

## EDITORIAL

Dalit Theology may be unfamiliar to our foreign readers of the *Journal of Dharma*. But everyone is aware of the contemporary Theologies of Liberation which have been the outcome of the struggles and cry of the poor and oppressed.

When the oppressed and exploited masses in Latin America began to revolt against the existing socio-economic, political and cultural domination and discrimination in dialogue with their own faith, there emerged the Latin American theology of liberation. The emergence of the Black Theology was the result of the dehumanisation, deprivation and discrimination against the Blacks. The world consciousness is now, more than ever, alert in freeing South Africa from apartheid. People all over the world join hands in solidarity, demanding the breaking down of apartheid and the establishment of a non-racial, united and democratic South Africa.

The 'Dalits' in India are the *people created in the image of God* but paradoxically neither treated nor recognized as humans. They are outcastes as they are excluded from the Indian social hierarchy (caste system). The Sanskrit '*dal*' and the Hebrew '*anāwīm*' convey the same predicament of this side-tracked, suffering, poor, oppressed and exploited section of population. They are victims of social, cultural, economic and political subjugation. Mahatma Gandhi fittingly represented their heartbreaking situation when he said: "socially they are lepers, economically they are worse than slaves, Religiously they are denied entrance to places we miscall 'houses of God'. They are denied to use public roads, public parks etc." During the British rule these people were known as the "depressed classes", "untouchables", "outcastes" and "backward classes". In the Indian Constitution the dalits are the Scheduled Castes and the Backward Classes. Article 46 of the Indian Constitution says: "The state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation."

Today, in India people hear the forceful clamor of the dalits. It is a call to deliver them from the bondage of discrimination, injustice,

inequality and oppression. The clamor and the response to this existential outcry of the 'broken' and the 'backward' and the under-privileged people in India is the Dalit Theology. A theology in order to a living theology must be in dialogue with the concrete concerns of the people and actively involved in the vital problems of the people. Can religions in India come forward and selflessly involve in the socio-political emancipation of the oppressed? The renowned advaita philosophy of India exclaims the realization of God in the other self. Can Indian religiosity be an inspiration for radical structural change inviting to see the Divine in the poor, oppressed and the 'outcaste' who also is 'human' and created in the image of God?

Indefatigable spirit of struggle from within the dalits and unprecedented solidarity on the part of the political, social and religious organizations can dismantle the prevailing oppressive structure and humanize the society. Any religion engulfed and entangled with barriers and boundaries is essentially an irrelevant religion. Religion must, above all, evoke the Divine in human, whether 'touchable' or 'untouchable'. The dalit cry is a divine call to which all religions must respond creatively and courageously.

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