

Discussion with Makkal Mandram Representatives, Fr. Jose, Advocate Lucy on 08.04.2008 (Tuesday)

At the outset Fr. Cosmon and Fr. Bosco made it clear that they came to visit Eraiyur on their own and not on behalf of the CBCI. They briefed the participants about the visit to Eraiyur and their reflections and insights. Among many other things they highlighted the following features:

- In spite of the sub-caste divisions and religious differences, the three groups of Dalits formed Makkal Mandram and stood against the discrimination of Dalits in Eraiyur. They appreciated their coming together for common cause.
- They were shocked at the unholy involvement of the priest-principal and teachers in the destruction of houses and properties at Dalit colonies.
- They appreciated the involvement of Dalit Viduthalai Peravai, Human Rights Association and Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Kazhagam in securing justice for the Dalits.

Insights and Suggestions from the participants

- First of all it is not a religious issue but it is an issue of discrimination on the basis of untouchability.
- Hereafter, we need not focus very much on Eraiyur but urgent measures are to be taken to address the discriminatory practices in Tamil Nadu Church and all over Indian Christian community.
- We need to concentrate on the reconstruction work at Eraiyur. It has to address the issues of economical development, psychological support and education of the Dalit students.
- The perpetrators of violence on Dalits have to ask general pardon and pay compensation.
- Even though the visit of Bishop Neethinathan and Fr. Packianathan was much appreciated by the people, the involvement of the Diocesan SC/ST/BC Commission, Tamil Nadu Bishop's Council SC/ST/BC Commission and the CBCI Commission for SC/ST/BC was not satisfactory.
- The plight of Dalit students in Eraiyur Catholic High School has to be addressed urgently. They have to be accommodated in some other school. In a humiliating and terrorizing atmosphere they cannot study. The students from poor families need financial assistance.
- The children are in need of special counseling by special counselors.
- We request the Nuncio to initiate ecclesiastical enquiry on Eraiyur incident and practices of discrimination within the Catholic Church. The former Holy Father has already exhorted the Bishops of Tamil Nadu to take special care and attention to address the issues of discrimination.
- We are ready to prepare an affidavit to be attached to our case in the Supreme Court.

- Let Eraiur be only the starting point and let the Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council initiate a study on discriminatory practices throughout Tamil Nadu.
- When Human Rights are violated what is the role of the TNBC or CBCI Commissions? Should they require permission from the local ordinary to study the matter and intervene? In the Government side the National Commission for Scheduled Castes has even judicial power. It seems the Commissions are helpless or powerless in the situation of crisis.
- We need to collect the cases of untouchability within the Christian community and file a Writ in the Court. Simultaneously we need to build up a movement against untouchability throughout Tamil Nadu.
- We need the support of other political movements and parties that are battling against caste and untouchable discriminations.

Insights from Mr. Chinthanai Selvan (VCK)

- Our party is privileged to take up this issue of discrimination and it is our issue. It will continue to address the issue of discrimination within the Christian community. Many of our committed members hail from Dalit Christian community. VCK is planning to have a state-level conference on discrimination within the Christian community.
- Dalit Christians in search of equality embraced Christian faith but now seeking caste security Vanniar Christians at Eraiur are ready to embrace Hinduism again. I would like to affirm that Christ's message is a liberative message of equality and justice.

Fr.Cosmon