In Search of a Contextual Pastoral Theology for Dalits in India

Johnson Petta
University of Denver

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd

Part of the Biblical Studies Commons, Christianity Commons, and the Practical Theology Commons

Recommended Citation
Petta, Johnson, "In Search of a Contextual Pastoral Theology for Dalits in India" (2012). Electronic Theses and Dissertations. 512.
https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/512

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu,dig-commons@du.edu.
IN SEARCH OF A CONTEXTUAL PASTORAL THEOLOGY FOR DALITS 

IN INDIA 

A Dissertation 

Presented to 

the Faculty of the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology Joint PhD Program 

University of Denver 

In Partial Fulfillment 

of the Requirements for the Degree 

Doctor of Philosophy 

by 

Johnson Petta 

August 2012 

Advisor: Dr. Larry Kent Graham
Abstract

Current approaches to the ministry of pastoral care and counseling in the South Indian context lack a serious grasp of the critical needs of survival, liberation and cultural identity of the Dalit Christian communities. Prevailing models of care that are individualistic and based on clerical hierarchy have failed to give adequate attention to the systemic, cultural and psychological dimensions of the contextual needs of the Dalit Christians and foster a shared understanding of their problems. The theological and cultural sources that inform the pastoral care practices are not indigenous to their context and therefore fail to provide a critical and constructive perspective on the needs that arise in the context of caste oppression.

This study develops a communal contextual and intercultural approach to pastoral care and theology that is interdisciplinary in nature and informed by indigenous sources of knowledge, Dalit liberation theology as well as Latin American liberation psychology to respond to the contextual needs of the Dalit people. The communal contextual approach seeks to understand pastoral needs in their wider sociocultural and political contexts that include the realities of caste prejudice, patriarchy and sexism, among others. The communal contextual approach also expands the ministry of care from being the exclusive domain of the ordained clergy to include caring resources of the faith community, thereby affirming the collective subjectivity of the Dalit communities. The intercultural approach offers a framework not only for facilitating a healthy, constructive
and respectful interaction with other cultures, but also for empowering marginal communities such as the Dalits. This approach encourages Dalits to resist the hegemonic nature of the dominant discourses while also affirming and privileging Dalit cultural perspectives and resources to build and strengthen Dalit cultural identity. As an intercultural approach, it pays particular attention to the power dynamics that come into play when two cultures interact. Dalit liberation theology provides the theological rationale and cornerstone for this communal contextual and intercultural approach to care. This theology is operationalized using strategies of intervention from narrative theory as conceptualized by Michael White and David Epston. This dissertation, written from a Dalit perspective, argues that this new model of pastoral care and theology creates new possibilities that theologically empower Dalits to not only to reimagine their ‘Dalitness’ by reclaiming their cultural heritage, but also to effectively address their critical issues of survival, liberation and developing a cultural identity.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the encouragement and support of several individuals who in one way or another contributed and extended their valuable assistance in the preparation and completion of this study. First and foremost, I would like to express my utmost gratitude to my parents, Petta John Roosevelt and Satyavathi, who encouraged me to pursue education above everything else. I am also very deeply indebted to Dr. Nicholas Gier, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, University of Idaho, for making it possible to pursue my higher education in the United States. Without his generous financial support, this work would not have been possible. He is also my philosopher, guide and friend, who encouraged me in difficult times during the research and writing of this dissertation.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my Advisor, Dr. Larry Graham, who patiently provided the vision, encouragement, advice and necessary resources for me to proceed through the doctoral program and complete my dissertation. He guided me through numerous challenging phases of my graduate studies. I thank him for all the insightful discussion, ideas, suggestions and feedback that were invaluable for this dissertation. I am also grateful to Dr. Carrie Doehring and Dr. Ginnie Ishimatsu for their ideas, suggestions and feedback. I especially thank Dr. Carrie Doehring for her patience in proof reading the document and helping me to gain clarity in many of the key ideas and theoretical viewpoints in this dissertation. Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my wife Sarita. Her support, encouragement, quiet patience and unwavering love helped me finish this long and arduous journey.
Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis and Scope</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology and Rationale</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance and Contribution</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Outline</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – THE CASTE SYSTEM AND THE DALITS</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalit Mass Movements</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missionaries and the Caste System</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-missionary Indian Dalit Church</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories of the Origin and Nature of the Caste System</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Hindu Mythic Explanation</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic or Occupational Theory</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of Ritual Purity-Pollution</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – DALIT PASTORAL CARE EXPERIENCES AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical Studies on Dalit Pastoral Care—Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical Studies on Dalit Pastoral Care—Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical Studies on Dalit Pastoral Care—Andhra Pradesh &amp; Karnataka</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Life and Pastoral Care</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theological Perspectives</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical/Traditional Western Theology</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Christian Theology</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dalit Theology</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCES OF THE DALIT PEOPLE</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Dalit Psychological Experiences</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology and Pastoral Care in South India</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalits and Internalized Oppression</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karma and Dharma</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Blame</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation and Adjustment</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survival Dependence</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent and Obedient Psyche</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caste Discrimination and Disunity among the Dalit Communities</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alienated Dyche</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Dalit Perspective in Psychology</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5 – CONSTRUCTING A NEW PARADIGM OF DALIT PASTORAL THEOLOGY

Pastoral Theology and its Evolution as a Field of Theological Discipline ..........................................................161
German Historical Background of Pastoral Theology .........................................................................................163
Anton Boisen .........................................................................................................................................................166
Hiltner’s Pastoral Theological Method ..................................................................................................................167
Critique of Hiltner’s Definition and Approach to Pastoral Theology .................................................................170
Contemporary Definitions and Understanding of Pastoral Theology and Related Concepts ...............................173
Nature and Characteristics of Pastoral Theology ..................................................................................................175
Definitions of Practical Theology, Pastoral Care, and Pastoral Counseling .........................................................177
Paradigms of Pastoral Theology and Care ..............................................................................................................178
Classical Paradigm of Pastoral Theology and Care ...............................................................................................180
The Clinical Paradigm of Pastoral Care ..................................................................................................................182
Communal Contextual Paradigm ..........................................................................................................................187
Intercultural Paradigm ..........................................................................................................................................191
Postmodernism and its Impact on Pastoral Theology and Care ............................................................................197
Self in Modernism ..................................................................................................................................................197
Knowledge in Modernism ...................................................................................................................................198
Language in Modernism .......................................................................................................................................198
Power in Modernism ..............................................................................................................................................199
Difference in Modernism ......................................................................................................................................199
Dalit Pastoral Theology ........................................................................................................................................208
Developing Dalit Pastoral Theology within the Framework of Communal Contextual and Intercultural Paradigm of Pastoral Care .....................................................................................................210
Dalit Theology .......................................................................................................................................................213
Dalit Psychology .....................................................................................................................................................217
Liberation Psychology of Latin America ................................................................................................................218
Pastoral Theological Method ................................................................................................................................220
Pastoral Care Functions .........................................................................................................................................224

CHAPTER 6 – DALIT NARRATIVES OF OPPRESSION AND COUNSELING APPROACHES

Historical Perspective on Counseling ..................................................................................................................227
Critique of the Universal and Culture-Centered Approach to Multicultural Counseling ........................................232
Multicultural Perspectives in Counseling ..............................................................................................................235
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberation Psychology</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalit Case Study</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies of the Communal Contextual and Intercultural model of Pastoral Care in the Dalit Context</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Dalits\textsuperscript{1} constitute a large but significantly distinct population of India whose cultural experiences are profoundly marked by discrimination and oppression based on caste. Even though they are not a homogenous social category, they are demarcated from the rest of the society by a fault line that runs through the Indian society.\textsuperscript{2} This fault line is the notion of ritual purity and pollution that is the ideological base to the structural reality of the caste system,\textsuperscript{3} a unique but fundamental organizing principle of Indian society that is closely identified with the orthodox version of Hinduism. With no legitimate place in the caste order and deemed as ritually polluted people by the caste Hindu community, Dalits endure the most inhumane forms of oppression and exploitation. Over the past two hundred years, however, the Dalit communities have been converting to Christianity and other religions, a socio-religious phenomenon known as “mass conversions,” to escape the caste oppression that they are subjected to in

---

\textsuperscript{1} Dalit is a term that literally means crushed or broken, denoting the oppressed existence of communities in India who were until recently known as the untouchables.

\textsuperscript{2} Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany, \textit{The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 12.

\textsuperscript{3} In simple terms, the caste system can be understood as the division of society into four occupationally determined, hierarchically structured social groups: the Brahmins (the priests), the Kshatriyas (the warriors), the Vaisyas (the merchants) and the Shudras (the laborers and craftsmen). Dalit people are considered as polluted people and hence excluded from the caste system and deemed as outcasts. They are subjected a variety of oppressive caste practices such as being denied access to basic amenities like water or worship in village temples.
Hinduism.\textsuperscript{4} Egalitarian ideals and values preached in the Christian gospel very likely appealed to the converts in search of a new identity, human dignity and a way of escaping the caste oppression.\textsuperscript{5} In specific terms, these conversions have been viewed as protests,\textsuperscript{6} a result of disillusionment\textsuperscript{7} and motivated by a search for “a greater sense of personal dignity, self-respect, improved socio-economic status.”\textsuperscript{8}

What is noteworthy and important about the mass conversions is that they were initiated by the Dalit communities. They symbolized, among other things, an active participation by the Dalit communities in their own emancipation. They showed a sense of strong collective solidarity and common struggle for Dalit liberation. A long history of systematic and brutal psychological oppression has not succeeded in reducing them to a state of complete passivity in their struggles to break away from the oppressive structures of the caste system. Living through extreme forms of cultural and psychological domination did not diminish the Dalit people’s courage to envision new possibilities beyond their oppressive existence in the caste order. For the vast majority of Dalit Christians in India today, however, the social and psychological aspirations that motivated their conversion to Christianity have not been realized. The collective cultural

\begin{flushright}
\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{4} John C. B. Webster, \textit{The Dalit Christians: A History} (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 32.
\textsuperscript{6} Webster, \textit{The Dalit Christians: A History}, 32.
\end{footnotesize}
\end{flushright}
experiences of Christian Dalit communities in contemporary India continue to include caste oppression and cultural alienation, both within the Church as well as the broader society. Rather than being an agent of liberation, the Church has become complicit in incorporating the Dalit Christians within the existing caste ideologies, values and structures. The ritualistic practices and social relations of the Church remind Dalits that they are a despised cultural group, a segregated community. The Dalit Christians represent a deep contradiction in the moral life of the Church. While in the doctrines and teachings of the Church, they are conceptualized as part of the one body of Christ, in practice they remain an un-reconciled morally inferior segment of the Christian community. Traditional approaches to pastoral care and counseling used in Christian Dalit communities in India have responded inadequately to the contextual needs of survival, liberation and caste identity that arise from caste oppression and cultural alienation. The ministry of pastoral theology and care operating in the Dalit context has

9 Dalit culture and religion were assimilated into the higher Sanskritic or Brahmanic religious traditions. In the contemporary socio-religious world of India, Dalit religion and culture is labeled as “little tradition.” See George Oommen, “Strength of Tradition and Weakness of Communication –Central Kerala Dalit Conversion,” in Geoffrey A. Oddie (ed.), Religious Conversion Movements in South Asia: Continuities and Change, 1800-1900 (Richmond: Curzon, 1997), 80. And in conversion to Christianity Dalits were asked to purge themselves of their old religio-cultural traditions. Sathianathan Clarke, Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 12.

10 Survival for Dalits involves developing critical consciousness among Dalit communities about their prevailing oppressive conditions as well their history, culture and traditions that can be utilized to resist the oppressive practices of the dominant traditions.


12 Caste identity, an imposed identity on Dalit communities, needs to be deconstructed and a positive ‘Dalit’ identity needs to be cultivated among Dalits by drawing from indigenous Dalit resources, the history and culture from which they have been alienated.
either ignored the overwhelming reality of caste discrimination and how it affects the Dalit Christians or framed it in ways that are not constructive to their liberation struggles from caste oppression.

Several factors explain the impaired response of these traditional models of pastoral care to the needs of Dalit people. First, the ministry of care operative in the Dalit context is shaped by the confluence of classical Western Christian tradition and Indian Christian theology. The significance of theology to pastoral care cannot be overemphasized. Theology plays a very central role in the conceptualization and practice of pastoral care. “It serves as a focus of commitment out of which interpretative norms and guiding images of ministry arise.” Theology also serves as a lens to assess the needs of the people who seek care.

Until recently, Classical Western Theology and Indian Christian Theology have been the two dominant theological sources of pastoral care in India. In the theological circles in India, there is a general perception that the Classical Western Theology in the post independent India has been replaced by the Indian Christian Theology. As such, Western Christian Theology has not been significantly included in theological reflection and writing in recent times. However, too often the fact is that Classical Western

---

13 Indian Christian Theology sought to interpret itself through Indian philosophical systems and Brahminical traditions. Ibid., 79.


15 Ibid., 57.

16 Peniel Rajkumar and Sathianathan Clarke are two Dalit Theologians who have almost completely ignored any significant discussion on Classical Western Theology, implying its irrelevance to Indian theological thinking.
Theology continues to have as much, if not more, influence in shaping Indian Christian
thinking, even today.\(^{17}\) Therefore, any discussion on pastoral theology and care in India
would be deficient, incomplete or distorted without taking seriously the influence of
Classical Western Theology.

While Classical Western Christian theology wedded itself to Western philosophy
and articulated Christian truths through “such philosophies as Platonic, Aristotelian,
Rationalistic, Evolutionary, Existentialist and Process,” Indian Christian theology sought
to interpret itself through Indian philosophical systems and brahminical traditions such as
Sankara’s Advaita, Ramanuja’s Vishishta Advaita or Sri Aurobindo’ integral yoga.\(^{18}\)
These primary theological/cultural sources ignore and denigrate the Dalit culture and do
not adequately speak to the socio-cultural realities and aspirations of the Dalit people.\(^{19}\)

Second, an individualistic approach to pastoral care has obscured the communal
needs of Dalits by focusing on individual needs of Dalit people. Struggles for justice and
liberation, contextual priorities for Dalit people in the face of caste oppression, have
received inadequate attention. In other words, an individualistic approach of pastoral care
understands individuals and their personal needs to the exclusion of the wider socio-

---

\(^{17}\) Franklyn J. Balasundaram, “Dalit Theology and Other Theologies.” In *Frontiers of Dalit
Theology*, ed. V. Devasahayam (Delhi, ISPCK, 1997), 251.

\(^{18}\) Arvind. P. Nirmal, “Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective,” in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*,
ed. Arvind P Nirmal (Madras: Gurukul, 1990), 140.

\(^{19}\) Western Classical and Indian Christian Theological traditions have debased the cultural heritage
of the Dalit people. Their culture and religious traditions are associated with “stupidity, fear,
inauspiciousness, pollution and demonology. Sathianathan Clarke, “Untouchable Culture, Liberating
cultural contexts that shape the individuals and give rise to their problems. It especially militates against efforts to interpret and engage historically ordered systems of oppression operative in the socio-cultural context of the Dalit communities.

Third, pastoral care is viewed as the exclusive preserve of the ordained ministers in Christian Dalit communities, who are the privileged bearers of ecclesiastical authority in defining the nature and practice of pastoral care.20 This clerical hierarchy colludes with the forces of casteism and patriarchy to deny voice, representation and participation of Dalit communities, in the ministry of pastoral care; it keeps their perspectives, questions and experiences from coming into the foreground of pastoral theological reflection.21 Clericalism also deemphasizes a communal role in pastoral caregiving. Dalit Christians are seen as objects of pastoral care rather than as people seeking to be subjects of their own history and as active participants in their liberation. The magnitude and acuteness of Dalit problems arising out of caste oppression are beyond the scope of care giving resources of individual clergy; they call for more resources at the congregational and community level.

And in the fourth place, the preoccupation with the moral, spiritual and faith perspectives in traditional Christian Dalit pastoral care22 does not utilize valuable perspectives and resources of the social sciences to illuminate and deepen the

---


21 Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 18- 22.

understanding of pastoral care situations. The predominant method of pastoral theology in Christian Dalit pastoral care remains that of applied theology, implying a classical paradigm of the ministry of pastoral care that focuses on individual salvation. The field of pastoral theology and care in India has not been adequately challenged to widen its vision and scope by drawing on the theoretical domains of psychology and cultural studies to understand the psychosocial impact of caste oppression on the Dalit people as well as develop effective strategies of interventions to address them. These limitations of the clerically-based and individually-focused paradigm of pastoral theology and care call for a new model of pastoral care and theology that is relevant to Dalit socio-cultural realities and religious sensibilities.

**Thesis and Scope**

The primary subject of this dissertation project is Dalit communities in South India. It focuses on their critical need for a life-giving psycho-social-spiritual personal and communal identity that will enable survival and liberation. This critical need has arisen in the context of caste oppression and discrimination. Traditional models of pastoral care have not adequately responded to the critical needs of the Dalit communities. Since the early missionary period, pastoral care has been in operation in the Dalit context. However, models of pastoral care during the missionary periods and those that began to take shape in the subsequent period have not been constructive in

---

23 Webster, has identified several psychological issues with which Dalit communities are struggling but he fails to provide any specific psychological approaches to address their problems. John C. B. Webster, *Pastor to Dalits* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1995).
addressing the critical need for a life-giving psycho-social-spiritual personal and communal identity that will enable survival and liberation.

The thesis of this dissertation is that a communal contextual and intercultural approach to pastoral care is more relevant for constructing a new model of Dalit pastoral theology and care in India that effectively addresses their critical need for a life-giving psycho-social-spiritual personal and communal identity that will enable survival and liberation. The communal contextual experiences of the Dalits will be explored primarily in relation to the caste system of the Indian society. The caste system is more than a hierarchical division of social group; it is an ideology that permeates and informs the value system of the socio-cultural and political contexts of the Indian society and classifies social relations in terms of pollution and purity, class and gender division.

The communal-contextual approach of pastoral care and theology emphasizes the wider socio-cultural realities as the context of care. This means that the interrelated contextual realities of caste oppression, patriarchy, poverty, capitalism and sexism will become the focus of pastoral care for and with Dalits. The communal contextual approach also expands the ministry of care from being the exclusive domain of the ordained clergy to include caring resources of the church or faith community.24 Caste based oppression that has produced acute and community-wide psychosocial challenges and problems, requires communal resources, not only at the congregational level, but also at the wider socio-political level. And in terms of practical strategies this model

---

reinterprets, reprioritizes and expands traditional pastoral care functions to include empowering, nurturing, liberating and reclaiming.\textsuperscript{25}

The intercultural approach to pastoral care is relevant to the Dalit Christian context because the classical Western Christian tradition as well as the Indian Brahminical tradition marginalized the culture and religion of Dalit people.\textsuperscript{26} An intercultural approach opposes and counters any tendencies to judge people of a minority culture like Dalits by universalizing the norms, values and perspectives of the dominant cultures.\textsuperscript{27} An intercultural approach encourages an affirmative exploration of socio-cultural contexts that care receivers recognize as their own and attempts to understand pastoral issues within those socio-cultural worldviews.\textsuperscript{28} This dissertation argues that a Dalit pastoral theology and care that fuses the communal contextual and intercultural approaches together offers meaningful, constructive, liberative, and transformative possibilities for Dalit cultural context.

Although the Dalit people are an international community, with significant presence in countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, Burma and India, this study is limited to the Dalit communities in South India. Access to previous ethnographical studies as well as

\textsuperscript{25} Reclaiming subjugated indigenous cultural resources and knowledge of Dalit communities is essential in this approach for building positive Dalit identity.

\textsuperscript{26} While baptism was a symbolic event in which the native Dalit convert had to purge himself of his traditional cultural and belief systems, Brahminical traditions assimilated Dalit gods and hierarchically subjugated their religious beliefs as “little traditions.”

\textsuperscript{27} Emmanuel Y. Lartey, \textit{In Living Colors: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling}. 2nd ed. (London : Jessica Kingsley, 2003), 32.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 173.
familiarity with cultural and theological systems in the region supports this limitation to the study.

**Methodology and Rationale**

The aim of this dissertation is to construct a communal contextual and intercultural model of pastoral theology and care for Dalit communities in South India. Watkins-Ali defines pastoral theology “as theological reflection on the experience of the cultural context as relevant for strategic pastoral caregiving in the context of ministry.”

In keeping with this definition, it can be said that Dalit experiences, profoundly impacted by the contextual factors of casteism, patriarchy and cultural alienation, become the primary source of pastoral theological reflection. To gain a more accurate understanding of the contextual experience of the Dalit people, several secondary sources of knowledge relevant to Dalit context such as Dalit history, psychology and theology will be utilized. For a more comprehensive analysis and exploration of Dalit psychological experiences, I will also draw on liberation psychology perspectives from Latin America.

Methodologically, this dissertation is interdisciplinary in nature; it engages these disciplines in a constructive and correlational manner.

A pastoral theological interpretation of Dalit cultural contextual experiences will be done primarily in relation to the caste system as operative in the Indian society. Understanding the caste system is the key to understanding Dalit contextual cultural

---

experiences and their critical needs of survival, liberation and nurturing a positive Dalit identity. In this dissertation Louis Dumont’s purity pollution principle will be examined to demythologize and deconstruct the caste system and frame it primarily in terms of a social construction of an ideology that has enslaved Dalit people for centuries.

Following the analysis of the historical context of the Dalit people in terms of the caste system, I will explore Dalit theology as a resource for Dalit pastoral theology. One of the central premises of Dalit theology is that Dalit people’s experiences in the context of caste oppression must be a primary source for theological reflection. Humanization of Dalit people and development of a life-affirming Dalit identity are the ultimate goals of Dalit liberation. Liberation was the norm for interpreting Dalit experiences as well as their culture. I will explore the theological writings of some of the pioneers of Dalit theology such as A.P. Nirmal and Abraham Aybrookuzhiel on the critical issues facing Dalit communities but also draw on these theologians to identify Dalit culture and religious belief systems as resources for doing theology.

A major deficit of the contemporary practices of pastoral care in India has been the inadequate utilization of psychological perspectives to understand and respond to the Dalit condition. The Dalit condition bears not only deep marks of physical violence but also psychological oppression. According to Ann Cudd,

"Psychological oppression occurs when one is oppressed through one’s mental states, emotionally or by manipulation of one’s belief states, so that one is psychologically stressed, reduced in one’s own self-image, or otherwise psychically harmed."

---


Material oppression and psychological oppression cannot be seen as two different things; they “mutually cause and exacerbate each other.”32 The psychological condition that a long history of oppression has given rise to among the Dalits is given the expression ‘Dyche,’ the wounded psyche.33 Low self-esteem, a culture of self-blame and feelings of worthlessness are some of the dominant manifestations of the wounded psyche of the Dalit people.34

Appropriate psychological and cultural resources have not been developed in the prevailing models of pastoral theology and care to address these psychological injuries suffered by the Dalit people under the caste oppression. In the new communal contextual and intercultural model of Dalit pastoral care, relevant psychological insights from the theoretical perspectives of Franz Omar Fanon, a French psychiatrist, as well as Paulo Freire and Ignacio Martín-Baró, Latin American liberation psychologists, will be critically examined and utilized to illuminate the Dalit condition and develop resistance strategies. Liberation psychological perspectives of these theorists explore the links between an individual’s psychological suffering and the social, political and economic context in which people are situated. Psychological experiences of caste oppression gleaned from Dalit writings and reflections in Dalit autobiographies will give an indigenous perspective on the psychological impact of a caste oppression of Dalit people.

32 Ibid., 24.
34 Ibid., 255-351.
Following the historical, contextual and psychological analysis, I will discuss a method of intervention that draws core ideas from narrative counseling approach utilized by Christie Neuger. I will also explore narrative group therapy techniques by Gerald Monk, Wendy Drewery, and John Winslade, such as naming, externalizing, deconstruction of the socially dominant story and reauthoring of alternative stories relevant to Dalit empowerment.

**Significance and Contribution**

The significance of this dissertation can be primarily seen in relation to the Dalit Christian community in terms of its contribution to the Dalit pastoral care and theology. To date there are only one published work and one dissertation that can be associated with Dalit pastoral care. The book was written about fifteen years ago by a Western scholar specializing on Dalit history. Even though the dissertation does discuss about the Dalit Christians, its primary focus is on developing a more inclusive identity for the Indian Orthodox Church. The dissertation is more about the identity of the Indian Orthodox Church than developing a model of pastoral theology and care for Dalit Christian community in India. This dissertation project’s significance can also be seen in utilization of relevant indigenous and non-indigenous resources and epistemologies in

---


36 John C. B. Webster, *Pastor to Dalits* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1995). This book is more of a survey on Dalit pastors and the psychosocial needs of Dalit communities than a serious work on the nature and content of Dalit pastoral theology.

constructing a Dalit pastoral theology. The question is not whether a resource is indigenous but whether it has liberative potential in a particular context. This project also redefines pastoral care as the ministry of the entire ecclesial community, greatly enhancing the liberation struggle of Dalit communities. And finally, this dissertation provides a specific method of counseling intervention to address psychological challenges that Dalit contend with every day in their lives, such as low self-esteem, dependency syndrome or lack of initiative.

**Chapter Outline**

**Chapter 1**: Introduction and statement of the problem. This chapter presents the background of the problem, states the thesis and scope, explains the methodological structure and approach, states the significance and presents a review of literature.

**Chapter 2**: Situating Dalit experience in the historical and socio-cultural context. Here I analyze the historical and socio-cultural experience of the Dalit people in reference to the socio-cultural reality of the caste system. I also discuss the history of colonialism and Christian missions among the Dalits.

**Chapter 3**: Dalit experience and theological perspectives. In this chapter I discuss the manner in which the Western classic theological traditions and as well as the Indian Christian theology have shaped pastoral care and theology in South India. I utilize Dalit theology as an indigenous theological resource for constructing Dalit pastoral theology in order to address the critical needs of Dalit communities in South India.
Chapter 4: Dalit experience and psychological perspective. In this chapter I explore Dalit oppression and identity issues by utilizing selected narrative and liberationist psychological perspectives. Here the focus is on understanding the debilitating effects of internalized caste oppression on the self-perception and sense of self-agency of Dalit people. I explain how recognizing these internalized values will help Dalits to participate creatively in their own liberation.

Chapter 5: A new paradigm of Dalit pastoral theology. The indigenous sources identified in the previous chapter are utilized to construct a new pastoral theology for Dalits that affirms and reclaims their Dalitness in positive ways that value their cultural and religious belief systems and empower their sense of self agency to resist and dismantle the socio-cultural reality of the caste system.

Chapter 6: Dalit narratives and Dalit pastoral theology. In this chapter I introduce Dalit narratives of caste oppression and cultural alienation and bring them into conversation with Dalit theological and psychological perspectives to illuminate the Dalit context and inform relevant practices of pastoral care. I explore ideas from narrative therapy in pastoral care interventions with specific Dalit issues. The chapter concludes by enumerating specific communal based pastoral care functions as well strategies to respond constructively to the critical needs of survival, liberation and a positive Dalit identity.
CHAPTER 2
THE CASTE SYSTEM AND THE DALITS

Introduction

The institution of the caste system is a complex and multifaceted exploitative cultural system that for thousands of years has been the primary source of oppression of Dalit communities in India. The caste system is not only a form of socio-cultural exploitation but also a form of group identity for Dalit communities. It is in this regard, Rajkumar writes, “Understanding Dalits inevitably entails understanding the Indian caste system.”¹ Thus this chapter will not only be a basic introduction to the cultural reality of the caste system in India, but also to the historical and socio-cultural experiences of Dalit communities in relation to the caste system. In particular the focus will be on Dalit Christians in South India and their caste based oppression in the religious and cultural life of the Church. In the final section of the chapter, I will attempt to develop a useful theoretical perspective on the caste system after discussing some of the dominant theories advanced in the past by prominent sociologists and anthropologists on the origin and nature of the institution of caste system, which in some way is uniquely an Indian socio-cultural phenomenon.

¹ Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 4.
The caste system is one of the oldest and most enduring social institutions in the world. In many ways it is unique to the Indian society and forms the basis of its social structure. It is the principle source of the norms, values and sanctions around which the institutional patterns of conduct\(^2\) are defined for the Indian people. The word “caste” has its roots in the Latin word ‘castus,’ which means pure or chaste. It was first used by the Spanish as ‘casta,’ meaning tribes, species or races, and was used in reference to the mixed breed between Europeans, Indians and Africans.\(^3\) The Portuguese used this word around seventeenth century in the Indian context “to denote the Indian institution, as they thought such a system was intended to keep purity of blood.”\(^4\) It is likely that endogamy, one of the most pronounced characteristics of the Indian social groups, may have influenced Portuguese thinking on the caste system. Endogamous practice continues to be a defining feature of caste system in India today.

Scholars disagree on the meaning of the term “caste.” Arriving at a precise definition is made difficult because caste is not a “timeless intellectual abstraction” but rather a social form that has a “history of its own, which has changed, and is changing, and has certainly diverged substantially from its misty and obscure origins.”\(^5\) Part of the

\(^2\) “The term institutional patterns of conduct refers to the patterns of behavior of everyday life in all the basic institutions of society: the economy, the political systems, the educational network, the family, and religion among other…it refers to the most fundamental affairs of daily life throughout the course of one’s life.” Melvin M. Tumin, *Social Stratification: The Forms and Functions of Inequality*, 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1985), 6.


\(^4\) Ibid.

challenge in defining caste also lies in its heterogeneous character. In the long history of its establishment, according to Forrester, not only has the caste system come to “mean different things at different periods of time” but as a system it also manifests itself in a diversity of forms in different parts of India. For example, ethnological studies show that the caste system in West Bengal is dissimilar in some ways from the one in Tamil Nadu.

The caste system is often defined in an idealized manner as constituting four distinct social groups, also known as *varnas*. The *varnas* are ranked in hierarchical relation to each other with *Brahmins* (priests and teachers) at the apex of the social order, followed by *Kshatriyas* (rulers and warriors), *Vaishyas* (merchants and farmers), and *Shudras* (workers and craftspeople), who are at the bottom tiers of the caste pyramid. In addition to these four caste groups, there is another distinct social group of people in the Indian society who, on account of their polluting nature, are regarded as socially unworthy to be included in the caste or *varna* system. They are a people without any caste identity and hence are the outcastes of the Indian society. Their “outcaste” status does not imply that they constitute a separate society; they are, “in many aspects of life” very much “an integral part of the Indian society.”

---


7 *Varna* is a Sanskrit word that literally means ‘color.’

8 Robert Deliege, *The Untouchables of India* (Guilford: Berg, 1999), 8.
they are an integral part of the society. The fact that they are denied privileges which the higher castes enjoy does not mean that they are not part of the society.”

While the outcastes are not part of the caste system, their lives are inextricably tied to caste system. For many of the outcaste communities in India today, life continues to be ordered and governed by the principles of the caste system. Who they are (cultural identity), where they live (designated areas of habitation), what they can do or not do (occupational restrictions), how they related to other social groups (social, commensal and matrimonial relations) continue to be shaped by the cultural rules of caste system.

As mentioned before, this fourfold division of India is an idealized rather than an actual or real portrayal of the organizational structure of Indian society. The hierarchical ordering of social groups in India is much more complex than is conveyed by the *varna* system. Srinivas writes that the “*varna-scheme* refers at best only to the broad categories of the society and not to its real and effective units.” A more helpful way to comprehend this complexity is to understand the concept of *jati*. “Caste” is a European term that is basically a conflation of two distinct but loosely related indigenous concepts of *jati* and *varna*. When used in the Indian context, the term can refer to both *jati* and *varna*. While the *varna* system can be understood as a theoretical division of Hindu

---


10 Ibid., 65.


12 Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 4.
society, jati system can be seen as a more practical one. Jatis, rather than varnas, constitute the basic socially organized units into which traditional Indian society is divided. In empirical terms, the caste system should be seen as a system of regional and local jatis, each with a history of its own, whether this is in Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, Bengal, or Gujarat. The histories may differ, but the form of social organization does not.

**Jati and Features of the Caste System**

A Jati can be defined as

an endogamous group bearing a common name and claiming a common origin, membership in which is hereditary, linked to one or more traditional occupations, imposing on its members certain obligations and restrictions in matters of social intercourse, and having more or less a determinate position in a hierarchical scale of ranks.

There are thousands of jatis in India, the largest containing many millions of persons and the smallest perhaps only hundreds. It is for this reason one can say that there is a poor correlation between the caste system (understood as four-fold division of society) and the jati system. The fourfold division of Indian society as enumerated in caste system gives the impression that castes are the same all over India. That is however, not true. As stated above, “there are many, many jatis in India and each region has castes that are unique. Any attempt to create a pan-Indian list of castes, let alone a consistent

---


ranking of them, would be absurd.16 The above analysis points to just one of the many complexities that one encounters in discussing the caste system in India.

Traditionally a jati or caste group was associated with a particular occupation in which specific members of the jati specialized in. The kinds of occupation can range from metalworking, carpentry, farming, weaving, laundering, or leather work to manual scavenging, street sweeping etc. Various traditional occupations were graded based on the purity and pollution principle, which also determined the rank of the group in the caste hierarchy. In other words, hierarchy is one of the defining features of the caste system. It is one of the principle bases on which the caste system is organized. If there were hierarchy, caste as a system would have little or no relevance. Work considered pure was performed by those jatis that ranked high in caste hierarchy. Less pure work was performed by those low in the caste hierarchy. In the contemporary Indian context, a jati’s association with certain occupation has largely broken down. Members of a jati are no longer bound to engage in jati associated occupations. It must be noted that this is more prominent in the urban areas than the rural sections of Indian society, where certain caste communities continue to engage in traditional occupations.

As stated in the definition of jati above, endogamy remains one of the most enduring features of the caste system. A more relaxed approach to rules of endogamous practices among various jatis across India would certainly lead to complete disintegration of the caste system.17 Endogamous practices in the caste system are meant to preserve the ritual position of jatis on the purity-pollution continuum. Even though caste rules strictly

---

16 Diane P. Mines, Caste in India (Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies, 2009), 34.
forbid members to enter into a matrimonial relationship with other caste communities, inter-caste marriages do take place, and more so in the middle rage groups of the caste hierarchy. It needs to be mentioned here that gender discrimination is very much evident in how rules pertaining to endogamy are observed among various caste groups. For example, if a high caste man enters into a matrimonial relationship with a low caste woman, the child born to the couple may be recognized as a member of the father’s caste. However, if the father belongs to a low caste group, and the mother belongs to an upper caste group, the child born would invariably be regarded as low caste.

Each caste has certain well-defined customs, rituals, traditions and practices that guide the social and personal conduct of its members. There are also elaborate caste-specific practices and restrictions on caste members regarding food and social intercourse with other caste groups. Certain caste groups restrict on what one can eat or drink and with whom one can have commensal relations. As a practice, members of the upper caste communities do not engage in commensal relations with those in the lower ranked caste communities. Here again the notion of ritual purity guides social behavior. For the upper caste communities, sharing of food with low caste communities can be polluting. However, commensal relations are more relaxed among the middle rage caste groups, where community members shares meals together. And certainly, this relaxing of the rules is more prominent in the urban areas than in the rural villages.

Another important aspect of hierarchical ranking of caste groups or *jatis* is that they are sometimes unclear and fluid, and vary from place to place. Srinivas writes that
the “position which each caste occupies in the local hierarchy is frequently not clear.”

Mobility of caste groups within the local hierarchy of caste rankings contributes significantly to this lack of well-defined caste rankings among various jatis. By means of Sanskritization, low caste communities can attain a higher raking in the caste order.

Srinivas describes Sanskritization as

[t]he process by which a low caste or tribe or other group takes over the customs, ritual, beliefs, ideology and style of life of a high and, in particular, a 'twice born' caste. The sanskritization of a group has usually the effect of improving its position in the caste hierarchy. It normally presupposed either an improvement in the economic or political position of the group concerned or a higher group self-consciousness resulting from contact with a source of the Great Tradition' of Hinduism.

The upward mobility of jatis or castes in social ranking sometimes occurs over several generations, and usually involves entire jatis rather than individuals because jatis are very cohesive social units, with strong identifiable customs and way of life. The Nadar caste in Tamilnadu, traditionally a toddy-tapping community, can be seen as a textbook example of a social group that has achieved a higher social rank through the process of Sanskritization. In the early nineteenth century, Nadar community was low caste community with no access to temples, public wells and roads. However, through political participation, economic entrepreneurship and imitating the dress and rituals of

---

18 Srinivas, Castes in Modern India and Other Essays, 66.

19 Srinivas, The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization and Other Essays (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 77.

20 They were once a quasi-Untouchable caste group. Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany. The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 81.
upper castes, they gradually ascended in the caste ranking, to occupy a position of power and influence in the state of Tamilnadu.21

While there is considerable ambiguity about rankings for groups in the middle range of the caste structure, there is no such ambiguity about who are at the top and who are at the bottom. There is little or no caste mobility for the outcastes of the Indian society. They are almost always ranked at the bottom of Indian society. Throughout the known history of the caste system, the outcastes of the Indian society have been called by a variety of pejorative terms such as Chandalas (dirty), Panchamas (the fifth caste) Avarnas (without caste). Untouchables, Depressed classes (under British rule) and Harijans22 (God’s children, Gandhi) are terms used before the word ‘Dalit’ gained widespread appeal among the caste oppressed communities to assert their selfhood and identity. Etymologically, the term Dalit is derived from a Sanskrit word dal meaning crack, split and open. In its adjective form it means burst, split, broken or torn asunder, crushed and destroyed.23 The term was first used in the nineteenth century by a Marathi social reformer and revolutionary Mahatma Jyotirao Phule to “describe the outcastes and untouchables as the oppressed and broken victims of [the] caste-ridden society.” 24 The


22 There are some outcaste communities in Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, including Ramnamis in Chhattisgarh, who continue to use the term harijan to denote to their caste identity and do not consider it derogatory in any sense. See. Ramdas Lamb, Rapt in the Name: The Ramnamis, Ramnam, and Untouchable Religion in Central India (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 7.


24 Ibid.
term gained mainstream appeal during the 1970s Dalit Panther Movement of Maharashtra where it was used as a “constant reminder of their age-old oppression, denoting both their state of deprivation and the people who are oppressed.”25

The essential features of the caste system enumerated above are particularly discriminatory against Dalit communities because of the purity-pollution principle. Pollution for most Hindus is “either a temporary or a limited affair.” For example, women are considered temporarily impure in their menstruation period and may refrain from cooking or worshiping.26 Likewise birth and death also cause temporary pollution for Hindus, and daily pollution may occur from secretions of the body.27 Ceremonial rituals or a simple bathing can reinstate a temporary impure person to a status of ritual purity. However, that is not the case for those who are permanently polluted. No ceremonial rituals, bathing or cleansing acts can reinstate a permanently polluted person as pure. In the socio-religious world of Hinduism, the Dalits are regarded as the permanently polluted people. They are regarded as polluted people because of the kinds of work they engage in such as skinning or removal of animal carcasses, manual scavenging, leather work, drum beating, work related to cremation, toddy-tapping that are considered as polluting occupations as they deal with human waste and polluting objects.28

25 Ibid.

26 Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany. The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 7.
As an outcaste community, the Dalits in India endure a variety of prohibitions, discriminations, disabilities and segregations imposed on them by the dominant caste groups. The most pronounced form of segregation is the geographical seclusion of their residential areas from mainstream society. This geographical segregation has been sanctioned from ancient times, for instance by *Manusmrithi*, a religious text of Hinduism from the early centuries C. E., in which it is written, “The dwelling of Chandalas and Svapakas (should be) outside the village.” Residential areas of the caste communities are located in the center of the village, with immediate access to public amenities and facilities like water sources, village temple, etc. With stringent caste rules in place to preserve and maintain ritual purity of the caste communities, Dalits were barred from having any social intercourse with high caste groups. Their breath, sight and “even their shadow were considered as pollution to the upper castes” Burdened with an impure caste status, “they were banned from temples, religious processions, school, public wells, walking through Hindu streets, and also from obtaining the services of barbers and washer men.”

At one time, “Dalits had to keep away from the different levels of upper caste people, 33 feet from the lowest group, 66 feet from the second middle caste group and 99 feet from the Brahmins,” clearly reflective not so much of literal distance but of the

30 However, such geographical distinctions are found less in the urban areas.
32 Ibid.
hierarchical caste gradations in the purity-pollution continuum. “Pollution and maintenance of social distance are specific forms of segregation and inequality bred within the caste system.” Dalits are the only community of people in the Indian society who as a social group are made the particular object of this discriminatory practice.

Hierarchical values and discrimination based on the notion of pollution-purity also extend to the deities and temple festivals of the Dalit people. In his analysis of a village religion in Tamil Nadu, Dumont concluded that Dalit worship the meat eating god Karuppu swami while the caste Hindus’ god, Aiynar, is vegetarian, reflecting theological categories of impure and pure respectively. Moreover, Aiynar is regarded as the master god and Karuppu as the servant god and in temple festivals and ceremonial animal sacrifices, a curtain is drawn before Aiynar to shield the god from these sights and to symbolize the low status of the deity Karrupu-swami.

Among the many humiliating discriminatory disabilities imposed on Dalits is their systematic exclusion from centers of knowledge and learning, both sacred as well as secular. Ancient Hindu law books such as Manu Smruti and Gautama Dharma Shastra said the following for Dalits who dare to gain access to the sacred texts:


36 Ibid.

37 While the Dalit people’s access to sacred knowledge was more direct, their access to secular knowledge was less direct. Practices of social segregation and discrimination made it very difficult for them to have quality education. While the situation is improving, many of the Dalit villages in India today
If he listens intentionally to the Vedas, his ears shall be filled with lead.
If he recites them, his tongue shall be cut out.
If he remembers them, his body shall be split in twain.\(^{38}\)

However, the Bhakti movements in Hinduism of the fifteenth century were more open to the Dalit communities. Dalits were not only accepted into the religious communities but treated as equals. In these movements, Dalits did have access to sacred texts and were imparted religious teaching and education.

The caste system also imposed restrictions on economic rights and privileges on the Dalit communities, which put them at a great disadvantage to pursue occupations that can adequately provide for their basic human needs. Traditional occupations of the Dalits are not only menial and degrading but also keep them in perpetual poverty, making them the most economically vulnerable and exploited sections of the Indian society. For example, it is a common practice that “Dalits are made to render free services in times of death, marriage, or any village function.”\(^{39}\) The exploitative nature of the caste system, especially in the economic realm, can be seen in the complex *jajmani* system that incorporates economic transactions between and among various caste groups. The system involves a family offering certain services such as agricultural labour or ritual performances. In return for these services the family receives remuneration in the form of

---

38 While the Dharma Shastras were talking about the Shudra caste group, it needs to be mentioned that Dalits were not seen any differently from the Shudras, who were above them in caste ranking. Narendra Jadhav. *Untouchables: My Family's Triumphant Journey Out of the Caste System in Modern India* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2003), 2.

39 Ibid.
a portion of the agricultural produce, instead of cash. This pattern of exchange of goods and services, in most cases, involves landowning high caste communities and landless low caste communities. On account of the disparity in relation to economic and political power between these two classes, there remains a high probability of economic exploitation of the landless low caste communities such as Dalits. This sort of economic exchange continues from one generation to another and takes the form of bonded labor. Many in the Dalit community feel trapped in this jajmani system. As the Indian society continues to modernize, the jajmani is gradually breaking down and disappearing from many village societies.

The psychological effect of caste oppression on the Dalits communities is also well documented. Paranjpe, in his study on caste, writes,

Many Harijans (sic) indicate the internalization of low status. The reaction of the personalities to degraded social status in terms of feelings of desperation, self hate, withdrawal and seclusion, anger and hatred, impulses for rebellion and reconstruction, a feeling of ‘nothingness’ or loss of identity were reflected in different cases.40

Similarly, Davasahayam suggests, “the psychological consequences of untouchability on the [D]alits are too damaging: lowered self-esteem, confusion of self-identity, self-hate, perception of the world as a hostile place, hypertension, neuroticism”41 among others.

T.K. Oomen touches upon the social, political, economic, religious as well as psychological dimensions of Dalit existence when he describes their oppression as


“cumulative deprivation” that leaves no aspect of their lives untouched by caste based discriminations and disabilities.\textsuperscript{42} The caste system, an antithesis of egalitarian society, systematically reduces Dalits to non-entities, a no-people. It robs them of their basic human dignity and basic human rights and forces them into a life of slavery. Through the centuries of their existence as the shunned communities by the Hindu caste order they have yearned to escape the caste oppression and to seek social dignity and respect.

The next section of this chapter will present a brief history of Dalit Christian communities in South India. It will show that many of the Dalits who converted to Christianity were motivated by a strong desire to elevate their social standing in the society. Further discussion on the experiences of the contemporary Dalit Christians will establish that their aspirations for higher social status remain an unrealized hope. What makes this discussion particularly significant is that in the contemporary Indian society, Christian Dalit communities are burdened by more dimensions of caste oppression than their counterparts in other religions.

**Dalit Mass Movements**

The history of the Dalit Christians in South India largely goes back to the modern Dalit movements in the nineteenth century when “Dalits began to make concerted efforts

to change their lives and Dalit aspirations.”

Western Christian missionaries identified them as ‘mass movements,’ that were localized, grass roots, somewhat simultaneous, conversion movements, initiated and led by Dalits. While in some parts of India there were Dalits who chose to become Muslims or Sikhs, the vast majority of Dalit converts throughout the country became Christians.

The mass movements were something “most Protestant missions neither sought nor expected, and to begin with they were puzzled by seeing that caste links could help rather than hinder evangelization.” The elite castes of the Indian society were the primary focus of the Western missionary’s evangelical work. It was generally assumed by the missionaries that once the high castes of the society begin to convert to the Christian faith, the low castes of the society would be more amenable to their evangelical efforts. If they could convince the Brahmins, who are the educated elite and representatives of Hinduism, of the truth of Christianity, “Christianity would percolate downwards slowly until even the Untouchables would at last be gathered in.”

The Portuguese Roman Catholic mission had witnessed one of the first mass conversions among the fishing community of Paravas in the coastal regions of Tamil Nadu in 1535-37 and Mukkivas in the coastal districts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu in 1544. Until then most of the conversions involved either individuals or families. These

---

44 Ibid.
45 Forrester, Christian Ethics and Practical Theology, 63.
46 Ibid., 64.
47 Webster, The Dalit Christians: A History, 44.
two fishing communities “were seeking protection from local oppressors.” It must be noted that almost all the mass conversions took place in villages rather than in big cities. This can be explained by the close kinship relations among the village residents but also by the severity of Dalit oppression in villages compared with the urban regions.

Historians also note that most of the mass conversion of Dalit communities occurred during the time of famines—1833-34, 1876-78, 1898-1900 and 1907-09. Consequently, they have suggested that material motives predominated in the mass conversions of Dalit communities to Christianity. The new converts from the mass movements were given undignified labels such as ‘rice Christians.’

The suggestion that there was a material basis for Dalit mass conversions can be disputed based on the fact that conversions were not an easy experience for many Dalit communities. As part of the conversion process certain occupational and dietary requirements were placed on converts to the new religion. These restrictions were more than mere inconveniences; they created real problems for converts. Dissuading the new converts from working on Sundays or prohibiting them from consuming carrion proved to be deeply disruptive to their daily lives. Grind}ing poverty made it extremely difficult for them to make such choices, besides creating situations of conflicts for them with the caste people, whose work demands did not involve any weekly holidays. Prohibition on

---

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Stanislaus, The Liberative Mission of the Church among Dalit Christians, 140.
51 Ibid.
‘worship of idols’ meant that they had to cease performing certain traditional functions in village religious rituals and celebrations. It was not uncommon for the high caste communities to respond with retribution and persecution. More often than not, the missionaries would come to the rescue of the Dalits by interceding for them, offering legal advice where it seemed necessary or even “intimidating local officials.”

Missionaries themselves pondered the motivations of the Dalit communities converting to Christianity in droves. After much thought and reflection, they listed five possible motivations that were most immediate and manifestly operative: the conviction that Christianity is the true religion; a desire for protection from oppressors and, if possible, material aid; the desire for education for their children; the knowledge that those who have become Christian had improved ‘both in character and condition’; and the influence of Christian relatives.

In the words of one missionary,

It ought to be frankly recognized that it may be towards the Motherhood of the Church rather than towards the Fatherhood of the savior from sin that the faces of the pariahs and aboriginal races of India are being slowly turned. They may be seeking baptism, for the most part not from a desire to have their lives and consciences cleansed from sin and to enter the eternal life of God, but because the church presents itself to them as a refuge from oppression, and as a power that fosters hope and makes for betterment.

---

52 Dancing or drum beating in village procession or festivals.

53 Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History*, 44.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid., 54.

Scholars generally agree 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.”

The demographic impact of the mass conversions on Indian Church was enormous. Between the years of 1872 and 1931, the population of the Christian community in India has quadrupled, to about six million. The Indian Church was also transformed from being an urban institution to a predominantly rural one. But the most important sociological fact of the Indian Church was the Dalitization of Indian Christianity. Estimates may vary but between fifty and eighty percent of the Indian church is comprised of Dalit people.

**Missionaries and the Caste System**

Roman Catholic missionaries were very accommodative as far as caste beliefs and practices were concerned. Part of that could be explained by the political interests of the Portuguese colonizers who wanted to keep the caste system unchanged. They needed the cooperation of the upper castes in order to make the colonial rule acceptable. Hence, “they encouraged the Catholic missionaries who came with them to get more Brahmins

---


58 Ibid., 61.

59 Ibid., 62.

60 Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 36.

61 Ibid.
and other upper-castes into the Church without attempting to change the caste system.”

One of the most prominent Catholic missionaries who pioneered this accommodative approach was Robert de Nobili, who established a catholic mission center in Madurai (Tamil Nadu) in 1606. He de-Westernized himself to appeal to the Hindu caste groups by modeling as a sanyasi. By conforming to the high caste mannerisms, food and dress, he clearly distanced himself from the low caste communities. Among the very first converts were the high caste Brahmins, who were not required to renounce their caste status or customs. He wrote, “[b]y becoming a Christian, [o]ne does not renounce his caste, nobility, or usages. The idea that Christianity interfered with them has been impressed upon the people by the devil, and is the great obstacle to Christianity.”

Nobili’s efforts were directed at making it possible for converts to experience Christian spirituality while being at ‘home’ in the Hindu culture. Webster, in his general analysis of the Catholic missionary activity, wrote, “the Catholics, following a policy of adaptation and viewing caste not as a religious but as a social institution like any other system of stratification, chose to work within the caste system.”

---


63 Hindu religious mendicant.

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

65 Ibid., 13.

Some of the Protestant missionaries to arrive in India were Ziegenbalg and Plutschau. In their missionary work they

adapted the method of ‘adaptation’ like the Catholics, permitting the converts to retain caste and thus endeavored to establish an indigenous church. They took a friendly attitude towards the caste and accepted caste distinctions.

Caste was not a problem for them; it was irrelevant and its existence did not warrant any attention on their part. Caste was perceived as a “secular institution that could be maintained without compromising any Christian principle.” One of the missionaries who worked among Kallars in Thanjavur, “took a lenient view on caste and believed that with gentle persuasion and gradual dissemination of Christian ideas, caste within the churches would gradually disappear.”

Missionaries, by and large, had a very ambivalent attitude towards the caste system as it manifested in the church as well some of the institutions, such as schools, that came under their administration. Some of the missionaries struggled with the evil of the caste system but felt powerless to root it out. A missionary report in 1727 stated that: “after several long consultations, we decided that order could well exist side by side with Christian humility and unity and permitted that Pariahs and Sudras sit in the church separate by one year. But in the distribution of the Sacrament no difference was made.”

---


68 Ibid., 127, 128.

69 Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History*, 137.


71 Ibid., 128.

72 Ibid.
Missionaries from SPG (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel) and SPCK (The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge) took a specific stand on the caste problem. They were of the view that “it would be inappropriate and injudicious for missionaries to interfere with caste.”\(^7^3\) Caste problems had become so severe that Bishops had to intervene. While Bishop Reginald Heber directed the missionaries to stop interfering in ‘private meals and social intercourse’ of the native Christians, Bishop of the Anglican missionary body came out very strongly against caste feelings in the Church. He wrote:

The distinction of castes, then must be abandoned, decidedly, immediately, finally; and those who profess to belong to Christ must give this proof of their having really ‘put off,’ concerning the former conversation, ‘the old, and having put on the new man,’ in Christ Jesus. The Gospel recognizes no distinctions such as those of castes, imposed by a heathen usage.\(^7^4\)

In general, most of the Protestant missionary organizations were opposed to caste feelings in the Church, the only exception being the Lutherans, who had taken a more conciliatory, and at time, very accommodative approach towards caste practices in the Church. As far as Catholic missions are concerned, it is quite evident from the discussions above that they gave their overt blessings on maintaining caste customs and practices in the Church.

Setting aside the fact that some missionary organizations were more tolerant towards caste feelings in the Church, it is important to analyze the general failure of the missionary effort (among those Protestant missions vehemently opposed to caste

\(^7^3\) Ibid., 129.

\(^7^4\) Ibid., 129, 130.
practices in the Church) to root out the caste factor from the Indian Church. First, they were part of a missionary organization, focused on their mission, which is about evangelism. Their major concern was evangelism not social change. Dismantling the edifice of the caste system was not part of their vision and mission strategies. Second, their efforts were directed more at addressing the symptoms of the caste system than ideological roots that sustained caste culture in the Church and the society. As observed above, they would use their position and authority in the society to advocate for the Dalits in areas such as land rights or to intervene on their behalf in any of the disputes with the high caste communities. Third, many of the missionaries perceived the Dalits as victims of the caste system and not as partners and agents of transforming the Church and the society through empowerment and engendering critical consciousness.

Part of the failure of the missions to address the caste problem in the Church effectively could also be attributed to the conceptualization of the caste system as a moral issue for the Church. Thus they appealed to the moral agency of the caste people to renounce their caste attitudes. Missionaries certainly lacked a good grasp of how deep the cultural roots of the caste system run in the Indian psyche. As noted above, some of the strategies deployed in breaking down the caste barriers in the Church involved use of scriptural quotes and issuing some spiritual/ecclesial injunctions against caste practices in the Church. Those measures were inadequate to make any significant impact on how the caste mind continued to flourish in the Church as well as the society during the missionary (nineteenth and early part of twentieth century) and post-missionary period, (1940s and later).
Post-missionary Indian Dalit Church

It is quite clear from the previous discussion that Dalit communities in South India were drawn towards the Christian faith primarily in search of a social status and personal dignity as human beings, particularly in regards to the purity-pollution discrimination that they are subjected to in myriad ways in their socio-cultural relations with the caste people. The Dalit mass conversion movements are viewed as a momentous event in the history of the Indian church, because they completely changed the character and identity of the Christian community. “The social roots of the Indian Christian community had become predominantly Dalit roots.” Even though the Dalits constituted the majority of the Indian Church their caste status and social relations with the caste converts in the Church remained unchanged. Various government commission reports attest to the widely prevalent practice of caste discrimination in the non-Hindu communities. The Kaka Khalelkar Commission Report (1955) states:

Even a change of religion does not destroy caste. For instance, converts to Christianity sometimes carry caste practices with them though their religion does not recognize it. A large number of people belonging to lower castes, in particular, from the untouchables become converts to these religions to escape the rigor and humiliation of the Hindu caste system. It is sad to note, however, that even these converts could not easily shake off their old caste disabilities.

Another report in 1980 also underscored the caste feelings among non-Hindu minorities:

Though caste system is peculiar to Hindu society, yet in actual practice it also pervades to non-Hindu communities in India in varying degrees. There are two reasons for this phenomenon: first, caste system is a great conditioner of the mind and leaves an indelible mark on a person’s social consciousness and cultural moves. Consequently, even after conversion, the ex-Hindus carried with them

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

their deeply ingrained ideas of social hierarchy and stratification …non-Hindu minorities living in a pre-dominantly Hindu India could not escape from its dominant social cultural influences. Thus, both from within and without, castes amongst non-Hindu communities receive continuous substance and stimulus.77

Srinivas commented that in conversion to Christianity, the only change noticed in the converts was their new faith. The rest remained the same, including their standing in the society.78 The untouchable practices among the Christians did not escape the attention of Gandhi himself. He wrote,

Whether the Harijan is nominally a Christian, Muslim or Hindu and now Sikh, he is still a Harijan. He cannot change his spots inherited from Hinduism, so called. He may change his garb and call himself a Catholic Harijan or neo-Muslim or neo-Sikh but his untouchability will haunt him during his life time.79 Dalit Christians in India today are discriminated at multiple levels.

Indian constitution itself denies protective discrimination to Dalit Christians that is awarded to Dalits from other religions, including Buddhism and Sikhism.80 Hence, many Dalits who have converted to Christianity choose to identify themselves as Hindus in public records so as to avail state benefits. It is for this reason that even today it is difficult to get a precise number of Christian Dalits in the official census.

Christian Dalits are discriminated against by fellow caste Christians in social relations as well as religious rituals. There are separate parishes, separate celebrations,


78 M.N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India (New Delhi, India: Orient Longman, 2000), 60.


80 Even though the Indian constitution guarantees freedom of religion, Dalit Christians are discriminated against because of their faith and prevented from availing the benefits awarded by the state in terms of job and educational reservation and support because of their faith.
separate cemeteries, separate seating arrangements for Dalit Christians.⁸¹ Dalit Christians are not invited or welcome in the weddings, prayers or other ceremonies/festivals celebrated by the upper caste Christians.⁸² Even upper caste clergy maintain their social distance from the Dalit congregants and were not open to having Dalits visit, dine and socialize with them.⁸³

As with the caste Hindu community, the Dalits are divided among themselves into various subgroups and manifest hierarchical discriminations that are not substantively different from caste discriminations that the Dalits are subjected to by the upper caste groups. Malas and Madigas of Andhra Pradesh, for example, are two Dalit communities that live in colonies that are segregated from each other and have separate burial grounds.⁸⁴ They rarely socialize with each other and have rigid connubial restrictions. Christian Malas and Madiga, likewise, worship separately and have no social relations. This social segregation, Stanlius says, “is a classical example of the oppressed being ruled by the values of the oppressor.”⁸⁵

This discussion on the general historical and socio-cultural background of the Dalit Christian communities in South India clearly portrays the caste system as the

---


⁸² Ibid., 71.


⁸⁴ A detailed study has been done on these two communities and caste discrimination between them. See Prabhakar M. E. “Caste-Class and Status in Andhra Churches and Implications for Mission Today: Some Reflections,” *Religion and Society*, 28, no. 3 (1981).

primary source of oppression for Dalits. The rest of the chapter will be focused on deconstructing the caste system by examining various theories advanced to explain the origin and nature of the caste phenomenon that pervades every aspect of life in India.

Theories about the Origin and Nature of the Caste System

Numerous theories have been advanced to explain the emergence and development of the institution of the caste system. Sociologists and anthropologists, in the West as well as in India, have theorized on its origin. I will analyze several of these theories in terms of their significance in understanding some of the contributory factors that might have given rise to the caste system as an institution.

Traditional Hindu Mythic Explanation

This theory has its source in the earliest of the sacred text of Hinduism called Rig-Veda.86 This text describes how the four-fold division of the Indian society came about. It points to a cosmic giant Purusha, the primal man from whose body various caste groups were created: The Brahmins from his mouth, the Kshatriya from his arms, the Vaishya from his thighs, and from his feet were created the Shudra, the fourth group of the caste order. This theory has several important implications as noted by Clarke.87 First, it

---

86 The Rig-Veda is the first as well as the most important of four Vedas that are considered as the earliest known scriptural texts of Hinduism. The Vedas are primarily a collection of Hymns written in Sanskrit that “reveals a ritualistic religion of sacrifice, very different in many respects from the Hinduism of medieval and modern times, although sacrifice does remain a core ritual and the Vedas are still regarded by the majority of Hindu teachers as authoritative texts.” Christopher John Fuller, The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), 12.

87 Clarke, Dalits and Christianity, 32-33.
effectively preempts Dalits from making any anthropological claims of being part of the Hindu community. Second, this creation myth, in no ambiguous terms, establishes Brahmins communities’ supremacy over the production, control and interpretation of knowledge. Third, it suggests an ontological distinction and separation of Dalits from the rest of the Hindu community. Clarke writes, “This means that their religious perspectives and their discursive and symbolic practices were easily jettisoned from the sphere of dialogical interaction.” And from a more practical point of view, this theory’s silence on the Dalits also leaves unanswered questions such as their origin and the practice of caste oppression. The power of this theory lies in the fact that within the belief system of the Hindus god created the four-fold division of the society.

**Economic or Occupational Theory**

J.C. Nesfield attempted to explain caste system based on occupational and economic factors. He writes that ‘function and function alone is responsible for the origin of the caste system.’ Caste system rankings are the result of gradual consolidation of the superiority and inferiority associated with different occupations over a long period of time. In a similar vein, F.G. Bailey postulates that in the caste system each person “performs economic, political and ritual roles and except for certain anomalies, there is a high degree of coincidence between politico-economic rank and ritual ranking of

---

88 The anatomical region of the body of Purusha from where the Brahmmins were born symbolically represents the thinking and production center of knowledge. Even though specifically it is stated as the mouth of the *Purusha*, in general terms it is understood as the head of *Purusha*, that includes the mouth.

89 Clarke , *Dalits and Christianity*, 33.

Both theorists understood the caste system as a social structure that came into existence independent of the religious and cultural influences. This theory has been criticized because it discounts the cultural and religious sanctions that the caste system receives in the Indian society. It also fails to explain why people practicing same occupations belong to different castes in India.

Theory of Ritual Purity-Pollution

Louis Dumont, a French anthropologist, also attempted to understand and explain the caste system. His principle work, *Homo Hierarchicus* is considered a “milestone in the history of Indian sociology,” a “masterly synthesis” of the Hindu caste system and a “vigorous theoretical analysis of the principle of hierarchy, which is the basis of the system.”

Dumont conceptualized castes as “social realities: family, language, trade, profession, territory. At the same time, they are an ideology: a religion, a mythology, an ethic, a kinship system, a set of dietary laws.”

He proposed the purity-pollution theory by “combining empirical observations with an analysis of the sacred scriptures” that contested the materialistic interpretation of caste system by F.G. Bailey. Unequal access to economic as well as political resources was emphasized in the materialistic position as foundational to the Indian caste system.

---


92 Delige, *The Untouchables of India*, 37.


94 David Keane, *Caste-based Discrimination in International Human Rights Law*, 44.
Dumont, however, argues that “Superiority and superior purity are identical; it is in this sense that, ideologically, distinction of purity is the foundation of status” in the caste system.\(^95\) What particularly intrigued Dumont about the caste system was that Brahmans, or priests, as a caste group were at the apex of the caste hierarchy, above other caste group member who are more powerful both economically and politically.\(^96\) He concluded that they have high caste rank “because they are inherently purer than those below them. At the bottom, and in opposition to the Brahmans, are the Dalits, who are inherently polluted.”\(^97\) The caste system is not primarily built on material difference but is an expression of the opposition of the pure and the impure that forms the “fundamental characteristic of the caste system.”\(^98\)

Dumont clearly distinguished between a Western concept of hierarchy and the hierarchy that defined the caste order. In the West one’s class status is determined to a large extent by power and wealth. But caste hierarchy, for Dumont, is directly relational to one’s position in the purity-pollution continuum. Even though most of world religions have some notions around purity-pollution, it is only in the “religious and social system of the Hindus” that the idea is its foundation.\(^99\) For Dumont, “The relegation of Untouchables to the bottom of the social ladder is, therefore religious in nature”\(^100\) In


\(^{96}\) Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 33.

\(^{97}\) Ibid., 34.


\(^{99}\) Deliége, *The Untouchables of India*, 38.
reaching this conclusion, Dumont has effectively made a clear disjunction between status and power, and sought to prove that “caste ranking is essentially a ritual matter, stemming from the notions of purity and impurity, and not from the possession of power.”

His theory is informed by “structuralist cognitive principles” laid down by the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. The theory put forward by Levi-Strauss was that “social systems are underpinned by identifiable systems of values and concepts, which take the form of binary oppositions.” Dumont, applied this principle to the Indian caste order by singularly identifying purity-pollution as the fundamental binary opposition operative in how the various caste groups are hierarchically organized in relation to each other. Although Dumont made a compelling argument for understanding the caste order in its totality, there are several problems with regard to the method of his study and his conclusions. With regard to Dumont’s methodology Berreman writes,

His artificial, stiff, stereotypic and idealized view of caste conforms rather closely to the high caste ideal of what the caste system of Hindu India ought to be, according to those who value it positively: it conforms well to the theory of caste purveyed by learned Brahmanical tracts. Dumont’s theory is reductionist as it preoccupies itself with ritual element as the basis of caste group organization and ignores other plausible factors in sustaining caste structure. As mentioned above, it represents the dominant view of how caste system is

structured and the principles that inform it. It is oblivious to the perspectives from below, especially the Dalit communities. For example, Dalit communities such as the Pallars in Tamil Nadu who firmly reject ritual impurity imposed on them by the dominant castes.

Studies done on ceremonial rituals in Pallars reveal that they have expressed no fundamental interest in ritual purity per se. Rather ritual purity for Dalits is basically about “making a claim to social status. The Pallars are merely treating their service castes in exactly the same way as other castes treat theirs. They are following conventional social behavior”104 In his most scathing attack on Dumont’s view on caste, Berreman writes:

Dumont fails almost totally to recognize caste for what it is on an empirical level: institutionalized inequality; guaranteed differential access to the valued things in life. Let there be no mistake. The human meaning of caste for those who live it is power and vulnerability, privilege and oppression, honor and denigration, plenty and want, reward and deprivation, security and anxiety. As an anthropological document, a description of caste which fails to convey this is a travesty… 105

In Berreman’s view, “Dumont was concentrating on the wrong matter. The appropriate issue was not whether Untouchables were part of and accepted the Hindu order, but how an inhumane order of domination and subordination could be broken.”106

In the final section of the chapter, I will build on Berreman’s view that the caste system is an inhuman order of domination and subordination. By making this argument, I am challenging Dumont’s position that caste is primarily about ritual ranking and not


105 Berreman, Gerald. D. Caste and Other Inequalities. (Meerut: Folklore Institute, 1979), 159.

106 Mendelsohn and Vicziany, The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and State in the Modern India, 15.
about status and power. I also challenge G.S. Ghurye’s view that caste-society was an attempt “on the part of the upholders of the Brahmanic civilization to exclude the aborigines and Shudras from religious and social communion with themselves.” By utilizing the social dominance theory, I will show that caste is not just a system of exclusion, but a system of domination.

According to the social dominance theory propounded by Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto,

[A]ll human societies tend to be structured as systems of group-based social hierarchies. At the very minimum, this hierarchical social structure consists of one or a small number of dominant hegemonic groups at the top and one or a number of subordinate groups at the bottom. Among other things, the dominant group is characterized by its possession of a disproportionately large share of positive social value, or all those material and symbolic things for which people strive.

They distinguish among three forms of stratification systems: a) age system, b) gender system and c) arbitrary-set system. Accordingly,

The arbitrary-set system is filled with socially constructed and highly salient groups based on characteristics such as clan, ethnicity, estate, nation, race, caste, social class, religious sect, regional grouping, or any other socially relevant group distinction that the human imagination is capable of construction. Among the three stratified groups, the “arbitrary-set system is also, by far, associated with the greatest degree of violence, brutality and oppression.”

---


109 Ibid., 32.

110 Ibid., 34.
postulates that group-based hierarchy is produced by social institutions of the society and the hierarchical integrity is maintained by systemic terror.\textsuperscript{111}

The discussion above has already been noted how Dalits are discriminated against by the State in area of reservation. Dalits also remain among the most illiterate communities in India, and that very much attests to the widespread discrimination of Dalit students. The historical exclusion of Dalits from attaining religious/secular education continues in modern India, in both covert and overt ways. Systematic terror is an everyday experience for Dalits across India, committed mostly by the upper caste groups. Often many of the atrocities go unreported for fear of more attacks on those who lodge a report in the local police station. Some of atrocities perpetrated against Dalits are rape, violent attacks, parading naked with painted faces, dispossession of lands or property, and physical prevention from voting.\textsuperscript{112}

The social dominance theory further states that the group-based hierarchy is maintained by legitimizing myths that consist of “values, beliefs, stereotypes, and ideologies.”\textsuperscript{113} These provide “moral and intellectual justification for the social practices that distribute social value within the social system.”\textsuperscript{114} Here the term “ideology” needs to be explained. It can be understood as knowledge deployed in the service of power. This view detaches ideology from questions of truth and falsity. A version of events, or a way of representing a state

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 41.

\textsuperscript{112} Oliver D’Souza, \textit{The Truth about Dalits: Caste System and Untouchability} (New Delhi: Dusky River, 2009), 56-59.

\textsuperscript{113} Sidanius and Pratto, \textit{Social Dominance}, 57.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
of affairs, may be true or false, but it is ideological to the extent that it is used by relatively powerful groups in society to sustain their position.115

Ideology not only encompasses what people think, but “what we think about, what we feel, how we behave, and the pattern of all our social relationships.”116 Ritual purity-pollution, *Karma*117 and *Dharma*118 are some of the elements of caste ideologies that have become part of the Dalit consciousness. Selvan explains,

That the principle of purity and pollution and social hierarchy existed even among the members of lower castes indicates the powerful influence of Brahmanical ideology, on the one hand, and the acceptance of the caste ideology by the lower castes, on the other. The Brahmanical ideology in a relatively peaceful manner swayed the lower-caste people so that subordination and incorporation into the Brahmanical ideological domain was accepted. The theory of *karma* and the belief in fatalism made these people endure inequality and oppression.119

The Indian Church as a social and religious institution has not been immune to the pervasive influence of the brahmanical ideologies that inform the Indian value system. Choondassery writes,

Brahminism and its religious ideology produced an ethical system rooted in the ideology of purity, pollution and human inequalities. It created a religious and social value system that considers the value of human beings within a paradigm of superiority and inferiority in the hierarchy of castes. Therefore, the Indian religious and social value system is inherently and innately not an egalitarian, but an elitist system…The Christian churches of India have assimilated the elitist value system of Brahminism…Consequently, the churches perpetuate cast

\[\text{\ldots}115 \text{Vivien Burr, } An \ Introduction \ to \ Social \ Constructivism \ (London: Routledge, 1995), 85.\]

\[\text{\ldots}116 \text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{\ldots}117 \text{*Karma* is the belief that one’s actions in the current life will determine the caste status in the next life.}\]

\[\text{\ldots}118 \text{The literal meaning of *Dharma* is duty, obligation. From the perspective of the caste system it could mean duties or obligations assigned to individual or groups based on their caste status.}\]

\[\text{\ldots}119 \text{S. Selvan, “Sociology of India and Hinduism,” in } Dalits \ in \ Modern \ India, \text{ed. S.M Michael, 200.}\]
dominance and its constituent element of oppression in its social and often religious practices.\textsuperscript{120}

As long as the ministry of pastoral care operates within this value system that is governed by the rules of the dominant brahminical culture, it becomes complicit in the oppression of the Dalits. In the next chapter, the ministry of pastoral care and counseling in the Dalit context will be examined with the help of some of the case studies done in the Dalit communities. Also, some of the traditional theological sources that have informed the ministry of pastoral care in the Dalit context will be analyzed. The major focus in the next chapter will be on Dalit theology, to examine the problems and constructive possibilities it holds as a pastoral theological resource to challenge the caste ideologies and the brahminical value systems and generate liberative practices that are life-affirming for the Dalit communities, in the Church and the society.

\textsuperscript{120} Yesudasan D. Choondassery “Opting for the Margins as Imago Dei: A Dalit Ethics of Human Flourishing” (Ph. D. diss., Drew University, 2006), 61.
CHAPTER 3
DALIT PASTORAL CARE EXPERIENCES AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

A few empirical studies have been done among the Dalit Christian population on the nature and practice of pastoral care from the perspective of Dalit pastors and Dalit congregations in various regions of South India. These studies are not exhaustive but nevertheless representative of the general character of pastoral theology and care currently operative in the Dalit context. They provide constructive insights into the cultural, historical and religious dynamics of the ecclesial contexts in which Dalit people seek pastoral care and how they impact practices of pastoral care. The empirical studies reveal several common characteristics, but also pronounced distinctions, particularly in terms of the issues identified and some of the experiences and perceptions shared by the participants in the studies. In the first section of this chapter, I summarize the findings of three different studies and draw out their implications for pastoral care and theology in the current Dalit context.
Empirical Studies on Dalit Pastoral Care—Andhra Pradesh

The first of the three studies pertaining to ministry of pastoral care in relation to Dalit communities is from the Mala and Madiga Dalit communities of Andhra Pradesh. The study had the express purpose of “yielding valuable information and data on the current situation of the Andhra churches and Christian communities.” The study involved two different consultations that brought together rural pastors, practical theology lecturers, social workers, development workers and action-groups’ animators belonging to the C.S.I., Lutheran, Baptist and Roman and Catholic traditions and many representatives of the other mainstream Protestant churches and Christian voluntary organization as well as schools and colleges in Andhra Pradesh.

The consultations yielded three broad findings on the state of Christian churches and communities in Andhra Pradesh:

Andhra Christians are generally caste-bound, both at the social and political levels; the marked caste consciousness of the various caste-communities composing the churches, promotes casteism, i.e., using caste as a lever to promote group and individual interests and to acquire power and dominance; Caste and class factors in the Christian communities become linked at the material (ownership/control of economic resources) and/or at the organi[z]ational (participation in or exclusion from authority) levels; Poor village Christians of Scheduled Caste/Tribe origin, and those in lowlier urban occupations have little or no social prestige, or direct participation in the policy-making bodies of churches.

The study highlights the inadequacy or the partial nature of the Christian pastoral ministry. The present understanding of parish ministry or pastoral tasks, is rather limited and confined to celebrating worship services and family/community events, administering

---


2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., 17.
sacraments, and matters related to Church Organization, viz., elections, property management, administration of institutions, running projects and a few others.⁴

The consultations had “prolonged deliberations on the meaning and scope of the Christian pastoral ministry amidst the changing social situations.”⁵ Pastors working in the rural areas describe certain special tasks that were part of their pastoral ministry. Those special tasks include

- assisting the local SC/ST communities including non-Christians in securing loans, planning and implementing socio-economic projects, interventions and providing leadership in the settlement of disputes relating to occupation of house sites or plots of land, wage struggles, mediation in police cases, communal conflicts and so on. Nevertheless, their involvement has been mainly as individuals, stretching out far beyond their approved pastorate or parish tasks, which often included several congregations, sometimes separated by distances.⁶

The study reveals that the organized churches have some economic support programs for the Dalit communities, but nothing substantial. The organized churches are very well aware of the history and struggle of the Dalit communities, yet there are no official policies or special programs or ministries “within the contemporary contexts of marginalization, socio-economic oppression and socio-political communalization.”⁷ The rural Dalit congregations place some expectations on the pastors who work with them, especially

- taking interest in and helping them in their community life situation. The pastors are often seen as leaders of the local community; partly such leadership role expectations are the result of SC/ST communities being minorities in their

---

⁴ Ibid., 21.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
⁷ Ibid.
situation and unorganized, or having no collective identity or enlightened leadership within their own communities.\textsuperscript{8}

While rural Dalit congregations have an enlarged vision for the scope of pastoral ministries that involves their socio-economic struggles for survival, the case is quite different for urban Dalit congregations. The ministerial role of the pastors of the Dalit congregations in the urban settings is more narrowly defined and limited in scope. There is a clear separation between their spiritual and material needs. Broadly speaking, urban Dalit congregations expect their pastors to meet their “\textit{adhyatmika} [spiritual matters] and inner needs” as their socio-economic needs and struggles are championed by trade unions or other professional associations.\textsuperscript{9}

As mentioned earlier, Dalit communities are not a homogenous social category but divided into numerous castes and subcastes. In Andhra Pradesh the two broad subcaste groups among Dalits are \textit{Malas} and \textit{Madigas}. Caste discrimination based on the purity-pollution principle is also a feature of the social relations between the \textit{Mala} and \textit{Madiga} communities. The normative caste values have become a part of these two caste subgroups and practiced in ways that are no different in broader caste structure in the society, even though these two social groups are outcastes of the caste society. Dalit Christians of \textit{Mala} and \textit{Madiga} origin are entrenched in caste ideologies and manifest caste features such as endogamy and hierarchy among their communal relations and congregational settings. This is one of the principle reasons why the Dalit communities remain a fragmented community, unable to form powerful alliance among themselves to

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.
resist and challenge the social domination of the upper caste communities and create more just socio-economic structures that give them equitable access to resources and opportunities for their well-being. For example, Prabhakar, in his assessment of the Dalit socio-cultural situation in Andhra Pradesh, points out that when inter-caste conflicts break out, oftentimes, the upper caste Christians and non-Christians and other caste groups form an alliance against the Mala Dalit community and violently repress any breach of caste injunctions, prohibitions and customs.\(^{10}\) These alliances reflect feelings of strong loyalty towards particular caste, one of the chief characteristic of casteism.

According to the Kaka Kalelkar, “Casteism…is an over-riding, blind and supreme group loyalty that ignores the healthy social standards of justice, fair play, equity and universal brotherhood”\(^{11}\) The enduring nature of the caste system can be partly explained by these caste alliances among the higher castes but also by the fragmented and divided state of outcaste communities that precludes them from cultivating solidarity among themselves to resist and transform the existing structures of domination.

Further analysis of the churches and church-related institutions in Andhra Pradesh reveals approaches to ministry, missions and pastoral care that limit the engagement with critical issues of survival, liberation and caste identity of Dalit communities. Church and church-related institutions “have been so far reluctant to encourage programmes that

---

\(^{10}\) Ibid., 12.

\(^{11}\) N. Jayapalan, *Rural Sociology* (New Delhi: Atlantic publishers, 2002), 143.
would promote among the people critical consciousness of their situations and develop collective strategies and action to change them."\textsuperscript{12} Prabhakar writes,

Excepting very few Christian voluntary organization and action-groups led by Christian individuals, by and large, the churches through their departments for social concerns/services and their relief/development agencies, as also the other independent Christian associations have been engaged in emergency relief activities, and running economic development programmes/projects, primarily to provide material aid to target communities. While all these efforts are praiseworthy, they generally foster an ethos of dependence among the beneficiaries, and become ends in themselves rather than being the means or instruments to conscientise and organize people to build up their own leadership, strength and power for confronting and eliminating the conditions that foster inequality and injustice.\textsuperscript{13}

The churches and Christian leadership have been complicit with the existing socio-economic power structures, “and explicitly support the status quo…Their theological and ideological stance limit [e]vangelism and [m]ission activities to preaching and securing converts into Christianity.”\textsuperscript{14} The churches have been comfortable in defining their role within the established norms and structures of society, thereby not just supporting the status quo, as Prabhakar points out, but strengthening it. Churches by and large have become conformist institutions where in any radical activities or involvement by the clergy are either disapproved or, or discounted as individual actions. ‘Christian led’ action-groups are also not officially recognized or supported. The churches have also been silent on the issues regarding Harijan atrocities, exploitation of women, bonded labour, repression of industrial workers or landless labour by the Police, forcible eviction and displacement of slum-dwellers.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12} Prabhakar, \textit{Caste-Class and Status in Andhra Churches}, 31.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
And even if there are efforts formulated and executed by the Church or church-related institutions, “the efforts are directed only towards restoring parity with the Hindu SCs and STs, and do not relate to the larger oppression of economic and ethnic minorities.”  

This clearly illustrates the limited vision and perspective of even the most progressive groups within the Church that have set for themselves the task of addressing Dalit issues. In the course of analyzing the Dalit situations in Andhra Pradesh, Prabhakar concludes that

More than a hundred years after the mass movement conversions, casteism, caste spirit and caste-discrimination continues in the churches, at all levels…Devout as they are, Christians seem to accept and practice uncritically the contrary ways of division and inequality in their corporate life.

After this brief survey of some of the pastoral issues and the nature of the ministry of pastoral care among the Dalits in Andhra Pradesh I turn my attention to the Dalit communities in the state of Tamil Nadu. The aim is to gain a broad perspective on the ministry of care and identify some of the central concerns of the Dalit communities in South India. In his book *The Pastor to Dalits* Webster has done significant empirical studies among the Dalit communities in Tamil Nadu with a special focus on the ministerial perspectives and experiences of Dalit pastors to the urban and rural Dalit Christian communities. In the following section I attempt to highlight some of the findings of the research study pertaining to the pastoral care of Dalit people in Tamil Nadu.

---

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 26.
Empirical Studies on Dalit Pastoral Care—Tamil Nadu

The empirical study done by Webster involved presentations by pastors about their pastoral experiences with rural and urban Dalit communities. Relevant data was also collected through questionnaire completed by Dalit parishioners. Open questions covered the following subjects: “worship, preaching, Christian education, pastoral care and visitation, social service and social action, local church government, the pastor’s personal life and the diocese.”

Pastors assigned to rural parishes identify three major responsibilities taking most of their time. First and the most important responsibility was concerns worship. As opposed to weekly services, a traditional Christian practice, worship services are held once a month. Besides the monthly service, pastors also conduct special prayer meetings as well healing services. Special services are held concerning “such rites of passage as birth, engagement, marriage, moving to a new house, and death.” House visitation is the second responsibility. The pastor visits each family at least once a year. In the absence of any serious problem faced by individuals or the families, a normal visit is characterized by “inquiries about the well-being of the family members, perhaps some pastoral advice and a parting prayer.” The final responsibility is providing guidance and counsel for those who seek it. The scope of problems pastors are asked to address is considerable, ranging from the personal psychological-spiritual, to advice on education and/or employment, to political problems in dealing with landowners and the police.

18 John C. Webster, The Pastor to Dalits (Delhi, India: ISPCK, 1995), 23.
19 Ibid., 49.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
All the Dalit pastors agree that one of the serious problems among rural Dalit people is alcoholism, which also leads to wife beating and child abuse. Webster explains that to these pastors habitual over-consumption of alcohol was not a root cause of the Dalit Christians’ problems, but the response to the harsh realities of their lives which did have the effect of exacerbating their problems. The root cause instead were three major circumstances of rural Dalit Christian life: the limited opportunities for regular gainful employment which might enable them to work their way out of poverty; their lack of education, or of appropriate education (that is, learning a marketable skill or just becoming more politically and economically “aware”), which decreased their chances of rising out of poverty; and their lack of social status as Dalits within the wider village community.  

Some of the other problems mentioned by the Dalit pastors concern “difficulties in uniting and organizing their parishioners, in meeting unrealistic expectations, in dealing with limited understanding, low self-esteem or unwillingness to change.” At the same time they also share some of the strengths of the rural Dalit Christians such as “generous giving, hard work, militancy, faith, spirituality, interest in evangelism, as well as social and political awareness.”

Following are the four prominent aspects of the rural Dalit ministry that the pastors shared: first is “moving with the people,” which “combines an open, friendly, and concerned presence with such behavior as regular visitation and efforts to ‘solve’ the problems people bring.” The second component of the Dalit ministry is preaching

---

22 Ibid., 50, 51.

23 Ibid., 51.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.
teaching, and formulating special programs designed to meet their specific needs. The third component pertains to unstructured discussions in a non-worshipping environment with individuals as well as in a group context concerning matters affecting the lives of the congregation and cheri community. Since Dalits often expect the pastor to ‘do it all,’ which increases not only the pastor’s burden but also the Dalits’ dependency. The fourth consisted of sharing leadership with local Dalits, as well as encouraging their ideas and decisions. 26

Dalit pastors feel that this kind of ministry has given some positive results in terms of increasing unity, confidence, discipline as well as awareness. Even though the present paradigm of pastoral ministry has helped Dalits with some of their immediate problems, Webster writes,

[I]t has not really improved their economic condition or provided adequate educational or employment opportunities for them. Whether that is because the Church is ‘passive to their needs’ or because it simply lacks the resources to bring about significant change is a matter of debate. Probably both are true. 27

While pastors in the rural congregations occupy themselves with counseling and problem-solving services, a greater portion of the ministry time for urban pastors is devoted to meetings such as Bible studies, youth groups, fellowship groups and prayer meetings. Some of the pastors also shared that evangelism and social services are among their important pastoral services. However, the priority of needs identified by urban pastors is no different from those by rural pastors, including employment opportunities, education and housing. Addiction among the educated and unemployed youth is one of the persisting problems that urban pastors are confronted with. One of the primary but

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 52.
unique issues that the urban Dalit Christians contend with is their caste background.

Webster writes,

[T]hey go to great lengths to hide, something which would be impossible in a village but which the anonymity and impersonality of the city make possible. Hiding in this way is more common within congregations in which Dalits are only a minority than in those in which they comprise a significant majority. In the former case, Dalits tend to be passive participants and rarely come forward as leaders lest their backgrounds become known. They also become reluctant to mingle with other Dalit Christians and even cut themselves off from poor relatives back in the village for the same reason. Some give and receive dowries, which is contrary to Dalit Christian custom; those who do marry outside their caste generally are most reluctant to affirm their Dalit origins.28

One of the chief problems that all the urban pastors have identified among the urban Dalit Christians concerns low self-esteem and shame on account of their outcaste status in the society. It is one of the greatest ministerial challenges for urban Dalit pastors, especially as it presents itself as formidable impediment in forging Dalit unity. Dalit pastors state,

How does one minister to Dalits when, on the one hand they do not want to be openly identified as Dalits and, on the other, publicly addressing Dalit problems (e.g., in a sermon) can provoke a negative reaction from non-Dalit members which could place the unity of the congregation in jeopardy?29

One of the ways in which urban pastors deal with caste problems in churches is “to keep quiet about it, for to discuss it openly is to introduce caste into the church. This conspiracy of silence about caste and its adverse effects upon Dalits, to which all are party, makes ministry to Dalits in a mixed congregation highly problematical indeed.”30

Others practice “sharing decision-making with the lay leadership of the pastorate, and

---

28 Ibid., 55.
29 Ibid., 56.
30 Ibid.
especially with the pastorate committee. This entails a lot of listening, a lot of flexibility, a lot of openness, and a lot of personal consultation with individual leaders.”31 Pastor’s own agendas are not pushed onto the church, allowing a pastorate committee to think about issues in terms of ‘the growth of the congregation and of the people.’ Another [pastor] said that a lot of pastoral stroking, both positive and negative, was necessary. One form of stroking used by many pastors was giving credit for positive accomplishments to the lay people involved rather than taking it for oneself. This way of dealing with the dilemma seems to be used with Dalit and non-Dalit members alike.32

Caste problems in the Church are also dealt with by ‘moving with the people,’ and by being a “friend to the Dalit members and identifying with them…[and] giving extra personal stroking, moral support and public recognition so that they feel equal to others.”33 Some pastors note that a public acknowledgement of their Dalit identity has had a positive impact on Dalit parishioners, who likewise have taken the courage to be open about their Dalit identity, rather than concealing it. Knowing that the Dalits are dealing with a social identity problem, one pastor suggests that it would be more effective to minister to Dalit people by forming a “cell of Dalit Christians in his pastorate for the purpose of carrying out a specialized ministry for Dalits.”34 Some progress can be seen and shared by urban Dalit pastors, such as increased educational and employment opportunities, enhanced self-esteem, unity among Dalit people and political awareness as well as participation in struggles for justice and dignity and equality. However, urban

31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
pastors also had to report that “casteism remains in the church as a silent, subtle force. So too does a popular theology which fosters both insensitivity to the Dalit’s plight and a willingness to accept passively the suffering casteism inflicts upon Dalits.”

Some pastors also state that

Dalit Christians normally remain silent about their identity and so are not in unity and solidarity either with each other or with other Dalits. Unemployment remains a serious problem, especially since Dalits cannot afford the donations demanded for seats in college and bribes expected for middle class jobs in particular.

One special phenomenon that the urban pastors observe is that

many Dalit Christians have used their Church of South India congregations simply for [H]oly [C]ommunion, important Christian festivals, and family rites of passage, but turn to the Pentecostals for emotional worship, recognition, and a simple ‘feel good’ theological message which helps them through the week.

Part of this could be explained by the “fact that both the Church at large and individual pastors are so busy that the ministry to Dalits does not get the time, and attention and energy which it deserves.”

Webster also pays special attention to the ministry of preaching among the Dalit congregations, both in the rural and urban areas. He analyzes the sermons preached to the Dalit congregations, sermons preached during Easter, Christmas and one preached on a regular Sunday to gain a holistic perspective on the nature of preaching ministry among the Dalit Christians. According the Webster,

35 Ibid., 57.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
In preaching the pastor brings his/her own perceptions of the people in a particular pastoral situation into relationship with the witness of scripture and Christian tradition, as the pastor perceives them, so as to convey the gospel to those people…Consequently, the analysis of sermons provides valuable data for understanding how pastoral ministry to Dalits is actually being carried out.39

Dalit pastors see themselves primarily as teachers and tend to address the intellect and understanding and not so much the imagination, emotion and intuition. “They talk mostly about things ‘out there’ or ‘back then,’ the truth of which is external both to the preacher to the congregations.”40 In his analysis of the sermons presented to him by the pastors, Webster writes,

[I]n teaching through preaching, pastors seem to assume that the congregation will listen to their message passively and respectfully, with a basic openness and receptivity. The sermons do not provide evidence that the preachers are contending with parishioners who are actively engaging, and even challenging in their own minds, and preached word with the personal agendas, ‘conventional wisdom,’ nostalgia, or inner turmoil they bring to worship every Sunday. In short, the pedagogy of preaching appears to be the time-honored one that assumes a pupil’s mind is a blank slate (tabula rasa) on which the teacher writes at will the message which the pupil is to learn.41

The Bible seems to be the exclusive source of revelation and theological knowledge for pastors ministering to the Dalit congregations. According to Webster,

Church tradition is totally ignored and the experience of the congregation is not used as a source of revelation…[M]ost sermons stay within the Bible, using only biblical illustrations and Biblical quotations as supporting evidence for theological points being made. A few sermons never move out of the Bible at all. This can give the sermons an ‘other-worldly,’ or at least ‘different-wordly’ aura.42

39 Ibid., 61.
40 Ibid., 62.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., 63.
In sermons Dalit people are addressed as them (third person) and not as us (first person). Webster elaborates,

[Dalits] are talked about in a generalized way, simply as an abstract category of people, without names, faces, thoughts, feelings, dilemmas, flesh or blood. The preachers, with one possible exception, present only the exterior side of being Dalit, i.e., a victim of external forces and circumstances. The preacher does not explore or reveal what being a Dalit feels like or does to a person deep inside.43

In his study of the Easter sermons, Webster noted that the majority of Dalit pastors,

[S]eem to assume that Dalits long for personal transformation of the kind Jesus’ early follower experienced: lives of hope, courage, joy, power, and meaningful participation in God’s ongoing saving work…the minority of preachers…see Dalits yearning for a new world in which not only is the law of karma broken but so also are the powers of this world as well as the forces of evil and death which hold Dalits captive.44

Having examined some of the ministerial aspects of Dalit people from the Dalit pastors’ point of view, I devote the next section to a brief discussion of Christian pastoral ministry through the eyes of Dalit parishioners themselves. In the survey the Dalit parishioners report that caste identity is indeed a big problem among Dalit Christians in general. While some Dalit pastor are open about their Dalit identity, Dalit parishioners would rather hide their Dalit identity and project other socially acceptable identities in socialization with other community members, particularly in urban areas that provide a scope for maintaining a degree of anonymity around caste status. Dalit identity is a source of shame for the majority of Dalit Christians who would rather identify

______________________________

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.
themselves as Christians or by other identities such as their work or job title. In fact, one young man responded by saying, “I degrade myself by telling I am a Dalit after attaining status equal to others.” Even though the scope of hiding one’s caste background is far less diminished in a rural setting, a rural parishioner observe that “we are open [about our caste background] only to get government benefits,” clearly suggesting that in the absence of any incentives for disclosing their caste identity, most of them would rather hide their caste background.

Caste based discrimination and practice of untouchability continue to mark the social experiences of both the rural and urban Dalit Christian communities. They are subjected to these discriminatory practices by the Christian and non-Christian high caste communities alike. However, Dalit Christians in the urban areas have chosen to be silent about the caste problem in the Church with a view to keep the unity of the Church. Many have been reluctant to raise any Dalit issues in the Church for fears of a hostile response from the high caste community or even splits in the churches.

A majority of the rural and urban Dalit Christians view the pastoral role in terms of giving ‘wise guidance’ and ‘problem solving.’ Among the dominant pastoral concerns that the Dalit Christians seek pastoral guidance for are those personal difficulties that are not associated with shame such as problems that emerge in the context of their situations

46 Ibid., 82.
47 Ibid., 84.
48 Ibid., 85-86.
49 Ibid., 86.
of poverty and caste oppression. However, those personal problems that have an element
of shame (financial problems, bad habits, personal sins and shortcomings and family
problems) are not shared or sought help with.50

Pastoral ministry, as researched by Webster and described in his study of Tamil
Nadu Dalit context (urban as well as rural congregations), clearly suggests that it has
acquired a ‘problem solver’ image.51 Such an image has not been constructive for Dalit
communities. According to Webster,

it discourages, even overwhelms people, instead of motivating them to make
changes…it begins by awakening existing feelings of inadequacy, frustration,
pessimism, and even dependency, while offering little or nothing to counteract
those feelings.52

Empirical Studies on Dalit Pastoral Care—Andhra Pradesh & Karnataka

The third empirical study was conducted in two districts of South India, Bellary of
Karnataka and Kurnool of Andhra Pradesh.53 About 44 villages in these two districts
were surveyed. Relevant data for the empirical study was compiled through a
questionnaire, congregational meetings, interviews with church leaders and observations.
This study was done among rural Dalit Christian population. The principle aim of the
study was to examine the socio-economic, religious and living conditions of Christian
Dalit community.

50 Ibid., 96.
51 Ibid., 103.
52 Ibid.
In addition to extensive research on the socio-economic and religio-cultural conditions of the Dalit population, the real significance of this study for this dissertation is substantial material devoted to pastoral care experiences of the Christian Dalit parishioners. The summary that follows focuses on these experiences of ministry after a brief description of their socioeconomic living conditions.

The social conditions of the Dalit Christians in the target areas of study are no different from the rest of the Indian society. They are conspicuously characterized by varied and multifaceted oppressive experiences that include a multitude of “social restrictions and compulsions as well as discriminations, harassments and not-too-infrequent atrocities.”54 The survey underscores the observation that a predominant number of Dalit Christians continue to experience social restrictions in terms of access to village tea, rations and grocery shops, water sources, availing of barber services, or making celebratory or other processions in what are clearly public streets in the village.55 Inter-dining with and social visits to caste communities are barred for Christian Dalits. Even though Christian Dalit communities toil in labor for the caste communities as domestic servants, they are never allowed past the door step of the caste people’s houses for fear that their presence will pollute their living spaces.

A majority of the Dalit Christians are engaged in traditional ‘caste prescribed’ occupations. Skinning, drum beating, grave digging, scavenging, slaughtering and leather work are a few of traditional occupations that continue to be practiced by Dalit Christian

54 Ibid., 62.

55 Ibid., 74.
communities, some more extensively than others. Christian faith combined with education and general awareness has had a positive impact on some Christian Dalit people giving up traditional occupations such as scavenging, slaughtering and grave digging.\textsuperscript{56} Giving up these occupations is certainly a positive development for the Dalit people, but their economic conditions remain deplorable as the structural impediments erected by the caste system keep them economically dependent. Many of the Dalit families are caught in the debt trap, unable to make payments for large amounts that they borrowed to tide over their financial difficulties in desperate times. Caste communities have been exploiting this vulnerable situation of the Dalit Christians by making them toil in forced physical labor for years on end. Verbal abuse and physical assaults are a regular feature of their social interactions with the caste communities, “so much so that it is the accepted norm.”\textsuperscript{57} While the Dalit Christians are made to address the high caste with deference, Dalits are called by demeaning and derogatory names. “It is interesting to note that in most of the villages the Christian Dalits adopt and unknowingly use the same insulting language, while conversing among themselves also!”\textsuperscript{58}

As a graded system of inequality the caste system is doubly oppressive for Dalit women because patriarchal values are built into the structure of the caste order.\textsuperscript{59} In this empirical study the Dalit Christian women were found indisputably to be the most marginalized social group. They are denied educational opportunities and forced into

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 88.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 90.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 91.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Sharmila Rege, \textit{Writing Caste, Writing Gender: Reading Dalit Women's Testimonies} (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2006), 73.
\end{itemize}
child marriage and temple prostitution. Christian Dalit women have the highest rates of illiteracy and there are strong cultural barriers for widow remarrying, which has resulted in a disproportionate number of widows in the villages. Endemic poverty is cited as the most pressing factor that seems to dissuade parents from prioritizing education among girls, but gender discrimination remains the dominant reason why girls are not educated. Some of the prevailing notions operative in the Dalit context with regards to girls’ education are: a) education for girls intensifies the dowry problem. b) investing in girls education is futile as they go away after marriage. c) girls are supposed to work at home. In essence, these cultural assumptions conclusively point to the deep gendered nature of the society and deeply rooted patriarchal values that systematically excludes the Dalit women from full participation in the mainstream social, political and economic life in Indian society.

**Religious Life and Pastoral Care**

The survey also reveals that the religious life of the Dalit Christians was in a state of crisis, with a very low membership in the church as well as few baptisms. Less than half of the villages with Dalit Christian population have any place of worship. The rest of the villages have churches that are either half constructed and in a state of dilapidation or have collapsed for lack of proper maintenance. Only those villages that are close to urban

---

60 The practice of temple prostitution refers to dedication of young girls to a goddess of a temple; more than half end up as prostitutes to those who pay for their services.

61 Webster, *The Pastor to Dalits*, 178-198.

62 Ibid., 182.

63 Ibid., 202.
areas have church buildings that have some semblance of a decent structure. Worship services are irregular with poor attendance (averaging twenty-five percent of Christian population) in most churches; they are mostly attended by women and children. There is a sharp jump in attendance only during special occasions such as Christmas or Easter. Some of the dominant scriptural themes in the sermons in the village congregations are the “cross, suffering, heaven and eternal life.” The sermons comprise “stories of the Old Testament heroes, their life and work; the suffering of Jesus and Jesus’ parables and miracles.” The first sign that there is inadequate pastoral work in the target area of research can be gauged from the fact that there are only seven pastors serving the entire population of 1500 Dalit Christians spread across 44 villages. Godwin Shree writes,

On the whole, it was found that there was a serious lack of pastoral care in most of the village congregations…the dilapidated conditions of the churches; the dwindling number of Full members (communicants); the large number of children not baptized; worship not taking place any more, all indicate a serious and stagnant condition in pastoral work there.

The Dalit Christians communities have expressed some expectations and frustrations about pastoral ministry in their villages. Some of their expectations are that they needs pastors who will stay in their village, regularly visit them, hold Christian worship and teach Bible, secure land for them, and mobilize government help. They expect their pastors to be courageous and plan and work for their development. Some of the frustrations of the Dalit Christians about pastoral ministry are that pastors visit only

---

64 Ibid., 209.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., 211.
during Christmas or for performing weddings. Some voiced frustrations that their pastors were only concerned with prayers and do not help them to avail some benefits from the government.\textsuperscript{67}

Whether in congregational relations or the broader social context, discrimination by fellow non-Dalit Christians is also a social reality. Inter-dinning and inter-marriage between them were completely non-existent. However, non-Dalit Christians are open to let their Dalit pastors visit their homes. Subtle caste feelings, nevertheless, are evident in how they relate to the Dalit pastors.\textsuperscript{68} The congregational and social experiences of the Dalit Christians are also not positive in relation to their non-Dalit pastors. A few reported that the non-Dalit pastors do not relate to them in a manner that is customary for them. They are not invited to the parsonages, offered a glass of water or socialized with freely. The non-Dalit pastors do not eat or drink with them for fear of losing their social standing with the caste communities.\textsuperscript{69}

In his summary of the experiences of Christian Dalits Godwin Shree writes,

\begin{quote}
[M]ost Christians were deeply aware that much of their plight as people of ‘untouchable’ origin has continued inspite [sic] of accepting the Christian faith and much of their expectations in new community (church) have remained unfulfilled. However, it appears that have not lost their hope in the Christian faith in which they have invariably seen and to some extent experienced also, a liberative potential. Apparently, it was in the Christian faith they seem to have seen a promise of being accepted as human beings and treated with some respect and dignity. It is this promise, though realized partly, which makes them cling on to the Christian faith inspite [sic] of all the inexplicably serious odds against it.\textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item 67 Ibid., 212-213.
\item 68 Ibid., 225.
\item 69 Ibid., 228.
\item 70 Ibid., 234.
\end{footnotes}
From this brief discussion of the contextual experiences of the small Dalit Christian population in the State of Karnataka and in the State of Andhra Pradesh I have shown that caste oppression is a reality that they contend with both in the society as well as in their congregational relations. Based on what has been shared and expressed by Dalit Christian communities it is clear that the ministry of pastoral care has not been sensitive and responsive to their contextual needs, their anguish and their freedom struggles. In short, it has failed to be a liberation ministry for a people whose collective aspirations of freedom from caste oppression continue to remain unrealized and unfulfilled.

All the three empirical studies discussed above point to similar human struggles among the Dalit Christian communities. At the most basic level, they all underscore the subjugated and marginalized existence of the Dalit Christians, who are not fully integrated into the Christian community as equals and accorded dignity and respect due unto them as any other caste community. They suffer caste discriminations in overt and covert ways both in the society and in the communal relations with fellow Christians in the Church life. Internalized caste oppression manifests itself in terms of caste discriminations within Dalit social groups as well as the language used to address each other. In his study Webster underscores that Dalit pastors, both in the rural and urban settings, have not ministered to “what lies deeper within their Dalit parishioners’ psyche” because of their preoccupation with the problem solving approach that is focused on the “outward circumstances of their….lives.”

---

71 Ibid., 102.
While some Dalit pastors are overly focused on the outward circumstances, there are others who focus just on their spiritual needs. Dalit parishioners report that their pastors are concerned with prayers only and do not take much interest in securing government benefits and working towards their socio-economic development. These different findings underscore the fact that there is no one uniform picture that emerges about the approach of the ministry of pastoral care in Dalit Christian communities. However, one distinct characteristic of the ministry of pastoral care common to all the three contexts described above is pastoral care conceived and practiced largely as a clergy centered ministry. It is in this respect that Webster writes,

Ministry to Dalits can be truly effective only if it becomes a top pastoral priority of the congregation as a whole. If it continues to be just one among many special pastoral concerns, nothing much of significance will happen. Real ministry to Dalit will occur neither as an automatic by-product of something else nor as a result of scattered special events such as an annual Liberation Sunday celebration or outdoor healing service led by a prominent evangelist. Only if a sustained deliberate, even somewhat single-minded and comprehensive effort is made to carry out this particular ministry may it bear some good fruit in due season. Moreover, while the pastor would be taking the lead in initiating this kind of change, ministry to Dalits is really a ministry of the entire congregation.72

Webster’s emphasis on the reconceptualization of pastoral care as the ministry of the entire congregation in the Dalit context is based on his clear understanding of the particular psychological wounds that Dalits are struggling with, many of which are “blurred to their pastors and remains largely unministered to.”73 He writes,

Just as the wounds in the Dalit psyche have been inflicted by long term social relationships of inferiority, subservience, dependency and shame, so also healing and change can come through long term social relationships of respect,

----

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.
symmetrical reciprocity, closeness and caring. This requires not just selected individuals but entire congregational communities to function as transforming counter-cultures within the wider society.\textsuperscript{74}

**Theological Perspectives**

The historical and existential experiences of the caste oppression, which remains the central issue for the majority of Dalit people, is not addressed seriously and in a comprehensive manner by the current model of pastoral theology and care in the Dalit context. Some of the deficits and limitations described above (an individualistic approach, poor understanding of the psychological struggles and needs of Dalit people and a failure to conceptualize pastoral care as the ministry of the whole congregation) have much to do with the two theological traditions—Classical Western and Indian Christian theology—that have shaped pastoral theology and care in the Indian context. These two traditions require brief explanations for the following reasons: First, they bring into sharp focus and clarify some of the problems that have been described above pertaining to pastoral care experiences of Dalit communities. Second, the full significance of Indian Christian theology and its impact on pastoral care practices in India cannot be understood apart from classical Western theology because in some sense Indian Christian theology has come into existence as a response to classical Western theology. Similarly, to situate the relevance of Dalit theology to the new model of pastoral theology and care I am proposing in this dissertation, it is essential to see it in relation to both Indian Christian theology and classical Western theology because what I propose is a

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
response to their theological inadequacy to speak to the issues and concerns that are central to the Dalit people. Balasundaram writes,

To situate the relevance of Dalit theology, it is important that one looks at other theologies. In other words, without making an attempt to know what we mean by other theologies, we will not be able to understand and appreciate Dalit theology which is gaining currency and relevance in the present-day context of India.  

Third, these theological traditions also offer a window into the larger socio-political and religio-cultural dynamics of the India society. For example, Indian Christian theology was driven by the undercurrents of nationalism and classical Western theology was seen as a handmaiden of Western colonialism. These cultural and political realities form the background of Dalit theology as well as the enterprise of pastoral care that has taken shape in the Indian context. Therefore, to understand the value and significance of Dalit theology to reconstruct the enterprise of pastoral theology and care in South India with attention to the particular contextual needs of the Dalit people, it is essential to study the Western and Indian Christian theological traditions, instead of focusing solely on Dalit theology.

Classical/Traditional Western Theology

Classical Western Christian theology can be closely identified with the Western missionaries who came to India to reach out to the people of the subcontinent with the Christian gospel. Ziegenbalg, Plutschau and Schwartz, were among the earliest of the Western missionaries, who primarily did their missionary work in South India in the early

---

75 Franklyn J. Balasundaram, “Dalit Theology and Other Theologies,” in *Frontiers of Dalit Theology*, ed. V. Devasahayam (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997), 251.
18th century. In their work among the Dalit and non-Dalit communities, they imparted the ‘missionary theology of medieval Europe.’\textsuperscript{76} The roots of Dalit Christianity can be traced to these missionaries’ version of Christianity theology. Ziegenbalg, Plutschau and Schwartz all came from a pietistic religious background. They were theologically educated as well as trained for their missionary work at the University of Halle, a prominent center of pietism and evangelical Christianity.\textsuperscript{77} They were particularly influenced by a pious professor August Hermann Francke, whose theology was rooted in the infallibility of scripture and the “new” or second birth. This “new birth” included five points:

\begin{itemize}
\item Realization of men’s invalidity and sinfulness;
\item Recognition of divine illumination of human will to do the truth;
\item Experience of God’s act of conversion which includes a struggle against the old nature;
\item Assurance of salvation means for the Christian becoming aware of God’s working in one’s life, and live a life of newly re-created person which includes a new style of life.\textsuperscript{78}
\end{itemize}

It must be mentioned here that Pietists did value good works, but these works were never “considered as a contributory factor for salvation. According to one of the earliest Pietists, George Major, they considered good works necessary only to preserve salvation, but these do not contribute to the process of salvation.”\textsuperscript{79}

Professor Francke himself believed in social work. He initiated numerous social work projects, educational institutions, hospitals and carpenter and copper shops, all with the


\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 197.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
belief that “Scripture is not only to be interpreted, but also implemented. But the
undergirding concept, which played the key role, was the Piety for Pietism.”

In other words, the primary thrust for Pietists is to prepare the people to hear the Gospel. One
Pietist pastor explains this idea as follows:

[A]ll those who have been baptized into Jesus Christ and live in his other worldly
kingdom whether they be peasants/burghers, noblemen are alike spiritual men and
priests provided they hold fast to the covenant of baptism and are faithful to their
rebirth and truly and diligently exercise their office of spiritual priesthood.

These Pietistic beliefs shaped the character of the missionary work in South India. This is
clearly evident in the conceptualization of missionary work of Schwartz, who
“considered helping the poor of a secondary level and a secular work, as compared to his
missionary obligations which means spiritual ones.”

In the words of Massey, missionary theology contributed to a partial salvation for
Indian Christian community, especially the Dalit people. He writes,

In a nutshell, the theological teachings of the early missionaries in India provided
only a ‘partial salvation’ because in it no effort was made to relate the teachings
of the Christian faith to the life of the people, but dealt only with moral issues, or
personal holiness and an other-worldly spirituality.

Coming from this pietistic religious background, the missionaries’ teaching “included a
special stress on ‘personal holiness’ and on the things of ‘another world,’ where the
caste-class struggle belonged to this world.”

---

80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., 201.
82 Ibid., 198.
83 Ibid., 202.
James Massey aptly describes the impact of missionary theology on Indian Christian community:

The average Indian Christian, even the most illiterate, even today carries this aspect of Christian faith deep down inside. This very religious factor is the main one, on which Christians in India have been nourished from the beginning. And this factor was/is the main reason which perpetuated the ‘dalitness’ and kept it within the inner being of the average convert from a dalit background. Also, for the same reason perhaps, the converts from the upper castes were encouraged to continue the caste system even after becoming Christians, and to treat the Christians from a lower caste background as not being equal.85

Beyond the other-worldliness and personal holiness, other characteristics of classical or traditional Western theology continue to operate in the Church today, including an emphasis on original sin and obedience. Balasundaran says, “It is these concepts which prove to be detrimental in the liberation of a particular people who have been and are under a specific oppression.”86 According to Byung Mu Ahn, the traditional Western theology is speculative, kerygmatic, logos centered and dichotomic in nature that has under-estimated social evils.87 Tissa Balasuriya, a Sri Lankan theologian, has found the traditional Western theology to be culture-bound, male dominated, clerical centered and non-revolutionary.88

85 Ibid., 48.
86 Balasundaram, “Dalit Theology and Other Theologies,” 252.
The culture boundedness of traditional Western theology has dispossessed Dalit communities of the cultural heritage in their conversion to Christianity. As mentioned previously, certain Dalit cultural practices such as drum beating were strongly discouraged by the missionaries, whose theological convictions framed them as heathenistic and incompatible with Christianity. The traditional Western theology has also explicitly supported clericalism, encouraging a form of elitism among the clergy in relation to laity or congregation, especially in terms their dominant role in the word, sacrament and the ministry of the Church. The gifts, work and authority of pastor are hierarchically established in relation to laity. This has distorted the vision and practice of pastoral ministry as a shared responsibility between pastors and laity. It has undermined the caring resources of the congregation, which have been largely left unutilized. At the same time, clergy are overburdened with caring responsibilities. The result is that the Church’s witness to God’s liberation activity in the history of the Dalit people has been severely fractured and weakened.

Park Sun Ai, an Asian theologian, points to the hierarchy of dualism in gender in the traditional Western theology, where women are associated with body and emotion and men were identified with spiritual, noble, sacred and intellectual values, providing a theological justification for the subordination of women in the Church and society. Pastoral care informed by the traditional Western theology has failed to recognize and

---

89 Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 20.

challenge the deep caste and patriarchal social structures that have subordinated Dalit women or to formulate strategies for the communal well-being of Dalit women.

In 1976 at Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania, about twenty-two Third World theologians gathered to deliberate on and critically analyze traditional Western theology and its impact on and relevance for the Third World contexts. A summary statement formulated by the collective wisdom of these theologians aptly evaluates traditional Western theology’s relevance from the Third World perspective and experience.

The theologies from Europe and North America are dominant today in our churches and represent one form of cultural domination. They must be understood to have arisen out of situations related to those countries, and therefore must not be uncritically adopted without our raising the question of their relevance in the context of our countries. Indeed, we must, in order to be faithful to the Gospel and to our peoples, reflect on the realities of our own situation and interpret the Word of God in relation to these realities. We reject as irrelevant an academic type of theology that is divorced from action. We are prepared for a radical break in epistemology which makes commitment the first act of theology and engages in critical reflection on the praxis of the reality of the Third World. 91

Classical or traditional Western theology is not the only theology operating in the Dalit context that needs to be considered before formulating any new approaches to pastoral care for Dalit communities. Indian Christian theology is another dominant theological tradition that is being utilized as a source for the conceptualization of pastoral theology and care of Dalit communities in India. The following broad overview of India Christian theology provides background for a consideration of pastoral care for Dalit communities.

91 Balasundaram, “Dalit Theology and Other Theologies,” 253.
Indian Christian Theology

Indian Christian theology came into existence as a response to the classical Western theology’s disregard of Indian cultural heritage. Few missionary theologians felt any need to “revise their basic formulations of the basic Christian doctrines such as those of the authority of the Bible, the person of Christ, the work of Christ, the Trinity, the Sacraments and the Church” in light of the great cultural and religious traditions of India, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and others. When Indian Christian theologians began to seriously think about their faith, they realized that it did not speak to their cultural experiences or their particular living context. They attempted to reformulate Christian theology wanting to make it relevant to their cultural heritage and living context. Clarke writes,

Indian Christian theology has predominantly been fuelled by the momentum resulting from the coalescence of at least two streams: a dynamic understanding of the Christian message and deliberated remembering of its rich indigenous religious heritage. For at least the last two hundred years, Indian-Christian theology occupied itself with the challenging process of recollecting, reinterpreting and reappropriating its religious and cultural legacy mainly in terms of the Hindu tradition. Correspondingly, theology in India continually sought to translate, adapt and correlate the ‘good news’ of Christian proclamation by taking into consideration its Hindu philosophical and cultural framework.

Several rationales have been put forward to explain the significance of Indian Christian theology. First, it is important to communicate the Gospel to India people, which is “doing theology in the Indian context, or verbalizing the message of the whole

---


93 Ibid., 7.

94 Clarke, Dalits and Christianity, 18.
Gospel in such a way that it is meaningful and relevant to the Indian ears.” 95 Second, it is vital to contextualize the Gospel in the Indian context because it is important that we “make use of the thought patterns (pre-understanding) of the hearer as much as possible so that the message of Jesus Christ will be possible to the hearer, evoking a meaningful response.” 96 The third rationale for doing Indian Christian theology is to show the “relevance of the Christian message to Indians, by making the content of the Christian message meaningful to them in their thought patterns, yet at the same time remaining faithful to the content of the message.” 97 The final rationale for doing Indian Christian theology is to utilize the richness of Indian spirituality to plumb the depths of the Scripture, such as the Gospel according to John, and draw out messages that have yet to be discovered. 98

Indian Christian theology emerged in diverse contexts. The first was the socio-political context pertaining to Western colonialism that has given a foreign image or identity to the Christian faith, thereby becoming a barrier to further evangelization among the dominant communities in India, especially the practicing Hindus. Second, the spirit of nationalism was on the rise and it was important for the Christian community to be identified with the freedom struggles as well as the nation building efforts during the

---

95 Sunand Sumitra, *Christian Theology from an Indian Perspective* (Bangalore, India: Theological Book Trust, 1993), 2.

96 Ibid., 3.

97 Ibid., 4.

98 Ibid., 5.
The third important context pertained to the religious revivalism or renaissance sweeping Hinduism. Western cultural values and educational initiatives have evoked conflicting currents in Hinduism; one pulled it towards revival and the other attempted to conserve it. In some ways Indian Christian theology participated in the religious revival of Hinduism.

There are several sources of Indian Christian theology. According to Sumitra, the Syrian tradition is the oldest Christian tradition believed to be introduced by Apostle Thomas in Malabar (Kerala) in the first century CE. The second tradition is Roman Catholic, which one that was introduced in India with the arrival of Francis Xavier in 1652 CE. The third source was the Protestant tradition, which began to take root in India with the arrival of protestant missionaries like Ziegenbalg in 1706 and William Carey in 1793. The fourth source is relates to the Indian theologians such as Ram Mohan Roy, P.D. Devanandan, Nehemiah Goreh, P. Chenchiah and others in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The fifth is the para church organization such as the National Council of Churches of India and the Federation of Evangelical Churches of India that were formed in the twentieth century.

One of the first attempts to indigenize Christian faith was made by Brahma Samajists headed by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Brahma Samajists attempted an inter-textual reading of biblical narratives and Vedic texts to posit not only the theological continuity between the bible [sic] and Vedas but also the

---

99 Ibid., 7.
100 Ibid., 20-25.
101 Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation, 32.

historical continuity of Christianity with *Vedic* Hinduism by demonstrating the correspondence between biblical teachings and the *Vedas*.102

Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1861-1907) was a Bengali theologian who viewed Christ as the “perfect fulfillment of centuries of Hindu longings,” and sought to understand Christian faith through the Hindu philosophy of *Advaita* (non-Dualism).103 While these Indian theologians belonged to North India, the most important South Indian theologians were called the “Madras Re-thinking Group.” They consisted of A.J. Appasamy (1891-1975), P. Chenchiah (1886-1959) and V. Chakkarai (1880-1958).

Appasamy, a pastor who later went on to be a Bishop of the Church of South India, “believed that Christian faith can be interpreted in India using the categories of the Indian religious and philosophical tradition.”104 He “presented Christianity as a *Bhakti* religion with mystical elements.”105 According to him, “communion with God rather the mystical union of non-dualism is the goal of the religious quest that is fulfilled by Christ.”106 Christian concepts like the union of divine and human in Christ and divine transcendence and immanence are seen in relation to the *Bhakti* tradition. One of his objectives was to reformulate the Gospel message to “reinterpret and renew India’s heritage.”107

102 Ibid.
103 Ibid., 33.
105 Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 33.
P. Chenchiah, the most radical of the creative thinkers of the Madras Re-thinking Group wished to indigenize Christian theology. He actually proposed that the Old Testament of the Bible could be replaced by Hindu Scriptures. He writes:

The convert of today regards Hinduism as his spiritual mother, who has nurtured him in a sense of spiritual values of the past. He discovers the supreme value of Christ, not in spite of Hinduism, but because Hinduism has taught him to discern spiritual greatness. For him loyalty to Christ does not involve the surrender of a reverential attitude towards the Hindu heritage.108

Vengal Chakkarai likewise tended to interpret Christian teachings through Hindu scriptures. He answered the question “How does one follow the cross?” with references to Bhagavad Gita.109 Bhagavad Gita finds the *karma marga* and *jnana marga* inadequate and upholds the *bhakti marga*. Chakkarai believed that *bhakti*, or an intense and loving attachment to the risen Christ, is the proper response. The Jews followed the *karma marga* the Greeks followed the *jnana marga* but Christians must follow the bhakti marga as far as Christ is concerned.110

Chakkarai was convinced that Hinduism was a preparation for Christ. He writes,

Since the God who reveals himself to man is the same everywhere he believes that He whom the *rishis*111 of old saw is also the God of the Bible, and so will not wipe away all of Hinduism.112

P.D. Devanandan and M.M. Thomas were also prominent Indian Christian theologians in the post-independence era. Both focused on the nature of mission as well as nation

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid.

109 The Bhagavad Gita a prominent devotional book of Hindu scripture, which is part of the ancient Sanskrit epic Mahabharata.

110 Sumitra, *Christian Theology from an Indian Perspective*, 110.

111 The word means sages.

112 Sumitra, *Christian Theology from an Indian Perspective*, 111.
building. Devanandan while working with YMCA directed his efforts to encourage Indian Christians to get involved in nation-building. He also focused his attention on inter-religious dialogue between Christianity and Hinduism around the concept of Truth. Thomas’s ‘living theology’ was developed in conversation with neo-Hinduism. “Thomas understood salvation as humanization and his understanding of Christianity can be premised under ‘karma marga’ or the way of action. He adopts an empathetic approach to Hindu Christian encounter.”

This brief study of Indian Christian theology, its sources and the particular contexts in which it arose as well as the writings and theological preoccupation of prominent Indian Christian theologians brings into sharp focus the complete disregard of the contextual needs of Dalit Christians, even though they constitute the majority of the Indian Christian population. Almost all the Indian Christian theologians belonged to the upper caste community and one of their primary objectives was to show that Indian Christian theology was “part of the emerging national community” and therefore “a concerted effort was made to positively respond to the Brahmo demand for national Christianity, which led to the incorporation of concepts and symbols from the Brahminic tradition.” Another objective of the Indian Christian theologians was a striving in apologetics “to establish the Christian truth against Brahmoism.” With a focus on nation building and inter-faith dialogue, the plight of

113 RajKumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation, 35.
114 Ibid., 36.
115 Ibid.
Dalit Christians and their caste oppression was left unaddressed. In a more critical analysis of Indian Christian theology, Sathiananthan Clarke un_masks the hegemonic interests of the upper caste Christians by functioning as an instrument of ideological co-option. This means that “from the point of view of the Dalits, they were given an opening to mask their real identity and live with illusory conviction that they were truly part of the overall Hindu society and heritage.”

The need for a Dalit theology was born in the theological context of India primarily because neither traditional Western theology nor Indian Christian theology addressed the needs, sufferings and aspirations of the Dalit. Pastoral theology and care in South India, informed by these two distinct theological traditions, has ignored the collective needs of the Dalit populations, failed to interpret and understand their oppressed experiences and aspirations and has therefore been inadequate to address their critical issues of liberation and caste identity. In the following section, I critically evaluate the Dalit theology as a resource for pastoral theology and care towards the Dalit people.

**The Dalit Theology**

Dalit theology is primarily concerned with liberation of the Dalit people from their socio-economic and political bondage. “Dalit theology is *doing theology* in community within the context of the sufferings and struggles of Dalits through dialogue,”

---

116 Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 43.

117 Ibid., 42.
critical reflection and committed action for building and new life order.”¹¹⁸ Dalit theology emerges from below and does not use the Sanskrit language, the language of the brahmanic culture, but uses the language of Dalit people. Dalit theology uses Dalit stories, songs, values, sufferings to “interpret their history and culture, and to articulate a faith to live by and to act on.”¹¹⁹ For A.P. Nirmal, the goal of Dalit theology is not “simply gaining of the rights of the rights, reservations and privileges. The goal is the realization of [our] full humanness or conversely, [our] full divinity, the ideal of the *Imago Dei*, the image of God in us.”¹²⁰ Balasundaram describes the goal and objective of Dalit theology in the following words, which emphasizes identity among other things.

> [t]he goal of Dalit theology is the liberation of the Dalits and their empowerment, i.e., strengthening Dalits, providing comfort to them, the good news that God is with them in their struggle, that they are God’s children and that they have their own God-given identity and that they are people with worth and dignity. That is, human dignity is more important than the question of economic emancipation.¹²¹

Nirmal clearly articulated the nature and content of the Dalit theology for the first time, privileging Dalit experiences as the primary source of doing Dalit theology akin to the liberation theology of Latin America. He writes,

> It will be based on their own Dalit experiences, their own sufferings, their own aspirations and their own hopes. It will narrate the story of their pathos and their protest against the socio-economic injustices they have been subjected to


throughout history. It will represent a radical discontinuity with the classical Indian Christian theology of the Brahminic tradition.\textsuperscript{122}

However, Dalit theologians have some serious disagreements with the nature and method of Latin American liberation theology. While it emphasizes the class factor and uses Marxist tools for doing social analysis, Dalit theology focuses on caste analysis. Caste is the most important category for analyzing the Dalit condition and developing liberative perspectives. The Dalit sufferings and struggles are framed as theological categories by Dalit theology. Unlike the classical Western theology that dispossessed the Dalit people of their culture by branding them as heathenistic and evil, Dalit theology affirms them and utilizes their experiences as important sources to articulate Dalit spirituality and experience of the divine.

Sathinanthan Clarke and Ayrookuzhiel have been at the forefront of identifying and affirming Dalit culture as a valuable resource for theologizing in the Dalit context. Clarke has done a major study on the Pariyar Dalit community in Tamil Nadu, focusing on the Dalit cultural symbols, especially the drum.\textsuperscript{123} He conceptualizes Christ as the drum, an instrument that is slighted and scorned by the caste communities as it is associated with pollution because the drum is made of leather, a polluting substance in the ritual world of Brahmanic tradition. He corrects the misapprehension and misconception that Dalit religion is demonic by exposing the Christic presence in the religious tradition of the Dalits. The focus of Clarke’s theology is the liberation of subaltern theology itself through the process

\hfill

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{123} Clarke, \textit{Dalits and Christianity}.
\end{flushright}
of incorporating the symbolic representations of the Dalit understanding the divine in the explication of a Christology.\textsuperscript{124}

Ayrookuzhiel’s primary quest has been to search, recover and affirm Dalit religious and cultural traditions. In particular his search focuses on those aspects of Dalit religion and culture that resist caste oppression. Besides Dalit culture and religion, Dalit theologians also take history seriously. The elements of Western Theology articulating God’s relationship to history did not carry into Indian Christian theology. Indian Christian theology also has ignored the category of history because history has no place in Hinduism. History is not conceived in a linear fashion but in a cyclical manner in Hindu thought.\textsuperscript{125} What this means is that it has no beginning or an end. This approach to history has greatly de-emphasized the historical experiences of oppression for the Dalit people. Dalit theologians such as Nirmal and James Massey have given great significance to history in the construction of Dalit theology. Nirmal talks about historical consciousness, which is the pathos experience of Dalit people.\textsuperscript{126} Dalit pathos seen through the historical lens helps in understanding the full scope of Dalit pain and pathos, which according to Nirmal is the “beginning of knowledge because for the sufferers their pain is more certain than any principle, proposition, thought or action.”\textsuperscript{127} This pathos experience has a generative potential of a protest movement among the Dalit people.

Nirmal writes,

\begin{itemize}
\item [\textsuperscript{124}] RajKumar, \textit{Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation}, 48.
\item [\textsuperscript{125}] Massey, \textit{Dalit Roots of India Christianity}, 167.
\item [\textsuperscript{126}] Nirmal, “Towards a Christian Dalit Theology,” 259.
\item [\textsuperscript{127}] Rajkumar, \textit{Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation}, 49.
\end{itemize}
The historical Dalit consciousness in India depicts even greater and deeper pathos than is found in the deuteronomistic creed. My Dalit ancestor did not enjoy the nomadic freedom of the wandering Aramean. As an outcaste, he was also cast out his/her village. The Dalit bastis (localities) were always and are always on the outskirts of the Indian village. When my Dalit ancestor walked the dusty roads of his village, the Sa Varnas tied a tree-branch around his waist so that he would not leave any unclean foot-prints and pollute the roads. The Sa Varnas tied an earthen pot around my [D]alit ancestor’s neck to serve as a spittle. If ever my Dalit ancestor tried to learn Sanskrit or any sophisticated language, the oppressors gagged him permanently by pouring molten lead down his throat. My [D]alit mother and sisters were forbidden to wear any blouses and the Sa Varnas feasted their eyes on their bare bosoms. The Sa Varnas denied my Dalit ancestor any access to public wells and reservoirs. They denied him the entry to their temples and places of worship… My Dalit consciousness therefore, has an unparalleled depth of pathos and misery and it is this historical [D]alit identity that should inform my attempt at a Christian Dalit theology.128

In order to make God relevant to the Dalit people in the context of their historical experiences of suffering, Nirmal conceptualizes God as a true Dalit deity. One of his primary concerns is to affirm the humanity of the Dalit people, even in their servant roles in the society. Therefore he writes that in performing their impure professions the Dalit people are ‘participating in the servant-God’s ministries.129 Servanthood becomes a guiding metaphor for his construction of Dalit theology as can be seen in his following statement.

But the God whom Jesus Christ revealed and about whom the prophets of the Old Testament spoke is a Dalit God. He is a servant God—a God who serves. Services to others have always been the privilege of Dalit communities in India. The passages from *Manu Dharma Sastra* says that that the Shudra was created by the self-existent (Svayambhu) to do servile work and that servitude is innate in him. Service is the *Sva-dharma* of the Shudra. Let us remember the fact that in Dalits we have peoples who are *avarnas* – those below the Sudras. Their servitude is even more pathetic than that of Shudras. Against this background the amazing claim of a Christian Dalit Theology will be that the God of the Dalits, the self-existent, the Svayambhu does not create others to do servile work, but does


129 Ibid., 224.
servile work himself. Servitide is innate in the God of the Dalits. Servitude is the sva-dharma of the God; and since we the Indian Dalit are this God’s people, service has been our lot and our privilege.\textsuperscript{130}

Nirmal presents Jesus as the suffering servant of Isaiah. He says, “The Gospel writers identified Jesus with the Servant-God of Isaiah. In his service, he was utterly faithful to God.”\textsuperscript{131} After quoting Isaiah text Chapter 53, he adds, that the language used to “describe the servant language full of pathos. That is the language used for God the God of Dalits. But that is also the language which mirrors our own pathos as Dalits. The language that mirrors the God of Dalits and Dalits themselves.”\textsuperscript{132} Christ’s experience on the cross is also an important part of Dalit Christology. Refering to the Gospel of Mark 8: 31; 9:12; 10:45, Nirmal writes,

These sayings indicate that Jesus as the Son of Man had to encounter rejection, mockery, contempt, suffering and finally death. All this from the dominant religious tradition and the established religion. He underwent these Dalit experiences as the Prototype of all Dalits.\textsuperscript{133}

Rajkumar, another Dalit theologian, questions the usefulness of Dalit theology in “offering an ethical framework to evaluate the foundations on which caste-based discrimination is validated and perpetuated.”\textsuperscript{134} In his analysis of whether Dalit theology is a useful resource to challenge the caste based discriminated against Dalit communities, he identifies four problems. First, Dalit theology has failed to provide any paradigm of

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 64-65.
\textsuperscript{133} Nirmal, “Towards a Christian theology;” 66-67.
\textsuperscript{134} RajKumar, \textit{Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation}, 59.
\end{flushleft}
action; it only leads to more theology. In the same vein, “nothing much has been said [or implied] in the role of Dalits in their own liberation.” According to him, there is a “lacuna between theology and action.” Second, it lays too much emphasis on pathos rather than protest. Third, by using exodus paradigm of liberation, Dalit theology has disengaged non-Dalits from a participatory role in the transformation of Indian society by creating what Rajkumar calls ‘polemic binarism.’ Fourth, Dalit Christians have played a passive role in interpreting the Christian stories that have meaning and relevance to them.

Rajkumar addresses these problems by turning to Gospel narratives, particularly the healing traditions, as a paradigm for Dalit theology. Jesus’ healing stories provide an ethical evaluative framework for formulating an effective response to caste based discrimination of Dalit communities. The Dalit people can identify with the people seeking healing in the Gospel narratives on several levels. The ritual notion of pollution and purity are common to both contexts, and so are the experiences of oppression, exclusion and hierarchical classification of people during Jesus’ time. Temple priests and the monopolization of religious rituals to serve their interests and those of other dominant communities is a mirror image of the Brahmin ritualistic domination on Dalit communities. Jesus’ ministry of healing can be viewed as a guiding paradigm in the context of oppressive relational patterns because he breaks through the boundaries that

135 Ibid., 60.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid., 62.
138 Ibid., 71.
divide people based on ritual notions of clean and unclean, the privileged and subjugated, the included and excluded. Through his acts of healing, Jesus attempts to bring people in communion and build an inclusive community. It is a subversive activity that challenges the established conventions, beliefs and practices that have become normative to religious and social relations. Rajkumar identifies three particular elements—touch, compassion and conflict or confrontation—in the healing narratives of the Gospel that are potentially significant for non-Dalit communities to participate in the process of integrating Dalit communities as full members of the society. The fourth element, faith, is applicable to the Dalit communities. Faith is understood here as taking initiative and being persistent about receiving healing.

Jesus’ healing stories as a paradigm of Dalit liberation can be viewed as a significant contribution to Dalit theology in terms of addressing several problems discussed above. First, Jesus in the synoptic stories is presented as the agent of change challenging the institutional structures and ideologies that have marginalized the sick, the ill and the poor in the society. As opposed to the Christological formulations in the contemporary Dalit theology that puts excessive emphasis on the servant image of Jesus, which only facilitates a slavish mentality and gives no impetus for Dalit to take a more active initiative for social change, Jesus in the synoptic gospels is portrayed as the one who symbolizes resistance, protest and change.

---

139 Ibid., 104.
140 Ibid., 110.
141 Ibid., 71.
142 Ibid., 115.
the leper story.\textsuperscript{143} The initiative the Leper takes towards his healing challenges the deeply rooted malaise of dependency in the Dalit communities. Jesus’ conflict and confrontation episodes that includes a pedagogical element can become an occasion for conscientization of Dalit communities as well as those of caste people. Studying gospel narratives of conflict can raise awareness of the manner in which both oppressed and oppressor are conditioned by the caste discourses to participate in a system that deeply distorts the vision of community that the Church symbolizes.\textsuperscript{144}

\section*{Conclusion}

I have shown that Dalit theology is a vital resource for a new model of pastoral theology and care in the Dalit communities because it offers a useful, authentic and valid interpretation of the Dalit peoples’ contextual experiences of caste oppression. First, it challenges the prevailing model of pastoral care to reexamine the sources, methods, and objectives in its caring activities of the Dalit persons and communities. It challenges the field of pastoral theology and care in the Dalit context to develop a deeper socio-political character of the nature of its vision and work, rather than keeping itself limited to spiritual matters of the Dalit people. The empirical studies discussed above reveal a mixed picture of the nature of pastoral care practice in the Dalit situation. While a few studies have shown some degree of socio-economic involvement, others reveal scant attention to issues and concerns that are not spiritual in nature. It needs to be underscored

\textsuperscript{143} Matthew 8:2; Mark 1:40; Luke 5:12.

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 105.
that the studies that seem to point to pastoral care practices that concern themselves with the social and economic needs of the Dalit people deal only with the symptoms of the systemic oppression of the caste ideology that pervades the Indian culture. I believe that helping the Dalit people find jobs or securing cultivable lands are positive and constructive steps in improving their living conditions in the short term. However, as long as the ideological structure of the caste system is not challenged and completely neutralized or dismantled, full and complete Dalit liberation is not possible. Dalit theology challenges pastoral care and theology in the Dalit context to work towards this goal.

Dalit theology also broadens the scope of pastoral care by engaging caste Christian communities in a non-alienating manner in the transformation of the Indian Church and society. By moving away from the Exodus paradigm of liberation to other more inclusive and constructive paradigms like the Gospel healing traditions, there is a strong shift evident in the Dalit theology to realize the significance of involving the caste-dominated Christian communities in the liberation of Indian Church from casteism. The field of pastoral care and theology cannot ignore this important shift of thinking in Dalit theology towards incorporating more inclusive paradigms in its care and concern of the Dalit people and the Indian Church.
CHAPTER 4
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCES OF THE DALIT PEOPLE

Introduction

The central aim of this chapter is to explore the psychological impact of caste oppression on the Dalit people and the implications for pastoral care and counseling in the Dalit context. The psychological experiences of Dalit people have remained, by and large, unexplored and poorly responded to by the current paradigm of pastoral care. This chapter sets out to describe the nature of the Dalit psyche shaped by the cultural forces of the caste system. In simple terms, it attempts to answer the question, what are the psychological aspects of Dalit reality? This chapter examines the affective, cognitive and behavioral experiences of the Dalit people, who are, undoubtedly, the most stigmatized and despised group in the Indian society. The first section of the chapter will explore some of the dominant psychological themes that pervade the Dalit people's psyche. These psychological themes will be discussed in relation to the harmful cultural dynamics of the caste system.

The Dalit people have suffered multigenerational exposure to systemic oppression that includes diminished social status, privations, threats, violence, invalidations, negations, cultural alienation, shame, stigma, inequities, injustices, limited life choices and severely restricted conditions and impositions that compromise their ability to live.
life authentically. I outline prominent features of Dalit psychology, an area of study that is still in its infancy. Much research needs to be done on this important subject that will offer valuable insights into the Dalit identity, their inter-personal and inter-caste relational dynamics, and the assumptions and presuppositions that affects how they engage with the world around them. I will offer constructive proposals for pastoral care ministry in the Dalit context. I begin with a preliminary investigation in which I deliberately present Dalit experiences that are as authentic to the Dalit context as much possible. Accordingly, much of the material presented pertains to the personal experiences of the Dalit people, including reflections and observations of the Dalit people on their experiences in the socio-cultural context of the caste violence and oppression.

**Significance of Dalit Psychological Experiences**

In his investigative study of the nature of pastoral ministry in the Dalit congregations Webster notes that “much of what lies deeper within their Dalit parishioners’ psyches appears rather blurred to their pastors and remains largely unministered to.”¹ He adds that “[f]or some pastors, changing the external circumstances of their lives has become the basic substance of ministry.”² Webster’s observation underscores the lack of a holistic dimension in the character and substance of pastoral ministry in the Dalit context. Lack of adequate attention to the psychological dimension of the Dalit people's oppression in the contemporary practices of pastoral care and

---

¹ Webster, *Pastor to Dalits*, 102.

² Ibid., 102.
theological reflection partly explains the limited success in addressing the critical issues of survival, liberation and loss of cultural identity among the Dalit Christian population.

L. Stanislaus in his study of the South Indian Dalit communities likewise observes that the psychological state of Dalit psyche has not been adequately understood by the Church in India. He writes,

Dalitness has a material and ideational dimension. Economically they are deprived and socially ostracized. At the level of consciousness, generally a Dalit Christian feels he is not wanted in the society and in his own Church, because he/she is denied rights which are due as a baptized Christian. This sense of ‘not-wanted’ is a serious problem. There seems to be a lack of understanding by the Christian community of the painful undercurrents which are embedded in every Dalit’s consciousness. It leads to a serious problem to live harmoniously in society.

James Massey, a prominent Dalit theologian, also argues that the liberation of the Dalit communities is not possible without a critical awareness of and appropriate strategies to break the chains of mental slavery that have made the Dalits captive to the ideologies of the caste system. He cites L.M. Shrikant, the first commissioner for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, who makes an important observation about the mindset of Dalit people that explains their subordinated status in the caste system.

By the force of habit the Harijan has lost his self-respect to such an extent that he regards his work to which his caste is condemned not as a curse from which he should extricate himself but as a privilege or presence which must protect. He has not much courage to seek another job in field or factory. He has become lazy in mind and body and callous to his own condition; and he will not educate his children.

---


James Massey, while making a reference to Shrikanth’s statement, highlights the importance of addressing the psychological issues of the Dalit people.

The above words of Mr. Shrikant reveal to us the inner nature of the Dalitness of the Dalits which they have reached by the ongoing oppression of caste and social system which our society continues to maintain…These also reveal to us the power of the caste system which can transform the person into such self-captivity or slavery from which it seems almost impossible to get liberation or freedom. The second most important truth about the Dalits Mr. Shrikanth has stated is that a Dalit has ‘become lazy, in mind and body, callous to his own conditions.’ Of course being ‘lazy in mind’ and to feel ‘callous’ for his/her own condition are part of the inner nature of the Dalitness of the Dalits which really is responsible for all the problems of the Dalits, and which simply cannot be dealt with by mere passing of legislation or providing economic facilities.5

Although I take object to the characterization of the Dalit people as ‘lazy in mind,’ I agree that there is a clear lack of initiative among the Dalit communities to challenge and transform their oppressive conditions that have denied them, on a fundamental level, basic human rights and authentic freedom to make life enhancing choices. The caste system has been the defining feature of the Indian society for thousands of years. Much of the enduring nature of this institutional system of domination can be attributed primarily to the psychological conditioning of the Dalit communities. A Mandal Commission report attests to this functional attribute of the caste system: “The real triumph of the caste lies not in upholding the supremacy of the Brahmin, but in conditioning the consciousness of the lower castes into accepting their inferior status in the ritual hierarchy as part of the natural order of things.”6

5 Massey, “Historical Roots,” 45.

The discussion above highlights the insufficient attention given to the psychological oppression of the Dalit communities in the Dalit theological and pastoral care literature. It clarifies that the contemporary Dalit literature does not reflect the totality of the Dalit experiences of oppression. There is a need for broader recognition of the ways Dalits experience oppression that incorporates, in substantial ways, the psychic dimension of their experience. Pastoral care practices can be truly liberational only in so far as they address the external as well as the internal reality of the Dalit people. Archie Smith, one of the leading theorists in the contextual-communal approach to pastoral theology and care, explains why the external reality and internal reality in pastoral care need to be seen together.

Oppression is both an external and internal reality, therefore the process of liberation must seek to transform the social and political order and to emancipate the inner life of human subjects from internalized sources of oppression. The reproduction of oppression is inevitable if emancipation of the inner life of the oppressed is not a part of the larger process of social change and transformation.7

In line with what Smith has rightly noted about the need to “heighten awareness of the interwoven character of personal and systemic oppression and the importance of keeping an analysis of inner and outer transformation together in liberation ministries,” my central focus here is to delineate the inner experiences of oppression that have remained largely invisible and poorly attended to in the Dalit liberation ministry.8 A brief discussion on the history of psychology and pastoral care in South India, I believe, will serve as a good preface to the discussion of psychological experiences of Dalit

7 Smith, The Relational Self, 15.

8 Ibid., 14.
communities. This will provide a useful introduction as well as background to an exploration into the Dalit psyche.

**Psychology and Pastoral Care in South India**

The field of pastoral theology and care in the West has benefited immensely from the non-theological sources, especially psychological sciences, to inform and guide its understanding of pastoral issues and practices in the ministry setting. The nature of pastoral ministry in India, however, has not progressed much beyond the classical paradigm of pastoral care. In some sense it can be characterized as frozen in time. Broadly speaking, the field of pastoral theology in the West “experienced the impact of modernity…in terms of the emergence of psychology and sociology as disciplines.”

Despite the fact that psychology flourished in the secular realm, its impact on the field of pastoral care has remained marginal and insignificant in India. Webster’s observation that pastors in the urban and rural congregations have a poor understanding of the psychological needs of the Dalit people strongly underscores the failure of pastoral care in the Dalit context to engage the discipline of psychology to inform its assessment and practices. If an over emphasis on the psychological sciences to guide and structure pastoral care has been a problem in the West, an underutilization of the psychological resources for interpreting and understanding marks pastoral care in Dalit communities in India. For example, the only course mandated as part of my ministry studies in India was on marriage and family counseling. On a very practical level, I soon realized that I was

---

ill-prepared to understand and respond to the Dalit issues and struggles in helpful ways during the early years of my pastoral ministry.

Two reasons explain the underutilization of human sciences and over reliance on church traditions, doctrinal theology and Scripture to guide pastoral care practices in the Indian context. First, the classical Western Christian tradition emphasizes the belief that Scripture is completely and totally self-sufficient in authority and knowledge to understand and respond to all human needs. Second, as Indians took on the mantle of leadership of the Indian church, and as foreign missionaries gradually reduced their mission involvement and returned to their countries of origin in the post-independence era (1947 onwards), the Indian Church became more insular. It became preoccupied with nation building efforts that also involved developing a more indigenous character to its faith and mission. During this period psychology as a discipline became a strong presence in the field of pastoral care and counseling in the West. It is likely that an increased association with the Western churches would have been more favorable to the introduction of a psychological perspective in the ministry of pastoral care practiced in Dalit communities. However, this view needs to be tempered by the fact that the churches that were involved with missions in India were theologically conservative and thus their openness to the non-biblical sources to inform pastoral care were limited. Second, the clinical or counseling psychology widely embraced in the Western context of pastoral caregiving, is closely associated with assessment and treatment of mental illness; this focus inhibits its utilization in the Indian context. Sue & Sue underscore this point in their

1040s-1980s, often described as a clinical paradigm of the ministry of pastoral care.
assessment of Asian cultures. They attribute underutilization of mental health services in Asian cultures to a sense of “shame and disgrace associated with admitting to emotional problems.”11 Furthermore, Asian cultures tend to handle “problems within the family rather than relying on outside resources” for addressing emotional and psychological distresses that arise in the context of their socio-cultural life. 12 Therefore, psychology as a resource for pastoral care assessment and interventions has been severely lacking in the enterprise of pastoral care operative in the Indian context.

Although much has been written about Dalit culture, religion and theology, Dalit psychology remains an unexplored subject. Dalit theologians have not given adequate attention to the psychological experiences of Dalit people. In the Dalit theological literature, Webster’s *The Pastor to Dalits* is one of the few books that discuss aspects of Dalit psychology. Therefore, much of the material in this dissertation is drawn from Dalit autobiographies. In addition, I also utilize Dalit psychological experiences enumerated by M.C. Raj, a veteran social worker and Dalit philosopher in his recently published book *Dyche*. His title fuses the words “Dalit” and “psyche.” This book is a semiautobiographical because much of the material comes primarily from Raj’s personal experiences. It is the primary source for discussing Dalit psychology in this dissertation for the following reasons: First, this work is a narrative of the personal experiences and reflections of a Dalit. Second, this semi-autobiographical book draws substantial material from author's decades of social work experience among the Dalit communities. Third,

---


12 Ibid.
this work reflects and analyzes particular issues and struggles of the South Indian Dalit communities.

**Dalits and Internalized Oppression**

Several social scientists have investigated the psychological experiences of the Dalit people. Their studies reveal that the sociocultural environment seriously impacts both the external life situations of the Dalit people and their thoughts and feelings. The social and political order of the caste system and the attendant ideologies, values and cultural norms have acted through the centuries as powerful forces of social conditioning of the Dalit people. The key concept here is “internalized oppression.” Psychologists Prilleltensky and Gonick define oppression as

> a state of asymmetric power relations characterized by domination, subordination, and resistance, where the dominating persons or groups exercise their power by restricting access to material resources and by implanting in the subordinated persons or groups fear or self-deprecating views of themselves.

E.J.R David further explains that oppression as a process and condition “wherein a group denies the rights, dignity, and words of another group…may lead to a condition known as internalized oppression.” Gail Pheterson describes internalized oppression as follows:

---


14 Webster, *Pastor to Dalits*, 36.


Internalized oppression is likely to consist of self-hatred, self-concealment, fear of violence and feelings of inferiority, resignation, isolation, powerlessness, and gratefulness for being allowed to survive. Internalized oppression is a mechanism within an oppressive system for perpetuating domination not only by external control but also by building subservience into the minds of the oppressed groups.17

In the following section I examine several manifestations of internalized oppression among the Dalit communities will be examined.

**Inferiority Complex**

One of the most profound manifestations of internalized oppression among the Dalit people is a deep sense of inferiority among the Dalit people. The importance of self-esteem to healthy psychological life cannot be overstated. According to Branden,

> Self-esteem is a powerful human need. It is a basic human need that makes an essential contribution to the life process; it is indispensable to normal and healthy development; it has survival value. Lacking positive self-esteem, our psychological growth is stunted. Positive self-esteem operates as, in effect, the *immune system of consciousness*, providing resistance, strength, and the capacity for regeneration. When self-esteem is low, our resilience in the face of life's adversities is diminished. We crumble before vicissitudes that a healthier sense of self could vanquish...Negatives have more power over us than positives.18

As mentioned earlier, low self-esteem is a pervasive psychological challenge among the Dalits. Raj writes,

> Every thought and action of the Dalit is compulsively conditioned by this overwhelming sense of worthlessness. Rejection and brushing aside at every


attempt to find a space in the general society further keep on reinforcing this worthlessness in Dyche. ¹⁹

Michael Mahar describes it in the following words:

The inculcation of attitudes of inferiority may be seen in the everyday experience of the very young. It does not require much time for the [s]weeper child accompanying his mother on her daily rounds to realize his position in society. The nature of the tasks performed by an Untouchable's parents, the mode of address and the tone of voice used by upper castes in issuing instructions, are readily apparent to children. The sending of [s]weeper children to collect food left over from upper caste feasts, their receipt of “gifts” on inauspicious occasions such as the eclipse of the sun, and their “right” to the clothing of the dead—all serve to reaffirm their association with pollution and inferior status. ²⁰

Paranjpe, a psychologist, had done research among the Dalit communities and the caste system. He concludes that:

Many Harijans [Dalits] indicate the internalization of low status. The reaction of the personalities to degraded social status in terms of feelings of desperation, self-hate, withdrawal and seclusion, anger and hatred, impulses of rebellion and reconstruction, a feeling of nothingness or loss of identity were reflected in numerous cases. ²¹

Dominant discourses in the society that have generated stereotypes that have been particularly harmful to the psychic health of the Dalit communities. Dalits are “regarded as poor, pathetic, unintelligent, slow and inefficient.” ²²

Sharankumar Limbale recalls his childhood days that testify to the early experiences that inculcate an inferiority complex among Dalit children. He writes,

¹⁹ Raj and Raj, 348.
Though branded as Untouchables we too are Hindus by faith. We too are human beings. High-caste children from the village may visit the temple, yet we are forbidden. There is a saying, ‘Children are the flowers of God's abode,’ but not us. We are the garbage the village throws out…I was used to filthy children in the Maharwada. We hardly knew what a village actually meant as we played and grew up only in the Maharwada. Heaps of garbage, tin sheds, dogs, pigs were our only companions. We spent most of our time on Jaganath Patil’s garbage, playing, where we found bits of waste paper and sandals. [In the school] we sat amidst the footwear flung all around us…I never touched my teacher’s chappals (footwear) as I was afraid of tainting their sanctity. To me his chappals were like Rama’s (Hindu deity) sandals.\(^\text{23}\)

Dalit children exposed to such an atrocious sociocultural environment cannot be expected to develop a healthy self-image about themselves and their community people. Studies have shown that the experiences described above severely impact the psychological development of Dalit children. Kancha Iliah draws attention to the inherent power structures in the caste system that socializes Dalit people from a very early stage to develop behaviors that are compliant to the dictates of the caste culture. He writes,

> The Dalitbahujans live very much within a certain framework of power relations. First and foremost the caste system itself sets up certain type of power relations. The Malas and Maadigas [low caste communities] right from childhood, are trained more to obey and to listen than to command and to speak. Starting from this early age one learns to listen and to obey or to speak and to command depending on the status of one’s caste. The lower the caste of the person, the higher will be the level of obedience, and the higher the caste of the person, the stronger will be the motivation to speak and to command.\(^\text{24}\)

Low caste people, he writes, are expected to behave in a particular manner in the presence of high caste people and the high castes

---


think that they have a right to humiliate and insult Dalitbahujan men and women... The power relations between castes are so structured that the self-respect which is of critical importance in developing the personality of Dalitbahujan women/men is mutilated.25

Comparative studies among Dalit boys and high caste boys between 14 and 18 years of age highlight the developmental impact of social oppression.

The personality inventory showed statistically significant differences between the two groups at four of its nine points. The Dalits scored lower on empathy, need to achieve, and dogmatism, but much higher haunts pessimism. This last trait the authors saw as his sign of a continuing sense of insecurity... 26

Commenting on this study, Webster notes the following:

What gives this study special significance, however, is that it is set within a theoretical framework derived from studies of oppressed and marginalized groups in other societies. Such groups elsewhere have also been found to exhibit low self-esteem, confusion about their identity, self-hate, a perception of the world as a hostile place, hypertension, neuroticism, and low intellectual development. Thus these traits appear to be not uniquely Dalit traits, but traits more universally manifested by similarly situated peoples. Moreover, the authors point out that scores on intelligence tests are indicators not of innate inferiority but of cultural deprivation. 27

One of the earliest studies among the population conducted by psychologist Prem Shankar in 1951 involved about 20 Dalit educated students and another 20 uneducated Dalit students. This group of students was selected randomly from municipal employees who belong to the same age and income category. Prem Shankar compared the results of Rorschach tests administered to the Dalit students with the baseline data of the Indian society in general. The results revealed that

25 Ibid., 37.


27 Ibid.
Dalits were below the general norm in intelligence, sociability, and ego strength; they were above the norm in anxiety, impulsiveness, immaturity, neurotic and psychotic tendencies. Within the Dalit sample the educated were more intelligent, ambitious, anxious, passive, egocentric, emotionally immature, withdrawn, incubated, and evasive in their responses than the uneducated. There were also more signs of neurosis and failure in social adjustment among the educated, while the uneducated showed greater dependency need and fear of a destructive father image.28

One surprising conclusion that Shankar reached in his study is that

Dalits revealed no more inferiority feelings than were found in the Indian population as a whole. This Shankar attributed this finding to the fact that the negative self-image had been imposed upon the Dalits from outside themselves and was not inherent within them.29

Shankar conclusion about the negative self-image among the Dalit students was countered by M. K. Hassan in his 1977 study. Results of his study on students of Dalit background show that “the Dalits (and scheduled tribes) had a more negative self-image as well as higher degrees of anxiety, authoritarianism, and dependence proneness as well as lower need for achievement than did the high or low caste students.”30

The three studies described above illustrate the cluster of psychological disabilities that systematic caste exclusion and subordination contribute to in the Dalit children and young adults. These studies give a brief snapshot of the impact of caste based discrimination and deprivations, both psychological and physical, on the Dalit psyche and how they have shaped the intra-psychic formation of Dalit self-image.


29 Ibid., 39.

30 Ibid.
Early childhood experiences have a lasting impact on the self-image of the Dalit people. Raj, a Dalit scholar, who is over fifty years old, writes that even after seeking some professional help he continues to suffer from a sense of self-worthlessness.\textsuperscript{31} According to him, Dyche is the wounded psyche of the Dalit people, the result of the “incessant barrage of ascriptions” of the caste people on the Dalit psyche.\textsuperscript{32} Raj elaborates,

The incessant barrage of ascriptions on the Dalit ancestors and its religious vigour have made a serious dent into the otherwise naturally positive self-image of the present Dalit people. What Brahminism has done to the Dalits is a serious assault on its personality through its multifarious ascriptions of the demeaning and degrading characters. Over many centuries of such barrages Dalits have internalized a rather low and worthless self-image of themselves. Such ascriptions where simultaneously coupled with economic deprivation, social exclusion and political subjugation.\textsuperscript{33}

Bama, in her autobiography, makes a similar point about the nature of the Dalit psyche and how it manifests itself in their social behavior. She writes,

Because Dalits have been enslaved for generation upon generation, and being told again and again of their degradation, they have come to believe that they are degraded, lacking honor and self-worth, untouchable; they have reached a stage where they themselves, voluntarily, hold themselves apart. This is the worst injustice.\textsuperscript{34}

I believe her “the worst injustice” provides an accurate description of the worst form of social conditioning of the Dalit people. Without a physical force acting on them they seem to have been conditioned to behave in a manner that is compliant to and reflective

\textsuperscript{31} Raj and Raj, 273

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 255.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 313.

of prevailing norms and prescriptions of the caste-based sociocultural relations with the dominant communities. Caste based exclusion and segregation of the Dalit communities from public places have been internalized to the extent that even when they are allowed access to public spaces, they exhibit great reticence to enter. Poor self-image hinders them from claiming their rightful access to public spaces. Other behaviors amply demonstrate the social manifestations of this poor self-image. Raj explains,

When there is a group of Dalits and non-Dalits who enter into the office of a rich person or a dominant caste person the Dalits do not take chairs or cushion sofas kept for visitors. They would either stand or sit in the corner. Dalits will be able to understand why they do this. It is simply because of a deeply buried feeling that we do not deserve to sit in clean and cozy places even if they are meant for the public irrespective of their caste. They have to be persuaded several times to sit equally with all the visitors. Such is the damaging impact of the dominant caste ascriptions on them.

**Personal Names**

Dalit names also signify a negative self-image. Some of the names given to Dalit children do not speak of any positive trait or characteristic of the person. For example, one of the names is *Buddaiyah*, which literally means “idiot.” It is really shocking for an outsider to hear such names given to people. Raj, expressing astonishment, writes, “One may wonder how a parent can give such a name to their child. But there is no such qualm in the Dalit families.” Other common names among the Dalit people are *Kariyanna* and *Kariyamma*, meaning “a black man” and “a black woman.” Hutchaiyah and Hutchamma

---

35 Raj and Raj, 314.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 317.
are other names that mean a mad man and a mad woman. “Vagabond beggar,” “heap of waste,” “devil” are among other meanings of names that Dalit people are given. Bama, in her autobiography, describes some of the most demeaning names given to Dalit people. She writes,

The names you heard along our streets would really surprise you. People’s baptismal names, given at church, were one thing; the names we used in the street were quite another. One child’s name was Munkovan, short-temper…A certain child who was very dark-skinned and plump was Murugan-spring pig. It seems that pigs wandered about, well-fed and plump, by the spring of Murugan; that’s why. There was a woman who leaked all over her legs when she relieved herself; she was called Kazhinja, Leaky. A small girl who went off to practice swimming in the well, but could only manage to float, was promptly named Medenda, Floater. Yet another woman used to go about chasing crows away when she was a child. The name stuck to her, Kaakkaa, Crow. I could go on and on…Dumbo, Crazy…black ant…black mouth…idiot.

Personal names are deeply intertwined with the self-esteem of people in general. Raj asks the question,

How can anyone gain a positive and ennobling self-image with such derogatory names and everyone being called from childhood to adulthood with such names? Added to this are the very highly derogatory nicknames that are given to the Dalit children by dominant caste children in villages and schools.

For example, Raj himself was given a nickname that meant ‘crow’s shit.’ For a large part of his childhood, he was addressed by this name in school by his friends. He was rarely called by his real name. It had a very serious negative impact on the formation of his psyche. As mentioned before, it continued to evoke a sense of worthlessness, even past

---

38 Ibid., 318.
39 Bama, 7-8.
40 Raj and Raj, 318.
fifty years of age, despite seeking professional help concerning self-esteem issues. The pattern of Dalit names not only reflects a poor sense of self-image among the Dalit communities but also reinforces a negatives selfhood among them through different developmental stages of life. It demonstrates of a vicious cycle that keeps the Dalit people trapped in the caste based oppression.

Shame

The caste system has created a culture of shame for the Dalit communities that manifests in a variety of their attitudes and behaviors. Besides the pattern of names, the eating habits of the Dalit people also reflect self-esteem issues that mark their psychosocial existence. Eating habits of the Dalit people are shaped by their experiences of shame, defined “as a pervasive sense of worthlessness, being unlovable, and a feeling that there is a fundamental flaw in one's being.” Dalit families, despite have cooking provisions in the house, are often found cooking their meals outside their house, in their backyard. It is an attempt on their part to be more discrete about what they are cooking. More often than not, they are found to be cooking beef. Raj draws attention to the influence of the caste ideologies on their perceptions on food. He writes,

The caste people in the villages cast aspersions on the Dalits eating beef as if they are unclean and dirty. The Dalits also began to believe that it was indeed a shame to eat beef. However, since this is the only meat that they often got free or at a very low cost they had to eat beef. Beef eating is our habit. It is an age old tradition of Dalit communities all over India. However, that caste forces have

---

41 Ibid., 273.

succeeded in instilling a guilt feeling in Dyche about eating beef. They would not cook beef inside their homes in the kitchen because of this aspersion on their character for beef eating.43

The Dalit people have developed a shame-based personality. According to Edward Wimberly, “a shame-based personality internalizes the negative images of one's group identity, such images undermining one’s basic sense of well-being.”44 I personally can recall similar experiences about eating beef in my family. There were numerous attempts on the part of my parents to keep the fact that we consumed beef occasionally a secret. I was explicitly instructed not to disclose that we consumed beef as part of our nonvegetarian diet. Cooking beef in the house was always a hush-hush affair. The idea was instilled in my mind that we would invite ridicule, shame and disrepute if the word got out that we eat beef.

**Dalits and a ‘Sinner’ Psyche**

For centuries, the Dalit people of Indian society have been deemed as the perfect embodiment of sin in Hinduism.45 According to the fundamental religious beliefs of Hinduism Dalits are born as Dalits because of their sinful past, a past that denotes their previous life. They are paying the penance for the sins of their previous life in their present life. Raj explains,

A Dalit is the cumulative essence of sin in Hinduism. There is not much problem if one is born as a pig. He can still be redeemed in the next birth by the pig’s

---

43 Raj and Raj, 321.


45 Raj and Raj, 330.
virtuous deeds. However, a Dalit can never be born as something else. The success of Hinduism and other religions is that they have transferred sin to the inner being of personalities through birth, instead of sin being the consequence of one's actions….This is also the success of Christianity that it has established sin as a matter of birth. Each human being is born with original sin.46

The sinner psyche of the Dalit communities can be witnessed in their celebration of a local festival called Maramma, a festival that is celebrated annually by the Dalit communities in Karnataka. The story behind the festival centers around a Brahmin girl called Maramma. It is believed that a Dalit (Kadaraiah) fell in love with Maramma. He desired to marry her. Since he was a Dalit, it was inconceivable that he ever could marry her. It is one of the cardinal rules of the caste system that there can be no matrimonial relationship between the Dalits and the caste community. To work around this problem he decides to conceal his Dalit background and instead identifies himself as a Brahmin in order to propose to her. Maramma accepts his proposal and they are eventually married.

A short while later when Maramma learns the truth about Kadaraiah’s caste identity, she feels cheated. An overwhelming sense of anger takes hold of her and she kills her husband for deceiving her about his caste identity. Before committing the ultimate act of aggression towards her husband, she pronounces a curse on him that his soul enter the body of a buffalo. Each year the festival of Maramma is celebrated to honor the Maramma’s killing of her husband, a Dalit, for the deceitful way by which he married her, breaching one of the most fundamental rules of the caste system. The celebration involves killing a buffalo as a sacrifice to commemorate Maramma’s courage in upholding the caste principles. After a buffalo is sacrificed, its severed head is placed

46 Ibid., 331.
at the entrance of village to remind people of the consequences of breaking the conventions and rules of the caste system.

The meat of the sacrificed buffalo is given to the Dalit people for their consumption because they are the people who consume beef. Raj explains the psychological significance of this festival in Dalit lives.

Every year they [Dalits] wait and request that caste lord to dedicate a buffalo as they know that it will go to them. They will have good food for a few days. The life of the Dalit people is inextricably interwoven around this goddess Maramma. Often it is said that Dalits have been co-opted by Hinduism. It must also be carefully analyzed if this is true. Often it is the Dalit people who have subconsciously co-opted Hinduism for the fulfillment of their survival needs. It can be easily witnessed in their acceptance of Maramma festival as theirs. Most of the Dalits in Karnataka know the story behind the festival well… Yet the people celebrate the festival as it is occasion which creates a social space for them.47

Aside from the fact that this festival provides for their material needs, it does a significant damage to their sense of self-esteem. It exemplifies the cultural tools that are deployed by the dominant communities to keep the Dalits subordinated. With these cultural tools in place, there is no need to terrorize the Dalit communities into submission to the dominant caste because the ideologies and belief of the oppressors become part of the oppressed and motivate them to think and behave in a manner that serves the interests of their oppressors and not themselves. The behaviors are initiated not so much from the outside as they are from inside of the oppressed people or groups. By participating in the festival, Dalits are subscribing to the dominant group’s negative stereotypes. These behaviors are a clear manifestation of the internalized oppression among the Dalit communities.

47 Ibid., 333.
Karma and Dharma

The notions of Karma and Dharma are at the heart of the Hindu religion, and these theological categories have been the legitimizing force behind the subordinated status of the Dalit communities and the dominant status of the high caste groups, especially the Brahmins. This idea has taken root in the psyche of both the caste people as well as the Dalits in India. Karma and Dharma are two fundamental theological principles in the Hindu religion that have reinforced a disempowering sin psyche in the Dalit communities. The significance of the concepts of Karma and Dharma, among others, in the Hindu belief system is well articulated by Satish Reddy, who states that

[t]hese concepts broadly determine Hinduism’s existential stance and are the starting point, framework, and context within which a Hindu views, structures, and lives his life. They are both the fundamental presuppositions of Hinduism and the emotional driving force of Hindu religiosity.48

In literal terms Karma means action. “The law of [K]arma is that every action has a reaction or consequence. It is a law of cause and effect. The action may be intentional, conscious or unconscious. Regardless, it has a consequence.”49 The notion of Karma, according to Reddy, is about psychic determinism.50 Hindus believe that they are “psycho-physically conditioned by actions [they] perform and the karma accumulated from these actions determines individual behavior, both in this life and the next.”51 The principle of Karma in the Hindu thought is explained from a psychological perspective

49 Ibid., 156.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
by Pittu Laungani in his book *Asian Perspectives in Counseling and Psychotherapy*. He says,

> The theory of Karma rests in the idea that an individual has the final moral responsibility for each of his or her actions and hence the freedom of moral choice. The law of karma stands out as the most significant feature of Hinduism. Although there is no basis for establishing its empirical validity, Hindus in general have an unswerving faith in the workings of the law of karma. It has shaped the Indian view of life over centuries. One might even go so far as to say that the Hindu psyche is built around the notion of karma. The influence of the law of karma manifests itself at every stage in a Hindu’s life: at birth, in childhood, during adolescence and adulthood, in marriage, in illness and health, in good fortune and misfortune, in death and bereavement, and after death.\(^{52}\)

Reddy draws attention to some of the psychological deficits that the notion of *Karma* gives rise to in the Indian psyche. First, the belief in *Karma* is a belief in determinism, and this is “likely to engender in the Indian psyche a spirit of passive, if not resigned, acceptance of the vicissitudes of life.”\(^{53}\) Second,

> it often leads to a state of existential, and in certain instances, moral resignation, compounded by a profound sense of inertia. One does not take immediate proactive measures; one merely accepts the vicissitudes of life without qualm.\(^{54}\)

Many Dalits in India believe in the notion of *Karma*; “they believe that they are born in the untouchable ‘caste’ as a punishment for their sin.”\(^{55}\) According to Devasahayam, “The *Karma* theory was the convenient tool in the hands of Brahmins to enable Dalits not

---


\(^{53}\) Ibid.

\(^{54}\) Ibid.

\(^{55}\) Raj and Raj, 348.
only to accept the[ir] exclusion and suppression but also to enjoy their slavery.”

Alan Dundes provides a clear explanation of the role of the religious notion of *Karma* in keeping the Dalit people within the confines of the caste system from a Western perspective. He writes,

> A reader unfamiliar with India and who is imbued with the modern Western ideals of egalitarianism and the possibility of upward social mobility in a system that rewards achieved status as opposed to ascribed status may wonder why individuals ‘trapped’ in low-ranked castes do not try to escape their life-long position of culturally defined inferiority. The answer lies in the fact that the caste system is closely connected to the worldview and religious belief. For example, the idea of rebirth, reincarnation as part of the elaborate system of eschatology, allows an individual to ponder upward mobility in the next life.

He quotes a Dalit man who recollects words of wisdom offered to him by his grandmother about his *Karma* and *Dharma* in this life in order to understand his present ‘Dalit’ condition and to earnestly seek a higher quality of life and caste status in the next life.

> …[S]he would tell me what we Untouchables only for one life, and that after this life we would be born either as a high-caste Hindu or a prince. This present life, she explained, was only the curse of the sins which we had committed in our past life, and all human beings have to go through this wheel of *Karma*, but if we are willing to do our work and be subjected to the discomforts of this world we should have reward in the next life.

The comforting words of solace that the Dalit woman offered to her grandson are born out of her deep belief in the notion of *Dharma*. Her words, “if we are willing to do

---


our work and be subjected to the discomforts of this world we should have reward in next life,” refer to the Hindu concept of Dharma. Dharma can be, and is, variously and simultaneously translated as duty, law, correct moral action, and acting in accordance with one’s nature. Dharma refers both to individual moral duty and social responsibility. Acting according to one’s Dharma refers to actions contextualized by one’s position in society (caste) and stage in life (asrama).59

What this means is that a person’s Dharma in Indian society is inextricably linked to his or her caste status. The notion of Dharma postulates that people in different castes are preordained with certain duties, in accordance with their particular castes, that need to be diligently preformed, which is essential to attaining moksha.60 It is hard to imagine that the Dalit people’s subordination in the caste system through the centuries can be explained or understood without some significant reference to these core principles, the foundations of the Hindu belief system. They are potent ideological weapons that are used by the caste communities to justify the subjugated status of Dalit people in the caste hierarchy while precluding any serious threats to their dominant status in the society.

Dundes explains how these notions, particularly Karma, served the dominant caste well in maintaining their hegemony over the Dalits. He argues that the Dalits cannot legitimately protest against their fate “since in theory, one’s fate was caused by one’s own actions in previous life.”61 He states that

Rebelling against one’s lot involves both disrespect for the law of [Karma] and failure to do one’s duties, and on both grounds have the necessary result of

---

59 Reddy, 159.

60 Moksha can be understood as spiritual release—and freedom and escape from the endless circuit of life-death-rebirth cycle, samsara.” Satish Reddy, 160.

61 Dundes, 5.
making one’s [Karma] worse, and so producing a regression to a lower stage in next birth.\(^6^2\)

Low caste communities who have organized their lives around such thinking have essentially participated in preserving the hierarchy of values and statuses structured by the caste system. Historically, the notions of Karma and Dharma have not only stymied any possibility of protest or resistance from low caste communities in the Indian society but also engendered a sense of resignation among the oppressed groups such as Dalits. Taylor notes: “If one accepts this notion of Karma, then one becomes resigned to one’s place in life.”\(^6^3\) Low caste people, who learn to interpret their experiences and the world around them through the Hindu ideological constructs of Karma and Dharma, these concepts indicate fatalistic thinking. Dundes explains that

> if one is of a lower caste or an untouchable, it is presumably because of some sin of omission or commission, e.g., involving pollution in a previous life. This kind of fatalistic, deterministic thinking tends to make individuals more or less accepting of—though not necessarily content with—their caste assignment.\(^6^4\)

Bama, in her autobiographical reflections, writes about a sense of resignation among the Dalit people. There are many Dalits who accept and endure their hard lives, consoling themselves that this was the destiny given them, that they cannot see a way to change the caste they were born into, nor the poverty that is part of that caste, nor indeed the humiliation of it all.\(^6^5\)

\(^6^2\) Ibid., 7.


\(^6^4\) Dundes, 6.

\(^6^5\) Bama, 69.
One should not conclude from the discussion above that the sinner psyche of the Dalit population is limited to the Hindu belief system. Dalit people across the religious spectrum can share in the experience of bearing the burden of a sin psyche. Raj makes this poignantly clear: “The Dalit people have been given a sinner psyche by the caste forces through Hinduism and by all religions to which they have gone in pursuit of dignity and equality.”66 The social experiences of the Dalit people in many of the religious belief systems manifestly denotes to some degree of a sinner psyche that remains one of the serious life limiting beliefs with which the Dalit communities contend. The majority of the Dalit people’s experiences in the social milieu of the caste system, including those of Christian Dalits, reinforce a sinner psyche among them, while the ‘sins’ of the dominant community against the Dalits that take the form of blatant and brutal caste discrimination, abuse and exploitation remain invisible. What is worst is that they are treated as justifiable acts against those who deserve them. And, as has been argued, the sinner psyche of the Dalit learns to believe it. Raj says that the sinner psyche conditions the life of the Dalit people today. What lives in the subconscious of the Dalit is that they are born untouchables because of their sins. To be born in a Dalit community is the curse of god.67

Self-Blame

Another important manifestation of the sense of worthlessness of the Dalit people is ‘self-blame.’ Dalit people are prone to blame themselves for any personal, familial or

66 Raj and Raj, 353.
67 Ibid., 353.
social mistake or failure that might have occurred. Raj, in his long association with Dalit communities, points out that self-blame attributions are a common occurrence among the Dalit people. He writes,

While the caste forces indulge in narcissism Dalit people indulge in self-blame game. We have come across many persons with inferiority complex who will, when something goes wrong, immediately begin to blame themselves. In reality what goes wrong is often beyond them. It may be external circumstances. However, such people have amazing quality of blaming themselves for everything that goes wrong around them and let the real cause escape. 68

Jeffrey Kauffman points to a high correlation between injustice and self-blame. He says,

A disturbing and revealing psychic occurrence in acts of injustice is the self-blame of the victim. This is a very significant part of the psychology of injustice: the guilt and shame of the victim. The violation of self by another wounds the victim in a way that arouses self-blame, with an intense, often hidden, shame. This is not an incidental aspect of the woundedness of injustice; injustice has a powerful tendency to fault the victim, perhaps based in the belief that I am responsible for what happens to me. Even where there is a clear conscious awareness that blame is unequivocally assigned to the offender, there is likely to be an undertow trend of self blame. 69

The disposition among the Dalit people to blame themselves is traced to the ‘inundated sense of sin’ and guilt that weighs down their psyche. He describes,

When a horrendous sense of sin and guilt gets into the conscious and subconscious personality of the Dalits it becomes easy for the dominant forces to shift the blame on the oppressed and it becomes much easier for the Dalit people blame themselves for every violation of rights and for all indignities. Even as the dominant forces scout around searching for a possible cause for some untoward event the Dalit people are ready pointing out to themselves as a possible cause of all evils happening around them. 70

68 Ibid., 349-350.


70 Raj and Raj, 350.
Self-blame is a very common occurrence among the Dalit communities. In their long association with Dalit communities as social workers, and being Dalit themselves, Raj and his wife Jyothi’s understanding of the problem of self-blame among the Dalit communities emerge from their personal interaction with them and their own experiences. They explain how this psychological disposition is closely related to the dominant discourses in the society that implicitly or explicitly find fault with the Dalit communities for a diverse range of problems that afflict the society:

This has been a very common experience for us both at the societal levels as well as in our personal interaction with many of our people. Glimpses of these cannot be denied even in our personal lives and interaction. It is a common experience in Indian villages for Dalits to be blamed for everything untoward that takes place in the village. If there is drought in the region the caste landlord will immediately ascribe it to the Dalit children daring to study in schools. If there is a disease in the village the caste people would unhesitatingly blame the Dalits for daring to speak in public. If there is a natural disaster in the village it would be immediately ascribed to the Dalits wearing new dress had having respectable marriage.

Most of the Dalit people in India grow up in an environment where they are blamed for every bad or evil thing that befalls the village community. Gradually, through the process of internalization, they learn to believe and assume responsibility for things that they are blamed for by caste communities as described above. How does this internalized oppression of ‘blame assaults’ play out in the lives of the Dalits? Raj writes,

Such unrelenting barrages on the Dyche have led to the gradual development of a sort of almost irreversible inferiority complex in the psychic world of Dalits. As a consequence, when something goes wrong in the village, much before, they are blamed for it the Dalits themselves would own it up voluntarily, go to the landlords and offer to do redemptive ceremonies. When young people in Dalit communities dare to defy the village caste traditions the parents would stand on their way and prevent them saying that it would bring disaster on their family and on the village.71

71 Ibid., 351.
What we see here is that the oppressor has become part of the personality of the oppressed. These unhealthy patterns of behavior reflect a psyche of the Dalit people conditioned by caste ideologies that keeps them subjugated in the caste system. The manner in which the Dalits participate, unconsciously, in their own oppression is the result of internalization of caste oppression.

**Accommodation and Adjustment**

Endemic poverty sometimes compels Dalit people to sometimes survive on handouts and leftovers from the high caste people. Leftover food is sometimes dropped into the bowls or utensil by caste people from a distance to keep them from being polluted by the touch of the Dalits. In her autobiography, Bama narrates one such event where she met a Dalit woman receiving food in such manner from a high caste family she worked for. Bama said to her that “she should not lay herself open to such behavior; it was ugly to see.”\(^{72}\) The woman responded by saying, “These people are the maharajas who feed us our rice. Without them, how will we survive? Haven’t they been upper-caste from generation to generation, and haven’t we been lower-caste? Can we change this?”\(^{73}\) The response made by the Dalit woman about the long entrenched structure of the caste relations between the Dalits and the high castes expresses the deep sense of despair and an attitude of resignation that has taken shape in the Dalit psyche. Long enduring caste experiences have generated a belief among the Dalit people that they are completely

\(^{72}\) Bama, 14.

\(^{73}\) Ibid.
powerless to change the systems of domination that have subjugated them through generations of the Dalit existence.

The Dalit woman is quite aware of her subjugated existence; however, a long history of caste discrimination and oppression has significantly weakened her resistive capacity to the point that she considers the idea of resisting the dominant structures as not realistic. Stanislaus explains,

Deprivation in their [Dalits] human dignity leads them to a resignation in their plight, even accepting dehumanization as unchangeable, and legitimizing their own existence because of the myths and beliefs foisted on them by the dominant caste culture. It leads the Dalits to a lack of self-understanding and self-respect of themselves.74 He adds that this is “due to a generation of exploitation and oppression resulting in a domestication of the Dalits.”75 The real success of any dominant system is to give rise to a belief in people who are marginalized that they lack viable options to systems of domination that are perceived by them as normative to their existence. Therefore, they learn to accommodate and adjust themselves to oppressive normative structures. The Dalit woman mentioned above is a good example of someone who has learned to adjust herself to the dominant structures and develop behaviors that fit the dominant script of how the marginalized ought to order their lives in the caste dominated Indian society.

Another relevant concept is the cultural phenomenon of sanskritization. Although it is not an accommodation strategy whereby Dalits, failing to see other pragmatic

---

75 Ibid.
options, seemed to adjust to the cultural realities imposed on them, it can be described as assimilationist. According to Srinivas, sanskritization can be described as:

\[ \text{the process by which a low caste or tribe or other group takes over the customs, ritual, beliefs, ideology and style of life of a high and, in particular, a 'twice born' caste. The sanskritization of a group has usually the effect of improving its position in the case hierarchy. It normally presupposed either an improvement in the economic or political position of the group concerned or a higher group self-consciousness resulting from contact with a source of the Great Tradition' of Hinduism.}\]

76

Dalits, by way of sanskritization, are given hope of positive social mobility to the upper social ranks of the Hindu society. This involves, as described in the definition, explicit and uncritical acceptance of the dominant culture and religion. In some ways, this can be seen as hegemonic preemptive strategy to keep the Dalits and other low caste populace from revolting against a cultural system of domination that favors few and subjugates others for perpetuity. It can be seen a token concession to the dominated communities to subscribe to the ideology of the caste system and work within it rather against it to change his/her social status. Dalits or other communities that have sought this method of climbing the social caste ladder have, consciously or unconsciously, embraced the false rationale concerning the legitimacy of the caste domination and participated in their own oppression. Rarely have those low caste communities been fully accepted as equals, even after undergoing the full process of sanskritization, by the caste communities. Kancha Illiah contends that this cultural phenomenon has been a sham and not really changed much for the Dalit people.

---

Many Dalitbahujans have attempted to [s]anskritize themselves. They changed their original names into brahminical names. Muthiahs became Murthies. Gopaiahas became Gopalkrishnas….But all this did not change the heart of urban Brahmanism. Whatever name a person has, the urban brahminical forces discover the caste background of a person within days and he or she will be treated accordingly….Not many, who tried the [s]anskritization trick, succeeded in getting an ‘upper’ caste daughter-in-law or a Brahmin son-in-law. More important than all these, no single [s]anskritized Dalitbahujan group can claim that their children have the connections to procure a good job without claiming reservation for which Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar fought all their lives. The [s]anskritization process did not dilute caste identities and caste based humiliation. Many Dalitbahujans who got [s]anskritized later realized the fact that [s]anskritization is no solution to Hindu barbarity.77

Survival Dependence

In some ways the Dalit woman mentioned above exemplifies the Dalit phenomenon of survival dependence. According to Raj, survival dependence is a psychological condition forced upon the Dalits. It is a psychological response of adaptation and accommodation to their socio-economic realities whereby they are made to depend on the high caste communities for their basic needs in life. This has created an impression upon the Dalits that their survival is made possible by the generous giving of the high caste people. He writes that

they [high castes] created a psychological conviction in the Dalits whom they have rendered illiterate that it was because of the caste people that the Dalits could even dream of living. As a very grateful return Dalits would do any menial service to the caste people. They would never be conscious that this very same service was taking away their life.78

This is quite evident in the response of the Dalit woman cited above, who called the high caste people as Maharajas, the great kings ‘who feed us our rice.’ The extreme

77 Ilaiah, 69.
78 Raj and Raj, 574.
deference seen in how the high caste people are addressed by the Dalits speaks to how they have come perceive them as the providers of life sustaining basic needs. Raj explains,

This is the general psychic trajectory of the Dalit community that they cannot easily see the evil designs of anybody against them as they essentially lacked a critical consciousness for a long time in history. This is one of the sure reasons why they allowed themselves to be exploited to the hilt as they could see only the goodness around them and not the evil designs behind such manifestations of goodness. They only saw what the castes forces were giving them in their daily lives. They were never allowed to see the limitless resources that they parted with at the rise of Brahmanism under their feet.79

Ambedkar, champion of Dalit people and the chief architect of the Indian constitution, explicitly points out the need for the Dalit people to become aware of their slavish mentality that keeps them from rising above their subjugated status.80 He names the “inferiority complex that had gripped their minds and hearts for ages and weakened their spirit and dried up their motivation.”81 In his survey of the South India Dalit communities, Godwin Shiri has recorded some of the responses to the questionnaire concerning pastoral care that illustrates dependency issues among the Dalit people.82 Responses such as, “we need pastors who will solve our problems; we need pastors who will secure government help for us” are clearly reflect a diminished sense of self agency among the Dalit people to effect change in their oppressed conditions.83 A deficient sense

79 Raj and Raj, 574, 575.
80 Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation, 66.
81 Anthniraj Thumma, Dalit Liberation Theology: Ambedkarian Perspective (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 83.
83 Ibid.
of self agency leads them to take the path of least resistance, which is to comply with the dictates of the caste system.

Silent and Obedient Psyche

The Dalit psyche is also conditioned into a state of obedience and silence by the dominant communities in the caste structure of the Indian society through inducing fear and offering rewards. Raj contends that there is a peculiar psychic situation where there is an interplay of reward and punishment at the psychic level. The Dalit is simultaneously conditioned by the two dinosaurs of impending punishment if he does not obey the hidden commands and the rewards that await him if he obeys.84

The caste system has systematically excluded the Dalit communities from gaining legitimate access to material resources and pushed them into a state of extreme poverty and destitution that has made them vulnerable to the exploitation by the caste people. In such a state of existence the Dalits are forced into silence by their oppressors, who exploit their vulnerable situations characterized by abject poverty and debt burdens to further subject them to caste injustices. Most of the Dalit communities find themselves trapped in this vicious circle of caste oppression where a culture of resistance and protest has limited appeal and suffering in silence is seen as a practical strategy of survival. Recalling his experiences of life in the Dalit community, Valmiki writes,

Most residents of the Bhangi basti were drowning in debt. So they could not afford to protest too much against any injustice done to them. Most of them suffered in silence. Honor and prestige had no meaning for them. Being

84 Raj and Raj, 646.
threatened and controlled by the high-ups was an everyday occurrence for the basti dwellers. 85

A real sense of fear has gripped the Dalit consciousness. It precludes the Dalit communities from exercising alternative possibilities to enduring their oppressive existence in silence. Fear has become the controlling agent of their lives. It has become an effective means of control at the hands of the dominant communities to dissuade the Dalits from challenging the status quo and the existing power arrangements that keep them subjugated in the caste hierarchy. Bama illustrates this in her experiences with fellow Dalit people who were attending to all kinds of menial jobs that they were offered in a convent school run by Catholic sisters from high caste community. She writes,

I felt a burning anger when I saw that all the menial jobs there were done by Dalits who were abused all the time and treated in a shameful and degrading way. I was pained to see even older people trembling, shrinking like small children, frightened by the power and wealth that the sisters had, burying their pride and self-respect, running to do the menial tasks assigned to them. If I told them that there was no need for them to die of fear, they need only do their work well, collect their wages and go their way, they would reply it was all very well for me to say that. After all I was here today, tomorrow I might be somewhere else; it was they who had to stay and suffer. And that struck me as true, too. 86

The Dalit women working for the sisters were very much paralyzed by fear to stand up against the high caste nuns even when their basic human dignity was violated and vandalized, repeatedly. They bore those indignities, for the most part, due to the high level of economic insecurity that their lives had been struggling against. They dare not challenge those who directly employ them because that would risk their livelihood. The Dalit people’s subservient behavior is informed by the paralyzing fear that they cannot


86 Bama, 23.
afford to push their already precarious existence any further by asserting their self-respect and human dignity before the caste people to whom they offer their services. A close observation of the Dalit behavior by Raj has revealed that such subservient behavior among the Dalit communities is directly related to the power structures in the society. Raj was initially perplexed to note that the Dalit people he had worked with in numerous villages seem to be emboldened to challenge people like him who are actually working with them to improve their welfare, but fail to show any substantial courage and boldness to face up to the dominant communities that oppress them. Raj gives a brief description of such behavior among the Dalit communities which reveals how the element of fear is dominating their interior life to assert themselves against the dominant communities.

One of the content areas of our training used to be social and caste analysis. We used to analyze threadbare how systems and structures were designed to exploit the poor and the Dalits. Since we used participatory training methodology the participants [Dalits] would generally identify such exploitative forces and individuals in their living area. Alternatives would be developed and we used to expect that after they [Dalits] went back they would begin to oppose dominant caste landlord and reclaim their lost land and dignity. Instead they would go back, especially the more vocal among them, and either join hands with other Dalits who were opposed to us or would write in newspapers against us…Reflecting on this phenomenon which was at times very painful we arrived at the ‘Reverse Bond’ theory in Dalit communities. We found out that this was not a unique experience that we were privileged to have. Many other Dalit leaders had to face the same music in their liberation efforts.  

Raj observes that the Dalits have no problem asserting themselves or picking up arguments or becoming physical with leaders who are fellow Dalits, but seem to be silent and submissive in relation to the high caste people.

We have seen this happening almost in all villages where we work. It is not against us but against one another among themselves. There would be vociferous

---

87 Raj and Raj, 646.
arguments and even fistcuffs in the village meetings against the leaders whom they elected. They would not raise even a small pitch against the caste landlord who is much more corrupt and exploitative than one of their Dalit leaders. It is evident that they are afraid of the landlord while they are free with one of them. What they have with the landlord is bondage, what they have with their brother Dalit is a bond, a true friendship that cannot be destroyed by petty quarrels. 88

Any ministry of liberation towards the Dalit communities needs to respond to this element of fear that has given rise to a silent and submissive psyche that keeps them passive to the exploitative behavior of the caste communities. The internalized image of the caste landlord very much conditions their behavioral responses that are expressive of their submissiveness to the dominant communities. Raj clearly explains how this manifests in the lives of the Dalit people.

The caste authority does not give a command every time there is a need for action by the Dalit. The commandments of the caste lord are largely unwritten but are firmly engrained in the psyche of the Dalit people. At every occasion to which they have to respond they know exactly how the caste lord wants them to behave and respond. Generally it is these unwritten laws of the caste society that govern the personal and community life of the Dalit people. 89

Bama narrates an exception to the tendency of the Dalit self to remain passive when there is a need for something to be done in the face of overwhelming sense of fear in one of her autobiographical recollections. This particular incident reveals what a non-passive behavior looks like in the face of some injustice meted out to a Dalit person by high caste people. The incident is about a confrontation that Bama had with the institutional heads of the school where she was enrolled as a student.

At another time I asked for permission to go home because my younger brother and sister were to make their First Communion. It was to be for a Saturday and

88 Ibid., 648.
89 Ibid., 650-651.
Sunday; these were anyway customary holidays. Even so, the Principal and the Warden joined together and were adamantly refusing to allow me to go. I grew hot with anger. I saw with my own eyes that they were giving permission for the wealthy children to go home. I lost my temper and challenged them head-on, “How is it that you are allowing these others to go; why is it that you only refuse me?” The reply that I was given: “What celebration can there be in your caste, for a First Communion?” They told me, in their domineering way, that they could not let me go to attend minor occasion like this. The more they spoke, the more I felt a wild rage impelling me to go, come what may. So I stood my ground obstinately. I managed to get my way at last by insisting that there cannot be different rules for different castes, only the same rules for everyone.90

Incident such as this are a daily occurrence in their lives of the Dalit people where fair and just claims on their rights and privileges in the society are routinely denied by the dominant communities. For my purposes, it is important to recognize in the incident narrated above that Bama shows exceptional courage and fortitude. Her strength, however, is not the norm but an exception. Raj emphatically asserts that, by and large, Dalit people have internalized the authority and fear of the caste people in ways that they have learnt not to question unjust caste practices and abuses. There have been incidents when some Dalit people have challenged degrading caste practices, but the Dalit communities have themselves actively opposed them fearing the consequences of disturbing the status quo that would inevitably invite a strong retaliatory response from the caste communities. Sharankumar Limbale narrates one such incident from his school days that speaks about the realities of the psycho-social behavior among the Dalit people in the context of caste oppression. It clarifies the kinds of psychological barriers that keep them powerless to challenge the dominance of the caste communities. Sharankumar Limbale writes that as a young boy he became conscious, owing to education, of the social realities of untouchability and other caste based discrimination as practices that

90 Bama, 19.
were unjust. He decided to do something about the practice of untouchability that he
witnessed at one of the local tea stalls in his village. The tea stall served the Dalit people
in a degrading and discriminatory manner, where the saucer, cup and tumblers used for
them were separate from the others used to serve customers from other caste groups. The
Dalits are served tea and water without touching them, from a distance. He writes,

Those days when we went around the village and walked with pride, the high-
caste people hated our confidence. They didn’t want us to enjoy any self-
esteeem….We loathed the low esteem that was imposed on us as our lot. The cup
and the saucer outside Shivaram’s tea shop were an insult to our entire
community. Old people from our community drank tea from that cup and saucer
without any protest. Rambaap used to go to Shivram’s tea shop and drink tea from
it. There was also an aluminum tumbler kept separately for us to drink water
from. As we held the tumbler the water was poured into it, carefully, without any
contact between us and the giver. Rambaap used to drink water as well as tea and
had to wash the tumblers too before he put them back in their place. He had to
put money for the tea on the ground or drop it from a height into the hands of the
owner because for a Mahar or Mang (Dalit caste groups) to hand money directly
to anyone was a sin. When Rambaap noticed me watching him do all this, he said,
‘We are low castes. What you have seen is a long tradition that has come down to
us from our forefathers. What can we do about it? How can we go against the
village customs?’91

Rambaap articulates Dalit people’s utter state of helplessness, hopelessness, and a
sense of resignation in the face of multigenerational exposure to caste based
discriminatory practices that are deeply entrenched in the Indian society. He is quite
aware of the caste injustices foisted on the Dalit people; however the long established
nature of the caste ‘traditions’ convinces him of the futility of any resistance against
them. He legitimizes his behavior of passively accommodating himself within the caste
defined values of the society and adjusting to the status quo by subscribing to the
dominant caste ideology that the Dalit communities have no escape from the caste

Press, 2003), 76.
bondage. What Limbale encounters with Rambaap is not the end of his experience at the tea stall. Rather what happens later provides insight into understanding the level of domestication of the Dalits into the dominant caste culture, whereby they actively participate in upholding the values and practices of the caste culture.

Determined to do something about the unjust untouchable practice, Limbale and his friend decide to take up this matter with the local police and ask for their intervention to stop such practice. After being verbally abused and threatened by the police officials at the station, they decide to quietly leave the police station. He writes,

We decided not to tell anybody about the whole affair. In fact we ourselves wanted to forget the whole thing. Parshay [Limbale’s friend] and I walked together towards the Maharwada [Dalit colony]. By the time we reached there the entire village and Maharwada were united against us for having gone to the police station to complain against Shivram. Kaka [Uncle] arrived home in the evening. He was furious about the whole affair. He shouted, ‘Sharanya, who have you complained against at the police station? Why the hell did you need to do that? I will smash your head like I would a snake’s.’

The reaction of the Dalits in the colony underscores how they have been co-opted by the dominant communities to maintain the status quo, even while they are struggling against it. Revolutionary change is not possible when little sparks of protest that arise among the Dalit communities face resistance from their own. Limbale implies that a low self-esteem among the Dalit people has muted their voice of protest against the indignities that they are subjected to in the caste society. It was education that awakened a sense of pride in Limbale, and impelled him to protest against caste injustice perpetrated by the caste communities. As has been pointed out earlier, low self-esteem is a chronic problem among the Dalit communities. A combination of fear of backlash

against challenging the status quo as well as poor self-esteem has impeded the Dalit people from raising their collective voice of protests against the dominant communities and their dehumanizing caste practices. Instead, they joined the caste communities in suppressing the voice of dissent and protest of their own. It clearly reflects the silent and obedient psyche of the Dalit people.

**Caste Discrimination and Disunity Among the Dalit Communities**

Dalit communities in India are not only victims of caste discriminations by the dominant social groups, but also victims of caste discriminatory practices within their own communities. These discriminatory practices within the Dalit communities haven’t received the attention that is necessary for formulating constructive liberation strategies for Dalit emancipation. Much of the attention has been focused on the caste discrimination and injustice committed against the Dalit communities by the dominant caste communities. Clarke notes that

> while the division between the caste community and the [D]alits and Adivasis [tribals], on the one hand, has been addressed and dealt with in a variety of ways, the rupture between the [D]alit communities themselves and between the [D]alits and Adivasis, on the other, has hardly been deliberated.\(^\text{93}\)

A close examination of the caste discrimination and division and disunity among Dalit communities reveals how the dominant values have become part of the Dalit psyche and have played a key role in keeping them subjugated to the oppressive regime of the caste system in India.

Dundes says “All castes, with the possible exception of the Brahmans, felt they had some castes above them and some below them…This is true even of the lower-ranked castes.”\textsuperscript{94} Stephen Fuchs, examining the caste phenomenon writes, “There is no caste in India so low that it does not find another one that in their own eyes is still inferior.”\textsuperscript{95} He further adds, “among those lowest scavenging sections which remove nightsoil there is still a distinction: those who serve in private houses consider themselves higher than those who clean public latrines.”\textsuperscript{96} As Dundes puts it, “The point here is that even among the untouchables, there are hierarchical gradations whereby one caste feels superior or inferior to another.”\textsuperscript{97} Caste based hierarchical group discrimination within Dalit communities is a clear case of the uncritical acceptance or internalization of the dominant values. Among other things, the Brahmanical cultural dominance of the Dalit communities has prevailed over a long period of the Dalit people’s history due to the conflict and divisions that internalized caste values have generated among the Dalit communities. These institutionalized divisions and conflicts keep Dalits from organizing themselves as a forceful political and cultural entity to challenge the oppressive injustices and exploitation of the dominant social groups. Bishop M. Azariah notes, in particular reference to the Christian Dalits, that “They are divided among themselves into different subsects like their Hindu counterparts. They observe caste discrimination against one

\textsuperscript{94} Dundes, 4.

\textsuperscript{95} Stephen Fuchs, \textit{At the Bottom of Indian Society: the Harijan and Other Low Castes}, (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1981), 207.

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 238.

\textsuperscript{97} Dundes, 5.
another, equally, strongly if not more like all Hindus.” 98 Stanilaus describes this problem as one that is critical for Dalit liberation.

Another serious problem with the Dalit Christians is that they are divided among themselves into different subgroups like the Hindu community. In Tamilnadu, there is a fourfold hierarchy of Dalits: viz., Pallans, Paraiyans, Sakkiliyans and Thottis. The lower-rung jati is untouchable to the upper jati...the discrimination is polarised between these subgroups. It is a classic example of the oppressed being ruled by the values of the oppressor. 99

Clarke, a Dalit theologian, in his visit to a village in Tamil Nadu, explored the sociopolitical dynamics between the Dalit social groups as well as the caste communities that revealed three relational characteristics that sharply focus on the “intra-[D]alit community division.” 100 He refers to the two Dalit communities of Paraiyars and Arundhatiyars. He writes:

First, the animosity of the Paraiyars was directed against the Arundhatiyars rather than the caste communities. This stemmed from a recent panchyat[local governing body] election in which the Arundhatiyars supported a caste Hindu man against a [D]alit Christian woman from the Paraiyar community. The Christian [D]alits tried to dissuade us from visiting the Arundhatiyar colony. In discussions it was clear that they did not think that anyone else shared the [D]alit identity with them. Second, the temple in the Arundhatiyar area, which was built over the last two years, was crowded with icons of non-[D]alit gods and goddesses. The goddess Mariyamman, who they claimed was their territorial deity, was there, but she was one among many others without any prominent position in the small temple. The person who functions as the priest was deliberately ambiguous in answering my question concerning this, and said: ‘We had to please the many caste Hindus that gave us most of the money to build this temple, but only Mariyamman is taken out and made to bless our colony during the yearly religious festival.’ 101

98 M. Azariah, The Un-Christian Side of the India Church, 11 Cited in Stanislaus, 63.
99 Stanislaus, 62-63.
101 Ibid.
Clarks’s observation of the social dynamics between the Arundhathiyars and Paraiyars gives insight into the strategies and practices of the dominant communities to sustain and reinforce their subordination of the Dalit communities. By offering them financial assistance, they have effectively offered a false image of themselves to the Arundhathiyars, who felt obligated to please the high caste communities to the point of diminishing the significance of their deities and elevating the presence of non-Dalit deities in their own temples. And equally important, in all probability, the Arundhathiyars also felt obligated to support a non-Dalit person to a governing body in local elections. Whether that is tied directly to the financial assistance provided to build a Dalit temple is not clear, but what is clear is that the Arundhathiyars certainly felt a need to find favor with the caste community and be favorable with them as well. This helps us understand how high caste social groups, through certain strategies (like making financial donations), maintain their caste dominance over the Dalit communities. They are tools of domination that are specifically deployed to co-opt Dalits into maintaining their oppression by devaluing their culture and religion and weaken their collective solidarity to resist the political and economic domination of high caste social groups.

The third point that Clarke makes concerns the attitude of Christian Dalits towards the Irrullar, another subjugated community commonly grouped under the tribal groups in India. He notes that

the indifference of the Christian [D]alits to the plight of the Adivasis was overt. There was an air of superiority that they communicated when talking about the Irrullar. The Paraiyar community confidently asserted that the caste communities treat them with much greater respect than the Irrullar because the latter were ‘dirty’ and ‘unclean’. Ironically, these were the same terms that caste
communities have traditionally used to distinguish themselves from the Dalits. On the one hand the Christian Paraiyar community comes across as a subordinated community of persons who are politically conscious, actively pursuing political means (fielding a candidate from their own community for local governing body elections) to empower themselves. On the other hand, the attitude of the Christian Paraiyar community in relation to the Irrullar that Clarke encounters in his visit suggests that their psyche remains chained to the casteist values. The Christian Paraiyar community is operates from ideological values that are internal to them and therefore have a more favorable opinion of the caste community than the tribal community of Irrular, who are equally, if not more, victimized under the caste system by the Hindu dominant community. This again reveals how the oppressed psyche identifies with the oppressor, and in the process reifies the oppressed and oppressor dynamic. The Irrular community are perceived and treated by the Christian Paraiyar community in a manner that is not dissimilar to the way that the Dalit communities are treated by the caste community in the caste structured society. Purity and pollution, the central elements of the caste ideology, are manifest in the relational dynamics between the Dalit and tribal communities. Their relationships are governed by these ideologies that are not external to them but have been internalized; they have become part of how they define themselves in relation to each other.

In Andhra Pradesh the caste discrimination is particularly seen among the two predominant Dalit communities: Malas and Madigas. These two communities, much like

---

102 Ibid.
the caste communities, maintain social and spatial distance from each other. Venkata Siva Reddy, a Dalit author, writes,

The Malas and Madigas used to live in separate segments of the village. Though, of late, both are found in the same locality, after the provision of the house sites for SCs and with Construction of SC colonies by the government. But here also they have occupied separate streets or segments for each of them. These two major untouchable castes have never maintained any social relations from the remembered past. In rural Andhra, the two castes do not draw water from the same well...though both are untouchable castes, there is no interdining practice between them. The Malas consider the Madigas inferior to them. Thus [sic] reflecting the caste hierarchy among the SCs.103

Shyam Babu, another Dalit writer, in his personal reflections, gives the following impressions about the Mala and Madiga Dalit communities.

Mutual distrust and acrimony between the Malas and Madigas habitually stop just short of violence. Collectively, they may be called Dalits or Scheduled Castes, but there is little that binds them together. They may be Christians or Hindus but they live separately, nay they keep as far away from each other as possible. Their separation extends not just to religious denominations...but to politics as well. That one sub-caste supports a particular political party is reason enough for the other to oppose it, and to the best of my memory Malas and Madigas have never voted for the same party....Each child of either sub-caste is taught to continue this cold war, and the process of acculturation starts when one is very young.104

The intra-Dalit discriminations and hierarchical values that have been noted above, show that for the Dalits

aping the oppressor seems natural. All they want to achieve is to become like their oppressors because that is the only image that is deeply imprinted in their hearts. So, at one and the same time they want to be free from their oppressors and also to perpetuate their memory.105


Aspects of disunity, discrimination and conflicts among the Dalit social groups circumvents any real possibility of establishing and sustaining a strong sense of collective solidarity and common struggle for Dalit liberation. Any and all efforts of Dalit liberation will fall by the way side as long as the internalized values of the caste system among the Dalit people that foster caste based discriminations, hierarchical divisions, and mutual animosity towards each other are not adequately recognized and appropriate psycho-social strategies formulated to address them. For far too long, the psychological captivity of the Dalit psyche to the ideologies of the caste system has remained out of focus for the ministry of the Indian Church among the Dalit communities. The Church has either ignored this or has not taken serious steps to address such problems that keep the Dalit communities enslaved to the caste ideologies.

**Alienated Dyche**

A deep sense of alienation has taken root in the Dalit psyche. This is a direct outcome of their personal and social experiences in the dominant culture of the caste communities that disparage them, treat them as polluting, and detest their presence and touch. They live in a world that degrades and devalues them because of their caste background. The entire cultural heritage of the Dalit people, including their customs, traditions and values are perceived as inferior, uncivilized and primitive to the cultural heritage of the caste people. Cultural discourses neither value their perspectives or their experiences. The cumulative effect of such experiences on a daily basis has, among other things, given rise to a deep sense of alienation among the Dalit people on a personal and
social level. “Everyone internalizes the dominant culture, both consciously and unconsciously up to a degree. When the culture does not mirror our identity or, worse, devalues it, then essentially, we internalize a sense of rejection of ourselves.”106 This is one of the ways alienation is understood psychologically. The social dimension of alienation manifests itself when people of a minority or non-dominant culture begin to show signs of withdrawal from significant areas of their social life and stop pursuing goals and interests that are meaningful for them. The following passage from Limbale’s autobiography captures the Dalit experiences of alienation:

Though branded as Untouchables we too are Hindus by faith. We too are human beings. High-caste children from the village may visit the temple, yet we are forbidden. There is a saying, ‘Children are the flowers of God's abode,’ but not us. We are the garbage the village throws out. There were so many caste factions in our school. The umbilical cord between our locality and the village had snapped, as if the village, torn asunder, had thrown us out of it. We had grown up as aliens since our infancy. This sense of alienation increased over the years and to this day haunts me.107

These words of Limbale are not the lone voice of one Dalit but represents all the Dalit people who live through the anguish of being caste out of the human community. Limbale feels alienated from caste defined human community. Finding himself on the other side of caste defied boundaries of pollution and purity, Limbale’s feelings of alienation are about his subhuman polluted existence. He feels alienated in terms of basic human dignity and worth of human person, considered as a fundamental human right in the civilized world. This is one of the most heinous and damaging of all acts of psychic


107 Limbale, 5.
violence that are afflicted upon the Dalit people. Dalits also feel alienated from their culture and history. The brahmanical worldview that forms the foundations of the cultural, political, economic and educational systems in India has done great harm to the cultural status of the Dalit groups; they are almost rendered almost invisible in the Indian society. Kancha Illiah, a Dalit writer, describes his experiences that manifested this invisibility for him as he pursued higher education. He writes,

[A]s I pushed my way into the institutions of higher education at various levels, education began to appear more and more alien to me, more and more brahmanical and anglicized. As long as my education remained basically in the Telugu medium, my Telugu textbooks and history textbooks consisted of only brahmanical narratives. Even mathematics was taught in a brahmanical paradigm. Gods and goddesses, who appeared in our books were brahmanical, the men who were projected as heroes came either from the brahmanical tradition or from the kshatriya tradition. The history books were full of stories of kshatriya kings: we read their love stories and their war stories; we read about their problems and prospects, their dreams. Dalitbahujan life figured nowhere in the curriculum. We had been excluded from history. In fact, it appeared as if our history was no history at all.108

My personal educational experiences were no different from what Kancha Illiah describes above. I was never exposed to Dalit people’s culture, religion and history in any of my educational programs, including undergraduate-level programs. Much of the knowledge about the Dalit people, in an academic setting, was gained during my ministry studies in a theological institution. It is not an accident that the Dalit people’s history, culture and their belief systems failed to enter the curriculum of Indian education system. It is a historical continuation of a systematic campaign of the brahmanical culture, spanning thousands of years, to deny Dalits the fundamental right to education but control the institutions that disseminate knowledge to serve its interests and preserve its

108 Ilaiah, Why I am not a Hindu, 54.
cultural values as the norm of the society. Brahmanical ideologies permeate not only the educational institutions in India but also other cultural, economic and political institutions in the service of the domination of the caste elites in the Indian society. Submerged and dominated in the brahmnical culture, the Dalit ‘self,’ struggles to affirm itself, and realize its potential.

A Dalit Perspective in Psychology

What has been presented in this chapter so far is a brief overview of the psychological experiences of the Dalit people. These experiences, by and large, are about the psychological impact of oppression and the challenges that the Dalit people have to contend with every day in their life. My principle argument in this chapter is that these psycho-social-spiritual consequences of oppression need to be taken seriously by the ministry of pastoral care to liberate the consciousness of the Dalit people and create a more just society. Unless these psychological aspects of the Dalit people are properly understood and appropriate approaches and strategies are developed, true liberation for the Dalit people will remain a difficult possibility. A Dalit perspective in psychology that I am developing in this chapter is primarily concerned with a deeper and more accurate understanding of Dalit psychological experiences, particularly in relation to the reality of caste oppression that defines their existence. Dalit psychology, in simple terms, is a consequence of being a Dalit in India. Dalit psychology is about the shared and collective experiences of the Dalit people in India. The principle objective of Dalit psychology is
not only the survival of the Dalit people, but also their complete and total physical, psychological and spiritual liberation.

In the rest of the chapter, I focus on the indigenous traditional, cultural and psychological heritage of the Dalit people. Their unique perspectives predate their oppressive encounters with the brahmanical culture that subsequently subjugated them by stripping them of their cultural capital and resources and imposing an alien culture. Raj identifies this indigenous heritage as the ‘Adijan psyche.’ Adijan is a representative name given to the indigenous ancestors of the Dalit people. Adijan is a name given to the ancestors of the Dalit people who were considered as the earliest inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent. Before they were subjugated by the brahmanical culture, they had a thriving cultural and religious life. Adijan psyche, discussed by Raj, is a psyche that is reflective of the indigenous cultural ethos and value system of the Dalit people.

Before identifying some of the significant cultural and psychological features of the Adijan psyche, representative of the unique Dalit perspective on psychology, I deem it is important to address the issue concerning the name “Dalit,” which I believe has implications for the psychological work of liberation and healing among the Dalit communities. Raj, takes issue with the term “Dalit,” a self-ascribed representative name for the outcaste communities of India, as being disempowering. He rejects the Dalit identity for the simple reason that Dalit indicates a broken past and present. The Dalit people are not a broken people as their history shows. They have been wounded in their psyche but not broken. 109

109 Raj and Raj, 89.
I am in complete agreement with the position that Raj has taken with regards to Dalit people as being a wounded but not broken people. The self-esteem issue among the Dalit people has been discussed at length in this chapter. As mentioned earlier, it is one of the most pervasive psychological problems that the Dalit people are struggling to overcome. From a psychological perspective, if the power of language is taken seriously, the name “Dalit” is counterproductive for a people who have low self-esteem because the word means broken, crushed, split and torn asunder. As Neuger points out, “language not only reflects reality but also creates it.”110 The term “Dalit” does not capture or convey a reality, a vision, a future that the Dalit are striving towards. In a historical context where internalization of negative images has been identified as a serious problem among the Dalit communities, there is overwhelming need to instill positive images to build their self-esteem, images that inspire them and infuse positive energy into their liberation efforts. The term “Dalit,” which reminds them of their broken state, fails to serve that purpose. It plays directly into the dominating agenda of the caste people, who want to see them as a broken and crushed people, primarily in psychological terms. Here I refer to their inner strength, courage and resiliency to resist the forces of oppression and work towards transformation of the sociocultural structures that keep them subjugated.

In my opinion, it is more appropriate to characterize the Dalit psyche as a wounded psyche and not as a broken psyche. If psychological health and wholeness is one of the goals of liberation efforts among the Dalit people, the image of image of a broken psyche limits envisioning possibility. Broken things, by definition, cannot be brought back to their original unbroken state. However, the image of a wounded psyche

---

is not limited in that sense. In light of this discussion, I believe it is imperative to deliberate on the name and consider other alternatives that may be positive and constructive in expressing the Dalit people’s struggle for psychological health and self-determination. I contend that the name “Adijan,” a collective and indigenous term representative of Dalit ancestors, has more constructive potential than the term Dalit to instill and strengthen their self-esteem. In this section, I explore some important features of the Adijan psyche that I believe offer a better perspective on interpreting the Dalit people’s psychological experiences.

**Adijan Psyche: Inclusive Psyche**

According to Raj, Adijan people were inclusive and accommodative by nature.\(^\text{111}\) They were governed by the cultural values of cooperation rather than competition to foster growth among the people and their community. Growth and well-being were not measured in individualistic but communitarian terms. Among the Adijan people there was a natural proclivity to maintain and strengthen cohesiveness of community life. The cultural value system of the Adijan community is not based on alienating system of rewards and punishments that leads to divisions and hierarchy. The system of rewards and punishment are practiced in a more integrated manner that do not segregate the offenders or alienate them from their community roots.\(^\text{112}\) Sharing and caring for others is

\(^{111}\) Raj and Raj, 90.

\(^{112}\) Ibid.
not a matter of obligation or compulsion but a natural extension of their sense of belonging to a community.

**Psyche That Values Egalitarian, Democratic Values**

According to Raj, historically the nature of local government for the Adijan community was very democratic, which basically reflected a life lived in community. A life lived in community did not require “centralized systems and structures of governance” because “responsibility for protection and provision was widely dispersed throughout the community.” The Adijan communities valued and lived by egalitarian principles. Those values have not completely disappeared but continue to be evident, especially in the gender relations in Dalit communities today.

Dalitbahujan patriarchy is completely antithetical to brahminical patriarchy. Here too the notion of man being superior and woman being inferior does exist. But when compared to brahminical patriarchy there is a great difference. Within Dalitbahujan patriarchy woman is an agent of both production and reproduction. The domains of man and woman are not completely bifurcated at home and in the field. A man does the cooking while the woman goes to work in the field and the woman does the man’s work when the man is away. While cooking or doing or doing agrarian tasks or while performing caste occupational operations there are no gender restrictions in belief or practice. A Maalaa or Maadigaa woman is as much expert in leather-based productive tasks as a Maalaa or Maadigaa man is… In these castes knowledge or skills do not function in closely-guarded separate compartments. The man observes the woman's work, the woman observes the man's work. Neither notional nor physical structures are erected between the domains of the sexes.114

113 Ibid., 114.

114 Ilaiah, 46.
The egalitarian values are also seen in religious world of the Dalits, where the priestly domination and mediation that so much characterizes the brahmanical religion are alien to the Dalit religion and spirituality.

**Psyche of Protest**

Knowledge of the history of the Dalits is limited because much of it had never taken the form of a written text. Moreover, whatever little we know of them comes from the literary culture of the dominant communities. However, a diverse range of folk songs, myths and stories reveal that the Dalit psyche is a psyche of protest. Clarke, in his brilliant ethnographic study of the Paraiyars of Tamilnadu, shows that despite millennia of brahmanical cultural and religious oppression on the Paraiyars, their culture has maintained its distinctive features from which they draw their identity.\(^\text{115}\) He particularly focuses on two important symbols of the Dalit Paraiyar religion: the goddess Ellaiyamman and the Dalit drum.

These two religious symbols show the resistive dimensions of the Dalit religion and culture. The Dalit drum, made of cow hide, is seen as polluting and unclean by the dominant culture. It was only supposed to be used only for “dealing with inauspicious rituals, i.e., primarily, death and blood sacrifices.”\(^\text{116}\) However, Dalits do not follow the


cultural rules of the caste communities, who deem it as a polluted instrument and limit its use to polluting and inauspicious occasions of human life. Rather,

much of the cultural and religious life of Dalits is intertwined with the drum. It is utilized for community celebration, community mourning and Dalit divine-human mediation...[T]he drum alone has been sufficiently able to voice all the conscious and unconscious tales of Dalit communities: it wails of their sorrow; it warns of their revolt; it whispers of their hope; it whiles of their complaint; and it woos the power of their deities.117

What this suggests is that the Dalits have embraced the drum, an instrument that is seen as polluting object by the caste communities, as a central element of their cultural and religious life. It has become the medium of their vocal protest against a culture that degrades them as polluted people. It suggests that the Dalit are not passive to the unrelenting oppression meted out to them by the caste communities. The drum is used in creative ways to communicate their subjective agency of defying the caste conventions, rules and prescriptions.

Similarly, the goddess Ellaiyamman also signifies the resistive element in Dalit religion. Clarke writes,

The symbol of the goddess in her independence from the authorization and attestation of the Hindu divine male pantheon is one basis of Dalit culture and religion...In much of the South Indian Dalit religions and goddesses mainly remain unmarried. Thus they are uncommitted and unobliged to the Hindu male gods. In being single they are asserting their independence and difference from the Hindu religio-cultural symbolic meaning system. For example, the fact that Mariayamman, Ellaiyamman and Gangaiamman are not spousified and domesticated by the powerful Indian male deities mark them out as being distinct and different from other Indian goddesses.118

117 Ibid., 96.

Psyche of Ownership

Historically, the lives of the Adijan people were integrated with the mechanisms of the universe. Being part of the movement and change of the cosmos the Adijan people see themselves more as being an integral part of nature than being its owners. Therefore, they lack the fundamental psyche of ownership of the world.¹¹⁹

While life in the Western world is inconceivable without many claims of ownerships we make on Earth and its natural resources, the idea of being owners of Earth was alien to their cultural ethos. Raj writes that

In their psyche it is the world that owns them as they see clearly the transient nature of all life. The subconscious desire in them is to go back to the Earth from where they and their ancestors came. The lack of ownership of the world does not allow them to master over the dynamics of nature.¹²⁰

It follows that since there was no ownership of resources, the possibility of anybody exercising any control over the resources never arose, and neither did the possibility of hoarding or accumulation. The communitarian sense of ownership continues to be a guiding value in contemporary Dalit communities. Kancha Illiah describes this in great detail.

The notion of private property is minimal among the Maadigaas and Maalaas. Preserving for the next day, for the next month and for the next year has not yet become part of the consciousness of these Scheduled Castes. By and large the Scheduled Castes have retained the tribal notion of property as ‘public’ for thousands of years. Whatever the Dalitbahujans procure—a dead cow or bull—or when they cut a living sheep or goat, they divide equally among themselves. In thousands of caste wadaas (colonies), particularly, Scheduled Castes wadaas, equal distribution takes place...(if it is mutton or beef dividing it into as many equal shares as the number of families; or if it is grain, again equal shares). Those who work more, fetching cattle or sheep, do not get more than the others.

¹¹⁹ Raj and Raj, 111.

¹²⁰ Ibid.
Someone may have worked more on that occasion, but they share he/she gets his equal.\textsuperscript{121}

The intrinsic character of community ownership and sharing in the Adijan psyche has survived thousands of the years of the most vicious attacks.

\textbf{A Productive and Artistic Psyche}

German anthropologist Stephen Fuchs conducted an extensive study on the life and culture of the Dalit people. He identified a long list of traditional occupations that the Dalit communities were associated with. In his analysis of these and other diverse occupational practices he writes,

This survey of the low castes and outcastes on an India-wide basis has brought out several interesting and perhaps so far noticed features and peculiarities. It shows, first of all, that the low castes and Harijans of India are descendants of a people or of peoples in possession of a fairly highly developed and complex culture. It was a farming culture, no doubt, but the ancestors of the present low castes and outcasts were on the whole artisans and manual workers in this culture. They perform the tasks of blacksmiths, potters, weavers, leather workers, etc. They were well skilled in the arts, in singing, playing musical instruments and dancing, in the composition of songs, poetry, of legends and ballads. There are also the painters and sculptors of this culture. And most probably the wonderful architecture, the temples, places and monuments, the caves and temples, were conceived and produced by the descendants of these artisans and village servants.\textsuperscript{122}

In a historical context in which the Dalits and their culture was vilified and degraded, Fuch’s study of the Dalit occupational practices presents a rich, highly developed and productive cultural capital that contests the false claims of the dominant culture’s labeling of the Dalit as primitive and unsophisticated. For example, the drum

\textsuperscript{121} Ilaiah, 41.

\textsuperscript{122} Stephen Fuchs, 305.
may be a despised musical instrument by the caste culture, but it nevertheless is an “artifact of their productive labor. From the hide of cattle, which needed to be cured and tanned through intensive labor and native/ingenious technology, Dalit manufactured drums.” It reflects a fairly advance cultural quality to Dalit workmanship, something that one be proud to call as part of their heritage. However the cultural realities of the Dalit context as dominated by caste discourses have succeeded in evoking a sense of shame in Dalits about their cultural heritage.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I present a general outline of Dalit psychology. I argue that a clear understanding of the inner experiences of the Dalit communities is indispensable for constructing a ministry of pastoral care that is truly liberative in their context. I identify some of the dominant themes pertaining to their psychological experiences in the caste system and discuss some of the religious and cultural elements pertaining to the Adijan psyche. The purpose of the discussion is to identify some of the traditional religious and cultural resources that can inform a constructive useful model of pastoral care for the Dalit context. In the next chapter, I introduce a new paradigm of Dalit pastoral theology that draws upon Dalit theology, culture and psychology, sources that are indigenous to the Dalit context. In utilizing these indigenous Dalit resources for constructing this new paradigm of Dalit pastoral theology, I argue that these indigenous Dalit resources will be more useful to interpret Dalit experience as well as promote survival, liberation and

---

cultural identity of Dalit people. In addition to these Dalit resources, I engage liberation psychology of Latin America to construct this new paradigm of Dalit pastoral theology.
CHAPTER 5
CONSTRUCTING A NEW PARADIGM OF DALIT PASTORAL THEOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter I develop a meaningful new paradigm of pastoral theology that is relevant and effective in conceptualizing and addressing critical issues of Dalit survival, liberation and cultural identity. The preceding chapters have set the stage to introduce the central objective of this dissertation project, which is to discuss the significance, nature and purpose of Dalit pastoral theology. A strong case has been made for the need for Dalit pastoral theology by way of discussing the critical issues faced by the Dalit people in South India. I have argued that the current paradigm of pastoral theology in the Dalit context fails to conceptualize and address those critical issues. I draw on the indigenous theological, cultural and psychological resources discussed earlier to construct a new paradigm of Dalit pastoral theology. To put Dalit pastoral theology in proper perspective, it is important to provide a broad overview of the historical development of the field of pastoral theology, especially in the West. The norms, scope and methods of pastoral theology have undergone significant changes in the past century that can best be described as revolutionary. This can be seen in the various fields of pastoral theology and care operative in the contemporary context. In this chapter I also trace the historical
development of these paradigms to provide background for the construction of a new Dalit pastoral theology.

**Pastoral Theology and its Evolution as a Theological Discipline**

In this section I survey the historical development of the field of pastoral theology, focusing especially on the significant contribution of Seward Hiltner. Rodney Hunter writes,

Hiltner remains a major conceptual resource...because he was the first systematic theorist of clinically based pastoral theology, and because his theory attempted to be a comprehensive methodological framework for all of the theology including practical theology, and of course, pastoral theology which was its principle concern.¹

Following the discussion of Hiltner’s approach, to clarify the meaning of the term “pastoral theology,” I also discuss competing or overlapping fields such as practical theology, pastoral care and pastoral counseling.

In his ground breaking *Preface to Pastoral Theology: The Ministry of Theory and Shepherding*, Hilter, the father of modern pastoral theology, defines the field as that branch or field of theological knowledge and inquiry that brings the shepherding perspective to bear upon all the operations and functions of the church and the minister, and then draws conclusions of a theological order from reflection on these observations.²

---


This definition was radical and revolutionary in many respects. He intends to redefine the entire landscape of pastoral theology and reposition it in relation to other theological disciplines. Hunter explains Hiltner’s argument that

the purpose of pastoral theology is to refine, enhance, and even correct theology by holding it accountable to the actual experiences of suffering people as observed and experienced in ministry from a point of view he called the ‘shepherding perspective.’ In this particular way pastoral theology was to learn theology itself from actual pastoral experience, and contribute its ‘findings’ (as Hiltner quaintly put it) to the common theological enterprise in the ‘village green’ where all theological disciplines ideally were to come together to pool their insights and develop both theory and the lived practice of Christian faith.³

Hiltner says that pastoral theology is a

formal branch of theology resulting from the study of Christian Shepherding, that is just as important as biblical or doctrinal or historical theology, and that it is no less the concern of the minister of the local church than of the specialist.⁴

The meaning of this statement can be truly grasped only when it is put in a proper historical perspective. During much of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the field of pastoral theology had no significant place or status among other disciplines, particularly theological disciplines in the institutions of learning and scholarship. “[T]he historical field of pastoral theology, which flourished mainly in the nineteenth century”…consisted “mostly of practical manuals that instructed clergy in their sacred duties and exhorted them to live lives worthy of their calling.”⁵

---

³ Hunter, “Pastoral Theology: Historical Perspectives and Future Agendas,” 12.

⁴ Hiltner, Preface to Pastoral Theology, 15.

German Historical Background of Pastoral Theology

The term “practical theology”\(^6\) is originally identified with the German Protestant movement in the eighteenth century that “incorporated the discipline within the academic theological curriculum. The concerns of practical theology included pastoral care, worship, preaching, Christian education and church government.”\(^7\) The scope of pastoral theology was defined “by its clerical nature and it was viewed as a discipline that was undertaken by clergy in fulfilling their duties in the church.”\(^8\) The entire field of theology was subdivided and organized into the four standard sciences of the German theological encyclopedia with practical theology referring to a specific set of duties. Those four sciences were: the Bible, church history, systematic theology, and practical theology. The first three were ‘theoretical’ disciplines and the fourth an applied or practical discipline.\(^9\)

The further marginalization and narrowing of the scope of pastoral theology continued during this period whereby

It was to be concerned with the study of the activities of the minister, i.e. churchly and ministerial activities. Therefore, practical theology was not considered to include ethics or any of the issues of individual or social moral life. Rather, it was divided into five subdivided into five sub-disciplines: homiletics, catechetics, liturgics, church jurisprudence and polity, and pastoral care.\(^10\)

The German liberal theologian Frederic Schleiermacher (1768—1834) structured practical theology in relation to other theological disciplines by using the metaphor of a

---

\(^6\) Used here interchangeably with pastoral theology. A more detailed definition is discussed later in this chapter.


\(^8\) Ibid.

\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^10\) Ibid.
tree, where practical theology was understood to be the crown of the tree and philosophy, dogmatic and historical theology constitute the roots and trunk.\textsuperscript{11} The idea was that student clergy would study philosophical and historical theology and then apply this to the work of church leadership and governance in practical theology,” especially “where the more individually-oriented pastoral tasks of healing, sustaining, guiding, teaching, conducting liturgy, preaching and shepherding fit in.”\textsuperscript{12} As an applied theology, “practical theology’s relation to other theological sciences was one of practice to theory. The insights and theories from the other theological sciences were to be applied to the church situation by clergy in the conduct of their duties.”\textsuperscript{13} Hiltner intended to “transform this quaint tradition of ministerial wisdom into a modern theological discipline.”\textsuperscript{14}

Against this background one can truly appreciate the significance of Hiltner’s approach. Pattison and Woodward say that

In asserting that pastoral theology is ‘just as important as biblical and doctrinal or historical theology,’ Hiltner is registering the protest of a practical theologian against the inferior status of the discipline of practical theology (pastoral care, preaching, administration) in modern theological studies.\textsuperscript{15}

Hiltner challenges the prescribed role of pastoral theology, particularly as it was seen in relation to systematic theology, considered as the queen of all theological disciplines in


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13} Smith, From Strength to Strength, 30.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 56.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 57.
the academia. During my early days of ministry studies in a theological institution in India during the late 1990s, I still remember hearing an Old Testament scholar say that the Old and New Testament disciplines along with systematic theology rank first among all the other disciplines.

Prior to Hiltner, pastoral theology was seen as an appendage to systematic theology. “Systematic theologians are said to do ‘real theology’ while practical theologian merely apply it.”¹⁶ Hiltner contends that pastoral theology is more than simply applying theological knowledge and insights generated by systematic theology. He was asserting that pastoral theology was no less equal to systematic and other theologies, especially in generating theological insights and knowledge that can positively contribute to the life of the Church, and particularly the ministry of care. In other words, Hiltner maintains that “pastoral operations, if properly defined and interpreted, have a valid epistemological claim to make in theology.”¹⁷ In his efforts to transform pastoral theology into a modern discipline on par with systematic and other biblical disciplines, Hiltner was influenced by the legacy of Anton Boisen, the father of clinical pastoral education.¹⁸ Hiltner himself writes, “The person who has done more than any other in our century to prepare the soil for a new pastoral theology is Anton T. Boisen.”¹⁹ He further adds that “Boisen has not himself been concerned to work out a systematic pastoral

¹⁶ Ibid.
¹⁷ Ibid.
¹⁸ Ibid.
¹⁹ Hiltner, Preface to Pastoral Theology, 51.
theology, but the basic clue to the systematic construction of this author has come from Boisen.\(^{20}\)

**Anton Boisen**

William Dean observes that as a historicist theologian, Anton Boisen was opposed to the “nature-spirit duality typical of pietistic liberalism, and accepted a nature-spirit unity…placing God as well as the religious self within the dynamics of history….God had to work within the world of natural and social history or not work at all.”\(^{21}\) Boisen’s understanding of theology was different from the traditional view of theology. It was not just the study of God and related doctrines. In fact, the goal of theology for Boisen was not to *construct* any kind of system of belief, whether liberal or fundamentalist. Rather he believed that the task and method of theology is to organize and test the validity of religious views in light of human experience.\(^{22}\)

He contributes significantly to the field of pastoral care and counseling by affirming the “possibility of a genuinely empirical theology…the conviction that the events which occur in pastoral care and counseling have theological significance along with the more traditional elements in theological construction”\(^{23}\) Boisen believes that “theological convictions should be changed when they do not take into account the facts of human experience.”

\(^{20}\) Ibid


\(^{23}\) Patton, “Physicians of the Soul,” 168.
experience.”24 He asserts that “theological students should read ‘living human documents’ in addition to the classical texts of theology.”25 “Boisen believed that the living human document was the focus of pastoral care” and more importantly “the living human document was a source of theology, just as scripture is a source of theology.”26 “Hiltner’s concept of an operation-centered discipline was…his attempt to conceptualize Boisen’s thesis in formal disciplinary terms.”27 In other words, “Hiltner took Boisen’s clinical approach and refined it” to build his model of pastoral theology.28

**Hiltner’s Pastoral Theological Method**

Seward Hiltner is widely acknowledged as a pioneer in using the correlational model “to bring psychological and theological perspectives into dialogue with the practices of care.”29 Seward Hiltner’s correlational method of doing pastoral theology can be traced to Paul Tillich, a noted philosopher and systematic theologian. Tillich advanced a correlation method by which he “sought to correlate existential questions that were

---

24 Ibid.


28 Ibid.


167
drawn from human experience with theological answers drawn from the Christian
tradition.”30 Tillich writes,

In using the method of correlation, systematic theology proceeds in the following
way: it makes an analysis of the human situation out of which the existential
questions arise, and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian
message are answers to these questions.31

Tillich “developed a model by which he could compellingly address
contemporary social issues with the truth of the gospel.”32 In the interdisciplinary
relationship between theology and psychology, Tillich prioritizes theology over
psychology. In doing so, he very much intends to preserve theology's centrality and
authoritarian stance in relation to secular sources of knowledge; that is, theology provides
the norms by which one engages knowledge generated in the secular realm. Tillich’s
model is constructive in certain ways; however, his initial

model was unidirectional, allowing the Christian tradition to provide answers to
temporal questions but not allowing the Christian tradition to provide answers
from culture and society to challenge understanding of the traditions.33

Hiltner, “acknowledging the importance Tillich’s method, moved beyond it and
developed a dialectical dimension which allowed for the integration of insights from
culture, theology and the Christian faith.”34 Hiltner modifies Tillich’s unidirectional

30 John Swinton, “What is Practical Theology?” in Religious Studies and Theology: An
Introduction, eds. Helen K. Bond, Seth D. Kunin and Francesca A. Murphy (New York: New York
University press, 2003), 398.


32 Smith, From Strength to Strength, 53.

33 Swinton, “What is Practical Theology?” 398.

34 Smith, From Strength to Strength, 53
model “to incorporate an element of dialectic and mutual conversation, believing that
two-way critical reflection is necessary in order to describe effective practical theological
method.”35 “For Hiltner, this dialogue resulted in their mutually critical correlation,
bringing together the questions and answers that arise from the contemporary social
context with those arising from the Christian tradition.”36 Hiltner writes,

Knowledge or insight of the utmost importance to theology may emerge at any
time from a discipline that seems far removed from theology, and it hardly seems
fair to say that that discipline has no claim to what it has discovered. We believe
that a full two-way street is necessary in order to describe theological method. If
we hold that theology is always assimilation of the faith, not just the abstract idea
of the faith apart from its reception, then it becomes necessary to say that culture
may find answers to questions raised by faith as well as to assert that faith has
answers to questions raised by culture. Tillich apparently hesitates to put the
matter this way, and there is obvious risk to the ultimate meaning of faith in so
putting it. But if psychiatry, for example, enables us to help someone to turn a
corner and thence move on into the faith, how can we avoid saying that culture
has given the answer to a problem posed by faith—provided we believe that our
understanding of faith is never known apart from such actual concrete
processes?37

David Tracy in his book, Blessed Rage for Order, introduces ‘revised critical
correlation’ model of theological reflection.38 This is certainly a direct critique of
Tillich’s correlational model. This model

revises this [Tillich’s] unidirectional question-and-answer approach to include
questions arising from the Christian tradition and answers from existence. In this
way he sets up a dialogical method of ‘mutually critical correlations’ in which the

35 Swinton, “What is Practical Theology?” 398

36 Smith, From Strength to Strength, 53.

37 Hiltner, Preface to Pastoral Theology, 223.

38 David Tracy, Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology (New York: Seabury
questions and answers flow in both directions between existence and Christian symbol.\textsuperscript{39} Tracey defines theology as that “discipline that articulates mutually critical correlations between the meaning and truth of an interpretation of the Christian fact and the meaning and truth of an interpretation of the contemporary situation.”\textsuperscript{40} He further states, that “The correlations are between both the questions \textit{and} responses of both phenomena, the Christian tradition and the contemporary situation, not simply ‘questions’ from one pole and responses from the other.”\textsuperscript{41} Tracey’s revised correlational model has been much favored by pastoral theologians “to their purposes of theological reflection on pastoral encounters.”\textsuperscript{42} Carrie Doehring writes that this model gained popularity during the 1960s through 1980s, “when many pastoral counselors were relying primarily on therapeutic psychological perspectives and techniques…and this became a dominant approach not only for pastoral psychotherapist, but for pastoral caregivers as well.”\textsuperscript{43}

\textbf{Critique of Hiltner’s Definition and Approach to Pastoral Theology}

Hiltner’s book, \textit{Preface to Pastoral Theology}, broke ground in terms of a new vision and method of pastoral theology whereby he reclaimed theology as a “rightful

\textsuperscript{39} Swinton, “What is Practical Theology?” 398


\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 63.

\textsuperscript{42} Larley, \textit{Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World}, 77-78.

partner”44 in doing pastoral theology, for introducing the shepherding perspective, for “developing a dialectical dimension which allowed for the integration of insights from culture, theology and the Christian faith...a dialogue between revealed tradition and the questions and insights that emerge from particular pastoral encounters.”45 Nevertheless, numerous criticisms have been leveled against his definition and approach. His pastoral theology is often critiqued as being individualistic, clerical based, and blind to the contextual and cultural factors that shape particular pastoral situations. Moreover, he “relied heavily on the practical wisdom and theoretical foundations of psychology.”46 Thornton explains Hiltner’s individualistic and psychological leanings.

Drawn in particular to Carl Rogers, Hiltner adopted Roger’s optimistic view of human understanding and the individual person’s ability to generate well-being form within him-or herself. From this perspective, political, social, and other environmental influences were minimized. The limitation of personal insight was not an issue for these scholars during the mid-twentieth century, when trust in human potential for addressing the ills of hurting people was at its peak. In-depth social analysis of the multiple causes of human misery and the enormous toll on society were not seen as being within the domain of pastoral care. Because their focus was elsewhere, the power of external forces that contribute to human brokenness were all but ignored and thus were unavailable for comprehensive examination for pastoral theology.47

Thornton argues against the individualistic and psychological bias in Hiltnerian understanding of pastoral theology. More importantly, she sees Hiltner’s approach as blind to the contextual factors impacting pastoral care situations. Carroll Watkins-Ali, an African American pastoral theologian, writes that

45 Smith, From Strength to Strength, 53.
46 Thornton, Broken Yet Beloved, 8.
47 Ibid.
the shepherding perspective cannot be considered normative for the African American context. Hiltner does not specifically address cultural contexts, especially problems of racism, sexism, and classism, and their importance as he asserts the shepherding perspective.\(^48\) Moreover, Watkins-Ali considers the shepherding perspective inherently paternalistic.\(^49\)

She says that “Hiltner’s focus on the individual pastoral overprizes the role of the pastor (usually male) in theological reflection. Thus, Hiltner’s approach asserts the pastoral caregiver (usually a White male) as the expert.”\(^50\)

There is a need to examine closely the metaphor of shepherd as well. Kenneth R. Mitchell summarizes the negative criticism that this metaphor has generated.

The metaphor was a relic of rural, agricultural times, unfit for use in modern urban society. Besides, sheep are notoriously unintelligent, stubborn animals; the comparison of intelligent human beings to stupid sheep is insulting and inaccurate. The metaphor involves the assumption that there is a person who knows what is good for the sheep far better than do the sheep themselves. They may be true with sheep, but it is a dangerous, ill-founded assumption to make about relationships between pastors and parishioners.\(^51\)

Clearly, the ‘shepherd’ metaphor conjures not only the things described above but also coercion.\(^52\) It precludes any possibility of considering a shared knowledge and understanding of the problems and challenges being addressed in pastoral care situations between pastors and parishioners and participatory role for those receiving care. Despite


\(^{49}\) Ibid.

\(^{50}\) Ibid.


\(^{52}\) Ibid.
these serious criticisms of Hiltner’s approach to pastoral theology, contemporary methods and approaches to pastoral theology have evolved from Hiltner’s contribution to the field of pastoral theology.

**Contemporary Definitions and Understanding of Pastoral Theology**

Pastoral theology is defined in a variety of ways in contemporary Christian theology. According to some Roman Catholics and Protestants,

it refers to the whole sweep of pastoral practice including education, worship, polity, and homiletics, as well as care. For other Protestants, it refers more specifically to theological knowledge arising from and informing ministries of care led by ordained pastors or representatives of a congregation.\(^5\)

Larry Graham further points out that “in Roman Catholic and some Protestant contexts it is relatively equivalent to the term ministry or ‘practical theology’ in the sociological or functional sense of describing the range of duties of ministry.”\(^5\) He elaborates that

In this definition, pastoral theology does not seek new theological interpretations nor does it expand beyond its originating tradition. Rather it is practices that are faithful to the tradition within which it occurs.\(^5\)

Pastoral theology is also defined as a discipline that

derivates insights from reflection upon Bible, tradition, and perhaps supplemental ideas from behavioral sciences such as psychotherapy shaping them into a theology of care applied to acts of care and counseling.\(^5\)

---


\(^5\) Ibid.

\(^5\) Ibid.
In this model “pastoral theology draws upon ‘cognate secular resources’ to construct new
theories, practices, and theological interpretations.”

The third definition of pastoral theology views it

as an academic discipline within theology that draws upon analysis of the
practices of helping carried out by representatives of religious communities in
order to develop new theories and practices of care. Most importantly, pastoral
theology in this mode contributes new or revised theological interpretations in the
light of reflection upon the practices it examines.

Graham finds these approaches of pastoral theology and care inadequate to qualify as
‘public theology.’ In response he provides a comprehensive definition of pastoral
theology as public theology that evaluates and modifies ‘normative value structures’ and
‘core meaning systems’ and liberates not only individuals, but also culture and the natural
order.

I understand pastoral theology as that field of theological discipline that offers
theoretical grounding for the conceptualization of, critical reflection upon and strategic
guidance of the ministries of care of a faith community by discerning and engaging in
constructive dialogue with sources of knowledge that are relevant to particular contexts
of care with the intent of liberating not only individuals and communities of faith but

\[57\] Ibid.

\[58\] Ibid.

\[59\] I discuss pastoral theology further in the section of this chapter where postmodern influences of
the field of pastoral theology and care will be discussed. Here, it is enough to point out that pastoral
theology as public theology moves beyond the “purely private inward, spiritual and psychological process”
to engage “[i]ssues of social context, institutionalization, economics, cultural meanings and practices.”
Ibid., 6.

\[60\] Ibid., 12.
transforming systems, structures and ideologies to promote psycho-social health, justice and equality.

**Nature and Characteristics of Pastoral Theology**

I understand pastoral theology as that theological discipline that grounds the conceptualization of, critical reflection upon, and strategic guidance of the ministries of care of a faith community. It engages sources of knowledge that are relevant to particular contexts of care with the intent of not only liberating individuals and communities of faith but also transforming systems, structures and ideologies to promote psycho-social health, justice and equality.

Here I expand this definition by discussing the nature and essential characteristics of pastoral theology. First, pastoral theology is a theological discipline. As such it “takes the insights and resources of the Christian religious tradition of belief and practice, such as Bible, theology and liturgy, as primary resources for its understanding and activity.”61 Part of the task of pastoral theology is to correct and contribute to our theological understandings. Pastoral theology is also a practical discipline. As such it is “concerned with actions, issues, and events that are of human significance in the contemporary world”62 In studying these practical issues,

the work of practical theology is to help generate concepts, norms and actions that will be of practical utility and make a difference. In this case, practical theology


62 Ibid., 7.
helps to direct and shape the concrete service of the Christian community in the world.  

Pastoral theology is also a critical, constructive, interpretive and expressive discipline. The critical and constructive nature of pastoral theology refers to engaging in analytical methods of research. This means that being able to analyze the social, cultural and historical background of any pastoral care situation in order to have a more accurate understanding of complex issues. The term “critical” also implies that a pastoral theologian has to make deliberate efforts to be aware of how the biases and prejudices of one’s social identity impact one’s role in pastoral care. As a constructive discipline pastoral care strives to propose ideas that “take new and innovative directions.”

The interpretive dimension of pastoral theology is evident in its ability “to throw the light of the gospel on the situations and circumstances of human life and seeks to understand and act in response to these situations in the light of this interpretation.”

The capacity to “interpret meanings, myths, and symbols that shape people’s views of themselves and their world” is also valued in pastoral theology. Pastoral theology is also an expressive and confessional discipline. In its expressive capacity, pastoral theology allows for expression of one’s faith in art, sermon, liturgy, counseling and music.

---

63 Ibid.


65 Ibid., 15

66 Ibid.

and other acts of service. As a confessional discipline, pastoral theology is “committed to looking at the world through the ‘lenses’ of a particular committed faith perspective or inhabited worldview.”

**Definitions of Practical Theology, Pastoral Care, and Pastoral Counseling**

Practical theology has considerable historical and contemporary significance and the term is often used interchangeably with pastoral theology. “Practical theology” is a term that emerged in the German Protestant tradition as part of the academic theological curriculum in the late eighteenth century. Although pastoral care was seen as one important area of concern in practical theology, its concerns extended beyond this to specialist interest in worship, preaching, Christian education, and church government.

The assumed purpose of pastoral theology in that context was to “apply theological principles to the activities in worship, preaching, Christian education and others.” Pattison and Woodward write that there is a lot of common ground between pastoral theology and practical theology. Ultimately, both are concerned with how theological activity can inform and be informed by practical action in the interests of making an appropriate, effective Christian response in the world.

---

68 Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, 16.


70 Ibid., 2.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.
They further state that the difference between them seem “…to be more one of emphasis than substance.” They concur with them on this point and in this chapter I use the two terms interchangeably.

Another related but vital term to pastoral theology is “pastoral care.” Ramsay provides a useful definition. Pastoral care “is the term Christians most often use to describe a religiously based ministry of care offered by believers and religious leaders.” I would clarify that pastoral care applies not only to individual work by the religious leaders and believers but also to a ministry that is offered by the entire Church or community of faith.

“Pastoral counseling” is another related term to the field of pastoral theology that needs to be defined here, even though its use will be more prominent in the next chapter where I discuss a counseling framework for the Dalit communities. Pastoral counseling is a specialized form of pastoral care and accountable to religious communities through skilled representatives of such communities who practice this ministry within and alongside the communities. It is a ministry of relational humanness that intends to integrate critically and skillfully therapeutic resources with theological understanding in order to facilitate healing and justice for individuals, relationships communities.

Paradigms of Pastoral Theology and Care

More of the essential characteristics of pastoral theology become apparent through examining the evolution of the field of pastoral theology and care over the last

---

73 Ibid., 3.


75 Ibid., 4.
century. The field has undergone radical and revolutionary changes that may be grouped under four distinct models – classical, clinical, communal contextual and intercultural. Some dominate past periods but continue to be “evident to differing degrees in different parts of the world and are helpful in understanding the nature of the practices of pastoral theology.” They especially appear in the Dalit context. The following section describes these paradigms and the method, sources and dominant practices of pastoral care engaged in each of the models.

The roots of the pastoral theology can be traced all the way to the beginnings of Christianity. It appears in the caring functions of healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling in the early Christian community. Although the term “pastoral theology” is not used often in relation to these functions specifically, it was there. Pastoral theology is undoubtedly a modern concept, but the meaning and substance it represents was present in the caring activities of the early Christian communities. Emmanuel Lartey says that “[a]lthough the term has not always been used, ‘pastoral theology’ has been an essential part of attempts by faith communities to embody, ‘enflesh’ and refine the acts of love and


78 Ibid.

79 It is true that William Plumer used the term “pastoral theology” as early as by in 1874 and Thomas Murphy as early as 1877, but it was Seward Hiltner who founded the modern discipline (Sharon G. Thornton, “Wounds of Dislocation and the Yearning for Home: Re-Imagining Pastoral Theology,” *Pastoral Psychology*, 49, no. 4, (2001): 301.)
care they engage in as an expression of their faith.”\textsuperscript{80} The first model of pastoral theology and care is commonly recognized as the classical paradigm of pastoral care.

**Classical Paradigm of Pastoral Theology and Care**

According to John Patton, “the *classical* paradigm for pastoral care extended from the beginning of Christendom beyond the Reformation to the advent of modern dynamic psychology’s impact of ministry.”\textsuperscript{81} He implies that the classical paradigm ended with the advent of modern psychology’s impact on the ministry of care. Although this may be true in some Christian traditions, it continues to prevail among the more conservative Christian traditions, in both the West and other parts of the world. The classical paradigm of pastoral care is also known as a “clerical paradigm” because it assumes that the activity of pastoral caregiving is the preserve solely of the ordained ministers. The discipline is “clergy-led and clergy-focused. The practice is understood firmly and strongly as religious practice and the expert, if not the sole, practitioners are recognized, licensed or ordained clergy in their respective traditions.”\textsuperscript{82}

The paradigm is also hierarchical in nature, where the ones who offer pastoral care are superior to those who receive the care. The persons receiving pastoral care had little or no say in the diagnosing of their problem or administration of their care.\textsuperscript{83} This

\textsuperscript{80} Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, 122.

\textsuperscript{81} Patton, *Pastoral Care in Context: An Introduction to Pastoral Care* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Jon Knox Press, 1993), 4.

\textsuperscript{82} Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, 122.

\textsuperscript{83} Patton, *Pastoral Care in Context: An Introduction to Pastoral Care*, 88.
hierarchical nature of pastoral caregiving leads to an “intrinsic tendency towards the abuse of power.”84 Under this model the goal is the salvation of the soul and liberation from spiritual bondage. It is “more concerned with the state of one’s soul rather than health of one’s body or relationships.”85 This approach reflects the spirit/matter dualism that pervaded the classical Christian tradition. Sin and evil were understood in personal terms and not seen in terms of their structural and systemic dimensions such as abuse of power and violence in racism, poverty or sexism.86 Preoccupation with the spiritual side of things also means that there is little regard for the human sciences and other sources of secular knowledge to understand and diagnose problems. This paradigm is also “individualistic and patriarchal, encouraging magical thinking, promoting dependence, and . . . theologically it is seen as allied to a monarchical view of God that can and has been associated with oppressive, paternalistic, imperialistic and colonial practices.”87

The classical paradigm of pastoral care limits pastoral functions to healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling. Clebsch and Jaekle write that pastoral healing is understood as recuperation from a specific illness but this recuperation is understood in the context of its spiritual significance.88 Guiding involves helping people make choices when they are perplexed in relation to how the decision might affect “the present or

84 Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, 122.

85 Patton, *Pastoral Care in Context: An Introduction to Pastoral Care*, 56.


87 Lartey, *Pastoral Care in Context: An Introduction to Pastoral Care*, 122, 123.

future state of soul.” The reconciling function is seen to reestablish relations that were broken between human beings and God, and this is achieved through forgiveness and discipline. Forgiveness requires religious rituals of confession and absolution. The various instrumentalities used for healing are “prayer, oil, herbs, relics, shrines, words of exorcism, vows and so forth.”

**The Clinical Paradigm of Pastoral Care**

The clinical paradigm “emerged in the wake of sustained critique of the classical” paradigm of the ministry or pastoral care, “and as a direct result of the growth of the human sciences, particularly psychology.” This paradigm, which began around the 1940s and prevailed until the 1980s, was “deeply shaped by therapeutic theoretical sources and practices on which it drew to inform the theory and practice of care.” In other words, the dominant philosophies of the clinical paradigm were drawn from the disciplines of medicine and psychology. The influence of psychology was strong in the ministry of pastoral care and counseling during this period because “psychology offered creative new ways of exploring what had traditionally been theological and philosophical questions” and there was an effort to “plumb this new psychology for its benefits to

---

89 Ibid., 9.

90 Clebsch and Jaekle, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*, 9.

91 Ibid., 10.

92 Larney, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, 123.


94 Larney, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, 123.
religion.” The appeal for psychology was not only in its creative explorations but also because “people increasingly believed in ‘therapy’ as a practice which not only cured illnesses but also enriched personal and spiritual growth.”

The curative promises of psychology kindled the imagination of the modern pioneers in the field of pastoral care and counseling such as Seward Hiltner, Wayne Oates, Carroll Wise and Howard Clinebell, who were eager to draw on the resources of psychology for pastoral care. Widespread use by pastoral care providers of the psychological theories and perspectives of the clinical paradigm meant that human problems were interpreted psychologically. Thus “the psychological context…[became] recognized as normative.” In other words, problems became “personal (or private) troubles” eventually “traced to their origins in psychic, biological dysfunction, or family disorganization,” or explained as “dysfunction in personal and familial terms.” Privileging of psychological context also meant that other perspectives and sources of knowledge such as political science, economics, and feminist theory were not given much importance in the understanding of human problems.

The medical or clinical model of approach, according to Oates, places the blame on the individuals for their problems rather than understanding the symptoms as a

---


96 Couture and Hester, “The Future of Pastoral Care and Counseling and the God of the Market,” 46.

97 Thornton, Broken yet Beloved, 8.

98 Patton, Pastoral Care in Context, 39, 40.

“magnifying glass for the sickness of a community as a whole.”¹⁰⁰ Identifying the person as the problem means that the intervention strategy is to “focus on changing the dysfunctions of the individual or attempt to adjust individual person’s problems within existing institutional arrangements.”¹⁰¹ Christie Neuger makes a similar point in relation to women. She says that current psychological theories (personality assumptions and their implication on counseling) that inform pastoral counseling “locate the source of the problem consistently inside the counselee or the counselee’s relationship and don’t do adequate sociocultural analysis.”¹⁰² Quoting Miriam Greenspan, she writes that most psychotherapeutic theories operate out of the assumption that ‘it’s all in your head’ (psychoanalytic and humanistic theories) or ‘it’s all in your hands’ (behavioral theories) or, I would add, ‘it’s all in your interactions’ (family systems theory). These ignore the cultural contexts of sexism, racism, classism, and heterosexism.¹⁰³

In other words, the pastoral care approach that focuses on the individual and fails to give adequate attention to the contextual influences on the person and their problems, which is also the case with the classical paradigm of pastoral care.¹⁰⁴

The therapeutic paradigm is not only individualistic but also universalistic. It accented the idea of a common core of experience, and assumed that psychological and pastoral knowledge is equally applicable to either gender and to all races and classes of persons. This principle expressed a deep and moral

---


¹⁰¹ Smith, *The Relational Self*, 41


¹⁰³ Ibid., 36-37.

conviction: what is most truly and profoundly human, hence of religious and pastoral concern, is that which is universal, transcending differences of race, class and culture.105

If salvation is the goal of pastoral care approaches in the classical paradigm, self-realization is the goal in the clinical paradigm.106 Thornton describes self-realization as the development or perhaps fulfillment of one’s potential. She writes that in the clinical paradigm of pastoral care, self-realization is narrowly understood as personal growth detached from the public life. She writes,

When self-realization becomes an end in itself, as it has over the past few decades, we minimize the impact that social structures and cultural environments have on our lives. This narrow expression of self-realization has become identified with personal growth and the enormously profitable self-help industry. But instead of producing people who are joyful and who actively participate in the world, this unreflective form of self-realization has taught people that public life is something remote and distant, a backdrop for human drama rather than the pulsing matrix out of which we grow. It promotes a false idea of public life as separate, given, and fixed and personal life as expansive, unlimited, and free.107

Preoccupation with self-realization, according to her, does not help people, especially those on the margins; rather it often blames them for lacking coping skills. In her decidedly feminist analysis, Thornton goes on to say that

Our preoccupation with self-realization as personal growth helps maintain the strong division between the public and private spheres of human activity that we have come to experience as normal. Again, as in to unnecessarily separate people from one another, serving to increase the suffering of those who are hurt by systems of exploitation and dehumanization. Historical injustices are seen as manifestations of personal maladjustment and individual depravation. People are


107 Thornton, Broken and Yet Beloved, 34.
condemned for having poor coping skills for addressing the very systems that starve and stifle them. In this way, self-realization has become an unfulfilled ideal for too many men and women and a growing number of children…When the separation of personal from public life is internalized, it feeds the destructive idea that self-realization as personal growth can be accomplished in the absence of public renewal.

Over-reliance on psychology to treat pastoral problems in the clinical pastoral paradigm narrows the meaning of pastoral care to pastoral counseling. Don Browning writes,

When viewed from the perspective of seminary curricula, pastoral care in the last two decades has generally been narrowed to mean pastoral counseling. It has had to do with how pastors counsel people to handle existential, developmental, and interpersonal crises and conflicts.

He further adds that modern pastoral care “has attempted to elaborate a rationale for its practice in a vacuum—without an ecclesiology, without an interpretation of modern cultural and institutional life, and without a social ethic.” Pamela Couture believes that the movement of pastoral care and counseling had lost its grounding in the locality of church, ministry and theology, although the clinical and social ministries of pastoral care and counseling were originally conceived as extensions of congregational ministries.

Likewise A. J. van den Blink observes that “For many pastoral counselors, psychotherapy became a new spirituality which replaced their religious faith with something that they experienced as more relevant.”

---

108 Ibid., 35.
110 Ibid., 21.
Communal Contextual Paradigm

The communal contextual paradigm, principally identified by John Patton, followed the clinical paradigm. It began to emerge in the late 1970s with the work of Edward Wimberly and Archie Smith that reflected their experiences and practices in African American congregations. Wimberly, for example, brought the total resources of the church to caring needs of the individuals, thus identifying the important role of community of faith in pastoral caregiving. Smith introduced an important concept of the ‘relational self’—understanding self not in isolation but in relationships. One of the important theoretical viewpoints of his book, *The Relational Self*, is a paradigm of pastoral ministry informed by ‘relationality’ or ‘web,’ which seeks a link between private problems with broad public issues so that “ministry is with people who are embedded in social milieus and structures that need transformation.”

Recognition of the importance of context in the pastoral care movement is the result of “various epistemological shifts [that have] occurred within the twentieth century.” In particular ideas pertaining to postmodernism had a dramatic impact on the communal contextual paradigm. A new paradigm emerges from “the realization of how context and social location influence all knowledge.” Larney insists that “As human beings, we are culturally and historically bound, and are socially and

---


115 This will be discussed in greater detail in the later part of this chapter.

psychologically conditioned to interpret reality in accordance with these limitations.”¹¹⁷
The communal contextual paradigm corrects the myopic understanding and practice of pastoral care and theology in the clinical and classical paradigms by widening the horizons of care to include community as well as wider context as concerns of pastoral care. “It is a reaction against clericalization, clinicalization and individualization of pastoral care and pastoral theology.”¹¹⁸ But it also preserves some elements of pastoral care from such as the message “of a God who caringly creates human beings for a relationship.”¹¹⁹ The use of counseling, a predominant practice in clinical paradigm, continues to play vital role in offering pastoral care in communal and contextual paradigm. However, now the private problems and intrapsychic conflicts or issues are now seen in relation to larger contextual influences on the person. Also, besides the pastor or religious leader offering pastoral care, the whole community is deemed an important resource for offering pastoral care. Church as corporate community become the loci, the base and the agent of care. Communities of faith are also receivers of care.¹²⁰ Thus pastoral care is not the exclusive preserve of the pastor or a religious leader but the responsibility of the whole congregation.

The context of the individual who is being offered pastoral care includes his or her social, religious, cultural and political background. Contextual issues such as racism,

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, 123.

¹¹⁹ Patton, *Pastoral Care in Context*, 5.

¹²⁰ Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, 123.
poverty, sexism, ageism, heterosexism, classism, ableism are important pastoral care concerns. In dealing with these contextual issues, pastoral theologians have begun to give greater attention to issues of justice and power. Larry Graham writes that most people who come for pastoral care “come with a sense of too little or inadequate power, to address their situation from a position of strength.” His power analysis clearly implies that unless power issues are understood in the larger context of family, systems and cultures, empowerment is not possible.

In this view power is integrally related to justice. In terms of authority then, it is mutual and collaborative rather than hierarchical. For example, in Neuger’s counseling approach to women, the counselee is the authority and expert of her story. In this paradigm, theology comes to the center of pastoral care and theology. This can be seen in numerous works such Archie Smith, who engaged the Black theology of James Cone, and Larry Graham, whose theological thought emerged from process theology. Carrie Doehring states that it is “The use of theology that makes pastoral care distinct from other forms of care.” This emphasis on power also appears in the Black theology and womanist theology that inform Watkins-Ali’s pastoral theology for the African American context.


122 Ibid., 151.

123 Graham, *Care of Persons, Care of World*, 147.


The primary source in the communal contextual paradigm is the client’s cultural experiences within a given context. To gain a deeper understanding of the lived human experience within a particular context, and for the analysis of the larger context that impacts particular cultural experiences, various secondary sources are brought into dialogue with the primary source. The secondary sources of knowledge are not limited to religious sources such as biblical texts, doctrines and religious traditions, but encompass a diverse range of theologies (feminist, womanist, black and liberation theology), and psychological theories. Other subjects such as anthropology, sociology, economics and political, cultural, colonial and postcolonial studies have been used to understand the context in which the one receiving the care is situated. Here the method is not the application of theology or psychology but engaging all the relevant disciplines in a correlational manner to interpret and illuminate the cultural context of care. This aids in constructing appropriate pastoral theological approaches and devising proper strategies of pastoral caregiving. Methods of research include literary studies, interviews, surveys and stories of lived experiences. Particular pastoral practices include prayers, worship, Christian sacraments, preaching, social activism, support groups, consciousness-raising groups, community outreach advocacy, pastoral counseling and group counseling.

Intercultural Paradigm

The intercultural paradigm builds on the communal-contextual paradigm and is principally proposed by Emmanuel Lartey, a Ghanian pastoral theologian. Lartey writes that this emergent model “extends the communal-contextual into a global justice and asks
questions concerning issues of global justice specifically including matters of race, gender, class, sexuality and economics." It engages the marginalized experiences of individuals and group in the area of gender, race, class and sexual discrimination and subjugation by critiquing the “totalizing structures and systems.” It does so by affirming that “wisdom does not belong to only one group, race, ideology or faith…and that many voices need to be spoken, listened to and respected in our quest for meaningful and effective living.” In other words, it creates space for people from the underside of history such as the Dalits to affirm their culture, their experiences and their identities by deconstructing the dominant ideologies and narratives that have assumed a normative and hegemonic character in a multicultural context. It does so by encouraging a multi-perspectival examination of pastoral care issues. Larney writes,

> Monocausal explanation of phenomenon—especially personal and social experience—are usually inadequate and can actually prove oppressive. The view that there is only one total explanation of any experience is considered untruthful in intercultural pastoral care. Power dynamics are seen to be at play in interpretations and explanations of human experience. Total and complete explanations have usually been handed down by the powerful to the powerless in situations.

An intercultural approach gives fuller expression to postmodern perspectives, where

> The ‘other’ who is significantly different from the self (i.e. the Western self) is to be highly valued, listened to and learned from…. Different forms of knowledge...

---


127 Ibid.

128 Ibid.

that have been subjugated are given the opportunity to be released, find expression and be explored.\textsuperscript{130} Subjugated knowledge, particularly relating to practices and beliefs once treated as irrational, evil and uncivilized are recognized not only as valid but also as crucial. In third world countries, local practices and belief systems such as divination, witchcraft storytelling, dramas, dances and music are being integrated with the some of the methods and practices that have originated in the West.

Lartey gives two good examples that express the intercultural paradigm of pastoral care. The first one is the therapeutic approach conceived by Abraham Berinyu of Ghana, who integrates Freudian psychoanalysis with local divination practices as well as drama, music, myths and proverbs. He calls this approach ‘psychoneumatist.’\textsuperscript{131} The second one is the ‘insight oriented therapy’ of Masamba Mpolo of Zaire, who integrates psychological concepts of the West with African traditional spiritualties in search for a liberating ‘spirituality.’\textsuperscript{132} This model strongly critiques monoculturalism (pays insignificant attention to cultural difference between people and assumes a false sense of cultural neutrality\textsuperscript{133}) cross-culturalism (sets up ‘us’ and ‘them ‘dynamic in cultural interaction and is inherently hierarchical\textsuperscript{134}) and multiculturalism (a model of counseling that “fails to avoid stereotyping, reductionism, individualizing, placing groups in

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 27-28.
hierarchical order and perpetuating myths that, when imbibed, can induce self-hatred within the subdominant groups”).\textsuperscript{135}

The intercultural approach builds on the premise that each individual is in certain ways like all others, like some others or like no other.\textsuperscript{136} This approach guides pastoral caregivers in understanding people seeking care. Understanding the uniqueness of people in particular contexts guards against stereotypes and generalizations.\textsuperscript{137} Therefore in this model the primary source for theological reflection and pastoral action is the concrete historical experience of people.\textsuperscript{138} In this ‘contextual analysis,’ the caregiver engages several different secondary sources to understand the experiences of individuals and people within particular contexts.\textsuperscript{139} Here pastoral care provider seeks to understand how “patriarchy, capitalism, militarism, sexism, racism, classism, religio-cultural ideologies and other ‘structures’ work in isolation or else in complex concert to initiate or aggravate the sufferings of persons.”\textsuperscript{140}

Some of the important secondary sources engaged in contextual analysis are Scripture, theological resources, and secular sources of knowledge that include anthropology, psychology, economic and political theories and cultural studies. The

\textsuperscript{135}Lartey, \textit{In Living Color}, 170.


\textsuperscript{137}Lartey, \textit{In Living Color}, 125.

\textsuperscript{138}Ibid., 125.

\textsuperscript{139}Ibid., 89.

\textsuperscript{140}Ibid., 127.
intercultural paradigm values theoretical perspectives from globalization and postcolonial studies as they enable pastoral theologians and pastoral care providers to analyze particular pastoral care contexts that have been impacted by cultural forces of globalization and cultural experiences shaped by colonial domination. They can be particularly useful in creating space for the marginalized groups in the third world context to become aware of the colonial impact on their culture. Thus they create ways of thinking and creatively strengthening practices of resistance to challenge the dominant discourses and develop alternatives to those dominant discourses. Secondary sources of knowledge are engaged in correlational way to better understand a given context that requires pastoral care intervention. The intercultural model gives great importance to collective symbolic actions. These community actions include marches, protests and demonstrations to call attention to issues that require to be addressed.\footnote{Lartey, \textit{In Living Color}, 137-138.}

The intercultural perspective is relevant to the Dalit context. First, it affirms that the Dalit people live in a world of many cultures. As mentioned above, the Dalit people in India are not a homogenous community, but rather heterogeneous communities with their own customs, traditions, languages, values, mannerisms, beliefs and food habits. Dalit people’s cultures and ways of life interact with the dominant brahmanical culture. An intercultural perspective is relevant to the Dalit communities because it affirms that life is enriched when many cultures interact in healthy, respectful and constructive ways, rather than retreating as closed communities of dominant or subordinate cultures. This approach should be adopted when caregivers and careseekers, belonging to different cultures, meet. However, in the Dalit context, it is important to affirm and privilege Dalit
culture in all pastoral care interactions because one of the primary tasks of pastoral care in the Dalit context is to build cultural identity for the Dalit people. It is only in affirming in Dalit culture that it is possible to build Dalit cultural identity for the Dalit people. It also needs to be emphasizes here that Dalit cultural traditions and practices will continue to disappear or be absorbed into the dominant culture unless active efforts are made to reclaim and affirm Dalit culture. On several fronts active efforts are being made to reclaim Dalit cultural resources. I believe this should be seen as a theological imperative on the part the part of Dalit pastoral theologians in their work with Dalit people. However, this does not mean accepting all Dalit cultural resources uncritically. This is where the intercultural paradigm gains prominence in the Dalit context. It is only through interaction with other cultures that Dalit culture can adopt a self-critical stance and challenge those cultural practices and traditions that do not promote life or foster community life.

**Postmodernism and its Impact on Pastoral Theology and Care**

“Postmodernism” is a complicated concept that defies precise definition. It has become ubiquitous in numerous disciplines and areas of study, including the arts, architecture, music, film, literature, sociology, communications, fashion, and technology.\(^{142}\) Clearly the meaning of postmodernism is bound up with modernism.\(^{143}\)


Their relationship depends on the discipline where they appear. Postmodernism can be understood as a historical period; for example, in literature, it is a “periodising concept to mark the literature that emerged in the 1960s Cold War environment.” Postmodernism is also a style of architecture that embraces eclecticism and openness rather than functionalism and utilitarianism.

Postmodernism is also an approach to knowledge. Francois Lyotard was among the first to clearly formulate a postmodern epistemology in his groundbreaking book, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. He defines postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarratives.” Metanarratives are “theories that claim to be able to explain everything.” One of the metanarratives of modernism is that values of reason, science and logic will eventually end human misery and lead to a state of freedom and happiness. Postmodernism expresses incredulity towards such metanarratives.

I intend to use the term postmodern as an approach to knowledge in discussing what is postmodernism and how it has influenced the field of pastoral theology and care.
In other words, examining critical notions such as epistemology, self and power associated with postmodernism as an approach to knowledge that have come to shift the paradigms of pastoral care and counseling today.

The only proper entry into the discussion of a postmodern approach to knowledge is through an understanding of modern approaches to knowledge by focusing on the concepts such as sense of self, epistemology, power and difference as they are understood, firstly, in modernism and later in postmodernism. I have chosen these particular concepts because power and difference are important concerns of pastoral theology as seen in a postmodern context\textsuperscript{151} and as Ramsay points out “critiques of modernity as represented by postmodernity are especially associated with epistemology and self, ethics, and redistributions of power.”\textsuperscript{152}

**Self in Modernism**

For modernism “the self” is conscious, rational, autonomous, and universal. Modernism assumes that no physical or cultural conditions or differences alter how this self operates. Freud challenged this notion of self by theorizing that the unconscious played a significant role in how the self operates. Through reason and rationalization, the self is capable of knowing itself and the world in which it exits.\textsuperscript{153}


\textsuperscript{153} Klages, *Literary Theory*, 164-165.
Knowledge in Modernism

Under modernism the process of knowing by the objective rational self is “science.” Knowledge gained through reason is unbiased and objective. The knowledge produced by science is empirically based “truth,” that is valid and reliable. This scientific knowledge is assumed to be morally good because it will always lead toward progress and perfection. All humans, institutions and practices can be analyzed by science (through reason and objectivity) and also improved.154

Language in Modernism

Under modernism language is considered a transparent medium of expression.155 It represents the undistorted reality as it exists to the observing rational mind. For a modern mind, language is a mirror of the world, recreating reality in the consciousness of the observer through the right use of language.

Power in Modernism

Francis Bacon, a strong proponent of scientific revolution and a key thinker of the enlightenment project, states that knowledge is power. According to him, acquisition of rational and scientific knowledge yields power, such as humans exercising power over nature by discovering the laws and secrets that govern the nature. Moreover, when power is associated with knowledge and reason, social groups like women and people of color,

154 Ibid.

155 Jane Flax, Thinking fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West (Berkeley: California University Press, 1990), 31.
who are seen as possessing less intellectual and reasoning capacity, have less cultural or political power. They have limited access to physical, psychological and social resources necessary to impact and shape their reality as well as experience the fullness of life. Modernism sees the gendered and racial differences that determined one’s claim on cultural and political power and access to resources as part of the natural order or nature of reality itself.  

**Difference in Modernism**

Modernity pursues order and defines disorder as its binary opposition to guard and promote order. In Western culture disorder gradually began to be identified as the ‘other.’ 

> “The normative human is white, male, heterosexual and middle class in the dominant European American culture.”

Thus anyone who not fit the norm or order was “different.” Anything “non-white, non-male, non-heterosexual, non-hygienic, non-rational, (etc.) becomes part of ‘disorder,’ and has to be eliminated from the ordered, rational modern society.” Put differently, “difference becomes a way to locate populations or portions of populations in terms of their rights to power and agency and to the shape of power appropriate to those groups.”

---


158 Neuger, “Power and Difference in Pastoral Theology,” 68.


160 Neuger, “Power and Difference in Pastoral Theology,” 68.
Postmodernism is essentially a critique of many of the foundational assumptions of modernism. It challenges the claims of rationalism and science. For postmodernists, knowledge, truth and reality are not objective, as argued by the modern mind. Rather, they are subjective and conditioned by the experiences of each individual in his or her encounters with the self and the world. Knowledge, truth and reality are provisional, contextual and particular. In other words, there is no one meaning, truth or reality, but a plurality of truths, meanings and realities. There is no external objective truth, but rather truth is created in the process of knowing. Reason is not the sole determiner of truth; emotion and intuition are also valid channels to knowledge. Postmodernism debunks the metanarrative of modernism that scientific knowledge will continue to advance to a point that the solutions that it will provide will end all suffering of humanity. It is true that the scientific progress does ameliorate physical aspects of sufferings, “but science cannot often provide remedies for spiritual and emotional pain.” Postmodernism also critiques how language is understood under modernism. Language, according to postmodernism, is not a neutral, objective and unbiased medium of representation. Rather language, as Neuger puts it, not only describes reality but informs, influences and determines what reality is. For example, she says, how one understands God determines to a great extent how one organizes and structures relationships. If God is seen as male, then male gender and perspective become dominant in gender relationships and perspectives.

---

161 Doehring, The Practice of Pastoral Care, 167.

162 Neuger, Counseling Women: A Narrative, Pastoral Approach, 12.
Postmodernism looks on power not as the result of acquisition of knowledge, but “as the ability to assert knowledge and authority as forms of social control. Power is claimed and used by those who have been given, by the culture, the right both to name and shape reality.”163 Postmodern understanding of power has essentially debunked the notion of truth or natural order associated with women or people of color as being less than the normative social group in terms of intellect, leadership quality.164 Turning Bacon’s famous aphorism “knowledge is power” on its head, Foucault argued that power is knowledge because people with social and political cultural power always decide what will or will not be counted as “knowledge.” With regards to the notion of difference, postmodernism is about intellectual, religious, and political pluralism and diversity. The universalizing and homogenizing tendency of modernity has given way to difference (respect for difference) and (and embrace of) heterogeneity.165

Postmodernism has had significant impact on the field of pastoral care and theology. Couture states that the postmodern approaches became apparent in the field of pastoral care and counseling in the middle of 1990s.166 However, I believe that the postmodern thought broke into the field as early as 1979 with the publication of Pastoral Care in The Black Church by Edward Wimberly.167 His book breaks the ground for

164 Ibid.
166 Couture, “The Effect of the Postmodern on Pastoral/Practical Theology and Care and Counseling,” 86.
privileging context and particularities of black culture over meeting individual therapeutic needs. In 1982, Archie Smith’s *Relational Self*, another important work by a Black pastoral theologian, shifts the focus from individual to communal transformation and privileged communal self over individual self.  

Smith introduces the concept of ‘relationality’ that conceives people as being constituted in their relationship with other people and in the particular historical context. Smith discusses the human self as eminently communal and relational, which is a social constructionist idea. These two books clearly break from the longstanding tradition that makes pastoral care and theology captive to modernism.

The modern tradition gave rise to the clinical paradigm of the ministry of pastoral care that emerged in 1950s and lasted until 1980s. The clinical paradigm of the ministry of pastoral care is most strongly identified with modernism, but does not actually correspond with the modern period, which emerged in the early eighteenth century and continues today. The classical paradigm of the ministry of pastoral care that preceded the clinical paradigm of the ministry of pastoral care began in early Christendom and lasted until 1940s – well beyond the emergence of modernism in the Western world.

With the embrace of postmodernist sensibilities, the field of pastoral care and counseling made significant shifts in the norms, methods and sources that were engaged to construct pastoral care theories and practices. Postmodernism began to influence the

---


Another significant effect of postmodernism on pastoral care has been the valuing, legitimizing and uplifting of the silenced, oppressed and suppressed voices, perspectives and experiences represented in modernism by the ‘other’ and ‘different.’ “Subjugated and marginalized people were increasingly being recognized as sources of authentic and crucial knowledge.”\footnote{Lartey, \textit{Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World}, 42.} One of the most monumental effects of postmodernism is that the dominant social groups (white, male, heterosexual and middle
class in the dominant European American culture) are challenged by those groups (non-white, non-male, non-heterosexual) considered deviant under modernism. Internationally, religion-cultural practices and traditions condemned and suppressed by the sweeping waves of modernism are now affirmed on their own terms. Lartey’s ‘intercultural paradigm’ is a good example of increasingly valuing indigenous sources, experiences and needs and giving them priority over Western methods that were often adopted and practiced uncritically in former colonized societies and cultures.178

The emergence of different models, such as liberation pastoral theology, feminist pastoral theology, womanist pastoral theology, black pastoral theology, and pastoral theologies for gays and lesbians, is a testament to the rise of plurality of perspective and diversity, which are key postmodern concepts. New diversity is also seen in the field of pastoral care with the inclusion of more disciplines, besides theology and psychology, such as sociology, anthropology, economics and cultural studies for understanding contexts of pastoral care. Increasing attention given to various social identities in pastoral care practices such as race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation reflects the impact of postmodernism on the field. It represents a shift away from the personalist tradition (individual wholeness and well-being that is one expression of the larger model of self-realization in the clinical paradigm of pastoral care and theology) in pastoral care to engaging social, cultural and political contexts of care and their transformation. This importance of context emphasized by postmodernism challenges the clinical paradigm’s approach to pastoral care as practiced by progressive pastoral theologians who

understood people and problems independent of the context in which they were situated. In *Pastoral Care in Context* Patton identifies this radical shift in pastoral approach as the “communal contextual paradigm.”

Graham clearly enunciates the idea that the cultural and political context shapes people’s lives in his “psychosystemic approach” to pastoral care. He writes that “there is ongoing, permanent and reciprocal interaction between the psyches of persons and the larger environment that are bringing psyches into being and influencing their nature.”

He points out that the character of families and individuals are strongly influenced by the society they are part of. The world views individuals carry, their sense of well-being, including their manner of thinking, feeling and acting, are the result of social interactions with other people in society. He strongly critiques the existential-anthropological approach. He argues that it promotes individualism by focusing on the self-realization and fulfillment goals of the individual pertaining to choice, freedom, health, growth and intimacy, often at the expense of more socially relational values such as “justice, love, mutuality, economic partnership and liberation.” Miller-McLemore uses the term ‘web’ to express the public context of care, which “requires understanding the human document as necessarily embedded within an interlocking public web of constructed meaning.” Clinical problems once seen as intrapsychic or interpersonal in the clinical

---

179 Graham, *Care of Persons, Care of World*, 41.

180 Ibid., 57.

181 Graham, *Care of Persons, Care of World*, 32-33.

182 Miller-McLemore, “Pastoral theology as Public Theology: Revolutions in the Fourth Area,” 51.
paradigm of the ministry of pastoral care are now understood as “situated within the structures and ideologies of a wider public context.” 183

In theological terms, the shift from modern to postmodern approaches to knowledge implies a move from private theology to public theology. Public theology “attempts to analyze and influence the wider social order… [I]t challenges religion’s modern privatization and affirm its wider public relevance.”184 Private theology becomes public theology when solutions to problems such as poverty, racism, and caste and gender oppression invite a religious or faith community to seek a more public role. This public role may involve engaging the social, economic and political systems and structures that are adversely impacting people’s lives. In the field of pastoral theology and care this public turn can be seen in how the traditional pastoral care functions of healing, sustaining, and guiding (as enumerated by Hiltner),185 and reconciling (added by Clebsch and Jaekle)186 are now considered inadequate. Watkins-Ali finds these functions inadequate in the pastoral care of Black Americans, who often deal with systemic violence and racial oppression.187 Therefore, she highlights how pastoral theology as public theology must also entail resisting, empowering and liberating individuals and

183 Ibid.

184 Ibid., 46.

185 See Hiltner, Preface to Pastoral Theology.

186 Clebsch and Jaekle, Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective, 8-9.

communities from the unjust economic systems, politically oppressive and racially biased structures and policies.\textsuperscript{188}

The pastoral functions such as resisting, empowering and liberating highlighted above are not ministerial functions solely of pastor but of the whole faith community.\textsuperscript{189} The shift from the clinical paradigm of the ministry of pastoral care to the communal contextual paradigm that decentered the pastoral agency that had been the norm for much of modern period brings on a critical transition. The male ordained minister now shares the locus of care with women and the whole community. In the postmodern communal context, sexism and clericalism, the oppressive realities that characterized the traditions and practice of pastoral theology and care in the classical paradigm of the ministry of pastoral care, are destabilized by the caring expertise of lay people, women and the whole community.

Postmodernism also introduces self-reflection on the part of the pastoral care providers as they consider the social advantages and disadvantages of their race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. By disclosing their particular social locations, religious worldviews, gender and sexual orientation they are recognizing the forces that have shaped their self-understanding, and how those particular identities and the associated privileges or deficits may influence pastoral caregiving.\textsuperscript{190}

\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 9.

\textsuperscript{189} Patton, \textit{Pastoral Care in Context}, 5.

\textsuperscript{190} Ramsay, “Contemporary Pastoral Theology,” 161.
Dalit Pastoral Theology

The collective cultural experiences of Christian Dalit communities in contemporary India continue to include caste oppression and cultural alienation, both in the Church as well as the broader society. The caste system and its attendant manifestations of domination and exploitation in the social, cultural, economic and political realms disempower Dalits, disenfranchise them and rob them of their cultural identity. The caste system legitimizes a slavish existence for the Dalit people, deprives them of political rights that are fundamental to any democratic sovereign state, and push them to the margins of economic existence where survival has become the dominant concern of their daily existence. Besides their experiences of socio-cultural marginalization and political domination by the high caste communities, they face enormous psychological challenges of debilitating identity issues, intra-community divisions and fragmentation, and low self-esteem that are the direct result of internalization of caste oppression. The ministry of pastoral care among the Dalit communities, both in the historical terms and in the contemporary context has failed to conceptualize Dalit problems and challenges in constructive ways.

The ministry of pastoral care in South Indian context reflects the essential characteristics of the classical paradigm of pastoral care. This paradigm emphasizes the spiritual needs of the Dalit communities to the exclusion of the other vital aspects and concerns. Although various studies of pastoral ministries among the Dalit communities have shown that there is some political awareness and involvement of the ministry of pastoral care in local political contexts of the Dalit communities, this concern has not
grown out of strong theological conviction that the Church’s transformational ministry ought to go beyond meeting the spiritual needs of the people to include the political realities and other relevant contexts that impact their lives. The tradition of classical Western theology continues to influence the pastoral care ministry towards the Dalit communities. Its preoccupation with the moral, spiritual and faith perspectives does not foster a critical theological understanding of a wider vision of Church’s caring ministry in the context of Dalit oppression because the social, material and political aspects of one’s existence are not taken to be of “fundamental theological concern.”

While the ministry of pastoral care continues to work towards liberating the Dalit communities from spiritual bondage, it lacks attention to liberating them from the bondage of caste oppression and promoting healing and transformation that includes engaging issues of justice and taking up a strong advocacy role. The ministry of pastoral care is also individualistic, concerned with meeting the needs of individual person to the exclusion of the wider socio-cultural contexts that shape those individuals and give rise to their problems. When pastoral care is reduced to meeting the individual needs, wider contextual issues such as casteism, sexism, capitalism and poverty recede into the background, with no systematic analysis of how these cultural forces impact the lives of the individuals and the community. The clerical nature of the ministry further undermines pastoral care in the Dalit context. Pastoral care is presumed to be the task of ordained ministers, which not only creates a hierarchical order but also diminishes the significance of community resources in addressing the critical issues that face the Dalit people. This

---

wider context of the socio-political and cultural realities of the Dalit people demands a new paradigm of pastoral theology, one that will seriously engage the critical issues of survival, liberation and cultural identity of the Dalit communities.

Developing Dalit Pastoral Theology within the Framework of a Communal Contextual and Intercultural Paradigm of Pastoral Care

The Dalit pastoral theology envisioned here occurs within the framework of the communal contextual and intercultural paradigms of pastoral care. In these paradigms, the primary source of pastoral theological reflection is concrete lived experience within a particular socio-historical context. The primary source for Dalit pastoral theological reflection is the lived experience of the Dalit people, particularly as it relates to their struggles for survival, liberation and cultural identity. Dalit communities continue to struggle with three critical issues. First, the Dalit communities in South India continue to contend with caste related violence, abuse and deprivation that endanger their lives. According to a report by Government of India, “every hour two Dalits are assaulted; every day three Dalit women are raped; two Dalits are murdered; and two Dalits’ houses are burnt somewhere in India”¹⁹² These statistics bear witness to the fact that the Dalit communities are struggling to survive in the face of continuing caste atrocities. Second, the caste system has imposes caste based cultural rules, norms, values and sanctions that deny Dalits dignity in society by deeming them as ritually polluted people. It denies them economic and educational opportunities to improve their occupational and livelihood.

status and denies them political freedom to participate in elections or to seek positions in local, state and national governing bodies and institutions to protect and promote the interests of the Dalit communities. Dalit communities struggle to seek liberation from these caste imposed structures of oppression.

The third critical issue facing the Dalit people is their cultural identity. Almost from the beginning of the brahmanical domination of the Dalit people, the Dalit culture and cultural identity has been under the assault, not only to erase and subjugate it, but also to assimilate it into the high caste culture and value system. This results in the loss of Dalit cultural identity and gives rise to identity issues among the Dalit people. Dalits are ashamed of their cultural identity and strive to hide it or aspire to claim a high caste cultural status through dubious practices such as sanskritization. These three pastoral care issues are of utmost concern and require urgent attention in the contemporary Dalit context. Addressing these issues is fundamental to the future wellbeing of Dalit communities. Most of the pastoral care concerns that the Dalit communities seek help for are related directly or indirectly to these issues.

In a new communal contextual intercultural liberative paradigm of Dalit pastoral theology, the primary focus is on the lived experience of the Dalit people. Their experience includes their stories of struggles, pain, despair in the context of caste violence, injustice and discrimination, and also their stories of hope, survival and life. With regards to the significance of experience as the primary source of pastoral theology,
Watkins-Ali insists that experience of a particular context should be the “point of departure for theological reflection.”⁹³ She points out that

The shift in the paradigm from the pastoral caregiver’s experience as the point of departure to the experience of the cultural context lessens the potential of imposing the pastoral caregiver’s perspective. In the African American context, pastoral caregivers have often imposed their own values and assumptions on African American experience rather than trying to understand the subjective experience of honoring the significance of values and issues specific to the African American worldview.⁹⁴

Watkins-Ali’s analysis is true in the Dalit context as well. As stated earlier, the prevailing model of pastoral care in the Dalit context is clerical in nature. In this clerical based model of pastoral care, the potential to impose pastoral caregiver’s perspective is high, and so is the danger of discounting or ignoring the cultural values and issues of the Dalit people. The clerical based model of pastoral operative in the Dalit context does not take the critical needs/issues of survival, liberation and cultural identity of the Dalit people seriously. The new communal contextual intercultural liberative model of pastoral theology and care in the Dalit context affirms that “people indigenous to the context are the subjects of their own stories rather than the objects of projections and/or perspectives formed by other worldviews.”⁹⁵ Watkins-Ali further notes that

[f]or any context, it is necessary to get in touch with the reality of the cultural experience if the pastoral approach is to prove effective for that culture’s pastoral care needs. Therefore it is best to get firsthand knowledge of the experience as interpreted by those who actually live in the context.⁹⁶

---

⁹⁴ Ibid., 125.
⁹⁵ Ibid., 123.
⁹⁶ Ibid., 124.
Dalit cultural experience should not be viewed as a monolithic experience. While caste oppression can be a common denominator of many of the Dalit stories, particularities of those experiences should not be ignored, a point that Watkins-Ali puts a great emphasis on while discussing the importance of cultural experience in a context as the primary source of pastoral theological reflection.197

Secondary Sources

In the new communal contextual intercultural liberative paradigm of the Dalit pastoral theology, resources of Dalit theology and Dalit psychology will be engaged to interpret the contextual cultural experiences of the Dalit people. These resources are indigenous to the Dalit context and therefore will offer a better interpretation of their experience. In relation to the use of indigenous resources in pastoral theology Watkins-Ali writes, “The implication is that cognate sources that are indigenous to the African American context most often offer more knowledge about the African American experience for theological reflection.”198

Dalit Theology

Lartey writes that “The main focus of pastoral theology is on care and caring activity. As such, the reflective and expressive activities of pastoral theology focus on

197 Ibid., 123.

care-giving activities of God and of human communities.”¹⁹⁹ In the traditional model of pastoral theology in the South Indian context, classical Western theology and Indian Christian theology have been the sources of interpreting the caring activities of God and of the human communities. The contemporary experiences of the vast majority of the Dalit communities in South India struggling with critical issues of survival, liberation and cultural identity suggest that these theologies have failed to provide a proper understanding and interpretation of the contextual needs of the Dalit communities. They have failed to provide the right theological language and raise pertinent theological questions to critically discern the situational needs of the Dalit people. The historical and existential experiences of the caste oppression, which remains the central issue for the majority of the Dalit people, is not addressed seriously or comprehensively by these theologies.

Classical Western theology, which was salvation focused, conceived of its mission of evangelism in dichotomized spirit/matter categories. Historical existential concerns and needs were not at the center of its missionary work. Later Indian Christian theology, on the other hand, focused on nation building. Its primary thrust was on indigenization of the Christian Gospel and it did so in brahmanical philosophical/theological categories. These theological traditions are alienating for the Dalits. They denigrate the cultural traditions and cultural experiences of the Dalit communities. In a new paradigm of Dalit pastoral theology, Dalit theology is an important theological resource. Dalit theology as a theological resource will be utilized to interpret and discern the Dalit experiences in the context of caste oppression. Dalit

¹⁹⁹ Lartey, Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World, 14.
theology has emerged primarily from the cultural experiences of caste oppression. It is concerned with liberation of the Dalit people from their socio-economic and political bondage. According to Nirmal, who was among the first to clearly articulate the nature and content of Dalit theology, it is based on the Dalit experiences, their own sufferings, their own aspirations and their own hopes. It will narrate the story of their pathos and their protest against the socio-economic injustices they have been subjected to throughout history.\textsuperscript{200}

Unlike the classical Western theology that dispossessed the Dalit people of their culture by branding it as heathenistic and evil, Dalit theology affirms it and utilizes it as an important source for articulating Dalit spirituality and experience of the divine. Dalit theology also conceives of God in Dalit terms. Nirmal reimagines God as a Dalit God, one who experiences their pain and pathos. When Jesus is presented as the suffering servant of Isaiah, one whose sufferings on the cross that include mockery, contempt and rejection, Dalits are enabled to see Jesus as one of them. Dalits identify with Jesus as someone who has endured the kinds of sufferings and rejection that are part of their daily lives. Jesus’ experiences on the cross are understood in terms of Dalit pathos. On the cross Jesus’s forsakenness is truly interpreted as Dalit people’s forsakenness and abandonment. This is the core of the Dalit people’s experience and reflects their inner consciousness. These experiences are the basis of Dalit Christology and form the primary source of Dalit knowledge.

In times of crisis, members of the Dalit Christian community are most likely to turn to their pastor for hope and strength. Dalit theology can become an important

resource for assessment of the pastoral care situation. It can help pastoral care providers to assess the situation of the careseeker in the wider context of some of the salient themes of Dalit theology such as its commitment of the liberation of its people, not just in spiritual terms but the totality of the human person. It can help pastoral care providers understand the present crisis in the larger context of caste oppression. It helps frame appropriate questions such as How are the forces of caste oppression limiting the choices of this person in the present situation? How are the Dalits experiencing God’s presence in a particular situation? What images of God are being drawn upon in the current situation and do they foster a connection with the divine? In their time of suffering, the Dalit people can be empowered by imaging God as a Dalit God, the one who experiences pain and pathos.

Dalit theology also provides important interpretive norms such as, liberation and Dalit cultural identity, to guide the activity of pastoral care for the Dalit people. Pastoral care providers utilizing communal-contextual and intercultural paradigms need to ask continuously whether or not their assessment of Dalit situations and their strategies of intervention are helpful in pursuing the larger goal of Dalit people’s liberation from the caste oppression and human indignities that have enslaved their lives and whether they are constructively contributing to Dalit cultural identity.
Dalit Psychology

Dalit psychology is another important resource for an interculturally based Dalit pastoral theology. In the contemporary Dalit context, the ministry of pastoral care among the Dalit communities does not utilize the theoretical perspectives and knowledge from the discipline of Dalit psychology. It is true that the field of Dalit psychology is a new discipline that is still evolving and has yet to make its presence felt among the various disciplines of research and studies in the area of Dalit culture and religion. Dalit theologians have been making earnest pleas for the last two decades for the need for more in-depth psychological study of the Dalit condition and to formulate strategies to address their psychological problems and challenges. Dalit psychology reveals that a diverse range of psychological challenges face the Dalit communities as a direct result of the internalization of caste oppression. Psychological problems such as low self-esteem, self-blame and alienated psyche and intra-Dalit divisions and conflicts are manifestations of internalized caste oppression. Unlike some of the current psychological theories that tend to see the source of the problem inside the person, studies in Dalit psychology have shown that the source of the problem is the oppressive structure of the caste system. It helps clarify that the psychological problems that the Dalit people experience are not disabilities or personality deficiencies, but rather survival adaptations or harmful adjustments to prevailing systems of social oppression.

Further discussion in Dalit psychology reveal some of the psychological strengths of the Dalit communities that have helped them to survive centuries of caste oppression but are part of the repressed Dalit cultural heritage. A long of history of brahmannical

---

201 Neuger, Counseling Women: A Narrative, Pastoral Approach, 36.
cultural domination has not completely erased the Dalit cultural values of egalitarianism, inclusiveness, community ownership and democratic governance. These values can promote the psychological wellbeing of the Dalit people. However, they remained under-recognized, under-developed and under-utilized in bringing the Dalit communities together to challenge the structures and systems that perpetuate caste based discrimination and injustices. These cultural values need to be recovered, reclaimed and affirmed by the Dalit communities. They are essential for the collective growth and wellbeing of the Dalit communities. Dalit psychology has also thrown some light on the elements of protest and resistance in the Dalit culture that have challenged false representations, stereotypes and the notions of brahmanical privilege and inherent inferiority of the Dalit communities. These also need to be further reinforced in the continuing Dalit struggle against the systems, structures and ideologies that keep them subjugated.

**Liberation Psychology of Latin America**

In addition to the secondary indigenous resource of Dalit psychology, a new paradigm of Dalit pastoral theology uses the Latin American liberation psychology to better understand and analyze Dalit psychological experiences. Psychology of liberation originated in some of the ideas proposed by Ignacio Martín-Baró in the political and social movements contending against forces of oppression, exploitation and exclusion in Latin America. He drew heavily from Paulo Freire’s “concept of conocientización the

---

awakening of critical consciousness,” to argue that if psychologists fail to develop a “critical consciousness that will move them toward a new praxis, they will never be able to make a meaningful contribution to the real problems of the day, which are the problems of human liberation.”

Montero and Sonn define the important psychological goal of liberation as a process entailing a social rupture in the sense of transforming both the conditions of inequality and oppression and the institutions and practices producing them. It has a collective nature, but its effects also transform the individuals participating, who, while carrying out material changes, are empowered and develop new forms of social identity.

Liberation psychology offers useful theoretical perspectives and analytical tools that can help Dalit pastoral theologians to interpret contextual experiences of oppression and respond to those experiences of oppression in constructive ways. The single most important concept that the Dalit pastoral theologians can draw upon from liberation psychology is conscientization. A thorough analysis of the Dalit psychological experiences reveals that psychological enslavement lies at the root of the internalization of caste oppression. Caste ideology has become the primary interpretative lens for their socio-cultural experiences. Caste ideology plays a key role in normalizing oppressive caste beliefs and practices. One of the most salient ones is that of the intra-group divisions and hierarchy along caste lines among the Dalit communities. Through the process of developing critical consciousness the Dalit people can come to a deeper


\[204\] Montero and Sonn, “An Introduction,” 1.
awareness of the multitude of ways by which they are made to participate in their own oppression. Breaking the psychological chains is the key for Dalit liberation because although violence and strong sanctions have been a strategy of enforcing caste stipulations and caste cultural rules, the Dalit people are not subjugated into the caste hierarchy primarily by any physical force; rather, they are subjugated through the internalization of the norms and values of the brahmanical culture.

**Pastoral Theological Method**

The pastoral theological method in the classical paradigm of pastoral theology and care involved the application of theological insights and knowledge drawn primarily from Scripture, systematic theology and other theological traditions to pastoral care situations. The pastoral theological method in the clinical paradigm involved the application of the theoretical knowledge of psychology and practices of psychotherapy, with little regard for the resource of theology in developing theoretical perspectives on the practices of pastoral care. As opposed these earlier paradigms, Dalit pastoral theological method is based on the communal contextual paradigm of pastoral theology and care. Here, social and cultural contexts are the focus and resource of pastoral care. Concrete experience is the beginning of pastoral theological reflection. It is the authoritative source, meaning it must be allowed to engage critically the theological and psychological sources of knowledge and their interpretation or theoretical perspectives on the Dalit people’s contextual experiences. Reflection on pastoral care

---

205 Larney, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, 123.
practices yields new knowledge that makes it possible to revise theological, psychological and cultural interpretation of Dalit experiences so that more effective pastoral care practices can be fashioned to address the contextual problems and challenges of the Dalit people. I understand this as a cycle of pastoral praxis.206

A pastoral theological method in Dalit pastoral theology engages the disciplines of Dalit theology, Dalit psychology, liberation psychology and Dalit cultural resources in correlational manner to develop a deeper understanding and interpretation of Dalit contextual experiences. Dalit pastoral theology draws upon these disciplines to build theories and practices of pastoral care. For example, one of the theoretical perspectives of Dalit pastoral theology is that any activity of pastoral care that does not engage the ideology of caste system will have limited impact on addressing the needs of the Dalit people. These theoretical perspectives guide and shape pastoral care practices.

The Communal Dimension of Dalit Pastoral Theology

Dalit pastoral theology also affirms that the Dalit faith communities or congregations are the loci, base and agent of care.207 Communities of faith are not only the agents of care but also receivers of care.208 The scale and seriousness of Dalit pastoral care issues related to survival, liberation and cultural identity require resources on the community level. Pastors and religious representatives may provide leadership but the

---

206 Lartey, In Living Color, 130.

207 Lartey, Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World, 123.

208 Ibid.
magnitude of the challenges facing the Dalit communities requires mobilization of the entire faith communities in the task of pastoral care.

**Intercultural Perspective in the Dalit Pastoral Theology**

An intercultural perspective is particularly relevant to the Dalit communities as it brings attention to the cultural experiences and identity of the Dalit communities. An intercultural approach counters any tendencies of the dominant and powerful groups to deliberately or unwittingly seek to impose their culture and perspective upon all others, or else control and select what is to be allowed expression. Worse still, and yet most common, has been the attempt to universalize and ‘normalize’ a particular’s experience and judge all others by that one’s views.

The tendency to universalize and standardize one’s culture and impose it on the non-dominant culture was particularly evident in “Eurocentric enterprise that has fuelled centuries of modernity. Such hegemonic attempts were pursued quite overtly in the period of Western [colonial] expansion, but even now often continue in subtle ways.”

Dalit people and their culture have been judged and denigrated not only by Western Christian missions but also by the dominant brahminical culture. The Dalit culture has been denigrated by the Western theological tradition as well as the Indian theological tradition by labeling it as primitive, unsophisticated, heathenistic and incompatible with Christianity. Dalit cultural subjugation began when brahminical culture “assimilated and subordinated in a hierarchical fashion the gods, priests, the myths and cult practices of the Dalit group into their religion by its central values of purity and

---


210 Ibid.
In delineating this process of cultural subjugation and denigration of Dalit culture, Clarke writes that the Christian symbol system in its Western manifestation was unproblematically identified with God (involving close relation with enlightenment, faith, auspiciousness, purity, and divinity) while the Dalit symbol system was easily classified with things evil (involving intimate relation with stupidity, fear, inauspiciousness, pollution, and demonology). To be fair to some early Christian missionaries, who tried to wipe out Dalit religion and culture as the storehouse of evil, they merely fit themselves into a framework that had already been espoused by the ideology of caste Hinduism. The logic was that if the God of life was to be introduced, the demons of death must be ejected; no trace of the old religious and cultural symbols of Dalit spirituality must be retained. The Christian God thus conquers Dalit deities in all their aspects.

The focus of an intercultural paradigm is to create space for people from the underside of history such as Dalits to affirm their culture, their experiences and their identities by deconstructing the dominant ideologies and narratives that have assumed the normative and hegemonic character in a multicultural context. Here the dominant ideologies of pollution and purity need to be deconstructed and demythologized and understood in their proper historical context, exposing and challenging their hegemonic tendencies that subvert the attempts of the Dalit people to affirm their humanity, their identity and subjectivity, and fund their liberation struggles by “recognizing Dalit culture and religion as resource” for constructing new identity and as resource “for [their] emancipation.”

---


213 Ibid.
Pastoral Care Functions

In Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective, Clebsch and Jackle argue that healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling have been important pastoral functions operative throughout the Christian era.214 They identify different historical epochs and suggest that in each of the historical epoch, one particular pastoral function dominated over the others. Based on the changing religious, psychological and intellectual situations, different pastoral functions gained prominence. While these traditional pastoral functions will continue to play an important role in the ministry of care of the Dalit people, the communal contextual needs of the Dalit people require expansion of these pastoral functions to include liberating, empowering and nurturing. Wimberly was among the first pastoral theologians to introduce liberation as one of the goals of pastoral theology.215 Smith further develops the liberation theme in The Relational Self, where he focuses on building a Black liberation ministry. Watkins-Ali articulates liberation as pastoral function more clearly along with empowering and nurturing.216 She defines liberating ministry that entails “action, including political activism that works toward the elimination of oppression.”217

Liberating the pastoral care function in the Dalit context involves dismantling the systems and structure of caste oppression and realization of full humanness. Liberation of the Dalit communities from the oppressive forces of caste system is the ultimate goal and

214 Clebsch and Jaekle, Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective, 32.
215 Wimberly, Pastoral Care in the Black Church, 74.
217 Ibid.
aim of the pastoral ministry toward the Dalit community. This involves conscientization of the Dalit people of the many ways in which they have internalized caste ideologies, values and worldviews that limit their abilities and options for change and realization of their full humanness.

The empowering function of pastoral care involves a strong advocacy role by and on behalf of the Dalits. Advocating for the Dalits can take the form of engaging with relevant political, economic and cultural institutions to address issues of injustice and rights and privileges that have been denied to them. Empowerment also comes through giving them access to relevant material, informational, legal and financial resources that can aid in spreading critical awareness on issues of concern and aid them in right actions and right strategies for change. Nurturing means providing continuous support, encouragement and affirmation so that adequate opportunities are created for strengthening their sense of self-agency for self-determination.

With regards to healing and reconciling functions, I echo what Wimberly has said in the African American context of pastoral care. Healing, described as “binding up the wounds; repairing damage that has been done as the result of disease, infection or invasion; restoring a condition that has been lost”\textsuperscript{218} for the Dalit communities is only possible when the larger systemic oppression of the caste system is completely dismantled. This is a wider understanding of healing function of pastoral care in relation to the Dalit people’s contextual experiences of caste oppression. In the same vein, the reconciling function of pastoral care defined as “reestablishing broken relationship

\textsuperscript{218} Wimberly, \textit{Pastoral Care in the Black Church}, 18.
between a person and God on the one hand, and between a person and other persons on
the other\textsuperscript{219} may be premature unless caste based hierarchy and unjust relationships are
made just and equal. Thus the healing and reconciling functions of pastoral care have a
broader context than the personal and interpersonal.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In this chapter, I develop a new paradigm of Dalit pastoral theology that
effectively responds to their critical issues of survival, liberation and cultural identity.
This new paradigm emerges within the framework of the communal contextual and
intercultural paradigms of pastoral care where the focus of theological reflection is on the
contextual experiences of caste oppression of the Dalit people. It brings these contextual
experiences into dialogue with Dalit theological and psychological sources to develop
more effective strategies of pastoral care. The new paradigm emphasizes the communal
dimension of pastoral care where the Church is the locus, agent and receiver of pastoral
care. Based on the intercultural paradigm of pastoral theology and care, the new
paradigm for Dalit pastoral theology affirms the indigenous cultural resources of the Dalit
communities and deconstructs caste discourses and ideologies that have enslave the
minds of the Dalit people and weaken their collective solidarity and common struggle for
Dalit emancipation.

\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., 19
Chapter 6
DALIT NARRATIVES OF OPPRESSION AND COUNSELING APPROACHES

Introduction

In this final chapter, I introduce Dalit narratives of oppression and cultural alienation in the form of two detailed Dalit case studies. These case studies build a communal-contextual and intercultural liberative pastoral theological model of care for the Dalit communities that utilizes narrative and liberation psychology. Traditional approaches to pastoral care in the Dalit context have ignored the cultural realities of the Dalit people. The ministry of pastoral care among the Dalit people has not taken seriously the caste based oppression that violates its victims not only physically, but also in the realm of their social, spiritual, material and psychological existence. Pastoral care ministry has failed to understand and adequately respond to the critical needs of liberation, survival and cultural identity of Dalit people that primarily arise in the context of their caste oppression.

The case studies in this chapter illustrate the critical issues of liberation, survival and cultural identity of the Dalit people and suggest constructive ways of addressing those needs by reclaiming and affirming the indigenous cultural resources that have been trivialized and demonized by the traditional approaches of pastoral care among the Dalit people. In fact, much of the evangelistic work among the Dalit people assumed that in order to introduce the God of Christian religion, “no trace of the old religious and cultural
symbols of the Dalit spirituality must be retained.”¹ Current models of pastoral either take an antagonistic or non-engagement stance with the indigenous cultural experiences of the Dalit people or assumed that the Dalit Christian communities have been wholly baptized into the Christian culture. One of the central aims of this chapter is to validate the liberative dimension of the Dalit culture. I begin with a brief discussion of the intercultural perspective on counseling, liberation psychology and narrative therapy and then present the case studies. I analyze each case critically and elaborate practical strategies for intervention.

Counseling Psychology: A Historical Perspective

Counseling as it emerged as a profession in the Western societies, is particularly rooted in American culture.² Research for many of the counseling theories developed in the latter years of the 20th century drew on research within the U.S. mainstream population of white, Western culture.³ Counseling theories and therapies such as the “psychoanalytic, behavioral, humanistic, or cognitive-behavioral were very much shaped by the Euro-American value system. They reflect the ‘mores, customs, philosophies, and


language of that culture.’”\(^4\) Thus they are “ethnocentric and monocultural.”\(^5\) Draguns observes that “In particular, the counseling enterprise has been greatly influenced by such American values as optimism, individualism, egalitarianism, glorification of social mobility, and encouragement of personal change.”\(^6\) They ignore the influences of several important variables, including, culture, gender, race-ethnicity, socioeconomic status, environment, discrimination, institutional barriers, socialization, values, person-environment-fit, and so forth.\(^7\)

They ignore cultural variables because the traditional counseling approaches have “focused on understanding human universals and individual characteristics and traits, but neglected understanding the role of shared customs, traditions, values and beliefs from cultural influences.”\(^8\) That is, they take an etic perspective in assuming that psychological disorders are found in all the cultures and that diagnosis as well as treatment is equally applicable to all cultural contexts and that there was no need to make the diagnosis or the treatment culture specific.\(^9\) Although the “emphasis on the traditional approaches is supposed to focus on universal traits and be applicable to all individuals, the theories are embedded within a specific cultural context.”\(^10\)

---


\(^5\) Ibid., 3.

\(^6\) Draguns, Counseling Across Cultures, 24.

\(^7\) Trusty, Looby, and Sandhu, Multicultural Counseling: Context Theory and Practice and Competence, 6.


\(^10\) Schwarzbaum and Thomas, Dimensions of Multicultural Counseling, 4.
Therefore, these theories and counseling approaches are not value neutral. When therapists and counselors apply these theories to people of non-Euro-American values systems, they transmit Euro-American values and become forms of cultural oppression.11 “The professions of psychology and counseling have not been innocent bystanders in the oppression of people, especially those who differ from the norm.”12 These professions have been used as “tools of discrimination and oppression.”13 In fact, Sue and Sue argue that counseling and psychotherapy have done great harm to culturally diverse groups by invalidating their life experiences, by defining their cultural values or differences as deviant and pathological, by denying them culturally appropriate care, and by imposing the values of a dominant culture upon them.14

It needs to be pointed out that psychology actually began as a science that was concerned with individual differences, but it soon was seen as science about the norms of behavior or functioning, and those norms were used to judge those who did not fit them.15

A multicultural approach to counseling attempts to address these problems by taking two different trajectories: the universal or transcultural counseling approach and the culture-specific counseling model. Clemont Vontress is one pioneer in the counseling field who has taken a universal approach.16 This approach assumes that “existing

11 Sue, Ivey and Pederson, Theory of Multicultural Counseling and Therapy, 5.
12 Trusty, Looby and Sandhu, Multicultural Counseling, 3-5.
13 Ibid., 6.
14 Sue and Sue, Counseling the Culturally Diverse, 34.
15 Trusty, Looby and Sandhu, Multicultural Counseling, 3-5
psychological theories and techniques are robust enough to have universal applicability for ethnic or cultural groups living in the United States.”  

It basically emphasizes the “universal elements of counseling that all cultural groups tend to share. Examples are: discrimination, identity development, validation and empowerment, communication, social class differences, acculturation, transference, and countertransference.”  

What is basically evident in the universal approach to counseling is that it embraces a Western-based counseling theory and associated helping strategies that they reason to be cross-culturally effective...[it is] suggested that a client-centered approach provides all the necessary and sufficient ingredients for effective counseling with any client, regardless of ethnicity.  

Proponents of the other trajectory, the culture-centered approach, argue that “counseling and psychotherapy must be practiced within the context of a particular culture.”  

Proponents of this approach believe that a universal approach to counseling obscures the real problems as well as their sources. In relation to racism they claim that a broad view approach to multicultural counseling “allows dominant cultural group individuals to avoid a focus on themselves or at least a focus on racism in the situation,” but a more “limited perspective might be better able to explore the possibility of


individual and institutional racism as factors in the perpetuation of behaviors aimed at specific culturally different individuals or groups.”

This approach specifically calls upon the counselor or therapist “to gain cultural expertise about the specific groups they will encounter in their work.”

Critique of the Universal and Culture-Centered Approaches

The universal approach to multicultural counseling underestimates the significance of culture on different aspects of counseling. These include “conceptualization of mental health and illness, perception and expectation of mental health agencies and professionals, symptom manifestation, help-seeking behavior, therapist-client relationship, therapeutic goals, strategies and process, among others.”

There is a danger in this approach that counselors or therapists might “overlook the salience of culture in many of the critical areas.”

Problems also arise in the culture-centered approach when culture specificity is not clearly defined. For example, Lock talks about working with Asian-American, native-American groups and gaining their cultural expertise. But these groups themselves consist of many subgroups and subcultures. If a counselor practices within a culture-
specific group, he or she may not be able to provide “culturally responsive services for
such diverse populations.” In other words, some sense of generality may be
unavoidable in order to be practical. Culture-centered approach may also give rise to the
erroneous belief that because in-depth understanding of specific cultures is
essential for cultural proficiency, then one might be better off by solely focusing
on serving clients from one's own cultural heritage, as there are too many cultures
to learn and too much complexity within each culture to master.

The culture-centered approach also encounters problems related to the inclusive
or exclusive nature of multiculturalism. It may focus on racial discrimination
disproportionately to other forms of social oppression that certain groups face. Some
therapists believe that including other group dimensionalities such as gender or sexual
orientation may diminish the saliency of race in human experience. Sue and Sue
acknowledge this problem and suggest that there is a need for recognizing other
sociocultural forces that may impact people without diminishing the significance of race
in multicultural counseling.

In response to these limitations of the traditional counseling approaches and the
culture-centered as well as universalistic models of multicultural counseling, I utilize the
theoretical perspectives of Sue and Sue’s tripartite model of counseling, the liberation
psychology of Latin America, and narrative psychology. Even though these intersect each
other in certain areas, they distinctly provide a more comprehensive model of addressing
Dalit issues related to the caste-based oppression. Sue and Sue’s tripartite model

25 Ibid., 460.

26 Hong, Garcia and Soriano, “Responding to the Challenge,” 460.

27 Sue and Sue, Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice, 37.
illustrates the need to keep all three levels – the individual, the group, and the universal – together for the most helpful and productive outcome in dealing with any particular counseling issue(s). This tripartite model is also affirmed by Larney in his intercultural approach to pastoral care and counseling, where he uses the ‘Trinitarian formulation’ of presented by Kluckhohn and Murray in 1948.28 This ‘Trinitarian formulation’ affirms that every human being is in certain respects like all others, like some other and like no others. Sue and Sue’s tripartite model is particularly helpful in fashioning therapeutic interventions that are sensitive to the cultural needs of the careseekers. Liberation psychology is particularly helpful in keeping the focus on the liberation needs of the oppressed communities. It brings attention to the psychological phenomenon of internalized oppression common among the oppressed communities and introduces the psychological concept of conscientization to address its effects. Narrative psychology is especially useful in the Dalit context as it provides an effective therapeutic framework to address their cultural identity issues. According to Neuger,

Narrative counseling theory is grounded in a constructionist set of assumptions. This means that people construct meaning and that is the meaning that people attribute to themselves and their experiences that constitute both identity and the development of resources for living life.29

In this project I am primarily concerned with developing a communal contextual and intercultural model of pastoral theology and care for the Dalits in South India. This model of pastoral theology and care highlights the need to understand people’s personal problems in the larger context of systems and cultures. For the Dalit people, the existing


29 Neuger, Counseling Women, 86.
institutional systems and structures pertain to the caste system. The historical reality of the caste system has denied them fundamental liberty and a life-affirming cultural identity. They are struggling to survive in the face of caste based injustices and violence that are perpetrated against them on a daily basis. Liberation theology provides a theological argument for addressing this oppression in pastoral care: Such oppression is dehumanizing and goes against basic theological claims that all human beings are worthy of dignity and respect. Liberation theology resonates with the theoretical perspectives of narrative and liberative psychology. Sue and Sue’s tripartite model of counseling approach provides valuable psychological resources to address the critical needs of survival, liberation and cultural identity of the Dalit people. These psychological approaches help understand caste oppression as both an external and an internal reality, and provide strategies and effective interventions to empower Dalits to resist the external and internal manifestations of caste oppression and work towards social transformation.

**Multicultural Perspectives in Counseling**

This model of counseling understands multiple dimensions of identity. People are understood at the individual level, at the group level, and also at the universal level. At the individual level people are understood in terms of unique biological constitutions as well as unique experiences. At the group level, people’s race, gender and ethnicity are recognized. At the universal level, biological or physical characteristics commonalities or life experiences such as love, sadness, birth and death that are shared by all human beings

---

30 Sue and Sue, *Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice*, 39.
are recognized.\textsuperscript{31} This model begins with the premise that historically the field of counseling and psychotherapy has not paid adequate attention to identity of people at the group level. Therefore this model of multicultural competency focuses primarily on the group identity of people, even though it maintains a theoretical position that a holistic approach to understanding people requires that all of the three dimensions of identity be recognized in counseling interactions.\textsuperscript{32}

This model espouses a broader more active and subjective role for the counselors including teaching as well as advocacy.\textsuperscript{33} This broader role is also espoused in the communal contextual and intercultural paradigm of pastoral care and counseling. Pastoral care and counseling in the communal contextual and intercultural paradigms is not limited to one-to-one counseling, but includes a broader socio-political involvement for pastoral care providers. Lartey, for example, highlights the need for a more active involvement of pastoral care providers, to include symbolic actions such as protests and marches.\textsuperscript{34} Watkins-Ali also envisions an advocacy role for pastoral care providers in African American context.\textsuperscript{35} This model underscores personal problems of people seen in relation to the systems and institutions embedded in the larger sociocultural context. Any effective solution is only possible when change is also actively pursued in those systems and structures that contribute to the personal problems.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 40.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 42.

\textsuperscript{34} Lartey, \textit{In Living Color}, 137-138.

Counseling interactions in the tripartite model of counseling are congruent with the cultural value systems of the clients. This model rests on three different competencies. The first one calls on the therapists and counselors to become aware of their assumptions, values, and biases. The second recognizes the importance of counselors and therapists understanding and sharing the worldviews of their clients. Sometimes this may require the therapist engage to educate himself or herself about their cultural background. The third competency is appropriate intervention strategies and techniques. For example, counselors are encouraged to utilize therapeutic interventions that do not violate the cultural norms and practices of people from diverse backgrounds.

Sue and Sue’s multicultural model of counseling gives relevant attention to the cultural needs of the Dalit people. The prevailing models of pastoral care in the Dalit context have either degraded the Dalit culture or treated them as irrelevant to the goals of the ministry of pastoral care. By ignoring their cultural resources, the prevailing models have failed to address their critical issue of cultural identity. Sue and Sue’s tripartite approach to counseling alerts pastoral care providers to affirm and recover Dalit cultural resources to build life giving psycho-social-spiritual personal and communal identity that enable survival and liberation. And more importantly, Sue and Sue’s model encourages pastoral care providers to pay attention not only to the individual particularities of the Dalit experiences, but also communal experiences of casteism, sexism and poverty. By emphasizing the need for pastoral care providers to be aware of their biases, assumptions and values, this model minimizes the dangers of pastoral care providers from different

36 Sue and Sue, Counseling the Culturally Diverse, 44.
37 Ibid., 45.
social group imposing their dominant values and perspectives on the oppressed communities such as the Dalits.

**Liberation Psychology**

Although ideas pertaining to liberation were in abundance during the latter part of the twentieth century, liberation psychology was conceived primarily by Ignacio Martín-Baró, who was a priest as well as a trained social psychologist. He put together his ideas in a paper titled “Towards a Psychology of Liberation,” in the *Bulletin of Psychology* published by Central American University in 1986. The paper highlights a sense of urgency to construct a new transformative psychological practice for oppressed peoples.

Martín-Baró outlined three basic tenets of liberation psychology: a new goal, a new epistemology and a new praxis. The most valuable goal of psychology, according to Martín-Baró, is to focus its theoretical and practical energies on the “needs and suffering of the majorities who are numbed by oppressive life circumstances.” He called for recognizing the links between individual person’s psychological problems and the wider social, political and economic contexts in which their lives are embedded. He intends for psychology to gain clarity in understanding the relationship between psychic

---


39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.
fragmentation and apathy that reduce people into a state of “submission and expecting not to live.”[^42] He draws attention to the social structures, ideologies and discourses that force people into “marginalized dependency” and “oppressive misery” by taking away “their ability to define their own lives.”[^43]

Liberation psychology is amenable to the communal contextual and intercultural model of pastoral care that I am building for the Dalit communities because it attends to people’s historical, cultural and social contexts. It is positioned to address the social structures, ideologies and discourses of the caste system that have created enslaving conditions for the Dalit people.

**Psychology in Need of a New Epistemology**

Martín-Baró writes that the liberation needs of the oppressed require seeking knowledge that “is not in their present oppression but rather in the tomorrow of their liberty. The truth of the popular majority is not to be found, but made.”[^44] What he means is that the truth is to be constructed “is not a matter of thinking for them (the poor and oppressed) or bringing them our ideas or solving their problems for them; it has to do with thinking and theorizing with them and for them.”[^45] The communal contextual and intercultural model of pastoral care that I am building for the Dalit communities makes the same affirmation. I also view the Dalit people as subjects of history rather than as

[^42]: Ibid.

[^43]: Ibid.

[^44]: Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 27.

[^45]: Ibid., 28.
mere objects of any pastoral care. The clerically based traditional model of pastoral care has not taken seriously their perspectives or experiences in framing pastoral care practices. Such pastoral care practices have denied subjective status to the Dalit people. My new model corrects this deficit.

In his quest to develop a new epistemology, Martín-Baró was certainly influenced by Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed. It needs to be emphasized here that Paulo Freire talks about “pedagogy of the oppressed,” not for oppressed; thus he asserts the subjectivity of the oppressed people. Here the ideas from liberation theology are also evident. He says,

> Just as liberation theology has underlined the fact that only from the poor is it possible to find the God of life enunciated by Jesus, a psychology of liberation has to learn that only from the oppressed will it be possible to discover and build the existential truth of the Latin American peoples.46

Martín Baró is not suggesting that all knowledge be discarded, but rather proposing that knowledge be relativized and critically revised from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed.47

**Psychology in Need of a New Praxis**

Martín-Baró challenges psychologists to engage in a new praxis “to place [themselves] within the process alongside the dominated rather than alongside the dominator.”48 He writes,

---

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
It is not easy to leave our role of technocratic or professional superiority and to work hand in hand with community groups. But if we do not embark upon this new type of praxis that transforms ourselves as well as transforming reality, it will be hard indeed to develop a Latin American psychology that will contribute to the liberation of our people. \(^49\)

He calls upon the psychologists to take a stand for the oppressed people, and make ethical choices. I am critical of his call to take sides in dealing with oppressed people. For psychologists, social workers or clergy to take sides- creates an unhealthy and harmful ‘us and them’ dynamic and does not help transform and build communities. As Rajkumar, a Dalit theologian points out, any such theological paradigm has the dangerous potential to reinforce an antagonistic and polemic binarism…that will undermine Dalit efforts to work alongside others in their quest for liberation. Further, such a paradigm also has the potential to advocate replication of the strategies of the dominant without breaking the cycle of domination. \(^50\)

He concludes that there is a need to work an integrative and dialogical manner. \(^51\)

### Three Important Tasks of Liberation Psychology

#### Recovery of Historical Memory

Recovery of historical memory means to discover selectively, through collective memory, those elements of the past which have proved useful in the defense of the interests of the exploited classes and which may be applied to the present struggles to increase [**concientización**]. \(^52\)

---

\(^49\) Ibid.

\(^50\) Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 64.

\(^51\) Ibid.

Recovery of historical memory is, according to Martín-Baró, critical to counter the negative self-image among the oppressed people. In relation to the Latin American people he writes that

The predominantly negative image that the average Latin American has of himself or herself when compared to other people indicates the internalization of oppression, its incorporation into the spirit itself, fertile soil for conformist fatalism, and so very convenient for the established order.\(^{53}\)

Recovering of historical memory has to do with recovering one’s sense of identity and the pride of belonging to a people but also a reliance on a tradition and a culture, and above all, with rescuing those aspects of identity which served yesterday, and will serve today, for liberation. Thus, the recovery of a historical memory supposes the reconstruction of models of identification that, instead of chaining and caging people, open up the horizon for them, toward their liberation and fulfillment.\(^{54}\)

This is relevant to the liberation tasks of the Dalit people, whose collective memory that lies buried in their history, culture and belief systems needs to be recovered. Centuries of direct assault by the tyrannical regime of brahmanical caste order has not completely decimated the Dalit culture. The central task of the communal contextual and intercultural model of pastoral care is to identity and recover those elements of the Dalit culture that have liberating and nurturing potential for the Dalit people.

**De-ideologizing Everyday Experience**

De-ideologizing, in Martín-Baró’s perspective, means a critical interrogation of the “daily discourses that denies, ignores, or disguises essential aspects of reality” to

\(^{53}\) Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 30.

\(^{54}\) Ibid.
maintain “a fictional common sense that nurtures the structures of exploitation and conformist attitudes.”\textsuperscript{55} He further describes de-ideologizing as the “means to retrieve the original experience of groups and return it to them as objective data,” in other words to allow oppressed peoples to reject the false filters of hegemonic cultural ideologies that serve the interests of the dominant communities and to develop the ability to see their experiences from their own perspectives.\textsuperscript{56}

De-ideologizing as a process is important to the communal contextual and intercultural model of pastoral care because it enables the Dalit people to interrogate critically the daily discourses that mask reality or present a distorted picture of reality. It is only by deconstructing or de-ideologizing these discourses that the Dalit people can begin to recognize the exploitative and dominating agendas behind them. For example, the dominant discourses label the Dalit people as not industrious people, but as poor in intellect; it sees their culture as uncivilized or primitive. These discourses have real consequences on how the Dalits view themselves and interpret their sociocultural world. Unless these ideologies are de-ideologized, the Dalit children will continue to drop out from schools believing that they are intellectually inferior to other social groups, and Dalit communities will continue to feel ashamed of their cultural heritage, thus contributing to their esteem issues. It is important to stress here that the caste system operates in the Indian society as an ideology. None of the efforts to liberate the Dalit people will bear much fruit as long as caste ideology continues to thrive in the Indian society. Complete liberation of the Dalit people is only possible when the caste system at

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 31.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
the ideological level is effectively targeted with strategies of de-ideologizing that awaken the Dalit people. They must interpret reality from their perspective and not from hegemonic and totalizing discourses that serve the interests of the dominant communities.

**Utilizing People’s Virtues**

Martín-Baró points to the need to utilize the virtues of the dominated people such as their strength of solidarity, their “hope for a tomorrow violently denied to them” and their sacrifices for the “collective good of the people” that have helped them survive past oppressive practices.\(^{57}\) This is an important strategy for building oppressed peoples cultural identity. This is an important task of the communal contextual and intercultural model of pastoral care for the Dalit people because it allows the Dalit people to affirm their culture and reclaim it. Their cultural heritage then becomes a vital resource to build their identity. In the context of Latin America, Martín-Baró quotes Oscar Romero, the assassinated Archbishop of San Salvador, who said,

> How is it possible that we, Latin American psychologists, have not been able to discover all that rich potential in the virtues of our people, and, consciously or unconsciously, have turned our eyes to other countries and other cultures when pressed to define objectives and ideals?\(^{58}\)

In summary, Martín-Baró truly challenges psychologists to work alongside oppressed people by valuing their perspectives and cultural resources. More importantly, he identifies the need to de-ideologize hegemonic discourses that distort essential aspects of reality and serve the interests of the dominant communities. While Dalit pastoral

\(^{57}\) Ibid.

\(^{58}\) Ibid.
caregivers can draw upon some of the Martín-Baró ideas, particularly the task of de-
ideologizing dominant caste discourses and valuing cultural perspectives and resources of the Dalit communities in pastoral caregiving, they must also advocate for the Dalit communities without dehumanizing the oppressors, a crucial task in building communities of justice.

One of the central concepts in liberation theology strongly identified with Paulo Freire is conscientización. Freire, a Brazilian educator, committed himself to the liberation of the Latin American people by reconceptualizing education as a tool of social transformation. It is important to flesh out “concientización” in order to better understand how liberation psychology utilizes this important tool in the service of oppressed communities.

**Paulo Freire and Conscientizacion**

Paulo Freire’s 1970 book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is a revolutionary work aimed at achieving liberation through education. Freire made the argument that

> the oppressed live in subservience to the privileged in fatalistic silence; remaining undereducated and trapped beneath imposed layers of pervasive ignorance and lethargy. This dominated status is supported by a selected education the oppressor provides for them—intentionally designed to strengthen a superimposed system of economic, social, and political domination.59

The relationship between the oppressed and oppressor is prescriptive. Freire writes,

> Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual’s choice upon one another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that

---

conforms with the prescribers’ consciousness. The behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor.60 This prescriptive behavior also internalizes the image of the oppressor.61 The oppressed existence gives rise to what Freire calls “the duality” that has firmly been entrenched in the innermost being of the oppressed. This means that “they are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized.”62 The oppressed people live in a reality that “absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings’ consciousness. Functionally, oppression is domesticating.”63

Some of the characteristics of oppressed people are fear of self-depreciation, fear of freedom, fear of risk taking, becoming oppressors themselves as well as resignation. The oppressed people, over a period of time, adapt themselves to the condition of oppression and “become resigned to it.”64 Gradually, they become incapable of taking risks required to secure their freedom.65 A lurking fear also inhibits their struggle for liberation and may result “in greater repression.”66

Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed. He writes that

It derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable

61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 51.
64 Ibid, 47.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
of learning anything—that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive—that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness.  

Moreover, “As long as their ambiguity [distrusting the false characterization of the oppressed such as lazy, intellectually inferior or given to drinking] persists, the oppressed are reluctant to resist, and totally lack confidence in themselves.”

In order to grasp Freire’s liberatory educational theory, it is important to understand critical terms he employs to discuss his theoretical approach to liberation oriented education, such as “ontological vocation” and “conscientization.” For Freire, ontological vocation essentially means a call to humans to complete the process of becoming, to become more human or to complete themselves. For him, human beings are “unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality. Indeed, in contrast to other animals who are unfinished, but not historical, people know themselves to be unfinished; they are aware of their incompleteness.”

Being conscious of their incompleteness, humans strive to complete themselves, to complete their becoming. At the heart of ontological vocation is the concept of human consciousness. Human consciousness, for Freire, comprises of awareness and intentionality. Victoria Dagostino-Kalniz elaborates Freire’s thought on human consciousness. She writes,

For Freire, humans have the ability to reflect on themselves as beings separate from the world and others, which they can objectify. The ability to objectify the world and others as entities to be known outside oneself allows humans to understand themselves as historical and temporal beings. This ability to separate oneself from the world and others provides a unique sort of awareness about the world. Animals, for instance, cannot separate themselves from the world, hence

---

67 Ibid., 63.
68 Ibid., 64.
69 Ibid., 84.
they are determined by the world. Also, because they cannot intentionally act upon the world they cannot determine what happens in the world, and thereby cannot determine what is to happen to them as beings. They have no consciousness of themselves as “beings” because they cannot objectively recognize others as beings with different intentions. In Freire’s words, men [sic] are not limited to a single reaction pattern, as animals are, but rather are able to think through a situation and modify their reaction to it. As such, men have the capacity to relate to their world in a critical way, through reflection, not through reflex, as animals do.\(^\text{70}\)

Furthermore, humans beings have the ability to recognize that they live in a particular time and space, that they know and understand that the world and humans have existed in the past, and exist currently in the present, and will continue to exist into the future, which animals do not have.\(^\text{71}\)

It is in relation to this human capacity of temporality that human beings are said to have historicity and consciousness. Based on this sense of historicity and consciousness, Freire “claims that men [sic] exist (are with the world) while animals merely live (are in the world).”\(^\text{72}\) In other words, “man [sic] is integrated with the world, he can adapt himself to reality, and he has a critical capacity to make choices and to transform that reality.”\(^\text{73}\) Because human beings have the sense of consciousness (awareness about themselves as well as the world), they “are able to give meaning to the world, i.e., to act intentionally on the world.”\(^\text{74}\)

\(^{70}\) Victoria M. Dagostino-Kalniz, “Toward a Being Based Liberatory Educational Paradigm: A Dialogical Encounter Between Paulo Freire and Erich Fromm” (Ph.D. Diss., The University of Toledo, 2008), 28, 29.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., 29.

\(^{72}\) Ibid.

\(^{73}\) Ibid.

\(^{74}\) Ibid.
In summary, Freire’s vision of human nature comprises human being’s ability to see themselves as temporal and historical beings because they can reflect on the past, present and future and therefore are able to act with intentionality in the world. As such, according to Freire, “humans are the only beings of praxis; of action and reflection. Animals have neither the capacity to reflect nor to act intentionally, hence animals lack consciousness in Freire’s terms.” The twin capacities of awareness and intentionality make it possible for human beings to transform reality as well as foster their development; these capacities enable them to attain their full humanity. This principle constitutes the basis of Freire’s concept of ontological vocation. Put another way, what Freire implies by ontological vocation (the quest to ‘becoming more fully human’) is actually a liberated existence; it “is becoming free, in particular, from oppression.”

In an oppressive situation, the oppressor transforms the consciousness of the oppressed by teaching worldview assumptions that portray injustice as an inevitable Darwinian justice and the oppressed as those who have chosen (and are happy in) their lot and station in life. The oppressed are given, by the oppressors’ education, a rationale for their domination.

---

75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., 31.
77 Ibid.
Furthermore, “The oppressed are educated to accept their vanquished status as being inevitable and perhaps even honorable and desirable. In this way, the oppressor goes unchallenged, and the oppressed” internalize the image of the oppressor.\(^{79}\)

Freire proposes conscientization as a way of enabling people to begin to think critically about the reality imposed on them by the dominant social groups. He advocates “a system of problem-posing education which challenges learners to break through the prevailing notions of the dominant society, which are repressive, in order to understand their subjectivity and to liberate themselves.”\(^{80}\) Freire says,

To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes so that through transforming actions they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity.\(^{81}\)

Building on Freire’s concept of conscientization, Maitza Montero, a liberation psychologist, describes essential characteristics of the process of conscientization. First, “It is an active, critical-ethical process starting from a victim’s perspective.” Second, it gives rise to a new understanding of the society and generates a new worldview. Third, conscientization “includes denaturalizing, de-ideologizing and de-alienating processes.” Fourth, it begins by doubting what is presented as inevitable and “problematizing what seems to be natural.” Finally, it is oriented to individuals as well as social transforming

\(^{79}\) Ibid., 12-13.

\(^{80}\) Dagostino-Kalniz, “Toward a Being Based Liberatory Educational Paradigm,” 26.

\(^{81}\) Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 47.
and is participated in by both individuals as well as social groups struggling with oppressive situations.  

Conscientization as a concept and as a process is at the heart of liberation psychology. This concept is also significant for the communal contextual and intercultural model of pastoral care that I am constructing for the Dalit communities in South India. In exploring the psychological experiences of the Dalit people in the fourth chapter of this dissertation, I provide strong evidence that internalized oppression remains a serious barrier for their psychic liberation. In outlining the various psychological problems with which the Dalit people contend, I show that internalized oppression is a common denominator to most of their psychological problems and challenges. Conscientization, as proposed by Paulo Freire, enables the Dalit communities to critically interrogate their Dalit conditions from their own perspective. It encourages them to question what is presented as inevitable or natural rather than living life in a culture of silence. It allows them to come into a new awareness of their situation and work with intentionality to transform the social order of their oppression.

**Frantz Fanon and Liberation Psychology**

Frantz Fanon is considered as a “luminary in the fields of revolution, liberation and psychology. His impact on the world continues to reverberate from his groundbreaking and revolutionary analysis of the impacts of oppression” on the psyche of  

---

the people.\textsuperscript{83} Fanon’s perspectives on oppression and liberation were shaped by his personal experiences of racism and oppression. He was subjected to overt forms of racism, sexual exploitation and harassment at the hands of the French army in his birthplace of Caribbean island of Martinique. On account of his skin color, he had personal encounters with bigotry and acts of abuse. He also witnessed similar acts of humiliation and abuse being directed at fellow African soldiers by the French army.

Fanon focuses most of his attention on the phenomenon of oppression. He is not so much interested in the ‘why’ of oppression as much about the ‘how.’\textsuperscript{84} “This shift from the why to the how of oppression reflected Fanon’s sense of urgency and a search for the practical solution neither Hegel nor Mannonni sought.”\textsuperscript{85} His sense of urgency has a personal dimension to it. He seriously analyzes the dynamics of oppression with great passion because, as mentioned before, he was

a man deeply scarred by the harsh realities of the enslaved and the colonized…. He was rooted in the world of the oppressed with which he completely identified, Fanon was at his best in clarifying the dilemmas and dynamics of the downtrodden.\textsuperscript{86}


\textsuperscript{84} Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan, \textit{Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression} (New York: Plenum Press, 1985), 120.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
His analysis of the dynamics of oppression involves self-analysis, clinical data, and social analysis to examine the phenomenon of oppression from the perspective of the oppressed. 87

For Fanon, the problem of oppression is about violence. Those who commit violence also

mystify the meaning and reality of violence. They enlist the services of religion, the law, science, and the media to confound and bewilder even the oppressed who otherwise would recognize that the social order is founded on and permeated by violence. But this pervasive and structural violence is often masked and rationalized as the natural order of life. 88

He strongly believes that violence or threat of violence plays a central role in the imposition, maintenance, as well as ending of oppression. Bulhan, who authored a semi-biographical account of Fanon and his thought, explains Fanon’s conceptual relationship between violence and oppression. He writes,

Historically, most of those on whom oppression was imposed had first put up a violent resistance. Many among them fought heroically and gave their lives for freedom. Oppression took root only when the fear of physical death exceeded the will to freedom. Defeat often heralds fear of physical death among survivors. Thus more than to superior arms, the oppressor owes his power to fear of physical death among survivors. Thus more than to superior arms, the oppressor owes his power to fear of physical death. This is one of the reasons why the psychological dimension of oppression is so significant. For if and when the oppressed overcome this fear, superior arms, violence, and the oppressor lose their potency. 89

Bulhan further writes,

The oppressed find everyday living a challenge. The narrow and rigid confines in which the oppressed are entrapped by laws and rules of conduct require a marked

87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 121.
89 Ibid.
degree of repression and personal versatility. Stripped of a collective aura, the oppressed tend to think, dream and act as a helpless minority of one. The oppressed learn to wear many masks for different occasions; they develop skills to detect the moods and wishes of those in authority, learn to present acceptable public behaviors while repressing many incongruent private feelings, and refine strategies for passive-aggressive behavior. This pattern of adaptation no doubt entails a personal toll, and excessive use of energy, and higher vulnerability for psychopathology. Though the human capacity for adaptation is remarkable, there is also a threshold for what is tolerable. It should therefore not be surprising if the oppressed often complain of many somatic afflictions…abuse substances.90

Fanon takes a sociogenetic orientation to “psychology of liberation for the oppressed based on the concepts of internalization and objectification.”91 He theorizes that

through the mechanisms of oppression, specifically a social structure based on the domination of others, a person is unable to achieve self-objectification and is prone to internalize the negative identities associated with the psychological assaults heaped upon him or her by the social institutions seeking to maintain their oppression.92

While traditional medical-based psychiatry and psychology peer inside a person to locate the source of such problems as obsessions, anxiety or inhibitions, Fanon argues that they “are not result of the unconscious but the manifestations of the internalization of conflict in the social order as well as restrictions imposed on one’s liberty.”93 From Fanon’s perspective, “psychopathology is the manifestation of sociohistorical and cultural conflict in persons with a low threshold for tolerance. In this regard,

90 Ibid., 123.


92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.
psychopathology is the person-specific response to a pathogenic social order.” 94 When people are subjected to oppression, Fanon believes, they tend to adopt the “cultural reality of the oppressor” and “abandon one’s own” which results in “a profound sense of alienation for the oppressed.” 95 Fanon suggests that oppressed people experience five aspects of alienation: (a) alienation from the self—meaning from one’s personal identity, (b) alienation from the significant other—from family and a social group, (c) alienation from the general other—“characterized by violence between Blacks and Whites,” (b) alienation from one’s culture—language and history, and (e) alienation from creative social praxis—”denial and/or abdication of self-determination and of socialized and organized activity, which is at the core of the realization of human potential.” 96

Fanon recasts the primary tasks for the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry. These tasks are basically to “unravel the relation of the psyche to the social structure, to rehabilitate the alienated, and to help transform social structures that thwart human needs.” 97 Fanon strongly believes that social structure was a “dynamic and potent force” that determines human psychology. Furthermore, “psychological theories that ignore the central role of the social order tend to blame the victim and also negate the human capacity to transform both the social order and human psychology.” 98

94 Ibid.
95 Ibid., 321.
96 Ibid.
97 Bulhan, Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression, 195.
98 Ibid.
Fanon’s writings on oppression are significant for the communal contextual and intercultural model of pastoral care because they invite pastoral care providers to pay attention to the alienation experiences of oppressed people. Through his writings one can discover how the alienation experiences are manifested in a subjugated community—by adopting the cultural reality of the oppressors and abandoning their own. Therefore, one of the primary goals of a communal contextual and intercultural model of pastoral care is to affirm and reclaim Dalit cultural resources in service of addressing their experiences of cultural alienation.

**Narrative Therapy**

Narrative therapy is a relatively new approach to counseling developed by Michael White, David Epston and others; it is based on the fundamental assumption that “the basic process by which people understand the experiences of their own lives and those of others is the narrative.” In this context “narrative” means “an account of an event or events.” It can refer to story-telling as well as story. A person’s “self-story” is a first-person narrative through which he or she “defines who he [sic] is, based on his memories of his history, his present life, his roles in various social and personal settings, and his relationships.”

---


101 Ibid.
Narrative therapy is informed by postmodern thinking, which sets it apart from traditional approaches to counseling and therapeutic practices. David Nylund and Debora Nylund explain:

Many traditional therapies, informed by positivism and/or liberal humanism, assume that the therapist can be objective in identifying problems, discover their discrete causes, and make “interventions” to assist clients in coming to resolution. From several traditional perspectives, problems (like depression, anxiety, or abuse) are typically described as individual pathologies attributable to distinct biological or characterological conditions. But in the postmodern perspective, it is assumed that objective knowledge is not possible; rather, it is our immediate, day-to-day, concrete personal experience of our lives—expressed through stories we tell others and ourselves about our lives—that is primarily knowable.¹⁰²

In narrative therapy the therapist shifts his/her focus from inside the human person to human person embedded in a sociocultural milieu. Narrative therapy is guided by the fundamental philosophical view that our interpretation and experience of reality are socially constructed, a theoretical perspective of social constructionism. Social constructionism “invites us to be critical of the idea that our observations of the world unproblematically yield its nature to us, to challenge the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world.”¹⁰³ It stands in opposition to positivism and empiricism in traditional science, which hold the view that what exists is what we perceive to exist.¹⁰⁴ In other words, human perception is a subjective process, and the activity of description and explanation of the world around us


¹⁰⁴ Ibid.
happens in relation to our social world, the people and institutions. One’s interpretation of his or her environment, the process of one’s meaning making, occurs through the medium of language. “Social constructionist thought focuses on language as foundational to the construction of the reality.” The ‘languaging’ of the encounters with one’s environment, both external interactions with people and internal mental processes, is often called a ‘discourse.’ “Discourses can be seen as systems of meaning, ways of representing ourselves and our social world, which not only constitute what we think and say, but what we feel and desire and what we do.” Discourses are structured narratively, “which refers to the mental process by which the raw data from the senses is organized into story form.”

Several research studies done on narrative theory and narrative psychology have shown that human personality is storied. Narrative theory, therefore, provides us a whole new way of understanding how human personalities are formed, how we think of ourselves, and construct and interpret the world around us. Narrative therapy, built on this theory, essentially displaces the objectivist posture of the modernist worldview that pervades the traditional models of counseling and therapeutic processes. It invites human

---


107 Ibid.

108 Burr, An Introduction to Social Constructivism, 84.


persons into a relational framework of therapeutic work, regarding them as subjects and sources of knowledge and construction of meaning in therapy. Instead of seeking a historical truth, narrative therapy is predominantly concerned with meaning and interpretation. In this quest for meaning and interpretation, it is the counselee, and not the counselor, who is considered the expert, in contrast to traditional approaches to counseling and therapy where the therapist is assumed to the expert. This shift in emphasis is particularly relevant for nondominant communities who are seeking help with problems that occur in the context of disempowering relational dynamics with dominant social groups.

The task of narrative therapy, therefore, is to introduce and interlace non-dominant perspective and experience into language to create an authentic, empowering and therapeutic interpretative lens for non-dominant communities. This epistemological shift immediately alters the meaning-making process. When they are telling their story, oppressed people are telling of themselves—their values, convictions, beliefs, and their stories become a medium of understanding and knowing. In Neuger’s words, “knowing,” helps people generate new language and new interpretative lenses and thus creates new realities. The potential to create new realities is not diminished even though their stories are full of oppression because “even sad stories are able to generate new

---

111 Neuger, Counseling Women: A Narrative, Pastoral Approach, 43.
That is possible because “in speaking and hearing that new things happen.”

The focus in the narrative approach is to identify the problem, name it, and then locate it in the map of one’s life as one narrates his or her story. The narrative therapist helps to separate the individual from the problem. This important strategy of externalization is the hallmark of narrative therapy. In the words of Gerald Monk, “[P]eople are people and . . . [and] are never problems in and of themselves.” Telling one’s story is one of most empowering experiences of individuals in the narrative therapeutic process. What follows the process of externalization of problem is the therapist’s careful examination of stories looking for unique outcomes. Unique outcomes are those elements of the story that contradict the problem story; they are exceptions to the dominant story. When those unique outcomes are brought to the attention by the therapist, it opens up opportunities for people seeking help to resist the dominant story and look for creative solutions.

By telling their stories people can create and establish a community of members with similar experiences who are able to participate in each other’s experiences. According to Tom Boomershine, narrating stories creates a community by establishing a

---


115 Payne, *Narrative Therapy*, 70.
context of familiarity which leads to friendship. In contrast, forgetting stories implies
depletion, exhaustion and poverty. Stories, then, are basically about connecting
people; the oppressed see their own lives in the story of others and recognize a
commonality of experience. The result a therapeutic relationship. Narrative therapy,
therefore, creates a possibility of a therapeutic relationship where people are participating
as social agents. It opens a window to creating communities that can recover agency
and subjectivity in people and engender collective consciousness.

Narrative therapy provides one of the counseling frameworks of the communal
contextual and intercultural model of pastoral care that I am developing for the Dalit
communities in South India. Narrative therapy is particularly useful for addressing the
cultural contextual experiences of the Dalit people in relation to the caste oppression that
has forced them into a culture of silence. The Dalit people's dissenting voices have been
submerged and silenced by the dominant discourses that give meaning shape their
experiences of reality. It is not hard to imagine the change that will set in when their
stories are listened to in empathy and their views are accorded value and intelligence.
Helping Dalits to narrate their life stories in the presence of an empathic listener,
therefore, can be a liberating experience in itself for Dalits. Through empathetic listening
Dalits’ discourses gain voice, authenticity and power to give meaning and structure to a

---


118 Smith, *The Relational Self*, 75.

119 Ibid.
reality. This occurs because language not only describes cultural reality, but also informs, influences, and to a certain extent determines that reality.\textsuperscript{120} By deconstructing the dominant discourses, Dalit people can learn to interpret their stories and experiences from their perspective. This type of therapy helps them to “generate new language and new interpretive lenses and thus create new realities.”\textsuperscript{121}

In summary, the psychological perspectives of narrative psychology and liberation psychology are resources for developing constructive counseling approaches in the communal contextual and intercultural model of pastoral care. Narrative psychology and liberation psychology are relevant to oppressed communities such as the Dalits in South India because they draw attention to the social structures, discourses and ideologies that force people into oppression by denying them their ability to define themselves and the world around them. One of the important tasks that is common to both therapeutic approaches is to deconstruct the dominant discourses and ideologies that serve the interests of the dominant communities. Through the process of deconstructing these hegemonic cultural ideologies, oppressed people such as the Dalits are able to interpret reality from their perspective and engage in transforming actions that can liberate their existence.

\textbf{Dalit Case Studies}

In the following section, I discuss two different Dalit case studies that illustrate the practical dimension of pastoral care ministry among the Dalit people. The caste

\textsuperscript{120} Neuger, \textit{Counseling Women}, 12.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 43.
system has reduced them to a marginal status in the socio-cultural, economic and political life of Indian society. They are among the most despised communities, who are denied access to basic resources needed for their survival. An appropriate Dalit theology speaks to these realities of the Dalit people. It seeks the transformation and humanization of caste-based exploitative systems that deny them full humanity. Dalit theology provides a basis for this dissertation and its focus on the critical need for a life giving psycho-social-spiritual personal and communal identity that will enable survival and liberation. What has been missing in Dalit liberation theology are strategies for implementing this theology in pastoral care. A communal contextual and intercultural approach to pastoral care provides a paradigm for operationalizing Dalit liberation theology in the practice of care. The psychological approaches outlined in this chapter provide a psychological rational and strategies for implementing Dalit liberation theology in the communal contextual practice of pastoral care. In other words, the case studies discussed below help in understanding the nature and task of Dalit pastoral theology.

The first case study utilizes Sue and Sue’s tripartite cultural approach to counseling and liberation psychology. This approach understands the multiple dimensions of identity and people at the individual level, at the group level and at the universal level.

The first case focuses on both the individual and group level experiences of cultural oppression of a Dalit family. Sue and Sue contend that traditional approaches to counseling have not given adequate attention to the identity of people at the group level. In this case study group level identity will be the major focus of analysis. In other words, it explores this family’s Dalitness in the sociocultural context of caste oppression.
After analyzing the Dalit family’s cultural experiences within the caste system, I discuss practical strategies of intervention. Sue and Sue envision a broader role for counselor that includes teaching and advocacy. In the teaching and advocacy role I engage liberation psychology, particularly the process of conscientization, to empower and liberate the Dalit family. I present appropriate strategies in relation to the cultural experiences and problems the family faces.

The most important aspect of the tripartite approach to counseling suggested by Sue and Sue are intervention strategies and techniques that affirm rather than violate the cultural norms and practices of the people in the counseling relationship. In this case study I present an intervention strategy that affirms the cultural norms and practices of the Dalit people and operationalizes a Dalit liberation theology.

**Multicultural and Liberation Psychological Features of the Communal Contextual Model of Pastoral Theology and Care to Dalits**

Ramesh is a 45-year-old poor herdsman. He was born and raised in a Dalit family. He lives with his wife, Soumya, who is 38 years old, and his son, who is 16. Just a few months ago, his daughter, Rani, who is 19 and is married, returned to stay with them. She has returned to her parents’ home because her husband, Mr. Deepak, has been harassing her over the dowry her father was supposed to pay. Mr. Ramesh and Soumya are deeply anguished about their daughter’s situation. The social stigma of having a married daughter staying with them has deeply affected their social life. Ramesh had

---

122 This is fictional case study illustrates the communal contextual and intercultural model of pastoral care for the Dalit people.
borrowed some money to make the dowry payment, but lack of any collateral had
discouraged any lenders from taking further risk. Poor as he is and without any land, he is
not a prime candidate for collateral loans. A herd of cows and buffalos do not compare to
what a piece of land could secure.

Taking a loan is not his only problem. His teenage son has not been doing well in
his studies. The boy has also had several run-ins with the law. He feels he is a misfit with
his friends, and the constant put-downs by his colleagues and the teachers make him feel
that education and school are doing him any good. He would rather be with his friends
who have dropped out of school and are earning some money doing odd jobs in the city.
His father is tired of telling him that if only he had the opportunities for education like
him, things would have been so much different for all of them. He does not want his son
to end up like him, struggling to eke out a living and support and raise a family if and
when he is married. His son, however, disagrees. He points out to all those Dalit
graduates who have not succeeded in their professional lives. There are others, who
without any career to begin with, are either in the fields irrigating the land or on the
streets mending shoes. Ramesh does not know how to convince his son of the importance
of education in the face of those arguments. He is worried sick that his son is making a
big mistake by not pursuing his studies.

It is Ramesh’s wife who comes seeking for spiritual help from me. She is not
immediately concerned about her son or her daughter, but rather her husband, Mr.
Ramesh, and the cattle. She is confused, helpless and anxious. After showing her
adequate concern and empathy, I ask her to state the nature of the problem. She explains
that for the last two weeks, her husband has not left the house to tend to their four cows.
And what is worse, he has dozed off a couple of times while attending to the cattle so that they strayed into the land of high caste people. This happened twice before they eventually seized two of Ramesh’s cows. She adds that the high caste people will not release the animals unless a hefty compensation is paid. Ramesh has been a responsible person but lately, according to his wife, he has not been sleeping well and refuses to leave the house. Strange dreams have disturbed him. Their cattle are the only means of their livelihood. She does not know what to do with the urgent need to reclaim their cattle seized by the caste people. She expresses her concern about those recurrent dreams that her husband has had over the past few weeks. He sees a dark shadow waiting to attack him outside his house, which he sees as being surrounded with Peepal (Plaska) trees. She feels that there are evil spirits at work to destroy her family. She needs to appease them by offering a sacrifice. However, she feels it is not a Christian thing to do. Not knowing what to do, she asks for my help.

Dalit Theology highlights the caste based oppressive existence of the Dalit people, and thus it can elaborate the nature of her suffering and the suffering of this family. It focuses on the historical experiences of the Dalit people in the socio-economic and political bondage of the caste system that has not only robbed them of their basic human dignity and fundamental human rights but also forced them into a life of slavery. Caste imposed socio-economic and political restrictions have denied them access to basic resources essential for their survival and well-being. Systematic caste exclusion and subordination have dispossessed them of their cultural identity, which reduces them to non-entities in Indian society. Dalit theology speaks to these realities of their socio-cultural existence.
Nirmal writes that Dalit theology is based on Dalit people’s experiences, their sufferings, aspirations and hopes. It is about their story of pain and protest against “socio-economic injustices they have been subjected to throughout history. It will anticipate liberation that is meaningful for them.”123 First, it validates the experiences of Dalit people. They live in a culture where their voices are silenced and their experiences are invalided. Pastoral caregivers, under the influence of the dominant culture, may sometimes find it hard to believe their stories. They may not be attentive and supportive to them so that they can gain voice and language to tell their stories. By claiming that Dalit theology is based on Dalit people’s experiences, Nirmal challenges pastoral caregivers to recognize and resist such temptations. Second, Dalit theology understands Dalit suffering in the context of caste oppression. It takes seriously the socio-cultural reality that gives rise to Dalit people’s suffering. By understanding the Dalit suffering in the larger socio-cultural context, especially the caste system, it challenges some of the dominant ideologies and theologies that tend to blame the person for their suffering rather than identifying socio-cultural factors that contribute to their suffering. Third, Dalit theology is not just about Dalit suffering but also their hopes and aspirations. Dalit theology challenges pastoral caregivers not only to focus on the suffering of the Dalit people but also to look for stories that can focus theological perspectives on this world. In that respect Dalit theology empowers Dalit people such as Mrs. Ramesh and her family to hope and aspire for a more liberated and fulfilling existence.

Dalit theology also privileges community as the locus of doing theology. The community becomes the base for theological thinking and action. Faith communities become resources for pastoral caregiving. This theology clearly moves away from individualistic focus-on personal salvation. Unlike the classical Western theology that dispossessed the Dalit people of their culture by branding them as heathenistic and evil, Dalit theology affirms them and utilizes them as important sources not only to articulate Dalit spirituality and experience of the divine but also to construct a Dalit cultural identity. These theological claims highlight the critical need for a life giving psychosocial-spiritual personal and communal identity that will liberate this woman and insure the survival of her family.

Derald Sue describes general characteristics of counseling as developed in the Western context that clearly would not be helpful for the Ramesh family. First, in the West the individual is considered the basic social unit of the society, but in Eastern societies the basic unit of society is the family, group or collective society. What a person decides reflects on the entire family. Important decisions are made not by individuals but by the entire family. Western therapeutic interventions that focus on making Ramesh self-reliant may indeed be doing him more cultural harm than good by disrupting the traditional value of interdependence. A Western trained therapist or counselor who believes in autonomy and independence may judge Ramesh’s daughter living with her parents as dependent and unassertive to lead her own life. In contrast to


125 Ibid.
the Western emphasis on individual identity, in India collective identity is more valued. Western psychotherapists also believe that identity development is something to be achieved in stages and such as those theorized by Freud or Erickson. In the Indian cultural system, identity is not achieved but rather is ascribed by the caste system.

Second, emotions are expressed differently in the Eastern societies and Western societies. In the Eastern societies, people tend to use non-verbal styles of communication. But the psychotherapeutic process designed to suit the Western societies emphasizes verbal expression of emotions and feelings. The problem is that many of the Eastern societies learn to conceal their feelings rather than openly express them. This may be construed by some Western trained therapists as being “inhibited, lacking spontaneity, or repressed.”

Third, there is an issue of openness and intimacy. “[S]elf-disclosure and discussion of the most intimate and personal aspects of one’s life are hallmarks of counseling.” However, for people from India openness may be problematic. Indian families in general tend to keep personal things very personal. Few outsiders know what is really happening in a family. If anything problematic related to the family comes out in the public, it is deemed as a thing of great shame. If a therapist finds Mrs. Ramesh reluctant to talk about the core issues, the counselor likely to perceive her as “suspicious, guarded and paranoid.”

---

126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
Fourth, another relevant issue in the Ramesh case is the nuclear versus the extended family. In Indian society the concept of family is quite comprehensive. It includes not only the husband, wife and children but also their grandparents and brothers’ and sisters’ families. When Mrs. Ramesh mentions making a family decision, it must not be automatically assumed that she is referring to her nuclear family. And if the therapist does not understand the larger concept of family, he or she may exclude the extended members of the family in the decision-making process, and thereby cause problems for them in making important decisions.

Sixth, another cultural difference concerns the locus of responsibility.

Traditional counseling stresses that responsibility for change resides with the individual and that the locus of the problem is generally internal. Thus, much of counseling is aimed at having clients explore their own conflicts, achieve insight, and become healthy in some manner.\textsuperscript{129} For many of the Asian cultures, including India, the locus of responsibility must be seen in a collective framework. To assume that change is possible for an individual outside the framework of a network of relationships in which the individual is embedded may be unhelpful for problem solving in the Indian context. The best way to initiate change is to work with all the people involved in the relationship rather than with an individual. Also Sue and Sue are right in pointing out the perception among racial and ethnic minorities that problem does not reside inside them but outside in system or social structure that need to be addressed before change is possible in their lives.\textsuperscript{130} This is true in this case as well, but this may not be readily apparent to members of the Ramesh family, who may be

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 817.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
victims of internalized casteism. Thus people like Ramesh may have accepted their situations as a normal part of life.

Another possible problem of using traditional approaches to counseling and therapy with regard to Mrs. Ramesh and her family is that they may not be favorable towards indigenous resources of healing because “all traditional counseling theories were conceived in modernist epistemic context.” Historically, “this modernistic epistemology is rooted in the Enlightenment assumption that…objective, scientific observation…[is] considered [as] the means to learn the truth about phenomenon.”

What this means is that traditional counseling approaches shaped by such thinking may not be open to Mrs. Ramesh’s desire to seek remediation from the local healers who use supernatural methods of healing. In other words, to a Western trained therapist traditional healing may seem to lack objectivity or a scientific basis and not be considered as a valid means to learn the truth about the phenomenon. For example, many indigenous cultures strongly believe that a cure is possible only when a local healer communicates with a spirit to reveal ways to deal with people’s psychological problems. However, Western science remains skeptical of “using supernatural explanations to explain phenomena and certainly does not consider the existence of spirits to be scientifically sound.”

---


132 Ibid.

Elaborating the Case Study Based on Multicultural Counseling and Liberation Psychological Perspectives

I begin by situating the case study of the Ramesh family in the broader sociocultural context. My intent is to examine how the wider cultural systems impact their identities and experiences. From a multicultural perspective, the examination of the wider cultural systems pertains to exploring the group level identity of Ramesh. Both liberation theology and psychology call for recognizing the links between individual person’s suffering and psychological problems and the wider social, political and economic contexts in which their lives are embedded. Here I explore the social structures, ideologies and discourses that force people such as the Rameshes into a marginalized existence. They are Dalits. Their Dalitness is a sociocultural category. This case study clearly occurs within the caste dynamics of the larger society. The current crisis facing the family centers on Mr. Ramesh’s psychological condition. He is having recurrent dreams of being trapped in his house. He feels paralyzed by paranoia that if he ventures out, something bad might happen to him. If I analyze his dreams with the recent life events in his life, I see that they relate to his daughter’s coming home and his son’s rebellion against his wishes. The dreams started after these devastating life experiences. Perhaps they reflect what Mr. Ramesh is experiencing inside himself. He is definitely weighed down by feelings of guilt, shame, fear and helplessness. He feels guilty because he essentially holds himself responsible for failing to make her daughter’s marriage work. This failure should be seen in relation to the Indian concept of Dharma, which is about his duties to live in a manner that upholds social rules of order and discipline.
Dharma can be considered as a moral law, and it is very important for individuals to uphold these moral laws for the just functioning of society. It has a strong religious connotation but also has a secular meaning. Dharma presupposes a social order in which all functions and duties are assigned to separate classes whose smooth interaction guarantees the well-being of society as a whole, and beyond that maintains the harmony of the whole universe.\(^{134}\)

Dharma is about one doing essential personal and social duties. These duties can be about oneself or towards the others in the society.

First, in this case the Dharma may be related to Mr. Ramesh being a responsible father by giving his daughter in marriage with the necessary resources to make her married life successful. If he had enough money, his daughter would have been in a happy relationship with her husband and his family. Second, his married daughter coming and living with the family is a great shame for him. Kaufman writes that shame is seeing oneself in a diminished state and thinking one is “deficient in some vital way as a human being.”\(^{135}\) It is not only seen in relation to external objects and involves feelings of “inferiority, powerlessness and lack of dignity” but is “more painful and devastating than guilt.” The shamed person feels the need to hide or “retreat from the mainstream society.”\(^{136}\) The shame for Mr. Ramesh can be seen in relation to the social expectations of what means to be a responsible father to his daughter.


\(^{136}\) Ibid.
Ramesh is also experiencing fear of the unknown and the uncertainty with regards to his daughter’s and son’s lives. He feels helpless because he does not know to do. He does not have adequate resources to deal with the situation. As is noted in the case study, Ramesh is an extremely poor herdsman. As an uneducated person, he has limited economic opportunities. It is true that a large section of Indian population in India is not educated. But the situation is worse among Dalits than other communities. Historically, because of the caste system, they have not been allowed to educate themselves. The caste system enjoins against Dalit education because they are considered a polluted people and too dull in their minds to learn the wisdom of the ancient Hindu scriptures.

After independence in 1947, the Indian constitution enacted laws that deem education to be a fundamental right of all the people of India. However, there is a huge gap between the enacting of laws and their implementation. Universal education laws have not changed the ideology of the caste system, which continues to shape people’s attitudes towards Dalit students seeking educational opportunities. They are discriminated in the classrooms by fellow high caste students as well as teachers. Dalit schools in villages lack the most basic infrastructure like blackboards, furniture and school buildings. This is good example of an institutional practice informed by the caste ideology that puts Dalit students and people at a great disadvantage in terms of building good careers for themselves. Ramesh is a victim of this institutional casteism that has deprived him of good education. Without basic education, he has limited economic opportunities to pursue in his life and therefore struggles to provide sufficiently for his family.
The ideology of the caste system creates not only concrete institutional barriers to their progress but also psychological problems such as low intellectual development and high rates of anxiety.¹³⁷ The high rates of anxiety among Dalit people should not come as a surprise because they are the result of the oppressive caste environment in which they live. And when other (personal or family) stressors impact their lives, it very likely causes a great deal of psychological disability. This is evident in Ramesh’s life where psychological problems are manifesting as disturbing dreams. The spirits that he sees in his dreams can only be understood in the context of his religious belief system. Clarke has studied the religious belief system of Dalit people.¹³⁸ According to him, Dalit religion consists predominantly of virgin goddesses. However, these goddesses are manifestations of one Supreme Being called Sakti. These various goddesses or deities are categorized by location such as a house deity or a village deity. The house deity is sometimes the “deceased spirit of a female family member who has died in an auspicious state.”¹³⁹ “Sacrifice at time of crisis has for generations been a common practice among” the Dalit people.¹⁴⁰ These sacrifices are performed to appease the deities as well as to seek good fortunes.

All the major social events in the family are occasions when sacrifices honor the presence of the deity in the house. The sacrifice is not elaborate but involves cutting the

¹³⁷ Webster, *Pastor to Dalits*, 35-38.

¹³⁸ Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹³⁹ Ibid., 73.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 78.
head of a chicken and sprinkling the blood in and around the house to mark the boundary so that no evil spirit may enter their house and disrupt family life.\(^{141}\) The house goddess or other deities also visit people and the divinely possessed person then foretells the future of those who seek his guidance. Besides these house deities, Dalits also visit local \textit{babas} and shamans to seek their blessing and curative interventions. The curative interventions include rituals as well as the ritualistic elements for ingestion or smearing over the body. Sometime they are used to ward off evil spirits from disturbing individuals and families.

For Dalits the most vital part of the healing process is “the person of the healer and not his conceptual system or his particular techniques.”\(^{142}\) In \textit{babas}, shamans and other local healers, Indians see a person who can be completely trusted in his healing abilities. They generate a great amount of \textit{vishwas}, which can be loosely understood as faith. This faith is the key to the healing process.\(^{143}\) Kakar, a popular psychoanalyst in India, says that in “the whole spectrum of mental illnesses, Baba is a relatively more specialized healer than a Western psychiatrist or psychotherapist who ranges over a bigger segment of mental disorders.”\(^{144}\)

Rameshs’s distress about their son’s education can also be understood in terms of another strong cultural practice. It is a common practice in India for a son to look after his parents when they grow old. A responsible son who does well in his studies and secures a

\(^{141}\) Ibid.


\(^{143}\) Ibid.

\(^{144}\) Ibid., 41.
good job will certainly make them feel more secure about their old age. Just as pensions and retirement savings are valued in this country, sons in the family of people in India are seen as economic security for aging parents.

Gender inequality also comes into play when we consider the fact that Mr. Ramesh is more interested in his son’s education than his daughter’s. In India, daughters are considered as ‘paraya dhan,’ which means is that a daughter is considered to be “other’s property.” In other words, no matter how much a father invests in her education, a daughter will one day be given in marriage to some other family. She will be their property and not one’s own. This clearly reflects the patriarchal structure of the Indian society where women are seen in limited domestic roles. In India, a largely male dominated society denies equal rights and privileges to women. Traditionally a woman is expected to move in with her husband’s family and is responsible to serve that family. Even educated women with thriving careers tend to give up their professional lives in order to fit in with the expected marital role. Dowry is also a patriarchal practice that essentially gives newly married women the message that their value in society is measured by how much money they bring to their new home.

Internalized oppression also impacts the oppressed people by making them “believe in the perception that the oppressor has of them.”¹⁴⁵ From a liberation psychological perspective, Ramesh’s son, who is doing poorly in school and wants to drop out and go to the city for work, has internalized the values of the dominant culture. He has a negative image of himself as a Dalit person. Escaping to a city culture is his way

of dealing with his negative self-image. He feels he can be more anonymous in a city
culture.

**Utilizing Indigenous Healing Systems and Liberation Psychology in Providing**

**Spiritual Care to the Ramesh Family**

The first priority in care of Ramesh and his family is to secure the seized cows by
the high caste people. It is important to take on an advocacy role here. Martín-Baró calls
upon liberation psychologists to take a stand for the oppressed people; he stresses the
need for liberation psychologists to work hand in hand with community groups. In other
words, he strongly suggests the advocacy role for those who are working with oppressed
people such as Ramesh. Multiple strategies to secure the cows ought to be tried. The
whole community needs to be mobilized to make a public protest until the cows are
released. Efforts should be made to involve the local police station, social work agencies
and other political bodies to act in this matter. As individuals the Rameshes may not get
much response from local police forces or other social agencies, but as a group Dalits
have a better chance to involve them.

After securing the cows, it is essential to explore ways to address the
psychological problems from which Mr. Ramesh suffers. Mrs. Ramesh, Soumya, poses
the question whether it is right for a Christian to think about performing sacrifice as a
way to appease the spirits that are disturbing him. Many Dalit Christian families face this
theological problem because as Christians, through the rituals such as baptism, they were
made to abandon their traditions and cultural practices.
Not all Dalits have completely dissociated themselves from their cultural systems. In times of crisis or other important occasions, they are always presented with the problem of whether they are being true Christians in practicing rituals that belong to their traditional culture and religious beliefs. While I was a pastor in a Dalit village I was a witness to this dilemma among Dalit Christians. My senior pastor had a creative way of addressing this theological problem among Dalit Christians. He usually quotes Luke 9:50, “Do not stop him for whosoever is not against you is for you.” (NRSV). He creatively interprets this text to mean if there are ways to help somebody, and they are being used with good intention and for good purposes and ends, then Jesus is for them. When such an interpretation was given to one of the Dalit members in my presence, I could see the sense of relief that he or she experienced knowing that a Dalit does not have to choose between Christianity and traditional practices. I would use the same approach in this case study to allow Soumya to seek local healers that she would like to involve to perform the sacrifices she feels are important to appease the spirits.

Many local pastors sometimes participate in indigenous rituals, and this usually sends a strong affirmation to the family and their members. I meet with Mr. Ramesh and provide him a nonjudgmental and empathic presence. I encourage him to share his story, his fear and apprehensions, and offer him emotional support. Sharing his story helps alleviate his sense of loneliness, helplessness and vulnerability. We discuss how he feels about visiting the local healers as well as the sacrifices his wife proposes. I encourage him to share his feelings about to ask any questions he has. It is important at this time to affirm the resources of his culture and traditions. Dalits also often seek the pastor’s prayers for the ritual performed by local healers. Blessing these rituals or praying for
them gives Dalits additional positive affirmations for their use of those traditional medicines. Mr. Ramesh experiences significant relief because of his belief in the healing power of the shaman. As explained by Kakar the person’s belief is a vital part in the healing process. Healing also comes because Ramesh feels connected to the spirits of his ancestors, the larger network of healing systems that have been relied on for many of generations. This faith is a unique resource for his healing. During my interactions with Ramesh and his family, I must attempt to be aware of my own assumptions, values, and biases so that I do not impose them on the family.

It is also important to continue the theological discussion with Ramesh and his family even as they begin to perform a series of rituals and offer the sacrifice to appease the evil spirits. At the same time it is essential to let them know of God’s grace and love towards them. It has been my experience with Dalit congregations that such words have meaning for them when they are shown in actions. I employ practical strategies to address his financial problems. One strategy to empower Ramesh is to encourage him to pool resources. Ramesh, who has four cows, and other Dalit herdsmen who may have few of their own need to form a partnership whereby all of them take turns in pairs or more to take the cattle for grazing. This effectively allows them have a strong presence against the caste people and allows others time during the week to engage in supplemental economic activities. If there is a crisis like the one Ramesh had with his cows, this partnership builds stronger Dalit front to address the situation. United they would not be as intimidated and threatened as an individual Dalit herdsman would be.

---

146 Kakar, *Shamans, Mystics and Doctors*, 39.
Besides these social and economic strategies, it is also essential for Dalit communities to counteract negative myths and messages that impact their sense of self-esteem. For example, Ramesh’s son feels that it is better for him to drop out of school as it is not doing him any good. Dalit children are constantly barraged with cultural messages that they are too dull to pursue education and create better opportunities for themselves. The myth behind the festival of Maramma is another example of cultural elements that undermine self-esteem. The festival celebrates a story in which a brahmin woman kills her Dalit husband. From a liberation perspective it is important to de-ideologize such cultural myths. Dalits must not interpret their experiences through the false filters of hegemonic cultural ideologies and theologies that serve the interests of the dominant communities. They must learn to question them and develop abilities to see them from their own perspectives. This will enable them to see the exploitative agendas behind these hegemonic myths and develop effective strategies to counter them. It is essential to demythologize such myths and negative cultural messages that have been destructive to their identity. A strategy from liberation psychology to counteract such myths would be to utilize positive Dalit myths and circulate them as counter discourses through Dalit folk arts. Martín-Baró suggests that recovery of historical memory is an important task of liberation psychologists. Recovering of historical memory promotes cultural identity and the “pride of belonging to a people but also a reliance on a tradition and a culture, and above all, with rescuing those aspects of identity which served yesterday, and will serve today, for liberation.”147 This psychological strategy operationalizes Dalit liberation theologies to counter dominant hegemonic theologies. To

---

147 Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, 30.
address the critical needs of survival, liberation and cultural identity of the Dalit people, these oppressive embedded theologies need to be named and counteracted. Another strategy involves historicizing the Dalit situation. A materialist explanation for caste oppression helps Dalits understand the historical conditions that have contributed to their present situation.

As pastoral care provider, I also advocate on behalf of Mr. Ramesh’s son. It is important that I give school administration and staff the clear message that caste based discriminations should not be tolerated. Concrete actions are to be taken to protect those who are being discriminated against as well as disciplinary action against those who are violating the rules. A Dalit interest group should be formed among the students that can act as monitoring agency. Such groups have already being implemented in many institutions. More importantly, Dalit students should be exposed to images and personalities that instill positive images. Dalit history and stories must be included in the school curriculum. The fact that I completed my undergraduate studies without ever having read Dalit history shows the gaping hole in Dalit literature in school education.

Positive exposure to Dalit history would effectively address the Rameshs’ daughter’s situation as well. Positive cultural information can empower Dalit girls to go for education or develop resourceful skills that can provide employment opportunities. It is only after the Rameshs’ daughter is able to support herself that any effort must be made to reestablish relations with her husband or seek other alternatives. Positive images from the Bible and Dalit culture can have a lasting impact on how women view themselves. Constructive interpretation of women texts in the Bible may be the first and important step to more liberated experiences for Dalit women.
Education and conscientization are keys to Dalit liberation. They should take place at all possible community and cultural centers for the Dalit people. Through conscientization Dalit people will come to a deeper awareness of how their lives are conditioned by the dominant caste discourses that reinforce their image as a polluted and degraded people. They will come to know how they have internalized the consciousness of the oppressors that keeps them domesticated to the dictates of the dominant social groups. They will come to know how they are alienated from themselves, their culture as well as fellow Dalits under the caste system. These alienating experiences keep them subjugated and weak to resist the caste injustices imposed on them. Through the process of conscientization the Dalit people will come to the critical awareness that the caste system is a cultural construction that legitimizes and normalizes unequal and unjust caste relations that serve the best interest of the dominant communities. This knowledge and awareness will empower the Dalit people to build solidarity, to resist caste oppression, and to establish a just and equal society.

In the above case study, I utilize perspectives from liberation psychology and multicultural counseling to address psychosocial problems and challenges facing the Ramesh family in the communal contextual and intercultural model of pastoral care. The intercultural perspective demonstrates affirming and privileging Dalit cultural practices by encouraging members of the Ramesh to offer the sacrifice to appease the evil spirits. These psychological perspectives help me understand the Rameshs’ personal problems in the larger socio-cultural context of caste oppression and other dehumanizing patriarchal and sexist values that permeate their sociocultural world. I develop pastoral care strategies using multicultural and liberative psychological perspectives that affirmed the
Rameshs’ Dalit cultural beliefs and practices. I explore conscientization as an important tool of liberation psychology to develop critical awareness of the various ways in which caste ideological and discourses keep the Dalits subjugated.

**Narrative Features of a Communal Contextual and Intercultural Model of Pastoral Care Model**

The second case study utilizes narrative psychological perspectives in framing a communal contextual and intercultural approach to pastoral care in the Dalit context. This case study engages important narrative strategies such as ‘externalizing,’ ‘naming,’ and ‘looking for unique outcomes’ to deconstruct the dominant cultural narratives that limit opportunities and choices for the Dalit people. When Dalits internalize these dominant cultural narratives, they are deprived of voice and language and begin to interpret reality through the perspectives of the dominant communities. They learn to adjust to the demands of the culture that operates in the interests of the dominant communities. After engaging three strategies of deconstructive listening in the case study, I take the important step of co-creating an empowering narrative. Finally I explore some possibilities for using narrative therapy in a group context.

Sunita is a 20-year-old Dalit woman who moved to the city of Hyderabad three years ago from a rural village, leaving behind her parents and two elder brothers.\(^{148}\) Her father works as a village cobbler and her mother assists him in his job while also taking care of their home. The sons have also joined his father in his business. The family does

---

\(^{148}\) This is a fictionalized case study and the names do not represent any real people or events, but it reflects my experience of rural Indian culture.
not earn much but enough to get by. Because Sunita was a girl, her mother raised her with the expectations that she learn the essential things to be a good and responsible housewife. Much of the training therefore focused on tasks such as cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, knitting and other skills she would need to manage her mother-in-laws’ house, which is a culturally defined expectation from most of the girls in the Indian families. This trend is clearly changing in urban areas but remains much the same in rural India. Sunita was sent to school but even though she was doing well at school, the parents asked her to stop going to school after 5th grade. They assumed it enough for her to know how to read and write—the basic skills in literacy to get by in life. Anything more was not necessary to be a responsible wife and daughter-in-law. From the very beginning Sunita perceived what the future held for her when she saw her parents putting the different pieces of it together such as saving for her wedding and teaching her various domestic skills. And she did not like what was coming her way. She did not want to settle for marriage. She wanted more from life. She knew that there was no future for her in the village other than suffering the indignities of being an outcaste and a dutiful wife. She escaped by moving to the city, where she could explore other opportunities. Once there, she does not know how to go about achieving her goals.

One day she learns that some distant relatives live in the city. She takes their presence as an opportunity and tells her parents that she would like to live with them for a while. Her mother is totally against it, but her father says it is alright for a while. So she and her brother goes to live with them. Her brother returns immediately but she just stays on. She continues to stay against her parents’ wishes. The distant relatives agree for her
to stay provided she is a paying guest. They also have a daughter of her age so they think of her as her sister or friend. They do not see any harm in her staying with them.

Sunita finds a job as a waitress in a local restaurant. She wants to save enough money get more education and find better jobs to support herself and her family. But her dreams are cut short when she falls in love with a man who also works at the restaurant. Soon their relationship becomes physical and she becomes pregnant. When the boy learns about the pregnancy, he disappears. The relatives she lives with ask her to leave immediately because of the bad name she would bring to the family. Not knowing what to do, she turns to me for help. She was extremely scared of her situation and very confused about what she was supposed to do. She seems anxious and battles feelings of shame and a sense of failure in her life. She definitely wants to keep the baby. She does not show any signs of suicidal thoughts.

Following is the narrative model that guides my practice of pastoral care in this case. I focus first on the art of telling and listening to the stories of the counselee, in particular the role of the therapist. Second, I move to externalization of the problem story. Third, I help the counselee name the problem, and fourth I look for unique outcomes that challenged the dominant narrative. Fifth I focus on co-creating an alternative story that empowers the counselee in a group context.

**Case Elaboration**

Sunita faces a very difficult life situation. She is burdened with a deep sense of guilt. She clearly feels abandoned and betrayed by somebody she trusted and loved. She believes that she made some very wrong choices in life that have led her to this situation.
How can I assess her situation theologically? What important theological themes and commitments will guide my ministry of pastoral care to Sunita? What are some of the goals of pastoral care ministry to Sunita? Dalit theology provides the answers to these questions. The primary goal of Dalit theology is the liberation of Dalit people from all forms of socio-cultural oppression. “Dalit theology is doing theology in community within the context of the sufferings and struggles of Dalits through critical reflection and committed action for building new life-order.” More than securing the rights and privileges of the Dalit people, Dalit theology seeks realization of full humanness of all Dalit people. It affirms a Dalit identity that is life-giving. Sunita is struggling to survive in a casteist and sexist culture. She is seeking liberation from caste based oppression and realities of a patriarchal culture that dehumanizes her. Sunita is in search of a caring and just community that will empower her to resist systems of exploitation and dehumanization that deny her essential resources to live life to her full potential. The goals and commitments of the Dalit theology discussed above require the narrative resources in the communal contextual and intercultural model of pastoral care for Sunita.

Bama writes in her autobiography, “If you are born into a low caste, you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death. Even after death caste differences do not disappear.” Life is even more miserable for Dalit women, who


are called as ‘the Dalit of the Dalit.’\textsuperscript{151} They are oppressed not only by the realities of patriarchy in the Indian society that have permeated every possible economic, political, social, cultural and religious institution, but also by Dalit caste oppression that makes their lives even more powerless than Dalit men. In such doubly oppressive environment, “their voices are silenced and their dignity and personhood trampled on.”\textsuperscript{152} Dalit women are among the poorest of the poor. All of their lives they are dependent on a male person for them to survive. When they are children they are dependent on their fathers, when married they are dependent on their husbands, and when old they are dependent on their sons to survive. In media, culture and religion their virginity is idealized, while for men the badge of honor is sexual encounters with many women.

Men prey upon and abuse single women at work and in home. Their work at home carries no value and they are underpaid in almost all the professions. The dowry system makes them a burden for parents and when they go to the in-laws’ house, many of them are treated like servants. They are called upon to take care of everyone in the house and meet their needs. They have little say in whom they marry and no choice to leave their husbands, no matter how abusive, disrespectful and uncaring they may become. Indian society will blame them for the failure of the marriage, a blame that they have to carry for the rest of their lives, oftentimes depriving them of opportunities for remarriage. The husbands incur no blame and are soon able to find another bride as well as another dowry. For divorced women the prospects of remarriage are so bleak that many choose to

\textsuperscript{151} Aruna Gnanadason, “Dalit Women-The Dalit of the Dalit,” in Reader in Dalit Theology, A.P. Nirmal, (Madras: Gurukul, nd), 129.

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
remain single. However, living single itself is not easy as they are constantly harassed by society as a woman without virtues. Single women become targets for rape and sexual assault. For a Dalit woman, these oppressions are even worse. “Many high-caste Hindu men have certain ideas about people belonging to lower order” and they think Dalit women “have no morals and therefore deserved to be raped.” Such attitudes among men of high caste society blame women who become pregnant because of sexual relationship, and the man who participated in the sexual relationship that resulted in Sunita’s pregnancy is absolved of any guilt.

In India if a woman desires to educate herself and puts her career before marriage, her parents may have to give a higher dowry. If she attains a higher level of education, she may have great difficulty finding a husband because men rarely marry more qualified women or women with a higher level of income. This naturally discourages parents from investing in their daughters’ educations; instead a girl is gender trained to be a housewife and parents save money so that they are able to give her in marriage to a good family. It is because of the gender training in the families and the larger society that “causes significant guilt feelings if they do not live up to their traditional sex role expectations—and yet they experience frustration at the lack of fairness.” Sunita experiences guilt because she has not lived up to the traditional gender role expectations. She feels that she should have stayed at her parents’ home and pursued marriage rather than thinking about her own life.


154 Neuger, Counseling Women, 19.
Media reinforces dominant values in the society about the image, worth, value and gender role for women that are always against the interests of women. They promote external beauty of women than their intellectual capabilities; more women are shown as housewives than those who have established themselves in successful professional careers. Men and women both internalize these oppressive images. In Sunita’s case gender oppression not only deepens her feelings of shame for having violated the cultural norms or rules, but also makes her feel abandoned and isolated. In the Indian culture, becoming an unwed mother is a complicated matter for the mother, her family and the baby. So severe is social condemnation that many unwed mothers choose abortion or suicide as the best option for them to avoid disrepute for themselves, their families and the future child. An orphan child may have some sympathy in Indian society, but a bastard child does not. Knowing this, Sunita is of course at high risk for suicide; as her pastoral care provider, I need to watch for this possibility. She believes the label ‘unwed mother’ becomes her fixed identity. It must be remembered that “the problem of identity is deeply connected to questions of personal and social meaning.”\textsuperscript{155} This snap shot of gender discrimination and stereotypes fits all women in Indian society, but the experiences of Dalit women are worse.

It is important to understand why Sunita chooses a pastor for help. Women like Sunita face a credibility problem. When they take the courage to “speak their feelings and thoughts, especially ones that seem to be counter to their gender training, there is a high

risk that they will not be believed or they will be dismissed.”156 Families sometimes can be equally dismissive and judgmental towards them, especially in Sunita’s case because she went against their wishes to pursue her life goals. Pastors need to be aware that women like Sunita take a great risk to come to them to “tell the truth about their lives.”157 She turns to a pastor not only to tell her story, but also for support and in the long run for “spiritual sustenance, a fortified sense of justice, and hope.”158 Gender discrimination and caste oppression collude to deny Dalit women authentic and liberated lives.

Narrative Approaches in Communal Contextual and Intercultural Model of Pastoral Care with Sunita

As a male counselor I “need to be aware of the ways dominant discourse privilege my speech,” and to be aware of gender blindness so that I “do not silence her voice by interrupting her.”159 It is not ideal for me as a male counselor to work with Sunita, but her real life situation requires me to provide pastoral care. My first task as a pastoral counselor is to offer Sunita a safe place and non-anxious support. As Sunita has been rendered homeless I must make immediate arrangements for her temporary shelter, food and other basic needs. It is important to ask her whether she intends to go to her parent’s home and to check with her if she has any suicide thoughts or feelings.

156 Neuger, Counseling Women, 70.
157 Ibid.
159 Nylund and Nylund, “Narrative Therapy as a Counter-Hegemonic Practice,” 390.
The next task is to help Sunita tell her story. McLeod presents strategies that can help the counselee tell his/her story in significant detail, such as open ended questions, appropriate listening skills as well as appropriate postures.\textsuperscript{160} In “the first session, the counselee’s story may be unfocussed and rich in detail.”\textsuperscript{161} As Sunita tells her story, it is important for me to listen with new eyes, listening carefully to hear her pain.\textsuperscript{162} People like Sunita who belong to marginalized, nondominant groups, “are not only deprived of language but are also denied voice.”\textsuperscript{163} In order for me to help Sunita access her voice, I must be present with her “as fully and respectfully as possible, validating her attempts to find language for realities that have been denied, minimized, and distorted by the dominant culture.”\textsuperscript{164} By listening deeply and believing whatever she says, I allow her “to name and define the problems that she experiences” and I create “a novelty that in itself empowers and strengthens.”\textsuperscript{165}

There are three different stages of deconstructive listening. The first is externalizing the problem from the counselee. “Externalization is the foundation from


\textsuperscript{163} Neuger, \textit{Counseling Women}, 68.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 71.

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 88.
which many, though by no means all, narrative conversations are built.”166 It involves encouraging “persons to objectify and, at times, to personify the problems that they experience as oppressive. In this process, the problem becomes a separate entity and thus external to the person or relationship that was prescribed as the problem.”167 The second stage in the deconstruction process is to invite the person to name the problem. Persons who come to therapy often feel disempowered by the problems that they are unsuccessfully trying to overcome or resolve. In narrative therapy one of the aims is to help the counselee to regain his/her “sense of control over her life”168 “To name is to regain a little control; naming is taking the initiative, imposing a chosen identification on something, or someone, threatening.”169 Naming the problem also acts as a morale-booster, and is a means “of clarifying problems and normalizing them – both of which contribute to a person's sense that he can position himself differently in relation to the problem.”170 The third stage is looking for unique outcomes. “Here persons can be encouraged to recall ‘facts’ or events that contradict the problem’s effect in their lives and in their relationships.”171

166 Alice Morgan, What is Narrative Therapy? An Easy-to-Read Introduction (Adelaide, South Australia: Dulwich Center Publications), 17.

167 White and Epston, Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends, 38.

168 Payne, Narrative Therapy: An Introduction to Counselors, 42.

169 Ibid.

170 Ibid.

171 White and Epston, Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends, 56.
As I invite Sunita to tell her story she presents a problem-saturated description of her life, which can also be understood as the dominant story of her life. When Sunita is describing her problems, it is helpful to know the problem’s influence on her by asking how the problem affects her. In the dominant story of her life some of the problems she brings to my attention her belief that she is a complete failure in life; she feels ashamed of herself, and feels hopeless about her future. She thinks that God will not forgive her, and her parents will never forgive her. She worries how she is going to raise and provide for the baby.

After having listened to her problem-saturated story, I help Sunita to externalize the problem by changing it from an adjective to a noun. For example when she says that she is a failure, I reframe this statement that she is struggling with failure or struggling with shame and guilt. The externalization helps Sunita separate herself from the problem. In this process Sunita and I join together against the problem.

Next I invite Sunita to name her problems. This step has great potential for Sunita to gain a sense of control over her life. I guide this naming process by giving Sunita some examples of how I did it in the past with other clients. She gives them different names of evil witches that she had read about as a child.

Following naming of problems, I invite her to look for unique outcomes to the problem narrative. Here I look for times when Sunita was able to resist the problem narrative in her life. For example, her sense of shame and total failure can be challenged

172 Zimmerman and Dickerson, If Problems Talked: Narrative Therapy in Action, 54.

173 Neuger, Counseling Women, 90.
by her desire to be a mother to the unborn baby. Shame can be “characterized as a pervasive sense of worthlessness, being unlovable, and a feeling that there is a fundamental flaw in one’s being.” 174 Shame also is a “feeling of powerlessness; there seems to be nothing one can do to make it right. Shame about the self is not like guilt over specific actions. It is more-encompassing and total.” 175 Moreover,

there is shame about shame. One cannot speak of one's sense of worthlessness; by acknowledging it, one risks finding oneself further exposed. Hence one feels isolated from others, harboring secret shame about the self. 176

I invite Sunita to examine her pervasive sense of worthless in light of her desire to be a mother to her child. As of yet she does not know how she is going to do it, but she has the desire to be a mother and provide a home and future to the child, which directly contradicts her sense of worthless and failure. She could have an abortion, but she does not; this decision to be a mother to the unborn child really shows that she believes she has some worthy qualities. She also addresses the problem of shame by seeking help rather than isolation or by taking her life in despair.

Her sense of shame and total failure can also be challenged by the fact that even though Kishore, her relative in Hyderabad, asks her to leave because she became pregnant, his daughter Priya continues to visit her and remains her best friend. Priya recently took Sunita for a job interview where the manager said she can work as long as she is able to do the job and when a new position opens up, she will definitely offer the


176 Ibid., 172-173.
position to her. Sunita also intends to complete her training for secretary jobs before she delivers the baby. All these ‘subplots’ challenge her dominant narrative that she feels totally worthless and a failure. I also emphasize that there is nothing fundamentally wrong with her in loving somebody and being in a relationship with him. It was not her fault that the man she loved chose to violate her trust and body for his selfish needs. She is not responsible for his actions as the problem-saturated story has made her to believe.

Sunita also believes that her parents will never forgive her. As a counselor looking for deconstructive possibilities, I ask questions that have not been given any place in her core narrative. For example, I asked her what she thinks of the times when her mother called Mr. Kishore to inquire about her health, even though her parents have clearly stated that they don’t want her to come back to live with them for the shame that she has brought on the family. I ask her to think of the visit from her brother, who gave her some money from her father. These narrative strands challenge the dominant narrative that her parents do not care for her and do not want a reconciliation.

Sunita’s belief that God will never forgive her can be largely attributed to the punitive God image that most of the Dalits learn in their faith traditions. From the very beginning, Christian faith traditions have encouraged a punitive view of a personal God to strongly discourage Dalits from participating in their local religious traditions. For Sunita such a punitive view of a personal God who demands obedience certainly makes her feel that God will not forgive her what she has done. The idea of a punitive God reflects her embedded theology that is not life-giving but destructive for her in her
moment of crisis. She needs to engage in deliberate theology that is life-giving.\textsuperscript{177} One constructive possibility for Sunita to reformulate her image of God comes with the “power of community in the body of Christ.”\textsuperscript{178} Communities that truly serve as the body of Christ reflect God’s power of love and justice. In such a community Sunita will be able to articulate a new life-giving theology that connects her to a God who is compassionate and loving.\textsuperscript{179} In other words, besides encouraging her to connect with the compassionate and loving God, I also invite her to be part of the community where she can hear parts of her “own stories in the lives of others who are seeking wholeness in themselves and in the world.”\textsuperscript{180}

One of the most important parts of the deconstructive work in narrative therapy is identifying the sociocultural influences on the personal narratives of people. In counseling women this analytical and deconstructive work can take place in “counseling groups of women.”\textsuperscript{181} In groups women find a safe place to also develop and practice “counter stories,” which Nelson defines as stories that undermine and weaken dominant stories and retelling them in such a way that new interpretations emerge.\textsuperscript{182} I strongly believe that for women like Sunita individual narrative therapy may not achieve the

\textsuperscript{177} Carrie Doehring, \textit{Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach} (Westminster John Knox, 2006), 116.

\textsuperscript{178} Neuger, \textit{Counseling Women: A Narrative, Pastoral Approach}, 58.

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 132.

results that are possible in a group context. A narrative counseling group for Sunita would require women who share similar experiences. In particular I would like this group to consist of members who are single or unwed mothers. It would indeed be a challenge to bring together such people, but the value that such group for Sunita cannot be underestimated. Even though the majority of the group members can be from a Dalit background, I would certainly prefer for a little more to allow learning experience both for Dalit and non-Dalit women. There are some who argue that even people from the dominant group should be invited to share their stories because they also need to ask for forgiveness and “move on to new preferred life stories.”183 I have certain reservations about this approach. At least in the first few sessions non-dominant people must be allowed to meet by themselves until they get comfortable.

The significance of group counseling is that it provides a good safe supportive and nurturing context for women to share their inner most experiences. “Within the group, members can play the role of audience or assist one another in noticing the development of an alternative account of self in group interactions.”184 My primary focus in this narrative group counseling would be for the members to identify how members have internalized dominant cultural stories about gender and patriarchal values and how these internalized stories that they have come to see as normal limit and constrict their options in life.


Sunita can explore how the dominant cultural stories have shaped her personal narratives about shame, feelings of worthlessness and total failure that she struggles with. For example, the patriarchal values of the society hold her completely responsible for the physical relationship with a boy with whom she was in love. It severely punishes her by banishing her from her relative’s house and making her homeless. She was fired from her job. Her parents did not want her to come home. She has a totally bleak future in terms of finding a life partner. Until she finds somebody who marries her, she will forever be called an “unwed mother.” While she is punished with these social and cultural sanctions, the man who is responsible for impregnating and abandoning her receives no blame. After deconstructing these social norms, she can re-author her story, She can gradually stop blaming herself and suffering shame as she works with other group members to explore constructive options in her life. The group members act as witnesses and “as an audience to performance of the new story.” They help “thicken” alternate stories. In this group context Sunita can feel the strength to seek justice for herself by finding the man and holding himself accountable. She can continue to pursue her aspirations for job and education as well being a mother to her baby without the guilt and shame that she has suffered with so far.

Summary: A New Model of Pastoral Care

These two cases demonstrate that the communal contextual and intercultural model of pastoral care is an appropriate and relevant model in the Dalit context. It

---

provides a framework for putting Dalit liberation theology into practice. Traditional models of pastoral care in the Dalit context have failed to address the critical issues of survival, liberation and cultural identity of the Dalit people. They have failed to adequately emphasize the clear link between the internal and external conditions of the caste oppression. The prevailing models of pastoral care in the Dalit context have a poor understanding of the internalized oppression of the Dalit people. Empirical studies in the various South India states reveal that Dalit pastors do not have a good grasp of the internalized caste experience of the Dalit oppression. They also lack adequate models of pastoral care to address the critical needs of survival, liberation and Dalit cultural identity.

The communal contextual and intercultural model of pastoral care challenges the individualized and clerical-based pastoral care approaches in the Dalit context. It affirms that personal problems that the Dalit individual and families struggle with should be seen in the larger socio-cultural context of caste oppression. It highlights the need to hold the internal source and external source of oppression together for complete emancipation of the Dalit people. This model of pastoral care calls for utilizing the communal resource of the faith congregations to serve the pastoral care needs of the Dalit individuals and communities. It also highlights the importance of valuing, affirming and reclaiming Dalit cultural resources to address the identity issues of the Dalit communities.

The study of the Ramesh family demonstrates that when pastoral care practices among the Dalit people utilize the indigenous cultural resources of the Dalit people, there are better outcomes. Multicultural perspectives of Sue and Sue’s tripartite model can guide pastoral care providers in the Dalit context to develop culture affirming practices.
in. Liberation psychological perspectives, especially the process of conscientization, highlight the need to make the Dalit communities critically aware of the multitude of ways in which caste related ideologies and discourses subjugate the Dalit people and keep them in a cultural of silence. These tools focus on the internalized oppression of the Dalit communities. Conscientization is key to Dalit psychic liberation because it enables them build solidarity among themselves and work towards the transformation of their social order to make it just and equal for all communities to exist in life affirming ways.

Narrative psychological perspectives are also amenable to the communal contextual and intercultural model of pastoral care as they provide effective strategies such as externalization to identify and deconstruct dominant cultural narratives. As the Sunita case study shows, when the Dalit people internalize these dominant cultural narratives, they lose voice and language. This process of internalization leads them to interpret reality through the perspectives of the dominant communities and to adjust to the demands of a culture that operates in the interests of the dominant communities. Through the process of deconstruction, Dalit communities are empowered to create life affirming narratives that form the basis for positive cultural identities.

**Strategies of the Communal Contextual and Intercultural Model of Pastoral Care in the Dalit Context of Caste Oppression**

There is an urgent need for the Dalit pastors to take seriously the caste based oppression, both in its overt and covert forms, and to give it the highest priority in their pastoral care work among the Dalit people. Unless pastors are strongly convinced of the urgency of this need, much of the pastoral care will continue to address the symptoms
rather than the problem of caste oppression itself. The focus must remain on breaking the chains of caste oppression at the personal and social level. There is need for a clear understanding of the external sources of oppression as well as Dalit people’s internalized oppression. While Dalit pastors show some degree of awareness of the external sources of oppression, their understanding of the internalized oppression of the Dalit people lacks depth. Dalit people’s liberation is not possible unless Dalit oppression is understood as both an external and an internal reality, and that outer and inner transformation must be held together in all activities of pastoral care among the Dalit communities.

The first and most important strategy for the Dalit pastors is to view the Dalit Church as the object of their pastoral ministry but also as a partner, a valuable resource in offering pastoral care to the Dalit people. This calls for redefinition of the concept of pastoral care among the Dalit people. No complete Dalit liberation is possible unless Dalit people themselves are mobilized to resist the forces of caste oppression and work towards their own liberation. One of the most debilitating effects of internalized oppression is that the Dalit people remain a divided people, divided along caste lines and engaging in caste based practices among themselves. As a divided people, they can never form a cohesive force to resist all forms of caste based oppression to which they are subjected by the dominant communities, in the church, society and other state managed institutions of administration and political bodies. Their internal division sabotages any effort to give strong voice to their demands and representation in the public arenas.

Dalit pastors also need to pay attention to the cultural capital of the Dalit people. Centuries of caste oppression has not managed to wipe out the Dalit culture. However, there is a need for the church to develop a clear theological understanding on the
categories of gospel and culture. As described in the first case study, Dalit culture is the principle resource in building a Dalit identity. Dalit pastors must identify ways in and through which Dalit culture can be reclaimed and affirmed. Dalit culture must become the medium through which the Gospel is communicated and experienced. Liberative and nourishing elements of the Dalit culture need to be put in the service of the meeting the socio-cultural needs of the Dalit people. Another important strategy of pastoral ministry is to collaborate with secular authorities and other religious Dalit movements, organization and bodies to address Dalit critical needs of liberation, survival and cultural identity. This collaboration is essential to forming a wider Dalit movement and building wider Dalit platforms to protect and promote the interests of the Dalit people.

Conclusion

My central aim in this dissertation project has been to argue for an alternative model of pastoral care to meet Dalit critical needs of survival, liberation and cultural identity. Current models of the ministry of pastoral care in the Dalit context of caste based subjugation and oppression do not meet these needs. The ministry of pastoral care continues to be clerically based and individualistically oriented. It has not given serious attention to the communal needs of the Dalit people who are one of the most despised cultural groups in the Indian society. Current model of pastoral care have also failed to understand the psychological challenges of the Dalit people. Dalit pastors do not have a clear grasp of the psychological enslavement of the Dalit communities. Dalit people continue to suffer from self-esteem and dependency issues, and are more willing to adjust
and accommodate in the oppressive social order rather than challenging the forces of oppression.

Dalit liberation theology provides a framework for challenging traditional models of pastoral care. However, Dalit liberation theologians have not adequately described how these theologies can be operationalized within Dalit Christian communities. Given the social realities of the Dalit people and the dysfunctional approaches of the current models of pastoral care, I have attempted to construct a communal contextual and intercultural model of pastoral theology and care that effectively addresses the Dalit people’s critical needs of survival, liberation and cultural identity. This model of pastoral care engages both the indigenous theological, cultural and psychological resources and relevant psychological perspectives of narrative and liberation psychology and multicultural counseling to gain a deeper understanding of the Dalit context. This model offers effective pastoral care strategies to address the outer as well as inner emancipatory needs of the Dalit people. I offer this alternative model for consideration by Christians, both lay and clergy, engaged in service to the Dalit people.


Dagostino-Kalniz, Victoria M. “Toward a Being Based liberatory Educational Paradigm: A Dialogical Encounter Between Paulo Freire and Erich Fromm,” Ph.D. Diss., The University of Toledo, 2008.


“Building Multicultural Counselling Bridges: The Holy or a Poisoned Chalice?”
_Counselling Psychology Quarterly_ 18, No. 4 (2005): 247-259.


___.


___.


___.


___.


___.


___.


___.


___.

Towards Dalit Hermeneutics: Rereading the Text, the History and the Literature. Delhi, India: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1994.


_____.


_____.


316


_____. Towards Dalit Hermeneutics: Rereading the Text, the History and the Literature. Delhi, India: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1994.


Narula, Smita. *Broken people: Caste Violence Against India's “Untouchables.”* Human Rights Watch. 27.


_____.”Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective.” In *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, ed. A.P. Nirmal, 139-144. Delhi: ISPCK, 1999.


322


