Original Article
ISSN (Online): 2582-7472

ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts
January-June 2024 5(1), 970–978

PITCHING CASTEIST PRAXIS AGAINST CHRISTIAN IDEALS: NAVIGATING COLONIAL CONFLICT IN DAVID DAVIDAR'S *THE HOUSE OF BLUE MANGOES*

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DOI
10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.3893

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the complex interplay between casteism and Christianity in David Davidar's novel, The House of Blue Mangoes. It explores how casteism, deeply entrenched within the socio-cultural fabric of India, conflicts with Christian ideals introduced during colonial times. The novel's narrative is dissected to reveal how caste distinctions are perpetuated despite the Christian emphasis on equality and brotherhood. Through a detailed analysis of the characters' experiences and the sociopolitical dynamics depicted in the novel, this paper highlights the challenges of reconciling Christian proselytisation efforts with the rigid caste structures. The findings suggest that the clash between the two ideologies often results in a superficial adoption of Christian values, which fails to dismantle the deep-seated caste prejudices. This study contributes to the understanding of religious influence on social hierarchies and offers insights into the enduring struggle against caste discrimination in India. The study exposes that despite conversion, casteism prevails in the South.

Keywords: Proselytisation, Caste, South, Christianity, Colonialism

1. INTRODUCTION

Contextualising casteism in the contemporary Indian society is a challenge. Though it is considered a domestic phenomenon, studies show that casteism has spread far and wide even to the diaspora (Mégret & Dutta, 2022). The coloniality of casteism in the postcolonial context is argued that "postcolonial theory needs disentangling from anti-colonial nationalism to be useful to, hold up to the scrutiny of, and offer more equitable entry points for students with different caste histories" (Chakraborty, 2022). Adopting the constructivist grounded theory (CGT), Deshmukh et al. (2024) observe ten aspects of casteism in contemporary India: 1. Preservation of cultural ideologies by maintaining the importance of religious practices including the caste system, 2. Caste blindness in the neoliberal economy by neglecting the social disparities based on caste, 3. Narrative of meritocracy by using merit to raise objections against affirmative action policies, 4. Academia as a site for the reproduction of caste discrimination that is the education system becoming a source of distress for lower-caste students, 5. Learning through the experience shared in media like forming conceptions about caste discrimination based on the information received in the media, 6. Localized cultural ideologies

that is the changing nature of discrimination as per geographical location and setting, 7. Guilt of affirmative actions that is experiencing guilt for taking benefits of the reservation policy, 8. Formation of caste based social bonds, 9. Intergenerational learning and internalization of inferior self-image, and 10. Interactions with peers and teachers that causes the learning from the differential treatment received from peers and teachers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Caste and Casteism: A Theoretical Perspective

"Caste, any of the ranked, hereditary, endogamous social groups, often linked with occupation, that together constitute traditional societies in South Asia, particularly among Hindus in India," defines *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, while classifying caste as a form of "social differentiation" (Madan, 2024). It is also known as *varna* or *jati*. M. N. Srinivas defines caste as "a hereditary, endogamous, usually localized group, having a traditional association with an occupation, and a particular position in the local hierarchy of castes" (p. 3). Tracing the history of the caste system in India, it is evident that the practice has been continued in the sub-continent right from the Vedic period and is rooted in Hindu cosmology and texts (Joshi, 2017). Casteism is the discrimination or prejudice based on caste, which is still prevalent in modern India. Manifestations of casteism are found in untouchability, violence against lower castes, and systemic inequalities in access to resources, education, and power (Sahgal et al., 2021, pp. 27, 96–98). In contemporary times, casteism intersects with issues of gender, class, and regionalism, compounding social exclusion for the marginalised (Sengupta & Guchhait, 2021).

Edgar Thurston of the Madras Government Museum, studies the castes and tribes of southern India in his seven-volume treatise, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (1909), wherein he records the social hierarchy, occupational roles, marriage customs, dietary habits, cultural and religious practices, providing ethnographic accounts of traditional crafts, folklore, and myths that are integral to the identities of these groups. He visually documents the attire, ornaments, and tools associated with different castes and tribes with photographic illustrations. Further, he provides comparative analyses of similar practices across different groups, shedding light on the interconnectedness and distinctiveness of each community (Thurston & Rangachari, 1909).

Traditionally, the philosophy of caste is justified through the doctrines of karma and dharma of Hinduism (Milner, 1993, p. 316). It holds that one's place in the caste hierarchy results from past actions in previous births, and one could secure a better position in the caste hierarchy if one fulfils the dharma in the present birth (Archie, n.d.). Religiously sanctioned, caste provided a foundation for a rigidly maintained social order (Sahay, 2022, p. 1166). Over the centuries, the caste system has been incorporated into the cultural dynamics of other religions, such as Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam, and Christianity in India (Claveyrolas, 2024).

Dr B. R. Ambedkar is one of the early scholars to deal with the caste question in his works. According to Ambedkar (1944), caste is more than just a social stratification; it is also a system that imposes social hierarchy and inequality. He argues that the caste system is inextricably linked to Hindu religious concepts that promote inequity, saying, "It is not possible to break Caste without annihilating the religious notions on which it, the Caste system, is founded" (p. 3). He states that the caste system is "not merely division of labour," but also "a division of labourers." He explains civilised society needs division of labour, while he observes that "in no civilized society is division of labour accompanied by this unnatural division of labourers into watertight compartments. Caste System is not merely a division of labourers which is quite different from division of labour—it is an hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other" (p. 22). This explanation of Ambedkar is proximal to the theme of the present paper, as he criticises the casteist hierarchisation of labourers.

M. N. Srinivas's contributions to understanding the caste system and its dynamics in India are significant. The following paragraphs provide a brief account of his key ideas on the workings of the caste system in India.

Srinivas contrasts the concepts he proposes – Sanskritisation and Westernisation – that the people adopt to mobilise themselves to higher levels in the social hierarchy. Sanskritisation is the adoption of the social practices of the upper castes by the people of the castes that are in the lower plane of the social strata. He writes, "Sanskritization enables a caste to obtain a higher position in the hierarchy" (Srinivas, 1962, p. 43). Further, he explains, "Hindu society is a stratified one, in which there are innumerable small groups each of which tries to pass for a higher group. And the best way of staking a claim to a higher position is to adopt the customs and way of life of a higher caste" (p. 44). On the other hand, westernisation is the adoption of Western ways of life and thought. He observes that while the lower castes adopt

the ways of the upper castes, the upper castes adopt the ways of the West (pp. 54–55). Further, social mobility is empowered by economic development and changing political affiliations.

Srinivas studies the dynamics of disputes in Indian villages and he terms the niche of such a study as "village studies" (p. 120). He confluences or converges his insights on a typical south Indian village in his fictional representation under the name of Rampura, which he details in his 1978 book on his ethnographic study, *The Remembered Village* (1978). He observes in chapters 8 and 9 of *Caste in Modern India* (1962), that due to the World Wars and the urbanisation of villages, interactions between the village heads, urban traders, and government officials became inevitable, which led to caste disputes and methods of resolving the disputes by local panchayats (pp. 112–135). Similar incidents are depicted in Davidar's fictional south Tamil village of Chevathar.

Srinivas also relates casteism to other forms of fundamentalism as reflected in the following statement: "In the political and cultural field, Westernization has given birth not only to nationalism but also to revivalism, communalism, 'casteism,' heightened linguistic consciousness, and regionalism" (Srinivas, 1969, p. 55).

Christianity in India: Proselytisation by the European Colonisers

The mission to civilise the people soaked in casteist and superstitious practices in India was carried forth by the European missionaries, though it is criticised for its colonial agenda. However, it is undeniable that scientific and rational thought in India has been seeded by the educational services of the European missionaries, though it was orthodoxically dogmatic in propagating Christian ideals and Christian conservative standards. A brief history of the Christianisation of the South is necessary to understand the historical context of the cultural civilisation of the people of the South.

The very first church in India—Thiruvithamcode Arappally, Thomayar Kovil, or St. Mary's Orthodox Church—was established in AD 63 by St. Thomas, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ, at Thiruvithamcode in Kanniyakumari District. It is considered one of the world's oldest churches that offers daily prayers. It is also India's oldest church that has not been reconstructed yet (Thiruvithamcode Arappally | Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, n.d.).

The history of Christianity in India is classified into four periods: the Syrian period, the Roman period, the Lutheran period, and the modern period. The oldest Christian community in India were natives of Travancore (Punniyavathi, 2011, p. 51). Caldwell (1881) writes, "The Roman Catholic Mission in Tinnevelly dates from 1532, ten years before the arrival on the coast of the celebrated Xavier, when Father Michael Vaz baptised most of the Paravas, or caste of fishermen. The founder of the Protestant Missions was Swartz, the most memorable name in the history of the Protestant Missions in Southern India" (p. 3).

Early missionaries of the Roman Catholic church in the South are the Spanish-born Portuguese Jesuit priest Francis Xavier, who arrived in India in 1542 and worked primarily among the Paravas of the Mannar coast (Daughrity, n.d., p. 3), Robert de Nobili, and Costantino Giuseppe Beschi (Caldwell, 1881, p. 4). On the other hand, the protestant mission in India was pioneered by the Danish missionaries Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Henry Pluetschau who arrived at Tranquebar (also known as Tarangambadi, Mayiladuthurai district) on July 9, 1706, by the orders of King Frederick IV of Denmark. The Danish mission collaborated with German Lutheran theological students of the University of Halle under the influence of the Evangelical Pietism movement. Ziegenbalg's leadership of the Tranquebar Mission was carried forward by J. E. Gruendler, and Benjamin Schultze. Danish missions were loosely affiliated with the British Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK). Christian Frederick Schwartz, who arrived at Tranquebar on July 30, 1750, is considered "the most renowned of all European Evangelicals in eighteenth-century India." The Tirunelveli missions of the SPCK and the SPGFP (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts) are documented in detail by Caldwell (1881), who observes that "the progress of Christianity in Tinnevelly (has) been greater and more rapid than in most of the other provinces of India" (p. 1). The mission to Christianize the subcontinent was led by five missionary societies, which are the London Missionary Society (LMS—founded in 1795), the Church Missionary Society (CMS—founded in 1799), the Wesleyan Methodist Mission (founded in 1814), the various Scottish missionary societies that would culminate under the banner of the Foreign Missions Committee in 1824, and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG—founded in 1701, but turned its attention again to India in 1818) (Daughrity, n.d., pp. 3–10). The five-fold doctrines of the Christian missions in India are church planting, educational initiatives, medical services, social development, and training local clergy.

Palamcottah, the present-day Palayamkottai in the Tirunelveli district, has been the hub of Christianity in the South, governed by the CMS. The educational contributions of the CMS in Tirunelveli include the founding of a printing press in 1847, the CMS Industrial School in 1854, the Sarah Tucker Training School for women in 1858, the Palamcottah High

School in 1867, the Usborne Memorial School in 1878, the Church Missionary College in 1880, Sarah Tucker High School in 1890, the Sarah Tucker College started in 1896, the Palamcottah School for the Blind in 1890, and the Florence Sainson School for the Deaf (Daughrity, n.d., p. 14). Notably, the Sarah Tucker College for Women is the first college in South Asia exclusively dedicated to women's education (Sarah Tucker College, n.d.). Palayamkottai, being the representative of Christian mission works in the South, has innumerable establishments that were founded by Christian missionaries in the South.

Another notable missionary in Tirunelveli, Amy Beatrice Carmichael, an Irish Christian missionary, based her mission at Dohnavur, Tirunelveli. She founded the Dohnavur Fellowship in 1901, which established an orphanage wherein former temple prostitutes and their children were aboded and rehabilitated (White, n.d.). Known as 'Amma' fondly, her spiritual, educational, and medical services are life-giving to the lowly (Sharpe, 1996). Today, it runs projects across the areas of child development, education, health care, community development, and conservation of nature (Dohnavur Fellowship, n.d.).

In the present-day Kanniyakumari district, missionary services have been immense as it was part of the then-Travancore empire, where Christianity rooted in India in the first place, as mentioned before. The prominent missionary cults that missioned in Travancore are the London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Church Missionary Society (CMS). LMS was established in 1795 by members from various denominations, such as the Congregationalists, the Presbyterians and the Methodists. The first LMS missionary in Travancore was W.T. Ringeltaube, a German Lutheran who commenced work in 1806. The CMS was formed by the Evangelicals in the Church of England in 1799 and started its work in north Travancore in 1816. Besides these two societies, there were a few Protestant missions, though they were relatively new and small. The Salvation Army established its headquarters at Nagercoil in 1890; the Brother Mission started its work in 1898; and the Lutheran Mission in 1907 (Kawashima, 1994, p. 93).

Indigenous education in Travancore had been inculcated by *asans* in the pial schools patronised by Brahmins and the Maharaja of Travancore (Kawashima, 1994, pp. 139–40). With the advent of the Christian missionaries, education became institutionalised in India. The education system of the LMS in Travancore was principally composed of three main parts – the Seminary at Nagercoil as the highest institution, the boarding schools and Anglo-Vernacular schools as secondary schools, and the village schools as primary schools (Kawashima, 1994, p. 143). In 1866, a total of 7, 853 students were enrolled in all the institutions of the LMS in Travancore (Kawashima cites the numerics from the LMS Annual Report for 1868 submitted by Duthie to Mullens) (Kawashima, 1994, p. 144). The prominent educational institutes founded by the LMS are Scott Christian College in 1864 and Girls' School in Neyyoor in 1850, among numerous middle schools and high schools. Koji's study also documents the curriculum and examination schemes followed by the government schools as well as those of the missionaries (Kawashima, 1994, pp. 138–88).

The medical services of the missionaries must also be marked. The LMS established the Neyyoor Mission Hospital in April 1838 (CSI Medical Mission Kanyakumari, n.d.), followed by more mission hospitals. The CMS, the Basel Mission, and the Salvation Army also contributed to the medical wellness of the South (Kawashima, 1994, pp. 189–239).

To this day, the Christian missions established in the South advocate education and health services as priorities. The CSI Kanniyakumari Diocese, the Tirunelveli Diocese, and the Thoothukudi-Nazareth Diocese, and the Roman Catholic parishes of the Dioceses of Palayamkottai, Kottar, Tuticorin, Kuzhithurai which are part of the Latin Rite, Thuckalay (Syro-Malabar Rite), and Marthandom (Syro-Malankara Rite), the Salvation Army, and other Christian organisations strive in the spiritual and overall well-being of the people (Church of South India - SYNOD, n.d.).

Sahay (2022) considers that the religious conversion of the oppressed sections of the society was as measure to assert their self-honour. Koji, in their doctoral thesis, examines the "triangular relationship between Christian missionaries, an(d) Indian princely state and the British colonial authorities" (p. 3).

Pate (1993), in his gazette of the erstwhile Tinnevelly district, observes, "In every hundred of the population eighty-four are Hindus, ten are Christians and six are Muhammadans. The proportion of Christians to the total population is higher than in any other Madras district" (88).

Be it the progressive initiatives of the missionaries on the one hand, it is also noted that "proselytizing activities of the missionaries increasingly came to be criticized by the higher castes, and the Travancore government issued an order to prohibit religious education in school hours" (Kawashima, 1994, p. 147). Though the measures of the missionaries are praised as "services" on the one hand, it has also been subjected to criticisms for their agenda of destroying or wiping away the native cultural practices by the process of Christianisation, which emphasises the privilege or superiority of

Christianity over the religions of the world. In the modern context, converting people of other cultures to Christianity is considered cultural imperialism and religious colonialism.

3. METHODS

Qualitative textual analysis has been employed for the present study. Manual sorting of the passages in the literary text has been utilised to correlate with theoretical concepts.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

David Davidar's *The House of Blue Mangoes*: An Introduction

Casteism and Christianisation are juxtaposed and contrasted in David Davidar's *The House of Blue Mangoes*. The novel is divided into three books titled "Chevathar," "Doraipuram," and "Pulimed," respectively, based on the prominent setting of the events narrated in each book. "Chevathar" narrates the conflicts between the fictional castes – Andavars and Vedhars – that culminate in the Bettle of Chevathar in 1899. This caste war is a fictionalisation of the Sivakasi Riots of 1899 between the Nadars and the Maravars. Davidar's fictionalisation of the Sivakasi Riots of 1899 not only anchors the novel in historical realism but also critiques the cyclical nature of caste violence, as mirrored in contemporary South Indian conflicts. It could also be considered as a convergence of the many disputes in South Tamil Nadu that happened between the Nadars and the Maravars as well as with other communities such as that of the Paravars in coastal regions. The Andavars come out victorious in the battle despite many casualties. Chevathar Gnanaprakasam Solomon Dorai Andavar, shortly Solomon Dorai, the headman of the village, coordinates the battle with his brother Joshua and second eldest son Aaron Dorai, whereas he chides his eldest son Daniel Dorai for being studious, intellectual, and not physically strong. As Daniel Dorai refuses to battle due to fear, Solomon Dorai makes Daniel accompany his mother Charity Dorai and the women of the family to Nagercoil, Charity's native place and Solomon's in-laws.

Book 2, "Doraipuram", is based in Nagercoil and narrates the re-establishment of the Dorai family in Chevathar after their dispersal to Nagercoil after the battle of 1899. Daniel Dorai, after being apprenticed to a doctor of indigenous medicine, goes on to pursue Western medicine in Madurai at the urge of his employer, Dr Pillai, the Siddha vaidyar. Over the years, Daniel Dorai has become a renowned doctor in Nagercoil, spearheaded by his business of self-composed skin-whitening oil and cream – Doctor Dorai's Moonwhite Thylam and Cream – among other body care products (Davidar, 2013, p. 223). With the wealth he has gained, Daniel Dorai plans to establish a colony of his family, including distant relatives over the generations. He invites all his kinsmen and divides among them the vast sections of land he acquired or bought in Chevathar. This establishment of a sub-colony in a land colonised by the British is parallel. As the British colonised India to Christianise and civilise the natives from eastern barbarism that includes casteism, superstitious beliefs and practices, Daniel Dorai, whose family having embraced Christianity, has their own tiny establishment in their native village, which can be interpreted as a miniature version of the British colony(ies).

The teaching of Christian ideals is featured in the novel with the mission work of Father Ashworth in St. Paul's Church, Chevathar (in Book 1), and the Home Church of Nagercoil in Book 2, where the Andavars put on the "white masks" (Franz Fanon).

The Clash Between Casteism and Christian Ideals

It is observable that the practice of casteism and the teachings of Christianity are at odds with each other. For example, the fundamental concept in Christianity, that is, to love one's neighbour as oneself, is incompatible with the divisive perception of identifying and treating each person according to one's caste identity. The principles of the casteist practices, are in disjuncture with the concept of perceiving every human to be as oneself, as only then will a person be able to love others as oneself.

Davidar articulates his criticisms of casteism throughout his narrative. The following passages attempt to trace the casteist elements, incidents, narratives and opinions mentioned in the novel, before which Davidar's voice of questioning and criticising casteism is quoted here, which rather appears later on in the novel, as the locals' participation in India's freedom movement are recounted:

> Indian vs Indian. We're brilliant at it. Differences of caste, community, language and religion have split our society for thousands of years. All the more surprising, then, that in modern times we've acquired the wholly undeserved reputation of being a tolerant people, exemplars to the rest of the world on how to make a plural society work. In

> truth, we're only happy to 'adjust' when it suits us, and our behaviour generally shows that we're unable to handle the vast diversity that invests this nation. If we're not actively intolerant we're inert. This makes us fair game for loathsome casteists and communalists (usually priests and politicians) who are always willing to exploit the envy and resentment we nurse against each other. (p. 243)

Aligning with Davidar's observation, Christ's sayings in the New Testament warn the early Christians to be beware of divisive attitudes that he prophesied. The prophetic biblical verses in Matthew 10: 21, and Matthew 24: 7, frowning at the brother against brother, nation against nation, and kingdom against kingdom narrative, reflect the casteist sentiments of the people. In Matthew 10: 21 (NIV), Jesus prophesies that "brother will betray brother to death," and later on in Matthew 24: 7 (KJV): "For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers(e) places."

The novel opens with a lucid description of the landscape of Chevathar, suddenly to narrate the tragic rape of an Andavar girl by thugs of uncertain identity, (first supposed to be Vedhar men, but later on revealed that these men were set up by Vakeel Perumal, an Andavar himself, to challenge Solomon's headmanship and take over him as the village head), as the girl along with her sister, were walking towards the village fair for the Panguni Uthiram festival. Later, it is revealed that this assault on the Andavar girl is a retribution by the Vedhars, for some Andavars entered the Murugan temple of the Vedhars, to which the Andavars were forbidden to enter. The Andavars were to worship in the Amman temple. This fictionalisation of the early temple-entry agitation of the Nadars can be viewed as the divisiveness inherent or rather added to the Hindu religion by people who wanted to enforce or maintain power. It is critical that the concept of the all-knowing, all-seeing God is divided by men to suit their power politics by enforcing biased, prejudiced, and inequitable laws that forbid and discriminate against certain sections of society.

The beginning of the novel mentions the challenges that hinder and delay the plan for the construction of roads in the village. Solomon Dorai, being the headman or the thalaivar of the village, has to provide a plan so that the caste sentiments of the villagers are not brushed over, as the British authorities consult him. It can be noted that the headman of the village is the point of contact for the British officials' administrative reforms in the village. Solomon's ancestors have kept the village free of caste disputes, and he takes it upon his shoulders to fulfil the duty of keeping his village in harmony. The problem that arises due to the road construction (to connect the village to the salt-works for trade) is that the various caste groups in the village claim that the road should pass through their quarters. However, the original plan by the officials was such that the road would pass along the ancestral "Big House" of the Dorai family in a straight line from the bridge to the salt-works, connecting Chevathar at the land in front of the Dorai house. After negotiations with the other caste representatives and the British officers, the road is laid in such a way that it connects all the settlements of the different castes "to appease their egos" (Davidar, 2013, pp. 38–41). This is the reason for the intensified caste riots of the late 19th century, not only in the South but also all over India, as the Industrialisation of India naturally required the Indians to break caste barriers. Until the British industrialisation of India, the mingling of castes was socially limited by the enforced norm that people of a certain caste must not enter the streets or the settlements of another caste. The same norm had been advocated even after connectivity through roads, which resulted in caste violence across the country. Even today, the norm is practised in parts of the South and the nation.

During the negotiations between the representatives of various castes on the construction of road, when the fact that the Government would not expend much to afford roads connecting all the quarters, the caste representatives object by arguing that "the traditional laws of pollution which forbade untouchables and the lowest castes from even venturing near the main village path would be broken not only by the inhabitants but by outsiders who would be able to wander at will into the village" (Davidar, 2013, p. 39). The negotiation is postponed for later, and after a year, Solomon meets Dipty Vedhar with a compromise: "The road would pass through the Vedhar quarter, and also skirt Vakeel Perumal's house and the Murugan temple, thereby assuaging the egos of the higher castes. But as this was a government road, members of every caste would have the right to use it, and it was up to him as thalaivar to ensure that as far as possible caste rules were not broken. It wasn't the perfect solution but it was the best he could come up with" (Davidar, 2013, p. 40), thereby burdening himself with the duty of keeping the village away from caste disputes.

The incapability and the compulsion to adhere to the caste norms to avoid trouble makes the headman propose a rule complying with the traditional caste laws. Paraiyans, being considered lower to the Andavars and the Vedhars in the caste hierarchy, the barbaric ego of the upper castes is evident in the incident recounted. The clash between the social customs and the laws of the government is evident. This could be read that the norms of casteism are illogical, uncivilised, and discriminatory, while Western logic and rationality are seen in the proposed straight-road plan.

Davidar (2013) speaks through the interior monologue in Solomon, who recognises that the innumerable small paths in the village conform to the "rules of pollution and caste" (p. 43). The lowest caste has(d) to walk twice as much as the highest caste to reach the same destination. Davidar (2013) ironically criticises the inequity in the social system, though his defenceless protagonist is wary of the "progress" (p. 38) that betides his village (Chevathar). As explained earlier, this description of Chevathar parallels the account of the "remembered village" of M. N. Srinivas.

Caste laws govern not only the administrative steps in the connectivity and transit between the places of a region but also dictate religious practices. Ironically, the Scottish priest of St. Paul's Cathedral, who was cattling Chevathar during the time of Solomon's grandfather, was left thinking about a solution to the casteist sentiments of the upper caste Andavars, after he baptised the Paraiyans into the church. To this casteist mental upheaval, Solomon's ancestor proposes that a "hollow" wall be built inside the church to separate the uppers from the lowers. Further, Davidar (2013) exposes the flexiblisation of Christianity by retaining casteist norms, as follows: "Separate communion tables and chalices would ensure that Andavar and Paraiyan didn't drink from the same cup or eat of the same bread. Neither group had set eyes on the other in all the years that they had worshipped together, for the lower castes left the church immediately after the service through a door set into their side of the building" (p. 45).

The prevalence and the rigidity of the caste system is an ugly truth. Undeniably, the Christianisation of the South failed in its vision of the praxis of loving one's neighbour as oneself, the doctrine of equality of all human beings. The following passage from *The House of Blue Mangoes* scaffolds this argument:

> Over the next sixty-two years, all the priests of the Chevathar mission had tried to dismantle the offending wall, without success. The present rector had often thought it a pity that Solomon, that most fair-minded of men, should refuse to take down the wall. Arguments that Christianity did not admit of caste were routinely ignored and after some years of trying, Father Ashworth gave up. (Davidar, 2013, p. 45)

While the undeniability of the failure of proselytisation to dismantle the caste system remains a fixed truth, to their best effort, the missionaries incorporated Western logic to "culturally familiarise" (Raja & Prabahar, 2023) the Hebrew scripture to suit the Indian context. As such, the missionaries tried to find parallels between the Indian scriptures and that of Christianity to make the Indians believe in the law of Christ. Father Ashworth's project to "collate and compare the sublime truths of Hinduism and Christianity" in his manuscript Some Thoughts on the Hindu-Christian Encounter is a fine example. Though Father Ashworth acknowledges the necessary scholarship for such an endeavour, he tries to expand his understanding and embarks on the above-mentioned manuscript, hoping to solve the village's problems. This "refashioning" of the native scriptures and traditions is evident in the Tamil songs sung in churches, christened as *keerthanaigal*. These *keerthanaigal* have Sanskritised words infused with them, as is explainable by the Sanskritisation of the Nadars in history.

The caste consciousness of the Christian converts is evident throughout the novel. The headman, Solomon Dorai, after his shave by the barber, considers that the "polluting touch of the low-caste barber had to be washed away" (Davidar, 2013, p. 23). Furthermore, as quoted in the previous paragraph, Solomon's disinterestedness in the Paraiyans' claiming their legal rights explains his discriminatory attitude, which is embedded in the "collective unconscious" (Carl Jung) and the "racial memory" (Northrop Frye) of the South. Further, Daniel Dorai, the second-generation character in the novel, forbids his son Kannan when he expresses his wish to marry an Anglo-Indian girl he met while studying at Madras Christian College, Chennai. The caste system holds endogamy at its core solely to ensure the assets remain inherited by their "imagined community" (Benedict Anderson's term) so that the wealth and power of the caste increase to provide social security and social mobility. These aspects of the converts' lives and behaviour strip off their hypocrisy, though it is also furthered by social fear. It can be noted that Solomon considers caste disputes as an "infection" (Davidar, 2013, p. 48).

Davidar (2013) concretises the casteist practises of the society in his nature and bird imagery: "even the birds were sucked into the caste structure with this, the most striking raptor, called the Brahminy kite, and the most dowdy, the Pariah kite" (p. 43). Davidar (2013) provides a bird's eye view of the village: "a fine mesh of lines incising the ancient earth of the village, several little paths that began and ended for no reason or wandered erratically across the place. Some of them had been worn into the soil by the boys who herded cows, goats, buffaloes and other livestock. But Solomon understood the significance of the other paths. These conformed to the rules of pollution and caste" (p. 43).

Even Father Ashworth tries to convince Solomon to end the caste dispute peacefully, avoiding bloodshed, but this is futile. Even the inhuman results of a battle, as urged by Father Ashworth, are not heeded by the casteist. Western Christian teachings thus become meaningless in the caste system that is rooted in casteism. Thus, the nature of the

relationship between casteism and Christianisation is explained. The clash is found to be irresolvable. Hopefully, in Kannan, one can find the unravelling of the casteist sentiment and an inclusive attitude. So, it is inferred that with time, education, and modernisation, the casteism inherent in the system can be dismantled.

5. CONCLUSION

The researchers have analysed the interplay between casteism and Christianity. It is argued that the practice of casteism is conflicting and contradictory to the ideals and teachings of Christianity. The religious hypocrisy of the South is revealed in the analysis that the converts embrace Christianity for the power it bestows on them economically and educationally, as they do not follow the teachings of the Christian scripture that advocates equality and non-discriminatory attitude among the followers. It is also acknowledged that this argument cannot be generalised to all Christian converts, as there are people who convert to Christianity solely for the spiritual enrichment it offers and the universal brotherhood it emphasises. The reason for the religious hypocrisy is observed as the greed or desire for social mobility, as well as the fear over social security. Thus, it is observed that, like other philosophies like Marxism, the theory and practice of Christianity are at odds with each other, primarily by the influence of the casteist tradition in the South.

Also, the destructive effects of casteism are contrasted with the empowerment that is bestowed by Christian education—especially on women. The educational and medical services of the missionaries are highlighted. The researchers deconstruct the power dynamics at play in the practice of casteism and Christianity.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The present research is funded by the Junior Research Fellowship of the University Grants Commission of India.

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