

DALIT HUMANIZATION: A QUEST BASED ON M.M. THOMAS' THEOLOGY OF
SALVATION AND HUMANIZATION

DALIT HUMANISERING: EEN ZOEKTOCHT GEBASEERD OP M.M. THOMAS'
THEOLOGIE VAN HEIL EN HUMANISERING

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	viii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Statement of Problem	1
1.2 Previous Research	4
1.3 Methodology	6
1.4 The Sources	7
1.5 The Structure of the Study	8
2. BACKGROUND OF M.M. THOMAS	12
2.1 Introduction	12
2.2 Political Revolution for Freedom	15
2.2.1 Colonialism and its impact on Indian society	15
2.2.2 Indian nationalism	17
2.2.3 Hindu-Muslim communalism	29
2.3 Social Revolution for Equality	30
2.3.1 Introduction	30
2.3.2 Dalit movements against Brahmanism	33
2.3.3 The context of patriarchy	37
2.3.4 The Context of Poverty	40
2.3.5 The Context of Ideologies	43
2.4 Religious Revolt for Identity	50
2.4.1 Renaissance and Resurgence Movements	50
2.5 Conclusion	58
3. THE LIFE AND WORK OF M.M. THOMAS	60
3.1 Introduction	60

3.2	In Search of Evangelical Spirituality (1916 – 1936)	61
3.2.1	The Evangelical spirituality	61
3.2.2	Personal salvation	63
3.3	In Search of Social Responsibility (1937–1946)	65
3.3.1	Social responsibility	65
3.3.2	A Quest and search for ideologies	72
3.4	In Search of an Ecumenical Responsibility for Unity (1947–1975)	78
3.4.1	World student Christian federation (1947–1953)	79
3.4.2	Christian institute for study of religion and society (CISRS) (1957–1976)	81
3.4.3	The World council of churches (WCC) (1953–1975)	83
3.5	In Search of Political Responsibility (1977–1992)	90
3.5.1	Political Emergency	91
3.5.2	Governor of Nagaland	93
3.6	In Search of Biblical Exposition for Contemporary Society (1977–1996)	94
3.6.1	The Study-Man	95
3.6.2	Experience of Marginalization	96
3.6.3	A Bridge-BUILDER	97
3.7	Conclusion	100
4.	M. M. THOMAS' THEOLOGY OF SALVATION AND HUMANIZATION	102
4.1	Introduction	102
4.2	Definitions	102
4.2.1	Salvation	102
4.2.2	Humanization	103
4.3	M.M. Thomas' Theology of Salvation and Humanization	105
4.3.1	Starting point of his theology	105
4.3.2	The Relation of salvation and humanization	107

4.4	Development of Thomas' Concepts of Salvation and Humanization	108
4.4.1	Salvation as redemption: An evangelical approach	109
4.4.2	Salvation and humanization: An ecumenical approach	110
4.4.3	Salvation as humanization: A liberational and pluralistic Approach	113
4.5	The Obstacles for Humanization	117
4.5.1	Pietistic individualism as source of dehumanization	117
4.5.2	Religion as source of dehumanization	118
4.5.3	Caste institutionalizes discrimination	120
4.5.4	Modernization as source of dehumanization	121
4.6	The Subjects of Humanization	123
4.6.1	Humanization of dehumanized people	124
4.6.2	Humanization of oppressive structures and systems	127
4.7	The Source of Humanization	131
4.7.1	The resurrection of Jesus is the hope of humanity	131
4.7.2	Universalization of the gospel leads to humanization	132
4.8	The Means of Humanization	134
4.8.1	Secularism as a means for humanization	135
4.8.2	Inter-religious dialogue as a means for humanization	137
4.8.3	Prophetic spirituality as a means for humanization	140
4.8.4	Conscientization as a means for humanization	141
4.8.5	Revolution as a means for humanization	143
4.9	The Process of Humanization	144
4.9.1	Individual salvation to collective salvation	145
4.9.2	Eschatological salvation to existential salvation	147
4.9.3	Social service to social justice	149
4.9.4	Sacralization to secularization	152
4.9.5	Church-centred religious fellowship to a	

	Christ-centred secular fellowship	153
4.10	The Goal of Humanization	157
	4.10.1 Humanization as personhood and peoplehood	157
	4.10.2 Humanization as hominization	159
	4.10.3 Humanization as new humanity in Christ	160
4.11	Mission as Humanization	162
4.12	Conclusion	163
5.	APPRAISAL ON M.M. THOMAS' THEOLOGY OF SALVATION AND HUMANIZATION	166
5.1	Introduction	166
5.2	Liberation Perspective	167
	5.2.1 A forerunner of liberation theologies in India	167
	5.2.2 A liberation theologian from the majority world	168
	5.2.3 A search for salvation and humanization	170
	5.2.4 Salvation as humanization	173
5.3	Tribal Perspective	174
5.4	Feminist Perspective	178
5.5	Appraisal of Dalit Theologians	180
	5.5.1 Arvind P. Nirmal: Exclusivism	181
	5.5.2 Masillamani Azariah: An advocator of brahmanism	188
	5.5.3 V. Devasahayam: A theologian of humanization	195
	5.5.4 Sathianathan Clarke: A colonial theologian	198
5.6	An Overall Assessment of Thomas' Theology	201
	5.6.1 A father of subaltern movements	204
	5.6.2 Christological significance for Dalit theology	211
	5.6.3 Anthropological insights for Dalit theology	212
	5.6.4 Ecclesiological significance for Dalit theology	212
5.7	Conclusion	213

6.	RELEVANCE OF SALVATION AND HUMANIZATION TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT	
	OF DALIT THEOLOGY	215
6.1	Introduction	215
6.2	Dalit Experience as the Starting Point for a Dalit Theology	217
6.3	Towards an Incarnational Dalit Christology	220
	6.3.1 Jesus' protest against social segregation	221
	6.3.2 The humanness of Jesus	223
	6.3.3 The dalitness of Jesus	226
	6.3.4 Jesus as the prototype of Dalit	228
	6.3.5 The resurrection of Jesus	229
6.4	Towards an Integrated Dalit Anthropology	230
	6.4.1 Humans as the creation of God	232
	6.4.2 Salvation of body and soul	234
6.5	Towards an Inclusive Dalit Ecclesiology	236
	6.5.1 The dominant minority rules the dependent majority	236
	6.5.2 A prophetic spirituality for humanization in the church	237
	6.5.3 A prophetic mission of the church for social and Eco-justice in society	239
	6.5.4 A Plurality of spirituality and a Christ-centred secular fellowship for humanization	241
6.6	Implementation of Dalit theology	247
	6.6.1 Dalit conscientization for humanization	248
	6.6.2 Visualization of historical realities: A contextual demand	251
	6.6.3 Verbalization of the historical realities: A Biblical command	252
	6.6.4 Verbalization to actualization for humanization: An existential participation	253
	6.6.5 Dalit education for humanization	254

6.6.6	Political participation for humanization	257
6.7	Conclusion	261
7.	CONCLUSION	265
7.1	Introduction	265
7.2	Thomas' Theology of Salvation and Humanization	265
7.3	Critiques of Thomas' Theology	269
7.4	Towards a Dalit Theology Based on M.M. Thomas' Concept of Humanization	271
BIBLIOGRAPHY		274
I	Primary Sources: Books and Articles	274
A.	Unpublished	274
B.	Published	274
II	Secondary Sources	279
III	Websites	292
SUMMARY IN DUTCH		293
CURRICULUM VITAE		303

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of Problem

According to the three Abrahamic religions God created human beings in His own image. In the creation narratives humanity, irrespective of race, color, creed and gender, is considered the crown of creation. Humans are said to be the representative of God on earth to rule over and take care of God's created world as a guardian. Though according to the dominant interpretation of these narratives all are equal in the sight of God, the Dalits¹ in India are considered as inferior, impure, degraded and thus dehumanized in every aspect of their life on the basis of a caste system.

Caste is divine according to Hinduism. One of the most ancient texts of this religion, the Rig Veda, dating from around 1200 BCE,² teaches that the creator god created four kinds of people out of his body: Brahmins- out of his mouth to be the mouth piece of Brahma; Kshatriyas- out of his arms to be the warriors to protect the people of the land; *Vaisyas*- out of his thigh as merchants to produce food for the people and the *Shudras*- out of his feet as slaves to serve all the above three kinds of people (Rig Veda 10,90). The fifth group is called Outcastes as they are not part of the four main castes of Hinduism and not part of the body of the creator god. They have been called Scheduled Castes (British colonial government) and at times also *Harijans* which means children of God (Mahatma Gandhi). But they call themselves *Dalits* which means broken and crushed people.³ The caste system advocated and legitimized by Hinduism denies basic human rights and privileges, and qualities like human dignity and

¹ Arvind .P. Nirmal, the founding father of Dalit theology, gives six meanings to the term Dalit. Dalit means 'the broken, the opened, the bisected, the scattered, the crushed and the displayed.' Thus they are 'no people'; A. P. Nirmal, "Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective", in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, ed. A. P. Nirmal, (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, no year), 139.

² Axel Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present*, (Princeton et al.: Princeton University Press 2004), 48.

³ Ramesh Chandra & Sangh Mitra, *Caste System in India*, (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 2003), 184 – 204; Sangeeth Kumar, *Changing Role of the Caste System: A Critique* (Jaipur/New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2005), 44 – 90.

human identity for Dalits in Indian society. This caste discrimination has caused a long lasting negative impact in the life of Dalits whereby they are religiously and systematically made to believe that they are inferior, impure and untouchable people of the society.

Dalits have protested against caste-system because it promotes discrimination, dehumanization, segregation, marginalization and inequality on the basis of caste, color and gender in the society. Dalits' struggle has been a struggle towards salvation and humanization, combatting all forms and forces of discrimination and dehumanization. They are fighting for salvation and humanization. The oppression of Dalits is not limited only to Hinduism, but it is all-pervasive in Indian society, including the Christian community. The churches of the past as well as the present have not adequately understood and addressed the issue of caste and Dalit discrimination.

Traditional evangelical Christianity has focused mainly on the salvation of human's ultimate destiny which is purely eschatological. It has tended to overlook the historical realities and challenges of human destiny in this temporal world- the penultimate. Even where evangelical churches and organization have paid attention to the social and physical aspects of human beings, they have mainly limited themselves to social service or charitable work and relief work. Though commendable, they have neglected to advocate a more radical transformation of society; they have not sought social action and social justice in terms of persons and society and community to build a perfect humanity. Christian mission organizations and churches in India have compartmentalized salvation and humanization, giving importance to eternal salvation over the humanization.

An exception is formed by the writings and speeches of the Indian theologian Madathilparampil Mammen Thomas.⁴ Thomas sees salvation and humanization as two equally relevant aspects of the Christian message of salvation. Thomas focuses and addresses the contextual and existential human struggles of marginalized groups in India, such as Dalits, tribals and women; his writings arise from and are of particular

⁴ Here after M.M. Thomas.

relevance to the marginalized and downtrodden people of the society in India.⁵ His writings are radical in nature, questioning the indifferent attitudes and approaches of both social and religious authorities of the society. Thomas advocates a context-oriented and action-required approach towards issues and challenges of struggling humanity. His theology is holistic and liberative, focusing on the wholeness of the person, both physically and spiritually, striving for a richer and a fuller human life in the society.

Thomas seems to be a man for the masses, as he interacts and reflects on the struggles of humanity. Though he has written on various topics and issues pertaining to social, political and religious life of the people such as religious pluralism, ecumenism, secularism and nation-building etc. his primary focus seems to be the humanization of dehumanized people of the society. This thesis studies M.M Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization with the focus of exploring its relevance for the development of Dalit theology in India. The concepts of salvation and humanization are crucial and relevant to the marginalized Dalits, tribals and women in the society as they are socially, religiously, economically and politically oppressed and suppressed in the society. These notions seem pertinent to the marginalized people because their struggle and cry has been a cry for humanization from all forms and forces of dehumanization.

Moreover, the church has not adequately done justice to the holistic and integrated salvation of both body and soul, historical and eschatological, penultimate and ultimate. According to John C.B. Webster two thirds or 70% of Indian Christianity is of Dalit origin but the church and its leadership did not pay due attention to the pertinent and perennial problem that the marginalized people suffer with regard to discrimination, segregation, degradation and dehumanization in the name of caste,

⁵ See M.M. Thomas and Paul E. Converse, *Revolution and Redemption*, (New York: Friendship Press, 1955); M.M. Thomas, *The Christian Response to the Asian Revolution*, (London: SCM, 1966); M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization: Some Crucial Issues of the Theology of Mission in Contemporary India*. (Madras: CLS, 1971); M.M. Thomas, *Religion and the Revolt of the Oppressed*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1981); M.M. Thomas, *Faith and Ideology in the Struggle for Justice*, (Bombay: Bombay Urban Industrial League for Development, 1984); M.M. Thomas, *God the Liberator*, trans. T.M. Philip, (Tiruvalla, India: CSS, 2004).

color and gender both in the church and society.⁶ As Thomas' concepts of salvation and humanization are so pertinent to the humanization of the dehumanized Dalits, this research aims to find its relevance and applicability towards building and developing a Dalit theology that would add and enhance the task and the process of humanization.

1.2 Previous Research

Thomas as a lay theologian played a key role in the mission and ministry of the church both nationally and internationally. He was a renowned Indian Christian thinker, writer and theologian with a worldwide reputation and was an important figure in the ecumenical movement. Thomas has been the subject of many research projects both nationally and internationally. A number of theses, at the master's and doctoral level, as well as other publications have studied Thomas' theology in an effort to understand and interpret the relevance of Thomas' theology for the mission of the church. A number of the doctoral studies and publications mentioned here recognize and appreciate the contribution of Thomas to Christianity in India. Sunand Sumithra wrote a PhD thesis entitled *Theology of Mission in Indian Context: A Study of Madathilaparampil Mammen Thomas*. The thesis, defended in Tübingen in 1981, is an attempt to systematize the theology of M.M. Thomas. Also in 1981 Stephen A. Morton defended a PhD thesis on M.M. Thomas at the University of Nottingham. Morton conducted a comparative study entitled *P.D. Devanandan, M. M. Thomas and the Task of Indigenous Theology*. Eric R. Mitchell also did a comparative study, looking at *M.M. Thomas' View on Church and Society: A Comparison with the Liberation Theology of Gustavo Gutierrez* (PhD dissertation, Drew University, New Jersey, 1985).

T.M. Philip's doctoral study on Thomas was published as *The Encounter between Theology and Ideology: An Exploration into the Communicative Theology of M.M. Thomas* (Madras: CLS, 1986). Jacob T. Thomas also did his doctoral studies on M.M. Thomas. His *Ethics of a World Community: Contribution of M.M. Thomas* examines the

⁶ John C.B. Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996), x.

theological ethics of Thomas in the secular ideological context of India and proposes a *koinonia* ethics for Indian society. Hielke T. Wolters focused on the prophetic participation of the Indian church for richer and fuller humanity. His work was published as a book named *Theology of Prophetic Participation: M.M. Thomas's Concept of Salvation and the Collective Struggle for Fuller Humanity in India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996). Mohan Chacko researched the political aspect of Thomas's theology; his work was published as a book *Interpreting Society: A Study of the Political Theology of M.M. Thomas and Its Implications for Mission* (Dehra Dun: Mohan Chacko, 2000).

K.P. Kuruvila's doctoral study - *The Word Became Flesh: A Christological Paradigm for Doing Theology in India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002) - discusses incarnation and cross as the paradigm for inculturation and liberation of people. He studies the liberative dimension of M.M. Thomas' theology for the liberation of Dalits. K.P Kuruvilla analyzes three basic approaches or voices prevalent in the formulation of Indian Christian theology. He takes Pandipeddi Chenchiah as the representative of elite voice who follows the brahmanical tradition; M.M. Thomas represents the ecumenical voice and the Subaltern voice to represent the Dalit interpretation of Christian theology. Kuruvilla's focus is on developing an Indian Christian theology which is contextually and culturally rooted in the Indian context based on the paradigm of incarnation. Ken Christoph Miyamoto's doctoral study compares the theologians M.M. Thomas and C.S. Song. His thesis entitled *God's Mission in Asia: A Comparative and Contextual Study of This-Worldly Holiness and the Theology of Missio Dei in M. M. Thomas and C. S. Song* (2007) concludes that God's this-worldly presence enhances the Asian ecumenism in the midst of diversity of cultures and plurality of faiths.

As it is evident from the survey above, there are a number of studies on different aspects of Thomas' theology. Yet the relevance of Thomas' theology for the struggles of the Dalits in India has generally speaking been neglected and overlooked. Adrian Bird's PhD dissertation attempts to connect Thomas with Dalit theology. He argues in his book *M. M. Thomas and Dalit Theology* (Bangalore: BTESSC/SATHRI, 2008) that Thomas's theology is a signboard for the emergence and development of Dalit theology. This

research goes beyond Bird and attempts to argue that Thomas' concept of salvation and humanization are key aspects for the development of a relevant Dalit theology that enhances the task and process of humanization of marginalized Dalits.

This study therefore undertakes the task of investigating Thomas' notions of salvation and humanization, focusing on development of the concepts in Thomas' theology as well and the – at times critical – reception of these notions in India and beyond. On the basis of this analysis this dissertation develops a Dalit theology which takes its point of departure in Thomas' notions of salvation and humanization. Rooted in but moving beyond Thomas' theology, the Dalit theology developed in this dissertation takes a triangular approach: it charts an incarnational Dalit Christology as its source and hope, an integrated Dalit anthropology towards an integrated salvation of body and soul and an inclusive Dalit ecclesiology which focuses on Christocentric spirituality but is open to theocentric humanization.

By doing this, the study argues that the concepts of salvation and humanization as proposed by Thomas are crucial to Dalits and relevant for the development of Dalit theology in India. Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization is not just, to use Bird's word, a 'signboard'; rather Thomas' theology is a springboard that gives birth to Dalit humanization and development of Dalit theology.

1.3 Methodology

The methodology used in this study is historical, systematic and analytical to explore the context and Thomas' life and work, both at the national and international level which were foundational for Thomas' development of the concepts of salvation and humanization. The historical method is used in Chapters 2 and 3 in order to situate the concepts salvation and humanization in their proper biographic and contextual settings; in Chapter 3 I make use of primary sources - both published and unpublished - to trace the relevant aspects of Thomas' biography. In Chapter 4 I explore the concepts salvation and humanization making use of both historical as well as systematic theological

methods, looking at the meaning of these concepts in systematic theology as well as the particular interpretation given to them by Thomas and how Thomas' theology was interpreted by other theologians. Chapter 4 as well is to a large extent based on primary sources, being Thomas' writings. In Chapters 5 I use systematic analytical and critical method to appraise Thomas' theology especially by the Dalit theologians to find out building blocks for the development of Dalit theology, while in chapter 6 I myself develop a Dalit theology that takes its departure in the theology of M.M. Thomas. As an Indian Christian theologian from Dalit background, I actively engage in the church and ministry among fellow Dalits. My quest for a Dalit theology on the basis on Thomas' concept of humanization is not merely an academic exercise but an attempt to contribute to a spirituality and theology which intends to underscore the dignity of Dalits and improve their life's situation. Chapter 7 serves as a conclusion.

1.4 The Sources

The research is based on published and unpublished sources, both primary and secondary. The primary sources are writings by Thomas which include both published and unpublished materials such as books and articles, typed and hand written materials, lectures, letters etc. These materials are available at United Theological College Library, Bangalore. A complete collection of all Thomas' writings both published and unpublished materials are systematized, available and accessible for the researchers in the UTC library archives. These materials are used to explore the theology of Thomas. The secondary sources are formed by books, articles and theses written on Thomas, some published and others unpublished, which are of crucial importance for the interpretation of Thomas' theology. Many of these materials are available at the UTC library in Bangalore, some were accessed at other places. Though the materials differ considerably in type, content and quality, they are materials that are relevant to the topic of study. In addition secondary material is used to sketch the Indian context during

the life of M.M. Thomas as well as for the assessment of Thomas' work by liberation, Dalit, tribal and feminist theologians.

The research is limited to the writings of Thomas in English. Thomas has written a number of articles and books in Malayalam which is his mother tongue, which unfortunately I cannot read; most of his writings are in English or have been translated into English by T.M. Philip.

1.5 The Structure of the Study

The study is comprised of seven chapters. Each chapter starts with a brief introduction and description of different sections and ends with a conclusion.

Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter which states and explains the statement of the problem. It situates the research question in its historical context and shows why this research is relevant and pertinent. The research problem focuses on the fact that the concept of salvation and humanization, which is so vital and crucial to human life both now and in the past, has not yet been adequately addressed by the past and present churches in relation to the struggles of the marginalized people in India, and in particular the Dalits. Therefore this study is important as it attempts to study and assess the vital concepts of salvation and humanization of M.M. Thomas with regard to their relevance for the Dalits and the development of Dalit theology. In this thesis I argue that as the Dalit struggle and focus has been the salvation and humanization of the Dalits Thomas' concepts of humanization and salvation are crucial for the development of relevant Dalit theology in India today. Dalits are and have been alienated and forsaken as outcastes because they do not belong to the four main castes of Hinduism. They are segregated and separated in society as unclean people as they do the menial work; discriminated and dehumanized as untouchables by all the people of the society. This thesis argues that Thomas' concepts of humanization and salvation in nutshell capture crux of the Christian message of liberation and salvation for Dalits in India today.

Chapter two deals with the context in which Thomas' concepts of salvation and humanization have evolved and taken shape. The chapter identifies three crucial contexts that influenced his theology of salvation and humanization. The first context was the context of political revolution; a revolution that fought for political freedom and independence from the colonial rule.⁷ The emergence of Indian National Congress imparted the spirit of Indian nationalism and mobilized the people to agitate and revolt against the foreign rule. This context of political revolution of people for freedom has had great impact in the life of Thomas and forms the background against which he wrote and advocated salvation and humanization of people from all political clutches and bondages that enslaved and denied the democratic rights and privileges of the people.

The second context was the context of social revolution of people for social equality, especially by the marginalized Dalits, tribals and women. There were many movements of revolt across India during the 19th century, questioning the unjust social system and structures which denied and deprived self-respect and equality of the Dalits. These movements gained momentum with the rise of various ideologies such as humanism, Gandhism, secularism and Marxism which supported human freedom and equality of all people. These movements and ideologies influenced Thomas to speak and reflect on salvation and humanization of the marginalized people who also suffered due to poverty and patriarchy.

The third context was a religious revolution for human identity and dignity from the divisive and oppressive *Brahmanism*⁸ which divided and segregated the people on the basis of caste. It was a revolt of the oppressed people questioning and challenging the religious traditional authority of Hinduism and even abandoning Hinduism to embrace other, more egalitarian religions such as Christianity, Buddhism and Islam.⁹

⁷ M.M. Thomas, *Revolution and Reconstruction in India, Pakistan and Ceylon: A Study Book in Preparation for the 1957 Triennial Conference*, (Bangalore: Bangalore Press, 1957), 3.

⁸ Brahmanism is an earlier form of Hinduism and the religion of the Brahmins who form the priestly class.

⁹ M.E. Prabhakar, "The Search for a Dalit Theology," in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, ed. Arvind P. Nirmal, (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, no year), 46.

Thus it was basically a context of revolution of people for self-rule, self-dignity and self-identity.

Chapter three focuses on the life and work of Thomas. It traces factors and influences both nationally and internationally that played a key role in the evolvement of salvation and humanization in Thomas' theology. This chapter is developed on the basis of the apt title of Thomas' unpublished autobiography *Faith Seeking Understanding and Responsibility*.¹⁰ Thomas structures his life account basically as a fivefold search towards understanding and responsibility. This fivefold search is presented chronologically to trace the development of his concepts of salvation and humanization at various stages and periods of his life: In search of evangelical spirituality (1916 – 1936); A quest for ideologies and social responsibility (1937 – 1945); In search of an ecumenical ecumenicity and unity (1946 – 1975); A quest for political responsibility and involvement (1976 – 1992) and finally a search for Biblical exposition for contemporary relevance in the society (1977-1996). Thomas' concepts of salvation and humanization are not merely a theoretical speculation but Thomas strives for an actual and real practical application and demonstration of one's own understanding of faith, relating to it to the historical context with the aim of social involvement and responsibility towards the process of humanization of humanity. Thomas' life has been a journey starting off with an evangelical spirituality leading towards social responsibility for humanization of humanity.

Chapter four is an exploration of Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization and the relation between the two. Though salvation and humanization are two different concepts, according to Thomas they are inseparable and interrelated. He interprets salvation as spiritual, ultimate, eschatological and eternal while humanization as physical, penultimate, historical and temporal; yet in Thomas' view they are two sides of the same coin. Salvation includes humanization and humanization includes salvation. Salvation and humanization focus on salvation of the body as well as the soul, both historical as well as eschatological. The obstacles, subjects, source,

¹⁰ Type-written unpublished material available at the United Theological College, Archives, Bangalore, MMT/38 (1972/2).

means, process and goal of humanization are discussed in this chapter based on the writings of Thomas.

Chapter five gives an appraisal of Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization. The appraisal is done in general as well as from the perspective of liberation theology, feminist theology, tribal theology and Dalit theology. Considering the focus of this thesis the appraisal by Dalit theologians is given importance. The assessment by Dalit theologians is classified into four types to highlight the relevance of Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization for the development of Dalit theology in India.

Chapter six focuses on the applicability of Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization for the development of Dalit theology in India. Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization is relevant to the Dalits' struggles and for the development of Dalit theology. The research proposes a triangular model for the development of Dalit theology towards the task of humanization of the dehumanized people.

Chapter seven serves as a conclusion to the whole study on Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization and its relevance to the development of Dalit theology. This research based on Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization proposes a triangular model for the humanization of dehumanized Dalits in the name of caste, creed and gender. The proposal is towards an incarnational Dalit Christology because Christ is the new man and the new humanity. The incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus give validity and dignity to every human irrespective of their socio-religious and economic background. The resurrection of Jesus gives hope for a better and a richer human life here on this earth. It proposes an integrated Dalit anthropology to focus on salvation and humanization; salvation of body and soul, historical and eschatological salvation. It proposes an inclusive Dalit ecclesiology with Christocentric spirituality but open for theocentric humanization in the context of religious pluralism for salvation and humanization of Dalits in India so that they can regain and restore their social identity and human dignity with self-worth and equality in the discriminated and dehumanized society.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND OF M.M. THOMAS

2.1 Introduction

The modern period is known for its scientific and technological inventions, Western discoveries and imperialism, and technological growth. It is a period where the whole world in general, and India in particular, underwent major changes; in this period there were many revolutions demanding human freedom and equality.¹¹ Thomas writes:

Indeed one could very well write the history of the modern period as the history of people's revolts of various kinds- the American War of Independence, the French Revolution for Democracy, the Russian Proletarian Revolution for Communism, West European Working class revolts for Trade Union Rights and Welfare State, the Asian-African-Latin American struggles for National Independence, the Chinese Peasant Revolution for Communism, the Islamic Revolution for Islamic State and identity and many other form a continuous story with many discontinuities.¹²

This worldwide context greatly impacted India and its people, including Thomas. Aleyamma Zachariah, a renowned writer on modern religious and secular movements, identifies four forces which entered India from the West and evoked social and religious awakening in India.¹³ Firstly, the English East India Company established their trade in India by supporting Hinduism. According to John Nicol Farquhar, a Scottish educational missionary to Calcutta and an Orientalist, the Company sponsored the building and

¹¹ Gerard Delanty, *Formations of European Modernity: A Historical and Political Sociology of Europe*, (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2013). Christophe Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India*, (Colombia: Colombia University press 2003).

¹² M.M. Thomas, *Religion and the Revolt of the Oppressed*, (Delhi; ISPCK, 1981), 37.

¹³ Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious & Secular Movements in India*, (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1994), 1 – 12.

repairing of Hindu temples but opposed Christian missionary work; it even refused to employ native Christians as its main goal was to establish trade and to support the Hindus.¹⁴ This approach has led to the awakening of Hindus. The second force was the British Government which began to reform and to abolish customs it considered to be social evils in Indian society, such as caste system, female infanticide, *sati*, human sacrifice etc. by stressing human equality and introducing English education, thus bringing about social change.

Thirdly, the Christian mission especially the Protestant missionary work in India, which started with the arrival of Danish mission in Tamil Nadu in 1706, stimulated education and literacy.¹⁵ William Carey and his team working in the early 19th century, for example contributed in the field of Bible translation, orphanages, schools and theological education. Soon after these, missionaries from Britain, America and Europe came to India in large numbers. Apart from the missionary societies, there were many individual Europeans who also started schools and colleges for Western education in the important cities. In 1830 Alexander Duff, a Scottish missionary started a school in Calcutta, John Wilson started schools in Bombay and John Anderson in Madras.¹⁶ Finally, the work of the Orientalists. European scholars who studied Indian literature, art and architecture, brought about change in Hindu consciousness. They became acquainted with Sanskrit and the Hindu religion and translated Hindu religious texts into English. According to J.N. Farquhar the British government and Protestant Missions were the two most important forces that caused awakening among the people.¹⁷

These four forces from the West paved the way for social and religious awakening in India. The awakening of people gave way to the emergence of movements and revolutions that demanded social justice and equality of all people, irrespective of

¹⁴ J.N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India*, (London: Macmillan & Co. Limited, 1924), 10.

¹⁵ The Catholic Missions were at work especially contributing in the field of education but not much in relation to awakening of the people. See J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India*, 10.

¹⁶ Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious & Secular Movements in India*, 17; J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India*, 17 – 23.

¹⁷ J.N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India*, 5- 8.

color, creed and caste in the 19th and 20th centuries in India.¹⁸ The Second World War and post-world war period created a new awareness of national identity. It also created a quest for what Jebaraj Devasahayam has called “people identity”. The Muslim people did not want to be ruled by the Hindus, the Dalits agitated against the brahmanic rule and the *Adivasis*¹⁹ and the women became conscientized and sought for their identity.²⁰ It was in this context of social and religious change as well as upcoming nationalism, that M.M. Thomas lived, worked and formulated his thoughts.

This chapter focuses in more detail on the social, political, economic contexts that form the background against which M.M Thomas formulated his thoughts. Discussing this background is important in order to understand how his concepts of salvation and humanization are situated in and have evolved against the historical background in which he lived and shaped his framework of theology. His theological reflections emerge from the actual historical contexts of his time, in particular those of India. Therefore K.C. Abraham writes: “he has written on a wide range of issues, such as Asian revolution, nation-building, political and social changes, secularism, inter-faith dialogue and ecumenism. Theological reflection is indeed his primary passion.”²¹ Thomas’ theology of salvation and humanization evolved in the context of a world-wide revolution and especially in the context of political, social and religious unrest and upheaval in India. K.C. Abraham observes that “[h]is own intense intellectual and emotional involvement in them and his quest to find meaning in these changes was the basis of his theological reflection.”²²

Section 2.2 of this Chapter deals with the developments in political struggle in India for freedom from colonial oppression. Discussed are the emergence of Indian nationalism in general and the rise of Hindu and Muslim nationalism in particular, and

¹⁸ Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious & Secular Movements in India*, 20.

¹⁹ The aboriginal tribal people of India who are treated low in the society.

²⁰ Jebaraj Devasahayam, “Appendix, Dalit Movements” in Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious & Secular Movements in India*, 261-263.

²¹ K.C. Abraham, “Foreword”, Hielke T. Wolters, *Theology of Prophetic Participation: M.M Thomas’ Concept of Salvation and the Collective Struggle for Fuller Humanity in India*, (Delhi/Bangalore: ISPCK/UTC, 1996), 12.

²² K.C. Abraham, “Introduction,” in *A Tribute to M.M. Thomas: Christian Witness in Society*, ed. K. C. Abraham, (Bangalore: BTESSSE, 1998), 8.

how this eventually led to Hindu-Muslim communalism, causing constant conflict and riots. Section 2.3 discusses Brahmanism, poverty and patriarchy as causes of oppression. In addition it also discusses ideologies that each in their own way protested against these forms of oppression and influenced Thomas' reflections. The religious revolutionary context in section 2.4 deals with the emergence of various renaissance and resurgence movements in the Indian society to bring about social and religious reformation that would liberate and enhance the life conditions of the poor and the marginalized people. Section 2.5 is a conclusion.

2. 2 Political Revolution for Freedom

The political revolution in India was a mass revolt against the British rule and its oppression, to free India and its people from the hands of foreign rulers. The Indian National Congress (INC) played a pivotal role by kindling the fire of Indian nationalism in the hearts of the people of India, mobilizing and organizing mass movements against the British rulers to quit India.²³ All people irrespective of religion, region, culture and language participated in the national struggle for independence.

2. 2. 1 Colonialism and its impact on Indian society

The dominant feature of the colonial period was Western imperialism by the French, British, Portuguese, Dutch and Danish but predominantly the British. India was under British influence from 1858 - 1947. A summary of the narrative would read that British traders ultimately became the rulers of the Indian masses.²⁴ Colonization is the domination and political rule by an alien nation in the land of the native people. Colonialism, according to Jacob S. Dharmaraj, is understood as an alien invasion, domination and economic exploitation of a territory, and so it must be resisted.²⁵ In

²³ Bipan Chandra, *Essays on Indian Nationalism*, (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications PVT LTD, Revised Edition, 1999), 16 -17.

²⁴ P.J. Marshall, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire*, (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 384.

²⁵ Jacob S. Dharmaraj, *Colonialism and Christian Mission: Postcolonial Reflections*, (Delhi: ISPC, 1993), 20.

India, the colonial period was an age of unrest and revolution against the colonial rule of the West to gain independence and freedom. The condition of the great majority of the colonized people in India during the 19th century was one of sorrow, grief and helplessness. The impact of Western colonialism and Christian mission was experienced differently by different groups, like Dalits, women, Brahmins etc. Therefore it is said that “all institutions of the past seem inadequate and all things appear simultaneously and unprecedentedly out of joint.”²⁶ The colonizers had not only invaded all territorial parts of India, but also all areas of human life and modes of thinking; this evoked resistance. Thus, in India the colonial period was a period of revolt against foreign domination, in favor of independence and self-government of democracy. Yet resistance in unity was not easy.

India is known for its cultural, linguistic and religious plurality which has caused division and disunity among the people India. Colonialism brought further disunity and poverty in India. Colonialism subjected the original inhabitants to a process of utter marginalization and caused fear and panic in the hearts of people who were “threatened with extinction, marginalization and minoritization, irrespective of the sources from which they are facing the threat.”²⁷ The colonial rule neither intended, nor equipped to bring about any revolutionary change. The general pattern of colonial impact was to empower the already powerful and further deprive the depressed. Their policy of non-interference in practice supported the upper caste people rather than the resistance of the oppressed people.²⁸ Since the arrival of the Portuguese in India, colonialism and Christian missions had gone hand-in-hand, with the belief that the colonization, civilization and Christianization of India were divine providence. Dharmaraj writes about the 19th century:

²⁶ Quoted in M.M. Thomas, *Revolution and Reconstruction*, 3

²⁷ T.K. Oommen, *Citizenship, Nationality and Ethnicity: Reconciling Completing Identities*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 94.

²⁸ G. Aloysius, *Nationalism Without A Nation in India*, (New Delhi: Oxford university Press, 1997), 48-49.

In the nineteenth century, Christianization and civilization were considered two sides of the same coin. Therefore European colonization was politically justified and missiologically encouraged. Conversion of the soul and conquest of the body bore the same spiritual stamp. All the European mission societies agreed in principle that colonization of India was the divine providence, and that it was the moral duty of the colonizers and spiritual commitment of the missionaries to civilize and Christianize the natives.²⁹

Christian mission organizations focused on Christianizing and civilizing the Indians and did so with the help of the British rulers. Though their focus was to bring development and welfare schemes for the people but with power and domination over the people.³⁰ The colonial period was not just a period of development and servitude; it was also a period in which India stepped into modernity. It was a period of the emergence of Indian nationalism and period of transition to nation and nationalism in India.³¹

2.2.2 Indian nationalism

The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 with the help of British political reformer and ornithologist Allan Octavian Hume.³² The INC started to bring together the leaders of all movements struggling for India's independence. Thus the Congress became a forum in which the great majority of the nationalist leaders developed strategies to cooperate, and to build a great national movement to compel the British to quit India. Thereby the Congress became the champion of the national struggle for independence. The Indians' participation in the nationalistic movement for freedom was commendable, as there was full cooperation and participation of all people irrespective of their social status and background. D.R. Jatava notes:

²⁹ Jacob .S. Dharmaraj, *Colonialism and Christian Mission*, xvi.

³⁰ Jacob. S. Dharmaraj, *Colonialism and Christian Mission*, 12.

³¹ G. Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation*, 21.

³² M.T. Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights: A Christian Response*, (Bangalore: Centre For Contemporary Christianity, 2007), 98.

The appearance of nationalism in India was not a spontaneous movement. It was consciously and unconsciously, propagated by an eminent galaxy of reformers and intellectuals. The persons who participated in the freedom-winning-process were social and religious reformers, political agitators and statesmen, poets and saints, students and teachers and the like.³³

The struggle for Indian Independence took shape and gained momentum at a time when nationality and nationalism were considered to be the primary pre-requisites for the independent political existence of a country. The leaders of the Indian Independence movement had to set aside the religious, linguistic and caste differences to 'prove' the spirit of nationalism and nationality to vindicate their claim for freedom from British rule. Though there were conflicts and tensions between the Hindu and the Muslim, yet their main focus was freedom from the British rule.³⁴ During the 19th century, apart from the European influences such as Enlightenment and liberalism, Western education, the Judeo-Christian ideals such as liberty, equality and fraternity, which came through the activities of missionaries, contributed towards the emergence of Indian nationalism, democracy and self-rule among the Indians.³⁵ Bipin Chandra writes

The national movement was the process through which the Indian people were formed into a nation and a people...it was the existence of common oppression by common enemy and the struggle against it which provided important bonds uniting the Indian people...the nation was not a datum prior to the nationalist movement.³⁶

³³ D.R. Jatava, *Indian Society Culture & Ideologies*, (Jaipur: Surabhi Publications, 1998), 204.

³⁴ M. Abel, "State, Religion, and Ideologies in Asia", in *Religion, State and Ideologies in East Asia: A Collection of Essays*, eds. M. M. Thomas & M. Abel, (The East Asia Christian Conference Committee on Church and Society, 1965), 34.

³⁵ James Alter, "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity: Themes in Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions", *Indian Church History Review*, 8/ 1, (January, 1978), 15ff.

³⁶ Bipin, Chandra "Nationalist Historians' interpretation of the Indian National Movement" in *Situating Indian History*, eds. S. Bhattacharya and R. Thapar (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 210.

The main focus of INC during this time was nationalism and political freedom from the British rule to establish an independent democracy for the people of India. The national movement's vision was based upon a critical analysis of colonialism and believed that the independence as well as rebuilding of the nation was not the task of any particular group but of the masses of people. Nationhood was based on a democratic political order which focused on civil rights movements, advocating freedom to elect, freedom to speak, write and criticize authorities and structures for their failures.³⁷ The nationalist movement believed that India could have rapid economic development by using the latest science and technology, but at the same time be pro-poor in its freedom struggle. The focus was on the aspect of social change and social justice. Though the constitutional committee of the INC was predominantly upper caste in composition, they accepted reservation for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.³⁸ It seems the spirit of nationalism was like a wild fire spreading across the country crossing, all barriers of region and religions. The spirit of nationalism took on religious dimensions that even nationalism was deified. Aurobindo Ghose a strong freedom fighter proclaimed the spirit of nationalism in the following way:

Nationalism is not a mere political program
Nationalism is a religion that has come from God
Nationalism is a creed which you shall have to live
Nationalism is immortal
Nationalism cannot die; because it is no human thing,
It is God, who is working in Bengal,
God cannot be killed, God cannot be sent to jail.³⁹

³⁷ Bipan Chandra, *Essays on Indian Nationalism*, 29- 47.

³⁸ Bipan Chandra, *Essays on Indian Nationalism*, 41.

³⁹ Quoted in George Thomas, *Christian Indians and Indian Nationalism 1885-1950: An Interpretation in Historical and Theological Perspective*, (Frankfurt: Veriag Peter D. Lang, 1979), 106.

Thus Aurobindo ascribes deity and immortality to nationalism. According to him this freedom is “not mere political freedom but a freedom of the community, freedom of the nation, spiritual freedom, social freedom, political freedom.”⁴⁰ Masses of people followed the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru to revolt against British rule. When young people asked Gandhiji to lead a movement against partition he said:

Movements are not made by the leaders. Movements are made by the masses. Masses move on their own and nobody yet knows what enables them to move. A leader is not one who creates a movement or moves the masses but who knows when the masses are stirring, who knows when masses are getting into motion. Then he comes forth and provides the right type of leadership and a mass movement is launched.⁴¹

Thomas who lived and worked in this context of British rule and rise of Indian nationalism has described the providential role of both colonialism and nationalism as within God’s creating, judging and redeeming purpose for India, in the following way:

The history of British imperialism and Indian nationalism becomes a continuous action of God’s creative providence for the Indian nation in which He uses British Imperialism first to judge and correct traditional Indian life and put India on the path of progress and in turn ordaining Indian nationalism to remove the tool of His judgment which has become perverse and to keep India on the progressive path.⁴²

Though Thomas sees both colonialism and nationalism as God’s tool, this does not mean that he lauded colonialism or that he considers the national movement to be a movement of divine redemption. These movements are merely connected to the divine

⁴⁰ George Thomas, *Christian Indians and Indian Nationalism*, 106.

⁴¹ Bipan Chandra, *Essays on Indian Nationalism*, 33.

⁴² George Thomas, *Christian Indians and Indian Nationalism*, 115.

work of redemption in Christ. Liberation theologians like C.S. Song, a renowned Asian theologian from Taiwan, share a similar view; Song says people need to have a “Third eye” or ‘Third dimension’ to see clearly what is happening and what God is doing in the world.⁴³ God is at work everywhere, where there is an acceptance of human identity and an affirmation of human dignity. In a similar line Vinay Samuel says “Where we see *human dignity* being affirmed and people discovering a sense of self-worth, self-acceptance and a sense of having something to contribute to the world and others, there God is at work.”⁴⁴ The revolution for political freedom and independence under the leadership of Nehru and Gandhi led to the independence India on August 15th 1947 from the British rule. But the conflict between Hindu and Muslim created communalism and unrest in the society.

Hindu nationalism

Indian nationalism emerged to challenge colonialism and imperialism to carve out an independent India. But its challenges were not only against the common enemy of imperialism; it also focused on challenges within the country, such as internal rivalries between caste and caste, community and community and especially between Hindu and Muslim. The upheaval was not merely a movement *against* colonialism but also a movement *for* a social change. Though the ideology of nationalism in the words of Anil Seal ‘stirred up the spirit of freedom and a free nation, it was only the swirling surface of the waters; below them were the tides of social change.’⁴⁵ Hindu nationalism emerged in the context of Indian nationalism, and aimed at countering Islam and Christianity. The Hindus had lost their control over politics and religion, as the result of both the Mughal and the British rule in India.⁴⁶ The Hindus were under subjugation of the Mughals from

⁴³ Choan Seng Song, *Third Eye Theology*, (Orbis Books, 1990), 27ff.

⁴⁴ Vinay Samuel, “God’s Intention for the World: Tensions between Eschatology and History” in *The Church in Response to Human Need*, eds. Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 149.

⁴⁵ Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 351.

⁴⁶ C.V. Mathew, *Neo-Hinduism: A Missionary Religion*, (Madras: Church Growth Research Centre, 1987), 57.

1526 onwards and India came under an Islamic rule, which lasted till the coming of the British in India.⁴⁷

A number of Indians had begun to embrace Christianity as the result of Portuguese missionaries and as the result of the activities of Jesuits like Francis Xavier and Robert de Nobili. But the second half of 19th century was a period of mass conversion of Hindus, especially the low caste people, to Islam and Christianity. This had shaken the foundation of Hinduism and Indian society as they declined to continue the menial work that they were doing under Hinduism.⁴⁸ Hindus were therefore not only losing their people and their territory, but also losing their control over the low caste people.

In response to colonialism and Christian mission, Hindu renaissance emerged in the 19th century. The Christian principles, especially the ethical teachings of Jesus Christ, attracted the Hindu reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy who in turn brought forth reformation and renaissance in Hinduism.⁴⁹ The plurality in terms of culture, language, religion and regions was a great challenge in the struggle for independence. The communal spirit of Indian nationalism was challenged by Hindu nationalism under the leadership Bal Gangadhar Tilak and later followed by Hindu *Mahasabha* and *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*⁵⁰ (R.S.S) and others. B.G Tilak was the trendsetter for Hindu nationalism.⁵¹ Though he was considered to be the icon of the Indian national struggle for independence reaching out to the people of India, he was also criticized for using Hindu religious symbols like *Ganapati*⁵² festivals and Shivaji⁵³ festivals to arouse the spirit of Hindu nationalism, as well as the spirit of Indian nationalism to fight against the

⁴⁷ M.T. Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights*, 158.

⁴⁸ John Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 45. Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1858*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1985), 335.

⁴⁹ M.M Thomas, *Acknowledged Christ of Indian Renaissance*, (London: SCM, 1969), Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1969, revised edition.1975), 19 – 25.

⁵⁰ Translation: National volunteer organization

⁵¹ M.T. Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights*, 314.

⁵² A festival celebrated on Ganapati's birthday. Ganapati is one of the gods of Hinduism whose statue is carried in the street procession with singing and dancing and immersed in the water.

⁵³ Shivaji festival was celebrated on the birthday of Shivaji who was a great warrior and king who was responsible for the creation of Marth kingdom and ruled the state of Maharashtra.

British domination.⁵⁴ Though the national writers had high regard for B.G. Tilak, Western writers criticized his approach of bringing religion into politics as 'irresponsible' and 'unethical.'⁵⁵ B.G. Tilak who wanted to revive the Hindu culture, openly acknowledged and identified nationalism with Hinduism, because he believed that Hindus were the majority everywhere in India.⁵⁶ Ambedkar criticized this spirit of Hindu nationalism and its claim of superiority over the minorities on account of Hindu majority. According to Ambedkar the Indian social system was basically governed by irrational and prescriptive Hindu customs. Ambedkar did not oppose nationalism in general but merely certain forms of nationalism. He stated that nationalism seemed nothing but the monopoly of the majority over the minority. He wrote:

Indian Nationalism has developed a new doctrine which may be called the Divine Right of the Majority to rule the minorities according to the wishes of the majority. Any claim for the sharing of power by minority is called communalism while the monopolizing the whole power by the majority is called Nationalism.⁵⁷

Hindu mahasabha

The Hindu *Mahasabha*⁵⁸ movement was established in 1906 in Lahore to promote brotherly love and unity among Hindus to help and serve destitute and disabled Hindu people. It aimed to protect, promote and represent the interest of Hindu people.⁵⁹ It was started as a political movement in response to the emergence of Muslim League in 1906 which aimed to protect and safeguard the rights of Muslim people. Many Hindu

⁵⁴ M.T. Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights*, 314.

⁵⁵ Bipan Chandra, *Essays on Indian Nationalism*, 71 See R. I. Cashman, *The Myth of the Lokamanya: Tilak and Mass Politics in Maharashtra*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 66, 97; S. Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale: Revolution and Reform in the Making of Modern India*,(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 68-70

⁵⁶ Charles H. Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*,(New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 1964), 141.

⁵⁷ G. Aloysius, *Ambedkar on Nation & Nationalism*, (New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2009) 26. Cf. Ambedkar, Vol. 1. *States and Minorities*, 427.

⁵⁸ Translation: Great Society

⁵⁹ John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 112.

believed that the Congress was pro-Muslim and thus they started a *Sanatan Dharma*⁶⁰ *Mahasabha* under the leadership of Lala Lajpat Rai in 1906 at Allahabad and later it emerged as Hindu *Mahasabha* in 1915 to protect and promote Hindu culture and values for the advancement of Hindu *rashtra*.⁶¹ They did not emphasize political involvement initially, as their leaders were also members of the Indian National Congress.⁶² C.V. Mathew, a writer of modern religious movement observes the two main contributions of Hindu Mahasabha. He writes:

In the history and development of politicized missionary Hinduism, *Akhil Bharatiya Mahasabha* (The Great All India Hindu Society)... played a significant role in the process of revitalization and self-conscientization of the Hindu society to new heights and enhanced a powerful expression of it with the use of a clear ideology of Hindu *rashtra* (Nation) and Hindu Nationalism.⁶³

The Hindu Mahasabha was “rested on the political ideals of a religiously–defined people” and “pressed for a religiously-defined state, which remained the only way to develop and protect the genius” of the Hindus.⁶⁴ Vinayak Damodar Savarkar who was called the high-priest of Hindu revivalisms⁶⁵ in his presidential address in Nagpur in 1938 said: “Our politics henceforth will be purely Hindu politics fashioned and tested in Hindu terms only, in such wise as will help the consolidation, freedom and life-growth of our Hindu Nation.”⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Translation: Eternal Religion

⁶¹ Translation: Nation

⁶² M. T. Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights*, 175-176.

⁶³ C.V. Mathew, *The Saffron Mission A Historical Analysis of Modern Hindu Missionary Ideologies and Practices*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2001), 163.

⁶⁴ Kenneth W. Jones, “Politicized Hinduism: The Ideology and Program of the Hindu Mahasabha,” *Religion in Modern India*, ed. Robert D. Baird, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981), 467.

⁶⁵ B. R. Purohit, *Hindu Revivalism and Indian Nationalism*, (Sagar: Sathi Prakashan, 1965), 113.

⁶⁶ V.D. Savarkar, *Hindu Sangathan: Its Ideology and programme*, (Bombay: Hindu Mahasabha, 1940), 88.

Rashtriya swayamsevak sangh (R.S.S)

The *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*⁶⁷ (R.S.S) was started in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889 – 1940) with the goal to achieve *Akhand Bharat* (undivided India) and Hindu *Rashtra* (Hindu nation) through inculcating in Hindus, ‘the spirit of service, sacrifice and selfless devotion to the Hindu samaj.’⁶⁸ RSS identified Muslims and Christians as two main religious forces that propagate values that lead to denationalization and westernization. Madhavrao Sadhshiv Golwalker, one of the leaders of RSS in the early period, treated them as second class citizens, denying their rights and privileges. He wrote:

The non-Hindu people in Hindustan must adopt Hindu culture and language; must learn to hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture...(they) may live in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment –not even citizen’s rights.⁶⁹

Hindu nationalism is closely associated with Hindutva⁷⁰, the saffron wave, communalism and fundamentalism.⁷¹ John Zavos, in his book on the *Emergence of Hindu Nationalism* states that Hindu nationalism may be defined as ‘an ideology that seeks to build a nation based on a particular culture characterized by Hinduism. Thus Hindu nationalism is nothing but Hindu communalism.’⁷² The term Hindu communalism is used for a movement that serves the social, economic, cultural and political interest of the Hindus over against the other communities, especially that of the Indian Muslims.⁷³

⁶⁷ National volunteer organization or national patriotic organization to unite the Hindus to fight against the British colonialism and to suppress the Muslim demand for a separate nation. See Andersen, Walter K.; Shridhar D. Damle (1987). *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 111.

⁶⁸ Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious & Secular Movements in India*, 172.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious & Secular Movements in India*, 172-173.

⁷⁰ Hindutva means Hinduness or Hindu nationalism.

⁷¹ John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism*, 1.

⁷² John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism*, 5.

⁷³ John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism*, 5.

The Indian Congress under the dynamic leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru chose secularism as its ideology, so that equality of religions was maintained for the welfare and development of the society. Thomas and his advocacy for secularism were influenced by people like Gandhi and Nehru. Nevertheless, Indian nationalism was characterized by religious communalism, especially among the Hindus and Muslims. Religious communalism had begun to shape and shift the movement of Indian nationalism towards Hindu nationalism since 1930s, but Gandhi and Nehru stood for Indian nationalism rather than Hindu nationalism.⁷⁴ They opposed religious fundamentalism and communalism and appealed to all people of India irrespective of their religious faith that they should work for a secular India where everyone can have their own religion and no religion is ultimate or superior. Religion, they stated, is a private and personal affair; therefore it cannot and should not interfere in the political life.⁷⁵

The leaders of Indian nationalism vehemently opposed all forms and forces of religious fundamentalism and communalism in the context of religious pluralism and condemned the constant conflicts between the communal groups, especially Hindu and Muslim, which caused the loss of numerous lives and property. Gandhi believed and said: "Free India will be not Hindus Raj, it will be Indian Raj based not on majority of any religious sect or community, but on representatives of the whole people without distinction of religion... Religion is a personal matter, which should have no place in politics."⁷⁶ Gandhi appealed to the Hindus, who were the majority, to protect and safeguard the rights of the minorities as these looked to the majority for justice. Nehru fought against Hindu nationalism and worked hard to establish a secular state. For

⁷⁴ For details read John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India*, 68-98, Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 60-89.

⁷⁵ M.T. Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights*, 111.

⁷⁶ M.K Gandhi, *India of My Dreams*, Compiled by R.K Prabhu, (Ahmadabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1948), 277- 278

Gandhi religion was a personal and private matter but for Nehru it “was secular both in private and in public.”⁷⁷

Muslim nationalism

Indian nationalism was not only challenged by the spirit of Hindu nationalism but also by the spirit of Islam which gave way to Muslim nationalism. Hindu nationalism and the increasing emphasis on Hindu religious sentiments in the independence/nationalistic movement resulted in Muslims founding a party of their own by the name of Muslim League in 1906.⁷⁸ Muslims under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah did not fully participate in the Indian National Congress, but were organized as a political organization named Muslim League to represent all the Muslims of India. Jinnah advised Muslims that they should be organized like Hindus with the spirit of Islamic nationalism.⁷⁹

Jinnah sedulously preached the idea that the Indian National Congress was out to establish Hindu supremacy as well as to promote the cause of Hinduism in India to eradicate Islam from India. He constantly pointed out to the British rulers or the nationalist leaders that Muslims were a numerical minority, and demanded that their religious tradition and culture should be safeguarded and protected against the majority of the Hindus.⁸⁰ R. C. Majumdar writes: “...it is an undeniable fact that a strong section of the Muslims from the very beginning adopted an unsympathetic attitude towards the Congress, though Muslims in general were indifferent, rather than hostile to it.”⁸¹ Jinnah was suspicious about the role of Congress and preached that the Muslims would not get justice from the Congress. He said “Muslims can expect neither justice nor fair play under Congress Government.”⁸² Many of the Muslims shared the same opinion.

⁷⁷ S. J. Samartha, *One Christ Many Religions: Towards a Revised Christology*, (Bangalore: SATHRI, 1996), 56.

⁷⁸ Kranti K. Francis, “Nationalism Among Catholics of Western India with Special Reference to Catholics of Mumbai,” *Indian Church History Review* (December, 2001), 174.

⁷⁹ Nirmal Kumar Bose, *Problems of Indian Nationalism*, (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1969), 22.

⁸⁰ Nirmal Kumar Bose, *Problems of Indian Nationalism*, 23.

⁸¹ R.C. Majumdar, H.C Raychaudhuri and Kalikinkar Datta, *An Advanced History of India*, (London: Macmillan, 1963), 896

⁸² R.C. Majumdar, H.C Raychaudhuri and Kalikinkar Datta, *An Advanced History of India*, 989.

Western education had had its impact on Muslims and drew a number of progressive Indian Muslims into the mainstream of the Indian national movement. But the poems of Muhammad Iqbal inspired a distinct Muslim nationalism.⁸³ Nehru wrote:

Indian nationalism was dominated by Hindus and had a Hinduized look. So a conflict arose in the Muslim mind; many accepted that nationalism, trying to influence it in the direction of their choice; many sympathized with it and yet remained aloof, uncertain; and yet many others began to drift in a separatist direction for which Iqbal's poetic and philosophic approach had prepared them. This, I imagine, was the background out of which, in recent years, arose the cry for a division of India.⁸⁴

The first half of the 20th century was a period of great struggle; on the one side there was a national call to fight against the British rule but on the other side to combat communal rivalry and conflict between Hindu and Muslim. The pre-independence and even after independence period was characterized by Hindu – Muslim communal rivalry.⁸⁵ It is in this context of religious communalism and fundamentalism which jeopardized the communal harmony of India that Thomas spoke about the necessity of an open secularism and a secular society that will be studied in the later chapter. The Hindu nationalism of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Islamic nationalism of the Muslim League had their base in the secular nationalism of the Indian National Congress. Thus there was a constant communal conflict and struggle between Hindus and Muslims.⁸⁶

⁸³ Amita Das, *India: Impact of the West with excerpts from Jawaharlal Nehru's writings*, (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1994), 62.

⁸⁴ Amita Das, *India: Impact of the West*, 26. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Discovery of India*, (Calcutta: Signet Press, 1946/1989), 350-351.

⁸⁵ Sunand Sumithra, *Christian Theology from an Indian Perspective*, (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1990), 8.

⁸⁶ C.V. Mathew, *The Saffron Mission*, 163.

2. 2. 3 Hindu-Muslim communalism

The challenge of post independent India was nation building and how to deal with religious communalism. The freedom fighters became nation builders, giving importance to national unity and economic development. In this context of conflict and bloodshed Nehru condemned communalism and warned that the alliance of religion and politics was most dangerous and a divisive force that would work against and devour its own people. He said:

Communalism is the badge of a backward nation, not of modern age. People have their religion and they have the right to hold on to it, but to import religion into politics and to break up the country is something which was done in Europe 300 or 400 years back. We in India have to get rid of it.⁸⁷

He opposed forms and interpretations of religion that manipulate and exploit people at the cost of national unity and nation building. Nehru often said that religion “seemed to stand for blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation and the preservation of vested interests...”⁸⁸ The Hindu-Muslim communal conflict was such that Gandhi in spite of all his efforts to bring unity among them, cried out of frustration saying: “I dare not touch the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity. It has passed out of human hands and has been transferred to God’s hands alone.”⁸⁹ The constant conflict between Hindu nationalism and Muslim nationalism eventually resulted in the split-off of Pakistan in 1947 amidst of violence and mass killing of both Hindus and Muslims. This unveiled the depth and seriousness of Hindu-Muslim conflict in a period where the call was to be united together, to fight against the common enemy and to build the nation. The Hindu-Muslim conflict was a boost to the British rulers. They welcomed such a division and even divided them one against the other and in the wake of independence

⁸⁷ Quoted in M. T. Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights*, 121.

⁸⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1980), 374.

⁸⁹ M.K. Gandhi, *Communal Unity*, (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Press, 1949), 135.

promoted discrimination in the services on basis of racial and social status of the people.⁹⁰

But a nation that is divided and devoured by communal conflicts cannot achieve anything great for its people, especially not for the more vulnerable sections of the society, like the Dalits, tribals and women. The way forward to curb religious communalism seems a form of religious unity with tolerance and social harmony of all people. Emil D’Cruz points out that:

Communalism can be mitigated if all religions jointly fight for the oppressed and exploited, shedding their arrogance and superiority. No religion should tolerate any injustice anywhere, whether suppression of human rights or economic exploitation. This would serve as an important shield against communalism.⁹¹

The British with their policy of divide and rule divided Hindu and Muslim in India in order to have their rule unchallenged. It was in this context of religious communalism which caused social disharmony and conflict especially between Hindu and Muslim, that Thomas stressed on the need for a secular India, where everyone has right to profess and practice one’s faith.

2.3 Social Revolution for Equality

2.3.1 Introduction

The political revolution in India was primarily aimed at ejecting the British rule and freeing the people of India from their hands; the social revolution within India was a revolt against the systems and structures of Indian society that deprived the poor and the marginalized people of their rights and denied their equality. In addition to communal conflicts and nation-building, the nation faced challenges such as industrial

⁹⁰ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 15-16.

⁹¹ Emil D’Cruz, Cited in *Indian Secularism A Fragile Myth*, (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1988), 65.

stagnation and recession, unemployment and inflation, increasing poverty, widening disparity of income and wealth, discrimination of the oppressed groups; thus, unjust structures and systems caused socio-political and economic crises in Indian society.⁹² Many people lost their faith and hope in the political system as political leaders failed to fulfill their promises for a better economy and for social welfare of the people. The constant increase of corruption and slow growth of economy pushed the majority of the people into poverty and this gave rise to social unrest and protest.⁹³ The protests were aimed at tackling the native and local oppressive and exploitative forces that worked against the freedom and equality of the people.

Social revolutions in India took place because large groups of people were deprived of freedom and equality, human rights and dignity. In the context of social injustice and inequality, anthropology was an important subject, giving importance to the significance and dignity of the human person. The farmers, untouchables, women and other oppressed classes emphasized social justice as a dominant theme during the post-independent period.⁹⁴ People began to realize the worth of every individual and to consider individual problems as social and collective problems. Damodaran K. makes this point clear when he says:

Freedom, democracy and humanism were the most important among the new values. Freedom was conceived as the realization of individuality...the problem of the liberation of the individual became a social problem to be solved through the transformation of the social structure.⁹⁵

The social outlook began to change as result of an emphasis on human beings and their welfare; Damodaran states that “the emphasis was shifted from god to man and from a

⁹² Siga Arles, *Missiological Education: An Indian Exploration*, (Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2006), 108. See Brindavan C. Moses, “Self-understanding of the CISRS in the Context of Indian Reality”, in *Religion and Society*, 31 (September 1983), 27-43.

⁹³ Sabu Philip, *Beyond Humanization: A Trinitarian Search on Mission*, (Tiruvalla: CSS/ Faridabad: Dharma Jyothi Vidya Peeth, 2004), 15.

⁹⁴ Sunand Sumithra, *Christian Theology from an Indian Perspective*, 11.

⁹⁵ K. Damodaran, *Man and Society in Indian Philosophy*, (New Delhi: People Publishing House, 1970), 81.

transcendental life to a mundane existence. Freedom of the individual was interlinked with social and political emancipation.”⁹⁶ It was this context of social change and the quest for human dignity of each individual that led Thomas to choose anthropology as the starting point of his theology. He said: “for me at least, it was much easier to start from the world, since that is how I came to appreciate theology. It is through my concern with politics and social life that I have come to recognize that theology is relevant.”⁹⁷ Thomas’ concern for theology starts with the context of daily life and the struggles of the people, similar to the approach of liberation theology. It was this conviction and commitment that made Thomas write and reflect on the humanization of dehumanized people which requires participation and action in the society. Jacob Thomas who explored the social and ethical thoughts of Thomas in his dissertation notes:

In his commitment to social justice Thomas is close to the liberation theologians in general. However, his theological commitment to the context as well as to the transcendent word of God that meets human beings in their particular historical situations keeps his theology in a dialectical tension between involvement and transcendence; this gives Thomas’s theology a special flavor.⁹⁸

In this period of revolution for social justice and equality, the oppressed and suppressed people questioned the so-called authority and privileges of the dominant groups. The ancient Indian joint-family system started breaking down and people started questioning the caste system and demanding equal rights for women, as they were degraded in particular. M.M. Thomas argues that it was the awakening of the poor that caused social and political revolutions; he says: “the social revolts and restlessness, and

⁹⁶ K. Damodaran, *Man and Society in Indian Philosophy*, 79-80.

⁹⁷ M.M. Thomas, “The Logic of the Christian Mission,” *The Pilgrim*, 3/1 ed. General Secretary (SCM, 1959). 69.

⁹⁸ T. Jacob Thomas, *Ethics of a World Community: Contribution of Dr. M.M Thomas Based on Indian Reality*, (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1993), 211. T. Jacob Thomas (ed), *M.M. Thomas Reader,- Selected Texts on Theology, Religion and Society*, (Thiruvalla: CSS, 2002).

demands for social change in India's social structure are the result of the awakening of the people at the bottom for their basic rights of bread, equality and freedom, nor as isolated values, but as a package in an integral or total revolution."⁹⁹

In short, in the past man's worth had been calculated in terms of the family, caste, or tribe to which he was born and his code of conduct varied accordingly. Such a conception of man and values came to be challenged. The modern conception of man as a person and individual with his/her own merits and the idea of fundamental human rights were universally being accepted and embraced.

2.3.2 Dalit movements against brahmanism

The practice of caste system is unique to India; it is a social stratification of society in which some people are considered as higher by birth and others lower. The foundation of Indian society was basically built on the caste system where the status of people is determined by birth; the system is legitimized and sanctified by the dominant brahmanic religio-cultural symbol and belief traditions. Indian society was and is characterized by an unequal, hierarchical distribution of power among diverse groups with hereditary occupations. G. Aloysius writes that this inequitable power distribution system was legitimized by generalized cultural and religious concepts on the basis on one's birth.¹⁰⁰ M.N. Srinivas, a social scientist, gives a clear picture of caste system in India:

Caste is undoubtedly an all-India phenomenon in the sense that there are everywhere hereditary, endogamous groups which form a hierarchy...Everywhere there are Brahmins, untouchables and peasant, artisan, trading and service castes. Relations between castes are invariably expressed in terms of pollution and purity. Certain Hindu theological ideas such as

⁹⁹ M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, (New Delhi: Forum for Christian Concern for People's Struggle, 1978), 4.

¹⁰⁰ G. Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India*, 24.

*samskara*¹⁰¹, *karma*¹⁰² and *dharmā*¹⁰³ are woven into the caste system...the ordering of different *varnas*¹⁰⁴ is clearly intended to support the theory of Brahminical supremacy.¹⁰⁵

Especially the Dalits in India have suffered due to this so-called Brahmanism which is nothing but casteism. Dalits were exploited, discriminated and dehumanized in many forms. They were not allowed to take water from the public well, enter into the temple, enter into a high caste house, not allowed to drink from a common cup and they were deprived of social, religious and civil rights.¹⁰⁶ The caste system in India was such, that it was practiced by all people everywhere, paralyzing the social movements of the Dalits. This is the plight of the Dalits even in the 21st century, especially in the rural areas. One of the Dalit theologians, Devasahayam, remarks that India is a land of compassion “where cow is worshipped and considered sacred, fellow human beings, the Dalits are treated worse than animals. One may touch an animal, say a dog but Hindu Sastras maintain that touch of a fellow human being, a Dalit, is polluting.”¹⁰⁷ The condition of the Dalits is such that the religion and the society made them as “unapproachable, inaudible, unseeable and untouchable.”¹⁰⁸

The Dalit experience then and now can in one word be described as dependency or powerlessness. The Dalits are totally dependent on the caste-minded rich people in every aspect of their life, whether it is socio-economical or religio-political. Self-reliance is impossible in the context of their dependence. In the time of Thomas, these social evils were practiced in Indian society mainly because they were legitimized by religious beliefs and practices; these were uncritically accepted due to lack of proper education.

¹⁰¹ Hindu doctrine of rebirth which teaches the cycle of births and rebirths.

¹⁰² One's own deeds and works that determine one's birth.

¹⁰³ Translation: Righteousness

¹⁰⁴ Translation: Color or Caste

¹⁰⁵ M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, (California: University of California, 1966), 3ff.

¹⁰⁶ S. Selvanathan, *Status of Schedule Caste*, (Delhi: Ashish Pub. House, 1989), 200.

¹⁰⁷ V. Devasahayam, *Outside the Camp. Bible Studies in Dalit Perspectives*, (Madras: Gurukul Publication, 1992), 23.

¹⁰⁸ V. Devasahayam, “Search for the Last, The Least And the Lost- Dr. M.M Thomas' Understanding of the Humans, God and the New Humanity”, in *A Tribute to M.M Thomas Christian Witness in Society*, 114.

The Western influence and the work of the Christian mission had played a key role in igniting and fueling the protest movements among Dalits to demand their rights and privileges.¹⁰⁹ J.N. Farquhar commented the impact of Christian mission in the social movement. He wrote:

The Indian social movement is a direct outcome of Christian missions and Western influences; and all communities have felt the impact in a greater or less degree. The primal impulse was communicated by the Serampore Missionaries to Ram Mohan Ray [Roy] and by him to the Hindu community; and, throughout the whole history, Christian teaching, effort and examples has done more than anything else to quicken the movement.¹¹⁰

The Anti-Brahmin movements that arose during the Indian freedom struggle sometimes revolted against Hinduism and other time demanded reforms within it, but they were “always opposing the hierarchical structure of caste and the traditional Hindu dharma in the name of social equality.”¹¹¹ The Anti-Brahmin movement’s leaders like Mahatma Jotirao Phooley (1827 – 1890) and B.R. Ambedkar (1891 – 1956) of Maharashtra, (See also 2.4) E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker (1879 – 1973) and Annadurai (1909 – 1969) of Tamil Nadu awakened the Dalits to agitate and to revolt against the domination of the Brahmins in search of justice and social equality.¹¹² These movements fought for the abolition of the caste system in a search for self-identity of the Untouchables which was to be achieved through socio-cultural revolution and mass education of the Dalits.¹¹³ Jotirao Phooley appreciated and wanted the British rule to continue in India, because he believed that they were God-sent to care for the freedom and welfare of the

¹⁰⁹ Jebaraj Devasahayam, “Appendix: Dalit Movements,” Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious and Secular Movements in India*, 277-278.

¹¹⁰ J.N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India*, (New Delhi: 1915/1998), 3.

¹¹¹ M.M. Thomas, *The Secular Ideologies of India and the Secular Meaning of Christ*, (Bangalore: CISRS, 1976), 124.

¹¹² Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious and Secular Movements in India*, 2002,215- 222; Cf, M. M. Thomas, *The Secular Ideologies of India* 124.

¹¹³ M.M. Thomas, *The Secular Ideologies of India*, 124 -145.

Untouchables. Keer affirms this by saying: “Frankly and boldly he preferred British rule to Brahmin rule.”¹¹⁴ E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker with his ‘Self Respect Movement’ fought against caste system and untouchability. He opposed the Indian National Congress and its ‘Home Rule’, as it was dominated by the Brahmins. He insisted that ‘[s]elf-Respect should come before self-rule’ and committed himself to the cause of socio-cultural revolution to bring freedom and equality from the hands of the Brahmins.¹¹⁵ The Dalit Panther movement of Maharashtra, founded in the 1972 fought and fights for the rights of Dalits and agitated against all forms of caste discrimination and oppression.¹¹⁶

These movements by the Dalits can be divided into three categories based on their motives: movements to establish caste honor as they wanted to challenge the high caste people, movements towards other egalitarian religions as social justice and equality was denied, and secular and political movements to participate in politics to enable Dalits to have power and decide their destiny.¹¹⁷ Most of these movements are politically oriented and mass-based movements, revolting against caste oppression and embraced other religions in search of human rights, dignity and equality.

The condition of Tribals

The tribals prefer to call themselves Adivasis or indigenous people. They are addressed as Scheduled Tribes in the Indian Constitution.¹¹⁸ The tribals in India mostly live in the north-eastern hills and border areas being different from the mainland in terms of language, culture, color and development. The tribals under-go innumerable sufferings such as social discrimination and degradation on account of their geographical and racial

¹¹⁴ Quoted, M.M. Thomas, *The Secular Ideologies of India*, 136.

¹¹⁵ M.M. Thomas, *The Secular Ideologies of India*, 136. See also Joseph D’Souza, *Dalit Freedom: Now and Forever the Epic Struggle for Dalit Emancipation*, (Secunderabad: Dalit freedom Network, 2010 Indian Revised Edition), 91-93.

¹¹⁶ Ramesh Chandra & Sangh Mittra, *Phases of Dalit Revolt*, (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 2003), 164- 172. For details, Lata, Murugkar, *Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra: A Sociological Appraisal*, (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1991), M. Sebastian, *Liberating the Caged Dalit Panther*, (Madras: Emerald Publishers, 1994).

¹¹⁷ Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious and Secular Movements in India*, 275.

¹¹⁸ Albert Minz, “Dalit and Tribals: A Search for Solidarity,” in *Frontiers of Dalit Theology*, ed. V. Devasahayam, (Madras/Delhi: Gurukul/ISPCK, 1997), 143.

differences.¹¹⁹ The tribals are a distinct social group of people who speak a common language or dialect and have their own territorial area which is mostly under developed. The life condition of the tribals is similar to that of Dalits as they lack civilization, education, technology and development etc. They are powerless and inferior both socially and politically.¹²⁰ The tribal movements in India can be categorized in to four groups: movements seeking political autonomy and formation of a state; agrarian and forest based movements; sanskritization process and cultural movements based on script and language.¹²¹

These movements fight for their rights and privileges because they are exploited by outsiders and they are economically deprived. Alienation of land, restriction on tribal rights in forest, exploitation of water resources and minerals without any benefit accruing to tribal people were some of the features of the post independent period.¹²² They continue to struggle and suffer “In spite of the new policies initiated by the government to protect the tribal people and promote their development, the exploitation of the tribal people and the erosion of their resource base multiplied manifold.”¹²³ According to James Massey and Nirmal Minz the Dalits and the tribals have the same roots as they were the pre-Aryan inhabitants or original inhabitants but after the Aryan invasion they became two different groups.¹²⁴

2.3.3 The context of patriarchy

If Brahmanism or the caste system is a ‘demon’ for the Dalits in India which deprives their basic human rights and human worth, women consider patriarchy as a ‘demon’ that stands against the welfare and betterment of women. India is a patriarchal society

¹¹⁹ Nirmal Minz, “Dalit – Tribal: A Search for Common Ideology,” in *Towards a Common Dalit Ideology*, ed. Arvind P. Nirmal, (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, No year), 105.

¹²⁰ Albert Minz, “Dalit and Tribals: A Search for Solidarity,” in *Frontiers of Dalit Theology*, 133- 134.

¹²¹ K.S. Singh, ed. *Tribal Movements in India Vol. 2*, (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1982), x.

¹²² S.R. Sharma, *Process of Social Change Among Tribes*, (New Delhi: MANAK Publications Pvt.Ltd, 2000), 168 – 169.

¹²³ K.S. Singh, “Foreword”, S.R. Sharma, *Process of Social Change Among Tribes*, 8.

¹²⁴ Nirmal Minz, “Theological Reflections from a Tribal Perspective,” in *Dalit and Women*, ed. V. Devasahayam, (Madras: Gurukul, 1993), 205. James Massey, *Roots: A Concise History of Dalits*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1991, 2nd edition. 1994), 52.

that did not treat women at par with men but degraded them as weak and dependent beings. It is a society which was and still is ruled and dominated by men, where women are oppressed by things such as dowry, *Sati*¹²⁵, widowhood, deprivation of education; social abuse and violence were and still are rampant in the Indian society. According to Kenneth Gill patriarchy is “a system in which there is general acceptance of control of men over women which limits their freedom of choice, behavior, action and even thought.”¹²⁶

Aruna Gnanadason, an Indian feminist theologian, says that the women’s movement has identified patriarchy as “a system of graded subjugation and hierarchical relationships which specify women’s oppressions in terms of class, caste, race, religion and gender.”¹²⁷ The status of Dalit women is worst of all. According to Ambedkar they are the Dalit among Dalit or downtrodden among downtrodden. He pictured the status of Dalits in general and women in particular as doubly alienated to the bottom of the society. He described the position of Dalit women in the Hindu caste system as:

A pyramid of earthenware pots set one on top of another. Not only are Brahmins and Kshatriyas¹²⁸ at the top and Shudras¹²⁹ and untouchables at the bottom, but within each earthenware pot, men are at the top and women of that caste are at the bottom like crushed and wasted powder. And at the very bottom are the Dalits and below them are the suppressed Dalit women.¹³⁰

The pyramid depicts the low status of women in Indian society. The practice of *Sati* denies the right of women to live after the death of her husband. Uma Chakravarti

¹²⁵ A system that denies women’s right to live after the death of her husband by voluntarily jumping into her husband’s funeral pyre.

¹²⁶ Kenneth Gill, *Count Us Equal*, (Bangalore: ATTWI, 1990), 24.

¹²⁷ Aruna Gnanadason, “Dalit Women-Dalit of the Dalit” in *Indigenous People Dalits: Issues in Today’s Theological Debate*, ed. James Massey; (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 170.

¹²⁸ They are the one who are created out of the arms of Brahma, they are the warriors and their duty is to protect the people.

¹²⁹ They are created out of the feet of Brahma and therefore they should serve all other high caste, Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas.

¹³⁰ Quoted by Aruna Gnanadason, “Social Hierarchies and Status of Women in India,” in *Adventurous Faith and Transforming Vision*, ed. A.P. Nirmal, (Madras: Gurukul, 1989), 133.

speaks about widowhood as “the chaste woman would cease to exist at the death of her husband by joining her husband on the funeral pyre but if she did not become a *sati* she came to be institutionally marginalized: while she was physically alive, she was socially dead.”¹³¹ Thus widowhood is a ‘state of social death.’

The *Manusmriti*¹³² was according to Indian tradition written by Manu, who is referred to as the most influential law giver of Hinduism; his laws were greatly revered and strictly practiced in every walk of human life in the Indian society.¹³³ The women were treated very low both socially and religiously because of the law of Manu. According to Manu women should be under the control of men although her life, from birth to death. He said “Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence.”¹³⁴ The practice of female infanticide was the direct outcome of the low view of women in the society as they are considered as a burden to the family and society. The practice of the *Devadasi*¹³⁵ is a system, in which girls are dedicated to the temple to serve god with the hope of *Moksha*¹³⁶ for her family; in reality those girls were sexually abused by the temple priest. It is not a practice of the past, but even in this 21st century the practice is continuing in remote corners of India.¹³⁷

Women leaders like Sarojini Naidu (1879 – 1949) Pandita Ramabai Saraswati (1858 – 1922) Annie Besant (1847 – 1933) and others played a crucial role in the emergence of women’s movements in India. The focus of women’s movement between the 1850s and the 1930s was on social reforms and participated in the national struggle

¹³¹ Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens*, (Calcutta: Stree, 2003), 82.

¹³² The Laws of Manu

¹³³ Freek L Bakker, ‘The Arya Dewaker Mandir in Paramaribo: A Hindu Temple with a Message’, *Electronic Paper Series in Hindu Studies 2*, (Québec: World Heritage Press 2015), 19. See Axel Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present*, 60-61.

¹³⁴ Manu, *The Laws of Manu, Sacred Books of the East* Vol. 25, Chapter IX: 3, translated by George Bühler, 1886.

¹³⁵ The female temple servants of god

¹³⁶ Hindu concept of salvation

¹³⁷ Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious and Secular Movements in India*, 14.

for freedom from 1930s and 1947.¹³⁸ In the post independent India the women's movement gained its momentum especially from 1970s renewal of concern in terms of education, employment, wages, and representation.¹³⁹ The women's movement addresses various issues such as women's legal and political rights, violence against women, reproductive choice and abortion, sexual freedom, employment opportunities and discrimination, and women's political participation and representation.¹⁴⁰ Women suffer everywhere but the degree and level of suffering may differ depends on their own respective culture and context. Amrita Basu remarks "the strength of women's movements lie in their insights into that which distinguishes them and that which joins them to others who have suffered. And from these encounters come the most exquisite knowledge, vitality and power."¹⁴¹

Religion, which was supposed to play a liberative role, was used as a source and instrument of domination and exploitation. It underscored patriarchy, discriminated women and was a vehicle of oppression and legitimization of age-old practices. Women were the most discriminated and oppressed on all levels of social life. With the coming of capitalism and the modernization of societies, the oppression of women became more evident by their absence in decision-making positions, even in issues and events that radically affected their lives.¹⁴² It was against this context of atrocities and injustice done against the women in the Indian society that Thomas evolved and developed his concepts of salvation and humanization to challenge and restructure the imbalanced male dominated society to seek equality and justice for women.

2.3.4 The context of poverty

Another important reason for social revolution in India was its mass poverty. Indian society is known for its massive poverty throughout the history of India. The poverty of

¹³⁸ Mala Khullar, ed. *Writing the Women's Movement: A Reader*, (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2005), 4 – 10.

¹³⁹ Mala Khullar, ed. *Writing the Women's Movement*, 11. See Mary E. John, *Women Studies in India: A Reader*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2008), 1 – 26.

¹⁴⁰ Amrita Basu, ed. *Women's Movement in Global Perspective*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1999), 11.

¹⁴¹ Amrita Basu, ed. *Women's Movement*, 20.

¹⁴² Franklyn J. Balasundaram., *EATWOT in Asia Towards a Relevant Theology*, (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1993), 142.

people continues to prevail and it will continue to exist until and unless the voice and choice of the poor people are heard and recognized in their socio-political and religio-cultural historical existence. According to C.T. Kurian, poverty is deprivation for many and affluence for the few. He defines poverty as “the socio-economic phenomenon whereby the resources available to a society are used to satisfy the wants of the few while the many do not have even their basic needs met”.¹⁴³ The Copenhagen Declaration of the World Summit for Social Development 1995, which was signed by the governments of seventeen countries, defined “Absolute poverty is a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to social services.”¹⁴⁴

Poverty in India is not something natural or automatic but it is man-made and enshrined in the structures of society through institutional legitimization.¹⁴⁵ Thus poverty is the deprivation of basic human needs both economic and social by the rich and dominant of the society. C.T. Kurian identifies four groups of people who suffer and experience the curse of poverty in India. They are the agricultural landless laborers; the farmers without enough land and income for their daily survival; the rural artisans and the people in urban neighborhoods with steady jobs but low wages.¹⁴⁶ The people who are living in the slums of many mega cities of India do not have any of the fundamental rights. They have no place, no address, no voting right, and no ration card and has no access to basic civic facilities. Thus they are called “no people”, and known as “invisible people.”¹⁴⁷ The Dalits suffer in every aspect of their life as they are the poorest of the poor in the society. V. Devasahyam describes their pathetic hopeless situation:

¹⁴³ C.T. Kurian, *Poverty, Planning and Social Transformation*, (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Ltd, 1978), 8.

¹⁴⁴ Paul Spicker & David Gordon, eds, *Poverty An International Glossary*, (London: Zed Books, 2007), 7.

¹⁴⁵ J. Murickan, S.J., “Introduction: Perspectives on Poverty”, *Poverty in India: Challenges and Responses*, ed. J. Murickan, S.J., (Bangalore: A Xavier Board Publication, 1988), 1.

¹⁴⁶ C.T. Kurien, “Why the Poor are Poor...And are Likely to Remain So”, *Journal of Social and Economic Studies*, 1/2 (April-June 1984), 104.

¹⁴⁷ Gnana Robinson, “Dealing with Poverty in India”, in *Challenges to Poverty Reporting in India*, (Chennai: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, 2011), 29.

The last and the least in India experience oppression in its multifacetedness: physical, social, economic, political, religious and cultural. They are the poor, the ones that mourn, weep, hunger, and are persecuted. Their poverty cannot be compared with the conditions of the poorest in the West. It is characterized by hunger, homelessness and near nudity and could be called pauperization or destitution.¹⁴⁸

It is so pathetic and shocking that many eat inedible things like rat meat, mango kernels, grass and even the earth and drink water. The *Musahars* which means rat eaters is a Dalit community who lives in the north Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and north Madhya Pradesh.¹⁴⁹ Colonialism, according to Thomas, was the root cause for the underdevelopment of not only India but of Asia as a whole.¹⁵⁰ This was acknowledged by the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), on the Wennappuwa conference of 1979 it declared:

Asia suffers under the heels of a forced poverty. Its life has been truncated by centuries of colonialism and a more recent neocolonialism. Its cultures are marginalized, its social relations distorted...what is produced, how and where it is produced, for whom it is produced, are the decisions of transnational corporations in collusion with national elites and with the overt or covert support of political and military forces.¹⁵¹

One of the causes of mass poverty in India was the colonialism of the West and the subsequent neo-colonialism of the multinational companies. Thus, poverty in India is an ongoing challenge with the ever growing population. The government should take concrete remedial steps. Though it has taken the necessary steps over the period, it fails

¹⁴⁸ V. Devasahayam, "Search for the Last, The Least And the Lost," 114.

¹⁴⁹ Gnana Robinson, "Dealing with Poverty in India", in *Challenges to Poverty Reporting in India*, 28.

¹⁵⁰ Franklyn J. Balasundaram., *EATWOT in Asia Towards a Relevant Theology*, 135.

¹⁵¹ "Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity: Toward a Relevant Theology," in *Asian Theology Emerging Themes*, ed, Douglas J. Elwood (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 101.

to implement and evaluate the success of the program, so as to know how far it has reached and helped the poor. The failure of the government enables the rich people – Indians and foreigners alike - to misappropriate money and resources that are allotted for the uplifting of people from their poverty stricken situation. Thomas had witnessed poverty and struggles of the people in India and thus seriously and continuously engaged in the humanization of people from all dehumanized conditions through his writings and involvement at various forums both within India and Overseas. Like the Latin American liberation theologians like Gustavo Gutierrez and others, Thomas believed that the hunger and poverty of the world could not be eliminated, without changing the forces and structures of exploitation.¹⁵²

2.3.5 The context of ideologies

The political and social revolutionary context created awareness among people that they could and should be freed from all oppression and that everyone is entitled to receive equal rights and privileges. Taken as a whole, Sunand Sumithra says that the first half of the twentieth century was a period of great political thought and action. Thinkers of this period were concerned with producing ideologies and programs that would build the nation and facilitate social justice and equality of the people. Their goals were justice and freedom, responsibility and creativity of the individual and the nation.¹⁵³ There were many ideologies that were propagated in India during the time of Thomas, but below only those are highlighted that impacted Thomas' concepts of salvation and humanization.

¹⁵² M.M. Thomas, 'Context for Development' *Seminar on Development*, (Goregaon/Bombay: Sept 20- 24, Examiner press, 1976), 23.

¹⁵³ S. Sumithra, *Revolution as Revelation: A Study of M.M. Thomas' Theology*, (Tubingen/New Delhi: TRACI, 1984), 37-38.

Humanism

The humanist ideology of the West quickened the process of social change in India.¹⁵⁴ Humanism tries to emancipate humanity from the clutches of religious orthodoxy and dogmatism. Humanism developed in late medieval Europe as a revolt against the other worldliness of medieval Christianity and a turning towards this-worldliness. The philosophy of humanism stood for “equalitarianism and secularization”¹⁵⁵ based on the respect for the dignity of man and his welfare. Some of the prominent Indian humanists, such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Rabindra Nath Tagore and Ambedkar, stood for the freedom of the individual, equal rights for men and women.

They wanted to free not only Indian people from the burdens of orthodoxy and traditionalism, but also from foreign rule and British imperialism. They didn't want to mix nationalism with religion but used nationalism as a means for social reconstruction and human brotherhood.¹⁵⁶ The ideology of humanism removed God from the center of man's life and placed man himself at the center of life. The focus shifted from God-centered life to man-centered life.¹⁵⁷ It was not meant to be a negation of God or religion but it gave priority of man over God. The emphasis in man's life moved from the “other-worldly” to “this-worldly” from the “life hereafter” to “life here and now”; this also meant that religion was not considered the primary need of man, but his food and shelter.¹⁵⁸

Humanism in India advocated focusing on human life on this earth, here and, now emphasizing on human worth, human rights, equality of all people. Humanism of the West stands for the conviction that human beings can shape their own destiny without the help of religion or God.¹⁵⁹ Thomas, being influenced by humanism (see

¹⁵⁴ Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374), known in English as Petrarch, was an Italian scholar, poet, and one of the earliest humanists. Petrarch is often called as the "Father of Humanism"

¹⁵⁵ M.N. Srinivas., *Social Change in Modern India*, 48.

¹⁵⁶ D.R. Jatava, *Indian Society Culture & Ideologies*, 250.

¹⁵⁷ M.D. David, “Defining Secularism”, *Crisis of Secularism in India: Report of the National Consultation on Crisis of Secularism in India*, (Bombay: The National Council YMCAs of India, 1993), 17.

¹⁵⁸ M.D. David, “Defining Secularism”, 17.

¹⁵⁹ I.S. Vidyasagar, *Concept of Humanism of Dr. Ambedkar*, (Jaipur: ABD Publishers, 2005), 62.

chapter 3), used the ideology of humanism positively towards the process of humanization.

Secularism

The ideology of secularism also emerged in medieval Europe; secularism is a Western concept that stands for conviction that challenges the religious domination of the medieval period. There were five forces that contributed to the birth of secularism in Europe: Humanism, Reformation, Rationalism, Science and Enlightenment.¹⁶⁰ In India the concept of secularism as a political philosophy emerged in the struggle for national independence, in response to Hindu nationalism and Islamic theory of two nations. India under the leadership of Gandhi and Nehru was successful in overcoming the forces of Hindu communalism in establishing a secular state.¹⁶¹ The nationalist movement from the very beginning was committed to secularism and secular society where they should not have any discrimination on the basis of one's religion because of India's context of religious pluralism.

Though secularism as understood in the Indian context, counters religion and its authority, it is not anti-religion. Blackshield opined that it was not "opposed to religion as such; it is opposed rather to the use of religious institutions and religious motivations, in the legal-political and educative processes."¹⁶² A secular state in this sense is neither a godless state nor an irreligious state but a state that does not patronize one particular religion but guarantees freedom of religion to every citizen of the country.¹⁶³ Secularism does not deny the importance of religion for the human life but it tries to show the evils of religion and its consequences when religion dominates or controls the political life of the state and the people.¹⁶⁴ According to Thomas it is "a movement from a sacred to a

¹⁶⁰ M.D. David, "Defining Secularism", 17.

¹⁶¹ M.M. Thomas, "The Concept of Secularism", in *Secularism in India*, ed. M.S. Gore, (New Delhi: Indian Academy of Social Sciences, 1991), 33.

¹⁶² A.R. Blackshield, in G.S. Sharma (ed), *Secularism its Implications for Law and Life in India*, (Bombay: M. N. Tripathi Private Ltd, 1966), 13.

¹⁶³ G.S. Sharma (ed), *Secularism its Implications for Law and Life in India*, 11.

¹⁶⁴ M.T. Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights*, 46.

secular ethos in corporate life.”¹⁶⁵ It upholds religious liberty as a fundamental civil right of every citizen and the co-existence of different religions and cultures in dynamic interaction for a peaceful life.

The word “secular” was not in the original Indian constitution, but it was added through an amendment in the 1970s by the Supreme Court of India. The primary aim to add the word secular was to prevent the rise of a “theocratic” state which gives first class citizenship only to its followers, while others’ privileges and rights in the society are restricted and denied.¹⁶⁶ The secular state, as intended by the Indian constitution, was anti-theocratic and intended to treat every religion and every religious individual as equal; everyone in society is equal to receive the rights and benefits of the state. The rise of secularism in India is to be understood in the context of religious pluralism and communal problems in the name of religion. In India, secularism cannot separate man from his religion as his religiosity and spirituality is interconnected and interwoven with his life in the society.

Secularism in India stands for the co-existence and tolerance of different religions without the interference of the State. Secularism was conceived to maintain religious harmony and tolerance in the context of Indian religious pluralism and to safeguard the religious rights of the minority people. Secularism in India became weakened by the growth of Hindu revivalism which emerged by the end of nineteenth century as a reaction to the fundamentalist attitude and the conversion work of Christian missionaries and Muslims.¹⁶⁷ Post-independence India became a victim of anti-secular and anti-democratic activities of fundamentalist organizations. Communal politics began to overpower democratic politics and values. M.T. Cherian writes:

There is an unprecedented growth of religious problems and communal violence...Religion has come to play a major role in country’s electoral politics.

¹⁶⁵ M.M. Thomas, “The Concept of Secularism,” 30.

¹⁶⁶ M.M. Thomas, *The Church’s Mission and Post-Modern Humanism: Collection of Essays and Talks, 1992-96*. Delhi: ISPCK, 1996), 21.

¹⁶⁷ M.T. Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights*, 315.

Secular education is facing a threat of saffronization. The secular history is giving way for communal history. The secular Constitution is under the threat of revision. All these developments prove that the secular fabric of India is affected by Hindu fundamentalism.¹⁶⁸

Secularism in India constitutionally means equality and freedom of all religions, equality of all people irrespective caste, creed and gender, guarantee freedom to profess, practice and propagate their faith or to live without a religion. It is non-theocratic and practices neutrality and impartiality to all religion. The future of secular humanism was under threat as the result of religious fundamentalism and communalism all over the world. M.M. Thomas said that “[n]ot only in India, but all the world over, there is a resurgence of religious fundamentalism and communalism which threatens the political, social and cultural achievements of movements of Secular Humanism”¹⁶⁹ He said: “In my assessment religious reform and renaissance is the result of religions absorbing within its concepts of transcendent spirituality, a limited but real process of secularization”¹⁷⁰ Thomas believed that secularism should be used as a tool to bring humanization in the society.

Gandhism

Gandhism as an ideology focuses on human beings and their welfare, both materially as well as spiritually. J.C. Kumarappa writes:

Gandhism aims at the development of the human being...state socialism looks upon all human beings as only living for the state, while under the Gandhian conception, state is an instrument for the benefit of every individual. He should develop spiritually, morally and economically. In so far as we are aiming at

¹⁶⁸ M.T. Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights*, 313.

¹⁶⁹ M.M. Thomas, “The Concept of Secularism,” 29.

¹⁷⁰ M.M. Thomas, “The Concept of Secularism,” 29.

material welfare there can be no difference between communism, socialism and Gandhism. The difference comes where we infuse moral values.¹⁷¹

Gandhi said: “My creed is service of God and the reform of humanity.”¹⁷² I. Sundaram summarized Gandhi’s views by stating: “Gandhism is neither a philosophy nor a dogma of life but a *sadhana* (striving for it).”¹⁷³ It is a Gandhian way of life. Gandhism, socialism and communism became competing ideologies during the Indian national struggle. Thomas was active in the Youth Christian Council of Action, Kerala (YCCA) during 1940 – 1941, Gandhi and his ideas influenced Thomas and others in working out YCCA’s social implications of Christian commitment.¹⁷⁴ Thomas was attracted to Gandhism as Gandhi stressed on non-violence which, according to Thomas, is also fundamental and central to Christianity. Thus, he said:

To my mind, Christ has enunciated the great principle of love and has left it in the hands of those who would take it and develop its technique in relation to particular situations and problems, under the guidance of His Spirit... Mahatma Gandhi has been an interpreter of Christ’s way of love in the realm of politics.¹⁷⁵

This is an example of how Thomas sees God at work in secular history.

Marxism

Marxism as an ideology worked and struggled to eliminate all kinds of exploitations, oppressions, discriminations of caste, class, color, creed, and community. The ideologies such as humanism, Gandhism and secularism focus on human identity, morality,

¹⁷¹ J.C. Kumarappa, *Gandhian Economic Thought*, (Rajghat: AB Sarvodaya Sangh Prakasham , 1962), 81. See Solomon Victus, *Religion and Eco-Economics of Dr. J.C. Kumarappa: Gandhism Redefined*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003), 183.

¹⁷² Gandhi, Quoted in I. Sundaram, *Gandhian Thought and Philosophy: Teachings of Mahatma Gandhi*, (Gandhi Nagar: Malhotra Brothers (P) Ltd, no year), 7.

¹⁷³ I. Sundaram, *Gandhian Thought and Philosophy: Teachings of Mahatma Gandhi*, 7.

¹⁷⁴ M.M. Thomas, “Gandhism and the Principle of Jesus”, in *Ideological Quest*, 1.

¹⁷⁵ M.M. Thomas, “Gandhism and the Principle of Jesus”, in *Ideological Quest*, 15-16. See George M. John, *Youth Christian Council of Action, Kerala 1938 – 1954*, (Bangalore: CISRS, 1972)

democratic rights and equality of all people whereas Marxism focuses more on creating a just society, based on economic equality. It focusses in particular on the exploitation of the common laborers by the capitalist system. It opposed all systems and structures of society that dehumanizes people, especially laborers. It advocated and promoted equality, liberation, and full humanization of people.¹⁷⁶

The anthropological focus and the humanizing elements of Marxism influenced many eminent Christian theologians, such as Jurgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Karl Rahner, Paul Tillich, Sebastian Kappen, Gustavo Gutierrez as well as M.M. Thomas.¹⁷⁷ Pannenberg wrote, “His [Marx] thought draws its power from its anthropological roots.”¹⁷⁸ Thomas’ biblical conviction and his social involvement needed an ideological tool to deal with the problems of the society. In this process he – as did many liberation theologians - used Marxist societal analysis as a tool, as it was committed to the goal of human emancipation, dealing with social and more specifically social-economic justice and was concerned about the economic condition.¹⁷⁹ Thomas believed that “a man’s spirituality depends largely upon his material conditions.”¹⁸⁰ He appealed to the church to accept the spiritual philosophy of materialism because it “is the materialism of Marx, for it is essentially spiritual, because Marx’s social –ethical consciousness is on a par with the principles of Jesus.”¹⁸¹

These ideologies, which focused human welfare, justice and equality of the underprivileged people, all had their impact on the life of Thomas in relation to humanization. Thus Thomas used these ideologies as an instrument towards the task of humanization of people especially the marginalized Dalit, tribals and women.

¹⁷⁶ Mervin Shinoj Boas, *Encounter between Marxian Philosophy and Theology of Humanization in India*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), xxi.

¹⁷⁷ Mervin Shinoj Boas, *Encounter between Marxian Philosophy and Theology of Humanization in India*, (xxiii).

¹⁷⁸ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *What is Man?* Trans. Duane A. Priebe, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 117.

¹⁷⁹ Wolf-Dietrich Schmied-Kowarzik, “Karl Marx as a Philosopher of Human Emancipation”, in *Marx’s Theories Today*, eds. Ryszard Panasiuk & Leszek Nowak, (Amsterdam- Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998), 365.

¹⁸⁰ M.M. Thomas, “The Church: What I Owe to It and My complaint Against It,” II/12.

¹⁸¹ M.M. Thomas, “The Church: What I Owe to It,” II/12-13.

2.4 Religious Revolt for Identity

While there was political and social revolution at its height demanding political freedom and social justice, Indian society also experienced a religious awakening and renaissance which questioned the so-called hegemony of the Brahmanism in the name of religion. The revolutionary context not only promoted the way for political independence, but also brought about change in the field of religion, especially as the result of Christian mission. Sumithra said: “And exactly as colonialism provoked Indian political self-consciousness, Christian missions evoked the Hindu religious self-consciousness.”¹⁸² Christian mission kindled the revival of Hinduism and its religious consciousness.

2.4.1 Renaissance and resurgence movements.

The positive effect of Western culture was that it instilled into the minds of Indians a spirit of rational inquiry which questioned the very basis of traditional religious belief systems. The rationalism of the West, as brought to India by colonialism and Christian missions, challenged some of the basic beliefs and practices of Hinduism. This spirit of rationalism and the quest for personhood and identity was the cry of the people. Though the changes were taking place at the social and political level, the conditions of *Shudras* and Untouchables remained the same. The socio-political changes awakened the oppressed and suppressed people of the society who as a result denounced Hinduism, as they realized that Hinduism was a source of alienation and dehumanization, rather than enhancement and humanization.¹⁸³ Millions of people left Hinduism and started embracing and following other faiths such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism etc. B.R. Ambedkar said: “I had the misfortune to be born with the stigma of ‘untouchable’, but it is not my fault, but I will not die a Hindu, for this is within my power.”¹⁸⁴ The British rulers tried to uplift them from their oppressive condition and in

¹⁸² Sunand Sumithra, *Christian Theology from an Indian Perspective*, 7.

¹⁸³ Jeyaraj Rajaiah, “Mediating Transformation for Humanization”, in *True Parenthood: Festschrift Essays in Honor of C. Jebaraj*, ed. P. Joseph Ramanathan, (Bangalore: Centre For Contemporary Christianity, 2010), 94

¹⁸⁴ Quoted in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, 53.

the words of Ram Gopal “sincerely desired to put Indian society on a better plane; they preferred evolution through education to revolution through law.”¹⁸⁵

Christianity as proclaimed by Christian missions in India emphasized and affirmed the worth of every individual in the sight of God and promised eternal life to the whole man. Christian missions and churches went beyond preaching the gospel and took up humanitarian work...”¹⁸⁶ Many of the people embraced Christianity first of all, because of the material prospect as they were economically poor.¹⁸⁷ The English education and the work of Christian mission in India challenged the basic socio- religious beliefs and practices of the people of India. Jatava acknowledges this positive impact of Western influence by saying that “Western impact rescued Indians from a philosophy of fatalism and fanaticism, pessimism and dogmatism, ritualism and casteism, etc. which had eaten into the vitals of Indian society.”¹⁸⁸

Christian mission and the propagation of Western education and values evoked a response amongst Hindus. It’s preaching also “initiated powerful indigenous movements like the *Brahmo Samaj*.¹⁸⁹ Hindu revivalism did not put forth an idea of a casteless and exploitation-free society but stood for a purified value system on the basis of Hindu *Sastras*.¹⁹⁰ The movements within Hinduism, that arose to counter the missionary religion of both Christianity as well as Islam, also brought forth reformation within Hinduism. In response to both these movements, reflection starts within Hinduism, leading to reform etc. In the following section I will discuss the three main groups.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁵ Ram Gopal, *British Rule in India*, (Calcutta: Bookland Private Ltd, 1963) 117 – 118.

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in D.R. Jatava, *Indian Society Culture & Ideologies*, 144.

¹⁸⁷ R.C. Majumdar (ed.), *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance Part II* (Bombay: Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, 1965), 155 – 156.

¹⁸⁸ D.R. Jatava, *Indian Society Culture & Ideologies*, 147.

¹⁸⁹ The Society of God which was started by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1828. It was a movement among the educated people which challenged the traditional Hindu beliefs and practices and brought forth renaissance in the Indian society as the result of Christian principle and influences. See, Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious and Secular Movements in India*, 23-39.

¹⁹⁰ V.P. Varma, *Modern Indian Political Thought*, (Agra: Laxminarayana & Co, 1971), 283.

¹⁹¹ P.D. Devanandan classified this movement into four groups as reform, revival, renaissance and revolt movements but I have clubbed the reform and renaissance movements together; P.D. Devanandan, *Resurgent Hinduism*, (Bangalore: CISRS, 1958), 5, See *Paul D. Devanandan Vol. I A Selection Edited with Introduction* by Joachim Wietzke, (Madras: CLS, 1983), 340- 349. See C.V. Mathew, *The Saffron Mission*, 25.

Reform Movements

According to Zachariah the reform movements within Hinduism, such as the Brahmo Samaj, were basically operating on Christian principles and values.¹⁹² The Indian thinkers and reformers were attracted and influenced by the ethical teachings of Jesus Christ. They accepted and incorporated new ideas and practices and discarded some beliefs and practices of Hinduism that they considered to be outdated. These movements were 're-formation', since the emphasis was more on the new than the old and sometimes on the new as against the old.¹⁹³ These movements emphasized and fought for the principle of individual liberty, human identity, and social equality and stood for nationalism.¹⁹⁴ Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833) who was influenced by missionaries and Western education, for example, vehemently opposed hereditary priesthood and caste system. He pointed out that "the caste order was undemocratic, inhuman and anti-national."¹⁹⁵ The social reform as promoted by the Brahmo Samaj brought some changes in the society; however, it did not benefit the marginalized and the underprivileged groups of the Indian society, due to the resistance of the high caste people.

The religious revolutions in India shook the very fundamentals of religion during this period. The Indian society was characterized by religious beliefs and practices such as caste system, *Sati*¹⁹⁶ and dowry etc. Christian mission and educational institution during the 19th and early decades of 20th century not only imparted intellectual and spiritual tools for struggle for a new society but also provided a climate of fellowship in which caste distinctions were transcended. Raja Ram Mohan Roy who was called as the 'morning star of the Indian renaissance and prophet of Indian nationalism' championed

¹⁹² Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious and Secular Movements in India*, 21-22.

¹⁹³ Paul D. Devanandan, *Paul D. Devanandan Vol. I*, 346.

¹⁹⁴ A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966), 240.

¹⁹⁵ D.R. Jatava, *Indian Society Culture & Ideologies*, 157.

¹⁹⁶ A social system, which denies the right of woman to live after the death of her husband by jumping into the funeral pyre of her husband.

the cause of the women and the weaker sections of the society.¹⁹⁷ He was the first social reformer in modern India who worked for educational and social reforms especially for the Indian women as their status was very low.

Revival movements

The focus of the revival movements was to bring about revival and renewal within Hinduism. The emphasis was not to borrow or depend on any other religions but to focus on the Hindu Scriptures and making them come back to life, claiming for itself a new resistance and relevancy in environments. The focus of the revival movements was not re-patterning the fundamentals but restating from the fundamentals. Devanandan said “The old faith is not merely revived and restated; it acquires in the process a new vitality, and amazingly new resilience, a surprisingly new meaning.”¹⁹⁸ Religious leaders such as Dayananda Saraswati¹⁹⁹ tried to reform Hinduism from all its ‘idolatry’, polytheism and caste system which he considered to be later developments in Hinduism. His approach was self-defensive and asserting the values of Hinduism. His main slogan and emphasis was ‘Back to the Vedas’, to maintain and achieve the purity of Hinduism, cleansed from all its later accumulations.²⁰⁰ Followers of Swami Dayananda Saraswati started the Arya Samaj in 1875 to regenerate Hinduism and to curb the spread and growth of the missionary religions such as Islam and Christianity. He believed that “India could be built only by the bricks and mortar of the Vedic culture.”²⁰¹ He believed that the Vedic period was the golden period and the revitalization of Hinduism should be fought and based on the Vedic text. He proclaimed the superiority of Hinduism to reconvert the Hindus from Islam and Christianity.²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ M.M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, 329. See for details of his life and work, *The English Works of Raja Rammohan Roy*, (Allahabad: 1906), *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohan Roy* by Sophia Dobson Collet, (London: 1900).

¹⁹⁸ Paul D. Devanandan, *Paul D. Devanandan Vol. I*, 347.

¹⁹⁹ Inspirer of the Arya Samaj, a militant Hindu association aiming at countering the spread of Christianity and Islam.

²⁰⁰ C.V. Mathew, *The Saffron Mission*, 25.

²⁰¹ Radhe Shyam Pareekh, *Contribution of Arya Samaj in the Making of Modern India 1875-1947*, (Delhi: Sarvadesik Aryaprathinithisabha, 1973), 221.

²⁰² Radhe Shyam Pareekh, *Contribution of Arya Samaj*, 221.

The Arya Samajis caused religious communalism and communal tensions as early as 1920s.²⁰³ Though Arya Samaj did not start as a political movement they believed that eventually self-government was better than foreign government. The Arya Samajis were a strong force in the Indian National Congress in its early years.²⁰⁴ It has been called the first modern Hindu missionary movement and grew as a strong 'regenerative' and 'revolutionary' movement. It was the militant movement of Hinduism and its service was greatly appreciated by the Hindus and it was considered as the 'defender and saviour of Hinduism.'²⁰⁵ According to Dayananda Saraswati Vedic religion is the only true religion and all other non-Vedic religions are false, especially Islam and Christianity, because the Hindus were converted, oppressed and ruled by them.²⁰⁶

C.V. Mathew, a scholar on modern religious Indian movements, mentions three important contributions made by the Arya Samaj to the cause of Hinduism: some intra-religious reforms within Hinduism; social service in the society; and polemics to counter and oppose the superiority and universality of Islam and Christianity.²⁰⁷ The Arya Samajis were moreover committed to the supremacy of Aryan religion and the task of Aryanizing the whole world through their apologetic approach.²⁰⁸ Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886) also worked for the renewal of Hinduism. The first major Hindu missionary society, founded by his famous disciple Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), is named after him, the Ramakrishna Mission.²⁰⁹ Swami Vivekananda stressed social service on the basis of Vedanta.

These movements were both defensive and apologetic and aimed to counter and arrest the influence of other religions especially Christianity and Islam. Jatava writes: "The Hindu revivalism emerged against the triple danger of Western

²⁰³ M.T. Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights*, 169.

²⁰⁴ M.T. Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights*, 171.

²⁰⁵ C.V. Mathew, *The Saffron Mission*, 63-64. See Lajput Raj, *The Arya Samaj*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1915), 251.

²⁰⁶ C.V. Mathew, *The Saffron Mission*, 70- 75.

²⁰⁷ C.V. Mathew, *The Saffron Mission*, 82 – 90.

²⁰⁸ C.V. Mathew, *The Saffron Mission*, 101.

²⁰⁹ C.V. Mathew, *The Saffron Mission*, 114.

encroachment, Islamic domination and Christian influence.”²¹⁰ Though the Hindus were in particular reacting to the content of the gospel of Jesus Christ, yet they were resistant to all missionary activities during this time; Mathew writes: “by the middle of the 19th century we see the slow and steady emergence of a resistant Hinduism in the national context.”²¹¹ They “rallied their forces for defense, and gradually moved over from the defensive to the offensive.”²¹² They believed offense was the best method of defense to protect and promote Hindu beliefs and practices.

Although the Arya Samaj and Gandhi made some serious attempts to improve the situation of the Dalits, the overall picture of India shows that their success was marginal. Though they did not oppose to the welfare of the suppressed section of the Hindu society, they did not show any concern for granting social equality even in theory, for it would mean a denial of *varnasrama dharma*²¹³ in principle.²¹⁴ Though the Ramakrishna mission fought against caste discrimination but they could not eliminate caste system. These revolutions were taking place within Hinduism to keep the Hindu people within Hinduism. According to Matthew they were increasingly conscious of their failures and the fact that they were losing their grip on their people.²¹⁵ They began to organize themselves both at the regional and national level to defend and to promote their faith. They resolved that the only way to keep them in the Hindu fold was to have renaissance and reformation in Hinduism as well as in Indian society. One can say unquestionably that these efforts and initiatives were made because of the impact of Western education and Christian principles.

Revolt movements

The third movement was a Dalit movement under the leadership of Ambedkar and others who revolted and reacted against the ancestral faith which denied fundamental

²¹⁰ D.R. Jatava, *Indian Society Culture & Ideologies*, 151.

²¹¹ C.V. Mathew, *The Saffron Mission*, 56.

²¹² Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 303.

²¹³ The practice of caste system

²¹⁴ D.R. Jatava, *Indian Society Culture & Ideologies*, 153.

²¹⁵ C.V. Mathew, *The Saffron Mission*, 63-66.

religious rights and privileges. The oppressive older values were considered outmoded and the modern liberative elements were emphasized by the oppressed and depressed people of the society. Ambedkar, the champion of Dalit people, believed that the emancipation of the Dalits from the powerful oppressive system of caste required strong political power. So he appealed to the Dalits, that they should involve in politics in order to gain political power for social transformation. He believed political power to be the only weapon through which transformation and humanization of Dalits could be achieved, as the Dalits do not have economic power. He said: "Political power is the master key through which you can open each and every lock."²¹⁶ According to Ambedkar caste system 'deadens, paralyses, and cripples the people'; it has ruined the Hindu race and has 'destroyed, demoralized and devitalized the Hindu Society. The caste system cannot be abolished unless its root, the *Manusmriti*²¹⁷ which canonizes caste, is destroyed.'²¹⁸ It even affected the growth of nationalism, according to Ambedkar. He said: "Brahmanism in instituting caste system has put the greatest impediment against the growth of nationalism."²¹⁹ A.P. Nirmal, the exponent of Dalit theology, writes that the Dalit movements always searched for an alternative system of values. Their primary aim was the removal of the inequality of humans. Some of these movements also explicitly denied the existence of God; others remained silent with regard to the existence of God. They all endeavored to promote human equality and human dignity.²²⁰

The Dalits' revolt and agitation was a challenge against an age-old formidable caste system which was deeply rooted in and intertwined with the religious sanction to root out basic human rights, identity and the dignity of Dalits. According to Prabhakar, those who were dissatisfied with the irrationality and religious beliefs of Hinduism left

²¹⁶ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, Vol.1. (Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1979), 80.

²¹⁷ Manu is the oldest law giver of Hinduism. His book is named after him *Manusmriti* which means the laws of Manu which is sacred book for the Hindus. *Manusmriti* is nothing but a demon that manipulates and exploits the Dalits and the women of India.

²¹⁸ Cited in M.M. Thomas, *The Secular Ideologies of India*, 156.

²¹⁹ G.Aloysius, *Ambedkar on Nation & Nationalism*, 33.

²²⁰ A.P. Nirmal, "The Dalit Search for Secular Polity", *Crisis of Secularism in India: Report of the National Consultation on Crisis of Secularism in India*, (Bombay: The National Council YMCAs of India, 1993), 62.

Hinduism and followed either Christianity or Islam.²²¹ There were others who simply rejected any type of religion as the result of secularization.²²² Looking at the human conditions and their struggles the World Conference on Church and Society which was held at Geneva in 1966 concluded thus:

The church as a body must speak to society on behalf of the oppressed...it demands identification with the oppressed...it should restore the dignity of the oppressed...the alleviation of human suffering...if the Christian community wishes to live out its faith in the world-wide community, it must put its weight on the side of the oppressed.²²³

During this time Christian leaders and theologians began to emphasize on the social ethics of the gospel. Sumithra observed

In general, Indian theologians have tended to place more emphasis on the experience of Christ and his power at the cost of purity of the dogmas...questions of social ethics have caught the attention of several Christian and Hindu thinkers. "Ethics before dogmatics" is generally true of this period.²²⁴

It was a period of great struggle for survival especially in the case of the poor and the marginalized people. This situation forced the church to "rethink more and more their role and this process led the whole Ecumenical Movement, both World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, to come out with clear theological perspectives on social issues."²²⁵ This makes clear the impact of the religious revolution and the importance of individualism of this period. These revolutionary movements basically reflect an unquenchable human quest and an unending fight for political, social and religious equality and identity. This context of human struggle for freedom and

²²¹ M.E. Prabhakar, "The Search for a Dalit Theology," in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, 46.

²²² C.V. Mathew, *The Saffron Mission*, 25.

²²³ Quoted in Franklyn J. Balasundaram., *EATWOT in Asia Towards a Relevant Theology*, 105.

²²⁴ Sunand Sumithra, *Christian Theologies*, 11.

²²⁵ Franklyn J. Balasundaram., *EATWOT in Asia Towards a Relevant Theology*, 103.

equality had a significant impact in the life of Thomas, so much so that he was committed to serve and fight all through his life for the basic human rights and privileges especially for the oppressed and downtrodden people of the society.

2.5 Conclusion

The context of Thomas may be summed up as a context of revolution for political, social and religious freedom and equality. The political revolution was against the oppressive British rule, challenging and demanding for political freedom and independence. It was not only a struggle against the external enemy but the strive for nationalism also exposed an internal conflict, especially between Hindu and Muslim, giving birth to Hindu nationalism and Muslim nationalism rather than Indian nationalism. It was unfortunate that for certain groups in society the communal elements and interest took prominence over the national interest and solidarity. Indian nationalism suffered in the hands of the Hindu and Muslim nationalism; in this period seeds for continued tensions in Indian society were sown.

The social revolution targeted the unjust society which deprived and denied basic human rights especially the Dalits, tribals and women. The stratification of the Indian society was characterized by caste, patriarchy and poverty etc. The social revolution for social equality advocated the rights of and was supported by the poor and the oppressed people especially the Dalits, demanding social identity and human dignity. They questioned the oppressive and divisive social systems and structures that perpetrated discrimination and degradation of people on the basis of one's caste and gender. The social revolution for equality of all people gained momentum with the popularity of different ideologies which supported the cause of human freedom and justice such as humanism, Marxism, Gandhism and secularism. Parallel to the socio-political revolution there was also religious awakening and movements for renaissance and resurgence to revive and to review the Hindu beliefs and practices became prominent. These movements came in response to the fact that marginalized people

like the Dalits, began to move out of Hinduism as a sign of protest, joining other religions like Christianity and Islam in search of human identity, dignity, equality and justice.

Thomas lived in these socio-political and religious revolutionary contexts, which demanded political freedom from colonial rule for the emergence of a new independent nation, and renaissance of traditional religions. These revolutions were for social, political and religious equality and acceptance along with others. It was a context of struggle for the survival of the weak against the survival of the fittest, the dominant and so called purest of the society. If one has to summarize the context of Thomas, one may say it was a context of revolution for humanization. This revolutionary context shaped the personal life of Thomas as well as his theology, especially his concepts of salvation and humanization.

CHAPTER 3

THE LIFE AND WORK OF M.M. THOMAS

3.1 Introduction

The context of India was discussed in Chapter Two in order to understand the socio-political and religio-cultural background of Thomas as it shaped the evolution and development of his concepts of salvation and humanization. This chapter deals with the life and work of Thomas, both at the national and international level. Thomas understood his work as enhancing “the work of God” through involvement both in the church and society. He aptly titled his unpublished autobiography *Faith Seeking Understanding and Responsibility*²²⁶, as his life was basically a search towards understanding of and responsibility for the society. The aim of this chapter is to chart the biography of Thomas and the development of his thought and theological reflection. Thomas’ life can be divided into five periods.

The periodization was made on the basis of Thomas’ church involvement and the development of his theological thought. Section 3.2 discusses Thomas’ life in the period 1916-1936 and focusses thematically on his search for an evangelical spirituality; Section 3.3 deals with his quest for ideology and social responsibility, a theme that was central in Thomas’ life and thought in the period 1937- 1945. Section 3.4 discusses Thomas’ pursuit of an ecumenical responsibility for unity between 1945 and 1975 and 3.5 discusses Thomas’ quest for political responsibility and involvement in the period 1976 – 1992. Section 3.6 finally presents the years of Thomas’ life after retirement, coined as his search for Biblical exposition for contemporary relevance in the society: 1977-1996. However, there may be some overlap between the periods, as he was involved nationally and internationally simultaneously. Section 3.7 presents the conclusion of this chapter.

²²⁶ M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking Understanding and Responsibility, Type written Unpublished Autobiography*, (United Theological College, Archives, MMT/38, (Bangalore, 1972), 1.

3.2 In Search of Evangelical Spirituality (1916 – 1936)

The first period of Thomas' life was characterized by a sincere and genuine search for an evangelical spirituality.²²⁷ This section deals with this Christian evangelical spirituality which Thomas experienced both at home as well as in his church. It also discusses his personal experience of salvation.

3.2.1 The evangelical spirituality

Madathilparampil Mammen Thomas was born on 15th May 1916 at Kavungumprayar and brought up at Kozhencherry in Travancore which is now called Kerala, one of the southern states of India. Thomas was the oldest of the nine children. He had a rural lower middle-class family background. His father Mammen was a Gandhian socialist, who worked as secretary of a local Corporative Society and had a printing press to ensure the livelihood of his large family. His father was a pious and active member of the Syrian Mar Thoma Church of Malabar²²⁸ and was an active evangelist and enthusiastic patriot. Thomas' mother was a school-teacher. Thomas had his early education in a school that was run by his church in his own village.²²⁹ He was regular to church service, Sunday school meetings and cottage prayer meetings of the church. T.M. Phillip maintains that the Sunday school lessons on the crucifixion of Jesus touched Thomas early in life, to the extent that it impacted him throughout his life.²³⁰ The evangelical piety at home, and his family's commitment to Christian faith and church

²²⁷ Evangelical spirituality or piety stresses the importance of personal holiness in accordance with the teachings of the Scripture and the tradition of the church. However, mostly one's spirituality is measured and judged on the basis of observing the tradition rather than obedience to the Scripture. See M.M. Thomas, *The Gospel of Forgiveness and Koinonia, Twenty Five Selected Sermons/Homilies*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 28 – 30. T. Jacob Thomas, ed. *M.M. Thomas, Reader: Selected Texts on Theology, Religion and Society*, 134-138.

²²⁸ This is one of the main denominations in India especially in the state of Kerala. According to the tradition and Indian Church history it is believed that St. Thomas, one of the disciples of Jesus Christ came to Malabar in Kerala in 52. AD and ministered to the people in that region. Thus the denomination is named after Mar Thoma which means St. Thomas.

²²⁹ T.M. Philip, *The Encounter Between Theology and Ideology: An Exploration into the Communicative Theology of M.M. Thomas*, (Madras: CLS, 1986), 1.

²³⁰ T.M. Philip, *Theology and Ideology*, 1.

tradition helped him to develop a disciplined prayer life. He believed in the importance of prayer; he was convinced that intercession for a personal, social and religious life would impact the society towards humanization. In order to achieve this, Thomas used books such as *Self-Training in Prayer* and *Self-Training in Meditation*.²³¹ The evangelical spirituality that he experienced both at home and in the church served as an early foundation to share his experiences of evangelical spirituality with his friends.

Thomas testifies to the impact of the liturgical and evangelical tradition of his Church on his spirituality. Thinking of his early life, he said in his autobiography: “looking back it is clear to me that I started my life of faith with what may be called evangelical and sacramental piety, I believe it is still the fundamental structure of my spiritual life.”²³² Sunand Sumithra, who has done doctoral research on the theology of Thomas, says that Thomas “consciously counts himself as standing in the evangelical and sacramental piety in his early years.”²³³ The influence of his church’s liturgy was large; Thomas wrote: “I have often been surprised how much the liturgical tradition of my church has become through the years an integral part of my spirituality.”²³⁴ Thus the spirituality of Thomas was characterized by the evangelical, sacramental tradition and the liturgical tradition of his church. He was so carried away by this evangelical spirituality during his early period that he had no attention for the social concern; this he developed in his later years. Hielke T. Wolters, who conducted his doctoral research on Thomas’ theology of prophetic participation, confirms that the following three factors played a significant role in his early spiritual and theological development: Firstly, the tradition of the Mar Thoma Church with its emphasis on liturgy and sacraments and their relation to one’s personal faith and social responsibility. Secondly, the personal faith received from his family background and upbringing that gave him a solid evangelical piety and personal commitment to Jesus Christ.²³⁵ The third was his

²³¹ T.M. Philip, *Theology and Ideology*, 2.

²³² M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 1.

²³³ Sunand Sumithra, *Revolution as Revelation: A Study of M.M. Thomas’s Theology*, 59.

²³⁴ M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 44.

²³⁵ Hielke T. Wolters, *Theology of Prophetic Participation: M.M. Thomas’ Concept of Salvation and the Collective Struggle for Fuller Humanity in India*, 12.

involvement with the Student Christian Movement. Thomas acknowledged: "It is to the reformation milieu of Kozhencherry and my family that I owe my faith which was solidified in the course of time."²³⁶

Thomas himself identified three strands of the reformation tradition of Mar Thoma church that were emphasized in his youth. Those were a strong belief in individual freedom and responsibility, a rationalistic faith that tolerates and respects others' views and his involvement in youth movements like Mar Thoma Youth Union and particularly the Student Christian Movement.²³⁷ These early foundations and convictions on human freedom and equality came to play a vital role in his advocacy for salvation and humanization of people, especially the marginalized people like the Dalits, tribals and women.

His family background makes clear that Thomas not only had a sound foundation in Christian spirituality, but also in national patriotism, which remained with him throughout his life and is reflected in his theology and writings. In his family in addition to Christian spirituality, there were influences of nationalism and Gandhism. His father was a Gandhian and an enthusiastic and staunch patriot who actively took part in the early phases of the independence movement; he used to wear *Khaddar*²³⁸ clothes. The printing press that his father owned was an early motivation for Thomas to write and print prayer letters and newsletters which he distributed among his friends and in the Interceding Fellowship Group.²³⁹

3.2.2 Personal salvation

Thomas had his early schooling in his native place Kozhencherry; he did his Bachelor degree in chemistry from Science College at Trivandrum in 1931-1935. He was honored with a gold medal for the best student. This period of study was crucial and decisive for

²³⁶ Quoted, Mohan Chacko, *Interpreting Society: A Study of the Political Theology of M.M. Thomas and Its Implications for Mission*, (Dehra Dun: Mohan Chacko, 2000), 30.

²³⁷ Mohan Chacko, *Interpreting Society*, 32.

²³⁸ *Khaddar* is a term for handspun and hand-woven cloth from India, primarily made out of cotton which are all spun into yarn on a spinning wheel called a *charkha*.

²³⁹ T.M. Philip, *Theology and Ideology*, 3.

the rest of his life. In the first year of his study he had a spiritual experience which he interpreted as having accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. In his autobiography he writes “Jesus Christ became real to me as the bearer of Divine Forgiveness; and gave my life, awakened to adolescent rages, a principle of integration and a sense of direction.”²⁴⁰ As the result of this new challenging experience with Christ, Thomas began to organize informal groups to share the gospel with his friends and was active within the Mar Thoma Youth Union and the Student Christian Movement throughout his student years. These movements nurtured and developed his spirituality during this period.

After his studies, in 1935 he worked as a teacher for two years in a high school that belonged to the Perumpavoor Ashram which was the center of the evangelistic and educational activities of the Mar Thoma Church. There, he organized his friends into an ‘Interceding Fellowship’; he also started an inter-religious fellowship of students. It is quite significant to note that his openness and commitment towards people of other faiths began to take shape even at an early stage of his life. During this period, he was involved in evangelistic ministry by visiting villages and plantation workers. This ministry exposure among the poor made him to realize that social concern should always go alongside preaching of the gospel. Later in his life he felt saddened and became critical about making Christianity a “duping drug” by preaching only the salvation of souls, without paying attention to the pitiable and pathetic living conditions of the people.²⁴¹ In 1937 he wrote fifty meditations on the cross which was published later as *Realization of the Cross*.²⁴²

Because of his evangelical tradition, Thomas’ spirituality was centered on salvation of the soul; this initially blinded him for social responsibility. Gradually, he began to understand social responsibility as an integral part of his spirituality, it is an early foundation on which he built and developed his theology of salvation and humanization.

²⁴⁰ M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 1. Cf. Sunand Sumithra, *Revolution as Revelation*, 58.

²⁴¹ T. Jacob Thomas, *Ethics of a World Community*, 30.

²⁴² M.M. Thomas, *Realization of the Cross*, (Madras: CLS, 1972).

3.3 In Search of Social Responsibility (1937–1946)

The second phase in Thomas' life was focused on social concern and responsibility. In 1937 he joined the Christian Institute at Alleppey (Kerala) and was associated with the Home for Waifs and Strays. From 1938, for the next three years, he was trying to build a home for the street boys in Trivandrum. During this time he also worked as a Secretary of the Trivandrum Beggar Relief Committee. In 1941 he was with Social Workers' Brotherhood in Bangalore to read books related to Christianity and politics. He worked with Student Christian Movement from 1943–1945.²⁴³ During this period he began to realize the shallowness and narrowness of his evangelical spirituality as he was exposed to different ideologies and institutions; these experiences opened his eyes to the importance of both spiritual as well as physical salvation. This section deals with Thomas social responsibility and his quest for ideologies.

3.3.1 Social responsibility

The impact of Thomas' personal salvation was great importance in his search for social *dharma* and responsibility. He writes "The self-consciousness that Jesus Christ is the ground and goal of my life became deep rooted in me. I dedicated myself to God in Jesus Christ on that occasion and it marks the beginning of my search for Christian social dharma."²⁴⁴ Thomas says the years 1937-1945, were "literally a pilgrimage in search of my dharma."²⁴⁵ After he left the ashram school and before joining the Christian Institute in 1937, he was wrestling with three related issues namely: the centrality of Christ in his life, the reality of other religions and the social implications of the gospel. Thomas writes:

²⁴³ M.M. Thomas, *Ideological Quest within Christian Commitment 1939-1954*, (Bangalore: CISRS/CLS, 1983), iii, iv.

²⁴⁴ T.M. Philip, *Theology and Ideology*, 3.

²⁴⁵ Quoted in Mohan Chacko, *Interpreting Society*, 4. *Dharma* here means vocation or duty.

I felt compelled to re-state my understanding of Christ in the context of my new discovery of the richness of other religions on the one hand and my slow awakening to the social implications of the Gospel on the other... the question was how to retain the centrality of Christ in my life, while grappling with the realities of other religions and of social concerns.²⁴⁶

Thomas' concepts of salvation and humanization and Christ-centered secular fellowship, which will be discussed in the next chapter, seem to evolve from his early convictions. This reflects his struggle between the centrality of Christ (his Christo-centric spirituality) and the call for social responsibility. He experienced this struggle because of his strong evangelical spirituality in which he had been nurtured both at home and in the Mar Thoma Church. The problem with Christianity at large, and with special reference to the evangelical tradition, has been the dichotomization and compartmentalization of the spiritual from the social and the social from the spiritual. He stood between the two as a connecting bridge through his powerful writings and addresses. He left his teaching job in order to become more involved in the ministry. One of the reasons for leaving his job as teacher in 1937 was the challenge to be more directly involved in evangelism and social service.²⁴⁷ It was in this search for social responsibility that he joined Christian Institute at Alleppey.

The Christian institute at Alleppey

Thomas joined Christian Institute at Alleppey in 1937 at the invitation of Sadhu Mathai,²⁴⁸ the institute combined inter-religious dialogue, evangelistic work and social service with a Christ-centered basis. Thomas was in charge of the morning and evening worship services in the Institute. He wrote many liturgical orders in Malayalam in which

²⁴⁶ M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 5.

²⁴⁷ H. Wolters, *Prophetic Participation*, 14.

²⁴⁸ This was a fellowship group founded by Sadhu K.I Mathai and others in 1934 in Alleppey which later became known as Christava Ashram in Manganam in 1940. Cf. T.M. Philip, *Theology and Ideology*, 3- 5.

“the Christian basis for the concern for social justice was emphasized in a new way.”²⁴⁹
The shift marks a movement towards a holistic approach to the gospel of salvation and a move away from pietistic spirituality. He writes about his earlier position thus:

Like many other, I had come to Christ in the tradition of pure spirituality and individual piety. I do not regret that tradition. But here was a challenge to its one-sidedness. If Christ rose in the body, the redemption He wrought was not merely of my spirit or soul, but of the whole of me, body, mind and soul, and of the whole of my relationship to nature and to men (sic).²⁵⁰

As a result of his gradually changing insights, Thomas began to challenge the pietistic spirituality of evangelicalism; he stated that since “incarnation is the continuation of creation” Christians need to be concerned about the whole creation and all the creative movement in it. Thus he challenged evangelical Christianity to shed pietistic attitude towards the world and become involved in the social struggles of the people.²⁵¹ It was K.A Mathew, the secretary of the Kerala Student Christian Movement (SCM) who first shared with Thomas the ecumenical and social implication of the gospel.²⁵²

Thomas’ exposure at Alleppey and the influence of Sadhu Mathai inspired Thomas to start a *Balabhavan* at Trivandrum: a house for the rehabilitation of street boys (waifs and strays) in 1938 which he organized on an inter-religious and inter-communal basis. For Thomas, Sadhu Mathai embodied the relation between Christian spirituality and social service for those in need. Thomas was challenged by Sadhu Mathai’s teaching which directed Thomas toward social concern. Thomas writes “And I remember with gratitude that it started me on my Christian social concern.”²⁵³ And: “When I began the work for the home, my desire was that it should develop on an inter-

²⁴⁹ M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 6.

²⁵⁰ M.M. Thomas, *Towards a Theology of Contemporary Ecumenism, A Collection of Addresses to Ecumenical Gatherings (1947-75)*, (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1978), 34.

²⁵¹ M.M. Thomas, *Towards an Evangelical Social Gospel*, (Madras: CLS, 1977), 28.

²⁵² M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey 1947-1975*, (Trivandrum: Ecumenical Publishing Centre Pvt Ltd, 1990), 2.

²⁵³ M.M. Thomas, “Sadhu Mathai: A Personal Tribute”, *Guardian* 49/.39 (Sept. 1971), 307.

religious rather than on a Christian basis. My inspiration for the social service is Christian; my goal also is Christian witness.”²⁵⁴ Thomas seems to have realized the need for dialogue with people of other faiths in his early period which he developed later on and which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Meanwhile Thomas worked as a secretary of *Balabhavan* and raised funds with local people with sincere commitment and passion by visiting their houses and collecting food and donations to meet the expenses of the home. He even learned shoe-making in order to teach the boys a trade. Thomas noted however that the boys themselves refused to sit with the cobbler, as the work was considered inferior.²⁵⁵ His experience with Mathai explored a deep quest and search in relating and connecting ‘the Word’ and ‘the world’, the word of Christ with the world of God. These influences played a major role in the evolvment and development of Thomas’ holistic and inclusive approach to his concepts of salvation and humanization.

During this period his reading focused on Christian social responsibility, especially of authors like William Temple, A.E. Garvey, W.R. Moltby and B.H. Streeter. He was in search of spirituality that was dynamic and life affirming. He remarked: “Spirituality by itself is not good, because the devil himself is spiritual. What is needed is a spirituality which is genuinely human.”²⁵⁶ This human-focused spirituality paid attention to the life conditions and welfare of the poor. He also organized a Beggar Relief Committee with the co-operation of the Trivandrum City Corporation. His involvement with the *Balabhavan* and beggar’s relief committee gave him deep insight in the dehumanizing conditions in which many of the people lived. Jacob Thomas rightly observes: “These experiences with the people of the lowest class of the society gave Thomas an insight into the dehumanizing condition in which they lived and the effect of those conditions upon their personality.”²⁵⁷ It was this personal exposure to suffering of the fellow humanity that moved him with great commitment to serve and humanize

²⁵⁴ Quoted, Mohan Chacko, *Interpreting Society*, 47.

²⁵⁵ T.M. Philip, *Theology and Ideology*, 5.

²⁵⁶ Quoted, K.C. Abraham, ed. “Introduction,” in *A Tribute to M.M. Thomas Christian Witness in Society*, 8.

²⁵⁷ Jacob Thomas, *Ethics of a World Community*, 32.

them. Thus from early days Thomas was concerned about the plight of the poor and marginalized in the society.²⁵⁸ He believed in the power of the gospel to change the social life of the people. Therefore he involved in social work.

Youth Christian council of action (YCCA)

Thomas, still in his early twenties, was one of the founding members of Youth Christian Council of Action (YCCA) in 1938. Its objectives were to bring out the social implications of the gospel, to expose the evils within and without the church and to act to remedy them, to study social problems etc. Thomas played a key role in the formulation of the objectives. The objectives were focused in the direction of social concern and responsibility. During 1940–41 Thomas worked as the secretary of the YCCA, but in 1942 Thomas left the movement because of a split over its non-violent strategies. In the same year he founded the National Christian Youth Council (NCYC) but it did not survive for long time. In 1941 he also became involved in the formulation of a Social Creed for the Mar Thoma Students Organization. This social manifesto was based on the 'divine purpose of human brotherhood, the worth of human personality and the equality of men in the sight of God.'²⁵⁹ These elements remained with him for the rest of his life.

Brotherhood of social workers

After Thomas resigned from *Balabhavan* in 1941 because his non-Christian colleagues criticized Thomas for spreading his faith to the children, he went to Bangalore to study with Brother Keithahn, a well-known Gandhian.²⁶⁰ Thomas was with him at the Social Workers' Brotherhood in Bangalore, which undertook a self-study project on Christianity and society. In the few months of his stay there he read many books, including the study volumes of the Oxford Conference 1937 on Church, Community and State. He studied allied subjects on Christianity and Society: books by Reinhold Niebuhr, Hendrik Kraemer, John Macmurray, V.A. Damani, Christopher Dawson, C.H. Dodd, Nicolas Berdyaev and

²⁵⁸ M.M. Thomas, *Ideological Quest*, iii.

²⁵⁹ S. Sumithra, *Revolution as Revelation*, 61.

²⁶⁰ M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 6.

Solovyev. The variety of books and authors reveal his quest and search in the direction of social responsibility.²⁶¹ Thomas' one-year stay in Bangalore was, in his own perception, a real time of preparation for his future ministry as he says it was "one of the most creative periods of my life."²⁶² It was during this period that he became acquainted with the thought of many western scholars and theologians.

The reading done during this year became the foundation for his future theological reflections. He developed an attitude of learning and exploring the world outside India, of searching to know God's plan for humanity and playing an active role in humanizing the society. He was a voracious reader right from his early age, which also made him as a prolific writer on all subjects and issues related to religion and society. His exposures both with Christian Institute at Alleppey and Social Workers of Brotherhood in Bangalore were focused on social service and responsibility. In all his search Thomas acknowledged the crucified Jesus as the basis for his search and all his theological reflection are 'under the shadow of the cross.' It is during this period his concept of salvation and humanization began to take shape.

Marriage with Elizabeth Pennamma

Thomas was denied ordination in the Mar Thoma Church because of his affinity to Marxism; he was also denied membership in the Communist Party because of his Christian faith. But in 1945 when Thomas was aged twenty nine, Metropolitan Juhanon Mar Thoma was sympathetic towards social issues of Thomas and appointed him secretary of the Youth Department of the Mar Thoma Church.²⁶³ This was his first salaried job after he left his job as a teacher. It enabled Thomas to marry Elizabeth Kurian (known as Pennamma) in 1945 after ten long years of engagement. Probably he delayed his marriage because he was not yet settled with a paid job; moreover he was in search of social *dharma* and responsibility. Pennamma was a teacher at a women's college in Trivandrum. Together, they had three children. Thomas refrained from

²⁶¹ S. Sumithra, *Revolution as Revelation*, 62.

²⁶² M.M. Thomas, "Foreword" in Ralph Richard Keithan, *Pilgrimage in India*, (Madras: CLS, 1973), vii.

²⁶³ M.M. Thomas, *Ideological Quest*, 18. See T. Jacob Thomas, *Ethics of a World Community*, 35.

making references to his wife in his writings as per her wish.²⁶⁴ However, Thomas himself acknowledges his debt to her Christ-centeredness and simple but strong faith. In 1956, when Thomas had taken up international appointments and worked for the WCC, and he failed to be present at her birthday due to a consultation meeting of WCC in Allahabad he wrote:

You are going to live long. And when the children are grown up we shall begin our life all over again in some quiet corner together, more together than we could ever be, and begin a spiritual pilgrimage like the sages of India-in Vanaprastha²⁶⁵ and Sanyasa-of course in the service of the Church in India. It is not yet time to plan for it. But we shall certainly do that when the time comes.²⁶⁶

His national and international responsibilities kept him away most of the time from his wife and family. This letter to his wife expressed his longing to be closer and spent more time together to experience the spiritual pilgrimage. Thomas was grateful to his wife Pennamma for being a great inspiration and motivation in his writing work as well as his Christ centredness. The Christocentric influence of his wife helped him in his constant struggle to retain the centrality of Christ in his life and theological reflections. While dedicating his book *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* (1970)²⁶⁷ to his wife he stated: "I do so however in gratitude for her constant concern for the Christ-centeredness of my vocation amidst my many wanderings among men, ideologies and theologies and for her intuitive spiritual discernment on which I have grown increasingly to rely."²⁶⁸

²⁶⁴ T.K. Thomas, ed. *Joyful and Triumphant: The Affirmations of Elizabeth Thomas*, (Madras: CLS, 1970), vii.

²⁶⁵ Hinduism teaches four stages of man's life: *bramacharya* - (student life); *grahastha* - (married life); *vanaprastha* - (hermit life in the forest)and *sanyasa* - (a life of total renunciation).

²⁶⁶ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 319. M.M. Thomas, *Letter to Elizabeth Thomas*, UTC Archives,(Bangalore, September, 28, 1956)

²⁶⁷ M.M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, (Madras: CLS, 1970).

²⁶⁸ M.M. Thomas, Preface, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, xvi. See, M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 319.

Student Christian movement (SCM)

Thomas' contact with Malcolm Adiseshaya of Madras Christian College gave him a wider exposure and brought him into renewed contact with Student Christian Movement (SCM) in 1944. During his college years he had been in contact with Student Christian Movement of Trivandrum. Throughout his college years he had also been actively involved in the SCM. Thomas wrote: "It was the Trivandrum SCM that gave me an opportunity to look into the broader meanings of Christianity."²⁶⁹ Now, Thomas was asked to lead the study conferences of the SCM and he wrote many articles in student magazines. He edited the SCM quarterly called *Student Outlook*. He also got involved in various student and youth organizations both in Kerala and at the national level. Through SCM he met various Christian leaders and students and interacted with them during camps and retreats. His relation with SCM helped him to understand the problems of the poor more deeply. He was involved in the collection of socio-economic data of the poorer sections of the Madras city, which was organized by SCM.²⁷⁰ He was able to involve in all sorts of evangelistic and social activities because of his involvement with Mar Thoma Youth Union and Student Christian Movement.

3.3.2 A Quest and search for ideologies

As Thomas began to associate and interact with different people and ideologies he began to realize the one-sidedness of his evangelical background. His quest for ideologies started when he realized the social implications of the gospel and the need for the transformation and humanization of the society. He says "Ever since I accepted that Christian Faith had social and political implications, I considered the quest for Ideology (i.e., Social anthropology as guide for understanding social reality and for social action) as integrally necessary to witness to the faith in concrete historical situations."²⁷¹ In this search he was attracted to several ideologies and accepted them critically and even tried to Christianize them for the sake of the possibility of a 'New Humanity' and

²⁶⁹ Quoted, Mohan Chacko, *Interpreting Society*, 40.

²⁷⁰ T.M. Philip, *Theology and Ideology*, 9.

²⁷¹ M.M. Thomas, *Ideological Quest*, iii.

‘New Community in Christ.’ Thomas writes that the period 1939-1954 was the period of his “early struggles in the search for a historically relevant social and political ideology within the framework of my commitment to the Christian faith.”²⁷²

His aim was to look for an ideology that would meet the historical realities and struggles of the people but did not contradict or compromise his Christian faith. His encounter with the Indian national movement and the social realities of India became the background and motivating factors for his search. He began his search of ideologies with the conviction and purpose that “Christians must involve themselves with others in creating and promoting ideologies which are informed by Christian insights and which can help the people in their struggle for justice.”²⁷³ He explains ideology as “a sort of social analysis, an analysis of the power-situation in terms of the interrelation of the forces of caste, class, religion, etc.”²⁷⁴

Gandhism

Thomas was attracted to Gandhism²⁷⁵ and Gandhian principles as it promoted a democratic society. In 1939 he studied Gandhism and Marxism as part of the Youth Christian Council of Action (YCCA) vacation course and says that “Gandhism was my ideology at that time.”²⁷⁶ In retrospect he stated: “The importance of Gandhism in India cannot be exaggerated. There is no ideology in India like Gandhism which consciously accepts a moral interpretation of social reality and therefore in a position to fill the moral vacuum in which politics and political ideologies exist.”²⁷⁷

Thomas was concerned about the social realities of Indian society and began to appreciate the social implication of the gospel. Gandhism as an ideology takes social

²⁷² M.M. Thomas, *Ideological Quest*, iii.

²⁷³ M.M. Thomas, *Religion and the Revolt of the Oppressed*, 52-53.

²⁷⁴ M.M. Thomas, “Indian Christian Theology, the Church and the People,” *Religion and Society*, 30/3-4 (September-December 1983), 74.

²⁷⁵ Gandhism as an ideology focuses on human freedom, equality and democratic rights of the people based on moral principles. See M.M. Thomas, “Gandhism and the Principles of Jesus – 1939.”; M.M. Thomas, “Gandhi, Marx and Nicolas Berdyaev’s Neo-orthodox Critique of Modern Civilization – 1942” ; M.M. Thomas “Towards A Redefinition of Gandhism – 1953,” in M.M. Thomas, *Ideological Quest*,.1 – 60, 236 – 252.

²⁷⁶ M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 7.

²⁷⁷ M.M. Thomas, *Ideological Quest*, 247.

realities and issues seriously and offers a moral interpretation, Thomas wrote: “Gandhism, Socialism and Communism had become competing ideologies with the Indian national struggle...most of us were influenced by Gandhiji in working out the social implications of Christian commitment.”²⁷⁸

The political context of India after the emergency period in 1977 was a search towards a new social philosophy, in which Gandhism with its emphasis on people’s power and participation played a central role.²⁷⁹ Gandhism stands for “direct” democratic control of the people over economic and social processes in small communities through appropriate technology and full employment.²⁸⁰ Thomas embraced Gandhism during this time, because it promoted justice to all people.²⁸¹ Gandhian Satyagraha principles were interpreted as God-within-man, fearlessness and non-violence. Though Thomas was initially attracted to Gandhism, later on he criticized it because, in his opinion, it did not take sin and evil seriously enough. Thus Thomas endeavored to reinterpret Gandhism from a Christian perspective. He argued that Gandhism is important because of its values, but at the same time he pointed out that it lacked strength as the values were based on what he considered ‘wrong theological and anthropological presuppositions.’

Gandhism started from the concept of divine immanence and the idea of the inherent goodness of the human beings. Thomas redefined the Gandhian principles in line with a Christian understanding of man, which acknowledges the fall of mankind and its need for redemption, because he believed that Gandhian principles were much needed in the process of nation-building in India.²⁸² Godwin says Thomas’ critique of Gandhism was a useful contribution, since Thomas was “able to discuss the dualistic basis of non-violence as well as its inherent characteristic of self-transcendence and its lack of an understanding of power.”²⁸³ The purpose of Thomas’ search for a relevant

²⁷⁸ M.M. Thomas, *Ideological Quest*, 1.

²⁷⁹ M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, 12.

²⁸⁰ M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, 12.

²⁸¹ M.M. Thomas, *Five Main Ideologies*, (Bangalore, UTC Archives), 1.

²⁸² M.M. Thomas, *Ideological Quest*, 248.

²⁸³ Godwin Shiri, *Christian Social Thought in India 1962-1977*, (Madras: CLS, 1982), 45.

ideology was his quest for social justice and social responsibility that would lead to humanization of society. But when he discovered that Gandhism as an ideology proved inadequate, Thomas moved to another ideology: Marxism.

Marxism

In 1940 Thomas studied Marxism. According to his own recollections, the lectures of Father Leonard Schiff on Christian social tradition “opened up for us the thoughts of Karl Marx and Karl Barth and the riches of the Christian social tradition. His classes gave the start to some of us of the Kerala Youth Christian Council of Action in the most stimulating search for an adequate Christian social philosophy.”²⁸⁴ Further he added “The Neo-orthodoxy of Nicolas Berdyaev and Reinhold Neibuhr coupled with an appreciation of the Marxist analysis of Indian social history gripped me. I returned to full-time work with the YCCA convinced that Marxism was a necessary ideological basis for political action...”²⁸⁵ Thomas began to realize if Gandhism could help to establish a moral society, Marxism might help for a political action. Schiff’s exposition of the philosophy of Marx was so “appealing and challenging, so that for the next few years I was struggling to relate Christian faith to Marxist, interpretation of society and to relate my understanding the ultimacy of Jesus Christ in the light of Marxian insights.”²⁸⁶

Marxism in a nutshell teaches that the rich people exploit the poor in the world because they hold private property. They enslave the masses and this enslavement results in suffering, sorrow and poverty.²⁸⁷ Thomas’ attraction towards Marxism emerged out of his search for a historically relevant social and political ideology in line with his Christian commitment. Gandhism and Marxism influenced Thomas to an extent that he even gave lectures on these ideologies in Sri Lanka in 1945. Thomas agreed that dogmatically speaking, Marxism as a system of thought was atheistic; he however felt

²⁸⁴ M.M. Thomas, “Comments on Current Events,” *N.C.C. Review* (August.1960), 285.

²⁸⁵ M.M. Thomas, “My Pilgrimage in Mission”, in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, (January 1989), 30. Cf, *NCC Review*, 9, (1989), 501 – 507.

²⁸⁶ M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 9.

²⁸⁷ J.A. David Onesimu, *Dr. Ambedkar’s Critique Towards Christian Dalit Liberation*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2008), 54.

he could mold it positively and creatively and he believed that Marxism was essentially a form of humanism.²⁸⁸ He used Marxism as a corrective force within the church because the church did not question the prevailing inhuman conditions in the society. Thomas said: "Marxism is humanism because it is a scheme of man's emancipation from alienation, the return of man to himself, his self-realization."²⁸⁹ The concern of Marxism for the poor and the needy was attractive for Thomas, as he was concerned about the welfare and equality of the people especially the Dalits, tribals and women.

Gradually another change and ideological development began to take place and Thomas began rejecting of Marxism from 1948 onwards, because of the sectarian policies of the Communist Party of India.²⁹⁰ Thomas moved away because the Indian Communist leaders considered Jawaharlal Nehru as the betrayer of Indian independence and because of the Stalinist coup *d'état* and the destruction of other socialist parties in Czechoslovakia.²⁹¹ He began to realize that Gandhism and Marxism as ideologies could not fully serve the needs of people, democratic power and participation as well as equality of the people. Thus Thomas moved from one ideology to yet another, in search of an ideology which would enable the process of salvation and humanization of the dehumanized people. He adopted that which was good for his quest for social justice of the community in Gandhism and Marxism and at the same time freely criticized its failures. As Thomas' theology of humanization was rooted in his anthropology he was also attracted to humanism.

Humanism

Another ideology that influenced his concept of salvation and humanization was humanism. Thomas acknowledged the role of humanism, and in particular new humanism, in bringing justice and equality to humanity. Thomas speaks about three

²⁸⁸ M.M. Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*, (Madras/Bangalore: CLS/CISRS, 1975), 120.

²⁸⁹ M.M. Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*, 113-114.

²⁹⁰ M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 56 -57.

²⁹¹ Ken Christoph Miyamoto, *God's Mission in Asia: A Comparative and Contextual Study of This-Worldly Holiness and the Theology of Missio Dei in M.M. Thomas and C. S. Song*, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2007), 105.

aspects of new humanism. Firstly, the awareness of man's selfhood which is distinct from nature. This awareness of selfhood is the source of man's freedom and creativity. Secondly, its conviction that there is a genuine search for a clear purpose and meaning of human life and history. Lastly, new humanism recognizes 'individual freedom and equality between man and woman, and among all people in the society.'²⁹² Thomas considered Christ the source for a new humanism. According to his perception, it is Christ who transcends cultures and transforms life of community. Therefore, according to Thomas, one should "present Christ who transcends all cultures and incarnates Himself in all cultures, as the source of a New Humanism, for integration of cultures."²⁹³ Thomas as a Christocentric person advocated that Christ was to be the source and normative factor for all human search for human dignity, identity and freedom.

Secularism

The presence of religious pluralism in India and the realities of its challenges made Thomas to move towards opting for a secular ideology of the state that would undertake the social and religious freedom of all people. Thomas defines secularism as "a movement from a sacred to a secular ethos in corporate life."²⁹⁴ It is "a revolt against the control of traditional religion over social and political life."²⁹⁵ It paves the way for a new spirituality and culture.²⁹⁶ In India the concept of secularism as a political philosophy emerged in the struggle for national independence, as part of the battle against Hindu Nationalism and Islamic theory of two nations. India under the leadership of Gandhi and Nehru was successful in overcoming the force of Hindu communalism to establish a secular state.²⁹⁷ This concept of secular state had two features: the

²⁹² M.M. Thomas, *Some Theological Dialogue*, (Madras: CLS, 1977), 95. See, M.M Thomas, "Search for New Humanism," in *M.M. Thomas Reader*, 108 – 119.

²⁹³ M.M. Thomas, "Inaugural address by His Excellency Dr. M.M. Thomas, Governor of Nagaland while inaugurating the Jubilee celebrations of the North East India Student Christian Movement," *Aikyatha, SCMI- North East India*, (November, 1990), 7.

²⁹⁴ M.M. Thomas, "The Concept of Secularism", 30.

²⁹⁵ M.M. Thomas, *Christian Participation in Nation Building*, (Nagpur: NCCI, 1960), 247.

²⁹⁶ M.M. Thomas, *The Christian Response to the Asian Revolution*, (Lucknow: Lucknow Publishing House, 1966/1967, Indian Edition), 85.

²⁹⁷ M.M. Thomas, "The Concept of Secularism", 33.

declaration of religious liberty as a fundamental civil right of every citizen and the co-existence of different religions and cultures in dynamic interaction for a peaceful life. These elements of Indian secularism were a result of the impact of western democratic and socialist secular ideologies which envisaged the idea of a more egalitarian society.²⁹⁸

The future of secular humanism was under threat as the result of religious fundamentalism and communalism all over the world. Thomas began to realize in the early 1990s that “Not only in India, but all the world over, there is a resurgence of religious fundamentalism and communalism which threaten the political, social and cultural achievements of movements of Secular Humanism”²⁹⁹ He said: “In my assessment religious reform and renaissance is the result of religions absorbing within it concepts of transcendent spirituality, a limited but real process of secularization”³⁰⁰ Thomas believed that secularization delivers men from the superstitions and oppressive religious institutions and dogmatism.³⁰¹ His search was never a purely theoretical and intellectual search for abstract truths but rather for truths that would demand a concrete social involvement to humanize the dehumanized society.

3.4 In Search of an Ecumenical Responsibility for Unity (1947–1975)

The third phase of Thomas’ life was characterized by ecumenism and ecumenical responsibility. This period of his life covers his work both nationally and internationally towards ecumenical unity and mission of the church. Section 3.4.1 deals with his work with World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) while Section 3.4.2 covers his work with the World Council of Churches (WCC) Section 3.4.3 is about his work with Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (CISRS).

²⁹⁸ M.M. Thomas, “The Concept of Secularism,” 35. Read, M.M. Thomas, “Open Democratic Secularism,” and “Interpretation of Open Secularism,” in *M.M. Thomas Reader*, 158 – 168.

²⁹⁹ M.M. Thomas, “The Concept of Secularism”, 29.

³⁰⁰ M.M. Thomas, “The Concept of Secularism”, 29.

³⁰¹ M.M. Thomas, “The Meaning of Salvation Today - A Personal Statement,” (Bangalore, UTC Archives), 9. Cf. CWME Bangkok, January 1973.

3.4.1 World student Christian federation (1947–1953)

Thomas' active involvement with SCM and as the youth secretary of the Mar Thoma Church gave him an opportunity to work with World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) from 1947 till 1953. In 1947 he was invited to work as a staff member of the global WSCF and to work in Europe upon the recommendation of Lesslie Newbigin, Malcolm Adiseshiah and D.T. Niles. Thomas and his wife happily accepted the invitation but it seems he was afraid to take up such a responsible job. He expressed his fear and inadequacy saying "... I have serious fears as to whether I shall be able to cope with the work you want me to do. I have all along been confined to work in Travancore...and to be transplanted immediately to the centre of world currents with a demand to make a contribution, is something which actually frightens me."³⁰² From 1947–1949 he joined the WSCF Geneva as a full time staff worker in its political wing. In 1947–48 Thomas was involved in the preparations for the First Assembly of the WCC at Amsterdam. In the preparation of this meeting he came into contact and worked with J.H. Oldham, Emil Brunner, Jacques Ellul, Reinhold Niebuhr and many other ecumenical leaders. He also helped in the preparation of the volume *Man's Disorder and God's Design* (1947) under the chairmanship of Oldham and because of his influence Thomas began to study Indian culture, history and Indian Nationalism.³⁰³

Thomas partly edited the *Student World*, the journal/magazine of the WSCF. Thomas seems to be a man of positive thinking and forward going personality. When he was about to sail from Bombay, he received the telegram that his wife delivered a baby boy; but he proceeded with his journey as he had to go. Even in Europe he was involved in evangelism, sharing and witnessing with atheistic communists.³⁰⁴ In retrospect Thomas wrote the two years with WSCF in the political wing in Geneva have "widened my horizon and deepened my knowledge of the ecumenical reality and given me the

³⁰² M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 2.

³⁰³ S. Sumithra, *Revolution as Revelation*, 62.

³⁰⁴ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 8.

conviction that there was a Christian vocation for the intellectual in the modern world.”³⁰⁵

Reflecting on his work with the WSCF he acknowledged its two main contributions to the formation of his life and vocation. It gave him an orientation to the ecumenical movement and an ecumenical home in the fellowship of friends committed to ecumenism: “The Federation gave me a new concern for the university world, widened my horizons and brought me into contact with the growing edges of the Christian world mission. It confirmed me in my vocation as a study-man.”³⁰⁶ He called these his “formative years”, which made him familiar with the universality of the church and strengthening him for his whole ecumenical journey.³⁰⁷ Thomas’ involvement with these movements and conferences gave him clear conviction and exploration to “the truth and meaning of Christ and their implication for social thought and action.”³⁰⁸

Thomas worked as the Vice-Chairman of the World Student Christian Federation from 1949–1952. In 1952 when he was offered the position of Associate General Secretary for WSCF from Asia. He said “There is no possibility of my coming to Geneva with the family and even if I go out of India for any considerable period in the near future, my feeling is that it should be to equip myself more intellectually and theologically so that I may better fulfill my vocation here in India.”³⁰⁹ It seems his heart was dedicated to India and to the people of India, especially the marginalized people who were struggling for social justice and equality in the society. Thomas spent his sabbatical of 1953-1954 at Union Theological Seminary, New York for personal study under the direction of John Bennett and he studied under Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr. This year was very important as it further consolidated his theological

³⁰⁵ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 88. See M.M. Thomas, *Recalling Ecumenical Beginnings*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1987), 77 – 87.

³⁰⁶ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 150.

³⁰⁷ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 150.

³⁰⁸ M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 37.

³⁰⁹ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 142.

framework. He says “I seem to have arrived at a framework of Faith-Theology-Ideology which has remained more or less stable.”³¹⁰

Thomas gained wide international exposures through his involvement with the World Student Christian Federation. He was able to travel widely in Europe and Asia to meet world church leaders and theologians. His dialogue with leading Christian leaders and theologians were collected and published under the title *Some Theological Dialogues*.³¹¹ When he was asked to continue as WSCF staff for another three years, he declined the offer by saying “my spiritual need at present is to be concerned with the life and problems among the Christian youth in India” and not to lose any relation with “local roots” at least for next three years. Though he was no doubt tempted to say yes, for the sake of his vocation and mission in India he refused to accept the offer of an extended stay in Europe.³¹² Instead, Thomas accepted a job at the Christian Institute for Study of Religion and Society (CISRS).

3.4.2 Christian institute for study of religion and society (CISRS) (1957–1976)

In the process of his search for Christian vocation and social responsibility Thomas, after having served WSCF while back in India, joined the Christian Institute for Study of Religion and Society. The institute discussed and addressed various religious and social issues through seminars, meetings and writings and sought to be relevant to the contemporary contextual demands and issues. Paul D. Devanandan was its first director. Thomas initially worked as the associate director from 1957 onwards, but then – due to the sudden death of P.D. Devanandan in 1962 - as its director from 1962–1976. In this period Thomas got acquainted with the reform movements of Neo-Hinduism and their search for religious and social reformation in the Indian society through Devanandan.

Devanandan played a key role in the development of Thomas’ understanding of Hinduism and the need for social change. Thomas said, “It was in his comradeship that I became aware of the Hindu religious dimension of social issues in India in a new way,

³¹⁰ M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 88.

³¹¹ M.M. Thomas, *Some Theological Dialogues*, (Madras: CLS, 1977).

³¹² M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 89.

and got involved in dialogue between Christianity and Renascent Religions in the context of the common struggle for a new society.”³¹³ Thomas was influenced by the Devanandan’s thoughts such as Christian influence in Hinduism, the need for inter-religious dialogue and community life in the society. Thomas’s book on the *Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* is an evidence of the impact of Devanandan in his life. Thomas writes about Devanandan’s influence in his life:

He has built me into a team with him and I have learned to take the security of his presence and counsel for granted...he saw more clearly than anybody else of his age, whom I knew, that the new period was one not of revolt but of reconstruction, whether in theological endeavor, Church life or nation-building.³¹⁴

It possible that Thomas’ involvement with Hinduism during this period has made him suspect to Dalit Theologians like Arvind P. Nirmal and Masillamani Azariah later on. When discussing the role of CISRS, Thomas strongly advocated that the center should focus both on study and action. It is accepted and stated in its biennial meeting in 1975 that “study and action are difficult to separate, and that no priority should be given to one over the other.”³¹⁵ During his directorship Thomas was able to develop CISRS and strengthen its role in discussing various social, political and religious issues of the society. His ecumenical connections helped CISRS to receive enough funds for its development and ministry. His contribution through CISRS is commendable in terms of his writing and involvement towards humanization. He was the architect and main thinker of Indian Christian social thought during his life-time.³¹⁶

As he was in search of his social *dharma* he joined the place “where society and religion meet and merge: he places himself in *and* between the two.” In him one finds

³¹³ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 189-190.

³¹⁴ Quoted, S. Sumithra, *Revolution as Revelation*, 52.

³¹⁵ Godwin Shiri, *Christian Social Thought*, 187.

³¹⁶ Godwin Shiri, *Christian Social Thought*, viii, 190.

“a marriage of sociology and theology.”³¹⁷ Eugene Carson Blake, the General Secretary of the WCC, asked Thomas in the beginning of 1967 to be the WCC associate general secretary, but Thomas refused the offer on the grounds that he was committed to the work of CISRS in India. Though Blake and others insisted for him to take up the post, Thomas contended: “I believe that I served the ecumenical movement better with my Indian roots intact.”³¹⁸ Thus he was committed to serve the Indian Church as well as the people of India with all his international and ecumenical exposures in the process of humanization. Thomas’ choice for CISRS seems to be a perfect choice of his vocation. Right from his early age he had a deep personal conviction to relate the Word of God with the World of people and word with action. Thus his two decades of work with CISRS focusing on Religion and Society were basically a connection and representation of salvation and humanization.

In 1968 Thomas was elected to the chairmanship of the WCC Central Committee. It demanded constant involvement in dialogue with the fellow officers, the executive, the central committee and many other committees, and also with the secretarial staff and staff working groups.³¹⁹ In spite of his responsibility as the chairman for WCC/CC and full time Director for CISRS, he planned his life with care to combine study with administration. He tried to keep a balance between study and work. His contribution in the field of writing and editing is huge, because of this conscious and constant effort to keep the balance.

3.4.3 The World council of churches (WCC) (1953–1975)

Thomas played a key role in the WCC at various capacities for more than two decades. This paragraph deals with his involvement with WCC’s ‘Ecumenical Studies on Societies in Rapid Change’ and as moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.

³¹⁷ Samuel Rayan, “M.M. Thomas – Response-ability,” in *Christian Witness in Society*, 3.

³¹⁸ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 294.

³¹⁹ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 348.

Ecumenical studies on societies in rapid change (1953–1968)

Thomas' work with the Mar Thoma Youth and Student Christian Movement helped him to join the WSCF and the WSCF facilitated his involvement in the World Council of Churches. He was the youngest participant and the only representative from the Third World to attend the first WCC Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948.³²⁰ Thomas played a major role in the formation of the East Asia Christian Conference (EACC) in 1959, which became the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) in 1973. Thomas served as the secretary of the East Asia Christian Conference (EACC) Commission on the Church in Social and Political Life. The CISRS gave Thomas three months every year to work for EACC on a part-time basis.³²¹ He started publishing its journal, *Church and Society* in 1960. Thomas also attended the third assembly of the WCC in New Delhi in 1961 where he was elected as the Chairman of the WCC Department of Church and Society. The 1966 World Conference on Church and Society held in Geneva was convened under the chairmanship of Thomas.³²² He objected to Christians linking Christianity in Asia with Western civilization and denominationalism saying: "Christianity must transcend Western civilization... as well as evils of denominationalism that discredits Christianity in Asian eyes."³²³ His concern was that Christianity should be rooted in the Asian and Indian cultures and thought-patterns, so that the church could be emancipated from the clutches of all forms of Western-ness.

Thomas worked as a visiting professor at the Union Theological Seminary, New York in the academic year 1966-1967, teaching World Christianity. His wife took leave from the college to be with him. During this time he began to study the different theological, philosophical, sociological and ideological approaches to pluralism.³²⁴ In this academic year he was influenced by Reginald Fuller, John Macquarie, Paul Lehman and

³²⁰ M.M. Thomas, *Ideological Quest*, 190. See Paul Abrecht, "Some Reflections on Ecumenical Social Thought – Then and Now" in *Christian Witness in Society*, 32.

³²¹ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 209.

³²² M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 198 – 210; See S. Sumithra, *Revolution as Revelation*, 65, 352-353.

³²³ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 161. See M.M. Thomas, *Recalling Ecumenical Beginnings*, 77 – 87.

³²⁴ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 293.

others who were on the Union faculty as well as Oscar Cullman, who was also a visiting professor. Thomas says “I tried to catch up with some aspects of their thought through reading and dialogue.”³²⁵

His sabbatical years 1966-1967 in Union Theological Seminary in New York and later in 1973-1974 in Selly Oak Colleges were productive. He says “I have always been surprised by the fact that the busiest period in my life, that is the period when I was both CISRS director and WCC/CC³²⁶ chairman, was the one in which most of my research books were written and published. *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* and *Salvation and Humanization* had come out before 1973.”³²⁷ As the result of his time in Selly Oak he wrote two books in 1975. *Man and the Universe of Faiths* and the *Secular Ideologies of India and the Secular Meaning of Christ*. Thomas was a prolific writer who wrote constantly on all aspects of Christian faith and life in the world. He hardly left any topic or issue untouched. Therefore it is very hard to put his ideas and thought in a coherent systematic frame.³²⁸

Moderator of the WCC central committee (1968–1975)

The year 1968 was very important and memorable in the life of Thomas. He says that the WCC assemble at Uppsala in 1968 has a special significance in his ecumenical journey for two reasons. Firstly, he was given the chance to play a leading role in the deliberations of the Assembly on the church’s political witness in revolutionary world and its participation in world economic and social development. Secondly, he was elected as the Chairman for the post-Assembly period 1968 to 1975 and this gave him “an opportunity to serve the whole ecumenical movement from its organizational center.”³²⁹ In Uppsala Thomas was unanimously elected as the Chairman of the Central Committee of the WCC. He had never sought the highest post but the ecumenical

³²⁵ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 293.

³²⁶ Central Committee of the WCC.

³²⁷ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 418-419.

³²⁸ Abraham Stephen, “Christ and Culture: An Examination of M.M. Thomas’ Theology of Religions” in *Contextualization: A Re- Reading of M.M. Thomas*, Godwin Shiri, ed. (Bangalore: CSS/CISRS, 2007), 105.

³²⁹ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 302- 303.

leaders and the delegates had discerned his leadership qualities and insights and considered him for the chairman post. Due to his constant contact with his wife Pennamma whenever he was away from home, his deliberations about his nominations have been preserved. The day before he was elected as the chairman of the Central Committee of the WCC, he wrote to his wife:

The CC met yesterday and elected a Nomination Committee and they are working on the nominations now. I must confess I am very indifferent though the prospect of my being called to the topmost position in the WCC frightens me a bit Anyway I shall know by tomorrow 9 am when the CC meets I always remember your statement that you take life as it comes. With God, of course.³³⁰

Samuel Rayan describes the way Thomas has reached to this prestigious post as:

The 1960s saw MM active in the ecumenical movement for the unity of churches. It was when he participated in a Church and Society study in Geneva in 1966 that the World Council of Churches (WCC) discovered his genius. Two years later in Uppsala, he was elected chairman of the WCC's Central Committee.³³¹

After having been elected, Thomas is said to have thanked everyone for their trust in him with the words: "I had enjoyed being on the margins of the WCC, that only time would tell whether I would enjoy being in the central leadership, but hoped I would."³³² After he returned from Uppsala in 1968, Thomas had to take his wife to the Christian Medical College Hospital Vellore for consultation, as she had fallen ill. He was broken when her illness was diagnosed as cancer. At this very crucial time, when Thomas was fully engaged in his leadership with WCC and at the same time was battling with his wife's illness, he never failed in his responsibility to the church and society. The

³³⁰ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 316.

³³¹ Samuel Rayan, "M.M. Thomas - Response-ability," in *Christian Witness in Society*, 4.

³³² M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 316.

CMC hospital became his office. During this time he wrote “so for some time I had to function as director of the CISRS and chairman of the WCC Central Committee from the Vellore Hospital Annexe.”³³³ She was in and out of the hospital for a year and a half and died on 22 December 1969 at the age of 51. He suffered with great sadness the loss of both his father and his wife by cancer in the same year.

Program to combat racism

The contributions of Thomas during his chairmanship were remarkable in terms of structural reforms and changes that he brought about within the WCC as well as because of his theological contribution for the unity and mission of the church. Thomas raised his voice against all forms of oppression and exploitation against humanity, whether it was a national issue or an international. Thomas observed the racial discrimination of the West in many of the international meetings and conferences. As a chairman of World Council of Churches Central Committee (WCC/CC) he introduced socio-political concerns into the WCC’s structures and succeeded in persuading the organization to adopt a Program for Combating Racism (PCR) as well as a Fund drawn from the WCC reserves to empower the groups fighting for the racial justice in Southern Africa and in other places.³³⁴ As a chairman he talked to all the Asian delegates to support the fight against racial discrimination. Thomas says “I had a personal discussion with the Asians. My concern was that Asians should not oppose the black’s perception or the program to combat white racism.”³³⁵ Thomas thus consistently fought against the racism of the West as well as against Christian denominationalism in the WCC meetings. He considered racism and poverty to be the dominant concerns of the ecumenical movement.³³⁶ Thomas was in search of ecumenical unity that would pave the way for a fuller and a new humanity in Christ. Thomas simplified the Rules of Procedures of the

³³³ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 318.

³³⁴ Samuel Rayan, “M.M. Thomas - Response-ability,” in *Christian Witness in Society*, 4.

³³⁵ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 341

³³⁶ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 341.

central committee for easier discussions and deliberations and this was observed during his seven years in office.

Rectification of imbalances in the WCC leadership

The WCC leadership was dominated by the western leadership. Thomas who advocated the cause of the poor and equality of all people exerted himself to bring more balance in the leadership. He wrote: “one of the concerns I had from the beginning was that of correcting the imbalances in executive staff through the appointment of new staff members from regions and confessions inadequately represented, without sacrificing efficiency.”³³⁷ Thomas also advocated changing the sexist language of the WCC Constitution and Rules of “chairman” to “moderator” to use an inclusive term in the Nairobi Assembly in 1975.³³⁸

Thomas worked as Chairman of the WCC Central Committee (WCC/CC) for four years with Eugene Carson Blake and three years with Philip Potter as General Secretaries. Thomas resigned from his chairmanship in 1972 to give others from the Third World a chance to assume the chair as the general secretary was also from the Third World, but the Council did not accept his resignation so he continued for another three years.³³⁹ In November 1972 Thomas had a minor cardiac condition and was hospitalized, but still he managed to travel to Bangkok where he gave the talk on “The Meaning of Salvation - a Personal Statement.”

A personal interpretative report

As part of his task as Chairman, Thomas wrote the Chairman report of the WCC, but did so with an interpretative approach. Until then, the staff wrote the report, presenting it as a chronicle of events and programs. Thomas however wrote: “My idea was to make it a personal interpretative report”, an innovation he continued as chairman from 1968-

³³⁷ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 325.

³³⁸ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 429.

³³⁹ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 400- 403.

1975.³⁴⁰ This gave him an opportunity to read the large volumes of reports and papers produced by the different commissions and program units of the WCC to get a total overview and make his contribution to the development of an integral theology of contemporary ecumenism. He wrote: "I used to say jokingly, and perhaps rightly, that I might be the only one who read all the papers produced by all the WCC program units."³⁴¹ Many appreciated Thomas for his report. The Dutch theologian Willem Visser't Hooft³⁴², who had served as the first secretary general of the World Council of Churches, said "you have indeed started a new tradition in the central committee with your report. I am really proud of you."³⁴³

Thomas' impact on and contribution to the ecumenical movement at large and the WCC in particular cannot easily be overestimated. In seminars, consultations and discussions in which he participated, he presented a new perspective, formulated problems afresh, or posed provocative questions for deeper insights and more radical solutions. The Jesuit priest and teacher Samuel Rayan writes: "His mind was like a young plant, growing all the time, bringing forth surprises."³⁴⁴ J. Russell Chandran an Indian Christian theologian who worked as a Vice Moderator of WCC/CC (1966–1968) states that Thomas' contribution in all consultations and conferences of East Asia Christian Conference (EACC) and the WCC was commendable: "His contribution to the discussions had always some freshness and sharpness of insight. Everyone respected his radical Christian commitment, theological insights and his concern for justice in socio-political affairs. He was also known for being a prophetic voice in the Church and in Society."³⁴⁵ He appealed for the ecumenical unity of all churches irrespective of their national,

³⁴⁰ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 339.

³⁴¹ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 340.

³⁴² His colleagues called him as Wim. He worked as the General Secretary of the WCC from 1948 till his retirement in 1966.

³⁴³ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 343.

³⁴⁴ Samuel Rayan, "M.M. Thomas – Response-ability," in *Christian Witness in Society*, 5.

³⁴⁵ J. Russell Chandran, Tributes of a Theological Friend," in *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, ed. Jesudas M. Athyal, (Thiruvalla: Thiruvalla Eccumenical Charitable Trust, 1997), 7.

racial, geographical and denominational differences. He was even called as “Mr. Ecumenism.”³⁴⁶

It is remarkable to note that a man who was rejected for the ordained ministry of the local church became the moderator for not the local or national churches but churches around the world. It was his hard work and his passion for the church as the body of Christ that elevated him to this ecclesial leadership position. It is also possible that the rejection of the local church office was a turning point and reinforced his determination to serve the church locally, nationally and globally. Sumithra summarizes Thomas’ contribution to the ecumenical movement with the words: “In the history of contemporary ecumenism, Thomas belongs to those who have shaped not only the ecumenical theology of mission but the ecumenical movement itself.”³⁴⁷

Thomas at several places in his writings expresses his gratitude to God for making him an instrument to bring people and churches together to build God’s kingdom. He saw his ecumenical journey “as an act of thankfulness to God for giving him so much part in the world-wide fellowship of people committed to exploring the meaning of Christ and Church for our modern world and to building up a movement of Christian struggling for human community.”³⁴⁸ Thus he worked hard to bring ecumenical unity among the denominations and churches through WCC for more than two decades, as chairman of the Church and Society Committee and as moderator of the WCC/CC.

3.5 In Search of Political Responsibility (1977–1992)

Thomas, after his retirement from WCC and CISRS, at the age of 61, became actively involved in political action. During this period he was actively involved in politics, fighting for democratic rights and freedom of the people. He did this, as an ordinary responsible citizen and in his capacity as the governor of Nagaland. Nagaland is one the

³⁴⁶ J. Russell Chandran, Tributes of a Theological Friend,” 7.

³⁴⁷ Sunand Sumithra, *Theology of Mission in Indian Context: A Study of Madathilaparampil Mammen Thomas*, PhD dissertation, (Tubingen, 1981), 1.

³⁴⁸ M.M. Thomas, “Preface,” *My Ecumenical Journey*, i.

states of India in the North East. The Nagas are a tribal community and Nagaland is a Christian state.

3.5.1 Political emergency

Thomas retired in 1975 as the moderator of WCC Central Committee and as the director of CISRS in 1976. He says "These two events marked a kind of halt in my ecumenical journey... But what brought new meaning to my journey in 1975 was my decision to oppose Prime Minister Gandhi's promulgation of Emergency in June 1975."³⁴⁹ Indira Gandhi declared emergency due to "internal disturbance", in the country. The political Emergency lasted for 21 months from 25 June 1975, until its withdrawal on 21 March 1977. The Congress Party had always advocated a secular India, but Thomas opposed the declaration of a state of emergency because the Emergency was a violation of democratic human rights and freedom. In his book *My Ecumenical Journey*, Thomas gave his reason for it: "My opposition to it was just a natural, almost passive unheroic, response to a political act which cut the ground of the ecumenical Christian concern for human rights and people's liberation and of the spiritual vocation of all middle class intellectuals including my own."³⁵⁰ He wrote in the *Guardian*, an Indian weekly newspaper, opposing the government. When he was no longer allowed to write in the *Guardian*, he wrote pamphlets and circulated them privately.³⁵¹ Thomas not only criticized the government for suppressing democratic rights of the people, but he also criticized the Indian churches which either supported the emergency rule or kept silence.

During the Emergency Thomas and M.J. Joseph organized a Political Detainees Family Distress Relief Fund, to help those families whose bread winners were imprisoned. He was elected the chairman of the Peoples' Union of Democratic and Civil Liberties (PUDCL) for Kerala and in that capacity organized public meetings to create

³⁴⁹ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 431.

³⁵⁰ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 432.

³⁵¹ These pamphlets were collected together and published after the emergency as a book, M.M. Thomas, *Response to Tyranny*, (New Delhi: Forum for Christian Concern for People's Struggle, 1979).

awareness among people about their rights and freedom. He himself stated that this was the only time he was directly involved in politics, making political speeches and asking people to oust Congress Party in the election.³⁵² He refused to keep quiet when human freedom and rights were deprived by a system or person. When there was a move to erect a statue for Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer,³⁵³ Thomas opposed it and collected the signatures of many Christians and obstruction the erection of the statue because Iyer oppressed human freedom.³⁵⁴ He criticized the leadership of Mar Thoma Church for suppressing its members of the clergy who opposed the decision of the church in controlling the private colleges in Kerala.³⁵⁵ Whether social, political or religious issues were at stake, wherever human freedom and rights were suppressed and deprived, Thomas protested, be it against individuals or be it against the structural system.

Thomas was a source of inspiration and motivation for the Social Action groups during 1980s and early 1990s with whom he had kept close contact. Thomas writes: "In the old days Christian ashrams were the centres which had the promise of Indian Christian theological reflection. Now it is the Action Groups. The Action Groups have this promise because they are rejected by the established Churches as well as by the Communists."³⁵⁶ Thomas after his retirement from WCC and CISRS became actively involved with the Program for Social Action (PSA) and served as its Chairman for many years; PSA is a network of action groups all over India.³⁵⁷ Thomas took keen interest in the National Alliance of People's Movements, a body that advocated the cause of the poor and the underprivileged people of the society. He chaired many of its meetings and was in "deep solidarity with the struggles of ...fish workers as well as with the struggles

³⁵² M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 434.

³⁵³ A political leader who denied the basic democratic rights of the people. Thomas opposed his rule because he had ruled people with an iron hand denying them their rights and privileges.

³⁵⁴ T.M. Philip, *Theology and Ideology*, 6.

³⁵⁵ M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 283.

³⁵⁶ M.M. Thomas, "Indian Christian Theology, the Church and the People," 75. See, M.M. Thomas, "Role of Christian Social Action Groups"(1995) in *M.M. Thomas Reader: Selected Texts on Theology, Religion and Society*, 154 – 155.

³⁵⁷ J. Russell Chandran, "Tributes of a Theological Friend," 7. See, Sabu Philip, *Beyond Humanization*, 103, 104.

of Dalits, Adivasis and women.”³⁵⁸ He sided with those who were rejected, victimized, sidelined and marginalized, because he himself had also gone through such experiences. During the years 1979–1989 Thomas was involved in teaching in various seminaries and universities as a visiting professor at Bochum University, Germany (1979), Princeton Seminary, USA (1980, 1982-1988), Andover Newton, Boston (1981), Southern Methodist University (1989).³⁵⁹

3.5.2 Governor of Nagaland

Thomas was appointed as the Governor of the state of Nagaland in May 1990.³⁶⁰ He was bold and courageous in carrying out his responsibilities in establishing justice. His first act as a Governor was to dismiss the Nagaland Government for corruption. Some politicians opposed and criticized the appointment of Thomas as the governor, saying that he was not a politician. As a governor he freely worshipped in the regular worship services as well as preached in several churches, ignoring the advice against it from the political leadership at the central government. India is a secular country where anyone can practice any religion but it is quite risky as a governor to involve in preaching. The people of other faiths or opposite political party can communalize or politicize the issue with the charge that he is using his political power to convert or Christianize people. He was forced and pressurized to resign his Governor post in April 1992 because of politics and change of government at the central government. The government charged allegation against him that he was supporting the missionaries from Overseas, while there were no missionaries from abroad. The central government ousted him and asked him to step down from his Governor post as he was not bowing down to the unconstitutional approach of the Delhi government. He ‘obeyed his conscience and the Constitution more than the President of India.’³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ Gabriele Dietrich, M.M. The Activist and Fellow Traveler,” *The Man and His Legacy*, 12.

³⁵⁹ Charles C. West, “Princeton Theological Seminary” in *The Man and His Legacy*, 104.

³⁶⁰ It is a great honor for a Christian to be a Governor of an Indian state. Christians in India has an aversion towards politics on the basis of a widely spread wrong notion that Christians should not involve in politics as they may be corrupted and compromise their faith.

³⁶¹ Gabriele Dietrich, “M.M. The Activist and Fellow Traveler,” *The Man and His Legacy*, 10.

His experience with the people of Nagaland led him to write the book *Nagas Towards AD 2000*.³⁶² While he was in Nagaland, Thomas wrote many articles dealing with his “attempts to understand the current problems the Nagas face as they move from their traditional tribal pattern of social living to the modern, and the ways in which Naga ethnicity is being remolded under the impulse of their awakening to a new sense of self-identity in modern history.”³⁶³ It was a tough task to be a governor in a state that was demanding to be separated from India, in order to become an independent sovereign nation. It was also facing civil wars between the various ethnic and tribal groups.

Thomas wanted the Naga people to be an integral part of India and he was concerned about the socio-economic development of the people. He was particular that they should not lose their culture and cultural identity in the wake of technological modernization. He said they have “to stop the pendulum swinging from individualism to collectivism and back, we need a culture that emphasizes human beings as persons-in-community, and defines freedom as moral responsibility.”³⁶⁴ The defense minister George Fernandes in his tribute to Thomas said “Dr. Thomas was a great Governor. He did more than any other Indian to make the people of Nagaland accept that India was as much their country as it was of any other Indian.”³⁶⁵ It was during these years that he began to understand the problems and struggles of the tribals especially in Nagaland and fought for their justice.

3.6 In Search of Biblical Exposition for Contemporary Society (1977–1996)

The last period of his life was a search for biblical exposition on the books of the Bible in Malayalam which is his mother tongue. Thomas, after his retirement from WCC and CISRS, lived in Thiruvalla, except for his two years in Nagaland, to spend the rest of his

³⁶² M.M. Thomas, *The Nagas Towards A.D.2000 and Other Selected Addresses and Writings*, (Madras: Centre for Research on New International Economic, 1992).

³⁶³ M.M. Thomas, Preface, *The Nagas Towards A.D.2000*, iii.

³⁶⁴ M.M. Thomas, *Nagas Towards A.D. 2000*, 115.

³⁶⁵ George Fernandes, “He did India Proud” in *The Man and His Legacy*, 31.

life in search of exploring Biblical insights, by interpreting the books of the Bible and relating theology with anthropology and anthropology with Christology, in an attempt at bringing biblical and theological relevance to the contemporary demands of the society. He wrote the astounding number of 25 books in this series before he died.³⁶⁶ As the result of his ministry and fellowship with his friends the Thiruvalla Sangham emerged as an informal forum for action, reflection and fellowship.

3.6.1 The study-man

Thomas' urge was to be a study-man all through his life and he remained as a study-man till his death. He was a self-taught theologian, as he had never been to any seminary to receive formal theological education. He constantly and consciously made effort, in spite of his busy work and responsibility, to find time to study in order to know and relate and bring contemporary relevance of the Bible to the demands of the society. His main concern was to bring integration between religion and society, because in his view religion was dichotomized and disconnected from the affairs of the world. He wanted to contribute to the life of the church and the nation as a "study man."³⁶⁷

As a lay theologian he received three honorary doctorates for his theological contribution and leadership both at the national and international level. He received an honorary doctorate from the Serampore University in India in 1970 and one more by Uppsala University at their 500th anniversary in 1977. He was also given an honorary doctorate by the University of Leiden, the Netherlands on May 1975, on the occasion of their 400th anniversary.³⁶⁸ His simplicity and lower middle class condition can be seen on several occasions especially, the one when he was conferred the honorary doctorate by the Leiden University in 1975. He went to Leiden with a good western suit and the Serampore robes borrowed from his friend Russell Chandran. But he was asked to wear the Indian dress by both Hendrik Berkhof of the Department of Theology and the

³⁶⁶ These 25 books have been translated into English by T.M. Philip and they are available.

³⁶⁷ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 167.

³⁶⁸ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 429.

Secretary of the University. Thomas writes about his torn *jubas*³⁶⁹ and how he managed with it.

I had two *dhotis*³⁷⁰ and two *jubas*, but the *jubas* were both torn in different places. However I had to use them if I had to appear in Indian dress. So I covered the torn parts by one dhoti used in Bangalee style and fastened it with a dozen safety pins which I obtained from Madame Berkhof, lest the cover should fall off exposing the torn parts. I was indeed thankful for those safety pins!³⁷¹

3.6.2 Experience of marginalization

Thomas had gone through the experience of rejection and marginalization many times at different stages of his life. He had to resign from Balabhavan that he started for the poor homeless street boys on account of misunderstandings due to his Christian faith. His request for his ordination in the Mar Thoma Church was rejected because of his involvement with the Marxist party. His request for membership in the Communist Party was rejected because he was a church man. In this situation he expresses his experience of rejection and marginalization. He says that he desired to make his

Double orientation real by getting ordained to the ministry of the Mar Thoma Church and by becoming a member of the Communist Party of India. Both of them refused; the Church's Ordination Committee on the ground that I was not Christ-centred enough because I did not adhere to the ethic of truth and non-violence and the Party on the basis that my religious conviction would bring disruption of the Party-ranks and pave the way for reaction.³⁷²

³⁶⁹ A long upper garment which is a typical Indian dress.

³⁷⁰ A single piece long garment tied around the waist.

³⁷¹ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 429.

³⁷² M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 24.

But he never gave up his passion for the ministry of the church and his involvement in the society and politics to serve the poor and the needy. In 1939 he presented a paper at a Mar Thoma Youth meeting on the subject, 'The Church: What I owe to it; And my complaints against it'. In this paper he mentions his change of conviction, "There was a time when I thought of joining the ordained ministry of the Church, and if now I do not think that way, it is because I have come finally to the strong conviction, that as things are now, I can better serve the Church, by being outside the official ministry."³⁷³ It was an honor to be elected as the Moderator for the Central Committee of WCC but at the same time Thomas writes about the different reactions to his election "Bishop Per Lonning (Norway) thought the election as chairman of a person not a professional theologian was a disaster."³⁷⁴

Thomas remembers how he was ridiculed in a reception at the house of Archbishop Ramsey: "In the procession before the opening service, I was without any robes; and Richard von Weizsacker came to me to say that in my ordinary suit I did not conform to his image of the WCC/CC chairman. I did not know whether he was serious or joking."³⁷⁵ He experienced suffering and marginalization at various stages of his life, on account of being a lay man, lay theologian, and non-political person. He was forced and pressurized to resign his Governor post in April 1992.

3.6.3 A Bridge-builder

Thomas is remembered as a man who was equally committed to study and service. This vocation formed the basis for his life-choices. Whenever he made choices, he consciously made sure that these fitted into his vocation and aspirations. When he was asked to be the chairman of the Division of Inter-Church Aid (ICA) he refused to accept the position as it mainly involved funds distribution.³⁷⁶ Thomas was a bridge builder connecting the Word and the World, orthodoxy and orthopraxis, sacred and the secular,

³⁷³ M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 9.

³⁷⁴ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 324.

³⁷⁵ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 342.

³⁷⁶ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 307.

religion and society, theology and sociology, evangelical and the ecumenical, east and the west, laity and the clergy, Dalit with the non-Dalit, ultimate and the penultimate, soul and the body and salvation and humanization. Rev. Harold D' Souza of Sri Lanka who later became Bishop called Thomas one who makes "Christians of Communists and Communists of Christians."³⁷⁷ He was not just the bridge but "[a] lay theologian challenging the "experts" and an Asian theologian challenging western "Christendom," whose life has been spent on the frontier of Christian witness in east and west."³⁷⁸

In May 1975 when he was awarded with an honorary doctorate in theology by the theological faculty of the University of Leiden, his promoter, Prof. Hendrik Berkhof spoke the following words:

And as the chairman of the W.C.C's Central Committee, in a period when many believed that the ecumenical movement could do without theology, you were and are the man who points to the very centre of our faith and the decisive role of theological reflection. We owe among others particularly to you, that theologians and laymen, and first and third world, can stay and act together. We as a typical classical western faculty honour you as a great bridge-builder. In doing so, you prepared the way towards greater unity both of the Christian church and of mankind as a whole.³⁷⁹

Thomas was a lay theologian who shaped the theology of the professional theologians and the theology of the church. He was constantly engaged in social, biblical and theological writing as a frontier connecting religion and society. He writes "I have functioned all my life as a lay theologian that is, as a person living in the frontiers between religion and society exploring and trying to communicate Biblical insights for

³⁷⁷ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 106.

³⁷⁸ Charles C. West, "Ecumenical Missionary Theology: A Critical, Historical Review," in *Christian Witness in Society*, 19.

³⁷⁹ S. Sumithra, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, 1.

people in analyzing and changing society.”³⁸⁰ He realized early in his life that there was a gap between the church and society, so he played a role of a pioneer and a frontier to stand between church and society to connect the social relevance of the gospel for transformation and humanization of society. His busy and active life finally came to a halt on 3 December 1996, a “father figure to numerous subaltern movements and social action groups.”³⁸¹

Thomas’ vision and work for the humanization and transformation of society continued even after his death through Pennamma Bhavan,³⁸² Thiruvalla Ecumenical Charitable Trust, the Thiruvalla Sangham³⁸³ and the publication group. Pennamma Bhavan is the abode of M.M. Thomas situated in the state of Kerala. It is named after his wife Elizabeth Thomas (Pennamma). One of the objectives of the Thiruvalla Ecumenical Charitable Trust was to facilitate “fellowship with subaltern movements, such as that of Dalits, Tribals, women and the like.”³⁸⁴ Because Thomas was a study-man all through his life, he wanted the Pennamma Bhavan to serve as a study center for all those who, like himself, were in search of spirituality and would commit themselves to identification with the struggles for humanization of the people, especially the poor and the marginalized in the society. Hence, most of his writings are preserved there for study purpose. His writings, books, articles, letters which are published and unpublished are kept in the Archives of United Theological College Library, Bangalore for research purpose. Thus Thomas the study-man eventually became the source-man for study and research in the field of theology, theology of mission, inter-religious dialogue etc.

³⁸⁰ M.M. Thomas, “The Use and Place of the Bible for Christians in their Professional and Social Involvement”, in *The Bible in Today’s Context*, ed. S. Immanuel David, (Madras: BTESSC/CLS, 1987), 38.

³⁸¹ Poulouse Mar Paulose, “Foreword,” *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*. vii.

³⁸² It is a study centre for learning for all people like students, clergies and teachers to discuss and interact on various theological and social issues.

³⁸³ These were founded by Thomas to serve the church and the society.

³⁸⁴ Jesudas M. Athyal, ed. “The Legacy,” *The Man and His Legacy*, 62.

3.7 Conclusion

The life and work of Thomas was characterized by faith seeking understanding and social responsibility. The evangelical spirituality of his home and the church centered on Christ gave him a foundation on which he was able to stand in the midst of all theological and ecumenical wanderings. But this evangelical spirituality was challenged and put into test as he was exposed to the social challenges of society and discovered the social dimension of the gospel and the social responsibility of the church. His quest for ideologies was aimed to fulfil his quest for social responsibility as these ideologies advocated and promoted humanization. The realization of his social responsibility led him to serve the poor and the needy and question the socio-political and religious oppression and exploitation especially against the marginalized people.

Thomas was a leading Indian thinker, theologian, socialist, writer, humanist, ecumenical leader, a nation builder and a bridge-builder. His theology, which he as a self-taught theologian developed, is a practical theology which combines faith and action, orthodoxy and orthopraxis. He started his life career as a school teacher, social worker, lay theologian and developed to become an international ecumenical leader. He stood between religion and society between the sacred and the secular world. He played a crucial role in WCC and CISRS in shaping the vision and mission of the church and connecting the church and society to deal with the key issues of human equality, justice and religious pluralism etc. After his retirement with WCC and CISRS he actively engaged in politics and societal action and committed to serve the church and society through writing biblical commentaries and conducting seminars and meetings especially for the marginalized and oppressed Dalits, tribals and women till his death.

Thomas, through exposure at various points in his life as an evangelist, in the ashram, in the WCC (sexism and racism) as a political activist and as a governor became more and more aware of the forces of oppression and marginalization at work in societies around the world and his quest to formulate an adequate Christian theology

that aimed at changing society. His life was a search for evangelical, social, political and biblical responsibility towards the task of salvation and humanization.

CHAPTER 4

M. M. THOMAS' THEOLOGY OF SALVATION AND HUMANIZATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization which forms the central focus/notion in most of his writings and speeches. The meaning of the terms salvation and humanization is explained in paragraph 4.2; paragraph 4.3 deals with Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization and the relation between the two concepts. Paragraph 4.4 traces the evolvment and development of Thomas' concepts of salvation and humanization, moving from redemption to salvation and salvation to humanization. Paragraph 4.5 describes what in Thomas' view are the obstacles for humanization; the subjects of humanization are discussed in paragraph 4.6. The source of humanization is the central theme of paragraph 4.7, while the means of humanization are analyzed in paragraph 4.8, the process of humanization in 4.9, the goal of humanization in 4.10. Finally, mission as humanization will be discussed in paragraph 4.11. Paragraph 4.12 gives a conclusion of the chapter.

4.2 Definitions

4.2.1 Salvation

Thomas states that salvation is "the transcendent ultimate destiny of human beings."³⁸⁵ Salvation according to Thomas is "the spiritual inwardness of true humanization and [that] humanization is inherent in the message of salvation in Christ."³⁸⁶ Thomas therefore sees a close link between salvation and humanization; salvation includes humanization and humanization includes salvation. Salvation has to do with the inwardness of the person; it is the salvation of the soul. Thomas elaborates on this when

³⁸⁵ M.M. Thomas, *The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 101.

³⁸⁶ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 10.

he says: "Salvation itself could be defined as humanization in a total and eschatological sense. And all our struggles on earth for the fragmentary realization of man's humanity point to this eschatological humanization as their judgment and fulfilment."³⁸⁷ Thus salvation is the 'realization of man's humanity' and connected with the ultimate and eschatological destiny of people. Though it is eschatological it is simultaneously a present reality as salvation starts today here and now; however its culmination is eschatological.

4.2.2 Humanization

Thomas coined the term humanization³⁸⁸ in 1971. For Thomas, humanization means making the human genuinely and fully human, liberated from all social, political and religious dehumanization.³⁸⁹ Humanization is integrally related and interwoven with salvation and is "the penultimate human destiny" which means the destiny of the temporal earthly life of people.³⁹⁰ The inwardness of humanization is salvation and the outwardness of salvation is humanization. He writes "Salvation has always been seen by Christian missions in India in close integration with humanization. Indian theologians such as Pandipeddi Chenchiah have even sought to define Christ and his salvation in terms of the 'new humanity'³⁹¹ offered by God for the ultimate humanization of all mankind."³⁹²

For Thomas salvation and humanization are complementary concepts, like two sides of the same coin. One cannot choose or ignore one over the other. According to Thomas, it is not a possibility, but an obligation to deal with both salvation and humanization. Though salvation and humanization both take shape in this historical life, Thomas uses the concept salvation for the ultimate eschatological salvation of people

³⁸⁷ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 18.

³⁸⁸ Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 314.

³⁸⁹ T. Jacob Thomas, *M.M. Thomas Reader*, 82.

³⁹⁰ M.M. Thomas, *The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 101.

³⁹¹ Pandipeddi Chenchiah a famous Indian Christian theologian described Jesus Christ as the 'New Man', the 'New Creation' and the 'New Humanity.' See, Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 144 – 151.

³⁹² M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 18-19.

and the concept humanization for penultimate historical salvation. Thomas concurred with Paul Lehmann, an ethicist and contemporary of Thomas, who asserted in 1964 that God is already working in the world to humanize the world and the responsibility of the church is to follow Christ where he has preceded us.³⁹³

Choan Seng Song, a theologian from Taiwan, a contemporary of Thomas, follows the interpretation of Thomas and also interprets salvation as humanization. Song writes, "God humanized himself [sic] to bring salvation to the world....The mission of God begins with humanization. In short, mission is humanization."³⁹⁴ According to M.M. Thomas salvation and humanization are inseparable.³⁹⁵ According to Sunand Sumithra "[h]umanization is the process of conforming man to the image of Jesus Christ"³⁹⁶ For Song, Lehman and Sumithra the word humanization seems to apply to human beings only, whereas Thomas' idea of humanization is more encompassing and applies to the whole creation. Also, Thomas has argued that the relation between salvation and humanization is not only vital to Christianity but it is the common concern of all religions and secular movements. His thesis was: "it is the theme of humanization which provides the most relevant point of entry for any Christian dialogue with these movements on salvation in Christ at spiritual and theological depth."³⁹⁷

Thomas believed humanization is possible in and through Christ, as Christ is the source and foundation of true humanization. Christ is the source because he is the new and perfect humanity; through his death and resurrection he offers a fuller and a richer life.³⁹⁸ For Thomas, Christ is the ultimate source of everything: "all things, spiritual and material, earthly and heavenly, the whole cosmos, come under the creative and

³⁹³ Paul Lehmann, "On Keeping Human Life Human", *The Christian Century*, (1964), 1299.

³⁹⁴ Choan Seng Song, *Christian Mission in Reconstruction*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1975/1997), 217.

³⁹⁵ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 8.

³⁹⁶ Sunand Sumithra, "Salvation and Humanization," in *Salvation: Some Asian Perspectives*, ed. Ken Gnanankan, (Bangalore: Asia Theological Association, 1992), 85.

³⁹⁷ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 20.

³⁹⁸ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 10.

redeeming activity of Christ.”³⁹⁹ Therefore he says: “The ultimate framework of reference for Christian thought is neither God nor man in the abstract, neither the metaphysics of god nor the science for man taken in isolation, but Jesus who is a God-man or rather God for man or to use Karl Barth’s expression the Humanity of God...”⁴⁰⁰ What matters to Thomas is not any abstract theology which is unrelated and irrelevant to anthropological struggles and challenges but a concrete Christology that gives hope and assures a fuller and richer human community in Christ. Therefore, Thomas’ theology of humanization is Christocentric. The following paragraph will look in more detail in how Thomas grounded and developed his theology of salvation and humanization.

4.3 M.M. Thomas’ Theology of Salvation and Humanization

4.3.1 Starting point of his theology

The late 1960s are known for the emergence and development of contextual theologies such as the liberation theology of Latin America under the leadership of Gustavo Gutierrez and others whose theologization was based and rooted in the historical context of the people. Following the tradition of liberation theologians Thomas as well takes ‘context’ seriously; the starting point for his theological reflection is an analysis of oppressive structures in the world (rather than scripture or tradition), the world being the centre of God’s work. He states clearly: “It is through my study of politics and social change in India...that my interest in Christian mission and Christian theology has been stimulated; and therefore I have a strong inclination (or prejudice) to start with the secular world rather than with Christianity.”⁴⁰¹ But this doesn’t mean that Thomas gives less importance to the scripture. Thomas follows the contextual approach of the liberation theology to deal with the issues and challenges of human struggles in the

³⁹⁹ M.M. Thomas, *The First – Born of All Creation: Colossians, Philemon, Contextual Theological Bible Commentary*, 2 Trans. T.M. Philip (Thiruvalla: CSS Books/BTTBPSA,2005), 93.

⁴⁰⁰ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 7.

⁴⁰¹ M.M. Thomas, *The Christian Response to the Asian Revolution*, 7.

contemporary society.⁴⁰² His theology is a theology 'from below'; not a theology 'from above'.

Thomas starts with the social sciences, such as anthropology, sociology and political science: the socio-political context of humanity.⁴⁰³ He speaks about a 'living theology'; a theology that is vibrant and questions the structures and social systems that enslave humanity by oppression, exploitation, manipulation, segregation and marginalization. Thomas writes: "The decisive theological reason for the selection of social justice as a point of entry is to be found in our faith in the universal Lordship of Jesus Christ and his concern for humanity as such."⁴⁰⁴ It is the universal Lordship of Jesus Christ that serves as an inner motivation for Thomas' passion for social justice. Thomas observes that the marginalized Dalits, tribals and women are denied of their basic rights and social justice due to unjust social system and structures that are legitimized in the name of religion and caste. Therefore, Thomas states, those anti-social elements need to be analyzed, addressed and challenged in order to establish social justice to all groups of people.

Thomas' theological motivation to start with 'the world' is because he grounds his theology in the incarnation: God's salvific plan to leave his divinity and to take on humanity. This implies, according to Thomas, that anthropology is the starting point of God's ultimate redemptive plan. He called his anthropological approach "a post-Kraemer theological framework."⁴⁰⁵ According to Thomas the 'gospel is from God' and therefore 'the gospel is for man.'⁴⁰⁶ For Thomas Jesus is the new humanity; God became human to make humans fully human and to give humanness to a humanity, that is dehumanized by fellow humans.

⁴⁰² John Parrett, ed. *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁴⁰³ Some theologians like Peter Beyerhause of the Department of Missiology of Tübingen and others have criticized Thomas for shifting the focus from theology to anthropology, God to man. M.M. Thomas, "Will Koinonia Emerge as a Vital Theological Theme?" in *The Ecumenical Review*, 41/2 (April 1989), 177 – 183.

⁴⁰⁴ M.M. Thomas and J.D. McCaughey, *The Christian in the World Struggle: A Grey Book of the World's Student Christian Federation* (Geneva: WSCF, 1951),14.

⁴⁰⁵ M.M. Thomas, "A Rewarding Correspondence with the Late Dr. Hendrik Kraemer,' *Religion and Society*, 13, (June 1966), 13.

⁴⁰⁶ M.M. Thomas, "Christ-Centered Syncretism," *Religion and Society*, 26 (March 1979), 29-30.

In the context of speaking about the reason for Christian mission, Thomas writes “for me at least, it was much easier to start from the world, since that is how I came to appreciate theology. It is through my concern with politics and social life that I have come to recognize that theology is relevant.”⁴⁰⁷ The very act of God becoming part of human history and human existence is a great significance to the world. The incarnation of Jesus taking human flesh affirms and validates human worth. Thus Thomas’ anthropology is rooted in his Christology and his Christology is rooted in his anthropology. For him ‘theology and anthropology are inter-related in Jesus Christ.’⁴⁰⁸ Jesus is the ‘human face of God.’ Methodologically, this means that Thomas starts with a sociological analysis of the context of oppression in order to detect the structures of oppression that prevent people from realizing their full human potential.

4.3.2 The relation of salvation and humanization

The heartbeat of Thomas’ theology is formed by the concepts of salvation and humanization and the dialectic relation between the two; he advocates this in all his literary exploration and expositions.⁴⁰⁹ His ultimate goal was that he wanted the Indian Church to contribute to the renewal of Indian society and build its cultural and spiritual foundations.⁴¹⁰ To achieve this, he felt that the relation between salvation and humanization needed deeper exploration. He asks: “Is not the ultimate salvation an “eschatological humanization” where sin, principalities and powers, and death will be removed and humanity will find divine fulfilment in the kingdom (1Cor15: 20 – 28)?”⁴¹¹ But for Thomas salvation is not merely an eschatological vision. The future salvation begins here in the present. It is the present salvation that prepares one for the ultimate and future salvation. The salvation of man is not only eschatological but it is historical and immanent with the deeper faith in the redemptive role of Christ and the work of

⁴⁰⁷ M.M. Thomas, “The Logic of the Christian Mission,” 69.

⁴⁰⁸ J. Russell Chandran, Tributes of a Theological Friend,” *The Man and His Legacy*, 8.

⁴⁰⁹ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach to Indian Ecclesiology*, (Rome/Tiruvalla: Centre for Indian and Inter-religious Studies (CIIS & CSS, 1995), 10.

⁴¹⁰ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach to Indian Ecclesiology*, 10.

⁴¹¹ M.M. Thomas, *Risking Christ for Christ’s Sake: Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Pluralism*, (Tiruvalla: CSS/ISPCK, 1987/1999), 113.

the Holy Spirit in history. There are infinite possibilities here for the eschatological becoming historical.⁴¹²

The question that arises here whether salvation includes humanization or humanization includes salvation? Thomas understands salvation and humanization in relation to human body and soul. Salvation and humanization cannot be compartmentalized or isolated, as they are interrelated and interdependent. He interprets salvation and humanization in a close dialectic relationship. Therefore, an integration of spiritual and physical, sacred and secular, historical and eschatological is a necessity. This concept is very fundamental and a driving force of his theological reflection and writings. Russell Chandran, an Indian theologian, acknowledges: "An important theological contribution of MMT is his interpretation of salvation as humanization. While emphasizing the Christological foundation for our salvation he was also aware of the struggle for full humanity and interpreted salvation as humanization."⁴¹³ Thomas considered the Bangkok 1972 meeting as crucial for his own thinking about salvation and humanization as Bangkok defined mission as both justification by faith and social justice. It "related salvation to humanization in its various dimensions and in terms of concrete global problems."⁴¹⁴ Thomas writes: "The mission of salvation and the task of humanization are integrally related to each other, even if they cannot be considered identical."⁴¹⁵

4.4 Development of Thomas' Concepts of Salvation and Humanization

Thomas' concepts of salvation and humanization have gone through considerable developments over time as he continued to grapple with these concepts and the

⁴¹² M.M. Thomas, "Happy the People whose God is the Lord: The Meaning of Salvation Today," in *NCCR*, XCIII/ 3, (March, 1973), 122.

⁴¹³ J. Russell Chandran, "Tributes of a Theological Friend," *The Man and His Legacy*, 8.

⁴¹⁴ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 409.

⁴¹⁵ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 8.

relation between them.⁴¹⁶ His advocacy of salvation and humanization as inseparable aspects of the mission of the church, featured especially in his later (post 1940s) writings. His interpretation of salvation and humanization is underpinned by three basic approaches to the whole issue of quest for human freedom and justice. The main three approaches are an evangelical approach, an ecumenical approach and a liberational and pluralistic approach which are discussed here below.

4.4.1 Salvation as redemption: An evangelical approach

The term salvation features scarcely in Thomas' earliest works (1930s to 1950s). The earlier writings of Thomas indicate that he preferred to use the term redemption rather than salvation, with redemption meaning freedom from sin, Satan and death.⁴¹⁷ Redemption in Thomas' earliest works is the salvation of the soul and restoration of the body of Christ, re-born into a people of God.⁴¹⁸ When he uses the term 'salvation' in his earlier works, redemption and salvation mean more or less the same and are used indiscriminately, though the term redemption dominates. This could be because of his Mar Thoma evangelical tradition. Thomas states that his theological framework in 1943 was that of 'creation, fall and redemption' but later he had a wider understanding which can be glanced from his speech in 1952 on "A Redeemed Life," at the General Committee of the World Student Christian Federation; there he spoke about the power of cross as not only forgiving the politicians but even redeeming politics from its all perversion.⁴¹⁹ The meaning of redemption in the 1952 speech has changed; it is no longer mainly personal salvation but it is also about social, structural and collective transformation. In retrospect, after 33 years, Thomas recollects his narrow view of 1943 on the power of the cross and writes:

⁴¹⁶ T.M Philip traces three phases in the development of Thomas' theology namely: the Liberal phase, the Neo- Orthodox and the post- Kraemer approach. T.M. Philip, *The Encounter Between Theology and Ideology*, 19 – 28.

⁴¹⁷ See M.M. Thomas and Paul E. Converse, *Revolution and Redemption*, 42 – 58.

⁴¹⁸ M.M. Thomas, *Ideological Quest*, 111.

⁴¹⁹ M.M. Thomas, "Reflection after Thirty Three Years 1976," in *M.M. Thomas Reader: Selected Texts on Theology, Religion and Society*, ed. T. Jacob Thomas, (Tiruvalla: Christava Sahitya Samithi, 2002), 26. M.M. Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*, 129- 139.

There was a time when I thought that the New Age of Christ was so much beyond history that it could be experienced in politics only as forgiveness and not as power... But I believe that it is possible for politics itself to be redeemed from its extreme perversions and be made more or less human, if it recognizes and receives into itself the power of the Gospel.⁴²⁰

According to this quote, Thomas' theology moved from the personal redemption to a more collective and structural redemption. He did not limit redemption to personal or individual level alone but was convinced it could have a collective and structural impact.⁴²¹ In 1955 he wrote that the prophetic ministry of the church was to bring "social and cosmic redemption to those fighting for justice."⁴²² Here the term redemption is not just about the individual but also includes social and 'cosmic' connotations.

4.4.2 Salvation and humanization: An ecumenical approach

The ecumenical exposures of Thomas brought a change to his evangelical interpretation of salvation as redemption from sin, death and Satan. Gradually, Thomas began to realize the importance of the salvation of the body as well as soul; thus he began to speak about salvation and humanization and as a result began to use the term salvation in a more inclusive way. In the 'ecumenical period' salvation is not just limited to soul and eternity but it includes both the salvation of the body as well as salvation of the soul. The notion of salvation in Thomas' interpretation also gained both personal and collective connotations. Due to this insight, Thomas moved from using the term redemption to salvation, as in his understanding redemption had more of a Christian connotation with a limited scope, pointing to the atonement of Christ. He now preferred salvation, as it is an inclusive as well as a common term, used in all religions. This aspect of inclusiveness of other religious traditions in his thinking is also a characteristic of this

⁴²⁰ M.M. Thomas, "Reflection after Thirty Three Years 1976," 25-26.

⁴²¹ M.M. Thomas, Paul E. Converse, *Revolution and Redemption*, 54.

⁴²² M.M. Thomas, Paul E. Converse, *Revolution and Redemption*, 57.

period. In addition to his ecumenical contacts, his respect and positive attitude towards people of other faiths in the context of religious plurality and nation-building intensified and may have contributed to his decision to opt for the term salvation.

The change was not simply limited to his use of the word salvation but also was a development with regard to its meaning and content. As Thomas' theology was contextual and contemporary, he articulated the concept salvation on the basis of what was happening around him in India as well as around the world. It is in this period that Thomas began using the word 'humanization' in connection with salvation. Devasahayam states about Thomas in this period: "Thomas speaks from a situation of poverty, caste structure etc. which dehumanize man, and also from within the quest in religious and secular ideologies for richer and fuller human life and he proceeds to speak of humanization as the contemporary meaning of salvation."⁴²³

The ecumenical journey of Thomas lasted nearly three decades: from 1947-1953 with World Students Christian Federation and 1953-1975 with WCC's Church and Society being the chairperson of the WCC/CC; this gave him adequate experiences and exposures which shaped his understanding and interpretation of salvation.⁴²⁴ Ken Gnanakan⁴²⁵, an Indian author in the field of theology of mission, states that "[t]he concept of humanization undoubtedly became central to his thinking ... Thomas' 'theology of humanization' had taken root in the ecumenical soil after the Uppsala event, and evangelism began to be seen as relevant only if humanization was its goal."⁴²⁶ During this period Thomas began to search for relevant and adequate methods, approaches and ideologies which were relevant to the challenging and changing context of Indian society. Thomas' keynote address on the theme 'Salvation Today - A personal statement' at Bangkok in 1972 indicates his change of focus. There, Thomas spoke of

⁴²³ V. Devasahayam, *A comparative study of Gutierrez' Liberation theology and Thomas' Salvation and Humanization*, (M.Th Thesis UTC Archives, 1979), 131-132.

⁴²⁴ M.M. Thomas, *Towards a Theology of Contemporary Ecumenism*, See M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*.

⁴²⁵ See Ken Gnanakan, *Kingdom Concerns*, (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1989); Ken Gnanakan, *The Pluralistic Predicament*, (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1992).

⁴²⁶ Ken Gnanakan, "Salvation and Humanization," in Emmanuel E. James ed. *Asian Concept of Salvation*, (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 2009), 63.

salvation in connection with the liberation movements and challenged the people present that true liberation is available only through the gospel of Christ. He said:

The mission of the Church in this context is to be present within the creative liberation movements of our time which the gospel of Christ itself has helped to take shape, and so participate in them as to be able to communicate the genuine gospel of liberation... It is this message that will liberate the liberation movements from the false spiritual structures of meaning based on idolatrous worship of schemes of self-redemption...⁴²⁷

Like liberation theologians, Thomas insisted that the marginalized people should unite to resist the exploitation of their oppressors. Thomas writes: "The struggle in the process of liberation must be accepted and understood as necessary.... When the poor and the oppressed people stand up for liberation against the powerful who oppress them, that very act humanizes and empowers them."⁴²⁸ Sathianathan Clarke⁴²⁹, author on Dalits and Christianity, comments on these statements, that by indicating that 'God's objective (salvation) is intimately tied up with subjugated peoples' goal (humanization) Thomas was able to urge Indian and Asian societies, which were historically divided by religion and ideology, to see realizable and effective networks of solidarity.⁴³⁰ And Sabu Philip writes:

Thomas uses the term humanization to communicate the meaning of the historical dimension of salvation in the secular context ... In such context, Thomas prefers the word humanization as more appropriate to convey the

⁴²⁷ M.M. Thomas, "Reflection after Thirty Three Years 1976," 26 - 27.

⁴²⁸ M.M. Thomas, *Religion and the Revolt of the Oppressed*, 51.

⁴²⁹ Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998/2000).

⁴³⁰ Sathianathan Clarke, "M.M. Thomas", in *Empire: The Christian Tradition New Readings of Classical Theologians*, eds Kwok Pui-lan Don H. Compier, and Joerg Rieger (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 428.

meaning of salvation even though it explains only partially the content of ultimate salvation.⁴³¹

4.4.3 Salvation as humanization: A liberational and pluralistic approach

From late 1970s onwards Thomas moved from an ecumenical approach to a liberational and pluralistic approach (like Stanley Samartha) with regard to the revelation of God and the salvation of God for humanity.⁴³² Thomas' book *Risking Christ for Christ's Sake* deals with the predicament of religious pluralism for communal and social harmony in the society.⁴³³ This shift could be explained as the result of the anthropological and Christological groundings of his theology, especially after his return to India after many years in Geneva.⁴³⁴ Though his affinity with liberation had already begun in the ecumenical approach, it became ever stronger in his later works. He writes in 1995, one year before his death: "I have been for the most part concerned with the study of the relation of Humanization to Salvation."⁴³⁵ In the latter part of his life, Thomas preferred the term humanization to the term salvation, because the Indian context, in which he lived, was a context of dehumanization in every aspect of human life, especially for Dalits, tribals and women. Moreover, as it was discussed in Chapter Two, it was also a context of revolution and strife for political freedom, social equality and religious freedom for human identity and dignity.

In order to address the dehumanization in the Indian context, Thomas interpreted salvation as humanization in a quest to integrate the salvation of soul and body, penultimate and the ultimate, secular and the sacred, existential and the eschatological dimension in his concepts of salvation and humanization. Siga Arles wrote: "Thomas took Devanandan's ideas of community and common humanity further

⁴³¹ Sabu Philip, *Beyond Humanization*, 130.

⁴³² M.M. Thomas, *The Secular Ideologies of India and the Secular Meaning of Christ*, (Bangalore: CISRS, 1976); M.M. Thomas, *Some Theological Dialogues; Faith and Ideology in the Struggle for Justice*; M.M. Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*; M.M. Thomas: *Reader Selected Texts on Theology, Religion and Society*, 52 – 59 & 71- 81

⁴³³ M.M. Thomas, *Risking Christ for Christ's Sake*.

⁴³⁴ T.M. Philip, *The Encounter Between Theology and Ideology*, 54- 60.

⁴³⁵ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach to Indian Ecclesiology*, 10.

and developed his theology of humanization. Whereas much of traditional theology over-emphasises the divinity of Christ, Thomas takes the incarnation – humanization of Christ as more relevant to contemporary missions.”⁴³⁶ To Thomas, salvation is collective and all encompassing; the subjectivity and individuality are essential aspects of human beings but they cannot be isolated from the social context. His emphasis on structural and collective salvation was a later development and the result of his engagement with Marxism and liberation theologies. Humanization in Thomas’ theology is not limited to humanization of people alone but it includes humanization of structures and systems.⁴³⁷ The writings of Thomas since 1966 reflect a great deal of change in his understanding of the nature of social revolution in India and move from a ‘prophetic to a political theology’ due to the influence of E.V. Mathew, who was the editor of the Indian weekly *Guardian*, Saral K. Chatterji who belonged to the Socialist Party and Indian economists like Samuel Parmar and C.T. Kurian.⁴³⁸

The salvation of God in Christ offers and leads to humanization of people. Clarke gives the following formulation of Thomas’ views: “Salvation as the gift of God in Jesus Christ modifies and qualifies all humanization movements. Thus through a dialectical relationship salvation represented the ultimate activity of God that forms and informs penultimate strivings of humanization.”⁴³⁹ It is God who is the initiator and author of humanization. God is the subject and human beings are the objects of this humanization. Man as he is, neither can he humanize himself nor can he make others human. Sumithra comments: “for Thomas, salvation is neither the fruit of humanization nor an alternative to it, but humanization is the main offer of Jesus Christ, of which salvation is only a part.”⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁶ Siga Arles, *Missiological Education*, 95-96.

⁴³⁷ M.M. Thomas, *Towards an Evangelical Social Gospel*, 28.

⁴³⁸ T.M. Philip, *Encounter between Theology and Ideology*, 14; M.M. Thomas, “Towards a Political Theology,” in *M.M. Thomas Reader: Selected Texts on Theology, Religion and Society*, 125- 126.

⁴³⁹ S. Clarke, *Empire*, 428.

⁴⁴⁰ S. Sumithra, *Revolution as Revelation*, 202.

Hielke Wolters identifies three aspects in Thomas' concept of salvation:⁴⁴¹ firstly, salvation is Christological as it is deeply rooted in and based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Secondly, the message of salvation has to be communicated clearly and properly through dialogues and secular ideologies. Thirdly, the context of religious pluralism requires a new form of community of fellowship for those who respond to the communication of the message of salvation. Wolters observes that the development of Thomas' concept of salvation during the period 1947 – 1954, when he worked with World Student Christian Federation, became the foundation for his later development and exploration on salvation. The three basic developments were: the Christological foundation of salvation, its relation to the struggles of humanity and its institutional implication.⁴⁴²

In 1969 Thomas was invited to give the William Carey lectures in the Serampore University convocation at Bangalore; in 1971 these were published under the title *Salvation and Humanization*.⁴⁴³ In 1994 Thomas revisited the topic of salvation and humanisation when he gave six lectures in memory of Kuriakose Elias Chavara at the Centre for Indian and inter-religious Studies (CIIS) in Rome. These lectures on Chavara were published as *A Diaconal Approach to Indian Ecclesiology* in 1995.⁴⁴⁴ Thomas writes: "These *Chavara Lectures* may be considered as "Salvation and Humanization Revisited After Twenty-five Years."⁴⁴⁵ One of the striking differences is that in his earlier writings Thomas spoke about the humanization of the oppressed and marginalized people of the society in a more general way, but during his later years he was more specific and addressed and identified them as Dalits, tribals and women. Thomas writes that the reason for this development was his close relationship with them:

⁴⁴¹ H. Wolters, *Theology of Prophetic Participation*, 8.

⁴⁴² H. Wolters, *Theology of Prophetic Participation*, 74.

⁴⁴³ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization: Some Crucial Issues of the Theology of Mission in Contemporary India*, (Madras: CLS, 1971).

⁴⁴⁴ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach to Indian Ecclesiology*, (Rome/Tiruvalla: Centre for Indian and Inter-religious Studies (CIIS) and Christava Sahitya Samithy (CSS), 1995).

⁴⁴⁵ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach to Indian Ecclesiology*, 7.

My association with the net-work of social action groups in the “Program for Social Action” and my two years in Nagaland in the situation of the modernizing-process of Naga and other tribals of the North East India have compelled me to continue rethinking on many of the questions related to modernization. Therefore, the “revisit” demanded reflections on old issues in new ways.⁴⁴⁶

Also in later years, Thomas continued to speak against those forms and forces that threatened the very basis and source of their survival. He gave special attention in his later period to issues of ecology, globalization and religious communalism.⁴⁴⁷ Humanization has become the central theme of Thomas’ life. He writes “...the enquiring into the conditions for humanization of modernity have been central in my theological-ideological-religious enquiring over the years.”⁴⁴⁸

As humanization was the central focus of Thomas’ life he believed that the road to humanization was to have religious tolerance and harmony in the context of religious communalism and communal conflicts in the society. Therefore he advocated secularism in the society and the church to be a Christ-centred secular fellowship. Thomas believed that since the desire and aspiration of all religious and secular traditions is to bring humanization, he invited everyone irrespective of their religious and secular backgrounds to cooperate and participate in the task of humanizing the dehumanized in the society. For Thomas community is first of all a human community, rather than a religious or Christian community. He believed the minority consciousness is detrimental to proper concern for all people and their human rights.⁴⁴⁹

Thus his evangelical approach denotes salvation as redemption, while his ecumenical period was the beginnings of reflections on salvation as humanization, and in his liberationist/pluralistic approach interprets salvation as humanization and gradually humanization become very concrete, focusing on Dalit rights, ecology etc.

⁴⁴⁶ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach to Indian Ecclesiology*, 8.

⁴⁴⁷ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach to Indian Ecclesiology*, 8.

⁴⁴⁸ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach to Indian Ecclesiology*, 7.

⁴⁴⁹ M.M. Thomas, “People’s Struggle for Genuine Humanism,” in *Christian Concern for Peoples’ Struggle*, (New Delhi: Delhi Forum for Christian Concern for People’s Struggle, 1978), 22- 23.

4.5 The Obstacles for Humanization

Thomas identifies several – rather wide-ranging - factors which he considers to be obstacles for humanization, such as alienation from God, casteism, religion and modernization. These factors are social as well as religious. He also identifies two theological obstacles for humanization. One is the pietistic individualism which propagates dogmatic belief and inner spiritual experiences only, without attention how faith affects human relations. The second obstacle is the failure of Christian theology to understand the Christ-centred secular fellowship outside the Church. The Christ-centred secular fellowship outside the church will be dealt with later in this chapter under 4.9 the process of humanization; other obstacles, theological as well as social, are discussed in this paragraph.

4.5.1 Pietistic individualism as source of dehumanization

Thomas criticizes the one sided interpretations of the gospel message that focused on 'pure spirituality.' The flaw of pure spirituality according to Thomas is that it is indifferent to human existential problems while pure existentialism overlooks the spirituality of the person.⁴⁵⁰ He points to the failure of evangelicalism that failed to connect and combine its teachings on individual salvation with the Lordship of Christ over one's personal life though in 1979 he remarked that he appreciated the recent change within evangelicalism of concern for social justice and to develop a holistic approach to the doctrine of salvation, as seen in the 'Willowbrook Report.'⁴⁵¹ Thomas considers individualism and pure spirituality that isolates social responsibility an obstacle for humanization of people in the society. Arles writes: "Thomas expressed definite Christ-centredness in his theological views, but did not approve of the otherworldly eschatological interpretations used by conservative Christians."⁴⁵²

⁴⁵⁰ M.M. Thomas, *New Creation in Christ*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1976), 70.

⁴⁵¹ M.M. Thomas, "The Willow brook Report: Report of a Consultation on Gospel and Culture, Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, January 6 – 13, 1978," *International Review of Mission* 17 (1978), 211.

⁴⁵² Siga Arles, *Missiological Education*,), 144.

For Thomas, sin is not absence of good but self-claim for self-sufficiency and self-dependency. It leads man to believe that he is capable of becoming and achieving far greater things apart from God and thus rejects God's grace.⁴⁵³ Man, according to Thomas, misuses and misdirects his mastery over nature and his capacity to create new structures and values "to assert that man is the maker of the universe and the master of his destiny."⁴⁵⁴ The more humanity is alienated from God, the more human beings dehumanize other fellow humans. But Thomas was convinced that "the alienation was overcome through the death of Christ on the cross and is realized through forgiveness mediated through Christ."⁴⁵⁵

Though Thomas was positive about human goodness and creativity even after the fall, yet he criticizes liberal humanism for their belief of easy optimism about human nature and historical progress. He presents the cross as the revelation of "the spiritual evil which is present in the best of human institutions of religion, society and state leading to their rejection of that goal and revealing the need of their redemption by God's initiative."⁴⁵⁶ Thus the cross is both the revelation of the depth of God's love for humanity as well as the revelation of the depth of evil in humanity.

4.5.2 Religion as source of dehumanization

Thomas concurred with Ambedkar that religion can be a source of dehumanization. He writes:

As Dr. Ambedkar once said so far as traditional society is concerned, property, social status and religion are all sources of oppressive power; and only where the struggle is simultaneously aimed at changing property-system, caste-oppression and their spiritual sanctions can the various forms of exploitation and domination be effectively fought.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵³ Quoted in T.M. Philip, *Theology and Ideology*, 48.

⁴⁵⁴ Quoted in T.M. Philip, *Theology and Ideology*, 48.

⁴⁵⁵ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 3.

⁴⁵⁶ M.M. Thomas, *Secular Ideologies*, 34.

⁴⁵⁷ M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, 25.

Religion – including Christianity – instead of being a liberative source and force of people from their socio-religious bondage was used to enslave people in the name of religion and caste. Rather than the church taking on a prophetic role, the church in Thomas’ view was opportunistic and cooperated with those in power. Thomas says: “The deep minority communal consciousness among Christians tends to make them subservient to whoever is in power to safeguard communal interests.”⁴⁵⁸ This is an evasion of what Thomas considered to be the political mission of the church, which is to struggle for human rights wherever they are ignored and suppressed and to exercise a prophetic voice against any form of oppression against the poor and the oppressed. Only when Christians are able to let go off the minority communal approach, they can truly be the church with Christ’s mission to the people.⁴⁵⁹ Thomas writes: “Religion has been a very anti-Dalit force and for this reason many Dalits would reject religion.”⁴⁶⁰ V. T. Rajasekar, who fights for the rights of the Dalits and as the editor of *Dalit Voice*, writes:

The social degradation of the Untouchables has had religious sanction under Hinduism. So they seek fresh air under other liberating religions... They want the self-respect which is denied under Hinduism. They will get it the moment they get out of Hinduism and convert to other religions.⁴⁶¹

Thomas believed the restoration of Dalit dignity depends on the renewal of traditional, cultural and religious values. He advocated equality between man and woman and equality between castes and peoples through renewal of traditional cultural and religious values. Equality is one of the most important principles which still remains to

⁴⁵⁸ M.M. Thomas, *Church and Human Community*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1985), 46.

⁴⁵⁹ M.M. Thomas, *Church and Human Community*, 46.

⁴⁶⁰ M.M. Thomas, *The Church Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 83.

⁴⁶¹ V.T. Rajshekar in *The Gospel among our Hindu Neighbours*, ed. Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (Bangalore: Partnership In Mission Asia, 1982), 131 -132.

be absorbed by the traditional cultures of India.⁴⁶² Thomas complained that though the churches in India (both Catholic and Protestant) had done a lot in terms of social service, education and medical care, etc., they had failed to confront the social injustice in the society. He says it is

Because of their deep religious minority consciousness and because of their continued dependence on foreign resources to maintain their service institutions and agencies, the Christian community has shown a tendency to become inward looking and to organize their services in conformity with existing power-structure.⁴⁶³

The religious minority-consciousness of the church paralyzed them from active participation for social justice. The focus was on the church's survival rather than social justice of collective existence.

4.5.3 Caste institutionalizes discrimination

The caste system in India has been one of the greatest obstacles to humanization as it has curbed socialization of people. In the words of Thomas, it has "suppressed individuality and institutionalized oppressive discrimination between groups and sexes, and strictly regulated social intercourse among them."⁴⁶⁴ Indian society is a caste-based and caste-structured society. Though the process of industrialization and urbanization has really shaken the caste system, caste spirit and caste emotions are still very strong.⁴⁶⁵ Thomas considered political parties as elements of casteless society because they all learnt to work together for the victory of the party irrespective of their caste and creedal differences.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶² M.M. Thomas, *The Church Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 83.

⁴⁶³ M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, 8.

⁴⁶⁴ M.M. Thomas, *Church and Human Community*, 41.

⁴⁶⁵ M.M. Thomas, "The Logic of the Christian Mission," 70.

⁴⁶⁶ M.M. Thomas, "Review", *Caste in changing India*, by A.P. Barnabas and Subhash C Mehta, in *Religion and Society*, 12/2. 1965, (New Delhi: Indian Institute for Public Administration, 1964), 95.

Thomas personifies caste as the mythical evil figure *Rakshasa*⁴⁶⁷ and says “casteism is a many-headed *Rakshasa* who grows new heads as soon as the old ones are chopped off.”⁴⁶⁸ The practice of caste is very dominant not merely in the Indian society but unfortunately also in the churches. The caste practice in the church controls the total life of Christians and also tries to control the society through the institutional authority of the church.⁴⁶⁹ Joseph D’Souza⁴⁷⁰ who champions the cause of the Dalits nationally and internationally says that the Dalit-Bahujan⁴⁷¹ should find ‘an alternate spiritual ideology’⁴⁷² that would emancipate them from the age-old oppression. He writes: “This alternate spiritual ideology is absolutely a key issue in the Dalit Freedom agenda. Dalit-Bahujan leaders insist that an alternate spiritual ideology must challenge the spiritual ideology on which caste is based: Brahmanism.”⁴⁷³ D’Souza himself believes that the life and teachings of Jesus Christ are the perfect model for the liberation of the Dalit-Bahujan; yet he also says that Dalits should be allowed to choose their own spiritual ideology as per their conscience, as God loves everyone unconditionally.⁴⁷⁴

4.5.4 Modernization as source of dehumanization

Thomas had a positive approach to modernization during the early period of his life, believing that it would emancipate people from their oppression and enhance their life

⁴⁶⁷ It means a great powerful evil giant who cannot be destroyed.

⁴⁶⁸ M.M. Thomas, “Review”, *Caste in Changing India*, 95.

⁴⁶⁹ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach*, 60.

⁴⁷⁰ Joseph D’Souza gives leadership to GS/OM (Good Shepherd /Operation Mobilization) India and its associated ministries, He is the Founder and Moderator of the Good Shepherd Churches in India who believes freedom begins with education and his main focus is to educate and empower the Dalits so that they are freed from the age old caste oppression. His vision and passion for the humanization of the Dalits through quality English medium education has given birth to 107 Good Shepherd Schools with 26000 children across India which is also called as the Dalit Education Centre, He has also started Dalit Freedom Network (DFN) in UK and other countries to mobilize international solidarity to fight against casteism and caste discrimination.

⁴⁷¹ Bahujans are not the outcaste like the Dalits but they are part of the caste system. They are known as the low or backward caste but higher than the Dalits in their socio-spiritual status. They are also oppressed and suppressed by the upper caste people.

⁴⁷² This alternate spiritual ideology challenges and nullifies superiority of the so-called spiritual ideology of Brahminism. It affirms and promotes human dignity, self-identity and equality.

⁴⁷³ Joseph D’Souza, *Dalit Freedom: Now and Forever*, 130.

⁴⁷⁴ Joseph D’Souza, *Dalit Freedom: Now and Forever*, 129-130.

conditions, but later he acknowledged the evil of modernization as it betrayed all hopes of humanization. Bastiaan Wielenga observes:

Reading M.M.'s writings of the 1950s and 1960s one is struck by the vigor with which he welcomes the process of modernization and by the confidence that it would be possible to make it serve the cause of human emancipation...Forty years later, we are all shocked to see the shattering of many of the hopes of those days.⁴⁷⁵

Thus, despite his initial optimism, Thomas later considered modernization a source of dehumanization.⁴⁷⁶ This development was the result of the changes that were taking place in the society.⁴⁷⁷ Thomas identified modernization as yet another dehumanizing factor in society, as it oppresses and exploits the poor and the marginalized people of the society. The promise of a richer and a fuller human life that was inherent in modernity was betrayed.⁴⁷⁸ Though the process of modernity brought changes and development in the country, it betrayed the aspirations and expectations of the people, especially the Dalits, tribals and women. It is this section of society that was affected mostly due to modern development. Thomas writes: "Since these sections of society have had no participation in the traditional or modern power-structures, they are being systematically alienated from their traditional habitat and work in the name of modern development."⁴⁷⁹ The modern world according to Thomas is created by the process of modernization, under the ideology of modernism and impelled by the spirit of modernity.⁴⁸⁰ Yet this whole process of modernity needs renewal and reconstruction based on the New Humanity in Christ. In traditional societies religion and state were integrated. Also the medieval Christendom was an integration of church, community

⁴⁷⁵ Bastiaan Wielenga, "With the Nagas Towards a Different Society," in *A Tribute to M.M. Thomas Christian Witness in Society*, 136. See M.M. Thomas, *Nagas Towards AD 2000*, 116.

⁴⁷⁶ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach*, 7.

⁴⁷⁷ Bastiaan Wielenga, "With the Nagas Towards a Different Society", 153.

⁴⁷⁸ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach*, 15.

⁴⁷⁹ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach*, 25.

⁴⁸⁰ M.M. Thomas, *Religion and the Revolt of the Oppressed*, 17.

and state. Thomas is not advocating Christendom but wants an integration of sacred and secular to work together for the task of humanization.

According to Thomas the technological world has become aggressive and destructive towards humanity. Thomas identifies four technologies that have been especially destructive. The material technology revolutionized industry and agriculture and increased economic productivity but it also produced poverty. The second is the military technology which controlled most of the scientific and technological resources and developments.⁴⁸¹ The social technology covers the techniques of efficient organization and management which is called bureaucracy. The fourth technology is that of human technology which deals with the bodily, psychic and genetic aspects of the human person, whether for good or evil. The danger of technology, according to Thomas, is that it undermines the natural foundations of society in family and neighborhood through urban industrialism and the mechanization of life.⁴⁸² It shakes and destroys the very foundation of the society in the name of modernity; that is why Thomas considers this an obstacle for humanization. These obstacles cannot remain as obstacles when humanization of the dehumanized is the main agenda of the human community.

4.6 The Subjects of Humanization

Thomas not only writes about various obstacles of humanization, but also about what and who needs humanization. He was clear that the marginalized people of the society should be humanized from all forces and forms of dehumanization. He advocates humanization of people as well as systems and structures that oppress and dehumanize people of the society. Thomas addressed the marginalized people as oppressed and outcaste in his earlier writings but his later writings especially after the emergence of Dalit theology in the late 1980s he freely used the term and addressed them as Dalits.

⁴⁸¹ M.M. Thomas, *Religion and the Revolt of the Oppressed*, 19-20.

⁴⁸² M.M. Thomas, *Religion and the Revolt of the Oppressed*, 31.

4.6.1 Humanization of dehumanized people

The Harijans

Thomas advocates humanization of all people but his main focus is on the traditionally oppressed people: the “*Harijans* (Dalit),⁴⁸³ *Girijans* (tribals),⁴⁸⁴ and the *Sreejans* (women).”⁴⁸⁵ These groups of people are not treated equally in the society, according to Thomas. They are oppressed people of the society on account of their caste, colour, region and gender. They are deprived of their basic human rights and privileges in the society as well as of participation in the decision making process of the society. Their struggle has been the struggle for restoration of human dignity, identity and equal acceptance and respect in the society. Thomas writes “the submerged and suppressed groups of the traditional society (e.g. the outcastes, the tribals and the women in India) should be given due participation in the structures of power and the processes of decision- making. The elimination of pockets of poverty and distress and indignity among the people is the goal for realizing community.”⁴⁸⁶

The goal of the human community, according to Thomas should be eliminating poverty and indignity of the people. The main goal of development should be the eradication of poverty and development should lead to liberation. Poverty is not the result of fate or a necessity, Thomas writes, but it is a social injustice, tragedy and oppression. It has to do with human responsibility.⁴⁸⁷

Thomas advocates the salvation and humanization of the marginalized oppressed groups of the society from the 1950s onwards, but it gave more concrete attention towards later part of his life from 1976, after his retirement from active role with both WCC/CC as well as CISRS. This change was because of his association and

⁴⁸³The British Government classified the oppressed people as Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes but Mahatma Gandhi called the Scheduled Caste people *Harijans*, which means children of God but the Dalits do not accept this term as it is derogatory. They proudly call themselves as Dalits which signifies dignity, power and hope. Arvind P Nirmal, *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, 48.

⁴⁸⁴ Thomas calls the Tribal people as *Girijans* which mean people of the hills as they live in the hills and jungles.

⁴⁸⁵ *Sreejans* mean women. M.M. Thomas, “Identity and Credibility of Action Groups,” *With Us Without Us in spite of Us* published by Program for Social Action, Thiruvalla (March 1989), 25.

⁴⁸⁶ M.M. Thomas, *Contemporary Ecumenism*, 178.

⁴⁸⁷ M.M. Thomas, *Contemporary Ecumenism*, 178.

closeness with the social action groups who worked for the liberation of the downtrodden people and with the tribal people of North East India as a governor. For this, Thomas earned the appreciation and affection of the Action Groups after he retired from CISRS. Thomas' focus was at the grass-root level, advocating the upliftment of the poor and the oppressed people of the society.⁴⁸⁸ Thomas was also involved in advocacy work, opposing the policies of Government that tried to domesticate the Social Action Groups who were working among the oppressed groups. He advised them not to be succumbed to the pressures and tactics. According to Thomas a community should practice justice and empower the poor, submerged and suppressed groups like Dalits, tribals and women who should have an assured participation in the structures of power and in the decision making process.⁴⁸⁹

The Girijans

Thomas advocates for the humanization of the marginalized Dalits, women and the tribals but he did not interacted with all of them from the beginning. He gradually developed as he began to associate with each group. Thomas' association with the tribal people and their leaders through conferences and consultations and working as a Governor of Nagaland, which is one of the tribal states in India, gave him a clear understanding of the struggles and suffering of the tribal people.⁴⁹⁰ While he was there, he wrote many articles dealing with his attempts to understand their struggles as they moved from a tribal pattern of living to a modern life influenced by modernity. Thomas was sympathetic towards their struggle for self-identity.⁴⁹¹

The tribal people in India need to be humanized according to Thomas, because they suffer due to lack of development and education. Traditionally and geographically

⁴⁸⁸ M.J. Joseph says this change was due to his closeness in body and mind to the action groups and the people's movements. M.J. Joseph, "A Tribute to M.M." in *Into the Twenty First Century: Essays in Honor of Dr. M.M. Thomas*, Gnana Robinson, ed. (Arasaradi: Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, 1986), 109.

⁴⁸⁹ M.M. Thomas, "Happy the People whose God is the Lord", 115.

⁴⁹⁰ As the result of his work as a governor in Nagaland and his association with the people he wrote *Nagas Towards A.D. 2000 and other Selected Addresses and Writings*, (Madras: Centre for Research on New International Economic Order, 1992).

⁴⁹¹ M.M. Thomas, "Preface", *The Nagas Towards A.D.2000*, iii.

they are isolated from the rest of the Indian society as they live in the hills. They struggle for self-identity, equal acceptance and respect in the society, but this struggle was suppressed by both the colonizers and the Indian national governments. It was the arrival of the gospel that brought self-awakening and transformation in their life both through the western Christian missions and indigenous churches. Thomas writes that the message of the gospel and the victory of the Crucified Risen Christ over the cosmic forces of evil freed them from the fear of the malevolent spirits.⁴⁹² In addition to the gospel, Christian Missions, English education and colonial administration worked towards the welfare of these people. Thomas advised the tribals that they should transcend all barriers and rivalries between both inter-tribal and tribal–nontribal sections. In addition, they should affirm solidarity with all their fellow victims who are victimized through modernization and struggle for social justice. He also advised that the tribal people should revive their reverence for the nature to preserve their environment for eco-justice.⁴⁹³

The Sreejans

The women in India undergo severe mental and physical suffering in the name of caste, creed and gender. They are degraded and treated very low, both in their family and in the patriarchal male dominated society. According to Thomas, in the modern world of technology and development women are commodified and their sexuality, fertility and labor are increasingly commercialized.⁴⁹⁴ In addition, they are always dependent on the men, just like the Dalits depend on the rich and the high caste people for their social survival. Manu, the oldest law-giver of Hinduism, never allowed the women to be free all through their life. A woman is to be under the control of her father when she is young, under her husband when she is married and at her widowhood under the control of her son.⁴⁹⁵ Thus she is never free and she is vulnerable to all kinds of inhuman

⁴⁹² M.M. Thomas, *Post- Modern Humanism*, 56.

⁴⁹³ M.M. Thomas, *Post-Modern Humanism*, 58.

⁴⁹⁴ M.M. Thomas, *Post- Modern Humanism*, 58.

⁴⁹⁵ Manu, *The Laws of Manu*, M.M. Thomas, *The Christian Response to Asian Revolution*, 40.

treatment socially and religiously. The Dalit women are thrice alienated and oppressed on the basis of their class, caste and sex. They are called as the 'Dalit among Dalits' and the downtrodden among downtrodden.⁴⁹⁶ Ambedkar described the Hindu caste system as a pyramid of earthen pots set one on top of another. In the very lowest bottom are the suppressed Dalit women.⁴⁹⁷

According to Thomas the history of Christianity in India to a greater extent shows that the oppressed groups became Christian not for the salvation of their soul, but for the acceptance of their human dignity that they did not get in Hinduism.⁴⁹⁸ The Dalits, tribals and women were oppressed and exploited both in the traditional society and in the present society. Traditional religion divided them on the basis of those who are ritually pure and impure. The Dalits were impure because they had to work in the land and the organic nature and its wastes. They made women as impure as they have to deal with blood every month. Thomas attacks the Hindu theory of purity and impurity which dehumanizes and stigmatizes the Dalits and the women. He says: "The purity-impurity divide within the traditional society had excluded the Dalits and women from its power structure and its decision-making processes."⁴⁹⁹ Thomas condemns all sorts of atrocities against women and speaks for the humanization of women.

4.6.2 Humanization of oppressive structures and systems

Humanization of religion

In his early writings Thomas speaks about the humanization of people from their dehumanized condition, especially the marginalized people. But in his later works Thomas includes not only the salvation of humanity, but also the humanization of history, religion, politics, technology, revolution etc. as he realized that the humanization of people is possible only through humanizing the structures and system of the society. Thomas attributes the root cause of dehumanization to socio-economic

⁴⁹⁶ M.E. Prabhakar, ed., *Towards a Dalit Theology*, (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1988), 146.

⁴⁹⁷ M.E. Prabhakar, ed., *Towards a Dalit Theology*, 146.

⁴⁹⁸ M.M. Thomas, *The Church Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 82.

⁴⁹⁹ M.M. Thomas, *The Church Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 82.

and religio-cultural factors and thus Thomas wrote an article entitled *Humanization of religion* in 1989.⁵⁰⁰

According to Thomas, the socio-religious systems and structures need to be humanized because they perpetuate marginalization and discrimination. Thomas identifies religious fundamentalism and communalism as threats to the secularism that he advocated, because they resist change in its traditional religious dogmas, ritual practices of purity and impurity in social laws. Communalism is a threat because it seeks political power for one's religious community or in the case of Hindutva⁵⁰¹ wants to establish a Hindu state.⁵⁰² Thus, communalism according to Thomas affects peace and tranquility and causes conflicts and social disharmony. He considers both minority consciousness and the majority consciousness of any religious group a danger to both religion and politics, because they arise as defensive reactions and create disharmony in the society.

Though all religious communities aim to bring spiritual reformation in the society, Thomas states they struggled and were reluctant to initiate an open dialogue with other religions and secular ideologies. Thomas believes that the only way forward was openness: "Opening up is the only path for the humanization of religion which will also enable it to communicate its message of spiritual salvation in relation to the humanization of society itself."⁵⁰³ The context of religious pluralism in his opinion necessitates a common secular approach to facilitate humanization. The Indian churches should take the lead in addressing the social injustice and dehumanizing forces of the society, following the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament as well as by taking Jesus as the revolutionary leader and liberator of the people.

⁵⁰⁰ M.M. Thomas, "Humanization of Religion" *People's Reporter* 2/4 (1989), 3.

⁵⁰¹ Hindutva is an ideology of the Hindu communal political parties such as Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Rashtrya Sevak Samaj (RSS) and Shiva Sena whose motto and election manifestation is to establish a Hinduraj or Hindu State.

⁵⁰² M.M. Thomas, *Post- Modern Humanism*, 46.

⁵⁰³ M.M. Thomas, *Post- Modern Humanism*, 46.

Humanization of politics

For Thomas, the humanization of people depends on the humanization of social and political structures as they promote dehumanization. Therefore, Thomas called for a humanization of politics so that it is people-oriented and works towards a just and fair society that will ensure enhancement of all people, especially the underprivileged of the society. Thomas' theology is basically a political theology as it calls for political action.⁵⁰⁴ The State is a necessary instrument of human community but it is a limited instrument. The State has the responsibility to preserve order, protect freedom and promote justice in society but it cannot redeem people.⁵⁰⁵ The focus should be on the people as they are the subjects, the ones who make politics and are not merely object of political manipulation. Thomas, a contemporary of Martin Luther King, concurs with King who fought for the rights of Blacks that participation in political power and processes (civil rights movement) is the essence of human dignity.⁵⁰⁶

To that extent Thomas even suggested in 1978 that there should be an organized militancy among the poor and the marginalized who live both in the rural and urban settings to resist and defend themselves from the attack of the dominant and high caste people. He writes that what is required is the formulation of a new kind of discrimination in favour of militant movements like the *Dalit Panthers* of the state of Maharashtra,⁵⁰⁷ who put up a spirit of militancy and resistance against traditional oppression among their people. According to Thomas they should not involve in violence but their self-defensive actions should receive legal and police protection.⁵⁰⁸ Thomas' suggestion or proposal for an organized militancy is unwarranted in the context of a constant religious communal violence taking place especially between the Hindus and the Muslims. Thomas believed that although the government with its 'protective discrimination' helped the Dalits educationally and economically, mostly the Dalits were

⁵⁰⁴ Sunand Sumithra, *Christian Theologies*, 181.

⁵⁰⁵ M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, 19-28.

⁵⁰⁶ M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, 22.

⁵⁰⁷ For details Lata Murugkar, *Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra: A Sociological Appraisal* (Popular Prakashan, 1991), M. Sebastian, *Liberating the Caged Dalit panther*, (Madras: Emerald Publishers, 1994)

⁵⁰⁸ M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, 24.

and are misused by the government. They are used as vote banks and made to be dependent.

Humanization of history

According to Thomas the history of the world as well as history of the church is the history of God who is in action. It is God who acts in history, both secular and sacred. The act of God in the history of the world before the coming of Jesus Christ was the history of preparation for the coming of Christ and the history of the world after the glorification of Jesus Christ is the history of the universalization of the gospel.⁵⁰⁹ The humanization is not just limited to the humanization of the secular history of the world but also the secular culture which has no reference to God but makes man as the creator of culture. Thomas wants the church to initiate humanization process through dialogue with secular ideologies in the context of religious pluralism.⁵¹⁰

The mission of the church is not simply proclamation of the gospel and growth of the church but it should go beyond that and work for the humanization of human history. It is not just the salvation history alone but the world history. The church should discern and realize the work of God in secular history and should respond to it positively.⁵¹¹ Sin has affected the whole of humanity and human existence. The powers of principalities and forces of evil continue to work against God's redemptive plan for humanity. But God in Christ has got victory over them. Therefore "the victory of Christ and salvation in Christ must find its manifestation in power over these forces as power for the humanization of our structures of collective existence."⁵¹² However, Leslie Newbigin was less optimistic and stated that the forces of evil will not totally be wiped out from human history.⁵¹³

⁵⁰⁹ M.M. Thomas, *To the Ends of the Earth: The Acts of the Apostles*, Contextual Theological Bible Commentary 6, Translated by T.M. Philip (Tiruvalla: CSS Books & BTTBPSA, 2005), 20.

⁵¹⁰ M.M. Thomas, *Post- Modern Humanism*, 58-59.

⁵¹¹ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 7-8.

⁵¹² M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 7-8.

⁵¹³ Cited in M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 9.

4.7 The Source of Humanization

According to Thomas the goal of human community should be humanization. There are obstacles and barriers created by human beings against the fellow human that work against the task of humanization. But these barriers should not in any way slow down the effort to bring humanization in the society. The dehumanized long for liberation from all discriminative and oppressive forces that deprive them of their self-identity, self-respect, self-worth and equality in the society. For Thomas Christ is the source of humanization of either people or structures of collective existence.

4.7.1 The resurrection of Jesus is the hope of humanity

Thomas believed in both the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Also, he acknowledges the centrality of Christ in all other religions. The term Christocentric in Thomas' work therefore does not mean 'limited to the Christian tradition'. Like Raymond Pannikar, for Thomas Christ is cosmic.⁵¹⁴ Thomas says: "All the ancient religions have been forced to redefine themselves in the light of Christ. Even in self-defence or aggression against Christianity, they cannot get away from the figure of Jesus Christ."⁵¹⁵ And also: "There is in Christ a new cosmos, a new universe."⁵¹⁶ Because Christ is cosmic, Thomas advocates that humanization should be Christocentric. The task of humanization should be a combined and integrated effort of all religious and secular movements. Russell Chandran writes: "Both the Crucified Christ and the Risen Christ were integral to his Christology and Soteriology. Both the confession of Jesus Christ and the affirmation of salvation are to be made in the context of the struggle for human dignity."⁵¹⁷ Thomas has at times been criticized for this strong Christological focus.⁵¹⁸

According to Thomas' theology, Jesus conquered the powers of evil and principalities through his death and resurrection. Thus the resurrection of Jesus gives

⁵¹⁴ Raymundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, (Darton: Longman & Todd Limited, 1964/1981).

⁵¹⁵ M.M. Thomas, Paul E. Converse, *Revolution and Redemption*, 10.

⁵¹⁶ M.M. Thomas, *New Creation in Christ*, 7.

⁵¹⁷ J. Russell Chandran, Tributes of a Theological Friend," *The Man and His Legacy*, 8.

⁵¹⁸ Sathianathan Clarke, *Empire*, 432. K.C. Abraham, "Introduction," in *Christian Witness in Society*, xiv.

assurance to the present struggles of humanity that humanization is possible here and now. It may not be fully possible in this fallen world, Thomas concedes, but as a present reality it leads towards a perfect and fuller humanity in Christ. Thomas believed that the resurrection of Christ is the hope for a new humanity and creates a new human fellowship which transcends and transforms all communal and traditional caste structure that divides and exploits people. He pointed out “this fellowship in Christ transcends not only the religious divisions but also all divisions created in society by nature, culture or history. This is the new man, the new humanity, which God is constantly renewing in his own image.”⁵¹⁹ The cross and resurrection of Jesus are crucial for Thomas’ theology of humanization. The cross of Christ symbolizes the identification of God with the struggles of people. The resurrection of Jesus symbolizes the ultimate hope and exaltation of the poor and oppressed for the glorification and transformation of their life. “The bodily resurrection of Jesus indicates the glorification of the personhood of Jesus who is crucified... The resurrection of Jesus marks the inauguration of a new humanity in the midst of history.”⁵²⁰

There are different aspects of his Christology which are relevant and relate to the quest for salvation and humanization of all people: the fact of incarnation shows God’s involvement with the world; Christ’s life and teachings are exemplary of how a new humanity could take shape; His death on the cross shows the extent of his solidarity with the suffering of people; His resurrection gives the hope that suffering is not the final word to be said and Christ after his resurrection has begun to work towards humanization and salvation of the world.

4.7.2 Universalization of the gospel leads to humanization

According to Thomas the resurrection of Jesus and the gospel of Christ promise humanization; therefore the message of the gospel needs to be communicated universally for humanization. He writes: “The ecumenical movement inspires the churches to achieve greater unity and to promote evangelization efforts; it is tirelessly

⁵¹⁹ M.M. Thomas, *New Creation in Christ*, 3.

⁵²⁰ Quoted in T.M. Philip, *The Encounter Between Theology and Ideology*, 68.

striving to serve suffering peoples and to transform the world order for greater justice and humanization.”⁵²¹ Thomas was convinced that the gospel itself played a critical role to counter western domination and to humanize the western model of development.⁵²² The modern missionary movement which became dominant in the 18th and 19th centuries has emphasized the proclamation of the gospel to the people of other faiths and cultures making clear that they were called to decide either for Christ or against Christ; in their view the decision to follow Christ meant to join the church. Thomas’ idea of salvation is broader and in his view salvation is not limited to Christianity.

In Thomas’ interpretation of the gospel, the essence of the gospel is not just the spiritual deliverance of the individual from sin and Satan but deliverance from all forces and structures that work against individuals and the very existence of humanity. Christian redemption is not just the salvation of the individual but the whole person with his involvement in society and culture. It is personal, social and cosmic.⁵²³ Forgiveness of sins stands as the ground and centre of the new humanity. Thomas writes: “While sin is the personal alienation of the humans from God, forgiveness of sin is personal reconciliation.”⁵²⁴ Sin distorts human relationships but forgiveness of sin enhances human personhood. Forgiveness of sin is the universal renewal conducive to Christ’s universal Lordship and his offer of universal salvation, transforming all areas of human life.⁵²⁵ Christianity has played a key role in the welfare of the marginalized people groups as well as given them a proper identity and social status in societies all across the world. Martha T. Frederiks while speaking about Gambia she writes “Christianity has been a constitutive element in the process of redefining and readjusting the identity of [these] groups to their new situation.”⁵²⁶

⁵²¹ M.M. Thomas, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 24.

⁵²² M.M. Thomas, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 23.

⁵²³ M.M. Thomas, *The church Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 117.

⁵²⁴ M.M. Thomas, *The First-Born of All Creation: Colossians, Philemon*, Contextual Theological Bible Commentary 2, Translated by T.M. Philip (Tiruvalla: CSS Books & BTTBPSA, 2004), 21.

⁵²⁵ M.M. Thomas, *The First- Born of All Creation*, 21.

⁵²⁶ Martha T. Frederiks, *We Have Toiled all Nights: Christianity in the Gambia 1456 – 2000*, (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2003), 395.

According to Thomas, the gospel of Jesus promises humanization, as the gospel of Christ has power to renew and humanize the society. The outcastes and the marginalized in the past have stepped out of their oppressive religious tradition and stepped into the church and other religious traditions with a great hope that they would be accepted and respected with all human dignity. But this was rarely realized, due to the practice of caste within the church. For Thomas “It was the promise of humanization inherent in the gospel of salvation that led to the influx of the oppressed into the Church.”⁵²⁷ The gospel of Christ is a source and hope that motivates people for their struggle for liberation.⁵²⁸ The outcastes saw (amongst others) the Christian faith as the source of a new humanizing influence and the foundation of a human community. They saw salvation in Christ not only in terms of individual salvation, of heaven after death, but also as the spiritual source of a new community on earth in which their human dignity and status were recognized.⁵²⁹ Thomas’ close friend Lesslie Newbigin also acknowledges that the gospel of Christ gives meaning and identity to people transforming the formerly “no people” to become God’s people.”⁵³⁰

4.8 The Means of Humanization

Humanization is the central theme of Thomas’ theology. Thomas not only talks about humanization but also suggests concrete ways and means to pursue humanization in the society. His approach is radical but genuinely human in his effort to humanize the dehumanized community. As mentioned earlier, key in his approach is the notion of incarnation: As Jesus emptied all his glory and sacrificed his life for the redemption of the whole world so also the caste minded and elite group of people should give up their caste mentality to accept every one as equal. Speaking about *kenosis* or emptying oneself for the sake of others Frederiks writes:

⁵²⁷ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 14.

⁵²⁸ M.M. Thomas, “Reflections after Thirty-two Years,” 2.

⁵²⁹ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 14.

⁵³⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda* (London: SPCK, 1985), 142.

Kenosis represents the willingness to be challenged and changed by the other in order to be with the other... Because *kenosis* calls for shedding one's once acquired status, the model creates room for flexibility and adjustment: for changing structures, institution, attitudes, policies, theologies or services which have become burdensome or obsolete.⁵³¹

4.8.1 Secularism as a means for humanization

In the work of Thomas secularism should not be understood in its western interpretation, because in the West secularism has little space for God or religion in the public domain. But in India as well as in Thomas' understanding secularism means the neutrality of the state towards the various religious traditions and an openness and cooperation among various religious communities, with the aim of promoting freedom, equality and justice in the society.⁵³² Secularism in Thomas' interpretation promises democratic toleration of plurality and equality of all religions. Equality of religion is not equality of "gods" or even "ideas" but equality of "persons."⁵³³ Thus secularism promotes what Thomas calls common humanity, not religious and caste communalism. Thomas believes that secularism as an ideology could be used as a means for humanization. He says the discussion on modern secularism "could be described as a reappraisal of *the relation between secularity and transcendence* in the being and becoming of man. In Christian theological categories, it is the relation of salvation to humanization or the relevance of the *ultimate eschatological* dimension to the *relative historical*."⁵³⁴

Thomas began to realize the vitality of secularism in the context of nation-building in the post independent era. According to Wolters it was during the years 1947 – 1954 that "the concept of the secular enriched Thomas' vocabulary, and became very

⁵³¹ M. Frederiks, *We Have Toiled all Night*, 406.

⁵³² M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach*, 40.

⁵³³ M.M. Thomas, *The church Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 26.

⁵³⁴ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 42-43. Italics in the original text.

significant in his future exploration of the relation between salvation and humanization” in the context of religious pluralism.⁵³⁵ He realized the importance of secularism and its values for the task of humanization in a society where people were dehumanized on account of religious beliefs and practices. Thomas believes that secularism with God can be a means of humanization and secularism without God is a source of dehumanization. He rejects any system or ideology that bars God from one’s effort to bring humanization in the society.⁵³⁶

Initially Thomas, being a sincere follower of the church, was relying on the church as the agent of humanization but later he began to criticize the church for its failure to do so. He began with the church because the church has the message of the gospel that is powerful to transform and humanize people and society. But he moved away from this exclusive position to an inclusive one to include other religions, secular ideologies and movements to work for the betterment of humanity and society as he realized all religions and secular movements have the common goal of humanizing the people who are dehumanized in the society. Therefore he advocated an inclusive and integrated approach and appealed to people of all religions and ideologies to give up their exclusivist position so that they can collectively involve and participate in the struggle for humanization.

Thomas seems to be over-conscious on humanization, which eventually led him to accommodate all religions and secular ideologies to work for the humanization of people and thus – according to some – compromised on the uniqueness of Christianity. Thomas considers secular humanism a means for humanization because it promotes and affirms human dignity that was lost as the result of dehumanization.⁵³⁷ He identifies three features of secular humanism that affirm human freedom; desacralization of nature and desacralization of social and political structure and laws.⁵³⁸ Humanization is possible only if secularism and religions engage in dialogue to integrate values that

⁵³⁵ H. Wolters, *Theology of Prophetic Participation*, 75.

⁵³⁶ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 43.

⁵³⁷ M.M. Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*, 154.

⁵³⁸ M.M. Thomas, “The Concept of Secularism”, 36-37.

would enhance humanization. For Thomas, a secular humanism that is open to the judgment and redemption of Christ in its spiritual inwardness can become a means for humanization.⁵³⁹

4.8.2 Inter-religious dialogue as a means for humanization

Like P.D. Devanandan⁵⁴⁰, Stanley J Samartha⁵⁴¹ and others, Thomas realized the importance and role of dialogue in the context of religious pluralism. He considers dialogue an important means for humanization of humanity because religious fundamentalism and communalism ignite communal conflicts and violence which lead to various forms of oppression and dehumanization. His stress on dialogue and community building was the result of his contacts with P.D. Devanandan. Thomas believed in a context like India where religious pluralism is a real challenge, active participation in inter-religious dialogue and inter-faith dialogue could enhance humanization in the society. Thomas was convinced that inter-religious dialogue can lead and result in humanization of structures of society. The religious pluralism and plurality of cultures necessitate inter-religious dialogue and dialogue calls for a partnership with religions and secular ideologies to build a human community.⁵⁴² According to Samartha inter-religious dialogue enhances and builds human relationships for a better human community in a pluralist world.⁵⁴³ It brings people together and closer, but according to Thomas it was more than that, because humanization was part of all religious traditions (as Christ was at work there).

Thomas refers to the position of Wesley Ariarajah who was the Director of the Dialogue Sub-Unit of the WCC for many years, that Christians “should consider religious

⁵³⁹ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 7.

⁵⁴⁰ P.D. Devanandan, *Preparation for dialogue:: A collection of essays on Hinduism and Christianity in new India*, Devanandan memorial volume, (Bangalore: CISRS, 1964)

⁵⁴¹ Stanley J Samartha worked as Director for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies of the WCC from 1971 – 1981. Read S.J Samartha, *One Christ Many Religions*; Read S.J Samartha, *Courage for Dialogue: Ecumenical Issues in Inter-Religious Relationships*, (Geneva: WCC, 1981).

⁵⁴² M.M. Thomas, *The church Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 119.

⁵⁴³ Quoted in S. Wesley Ariarajah, “A World Council of Churches Perspective on the Future of Hindu-Christian Dialogue” in *Hindu-Christian Dialogue - Perspectives and Encounters*, ed. Harold Coward , (Lucknow: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1993), 251-252.

plurality to be within God's purpose." Ariarajah says "The Christian is called not to convert but to witness. The burden of responding to the message is that of the hearers and not of those who proclaim."⁵⁴⁴ Ultimately it is Christ who renews and transforms all life and those who respond to Christ positively can be invited to the fellowship of the church. For Thomas "the dialogue between Christianity and Secularism at the inter-faith level acquires its evangelistic significance only within the context of an active co-operation between them in the humanization of the structures of society and state."⁵⁴⁵ In the context of religious pluralism and its challenges active cooperation is a necessity. So Thomas says one has to "find a new pattern of ideologically pluralistic secular humanism and religiously pluralistic spiritual humanism entering into dialogue with each other on anthropology, the nature and meaning of being and becoming human."⁵⁴⁶ The focus should be centred on humanization of people and not on one's religious and ideological differences. Frederiks writes the need is to move from 'forgetting our differences to understanding our differences' for a peaceful and harmonious life in the society.⁵⁴⁷

Thomas speaks about the need for not only inter-religious dialogue but an inter-faith dialogue which includes secular ideologies as they too have a faith dimension. This is also the perception of the WCC Unit of dialogue with people of different faiths and ideologies. For Thomas, any dialogue, whether it is between religious or secular ideologies, should address the modern problem of human existence and aim for humanization of modern technological culture.⁵⁴⁸ When this dialogue between religions and secular ideologies takes shape, people can build a common civil culture. In this common culture different religious communities can participate fully in building the

⁵⁴⁴ Ariarajah notes that the Israelites were called to witness and proclaim the name of Yahweh to the Gentiles not to incorporate them in to Judaism by leaving their religion and cultures. Quoted in M.M. Thomas, *The Church Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 120.

⁵⁴⁵ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 58.

⁵⁴⁶ M.M. Thomas, *The Church Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 148.

⁵⁴⁷ Martha Th. Frederiks, "Let us Understand our Differences: Current Trends in Christian-Muslim Relations in Sub-Sahara Africa" in *Interfaith Relations After One Hundred Years: Christian Mission among Other Faiths*; ed. Marina Ngursangzeli Behera, (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2011), 50.

⁵⁴⁸ M.M. Thomas, "Inter-Faith Dialogue for Humanization" *Seminar Dialogue*, 394, (June, Delhi: 1992), 19-20.

nation-state and a national community without fearing the loss of their respective self-identity. They can also:

help the people at the bottom, who have traditionally been outside the power structure, as well as Dalits, tribals and women, to become sufficiently aware of the sense of selfhood and social justice to be able to put up an organized fight, non-violent but effective, against their exploitation by the dominant classes, castes and sex.⁵⁴⁹

In the process of engaging in religious dialogue between Christianity and other religions and secular ideologies one should not forget that man's ultimate destiny is reconciliation and social communion.⁵⁵⁰ Building human community in a pluralistic age requires dialogue with the people of other religious and ideological faiths. It has brought to the forefront the relation between ultimate goals (salvation) and values of personal community and justice (humanization) in each faith in open dialogue.⁵⁵¹

Thomas argues the relation between salvation and humanization, is not only vital to Christianity but it is the common concern of all religions and secular movements. His thesis was "it is the theme of humanization which provides the most relevant point of entry for any Christian dialogue with these movements on salvation in Christ at spiritual and theological depth."⁵⁵² Religions should not be a barrier as its focus is humanization of people. As humanization is the focus of all religions he believes that one should engage in dialogue with people of other faiths to have a collective human effort that would enhance the cause of humanization of humanity.

⁵⁴⁹ M.M. Thomas, "Inter-faith Dialogue for Humanization", 20.

⁵⁵⁰ M.M. Thomas, *Religion and Revolt of the Oppressed*, 69.

⁵⁵¹ M.M. Thomas, "Will Koinonia Emerge as a Vital Theological Theme?", 183.

⁵⁵² M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 20.

4.8.3 Prophetic spirituality as a means for humanization

Thomas emphasizes the need for a new spirituality that would enhance humanization of humanity. For him spirituality is a new understanding of the integral relation between self, God and World and the path of self - fulfilment.⁵⁵³ It is the human self-hood, which knows itself “to be *participating* in the necessities of nature and *transcending* nature in a historical destiny and *transforming* nature in relation to that destiny. Man’s relation to nature is characterized by participation, transcendence and transformation.”⁵⁵⁴ Humanization of society will never be actualized if human beings fail to actively participate in the existential struggles and sufferings of people. They are called to be participators and not spectators in the struggles against injustice and inequality practiced in society on account of one’s social and economic status.

Thomas speaks about two kinds of spirituality,⁵⁵⁵ the Prophetic spirituality and Monastic and Pietistic spirituality. He criticizes the monastic spirituality which is being practiced by Roman Catholics and Hindus and pietism as practiced by Protestants because it isolates self and seeks communion with God as “alone with Alone.” Though monastic orders have done considerable good things in mission and development work, Thomas as pointed out earlier in this chapter condemns pure pietistic spirituality. For him the true biblical spirituality is the Prophetic spirituality because it calls for transformation of nature, society and history and in that process one finds self-fulfillment in worldly responsibility. The cross represents God’s identification with the suffering humanity and God’s presence in the struggle of humanity to build a new human society.⁵⁵⁶

The prophetic spirituality and its focus on the purposeful history are needed for humanization of society. His conviction is that “Christianity will serve the struggle for humanization best if we see the prophetic tradition as integral to the gospel of

⁵⁵³ M.M. Thomas, “Identity and Credibility of Action Groups,” 26.

⁵⁵⁴ M.M. Thomas, *Religion and Revolt of the Oppressed*, 54.

⁵⁵⁵ M.M. Thomas, *Seminar on Development*, 24.

⁵⁵⁶ M.M. Thomas, *Seminar on Development*, 24.

Christ.”⁵⁵⁷ According to Thomas, the prophetic tradition sees society and people as it is, as the tradition is not siding with anybody but stands against all social injustice and fight for justice, equality and rights of every human.

4.8.4 Conscientization as a means for humanization

Thomas believes that humanization is possible through conscientization⁵⁵⁸ of people in general and the oppressed in particular. Conscientization, coined as a technical term by Paulo Freire, creates a critical awareness or human consciousness among the people to know who they are and what their rights and privileges are in the society. If people are what liberation theologians have called ‘the subject of history’, they should be conscientized of their rights and privileges.⁵⁵⁹ There can be catalytic agents, supportive forces and voluntary aid agencies but the main factor in any kind of liberating change is the organization and participation and struggle of the poor themselves. The conscientization of Dalits by the Dalits is easier than by others. The presence of catalytic agents is always necessary to promote conscientization of the poor and the oppressed.⁵⁶⁰ The poor and the marginalized people have been dehumanized and exploited throughout the history of humanity; this is an undeniable historical fact. But the main reason for this is that the poor and marginalized are ignorant, illiterate and unaware of their rights and privileges. In many cases even if they know, they do not have the critical consciousness and audacity to question and challenge the power structures because they are a powerless and landless people. Thomas advocates that they should be organized and conscientized so that they realize their self-worth and fight for their rights.

Thomas envisions the realization of this by the cooperation and participation of all religious and secular movements. All should participate in promoting human rights

⁵⁵⁷ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 23.

⁵⁵⁸ Paulo Freire a Brazilian educator popularized this term and believed that conscientization of people brings liberation both to the oppressors and the oppressed. For detail, Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated by Myra Bergman Ramos, (New York: Continuum, 1970/1998).

⁵⁵⁹ M.M. Thomas, “People’s Struggle for Genuine Humanism,” in *Christian Concern for Peoples’ Struggle*, (New Delhi: Delhi Forum for Christian Concern for People’s Struggle, 1978), 34.

⁵⁶⁰ M.M. Thomas, “Theological Aspects of the Relationships Between Social Action Groups and Churches” in *Religion and Society* 31/2 (1984), 22.

and dignity to the poor and the marginalized people of society by developing “the constituency of conscience” within the voluntary sectors to undergird the rights of persons on state and society. This constituency is the foundation of political vocations; the churches may well play a vital role at this level.⁵⁶¹ The call is to initiate dialogue between experts in theological ethics and the political and social sciences with practicing politicians, “to build up a body of Christian thought which combines the secular insights of Christian humanism with those of scientific analysis of Indian political realities.”⁵⁶² S. Sumithra summarizes that Thomas’ solution to arrest and eliminate the evils in Indian society has been: “organization of the oppressed into an effective opposition, the break-down of the oppressive structures, participation of the people at the decision-making centers of power, and the development of relevant ideologies to empower these revolutions.”⁵⁶³

Thomas was also networking with the Social Action Groups⁵⁶⁴ and gave his full support to them as they worked for the upliftment of the poor and the marginalized people in the society. The main objective of the Social Action Groups was to create and build up self-awakening among the people.⁵⁶⁵ The awakened people should search for an ideology that gives them an objective understanding of the situation and the direction in which Indian society is moving. Thomas writes:

Ideologies of humanism are necessary as guides to political and social action, and ideologies should be informed by the insights of the Christian faith about man. But faith is not identical with ideology; ideologies are created as instruments of the Christian concern for man’s humanity in particular situations and ought to be changed or destroyed, when it ceases to serve that purpose.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶¹ M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, 27.

⁵⁶² M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, 27.

⁵⁶³ S. Sumithra, *Revolution as Revelation*, 323.

⁵⁶⁴ These Social Action Groups are both Christians and people of other faiths whose common focus was the humanization of the marginalized people in the society irrespective of one’s religious background.

⁵⁶⁵ M.M. Thomas, “Identity and Credibility of Action Groups,” 24.

⁵⁶⁶ M.M. Thomas, “The Core of the Gospel,” in *Mashi Sevak*, UTC- Gurukul Alumni Journal, (October 1975), 48– 49.

4.8.5 Revolution as a means for humanization

For Thomas, revolution is a means for humanization because God is at work in the revolution. Thomas interpreted the Asian revolutions both as a direct and indirect impact of Jesus Christ on Asia, as the soul of Asia meets Jesus Christ in these revolutions and upheavals.⁵⁶⁷ Thomas identifies three revolutions in Asia namely: scientific, secularization and the revolt of the oppressed people.⁵⁶⁸ The Asian revolutions in Thomas' view are a preparation for the Gospel. Asia can either accept Christ or reject him. This is both the opportunity and the danger.⁵⁶⁹ He believes "God, who is the Lord of this world, is also the Lord of the Asian Revolution... He is Lord of all the revolutions-political, economic and social. Christ is here present, creating, judging and redeeming (Col. 1: 15 – 20)"⁵⁷⁰ It is the responsibility of every human to recognize the work of God and co-work with him to create a richer and fuller humanity which Christ offers to all. Thomas interprets Asian revolutions as revolutions for democracy, freedom, equality and human dignity. He identifies three basic elements in the Indian social revolution: the right to bread, the right to equality and the right to personal and group religious equality.⁵⁷¹ Miyamoto says "the idea of God's this-worldly presence became starting point for Thomas to develop creatively his theology of critical discernment and participation in the revolution."⁵⁷² But Thomas was criticized for identifying revelation with revolution by ecumenical theologians such as Hans Heinrich Wolf and Sunand Sumithra.⁵⁷³

For Thomas, Christ is cosmic and therefore humanization is Christocentric. The kingdom of love and justice which is the goal of all liberation movements should be based on Christ. He argues that without Christ they cannot fully achieve their goal on

⁵⁶⁷ M.M. Thomas, "The Logic of the Christian Mission," 73.

⁵⁶⁸ M.M. Thomas, *Religion and the Revolt of the Oppressed*, 17 – 68; M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, 1 – 28. M.M. Thomas and Paul E. Converse, *Revolution and Redemption*.

⁵⁶⁹ M.M. Thomas, "The Logic of the Christian Mission," 73.

⁵⁷⁰ M.M. Thomas, "The Logic of the Christian Mission," 72.

⁵⁷¹ M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, iii – viii. M.M. Thomas, *Religion and Revolt of the Oppressed*, 37 – 53.

⁵⁷² Ken Christoph Miyamoto, *God's Mission in Asia*, 135.

⁵⁷³ Sumithra, an Indian evangelical theologian attempted to systematize the unsystematic theology of M.M. Thomas in his PhD studies. Sunand, Sumithra, *Revolution As Revelation; A Study Of M.M. Thomas's Theology*, 321- 322. See T. Jacob Thomas, *Ethics of a World Community*, 212.

their own.⁵⁷⁴ He criticizes the way Christianity had at the Strassburg World Conference in 1960 responded to occurrence of social and technological revolutions. The Christian response was either total rejection of revolutions because they considered it to be Satanic or blindly accepting all revolutions in itself a scheme of redemption. He stated that both these approaches are wrong; according to Thomas in the revolutions Christ is at work, awakening desires for more human values. He identified the values in the revolutions as: freedom, selfhood, humanness of the community and a sense of personal destiny, being involved in mankind's historical destiny. He saw the revolutions as the partial fulfilment of the kingdom God; the Church should remain as a prophetic voice.⁵⁷⁵

Thomas wrote: "Jesus Christ is also at work in the revolutions as victor over (the) evil powers through His Cross and Resurrection. And His Kingdom and His New Humanity are offered within the revolution as the fulfilment of its promises."⁵⁷⁶ Thomas recognized all Asian revolutions as the movements of humanization.⁵⁷⁷ Thomas believed that God was at work in the revolutions, awakening people in the society but at the same time he did not accept all revolutions as good. Therefore he called for what he named the 'humanization of revolutions.'⁵⁷⁸ He appreciated the benefits of technological revolution developments but at the same time he pointed to the destructive and dehumanizing nature of technology.

4.9 The Process of Humanization

In Thomas' view humanization cannot take place overnight because of the enormity and complexity of human exploitation which is rampant everywhere down through the centuries of human history. It is a story of humanity killing its own humanity. Humanization, according to Thomas, was a continuous process; thus it needed space

⁵⁷⁴ Quoted in T.M. Philip, *The Encounter Between Theology and Ideology*, 52.

⁵⁷⁵ Cited in Sunand Sumithra, *Revolution as Revelation*, 80.

⁵⁷⁶ Quoted in Sumithra, *Revolution as Revelation*, 80.

⁵⁷⁷ T. Jacob Thomas, (ed), *M.M. Thomas Reader*, 96.

⁵⁷⁸ M.M. Thomas, *The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 100.

and time to accommodate people and structures to play an active part in the process of humanization of humanity. It is a long process, but the process should start moving from one stage to another towards the humanization of humanity.⁵⁷⁹ Thomas in his thinking moved from personal sin to corporate sin and from personal and individual salvation to corporate and collective salvation. The justice and equality of a person in the society is measured on the basis of human self-respect that is practiced in the society.

4.9.1 Individual salvation to collective salvation

Salvation according to Thomas should be given a holistic perspective rather than an individualistic approach. Evangelical Christianity during Thomas' time mostly emphasized salvation of the individual and their spirituality.⁵⁸⁰ Thomas criticized this narrow approach. In the 1970s he wrote that evangelical spirituality or "evangelicalism becomes religious individualism so totally concerned with an inner spirituality that the objective structures and relations of human social existence tend to get summarily dismissed as virtually insignificant."⁵⁸¹ To Thomas, as has been stated earlier, salvation was collective and not limited to salvation of people but it included humanization of structures and systems.

According to Thomas it was useless to debate on whether individual salvation or social salvation had priority. He says: "My emphasis has been on the salvation of man; and everything of man, his individuality and his collectivity included, has roots in different levels of self-awareness, sense of spiritual freedom and responsibility..."⁵⁸² Though salvation impacts individuals, individual regeneration in Thomas' perception should not be seen as going to heaven, but in relation to the total structure and collective existence of man. Christ came to transform and humanize the *world*. For Thomas "this world is the theatre of God's glory" and centre of God's work and the

⁵⁷⁹ Jeyaraj Rajaiah, "Mediating Transformation for Humanization," 85.

⁵⁸⁰ Samuel Moffett, "Evangelism: The Leading Partner," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, (eds). R.D. Winter & S.C. Hawthorne, (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1992), 207 – 209.

⁵⁸¹ M.M. Thomas, *Towards an Evangelical Social Gospel*, 28.

⁵⁸² M.M. Thomas, "Happy the People whose God is the Lord: The Meaning of Salvation Today," in *NCCR*, 93/3 (1973), 120 – 121.

church is God's instrument in the world, existing to work with God towards salvation and humanization of people, systems and structures of collective existence.⁵⁸³ Here he distinguishes himself from the evangelical stances in his time, as evangelicals feel that God is primarily concerned with the church and his concern for the world only through the church.

Thomas believed that the Gospel concerns personal and corporate salvation. Individual salvation in his view however, is not sufficient to change the corporate life of society, as the corporate life has within it oppressive structures and dehumanizing institutions like caste system, bonded labor and industrial exploitation. He says: "no individual salvation can change it. It needs corporate salvation."⁵⁸⁴ But can there be collective or corporate salvation without the salvation of the individuals in the society? The salvation of an individual may not change the oppressive structure of the society, but society needs the salvation of the individual as society consists of individuals. The salvation of individuals leads to the transformation of society because transformation starts with the individuals. A social system cannot change by itself unless individuals and leaders who are in the society decide to change.⁵⁸⁵

The salvation of individuals is needed but at the same time, Thomas argued, the focus should be on collective salvation because sin has its corporate expression in the dehumanizing spiritual forces of corporate life; but the victory of Jesus Christ over Satan and salvation in Christ should give human beings the power for humanization of the structures of collective existence.⁵⁸⁶ Thomas spoke out against attempts and efforts that only focused on humanization of individual person here and now, and advocated that humanization of collective structures and system was an integral part of humanization. The penultimate and the ultimate concerns of human beings and social structures

⁵⁸³ M.M. Thomas, "People's Struggle for Genuine Humanism", 25.

⁵⁸⁴ M.M. Thomas, *Seminar on Development*, 25.

⁵⁸⁵ Jeyaraj Rajaiah, "Mediating Transformation for Humanization," 92- 93.

⁵⁸⁶ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 6.

should be given due importance. He questioned the famous New Testament theologian Bultmann's exclusive emphasis on the individual and the now.⁵⁸⁷ He wrote:

The question is whether the eschatological reality is concerned only with the struggle for authentic humanization of *individual persons in their isolation* from the structures of nature, society and cosmos which are supposed to be spiritually irrelevant to its concerns, or with the struggles for the authentic humanization of these structures also as an essential aspect of meaningful personal existence in community.⁵⁸⁸

He also criticized the positions of conservative evangelicals who define salvation purely in individualistic terms denying the social concern and isolating soteriology from anthropology and compartmentalizing salvation history and secular history.⁵⁸⁹ He not only advocated a shift from individual salvation to collective salvation but also to move the focus from the eschatological hope to existential struggles of people here and now before death rather than beyond death.

4.9.2 Eschatological salvation to existential salvation

Thomas did not deny the eschatological salvation of humanity but because it was given unduly importance in the history of Christianity he advocated the existential salvation of humanity to be the starting point. He said there was no reason why the historical destiny of the human being could not be the starting point for the understanding of man's ultimate destiny in the purpose of God.⁵⁹⁰ According to Thomas, it is the existential salvation that prepares one for eschatological salvation. There cannot be an eschatological and future salvation without experiencing a salvation in the present and in one's own historical existence. He wrote: "Salvation remains eschatological, but the

⁵⁸⁷ Thomas in his discussion of salvation and humanization, he engages in discussions with major theologians of his time Bultmann, Brunner, Pannenberg, Song etc.

⁵⁸⁸ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 54.

⁵⁸⁹ M.M. Thomas, *Risking Christ for Christ's Sake*, 112.

⁵⁹⁰ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 9.

historical responsibility within the eschatological framework cannot but include the task of humanization of the world in secular history.”⁵⁹¹

Thomas argued that the Bible speaks more about life on earth rather than life in heaven, Christ coming to the world rather than human beings go to Him.⁵⁹² According to Ken Christoph Miyamoto the period from 1955 to 1975 reflects the most matured phase in the theology of Thomas where he creatively developed his theology, especially ‘God’s this worldly presence.’⁵⁹³ In Thomas’ view, the hope for the future starts with the present life. The structures, institutions and systems should not be masters to rule humanity but serve humanity in the process of establishing social justice.⁵⁹⁴

Thomas’ theology is basically an attempt to relate the word of God to the world of people and world of people to the word of God in a way that would enhance humanization of people. T.M. Philip makes this point clear when he says “the process of interaction between the content of the Gospel and the context of the socio-political changes in India where political systems of thought and renascent Hinduism are working as powerful ideologies is the theology of Thomas.”⁵⁹⁵ Thomas refuted criticisms against his choice to start with anthropology. He said “A Christ-centered Humanism is integral to the Gospel and has its own evangelistic dimension. If theology is Christologically oriented it need not be opposed to anthropology.”⁵⁹⁶ Thomas gave a rationale for his anthropological starting point in the introduction of his book, *Man and Universe of Faiths*. He wrote:

My choice of the title underlines my conviction that the common humanity and the self-transcendence within it more especially the common response to the

⁵⁹¹ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 8.

⁵⁹² M.M. Thomas, *Towards an Evangelical Social Gospel*, 34.

⁵⁹³ Ken Christoph Miyamoto, *God’s Mission in Asia*, 89.

⁵⁹⁴ M.M. Thomas, *Towards an Evangelical Social Gospel*, 37.

⁵⁹⁵ T.M. Philip, *The Encounter Between Theology and Ideology*, 30.

⁵⁹⁶ Quoted in T.M. Philip, *The Encounter Between Theology and Ideology*, 32.

problems of humanization of existence in the modern world...is the most fruitful point of entry for a meeting of faiths at spiritual depths in our time.⁵⁹⁷

Thomas followed systematic theologian Paul Tillich's "method of correlation" which says that "the Christian message provides the answers to the questions implied in human existence."⁵⁹⁸ The life of Thomas can be seen as a "quest of faith." He stood at the intersection between the church and the world and did his theologizing."⁵⁹⁹

4.9.3 Social service to social justice

According to Thomas humanization is not just confined to social work doing relief and rehabilitation but to work for social justice. The process of humanization required a move from social service to social justice as people suffer as the result of social injustice and exploitation. Thomas acknowledged the importance of social service in the task of humanization but he emphasized that the church needed to move from social service to social justice to bring humanization to the dehumanized people.⁶⁰⁰ Thomas used the term 'social *diakonia*', a term he borrowed from Japanese theologian Masao Takenaka who distinguished 'charitable *diakonia*' as social service and 'social *diakonia*' as social justice at the 1961 New Delhi Assembly of the WCC, to emphasize the role of the church in the direction of social justice.⁶⁰¹ Thomas also used the term 'diaconal witness in culture' which was proposed by the Orthodox theologian Nikos Nissiotis to bring a renewal in the society.⁶⁰² Thomas used these expressions to stress that the church needed to be restructured to work towards the social justice of the people.⁶⁰³

⁵⁹⁷ M.M. Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*, vi

⁵⁹⁸ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology I* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 64.

⁵⁹⁹ T.M. Philip, *Theology and Ideology*, 36.

⁶⁰⁰ Thomas started homes for the street boys and raised funds for those families whose men were imprisoned during the political emergency period. He also appreciated the charitable *diakonia* of Mother Teresa but in his later period he moves from charitable *diakonia* to social *diakonia*.

⁶⁰¹ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach to Indian Ecclesiology*, 9.

⁶⁰² Nikos A Nissiotis, "The Church as a Sacramental Vision and the Challenge of Christian Witness," in *Church, Kingdom, World: The Church as Mystery and Prophetic Sign*, ed. Limouris Gennadios, (Geneva: WCC, 1986), 116, 121. M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach to Indian Ecclesiology*, 10.,

⁶⁰³ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach to Indian Ecclesiology*, 10.

According to Thomas the church is good in the ministry of preaching, teaching, serving and fellowship but it has neglected the ministry of social justice.⁶⁰⁴ For Thomas, coming from an evangelical background, this insight dawned on him gradually; hence there was a shift from social service to social justice in his later writings. Frederiks says that there was a paradigm shift in relation to the place of *diakonia* in the ministry of the church. Till middle of the twentieth century the model of *diakonia* was used as preparation for the gospel and to spread Christianity. But from the middle of the twentieth century *diakonia* was not mainly focussed on the spread of Christianity but service to the society.⁶⁰⁵ But the more recent interpretation of *diakonia* is to speak against all forms of injustices and oppression that deprive the basic human rights and privileges of the marginalized people. Frederiks says “From the 1980s onwards, the churches have also seen the strife for justice and human rights as part of their service to society.”⁶⁰⁶ Thomas became more and more conscious of this quest for social justice as the result of his association with the marginalized groups and his involvement in politics especially working in Nagaland as a governor. Thomas advocated social justice, because he had seen the struggles of the oppressed and suppressed groups of the society whose human identity and dignity denied in the society.

According to Thomas the churches in India needed to shift from charitable *diakonia* to social *diakonia*; however, what the Indian churches have done so far in Indian society, Thomas wrote, is that they have served the poor and the needy but have not been involved in social justice to mobilize the mass to question and to confront social injustice and inequality. And he added that even in the social service the churches and Christian institutions have catered mainly for the need of the elite and dominant group.⁶⁰⁷ Evangelistic witness cannot be isolated from the total life and ministry of the church. The proclamation of the *kerygma* is integrally related to the *didache*, its teaching, *diakonia* its service to society and to the *koinonia*, its fellowship with the

⁶⁰⁴ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach to Indian Ecclesiology*, 10.

⁶⁰⁵ M. Frederiks, *We Have Toiled all Night*, 398-399.

⁶⁰⁶ M. Frederiks, *We Have Toiled all Night*, 399.

⁶⁰⁷ M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, 8.

people. Thomas quotes from the World Council of Churches Assembly, “The greatest contribution that the church can make to the renewal of society is for it to be renewed in its own life in faith and obedience to its Lord. Such inner renewal includes a clearer grasp of the meaning of the gospel for the whole life of man.”⁶⁰⁸

Thomas when speaking about *diakonia*, more concretely highlighted two aspects of *diakonia*: the affirmation of solidarity with the dehumanized Dalits, tribals, and women in their sufferings and struggle for social and eco-justice and the participation in the exploration of an alternative pattern of development that would humanize the dehumanized people of the society.⁶⁰⁹ While speaking about the Good Samaritan parable Thomas stated that in this example “The material was the means for the spiritual.”⁶¹⁰ He has argued that “Spirituality unrelated to the material is sentimentality and hypocrisy.”⁶¹¹ The summary of the Social Creed that he wrote for the Mar Thoma Church affirmed four things clearly: ‘the divine purpose of human brotherhood; the worth of human personality; the equality of men in the sight of God and the sacramental value of the gifts of God’.⁶¹²

This shows that right from his early period he was focused on human worth and equality of all people. Robin Boyd rightly describes Thomas’ theology as a theology of *Karma Marga* – way of action. Thomas self-consciously followed the path of *karma marga*. He believed that *karma marga* is a way for searching and finding God in this world.⁶¹³ The influence of practical philosophy of Marx helped Thomas to become a theological activist of humanization. He challenges the churches and Christian organizations to move from relief work to economic and social development projects and the need to move further to relate development to the political dimension of people’s power wherever possible.⁶¹⁴

⁶⁰⁸ Quoted M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, 14.

⁶⁰⁹ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach*, 40.

⁶¹⁰ M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 14.

⁶¹¹ M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 14.

⁶¹² M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 15.

⁶¹³ Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 313-314.

⁶¹⁴ M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, 27 – 28.

4.9.4 Sacralization to secularization

In the process of humanization that Thomas describes, the move from sacralization to secularization is an important one. It means a move from sacred to secular, spirituality to secularity, religious community to a secular community. Thomas' concern for secularization was necessitated by the context of nation building after the independence of India. His main concern was to build national unity and welfare through a secular state. He believed that the process of humanization required a move from sacralization to secularization so that the gap between the two was bridged and a balance was maintained for the purpose of humanizing the society. He was wary of communal politics and groups; therefore he rejected the idea of a separate Christian political party, believing that the communal politics would jeopardize the safety and security of the people. He advocated secularization for the purpose of national integration and cooperation between members of different religions.⁶¹⁵ For him social matters and religious concerns were not two different worlds. His quest was for integration of sacred and secular, body and soul, temporal and eternal for a richer and a fuller life.

Thomas believed that humanization "lies at the heart of secularization," something that Samuel Rayan phrased as "He encountered the sacred at the centre of the secular, and the secular in the heart of the sacred."⁶¹⁶ His friends used to tease MM: "So you wanted to preach the Gospel to the Marxists and preach Marxism to Bishops?"⁶¹⁷ Thus his concern was to bring integration between the two to avoid compartmentalization of human life into sacred and secular. Thomas quotes Radhakrishnan "Life is one and in it there is no distinction of sacred and the secular."⁶¹⁸ And Gustavo Gutierrez observed, that secularization is a process which not only coincided perfectly with a Christian vision of man, of history, and of the cosmos; it also

⁶¹⁵ Sunand Sumithra, *Revolution as Revelation*, 104.

⁶¹⁶ Samuel Rayan, "M.M. Thomas – Response-ability," in *Christian Witness in Society* 2.

⁶¹⁷ Samuel Rayan, "M.M. Thomas – Response-ability," 2.

⁶¹⁸ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 23.

favoured a more complete fulfilment of Christian life insofar as it offered man the possibility of being more fully human.⁶¹⁹

4.9.5 Church-centred religious fellowship to a Christ-centred secular fellowship

The consequence of Thomas' emphasis on secularization and pluralism was his plea for a Christ-centered secular fellowship. The religious pluralistic context of India and the communal forces that threatened the existence of humanity was a major concern of Thomas for humanization. Therefore he appealed to the churches in India to move from a Christ-centred religious fellowship to a Christ-centred secular fellowship that would enhance and enrich the process of humanization of people.⁶²⁰ Thomas made a difference between 'Christ centred religious fellowship' and 'Christ centred secular fellowship.' He interpreted a 'Christ centred religious fellowship' as a fellowship of believers who took membership in the church through baptism and a 'Christ centred secular fellowship' as fellowship of people who accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior but not taken membership in the church through baptism. They need not be totally cut off from their community and culture but it is Christ centred.⁶²¹

Thomas advocated this shift because the Church-centred religious fellowship is an exclusive closed Christian community which isolated itself and was being isolated by the rest of the people of society. For Thomas Christ-centredness was an inclusive concept; it meant for example interpreting Hindu religious tradition in the light of Christ by the fellowship.⁶²² The Christ-centred secular fellowship is an ideal, inclusive, open human community. According to Thomas the present church was not an ideal church because of its religiosity, rigidity and exclusivity. Everything is centered on the church, rather than Christ who is the head of the church. Because the term church carried a negative religious connotation, Thomas used the term Fellowship-*Koinonia*. He

⁶¹⁹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation History, Politics and Salvation*, edited and trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1973), 67.

⁶²⁰ Thomas also uses the term 'Christ centered religious fellowship' but what he means is the church. Therefore it should be called as Church centred religious fellowship. So the move is from Church centered to Christ centered secular fellowship.

⁶²¹ M.M. Thomas, *Some Theological Dialogues*, 110 - 125

⁶²² M.M. Thomas, *Church and Human Community*, 51.

advocated for the Fellowship to be secular, so that it is open to all people, without any religious barriers and boundaries. This secular fellowship should be Christ centered because Christ is cosmic and hope of the new humanity.

Thomas interpreted other religious traditions from a Christ-Centered perspective. His critical stance towards the church had many reasons: The westernized nature of the Indian church with its form, theology, liturgy and worship; the presence and practice of caste within the church; the exclusiveness of the church in relation to people of other faith and secular movements and ideologies; the minority consciousness and its isolation and failure to participate in the human struggle for freedom, equality and justice in the society and the church's exclusion of others on account of their caste, creed and color.⁶²³ Thomas believed in the cosmic Christ whom he considers to be present in religious and secular traditions, whose common goal is humanization.⁶²⁴ Therefore Thomas strived for Christ-centred secular fellowship which is open to all and not fenced with religious boundaries. Wolters writes "Thomas has parted with his exclusive concept of the church."⁶²⁵ Therefore he advocated inter-religious dialogue; a Christ centred secular fellowship and secular ideologies and movements so that all could work towards the task of humanization.

Thomas' move from a Church centered religious fellowship to a Christ centered secular fellowship can also be understood theologically; there was a change in his "doctrine of the church."⁶²⁶ In the early years of his life Thomas had an evangelical understanding of the church. He believed church to be the centre of God's activity –and salvation as mediated only through the church. But Thomas moved away from this church centric position and accepted the world as the primary centre of God's redemptive work and the church is the witness of God in the world. The Christian *Koinonia* is the foretaste and sign in the world to show what God has been and is continuously doing to make human life human. He said: "not that God is only working in

⁶²³ M.M. Thomas, Paul E. Converse, *Revolution and Redemption*, 10; M.M. Thomas, *New Creation in Christ*, 7. M.M. Thomas, *Some Theological Dialogues*, 110 - 125

⁶²⁴ M.M Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 7.

⁶²⁵ H. Wolters, *Theology of Prophetic Participation*, 77.

⁶²⁶ M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 16.

the Church, though it is given to the Church to discern the working of God, the whole politics of God outside itself also. It is here in the Christ-centered secular fellowship that the *Koinonia* of the church becomes central, as a witness to this new humanity.”⁶²⁷

Thomas concurred with Paul Lehman that “the Church and the world have the same centre: Jesus Christ.”⁶²⁸ Thomas also agreed with and quoted Visser’t Hooft that “The Church is the inner circle, the world the outer circle, both together are the realm over which Christ is King.”⁶²⁹ Thomas also quotes Paul Loeffler with affirmation: “Wherever people respond to God’s acting in history, fight injustice, wherever these things happen, there the *Basileia*⁶³⁰ is taking shape in this world, be the name of Christ consciously called over it or not.”⁶³¹ Devasahayam writes for Thomas “it may be possible to be ‘outside the church’ but no one in creation can be ‘outside Christ’... we can only speak of either a closer or wider relationship to Christ and not inside or outside of Christ.”⁶³²

Thomas argued that according to the New Testament scholars *koinonia* is not the fellowship within the church but in the society which is the manifestation of God’s work in human history.⁶³³ He wrote “The religious fellowship within the church and the human fellowship in secular society are both within the reality of Christ and the history of salvation in the world.”⁶³⁴ Therefore, the church should work for the salvation and renewal of humanity here and now through fellowship. This should be emphasized because the fellowship in Christ includes all people of the Indian society, irrespective of their socio-religious background; especially it includes the outcastes and the poor

⁶²⁷ M.M. Thomas, “Salvation and Development,” *The Journal of the General Synod Board for Social Responsibility Crucible*, July- September, 1974, 135. M.M. Thomas, *Some Theological Dialogues*, 110 – 112.

⁶²⁸ Paul Lehman, *Ethics in a Christian Context*, (SCM Press, 1963), 116; See M.M. Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*, 135.

⁶²⁹ M.M. Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*, 135. See V. Devasahayam, “Search for the Last, The Least and the Lost, 129.

⁶³⁰ It means kingdom.

⁶³¹ M.M. Thomas, *Some Theological Dialogues*, 143.

⁶³² V. Devasahayam, “Search for the Last, The Least And the Lost, 129.

⁶³³ For a detail argument between Thomas and Newbigin on the meaning of *Koinonia* and secular fellowship see M.M. Thomas, *Some Theological Dialogue*, 110 – 144. or M.M. Thomas, “Baptism, The Church, And Koinonia: Three Letters and a Comment”, in *Religion and Society*, 19/1(1972), 69 – 90.

⁶³⁴ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 19.

because it was the bearer of human dignity for them, as a result many of them became Christians.⁶³⁵ The social and evangelistic mission of the gospel has changed the life of the people, not only the outcastes but also the upper castes. He writes:

Jesus Christ became the good news of a new humanity, a new human dignity, the source of a new society, so that many were led to acknowledge Christ and join the Church while many others sought reformation of Hindu religion and society from within to make...casteless society as part of Hindu dharma.⁶³⁶

All of this is the working of Christ. Thomas appreciates and follows the interpretation on *koinonia* by Charles Raven a New Testament scholar. According to Raven *koinonia* means community, communion and communism.⁶³⁷ Thomas complained that Christians always focus on the community and communion but have never taken seriously the communism which is significant for politics and justice.⁶³⁸ He considered it to be the important ecumenical task of his generation to discern the faith responses to Christ outside the church and the need of Christians to be in dialogical partnership with others and call for a redefinition of different forms of *koinonia* in Christ and the Christian mission of humanization and salvation.⁶³⁹

Thomas envisages three levels of *koinonia* in Christ: The *koinonia* of the Eucharistic community of the church where diverse groups of people acknowledge the *person* of Jesus as the Messiah. The second is a larger *koinonia* of dialogue among people of other faiths who acknowledge the *pattern* of suffering servanthood of Jesus exemplified on the cross. The third is still a larger group of people who are involved in political struggle for a new society and world community based on religious or secular

⁶³⁵ M.M. Thomas, *Towards an Evangelical Social Gospel*, 38.

⁶³⁶ M.M. Thomas, *Church and Human Community*, 43.

⁶³⁷ Charles Raven, *Christ and Modern Opportunity*, (London: SCM Press, 1956), 73.

⁶³⁸ M.M. Thomas, "Salvation and Development," *The Journal of the General Synod Board for Social Responsibility Crucible*, July- September, 1974, 135-136.

⁶³⁹ M.M. Thomas, *Risking Christ for Christ's Sake*, 114.

anthropologies *informed* by the agape of the cross.⁶⁴⁰ Thus for Thomas, Christ is the source and hope for a new human community; this is not based on any religious identity or ideologies but Christ-centred. He felt towards the later part of his life that the mission of the church inside is more important than the mission outside, as it cannot make any impact outside the church unless there is a proper restructuring within the church so that the church can play a vital and exemplary role in bringing humanization in the society. Thomas concluded “The diaconic ministry and the servant character of the church’s being within and among diverse communities must shape the preaching, teaching, sacramental communion and other dimensions of the life and structure of the Indian Church.”⁶⁴¹

4.10 The Goal of Humanization

Thomas’ theology of salvation and humanization focuses on people as the subject of history. The socio-political and religious structures and systems that obstruct a fuller and a richer humanity should be humanized so that people are treated and respected as humans, persons and people. The goal of humanization is to give people their dignity, lost personhood and peoplehood so that they become subject of history and makers of history with all rights and equality.

4.10.1 Humanization as personhood and peoplehood

Thomas speaks about two types of human rights.⁶⁴² One consists of the rights of peoples or ‘peoplehood’ which for the Indian context refer to the rights of Dalits, tribals, women etc. The other refers to the fundamental rights of each individual person or ‘personhood’ irrespective of language, gender, creed, caste and color. Therefore humanization has to do with the rights of personhood as well as peoplehood in the society. Thomas identified caste as the main demon, because it denies and deprives

⁶⁴⁰ M.M. Thomas, *Risking Christ for Christ’s Sake*, 119.

⁶⁴¹ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach to Indian Ecclesiology*, 94.

⁶⁴² M.M. Thomas, *The Church Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 78.

Dalits of both 'personhood and peoplehood' though created in the image of God.⁶⁴³ In order to combat this 'demon' the church needs to fight for social justice in the society; this could be done through political involvement which would lead marginalized to their liberation and peoplehood. Thomas distinguished between 'masses' and 'people'. The masses can be pushed out but people have their selfhood. This distinction is due to his association and closeness with the marginalized people, especially after his retirement from WCC and CISRS. Therefore the masses should be peopled. Peopling the poor or peopling the masses is the basic goal of any society which works for social justice and human development.⁶⁴⁴ The peoplehood and personhood of the marginalized people can be restored only when they become part of decision-making group.

The purpose of God for humanity according to Thomas, is to give them freedom and responsibility so that they can work with God and work for God to fulfil God's plan for the entire humanity and human existence. God's dealing with humanity starts with his covenant relationship with them. The three covenants of God with all humanity (Gen.1-12) namely with Adam, Noah and Abraham, symbolize God's creating, preserving and redeeming activity in the world. These covenants also symbolize three aspects of the universal vocation of humanity, to create and share responsibility with God, to preserve the fallen world through the promotion of legal justice based on reverence for all life and sanctity of human life and to share the suffering of God's Messiah mediating the grace of God that redeems the creation. Thomas interprets them as a call to participate in establishing justice and equality in human society.⁶⁴⁵

Thus the very first three covenants of God with humanity call for an active participation in these vocations to establish a responsible and just society that affirms and validates personhood and peoplehood. These covenants and vocations were according to Thomas fulfilled in the Divine Humanity of Jesus Christ. Through Him, according to Thomas, all creation comes into being and develops, and in Him all creation

⁶⁴³ M.M. Thomas, *Towards an Evangelical Social Gospel*, 37.

⁶⁴⁴ M.M. Thomas, "Theological Aspects of the Relationships Between Social Action Groups and Churches" 18.

⁶⁴⁵ M.M. Thomas, *The Church Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 31.

remains united in spite of human alienation and disintegration and by His cross He redeems, renews and perfects all humanity into a new community of persons in the context of the community of life and all creation.⁶⁴⁶

4.10.2 Humanization as hominization

Thomas used the term 'hominization' that was used by Catholic theologians like Karl Rahner⁶⁴⁷ and others to describe the process of making one's own history. Thomas used this term as it is closely connected to his theology of humanization. The social revolt of the oppressed people was an attempt to make their own history. Thomas made clear that "the people are the subjects and not objects, subjects of their own history, subjects of their own dignity."⁶⁴⁸ According to Thomas the main features of hominization are: the tremendous human creativity such as technology, social planning and liberation movements through which human beings can create their own history; the awakening of people for their selfhood and identity; the idea of history as human liberation and the sense of unity of humanity.⁶⁴⁹

Thomas accepts that "These historical processes of development and creativity, described as hominization, have brought about a great deal of tragedy. People are conscious of the fact that the creativity of man has produced de-humanizing forces."⁶⁵⁰ Hominization is not an automatic perfect human community or higher human quality of life; rather it increases the potentiality of both humanization and dehumanization. Thomas believes that God created man and woman in His own image and with human freedom and creativity. This human creativity has power to destroy and to create things for the welfare of the people. Human beings do not create out of nothing but create out of the raw materials that God has provided. This human creativity should be used positively to bring humanization and hominization in the history of humanity.⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁶ M.M. Thomas, *The Church Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 31.

⁶⁴⁷ Karl Rahner, S.J., *Hominization* (West Germany: Herder K.G. 1965).

⁶⁴⁸ M.M. Thomas, "People's Struggle for Genuine Humanism," 26.

⁶⁴⁹ M.M. Thomas, "Salvation and Development," 133.

⁶⁵⁰ M.M. Thomas, "Salvation and Development," 134.

⁶⁵¹ M.M. Thomas, "How Human is *Humanae Vitae*?" *Religion and Society* 16 (March 1969), 71.

4.10.3 Humanization as new humanity in Christ

Thomas interprets humanization as 'New Humanity' in Christ. Jesus Christ is the New Humanity, the ideal humanity who came to this world to make the dehumanized community a new humanity in God through Christ. God is at work in the world in Christ through the church with the goal of making human community as a new humanity. Miyamoto notes "Devanandan's concept of new creation and new humanity greatly contributed to the refinement of his [Thomas] theological anthropology."⁶⁵² New humanity according to Thomas was "the restoration of the human person in Christ as God's free creative agent in the divine act of new creation to restore the wholeness of the entire universe throughout history."⁶⁵³

The goal of human community is to practice justice for the poor and submerged and suppressed groups like Dalits, tribals and women so that they can have an assured participation in the structures of power and in the decision making process.⁶⁵⁴ Thomas writes the mission of the Church is "to participate in the movements of human liberation in our time in such a way as to witness to Jesus Christ as the Source, the Judge and the Redeemer of the human spirituality and its orientation as it is at work in these movements, and therefore as the Saviour of Man Today."⁶⁵⁵ The world is the centre of God's work therefore the church should actively involve in the service and struggles of the world.⁶⁵⁶

According to Thomas traditions and technologies have to be humanized so that they support eco-justice and social justice which would lead to a new humanity in Christ.⁶⁵⁷ Thomas connects social justice of the marginalized people with eco-justice because people are alienated from their basic source of life. The goal should be the transformation of structures which helps and not hinders the dignity of human persons

⁶⁵² Ken Christoph Miyamoto, *God's Mission in Asia*, 113.

⁶⁵³ Ken Christoph Miyamoto, *God's Mission in Asia*, 119.

⁶⁵⁴ M.M. Thomas, "Happy the People whose God is the Lord", 115.

⁶⁵⁵ M.M. Thomas, "Happy the People whose God is the Lord" 118.

⁶⁵⁶ M.M. Thomas, "Uppsala 1968 and the Contemporary Theological Situation", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 23/1 (1970), 44.

⁶⁵⁷ M.M. Thomas, *The Church Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 84.

and the community of persons in justice and love.⁶⁵⁸ Thomas speaks about three aspects of the newness of humanity in Christ.⁶⁵⁹ Firstly, the humanity in Christ brings freedom from the elemental spirits of the universe, secondly it transforms oppressive social structures that separate and alienate the humans from each other and finally the new humanity in Jesus Christ offers a new personhood to the humans. Thomas writes “The new humanity revealed in Jesus Christ is the instrument of constant revolution in social history, exerting pressure aimed at creating universal brotherhood/sisterhood.”⁶⁶⁰

Thus the new humanity in Christ is a humanized community which is free from all forms of oppression and subjugation and enjoys and experiences equality of rights and privileges. If this has to be a possibility and achievability the task and focus of humanity should be building one human community.⁶⁶¹ The church is the laboratory of community which includes the whole human community. For Thomas:

Our immediate task is the creation of a secular *koinonia* in Christ, which would mean also the development of an ideology of humanism in which Christians and non-Christians can participate. I think there is need for the development of such an ideology, which is open to Christ, which is based on the idea of the new humanity in Christ, a secular ideology based on the Christian hope. This also is the task of the Church.⁶⁶²

The Uppsala 1968 Assembly recognized the quest of people all over the world for fuller humanity and saw God’s answer to it in his gift of new humanity in Jesus Christ. The conservative evangelicals and evangelicals among the ecumenical leaders were unhappy about this shift in the starting point from theology to anthropology, from salvation to humanization. But in the context of human penultimate quest and secular anthropology

⁶⁵⁸ M.M. Thomas, *The Church Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 73.

⁶⁵⁹ M.M. Thomas, *The First- Born of All Creation*, 20 – 26.

⁶⁶⁰ M.M. Thomas, *The First- Born of All Creation*, 26.

⁶⁶¹ M.M. Thomas, *Church and Human Community*, 10.

⁶⁶² M.M. Thomas, “Salvation and Development,” 137.

the church had to define its Christology from below and to interpret its significance for unity among all people.⁶⁶³

4.11 Mission as Humanization

Like Aloysius Pieris, Thomas believed that the church should exercise “a divine option for the poor”, striving for the humanization of people especially the poor and the marginalized like Dalits, tribals and women.⁶⁶⁴ The church should involve in the prophetic mission of humanization in the context of religious pluralism, technological development and modernization. The focus should be justice to the whole person, social justice to the poor and the marginalized and justice to the organic natural basis of production and reproduction of life on earth.⁶⁶⁵ Humanization restores human dignity and freedom.

Christian responsibility to ensure human dignity is one of the major subjects of discussion in Indian Christian social thought during Thomas’ time. Godwin writes “The human is the crown and criterion of creation.... It is argued that within a widely dehumanized situation like that of India, the only course of action left is humanization, which can restore human dignity and freedom.”⁶⁶⁶ It is this concern for human dignity which has motivated Indian Christian social thinkers to attempt dialogues with people of other faiths and ideologies. The concern of different faiths, ideologies and the state are also with regard to the question of human dignity and trying to eradicate the sub-human conditions created by the traditional, feudal and colonial past and continued by present unjust structures.⁶⁶⁷ Thomas writes ‘the search for self-identity by oppressed groups is an essential part of the struggle for human dignity.’⁶⁶⁸ He believes that Christ is the New Humanity who restores human lost identity and dignity.

⁶⁶³ M.M. Thomas, “Will Koinonia Emerge as a Vital Theological Theme?” 180.

⁶⁶⁴ Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1988), 3.

⁶⁶⁵ M.M. Thomas, *The Church Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 125.

⁶⁶⁶ Godwin Shiri, *Christian Social Thought in India*, 149 -150.

⁶⁶⁷ Godwin Shiri, *Christian Social Thought in India 1962 – 1977*, 149 -150.

⁶⁶⁸ M.M. Thomas, *The Secular Ideologies of India and the Secular Meaning of the Gospel*, 156.

It is significant that Vatican II and the Uppsala Assembly of the World Council of Churches define the church as the sacramental sign of the unity of all humanity, and also speaks of the presence of the Paschal Mystery among all peoples. This approach assumes that in Christianity, acknowledgment of *Salvation* (understood as the transcendent ultimate destiny of human beings) finds expression and witness in the universal struggle for *Humanization* (understood as the penultimate human destiny) in world history which is shaped not only by the forces of goodness and life, but also by the forces of evil and death.⁶⁶⁹

4.12 Conclusion

The whole theology of Thomas can be summarized as a theology of humanization. Any issue or concept whether it is theological, anthropological or missiological in Thomas' theology revolves around humanization of humanity and therefore humanization can be called as the crown of his theology. He considers salvation as the ultimate destiny of humanity and humanization as the penultimate destiny of humanity, but both are complementary and inseparable as body and soul. Thomas' starting point of theology is anthropology but his anthropology is rooted and based on his Christology and in particular the notions of incarnation and the cross. He starts with the context of humanity and relates this with the revelation of God in the Scripture. He constantly connects the world of the people with the gospel of Christ and vice versa.

Thomas identifies many obstacles in human society that stand and work against the salvation and humanization of humanity, such as the church, religion, caste, modernization etc. He considers them obstacles because they are exclusive and divisive in their approaches and thus remain as source of dehumanization. Thomas supports and stands for the rights of poor and the marginalized of the society like Dalits, tribals and women because they are not treated as humans by their fellow human beings and their rights and privileges are deprived on account of their creed, color, caste and gender.

⁶⁶⁹ M.M. Thomas, *The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 100-101

Thomas realizes the humanization of people largely depends on the humanization of social structures and system which legitimize and sacralize division and discrimination in the name of caste, creed and gender. Humanization is personal, corporate and cosmic.

The humanity is paralyzed with all divisive and oppressive socio-religious system but that is not the end of human history; Thomas believes that Christ is the source, hope of a new humanity through his death and resurrection. The gospel of Christ according to Thomas offers a richer and a fuller human life and thus it has to be universalized for the sake humanization of people and history. The humanization is not something for the future, but it is here and now and a present reality which can be achieved through various means and ways such as secularism and inter-religious dialogue etc. Thomas believed salvation and humanization are a process that should begin in one's own existential life today and move towards a future culmination. The process that he proposed and promoted was basically a shift from exclusivism to inclusivism, polarization to integration to maintain a dialectic relation between salvation and humanization, sacred and secular, individual and collective salvation of both present and future, people and structures of society. He also advocates that there must be a drastic shift from the feeling of communality to community and from Church centred religious fellowship to a Christ centred secular fellowship to create a common humanity and a community rather than a communal and religious community.

For Thomas, the goal of humanization is to create a perfect, richer, fuller humanity which is a New Humanity in Christ where personhood and peoplehood are affirmed and people become subject of their own history. This may not be realized fully on this side of eternity before death but it is a possibility beyond death. Therefore the mission of the church is to channel its sources and resources to facilitate and enhance towards the salvation and humanization of people of collective existence.

Thomas' theology was dynamic; he constantly revised his views and position according to the challenges and demands of the context. His interpretation of salvation and humanization was influenced by his socio-political context as well as by the people who influenced his life and his theology. He initially interpreted salvation as redemption

from sin, Satan and death as the result of his early evangelical tradition. His wider ecumenical exposures and influences challenged his evangelical position and thus he came to interpret and advocate salvation and humanization of soul and body as well as humanization of systems and structures of society like the liberation theology. The later part of his life and writings reveals further shift from ecumenical to a pluralistic position whereby he acknowledges the importance of the collective role of all religions and secular ideologies towards the task of humanization in the context of religious pluralism.

CHAPTER 5

APPRAISAL ON M.M. THOMAS' THEOLOGY OF SALVATION AND HUMANIZATION

5.1 Introduction

Thomas was a renowned Christian leader who worked with many leaders in India as well as elsewhere. His writings and theological articulations received wide readership as well as appreciation across the globe and were discussed and debated at various theological fora as well as at the level of theses at the Master's and PhD level.⁶⁷⁰ His theological contributions were appreciated, but the criticism has been voiced time and again that 'in Indian admiration of his personal traits, a critical appraisal and review of Thomas' thought and concerns, it seems, has often been overlooked.'⁶⁷¹ This chapter is an attempt to critically appraise Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization from the perspective of the liberation theologies in India and more in particular from the Dalit, tribal and feminist emphases.

Section 5.2 deals with the connection between liberation theology and Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization. Section 5.3 gives a brief appraisal from the

⁶⁷⁰ Sunand Sumithra, "Theology of Mission in Indian Context: A Study of Madathilaparampil Mammen Thomas", PhD dissertation, (Tubingen 1981); Stephan Andrew Morton has done a study on "P.D. Devanandan, M.M. Thomas and the Task of Indigenous Theology." PhD dissertation, at the University of Nottingham, 1981. Eric Robin Mitchell, "M.M. Thomas' View on Church and Society: A Comparison with the Liberation Theology of Gustavo Gutierrez", PhD dissertation, (Drew University, New Jersey, 1985). T.M. Philip, *The Encounter between Theology and Ideology: An Exploration into the Communicative Theology of M.M. Thomas*, (Madras: CLS, 1986), T. Jacob Thomas, *Ethics of a World Community Contributions of Dr. M.M. Thomas Based on Human Reality*, (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1993), Hielke T. Wolters, *Theology of Prophetic Participation: M.M. Thomas's Concept of Salvation and the Collective Struggle for Fuller Humanity in India*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996). Mohan Chacko, *Interpreting Society: A Study of the Political Theology of M.M. Thomas and Its Implications for Mission*, (Dehra Dun: Mohan Chacko, 2000). K.P. Kuruvila, *The Word Became Flesh: A Christological Paradigm for Doing Theology in India*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002), Ken Christoph Miyamoto's *God's Mission in Asia: A Comparative and Contextual Study of This-Worldly Holiness and the Theology of Missio Dei in M.M. Thomas and C. S. Song*, 2007, Adrian Bird, *M.M. Thomas and Dalit Theology*, (Bangalore: BTESSC/SATHRI, 2008).

⁶⁷¹ "The Legacy" in *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, Jesudas M. Athyal, ed. (Thiruvalla: Thiruvalla Ecumenical Charitable Trust, 1997), 63.

tribal perspective; it is brief because so far not many tribal theologians have engaged with Thomas' theology. Section 5.4 deals with a feminist perspective on Thomas concepts of salvation and humanization. Again, this is a relatively brief section, because there are few Indian feminist assessments of Thomas. Section 5.5 gives a Dalit appraisal of Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization; because the Dalit appraisal of Thomas is pertinent for the research question, this section is quite elaborate. 5.6 gives an overall assessment of what these critiques means for the validity of Thomas' theology and 5.7 serves as a conclusion.

5.2 Liberation Perspective

The basic pursuit of liberation theology is to advocate the humanization of human beings from all oppressive and destructive systems, social, political, economic and religious. Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization is closely related to the goals of liberation theology. Much research has been done to compare and relate Thomas' theology with the liberation theology, and in particular with Latin American liberation theology.⁶⁷² This unit aims to evaluate Thomas' concept of salvation and humanization from the perspective of liberation theology.⁶⁷³

5.2.1 A Forerunner of liberation theologies in India

According to Robin Mitchell, Thomas was influenced by the liberation theology and theologians of Latin America such as Gustavo Gutierrez and Leonardo Boff. Thomas' theology echoes the ideas of the liberation theologians, which reflect on the historical

⁶⁷² E.R. Mitchell, M.M. *Thomas' View on Church and Society: A Comparison with the Liberation Theology of Gustavo Gutierrez*, PhD dissertation, (Drew University, New Jersey, 1985). Hielke T. Wolters, *Theology of Prophetic Participation: M.M. Thomas's Concept of Salvation and the Collective Struggle for Fuller Humanity in India*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996). Mohan Chacko, *Interpreting Society: A Study of the Political Theology of M.M. Thomas and Its Implications for Mission*, (Dehra Dun: Mohan Chacko, 2000). K.P. Kuruvila, *The Word Became Flesh: A Christological Paradigm for Doing Theology in India*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002); Ken Christoph Miyamoto's *God's Mission in Asia: A Comparative and Contextual Study of This-Worldly Holiness and the Theology of Missio Dei in M.M. Thomas and C. S. Song*, (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2007), Adrian Bird, *M.M. Thomas and Dalit Theology*, (Bangalore: BTESSC/SATHRI, 2008).

⁶⁷³ Beyerhaus, S. Sumithra and others.

existential struggles of the poor and the marginalized people of the society.⁶⁷⁴ V. Devasahayam in his M.Th. thesis in 1979, made a comparative study of Gutierrez' liberation theology and Thomas' salvation and humanization where he shows the connection and the relation between the two and argues that Thomas has a lot to offer for the liberation of the oppressed people.⁶⁷⁵ Thomas is widely considered as a forerunner of liberation theologies in India such as Dalit, Tribal and Feminist theologies. As a forerunner he has laid the foundation and set an adequate platform for liberative approaches in Indian theology.

5.2.2 A liberation theologian from the majority world

Thomas' theology reflects on the context of the Majority World which is characterized by poverty, casteism, inequality, exploitation and discrimination in the name of socio-religious systems and structures as well as by revolutions for political freedom, social equality and religious identity; his was also a responsive theology because it wrestles with and responds to human struggles and sufferings, especially the marginalized Dalits, tribals and women. His theology takes the historical context of the people as the starting point, because the context demands social justice. Thus his theology focuses on social justice; this according to Thomas can be achieved through the word of God as it encounters people in their context of struggle for justice. Jacob Thomas notes:

In his commitment to social justice Thomas is close to the liberation theologians in general. However, his theological commitment to the context as well as to the transcendent word of God that meets human beings in their particular historical situations keeps his theology in a dialectical tension between involvement and transcendence; this gives Thomas's theology a special flavour.⁶⁷⁶

⁶⁷⁴ E. Robin Mitchell, "Profile: M.M. Thomas India's Prophet on the Fringes", 35- 36. Cf. *New World Outlook* (October 1986), 419-420.

⁶⁷⁵ V. Devasahayam, *A comparative study of Gutierrez' Liberation theology and Thomas' Salvation and Humanization*, (M.Th. Thesis UTC Archives, 1979).

⁶⁷⁶ T. Jacob Thomas, *Ethics of a World Community*, 211.

Clarke comments that God's objective salvation is intimately tied up with humanization of the subjugated peoples. Thomas, according to Clarke, was able to urge Indian and Asian societies, which were historically divided by religion and ideology, to see realizable and effective networks of solidarity.⁶⁷⁷ Allan Boesak, the South African theologian acknowledges that Thomas' interpretation of history is related and relevant to Black Theology and Black Power.⁶⁷⁸ Mitchell whose doctoral dissertation was a comparative study of the writings of M.M. Thomas and Gustavo Gutierrez says: His theology "seeks to assist the incarnation of the Gospel in a particular situation" and has universal implications across cultural and national boundaries within the Third World and beyond.⁶⁷⁹ Thomas' theology is neither theoretical nor academic speculation but it is contextual and practical; the idea of "people as the subjects of history," which is a basic concept of the Minjung⁶⁸⁰ theology which took form in 1970s, has also been a dominant liberative theme in Thomas' theological writings.⁶⁸¹

Also methodology-wise, Thomas' methodology was similar to that of the liberation theologians starting with the suffering context of the people. James Cone⁶⁸² the Black theologian writes "The first act [of doing theology] is both a religio-cultural affirmation and a political commitment on behalf of the liberation of the poor and voiceless.... The acid test of any theological truth is found in whether it aids victims in their struggle to overcome their victimization."⁶⁸³

Eric Robin Mitchell states that Thomas' theology moves beyond Latin American liberation theology; he comments that Thomas' critical incorporation of ideologies and

⁶⁷⁷ Sathianathan Clarke, *Empire*, 428.

⁶⁷⁸ Jacob Thomas, *Ethics of a World Community*, 215; See Allan Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1977/1981, 3rd Printing), 85.

⁶⁷⁹ E. Robin Mitchell, "Profile: M.M. Thomas India's Prophet on the Fringes", 6. Cf. *New World Outlook*, 420.

⁶⁸⁰ People's theology of Korea focuses on equality and liberation of people from socio-political and religio-cultural exploitation. Read *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History*. Ed. Commission on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia. (Maryknoll, Newyork: Orbis, 1983), 38 – 43.

⁶⁸¹ T. Jacob Thomas, *Ethics of a World Community*, 208. See Choan-Seng Song, *Christian Mission in Reconstruction*, 51ff, 212ff, Choan-Seng Song, *Compassionate God*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books 1982), 166.

⁶⁸² James Cone is the exponent of Black Theology who interprets God as the God of the Blacks who fights for the liberation of the Blacks from all racial and social discrimination. Read, James H. Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and Black Church*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1984).

⁶⁸³ James H. Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and Black Church*, 147, 151.

his appreciation and sensitivity to religio-cultural factors that affect social situations can serve as correctives to Gutierrez's liberation theology.⁶⁸⁴ Also, unlike the Latin American liberation theology, Thomas gives equal importance to both historical and eschatological dimension of salvation. Sabu writes "In liberation theology the transcendental dimension of humanization is historical but in Thomas' interpretation it is both historical and eschatological."⁶⁸⁵ Thus salvation is a present reality as well as a future hope and fulfilment. Thomas moves beyond mere economic justice; he includes social elements and salvation is both historical and eschatological.

5.2.3 A Search for salvation and humanization

In the context of nationalistic movements striving for freedom and equality, Thomas connected the theological goal of Christian salvation with the indigenous people's legitimate objective of humanization. According to Thomas, the salvation of God in Christ offers and leads to humanization of people. For Thomas, Clarke writes "Salvation as the gift of God in Jesus Christ modifies and qualifies all humanization movements. Thus through a dialectical relationship salvation represents the ultimate activity of God that forms and informs penultimate strivings of humanization."⁶⁸⁶ It is God who is the initiator and author of humanization. God is the subject and people are the objects of this humanization. Human as he is, neither can he humanize himself nor can he make others human. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that humanization becomes possible.⁶⁸⁷ Clarke writes "Thomas's agenda for Christian Soteriology was both context-situated and liberation-centred. It is within the context of the quest for humanization, which was spreading all over India...that the working of God's salvation may be located and interpreted."⁶⁸⁸ Sumithra comments "for Thomas, salvation is neither the fruit of humanization nor an alternative to it, but humanization is the main offer of Jesus Christ,

⁶⁸⁴ Eric Robin Mitchell, *M.M. Thomas's View of Church and Society*; cf. Jacob Thomas, *Ethics of a World Community*, 215.

⁶⁸⁵ Sabu Philip, *Beyond Humanization*, 129.

⁶⁸⁶ S. Clarke, *Empire*, 428.

⁶⁸⁷ Choan-Seng Song, *Christian Mission in Reconstruction*, 206, Cf. Sunand Sumithra, "Salvation and Humanization," 86.

⁶⁸⁸ S. Clarke, *Empire*, 429.

of which salvation is only a part.”⁶⁸⁹ He criticizes Thomas however for understanding and interpreting mission as predominantly political. He writes:

Humanization as the goal of mission, participation as the method and organization of the Church as the bearer... His understanding of mission is basically political....His emphases on the confession of participation, as against proclamation, humanization as the goal, Jesus Christ understood as the unifier, the ideal, an historical understanding of the Kingdom of God rather than the apocalyptic, the emphasis on the function of the Church rather than on her nature - to mention a few – all these reveal this political aspect.⁶⁹⁰

Generally speaking however, there has been a wide appreciation of Thomas’ quest for humanization. Robin Boyd calls Thomas a man, who was “deeply and intelligently committed to Christ, to the Church, to social and political justice, to Christian unity, and ultimately to the unity of the whole human race.”⁶⁹¹ Similarly, Godwin Shiri who played a key role in CISRS growth says: “M.M. Thomas has been the chief architect and the main thinker of Indian Christian social thought during the last decades.”⁶⁹² He was appreciated for his concern and commitment from the beginning of his adulthood for social service, social action and study of society.⁶⁹³

Thomas appealed to humanity in general and church in particular to create and establish a new society, a new order for human freedom, equality, identity, dignity and justice for all especially the Dalits, women, tribals of the society. The notion that theology aims to transform society, is another aspect Thomas shares with liberation theology. Gnana Robinson, a close associate of Thomas, notes that Thomas through his life and writings “challenged and prepared a large number of disciples to continue his

⁶⁸⁹ S. Sumithra, *Revolution as Revelation*, 202.

⁶⁹⁰ S. Sumithra, *Revolution as Revelation*, 345.

⁶⁹¹ R. Boyd, *Student Christian Movement*, 90.

⁶⁹² Godwin Shiri, *Christian Social Thought in India*, viii.

⁶⁹³ Mohan Chacko, *Interpreting Society*, Preface.

work as we move into the twenty first century.”⁶⁹⁴ Thomas believed that if people can work together irrespective of their caste, creed and ideologies they can form a new society through God in Christ where people are respected with dignity and equal rights. Koshy Matthew gives a comprehensive description on Thomas:

Thomas is a rabble-rouser and an advocate of peace and justice. He is a pontiff to the many who are disempowered and poor. He is a bridge-builder between the established order and the new order and an ardent advocate of new values. He is a socialist, Gandhian, a Marxist and a Christian believer - all rolled into one. He is one of a kind – there were not many like him before, nor is it likely that there will be any in the near future.⁶⁹⁵

Yet according to some, his appeal for transformation has largely gone unheard in Indian society Wielenga says “As things develop at present in the Church in India and in society we need to listen to him more urgently than ever.”⁶⁹⁶ Thomas courageously challenged whatever the ‘powers that be’ questioning both the religious authority of the Church as well as the political authority. He questioned the authority of the church for failing to play an active and responsible role in the struggle for justice and equality for the people. It is said that an “uncompromising stand on human rights and justice made him interpret social justice for today as participating in the struggles for the rights of the Dalits, tribals, fisher people and women.”⁶⁹⁷ His writings challenge political authority for their failure to distribute justice and safeguard the human rights and dignity of people.⁶⁹⁸ He spoke of a ‘new humanism’ and a new ‘socialism’ so that degraded and depressed

⁶⁹⁴ Gnana Robinson, “Preface” in *...Into the Twenty first Century*, i.

⁶⁹⁵ Koshy Matthew, *MM: Champion of New Order*, UTC Archives, MMT, 60.2 A Newspaper Cutting.

⁶⁹⁶ Bastiaan Wielenga, “Liberation Theology in the Ideological Context of India” in *...Into the Twentyfirst Century*, 51.

⁶⁹⁷ “Celebration of Life Victorious Over Death,” *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*.

⁶⁹⁸ M.J. Joseph, “A Tribute to M.M” in *...Into the Twentyfirst Century*, 108.

people are treated as human and have an access to the rights and privileges of the society.⁶⁹⁹

5.2.4 Salvation as humanization

Thomas interpreted salvation as humanization in the context of the revolutions of people especially from the suppressed people of the society in India and in the context of his ecumenical background. Newbigin notes “An important theological contribution of MMT is his interpretation of salvation as humanization. While emphasizing the Christological foundation for our salvation he was also aware of the struggle for full humanity and interpreted salvation as humanization.”⁷⁰⁰ However, Thomas’ interpretation of salvation as the humanization of the world was also criticized; amongst others Peter Beyerhaus of the Department of Missiology of Tübingen and an evangelical theologian, criticized Thomas and the ecumenical movement for ‘shifting the focus from God to man, replacing theology by anthropology; turning world history into history of salvation and a move from salvation of soul based on proclamation of the gospel to humanization of society based on social activity. According to Beyerhaus it is a conscious turning away from God as the absolute and ultimate frame of reference to every Christian thinking and service.’⁷⁰¹

According to Thomas humanization is contemporary salvation from poverty, caste discrimination, patriarchy and all forms of dehumanization. Devasahayam writes “Thomas speaks from a situation of poverty, caste structure etc. which dehumanize man, and also from within the quest in religious and secular ideologies for richer and fuller human life and he proceeds to speak of humanization as the contemporary meaning of salvation.”⁷⁰² Thomas hoped for the salvation and humanization of all underprivileged people; therefore he explored the possibility of uniting likeminded people of religious and secular background to collectively fight for the corporate

⁶⁹⁹ J. Russell Chandran, Tributes of a Theological Friend,” *The Man and His Legacy*, 8.

⁷⁰⁰ Leslie Newbigin, “Reflection of a Fellow- Traveller,” *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, 8.

⁷⁰¹ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 6-7. See Peter Beyerhaus, *Missions: Which Way? Humanization or Redemption?* (Grand Rapids, 1971) Sumithra, *Revolution as Revelation*, 295.

⁷⁰² V. Devasahayam, *MTh Thesis*, 131-132.

salvation. Humanization or liberation is not a prior stage to salvation but it is part of salvation. It has to do with here and now in one's own present life. The present salvation prepares and leads people to the ultimate eschatological salvation. Christianity down through the centuries over-emphasized heaven but failed to look into this worldly and earthly salvation and liberation of people from all oppressive and exploitative forces. This was also the criticism of Gutierrez who writes:

Salvation is not something otherworldly to which the present life is merely a test. Salvation – the communion of men with God and the communion of men among themselves – is something that embraces all of human reality, transforms it and leads to its fullness in Christ: Thus the centre of God's salvific design is Jesus Christ, who by his death and resurrection transforms the universe and make it possible for man to reach fulfilment as a human being.⁷⁰³

Thus Thomas' theology is akin to liberation theology in taking a starting point in the actual sufferings of people, in his focus on the world and on history and on salvation as this-worldly. For Thomas, theology is meaningful when it contributes to the transformation of society. As a result, he was criticized for identifying God with political realities of the society and giving more importance to the context and human beings and less importance to revelation and God. Thomas considered Marxism as a useful tool for societal analysis and like liberation theology, he takes the context as his methodological starting point.

5.3 Tribal Perspective

The tribal and feminist perspective on Thomas' theology is presented only briefly here, because they rarely engaged with Thomas' theology. This could be because of Thomas' non-tribal background and unfamiliar with his writings. Also, the appraisals from these

⁷⁰³ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation History*, , 151f.

perspectives that exist are one's of appreciation for the contribution of Thomas rather than a critique. Moreover, the focus of the study is on Dalits therefore the impact of Thomas on tribal and women theologies are not given importance.

The tribals in India live in the mountain regions⁷⁰⁴ where there is no adequate development in comparison with the rest of India. They are quite isolated and distanced from the rest of Indian society. The cry of the tribals in India is for development and welfare schemes so that they can have access to all rights and privileges. They experience many struggles and sufferings because of their complexion, geographical location, underdevelopment, illiteracy and a lower standard of life etc. Thomas seems to have played a significant role in the humanization of the tribals – especially the Nagas – as he served them as Governor of Nagaland appointed by the President of India.

Thomas considered political participation to be part of his responsibility as a Christian and a means to witness Christ. He supported people's freedom and human rights and supported all political movements that advocated the people's rights to participate in political activities.⁷⁰⁵ When there was an opportunity for him to serve in the Indian government, he courageously accepted it as he believed that Christians should be involved in politics and it is through political power that one can bring justice and humanize the society. Though he was a Governor⁷⁰⁶ he initiated and mobilized the Christian leaders and political leaders to realise the need of relating their Christian faith with their socio-political responsibilities. Newbiggin wrote to Thomas, saying: "I am thrilled to know your own role in trying to bring the Church leaders and thinkers to a more mature understanding of the relation of their faith to their political

⁷⁰⁴ The Tribals in India were branded as Scheduled Tribes by the British government. They settled down in the mountain region as they had to flee from the wrath of Aryan's invasion. They could not fight against the powerful Aryan military so they fled to the mountain regions to hide themselves in the jungles and settled down there.

⁷⁰⁵ Sabu Philip, *Beyond Humanization*, 81.

⁷⁰⁶ He was the Governor of Nagaland, one of the north eastern States in India. Governor is the highest post in the state appointed and working directly under the President of India. Since Christianity is a minority religion in India any Christian who becomes a political leader or Government servant is reluctant to involve in any religious activities openly as they are afraid of losing their position.

responsibilities. I find it very exciting to know that you carry your theological passion into this new sphere.”⁷⁰⁷

Thomas served the Christian community as a theologian as well as the society as a political statesman serving as Governor of Nagaland. Clarke states “Interestingly the overall concerns of both the church and the communist party always showed up in his theological work: the salvation language of the church constantly merged with the humanization vocabulary of the communist party.”⁷⁰⁸ Clarke writes “When one realizes that Christians consist of less than three percent of the population in India this responsibility, of serving as theologian-statesman in an increasingly Hindu fundamentalism-prone postcolonial situation, takes on added significance.”⁷⁰⁹ The Chief Minister of Nagaland in his obituary to Thomas said: “Dr. Thomas was a lover of humanity, a champion of the rights of human beings and supporter of religious movements. He wanted to eradicate all social and political evils which destroyed human happiness and retarded the progress of mankind at large in the society.”⁷¹⁰

Thomas had to resign as governor of Nagaland because of the pressure of the new Congress government at the Centre which asked him to support the policy of the Congress government but Thomas stood for the humanization of tribals especially in Nagaland. Dietrich says: “He had to quit because he obeyed his conscience and the Constitution more than the President of India.”⁷¹¹ He worked for the salvation and humanization of the marginalized people of the society. He was given a fitting farewell for all what he has done for humanity in general and the tribals in particular. In the words of C.T. Kurien: “Thomas the intellectual and theologian identified himself with the marginalized and oppressed in their struggles for liberation and dignity. They gave him a

⁷⁰⁷ L. Newbigin, “Letter to M.M. Thomas” dated 26th September 1990, UTC Archives MMT,61: 36, (1990).

⁷⁰⁸ S. Clarke, “M.M. Thomas”, eds. Kwok Pui-lan, Don H. Compier, and Joerg Rieger, *Empire: The Christian Tradition New Readings of Classical Theologians*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 425.

⁷⁰⁹ S. Clarke, *Empire*, 426.

⁷¹⁰ S.C. Jamir, “An Extract of the Proceeding of the Nagaland Legislative Assembly on 15.3.97” in *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, 99.

⁷¹¹ Gabriele Dietrich, “M.M. The Activist and Fellow- Traveller,” in *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, 10.

touching farewell when the end came.”⁷¹² Thomas has made great strides in awakening the church to social responsibility and justice on a world level. He is a ‘prophetic voice’ that must be heard.⁷¹³ The Nagaland Assembly made a clear note on Thomas’ commitment and work stating that he championed the cause of the tribals and others in the process of humanization. ‘He considered the commitment to justice in action as the cardinal note of spirituality.’⁷¹⁴

Thomas stressed the importance and necessity of democratic rights of the marginalized to build their organizations and movements. He believed that they should have their property. Thomas was not only a critic of the church, contemporary political and social affairs but also a believer in humanity and human values. His appointment as the honorary Director of the University of Kerala’s Christian Study Centre, Trivandrum created some controversy by Christian leaders and bishops as he did not represent the church. But the University declared that they are not looking for a “churchman” but a “Christian” to head the Centre.⁷¹⁵ One of the objectives of the Thiruvalla Ecumenical Charitable Trust that Thomas started was to have “Fellowship with subaltern movements, such as that of Dalits, Tribals Women and the like.”⁷¹⁶ There is general appreciation for Thomas’ work as a governor of Nagaland among tribal theologians but there has been no engagement with Thomas’ theological ideas in tribal theology so far nor has there been much study connecting Thomas’ theology with tribal theology; this in spite his work as a governor in Nagaland and his solidarity and support towards their welfare and developments.

⁷¹² C.T. Kurien, “The Champion of People’s Power” in *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, 27.

⁷¹³ Paul Barton, “M.M. Thomas: A Prophetic Voice,” in *Profile*, MSS, MMT: 59/4, Archives, (UTC, Bangalore), 3.

⁷¹⁴ “In Memoriam: An extract of the proceeding of the Nagaland Legislative Assembly on 15.3.97,” *The Man and His Legacy*, 101.

⁷¹⁵ Koshy Matthew, *MM: Champion of New Order*.

⁷¹⁶ “The Legacy” in *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, 62.

5.4 Feminist Perspective

Thomas seems to give careful thought to the condition of women and their struggles in the patriarchal society, especially in India. He paid attention to the struggles and sufferings of women in his writings as well as speeches. In his concept of salvation and humanization he addressed the humanization of Dalits, tribals and also women as they are oppressed and suppressed in the male dominated society on the basis of their gender, sexuality and physicality. Thomas' writings as well as a number of Indian feminist theologians seem to agree and project that Thomas was a pro-feminist who raised his voice and fought for the rights and equality of women in the society.

Women undergo and experience numerous and untold sufferings in patriarchal societies such as India.⁷¹⁷ They undergo sexual violence and exploitation in the society. Aruna Gnanadason says "...Women's sexuality has been commercialized and commodified and this is often legitimized by religion."⁷¹⁸ Gnanadason admits that the women's liberation movement in India by and large has not taken roots in the rural areas as it is basically a middle-class oriented, centred around educated and relatively rich urban women. The task of women's movements is to combat all forces and forms of oppression – economic, political and social individually and collectively.⁷¹⁹

Thomas expressed his solidarity with women and their struggles and felt that they need to be respected and treated with equality in the society. Feminist theologian Gabriele Dietrich, who worked in India for decades, despite her being a German, appreciates M.M. Thomas for his contribution towards humanization of women speaking against religious system and institutions which deny equal status for women. Dietrich says: "M.M. Thomas in fact has developed a growing awareness of it over the years. However, a feminist dimension of liberation theology has not yet evolved to a

⁷¹⁷ Aruna Gnanadason, "Fullness of Life Christ for all", *CSI Life Magazine of the Church of South India*, 3/5(May 2004), 3.

⁷¹⁸ Aruna Gnanadason, "The Struggle to be Human: A Reflection of Human Sexuality in India", *NCCR*, 121/4 (May 2001), 291.

⁷¹⁹ Aruna Gnanadason, "Human Rights and women's Concerns" *Religion And Society*, 28/1 (March 1981), 23.

substantial extent.”⁷²⁰ She admits that Thomas created an awakening and awareness among people – and in particular among women – for women’s religious and social status. Pauline M. Webb who worked with Thomas in WCC says: “M.M. always gave his total support to the struggle against sexism in the church, as he did also to the struggle against racism.”⁷²¹ He has not only expressed his solidarity for the liberation and equality of women with words but through his practical life whether in public or private. Webb says the responsibility that he shared with her in the work of partnership was “neither patronizing nor patriarchal.”⁷²² Thomas also advocated changing the sexist language of the WCC Constitution and Rules of “chairman” to “moderator” to use an inclusive term in the Nairobi Assembly in 1975.⁷²³

Thomas raised his voice against any form of oppression and exploitation against humanity whether it was of national interest or international, social or religious to enhance freedom and equality of all people without any discrimination. Annamma George from the Forum of Christian Women for Women’s Rights notes that “He had always assured us of his solidarity in the struggles for women’s liberation and against all forms of discrimination. He was our great source of inspiration.”⁷²⁴ Feminist voices, Indian or otherwise, reflecting on Thomas’ theology are rare. However, some male theologians have commented on Thomas’ quest for women’s equality. Clarke feels that Thomas could have done much more with regard to the liberation and humanization of women and comments that if he has failed to do this in the earlier period he could have taken it on at least towards the later period of his life. Clarke complains:

There appears to be a blind spot in Thomas to the fundamental, destructive, and overwhelming impact of patriarchy in Asian and Indian liberative movements toward humanization. While feminist or womanist voices may not have been a

⁷²⁰ Gabriele Dietrich, “Women and Religion, or Can the Women’s Movement Become an Anti-Communist Force?” in *...Into the Twentyfirst Century*, 83.

⁷²¹ Pauline M. Webb, “The Risk of Inter-Faith Dialogue,” in *A Tribute to M.M. Thomas Christian Witness in Society*, 179.

⁷²² Pauline M. Webb, “The Risk of Inter-Faith Dialogue,” in *A Tribute to M.M. Thomas*, 178.

⁷²³ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 429.

⁷²⁴ Annamma George, “The Man: Tributes” in *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, 73.

conscious part of theological and political discourse through his early days of writings, there appears to be no justification for ducking this crucial analytical resource for understanding and overcoming a notorious native dimension of domination (colonization) in India during the latter decades of his career.⁷²⁵

Thomas included Dalits, tribals and women as the subject of humanization regularly in his writings but it seems he did not elaborate on each of these groups and expressed their specific forms of oppression adequately. He seems to have either failed or refrained from writing substantially and concretely. Though he was a supporter of gender equality and women liberation, his narrative language seems to be exclusively masculine in expressions. His writings and speeches lack an inclusive language.

There has been very little critical theological interaction of Indian feminist theologians with the work of M.M. Thomas. This may be because of his solidarity with the marginalized groups and their admiration of his contribution towards humanization of the marginalized Dalits, tribals and women.⁷²⁶ Future theologians may explore the relevance of Thomas for tribal and feminist theology as Thomas advocated for their rights and equality in the society as well as in the church.

5.5 Appraisal of Dalit Theologians

The purpose and focus of this section is to see the appraisal of the Dalit theologians in relation to Thomas and his concepts of salvation and humanization. Dalit theologians also form one of the groups who have extensively engaged with the work of Thomas. Four Dalit theologians -Arvind P. Nimal, Masillamani Azariah, V. Devasayam and Sathianathan Clarke –are presented here because they interact with Thomas' ideas. Amongst the criticasters is Sathianathan Clarke; though Clarke himself is not a Dalit, he is widely accepted as a Dalit theologian. Moreover, he worked and lived among the

⁷²⁵ S. Clarke, *Empire*, 436.

⁷²⁶ "The Legacy" in *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, 63.

Dalits for many years and has written extensively about Dalits and advocates Dalits' humanization.⁷²⁷ Thus his appraisal on Thomas is presented here as well.

5.5.1 Arvind P. Nirmal: Exclusivism

Arvind P. Nirmal, the founder of Dalit theology, denied any significance of Thomas' concept of salvation and humanization towards the development of Dalits. First Nirmal's arguments are presented and then they are discussed. His arguments are fourfold:

Firstly, Nirmal states, Thomas as a non-Dalit cannot write Dalit theology as Dalitness is the criteria for Dalit theology. Nirmal took a radical position which argues that only a Dalit can write Dalit theology, because Dalit theology according to Nirmal is based on Dalits' "pain-pathos" and Dalitness which are unique to the Dalits. Nirmal advocated "methodological exclusivism", a position he shares with Azariah; he writes: "If a Dalit theology has to play the role of counter theology then it must adopt an exclusivist stance and shut off the encroaching influences of the dominant theologies. This methodological exclusivism is necessary for maintaining the distinctive identity of Dalit theology."⁷²⁸ Nirmal argued that:

Christian Dalit theology will be produced *by* Dalits. It will be based on their own Dalit experiences, their own sufferings, their own aspirations and their own hope. It will narrate the story of their *pathos* and their protest against the socio-economic injustices they have been subjected to throughout history. It will anticipate liberation which is meaningful to them.⁷²⁹

Dalit theology should remain "exclusive in character." He says this exclusivism must be stressed "because the tendency of all dominant tradition – cultural or theological – is to

⁷²⁷Read, Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, ; Sathianathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala, & Philip Vinod Peacock, *Dalit Theology in the Twenty First Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*, (Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷²⁸ Arvind P. Nirmal, "Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective," in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, 143.

⁷²⁹ Nirmal, *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, 58-59.

accommodate, include, assimilate and finally conquer others.”⁷³⁰ Nirmal speaks about three different modes of knowing of Dalit suffering: ‘*pathetic* knowing, the *empathetic* knowing and the *sympathetic* knowing.’⁷³¹ Pathetic suffering is the experience of the Dalits. Empathetic knowing is the experience of the Shudras⁷³² who also suffer because of caste discrimination but not like the Dalits. Sympathetic knowing is a category that pertains to the non-Dalits, who sympathize and work for the liberation of the Dalits.⁷³³ This last category could be something that applies to Thomas, but Nirmal denies that as well (see below).

Secondly, Nirmal was of the opinion that Thomas as a high caste Syrian Christian did not work for the welfare of the Dalits. Thirdly, Nirmal argues that Indian liberation theologians like Thomas have ignored the reality of caste and its impact on Dalits. They engaged with socio-economic issues rather than caste.⁷³⁴ This critique here is twofold: firstly that the focus of Indian theologians was mainly on engagement with the philosophy of the high caste dominant minority group and secondly the attempts to formulate an Indian Christian theology were amongst others made by the high caste people who were converted to Christianity. Nirmal holds that “until the 1970s Indian Christian theology was developed mainly by caste converts to Christianity. They propagated the brahmanic tradition, trying to formulate an Indian Christian theology using mainly *advaitic*⁷³⁵ categories and following the *jñana*, *karma* or *bhakti margas*.⁷³⁶ This theology could not have mass appeal as the majority of Christians in India do not come from the brahmanic tradition.”⁷³⁷ Thus Indian Christian inculturation theology is

⁷³⁰ A. Nirmal “Towards A Christian Dalit Theology,” in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, 58-59.

⁷³¹ A. Nirmal, *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, 139.

⁷³² The Shudras are the last and least of the four main caste in Hinduism

⁷³³ Nirmal, *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, 142.

⁷³⁴ Arvind P. Nirmal, *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, 56.

⁷³⁵ *Advaita* is a brahminic philosophy which teaches monism saying that there is only one ultimate reality that is Brahman.

⁷³⁶ Hinduism teaches three *margas* or ways to attain salvation which are: *jñana marga* which stresses on knowledge as a way to salvation; *bhakti marga* which emphasizes devotion as a means to salvation; and *karma marga* which advocates works/deeds or action as a means to salvation.

⁷³⁷ A.P. Nirmal, in *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide to Authors, Movements, Sources*, Vol.1 eds. John C. England et.al (Delhi/New York: ISPCK/Orbis Books, 2002), 306-307.

nothing but brahmanic theology which has neither any connection nor any relevance to the Dalits in India as it was written and dominated by brahmanic thinkers and writers.⁷³⁸

Finally, Nirmal argued that Thomas aligned with the oppressive brahminical tradition which discriminates and deprives the rights and privileges of the Dalits and women. He described Thomas as a proponent of Hindu *karma marga*⁷³⁹ and classified him as 'a theological foe rather than an ally of Dalit theology'.⁷⁴⁰ Dalit theologian James Massey who has contributed and written many books on the historical roots of the Dalits⁷⁴¹ also remarks that though P.D. Devanandan and M.M. Thomas had brought back the importance of human history in the construction of Indian Christian theology, a category which was ignored in Hinduism, yet both of them simply followed and failed to critically assess the tradition of Hinduism, as did their predecessors.⁷⁴² Dalit theologians like Nirmal and others are highly critical of Indian Christian inculturation and interreligious theology because it promotes Brahmanism and does not take into account of the experiences of the Dalits engendered by the caste-system that is legitimized by Hinduism nor engage with the theological contributions of the Dalits.⁷⁴³ Nirmal's criticism of Thomas as a brahmanic theologian will be dealt along with the criticism of M. Azariah in 5.5.2 as they both share similar view.

The validity of the above arguments of Nirmal will be examined here on the basis of the life and work of Thomas as well as the testimonies of others. The methodologically exclusive approach by Nirmal that only Dalit can and should write Dalit theology builds fences around it and denies the eligibility for doing Dalit theology by any non-Dalits even if they are pro-Dalits. According to this argument Thomas cannot be a

⁷³⁸ See Robin Boyd, *Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*; M.M. Thomas, *Acknowledged Christ Of The Indian Renaissance*.

⁷³⁹ Hinduism teaches three *margas* to attain moksha or salvation. *Jñāna marga* promises salvation through knowledge, *bhakti marga* guarantees salvation through devotion and complete dependence on God while *karma marga* emphasizes salvation through works and action.

⁷⁴⁰ Arvind Nirmal, ed. *Heuristic Explorations*, 139 – 140, *karma marga* or 'path of action' within the Hindu tradition, See Adrian, *M.M. Thomas and Dalit Theology*, 17.

⁷⁴¹ James Massey (ed), *Indigenous People Dalits: Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994); James Massey, *Roots of Dalit History, Christianity Theology and Spirituality*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996).

⁷⁴² James Massey, *India 50 Years of Independence: 1947-97 Status, Growth & Development, Dalits Issues and Concerns*, (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1998), 171-172.

⁷⁴³ Arvind P. Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, 55.

Dalit theologian on the basis of methodological exclusivism but could contribute to Dalit liberation (sympathetic knowing leading to community inclusivism). These exclusivist positions of Nirmal raise critical questions: Dalits need help and solidarity of others to work and promote the cause of the Dalits. Nirmal also admits that the Dalits cannot save themselves without support of non-Dalits; therefore he says Dalit theology should have a “methodological exclusivism” but not “community exclusivism” as Dalits need the help of others for their liberation.⁷⁴⁴ Nirmal advocates methodological exclusivism for an ‘authentic Dalit theology’ based on ‘Dalit pain-pathos’ but promotes community inclusivism for Dalit humanization which includes non-Dalits on the basis of their ‘sympathetic knowing’.⁷⁴⁵ He advises that the Dalit community must be open to other communities and willing to receive help and support from all sources and they must also promote horizontal relationships with all communities.⁷⁴⁶

Nirmal admits that his way of theologising is a Dalit perspective among others and he is open to other ways of theologising from the Dalit standpoint. However, all should take into consideration the particular experience of the Dalits in their theologising.⁷⁴⁷ This exclusive approach according to Bird, leads to polarization and ‘theological isolation’⁷⁴⁸; Stanley Samartha calls it moving from ‘one bondage to another’.⁷⁴⁹ If one follows the logic of Nirmal’s argument the ultimate consequence would be even Jesus who is the source and hope for Dalits cannot save them as he is not a Dalit racially though he suffered like a Dalit. In Nirmal’s perception Jesus could not develop Dalit theology (methodological exclusivism) though he could contribute to Dalit liberation (community inclusivism).

The exclusive approach reflects the genuine concern that others (non-Dalits) would dilute and duplicate its originality and authenticity as many are encashing in the name of Dalits; also it is Nirmal’s way of ascribing power and exclusiveness to Dalit by

⁷⁴⁴ A. Nirmal, *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, 142.

⁷⁴⁵ A. Nirmal, *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, 142.

⁷⁴⁶ A. Nirmal, *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, 142, 143.

⁷⁴⁷ A. Nirmal, *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, 139.

⁷⁴⁸ Adrian Bird, *M.M. Thomas and Dalit Theology*, 9-10.

⁷⁴⁹ Stanley Samartha, *One Christ Many Religions*, 94.

claiming this as exclusive possession and position of Dalit. There is a difference between a Dalit theology by the Dalits and Dalit theology by the non-Dalits as it is done as an outsider and not as an insider. Dalit theology formulated by non-Dalits is objective not subjective, it is theoretical and not experiential; it lacks Dalitness and Dalit identity which is the very fabric of Dalit theology.

From my point of view the Dalits' battle for social equality, human dignity and humanization has to be fought with the support and involvement of others as the demon of caste or the *rakshasa*⁷⁵⁰ is so strong with its unshakable deep roots deeply rooted and legitimized for centuries. It is true that Thomas came from a high caste background, being Syrian Orthodox. Because of his stance on 'methodological exclusivism', Nirmal considers Thomas' non-Dalit background as a disqualification of his efficacy for Dalit theology, stating that a non-Dalit cannot develop Dalit theology. However, Nirmal's methodological exclusivism is not shared by all Dalit theologians like V. Devasahayam and James Massey and hence his disqualification of Thomas regarding Dalit theology on the basis of his high caste background is contested and not shared by all Dalit theologians. Though Sathianathan Clarke is not a Dalit but he is widely accepted as Dalit theologian because of his extensive writings and his advocacy for Dalit humanization.

Nirmal also denies Thomas' theology validity in view of solidarity of a wider societal solidarity with Dalit, stating that Thomas being a high cast Syrian Orthodox, did not work for the welfare of Dalit. Also this disqualification of Nirmal is contested. Many Dalit theologians such as James Massey, V. Devasahayam and S. Clarke point out that despite his high-caste background, Thomas did not support or practiced caste. In fact, in his publications, speeches and actions, he condemned caste system in the Indian society and the practice of caste within the church from the beginning of his theological journey and as early as in 1965. He warned the church and personified caste as a *Rakshasa* and says "casteism is a many-headed *Rakshasa* who grows new heads as soon as the old

⁷⁵⁰ Thomas identified caste as a *rakshasa* which means a wicked powerful giant who always works evil against people to destroy them.

ones are chopped off.”⁷⁵¹ Thomas advocated a casteless society and vehemently opposed the prevalence and practice of caste within his church and outside the church.⁷⁵² He considered the prevalence and practice of the caste in the church as a tragedy. He writes:

Christians in India have no sense of tragedy about the widespread prevalence of caste in the life of the Church. They seem to have settled down to a Christianity which is no more than an ethnic or caste cult. And there is little prophetic ministry within the Church, to stimulate self-criticism and repentance. The revival preachers are plenty. But they only promote a cult of spirituality which is unrelated to the transformation of social relationships.⁷⁵³

Thomas did not just condemn caste, but was active in Action Groups striving for human dignity, identity and rights and privileges especially after his retirement from WCC and CISRS in 1976. Adrian Bird, a British theologian acknowledges the contribution of Thomas saying that Thomas was a “theological signpost” for the emergence of Dalit theology.⁷⁵⁴ He maintains that Thomas was not an enemy of Dalits; rather he was “a lover of humanity, a champion of the rights of human beings and supporter of religious movements. He wanted to eradicate all social and political evils which destroyed human happiness and retarded the progress of mankind at large in the society.”⁷⁵⁵

Nirmal’s comments seem to imply that Thomas was a foe of Dalit theology or anti-Dalit. Samson Prabhakar says any studies or books relating Thomas and Dalit theology could be quite ‘risky’ and ‘controversial one for many’ Dalit theologians like Nirmal but that the risk is worth taking for the betterment of Dalits.⁷⁵⁶ Further

⁷⁵¹ M.M. Thomas, “Review”, *Caste in changing India*, 95.

⁷⁵² M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach*, 60.

⁷⁵³ M.M. Thomas, “The Transcendent Satyagraha of God,” *The Guardian*, 48/1, (January 1, 1970), 3. See Adrian Bird, *M.M. Thomas and Dalit Theology*, 128.

⁷⁵⁴ Adrian Bird, *M.M. Thomas and Dalit Theology*, 310-313.

⁷⁵⁵ S.C. Jamir “An Extract of the Proceeding of the Nagaland Legislative Assembly on 15.3.97” in *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, 99.

⁷⁵⁶ Samson Prabhakar, “Foreword”, Adrian Bird, *M.M. Thomas and Dalit Theology*, ix.

Prabhakar says that Bird's claim that Thomas' theology is a 'signpost' "seems to have been very carefully worded, so that M.M. Thomas would not be identified among the pioneers of Dalit Theology, like A.P. Nirmal, who laid the foundation stone for building Dalit Theology."⁷⁵⁷ Nevertheless Thomas has contributed towards the humanization of Dalits. Poulouse Mar Poulouse of Thiruvalla Ecumenical Charitable Trust writes: "In India he was an elder statesman and also spiritual father to numerous subaltern movements and social action groups. For countless number of people across the globe, he was a father figure."⁷⁵⁸

Therefore, Nirmal's argument that Thomas did not do anything for Dalits is contested because Thomas spent his whole life towards the purpose of humanization of humanity, especially the marginalized Dalits in the society. Thomas' efforts have been acknowledged by many theologians, including e.g. Dalit theologian V. Devasahayam who calls him "the theologian of the marginalized masses..."⁷⁵⁹ Thomas himself said humanization has been the central theme of his life. He writes "... to bring a richer and fuller human life for all peoples ... and the enquiring into the conditions for humanization of modernity have been central in my theological-ideological-religious enquiring over the years."⁷⁶⁰ Gabriele Dietrich who worked with him in CISRS says: "All along through his retirement, he continued as an activist for many human rights causes and an active supporter of the National Alliance of people's Movements."⁷⁶¹

Thomas was the founder chairperson of Program for Social Action (PSA) and continued in that post till his death. It is a fellowship of social action groups which is spread all over India. He was also the spiritual father of the PSA fellowship.⁷⁶² The works and writings of Thomas as well as the testimonies of national and international theologians seem to question Nirmal's charges against Thomas. Nirmal also admits that "In M.M. Thomas we have a theologian who has contributed to theological

⁷⁵⁷ Samson Prabhakar, "Foreword", Adrian Bird, *M.M. Thomas and Dalit Theology*, x.

⁷⁵⁸ Poulouse Mar Poulouse, "Foreword," *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*.

⁷⁵⁹ V. Devasahayam, "Search For the Last, the Least and the Lost", 56.

⁷⁶⁰ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach to Indian Ecclesiology*, 7.

⁷⁶¹ Gabriele Dietrich, "M.M. The Activist and Fellow- Traveller" in *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, 10.

⁷⁶² Jesudas M. Athyal, ed, *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, 86.

anthropology at the international level and who laid the foundation for a more active theological involvement in India-the *karma marga*.”⁷⁶³

Nirmal’s argument that Indian liberation theologians have not taken the issue of caste seriously though Indian Christianity consists mainly of Dalit, is a valid critique which also applies to Thomas. The educated high caste people who became Christian attempted to formulate an Indian Christian theology based on Indian context and culture in order to free Indian Christianity from the influence and domination of western thought patterns and practices. Christians were criticized for embracing the religion of the oppressors – Britishers and Indian Christianity was viewed as western. Therefore their immediate task was to make use of Indian philosophy and culture to counter the criticism and to present an Indian Christian theology which is appealing and recognizably ‘Indian’. In doing so they developed a theology that was acceptable to the minority rather than dealing with the majority Dalits. Caste was not at all an issue as they were mostly from high caste background, trying to reach out their own caste groups with their religious and philosophical tradition. They failed to take caste as an issue on priority basis. Thus Nirmal’s critique that Indian inculturation and dialogue theologians have not taken the issue of caste and not dialogued with Dalits seems valid.

5.5.2 Masillamani Azariah: An Advocate of Brahmanism

Masillamani Azariah is one of the Dalit theologians who work for the liberation of the Dalits through his writings and theological articulation. His main concern is to bring a conscious awareness among the Dalits to realize their Dalitness and Dalit identity so that they can fight together against Brahmanism and caste discrimination. Azariah questions the relevance of Thomas’ theology for Dalits on the basis of four criticisms. Firstly, Azariah described Thomas as a ‘brahmanical theologian’ who had a ‘brahmanical mindset’ because of his high caste Syrian Christian background.⁷⁶⁴ In this Azariah represents a wider group of Dalit theologians, who have associated Thomas with

⁷⁶³ A.P. Nirmal, “Towards a Christian Dalit Theology,” in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, 55.

⁷⁶⁴ C.P. Mathew & M.M. Thomas, *The Indian Churches of Saint Thomas*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 156. Adrian Bird, *M.M. Thomas and Dalit Theology*, 119.

Brahmanism and brahmanical tradition because of Thomas' affinity with the tradition of the higher caste people. Secondly, Azariah criticizes Indian Christian theologians like Thomas and others for following Western philosophical methods and thirdly Hindu brahmanical traditions which are limited only to the elite high caste people and neglect the Dalits who are the majority in the church.⁷⁶⁵ Azariah as well as Nirmal criticize Thomas for using *karma marga*⁷⁶⁶ of the Brahmins, the dominant group. They argue that Thomas followed the tradition of the high caste Brahmins and attribute this to the fact that he himself comes from a high caste background. The fourth criticism of Azariah is that Thomas was a dialogue theologian who was concerned about religious pluralism and religious harmony rather than the problem of caste.

Azariah described P.D. Devanandan, Raymond Panikar and Thomas as 'dialogue theologians' whose focus is on the religious, cultural and ideological plurality rather than the welfare of the Dalits. He says these theologies are neither focused on the Dalits nor bring any benefits to more than two third of (20 million out of 30 million) the Indian Christians.⁷⁶⁷ The Dalit theologians are highly critical of the general tendency in Indian Christianity for not appreciating the Christian Dalit movement and their theology in their struggle for human rights and dignity.⁷⁶⁸ Like liberation theology for Azariah, what constitutes Dalit theology is not one's knowledge about the Dalits and their sufferings but an encounter with the God of the Dalits and the experience of Dalitness. He says: "It is this encounter with the God of the oppressed in suffering and the oppressed Dalits in our land that has to be articulated and formulated as Dalit theology."⁷⁶⁹ Although Thomas addressed to the Indian context of religious pluralism, cultural plurality and diversity of secular ideologies through dialogue, this according to Azariah is only significant for the elite group and not for the marginalized groups. Azariah says that

⁷⁶⁵ Masillamani Azariah, *A Pastor's Search for Dalit Theology*, 129-130.

⁷⁶⁶ *Karma marga* emphasizes salvation through works and action.

⁷⁶⁷ M. Azariah, *A Pastor's Search for Dalit Theology*, 130.

⁷⁶⁸ Arvind P. Nirmal; V. Devasahayam, ed. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: A Centenary Tribute*, (Madras: Gurukul, 1991), 91.

⁷⁶⁹ M. Azariah, in *Asian Christian Theologies*, 294.

Thomas' theology of dialogue is not relevant for the Dalit Christians who form the majority of Indian Christianity.⁷⁷⁰

Azariah's argument that Thomas was a brahmanical theologian cannot be fully accepted. It is true that Thomas was of high caste background (see discussions earlier) and that Thomas' theology is known as theology of *karma marga*; but the term was not used by Thomas. It was Robin Boyd's description to indicate that Thomas gave importance to action and reflection.⁷⁷¹ Boyd writes: "If we allow ourselves to describe the theology of M.M. Thomas as *Karma marga* we must make it clear that the 'action' involved is chiefly 'action in the world', the action of loving *diakonia*."⁷⁷² The methodology of Thomas' theology was based on action and reflection, a feat he shares with liberation theology. He focused on a participatory theology rather than a speculative, practical and not theoretical or philosophical. Thomas' theology was not a theoretical or an arm chair theology but an engaged, action-oriented practical theology. Thus he gave importance to action which is called *karma* or works. However, Azariah has a point in the sense that Thomas was happy to describe himself as the follower of *karma marga* in his later years.⁷⁷³ Nevertheless, Adrian Bird in his book on *M.M. Thomas and Dalit Theology* argues that content-wise Azariah's criticism is inadequate and invalid because Thomas spoke against the prevalence and practice of caste within his own church as well as in the society.⁷⁷⁴

Thomas condemned the basic foundation of Brahmanism which is nothing but the caste system. Thomas criticized religion because it exploited and discriminated the Dalits. Thomas writes: "Religion [Hinduism] has been a very anti-Dalit force and for this reason many Dalits would reject religion."⁷⁷⁵ Thomas exposed the discriminative and exploitive nature of Brahmanism and appreciated the Dalit movements for their boldness to question its religious authority. He writes: "the untouchables, women and

⁷⁷⁰ M. Azariah, *A Pastor's Search for Dalit Theology*, 130.

⁷⁷¹ R. Boyd, *Indian Christian Theology*, 311-330.

⁷⁷² R. Boyd, *Indian Christian Theology*, 323.

⁷⁷³ R. Boyd, *Indian Christian Theology*, 315.

⁷⁷⁴ Adrian Bird, *M.M. Thomas and Dalit Theology*, 129.

⁷⁷⁵ M.M. Thomas, *The church Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 83.

other weaker sections of Hindu society had been awakened by Hindu reform movements to the injustices they suffered; Anti-Brahmin movements were challenging traditional Hindu laws.”⁷⁷⁶

One needs to critically evaluate the substance and credibility of the criticism of Dalit theologians for labelling Thomas as the supporter of brahmanical tradition. Thomas does use elements from the brahmanic tradition such as *karma marga* and how brahminical leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Kechub Chandra Sen and Gandhi etc. have acknowledged Christ during the Indian renaissance in the 19th century, but at the same time he rejects the caste-system and pleads for reform.⁷⁷⁷ Thomas says: “Christianity is communion of communities in Christ. Christians are to be united in matters of justice for the Dalits etc.”⁷⁷⁸ If Thomas was a follower of brahmanical tradition then he should have also used *jñana* and *bhakti marga* of Hinduism. He was not concerned about them as they do not focus on action or praxis which was very crucial to him.

Thomas differentiated between social service and social action and emphasized social action to bring about social justice to the marginalized Dalits.⁷⁷⁹ The social service is the charitable humanitarian work that the church is doing from the beginning of Christian mission in India. But social action is not social service but social justice. It is the participation and involvement of the church in the society and politics to bring social justice by raising her prophetic voice against all divisive forces that works against human welfare and social harmony.⁷⁸⁰ The question one needs to answer is: has he used *karma marga* to support brahmanical tradition or as a methodological tool for Christian involvement and active participation in the society? It is an undeniable fact that Thomas’ theology is a theology of action and reflection.⁷⁸¹ But for Azariah and Nirmal,

⁷⁷⁶ M.M. Thomas, “The Concept of Secularism”, 36-37.

⁷⁷⁷ M.M. Thomas, *Acknowledged Christ of Indian Renaissance*.

⁷⁷⁸ M.M. Thomas, “Crisis of Secularism in India- A Christian Response”, in *Vision 2* (July 1993, Kottayam), UTC Archives MMT 490, 18-19.

⁷⁷⁹ M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, See Chapter 4.8.5.

⁷⁸⁰ M.M Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach to Indian Ecclesiology*, 9.

⁷⁸¹ R. Boyd, *Indian Christian Theology*, 311.

Thomas, by using elements of the brahmanical tradition, acknowledges the legitimacy of the whole tradition.

It is true that Thomas did not pay much attention to articulating or formulating a systematic and basic Dalit theology; but he definitely worked for the humanization of Dalits. Like Liberation theologians he insisted not on theologization of Dalits but humanization of Dalits. The claim that Thomas has nothing to offer to the Dalits and the marginalized people of Indian society and the cautious approach to disassociate Thomas with Dalits and Dalit theology seems an attempt to marginalize Thomas' contribution towards the salvation and humanization of Dalits. Dalit theologian V. Devasahayam, whose views will be discussed later in this chapter, makes a concrete statement which rejects these arguments. He writes "The goal of M.M's life and thought could be summarized as *Humanization*, humanizing the dehumanized or peopling the depeopled. It has been a search for the last, the least and the lost."⁷⁸² It was a search and faith seeking understanding and responsibility to humanize the last, the least and the lost people of Dalits, tribals and women.

Thomas spoke about humanization of Dalits, that is to make them fully human, to have a richer and fuller human life. Nirmal also believed the ultimate goal of liberation movement "cannot be simply the gaining of the rights, the reservations and the privileges. The goal is the realization of our full humanness or conversely our full divinity, the ideal of the *imago dei* the image of God in us."⁷⁸³ Thus, the goal of both Thomas and Dalit theology is to make the Dalits fully human for a better and a richer human life. James Massey writes that Dalit theology should create the possibility for fuller liberation or salvation based on the redemption of Christ to make the Dalits as subject of their history and to achieve and enjoy human life to its maximum potentiality.⁷⁸⁴ This is what Thomas strove to achieve.

⁷⁸² V. Devasahayam, "Search for the Last, The Least And the Lost", 110. See *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, 37 – 56.

⁷⁸³ A.P. Nirmal, "A Dialogue with Dalit Literature," in *Towards a Dalit Theology*, ed. M.E. Prabhakar (Delhi: ISPC, 1988), 79.

⁷⁸⁴ James Massey, *India 50 Years of Independence*, 189.

The criticism of Azariah that because Thomas was a dialogue theologian, his theology is irrelevant for Dalits, is also contested. Thomas stressed the need for dialogue with people of other faiths to maintain religious harmony, to avoid religious communal conflict and violence where mostly the marginalized innocents are affected for no reason. Thomas' call for both religious and secular traditions and ideologies to come together without any barriers is to enhance the task of humanization of people especially the marginalized Dalits. His plea for a Christ centred secular fellowship was aimed at working together with people from all walks of life for the transformation of society and the humanization of all. Bird notes that Dalit theologians have unfairly classified Thomas "as a caste Indian Christian theologian and thus irrelevant for Dalit theology."⁷⁸⁵

Azariah is not all-encompassing in his criticism against Thomas, because he also appreciates the courage of Thomas to criticize the church for its failure to take a stand with the Dalits. He welcomes the criticism of Thomas that the spirituality of Indian Christianity is deeply non-political and satisfied with individual salvation and charitable service.⁷⁸⁶ Further Azariah acknowledges the support of Thomas for the Christian Action Groups who work for the poor and the marginalized people of the society with a new Christian spirituality.⁷⁸⁷ Azariah's writings in the 1980s seem to indicate that he initially was more positive towards Thomas' ideas, but later on he was more negative probably because of Thomas' contextual theology. Others however are more positive about Thomas' contribution.

Azariah and Nirmal agree on methodological exclusivism for Dalit theology. Bird notes that the methodological exclusivism, as advocated by Nirmal and Azariah, and the high caste Syrian Christian background of Thomas have been used as arguments to reject and discredit the relevance of Thomas for the Dalits.⁷⁸⁸ But Azariah does not

⁷⁸⁵ Adrian Bird, *M.M. Thomas and Dalit Theology*, 17.

⁷⁸⁶ M. Azariah, *A Pastor's Search for Dalit Theology*, (Chennai/ Delhi: Dalit Liberation Education Trust/ISPCK, 2000), 122. See, M.M. Thomas, *Church and Human Community*.

⁷⁸⁷ M. Azariah, *A Pastor's Search for Dalit Theology*, 123. See, M.M. Thomas, *Church and Human Community*.

⁷⁸⁸ Adrian Bird, *M.M. Thomas and Dalit Theology*, 122.

completely reject the contribution of Thomas. This is clear when he writes “Now, these same approaches of Humanization, Liberation and Conscientization are well explained as being appropriate for application and adoption in India by Dr. M.M. Thomas in his book, ‘Salvation and Humanization’ and other writings.”⁷⁸⁹ Thus he recognizes the significance of Thomas’ theology of humanization. Azariah openly admits that the Indian church needs lay theologians like Thomas very urgently.⁷⁹⁰

The criticisms of Azariah and Nirmal that Thomas was a supporter of the brahmanic tradition, is only valid if one concedes that by using aspects of the brahmanic tradition in his theology, Thomas indirectly validated the whole tradition. However, it seems unfounded to reject Thomas’ thinking on the basis of the claim that he was a supporter of the brahmanic traditions. According to Thomas the Dalits suffered more after Independence under the Brahmins than under the British rule.⁷⁹¹ Thomas took caste system seriously and consistently criticized it; he not only spoke against it in India but also outside India (like Ambedkar), even before the emergence of Dalit theology. In his sermon at the Princeton Seminary in 1983 he spoke against it and stated that it has “enslaved one fifth of the people of India as outcasts for several centuries.”⁷⁹²

Thomas not only advocated Dalit cause but also encouraged Dalit movements and leaders who fought for the Dalit liberation. In 1983 he wrote to the editor of *Dalit Voice*⁷⁹³ expressing his support for the rights and struggles of the Dalits. Thomas writes “Whenever I get *Dalit Voice* I read the editorial and other items with great interest. I appreciate the manner in which you carry on the struggle.”⁷⁹⁴ Therefore, Thomas worked behind the screen as well as did advocacy on the national and international

⁷⁸⁹ M. Azariah, *A Pastor’s Search for Dalit Theology*, 104.

⁷⁹⁰ Adrian Bird, *M.M. Thomas and Dalit Theolog*, 119. See M. Azariah, “Growing and Sharing Together in Unity,” *The South Indian Churchman*, (Chennai: CSI Synod, March 1996).

⁷⁹¹ M.M. Thomas, et al., “Caste, Class and Power Structures,” Editorial, *Religion and Society*, 21/ 3, (September, 1974), 1.

⁷⁹² M.M. Thomas, “A Spirituality for Combat,” Sermon preached at Princeton Seminary, (December 8, 1983), Manuscript, UTC Archives, Bangalore.

⁷⁹³ *Dalit Voice* is a Magazine that echoes the voice of the Dalits and their aspiration. It tries to bring awareness among the Dalits as to know and see the atrocities being done against the Dalits and to challenge them to question and protest against all injustice and discrimination against the Dalits.

⁷⁹⁴ M.M. Thomas, “Letter to the Editor,” ed. V.T. Rajashekar, *Dalit Voice*, Bangalore: Dalit Sahitya Akademy, 2/8 (1983), 1- 15, 9.

level, giving Dalit the needed support so that the Dalits can come forward and take the lead. He organized, gave leadership and supported the marginalized to come up in their life. Adrian Bird summarizes this when he states:

Thomas was a liberation theologian who stood opposed to caste communalism, class injustice, human indignity and powerlessness, and a theologian searching for a dynamic theological foundation adequate in the quest for a full, liberating and just Indian society. It is here that the theological contribution of M.M. Thomas to the emergence of Dalit theology becomes most apparent.⁷⁹⁵

5.5.3 V. Devasahayam: A theologian of humanization

A Man for the last, the least and the Lost

Where Nirmal and Azariah rejected the relevance of Thomas for the Dalits on the charges that he was high caste and advocated Brahmanism, V. Devasahayam, another Dalit theologian acknowledges the contribution of Thomas for the humanization of Dalits. He makes clear that Thomas' ideas and theology impacted his personal life and his theological journey. Devasahayam notes that the life search of Thomas "has been a search for the last, the least and the lost" whom he identifies with the Dalits, the tribals and the women.⁷⁹⁶ Thomas' theology, according to Devasahayam, is a theology of humanization which advocates to treat a human being as a human being and to restore his/her lost human dignity and identity. Devasahayam is grateful to Thomas for his boldness to address the evil of caste in the society and for making clear that caste is a man-made divisive and deceptive system and therefore it should be rectified and eliminated by man. He says:

For M.M., the situation of the last, the least and the lost is not a divine destiny but the result of human sinfulness, a human creation requiring a human response for its eradication... This situation of oppression is made possible

⁷⁹⁵ Adrian Bird, *M.M. Thomas and Dalit Theology*, 165.

⁷⁹⁶ V. Devasahayam, "Search for the Last, the Least and the Lost", 110.

through human sinfulness expressed in structures such as casteism, capitalism and patriarchy.⁷⁹⁷

Devasahayam states that according to Thomas the struggles of the oppressed all through their life is nothing but for a threefold quest for salvation: 'A quest for selfhood, self-identity and group identity; a quest and search for historical consciousness and purpose in history and a quest to realize and experience an ideal community based on freedom, equality and fraternity.'⁷⁹⁸ Devasahayam addressed Thomas as the theologian of the marginalized masses. He makes an important statement, saying: "MM, as the theologian of the marginalized masses, has been a theologian not of the classes but the masses...but took a critical look at institutions like caste, family etc, which contributed to the marginalization. He has explicated salvation in terms relevant to the marginalized masses, as humanization."⁷⁹⁹

According to Devasahayam Thomas' theology of humanisation is a pertinent theology for the Dalit people as they need to be humanized from all forms and forces of dehumanization. This means a relevant and meaningful theology for the Dalits should be a theology of humanization as was advocated by Thomas. Devasahayam seems to be open towards a theology *for* the Dalits which gives space for others, where Nirmal was radical and exclusive in his approach advocating that there could only be a theology *of* the Dalits and *by* the Dalits. A genuine theology, according to Devasahayam, should express the longings of the marginalized people. It should reflect their struggles and speak for their equality and justice. Catholic liberation theologian S. Kappen shares similar view, making transformation a criterion. He writes "Only that theological reflection is true which grips the masses and thereby becomes a power that changes the whole world. All theologies of importance, therefore, stand self-condemned and must be discarded once and for all."⁸⁰⁰

⁷⁹⁷ V. Devasahayam, "Search for the Last, The Least And the Lost", 113.

⁷⁹⁸ V. Devasahayam, "Search for the Last, The Least And the Lost", 110; M.M. Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*, 23ff.

⁷⁹⁹ V. Devasahayam, "Search For the Last, the Least and the Lost", 56.

⁸⁰⁰ S. Kappen, *Liberation Theology and Marxism*, (Asha Kendra: Puntamba, 1986), 27.

According to Devasahayam the salvation that Thomas advocated was deeply connected and significant to the real day-to-day existential struggles of the oppressed Dalits. Salvation is closely “related to the struggles of the oppressed for a richer and fuller human life or to the process of humanization. Salvation is historical, corporate and universal, and eternal life is a present possession since the timeless God has entered into time.”⁸⁰¹ According to Devasahayam, Thomas was a prophetic voice for the Dalits who challenged the church to identify with Dalits. He writes: “For M.M. all quests and struggles for richer and fuller human life are the works of Christ and the Church is called to identify with those deprived of their humanity. He also maintains that participation in the struggles of the marginalized for humanization, is an authentic imitation of Christ.”⁸⁰² Devasahayam recognizes that Thomas spoke about humanization so that humanity, that is created in the image of God, is restored and honored to the maximum potentiality. Thomas criticized the church because the church as the body of Christ is supposed to raise its prophetic voice in support of the Dalits and the marginalized people, yet the church itself has become an embodiment of oppression.

Devasahayam acknowledges the contribution of Thomas in his own personal life as a student as well as in his professional life as a professor of theology, particularly Dalit theology. He writes: “I have drawn many valuable insights of M.M. for my lectures. As a student of M.M., I was greatly influenced by him in my theologizing.”⁸⁰³ The radical and revolutionary ideas of Thomas and his critique of the church for its practice of caste, the contextual and liberative dimension of his theology especially advocating humanization of the last, the least and the lost has impacted his life. These insights and the impact of Thomas has ignited and influenced Devasahayam’s theology and thus it is – indirectly - relevant to the Dalits and to the development of Dalit theology.

Devasahayam has emphasized the role Thomas played in protesting against Church’s tendency to go with the status quo and the party in power, sanctifying the existing order. Thomas however, demonstrated the need for prophetic criticism during

⁸⁰¹ V. Devasahayam, “Search for the Last, The Least And the Lost”, 115.

⁸⁰² V. Devasahayam, “Search for the Last, The Least And the Lost”, 127.

⁸⁰³ V. Devasahayam, “Search for the Last, the Least and the Lost,”110.

the Emergency period. Thomas, Devasahayam maintains, pressed the need for the revival of the prophetic voice of the Old Testament for maintaining human dignity and human values in the life of the Church.⁸⁰⁴ Thomas conceived the church of Christ as a secular movement to work for the liberation of the oppressed. The vision of the ideal human community and society is a struggle to break the oppressive structures of caste, class and patriarchy, which sabotage the attempts to establishing the community. It is a quest for salvation.⁸⁰⁵ Thus Devasahayam appreciates Thomas' notion of humanization, his emphasis on the importance of history, his prophetic role especially in the church. Thomas had direct influence on the theological development of Devasahayam and in this way also on the development of a part of the Dalit theology.

5.5.4 Sathianathan Clarke: A Colonial theologian

Sathianathan Clarke is a non-Dalit postcolonial theologian who advocates humanization of Dalits through his writings. Clarke has criticized Thomas for his indifferent attitude to the marginalized people and their struggles for fair treatment and acceptance in the society as equal human beings as others. According to Clarke, Thomas seems to ignore – and his solidarity with the poor and the weak as well as failed to explore – the ways and means towards their humanization and liberation. Clarke criticizes Thomas for his lack of attention to the “internal colonialism” that was distinctly and intrinsically part of systematic dehumanization of Indian society.⁸⁰⁶ Clarke states that Thomas did not pay attention to the Western agents of domination and exploitation. His failure has denied empowerment for the subjugated and marginalized people which would name and shame the colonizers. He also criticizes that Thomas has failed to study the power and impact of colonialism and failed to give guidelines which could have been a tool or help to deal and overcome the future forms of domination.⁸⁰⁷

⁸⁰⁴ V. Devasahayam, “Search for the Last, The Least And the Lost,”129. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983); Leonardo Boff, *Introducing liberation theology*,(Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987)

⁸⁰⁵ V. Devasahayam, “Search for the Last, The Least And the Lost,”116.

⁸⁰⁶ Clarke, *Empire*, 436.

⁸⁰⁷ Clarke, *Empire*, 435.

David C Scott who reviewed Thomas' book *Risking Christ for Christ sake* feels that though Thomas was concerned about the plight of the Dalits, he failed to identify the unique sufferings of Dalits as he has generalized the sufferings of the Dalits with the suffering of the rest of the people. Thomas was criticized for this generalization. Scott writes: "M.M's theological analysis is powerful and effective to a point. The same could be said of most liberation theologies. But by reducing the dehumanized to a general class of people that share certain "universal" attributes, some more telling attributes are disregarded."⁸⁰⁸ This objective approach of Thomas seems to justify the position of Dalit theologians like Nirmal and others that there is the need for an exclusive methodology that only Dalits can and should write a Dalit theology for the Dalits because others neither can share nor experience the dalitness of the Dalits.

Clarke along with other Dalit theologians feels that Thomas' contribution to the humanization of marginalized majority like Dalits, tribals and women lacks depth and analysis. He writes "For Thomas, who was a member of the dominant Syrian Christian (caste) community, to have missed these in some analytical (theological and anthropological) depth make one wonder whether he deliberately undercuts particular human beings and their concrete debilitation in valorising the much more abstract notion of humanization."⁸⁰⁹ Thomas was capable and could have done so much towards the humanization of the marginalized people but Clarke seems to suggest that he purposely avoided it.⁸¹⁰ Similar remarks have been made against liberation theology, feminist theology etc. and that ongoing reflection has made clear that generalizations on the basis of caste, gender, race etc are nowadays considered problematic.

Joy Joseph however notes that Thomas did not neglect the marginalized people. In fact he was trying to bring awareness and awakening among them right from early period of his life. Many non-party movements and Action Groups were attracted to his writings and commitment towards the poor and the marginalized in the society. There

⁸⁰⁸ David C. Scott, "A Mirror to M.M. Thomas's Perspective on Inter-Religious Studies" in *A Tribute to M.M. Thomas Christian Witness in Society*, 165.

⁸⁰⁹ S. Clarke, *Empire*, 436.

⁸¹⁰ S. Clarke, *Empire*, 436.

were movements and groups which he initiated - Delhi Forum is one such group.⁸¹¹ Thus, it seems, Thomas moved beyond mere words and facilitated and stimulated instruments for the transformation of society and the implementation of humanization. K.C. Abraham pointed out that Thomas used the 'grand narratives'⁸¹² of the dominant group ignoring the weaker section of the society. He says "A kind of 'grand narrative' that sweeps across different specificities is characteristic of his and other theologians of his time."⁸¹³ Dalit theologians reject the "master narrative" or "grand narrative" of the dominant elite group.

John C Webster, who has contributed to the history of Dalit Christians, also speaks about the "great theological tradition" and "little theological traditions" vis-à-vis the Dalit Christians. The 'great theological tradition' is the theology of the well-educated leadership, most of whom have had considerable formal theological training and in the case of India it is written in English. Little theological traditions are the theologies of the less well educated village pastors and catechists or of the semi-literate and illiterate majority of the Dalit Christian population. They are expressed in the vernacular. Webster supports the agenda of the Dalit theologians of today to interact theologically with the little theological traditions of Dalit Christians, with other theological traditions within the Indian Church and with Dalits who do not share their Christian convictions.⁸¹⁴ Dalits don't want somebody to write their history but they want to write their own history from their own experiences and perspective. They want to write a theology in which the Dalits are the subject of their own history.⁸¹⁵ As the majority of Indian Christians is of Dalit origin it is necessary that the church should pay more attention to the language of the 'smaller narratives' of the Dalits, tribals and women.

⁸¹¹ Joy Joseph, "Delhi Forum", in *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, 107 -108.

⁸¹² Brahmanical tradition and *advaita* philosophy etc.

⁸¹³ K.C. Abraham, "Introduction," in *Christian Witness in Society*, x.

⁸¹⁴ John C.B. Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 243-245.

⁸¹⁵ Sathianathan Clarke, "Dalit Theology: An Introductory and Interpretive Theological Exposition," in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-First Century*, 19 – 29.

David C Scott writes that though Thomas used the dominant religious tradition, yet he is not the only culprit as he is a follower and part of an earlier tradition.⁸¹⁶ One may like Scott find a logical reason to excuse Thomas for his uncritical acceptance of the grand tradition which is the tradition of the Brahmins, yet Thomas of his stature both nationally and globally should not have been carried away by the traditional way of using the grand dominant tradition. As a frontier and trendsetter he should have been sensitive to include smaller narratives and traditions of non-theologically trained as well as the marginalized people to justify his commitment to the poor and the liberation of the marginalized people of the society.

Thus, Thomas has been justly criticized for generalizing the unique sufferings of marginalized people with others, for engaging the brahmanic tradition in Indian theology and therefore using theology to voice the dominant narrative instead of engaging the 'little traditions' of marginalized Dalits in his reflections. Thomas may have failed to reflect directly on the internalization of colonialism among groups like the Dalits but his stress on Dalit's conscientization, empowering them to be part of the decision making process and enabling them to be subject of their own history seems to suggest that Thomas was indirectly addressing the internalization of colonialism.

5.6 An Overall Assessment of Thomas' Theology

The aim of this chapter was to see how Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization was appraised by the liberation theologies in India such as Dalit, Tribal and Feminist theology. Most assessments agree that the concepts of salvation and humanization of Thomas are inclusive and holistic, as they cover salvation of both body and soul; personal and corporate; historical and eschatological; penultimate and ultimate; secular and the sacred. He spoke about salvation and humanization of all people irrespective of their religion and caste especially for the humanization of the marginalized people in the society like Dalits, tribals and the women.

⁸¹⁶ David C. Scott, "A Mirror to M.M. Thomas's Perspective on Inter-Religious Studies" in *A Tribute to M.M. Thomas Christian Witness in Society*, 160.

The Syrian Christian high caste background of Thomas is a contested issue by especially Dalit theologians, who on the grounds of methodological exclusivism, deny that he contributed to Dalit theology. Many others however have pointed out that his high caste background however did not prevent him to fight for the equality of Dalits as God created all people in His own image. He openly questioned and criticized the prevalence and practice of caste within his own denomination as well as outside. Thomas was not a Dalit but he advocated for the humanization of Dalits and others. He did not write a Dalit theology as such; his writings and reflections were more inclusive in nature covering varieties of topics such as religious pluralism, nation building, theology of mission and dialogue etc. But his theological notions of humanization and salvation can be used as building blocks for a Dalit theology.

The critique by Clarke and others that Thomas generalized suffering and did not specify the particular oppression and sufferings of each group is justified. Also Clarke's comment that Thomas failed to engage with the 'little traditions' of the marginalized groups, is pertinent. Having said this, he neither ignored nor neglected the evil of caste and how it affected the life of the Dalits and the ministry and mission of the church in India. On the contrary, he suffered rejection by his own church on account of challenging the observance of caste in the church and its failure to play an active role in the struggle for human dignity and equality. Newbigin writes "He could be a formidable critic of the Church and yet his commitment to Christ was the deepest source of all that he did, wrote, said and was."⁸¹⁷ Thomas wanted the church to witness to the God of liberation as portrayed in the Bible by participating in the struggles of the oppressed sections like Dalits, tribals and women for justice, equality and human dignity in the human history.⁸¹⁸ Adrian Bird says "while Thomas is highly critical of the Church as an institution organized on caste and class lines, he is an advocate of the Church; in

⁸¹⁷ Leslie Newbigin, "Reflection of a Fellow- Traveller," *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, 3.

⁸¹⁸ M. J. Joseph, "A Tribute to M.M" in *...Into the Twentyfirst Century: Essays in Honor of Dr. M.M. Thomas*, 112.

particular the sacramental reality of Christ in the Lord's Supper, which, he believed, shook the foundation of caste for the first time in India."⁸¹⁹

Thomas was equally rejected by the Dalit theologians because of his high caste background, his use of brahmanic tradition in the formulation of his Indian Christian theology and his lack of an in-depth discussion and analysis of the Dalit plight in his theological articulation and theologization. It is interesting to note that where some Dalit theologians reject Thomas because he was high caste, such things do not seem to happen with tribal theologians or women's theologians. Nirmal and Azariah do not recognize the contribution of Thomas for Dalits and their humanization since they believe that they themselves developed the notion of Dalit theology. Nirmal may have laid the foundation for Dalit theology, but the writings of Thomas and the testimonies of others especially by the Dalits, tribals and the women about Thomas reveal that Thomas can be considered a forerunner who has contributed towards humanization of Dalits and the development of Dalit theology.

Thomas did not articulate a clear Dalit theology as such, but he advocated for the humanization of Dalits. He condemned discrimination on the basis of caste, emphasized the need for conscientization of Dalits, insisted that Dalits should be part of the decision making process to write their own history and destiny. Thomas has given seminal thought and given a sort of blueprint and foundation for the emergence and development of Dalit theology. In the eighties Nirmal and others have built on the foundation laid by Thomas which are revolutionary, reformatory, liberative, transformative and ultimately humanizing in nature. V. Devasahayam himself acknowledges how Thomas influenced his student life and impacted his theologization.⁸²⁰

⁸¹⁹ Adrian Bird, *M.M. Thomas and Dalit Theology*, 225. Cf M.M. Thomas, "Fellowship in Christ: The Gospel for Contemporary India," Manuscript, United Theological College Archives, (August 3, 1972), 3- 4.

⁸²⁰ V. Devasahayam, "Search for the Last, the Least and the Lost," 110.

5.6.1 *A Father of subaltern movements*

The nerve that runs through all Thomas' theology and writings is a call for a collective participation and action for humanization of the Dalits, tribals and women. His theology of salvation and humanization was not a literary theoretical articulation but a challenge both to the Christendom and people across the globe to respond to it through collective participation. He practiced what he advocated, by starting and giving leadership to many social action groups. He chaired National Alliance of People's Movements many times and was in deep solidarity with the struggles of the National Federation of the fish workers, Dalits, *Adivasis* and women.⁸²¹

Thomas' contribution towards humanization of the marginalized people was appreciated and Thomas was acknowledged, in the words of Mar Poulouse as 'spiritual father to numerous subaltern movements and for many across the globe he was a father figure.'⁸²² Though Thomas was not a Dalit he seems to have played a major role in mobilizing and organizing people and movements to work for the humanization of the Dalits and the underprivileged people. He believed "it is only the Action Groups and the people's movements that can challenge the State and the structure that it perpetrates."⁸²³

Thomas seems to have been a constant fighter and advocate of the marginalized people of the society all through his life. He not only fought but organized and challenged others to fight for the rights and justice of the marginalized people. He became, in the word of Kurian, in his "later years the champion of people's power and to participate in and organize a variety of people's movements, particularly those that represented the cause of women, Dalits, tribals and fisherfolk, for the establishment of a just social order."⁸²⁴ Poulouse Mar Poulouse writes:

⁸²¹ Gabriele Dietrich, "M.M. The Activist and Fellow- Traveller" in *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, 12.

⁸²² Poulouse Mar Poulouse, "Foreword," *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, i.

⁸²³ M.J. Joseph, "A Tribute to M.M" in ...Into the Twenty First Century, 111.

⁸²⁴ C.T. Kurien, "The Champion of People's Power" in *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, 27.

More than anyone else, MM was conscious of the task ahead. Since his return to Kerala in 1976, he was consciously nurturing people, especially the young people, to meet the challenges ahead. His energy, his house and his resources were set apart for this cause. The Thiruvalla Ecumenical Charitable Trust is an expression of his commitment to nurture future generations.⁸²⁵

He supported liberation movements which fight for their rights and freedom. It is said: "M.M. who discovered spirituality in the struggles of the poor in Asia, experienced spirituality in the resistance movements. In affirming and supporting the liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America, MM was defining the spirituality of combat."⁸²⁶ Thomas even favoured and justified violence as a strategy for self-defence for the militant movements like Dalit Panthers of Maharashtra as he recognized the prevalence of violence in the establishments as 'self-defensive actions'⁸²⁷

Thomas seems to have played a role like a ladder which others used to climb on to see and realize the revolutionary context of India and to engage and to evolve a relevant ideology and theology to liberate and humanize the dehumanized people of the society. He is not the leader of Dalit theology but he deserves to be recognized as a forerunner and frontier for the emergence and development of liberation theologies such as Dalit, tribal and feminist in India. It is logical for a Dalit leader to champion the cause of the Dalits like B.R. Ambedkar, but for a non-Dalit like Thomas to be a pro-Dalit and to speak and actively involve for the salvation and humanization of the Dalit is to be welcomed and appreciated by all who adhere to the equality of all people in the society.

It is true that Thomas dedicated limited space in the explication and exposition of Dalits in a more exclusive way, compared to other social and theological issues of his period. He developed his theological concepts as work in progress, in response to the day to day historical realities he observed and he responded to these as a Christocentric

⁸²⁵ Poullose Mar Poullose, "Foreword," *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, i.

⁸²⁶ "Celebration of Life Victorious Over Death," *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*.

⁸²⁷ V. Devasahayam, *A comparative study of Gutierrez' Liberation theology*, 120. See M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, 20).

person. He always tried to relate his personal faith in Christ to concrete situations and tried to respond to it as a responsible Indian and a Christian. Sabu Philip writes “Thomas did not try to systematically develop or interpret any theology or mission concept. His notions are a fragmented response to the different interpretations of various sociological realities in the last century.”⁸²⁸

Thomas advocated secularism in the context of religious pluralism; he developed this idea especially in view of the position of vulnerable groups like the Dalits who suffered most from communal violence. But Thomas’ secularism was to be an open secularism which has a place for God. In other words, for the purpose of humanization he wanted a theistic secularism which has a place for religion but which was not controlled by the religions or by any one religion. He advocated religious traditions which are open to secular values as well as a secularism which is open to religious values. Their existence and purpose is not to divide and exploit people but to unite and build both religious and secular values to enhance the process of humanization in the society. Thomas captured this with his notion of a Christo-centric secular fellowship.

C.T. Kurien who worked with Thomas in the writing projects for CISRS who summarizes the life and the commitment of Thomas in the following way:

I do not have the competence to appraise his theological writings. But what I have learned from him is that commitment to God is put to test in the commitment to human beings; the commitment to human beings is put to test in the commitment to the neglected, marginalized and the oppressed; and the commitment to them is put to test in action. This, surely, is not a creed for congregational recital, but I believe this was the basis of what he constantly spoke of as “the spirituality of combat.”⁸²⁹

Despite the wide international appreciation for Thomas’s theology and contribution to the ecumenical movement, Thomas encountered much opposition to his ideas in the

⁸²⁸ Sabu Philip, *Beyond Humanization*. 244.

⁸²⁹ C.T. Kurien, “The Man: Tributes” in *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, 72.

Indian context, by both church leaders and politicians. The lifelong struggle of Thomas was to transform and humanize the dehumanized people from the unjust social system. He seems to counter and confront political and religious authorities which either promoted exploitation of the poor or simply ignored the outcry of the marginalized groups. As a result, Thomas was criticized and condemned as a rebel and dissenter of the church. Thomas agreed that he has been a dissenter and was 'in the opposition always.'⁸³⁰ As he tried to integrate religion and society to bring about humanization in the society he was often rejected at both ends. Gabriele Dietrich notes "Since M.M. Thomas makes radical statements in religious language, he often suffers the fate of not being heeded by religious congregations (because of his political convictions) and by the secular political movement (because of his faith dimension)."⁸³¹ Thomas had a critical participatory relationship with the established church structures. He often quoted John R. Mott: 'Be a rebel within the church until it becomes what it should be'. This was an important aspect of his life.⁸³²

Despite his deep appreciation for Thomas, Newbigin criticized Thomas for identifying God at work in contemporary political revolutions. Newbigin objected to Thomas' radical understanding and interpretation of the universal revelation of God. Newbigin believed that the revelation of God in the Scripture is a universal revelation for all people at all times and at all situations. Therefore the Gospel has its universal relevance of changing and transforming society. But Thomas rejected this universalism and Biblicism on two bases. The human problems and sufferings may be somewhat same of the past history yet they are at the same time different from the past, simply because of the new situations and contemporary developments. Thus there is newness and Thomas says "it is the duty of the Church to grasp this newness."⁸³³

The second reason is that though Thomas subscribed to the idea that the Bible is the basis yet he was convinced that it could not be universally relevant and intelligible

⁸³⁰ Joy Joseph, "Delhi Forum", in *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, 108.

⁸³¹ Gabriele Dietrich, "Women and Religion, or Can the Women's Movement Become an Anti-Communist Force?" in *...Into the Twentyfirst Century*, 81.

⁸³² Jesudas M. Athyal, ed. *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*, 96.

⁸³³ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 47.

to modern people without translation and interpretation according to its present situation. Thomas says “The particular situation we face must determine the method and language, and to a certain extent even the content of the message of the Gospel.”⁸³⁴ Thomas gave more importance to the local context than to the biblical text because for him it is the context that adds meaning to the content. The content has no relevance without a proper context. This indicates the influence of Liberation Theology in his interpretation.

Thomas was also criticized for identifying revelation with revolution by ecumenical theologians such as, Hans Heinrich Wolf and Sunand Sumithra.⁸³⁵ According to Sumithra Thomas’ theology is not a proper theology Thomas has tried to find ‘revelation in the revolutions. His theological writings are highly philosophical, sociological, ideological or political, but almost never have biblical support.’⁸³⁶ But in defense of Thomas, Dutch theologian Theo Witvliet and South African theologian and anti-apartheid activist Allan Boesak have pointed out that “nowhere does Thomas give historical events the authority of divine revelation.”⁸³⁷ T.M. Philip⁸³⁸ argued that Thomas was “not identifying revelation with revolution because he is looking at the present historical situation through the eyes of the Christian Faith centred on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the New Humanity created in Him.”⁸³⁹ Thomas’ answer to his critics was that:

If we speak of God’s work *within* the revolution of our time, it does not mean that these revolutions determined God’s work, but rather the reverse; that He is

⁸³⁴ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 47.

⁸³⁵ Sunand Sumithra, an Indian evangelical theologian attempted to systematize the unsystematic theology of M M. Thomas in his PhD studies.

⁸³⁶ Sunand Sumithra, *Christian Theologies from an Indian Perspective*, 181.

⁸³⁷ Allan Aubrey Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence* 86; cf. Theo Witvliet, *A Place in the Sun: An Introduction to Liberation Theology in the Third World*, trans from Dutch by John Bowden (New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 157. See T. Jacob Thomas, *Ethics of a World Community*, 212.

⁸³⁸ See T.M. Philip, *A Study of the Encounter Between Theology and Ideology in the Writings of M.M. Thomas and its application in formatting a Communicative Theology in India*, Th.D dissertation (Chicago: Lutheran School of Theology, 1985).

⁸³⁹ Quoted in Jacob Thomas, *Ethics of a World Community*, 59; See T.M. Philip, *A Study of the Encounter Between Theology and Ideology*, 65.

in control of the revolutions of history; not that the divine power remain subordinated to the revolutionary purposes of man but the pressures of God are at work in them and that even the rebellion of man cannot go outside His ultimate purpose and that His power is available for the judgment and renewal of every situation.⁸⁴⁰

Thomas did not accept blindly all revolutions as God's revelation as he admits the evilness of the revolution. Thomas accepts that revolution devours its own children⁸⁴¹ but he holds that "God is active in the Indian revolution preparing men and groups in India to face the challenge of the gospel of Jesus Christ."⁸⁴² The revolutions are not revelation of God but the revolutions are the indication of God at work in history. Thomas was considered as a trendsetter, a pioneer who connected the East and the West, Christian theology and social ethics, religion and society, secular and the sacred, historical and eschatological, ideologies, movements of secular and religious to work for a richer and fuller human life offered in Christ for all humanity especially the marginalized Dalits, tribals and women of the Indian society.

Yet some critique of Thomas seems justified. Thomas advocated humanization of Dalits, tribals and women but he failed to deal concretely and in detail with the crucial issues such as untouchability and their social humiliation. The criticism has been that he deliberately avoided these issues.⁸⁴³ In the particular case of the Dalits, though he spoke about the humanization of these people, he failed to address the unique suffering of Dalits with regard to untouchability and social discrimination. He tended to generalize the unique suffering of Dalits with the suffering of any other people in the society.⁸⁴⁴ In this way he minimized and overlooked their particular pain of social humiliation and discrimination.

⁸⁴⁰ M.M. Thomas, *Some Theological Dialogue*, 67.

⁸⁴¹ Refer Chapter 4.7.6 M.M. Thomas, *The church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 100.

⁸⁴² R.W. Taylor and M.M. Thomas, *Mud Walls and Steel Mills*, (New York: Friendship Press, 1963), 92.

⁸⁴³ S. Clarke, *Empire*, 436.

⁸⁴⁴ David C. Scott, "A Mirror to M.M. Thomas's Perspective on Inter-Religious Studies" in *A Tribute to M.M. Thomas Christian Witness in Society*, 165.

Thomas as the chairperson of the WCC/CC fought against the racial discrimination of the white against the Blacks under his leadership. He even initiated and made WCC to set apart a special fund to help and develop the suffering Black people. This adds to his credit and concern for the humanization of the Blacks who are marginalized and discriminated because of their racial background. He even asked for the cooperation of the representatives from Asia to be together with him to wage the war against racism.⁸⁴⁵ But when Thomas could do something concrete for the problem of apartheid in South Africa at the international level what did he do in WCC for his own Indian Dalits? Was he sensitive to the dehumanization of the Blacks beyond India but insensitive and indifferent to the dehumanization of Dalits within India? It is striking that Thomas failed to mobilize the members of the WCC and especially the Indians and Asians to fight against untouchability practiced both in the society and within the churches. He dealt with the global issues like racial and gender discrimination but failed to pay attention to local and national issues which threaten the very basis and rudiment of human freedom and existence.

Thomas called for an inclusive approach towards people of other religious and secular ideologies but he is not open to the gods of other religions as he postulated a Christo-centric secular fellowship. On the one hand he calls for an openness and inclusivism but on the other hand he was exclusive in his Christo-centric secular fellowship. There seems to be a contradiction as there is exclusivism within his inclusivism.⁸⁴⁶ Clarke and K.C Abraham criticize Thomas for his Christo-monism as he gave more important to Christ. Clarke says "One wonders whether Christocentrism was Thomas undoing....Perhaps a theocentric proposal could have made room for more God outside of Christ while also legitimizing various models of being human beyond Jesus."⁸⁴⁷ K.C. Abraham also criticizes Thomas on the same line saying "Christocentrism is not the most helpful paradigm, but Christ-in-relation seems to be the better way of

⁸⁴⁵ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 341.

⁸⁴⁶ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 40-41

⁸⁴⁷ S. Clarke, *Empire*, 432.

affirming God's renewing transforming work in our midst."⁸⁴⁸ Thomas' Christocentrism calls for a review in the context of multiple claims for finality and superiority of revelation and salvation.

However, despite the justified critique that has been voiced against certain aspects of Thomas' theology, this study on Thomas' concepts of salvation and humanization has identified more positive elements than negative towards development of Dalit theology and humanization. The building blocks that are identified in Thomas' theology for the development of Dalit theology could be classified into three main fields as anthropology, Christology and ecclesiology.

5.6.2 Christological significance for Dalit theology

Thomas' Christology is the foundation both for Dalit solidarity and Dalit humanization. Thomas' notion of the historical Jesus serves as the source and base for development of Dalit Christology which promises a richer and a fuller life in Christ from all dehumanization. His Christo-centric notion of anthropology based in incarnation is pivotal for human equality. For Thomas the incarnation of Jesus as God identifying and contextualizing himself with the poor and the needy people of the society authenticates equality and sanctity of human life. Jesus as the new man and new humanity gives hope for a richer and fuller life for Dalits. The socio-religious humiliation and crucifixion of Jesus portrays the dalitness of Jesus and his suffering as a proto type of Dalit is significant towards the development of Dalit theology. Jesus touching the untouchable lepers and healing them, his association with sinners, tax collectors and Samaritans breaks all social and religious barriers and affirms equality and purity of all people in the sight of God. Thomas' focus on the resurrection of Jesus is the foundational hope for the marginalized Dalits as resurrection of Jesus promises a richer and a fuller human life both historically and eschatologically.

⁸⁴⁸ K.C. Abraham, "Introduction," in *Christian Witness in Society*, xiv.

5.6.3 Anthropological insights for Dalit theology

Thomas' quest for humanization and for a political and this worldly interpretation of salvation are a basic building block for humanization of Dalits. His advocacy to make vulnerable groups subject of their own history and empower them to be part of the decision making process is important for them to decide their own history and destiny. His stress on the importance of land for Dalits is pivotal both for their economical dependency as well as reputation and status in the society. Thomas' focus on humanism brings significance to the struggles of Dalits for their human identity and dignity. His emphasis on Dalit education and conscientization to bring awareness and awakening among Dalits is a key for Dalit humanization. Thomas' integrated salvation of body and soul, sacred and secular, historical and eschatological are of considerable value to present a holistic approach to salvation and humanization. The aim of his theological quest is humanization and transformation of society which he has in common with Liberation Theologies. Therefore he starts from the context, with actual people and their lives, rather than with theology, philosophy or the bible. While Thomas puts much emphasis on anthropology, he does not go as far as Azariah who states the God of the oppressed can be encountered in suffering and the oppressed Dalits.

5.6.4 Ecclesiological significance for Dalit theology

Thomas' critical and radical ecclesiology is critical for Dalit ecclesiology as he freely and boldly criticized the church for its failure to carry out its prophetic ministry and its practice of caste within the church. His notion of open secularism and a Christo-centric secular fellowship aim for religious harmony and peaceful coexistence in the context of plurality of religious faiths and multiple truth claims for superiority of one's religious tradition and revelation. His plea to work with all people of good will irrespective of caste, color and creed towards Dalit humanization is a necessity because Dalits need cooperation and solidarity of all people to be freed from all forms and forces of oppression and exploitation. Thomas' observation and recommendation of Lord's Table and how it has brought and can continue to bring people of all castes together as one

body of Christ at the communion table is significant for the eradication of caste towards establishing a casteless society. Thomas' concepts of salvation and humanization connect church and society, salvation to represent the church and humanization for secular. Thomas's critique of evangelical spirituality and eschatological salvation of the church has been the critique of liberation theologies like Dalit theology. His critique of church and society for segregating and stigmatizing the marginalized Dalits, tribals and women on the basis of caste, color and gender shows his solidarity for their dignity, identity and equality in the society.

5.7 Conclusion

Thomas' concept of salvation and humanization has been greatly appreciated and recognized both nationally and globally by Christian leaders and theologians. The appraisal of Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization has been done from four different perspectives. The liberation perspective shows how Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization is closely related and connected with the liberation theology, focusing on the humanization of the marginalized people like Dalits, tribals and women from all forms and forces of exploitation, oppression, dehumanization and discrimination in the name of creed, caste, color and gender. Thomas was acknowledged as a liberation theologian of the Majority World and as a forerunner of liberation theologies in India such as Dalit, tribal and feminist theologies. He questioned and challenged both religious and secular authorities to work for the humanization of people so that they could have a fuller and a richer human life in the society.

Dalit theologians like Nirmal and Azariah declined to recognize the contribution of Thomas on the charges that Thomas was a high caste Syrian Christian, used the tradition of the Brahmins which is anti-Dalit, oppressive and discriminatory in nature. Yet these charges were questioned and rebutted in this study because Thomas vehemently opposed and condemned caste within the church and outside of the church. Moreover, Dalit theologians like Devasahayam and others recognized and

acknowledged Thomas as the theologian of humanization, a prophetic voice for the voiceless people and a theologian of the marginalized masses.

The life of Thomas especially the later part of his life was dedicated towards the salvation and humanization of the marginalized Dalits, tribals and women. The tribals and feminists looked at Thomas as a champion of human rights who fought against sexism and racism to bring freedom, equality, human identity and dignity. There is little doubt that Thomas was a theologian of humanization who defended the cause of the marginalized people but the main valid criticism is that Thomas did not adequately deal with the actual and specific problems and sufferings of these groups of people. The struggles and suffering of the each of the marginalized people are unique, while Thomas generalized their sufferings as comparable with the suffering of all other people. Thomas failed to acknowledge the internalization of oppression and the smaller narratives of the Dalits but he used the grand narratives of the high caste people. He could have done much more to the humanization of these people with his responsible position in the WCC/CC had he paid more attention to the dehumanized people of the society.

The Dalits live in the outskirts or margins of the village; the tribals live at the mountain regions or the margins of India; and the women in general and Dalit and tribal women in particular live at the very bottom of the society. Indeed, they are the marginalized and suppressed people of the society whose dignity, fullness of life and humanization was the central concern of M.M. Thomas. Thomas' Christology that portrays Jesus as the new human and new humanity, his anthropology which focus on equality of all human beings in the creation of God and his radical and critical ecclesiology are crucial for development of Dalit theology which advocates humanization of Dalits.

CHAPTER 6

RELEVANCE OF SALVATION AND HUMANIZATION TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF DALIT THEOLOGY

6.1 Introduction

The cry of humanity – in particular of the marginalized Dalits – has been a cry for salvation and humanization from all forms and forces that suppress and discriminate people on the basis of caste, color, creed and gender. The Dalit movement and Dalit theology have emerged to address and challenge these systemic and structural evils that deny Dalits of their basic human rights. A Dalit theology of humanization that takes its point of departure in the theology of M.M. Thomas should reflect on these burning issues of Dalits, such as social injustice, inequality, discrimination and dehumanization in the society. The caste system of Hinduism in India has been considered a curse by Dalits and Dalit activists; it breeds inequality and discrimination among people to keep them against each other as enemies, as one is placed higher than the other in the hierarchy of caste. The caste system can therefore be considered an ‘enemy’ of Dalits; because of it, people treat Dalits as worse than animals and dehumanize them in every aspect of their social and religious life.

This chapter deals with the significance of Thomas’ theology of salvation and humanization for the development of a Dalit theology in India. Though there is a general acclamation of Thomas’ interpretation of the concepts salvation and humanization and of his quest for humanization of marginalized groups like Dalits, tribals and women, Thomas has often been reproached for generalizing both the suffering and the quest for humanization of marginalized groups. Building on Thomas’ notions of salvation and humanization this chapter endeavors to move beyond Thomas’ theology and aims at developing a Dalit theology which links Thomas’ ideas to the particular plight and humanization of Dalits. His theology of humanization has a far reaching relevance for

the development of a Dalit theology as well as for the mission of the church. In this chapter I propose a triangular model for the development of Dalit theology which enhances the task of humanization of the Dalits. Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization revolves around Christology, anthropology and ecclesiology and aims at the humanization of the marginalized people. The task of humanization requires a clear understanding of the above three foci in theology for the humanization of Dalits and their interdependence. The proposed triangular model is integral; it argues for an integrated understanding of the salvation of body and soul, both historical and eschatological.

The structure of the chapter follows the three-step see/judge/act approach of liberation theology. Section 6.2 focusses on the 'see' part of the hermeneutical circle: the context. It describes the position and the sufferings of the Dalits and the oppressive structures that produce and prolong their oppression. The experiences of Dalits form the starting point for the systematic theological reflection that follows in the next paragraphs; this is the 'judge' part of the hermeneutical circle. Section 6.3 proposes an incarnational Dalit Christology as the source and foundation for humanization which relates the struggles and sufferings of the Dalit people to the sufferings of Jesus Christ. Section

6.4 suggests an integrated Dalit anthropology for humanization in the context of a disintegrated and dichotomized approach to human salvation. Christology and anthropology are interconnected and thus anthropology finds its base in Christology for humanization. Section 6.5 proposes an inclusive Dalit ecclesiology in the context of religious pluralism and communalism and advocates that the church as the body of Christ engages in the task of humanization of the Dalits with people of other faiths and secular movements. Section 6.6 discusses the 'act' part of the liberation theology approach and offers ways forward to improve the plight of Dalits based on the theological notions discussed in this chapter. Section 6.7 gives a conclusion to this chapter.

6.2 Dalit Experience as the Starting Point for a Dalit Theology

The attempt of liberation theologies such as Dalit theology is to come to a fresh reading and re-reading of the scripture based on questions arising from the context. To develop a theology based on Dalit experience is a good start towards the task of Dalit humanization. Dalit theologian M.E. Prabhakar summarized the multiple oppressions of Dalits in the following words:

Dalits have been the most degraded, downtrodden, exploited and the least educated in our society. They have been socially and culturally, economically and politically subjugated and marginalized through three thousand years of our history and remain so, even after half-a-century of protective discrimination (as Scheduled Castes) under the aegis of the Government of India. Even today they are denied individual and social identity (self-respect and status). The Dalits form the inner core of poverty, which is birth-ascribed.⁸⁴⁹

Dalits suffer from an inferiority complex. They are taught about their low status in comparison with high caste people at home, school and in the society from their childhood onwards. The deep inferiority complex that is imparted and injected in the minds of the Dalits impairs their social mobilization. The Brahmins exploit and discriminate the Dalits with the religious sanction of the Hindu scriptures and religious traditions which play a central role in the life cycle of the people. B.R. Ambedkar said: "I had the misfortune to be born with the stigma of 'untouchable', but it is not my fault, but I will not die a Hindu, for this is within my power."⁸⁵⁰ What matters is not one's caste but character. Human liberation requires human collective revolt against these controls of Brahmanical religion on the people. Thomas believed: "It is only when this basic socio-cultural revolution abolishes the mental cum social slavery of the caste system that the free and equal society which does justice to man's humanity can

⁸⁴⁹ M.E. Prabhakar "The Search for a Dalit Theology," in *Toward a Dalit Theology* 40.

⁸⁵⁰ Quoted in *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, 53.

emerge in India.”⁸⁵¹ Aruna Gnanadason observes that in the name of caste superiority a form of genocide is quietly being committed against the Dalits and she says that the violence against the women is on the increase.⁸⁵² The majority of the marginalized Dalits are not aware of their basic human rights and privileges.

The dehumanizing activities continue to happen in the open street because nobody has the courage to question it. Dalit women are being gang-raped publically and forced to parade naked on the streets; these are things that have become common phenomena even in the 21st century. Gnanadason speaks about three mandates to challenge the violence against women: to recognize violence in all its forms as violence is the *violation of the personhood* of the other; to recognize our own complicity in the violence and to see the liturgy of the church as providing a sacred space that challenges violence.⁸⁵³

Dalits are manipulated and exploited in numerous ways. Apart from societal marginalization and exploitation Dalits complain that they are made a market place, being marketed through writings and speeches of some people as object of all kinds of research both by the national and international researchers. They remain only the object of academic research and theologization rather than the subject of humanization. There are ministries and theologies that encash money in the name of Dalits, but in reality there is no significant change of status both socially and economically, neither in the society nor in the church. In spite of government reservations, Christian and other NGO social work and all the research work among the marginalized people their status remains the same. Where is the problem rooted? Taking advantage of the sensitive and reactive nature of caste system, caste is neither openly addressed nor criticized. Even within the church, the issue is silenced, rather than addressed through the preaching of the word nor through any discussion and debates. The demon of caste is covered and protected within the church and not to expose either by the high caste or low caste

⁸⁵¹ M.M. Thomas, *The Secular Ideologies of India*, 125.

⁸⁵² Aruna Gnanadason, “Fullness of Life in Christ for all”, 3.

⁸⁵³ Aruna Gnanadason, “Religion and Violence as a Challenge to the Ecumenical Movement” *National Council of Churches Review*, 122/4 (May 2002), 426 – 431. (421 – 435)

people. The high caste people don't want to speak against caste system as they are the oppressors and direct beneficiaries of caste system, by not allowing the Dalits to come up in the leadership of the church. The Dalits don't want to speak or hear anything about them as it is not a topic of human respect and dignity but shame and humiliation. This mentality need to be radically challenged and changed for a genuine human identity.

One of the main reasons for the oppressed and exploited condition of Dalits is the lack of education. Most of them are illiterate and illiteracy handicaps them to freely relate to other people, so their social mobility is mostly confined to their own people and locality.⁸⁵⁴ Most of the parents are neither educated nor feel the importance of education for their children. They are more interested to send their children for daily wages to earn money than to send and spend for their education. The Constitution of India Article 24 prohibits child labor in any form below the age of 14 but it is not strictly followed. The children are put into all vulnerability at their work places where they are used and misused by the employers as per their interest.

Dalit Christians suffer a threefold suffering: they suffer at the hands of the high caste people, at the hands of the government who denies them scholarship and other privileges, which the Hindu Dalits receive, on account of their Christian faith and at the hands of their fellow Christians in the church.⁸⁵⁵ The Dalits are a majority quantitatively in the church but not qualitatively. They are numerically more but they have neither more power nor equal power compared to the minority upper caste people. The greatest challenge to achieve this is probably to unite all Dalits, as they are disunited and divided among themselves. Therefore Kancha Ilaiah⁸⁵⁶ writes that the Dalits should be united as one force to be freed from the brahmanic exploitation. He writes: "I hope, therefore, that in a struggle to liberate themselves from caste and class exploitation and

⁸⁵⁴ M.E. Prabhakar, "The Search for a Dalit Theology," 40.

⁸⁵⁵ M. Azariah, *A Pastor's Search for Dalit Theology*, 28 – 44.

⁸⁵⁶ Dr. Kancha Ilaiah is a Professor of Political Science and social activist who writes against caste discrimination.

oppression, the Dalitbahujans⁸⁵⁷ turn to the base of the material culture to emerge as a united force. Over a period of time the brahmanical castes will become casteless and classless and then we will establish an egalitarian India.”⁸⁵⁸ It was also the strategy of the Brahmins to keep Dalits divided so that they can manipulate and exploit like the British who followed a divide and rule policy.

6.3 Towards an Incarnational Dalit Christology

M.E. Prabhakar has said that Arvind P. Nirmal, the founder of Dalit Theology explored Dalit Christology but that many of his insights on Dalit Christology such as the dalitness of Christ (with regard to his birth and death), were not developed or followed up due to his early death.⁸⁵⁹ This indicates the need for contributing to the debate on Dalit Christology. The historical person Jesus, who lived and worked in a particular place at a particular time, has been a great source of inspiration, motivation and hope for the liberation theologies such as Latin American liberation theology, Black theology, Tribal theology and Feminist theology and others. A Dalit theology which takes Thomas’ theology of humanization as a central notion also finds its roots and source in the historical Jesus, because it understands incarnation as God’s visitation of human habitation; thus human history is affirmed as it becomes the sphere of God’s redemptive work. Hinduism in contrast does not give importance to history; history is seen as cyclic and thus it has no purpose or progress.⁸⁶⁰

⁸⁵⁷ Bahujans are considered the oppressed communities within the caste system. They are known as the low or backward caste. They are the original early inhabitants who lived in India even before the coming of Aryans. Though theoretically higher in socio-spiritual status than the Dalits, they do not enjoy equal rights or privileges with the upper castes. See Joseph D’ Souza, *Dalit Freedom: Now and Forever*, 28. See, Kancha Ilaiah, *Why I am not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy*, (Calcutta: Samya, 1996), ix. V.T. Rajshekar, *Caste: a nation within the nation recipe for a bloodless Revolution*, (Bangalore: Books for Change, 2002), 7.

⁸⁵⁸ Kancha Ilaiah, *Why I am not a Hindu*, ix.

⁸⁵⁹ M.E. Prabhkar, “Christology in Dalit Perspective,” in *Frontiers of Dalit Theology*, 410.

⁸⁶⁰ Robin Boyd, *Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 186. The *advaita* of the classical or philosophical Hinduism teaches that there is only one reality that is Brahman and everything else is unreal. Thus history is down played in Hinduism.

The humanity of Jesus as embodied in the incarnation emphasizes the humanness as well as the Dalitness of Jesus (with regard to his experience of struggles and sufferings); both are key-components for an incarnational Dalit Christology. In chapter four we identified the following aspects of Thomas' Christology: a. the incarnation signals God's involvement with the world; b. Christ's life and teachings are exemplary of how a new humanity could take shape; c. his death on the cross shows the extent of his solidarity with suffering people; d. his resurrection gives the hope that suffering will not have the final word; e. Christ after his resurrection has begun to work towards humanization and the salvation of the world (in history through people). This paragraph develops a Dalit Christology, taking the above aspects of Thomas' Christology as building blocks.

6.3.1 Jesus' protest against social segregation

Thomas' interpretation of Jesus as the new man, new creation and new humanity assures newness and genuineness to Dalit human identity. According to Thomas, Jesus in his life and teachings exemplified how a new humanity could take shape and come into being. He demonstrated the validity and sanctity of human life by touching the untouchable lepers who lived in the outskirts of the city, like the Dalits. The Manusmriti segregated and stigmatized Dalits as untouchables and unseeable of the society; likewise, the Mosaic Law declared the lepers as untouchables and unseeable.⁸⁶¹ But Jesus approached them and touched them (making himself unclean according to Mosaic law) and brought cleansing and healing to their bodies and set them free from the curse of the law which separated them from the rest of the society who claimed themselves as pure and clean.⁸⁶² The lepers received newness and wholeness in their body and thus they could be legally and ritually certified to be accepted back in the society as full human beings, without any discrimination.

⁸⁶¹ Leviticus. 13: 45.

⁸⁶² Luke 17: 11 - 19

Jesus affirmed these actions by his teachings, saying: 'I have not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it.' Jesus fulfilled the law and gave it a new interpretation.⁸⁶³ The healings of Jesus bring both physical and social healing in the life of the people. In the case of the lepers and woman with issue of blood and he takes away the cause of impurity and segregation; in the case of the Samaritan woman the notion of impurity according to the Mosaic law is not changed, but the attitude of Jesus towards the people and the law changes. In what has sometimes has been called 'the Nazareth Manifesto' (Luke 4: 18 and 19), Jesus proclaimed the beginning of a new era with his ministry: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of God's favour." And he added: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

The Nazareth Manifesto is good news for the poor and the marginalized people. According to David Bosch the Nazareth Manifesto t makes three things clear: the centrality of Jesus' ministry is focused on the poor; there is no more vengeance and his ministry includes the Gentiles.⁸⁶⁴ This is also the mission manifesto of Jesus to the Dalits who are poor, oppressed and imprisoned socially and religiously by the caste system. Dalit theologians believe that the Nazareth Manifesto is very significant for Dalit humanization and Dalit theology. Nirmal says that the Nazareth Manifesto is manifesto for Dalits. The liberation that Jesus promises includes the liberation of Dalits.⁸⁶⁵ It is the execution of the Nazareth Manifesto that led to the crucifixion of Jesus on the cross. Jesus the new man and new humanity promises a fuller and a richer life for Dalits, humanizing the dehumanized from all forms and forces that oppress people.

Jesus assured freedom from the law which legitimized the discrimination of the lepers, prostitutes, Samaritans, tax collectors and sinners as socially and religiously impure and proclaimed the beginning of the Kingdom of God. Like Jesus, Paul stressed

⁸⁶³ Mathew. 5: 17.

⁸⁶⁴ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991, Bangalore: Centre For Contemporary Christianity, 2006), 110 – 115.

⁸⁶⁵ A.P. Nirmal, *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, 69

the importance of freedom from the law, especially in his epistles to Romans and Galatians, stressing that the gentile Christians were not to be burdened with the Mosaic law, but were included in a new community through their faith in Christ.⁸⁶⁶ Jesus stated that what makes people unclean is their intention and their deeds, not what they eat or whom they touch (Mt 15: 11). Jesus' touching of unclean woman and a deceased boy, his interaction with Samaritans, and leprosy patients as well as his teachings affirm that there are no ideas of pollution and impurity in the new community in Christ. This is reaffirmed in the story of Peter and Cornelius the Roman Centurion.⁸⁶⁷ In that spirit, Thomas condemned the prevalence and practice of caste both within the church as well as outside the church.

6.3.2 The humanness of Jesus

The humanness of Jesus in its most basic sense is the common human nature that Jesus shared with the rest of humanity. But theologically speaking, the very act of God becoming human in Jesus, was an act which indicates how humanity is affirmed and dignified in God's plan of redemption. The humanness of Jesus therefore gives validity and authentic meaning to humanity in general and to the marginalized people whose human identity and dignity has been denied, in particular.⁸⁶⁸ For Dalits, the validity and genuine humanness of their life has been denied by Hindu scriptures and tradition.⁸⁶⁹ This has been taught and legitimized, sanctified and practiced by the Hindu society down through the centuries. Dalits have been taught to believe this evil device - the caste system - that Brahmins have developed to segregate and separate people into castes; on the basis of this system Dalits are discriminated and stigmatized as impure, unclean and thus are considered the untouchables of the society. As a result Dalits are manipulated and exploited and forced to live an inhuman, subhuman and dehumanized

⁸⁶⁶ See, Jeyaraj Rajaiah, *An Understanding of 'Freedom from the Law' in the Epistle to the Romans and Galatians and its Relevance to the Dalit Movement in India*, Thesis, Bachelor of Divinity, (Leonard Theological College, Jabalpur, 1989), 69 – 82.

⁸⁶⁷ Acts 10: 1 – 42. M. Azariah, *A Pastor's Search for Dalit Theology*, 3, 4.

⁸⁶⁸ M.M. Thomas, *New Creation in Christ*, 3. M.M. Thomas, "The Use and Place of the Bible for Christians in their Professional and Social Involvement," 38. Ken Christoph Miyamoto, *God's Mission in Asia*, 119.

⁸⁶⁹ Arvind P. Nirmal, *Towards a Common Dalit Ideology*, 124 – 126.

life in the society. They are oppressed and suppressed to live outside of the village and to carry out menial work that is considered unclean and impure. They are treated worse than animals, as animals are touched and loved by the people.⁸⁷⁰ As this treatment is legitimized by religion, Dalits are made to believe that this is their fate in life and many have internalized the notions of caste and also consider themselves to be worthless.

The humanness of Jesus authenticates and validates the humanness of all humans, including Dalits, and nullifies the so-called humanless-ness of Dalits, taught by the caste-system.⁸⁷¹ Thus an incarnational Dalit Christology, which builds on the humanness of Jesus, is a positive affirmation for Dalits' dignity and identity and a key notion for development of Dalit theology. For Thomas the goal of dehumanized humanity is to be incorporated into the humanity of Jesus. It is Jesus the new man, the ideal man, the perfect humanity who solidifies the search and quest for humanization. For Thomas, Christ is the true man, 'God-for-man', who in his life and teachings exemplified how a new humanity could take shape.⁸⁷²

Jesus did not just become human; throughout his life - in his work, life and death -he identified with the most vulnerable. The humanity of Jesus solidifies the experience of dalitness, impoverization and marginalization of the underprivileged people. According to Aloysius Pieris God opted to side with the poor because they are vulnerable and not treated with respect and no one seems to care for their socio-economical needs.⁸⁷³ In the identification of Jesus with the marginalized people of his time, God shows his preferential option for the poor. Jesus identified with the poor, women, tax collectors, lepers, the Samaritans and other people who were considered impure and unclean and who were rejected and treated low in the society. Joachim Jeremias, a New Testament scholar, maintains that the people in Palestine were divided into three groups based on the purity of blood. The Jews are the people of pure blood;

⁸⁷⁰ V. Devasahayam, *Outside the Camp*, 23.

⁸⁷¹ M.M. Thomas, *The First-Born of All Creation*, 26.

⁸⁷² M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 7.

⁸⁷³ Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 3. See M. Azariah, *A Pastor's Search for Dalit Theology*, 18.

the Samaritans are the people of mixed blood and the Gentile are the people of impure blood.⁸⁷⁴ Jesus lived and identified with the people of mixed and impure blood.⁸⁷⁵

The gospel records Jesus' appreciation of the marginalized people of his time for their faith and dependence on him. He appreciated them publically and interacted with the Samaritans who were treated with contempt - like Dalits - by the Jews. He commended them for their service attitude, gratitude and spirituality. The parable of the Good Samaritan is an example of one's social responsibility to serve fellow humans even if they are generally considered oppressors and enemies.⁸⁷⁶ The Grateful Samaritan Leper is an example of one's attitude of gratitude in response to what God has done.⁸⁷⁷ The Samaritan woman was socially rejected and degraded because of her being a Samaritan as well as because of her lifestyle, but Jesus accepted her and it transformed her life. After encountering Christ she herself becomes an instrument in mediating transformation and humanization for others in her own village.⁸⁷⁸

These stories of Samaritans remain as models of an ideal life based on the teachings of Jesus to love your God and to love neighbor. Though the Samaritans were rejected and neglected as worthless in the sight of the society, in the sight of God they were worthy and commendable not only because of what they could do, but also because they are humans. This affirmation and commendation by Jesus of people who were considered societally unclean and outcasts not only boosts the self-worth of the Dalits but motivates them to follow these models of ideal life. It also counters and challenges the unjust systems and exploitation by the pure and the dominant group. The people who were rejected as worthless were projected and promoted by Jesus as a model for an ideal human life.

An incarnational Dalit Christology is vital for Dalits and Dalit theology because Jesus not only accepts and identifies with those who were rejected in the society but also affirms their human worth; thus the marginalized people regain their lost human

⁸⁷⁴ V. Devasahayam, *Outside the Camp*, 24.

⁸⁷⁵ V. Devasahayam, *Outside the Camp*, 24.

⁸⁷⁶ Luke 10: 30 – 37.

⁸⁷⁷ Luke 17: 11 – 19.

⁸⁷⁸ John 4: 1 – 43.

identity and dignity.⁸⁷⁹ The ones who were labelled as symbols of humiliation and worthlessness are recognized, humanized and made as a symbol of admiration, imitation and hope. In the words of Azariah, the main focus of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ was to address “the little ones, the widows, the orphans, the strangers, the hungry, the unjustly accused and the dishonored, the outcasts and the despised in society. Thus the incarnation of Jesus validates human equality, identity, dignity and human worth to the Dalits who were denied and dehumanized by the society.”⁸⁸⁰

6.3.3 The dalitness of Jesus

Ethnically Jesus was a Jew, but he can be compared with the Dalits socially, on the basis of how he was looked down upon by the people of his society, in particular the Jewish religious leaders who claimed themselves to be the children of Abraham.⁸⁸¹ Dalitness is the condition of brokenness where Dalits are crushed and oppressed in every aspect of human life in the society. Dalitness is that which constitutes a Dalit as a Dalit with brokenness, oppressed-ness and worthlessness.⁸⁸² Dalits do not accept derogative terms such as Harijans and untouchables but proudly call themselves as Dalit. James Massey captures the wide usage of the term Dalit as follows:

Dalit is thus not a mere descriptive name or title, but an expression of hope for the recovery of their past identity. The struggle of these "outcastes" has given the term Dalit a positive meaning. The very realisation of themselves as Dalit, the very acceptance of the state of "dalitness," is the first step on the way towards their transformation into full and liberated human beings.⁸⁸³

⁸⁷⁹ Arvind P. Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," 229. M.E. Prabhakar, "Christology in Dalit Perspective," in *Frontiers of Dalit Theology*, 409.

⁸⁸⁰ M. Azariah, *A Pastor's Search for Dalit Theology*, 18

⁸⁸¹ M.E. Prabhakar, "Christology in Dalit Perspective," 409.

⁸⁸² M.E. Prabhakar, "Developing a Common Ideology for Dalits of Christian and Other Faiths," in *Towards a Common Dalit Ideology*, 54, 55.

⁸⁸³ James Massey, *Down Trodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation*, (Geneva: WCC, 1997), 3.

The dalitness of Jesus can be traced from his birth to death. Jesus was the child of an unmarried woman. According to Jewish custom Jesus should be called Jesus son of Joseph but he was called as the son of Mary⁸⁸⁴, a derogatory term to indicate that he was born out of wedlock. The birth of Jesus in the stable was first announced to the shepherds in the field who were considered as low and menial in the society. The sign that was given to the shepherds to identify the saviour of the world was the unlikely sign of a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger. Similarly, the sign and identity of a Dalit is that of poverty and seclusion in the society.

The birth of Jesus at the stable exposed him to all vulnerability in relation to hygiene and health, which is similar to the condition of Dalits in their locality with unhealthy atmosphere. Jesus had a shocking and traumatic experience as his parents were taking him from one place to another as per the direction of the angel. The flight from Bethlehem to Egypt and from Egypt to Nazareth clearly depicts how his survival and existence was threatened and challenged, right from his infancy, by the power system of his time. This has been the unsung and unheard life story of 250 million Dalits in India. Jesus suffered humiliation in every aspect of his life like the Dalits.

Jesus was called as a Galilean because he grew up in Galilee and worked in Judea, Jerusalem as well as in Galilee. He started in Galilee, a place which was nicknamed 'Galilee of the Gentiles'.⁸⁸⁵ Dhyanchand Carr, the New Testament scholar, gives three reasons for Jewish contempt for Galilee.⁸⁸⁶ Firstly, it was the land assigned to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali which were considered cursed tribes. Secondly, Galilee was situated on the trade route between Assyria and Egypt and thus the people were polluted as they had contact with the Gentiles. Thirdly, the people of Galilee were not considered orthodox religiously, because of the origin of Zealot sect in Galilee. Jesus chose to be incarnated and live and serve the impure people of his time.

⁸⁸⁴ Mark 6: 3.

⁸⁸⁵ V. Devasahayam, *Outside the Camp*, 24.

⁸⁸⁶ V. Devasahayam, *Outside the Camp*, 24- 25.

He and his family were looked down upon by the people of his time, saying is he not son of a carpenter?⁸⁸⁷ Nazareth, where Jesus was brought up was not a place of honour but shame and degraded by the people. It says can anything good come out of Nazareth?⁸⁸⁸ Again the similarity is striking. This is what the high caste people think of Dalits and their residences, as if they are good for nothing, thus they are considered no people. Jesus said the birds of the air have nest, the foxes have holes but the Son of Man has no place to lay down his head.⁸⁸⁹ The Dalits are depended on others for their survival because they are landless and homeless people. Thomas agrees with Ambedkar and appeals that Dalits should be helped to have their own land so that they can depend on the land for their livelihood.⁸⁹⁰ Azariah categorizes the Indian reality, specifically in relation to the Dalits, into five main groups which are 'population explosion, poverty, politicalism, pollution and pluralism'; these have been the challenge of Indian society.⁸⁹¹

6.3.4 Jesus as the prototype of Dalit

The condition of the Dalits' suffering mirrors the narratives about the suffering and death of Jesus. The crucifixion of Jesus is God's identification with the oppressed and suffering people of the world. Jesus suffered like a Dalit and therefore M.E. Prabhakar writes: "Jesus underwent these Dalit experiences as the prototype of all Dalits."⁸⁹² Jesus was taken in the public procession half naked on his way to the Golgotha where he was crucified. The Dalits, especially women, were taken in a public parade naked, for slaughtering the cow and many Dalit women are gang raped.⁸⁹³ The women are treated as 'fourth class citizen.'⁸⁹⁴ The Dalits live outside the village; Jesus died at the outskirts of Jerusalem. The Dalits are not able to resist and speak against all atrocities done

⁸⁸⁷ Mathew 13: 55

⁸⁸⁸ John 1: 45, 46.

⁸⁸⁹ Luke 9: 58.

⁸⁹⁰ M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, 25.

⁸⁹¹ M. Azariah, *A Pastor's Search for Dalit Theology*, 139.

⁸⁹² M.E. Prabhakar, "Christology in Dalit Perspective," 416.

⁸⁹³ Oliver D' Souza(ed), "Dalit Woman Gang-raped", in *Dalit Post*, (September 15, 2015), 2.

⁸⁹⁴ M. Kamal Raja Selvi, "The Dalit Women the Fourth Class Citizen," in *Frontiers of Dalit Theology*, 117, 129.

against them. Jesus remained silent as they charged him falsely. Jesus was publically humiliated by mockingly crowing him as king and crucified on the cross.

In the same way the Dalits remain voiceless and powerless people, succumbed to untold and manifold problems and sufferings in their life. Jesus was stripped off totally and rejected and forsaken by all including his disciples. The total rejection can be seen in his cry on the cross 'my Lord my Lord why have you forsaken me?'⁸⁹⁵ Thomas says that in "India the crucifixion of Jesus as the symbol of God as Suffering Love identifying himself with the agony of oppressed humanity, has been a most potent spiritual vision, inspiring many Indians irrespective of religious or secular labels to identify themselves with the poor and down-troddens."⁸⁹⁶ The crucifixion of Jesus is very significant for the downtrodden like the Dalits, tribals and women in their struggle for social justice and equality.

The mission mandate of Jesus for humanity is the 'Nazareth Manifesto' which Jesus proclaimed at the beginning of his ministry at the Synagogue in Nazareth.⁸⁹⁷ The Manifesto is a manifestation of humanization which envisages and promises justice, equality and liberation of the marginalized people. It was in the process of fulfilling the Nazareth Manifesto that Jesus had to face struggles and suffering all through his ministry. It was the Nazareth Manifesto that set the stage for the cross of Christ.

6.3.5 The resurrection of Jesus

The suffering and crucifixion of Jesus are followed by the resurrection of Jesus which is an ultimate victory over evil. Thomas believed that the resurrection of Jesus is the source and hope for the marginalized Dalits, tribals and women whose life in the society is characterized by separation, degradation and dehumanization. Though Jesus was humiliated and suffered death, yet Christians - especially the marginalized Dalits, tribals and women – believe that in Jesus' death and resurrection the brokenness of humanity is restored and people are all again restored to Imago Dei. The resurrection of Jesus is

⁸⁹⁵ Mathew 27: 46.

⁸⁹⁶ M.M. Thomas, "Faith and Ideology in the Struggle for Justice," 4.

⁸⁹⁷ Luke 4: 14 – 21.

significant for Dalits as it assures newness, new hope, new life, human identity and dignity.⁸⁹⁸ The life of Jesus from his birth to his resurrection gives hope for a better humanity and a better world. Bonhoeffer affirms this when he said:

In Jesus Christ we have faith in the incarnate, crucified and risen God. In the incarnation we learn of the love of God for His creation; in the crucifixion we learn of the judgment of God upon all flesh; and in the resurrection we learn of God's will for a new world. There could be no greater error than to tear these three elements apart; for each of them comprises the whole.⁸⁹⁹

The struggles and sufferings of this world should not be a stumbling block to see the hope and glory in the resurrection of Jesus. If the cross is the symbol of humiliation and suffering, the resurrection is the symbol of exaltation and glory. Therefore a Dalit Christology based on the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus promises the ultimate victory of good over evil, restoration of all human beings in the image of God and offers a perspective of a richer and a fuller life for the Dalits. Thomas writes:

the gospel of Christ is the message of a new humanity and that therefore being Christian in involvement with the world is a way of being and becoming human by humanizing the world, which witnesses in the pluralistic society of India to Christ as the source of a genuine humanism in which all may share.⁹⁰⁰

Christ is the source and hope of humanity and thus Bonhoeffer says "the whole reality of the world is already drawn in into Christ and bound together in Him, and the movement of history consists solely in divergence and convergence in relation to this center."⁹⁰¹ Massey believes it is the gospel of Jesus as the Christ that gives form and

⁸⁹⁸ M.E. Prabhkar, "Christology in Dalit Perspective," 412.

⁸⁹⁹ D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. by Eberhard Bethge, trans. by Neville Horton Smith (New York: The Macmillan Co, 1969), 130.

⁹⁰⁰ M.M. Thomas, "The Use and Place of the Bible for Christians in their Professional and Social Involvement," 40.

⁹⁰¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 198.

shape to Dalit theology and liberation. The content of the gospel is liberation and “the Gospel is Jesus Christ in whom, through whom and by whom God participated in our human history, which in the real sense is Dalit history leading the Dalits to freedom. It is in God’s action in history that, we see the roots of Dalit theology as well as its theological task.”⁹⁰²

6.4 Towards an Integrated Dalit Anthropology

The humanization of Dalits – especially Christian Dalits – requires an integrated Dalit anthropology based on the notion of creation as well as Christology. Dalit anthropology departs from the notion of creation; the Scripture affirms and supports that all human beings were created equally and in the image of God. In this the Bible forms a counterweight against the Hindu scriptures Purushasukta (Rig Veda 10, 90) and the Manusmriti that legitimize the caste-system. Thomas’ theology of salvation and humanization addresses the struggles and sufferings of humanity, especially of the marginalized people, and offers ways and means towards the task of humanization of the dehumanized people.

Thomas’ anthropology is also deeply rooted in his Christology. Therefore the Dalit anthropology should be based on Christology as Christology underscores the intervention of God in human history in the person of Jesus. Dalit anthropology finds its base and hope for humanization in the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, whilst the resurrection of Jesus Christ signifies the conquest of death and evil. Dalit anthropology without its base in Christology has no hope for a fuller and a richer human life. In the theology of Thomas’ salvation and humanization, anthropology and Christology are integrated and integral for the humanization of not only the marginalized people, but for all people.

⁹⁰² James Massey, *Roots of Dalit History*, 87.

6.4.1 Humans as the creation of God

God created all people in the image of God to have human equality and dignity; therefore the belief in creation is a powerful statement about the dignity of human beings. Creation also signals the fact that there is no inequality or superiority of one person over the other. In the creation of God all human beings are essentially equal in terms of both rationality and relationality in relating to God and fellow human beings. The dual purpose of humanity is to worship God and serve fellow humanity.⁹⁰³ The Biblical anthropology affirms equality of all people, before God, as equality and justice is the very nature of God. Therefore Thomas insisted that the marginalized Dalits, tribals and women ought to be enabled and empowered so that they can be part of the power structure of the society.⁹⁰⁴

This anthropology of equality and dignity needs to be embraced by Dalits, as they have been taught to believe that they are impure and inferior. It could serve as the base for positive thinking and self-esteem as well as for a clear biblical understanding of all human life and its importance in the plan of God. Thomas developed his concepts of salvation and humanization in a revolutionary, ideologically-gearred context. His theology links up with this revolutionary spirit and challenges the unjust social and religious structures and systems of the society.

The salvation and humanization that Thomas advocates is not just for individuals, but is a collective and corporate one. The power structures of society and strongholds of religious institutions, that produce and sustain injustice and inequality, need to be challenged collectively by all, irrespective of their regional, racial, national, creedal and caste interests and entanglements, to bring justice and equality to all people.⁹⁰⁵ Clarke makes a valid comment that “[a]ny anti-imperial theological analysis ought to be acutely aware of both the internal and external forms of domination and subjugation.”⁹⁰⁶ And Massey writes: “The liberation of the Dalits will destroy the system

⁹⁰³ D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 198.

⁹⁰⁴ M.M. Thomas, *Contemporary Ecumenism*, 178.

⁹⁰⁵ M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 325.

⁹⁰⁶ Sathianathan Clarke, *Empire*, 436-437.

built by the oppressors for survival of their own structures and status. The power generated by their struggle will liberate both the Dalits as well as their oppressors.”⁹⁰⁷ Thomas addressed and rectified the problem of gender and racial imbalance even at the international level in the various committees of WCC and in India strove for the abolition of casteism.

The greatest challenge to achieve justice for Dalits, probably is to unite all Dalits, as they are disunited and divided among themselves. Therefore Kancha Ilaiah⁹⁰⁸ writes that the Dalits should be united as one force to be freed from the brahmanic exploitation. He writes: “I hope, therefore, that in a struggle to liberate themselves from caste and class exploitation and oppression, the Dalitbahujans⁹⁰⁹ turn to the base of the material culture to emerge as a united force. Over a period of time the brahmanical castes will become casteless and classless and then we will establish an egalitarian India.”⁹¹⁰ It was the strategy of the Brahmins to keep Dalits divided so that they can manipulate and exploit them, a policy similar to the British who followed a divide and rule policy.

Jesus as the Son of God represented God to humanity and as the Son of man represented humanity to God. Jesus through his incarnation and crucifixion reconciled God with humanity and humanity with God. He reconciled humanity with humanity breaking the middle wall of partition between Jews and the Gentiles, clean and the unclean, so that all have equal standing with God. Thomas says that the nature of new humanity created in Christ is not only an inner spiritual experience of individuals but it also “the birth of a new age which manifests the new life in Christ and creation of a new human race as the body of Christ in the history of the world. That means, God in Christ has inaugurated a new – life movement, which renews human relationships, structures

⁹⁰⁷ James Massey, *Roots of Dalit History*, 102.

⁹⁰⁸ Dr. Kancha Ilaiah is a Professor of Political Science and social activist who writes against caste discrimination.

⁹⁰⁹ Dalitbahujans means ‘people and caste who form the exploited and suppressed majority.’ They are the original early inhabitants who lived in India even before the coming of Aryans. See, Kancha Ilaiah, *Why I am not a Hindu*, ix. V. T Rajshekar, *Caste: a nation within the nation*, 7.

⁹¹⁰ Kancha Ilaiah, *Why I am not a Hindu*, ix.

of society and culture, and even the history of the world.”⁹¹¹ Jesus as the new man and new humanity came to seek and save the lost, the last and the least of the marginalized Dalits in the society. This indicates God’s preferential option for the poor.

6.4.2 Salvation of body and soul

An integrated Dalit anthropology builds on Thomas’ holistic approach towards salvation and humanization of people. Thomas used salvation and humanization as inclusive and complementary concepts, emphasizing that according to the scriptures both need to be taken together consciously and carefully, for the gospel proclaims salvation of both body and soul. This approach is both corrective and normative and aims at bringing a richer and a fuller human life. It is corrective because it corrects the disproportioned emphasis on the proclamation of salvation of the soul and the one sidedness of the debate on the relation between evangelism and social work. It is normative because salvation and humanization are an integral part of church mission to bring people to a fuller and richer life in Christ.

James the brother of Jesus, in his letter teaches the importance of this integration of soul and body and faith and action.⁹¹² The salvation of the soul and body is important both historically and eschatologically; they are integrated and belong together. The resurrection of Jesus is the hope for the humanization of the dehumanized people, but this humanization starts here and now and will reach its ultimate fulfilment in the hereafter. Thomas makes this clear when he writes: “If Christ rose in the body; the redemption he wrought was not merely of my spirit or soul but one of the whole of me, body, mind and soul, and of the whole relationship to nature and men.”⁹¹³

The approach, that is required for humanization is not a dichotomization or compartmentalization of the secular from the sacred or body from the soul but an

⁹¹¹ M.M. Thomas, *A New Man in Jesus: Romans 1 – 8 Contextual Theological Bible Commentary*, trans. T.M. Philip (Thiruvalla: CSS, 2009), 28.

⁹¹² James 2: 14 – 26.

⁹¹³ M.M. Thomas, “The Christian Gospel of Redemption as the formulation of a True Secular Humanism”, *Student World*, (2nd Quarter, 1953), 138.

integration of both realms and aspects of life. This integrated approach also creates avenues to dismantle the divisive and discriminative forces that jeopardize humanization of humanity. Thomas' use of the term salvation and humanization connects church and society: salvation to represent the language of the church and humanization for the secular world. Salvation has to be both personal and corporate, humanizing individuals, groups of people and society as a whole. J. Murickan writes: "Though all religions condemn injustice and exploitation of the poor in their teachings, they have played a historical role in legitimizing the oppressive structures which has led to the marginalization and dehumanization of the masses."⁹¹⁴

But this cannot continue to happen in the civilized, technological and contemporary society. This evil system can only be challenged with the cooperation and support of people of all faiths and traditions so that the present and future generations can be protected from discrimination and dehumanization. The marginalized Dalits, tribals and women should seek the support of other likeminded people to challenge the unjust system; this is what Nirmal called for when he spoke about 'communal inclusion'.

Thomas believed that his quest for humanization of the dehumanized Dalits, tribals and women was the true quest of all religious and secular traditions. His pursuit of a political and this worldly interpretation of salvation and his critique of eschatological salvation of the church are of great significance to the marginalized people and is to be taken seriously. Thomas' integrated salvation of body and soul, sacred and secular, historical and eschatological is an appeal to the churches to present a holistic approach to salvation and humanization.

In his mission for humanization, Thomas advocated making vulnerable groups subject of their own history. Dalits becoming subjects of their own history, implies agency in a number of ways. It is e.g. important for Dalits to write their own history and not put up with a distorted history written by their oppressors. Thomas' stress on the importance of land for the Dalits is crucial; this way they can be economically independent which would enhance their social reputation and status. His advocacy that

⁹¹⁴ J. Murickan, S.J., "Introduction: Perspectives on Poverty", *Poverty in India*, 33.

the Dalits should be part of the decision making process is pivotal, as until now someone else decides the destiny of Dalits. His focus on humanism brings significance to the struggles of Dalits for their human identity and dignity. His emphasis on conscientization bringing awareness and awakening among Dalits is a key to bring about change and humanization in the society. The humanization of the downtrodden will not be a historical reality unless there is a radical restructuring of social structures and Dalits themselves are empowered becomes agents of change.

6.5 Towards an Inclusive Dalit Ecclesiology

6.5.1 The dominant minority rules the dependent majority

The Church of India is the Church of Dalits because 70% of Indian Christianity is of Dalit origin. But the leadership of the church is in the hands of the high caste people. Devasahayam says:

It was the Dalits (not missionaries) who took the initiative in mass movements and the missionaries were forced to respond to this Dalit initiative. There was a dramatic increase in the membership of the church. Due to the mass movements, the nature of Christian church was transformed from a tiny, urban, educated community of mixed social origins to a predominantly poor, rural, illiterate Dalit community. A permanent Dalit stamp was marked on the church and it is this church that has come to stay.⁹¹⁵

Yet the majority of Christian Dalits is ruled by a minority upper of caste people because Dalits are economically depended on the high caste people. This majority suffers at the hands of the minority because caste is practiced in the church. The Indian church needs an ecclesiology that is rooted in the Scripture and not on the caste system. The prevalence and practice of caste in the church not only affects the life and participation of Dalits but also harms the testimony of the church, the body of Christ. An inclusive

⁹¹⁵ V. Devasahayam, *Outside the Camp*, 38.

Dalit ecclesiology should identify potential Dalit leaders, which after adequate leadership training are given leadership in the church. The new humanity and community in Christ promises equality of all people whether one is Jew or gentile, male or female, free or slave for all are one in Christ. The incarnation of Jesus was to equip and empower the Dalits so that they are humanized and dignified in the society.

6.5.2 A Prophetic spirituality for humanization in the church

The insensitivity of the church towards the prevalence and practice of caste system in the Indian church is a major concern. Thomas says: "They seem to have settled down to a Christianity which is no more than an ethnic or caste cult. And there is little prophetic ministry within the Church, to stimulate self-criticism and repentance. The revival preachers are plenty. But they only promote a cult of spirituality which is unrelated to the transformation of social relationships."⁹¹⁶ His critique of a narrow-minded evangelical spirituality of the church is valid because often the teaching and preaching of the church is more focused on heaven- and eternal and spiritual life than on the present life and justice in the here and now. And this has been one of the main criticisms of liberation theology and the marginalized Dalits, tribals and women against the church. Thomas rejects this type of pietistic spirituality of the church but recommends that the church should focus and practice the prophetic tradition and spirituality of the Old Testament.

This notion by Thomas constitutes a key-element of a Dalit ecclesiology. The prophets in the Old Testament were not only committed to the spirituality of the people but also social justice and equality of the people.⁹¹⁷ The prophet Amos spoke the much-quoted words: 'Let justice roll like a river and righteousness as a never ending stream' (Amos 5: 24). They were the mediators between God and people. As the mediators of God they received the message from God and communicated to the people without any fear and prejudices. The message of God was received and communicated through the mouth of the prophets saying: 'thus says the Lord.' They questioned social injustice and

⁹¹⁶ M.M. Thomas, "The Transcendent Satyagraha of God," 3.

⁹¹⁷ M.M. Thomas, *New Creation in Christ*, 70.

oppression at every level of human life, no matter whether people were rich or poor, king or ordinary people. The kings and rulers were afraid of the prophets, because they exposed and challenged the oppressive and unjust system. A Dalit ecclesiology will have to address the problem of caste within the church, as the caste-system within the church taints the credibility of the church's witness, as well as outside the church, in the society at large, with courage and power. The silence on caste in the church has been the continued failure of the church, ever since the birth of Christianity in India. Hence prophetic voices like those of Thomas and of Dalit theologians such as Nirmal and Azariah need to be encouraged and heeded in the Indian church.

Change is needed in social systems and customs, cultural values and laws of the state to facilitate the process of humanization, but this change needs to start in the Church as the nucleus of God's new community. A prophetic tradition does not only address the social injustice and discrimination against the marginalized people with courage, but will also have to practice prophetic spirituality. This means a spirituality that takes seriously the struggles of people and engages itself to side with the poor and the victimized and to be the voice of the voiceless and hope for the hopeless people, beginning at home, i.e. in the church itself.

The prophetic spirituality aims at empowerment of the powerless and at equality, justice and freedom of people. Gnanadason appeals for "[a] spirituality of new life, of hope and of a future where justice and peace will reign – a spirituality wherein the Holy Spirit will empower those ground to the dust to rise up and dance the dance of freedom and liberation – it is this spirituality that sustains in our struggles."⁹¹⁸ The church should not be based on caste or class, but on love and compassion for one another and the acceptance of each other because all have become brothers and sisters through Christ, who liberated and saved humankind. A Dalit ecclesiology that aims to achieve this transformation needs to have a solid grounding in the prophetic tradition as its guide in decisions and deliberation in the process of bringing humanization in the church.

⁹¹⁸ Aruna Gnanadason, "A Spirituality That Sustains us in our Struggles", *Voice From the Third World*, 14/1(June 1991), 82.

For Thomas the sacrament of the Eucharist was the litmus test for an ecclesiology based on equality and justice. He believed that the sacrament of Lord's Supper is a common table at which all are welcome irrespective of caste, class or gender; that notion shook the foundation of the whole system of caste in the Indian churches.⁹¹⁹ Thomas' emphasis on the Lord's Table and its significance to break caste barrier has to be addressed in the preaching and teaching ministry of the church. Thomas believed that sharing the Eucharist has not only brought significant changes and transformation in the caste driven churches but can continue to bring people of all castes together as one body of Christ at the communion table. The Lord's Table invites and accepts people of all castes to participate together and to drink from the same cup.

Thomas fought for a casteless church, a church that is free from the observance and practice of caste so that it can be a model and instrument in changing caste discrimination in the society. He writes "The Church will have to involve itself more seriously than ever in the fight against casteism within the church both as worshipping community and as a social group. Is it not time for the Church to see that no recognition is given to caste at any point in the religious life of the Church, in worship and sacraments, prayer meetings and other functions?"⁹²⁰

6.5.3 A Prophetic mission of the church for social and eco-justice in society

Dalit ecclesiology is a prophetic theology which questions the very foundation of caste consciousness and the roots of caste in the church. Moreover, it advocates that the church participates – and takes the lead – in the prophetic mission of taking a critical stance towards the collective power of economy and state, based on the Nazareth Manifesto and other liberative passages of the Bible. The church should stand with the people in their struggle for an economy that gives priority to social justice and eco-

⁹¹⁹ M.M. Thomas, "Fellowship in Christ: The Gospel for Contemporary India" 3- 4.

⁹²⁰ M.M. Thomas, "Revival of Caste Consciousness," *National Christian Council Review*, 78/11, (November, 1958), 479.

justice (as God's salvation includes the whole world and not just humanity) rather than only affirming economic growth based on high technology.⁹²¹

The world is the center of God's work; therefore the church should be actively involved in the service to and struggles of the world. The Church becomes the Church in response to the world. The WCC Uppsala report in relation to the unity among all churches says: 'we have come to view this world of men as the place where God is already at work to make all things new, and where He summons us to work with Him.' Thus the churches need 'a new openness to the world, in its aspirations, its achievements and its despair.'⁹²² Jesus emptied all his glory and sacrificed his life for the redemption of the whole world so also the caste minded and elite group of people should give up their caste mentality to accept every one as equal. Frederiks makes clear as to what one should give up for the sake of others. She writes:

Kenosis represents the willingness to be challenged and changed by the other in order to be with the other. The model of *kenosis* is therefore a relational model of being in community in interaction with the other. Because *kenosis* calls for shedding one's once acquired status, the model creates room for flexibility and adjustment: for changing structures, institution, attitudes, policies, theologies or services which have become burdensome or obsolete.⁹²³

The missiologist David J. Bosch said that the church as one of God's instruments in the world, should work hard to bring reconciliation, unity and harmony in the society because God's salvation is for the whole world, rather than just the church. Bosch said: "The church is called to be a community of those who glorify God by showing forth his nature and works and by making manifest the reconciliation and redemption God has wrought through the death, resurrection, and reign of Christ."⁹²⁴ The focus should be on

⁹²¹ M.M. Thomas, *The church Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 126.

⁹²² M.M. Thomas, "Uppsala 1968 and the Contemporary Theological Situation", 44 (MMT 170, 41 – 50).

⁹²³ Martha T. Frederiks, *We Have Toiled all Night*, 406.

⁹²⁴ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 210.

the preservation of the community and the world and not one self. Though the humanization is specifically aimed at humanizing the marginalized people like Dalits, tribals and women in India, it has universal relevance everywhere where humanity is oppressed and dehumanized in various ways and forms.

6.5.4 A Plurality of spirituality and a Christ centred secular fellowship for humanization

Thomas believed that the Indian church should encourage and practice plurality of spirituality for the liberation of people. The church should embrace and practice the liberative spirits of Liberation theology, Black theology, Dalit theology and feminist theology because they produce new spirits of struggle against all oppression and injustice.⁹²⁵ These liberative theologies should work together, not independently but collectively, to show their solidarity in the fight against oppression and exploitation of people. The church of Christ according to Thomas, should be proactive and participatory to bring social and religious change in the society which is divisive and discriminatory.

Thomas envisages an inclusive ecclesiology which moves beyond Christian ecumenism and embraces all Indian traditions, cultures and religions to humanize people who are marginalized and dehumanized through various divisive forces.⁹²⁶ He appealed to both religious and secular traditions and ideologies to work together for the common good of humanity because humanization has been the search and quest of all religions. The two dimensions of spirituality which are relevant for revolutionary action in bringing justice to the poor and the oppressed are a regulative principle of love for liberative and political action and a justice centered on others.⁹²⁷ Thomas says:

Liberating social action in a pluralistic society has to be common secular-action but sustained by a plurality of spiritualities which may be religious or non-

⁹²⁵ M.M. Thomas, "A plurality of Spiritualities for Common Liberating Social Action in India" UTC Archives, MMT, 59: 49, 1989, 9.

⁹²⁶ M. Dominic Savio, "M.M. Thomas (1916 – 1996)," *Indian Christian Thinkers*, ed. Anand Amaladass, (Chennai: Satya Nilayam Publications, 2005), 244.

⁹²⁷ M.M. Thomas, "A plurality of Spiritualities," 9-10.

religious. It is a framework of dialogue among religions and between religions and secular ideologies at the anthropological level in depth that can create the cultural and spiritual support to liberating social action.⁹²⁸

As long as the common goal and focus is humanization, one's religious differences and ideologies should not be a barrier. Humanization of Dalits needs an inclusive common secular action of people of a plurality of spiritualities who join hands. The claim for self-sufficiency and superiority on matters of ultimate religious truth causes religious conflict and confrontation in the religious pluralistic society. The message of the gospel is more inclusive in nature, embracing all people of the world, as it has power to transform the life of all people irrespective of their racial, national and creedal differences. Siga Arles says that though Thomas advocated for an inclusive ecclesiology "the problem with Thomas' inclusive theology is that it remains undeveloped in clarifying what this inclusivity means. Nowhere does Thomas fully define the theme of the 'Christ-centred fellowship of faith' within other religions and ideologies."⁹²⁹

In the context of religious plurality and complexity of human life it is problematic to prioritize one particular spirituality as normative for all people; therefore the acceptance of a plurality of spirituality is an important tool to enhance humanization in the society. An acceptance of plurality of spirituality for humanization can better cater to the diversified groups of people and their needs and to some extent attends to the problem of religious conflict and disharmony in the society, where diversity creates tension and leads to dehumanization of people as one religious tradition is claimed to be higher and superior over the other.

This plurality of spirituality does not negate particular religious traditions, but can be based on one's own religious background. The Christo-centric spirituality of Christians can enrich and inspire other spirituality but need not be the normative for everyone. Thus, this inclusive model creates space for cooperation in the task of

⁹²⁸ M.M. Thomas, "A plurality of Spiritualities," 16.

⁹²⁹ Siga Arles, *Missiological Education*, 95.

humanization as everyone comes with their own particular spirituality which urges and searches for a fuller and richer human life. The common goal of religious and secular traditions is to be at harmony with God and fellow human beings. This basic human religious spirituality should be utilized for the good of humanity. Thomas advocated an inclusive approach connecting both religious and secular values to press hard for the task of humanization. He writes "... I have functioned all my life as a lay theologian that is, as a person living in the frontiers between religion and society exploring and trying to communicate Biblical insights for people in analyzing and changing society."⁹³⁰

In addition to the plurality of spirituality based on one's own religious or secular tradition the common humanness shared by all human beings forms the shared foundation in the quest for humanization. The common humanness such as to love and to be loved, to accept and to be accepted, to achieve and to be appreciated is shared by all human beings. Everyone is in search of ultimate truth to have communion with God and with fellow human beings. The inclusive model operating on the basis of plurality of spirituality with a religious human spirituality and common humanness or humanity gives space and hope to work together towards the process of humanization.

The ecclesiology that Thomas envisages, is one of a Christ centred secular fellowship; this notion is pivotal for an inclusive Dalit ecclesiology. In the Indian context of religious plurality and claims for superiority of one's religious tradition Thomas' notion of a Christo-centric secular fellowship is to be welcomed as it promotes religious tolerance. His stress on secularism and secularity in the context of religious communal conflicts advocates equality of all religions in the eyes of the state, with the aim of working towards religious communal harmony and a peaceful co-existence. Secularism according to Thomas is not 'without God', but it affirms the existence of God and accepts the equality of other religions. Equality of religion does not mean equality of gods but equality and acceptance of all religious people as people of faith.⁹³¹

⁹³⁰ M.M. Thomas, "The Use and Place of the Bible for Christians in their Professional and Social Involvement," 38.

⁹³¹ M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach*, 40.

Thomas' Christ centered secular fellowship envisages a casteless secular fellowship because it is religion (Hinduism) that legitimized and sanctified caste as being from divine origin. He also advocated Christ centered *secular* fellowship because the rivalry between particular religious fellowships leads to communalism which creates social and religious disharmony.⁹³² The focus of interaction between human beings according to Thomas should be human identity rather than religious or communal identity. It should be a human community rather than a religious community. He writes that the distinction between church as fellowship and church as religious community needs emphasis in India. Religious communalism is characteristic of all religions in Indian society, as each religion has its own ethics which directs and controls the decision of people.⁹³³

This Christocentric secular fellowship – Thomas uses the word *koinonia* – according to Thomas should be Christ-centred, because Christ is the source and hope of the new humanity. Thomas' emphasis was to "move away from being a communal entity to become an open fellowship able to witness, in all religious and secular communities, to Christ as the bearer of both true human life and salvation."⁹³⁴ The church should not be an exclusive religious community but an inclusive secular human fellowship. He is critical of the form and shape of the church and believes that the church as an organization has a very little value, especially in the age of secularism for two reasons.⁹³⁵ It controls the total lives of Christians as Christendom did through institutional authority. Also, it isolates the Church from other religious communities by communalism, i.e. by making the Christian community one self-regarding religious community among many such religious communities. Thomas was not advocating a "non-Church Christianity" but as Alfred Krass has explained the burden of Thomas was "freeing the Church from the caste position into which Hinduism tried to place it."⁹³⁶

⁹³² M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconal Approach*, 46.

⁹³³ M.M. Thomas, *Church and Human Community*, 44.

⁹³⁴ Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 40-41

⁹³⁵ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 60.

⁹³⁶ M.M. Thomas, *Some Theological Debate*, 132.

The context of religious pluralism and constant religious communal conflict and tension demands a fellowship which is secular in nature. Boyd says that Thomas was “the leading representative of those who advocate a theology much more closely related to modern, secular India, and to the world of the Asian revolution.”⁹³⁷ The secular nature of the fellowship is based on mutual respect and acceptance of all people irrespective of caste, class, gender and religion, a shared humanness and the goal for humanization. Like Devanandan Thomas gave importance to dialogue. Thomas distinguishes three types of dialogue: secular dialogue, religious dialogue and the dialogue of interiority which takes place at the deeper level. But he was mainly interested in the secular dialogue because it is here “Christian and Hindu meet together in the context of modern, secular India in order to find common fields of action and service for the good of the nation as a whole and of individual persons.”⁹³⁸

Thomas’ idea of Christo-centric secular fellowship and Christo-centric humanization is problematic and likely to create tension in the context of religious pluralism, because of the central role attributed to Christ in his notion of fellowship. There cannot be exclusivism within the inclusive model that Thomas claims to propose for humanization. Therefore, the inclusive model of fellowship should be rather focused on God, as God is a common term for all. The ideal for a religiously pluralistic context is a plurality of spirituality where everyone can come with their own spirituality – like that of Christo-centric spirituality of Christians. But Thomas postulates a pursuit for humanization centered on Christ, with the argument that Christ is the source and hope for a better humanity. This exclusive focus on Christ seems to be in contradiction with his inclusive approach where he appeals to people of all faiths and traditions to come together for the task of humanization.

Christocentric humanization bars other religious and secular traditions from involving in the task of humanization. Clarke rightly criticizes Thomas for focusing more on Christ and making Christ as the center of everything rather than God. Clarke says: “Perhaps a theocentric proposal could have made room for more God outside of Christ

⁹³⁷ Robin Boyd, *Indian Christian Theology*, 311.

⁹³⁸ Robin Boyd, *Indian Christian Theology*, 312.

while also legitimizing various models of being human beyond Jesus.”⁹³⁹ The scope for the humanization of humanity is wider and more open in the theocentric secular fellowship for humanization than in a Christocentric secular fellowship for humanization. Therefore the move should be towards a theocentric quest for humanization which focuses on God as the center and criteria for humanization. It was in God’s image that humans were created. Theocentric humanization is sought and actualized through the plurality of spirituality; this might be a Christo-centric spirituality for Christians, but might also be a different spirituality for people of other religious traditions or ideologies. The Christian quest for humanization in the religiously pluralistic context is a quest based on Christo-centric spirituality but it leads to theocentric action for humanization. It is a combination of spirituality based on Christ and a quest for humanization based on God.

Humanization can be well mediated through joint theocentric action as God is a common and inclusive term for all theistic religion. For some, this might raise the question: what is the name of this common God? Does God require a name? Moses wanted a specific name of God as the basis to carry out the task of humanization of the dehumanized people of Israel who were oppressed and exploited for centuries. When he asked God what is your name the answer was ‘I am that I am’ as God does not require nor have a name. What is required in the context of religious pluralism is to follow one’s own spirituality whether secular or sacred, as the means to achieve the goal- humanization centred on God.

The humanization of humanity should be sought at any cost by all people of the society. Any clash or confrontation between religions and ideologies is to be avoided to achieve this goal, as all should co-exist peacefully and cooperate to establish a just society especially in the context of religious and cultural pluralistic society. Thomas writes:

⁹³⁹ S. Clarke, *Empire*, 432.

Theology is not just the explication of our faith in Jesus Christ. It involves also putting that faith alongside other faiths, and alongside rationality and other human values which we share with others, allowing the examination of each, including our faith in the categories of the others. In this process we, as Christians, risk Christ for Christ's Sake.⁹⁴⁰

Jesus came to this world as human to make humans human, to humanize the dehumanized people who were created in the likeness and image of God. Jesus had to risk his life though his disciples didn't want him to die on the cross. But Jesus, to save humanity from the bondage of sin and Satan and all oppressive system of the society, risked his own life for the salvation of the world. Thomas as a champion of humanization and a Christo-centric theologian challenges the Christian community that is always inward looking with its minority consciousness, caste consciousness and exclusive claims, to risk all of them, if that can facilitate and enhance the process of humanization.⁹⁴¹

6.6 Implementation of Dalit Theology

One of the key goals of liberation theology – and a key goal of Thomas' theology – is the transformation of society, both at the level of individuals and at the level of communities and structures. This is true for Dalit theology as well. In order to achieve this transformation a number of steps need to be taken: conscientization of the oppressed (a term by Paolo Frere), the visualization of the society to be achieved, the verbalization of the quest, the education of Dalits, and finally political action with all people of good-will, who join in a theocentric secular fellowship for humanization's sake.

⁹⁴⁰ M.M. Thomas, *Risking Christ for Christ Sake*, 7.

⁹⁴¹ M.M. Thomas, "People's Struggle for Genuine Humanism," 22- 23.

6.6.1 Dalit conscientization for humanization

Dalits suffer from an inferiority complex. They are taught about their low status at home, school and in the society in comparison with high caste people from their childhood. The deep inferiority complex that is imparted and injected in the minds of the Dalits impairs their social mobilization. The function of Christian Dalit theology/anthropology is to undo the false notion from the minds of the people and to build a positive human potentiality of what they are and what they can do with God on their side. The Bible clearly affirms the equality, validity and sanctity of human life irrespective of whether human beings are native or alien; even the animals are not allowed to kill a man or woman.⁹⁴² The importance, dignity and value of human life need to be taught and embraced so that people learn to accept and respect people as they are, as human beings.

The majority of the marginalized Dalits, tribals and women are not aware of their basic human rights and privileges. Therefore Thomas stressed that the first step towards the humanization of Dalits is the conscientization.⁹⁴³ He appealed to the churches and Christian leaders to develop what he called “the constituency of conscience” in order to bring awareness and awakening among the poor and the downtrodden people of the society.⁹⁴⁴ Conscientization is a process of creating awareness among Dalits to embrace their self-worth and to know their basic constitutional human rights and privileges in the society. Conscientization also involves making them see and realize what they are today and what they could become in the light of their constitutional rights and privileges. This awareness and awakening of Dalits leads to activate and actualize their freedom and equality in the society. Devasahayam believes: “An analysis and awakening of the historical consciousness of the Dalits is an important source of Dalit liberation.”⁹⁴⁵

The process of social mobilization and conscientization of people plays a vital role to bring about sustainable poverty alleviation especially among the

⁹⁴² Exodus 21: 28- 36.

⁹⁴³ M.M. Thomas, “People’s Struggle for Genuine Humanism,” 34.

⁹⁴⁴ M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, 27.

⁹⁴⁵ V. Devasahayam, *Outside the Camp*, 15.

disadvantageous groups like the Dalits in rural India.⁹⁴⁶ Conscientization has three basic functions which are connected to each other and lead toward the process of humanization. They resemble the methodology of Liberation theology 'to see, judge and act.'⁹⁴⁷ According to Prabhakar it is "Pathos-Protest-Praxis that constitutes the basis of Dalit liberation."⁹⁴⁸ Conscientization helps people to know and understand, see and realize, to act and react so that humanization is aimed and gradually achieved. The conscientization has to take place both individually and collectively so that there is group identity and group organization for active participation.

The self-realization and group realization of Dalits is vital for group organization for humanization. Massey says: "The spirituality of the Dalit – is a spirituality of liberation as offered to both, Dalits and their oppressors. The unique feature of this is – liberation can flow only from the Dalits as it is their need."⁹⁴⁹ The Dalits are large in number but they are a scattered and divided minority all over India. They are divided and disunited by the high caste people to serve their own vested interest because they know if Dalits are together they as high caste cannot achieve their purpose. Thus they are a powerless people and "a nationality in captivity, not in exile but in their own land."⁹⁵⁰

Two main problems may be identified among the Dalits. They suffer together but they are not united in the fight against their adversaries. Another problem is the inferiority complex that is inherited through the generations; Dalits think they cannot fight against their oppressors because they are Dalits. The success and continuation of caste system down through the centuries is based on a constant injection and impartation of inferiority complex in Dalits. James Massey says that according to the Mandal Commission⁹⁵¹ report of 1980 "[t]he real triumph of the caste system lies not in

⁹⁴⁶ R. Radhakrishna, "Introduction", in *Handbook of Poverty in India: Perspectives, Policies and programs*, eds, R. Radhakrishna & Shovan Ray, (Oxford University Press, 2005), xxv.

⁹⁴⁷ Elaine Graham, et al. *Theological Reflection: Methods*, (London: SCM Press, 2005), 188.

⁹⁴⁸ M.E. Prabhakar, "Christology in Dalit Perspective," 412.

⁹⁴⁹ James Massey, *Roots of Dalit History*, 102.

⁹⁵⁰ V. Devasahayam, *Outside the Camp*, 15.

⁹⁵¹ The Mandal Commission was established in India in 1979 by the Janata Party government under Prime Minister Morarji Desai with a mandate to identify the socially or educationally backward. It was headed

upholding the supremacy of the Brahmin, but in conditioning the consciousness of the lower castes in accepting their inferior status in the ritual hierarchy as part of the natural order of things.”⁹⁵² They seem to elect their own villains or enemies innocently or carelessly.

There should be a radical change in the psychology of Dalits to overcome these barriers of inferiority complex and disunity so that they can become subject of their own history. Dalits will be able to decide their own destiny only if they are part of the decision making group. Thomas appealed to the church and to the Dalits that they should become the subject of history and not the object. Thomas writes: “the submerged and suppressed groups of the traditional society (e.g. the outcastes, the tribals and the women in India) should be given due participation in the structures of power and the processes of decision- making.”⁹⁵³ The ideology of Ambedkar was ‘to educate, agitate and organize to liberate’⁹⁵⁴ the Dalits from all forces and forms of exploitation and dehumanization. Azariah says: “any Dalit theology will have to be Theology of Liberation and a Theology of Hope.”⁹⁵⁵ Azariah speaks about ‘triple goals of Dalit theology or 3Rs of Dalit liberation which are self-realization, self-respect and self-reliance.’⁹⁵⁶ According to M.E. Prabhakar the function of Dalit theology is to have ‘revelation’ of one’s self which should lead to ‘revolution’ and ‘reevaluation or re-ordering of values’ in the society which is divisive and oppressive.⁹⁵⁷ The more Dalits are conscientized, the more they are able to visualize the forms and forces of evil that works against their wellbeing.

by Indian parliamentarian B.P. Mandal to consider the question of seat reservations and quotas for people to redress caste discrimination, and used eleven social, economic, and educational indicators to determine backwardness.

⁹⁵² James Massey, “Historical Roots”, in. *Indigenous People*, 45.

⁹⁵³ M.M. Thomas, *Contemporary Ecumenism*, 178.

⁹⁵⁴ M. Azariah, *A Pastor’s Search for Dalit Theology*, 172.

⁹⁵⁵ M. Azariah, *A Pastor’s Search for Dalit Theology*, 136.

⁹⁵⁶ M. Azariah, *A Pastor’s Search for Dalit Theology*, 170.

⁹⁵⁷ M.E. Prabhakar, ed. *Towards a Dalit Theology*, 50.

6.6.2 Visualization of historical realities: A contextual demand

Visualization is an ability to see the beauty of God in the created universe and everything in it. People learn, unlearn and relearn through their God-given sensory perceptions. There seems to be numbness in the visibility and perceptibility in the mundane events of the society. Thomas questioned the evangelical and 'pure spirituality' of the church which was inward looking and concerned about their well-being and salvation of the soul. God is already at work in humanizing people from all forms of dehumanization. The church should be sensitive and empower people to be sensitive – to see what God is doing already in the society. C.S. Song, a renowned Asian theologian from Taiwan, says that the church need to have a "Third eye"⁹⁵⁸ or 'Third dimension' to see clearly what is happening and what God is doing in the world. According to Song God is at work where there is an acceptance of human identity and an affirmation of human dignity. Vinay Kumar rightly says "Where we see *human dignity* being affirmed and people discovering a sense of self-worth, self-acceptance and a sense of having something to contribute to the world and others, there God is at work."⁹⁵⁹

For Thomas God is the one who works behind the revolutions of people. Revolutions are taking place because God is at work in the revolution.⁹⁶⁰ He recognizes all Asian revolutions as the movements of humanization.⁹⁶¹ But the church is mostly insensitive to the historical realities of injustice, exploitation and oppression of the poor and the marginalized people. The church along with the Dalits has remained silent and for the largest part has so far failed to recognize and visualize the work of God in the revolution of people.

⁹⁵⁸ C.S. Song, *Third Eye Theology*, (Orbis Books, 1990), 27ff.

⁹⁵⁹ Vinay Samuel, "God's Intention for the World: Tensions between Eschatology and History" in *The Church in Response to Human Need*, 149.

⁹⁶⁰ M.M. Thomas, *Religion and the Revolt of the Oppressed*, 37ff; Cf, M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, 1- 28. Sunand Sumithra, *Revolution as Revelation*, 31ff.

⁹⁶¹ T. Jacob Thomas (ed), *M.M. Thomas Reader*, 96.

6.6.3 Verbalization of the historical realities: A Biblical command

Indian society is a caste-crippled society because of the social stratification based on the *Varnashrama dharma*⁹⁶² which is unique to the Indian subcontinent.⁹⁶³ One of the leading Dalit theologians Bishop Devasahayam remarks that India is a land of compassion “where cow is worshipped and considered sacred, fellow human beings, the Dalits are treated worse than animals. One may touch an animal – say a dog – but Hindu Sastras maintain that touch of a fellow human beings, a Dalit is polluting.”⁹⁶⁴ Dalits’ experience is an experience of humiliation and degradation. The verbalization and interpretation of the hermeneutical community should reflect the visualized historical realities of Indian society if it has to mediate humanization. Devasahayam says: “No theological method is adequate in Indian context, which does not critically analyze, reflect upon and bring the Christian Gospel in relation to caste.”⁹⁶⁵ Any theology is invalid and irrelevant if it does not relate text to the context and connect the context back to the text. For Thomas a theology has life only if it is related and relevant to its environment.⁹⁶⁶

In the context of a caste-crippled society the church has a great responsibility to defend and promote the cause of the poor and the marginalized as their very existence is in grave danger. Verbalization and theologization is not primarily interpretation of Christianity and its tradition, but as Felix Wilfred says, “It is interpretation of life and is in service of life and its promotion, and in defense of life when it is threatened.”⁹⁶⁷ Thomas accepts the limitation that “classless and casteless society may not be an easily realizable ideal. It may not be realizable at all in its fullness, but it is an ideal which inspires and moves people in their search for a new society.”⁹⁶⁸

⁹⁶² Translation: Caste system

⁹⁶³ Pakistan and Bangladesh also have varieties of a caste-system and also places to where Indians have migrated, such as Trinidad, Guyana and Surinam.

⁹⁶⁴ V. Devasahayam, *Outside the Camp*, 23.

⁹⁶⁵ V. Devasahayam, *Doing Dalit Theology in Biblical key*, (Madras: Gurukul /ISPCK, 1997), 26.

⁹⁶⁶ M.M. Thomas, “Foreword,” Boyd, *Indian Christian Theology*, v.

⁹⁶⁷ Felix Wilfred, “The Contours of Third World Contextual Theologies” in *Ethical Issues in the Struggles for Justice Quest for Pluriform Communities* (ed), Daniel Chetti, & M.P. Joseph, (Tiruvalla: CSS, 1998), 124.

⁹⁶⁸ M.M. Thomas, *Revolution in India and Christian Humanism*, 5.

6.6.4 Verbalization to actualization for humanization: An existential participation

According to Thomas “creative participation in development and justice in the world is the means of being and becoming human for all humanity.”⁹⁶⁹ Religious systems and structures should not control or manipulate people for their own benefits. Religion should be an instrument and spiritual resource towards people’s quest for freedom and equality and dignity. Seventy percent of Indian Christianity is of Dalit origin; therefore what is in a fact a Dalit church should play a major role towards the liberation of the marginalized people.⁹⁷⁰ It may be said that the failure of the church is the failure of the Dalits. The Dalits are a majority quantitatively in the church but not qualitatively. They are numerically in the majority but they do neither have more power nor equal power compared to the minority upper caste people. The history of Indian church has been the history of a minority ruling the majority, on account of their high caste background. This condition can be gradually changed if Dalits are conscientized and enlightened of their self-worth, united, educated, equipped and empowered to be part of decision making process of both church and society.

Also, dehumanizing activities continue to happen openly, in the street because nobody has the courage to question it. Dalit women are being gang-raped publically and forced to parade naked on the streets are things that have become common phenomena even in the 21st century.⁹⁷¹ The sufferings of Dalits are so terrible and horrible that it has become an international issue being discussed and debated at the international meetings and forums. The church cannot remain silent but needs to vouchsafe to side with the poor and the marginalized, like Jesus the redeemer and humanizer of dehumanized people. There is a clear contextual demand to respond to the situation, but the leadership is indifferent and insensitive to those incidents and atrocities done against fellow humanity.

⁹⁶⁹ M.M. Thomas, “The Use and Place of the Bible for Christians in their Professional and Social Involvement,” 44.

⁹⁷⁰ John C.B. Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 245.

⁹⁷¹ <http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/Dalit-Woman-Gangraped-Paraded-Nude/2014/06/15/article2280693.ece>, 05/11/ 2015, <http://www.ambedkar.org/News/hl/Dalit%20woman.htm>,

The leaders and high caste Christians don't pay attention to it because it does not affect them. The more the awareness and awakening among the people grows, the more they are able to see and realize how they have been exploited and suppressed down through the centuries in the past as well as in the present. The more they visualize and realize the actual realities and atrocities, the more they can verbalize and demand courageously for their basic human rights and privileges which they deserve. The more they visualize and verbalize their sufferings and struggles the more the possibility for them to be organized together to act and fight for their rights so that humanization is actualized. The change has to take place from both groups; the oppressed and the oppressor so that there is a hope for a better human community.

The cooperation and involvement of non-Dalits in the fight against dehumanization is largely based on the unity and cooperation among the Dalits for their humanization. Unless and until the Dalits themselves fight for their human identity and dignity, the effort of others will not make any impact. The Dalits should fight their own battle against injustice, inequality and discrimination in the society with the support of others who are committed to the task of humanization.

6.6.5 Dalit education for humanization

In the struggle for humanization, education is key. At present, education is compulsory and also Dalit children are (to be) enrolled in the schools. However, the government should not only make education compulsory but should make sure that compulsory education is implemented. The way towards humanization is to give Dalits quality education, preferably in English, as it gives a positive image and perspective to their life of rejection and humiliation, with information which moves beyond the immediate Indian context. The ability to converse in English gives them a free movement everywhere in the country, both for studies as well as for employment, and enables social mobility. Ambedkar, the champion of Dalits because of his education, climbed the social ladder and became the father of Indian Constitution. He believed if Dalits have to be liberated the first step is to educate them. The education of Dalits has to play a major

role in developing a paradigm for the overall development of Dalits; especially educational institutions that are run by the Christian institutions need to participate, as they are focused on the welfare and development of the marginalized and weaker section of the society. Thomas argued that:

Christian education must in some way express their solidarity with the victims of modern globalization like the Dalits, the tribals, the fisher-folk and women and find ways of supporting their struggle for justice and their search for a new paradigm of development which does justice to their peoplehood and to the natural sources to which they are related.⁹⁷²

Thomas' advocacy for the education of Dalits is an important tool towards the task and process of humanization because education gives self-confidence, social dignity, economic self-reliance and employment which are basics for Dalit humanization. Christianity has been known for its commitment to the educational ministry, as education is the key to open the doors of ignorance to pave the way for success in life. Joseph D' Souza, the modern champion of the Dalit-Bahujan, has been committed to work for the emancipation of the Dalits and the marginalized people in India. He has championed the liberation of Dalits nationally as well as internationally at various high level meetings and forums. He writes:

The Dalit-Bahujan leaders want to see their children get a quality, English-based (plus mother-tongue) education with an alternate worldview that teaches them they are made in the image of God. According to many Dalit-Bahujan leaders, offering a world-class English education with an alternate worldview will change the Dalit-Bahujan situation permanently.⁹⁷³

D' Souza further writes about the role of education;

⁹⁷² M.M. Thomas, *The church Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, 145.

⁹⁷³ Joseph D' Souza, *Dalit Freedom: Now and Forever*, 122.

For caste inferiority to be eradicated, education must be given in a way that fosters equality in the minds of the students from the earliest of ages. The teachers must instill in their students a worldview of equality, human dignity and self-worth. It must be worldview in which the inherent worth of the individual is derived from divine truth. The Hindu worldview is imbued with caste.⁹⁷⁴

Schools give education to all but the Dalits cannot afford to go for English medium education due to their poverty. The government schools are taught in vernacular language with a very low standard of infrastructure and with poor quality of teaching, which leads to poor result. As education is the key for the humanization of Dalits Operation Mobilization, India has started in 2003 quality English medium schools for the marginalized and underprivileged people like Dalits with the name Dalit Educational Centre but they are known as Good Shepherd Schools.⁹⁷⁵ These schools are located in the outskirts and in the villages where the Dalits live and where there are no English medium schools. They are primarily focused and cater to educate the Dalit children who are being deprived of English medium education due to their poverty and denied admission in the school due to the illiteracy of their parents. The education of parents is one of the primary criteria to get admission for the child in the private schools so that the parents can help them to do their homework. Some NGOs try to amend this situation so that the Dalit children also get quality English medium education. There are 107 Good Shepherd Schools all over India catering to over 26,000 children with subsidized tuition fees.⁹⁷⁶ The big goal is to give education for one million Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Caste SC/ST/OBC⁹⁷⁷ and under privileged

⁹⁷⁴ J. D' Souza, *Dalit Freedom. Now and Forever*, 123.

⁹⁷⁵ J. D' Souza, *Dalit Freedom. Now and for Ever*, 123ff.

⁹⁷⁶ Joseph D' Souza, *Good Shepherd English Medium Schools*, (Secunderabad: Operation Mercy India Foundation (OMIF), 2014), 2.

⁹⁷⁷ Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Caste. These are the people of the Indian society who are economically poor and socially marginalized and ill-treated by the rich and the high caste people. Therefore the government of India categorized them and put them under reservation to receive special aids, scholarships etc. from the government.

poor children across India. More such schools are needed to educate the underprivileged people to enhance their life condition to restore their lost human identity and dignity in the society. A model like this is definitely going to change the destiny of the Dalits in another ten years.

Education gives Dalits a positive self-image and a positive outlook for their life in the present as well as for the future. It gives them self-confidence as they relate, interact and exposed to a wider context. It boosts their social and economic status as they begin to know what they can do with their education. The caste of a person is easily identified or traced on the basis of the place where one lives and the caste entry in the school certificate. The caste entry in the certificate makes a person vulnerable for discrimination and dehumanization on the basis of their caste even after he leaves his locality and settles down in the cities.⁹⁷⁸ According to Rohan Gideon Dalit theology should focus its attention to the betterment of the Dalit children. He says:

Dalit theology is still an adult domain by not considering caste politics entrenched in child-rights discourses in India. In that sense, this work has consciously or otherwise greater liberation as its motif, and reflexively opened up yet-unaddressed avenues in Dalit theology in India for a broader “heterologic” base for Dalit theology.⁹⁷⁹

6.6.6 Political participation for humanization

Finally, in order to achieve humanization Dalits and the church should engage in politics because salvation starts here and now. The success of Dalit theology in bringing humanization to people is largely based on a strong conviction and commitment for its involvement in politics. Christians in India are afraid to enter into politics, as they think

⁹⁷⁸ The caste system can be eradicated slowly if the government stops entering the caste identity of a person. The Dalits receive government scholarship and privileges not just on the basis of their low caste but also based on the production of annual low income certificate from the local authorities. The government issues Ration Card for every family and certifies eligibility to buy food commodities at a subsidized cheaper rate in the government ration shops on the basis of low income. The caste is not the criteria to receive such a subsidy but the low income. In the same way Government reservations and scholarship should be based on the economic status and not on the basis of caste.

⁹⁷⁹ Rohan Gideon, Review of Sathianathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala, and Philip Vinod Peacock, editors, *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-First Century*, 7.

Christians have nothing to do with politics of this world. This not only reflects the irresponsibility of the social side of the church in bringing justice to people through political means but also shows a spirituality does not take into account the historical realities and struggles of the people for freedom and equality. Webster makes an important comment:

God calls Christian Dalits to participate actively and even lead in the grassroots political struggles of all Dalits for the liberation God intends. In that struggle the Church has proven to be weak, ineffective, and often an instrument of caste oppression, even though it is predominantly Dalit in composition. The church must repent and become the shalom community God created it to be, living and acting in solidarity with all Dalits.⁹⁸⁰

Christians in India do not have a clear track record of their active role in politics. Thomas stressed the importance of active involvement in politics, especially by Dalits, tribals and women, so that they can fight for their rights and privileges with political power. Thomas questioned the declaration of Emergency in India because it was against democracy. Yuhu Vinayaraj writes: "Anyone wanting to look at a clear articulation of the theology of state, democracy and political practice in India can see that it is M.M. Thomas who critically engaged with these notions and envisaged a political theology of humanization in the country."⁹⁸¹

Christians approach to politics has been so negative, that even when someone supports the idea of politics, s/he is criticized.⁹⁸² Christians do not have a positive perspective on politics; thus they avoid and discourage their children to be involved in politics. This is a great weakness of Indian Christianity that it has failed to build up strong political front to serve the nation as well as to defend and protect the cause of

⁹⁸⁰ John C.B. Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 245.

⁹⁸¹ Yuhu Vinayaraj, "The Empire, the Multitude and the Church: Signifying M.M. Thomas for a Theology of Multitude in India", *Religion and Society*, 60/4 (December 2015), 19.

⁹⁸² Sunand Sumithra, *Christian Theologies*, , 181.

the marginalized people and the minority Christians. This was one of the criticisms of Ambedkar who had a high regard for the philanthropic work of Christianity but criticized the indifferent attitude of Christians towards politics. In his speech addressed to the Christians of Sholapur in 1938 he said:

Missionaries feel they have done their duty when they convert an untouchable to Christianity. They do not look after their political rights. I find this is a big fault in Christians because they have not entered into politics until now. It is difficult for any institution to survive without political support. We, Untouchables, though we are ignorant and illiterate, we are in movement. That is why we have 15 seats in the Legislative Assembly. Students are getting scholarships, there are government hostels. Such is not the case of Christian students. If an untouchable student getting scholarship gets converted, his scholarship is stopped though his financial status remains same. If you were in politics, things would have been opposed.⁹⁸³

This weakness of the church makes her more vulnerable to the attacks of antisocial elements in the society. The churches are burned, destroyed and Christians are persecuted everywhere and there is no political body or lobby to fight for their religious rights. The minority consciousness and the inward looking attitudes of Christians give free hand to the Hindutva forces and other groups of vested interest to deprive the rights and privileges of Christians and Dalits and especially Christian Dalits. The Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh Dalits are eligible to receive Government scholarship and reservation but Christian Dalits are denied and deprived of this right, simply on account of their Christian faith. This is because they do not have anybody fighting and voting for the rights of Christians in the parliament where policies are made. Ambedkar is right in saying:

⁹⁸³ B.R. Ambedkar, Published in 'Janata' of 5.2.1938, reproduced from 'Dnyanodaya' See also Ganjare vol. III. 142 ff.

Your society is educated. Hundreds of boys and girls are matric. These people have not agitated against this injustice unlike the uneducated untouchables. If any girl becomes a nurse or any boy becomes a teacher they are involved in their own affairs, they do not get involved in public affairs. Even clerks and officers are busy in their work, they ignore the social injustice. Your society is so much educated, how many are District judges or magistrates? I tell you, this is because of your neglect towards politics, because there is nobody to talk of and fight for your rights...⁹⁸⁴

A few Christian political parties have emerged over the period, such as All India Christian Council (AICC)⁹⁸⁵ and the political wing of Operation Mobilization, India. But until and unless there are enough Christian Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) and Member of Parliament (MP) both at the State and Centre where laws are made and amended the destiny of Christians and especially Christian Dalits will remain the same. For instance, there is a continued discussion on the ban on cow-slaughtering but nothing happens. Many attempts have been made by the church and Dalit Christian organizations for many years now, appealing for the equal treatment of the Dalit Christians along with their fellow Hindu or non-Christian Dalits. The attempt has been in the form of petition, agitation, procession, consultation and commission but nothing has been accomplished so far and nothing can be done, unless they have a political voice and power.

Therefore the church should move boldly in the direction of politics, not only to serve the interest of the church but also to assist in the task of humanizing the politics, so that the polity of the state would be pro- Dalits and pro-poor to uplift the marginalized and underprivileged people of the society. The Scripture neither speaks against politics nor restricts Christians for active involvement in politics; rather it presents great models and public figures such as Joseph, Daniel, and Esther etc. even in the land of their captivity at a great time of crisis. Ambedkar wanted the Dalits to be

⁹⁸⁴ B.R. Ambedkar, Published in 'Janata' of 5.2.1938, reproduced from 'Dnyanodaya' See also Ganjare vol. III. 142 ff.

⁹⁸⁵ All India Christian Council is a political wing of Operation Mobilization, India started in 2003 by Joseph D' Souza to protect and defend the rights of Christians.

actively involved in politics for political power because it was through political power that Brahmanism legitimized untouchability. He said: “The root cause of untouchability is the caste system; the root of the caste system is religion attached to *varnashram*⁹⁸⁶; and the root of *varnashram* is the brahmanical religion; and the root of the brahmanical religion is authoritarianism or political power.”⁹⁸⁷ Dalit theology should advocate and enhance political participation and embrace a prophetic role so that it won’t repeat the failure of Indian Church which Dalit theologians have criticized. In the words of M. E. Prabhakar:

The emergence of the Christian Dalit Movement and its commitment to fight against casteism within churches and society, and to promote along with the churches, the Christian Dalit Struggles for civil economic rights, are not fully recognised or appreciated by the Church. Indian Christianity has not yet accepted the emergence of Dalit Theology which can initiate a counter-culture within the Church.⁹⁸⁸

6.7 Conclusion

Thomas’ theology of salvation and humanization is relevant and useful for the humanization of marginalized Dalits, tribals and women as well as for the development of Dalit theology in India. A triangular relevance is identified and proposed for the development of Dalit theology in the field of Dalit Christology, anthropology and ecclesiology which play a crucial and significant role for the salvation and humanization of the marginalized Dalits, tribals and women in the society. The incarnational Dalit Christology should be the basic foundation on which any liberation theology especially Dalit theology should be built. The purpose of incarnation is the humanization of the dehumanized humanity, especially the marginalized people who are pushed

⁹⁸⁶ Varnashram is the Hindi or Marathi word for to the caste system.

⁹⁸⁷ Quoted in V.T. Rajshekar, *Caste: A Nation Within the Nation*, 12.

⁹⁸⁸ Arvind P. Nirmal & V. Devasahayam (eds.), *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar*, 91.

geographically to live in the margins and borders of the villages; oppressed and suppressed socially and economically to live in the bottom of the society; stigmatized and legitimized religiously to live as unclean and untouchable forever on the basis of caste, creed, color and gender.

An incarnational Dalit Christology relates and connects the life condition of Dalits with the life condition of Jesus to construct a Dalit Christology which gives hope for the humanization of Dalits. The life and sufferings of Jesus beginning from his birth to death reflect the sufferings that the Dalits are subjected to on a daily basis. The humanness of Jesus as well as the Dalitness of Jesus becomes a foundation for a Dalit Christology that redeems and humanizes people from all dehumanization. The Dalitness of Jesus gives an affinity and solidarity to the sufferings of the Dalits while the humanity or humanness of Jesus affirms Dalit human identity and dignity that was denied to them. The incarnation was the identification of Jesus the Son of God and Son of Man was the identification of Jesus with the sons and daughters of men to break all unjust socio-religious barriers. The incarnational Christology affirms human suffering in relation to the humanness and Dalitness of Jesus but it also validates humanity and human history, because incarnation is God becoming human to humanize both humanity and the human history. The incarnational Christology of Thomas offers hope in the resurrection of Jesus that the dehumanized humanity will be restored and humanized as a new humanity. The humanization is the incorporation into the glorified humanity of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus gives promise and assurance that the Dalits and others will rise against all evil and oppressive forces to experience the restoration of their human identity and dignity with a richer and a fuller life on this earth.

As incarnational Christology is the foundation of Dalit theology an integrated Dalit anthropology should be the pillar of Dalit theology. Dalit anthropology is based on creation and incarnation and takes its departure in the integrated anthropology of Thomas. The integrated anthropology of Thomas gives a holistic approach to human life. It does not dichotomize or compartmentalize body and soul, sacred and secular, penultimate and ultimate and historical and eschatological but integrates them through

his concepts of salvation and humanization for a richer and fuller life that is promised and available in Christ.

The incarnational Dalit Christology and integrated Dalit anthropology should have a strong inclusive Dalit ecclesiology which harbors all likeminded people who are open and willing to participate and articulate patterns and paradigms that enhance the task and the process of humanization irrespective of their race, caste, creed, color and gender. Though the Indian church is the church of the Dalits numerical, in effect it is the high caste dominant minority that rules the dependent majority Dalits. The church in its societal action should maintain the secular nature of the Indian Constitution, while at the same time maintaining its own religiosity, so that the nature of the church is inclusive and not exclusive. The contexts of religious pluralism and constant communal conflict between religious groups call for a common theocentric humanization rather than a particular Christocentric humanization.

This inclusive church is called Christ centered Secular Fellowship where both religiosity and secularity is practiced and the balance between them is maintained; this lead to societal participation in a theocentric secular fellowship where everyone is accepted and respected, not based on their caste, creed and class, but on the common humanness that all share and the common goal that all have for the humanization of humanity especially the marginalized Dalits, tribals and women in the society. A theocentric humanization is proposed through a particular spirituality of one's own choice. Although one should be open to plurality of spirituality for humanization, Christians might prefer a Christocentric spirituality for theocentric humanization of humanity especially the marginalized and dehumanized Dalits, tribals and women.

This integration is possible only through quality education and continuous conscientization to construct a positive psychology to visualize the historical day to day atrocities done against the Dalits so that they are able to verbalize with boldness and courage to actively participate in the task and the process of actualizing humanization for all especially the marginalized people of the society. They should be empowered to believe that they are the subject of their history and thus they should have both political

and religious power to decide their own destiny and write their own history of past, present and future which would restore their lost human identity and dignity of life in the society.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

This dissertation has studied Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization and investigated if, and if so to what extent, Thomas' theology can serve as a basis for the development of a Dalit theology. The dissertation has shown that the answer to this question is affirmative. The following paragraphs recapitulate the main tenets of Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization and the background against which it developed. Then, the main critiques that Dalit theologians have voiced against Thomas' theology are reviewed and finally this chapter charts the contours of a Dalit theology that builds on Thomas' concept of humanization.

7.2 Thomas' Theology of Salvation and Humanization

Thomas lived and worked in a time when social- and political movements challenged the foundations of socio-political- and religio-cultural structures in India. Three of these movements were particularly influential on Thomas' work: the political revolution, that protested against British rule and sought political independence and freedom; the social revolution, initiated especially by Dalits, tribals and women, that demanded equality and social acceptance of marginalized groups in the society, and the religious revolt that campaigned against the so-called religious traditions and systems which divided, degraded and segregated people from their fellow human beings. Each of these movements strove in its own way for humanization, by protesting against structures that – in the name of caste, color, creed, class or gender - endorsed and upheld deprivation and denial of basic human rights and privileges, human identity and dignity; all three had a profound impact on the life and work of Thomas and spurred on his

quest for a theology of salvation and humanization. Thomas' theology can best be understood as a Christian reflection on and response to these developments in India.

In a nutshell, Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization appeals to adherents of religious as well as secular traditions to become actively involved in the task of humanization, and to cooperate, across traditions and ideologies, for the humanization of marginalized groups such as Dalits, tribals and women. However, the development of Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization evolved over time, in response to changing contexts and new insights. In Thomas' early period (in the 1930s), when his evangelical spirituality of the Mar Thoma tradition still dominated his theology, the injustice of dehumanization does not seem to have affected his theology. In this period Thomas mainly understood salvation in terms of redemption. By the 1940s however, this began to change. The home that he started for the street children in Trivandrum, the funds that he collected for the families of those who were imprisoned during the Emergency period, the influence of Sadhu Mathai in the Christian Institute at Alleppey, the Youth Christian Council of Action and the Brotherhood of Social Workers brought him into contact with people who were vulnerable and marginalized.

These experiences opened his eyes and began to shape his thinking and writings. Also his involvement in national and international ecumenical organizations and his exposure to ideologies such Gandhism, Marxism, humanism and secularism influenced him. All these experiences combined resulted in his active engagement with social and political responsibility issues. In the process he discarded his earlier interpretation of salvation as redemption and embraced the notion of salvation as humanization; in the Indian context of religious pluralism, he considered the quest for humanization to be a joined effort of people of all faiths and ideologies.

Thomas' life can best be understood as a journey of experiencing and experimenting with different ways and means to move away from the evangelical spirituality of his upbringing and a journey towards ecumenical, social and political responsibility. The aim of this journey was to bring about a richer and a fuller human life for marginalized people. During this journey he moved from an evangelical position to

an ecumenical stance and from an ecumenical position to liberational and pluralistic stance. Thomas acknowledged this change in his life. His unpublished autobiography *Faith Seeking understanding and Responsibility* clearly depicts this quest for a spirituality of social responsibility.

Thomas' theology has strong anthropological, Christological and ecclesiological overtones. In his most fully developed reflections, salvation and humanization are deemed inseparable, as both sides of the same coin. He defines salvation as 'the spiritual inwardness of humanization' and humanization as 'the outwardness of salvation'. Salvation is more than redemption to Thomas, it means transformation of humanity and of society through humanization here and now. To Thomas both dehumanization and humanization are social as well as theological notions: the more humanity is alienated from God, the more human beings dehumanize other fellow humans. Thomas however was convinced that this alienation and dehumanization was overcome by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and that humanization could be realized through forgiveness mediated by Christ. Humanization to Thomas means: making human beings genuinely and fully human, liberated from all forms and forces of oppression and exploitation. Human beings as God had intended human beings to be, human beings who have regained their dignity and have become the subject of their own history. To Thomas Jesus embodied this new humanity.

Thomas identified Dalits, tribals and women as the key subjects of humanization in India. Dalits, tribals and women are marginalized and dehumanized in India: they are treated worse than animals; they are degraded, discriminated, segregated, oppressed and exploited. In Thomas' analysis people are denied and deprived of their basic human rights because of social and religious oppressive structures and systems. Therefore Thomas also incorporated the humanization of religion, revolution, politics and history in his theology, so that these oppressive systems will be transformed and thus effectuate change in the society. Thus, his theology of salvation and humanization has both a personal and a structural component.

Thomas identified several tenacious sources of dehumanization in the Indian society, which he sought to combat; among them are pietistic spirituality, religion, casteism and modernization. He appealed to the leadership of the church - and society at large - to critically address these issues and to have a more balanced view of salvation and humanization. He condemned spiritualities that exclusively focused on the salvation of soul and a heaven oriented life and advocated an integrated understanding of salvation, which encompassed both body and soul, and which was both historical and eschatological, penultimate and ultimate, personal and corporate and included both the secular and sacred realms of life in the society. His prophetic stance and his critique of the church, which in his opinion failed to address the social injustice and inequality levelled against people such as Dalits, tribals, women and the poor, went largely unheard. Many of the higher echelons of the church rather resented him for these critiques.

Though dehumanization is rampant in the society, Thomas was optimistic that change could be effectuated, because he believed that Jesus Christ as the new man and the embodiment of the new humanity is the source of humanization. Thomas' theology has a strong Christological focus; Jesus is 'the human face of God'. Jesus' incarnation for Thomas signifies God's intervention in the ongoing process of dehumanization: God became human to make humans fully human and to give humanness to a humanity that is dehumanized by fellow humans. Jesus' death of the cross represents simultaneously the extent of God's love for and his solidarity with humanity as well as the depth of evil in humanity. Thomas believed that the resurrection of Jesus signified the conquest of this evil; thus for Thomas, the resurrection denotes that humanization is possible. Therefore, the resurrection is the hope for marginalized groups, like Dalits, tribals and women. The goal of humanization is to retrieve people's dignity, lost personhood and peoplehood so that they become subject of history and makers of their own history, with all rights and equality.

As humanization is the goal of humanity, it should be pursued at any cost and without any compromise. Thomas had clear ideas how to achieve this; he suggested

secularism, inter-religious dialogue, prophetic spirituality, conscientization and revolution as ways and means towards the task of humanization. Humanization could only be achieved according to Thomas if all people of all religious and secular traditions work for the humanization of the marginalized people. Thomas coined the term 'Christ-centered secular fellowship' for this cooperation. In his theology, Thomas stressed the importance of integrating faith and action, orthodoxy and orthopraxis, religion and society.

Many consider Thomas' theology to be revolutionary and liberative, a theology akin to the views and aspirations of liberation theologians. Thomas is therefore often considered the forerunner of liberation theology in India. Like the Latin American variety of liberation theology Thomas begins his theology by analyzing the human context which is characterized by oppression, exploitation, inequality, discrimination and dehumanization in the name of caste, creed, color and gender and takes this as his starting point for theological reflection. Thomas believes that a theology can be a living theology only if it is connected to and relevant for the concerns and struggles of people. A living theology should lead to transformation; for Thomas this meant leading people towards (the task of) humanization.

7.3 Critiques of Thomas' Theology

Though both nationally and internationally there has been wide-spread acclamation for Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization, the value of Thomas towards the liberation and humanization of Dalits has been a matter of fierce debate in India. Especially Dalit theologians like Nirmal and Azariah have questioned his contribution. Their key objections are twofold: First of all, they have argued that Thomas is not a Dalit himself, but rather has a high caste background and thus cannot contribute to Dalit theology. Especially Nirmal has put forward this stance of methodological exclusivism, emphasizing that only Dalits can write Dalit theology. Though Nirmal in his theology leaves space for the contribution of non-Dalits through his notion of communal

inclusivism, he rebuffs that Thomas contributed for the welfare of Dalits. Azariah is less stern and acknowledges Thomas' societal contributions.

Not all Dalit theologians follow Nirmal in his exclusive approach; some have pointed out that this leads to community exclusivism, polarization, and theological isolation. Rather, a Dalit theologian like Devasahayam acknowledges that Thomas was a theologian for the lost, the least and the last people of the society. Many Christian leaders and political leaders have like Devasahayam acknowledged Thomas as the champion and father of subaltern movements. They have underscored that though Thomas came from a high caste background, he did not practice caste and rather condemned it outright. Thomas also criticized the church for observing and practicing caste.

Secondly, Nirmal and Azariah have rejected Thomas because of his allegiance to the brahmanic tradition of Hinduism. Especially Azariah has criticized Thomas as a brahmanic theologian, advocator of Brahmanism and an anti-Dalit, pointing to his use of the tradition of *karma marga* and to his appreciation for interreligious dialogue, his quest for communal harmony and association with the elite of society. Thomas' theology has indeed been interpreted as theology of *karma marga* because of its focus on action, but this has been done by others than Thomas. The main focus of Thomas' theology is orthopraxis and therefore he appeals to the church and society to actively participate to dismantle all the forms and forces of evil in the society. Likewise, though Thomas thought interreligious dialogue and communal harmony to be important, he considered both to be instruments for the larger goal of humanization of Dalits, women and tribals.

This is not to say that Thomas is beyond criticism. There is some justice in the critique that he could have done much for the humanization of Dalit with his national and international influences especially his role in the WCC; but that does not disavow his contribution towards the task of humanization. Thomas also failed to analyze and understand the real struggles and sufferings of the Dalits, of women and of tribals. The critique, voiced by people like Clarke, that he generalized the sufferings of Dalits and

others and did not pay attention to the particular sufferings and mechanisms of oppression of each of these groups, is justified. Concluding it seems fair to say that though Thomas was not a Dalit, he was a pro-Dalit; his theology serves as a spring board for liberation theologies and raises a genuine quest for human identity, dignity, equality, justice and humanization among people.

7.4 Towards a Dalit Theology Based on M.M. Thomas' Concept of Humanization

This thesis has argued that Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization – and in particular its anthropological, Christological and ecclesiological insights - has far reaching applicability and relevance for the struggles and suffering of the marginalized and their humanization. Taking cognizance of the critiques that Thomas has tended to generalize the suffering of the various groups, this dissertation focusses on the plight of Dalits only. It moved beyond Thomas' theology of humanization by taking the particular sufferings of Dalits as the context against which a Dalit theology is to be developed. It then opts for a triangle approach, intersecting an incarnational Dalit Christology, an integrated Dalit anthropology and an inclusive Dalit ecclesiology.

The incarnational Dalit Christology serves as a foundation for this Dalit theology because according to Thomas the purpose of incarnation is the humanization of the dehumanized humanity. Thomas has highlighted that the incarnation of Jesus affirms and validates the sanctity of human life in general and the marginalized Dalits in particular. The humanness of Jesus as well as the Dalitness of Jesus were proposed as focal points for a Dalit Christology. The Dalitness of Jesus embodies affinity and solidarity with the sufferings of the Dalits while the humanity or humanness of Jesus affirms Dalit human identity and dignity that society has denied them. Jesus' suffering as the proto-Dalit, Jesus challenging social segregation and his solidarity with the marginalized people of his time, exemplify and solidify Dalits' cry for humanization. Thomas' interpretation of Jesus as the new man, new humanity and the resurrection of

Jesus gives hope for the hopeless and helpless Dalit people to be incorporated into the glorified humanity of Jesus.

Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization gives rise to an integrated Dalit anthropology which emphasizes that there is no dichotomy between the salvation of body and soul, eschatological and historical and secular and the sacred. Conscientization, education and empowering the Dalits to be part of the decision making process are proposed as important steps towards the task of Dalits humanization. With Thomas this dissertation advocates that Dalits should be subject of their history and destiny. They are to be empowered have a positive approach to life and come out of their inferiority complex that was injected in them down through the centuries. Humanization as envisaged in this Dalit theology includes restoration of Dalits lost self-identity, self-worth, dignity, equality, justice and acceptance in the society which were denied on account of their caste, creed, religion and gender. Thomas' quest for 'peoplehood and personhood' of the dehumanized Dalits is to be the quest of all religious and secular traditions towards the task of humanization. The creation of God affirms equality of all people and the incarnation of Jesus and his identification with the marginalized people of his time breaks all so called socio-religious barriers and affirm equality and purity of all people in the sight of God.

Thomas' theology is relevant not only for an inclusive Dalit Christology and an integrated Dalit anthropology but also for an inclusive Dalit ecclesiology. Thomas rightly observed that the context of religious pluralism calls for an ecclesiology which is open and secular in nature and accepts the equality of all persons in the society. Thomas advocated that the church participate in what he called a Christ-centered secular fellowship with people both religious and secular and free from caste discrimination and religious intolerance and work together for humanization. The church of Christ should boldly and freely verbalize what it has visualized so that it can actively engage and participate in realizing and actualizing humanization in the society. However, where Thomas' theology of salvation and humanization in the context of religious pluralism and religious communalism envisages a Christ-centered secular fellowship, this

dissertation, taking account of the plurality of spirituality in India, argues for theocentric action and a theocentric secular fellowship for humanization.

Thomas as a Christocentric theologian proposed Christ as the center of humanization in spite of his openness to other religious and secular traditions. This dissertation has questioned the efficacy of Thomas' Christomonism and exclusivism in the context of religious pluralism and has argued that Christocentric humanization could lead to religious conflict and tensions rather than cooperation and coexistence. Therefore, it proposed to move beyond Thomas and has argued for theocentric secular fellowship in which people from various religious traditions and ideologies participate, each motivated by their own spirituality. Christians participated in this theocentric secular fellowship because of a Christocentric spirituality.

Thomas has advocated the humanization of Dalits, tribals and women. So far, Thomas' theology of humanization has received little attention from tribals and women. This research was limited to the relevance of Thomas' ideas with regard to Dalits. Future studies could be conducted to explore the relevance of Thomas' theology of humanization for tribals and women.

The Dalits live in the outskirts or margins of the village; the tribals live in the mountain regions of India; and the women in general and Dalit and tribal women in particular live at the very bottom of the society. Indeed, they are the most marginalized and suppressed people of the society whose desperate need is humanization. Theologies based on the concept of humanization by M.M. Thomas promote and advocate the restoration of identity and dignity, equality of human rights and privileges and above all the incorporation of humanity in the glorified humanity of Jesus. This is good news for all, and for Dalits, tribals and women in particular.

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SAMENVATTING

Vrijheid en gelijkwaardigheid voor alle mensen vormen de basisprincipes van Gods schepping. Maar in India worden Dalits, mensen die in stamverbanden leven (*tribals*), en vrouwen tot op vandaag de dag gemarginaliseerd, gediscrimineerd en gedehumaniseerd vanwege hun kaste, huidskleur, geloof en hun *gender* of sekse.

Het eerste hoofdstuk van dit proefschrift (de inleiding) formuleert de doelstelling van deze dissertatie, namelijk het ontwikkelen van een Dalit-theologie gebaseerd op de begrippen heil en humanisering, zoals uitgewerkt door de bekende Indiase theoloog M.M. Thomas. Het hoofdstuk belicht de onderzoeksvraag van de dissertatie, geeft een overzicht van eerdere studies naar het werk van Thomas en bespreekt de methodologie en bronnen die voor dit onderzoek zijn geraadpleegd. Ook wordt de opbouw van de dissertatie besproken.

Het tweede hoofdstuk richt zich op de sociaal-politieke en religieuze context waarin M.M. Thomas leefde en werkte. Het hoofdstuk traceert welke invloed deze context op het leven en de theologie van M.M. Thomas heeft gehad en concludeert dat Thomas' theologie van heil en humanisering ontstond in wisselwerking met allerlei revolutionaire bewegingen. Zo vond tijdens Thomas' leven een politieke revolutie plaats: de verdrijving van de Britse overheersing in India die resulteerde in de Indiase onafhankelijkheid. Tegelijkertijd kwam er een sociale revolutie op gang die streefde naar sociale gelijkheid; deze beweging stelde de structuren van onderdrukking en uitbuiting, die systematisch groepen van mensen marginaliseerden aan de kaak. Thomas zelf bekritiseerde vooral patriarchale structuren en het brahmaanse superioriteit-denken. Als onderdeel van deze sociale protesten waren er ook religieuze protesten, met het gevolg dat veel mensen op zoek gingen naar een nieuwe religieuze identiteit.

In een poging een antwoord te formuleren op de uitdagingen die deze revoluties aan de orde stelden, ging Thomas te rade bij een veelheid van stromingen; zo raakte hij

geïnspireerd door Mahatma Gandhi, door het Marxisme, het humanisme en door secularisatie. Reflecterend op een omgeving, waarin naar zijn visie mensen nog slechter behandeld werden dan dieren, probeerde hij de sociale implicaties van het evangelie van Christus te ontdekken en theologisch te verwoorden.

Hoofdstuk drie geeft een uitgebreide biografie van het leven van Thomas en concludeert dat Thomas' leven kan worden samengevat als een voortdurende zoektocht naar humanisering. Naar het voorbeeld van zijn nooit gepubliceerde autobiografie, *Faith Seeking Understanding and Responsibility*, bespreekt deze dissertatie Thomas' levensverhaal in vijf perioden die elk een onderdeel van zijn zoektocht naar humanisering representeren. De vijf perioden beslaan achtereenvolgens een zoektocht naar een evangelische spiritualiteit (1916-1936); een zoektocht naar relevante ideologieën en sociale verantwoordelijkheid (1937-1945); een zoektocht naar oecumene en oecumenische eenheid (1946-1975); een zoektocht naar politieke verantwoordelijkheid en engagement (1976-1992); en tenslotte een zoektocht naar relevante Bijbelse inzichten voor de hedendaagse samenleving (1977-1996).

Aan het begin van zijn leven werd Thomas vooral geïnspireerd door het piëtisme en door de evangelische spiritualiteit van de Syrisch-christelijke kerk. Gaandeweg ontwikkelde hij zich meer en meer tot een nationaal en internationaal oecumenisch leider wiens levensdoel het werd om mensen die gemarginaliseerd zijn, een voller, rijker en meer menswaardig leven te bieden. Hij beperkte zich daarbij niet slechts tot woorden en ideeën, maar poogde ook concreet iets te doen aan de onderdrukkende structuren in zijn directe omgeving; zo opende hij in Trivandrum een tehuis voor straatjongens en zamelde hij later in zijn leven geld in voor de familie van mensen die tijdens de Indiase *Emergency*-periode gevangen waren gezet.

Al werden Thomas' opvattingen over heil en humanisering in context van India en de revoluties in Zuid Oost Azië werden uitgedacht, de ontwikkeling en uitwerking ervan werden mede bepaald door zijn ervaringen in de internationale oecumenische wereld. Zo werkte hij onder andere voor de World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), het

Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (CISRS) en de Wereldraad van Kerken (wcc).

Wie de verschillende fasen van Thomas' leven bestudeert, valt het op dat Thomas' visie op geloof en samenleving zich ontwikkelde van een evangelisch naar een oecumenisch perspectief en later van een oecumenisch naar een meer bevrijdings-theologisch en pluralistisch gezichtspunt. Met name na zijn pensionering van de WCC en CISRS investeerde Thomas veel tijd in de verbetering van de positie van de Dalits; ook het schrijven van maatschappelijk relevante Bijbel commentaren die antwoord probeerden te formuleren op de vele uitdagingen en problemen van de Indiase samenleving stond hoog op zijn agenda.

Dit biografische hoofdstuk laat zien dat Thomas als voorvechter van humanisering Oost en West, evangelicalen en oecumenischen, religieuze en seculiere krachten en ideologieën bijeenbracht om gezamenlijk te strijden voor een menswaardiger wereld. Hij was een bruggenbouwer bij uitstek, die religie en samenleving, lichaam en geest, en de wereld van het hier en nu (*penultimate*) en het hiernamaals (*eschaton*) met elkaar in verbinding poogde te brengen.

Hoofdstuk vier analyseert Thomas' theologie van heil en humanisering en bestudeert het verband tussen deze twee kernconcepten in Thomas' theologie. Ofschoon het twee onderscheiden begrippen betreft, zijn deze concepten volgens Thomas niet van elkaar te scheiden. Heil (*salvation*) omschrijft hij als 'de spirituele binnenkant van humanisering' en humanisering (*humanisation*) als 'de buitenkant van het heil'. Hij interpreteert heil als spiritueel, als het ultieme, eschatologische en eeuwige, terwijl hij humanisering ziet als fysiek, als het voorlaatste, historische en tijdelijke. De begrippen vormen volgens Thomas twee kanten van dezelfde medaille. Heil omvat humanisering en humanisering omvat ook heil. Heil en humanisering beogen beide het goede voor zowel lichaam als ziel, en richten zich daarom op zowel de historische- als de eschatologische werkelijkheid.

Heil omvat voor Thomas dus meer dan verzoening; het betekent ook de transformatie van de mensheid en de samenleving hier en nu. Voor Thomas betekent humanisering: mensen de kans bieden daadwerkelijk volledig mens te worden, een mens bevrijd van alle onderdrukking en uitbuiting. Mensen moeten de mogelijkheid krijgen mens te worden zoals God mensen bedoeld heeft, mensen die hun waardigheid teruggewonnen hebben en subject geworden zijn van hun eigen geschiedenis.

Thomas beschouwde Dalits, *tribals*, vrouwen als de voornaamste doelgroepen voor humanisering van India. In India worden Dalits, *tribals* en vrouwen gemarginaliseerd en ontmenselijkt. Velen worden slechter behandeld dan de dieren. Zij worden vernederd, gediscrimineerd, buiten gesloten, onderdrukt en uitgebuit. Volgens Thomas' analyse worden deze groepen door godsdienstige en sociale structuren en allerlei systemen van onderdrukking zelfs van hun meest fundamentele mensenrechten beroofd en wordt ontkend dat hen die rechten toekomen. Daarom spreekt Thomas in zijn theologie ook over de noodzaak tot humanisering van religie, revolutie, politiek en geschiedenis, zodat deze structuren en systemen veranderen en de broodnodige verbeteringen in de samenleving teweeg zullen brengen. Om die reden heeft zijn theologie zowel een persoonlijke als structurele dimensie.

Thomas identificeert in de Indiase samenleving een aantal obstakels, die een voortdurende bron van dehumanisering zijn; zaken als piëtistische vroomheid, religie, het kastenstelsel en modernisering noemt hij expliciet bij naam. In zijn publicaties doet Thomas voortdurend een beroep op de Indiase kerk en samenleving om tegen deze bronnen van dehumanisering in de samenleving te strijden.

De figuur van Christus speelt in Thomas' denken een belangrijke rol als het gaat om de vraag waarop de hoop dat verandering mogelijk is, gebaseerd is. Christus belichaamt voor Thomas de nieuwe mens en staat model voor een nieuwe mensheid. De opstanding van Jezus die de overwinning op het kwaad en de dood symboliseert, en de inmiddels wereldwijde verspreiding van dit evangelie, is de bron van hoop en de inspiratie tot humanisering van gemarginaliseerde groepen zoals Dalits, *tribals*, en vrouwen.

Omdat het realiseren van een menswaardig bestaan het doel van de mensheid is, moet dit ten koste van alles en zonder compromissen worden nagestreefd. Thomas ziet secularisatie, interreligieuze dialoog, profetische spiritualiteit, consciëntisering en revolutie als wegen en middelen om tot dit doel te komen. Humanisering zal alleen worden gerealiseerd als zowel mensen die zich laten inspireren door religieuze overtuigingen, als mensen die geïnspireerd worden door seculiere tradities dit tot hun gezamenlijke prioriteit maken.

Thomas' centrale focus op humanisering houdt een radicale verschuiving in van heil als iets individueels, naar heil als iets collectiefs, een verschuiving ook van heil als iets eschatologisch en op de hemel gericht, naar heil als iets historisch en existentieel. Een dergelijke interpretatie van heil betekent ook een verschuiving van sociale dienstbaarheid naar sociale gerechtigheid, van sacralisering naar secularisering, en van een op Christus gerichte kerkelijke gemeenschap naar een op Christus gerichte seculiere gemeenschap. Heil als humanisering beoogt de randvoorwaarden voor maatschappelijke verandering te scheppen, zodat mensen die gemarginaliseerd worden, in de historische werkelijkheid van het hier en nu een rijker en menswaardig leven zullen krijgen. Als humanisering het doel is van de mensheid, dan is het doel van humanisering het herstel van menselijke waardigheid, zowel individueel als collectief, zodat gemarginaliseerden weer hun eigen leven kunnen vormgeven, met alle rechten die daarbij horen.

De analyses in het vierde hoofdstuk maken duidelijk dat Thomas' theologie van heil en humanisering zich geleidelijk heeft ontwikkeld. Dit voortschrijdend inzicht werd gevoed zijn ervaringen in de wereld van de oecumene en andere nationale en internationale contacten. In zijn vroegste periode vatte hij overeenkomstig zijn piëtistische Syrisch-christelijke achtergrond van zijn familie heil op als verzoening van zonde, van Satan, en van de dood; later tendeerde hij meer in de richting van een oecumenische, bevrijdings-theologische en pluralistische benadering van heil en interpreteerde hij heil eerst en vooral als humanisering.

Hoofdstuk vijf geeft een sterke/zwakte analyse van Thomas' theologie van heil en humanisering vanuit het perspectief van de drie groepen die Thomas voortdurend noemt in zijn werk als subject van humanisering: Dalits, *tribal*, en vrouwen. Vanwege zijn theologische voorzetten op het terrein van humanisering en vanwege zijn keuze om theologie te laten opkomen uit de context, wordt Thomas door velen beschouwd als een voorloper van de bevrijdingstheologie.

Thomas begint zijn theologie telkens met een analyse van de context; deze wordt volgens Thomas in India gekenmerkt door onderdrukking, uitbuiting, ongelijkheid, discriminatie en dehumanisering in de naam van kaste, geloof, kleur en *gender*. Vervolgens neemt Thomas deze analyse als uitgangspunt voor zijn theologische reflectie; hij doet dit vanuit de overtuiging dat theologie alleen relevante theologie kan zijn, wanneer zij reflecteert op zaken waar mensen dagelijks mee worstelen. Alleen een dergelijk type theologie – hij noemt dit zelf levende theologie - kan volgens Thomas ook transformatie van de maatschappij en de omstandigheden van mensen teweeg brengen. Voor Thomas betekent dit dat zijn theologie ten dienste staat van de humanisering van mensen.

Hoewel Thomas intensief heeft gepleit voor de humanisering van niet alleen Dalits, maar ook *tribals* en vrouwen, hebben *tribal* en feministische theologen zich niet of nauwelijks met zijn theologie bezig gehouden. Dalit-theologen als A.P. Nirmal en M. Azariah hebben dat daarentegen wel gedaan; beiden bekritisieren Thomas op methodologische gronden en ontkennen dat Thomas een bijdrage heeft geleverd aan het welzijn en de theologie van de Dalits. Nirmal en Azariah stellen namelijk dat mensen die geen Dalit zijn, zoals Thomas die uit een hoge kaste kwam, geen bijdrage kunnen leveren aan Dalit-theologie. Dit methodologisch exclusivisme maakt het Dalit-zijn tot voorwaarde om te kunnen bijdragen aan Dalit theologie. Nirmal en Azariah oefenden ook kritiek uit op Thomas, omdat hij gebruik maakte van de brahmaanse traditie, een traditie die Dalits discrimineert omdat ze onrein en daarom onaanraakbaar zouden zijn.

Het is waar dat Thomas, net als andere Indiase theologen, in zijn theologie gebruik heeft gemaakt van de brahmaanse traditie en daaraan de uitdrukking *karma marga*

ontleende voor zijn nadruk op actie. Maar het leven en werk van Thomas, en in het bijzonder zijn latere publicaties, tonen aan dat Thomas een fervente voorstander van de humanisering van de Dalits was. Hij karakteriseerde kaste als een *rakshasa*, een reuzendemon, wiens macht alleen kon worden gebroken wanneer religieuze en seculiere krachten gezamenlijk hier tegen ten strijde trokken. Ook uitte hij felle kritiek op kerk en samenleving vanwege het feit dat ze het kastenstelsel kritiekloos tolereerden en zelfs praktiseerden.

Nirmal en Azariah zijn niet de enige Dalit theologen die op Thomas hebben gereageerd. Er zijn ook veel Dalit-theologen en andere Indiase theologen stellen dat Thomas zich die juist wel sterk heeft gemaakt voor de positie van Dalits. Dalit-theoloog V. Devasahayam schetste Thomas als iemand die zich inspande voor het welzijn van de meest kwetsbaren, de minsten en de verlorenen in de samenleving. Anderen zeggen dat Thomas de stem was van al diegenen die monddood gemaakt zijn, en noemen hem de vader van de *subaltern* bewegingen.

Deze dissertatie sluit aan bij de laatste groep aan en stelt dat Thomas' theologie van humanisering van grote betekenis kan zijn voor de Dalits en hun humanisering. De dissertatie betoogt dat Thomas' theologie van humanisering niet abstracte of onthecht is zoals zoveel theologie, maar dat het een concrete en holistische theologie is die het heil van lichaam en ziel, de historische en de eschatologische werkelijkheid, het voorlaatste en het ultieme, het individuele en het collectieve en het heilige en het seculiere met elkaar verbindt. Thomas zal niet door iedereen als een Dalit-theoloog worden beschouwd en geaccepteerd, maar op grond van wat hij heeft gedaan en wat deze studie naar voren brengt, hij kan, zo stelt deze dissertatie, worden beschouwd als een voorloper van de Indiase bevrijdingstheologieën, inclusief de Dalit-theologie. Thomas was dan misschien niet de formele leider en initiator van Dalit theologie, hij was wel de ladder en springplank op basis waarvan anderen in staat waren een plek op te eisen voor een theologie van Dalit humanisering.

Hoofdstuk zes richt zich op de relevantie van Thomas' concept van humanisering voor een theologie die de humanisering van de Dalits nastreeft. Het hoofdstuk laat zien hoe Thomas' streven naar humanisering relevant kan worden gemaakt voor het streven van de Dalits naar humanisering en bevrijding van allerlei dehumaniserende krachten. Dit proefschrift onderkent dat Thomas de neiging had zich generaliserend over het lijden van verschillende groepen te uiten; daarom richt deze studie zich specifiek op het lot en de positie van Dalits. Het onderzoek gaat verder dan Thomas' theologie van humanisering door een analyse te geven van het specifieke lijden van de Dalits en vanuit deze specifieke context een Dalit-theologie te ontwikkelen die ingaat op de vraag wat Thomas' notie van humanisering voor Dalit theologie zou betekenen.

Deze dissertatie beargumenteert dat Thomas' theologie van humanisering op drie gebieden relevant is voor de humanisering van de Dalits. Die gebieden zijn de christologie, antropologie en ecclesiologie. In Thomas' christologie is de incarnatie de meest centrale notie. Deze dissertatie betoogt dat de incarnatie relevant is, omdat het mens- en Dalit-zijn van Jezus middels incarnatie zijn solidariteit met de strijd van Dalits voor humanisering toont. Dalits worden in de Indiase samenleving niet als mensen behandeld; de incarnatie en het mens-zijn van Jezus bevestigt de betekenis van het mens-zijn in het algemeen en de menswaardigheid van Dalits in het bijzonder; daarmee geeft de incarnatie betekenis aan hun mens-zijn. Jezus' opstanding betekent hoop voor Dalits dat hun ontmenselijkte bestaan kan en zal worden veranderd in een volwaardig mens-zijn. De incarnatie biedt daarom samen met de verhalen over kruisiging en opstanding van Jezus, de hoop op een voller, rijker en menselijker leven in Christus te midden van alle hopeloosheid en hulpeloosheid. Christologisch gesproken betekent humanisering onderdeel worden van het vernieuwde mens-zijn dat in en met Jezus is begonnen.

Een holistische Dalit-antropologie kiest volgens deze dissertatie haar uitgangspunt in het Bijbelse verhaal van de schepping, dat de gelijkheid van alle mensen voor God bevestigt. Bovendien bevraagt het scheppingsverhaal – en daarmee deze Dalit antropologie – de conventionele dichotomie tussen lichaam en ziel, seculier en heilig,

historische en eschatologische werkelijkheid; Dalit-antropologie roept op tot een geïntegreerde en holistische theologie van heil en humanisering.

Deze dissertatie bepleit tenslotte een Dalit-ecclesiologie die de nadruk legt op inclusivisme. Deze Dalit-ecclesiologie propageert een inclusivistische gemeenschap van alle mensen die zich willen inzetten voor het gemeenschappelijke doel van humanisering, ongeacht hun kaste, geloof, kleur en *gender*; er is binnen deze gemeenschap ruimte voor een veelheid van spiritualiteiten. Deze inclusieve Dalit-ecclesiologie werkt vanuit een profetische spiritualiteit die momentum geeft aan de profetische missie tot humanisering. Juist in de Indiase context van religieus pluralisme en communalisme - beide een potentiële bedreiging voor vreedzame co-existentie en menswaardig bestaan - is een theocentrische (ipv. een christocentrische) focus in de strijd voor humanisering van belang. Anders dan Thomas kiest dit proefschrift daarom voor een theocentrische focus in strijd voor humanisering; mensen participeren in deze strijd geïnspireerd door hun eigen spiritualiteit. Hoewel alle participanten de pluraliteit van spiritualiteiten die gericht zijn op humanisering dienen te respecteren, zullen christenen waarschijnlijk ervoor kiezen deel te nemen aan deze theocentrische seculiere gemeenschap van mensen vanuit een christocentrische spiritualiteit.

Dalit-theologie en de christelijke gemeenschappen kunnen Dalits middels consciëntisering en onderwijs de middelen in handen geven om zelf te werken aan humanisering. De kerk heeft een belangrijke taak in het zichtbaar maken en verwoorden van de vele wandaden die tegen Dalits worden begaan. Doordat de kerk dit bewustwordingsproces en onderwijs faciliteert, kunnen Dalits politiek actief worden en zo zelf komen tot humanisering.

Hoofdstuk zeven concludeert dat Thomas' theologie van heil en humanisering voor en met de gedehumaniseerde Dalits in het hier en nu een vollediger en rijker leven in Christus nastreeft en hun waardigheid als mens in de samenleving wil herstellen. Thomas was geen Dalit, maar hij koos wel de zijde van de Dalits; zijn theologie kan als een springplank dienen voor bevrijdingstheologieën, zoals Dalit theologie. Thomas'

theologie erkent de waarde en waardigheid van ieder mens en roept op tot gelijkheid, rechtvaardigheid en humanisering van mensen die leven in een context van discriminatie, vernedering en dehumanisering op grond van kaste, geloof, kleur en *gender*.

Dit onderzoek heeft zich beperkt tot de relevantie van de theologie van Thomas met betrekking tot Dalits. Toekomstige studies zouden zich kunnen richten op de relevantie van de ideeën van Thomas ten aanzien van mensen die in een stamverband leven en vrouwen.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Jeyaraj Rajaiah was born on 4th March 1965 in Tamil Nadu, India. He had all his theological education with Serampore University: Bachelor of Theology (B.Th 1983 – 1986), South India Biblical Seminary, Bangarapet; Bachelor of Divinity (B.D.1987 – 1989), Leonard Theological College, Jabalpur and Master of Theology (M.Th.1993 - 1995), Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, Chennai, Tamil Nadu. He served as a lecturer and Academic Dean in Bethel Bible Institute in Danishpet, Tamil Nadu from 1989 - 2002. He moved from his home state to Andhra Pradesh in 2002 with his family to serve as faculty in the International College of Cultural Studies, Secunderabad. Since 2002 he is teaching both at the Bachelor and Master level program and is part of the Faculty Forum of the college. He served in various capacities as coordinator for the Master program and as administrator of the college.

In May 2007 he was ordained to the Episcopal ministry and served as an honorary presbyter of the St. Thomas (SPG) Tamil Cathedral, Secunderabad from 2007 - 2013. Since 2014 he serves as Moderator Bishop's Chaplain, as National Director for Good Shepherd Pastors training, senior pastor of the English Good Shepherd church in Secunderabad and a member of the national Secretariat of the Good Shepherd Church of India since 2014.

He is happily married with Elsie and they have a son Richard and a daughter Regina.

Quaestiones Infinitae

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