

PROTEST: THE LANGUAGE OF PROFECY

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In their quest and struggle for identity, dignity and full humanity, the dalits have changed the rigidity and legitimacy of the caste system, and their leaders have championed their cause by striking a path of dissent through counter-cultural movements and literature¹. The Dalit Sahitya (literature) Movement, which was started in Maharashtra, aimed at the liberation of the dalits through social change, striking a violent note of protest against the legitimacy of the caste system² and against the organized violence savagely lashed out on them in God's name. Here is a sample:

One day I cursed that... God.
He just laughed shamelessly.
My neighbour—a born-to-the-pen Brahman—was shocked.

He looked at me with his castor-oil face and said,
“How can you say such thing to the
Source of the Indescribable,
Qualityless, Formless Juggernaut?
Shame on you for trying to catch his dharma-hood
In a noose of words.’
I cursed another good hot curse.
The university building shuddered and sank waist-deep.
All at once, scholars began doing research

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¹M. Amaladoss, “Folk-Culture as Counter Culture: The Dalit Experience”, *Jeevadhara* 24 (1994) 31; A.M.A. Ayrookuzhiel, “Dalit Theology : A Movement of Counter-Culture”, in M.E. Prabhakar (ed), *Towards a Dalit Theology* (Delhi : ISPCK, 1989) 92-95.

²J.H. Anand, “Dalit Literature is the Literature of Protest”, in Bhagwan Das and James Massey (eds), *Dalit Solidarity* (Delhi : ISPCK, 1995) 177-184; A.P. Nirmal, “A Dialogue with Dalit Literature”, in M.E. Prabhakar (ed), *Towards a Dalit Theology* (Delhi : ISPCK, 1989) 66-75. See E. Zelliott, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on Ambedkar Movement* (New Delhi : Manohar Publications, 1992) 267-333. This type of literature is available today in many of the Indian languages, including dialects. It resembles very much the black literature of the Afro-Americans in the U.S.A.

Into what makes people angry.
 They sat in their big rooms fragrant with incense,
 Their bellies full of food,
 And debated.
 On my birthday, I cursed God.
 I cursed him, I cursed him again.
 Quipping him with words, I said.....
 "Would you chop a whole cart full of wood
 for a single piece of bread?
 Would you wipe the sweat from your bony body
 With your mother's ragged sari?
 Would you wear out your brothers and sisters
 For your father's pipe?
 Would you work as a pimp
 To keep him in booze?

Oh Father, oh God the Father!
 You could never do such things.
 First you'd need a mother—
 One no one honours,
 One who toils in the dirt,
 One who gives and gives of her love."
 One day I cursed that...God.³

Such poems, which resemble the lament-cum-protest of Job (ch 3), do articulate and accentuate the cry for justice to a God who has a preferential love for the oppressed. One is greatly struck by the similarities these poems exhibit, not only in their content but also in form.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the protest elements which are articulately manifest in the book of Job and in the dalit counter-cultural movements and to see the similarities between the symbolic world of Job and the symbolic world of the dalits.

³K.Meshram, cited in Zelliott, *From Untouchable to Dalit*, 300-301.

I. The Protest of Job

1. Job the Rebel

In its own folklore style the Joban narrative opens in the mysterious land of Uz and the eponymous hero is introduced as a superlatively righteous person (1:1-5). Consequently his practice of justice in his social life became legendary (Ezek 14:14, 20; Sir 49:9).

Yahweh himself was so pleased with Job's superb character (1:8; 2:3). Even the satan did not doubt his integrity, but only suspected his ulterior motives (1:9-11; 2:4-5). This occasioned a wager between the satan and Yahweh who accepted the former's challenge because of his trust in Job, and permitted the test to be done.

All of a sudden Job's world began to crumble, and a series of calamities rained down upon him in a single day. He was stripped of all his possessions category by category (1:13-17), and was reduced to utter and abject poverty. He was also deprived of all his ten children (1:18-19) who were the promise of prosperity in old age and assurance of retirement security in olden times. Left behind without a progeny, he became a man without a future (cf 29:18-20), and his name was destined to be blotted out from the face of the earth.

Afterwards stricken with a deadly and humiliating disease, he endured unbearable physical suffering (2:7-8). He was so disfigured and became so loathsome in appearance that even his close friends could hardly recognize him and performed the rites of mourning as if he were already dead (2:11-13).

To physical death that was already at work in his flesh there is now added social death. Although his sympathetic and supportive wife was left alive, she seems to have distanced herself from him by no longer sharing his religious convictions (2:9-10; cf 19:17). Like 'fair weather friends' all his relatives and acquaintances deserted him (see 42:11; 16:20; 19:13-19; cf Prov 19:4; Sir 6:8-13), except the three friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar (2:11-13). To make matters worse, as an outcast he was ostracized from the community which had hitherto held him in the highest esteem, was isolated from the warmth of human fellowship, and was forcefully

pushed from the centre of society to its periphery (2:8).⁴ Now he remains alone, abandoned by one and all (30:29). The sense of alienation haunted him continually (ch 6; 19:13-22).⁵

The catastrophe is total. Everything worthwhile in life has been taken away from him. The most blessed on earth has now become the accursed of all, because poverty, sickness and death were considered direct punishments of God for sins.⁶ The fact that Job was suffering greatly was itself an indication to his contemporaries that he was a great sinner, even though he knew that he was innocent (19:5-6). This was the most agonizing of all.

Having been deprived of all but his bare existence, Job immediately went into mourning according to the customs of his time (1:20). However, it was not just an expression of grief, but an act of surrender and submission to Yahweh's omnipotent decree. He did not curse Yahweh as the satan had predicted (1:11;2:5), or as his wife had suggested (2:9). Instead he blessed him as he saw only his hand in all the event: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord had taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (1:21). Right in the midst of great adversity he remained unbroken, persisted in his integrity (2:3, 9; 1:22; 2:10), and feared Yahweh 'for nothing' (1:9). Thus the prologue (1:1-2:10) portrays Job as a paragon of piety and patience in the face of unexplained suffering (Jas 5:11).⁷

⁴F.I.Andersen, *Job: An Introduction & Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976) 92, 95; G.Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Maryknoll : Orbis Books, 1987) 6.

⁵K.Thompson, Jr. ("Out of the Whirlwind : The Sense of Alienation in the Book of Job", *Interpretation* 14 [1960] 51-63) analyses Job's triple alienation: alienation from God, alienation from friends, and alienation from self. Similarly N.C.Habel. "Only the Jackal is my Frined' : On Frineds and Redeemers in Job", *Interpretation* 31 (1977) 227-236.

⁶J.Lutyten, "Perspectives on Human Suffering in the Old Testamnet", in J.Lambrecht and R.F.Collins (eds), *God and Human Suffering* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1989) 4-12.

⁷For details see K.J.Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature* (Berlin : Walter de Gruyter, 1991) 6-29.

However the proverbial patience of Job abruptly came to a dramatic end, never to appear again in the story. Crushed under the weight of affliction of his body and the agony of his soul, he broke the silence of seven days and seven nights (2:13-3:1), and gave a heartrending expression to his bitter feelings by means of a lament (3:3-22), which is the language, often the only language, of the oppressed and the afflicted⁸ — a language of protest which is a legitimate response to suffering.⁹

i. Job Cursed the God of Life

All the good things that Job had owned and cherished were suddenly taken away from him, so that he was reduced to a chaotic, death-like state (2:7-8). He struggled for life in the face of death. His suffering was so intense that he became weary of life—the very life which he had previously celebrated and promoted—and could, therefore, only curse the day of such a miserable birth and look for deliverance from it in death (cf Sir 41:2).

Even though Job did not curse God explicitly, by deliberately cursing the origins of his life (3:1-10) he implicitly cursed him, the creator and author of all life, and thereby revolted against him. He also bemoaned his own sad plight (3:11-26) by giving vent to a death-wish: Would that he had died, he would now enjoy the bliss of rest and relief among the dead (3:11-19; cf 10:18-22; 13-14; 7:16)! He did not seek restoration of his losses, but an escape from life, because God's preservation of his life, in his view, would mean only an artificial prolongation of his misery. Whereas in the kingdom of the dead he sees no social distinction or discrimination between kings and subjects, masters and slaves, the great

⁸C. Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981) 264. J.D. Pleins, *The Psalms: Songs of Tragedy, Hope, and Justice* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993) 1, affirms that not only the laments but all the psalms 'represent Israel's way of speaking to God in a world of individual pain, political oppression, and communal distress'. Also Ceresko, *Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom: A Spirituality for Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999) 77-79.

⁹K.J. Dell, *Shaking a Fist at God: Understanding Suffering through the Book of Job* (London: Fount, 1995) 54-69.

and the small, though they were in life locked together in a bitter social relationship (3:13-15; cf Wis 18:11-12).¹⁰

Over and above, in the netherworld, according to Job's point of view, all activities associated with oppression on earth disappear: the wicked are free from their turmoil, the powerful from their extortions, prisoners from ceaseless hard labour, and slaves from their masters (3:17-19; cf Qoh 4:1-3; Sir 30:17). That is what makes Sheol a restful place.¹¹ Having thus experienced life at the bottom of the social pyramid as an outcast and an object of contempt, and having seen the darker side of society, especially the misfortunes and injustice which the oppressed and the despised suffer, Job identifies fully with all of them.¹² This sense of fellow feeling and solidarity makes his protest all the more sharp like that of the prophets.¹³

As the dialogue progresses, Job's sense of solidarity with the lowly deepens. As a result, he accuses his friends (6:22-27) of being heartless hagglers who would bargain over the fate of orphans (cf Kgs 4:1), and who would readily sell a friend for gain (cf Gen 37:27-28). With biting sarcasm he accuses Bildad—and probably all the three—of having violated the patriarchal mores by doing nothing to rescue him from his oppressive circumstances (26:2-4)—a role which he himself had played in times of fortune (cf 4:3-4). He also blames the wicked for the gruesome conditions of those who are without food, shelter or clothing, drawing special attention to the plight of the poor, the widows and the orphans (24:2-12).¹⁴

¹⁰J.E.Hartley, "From Lament to Oath : A Study of Progression in the Speeches of Job", in W.A.M.Beuken (ed), *The Book of Job* (Leuven : Leuven University Press, 1994) 81-82.

¹¹L.G.Perdue, "Job's Assault on Creation", *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1986) 306.

¹²N.C.Habel, *The Book of Job* (London : SCM Press, 1985) 111; D.J.A.Clines, *Job 1-20* (Dallas : Word Books, 1989) 92-97.

¹³Ceresko (*Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom*, 84) says: "Job cries out on their behalf and protests against their suffering and exploitation. As a result, the language of the book more closely resembles the language of the prophets than any of the other wisdom writings".

¹⁴Here Job stands in solidarity with all the wretched of the earth. See C.A.Newsom, "Job", in C.A.Newsom and S.L.Ringe (eds), *The Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville : SPCK, 1992) 134; J.E.Hartley, *The Book of Job* (Grand

Job had hoped that a life dedicated to the preservation and promotion of justice would be rewarded by God with a great progeny and immortal glory, coupled with power (29:18-20). But then his present predicament is a different story altogether. So he contrasts the glory of his past with the misery of his present existence in ch 30.

A close reading of this lament clearly shows that he was tormented not so much by his losses, not even by the loss of his health, as by shame—the loss of status and honour in the community he once governed with justice.¹⁵ He speaks of the nobodies who now despise him (30:1-8; cf 17:6)—the scoundrels of society who were driven out from society and were destined to live like wild beasts under subhuman, nay inhuman conditions without even the minimum food, clothing and shelter.¹⁶ Job's scathing contempt for these lower-class people seems to take the form of mocking their poverty (30:1-8). What has then come of his solidarity with the lowly?

C.A. Newsom opines that his former solidarity with the oppressed seems to have evaporated before his preception that his honour has been trampled by those without honour.¹⁷ However, H.H Rowly remarks that Job's contempt is not because these people were miserable outcasts, but because such persons, like those Job has always treated with generosity and kindness, now turned on him, despised him and treated him as beneath

Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 342; Ceresko, *Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom*, 83-84.

¹⁵L.M.Bechel, "Shame as a Sanction of Social Control in Biblical Israel : Judicial, Political, and Social Shaming", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 49 (1991) 47-76; Habel, *Job*, 418-420.

¹⁶Habel, *Job*, 418-419; E.M.Good, *In Turns of Tempest : A Reading of Job with a Translation* (Stanford : Stanford University Press, 1990) 305. Good comments that 30:1-8 could be a vivid imagery for the desperate conditions of the poor already mentioned in 24:5-8.

¹⁷Newsom, "Job", 134. She also finds here the same old 'proud patriarch' for whom true solidarity with the oppressed is an impossibility. However, Hartley ("From Lament to Oath", 95, n.91) suggests that Job's attitude towards the rabble in 30:1-8 shows that he has not reached the standard of 31:15 completely.

themselves.¹⁸ On the contrary, A.R. Ceresko suggests that Job's language here betrays that he shared both the prejudices of his class and those of his community as a whole against this group; but now that he is forced by circumstances to experience the isolation and abandonment of these very outcasts, he gains a new perspective, and as a result his attitude towards them changes.¹⁹

What is emphasized here, therefore, is that Job has become the butt of human ridicule and scorn (30:9-15), that he was even worse off than these unfortunate people.²⁰ This state of affairs, he says, has aggravated his physical suffering (30:16-17) and has reduced him to a state of despondency and despair—a feeling that God has turned against him and is cruelly persecuting him to the point of eliminating him completely (30:18-23; cf. Chs 6;16;19).²¹ He repeats his earlier claim that he has been all along a man of compassion and concern for justice (30:24-25; cf 29:12-17); and yet he affirms, God has ignored his own cry for justice (30:18-23). As a result, he laments, rather protests that his whole being has been thoroughly affected (30:28-31).

ii. *Job Attacked the God of his Friends*

Moved by genuine compassion and a sense of loyalty, the three friends of Job came to condole with him and to console him (2:11).²²

¹⁸H.H.Rowley, *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids : Eerdmans, 1976) 190. According to him, it is their ingratitude and arrogance that are castigated, and their moral character matches their wretched state.

¹⁹It is these changes of perspective and attitude on the part of Job, according to Ceresko, that are more important in the book. See Ceresko, "The Option for the Poor in the Book of Job", *Indian Theological Studies* 26 (1989) 113-121.

²⁰R.A.F.MacKenzie and R.E.Murphy. "Job", in R.E.Brown, J.A.Fitzmyer and R.E.Murphy (eds), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Bangalore : Theological Publications in Inida, 1990) 482. R.Girard, "Job as Failed Scapegoat", in L.G.Perdue and W.C.Gilpin (eds), *The Voice from the Whirlwind : Interpreting the Book of Job* (Nashville : Abingdon Press, 1992) 187, comments : "He has become the pariah even of those who are treated as pariahs. He is despised and rejected by a sort of minority group, a subproletariat".

²¹Rowley, *Job*, 195; Thompson, "Out of the Whirlwind", 51-63.

²²N.C.Habel, "Only Jackal is my Friend" : On Friends and Redeemers in Job", *Interpretation* 31 (1977) 227-236.

Sitting on the refuse heap beside him for a whole week, they spoke, without uttering a word, 'perhaps the wisest consolation, their silence' (2:13; cf 13:5).²³

Since they were soon shocked by Job's lament bordering on despair and blasphemy, and were, therefore, compelled to answer his repeated 'whys', they abandoned their wise silence, they were more interested in the disease than in the patient and missed one basic thing, namely his integrity, concentrating wholly upon the fact that he was suffering. In their passionate attempt to explain the cause of suffering, they expounded with conviction and vigour, and reiterated in one form or another the iron law of retribution (4:7-9; 5: 14-27; 8:11-22; 11:6; 15:20; 18: 12-13; 20:23).²⁴

This boils down to saying that some sin of his, however, secret or inadvertent it might be, must have brought all the misery down upon his head. Hence in their eyes he could only be classified as a hypocrite and secret sinner (cf 32:1). This is the main burden of their argument which runs through three rounds of speeches and counter-speeches (chs 4-14, 15-21, 22-27). In other words, they rose to God's defence and spoke falsely of him (13:7-8). Therefore Job called them treacherous wadis (6:15), worthless physicians (13:4) and miserable comforters (16:2) and chided them for their unsympathetic attitude and inhuman behaviour (e.g., 6:14-21; 12:2-5; 19:2-3, 22, 28).

The friends generally caricature God as 'the impartial celestial administrator', who is passionless, unconcerned and too mechanical, reacting according to a rigid code for reward and punishment (4:7-9).²⁵ For them his suffering itself is a sufficient evidence to conclude that he is a sinner worthy of punishment (19:5-6). But the same logic leads Job to the

²³M.D.Guinan, "Job" in D.Bergant and R.J Karris (eds), *The Collegeville Bible Commentary* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1989) 679.

²⁴L.Alonso Schoekel, "Toward a Dramatic Reading of the Book of Job", *Semeia* 7 (1977) 52-56. A large number of interpreters have identified the age-old doctrine of retribution as the central message of the book (see Dell, *Book of Job*, 35-39).

²⁵R.A.F.MacKenize, "The Purpose of the Yahweh Speeches in the Book of Job", *Biblica* 40 (1959) 440; T.N.D.Mettinger, "The God of Job: Avenger, Tyrant, or Victor", in L.G.Perdue and W.C.Gilpin (eds), *The Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992) 41-42.

conclusion that God is a criminal who perverts justice (cf 8:3), because he knows well that he is righteous and yet he suffers—so also the victims of society like himself are righteous and yet suffer inordinately – while the wicked do all sorts of barbarous, inhuman atrocities and yet go about with impunity. He contests the theory of retribution, because they had come to equate it with justice and thereby defend social evils and injustice in the world. He also raises the perennial question, Why do the wicked prosper? (21:7-6), like the prophets (Jer 12:1; Heb 1:13; Mal 3:15) and the Psalmist (Ps 73:3). His contention is that God either makes no distinction between the good and the wicked (9:21-24; 21:22-26), or takes no interest in the world, with the result injustice holds sway.

God for Job, is a mighty hero or warrior who attacks and thereby causes suffering (e.g., 10:2-12; 13:23-27; 16:7-12). Therefore he calls him names: gangster God (9:17-19; 10:17; 16:7-14), savage God (19:5-12, 22; 30:19-23), watcher of humanity (7:19-20; 10:14; 13:27), hunter of human beings (6:4; 10:16; 13:15), oppressor (7:1-6, 12-15; 10:3; 13:25-27; 19:21-22; 23:2, 13-16), monstrous tryant (13:21; 23:16; 31:23), criminal (9:21-24; 10:2) and so on. All this is tantamount to plain heresy. To put it differently, he accuses God of being a violent anarchist who reverses his own cosmic order (10:8-12; 12:7-10; 9:4-10; 26:5-14), and of favouring the wicked and the chaotic forces in order to oppress human beings, especially the poor and the powerless (24:2-12).²⁶

iii. *Job Challenges God*

Job's suffering is an indication for him that God has taken some sort of legal action against him (10:2; 19:5-6). Therefore he also uses legal complaints which are both addressed to God, his judge (e.g., 9:14-21; 27:7-12) and which are ultimately directed against him, his adversary—he

²⁶The force of this pericope is that God is the defender of the lowly, but he seems indifferent to their needs or delays intervening to redress their ills (Habel, *Job*, 360). W.A.Brueggemann ("Theodicy in a Social Dimension", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33 [1985] 17) comments that God is assaulted not for direct actions, but because of unfair, unreliable social practices and agents which God sanctions. Nevertheless Job acknowledges that God dethrones and destroys the powerful, the wicked (12:16-25; 21:7-34; 24:1-25; 27:7-23).

appeals to God against God himself (10:3-12; 13:17-14:12)!²⁷ He charges God of having perverted justice, and summons him to appear in the court.

Job does not trust God to conduct a trial (9:28-29), and therefore he looks for an umpire who is not simply a neutral arbiter, but an advocate and a powerful redeemer who would stand at his side, espouse his cause and fight for his rights (9:33). To appropriate the words of Habel, he longs for someone who will identify with an oppressed human being and strive to remove the rod of oppression imposed by his celestial taskmaster.²⁸ Finding no support on earth, Job gropes for a celestial witness who would appear on his behalf and bring his case to court—for a friend who would support him and act as his interpreter and advocate (16:19).

Conscious of the full force of injustice he suffered and of his own exercise of justice (30:16-31), Job is now driven to confront the false accusations of his friends by passionately seeking a complete clearance through a series of exculpatory oaths (ch 31) by which he vows to accept terrible curse upon himself if he has committed any of the sins he enumerates.²⁹

To start with, Job swears that he has not looked upon virgins with lustful eyes and thereby has not assaulted their honour (31:1-4), because eyeing a virgin as someone desirable was a known habit of owners of slaves such as Job was (cf Sir 9:5; Prov 16:30). He claims that deceit and dishonesty especially in business transactions were foreign to him (31:5-8; cf 27:4-6; Prov 20:23). In particular, he disavows any form of inhumanity to the unfortunate who are too weak to defend themselves—married women (31:9-12), male and female slaves (31:13-15), the poor, the widows and the orphans (31:16-23; cf 29:12-17; Sir 4:1-10).

Although Job was exceedingly rich, he disclaims that he ever made an idol out of his riches (31:24-25; cf Sir 31:8), but put his trust in God (cf

²⁷C.Chin, "Job and the Injustice of God: Implicit Arguments in Job 13:17-14:12", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 64 (1994) 91-101; M.B.Dick, "The Legal Metaphor in Job 31", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 (1979) 37-50.

²⁸Habel, "Only Jackal is my Friend", 232-233; *Job*, 196-197.

²⁹In default of witnesses or clear evidence, such an oath – denial of an accusation – was accepted as settling a case (Hartley, "From Lament to Oath", 94-98, 87-88).

22:24-26). His oath about idolatry (31:26-28) is not out of place, because his concern here is not about a cultic crime, but about social injustice often associated with idolatry.³⁰ He affirms that he did not harbour a vengeful spirit towards his enemies, nor took pleasure at their downfall (31:29-30). His unstinted hospitality was widely known. No wonder then that he stoutly denies every kind of hostility especially to strangers/travellers (31:31-32). He also put away every form of hypocrisy or dissimulation in his dealings with others (31:33-34), since he was a person of integrity (1:1). By foreswearing abuse of land (31:38), he hints at the fact that he has observed all the agricultural laws whose intent was to protect the soil from ecological tyranny, to provide for the needs of the poor (e.g., gleanings – Lev 19:9-10; 23:22), to maintain land ownership within the family, and to ensure offerings were made to the sanctuary, especially the tithes which were meant for the sustenance of the Levites, aliens, the orphans and the widows who had no land of their own (Deut 14:27-29; 26:12).³¹ His final claim is that he has willingly paid the tenant farmers/hired labourers their wages (31:39).³² Thus all the sins enumerated

³⁰Guinan, "Job", 693. The first commandment on the worship of the one God was meant to profess one's faith in Yahweh who demands justice and hates oppression (Jer 7:1-15; Ezek 18:5-0), while the false gods/idols do not and cannot attack oppression, but only legitimize it. This is the reason why the oppressors hate Yahweh and deny him (21:14-15; 22:17-26; Ps10:3-4). Idolatry and oppression go hand in hand (Ezek 22:3, 6-7), so also idolatry and accumulation of wealth (Isa 2:6-8; Jer 50:37-38). Whereas Job wanted that his life be one of 'surrender to the God who has a preferential love for the poor' (Gutierrez, *On Job*, 43).

³¹L.G.Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt : Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job* (Sheffield : JSOT Press, 1991), 186-187; Rowley, *Job*, 206. Perdue adds that social crimes and religious sins were thought to affect the land adversely, resulting in famine (Deut 28:24; Amos 4:6-8; cf Job 16:18; Gen 4:9-12; 3:17-18). Thus Job practised a kind of ecological justice towards the earth, mother of life and source of food for the poor. See Gutierrez, *On Job*, 42; C.Uehlinger, "The Cry of the Earth? Biblical Perspectives on Ecology and Violence", *Concilium* (5/1995) 42-57; Rui de Menezes ("The Pentateuchal Theology of Land", *Bible Bhashyam* 12[1998] 5-28) concludes that the land was parcelled out to all the tribes according to their size, and there is no reason for amassing of property by individuals to the detriment of others (24:2; 1 Kgs 21) which would be an exploitation or abuse of the land.

³²Job, as an honest employer, did not abuse his workers by withholding their wages (Deut 24:14-15; cf Sir 34:27), nor shorten their life span by demanding

here are primarily sins against his fellow human beings, and yet they are also sins against God.³³ Righteous actions and attitudes promote the well-being of society, while sinful and criminal deeds lead to social harm.

Job's abiding concern for the welfare of others was based on common origin, inherent dignity and fundamental equality of all human beings, the ultimate basis for human rights and social justice: "Did not he who made me in the womb make them? And did not one fashion us in the womb?" (31:15; cf 33:6; 34:19; Gen 1:27; Prov 14:31; 17:5; 22:2; 29:13; Mal 2:10; Sir 4:1-10; 17:1-3). Since he recognized slaves, among others, as God's creation and as equal before the law, he has 'taken a giant leap forward in advancing the value of humanity'.³⁴ It is thanks to this sublime realization and recognition that Job treated justly not only the slaves, but all human beings, especially the marginalized (31:13-15).

Prompted by his fundamental rectitude, he works up the courage to confront the Almighty with his titanic challenge (31:35-37; 27:2-6; cf 7:11-21; 13:3, 13-27; 23:2-7). In so far as legal language is incorporated, his lament becomes a protest which lays the matter out before God so that he will do something about it.³⁵

excessive production under poor working conditions. See Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 187-89.

³³Guinan ("Job", 694) suggests that these sins cover all types of relationships: to God, to self, to fellow human beings, and to nature itself, and therefore righteousness is a matter of right relationship.

³⁴Hartley, "From Lament to Oath", 95; Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 185-186. R Gordis (*The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies* [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978] 339) notes that 31:15 contains the most striking affirmation in the Bible, unsurpassed anywhere else, of the equality of all human beings. As D.Cox ("Peace and Peacemakers in the 'Writings' of the Old Testament" *Studia Missionalia* 39 [1990] 18) puts it, "The fact that all have been created by God leaves each individual with the inherent responsibility of seeing to the needs, material and human, of others". Common humanity as God's creatures levels or elevates everyone. Therefore every human being should be treated humanly in spite of and irrespective of colour, creed etc. (D.Bergant, *Job, Ecclesiastes* [Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1982] 150).

³⁵Plenis (*Psalms*, 25) says that 'a lament, spoken by an innocent individual, carries a Job-like quality, especially in its protest against a God who, in the midst of suffering, appears to be the enemy'.

2. The Function of Job the Rebel

During the early post-exilic period (538-400 BC) the Jews faced a severe socio-economic crisis on account of the rigorous taxation system which had been imposed by the Persians. Crushed under the weight of this exploitative policy, the small farmers and those at the lower strata of society were forced to go into debt and slavery (see Neh 5:1-5). Some of the wealthy, large landowners were concerned only with their own advantage; they were not bothered about their religious obligations in the social sphere; they proposed and enjoyed affluence by cleverly exploiting their social standing (see Neh 5:5; Job 20:19; 21:7-16, 23-24, 28-33; 22:8; 24:4-27). On the contrary, some pious, rich Jews like Nehemiah himself took their inspiration from the egalitarian ideals of Israel's covenant and its demand for solidarity with those in difficulty (see Neh 5:10-11) and put themselves in danger of economic disaster, loss of position and isolation (see Job 30:1, 15, 28; 19:9, 13-20). Thus there must have been some three groups among the Jews which were at odds with one another. It was but natural that the question of God's justice and the meaning of innocent suffering arose with all the concreteness, sharpness and urgency of a real life situation.³⁶

Led to a feeling of alienation and hopelessness, the pious lower class must have become strongly eschatological in their orientation to life, and awaited their redemption by means of a great social upheaval to be brought about by God who would completely do away with the unjust economic and social structures and take the side of the poor (see Isa 56:6-57:21). They also claimed for themselves that they were the real pious ones, the real Israel. This was born of the protest, as Al bertz puts it, of the victims who refused to accept as God-given the humiliating economic pressures which cast them to the ground, and it gave those who were robbed of their rights and dignity a new dignity with a religious foundation.³⁷

³⁶R. Al bertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period 2 : From the Exile to the Maccabees* (London : SCM Press, 1994) 437-522; Ceresko, *Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom*, 68-71, 78-79.

³⁷Al bertz, *History of Israelite Religion 2*, 503-507; Possibly this was due to the influence of the postexilic prophets, especially Second Isaiah. The oppressed, therefore, are not a pitiable group of unfortunates who merely wait passively for their deliverance, but a *dynamic* group which plays a significant role in biblical history as

At this critical juncture the author of the book of Job, playing the role of a pastor, wanted to offer consolation and guidance to his divided, but dejected community. To this end he must have borrowed the folk-tale of 'Job the patient', definitely familiar to them and reworked it to suit his purpose, by introducing the dialogue section (3:1-42:6),³⁸ which portrays Job as "the tormented, devout, rebellious man who has raged against the human situation and demanded that God 'justify his ways to human.'"³⁹

The function of the present book of Job then is to raise questions – legitimate questions about God, about his way of governing the world, about one's faith – and to register one's protest by challenging and changing traditional ideas. This is ultimately the task of theology: to talk about God in the context of suffering and death forced upon the poor.⁴⁰ In spite of their will to defend God, the friends of Job only flattered him and did not speak of him what was right (42:7); whereas Job's cry and quest was for a new image of God and a new language of God. Thus, questioning the traditional concept of God (e.g., chs 12-14), he paints a picture of the 'existential God of human experience'. In the process, he learnt to speak correctly about God and became a theologian (42:7). Interestingly Job is also sensitive to the needs of the suffering masses and theologizes in solidarity with them and that made his theologizing more real and authentic. The task of a theologian therefore is to become one with the 'Job-people', to experience life in solidarity with them, to voice their silent, or better silenced protests and to articulate their deep-seated thirst for total liberation, for a new world order.⁴¹ This is, according to Gutierrez,

reflected in the foundational event of the exodus (Ex 6:6-7; 19:1-20:21) and which again looks for a new social order to be actualized in and through its struggle for liberation (cf Isa 65:12-25). See G.M.Soaresh-Prabhu, "Class in the Bible: The Biblical Poor a Social Class?", *Vidyajyoti* 49 (1989) 336-342.

³⁸Ceresko, *Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom*, 70-71; Dell, *Shaking a Fist at God*, 44-53. Focusing on Job's protest, some authors have tried to present him as an impious and impatient rebel like Prometheus. See Dell, *Book of Job*, 44-56; Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*.

³⁹MacKenzie and Murphy, "Job", 486.

⁴⁰Gutierrez, *On Job*, xvii-xix.

⁴¹J.Susaimanickam, *Commitment to the Oppressed: A Dalit Reading of the Book of Job* (Excerpts from the Doctoral Dissertation submitted and defended at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, 1996) 41-44.

the language of prophecy which appears principally in chs 3-31- a language of protest against unjust suffering – a language which is characteristic of the prophetic tradition.⁴²

II. The Protest of the Dalits

The impact of the caste system is still very strong, as it governs the life, of an average Indian. The caste people have vested interests in maintaining and perpetuating it; whereas with the dalits it is the greatest obstacle. As B. Das has rightly observed, if the dalits do not destroy caste, caste will destroy them and therefore their salvation lies in its eradication.⁴³

Several religious leaders and social reformers, who have emerged from among the dalits, have championed their cause. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who remains a symbol of achievement and leadership among them, made the liberty, equality and fraternity of his people the centre of his life's concern; he tried to conscientize them through his slogan, "Educate, Agitate and Organize", and as a sign of protest to Hinduism led some three million of his followers to Buddhism.⁴⁴

Today an educated dalit elite had emerged, cutting across religious, linguistic and regional barriers, and had begun to consolidate its position through concerted and continued action. The growing strength of militant dalit movements all over the country – a power which no longer can be ignored – has pushed their problem to the forefront.⁴⁵

⁴²Gutierrez, *On Job*, xii-xiv, 19-49.

⁴³B.Dass, "Dalits and the Caste System", in J.Massery (ed), *The Indigenous People : Dalits – Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994) 75.

⁴⁴S.Lourdusamy, *Religion as Social Protest* (Calcutta : Multi Book Agency, 1993) 95-112; B.Das, "Untouchability, Scheduled Castes and Nation Building", in J.Kananikil (ed), *Scheduled Castes and the Struggle Against Inequality* (New Delhi: ISI, 1983) 20-23; M.Amaladoss, *A Call to Community: The Caste System and Christian Responsibility* (Anand:Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1994) 61-65.

⁴⁵Antony Raj, "The Dalit Christian Reality in Tamilnadu", *Jeevadhara* 22 (1992) 106-111; J.C.B.Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1992) 180-188. However, every move of the dalits for liberation is resisted, often with violence, by the dominant castes; it has provoked rising incidents of atrocities

The dalits are not reconciled to any sort of humiliation heaped upon them. In spite of their constant experience of the denial of the required socio-cultural and politico-economic space, they still articulated their legitimate wrath, perhaps in organised ways, through their counter-cultural movements. When they undergo the ordeal of dehumanization, they detest such situations, it gets expressed itself, very often, in terms of certain dormant expression of their righteous wrath.

The protest elements seeking to usher in an alternative vision for equality and fraternity are present both in the latent and articulate forms of their protest (rejection of the very caste system). It is these protest elements which are the essential threadline of their spirituality (stream of life from within). For want of space, we highlight only some of the major elements.

i. Against the Term 'Harijans'

The Indian sub-continent is divided both vertically and horizontally by the mighty and divisive institution of caste which is the 'linchpin of society'.⁴⁶ An individual is born into a particular caste group and is forced in a way to socialize willy-nilly within that group because of a strong sense of solidarity. Indian society is a caste society and not a class society. caste is, therefore, an affirmation not of an accidental but essential difference between people.⁴⁷

However, there is a group of people who are excluded from the caste system altogether and are, therefore, considered 'outcaste'. Nevertheless they are meant to serve the other four groups, the so-called 'caste people'.

During the British rule these people were known mainly as 'depressed classes', though other names like 'exterior classes',

and caste war in every corner of the country; it has also increased caste consciousness and consolidated caste solidarity among the caste people. See F.Wilfred, "Dalit Christians – Quest for Dignity", *From the Dusty Soil: Contextual Reinterpretation of Christianity* (Madras: University of Madras, 1995) 131-132.

⁴⁶See Antony Raj, "Disobedience: A Legitimate Act for Dalit Liberation", in A.P.Nirmal (ed), *Towards a Common Dalit Ideology*(Madras : Gurukul, 1989) 40.

⁴⁷G.M.Soaes-Prabhu, "The Indian Church Challenged by Poverty and Caste", *Sedos Bulletin* 26 (1994) 171-182.

'untouchables', 'outcastes' and 'backward classes' were also in vogue. But Dr. Ambedkar objected to the use of the term 'depressed classes' as degrading and contemptuous, and suggested different terms such as 'Protestant Hindus' and 'Non-conformist Hindus'. Mahatma Gandhi, in his attempt to rid Hinduism of untouchability without giving up caste, called them 'Harijans' (the children of God)-a term that had become of late a condescending and unwittingly insulting designation which the so-called untouchables themselves rightly resent.⁴⁸

The Constitution of India has outlawed untouchability. Therefore, the 'ex-untouchables' are mentioned in the documents of the government as members of the 'scheduled castes', that is, of the castes which appear in the list of the disadvantaged groups which are entitled to preferential treatment by the government through the system of reservation in matters of education, employment and the like.⁴⁹

M.J. Phule, a nineteenth century social reformer, was the first to use the word dalit to refer to the outcastes in order to indicate the fact that they were the oppressed and broken victims of the caste-ridden society. It was however the followers of the Dalit Panther Movement of Maharashtra who gave currency in 1970s to the term dalit as a constant reminder of their age-old oppression, denoting both the state of deprivation and the people who are oppressed.⁵⁰ The people, hitherto considered 'outcastes', prefer to style themselves dalits, because it is not a mere name or title, but a counter-cultural affirmation – an assertion of pride in their heritage, a

⁴⁸See J.Kananaikil, "The Scheduled Castes and their Status in India", in W.Fernandes (ed), *Inequality, its Bases and Search for Solutions* (New Delhi : Indian Social Institute, 1986) 89-92.

⁴⁹Kananaikil, "The Scheduled Castes and their Status in India", 93, 96-99; Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 129-190. This policy of reservation, also known as 'compensatory/protective discrimination', is in fact the Indian government's 'option for the poor'. See Wilfr, "Human Rights and the Mandal Movement : Reflections on Human Rights in an Asian Context", *Sunset in the East? Asian Challenges and Christian Involvement* (Madras : University of Madras, 1991) 49-64.

⁵⁰J.Massey, *Roots : A Concise History of Dalits* (Delhi : ISPCK, 1991) 10.

rejection of oppression and an expression of hope for recovering their past self-identity.⁵¹

ii. Against the Caste System

The exclusion of the dalits from the caste system and their position in the social hierarchy are legitimized and sanctioned by the Hindu religion. In Hindu thinking a rigid causal nexus between sin and suffering is postulated. This is known as the law of *Karma*, an Indian version of the Biblical doctrine of retribution (e.g., Prov 26:27-28; Deut 30:15-20). Thus each person is involved in a cycle of births and the status that one has in a given birth is determined by one's past actions. Once a person is born in a particular caste, the only way of attaining ultimate liberation is by doing one's duty – the duty of one's caste. In this way *karma* provides a religious justification for one's disabilities and teaches people to accept their present condition. It may be more a way by which the affluent justify their own good fortune and the wretched of the earth, their misfortune.⁵²

The notion of pollution still conditions the relationship between the dalits and the caste people, and the amount of pollution that a caste carries with it makes it low or high. Forced to do menial jobs like removing dead animals and garbage, sweeping the streets and drains and the like, the dalits are treated by the so-called 'clean castes' as ritually polluted and hence untouchable, because they are considered to be in permanent contact with polluting objects and therefore themselves impure. Consequently their touch, their breath, their sight, and even their shadow are thought of as polluting the pure castes. They are literally pushed out to live on the periphery of the villages of the caste people and segregated like the lepers of olden days; they are expected to maintain a graded distance from the

⁵¹Massey, "Christian Dalits : A Historical Perspective" *Journal of Dharma* 16 (1991) 45; P.M.Larbeer, "Dalit Identity – A Theological Reflection", in V.Devasahayam (ed), *Frontiers of Dalit Theology* (Madras: Gurukul, 1997) 379-381. Antony Raj, "The Dalit Christian Reality in Tamilnadu", 96, further clarifies that the word dalit identifies, among other things, their (dalits') oppressors, connotes the consciousness of their own unfree existence and outcast experience, and indicates a certain militancy; it is a symbol of change, confrontation and revolution.

⁵²See Amaldoss, *A Call to Community*, 40, 71.

different levels of upper caste people, they are denied access to temples, schools, public wells, common roads etc.⁵³

But today the dalits are becoming more and more aware that gods themselves do not practice any untouchability, that all human beings are equal before God and society, and that it is the vested interests of the upper classes which have legitimated the caste system with religious sanctions. They have started to voice their angry cry of protests against the legitimacy of the caste system and against the systematic, organized violence and social inequalities that go with it. Some dalits have rejected Hinduism wholesale; some others have begun to re-interpret, remythologize and thereby integrate themselves within the classical Hindu traditions. Efforts are already under way to rewrite their past history by tracing it back to the pre-Aryan times, and thereby to affirm themselves as the indigenous people, the original inhabitants of India. The dalits have become the protagonists of their own liberation, subjects of their own history and masters of their own destiny.⁵⁴ This dalit-consciousness or dalitness has heightened their dignity, has infused into them self-confidence and self-respect, and has given them new strength and hope towards their liberation.⁵⁵

iii. *Against Dehumanizing Poverty*

The dalits are economically exploited and are deprived of the necessary material means to live with human dignity. Most of them live

⁵³V.Devasahayam, "Pollution, Poverty and Powerlessness : A Dalit Perspective", in A.P.Nirmal (ed), *A Reader in Dalit Theology* (Madras: Gurukul, 1992) 4-9. Cf. A.M.Arul Raja, "A Dialogue between Dalits and Bible: Certain Indicators for Interpretations", *Journal of Dharma* (24 (1999) 45.

⁵⁴Amaladoss, *A Call to Community*, 53-75; S.M.Michael, "Dalit Vision of a Just Society in Inida", *Vaiharai* 1 (1996) 105-22; Susaimanickam, *Commitment to the Oppressed*, 29, 31.

⁵⁵F.Wilfr, "The Dalits and their Struggle for Liberation". *From the Dusty Soil: Contextual Reinterpretation of Christianity* (Madras: University of Madras, 1995) 118-119.

below or just on the poverty line – a life hardly worthy of human beings; they are the ones most affected by the massive poverty of India.⁵⁶

Any scheme implemented by the government to improve the economy of the country is bound to help only the rich, making them richer still, and to hit those at the bottom hard making them even poorer. There is a structural poverty, because caste functions as a very effective system of economic exploitation, marginalizing, even enslaving the majority in favour of a small, but powerful minority.⁵⁷

Caste has played an important role also in the allotment of land to the people. Accordingly the dalits, who along with the tribals claim to be the original inhabitants of India – the ‘indigenous people’ – have been deprived of their right to land and a healthy environment to live in.⁵⁸

Thanks to the ‘protective discrimination’ practised by the government which has reserved for the dalits, among other privileges, fifteen per cent of the seats in the government educational institutions and fifteen per cent of the jobs in public services, a small number of them have profited by this and belong to the lower middle class.

However, the dalits do not beg any longer for condescending charity or constitutional privileges, but demand social justice – their birthright as children of God and citizens of India – structural changes.⁵⁹

iv. Against Social Ostracism

The dehumanizing poverty of the dalits is compounded by humiliating social disabilities imposed on them by the caste people. On account of this, they do not see themselves as poor but as outcasts; they experience themselves not so much as members of an economically

⁵⁶Soares-Prabhu, “The Indian Church Challenged by Poverty and Caste”, 174-176; Wilfred, “The Dalits and their Struggle for Liberation”, 106.

⁵⁷F.Franco, “The Structural Nature of Poverty in India”, in J.Murickan (ed), *Poverty in India: Challenges and Responses* (Bangalore: Xavier Board of Higher Education, 1988), 37-58.

⁵⁸G.M.Nalunnakkal, “Search for Self-Identity and the Emerging Spirituality: A Dalit Theological Perspective”, *Bangalore Theological Forum* 30 (1998) 38-43.

⁵⁹Susaimanickam, *Comminment to the Oppressed*, 34.

exploited class but of a hierarchically ranked caste.⁶⁰ They are not only 'have-nots', but also 'be-nots' and therefore are neither recognized nor treated as human beings.

Moreover, they are physically segregated from the caste people and are forced to live on the periphery of society as people on the margins of life. Over and above this, they are humiliated, insulted, assaulted, manhandled, tortured and burnt alive and their womenfolk are molested and raped. In short, they are sometimes treated as animals, nay, worse than that,⁶¹ and thereby their humanity is most disfigured and disgraced. It is this social ostracism which characterizes their identity and compounds their sad plight.⁶²

Even the few dalits who have attained a middle-class status from the economic point of view are by no means freed from their social handicap, because the whole point of caste is that status comes not from wealth but from birth. This means, once a person is born a dalit, he/she always remains a dalit. For that matter poor persons of a so-called high caste, even though they too might suffer from economic oppression as much as the dalits, are not subjected to social oppression – this makes a world of difference! – and hence they also would look down upon the dalits who are economically well-off. It is only in the anonymity of large cities that the dalits can, to a certain extent, escape the stigma of their birth and get relatively fair treatment.

What is more pathetic about the dalits is that they have internalized their oppressors' ideology, that is, they have accepted their state of oppression as the condition proper to them, and thereby they participate in their own oppression. As a result, their psychological make-up has been so deeply impaired that they have developed a kind of inferiority complex, a

⁶⁰Soares-Prabhu, "The Indian Church Challenged by Poverty and Caste", 172.

⁶¹ For a host of atrocities lashed out on the dalits, see Antony Raj, "The Dalit Christian Reality in Tamilnadu", 96-99.

⁶² P.S.Rajan, "Christian Dalit Aspirations as Expressed by Joshua Kavi in *Gabbilan* (The Bat)", in J.Massey (ed), *Indigenous People : Dalits – Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate* (Delhi : ISPCK, 1994) 324-330.

low self-image.⁶³ They possess a diminished, broken humanity and suffer from a loss of dignity. Most simply put, caste adds a dimension of social humiliation and hopelessness unparalleled in the history of humankind.⁶⁴

The dalits have come to realize that all human beings are equal before God, which is one of the basic teachings of all the religions of the world including Hinduism, and in the eyes of the society which is guaranteed by the Constitution of India and of almost all the countries. Their quest is for justice, for full and authentic humanity.⁶⁵

v. *Against the Church*

Many dalit groups have rejected Hinduism in its entirety and have embraced other religions like Islam, Sikhism and Christianity which promise, in theory at least, a great sense of liberty, equality and fraternity. Conversion for them was a form of protest and a search for a new identity, and waves of mass conversions took place especially during the nineteenth century.⁶⁶ But the crude fact is that the stigma of untouchability has followed the converts even in these religions.⁶⁷ As a result the dalit Christians are doubly discriminated against both by the State and the Church.⁶⁸

The European missionaries, who founded the Christian communities in India, compromised with caste because of their thorough misunderstanding, confusing it with class they were familiar with, and for

⁶³ Ayrookuzhiel, "Dalit Theology", 91-92; Antony Raj, "Disobedience", 339-340, calls it slavery and social death.

⁶⁴ Soares-Prabhu, "The Indian Church Challenged by Poverty and Caste", 172.

⁶⁵ Susaimanickam, *Commitment to the Oppressed*, 34.

⁶⁶ Wilfr. "The Dalits and their Struggle for Liberation", 116-118; Antony Raj, "Disobedience", 44-45.

⁶⁷ Das, "Dalits and the Caste System", 61, 74-75.

⁶⁸ Antony Raj ("Disobedience", 44-45) notes that dalit Christians suffer a five fold discrimination, namely discrimination by the government, by caste Hindus, by the hierarchical Church, by caste Christians and even by fellow Hindu dalits. However, discrimination varies from place to place, and from Church to Church.

the sake of conversions.⁶⁹ But what is most surprising is that down the centuries Christians in India have been able to tolerate and accommodate the caste practices without serious conflict with their Christian sensibility.⁷⁰ Despite the fact that church leaders over and over again have officially condemned caste discrimination in Indian society and more specifically in the Church, Christians of all denominations without exception continue to nurse caste feelings and nurture discriminatory practices, especially in rural areas.⁷¹

The continuing discrimination in the Church has triggered off the irruption of the dalits. Consequently many dalit Christian movements have come into existence to fight for human dignity, equality and justice for the aggrieved dalits and dalit communities.⁷² They even threaten to break away from the present Church, dominated by the upper castes, and to form a 'Dalit Church' where the dalits will be on their own as citizens and believers.⁷³

Conclusion

There are mythical and biblical archtypes who rebelled for liberation: Prometheus, Job, Jesus etc. There is also a whole galaxy of dalit leaders like Ambedkar who rebelled in order to affirm their identity and achieve their liberation.

Protest, which generally the language of prophecy, characterizes Job's speeches. By his protest Job underscores the fact that if the poor are poor and become poorer day by day, it is because they are oppressed and

⁶⁹W.Fernades, *Caste and Conversion Movements in India: Religion and Human Rights* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1981). Webster, *Dalit Christians*, 33-76.

⁷⁰J.Kanankil, "Caste Discrimination : A Challenge to the Christian Conscience in Inida", *Vidyajyoti* 46 (1982) 522-529; Soares-Prabhu, "The Table Fellowship of Jesus : Its Significance for Dalit Christians in Inida Today", *Jeevadhara* 22 (1992) 154-159.

⁷¹See Soares-Prabhu, "The Indian Church Challenged by Poverty and Caste", 177-78; Antony Raj, "The Dalit Christian Reality in Tamilnadu", 100-103.

⁷²A.M.A.Ayrookuzhiel, "Christian Dalits in Revolt", *Jeevadhara* 23 (1993) 267-273.

⁷³Wilfred, "Dalit Christians – Quest for Dignity", 131-133.

exploited by the affluent and the powerful in society, and that justice should be restored to them through structural changes. He is primarily concerned about restoring the right social order.

What Brueggemann says about wisdom in general is much more true of Job: "Wisdom represents a protest against such deferred goal. It is pragmatic and impatient. It affirms that life's value are embraced or rejected here and now – any other approach which lets us off the hook is quite irrelevant. Any talk of the will of God which doesn't lead to life for the community here and now is idolatry. Anything which creates life for the community, no matter what its source, is the will of God."⁷⁴

Of course, Job's protest is prompted by his firm belief in a moral God who governs the universe with justice and love, with passion and compassion. He longs for a just world order – an alternative world.

The dalits raise their angry voice to protest against the existing dominant socio-economic, political and religious situations of India. The reason is: "Any irrational institution, however legitimate it may be, has to be disobeyed and any religion that supports such irrationality has to be equally rejected stock and barrel... Particularly, when social and economic discrimination reinforce the minority political status of the oppressed, there is no moral obligation to obey such authority, however sacrosanct it may be."⁷⁵

In both case the goal of protest is the same: to usher in a new, just social order, an egalitarian society, a contrast-society in which all human beings, small and great, poor and rich, outcast and caste people alike, can live together in harmony as brothers and sisters with more dignity and equality.

⁷⁴Brueggemann, *In Man We Trust*, 17.

⁷⁵Antony Raj, "Disobedience", 49.