknowledged that difference of opinion has resulted in division. On the other hand, Samaresh said regarding his church, “There is difference of opinion but no division in our church.” Different personalities and beliefs or different thinking do not necessarily mean that there are conflicts, unless they result in dividing the community. Deepika expressed her view that different ways of thinking are good for the growth in families, churches or communities.

Like Pastor Gajjala, Hemant observed, “The main reason for the difference of opinion or arguments is when people do not accept that they are wrong.” Unhealthy egos

make them think that they are always right. As Stuti observed, some people think too highly of themselves. When they think they are better than others, their attitude towards others changes. Satish said that it was not caste conflicts but differences of opinion that cause divisions in the church. Ravish claimed that although there was groupism in the church, there were no opposition groups in their church. Difference of opinion need not affect the interpersonal relationships.

Resolving Conflicts

Prayer Unites: Prayer is the key for seeking God's intervention in the troubled times. It gives us confidence and relief from anxieties. Through prayer, God's will is sought to deal with the situation in times of conflicts. Without prayer, conflicts multiply, as people might not know how or what course of action they need to take to resolve their issues. As mentioned earlier, Pastor Lal shared that when people hear others praying for them, they forget all the misunderstandings and conflicts. Their perspectives change. Arun stated that there is no remedy for the problems of conflicts other than prayer. He believes that the prayer approach can always lead to a positive response from people who are in conflict. Like Pastor Gajjala, Shweta also believes that it is only through prayer and fellowship that conflicts can be resolved.

Through prayer, miracles are experienced. When Dalits witness healing and miracles taking place among their relatives through the prayers of the church, they are attracted to the church during every difficult situation. Pranav rightly expressed the opinion that strong faith and prayers enable people to correct each other in the congregation.

Education/Christian Education: Conflicts arise due to difference of opinion, misunderstanding, ego, personal ambitions, and ignorance and resolving conflicts is a big task. Conflicts divide communities. Going to the root causes enables people to resolve conflicts.³³¹ Through education, most of the conflicts can be solved. Raj Kumar notes, “Phule considered that the main instrument for awareness and anti-caste consciousness among the people of the lower caste was education.”³³²

In agreement with this idea, Pastor Gajjala and Hemant stated that education was the only remedy for divisions within the congregation. Hemant rightly observed that without proper education, getting employment is not possible. Education gives one the confidence that he or she needs to face problems and to find solutions. Freire calls this conscientization. For him “conscientization is the deepening of the attitude of awareness, characteristic of all emergence.”³³³ Due to competition, Dalits find it difficult to secure government scholarships based on the limited quota assigned for Dalits.

Dalit converts change their official documents to identify their original caste as Dalit in order to receive benefits from the Indian government. This process reinforces the caste mentality among Dalit converts. Not only the secular academic, but also Christian educational services can provide a foundation for building virtues and right perspectives in people.³³⁴ Christian education instils right morals in a person’s life. The Jesuits started schools with the aim “to improve living and learning for the greater glory of God and the common good of all.”³³⁵

³³¹ L. Stanislaus, *The Liberative Mission of the Church Among Dalit Christians* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 340.

³³² Kumar, *Dalit Personal Narratives*, 137.

³³³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary Edition, 109.

³³⁴ T. Raju, “Religion and Human Dignity Inter-Faith Pastoral Praxis against Discrimination,” 9.

³³⁵ Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, 74.

Education is the foundation for the right living of the Christian life. It transforms the perspectives and behaviors of people. Thus, it is important for the church to provide Christian education to new believers as well as to old members. This will change their attitudes and behaviors toward each other. As Stuti and Vandana expressed, there is a need to develop a spirit of encouraging of one another, both by the pastors and among the believers. The ministry of encouragement is missing among the believers.

Dialogue brings Reconciliation: Dialogue is the key solution to resolve conflicts. When such issues are discussed, points of agreements can defuse the tensions and bring about solutions to the problems.³³⁶ However, initiating dialogue is crucial. It requires a mediator to facilitate it. Dialogue should not escalate the conflicts, but reach toward amicable solutions.³³⁷ The mediator needs to be mature enough to guide both the parties towards a mutually accepted solution.³³⁸ Both parties need to look within themselves so that they can genuinely enter into a dialogue to find solutions to the issues at conflict.³³⁹ Arun, as a participant, voiced his view that a pastor's initiative in bringing two persons or groups to dialogue can bring reconciliation. When each group understands the other group's feelings, it creates an atmosphere for reconciliation.

Dialogue among family members is very important, as they can understand each other and solve issues among themselves. This will help them to understand others and find solutions when conflicts arise. To avoid conflicts and misunderstandings, as Aradhana observed, and to enter into a dialogue, church members need to visit each

³³⁶ Rachael D. Goodman and Cirecie A. West-Olatunji, "Applying Critical Consciousness: Culturally Competent Disaster Response Outcomes," *Journal of Counseling and Development* 87 (Fall 2009): 458, ACADEMIA. Accessed August 15, 2021.

³³⁷ Lazar, "Religion and Human Dignity Inter-Faith Pastoral Praxis against Discrimination," 10.

³³⁸ Prabhakar, "The Search for a Dalit Theology," 48.

³³⁹ Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 166.

other, understand each other, encourage one another, and pray for one another's needs. This brings healing and reconciliation among the believers.

Conclusion

The above discussions reveal that the four pastors and their forty church members agree on most of the topics. However, their responses differed on a few issues. The motivations of Dalits for embracing Christian faith include: acceptance, healing, social identity, miracles, education, and deliverance through prayer, material help, spiritual hunger, and rehabilitation. The evidences of caste or social conflicts were discussed by pastors and their church members. The common evidences discussed were lack of education, low income for pastors, conflicts within a caste, same-caste marriages, and inequality between old and new believers, maintaining the status quo among rich and poor, and denial of caste distinctions.

The causes for divisions shared by pastors and their church members included the caste system, inequality, discrimination, leadership ambitions, false claims of no caste within the church, corruption, lack of spirituality, differences of opinion, and incompetent leadership. Strategies to resolve conflicts as suggested by pastors and their church members included equal opportunities, education/Christian education, prayer groups, mixed marriages, and dialogue.

This phase II leads now to phase III in which pastors were brought together with their respective church members. They went through the list of the issues faced by their congregations and together worked on strategies to resolve those issues.

Phase III: Workshops, Combined Discussions, and Common Forums

In Phase I and Phase II, four pastors and forty church members from two holiness denominations participated in the “Reflection” component suggested by Freire’s “Critical Consciousness” model. Phase III is about the “Action” component, suggested by Freire. During Phase I and Phase II, pastors and church members separately reflected on the issues of divisions within their congregations. They identified several aspects that caused divisions within their local congregations.

In Phase III, pastors and their respective church members were expected to attend a workshop and participate in combined group discussions. During the combined group discussions, they were asked to reflect on the issues causing division within their congregations. After the reflections, they were encouraged to plan strategies to solve those problems. They were also encouraged to plan at least one action project to reflect that they all were united and that unitedly they wanted to solve the problem of division within their congregations.

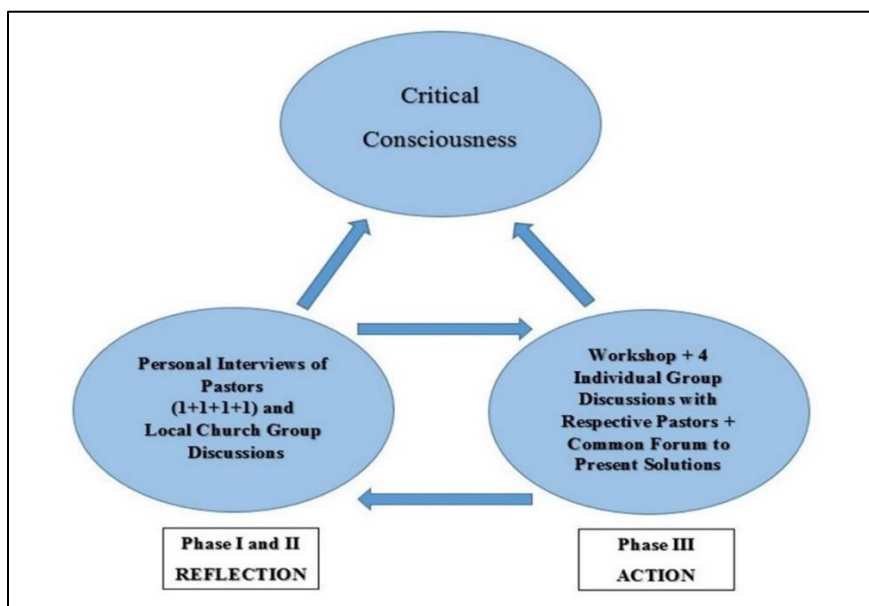


Figure 7. Conceptual Framework Copy

Individual interviews of the four pastors and the focus group discussions with the forty church members from the two holiness denominations facilitated the component of reflection on the issues faced within their congregations. All four pastors and the selected ten church members from each of their congregations enthusiastically participated in every meeting.

In Phase I, responses from each pastor were compared and contrasted with those of the other three pastors. The major themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data were analyzed in the summary section. Similarly, in Phase II, responses from the research participants within the groups were compared and contrasted. Responses were also compared and contrasted with the responses of their respective pastors. In the summary, the emerging major themes and sub-themes are analyzed.

In Phase III, I had planned a combined workshop to bring together all four pastors and all forty research participants from their congregations who had participated in the focus group discussions. Due to covid travel restrictions and the long travel distance between a couple of churches, I had to conduct two separate workshops in two different locations that were manageable for the research participants' travel.

Thus, twenty research participants from two Nazarene churches along with their pastors were invited to participate in the workshop on the "Characteristics of a Biblical Community." Similarly, twenty research participants from two Free Methodist churches were invited to participate in another workshop on the same.

Both the denominational groups were asked to choose a convenient venue for them to use for the workshop. I encouraged them to choose a venue which had some significance in terms of a long-lasting memory. Both the Nazarene groups chose a venue

that was known for the spiritual camp meetings where revival occurred during the Nazarene missionary period from the 1930s to 1980s. Most of the research participants from the Nazarene groups had memories of the revival meetings and spiritual conventions in that place. For them, going to this place was a pilgrimage. I too was excited about it, as I also had many spiritual memories of attending revival meetings and spiritual conventions in the same place.

The Free Methodist churches chose to meet in a central location which has a very special significance for every Indian citizen. It is called “Gandhi Sevagram Ashram.” People from all over the world visit this ashram and stay in the accommodations provided there. This is the place where Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi lived for several years, and he led the freedom march from there. Pastors and members from both the Free Methodist churches were excited to visit the ashram and participate in the workshop. For many of them, this was their first visit to the Gandhi Ashram. I was as excited as they, since I could take advantage of this visit to learn more about Mahatma Gandhi and his contribution, not only to India’s independence from British rule, but also for his emphasis on non-violence and peace.

Keeping the focus of the workshops topic on the Characteristics of Biblical Community, I planned both workshops with different approaches. During both the workshops in two different places, research participants discussed within their church group, along with their pastors, important aspects that they wanted to see happen in their congregations. After their presentations, I proposed three practical activities for them to consider as a demonstration of transformation among themselves. The proposed participatory activities included: 1) Role-play, 2) A social project in the community as a

team, and 3) A Symbolic Action (e.g., foot-washing or the sacrament of the Lord's Supper). All groups agreed on a foot-washing activity. I proposed that the foot-washing activity be organized after a month. The intention of suggesting a delay was to see the research participants immerse themselves into the foot-washing activity with conviction. It was not to be an activity just to fulfil the requirements of workshop. Thus, the Phase III workshop was divided into two activities: Action-A – Combined Forums and Action-B – Foot-washing Ceremonies.

Workshops and Common Forums

Workshop on the Biblical Community for the Two Nazarene Churches

The purpose of the workshop was to bring the Nazarene pastors and their twenty church members together to encourage them in reflection and action on the issues faced by their congregations. A devotional message was brought by a pastor friend. He is an ordained minister from the Church of the Nazarene. He is also a former District Superintended and a former national leader for the Jesus Film project. He is a very prominent preacher and a Bible teacher in the Church of the Nazarene in India. He is also a good musician. He grew up in Vidarbha and his father served in the Church of the Nazarene for many years. Both the Nazarene groups know him and respect him as a church leader. He spoke on the topic "God's People" from Exodus 25:8-9, Matthew 22, and John 13:34-35.

The devotional message reminded the participants that believers are the chosen people of God and that they need to reflect unity to fulfil God's agenda for peace. After the devotional message, I started the workshop by reiterating the devotional message on "Church as the People of God." All twenty-two research participants were reminded of

the issues faced by their congregations as shared by them during the interviews and focus group discussions. A cut-out of a church building symbolizing a congregation was prepared before the workshop. The church building cut-out was cut into small pieces with serial numbers on the back. Those small pieces were distributed to all the research participants. They were asked to write any one particular characteristic that would make the church a biblical community of God's people.

Once everyone was ready, the research participants were called according to the serial numbers on the chits. Participants were asked to post them on the wall to make a complete picture of a church building symbolizing a local congregation. They were asked to read out the characteristics they had written on the papers before posting them on the wall. All research participants enthusiastically participated in the activity. After all papers were posted, they could see a complete picture of a church building.



Figure 8. Building a Biblical Community

A Common Forum for the Two Nazarene Churches

This activity prepared them for the next activity of planning action projects within their individual groups with their respective pastors. Both the groups were dispersed with chart papers, to reiterate their solutions to the problems faced in their congregations and to propose possible action projects they could carry out in the near future. After discussions among themselves, both the groups were called together for a common session to share their resolutions for building a biblical community within their congregations. Representatives from both groups presented their suggestions written on the chart papers. The following chart shows strategies suggested by both the Nazarene groups to address and solve the problems faced by their local congregations.

Table 5. Common Suggestions for Building Biblical Community

First Church of the Nazarene	Second Church of the Nazarene
Christian Education: - Focus on Bible study, Sunday school, women's fellowship, men's fellowship and youth fellowship – guided by church elders. - Avoid false teaching	Christian Education: - Making Christian education available to all church members - Positive response to the Word of God.
Prayer: Decisions to be taken prayerfully	Prayer: Decisions to be taken prayerfully
Members: - Cooperation by all members in every church activity. - Pride, ego and boasting to be avoided - Casteism to be avoided while seeking marriage alliances.	Members: - Cooperation in every church activity. - Church is a family—cordial relationships with each other. - Wholehearted surrender to the will of God. - Wholehearted love for each other. - Grow together by the power of the Holy Spirit. - Supporting the ministry of evangelism by participation and finances. - Caste distinctions to be avoided in all activities in the community. - Emphasis on unity. - Emphasis on forgiveness.
Church Board: - To demonstrate spirituality - Knowledge of the Word of God - loving and caring	
Church Leaders: - House visitation - Concern for each church member - Acknowledging the missionaries and church leaders who have sacrificially served in the church	
Church Discipline: - Need to focus on the Nazarene Manual for smooth church activities.	Church Discipline: - Board resolutions need to be communicated to church members. - Need to follow disciplines of the church in regard to financially supporting the church ministries.

Property Issues: - Leaders and church members need to protect church properties without any selfish motive.	Property Issues: - Church properties to be protected and not use for personal benefits.
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For the individual action project by each group along with their respective pastors, I had given three options as mentioned earlier: 1) Role-play, 2) A social project in the community as a team, and 3) A symbolic action (e.g., foot-washing or the sacrament of the Lord's Supper). Both groups agreed on the foot-washing activity. As mentioned earlier, they were encouraged to organize the foot-washing activity after a month so that they will be prepared spiritually to participate in the solemn activity of foot-washing. A report on the foot-washing activity is presented in section B – "Action Projects."

Workshop on the Biblical Community for the Two Free Methodist Churches

As stated earlier, the Free Methodist churches chose to meet in a venue which has a very special significance in the history for Indian nation. It is called "Gandhi Sevagram Ashram." People from all over the world visit this ashram and stay in the accommodations provided there. This is the place where Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi lived for several years and led the "freedom march." Pastors and members from both the Free Methodist churches were excited to visit the ashram and participate in the workshop. This visit to Gandhi Ashram reminded us all about Gandhi's contributions to the independence of India, as well as his teachings on non-violence, peace, and the equality of human beings.

As also stated earlier, the purpose of the workshop was to bring together both pastors and their twenty church members in a common workshop to encourage them in

reflection and action on the issues faced by their congregations. Participants were asked to introduce themselves to the others. A devotional message was brought by a pastor friend. He is an ordained minister in the Church of the Nazarene. He has been pastoring a Nazarene church in Sevagram city for twenty-five years. He is a former District Superintendent in the Church of the Nazarene. He is known as a good preacher and a Bible teacher in Vidarbha. He is well connected with all Christian denominations in Vidarbha. Since he resides in the same town where the Gandhi Ashram is located, he was the best guide to take the group through the Gandhi Ashram.

He spoke on the topic ““United Prayer can Transform Our Situations” from Acts 12. He emphasized that prayer keeps the congregation united as the members intercede for each other out of their love and concern. He also emphasized that genuine prayers make all things possible. If there are no prayers, then disunity, hatred, and enmity grow among the believers. He mentioned that unity among the believers brings transformation in the community. It is only prayer that can unite people as they seek God’s intervention in their difficult situations. He observed that unity requires sacrifice and humility. He frequently referred to Mahatma Gandhi’s thoughts on prayer. The devotional inspired the participants to be united in prayer so that united they could face challenges and also solve internal conflicts.

After the devotional message, I started the workshop by reiterating the devotional message on “United Prayer can Transform Our Situations.” Both groups were reminded of the issues faced by their congregations, as shared by them during the interviews and focus group discussions.

Due to the setting of this workshop, the workshop was different from the one held for the two Nazarene churches. Everything surrounding the participants had significance because of the memories of Mahatma Gandhi. Trees, artifacts, roads, boards, huts, and displays of Gandhi's personal items created a learning atmosphere. I took the participants on a tour of the campus and visited "*Bapu Kuti*" (Gandhi's hut), his office, and prayer room, which had a Bible along with other religious books.

I asked the participants to take note of the boards and displays on which philosophical thoughts of Gandhi were written. While moving around, participants were asked to discuss with each other the ethical principles they could read on different boards and artifacts. I informed the participants that, after the tour, during the common forum, they were expected to list solutions for the issues faced by their congregations. They were asked to reflect on Gandhi's principles observed during the tour and integrate them in the plan of action to be implemented in the near future.

During the ashram tour, as shown below, a few boards and artifacts conveyed a significant message of Mahatma Gandhi that aligned with the biblical principles of unity and harmony as characteristics of a peaceful community.



Figure 9. Mahatma Gandhi's Thoughts on Prayer and Ethics

Each article shown in the picture has a significant history and meaning in the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi. The sculpture of the three monkeys conveys the principle “See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.” The Spinning Wheel (*Chakra*) conveys a unifying call-to-action. One board reads, “Prayer without words is acceptable; however, the heart of a man must be in the prayer. Prayer without the presence of heart is useless.” The second board reads, “I do not accept any religious doctrines which are against ethics and not appealing to the mind. The bond between true religion and true ethics is unbreakable.”

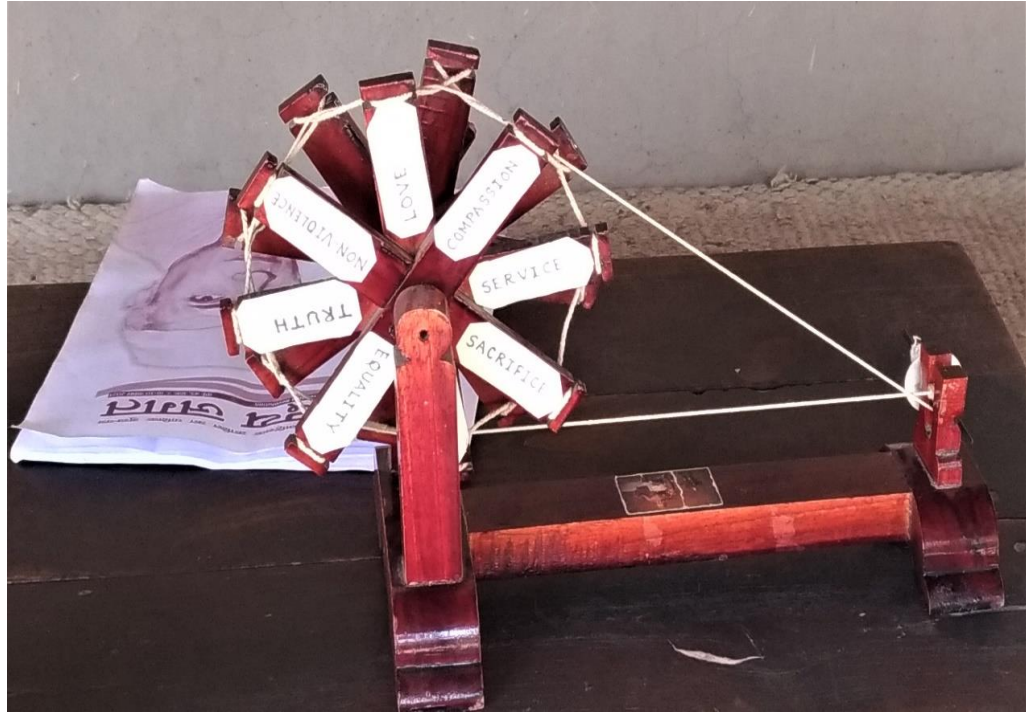


Figure 10. The Spinning Wheel (Chakra) of Mahatma Gandhi

The Spinning Wheel (*Chakra*) conveyed a message of unifying call-to-action. Mahatma Gandhi appealed to people to be self-sufficient and free from dependency. He used the spinning wheel to weave clothes. On each spoke of the spinning wheel, Gandhi wrote ethical principles to inspire people to create a peaceful community. The ethical principles found on the spokes are Love, Compassion, Service, Sacrifice, Chastity, Equality, Truth, and Non-Violence.



Figure 11. Gandhi Ashram Observances

The ashram rules list a few more ethical principles: Truth, Non-Violence, Chastity, Non-Possession, Non-Stealing, Bread-Labour, Control of The Palate, Fearlessness, Equality of Religions, the Law of Neighborhood, and Removal of Untouchability. Mahatma Gandhi was against the untouchability faced by the Dalits in India.

A Common Forum for the Two Free Methodist Churches

After the tour, all participants were gathered together for a recap on the ethical principles of Mahatma Gandhi which they were influenced with during the tour. The tour had an impact on the participants as they were reminded of Gandhi's teaching on prayer and non-violence. Following the recap, both groups were dispersed with chart papers to prepare a list of suggestions to resolve issues faced within their local congregations. Once both groups were ready, they were called back for the common forum, to present their

solutions for the issues faced within their local congregations. Representatives from both groups presented their suggestions written on the chart papers. The following chart shows strategies suggested by the two Free Methodist groups to address and solve the problems faced by their local congregations.

Table 6. Suggestions for Building Biblical Community

First Free Methodist Church	Second Free Methodist Church
- Christian Education: No false teaching	- Education or Christian Education: Education is the key for success
- Resolving conflicts amicably	- Prayer helps resolve conflicts
- Church Discipline: Book of Discipline	- Church Discipline: Book of Discipline
- Dialogue	- Dialogue helps resolve conflicts
- Equalizing opinions	- Seeking opinions of spiritual people
- Giving opportunities to others	- Giving opportunities to spiritual people
	- Listening / Respecting others' opinions
- Integrity	- Stand for truth
- Accepting one another in the image of God	- Reconciliation
- Equality	- No discrimination based on financial status
- Encouraging	- Giving people time to improve
	- Support good activities
- Teamwork	- Work together with one mind
- Understanding one another	- Know the feeling of people
- Cooperation	- Cooperate with good people
- Genuine spirituality / no hypocrisy	- Promote a disciplined life
- Developing friendly relationships	- Fellowship with each other
- Teaching biblical foundations	- Preaching according to the needs of church members
- Giving preaching opportunities to the lay leaders	- Training lay leadership (1 Tim. 3:1-7)
- Impartiality by pastors	- Promoting unity
	- No caste distinctions while seeking marriage alliances
	- Humility
	- Hospitality
	- Transparency
- Helping the needy	
- Proper pastoral leadership training	

- Pastor to focus on pulpit ministry and not on administrative issues	
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Summary

In Phase III, two separate workshops were held for the two holiness groups in Vidarbha. In separate groups, each pastor and his ten church members were asked to reflect upon the issues faced within their congregation. They were asked to participate in an action project to solve the issues faced by their congregations. Each group presented a list of solutions to make their congregation a peaceful community.

Each group planned an action project of foot-washing within their group. This was not included in the initial plan for this research. It emerged from the common forums. After a month, each group participated in the foot-washing activity. Reflections of each participant were recorded. The entire process of reflection-action-reflection followed the Freirean model of critical consciousness. The foot-washing activity demonstrated changed perspectives of the research participants. Examples of a few of those reflections are presented in Appendix K.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to inquire into the possibility of the misplaced social motivation of Dalit Christians within select holiness groups in the Vidarbha region of India. The central research question for this research study was: “Does the misplaced social motivation of Dalit Christians cause division within the local church?” The guiding sub-questions were: a) What are the social motivations of Dalits for embracing the Christian faith? b) What are the evidences of caste distinctions, if any, within the local congregations? c) What are the causes of divisions within the local congregations? d) What could be the solutions for the factors causing divisions in the local congregations? Based on the above questions, the following objectives for this research study were developed:

1. To find out from select pastors and their select church members whether social motivations of Dalits Christians caused division within the Christian community in the select holiness groups in the Vidarbha region of India
2. To find out from select pastors and their select church members whether conflicts that existed within their congregations are related to social castes.
3. To find out from select pastors and their select church members what has caused social conflicts within their congregations.

4. To find out from select pastors and their select church members, what strategies they thought could help resolve social conflicts within their local congregations.

To delve into the phenomenon of division within the selected holiness groups in Vidarbha, several literature sources were consulted. In the literature review, aspects related to the phenomenon of division within Christian communities were discussed. Based on those discussions, the research design for this study was planned.

This research was conducted among research participants from two holiness groups in the Vidarbha region: 1) two pastors from each of the two holiness groups in the Vidarbha region, and 2) ten church members from each of the four congregations represented by the pastors. The two holiness groups in the Vidarbha region were identified as: 1) The Church of the Nazarene and 2) The Free Methodist Church.

For this research study, Paulo Freire's critical consciousness concept was adopted. It consists of both reflection and action components. It is a continuous process, a chain of reflection-action. Based on this model, the research was designed into three phases. In Phase I, four pastors were interviewed individually. In Phase II, forty church members from the four congregations represented by the four pastors participated. In Phase III, two separate workshops were held for the two denominational groups. Workshops included combined discussions and common forums. In the following sections, conclusions are presented, followed by recommendations for resolving conflicts.

Conclusions

In this research, Paulo Freire's "Critical Consciousness" theory was applied to investigate and address division within the Christian community of two holiness groups in the Vidarbha regions of India. Since it was a participatory action research, all

participants were asked to reflect on the situation within their local congregations. After they reflected on the problems faced within their local congregations, they were brought together in combined forums to plan strategies for their congregations to resolve the issues by themselves. They were asked to plan an action project they could do to begin the process of resolving social conflicts within their congregations. From the four major themes discussed throughout the research, this research study draws the following conclusions:

First, it is concluded that most of the Dalit Christians embrace the Christian faith out of social motivations and not out of spiritual hunger. Although this fact may not be applicable to all, it is nevertheless evident through the research that very few Dalits have embraced Christian faith out of spiritual hunger. Most of them are seeking acceptance, social identity, healing, material help and a better future.

Secondly, it is concluded that most of the Christians deny the existence of social conflicts within their local congregations. In spite of this, there are signs that prove the existence of caste mentality among believers. This is demonstrated particularly while seeking marriage alliances within the same caste as well as among the old believers.

Thirdly, there are several causes for division within the local congregations. Believers deny social conflicts within their own congregations. Yet, when asked about other congregations, they listed out several causes. Discrimination by one group against other on the basis of caste, differences of opinion, abuse of seniority or financial status in the church membership, lack of spirituality, and incompetent leadership cause people to follow their own will.

Fourthly, social conflicts can be resolved through prayer. When people unite in prayer, they accept each other and forget and forgive the grievances. Equal opportunities give a sense of belonging to the community. Dialogue is one of the most important strategies to resolve conflicts. When people engage in dialogue, they listen and understand others. In the process, they also accept their own weaknesses. This helps both the parties to focus on the common goal.

Finally, in this research, Paulo Freire's "Critical Consciousness" strategy worked well, as it helped the research participants to experience conscientization through the reflection and action process. By using this strategy, as a researcher, I did not have to impose my perspectives on the participants. All the research participants expressed that this was their first experience participating in action projects and seeing their perspectives changed. Given the cultural context of Vidarbha, I believe that conscientization is a better strategy than any other to bring transformation in the communities.

Recommendations for Resolving Conflicts

The research data revealed that there are two kinds of conflicts in within the holiness groups in the Vidarbha region of India: 1) Issue-base conflicts: Lack of education, conflicts within a caste, difference of opinion, corruption, denial of caste system, and incompetent leadership; 2) Identity-based conflicts: Caste system, discrimination, same caste marriages, leadership ambitions, and old and new status quo. In the following sections, recommendation for resolving conflicts are presented. These recommendations are mainly for the holiness groups in the Vidarbha region; however, they could be applied to any Christian congregations within and outside Vidarbha region of India.

Prayer Unites: As the body of Christ, the Christian community looks to God for His intervention in everyday life. Prayer is the key for seeking God's will and intervention in troubled times. It is through prayer, that believers express their trust and confidence in God's sovereign power. Sincere prayer makes impossible things possible by the will of God in His time. As shared in one of the workshops, the church was earnestly praying for Peter when he was in prison. As the church was praying, God miraculously freed Peter through an angel (Acts 12). Prayer requires seeking God's will in our daily lives. It should not be offered only just for selfish motives. Prayer is acceptable by God when believers settle matters with each other (Matt. 5:23-25). Hypocritical prayers are not accepted by God (Lk 18:9-14). As noted in the workshop conducted in the Gandhi Ashram, one of the boards read Gandhi's thought on prayer, "Prayer without words is acceptable; however, the heart of a man must be in prayer. Prayer without the presence of heart is useless."

Prayer is the most important strategy for resolving conflicts. When believers unite in prayer, they need to intercede for each other. They need to express their love and concern for each other (Mark 10:43). There is a need for educating believers to pray with confidence. Believers need to be trained in developing a discipline of prayer. Churches need to mobilize a prayer movement among believers. Prayer calendars should be circulated with prayer requests from within the congregation as well from the outside community. When people hear others praying for them, their misunderstandings disappear. Prayer changes our perspectives of ourselves and others. When prayers bring healing and miracles, people trust each other and God. They depend on God's will more than their self-efforts.

Education Liberates: Education changes the perspectives of people. It liberates them from ignorance.³⁴⁰ Lack of education keeps people ignorant of the past as well as the current situation. They need to be educated about their situation and how they can overcome it. Freire calls this conscientization.³⁴¹ It heals the minds of people.³⁴² Lack of education leads people to misbehaviors and abuse in the society. The understanding level of people differs on the basis of personal maturity and the education they get exposed to.

In the Indian context, secular education is seen as a must to overcome unemployment challenges. The Indian constitution provides the right to education to every citizen.³⁴³ However, due to poverty, many Dalits cannot take advantage of the right to education. They struggle to find employment because of their low educational qualifications. Many of them cannot afford sending their children to schools, due to poverty and lack of facilities in their homes. Even Dalit Christians face social, economic, and educational discrimination in the India society.³⁴⁴ This is mainly due to their dual identity as Dalits and Dalit Christians.³⁴⁵

Education is a must for uplifting people. The early missionaries in India, particularly in Vidarbha, established schools and educational institutions. This allowed Dalit children to have access to education. Eventually, many of them excelled and are now placed in better positions. Unfortunately, in the recent times, schools and educational institutions established by missionaries, are struggling to survive due to leadership crisis and unjust politics within the Christian community. As a liberating

³⁴⁰ Stanislaus, *The Liberative Mission of the Church Among Dalit Christians*, 340.

³⁴¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary Edition, 109.

³⁴² Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 165.

³⁴³ "Constitution of India," 25-33.

³⁴⁴ Prasad, "Exclusion and Caste Based Discrimination on Dalit Christians in India," 13-17.

³⁴⁵ Iyadurai, "Religious Conversion and Dual Identity: A Phenomenological Perspective," 268.

community, the church needs to provide educational opportunities to the poor. If churches and Christian organizations cannot afford starting schools or educational institutions, they can provide guidance and help poor children get admission in the existing Christian schools. Churches can also provide information and awareness on the educational facilities that are provided by the government and other non-government organization in the nearby localities. These informations can be posted on the walls of the churches or outside the church buildings so that the needy will get the contact details of the respective schools and institutions.

Christian Education Transforms: Christian education is the foundation for building believers in faith. It changes the worldviews of people. It transforms lives.³⁴⁶ When people grow in spiritual education, they develop peaceful relationships. Conflicts arise due to the difference of opinions. Lack of Christian education creates misconceptions about the Christian life. Due to the lack of Christian education, believers do not follow the Word of God. Christian education needs to be provided for every believer in the church from his or her childhood onwards so that they can grow and mature in their faith. Many churches in the Vidarbha region do not have a Christian education curriculum for their church members. They do not have regular Sunday Schools because of the lack of trained teachers. Workshops for Christian writers should be conducted so that these writers will be encouraged to write the curriculum in the Indian context.

Christian education seminars and workshops should be conducted in every church or denomination or the Christian ministry organizations. Children's camps and youth

³⁴⁶ T. Raju, "Religion and Human Dignity Inter-Faith Pastoral Praxis against Discrimination," 9.

camps should be conducted with an intentional goal of creating hunger for spiritual growth. Follow-up meetings need to be conducted so that the children and youth do not get distracted and disillusioned later. Sunday school camps and retreats can encourage children as well as youths to be active in the Christian education programs in the churches. Churches in India should develop libraries for church members to study Christian literature. Christian educational programs should be aimed, like the Jesuit schools, to help people “improve living and learning for the greater glory of God and the common good of all.”³⁴⁷

Equal Opportunities: One of the main reasons for the inequality within the Christian community, shared by the research participants, was the lack of equal opportunities in church activities. It is when only certain groups of people get preferences in church activities and leadership, that others feel discriminated. Others are neglected especially if they are uneducated, poor or new believers. When pastors and church leaders take sides with any particular person or a group, it creates more misunderstandings and results in hatred towards the pastor or the group he is with. In the Indian context, as shared by the research participants, in most of the churches groupism is based on the caste or social status of people. Relatives from the same caste background form their own group. The financially well to do create their own group. The poor, uneducated and the new comers are left alone. They feel discriminated. So, anything whether caste or financial status, that creates groupism, is an anti-fellowship element.³⁴⁸

Giving equal opportunities to those who are neglected will encourage them to participate in the church activities. Their talents and strengths could be used in different

³⁴⁷ Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, 74.

³⁴⁸ Yengde, *Caste Matters*, 42.

activities of the church. People feel encouraged if they are given responsibilities for the betterment of the church. Whenever needed, for different church activities, sign-up sheets can be posted on the notice boards so that people can make themselves available for the activities they are interested in. In the church board and other committees, representation from different age groups, gender and experience would give opportunities for the members to serve the congregation in different roles. Pastors and church leaders need to focus on the spiritual as well as the social growth of each member in the congregation.

Through preaching, teaching and other avenues, a sense of belonging to each other in the church congregation needs to be developed. The church atmosphere needs to be created in such a way that “love, sharing, good will, cooperation and brotherhood would be experienced by all.”³⁴⁹

In the imbalanced life situations caused by the social structure of the Indian society, some people get priority while others are neglected. In such situations, an awareness among the people needs to be created. Awareness that through united efforts, they can uplift each other so that nobody feels discriminated or isolated.³⁵⁰ Making available the public and social resources can give equal opportunities to all, and ensure non-discriminatory practices within the Christian communities.³⁵¹ Employment opportunities need to be developed for poor people in different fields in a Christian atmosphere, so that they will not be discriminated elsewhere. Poor people can be empowered to be self-sustaining when provided with training and resources.

³⁴⁹ Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 276.

³⁵⁰ Sharma, “Dalits in India: Discrimination and Development,” 13.

³⁵¹ Harriss-White and Prakash, “Social Discrimination in India,” 2-3.

Vocational training and bank loans should be made available for the needy to establish their professions. Educational activities should be conducted to empower the church members to realize their dignity and self-confidence.³⁵² All these activities will create a sense of belonging to the community, which will result in less or no conflicts in the Christian communities. When people realize that they are loved and cared for by their congregation, they would cooperate with other church members.

Marriage Counseling: The caste mentality of people is exhibited while seeking marriage alliances. Christians are not immuned to this. Through the interviews and group discussions, it was revealed that caste issues are not openly discussed among the Christians. When asked all denied the existence of caste problems in their congregations. However, during the personal interviews, all four pastors revealed that when seeking marriage alliances, people ask pastors to find a boy or a girl from the same caste. They think that during the troubled times, it is easier to deal with the people from the same caste than those from a different caste. One of the pastors revealed that the early missionaries however, matched a few people from two different caste backgrounds for marriage and it worked well. Yet, in the present context, marriage has become an individual decision. The present youth move to urban cities for education or jobs. Many of them do not care about the caste background of their life partners. However, they always seek blessings from their parents and relatives. And furthermore, in many cases, parents or relatives want to make sure that the boy or girl is from the same caste background.

³⁵² Thumma, *Marching with the Marginalized*, 33.

Churches should have seminars on marriages and seeking the will of the Lord while looking for a life partner. There is a need for counseling both the parents as well as the prospective grooms and bridegrooms. They need to be reminded that caste mentality divides people. God has created man and woman in His own image (Gen. 1: 27). So, all are equal in God's sight. Christian marriage bureaus should counsel people who seek help in finding life partners. Churches should have a counseling ministry to the families who go through troubled marriages. In the men's and women's fellowships, there should be discussions on the ways to deal with elements that trouble marriages. People should share their personal experiences of how they dealt with such difficult situations. During counseling sessions, couples need to be made aware of the trauma and shame children go through when their parents separate. In the Indian context, especially in the Christian communities, divorce is not appreciated as it is considered to be a shame to the whole family and their relatives.

Acceptance Transforms Relationships: Conflicts arise when people do not accept each other due to the difference of opinion or the social status and the caste background they come from. In the Indian context, caste mentality creates conflicts as people from other castes are not accepted as equals. Dalits face this discrimination even after accepting the Christian faith. As it was revealed during the interviews and group discussions, old Christians ignore new believers leaving them feeling unaccepted in the church. The congregation should welcome them in such a way that they will feel accepted in the family of God. Every gathering in the church should give them a sense of belonging to a community that loves and cares for them.³⁵³

³⁵³ Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 165.

For a peaceful community to prevail, people need to accept each other as they are. Accepting each other allows meaningful relationships in the congregations. People who struggle due to poverty, discriminations and other such atrocities; long for acceptance by a community where they can enjoy equality. The Church is the most important community where people can experience equality. It is through the Word of God that people can reclaim their dignity and identity as human beings in the Christian community.³⁵⁴

Church members need to realize their responsibility of maintaining peace and harmony among themselves. Accepting others as created in the image of God, brings transformation in relationships (Gen. 1: 27). Mutual love and respect helps people accept others. The church needs to develop ministries through which people will be ministered in their given situations. When people feel accepted, they forget their struggles.

Acceptance heals the hurting relationships. It liberates people from oppressing others and from being oppressed by others. This results in fulfilling Christ's mission on earth through the church.³⁵⁵ Acceptance of each other should be demonstrated through visitation, love feasts, sports, small bible study groups and ministry activities in the church as well as in the surrounding communities. These activities would nurture the interpersonal relationships.³⁵⁶

Dialogue Brings Reconciliation: Dialogue another essential strategy to help people solve their conflicts. Dialogue allows people to embrace others and understand their perspectives.³⁵⁷ Most of the conflicts occur when people do not want to dialogue

³⁵⁴ Rajkumar, "How Does the Bible Mean? The Bible and Dalit Liberation in India," 411.

³⁵⁵ Prabhakar, "The Search for a Dalit Theology," 49.

³⁵⁶ Lazar, "Religion and Human Dignity Inter-Faith Pastoral Praxis against Discrimination," 10.

³⁵⁷ Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 166.

with each other and solve the issues that bring trouble. In dialogue both parties get equal opportunities to express themselves and to also understand the perspectives of the other party as they listen to each other. It improves inter-personal relationships.³⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer observed that in dialogue, listening is the first service we can offer. It allows us to express God's love and mercy towards each other. It gives an opportunity for forbearing and upholding others. It also provides an opportunity to share the Word of God with each other. And lastly, it gives us peace and happiness (Eccles. 4:19; Col. 3:13; Eph. 4:2; Isa. 53:4-5; Mark 10:43).³⁵⁹ This element of listening to the other in dialogue should be included for bringing peace and harmony in the congregations. Seminars and workshops should be conducted to help people engage in a meaningful dialogue with others in the congregation. Dialogue helps people to know themselves as they listen to others.³⁶⁰

In a few cities of Vidarbha, once in a month pastors gather together for prayer meetings. They mainly focus on prayer and preaching. While this is important, there should also be discussions on issues faced by church members within the pastors' group. Similarly, in the local churches, initiatives should be taken to discuss the conflicting issues and resolve them amicably.³⁶¹ This means that the unjust practices should not be tolerated. Where necessary, unjust practices need to be opposed and peaceful solutions need to be provided.

Pastors and church leaders should be the mediators between two conflicting parties to bring peace between them.³⁶² Church leaders should avoid getting involved in

³⁵⁸ Lazar, "Religion and Human Dignity Inter-Faith Pastoral Praxis against Discrimination," 10.

³⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 97-109.

³⁶⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 75.

³⁶¹ Lazar, "Religion and Human Dignity Inter-Faith Pastoral Praxis against Discrimination," 10.

³⁶² Prabhakar, "The Search for a Dalit Theology," 48.

unhealthy church politics. They should not take sides with one group and neglect the other group. Healthy dialogue removes misunderstandings and enables people to accept each other with Christian love. It brings healing and reconciliation between the divided groups. There should be forums among church leaders and church members on unitedly planning ministry activities for the growth of the congregation.

True Spirituality: True spirituality is loving God and loving our neighbors. Our love for God is best expressed through our love for our neighbor. Loving our neighbors as ourselves requires humility, discretion, and reverence. Such humility is a demonstration of complete inner transformation as we accept others as our brothers and sisters.³⁶³ Spirituality is a life of holiness that is expressed in love for God and love for our fellow human beings. Personal spiritual experiences need to be expressed and exercised in the community. It is in the church that people can experience and express spirituality. The incarnational spirituality enables us to live a holy life and reflect the image of God.³⁶⁴

Misconceptions of true spirituality cause people to behave according to their own understanding of spirituality. It can isolate them from the body of Christ.³⁶⁵ Believers need to develop a sense of belonging to the community in which they get their sources for spiritual growth (1 Cor. 12:12). The Church, as the body of Christ, becomes the spiritual community in which believers are bonded together in a mutual covenant relationship.³⁶⁶ The mutual covenant relationship should result in transformation. As Peck mentions, each leader should strive to bring transformation in others so that, in return they will try

³⁶³ Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, 18.

³⁶⁴ Bubash, "Dalit Theology and Spiritual Oppression," 48-49.

³⁶⁵ Hauerwas, "The Sanctified Body," 23.

³⁶⁶ Palmer, *To Know as We are Known*, 57.

to bring transformation in the leader.³⁶⁷ The chaos has to take place so that mutual efforts can be made to bring transformation in the individuals, as well as in the communities.

Similarly, leaders need to go through the process of emptiness so that they can be ministered by the fellow believers. In the Indian culture the concept of emptiness may not be appreciated as leaders fear losing their leadership by exposing their weaknesses.³⁶⁸ Both these concepts of chaos and emptiness should be adopted by the Indian church, especially by the church leaders. There should be seminars to help them understand these important concepts and their effectiveness in bringing transformation in the communities.

True spirituality is experienced in the covenant relationship with God and His people. For the children of Israel, living in a community was a sign of God's presence among them (Exod. 19:4-6; John 8:31). Spiritual accountability to each other enables believers to grow spiritually as well as help others grow in true spirituality.³⁶⁹ To maintain peace and to grow in true spirituality, believers need to avoid a spirit of animosity, evil talk, and judging others. Instead, graceful talk and service strengthens the community life. Meekness is a sign of the experience of forgiveness of sin in Jesus Christ (Rom. 12: 16; John 5:44). Meekness leads us to be listeners.³⁷⁰ True spirituality is also expressed through compassion and simplicity as while serving others.³⁷¹ Compassion toward the needy is an expression of complete surrender to the will of God.³⁷²

Perfect Love: Holiness cannot be lived in isolation. It is best lived in the community. John Wesley emphasized that religion or holiness is futile if it is not lived in

³⁶⁷ Peck, *The Different Drum*, 91.

³⁶⁸ Peck, *The Different Drum*, 101.

³⁶⁹ Palmer, *To Know as We are Known*, 31.

³⁷⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 91-97.

³⁷¹ Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, 31.

³⁷² Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*, 13.

a community. He expressed it saying, “Holy solitaires is a phase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social, no holiness, but social holiness.”³⁷³ Wesley defined perfect love as love for God and love for neighbors. He describes this saying, “No wrong temper, nothing contrary to love with our thoughts, words, and actions is governed by pure love.”³⁷⁴ Social religion or social holiness has to be pursued in community, where other believers also pursue the same goal.³⁷⁵ From his early ministry, Wesley saw the importance social religion and social holiness through the holy club, bands, societies, and classes.³⁷⁶

The implications of Wesley’s emphasis on social holiness provides the correct understanding of true holiness and true spirituality. Social holiness provides a way for unity within the holiness groups in Vidarbha. Causes for conflicts within the holiness groups, as expressed by the research participants, require more emphasis on the Wesleyan teaching on perfect love. During the missionary era until the early 1990s, holiness conventions, retreats, and publications were conducted by the holiness groups in Vidarbha. Gradually, those activities disappeared. At present there are no combined gatherings among the holiness groups in Vidarbha.

Lack of proper understanding of holiness in terms of perfect love misguides people who claim to belonging to the holiness tradition. Several holiness groups in Vidarbha have gone away from the holiness emphasis. This has left only two holiness groups still remaining, namely, the Church of the Nazarene and the Free Methodist

³⁷³ Field, “Holiness, Social Justice and the Mission of the Church: John Wesley’s Insights in Contemporary Context,” 183.

³⁷⁴ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 36-37.

³⁷⁵ Mobley, *Common Bound: The Small Groups of Methodism*, 55.

³⁷⁶ Runyon, “Holiness as the Renewal of the Image of God in the Individual and Society,” 81-82.

Church in Vidarbha. Both these holiness groups should unitedly address the causes for the conflicts within the local congregations. Holiness conventions, seminars and workshops should be organized to educate congregations on true holiness and further guide them to demonstrate perfect love as preached by Wesley.

Holiness literature should be made available through church libraries. Workshops for writers should be conducted so that, the writers can develop holiness literatures in the Indian context. Holiness and perfect love are two sides of the same coin.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS AND GUIDE QUESTIONS

Prior to the actual interviews with the Church members and pastors of Holiness groups, they will be oriented with the purpose and procedure of the interviews. A research assistant will be assigned who will also be oriented about the purpose and procedure of the interviews. The research assistant will be given clear instructions on his or her role in the research procedure.

A written permission will be sought from key leaders of these two holiness groups. This will be done to ensure that the respective leaders wholly understand, support and benefit from the conclusions of the study. All leaders as well as the interviewees will be assured of confidentiality. Letters of permissions and consent forms from the respective participants (Appendix H), research assistants and church leaders are developed.

Research questions for Dalit Christians and their pastoral leaders within the holiness groups in the Vidarbha region will include:

I. A survey questionnaire: Answers to the following research questions will be sought from four pastors and ten church members from each of their congregation.

1. What is your name? The name would include the surname or family name.
2. What is your age or date of birth? This question will determine the age profile of the research subject.
3. What is the gender? This question will determine the gender of the subject.
4. What is your denominational affiliation? This question will ensure that the subject belongs to the group to be researched.

5. How long are they in Christian ministry? This question will be directed to the pastoral leader of the select group.
6. What is your caste background? The question will give them seven options:
 - a. Brahmin (), b. Kshatriya (), c. Vaishya (), d. Sudra (),
 - e. Dalit (), f. I do not know (), g. I do not care ().
7. Do you know the origin of your caste identity?

Options: a. Yes (), b. No ().
8. Do you consider your original caste identity to be:

Options: a. Superior (), b. Inferior ().
9. Do you identify yourself as a Dalit?

Options: a. Yes (), b. No ().
10. Do others identify you as a Dalit?

Options: a. Yes (), b. No ().
11. What signs or symbols identify you as belonging to a particular caste?

Options: a. Name (), b. Spouse (), c. Occupation (),

d. Native place (), e. Clothes (), f. Other (_____).
12. Are there any instances when you have been treated as a Dalit?

Options: a. Yes (), b. No ().
13. Do your children face the same discrimination within the local congregation?

Options: a. Yes (), b. No (), c. I am not aware ().
14. Are you open to marrying your children without considering caste difference?

Options: a. Yes (), b. No (), c. Can't say ().
15. Are there evidences of caste discrimination in your local congregation? Tick the appropriate number in the scale of 1 to 5
 1. Strongly Disagree (), 2. Disagree (), 3. Neither Disagree

Nor Agree (), 4. Agree (), 5. Strongly Agree ()

II. The following questions will be directed mainly to the members of congregation:

1. What are the social motivations of different caste groups represented within your local congregation?
2. What are the evidences of caste distinctions, if any, within your congregation?
3. What are the causes of divisions within your local congregation?
4. What are the solutions for the factors causing divisions in your local congregation?

III. The following questions will be directed to pastoral leaders of the specific congregation:

1. What is your caste background and what caste groups are you primarily ministering to?
2. What are the evidences of caste discrimination, if any, within the congregation? What challenges do they bring to the ministry?
3. Are there divisions within the congregation and if yes, what are the causes for these divisions?
4. How do you resolve conflicts within your congregation?

APPENDIX B**MAP OF VIDARBHA REGION**

www.google.com/search?q=Vidarbha+Map

APPENDIX C

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

To determine whether or not the interviewees were genuine in their responses to the questions asked, I observed their behavior and their expressions. These observations were recorded separately. Their expressions are reflected in their responses to the questions asked during the interviews and group discussions.

Queries Related to Life Situation	Observed Behaviors	Assessment
1. Are you comfortable to discuss about caste discrimination in your society?		
2. Are you comfortable to discuss about caste conflicts within your local church?		
3. What are your thoughts about Dalit Christians?		
4. How do you relate with people from different caste than your caste?		
5. Have you ever tried to reach out to people from different castes?		
6. Have you ever experienced caste discrimination in Christian community?		
7. Do you think the issue of caste conflict will ever be solved within the Christian community?		
8. Do caste conflicts effect on Christian life?		

APPENDIX D

CONFIDENTIALITY COMMITMENT FOR RESEARCH ASSISTANT

This agreement is signed between the main Researcher and the Research Assistant

Terms of the agreement:

1. The research assistant will maintain modesty and honesty at every step of this research
2. The research assistant will maintain all the records and data confidential
3. The research assistant will not manipulate, modify or tamper any data collected for this research
4. The research assistant will make sure that all the logistics are prepared prior to the interviews
5. The research assistant will communicate with the respective interviewees to make sure that they are present at the designated place for interviews as per the schedule prepared beforehand
6. The research assistant will hand over all the data to the main researcher upon completion of the data gathering
7. The research assistant will delete or destroy all the data after handing it over to the main researcher

Research Assistant	Signature	Date

Research Assistant	Signature	Date
---------------------------	------------------	-------------

Research Assistant	Signature	Date

Prakash Nemade 20th January, 2022

Researcher _____ Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher _____ Signature _____ Date _____

Prakash Nemade 20th January, 2022

Researcher _____ Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX E

LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM CHURCH LEADERS

To:
The Reverend Bishop/District Superintendent/Pastor
..... (Denomination)
Address:

From:
Prakash Nemade
203, A. H. Desire,
Trinity Christina Layout, Opp: SAIACS CEO Centre
Byrathi Village,
BANGALORE – 560077

Subject: Request for Permission to Conduct Interviews with Pastors

Respected Bishop/District Superintendent/Pastor, I am Rev. Prakash Nemade, a registered student in the PhD in Transformational Development program at the Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Manila, Philippines. My supervisor is Dr. Fletcher Tink. Herewith, I request your permission to conduct my field research with pastors and church members in your jurisdiction.

The objectives of the interviews are:

1. To understand the perspectives of pastors on inequality and caste discrimination among the Christians
2. To understand the efforts of pastors in dissolving caste conflicts within their congregations
3. To understand the difficulties of pastors and congregations in addressing the issues of inequality and caste discrimination within and outside the Church.

I will treat all information gathered through the interviews as confidential while holding to the ethical standards of conducting research. With your kind permission, I will be able to fulfill my requirements towards my PhD studies. You will be given copies of the conclusions, if desired.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor. Our contact details are as follows:

1. Name: Rev. Prakash Nemade
Phone: +91 9902107427
E-mail: prakashwn@gmail.com

2. Name of the Program Director: Dr. Fletcher Tink
Phone: +16148001020
E-mail: fletcht@aol.com

Your permission to conduct interviews will be greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Prakash Nemade
Signature of the Researcher

Date: 20th January 2022

Signature of the Program Director

Date:

APPENDIX F

CONFIDENTIALITY COMMITMENT FOR DATA ANALYST

This agreement is signed between the main Researcher and the Data Analyst

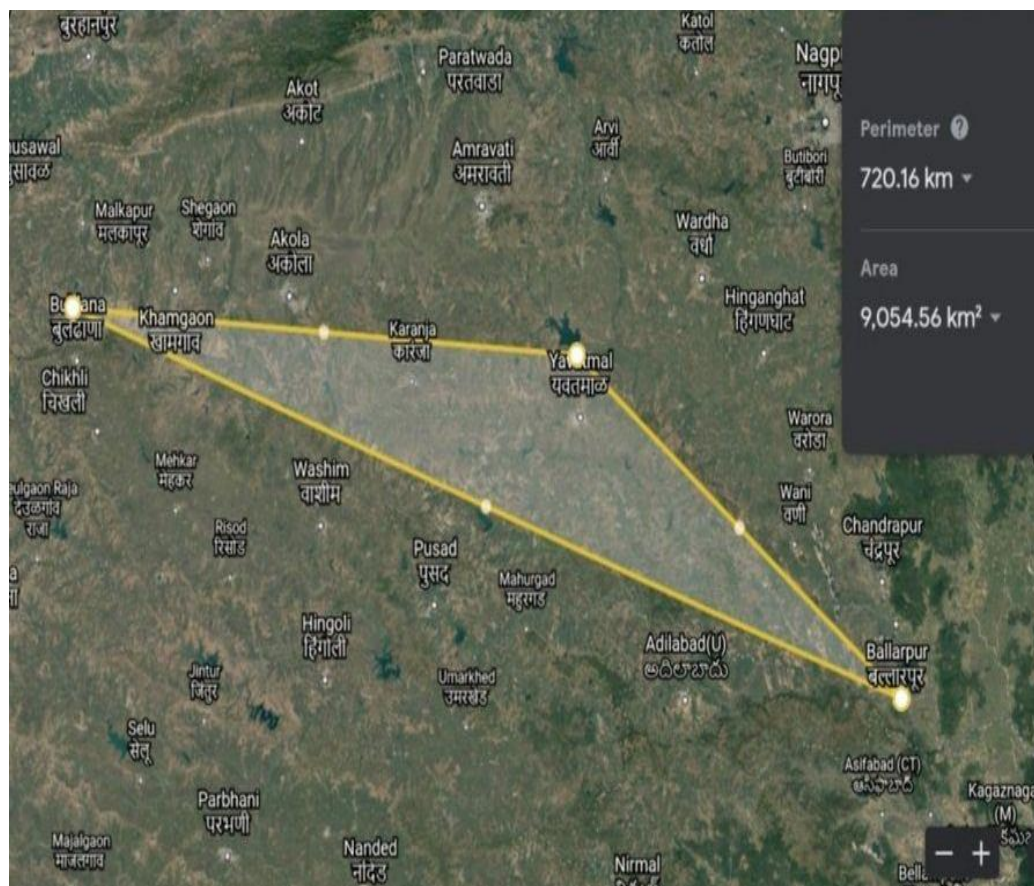
Terms of the agreement:

1. The data analyst will maintain modesty and honesty at every step of this research.
2. The data analyst will maintain the confidentiality of all the records and data.
3. The data analyst will not manipulate, modify, or tamper with any data collected for this research.
4. The data analyst will hand over all the data to the main researcher upon completion of the data gathering.
5. The data analyst will delete or destroy all remaining copies the data after handing it over to the main researcher.

Data analyst	Signature	Date
<u>Prakash Nemade</u>		<u>20th January, 2022</u>
Researcher	Signature	Date

APPENDIX G

GEOGRAPHICAL PERIMETER FOR THIS RESEARCH
STUDY IS ABOUT 720 KMS IN VIDARBHA



APPENDIX H

CONSENT LETTER FOR THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Date: 20th January, 2022

From
Prakash Nemade
203, A. H. Desire,
Trinity Christina Layout, Opp: SAIACS CEO Centre
Byrathi Village,
BANGALORE – 560077

To
Name:
Address:
Name of the Denomination:
City, State, Zip Code:

Dear Mr/Ms/Rev.:

I am a student enrolled in the PhD in Transformational Development degree program at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Manila, Philippines. I received your name from _____ (your denomination leader), and I would be most grateful if I could meet with you for an interview.

The purpose of this interview is to understand the struggles of Christians within and outside the Christian community in regard to inequality and discrimination faced. Your participation in this research will contribute toward the requirement of my doctoral dissertation in Transformational Development.

I would like to interview you in person and hope that you are available during the week of _____. I have at least 14 short questions to ask and I will probably take 60 minutes of your time. Your identity will be kept confidential to protect you and your ministry.

I will call you on _____ to see if you are available or you may leave a message for me using my information below. Thank you so much and I look forward to meeting with you.

Please reply to this letter as a sign of your consent to participate in this research.
Sincerely

Prakash Nemade
Phone: +91 9902107427
E-mail: prakashwn@gmail.com

APPENDIX I

CONSENT LETTER FOR THE FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Date: 20th January, 2022

From
Prakash Nemade
203, A. H. Desire,
Trinity Christina Layout, Opp: SAIACS CEO Centre
Byrathi Village,
BANGALORE – 560077

To
Name:
Address:
Name of the Denomination:
City, State, Zip Code:

Dear Mr/Ms/Rev.:

I am a student enrolled in the PhD in Transformational Development degree program at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Manila, Philippines. I received your name from _____ (your denomination leader), and I would be most grateful if you could participate in the focus group discussions.

The purpose of the focus group discussions is to understand the struggles of Christians within and outside the Christian community in regard to inequality and discrimination faced. Your participation in this research will contribute toward the requirement of my doctoral dissertation in Transformational Development.

I would like you to participate in the focus group discussions and hope that you are available during the week of _____. I have at least 4 questions for group discussions. Focus group discussions will probably take 90 minutes of your time. Your identity will be kept confidential to protect you and your ministry.

I will call you on _____ to see if you are available or you may leave a message for me using my information below. Thank you so much and I look forward to meeting with you.

Please reply to this letter as a sign of your consent to participate in this research.
Sincerely

Prakash Nemade
Phone: +91 9902107427
E-mail: prakashwn@gmail.com

APPENDIX J

IRB PERMIT



Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary
Ortigas Avenue Extension, Kaytikling
Taytay 1920, Rizal, Philippines

NOTIFICATION OF REVIEW APPROVAL

November 17, 2021

Nemade, Prakash
prakashwn@gmail.com

**Protocol Title: “AN APPROACH TO INVESTIGATE AND ADDRESS DIVISION
WITHIN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF TWO HOLINESS GROUPS IN
THE VIDARBHA REGION OF INDIA”**

Protocol#: AR-015
IRB Review Date: November 17, 2021
Effective Date: November 17, 2021
Expiration Date: November 17, 2022
Review Type: Exempt Review
Review Action: Approved

The IRB made the following determinations:

- Waivers: Waiver of informed consent documentation
- Other Documentations: All necessary attachments submitted
- Risk Determination: No greater than minimal risk

Please contact me at cingsian.thawn@apnts.edu.ph if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Miss Cing Sian Thawn
Director of Research

Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary

APPENDIX K

ACTION PROJECTS BY FOUR GROUPS, INCLUDING THEIR PASTORS: FOOT-WASHING

During the common workshops, research participants were asked to choose at least one activity for the action project:




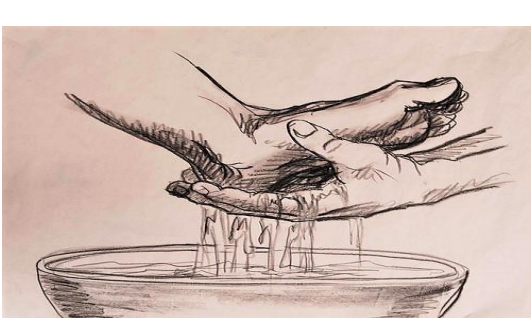
- 1) Role-Play
- 2) A Social Project in the Community as a Team,
- 3) A Symbolic Action (E.g., Foot-Washing or the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper).


All four groups chose the foot-washing activity for the action project, to be conducted a month after the common workshop. They prepared a plan to meet in their respective churches. They informed me of their preferred dates for the meet. I traveled to all four locations. This being my third visit with each of the group, I observed that all participants genuinely participated in the foot-washing ceremony.

The foot-washing activity demonstrated humility, acceptance, love, respect, and unity among the research participants. After the foot-washing ceremony in each location, reflections of the research participants were recorded. Below are a few of those reflections from the participants:

Foot-washing	Reflections After Foot-Washing
	<p>Pastor Ubale: "As a pastor, I have experienced foot-washing a few times in different meetings. It reminds me of humility. I am encouraged to demonstrate love and care toward others in different ways. Today, I am blessed by washing my church member's feet. I want to serve them wholeheartedly."</p>
	<p>Pastor Gajjala: "Jesus taught us to be humble. Washing our friends' feet is easy. However, washing our enemy's feet transforms his life. It will bring transformation in the church."</p>

	<p>Kavita: "Praise the Lord! This is my second experience. But in our church, this is our first experience of foot-washing. I am blessed by the humility shown by each member of our group. I want to show humility, love and care for others in the church so that they will grow in unity and love for the Lord."</p>
	<p>Sachin: "I am very emotional because now I can imagine how Jesus demonstrated humility towards His disciples. I am blessed through this activity. I want to show humility towards others by serving them in whatever way I can."</p>
	<p>Jyoti: "Today it is my first experience of observing foot-washing in the church. Today, I can see that we all are united in love and respect for each other. I pray that the Lord will bless other church members through us."</p>
	<p>Gaurav: "If Jesus can wash His disciples' feet, we also need to wash others' feet. As a church we are a family. I used to wash my own feet, but today, I could wash Pastor's feet. I am blessed."</p>

	<p>Hemant: “This was a great experience for me. I got scared and nervous because elders washing others’ feet is beyond my imagination. When we practice this, people will reconcile with one another and grow.”</p>
	<p>Arun: “We have been hearing about Jesus washing the feet of His disciples. But today it became a reality for me. Washing feet of our dear ones may be easy. But washing the feet of strangers or those we hate will be a great experience. It will show our transformation.” “It is not easy. But that is what Jesus has taught us to do. He has set an example for us.”</p>
	<p>Stuti: “I had experienced it a couple of times. It reminds me of Jesus’ humility. I am blessed because today I was able to wash my brothers’ and sisters’ feet.”</p>
	<p>Aradhana: “This is a very humbling experience for me. I will never forget this experience in my life. I hope we have more occasions when we can wash one another’s feet and express our love and humility in the church.”</p>

	<p>Bipin: “This is my first experience. We hear sermons on Jesus washing the feet of His disciples. But we never practiced it in the church. Today I got a real experience and I learned a lot from this. Unless we humble ourselves, we cannot serve others.”</p>
	<p>Suchita: “It is an emotional experience for me as for the first time I was able to wash my father’s feet. He has washed mine since I was born. But today, it was my God-given privilege to wash daddy’s feet to express my love and respect for him.”</p>
	<p>Pratibha: “If a man washes a woman’s feet, it is an example of humility and submission. Women do not like men to touch or wash their feet.”</p>
	<p>Deepika: “This was my first time to experience a foot-washing ceremony. We need to obey the command given by God.”</p>
	<p>Sameer: “As I was watching our brothers and sisters washing the feet of others, like Peter, I too did not want my feet to be washed by others. This experience has blessed me so much. I do have some misunderstandings with a few people in the church. I will plan</p>



to visit them and request them to allow me to wash their feet. This is a life transforming experience for me.”

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