

March 2013

Dear friends,

I want to say how grateful I am to MWiB for their commitment to care and for the hard work they have put into creating this pack for us. Sometimes we feel we can do so little that we end up doing nothing. I want to invite you to reflect on the difference you are able to make by your response to all that is offered to you here.

If some of the stories shock you, then recognise God's call to act.

If some of the action Dalit peoples and others are taking excites you, then join in. Use and share the prayers, the Biblical material and the resources.

Join MWiB in offering your 'little' or 'much' in support for these people, and in challenge to those who have the power to change things.

And may God continue to bless MWiB and all of us as we seek to share God's love and offer God's hope.

Alison Tomlin

President of the Methodist Conference 2010-11

- Since its inception in July 2011, Methodist Women in Britain (MWiB) has been seeking ways to show solidarity with the cause of Dalit people in India and around the world, and a small task group began meeting in January 2012.
- We soon realised that this is a huge subject with many angles and that many other groups were also committed to the struggle, so we offer this pack to complement all that is being done, in the hope that it will add to the wider awareness of this issue across the Methodist Church and further afield.
- We are very grateful to many people for their help and encouragement in all sorts of ways, and their names, along with others, are included in the resources lists in the final section. All resources can be photocopied for use as needed.
- Additional material, including a PowerPoint presentation, is available on www.mwib.org.uk – follow the links to Dalit Solidarity.

Starting on a journey

Walking alongside our Christian sisters and brothers, and indeed alongside all Dalits in their struggle for justice, is a key way in which we can show support and solidarity with them.

As incoming MWiB President from July 2013, I was privileged to go on a 3-week visit to the Church of North India (CNI) in February 2013. The visit had a number of objectives, for MWiB, for the wider church here and in India, and for me personally:

- To further the work already being done by MWiB, by experiencing and understanding more of CNI's work with Dalits, especially women and girls.
- To visit and learn about the new CNI model of community hostels that give Dalit children access to education.
- To discover the priorities of the Church of North India, particularly in their women's work, with a view to developing relationships if possible.

I learnt at first-hand that

- Dalits make up 85-90% of the membership of CNI, so any programme for CNI members and their families, in the areas I visited, is for Dalits.
- Dalit Christians (and Muslims) face double discrimination as schemes to reserve a quota of places for Dalits in higher education and in employment, recognising their disadvantaged position in society, are only available to Dalits of the Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh faiths. Campaigning to change this law is a key part of CNI's work for social justice for its members, and one on which they are putting increasing emphasis.
- The vast majority of Dalits still live in extreme poverty and experience severe discrimination in all aspects of life, despite the recent development of cities, the growth of the Indian economy, the emergence of a metropolitan middle-class, all of which only benefit up to 20% of India's 1.2 billion people.
- For Dalit women and girls, with lower participation in education and employment, with fewer rights in society and with lower literacy rates than their male counterparts, the position is even bleaker, without targeted intervention and support.
- Girls are not valued equally with boys in many parts of Indian society, with abortion of female foetuses and the killing of baby girls being not uncommon.
- Parts of Indian society too are not respectful of girls and women, with sexual harassment and assaults being commonly found.

As MWiB explores a major partnership with the Church in North India (see 5.5-5.6), CNI has chosen to focus that support initially in the Marathwada Diocese. This is part of the state of Maharashtra, which stretches from Mumbai to Nagpur. The Diocese has 2 main cities Aurangabad and Jalna. Despite being poor and having little experience of partnership working, the Diocese is making bold plans to build and manage a hostel in each of the two cities. These will be for Dalit girls to help them access education which is not available in their home locations.



India: A brief introduction to the Dalit situation

- India is the seventh largest country in the world by area but has the second largest population of over 1.2 billion, of whom 26% are Dalit or Tribal*.
- India's economic boom may have led to a rich elite and growing middle class, however 450 million people continue to live in extreme poverty.
- The great majority of those living in extreme poverty are Dalit or Tribal people, which means they are discriminated against, marginalised and considered to be less important in society. They are often unaware of their basic human rights to education, healthcare and services.
- They have given themselves the name Dalit, meaning crushed, broken.
- The Hindu caste system which believes social status is linked to the actions – good or bad – of a previous existence results in a contemptuous regard for the poor.
- Although discrimination and atrocities against Dalit or Tribal people are outlawed, the majority of Dalits in India are forced to live in colonies in rural villages or city slums and the majority of 'bonded labourers' in India (up to 60 million) are Dalits.
- A report in 2006 stated that public health workers refused to visit homes in 33% of villages; Dalits were prevented from entering Police Stations in 26.7% of villages; Dalits were denied access to water sources in 48.4% of villages because of segregation and untouchability practices; Dalit children had to sit separately while eating in 37.8% of schools; Dalits are not allowed to drink in the tea shops.
- Literacy rates for Dalit women are below 40% in rural India.
- Violence against Dalits:
 - It is estimated that every 2 hours a Dalit is assaulted.
 - Every day 3 Dalit women are raped, 2 Dalits are murdered and 2 Dalit houses are burned.

***Dalit** is the name adopted by those who are traditionally seen to be untouchable. They are considered to be below the caste system altogether, and are often assigned to menial jobs like cleaning latrines and collecting waste. They are/were therefore considered to be polluted and untouchable. See 1.5-1.6 Introduction to Dalit Theology for more detail.

Adivasi or Tribal communities are those that are said to be indigenous to India. Historically they were said to have been in India before the Hindus came. They have their own languages (although many now speak state languages as well) and are extremely marginalised from mainstream society, often living in forests or very remote areas.

Information from: MRDF website; "Untouchability in rural India 2006", 'A Cry for Dignity' Mary C Grey Available as an illustrated PowerPoint presentation at www.mwib.org.uk Dalit Solidarity

Introduction to Dalit Theology – Elizabeth Joy

- Dalit Theology articulates the faith of Dalit people from their dehumanized experiences of utter pain as well as total rejection due to caste-based discrimination.
- Dalits existed as no people with no history of their own, no right to claim any human-rights as they were deemed less than humans and ill-treated like animals or even worse!
- However, as we look at Dalits and their past, although difficult, it is not impossible to reconstruct their history through some archaeological and literary sources. Their history can be traced back 3500 years when they were a great people with their own glorious history as rulers and not slaves, a people with their own landed properties, wealth, riches, productive skills, freedom and a dignified human life.

The Caste Structure:

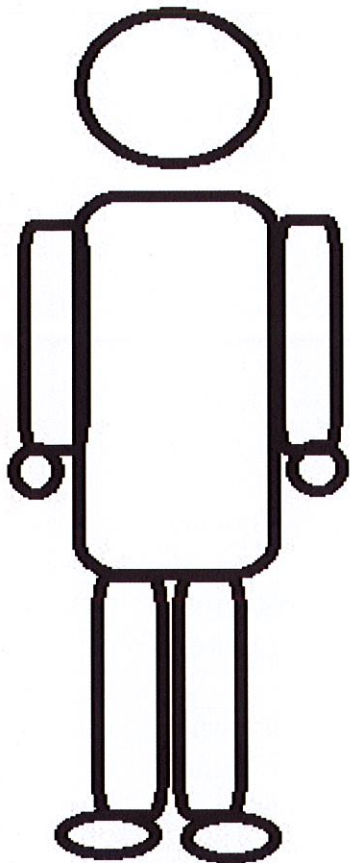
- The age old caste structure (see overleaf) has its origin and sanction in the Hindu religion and is divisive and decisive. It operates by perpetuating the evil system through endogamy (the practice of marrying within a specific ethnic group or social class) and thus through the body of the male and female.
- All identities of a person are affected as it has its impact on the socio, economic, political, geographical, linguistic and faith status.
- It operates based on mainly the concept of ‘Purity and Pollution’ of Brahminism that enables the Brahmins to dominate, exploit and exclude, marginalizing all other castes, with the worst impact being on the untouchables or Dalits.
- Apart from the domination, social exclusion and economic marginalization, this social hierarchy manifests itself in occupational segregation, economic deprivation, untouchability, political powerlessness, social immobility and economic instability.
- This also, in a hierarchical gradation, gives power to the caste that occupies a higher position to rule over the ones lower than them and the ones in a lower position to serve without question the castes that occupy a higher position than theirs. Thus we have four castes in a hierarchical level one above the other while the fifth one (Panchama) lies outside this system and inferior to all these four, hence called outcast, or the fifth caste.
- So the people are divided on the basis of their birth and caste operates as a social and religious hegemonic structure relegating lower positions to women within each caste.

The emergence of Dalit Theology (Dalit Christian Theology) in the late nineteen seventies has changed the theological landscape of India radically. It is becoming a strong tool in the hands of the people who have been in a state of oppression, exploitation and marginalization for the last 3,500 years within the hierarchical Indian Society.

When Dalit Theology emerged from the bitter inhuman experiences of Dalits, the goal was ‘Total Human Liberation’. Although Dalit Theology originated from the Liberation Theology of Latin America and the Feminist Theology of America, this goal gave it a new direction, and hence its departure from Liberation Theology and Feminist Theology.

The caste system

Human beings created from God Brahma's body



At the top of the caste pyramid are the **Brahmins**, the priestly class, coming from the head and wielding the maximum power and authority over all other castes and outcastes. They are the most privileged ones having the best resources as well as access to education, employment. Socially they have the most superior status and are the custodians of the Hindu religion.

Then, from the shoulders, come the **Kshatriyas** who represent the warrior or ruling class having the political power

They are followed by the **Vaiśyas**, coming from the thighs. These are the business people who have the economic power

From the feet come the **Sudras**, the servant, or working class, who have to serve all the other castes.

Outside this caste hierarchical pyramid, at the bottom-most level, are people who have been treated as less than human. **Dalit** is the name or identity they have chosen for themselves. This root word Dal in both Sanskrit and Hebrew has many meanings such as “crushed, broken, spilt, rent asunder, oppressed”. They are the “outcastes”, also formerly called the **untouchables** or referred to by other names such as the **depressed class** (a name conferred on them by the British), **scheduled caste** (coined by Simon Commission), **panchamas**, **outcastes** and **Harijans** (coined by Gandhi).



Social and spiritual activist, Elizabeth Joy addresses Dalit issues among others focussing on ‘Total Human Liberation’ which is the goal of Dalit Theology. She is currently studying part-time for a PhD in Theology at King’s College, London. She is also the director of Meora World Mission. Elizabeth was formerly the Executive Secretary for Mission Education with the Council for World Mission and is the only woman to have held the post of General Secretary of Student Christian Movement India in its 100 year history.

She has recently co-edited along with Dr Hrangthan Chungi the book entitled, “Dalit Tribal Interface” published by CWM/ISPCK/NCCI/MWM/PCI in 2012 ISBN 978-81-8465-236-9