Mr. Pitchai, a poor non-Christian Dalit landless labourer is one of my best teachers of theology. According to him God is part and parcel of life. So “theology in Dalit tradition is not just speaking or writing, it is life that is lived with God”. Theological expression is not just verbal; it is expression of life. Even the tradition of our oppressors speaks about Karma, Gnana and Bhakti Margas. For them also theology is a marga, that is, a way of life, of course oppressive way of life.

Whether it is oppressive or liberating, theology is a way of life in Indian tradition. God is linked with every aspect of life. For example, according to the tradition of our oppressors casteism, their basic way of life, has come from God. With this introduction, let us now perceive the Dalit way of theological expression.

Of all theological expressions, worship is the most important one. It is in worship, we relate ourselves with God. Unfortunately, worship is not considered as theology now. In Dalit tradition, however, worship is the main theological expression.

But, Dalit worship is quite different from the present day Christian worship. The Christian worship has been more or less reduced to words that mostly do not mean anything. But Dalit worship include all aspects of human life. It is EPSI PEGS theological expression. It has Economic, Political, Social, Ideological, Psychological, Gender-related and Spiritual connotations. (Spiritual here means transphysical which I have explained in my paper on “Communication for Dalit Liberation”).

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Before analysing the EPSI PEGS aspects of Dalit worship, let us understand that these aspects are inter-connected, inter-dependent and inter-active to each other. Only for the sake of understanding them deeply, we deal with them separately.

**Economic Expressions in Dalit Worship**

Dalit worship is always connected with food. Without food there is no worship. This food is not the ‘nivethana’ of the dominant tradition. The ‘nivethana’ is the food donated by the rich and after offering it to the deity, is doled out by the Brahmin priest to the worshippers. It is food of charity, literally thrown out to the worshippers who receive it as beggars.

In Dalit worship the food is not a charity food. It is the food acquired by right, since all the worshippers have paid for the food as well as for the expenses. There is no class difference in sharing the expenses. All the worshippers pay equally. No one is allowed to pay either more or less than others. This ‘classless participation’ is one of the main aspects of Dalit worship which cannot be changed.

Equal sharing, one of ‘the Kingdom virtues’, is also found in Dalit worship. Everything offered to the Deity are shared equally. This equal sharing is not only quantitative but also qualitative. For example each part of sacrificed animal like liver, lung, thing etc., will be divided equally among the worshippers.

This equal sharing has deep economic connotations. At present living thing is exchanged or sold. This has given birth to consumerism, and money which is the exchange unit, has become the most powerful tool of exploitation.

If the surplus values are shared instead of being exchanged the power of the idolised money will disappear. I need not explain how this will remove various economic exploitations, for example, the unjust exchange rates of different currencies.

Here, it is not claimed that the equal sharing in Dalit worship has brought out all the above mentioned economically positive
transformations. This transformation will occur only if the Dalits start worshipping daily. At present, this Dalit theological expression is restricted to just once or twice in a year. This token act of equal sharing in Dalit worship should become a way of life. Christian tradition also had this equal sharing in the Eucharistic meal. But now it is not even a token act but just a pale symbolic act that has lost the original meaning. The Eucharist should become ‘oru olai’ the regular common eating together of the one family of God who is our universal parent. An emerging Dalit-theology should have this economic expression in its forefront.

**Political Expression**

Dalits stand as equals when they worship. As we have seen, there is no class difference here. Everyone has equal power. There is no place for the priest in the original Dalit worship. Only in the Sanskritised cult we find priests. In Dalit worship there is no hierarchy, such as the priestly and the lay.

Jesus said that the power of Son of Man lay in service and sacrifice. In Dalit worship also role of the ‘nattamai’ or ‘moopan’ is restricted to service. He serves only as the convenor of the worship or community meetings. He cannot decide anything by himself such as the date of worship; and the share of the worship-expenses is decided by the community. Responsibilities are also decided upon by the community as a whole, not on majority of votes. In other words, every one should agree, and the worship will not be conducted even if one person disagrees.

Thus Dalit worship is the expression of real democracy and equality. Dalit liberation movement must inherit this democracy. A Dalit leader should serve others and not make others to serve them.

**Social Expression**

The first question that is asked in Dalit worship is “Have all the in-laws, brothers and sisters come?” This shows that Dalit worship is family worship. As one family they stand in front of
God in worship. There is no social discrimination among the worshippers. All belong to one family.

This family is not just a group of people. It is an organic unit. Once I asked a Dalit, why they had postponed the worship. He said that one member of the community had very important business. I said, “Why don’t you leave that person and worship?” He said, “that will be like cutting our fingers”. Thus the Dalits when they worship are one family with an organic unity. Their deity is the mother of that family.

This expression of worshippers as one family also belonged to the Christian tradition. They called God as ‘our father’ and shared one bread—that is the food of one family. In Act 2:44 and 3:32 we find that they had everything in common, as it is in a family.

But this ‘one family sharing one bread’ was killed by Cyprian, who described it as the sacrifice offered for our sins by the priest. He did that to establish the power of the priests. Thus, the believers as one family of God the common parent, disappeared. The Indian Christians along with other Christian calls God as ‘Our Father’ when they pray. But at the same time they say they belong to different castes! How can children of one father belong to different castes? The only explanation I can conceive of is that they think their God the father, is a womaniser having many wives, each a mother, for each caste. Thus they abuse God.

These Christians should learn from the Dalits and become one family of organic unity without any kind of social discriminations such as caste. This is another theological task we face.

**Ideological Expression**

In Dalit worship ideas are expressed mainly in terms of narratives. Their songs, dramas and rituals are all linked with narratives. As we all know our Bible is also dominated by narratives. But unfortunately our later theologies have become
conceptual. Of these two, narratives have a greater communication-potential than concepts. Concepts can be easily misunderstood and may have many meanings. For example, ‘Love’ as concept may be understood differently. One husband told me that he beat his wife because of love! His concept of love includes beating. Thus concepts can be ambiguous. But since narratives explain ideas in terms of action they are rarely ambiguous. In this regard, the Dalit theological expression-of-ideas seems better. So far, Dalit theological expression has been restricted to expression of ideas. Even this expression is dominated by concepts. Following the Dalit tradition, we need to translate our ideas into narratives, songs and drama.

**Psychological Expression**

Dalit worships through festivals. Festivity and celebration is the core of their worship. They meet God in joy. This festivity liberates the Dalits—atleast during the worship—from their perennial experience of shame and fear. Moreover, the narratives that talk about the mighty deeds of their deity make them proud and thus remove their shame-consciousness. Worship according to the Bible is also same as that of the Dalits. The Passover and the Eucharist are festivals of joy, celebrated with food and drink. The salvific acts of God are also narrated and dramatised in action. But the present-day Christian worship is devoid of emotional involvement. That is why many Indian Christians, especially women go after the Charismatic groups. They need liberation from the emotional oppression, such as feelings of shame, fear and guilt. Unfortunately, these worship programmes derived from the West, are only opiates providing temporary escapes and do not lead to liberation or protest.

The emerging Dalit theology should take this psychological or emotional expression seriously, since Dalits are emotionally oppressed. We should get away from intellectual and dogmatic determinism, and stop toning down or degrading the emotional expression of worship.
Environmental Expressions

The Dalit worships in nature. The Dalits do not disturb the eco-balance by building temples or churches for their worship. For them the deity is the parent of whole universe. Therefore, they consider nature as their brothers and sisters. Moreover some trees like the medicinal *neem* tree are considered as sacred. Cutting these trees is sacrilege, a sin against the deity. Thus Dalit worship attempts to keep the eco-balance. This type of eco-theology should be included in the emerging Dalit Theology.

Gender Related Expressions

In Dalit worship women play an equal role. They also pronounce the word of God. In some worships for example, in Mullapaari-worship, it is the women and only women who can perform the worship. In these cults, men remain passive participants. There are also certain worships where it is the men who play the active role. Thus, Dalit worship is neither patriarchal nor matriarchical. It is egalitarian. Men and women stand equal in front of the Deity.

It might appear that Dalit theology expressed so far do not involve women’s participation. This is because we have reduced theology only to verbal expression. This needs to be redressed.

Transphysical (Spiritual) Expressions

Dalit worship is always noisy. Noise is the most important factor in their worship. The main source of the noise is the beating of the drums. They play a major role in transphysical expression. Transphysical actions are actions that transcend the physicality. We have discussed this in detail in the paper on ‘Communication for Dalit liberation.’

Here I like to point out the role of drums beating in the transphysical dynamics. My daughter a student of Physics, says that if electric current is fed into a crystal the crystal vibrates. The reverse of this that the vibrations produces electric current is also
true. We know that human body has electricity. The Dalit drum produces vibrations that increase the electricity in the body of the worshippers. Their body, mind and spirit are mellowed by this increase and allow the divinity to take possession of them. This leads to the transcendence of their physical and social conditions. I have seen weak Dalit women, when possessed, become so strong that it takes five strong men to hold even one.

Some may think that these possessions are diabolic and unchristian. The difference between Devil and Deity is simple and straight. Devil oppresses but Deity liberates. If the transphysical actions lead to oppression they are diabolic. If they lead to liberation they are divine and truly Christian.

Insofar almost all of the transphysical expressions I have studied are protests against oppression, they are rarely oppressive and therefore rarely diabolic. It is high time that we need to think seriously of these transphysical actions. We have to analyse and understand them. Since oppression of the Dalit is very deep and strong, only these transphysical actions can annihilate that oppression.

Thus, Dalit worship is connected with all the EPSI PEGS-aspects. Their theological expressions are holistic and are not reductions. I wish that the emerging Dalit theology may follow the Dalits, and be wholistic in theological expression. If these expressions become our way of life, the liberation of Dalits as well as the liberation of the universe will emerge itself in all its power.