



## Introduction

### “Our God with struggling People”

**Dalit Liberation Sunday**  
**11th December 2011**

*'Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people ...; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them....' (Exodus 3:7-8)*

### Cries and shouts

Caste system is the most heinous social structure the world has ever seen. Demeaning Dalits, who are also the handiwork of the Creator God, on the basis of birth, is a challenging justice issue for entire humanity. But the people from the 'high caste' who benefit out of this system in India, want to strengthen the system by any means. India has been witnessing many struggles of Dalits against the inhuman caste system. The cries of the people, who are oppressed and pushed out from the main stream of Indian society, are expressions of their suffering and their vehement protest against casteist marginalisations. Dalits are no more a people who silently yield to oppressions. They are becoming increasingly aware of their rights and strengths in the society. Their spirituality makes them more vigilant and confident of facing harsh realities. The National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) along with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), reiterate the ardent Christian belief that our God is the one who sees the struggles of the marginalised people and joins in that struggle for freedom, justice and equality.

### **Celebration of liberation**

Dalit Liberation Sunday is an initiative of the National Council of Churches in India. The National Coordination Committee for Dalit Christian Rights (NCCDC), a joint programme of NCCI and CBCI, committed to challenging and empowering the local congregations for Dalit liberation, later on decided to observe this as a joint celebration. Accordingly, this year Dalit Liberation Sunday will be celebrated by the member churches of NCCI and the churches under CBCI among all their local congregations across India on the 11th of December 2011. [Dalit Liberation Sunday is observed on the Sunday nearest to the International Human Rights Day (IHRD: December 10th) commemorating the importance of Dalit rights as human rights. To endorse the struggles that Dalits have carried out in the recent past for human dignity, livelihood, and development, this Sunday will be celebrated with special worship services, rallies, folk art forms, and solidarity fellowships.

### **God with the struggling people**

The present day Indian context is one of continual struggles of Dalits. The neo economic policies and the dominant development paradigm attached to it make Dalits refugees in their own land. The landless Dalits are becoming homeless also. The 'upper layer' of the society continues to consider Dalits as those who are destined to do the menial jobs for them. People in India are not ashamed of the fact that manual scavenging is still prevailing in India.

Ambedkar observed rightly that "We (the Dalits) may forego material benefits, we may forego material benefits of civilization, but we cannot forego our right and opportunities to reap the benefit of the highest education to the fullest extent". But it is alarming that higher education in India becomes more and more a business and thus unreachable for Dalit students. Private sector is increasingly taking over education while the government is gradually withdrawing from

the arena of education. The absence of reservation in the private sector and the staunch and emotional and political outcry against the reservation system push out the Dalit students from the field of higher education. But, whenever Dalit students have been given an opportunity, they have proven their merit. Dalits belonging to Christian and Muslim religions have been denied their legitimate constitutional rights and equality before law. The paragraph 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950 is discriminatory because Dalits belonging to Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism are given Scheduled Caste status while Scheduled Castes of other Indian religions are denied the rights of reservation policy. Even though the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities under Justice Ranganath Misra, appointed by Govt of India strongly recommended for deletion of this paragraph, the government is not willing to do so fearing the Hindutva forces. The human rights of the Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims are denied and their lives are subject to double oppression. Atrocities against Dalits are rampant across the country. There is violence from the people of casteist Hindus as well as from the State. Studies conducted come up with fearfully astonishing facts that in India every day three Dalit women are raped, two Dalits are murdered and eleven Dalits are assaulted while every week five Dalit homes or possessions are burnt down, and six Dalits are abducted! The killing of Dalits in Paramakudi, Tamil Nadu, on September 12th, 2011, by the police\* is the latest of the 'state sponsored atrocities' against Dalits. Dalits are thus vulnerable to the mental as well as physical struggle because of the heinous caste system in India. Even though Dalit Christians face multi level oppressions in India, they are undeterred because of their strong faith that God identifies with them in their struggles. God encountered Moses from the burning bush and said to him: "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I

have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians....” This God is still seeing the miseries and hearing the cries of the Dalits in India. This is the same God who gives the courage to the Dalits to fight against the unjust powers of oppression. This year's Dalit Liberation Sunday draws its theological and sociological basis from this staunch belief.

### **Burning bush - Burning issues**

God in the burning bush calls us to respond to the burning issues faced by Dalits in India. The celebration of Dalit Liberation Sunday should be part of this praxis oriented belief. Hence you are requested to

- Sensitize the local churches/ organisations to be in solidarity with Dalits as they face the multi level oppressions.
- Encourage the local congregations to pressurise the central government of India to extend equal justice to Dalit Christians (and Dalit Muslims) without any further delay.
- Affirm that our God is against all forms of discriminations including casteism within the church, and declare along with the NCCI that 'No one can serve caste and Christ'.
- Oppose the myriad forms of atrocities committed against the Dalits across India.
- Make various projects in the Church at local congregational levels to encourage Dalit students to pursue higher studies in various subjects, which can facilitate them for job opportunities and enhance their social status.

We are presenting this booklet that contains ideas for Dalit Liberation Sunday worship with much anticipation and with a call to use your creative thinking and solid actions towards the emancipation of Dalits.

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## **Some Ideas for Worship**

### **1. Invocation**

Use drum beating for the invocation. The traditional Dalit percussion instruments can be used for this invocation. In front of the church a pot and a broom could be kept eighteen feet away from the front door to denote the heinous untouchability suffered by Dalits. A red carpet or red cloth can be kept between this pot and the front door. Worshippers can start the procession from around fifty or more feet away from the front door and step over the broom and pot and tread over the carpet to enter the church as an act of protest against casteism.

In the forefront of the procession, a Dalit girl may carry an open Bible. Worshippers can feel free to dance according to the drum beats. A cross, surrounded by a broken chain, which symbolises God's solidarity with the struggling people, could be carried by a Dalit boy.

### **2. Lighting of the lamp**

After entering the worship place, the elders of the church may join to light an earthen lamp as the symbol of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

### **3. Call to worship**

*Leader:* Dear fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, our dear kith and kin who share the same blood; come, let us worship together our redeemer God! Let us realise the presence of our God in trinity amongst our struggles and pains, sorrows and fears, fights and resistance! Let us be reminded that our God is the God of equality and justice! God is Emmanuel, who is with us in every walk of our life. Let us be reassured of God's help in our struggles towards fuller humanity!

*Congregation:*

We shall overcome

We shall overcome

We shall overcome some day

Chorus: Oh, deep in our heart  
We do believe  
We shall overcome  
Some day

#### 4. Responsive Reading (A response to the Magnificat)

*Leader:* My soul glorifies the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour.

He looks on his servant in her lowliness; henceforth all ages will call me blessed.

*Congregation:* **God, we continue to glorify you and worship you, for you are the one who sees our lowliness, who is having mercy on us and who is blessing us with the endurance to face our struggles. We rejoice in you, O our Lord!**

*Leader:* The Almighty works marvels for me. Holy his name!  
His mercy is from age to age, on those who fear him.

*Congregation:* **God, we thank you for your care and concern for our forefathers and mothers. You have seen their misery and heard their cries. You had been with them while they were harassed, oppressed and assaulted. You gave them courage and hope to look into the future. We worship you, O Lord!**

*Leader:* He puts forth his arm in strength \*  
and scatters the proud-hearted.  
He casts the mighty from their thrones  
and raises the lowly.

*Congregation:* **God, you are the one who breaks barriers and build bridges. Use your mighty powers to scatter the proud hearts of casteist people in India. O our God of justice, put forth your strong arm against the unjust caste system. We believe in you, O Lord!**

*Leader:* He fills the starving with good things, sends the rich away empty.

*Congregation:* **God, fill your Dalit children who are starving, with fullness of humanity, justice and equality. Quench our thirst for revolutions and self affirmation. O God, root out the abundance of caste arrogance, oppression, and discrimination. We long for justice, O Lord!**

#### 5. Confession (In unison)

Lord, you have granted us the internal strength to discern the oppression Dalits suffer and the surreptitious ways of continual existence of casteism. God, but we are many a time unable to oppose the oppression. Many of us take side with the oppressors. God, we ignore and forget that you are the God of equality. You are the creator father and mother who created us in your own image. We confess that we fail frequently to figure out your image in our fellow beings. Dalits among us are considered not even human beings.

Even we as Dalits, have yielded to caste oppression without realising the fact that you are a God who is in solidarity with the struggling people. We confess that we do not want to wake up from the slumber of oppression. We are possessed with the demon of caste system and thus we disfigure our church, which is your body.

We are insensitive to the atrocities and discriminations faced by our Dalit brothers and sisters. We hear the derogatory comments against Dalit brothers and sisters; we laugh loudly, not remembering that they are our brothers and sisters. We hear about the brutalities against them even by the state; we keep silence even though we know that silence is criminal. We confess that we often ask that 'are we the keepers of these Dalits?'

God, we confess that as a society we play down the resurgence of Dalit self esteem. We use cultural fascism to destroy the struggles of Dalits for land and livelihood.

**God, our father and mother, help us to realise that all of us are your children. Help us to understand the real meaning of Christian love and unity. We pray in the name of our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.**

### **6. Absolution**

*Leader:* God wants to pardon you instead of punishing you, God wants to continue to strengthen you in your struggles, God wants to make you realise the virtues of equality, justice and fellowship. Our God pardons you all your sins against the greater fellowship of human beings. **Amen.**

### **7. Scripture Readings**

Exodus 3: 1- 12

Acts of Apostles 10: 9- 16

St. Luke 4: 14- 20

### **8. Affirmation of faith (Excerpt from No One can Serve Christ and Caste!\*\*)**

*Leader:* We affirm...

*Congregation:* **Faith in the God of justice who works for abundant life for all human beings. This calls us to name casteism as sin, apostasy and rebellion against God. Caste discrimination is unbelief in God and a crime against human beings.**

*Leader:* We affirm...

*Congregation:* **Love for God in 'the Word made flesh" who links the wounded body of Jesus to 'the broken ones. 'This calls us to take sides with the Dalits struggling for freedom and wholeness. Casteism is a rejection of Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. Caste discrimination is the extended wounding of Christ among us as the least and crushed ones.**

*Leader:* We affirm...

*Congregation:* **Casteism is a grievance against the Holy Spirit. Caste discrimination manifests signs of enemies of the Holy Spirit, whose greatest gift is love. The communion of the Holy Spirit brings healing with reconciliation for Dalits and contrition with reconciliation among dominant communities.**

*Leader:* We affirm...

*Congregation:* **The historical working of God, the liberator, accompanier and advocate, ...through the witness of the Church that protects, supports and nurtures the broken ones. This calls us to deepen our solidarity and further our commitment to God's mission of liberation of Dalits.**

*Leader:* We affirm...

*Congregation:* **The hope that the reign of God will come on earth as it is in heaven. This calls us to commit ourselves to break all walls of separation, trusting in the power of the Spirit to make all things new in the way of Jesus and for the glory of God. Amen.**

### **9. Dalit litany**

*Leader:* God, we pray for all the Dalits who are facing adverse effects of the unjust development patterns. Many have been displaced, many have lost livelihood, and many have become homeless. The new economic policies make the Dalits more vulnerable. Private sectors keep the Dalits away from job opportunities. Rocketing fuel prices make the lives of Dalits more miserable. God, the Dalits are struggling in their day to day life.

*Congregation:* **Loving God, we know that you are with us as you were with the Israelites. You were with them as a pillar of cloud during the day and pillar of fire during the night. Gracious God, we humbly beseech you to continue to be with the struggling Dalit people. Help us to face the harsh realities of life.**

*Leader:* God of wisdom, our young Dalit students struggle to get more opportunities. Even though they want to do higher studies, it is getting tougher to enter into that sphere because of the huge capitation fee and expenses. Our Dalit children are discriminated in the schools and colleges based on their caste. We pray for the drop out Dalits from schools, because of their poor family conditions, lack of self esteem, and absence of endurance.

*Congregation:* **Caring God, help the Dalit students with the power of endurance, vision for a better future and courage to be proponents of freedom. Open ways for them to overcome financial struggles. Strengthen them to be a help for each other. Grant them wisdom to believe in fellowship and mutual respect. Help us O Lord to be better human beings.**

*Leader:* O our God of justice, your Dalit children under the fold of Christianity and Islam face injustice and discrimination in India. They are deprived of the reservation they deserve. The governments in power are not willing to hear the cries of these Dalit brothers and sisters. They are thus deprived of their rights and privileges.

*Congregation:* **Compassionate God, give the sensitivity to our rulers of the country to realise that they have been indulging in unjust discrimination against Dalits on the basis of their religion. Our freedom of religion is at stake. God, grant the authorities wisdom to rule the country with virtues such as equality and justice.**

*Leader:* O Trinitarian God, we pray for those who are struggling against caste discrimination by advocacy work and solidarity steps with Dalits. We pray for all the churches, non government organisations, Dalit movements, and human rights movements, who fight for justice for Dalits. We pray specially for the work of the International Dalit Solidarity Network and, the World Council of Churches for their commendable work to bring Dalit issues in the international arena.

We pray for all non Dalits who are in solidarity with the struggle of the Dalits for fuller humanity.

*Congregation:* **God of fellowship, we thank you for the fraternity we have to fight injustice against Dalits. Grant us your continual strength to fight for justice and equality. God, grant all of us the perseverance to struggle against all injustice and discrimination based on birth.**

## 10. Lord's Prayer (In our own mother tongue)

### 11. Benediction.

*Leader:* May God the Father and Mother, who revealed through a burning yet undistorted bush, help you to continue your struggle with vigour against injustice;

May God the Son, who opposed making the temple into a market place, continue to strengthen you to oppose all the discriminations; and May the Holy Spirit bind you together to strive for a better tomorrow.

**Amen.**

\*“Five killed in police firing at Paramakudi”

<<http://www.thehindu.com/news/states/tamil-nadu/article2444651.ece>> accessed on 20.10.2011 at 11.00 pm

“Paramakudi violence engineered by police”

<<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/article2447656.ece>> Accessed on 20.10.2011 at 11.15 pm

\*\* The affirmation of faith is from the National Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits, convened by NCCI in partnership with WCC, New Delhi, 22-24 October 2010. This was later on adopted by the NCCI Executive Committee held on 23rd March, 2011, and proposed to be used by its constituent members.

- Member Churches are requested to use these ideas of worship on Dalit Liberation Sunday in their respective local congregations. If the tradition of worship in your church does not permit to use these suggestions, please use them in other prayer meetings rather than in the regular Sunday worship. You could perhaps adopt some parts, like intercessory prayers, for the Sunday Service.
- The cover page of the booklet and the poster are designed using a painting by Rev. Sunil Raj Philip. It depicts Trinitarian God who is with the struggling people. God the Father/Mother who appeared in the burning bush, Jesus who was bruised and crucified to death, and the uniting Holy Spirit are portrayed in this painting.
- These ideas for worship have been prepared and published by the NCCI- Commission on Dalits. All of you can feel free to use this material, photocopying it or quoting from it with due acknowledgment in any worship service and meeting.
- The Member Churches are requested to use their creativity and human resources to make this day meaningful. Soft copies of ideas for worship and of the poster are available on request. Churches are encouraged to translate this into vernacular languages.

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