

# Dalit theology



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Dalit theology is a branch of Christian theology that emerged among the Dalit caste in India in the 1980s. It shares a number of themes with liberation theology, which arose two decades earlier, including a self-identity as a people undergoing Exodus.

[1] Dalit theology sees hope in the “ Nazareth Manifesto” of Luke 4,[2] where Jesus speaks of preaching “ good news to the poor ... freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind” and of releasing “ the oppressed.”[3]

### Development

A major proponent of Dalit theology was Arvind P. Nirmal (1936–95), a Dalit Christian in the Church of North India.[4] Nirmal criticised Brahminic dominance of Christian theology in India, and believed that the application of liberation theology to India should reflect the struggle of Dalits,[4] who make up about 70% of Christians in India.[5]

Nirmal also criticised the Marxist element within South American liberation theology.[1] Nirmal drew on the concept of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53[6] to identify Jesus himself as a Dalit – “ a waiter, a dhobi, and bhangi.”[7] Dalit theologians have seen passages in the gospels, such as Jesus’ sharing a common drinking vessel with the Samaritan woman in John 4,[8] as indicating his embracing of Dalitness.[9]

M. E. Prabhakar expanded on the Dalitness of Jesus, stating that “ the God of the Dalits ... does not create others to do servile work, but does servile work Himself.”[10] He also suggested that Jesus experienced human, and

especially Dalit, brokenness in his crucifixion.[10] Prabhakar has developed a Dalit creed, which reads in part: “ Our cries for liberation from harsh caste-bondage

Were heard by God, who came to us in Jesus Christ To live with us and save all people from their sins.”[11] Vedanayagam Devasahayam (b. 1949) of the Church of South India followed Nirmal as head of Dalit theology at the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, and further developed Nirmal’s ideas, writing a number of books.[12] Devasahayam later became bishop of the Church of South India’s Madras Diocese.[12] Dalit theology opposes indigenization movements within Indian Christian liturgy, since these are seen as reinforcing traditional caste hierarchies.[13]

However, the incorporation of some pre-Sanskritic Indian religious traditions is supported.[13] Introduction

The emergence of dalit theology in India can be considered as a significant event in the history of Indian Christian thinking as it is very much related to the historical experiences of an oppressed and down trodden people. It can be conceived in the context of the struggles of a community against casteism and their continued aspirations for social justice both in church and society.

However, the immediate concern for formulating a Dalit theology emerged within the Christian Dalit Liberation movement. So the sources and process of Dalit Theology lay in the agony and sufferings of Dalits in their search for self identity, equality and their search for a meaningful life in the community

WHO ARE THE DALITS? The social structure of India is stratified, with in built inequalities and injustices, based on the caste- system sanctified by Brahmanic -Hinduism. Although social stratification exist in almost all societies, the caste system is quite unique to the Indian society.

Sanctioned by the religio-philosophical system, the Dalits are socially placed outside the four-fold caste system and they are referred to as the fifth caste ( panchamas ), even when they live as outcasts. Dalits are differentiated from the lowest strata of other societies with regard to their stigma of untouchability.

“ The Dalits form the inner core of poverty, which is birth ascribed. They have been excluded from the caste system (social hierarchy), hence out-castes; declared ritually unclean, hence untouchable; and pushed out for fear of pollution to live on the outskirts of villages, hence segregated.” In fact, Dalits have been the most degraded, downtrodden, exploited and the least educated in our society.

They have been socially and culturally, economically and politically subjugated and marginalized through three thousand years of our history. However, the Dalits in India are believed to be the ancient Dravidian race, the original people of India. We can say that they only introduced culture in India. They were the owners of all property.

The Aryans, a series of related and highly self conscious tribes sharing a common language and religion, began their invasions of India from the Northwest around 1500 B. C. If a king wins a battle in the neighboring

country, he makes the loser king and his people as slaves and snatches all their properties.

Here also, the Aryans snatched away all their properties and kept them aside branding them as out-caste. So the dominant view traces the origins of both caste and untouchability to the Aryans themselves and to their ways of relating to the original peoples of India with whom they came into contact with.

Untouchability and segregation are resulted due to the Brahmin supremacy among the Dravidian races. The Dravidian race was initially casteless and had horizontal ethnic divisions and clan groups which under Brahmanization became vertically graded and ritually ranked by the principle of purity-pollution. WHAT IS DALIT THEOLOGY?