doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.15359/siwo.10-1.5 [p. 129 – p. 164]

God/Body: Dalit Theology After Continental Philosophy

Dios / Cuerpo: Teología Dalit después de la filosofía continental

Deus / corpo: teologia dalit após filosofia continental

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Recibido: 06 de marzo 2017
Aprobado: 15 de mayo/2017

1. Introduction

From Plato through Kant to Hegel, the Continental philosophical thought (the post-Enlightenment Western philosophical thought) has been transcendentalist and has devalued immanence as an enclosed system of matter, body, and being. The Continental philosophers of 'hypertranscendence' in the postmodern period such as Levinas, Derrida, and Marion, on the other hand, problematized and criticized both the traditional and the modern images of transcendence for not being transcendent enough since they fail to escape the immanence of being.[1] The philosophers who belong to the post-continental

1 John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon identify two main postmodern responses to the classic idea of transcendence: 'hypertranscendence' and 'post-transcendence.' hypertranscendence argues for more transcendent position which cannot be assumed by immanence. Post-transcendence, on the other hand, talks about transcending transcendence which is of course a turn that falls back into immanence. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, *Transcendence and beyond: A Postmodern Inquiry* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 2.

philosophical tradition such as Gilles Deleuze, Luis Irigaray, Georgio Agamben, Alain Badiou and Slavoj Zizek, offer a sharp criticism of transcendentalist Western philosophy and its theistic theological discourses. They propose a philosophical turn towards 'a plane of immanence'.

Interacting with the post-continental philosophical tradition, this paper tries to re-locate Dalit theology after Continental philosophy. Dalit epistemology as an indigenous knowledge system which signifies a counter political ontology and epistemology of resistance rejects the notion of transcendence or the notion of a 'transcendent God' based on the early materialist philosophical traditions in India *Carvaka/ Lokayata* philosophy. This study will analyze how Dalit theology that emerged out of the materialist philosophy of non-transcendence can be a Christian theology in the contemporary context. By analyzing the epistemological trajectories of the Dalit body, this paper proposes a materialist theopolitic of no-God that might locate Dalit theology in a post-Continental philosophical context.

2. Defining Dalit as a Materialist Category

Defining the category of 'Dalit' necessitates an epistemological tour to the historical emergence of Dalit consciousness and the Dalit movement in India.[2] Gopal Guru defines 'Dalit' as 'a category that is historically arrived at, sociologically presented and discursively constituted'.[3] Guru traces various nomen-

2 Etymologically the word 'Dalit' means 'broken', 'crushed', 'downtrodden' and so on. The category 'Dalit' in the contemporary Indian context refers to the most marginalized people who are the victims of the caste power structure. Dalits constitute 20% of the total population (over 200 million). S. M. Michael, ed., *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values* (New Delhi: sage Publication, 2007), 76.

3 Gopal Guru Goapal Guru, ed., *Atrophy in Dalit Politics* (Mumbai: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 2005), 69.

clatures given to Dalits in India in concordance with the various theoretical and epistemological emphases in colonial and post-colonial modernity. During the colonial period, the British East India Company referred to Dalits as "the Depressed Classes" who needed empowerment to 'catch up' with the elite class. Indian reformers like Gandhi wanted to call them "Harijans" which means the children of God. The reformers wanted to accommodate Dalits into the extended fold of Hinduism. In the post-independence period, the terminology "Scheduled Castes" came into existence. It was an attempt to define Dalit in terms of the welfare measures of the Nation-state. For the nation-state, Dalits are the problem to be solved. However, it was the Dalit Panthers Movement in Maharashtra that popularized the term 'Dalit' in the post-Ambedkar era as a mark of identity and political agency. For them, it was a revolutionary term that rejects all the names imposed by others, and it was considered the moment of self-naming by the Dalits.

By analyzing the historical and epistemological trajectories of the constitution of the term Dalit in Indian political philosophy, Gopal Guru defines the category Dalit as a materialistic category. Guru clarifies the reason to deny the metaphysical nomenclature -'*Harijan*' (children of God) that was offered to Dalits by Gandhi.[4] He argues that Dalit is not a metaphysical construction but derives its epistemological and political strength through material social experience. For him, the category Dalit receives ideological assistance from Buddha, Jyotiba Phule, Marx and Ambedkar and in the process becomes human centered rather than God centered.[5] Guru argues that Dalit is a materialist category which is 'not immune' to its own transcendence. For him, it signifies the politics of the 'lived experiences' through which they envisage social identity and agency.

4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.

Dalits are still politically neglected, economically poor, socially discriminated against, religiously untouchable, and symbolically othered people in India. They are mainly concentrated on *Cherries* or colonies-the geographical spaces provided to them by the age old developmental patterns and civilizations. They live on the outskirts of the 'public living' spaces by doing caste-assigned and thus enforced menial jobs like scavenging, and animal skinning. The exclusion or the marginalization or the othering of Dalits is not because of the malfunctioning of the welfare measures or developmental activities of the state; rather, it is an epistemological issue that defines ontology and politics discursively. It is here that caste as an epistemological practice which comes into our discussions imperatively.

The prominent theories on caste define it as a social system that connected to a particular period of history or pertaining to certain consensus on values. Louis Dumont offered a theory of mutually dependent society in which both higher and lower castes are organized hierarchically.[6] According to Dumont, it is the principle of purity and pollution that determines the relative position of castes within the hierarchy. Michael Moffat, on the other hand, explains this theory by exemplifying the practices of purity and pollution within the low caste communities.[7] The modern progressive social theories like Marxism and socialism, on the other hand, believe in the historical dissolution of such 'internal contradictions' in due course in history.

Contra to the other theories that render caste as a social system, this study analyzes caste as an epistemology which is being disseminated through certain institutional practices. Caste is to be seen as a social practice which emerged out of

6 Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (London: Paladin, 1972).
7 Michael Moffat, *An Untouchable Community in South India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

some hegemonic social knowledge that determines social distribution of the cultural, economical and symbolic capital. Caste functions as the basic knowledge that legitimizes the subsequent hierarchical ordering of the social body, unequal distribution of social capital, and marginalization of Dalit bodies as untouchables. Since the Indian social body is inherently casteist, all social relations, bodies, spaces and capital are infected by the contagious caste epistemology.

Caste epistemology was founded on the Vedic epistemology of the 'orthodox' (*Astika*) philosophical traditions in India. 'Orthodox' knowledge systems in opposition to the 'Heterodox' (Nastika) knowledge systems, upheld the some unitary visions of God, being, and the other. They had a vision of an 'omniscient unitary order', the absolute Being-the God who is the 'ritualistic force' and 'the essence' of all being (self). The being and the world are ontologically separated from God but ritualistically connected. Knowledge, which is ritualistic, is situated in the soul (Atman). This ritualistic knowledge is 'given' and esoteric. This esoteric knowledge of God and the world is the prerogative of the people who hold ritualistic power. Dalits, who are alien to this esoteric knowledge and the disseminating ritualistic practices, hence, cannot be knowledgeable. Thus, Dalits are unable to understand 'mantras' pertaining to the functioning of the divine and the world. This is the epistemological reason for denying education to the lower caste people in India. The caste logic perceived education for Dalits as a violation of the *Sanatan Dharma* (Universal Truth).

3. Dalit Body: The 'Denied Transcendence'

According to the caste epistemology, sacrality and purity of the body and space are defined by accessibility to the esoteric

knowledge of God and the ritualistic practices that disseminate this knowledge. In Vedic epistemology, the body is made up of certain *gunas* (qualities) which are 'given' and thus eternal. In this thought, some bodies are insufficient for certain *gunas* so they cannot come up with the highly qualitative bodies. Less qualitative bodies cannot have social spaces as in the case of higher bodies. The hierarchical ordering of labor, social spaces and social capital are foregrounded on the epistemology of the ontological separation between Divine/ sacred body and the 'non-divine'/ impure bodies.[8] What is interesting is that it is the body that becomes here the primary 'ground' of all caste violations and violence which forces Dalits to define their ontological politics as materialistic.

One of the cosmologies of the early-Vedic tradition defines the four fold social structure (the *varnasrama dharma*) in connection with the very being of God which provides the epistemological and theological rationale for the construction of the Dalit body. According to the *Purusha Sukta* in Rig Veda, the elite class *Brahmana* were born out of the mouth of God, the *Rajanyas-* the warrior class came out of the arms of God, the *Vaishyas-*the business class came from the thighs of God, and the *Sudras-*the working class were born out of His feet[9] According to this cosmogony, Dalits exist alien to the very being/ body of God and thus have no 'ontological participation' with the divine or transcendence. The Dalit body is rendered here as self-enclosed body which is denied of transcendence. According to this cosmology of 'denied transcendence,' the Dalit body is 'inherently irredeemable' and eternally unalterable.

8 Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class, and Power* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1965).

9 Rig Veda, 1981: XXC, 126.

Denying the caste epistemological construction of the Dalit body and re-defining it in terms of a political ontology, Guru re-imagines the Dalit body as a potential site of resistance as well as liberation.[10] The Dalit body, in this sense, is open to its own transcendence even though it is denied of transcendence by the Vedic epistemology, ontology, and politics. For Guru, the Dalit body embodies resistance and social agency. In this view, the Dalit body holds internal potential for its 'counter formations' based on certain 'counter knowledges' out of their own 'materialist experiences'.[11] The Dalit body has the potential for its counter subjectivity. In this understanding, the Dalit body becomes not just a thing, rather, it is a 'radical discourse' of resistance and transformation.

4. 'Offered Transcendence': The Dalit body and the Christian Theology

Christian Theology approached the Dalit body in the context of colonial modernity. Christian Theology responded to colonial modernity differently. Indian Christian Theology is an outcome of those responses through which Christian Theology interacted, appropriated, and interrogated the colonial modernity in India.[12] The Indian Christian Theologies, whether

10 Goapal Guru, ed., *Atrophy in Dalit Politics*, 69.

11 According to Michel Foucault, the resistances to the hegemonic practices that construct our body, subjectivity and social spaces are inherent within the body counter practices. Human bodies are not just 'subjected' to certain knowledges, rather; they can be 'subjects' of their destinies by creating counter discourses and practices. Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1972), 3-15. For a detailed study of Dalit epistemology, see Y. T. Vinayaraj, *Re-imagining Dalit Theology: Postmodern Readings* (Thiruvalla: CSS, 2010), 25-30.

12 Theology in India signifies the postcolonial face of Christian theology. Indian Christian theologies emerged in the context of validating indigenous knowledges and theologies in response to the modern Western Theology. It was an attempt form the Indian Christianity to 'confess its faith and establish its historical

influenced by the theologies of the Western missionaries or the Indian elitist philosophical traditions, offered transcendence to Dalit bodies through their sacramental theologies.[13] The non-dualistic theologies like Raimon Panikkar's *theoanthropocosmic* vision promised transcendence to Dalit bodies without attending to the epistemological construction of the Dalit body.[14] Following the Sankara's *Advaita* philosophy, Panikkar argues for a mystic unity of God, cosmos, and human being.[15]

existence in dialogue with its own environment.' See, M.M. Thomas, 'Foreword' in *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Madras: CLS, 1969), v.

13 While analyzing the development of Christian Theology in India, J. Russell Chandran highlights five stages of its formation: (1) Missionary Theology, through which the western missionaries represented the faith and the cultures of Indian Church; (2) Hindu responses to the Western mission theology that emerged outside of the Church; (3) Christian Theology within the Church, in which the early Indian Christian theologians appropriated the Indian categories and philosophical traditions; (4) The emergence of the theology of dialogue through which the interreligious dialogue was signified; and (5) The Theology of Liberation and Humanization. See, J. Russell Chandran, "Development of Christian Theology in India: A Critical Survey," in *Readings in Indian Christian Theology, Vol. 1*, edited by R. S. Sugirtharajah and Cecil Hargreaves, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), 4.

14 J. Jayakiran Sebastian tries to interstice between Panikkar and Dalit theology in one of his articles. The problem with this thesis is that it does not enter into the epistemological differences. J. Jayakiran Sebastian, "Fragmented Selves, Fragments of the New Story: Panikkar and Dalit Christology", *Exchange* 41 (2012) 245-253.

15 According to the Panikkar's *theoanthropocosmic* vision: "there is no God without Man and World; There is no man without God and World; There is no World without God and man." Raimon Panikkar, "Ecology: From an Eastern Philosophical Perspective," *Monchanin*, Vol. VIII, Nos. 3-5 Cashier 50, June-December 1975, p. 26. All reality has three constitutive dimensions which are present and real in everything that is: divine, human and cosmic. A truly conscious life means to be the conscious nexus of these three dimensions. According to Panikkar, the *theanthropocosmic* principle overcomes both the monistc and the dualistic tendencies in Indian philosophy of God. Raimon Panikkar, "Religious Education in an Inter-Faith Perspective," *Monchanin*, p. 32. For Panikkar, though Sankara's (Advatic) *Isvara* locates itself in the diversity between the Brahman and the world, seems helpful for an Indian Christian theology that appropriates the *Isvara* with Christ. *Isvara* of his interpretation points towards the mystery of Christ. Taking the *Advaita* notion of non-relational union with the Reality, Panikkar argues that the spirituality of Holy Spirit is identical with the *Advaitic* spirituality.

For Sankara's *Advaita* (non-dualism) philosophy, only Brahman is real and the world of experience is unreal because it is subject to change and perishing. The notion of an unreal world and the body is not the same as the Cartesian dualistic ontology, but contributed to the legitimization of Brahmanic (high caste) hierarchy and patriarchy in an Indian context that disparaged both indigenous knowledges and their bodies. As Gopal Guru argues, the consciousness of Oneness and Reality in Indian 'orthodox' philosophy never attended to the difference of the Dalit life-world and assumed a fake relationality between social groups.[16]

The emergence of liberation theologies in the post-independent period, on the other hand, marked a (secular) humanist turn in Indian Christian Theology that affirmed 'the humanization of nature, creativity of man in purposive history, liberation from social bondage and realization of love in human relation as the promise and potentiality of mankind in every historical situation.'[17] Following this vein of thought, theologians like M. M. Thomas and Sebastian Kappen shared the hope of the in-breaking of the kingdom in history: 'as when the blind see, the deaf hear, the oppressed are set free when the poor take possession of the earth' which is foundational to the Liberation model. Arvind P. Nirmal's address at the Carey Society of the United Theological College, Bangalore entitled 'Towards a Shudra Theology' is considered the initiation of the formal theological treatise on Dalit theology and envisaged a new turn by critiquing both the elitist theological engagements and the liberation theology in India for neglecting the Dalit pathos in the

16 Gopal Guru and Sunder Sarukkai, *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012).

17 M. M. Thomas, "The Secular Ideologies of India and the Secular Meaning of Christ," in *Readings in Indian Christian Theology*, Vol. 1 (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), 94.

caste hierarchical Indian social body. Of course, Dalit theology's relationship with liberation theology is complex and contested.

However, this study argues that Dalit theology, though it criticizes Latin American liberation theology for neglecting the Dalit life-world for theologizing, Dalit theology shares the same epistemological and ontological understanding of God, body, and othering. It is argued here that Dalit theology as it is conceived by the Dalit theologians in India still carries the baggage of liberation theology in terms of its doctrine of God, human and creation. For that matter, two theologians, one from liberation theology and the other from the Dalit theology, are analyzed as they approach Dalit body theologically in the post-independent period in India: M. M. Thomas and Sathianathan Clark.

5. Dalit Theology and Liberation Theology: M. M. Thomas and Sathianathan Clarke

M. M. Thomas emphasized the role of Christian theology in the formation of a democratic Nation-state in India.[18] M. M. Thomas was convinced of the liberationist motive of theology in order to make it a 'living theology' in the context of dehumanization and marginalization in India. Following the liberationist model, he tried to correlate the Christian theology of salvation and secular politics of humanization. The mission of the Church in India in the post-independent, for him, is nothing but to reinforce the acts of humanization. He explains his thesis:

18 Dr. M. M. Thomas' involvement in the secular movements pursued him to formulate a political theology of secular humanism. In his political liberation theology, he tried to signify Christ and Christianity in the pluralist religious context and in the socialist, humanist, and nationalist Indian context. The book *The Secular Ideologies of India and the Secular Meaning of Christ* reveals his theology of secular humanism.

> The crucial question raised in the theology of mission…is that of the relation between the gospel of salvation and the struggles of men everywhere for their humanity, constituting as this (in) the contemporary context of the world in which the gospel has to be communicated. The question, in other words, is that of the relation between Mission and Humanization.[19]

This quest for the fullness of humanity and the quest for liberation and justice signify his methodological inclination towards Latin American liberation theology. Thomas attends to the Dalit issue as the basic example of dehumanization in the Indian context. The theology of the new humanity in Christ, according to Thomas, exemplifies the theological potentiality of a transformed society in which justice for the Dalit is also promised and realized. Thomas contends that a new humanity in Christ is a call to humanity to discern the presence and activity of Christ in this world in order to renew structures of society to develop a true human community. In the sense of liberation, as Adrian Bird comments, M. M. Thomas qualifies himself as a Dalit theologian.[20]

Being a liberation theologian, Thomas believes in the 'infinite possibilities of the eschatological becoming historical.[21] According to Thomas it is in solidarity with the struggles of the oppressed that reveals the eschatological hopes in our contemporary life. For him, the cross signifies the identification of God with the victims of oppression in the contemporary world. Thus resurrection means that the forces of death and evil which find expression in the oppression of humanity have been and will

19 M. M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization: Some Critical Issues of the Theology of Mission in Contemporary India* (Madras: CLS, 1971), 2.

20 Adrian Bird, M.M. *Thomas and Dalit Theology* (Bangalore: BTESSC/ SATHRI, 2008).

21 M.M. Thomas, "The Meaning of Salvation Today," in *Towards a Theology of Contemporary Ecumenism* (Madras: CLS, 1978), 187.

be finally overcome.[22] The following words summarize Thomas' theology of humanization as the methodological paradigm of Indian Christian theology:

> God calls human beings to participate with God in all these three levels of Divine mission, namely to participate in programmes of creative development, to be involved in fighting injustice and establishing social justice through the rule of law and other checks to oppressive power and along with it all to participate in the redemptive mission of love.[23]

Following the liberation methodology, Thomas defines God as the God of history. He affirms God's salvific engagement in the historical realm. For him, "salvation is of man as historical being and it invests history and human freedom and action in history with ultimate spiritual significance."[24] Nature is seen by Thomas as the Creation of God providing the background for history as salvation and sharing in it. Salvation involves social liberation of all people from bondage including the distorted nature. Christ becomes the sign and the sacrament of this wholistic liberation.

According to Thomas, (hu)man is created in the image of God which means 'he' (sic) has given freedom and at the same time creativity with responsibility. Thomas explains his theological anthropology:

> Man has to transcend 'himself' to become himself through the exercise of creativity and responsibility. An orientation of the Future or/and the Beyond, is thus inherent in it as an imperative. This imperative is the call of the Infinite Spirit, of the ultimate values of truth, goodness, and beauty

22 M.M. Thomas, "Theological Aspects of the Relationship Between Social Action Groups and Churches," *Religion and Society,* Vol. XXXI, No.2, June, 1984, p. 19.

23 M.M. Thomas, "The Living God," The Gospel of Forgiveness and Koinonia: Twenty five Selected Sermons/ Homilies (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 78.

24 M. M. Thomas, "The Secular Ideologies of India and the Secular Meaning of Christ," in *Readings in Indian Christian Theology*, Vol. 1 (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), 93.

> on man's finite spirit, and is sustained by it. Therefore, the reality of man, human society and human history cannot be interpreted in purely naturalistic or purely spiritual terms. Humanism is not naturalism at a higher stage, or a closed social organism or spirituality at a lower stage. Man is becoming creatively open to the future, with objectivities of dynamic nature, subjective self understanding of persons and societies and the reality of a transcendent Providence, all playing their roles in their inter-relation. An interpretation of the dialectic of history has to take all these elements into account to be essentially human or adequately true.[25]

M.M. Thomas upheld the view that it is human self-centeredness which makes them sinful. Jesus' Cross becomes the answer to this human problem where God himself shows his way of becoming a true human by sacrificing himself for the other.[26] It is the cross that reveals to us the complete sense of humanization. The values of forgiveness and self-sacrifice that have been revealed on the cross of Jesus Christ, and communion in this spiritual ferment offer a new humanity in Jesus Christ which is fundamental to the call and the commission of the church in this world. This self-sacrificial love transcends human planning, organization, and politics. This self-sacrificial love is always angled towards the other-the weak, the poor, and the marginalized. It is our critical engagement with the unjust social structures and powers that marginalize the poor and the vulnerable that determines and reveals the presence of the Risen Jesus Christ with us. Humanization is very much linked to an eschatology that discloses any kind of self-centeredness and self righteousness in history. Salvation is humanization where the new humanity in Jesus Christ is envisaged and envisioned.

25 Ibid., 95.
26 Ibid., 98.

Despite the criticisms against Thomas' theology from Dalit theologians, who highlight the 'high caste' social location of Thomas, M.M. Thomas as a liberation theologian signifies himself in the theological process of rejecting all kinds of epistemologies of domination including caste and patriarchy. Recalling the mission of the church Thomas notes:

> The outcastes, the poor and the orphans saw Christian faith as the source of a new humanizing influence and the foundation of a human community. Where conversion was genuine, whether of individuals or of groups, the converts saw Salvation in Christ not only in terms of individual salvation or heaven after death, but also a spiritual source of a new community on earth in which their human dignity and status were recognized.[27]

On the demand for the human dignity, equality, and freedom no distinction can be seen between Thomas and Dalit theologians except in the question of their respective ethnicities. The inclination towards the Hegelian dialectics and the Western ideologies of secularism and humanism qualifies Thomas as a true liberationist that keeps him very close to the methodology of the Dalit theologians in India. Methodologically speaking, infact, there is no distinction between Thomas' theology of humanization and the contemporary Dalit theology in their notions of God, being and the other.

Sathianathan Clarke, a prominent Dalit theologian in India, on the other hand, concentrates on the liberation of Dalits in India as a theological project.[28] Following the liberationist pa-

27 M. M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 14.

28 Sathianathan Clarke is currently Bishop Sundo Kim Chair in World Christianity and Professor of Theology, Culture and Mission at the Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington DC, USA. He is the author of *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003) which is one of the authentic studies on Dalit religion and theology in India.

radigm, he renders the social location of exclusion, marginality, and discrimination as the theological site for God's preferential option for the poor. In his comprehensive monograph *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India*, he offers a liberation theology of Dalits invoking Indian Christian theology to validate and advocate the experience of marginalization of Dalits in India. Moving beyond the 'methodological exclusivism' of Arvind P. Nirmal, Clarke explains the inclusive methodological matrix of Dalit theology:[29]

> Deeply affected by the person of Jesus and passionately aligned with the work of Christ, Christian Dalit theology is a specialized discipline. It documents the reflections of liberation-identified Dalits and Dalit-identified liberationists on the interlocking of divine and human matters that both generate life now, and reimagines future life for communities pushed towards physical and economic death. Thus Dalit theology is founded on the 'pathetic' experience of specific Dalit communities, filtered through the inspirational person and work of Jesus Christ, and entwined into the lives of oppressed peoples in India with the objective of funding and finding life in all its fullness for all human beings.[30]

Sathianathan Clarke's Dalit theology finds liberation as the link that binds all communities together in a common mission that benefits, first, Dalits, and next, other subjugated communities, and eventually all human beings as they seek to live together

29 Clarke argues that Nirmal does not propose a totally exclusive program of theologizing. According to Clarke, Nirmal tries to signify the empathetic knowledge of Dalits which is integrally connected to the sympathetic knowledge of non-Dalits who participates in the action of liberation. As in the case of the pain-infected stomach and pain effect informed brain works together to voice out the scream of the woman, Clarkes argues that those two knowledges are valid for any kind of liberation theologies like Dalit theology. See for more details, Sathianathan Clarke, "Dalit Theology: An Introductory and Interpretative Theological Exposition," in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*, eds., Sathianathan Clarke et al. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 20-22.

30 Ibid., 19.

in security, justice, peace, and life in all its plenitude.'[31] For him, like any other liberation theology, an ongoing dialectic between resistance and liberation is fundamental to Dalit theology.

Sathianathan Clarke alludes to a God who has been relocated from the metaphysical riddles of reason into the broken bodies of Dalits. Unlike the Brahmanic gods, Clarke argues for a just and passionate Dalit God who has been revealed through Jesus Christ. He contends that Jesus as co-sufferer with the afflicted becomes the model for human living as ordained and acceptable to God.[32] Clarke, in his excellent work, envisions an interactive theology of God for Dalit Christian theology by creatively interacting with Dalit religious and cultural resources that stem from their pain-pathos and the Judeo-Christian conceptions of the identifying God in history. It is out of his theological insight that he creates the slogan-Jesus as the Dalit drum.[33]

Clarke, as in the case of Enrique Dussel, upholds the perception that it is the 'excluded one' who determines the transcendence of the system as it dismantles the system. Thus the 'excluded one' is nothing but the 'transcendent Other.' According to this theology, the marginalized and the oppressed Dalits signify God-the 'wholly Other'. However, unlike Dussel, who has been criticized for essentializing the category poor, Clarke tends to define Dalit identity or Dalit consciousness beyond the question of essentialism. He argues that it is not their ontological privilege that provides them centrality in the preferential option of God; rather, it is their participatory knowledge in the struggles for justice along with God in the cooperative journey toward authentic and free life which substantiates God's presence along

31 Ibid., 23.
32 Ibid., 32.
33 Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

with them. It is the participation in these struggles for justice that offers an inclusive methodology for doing Dalit theology. Clarke explains this convincingly:

> For Dalits and Adivasis, just as for all human beings, God is known as the source, sustainer and goal of life. Nevertheless, in an indirect way, because it is primarily the oppressed and exploited (Dalits and Adivasis as the case in India suggest) that want to subvert the unjust and oppressive socio-economic and religio-cultural structures, they will more likely join in the working of God to bring about such a life of freedom and dignity for all, especially the subaltern. So implicitly the participation in solidarity with God's liberative working is in a particular way more appealing and germane to the oppressed and alienated. Within this logistic scheme the issue is not set up in a manner whereby God is seen only on the side of Dalits and Adivasis' rather, the argument seems to hinge on the practical possibility that if knowledge of God is conceived of in terms of participatory knowing through commitment to God's working in the world, then it is most plausible than the oppressed and alienated will inevitably take the side of God.[34]

Even though Clarke distinguishes himself from the other Dalit theologians who define Dalit as an essentialized category, Clarke fails to foreground it in a consistent theoretical framework. He makes use of the Gramscian notion of subaltern to define a post-Dalit/ post-Adivasi identity, but cannot escape a form of essentialism. Alluding to Gramsci, Clarke defines subaltern in India as the people who hold an 'anti-caste consciousness.' This consciousness of subalternity is similar to the class consciousness as it was theorized by Gramsci. Clarke believes in the resistive and constructive role of this 'anti-caste consciousness' among Dalits in their journey toward self-respect and

34 Sathianathan Clarke, "Subalterns, identity politics and Christian Theology in India," in *Christian Theology in Asia*, edited by Sebastian C.H. Kim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 277.

dignity. The problem with this notion of identity consciousness is that it never de-others itself in the epistemological practices of caste. It is nothing but the reaffirmation of the caste positionality of 'dalitness' and assumes an opposite identity consciousness as a derivative of the caste other. Clarke does not compromise with the specific experience of marginalization of Dalits as a privileged location to gain God's favor. Though he denies the identitarian social location of Dalits as essentialist, Clarke links God's preference with Dalits social experience of oppression and marginalization.

As in the humanization theology of M.M. Thomas, Clarke's God is a 'transcendent Other' who manifests himself in the struggles of justice and freedom from outside or Beyond. It is a 'wholly Other' God who comes from beyond. As it is in the liberation theological paradigm, the poor and the marginalized symbolize the Divine encounter in history. Here God or the 'transcendent Other' is ontologically defined and metaphysically located. According to Clarke, we are restricted to a particular understanding of ourselves in relation to God. Transcendence or liberation is to come from 'beyond.' Our experience with this God is quite transactional. It is in our participation in a liberative work that confirms the experience of God which is given to us as a reward.

As in the case of M. M. Thomas, Clarke offers Dalit theological anthropology on the basis of the theological notion of *imago dei*. Human beings are created by God in love and freedom. It is the sin of human beings who created dalitness, oppression, and brokenness by ejecting God from the world. By affirming the liberatory work of God in the world, Dalits rejects the eternally enslaving systems like casteism. The healing of the self is always connected to the healing of the other. It is here that Dalit theology becomes paradigmatic for all liberation theologies that seek the fullness of humanity. Clarke writes: "If pain-pathos can be

the way to overcome suffering and oppression, then Dalit theology may have the key to open new doors of becoming human from the confines of our increasingly exploitative and dehumanizing world."[35]

Following the liberation theological tradition, the God-world relationship is symbolically connected and theologically argued in Clarke's Dalit theology. The God experience in Clarke is not relational or spontaneous, but conditional and transcendental. The importance of theology in his methodology is that it ensures participation in the experience of transcendence by the participatory knowledge in the liberation action for justice and equality. Here, in contrast to the Brahmanic theologies that deny transcendence to Dalit bodies, Clarke's Dalit theology, offers it to Dalit bodies by the participatory knowledge of action for justice. Clarke's Dalit theology as in the case of any other liberation theology, offers transcendence to Dalit bodies from 'beyond' based on a Christian philosophy which is foregrounded in the Western notion of 'wholly Other.' It is here where contemporary Dalit theology has to find a theology of God, body and the other from its own epistemological discourses.

6. Absence of Transcendence: Dalit Epistemology after Continental Philosophy

The word 'transcendence' in western thought is a controversial and overdetermnined one with a long history in both theology and philosophy. In its general sense, transcendence signals 'the beyond.' Immanence is assumed as limited to within certain borders. It is limited within bodylines or worldliness. Christian theology, with the help of the ancient western

35 Ibid, 35.

philosophical traditions, tried to bridge transcendentalism and immanentism with the theistic notion of 'rhetoric of ascent.' The Kantian and Hegelian effort to go beyond transcendentalism ended up with the totalitarian One. Kant offered a theory of immanence-experience of the phenomenal world-that is not determined by a transcendent or external principle but is the product of reason's own activity. Hegel, by pushing the Kantian notion of immanence to the extreme, offered a *Phenomenology of Spirit* through which reason attains a point of Absolute knowing of itself. The post-transcendence philosophers such as Deleuze, Irigaray, and Adorno, while critiquing the Hegelian formulation of immanence as closed totality, strive to render immanence as an open whole. It is open because it is capable of self-transcendence or becoming. For them immanence is a space of difference and alterity rather than coherence and integrity. Patrice Haynes' evaluation is right about the post-transcendence philosophers: "by relocating transcendence to the plane of immanence, they hope to develop a non-reductive materialism that does not lapse into a totalized, logicized immanence."[36]

Among the post-transcendentalists, Deleuze is known for his theory of 'pure immanence.' According to Deleuze, transcendence that designates the transcendent which lies beyond, outside or external to the world is the dominant concept in Western philosophy and theology.[37] The political correlate of this 'transcendent' is the Sovereign: the absolute legislator. Thus, Deleuze constantly calls to 'hunt down transcendence.' Deleuze upholds the view that transcendence is a secondary and temporary phenomenon or effect taking place purely within the plane of immanence. Rejecting the Platonic notion of 'One' that

36 Patrice Haynes, *Immanent Transcendence, Reconfiguring Materialism in Continental Philosophy* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 7.

37 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (London and New York: Verso, 1994), 47.

falls in favor of transcendentalism, and the Levinasian cry for the protection of transcendence, Deleuze proposes 'the plane of immanence' as a 'basin' that can even receive eruptions of the transcendent. 'Pure immanence' denies any effort to define matter or body or being as inferior to any idea of transcendence or forms. Following Spinoza and Nietzsche, Deleuze offers a theory of univocity that ultimately envisages differences within being. Deleuze borrows the idea of 'internal difference' from Bergson, who created the concept to avoid the sense of negativity that Hegel introduced into his metaphysical system by defining difference as an exteriority. By thinking about difference as internal, Deleuze tries to unite 'the One' and 'the Many' in his thinking. Deleuze writes:

> The essence of univocal Being is to include individuating differences, while these differences do not have the same essence and do not change the essence of Being… There are not two 'paths' …, but a single 'voice' of Being which includes all its modes, including the most diverse, the most varied, the most differentiated. Being is said in a single and same sense of everything of which it is said, but that of which it is said differs: it is said of difference itself.[38]

Alluding to Spinoza, Deleuze offers an idea of univocity which does not order transcendence and immanence hierarchically. 'Everything is in the plane of immanence.' Here God doesn't remain as a 'transcendent Other' to the creatures; rather, God expresses himself in all creatures internally. According to Deleuze, God and creatures share an identity of form, 'while permitting no confusion of essence.'[39] Being is equal for everything-every being expresses the same amount of Being-but not everything is equal. Deleuze defines Being as difference-a

38 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton (London: Continuum, 2004), 45.
39 Deleuze, *Expression in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. M. Joughin (New York: Zone books, 1992), 47.

continuously differentiating creative force. It is not denying God; rather, it is denying God as the 'transcendent Other' who has no ontological relationship with the creatures. In a nutshell, Deleuze proposes a notion of immanence which is a practical 'way of life' in which transcendence and immanence, the self and the other, creator and the creatures are completely intertwined.

Another important theoretical position that affirms the non-dualist, dialectical and relational concept of transcendence and immanence in the post-Continental philosophical tradition is Jean-Luc Nancy's "transimmanence." Without embracing the 'pure immanentalism,' Nancy offers a counter position to transcendence. Nancy's 'transimmanence' is neither transcendental immanence nor immanental transcendence. It is an 'open immanence' that does not fix any form of transcendence 'outside,' and it falls back on the 'weight of the world.'[40] Nancy explains it as taking an example of art:

> One could also put it this way: art is the transcendence of immanence as such, the transcendence of an immanence that does not go outside itself in transcending, which is not *ex-static* but *ek-sistant*. A transimmanence. Art exposes this. Once again, it does not "represent" this. Art is the ex-position. The transimmanence, or patency, of the world takes place as art, as works of art.[41]

According to Nancy, art is an example of transimmanence through which it forms, forces, and creates its own comings, departures, crossings, and expositions in the singular plural world. Just like art, the body can have its own multiple "being-in-the world." Nancy's transimmanence signifies the bodies, their masses and their singular plural events that have 'the absence of

40 Nancy, *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Camuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 34.
41 Ibid., 35.

ground.'[42] Thus 'transimmanence' displays a resisting or liberating quality. The "weight of the world" of the transimmanence signifies the weight of the sufferings of the world-the agonistic politics of the world. Mark Lewis Taylor while signifying this concept of 'transimmanence' for his theopolitical project expounds on it clearly:

> It is the liberating opening and closing, and continual opening and reopening, of existence to itself, to and through its many singularities and pluralities. Transimmanence is existence thus refusing to be locked in place, "locked down" in systems that resist continual opening and reopening. It is a kind of passing, a traversing of manifolds and relations of immanence, which can be discerned especially along the boundaries marking agonistic strife between the powers that seek to dispose of weaker peoples and those peoples who resist being so disposed.[43]

Taylor defines 'transimmanence' as a transitive process of creating world, all against the worlding of the powerful, liberating the concentrated miseries of the 'unrounded' masses with all its dread, its fear, its agony. For Taylor, 'transimmanence' signifies an ontological politics of the 'bare life' (Agamben). As in the case of Nancy, who refuses to reject the role of transcendence, Ernesto Laclau advances his populist vision of 'failed transcendence' which locates itself beyond the dialecticality of transcendence and immanence. Laclau writes:

> What we need, therefore, is a change of terrain. This change however, cannot consist in a return to a fully-fledged transcendence. The social terrain is structured, in my view, not as completely immanent or as the result of some

42 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 77.

43 Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Theological and Political: On the Weight of the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 15.

> transcendent structure, but through what we could call failed transcendence.[44]

Spivak, in the same vein, tries to re-read the religious notion of transcendence in terms of a materialist culture where the sacred is detranscendentalized and identity is non-essentialized. It is an invitation to a 'mundane transcendence' of the self.[45] As postcolonial theologians argue, through this notion, Spivak affirms the transcendentability of the poor. However, the problem with Spivak is that when she tries to find out the religious sources of this embodied mundane transcendence, as a typical postcolonialist, she tends to depend upon the Hindu-Brahmanic religious cultural resources with which she is acquainted. This is evident in the postcolonial reading of Spivak offered by Susan Abraham. According to Abraham, Spivakian planetarity is consequently in a field of rhetorical play that includes religious and theological attempts to address the relationship between transcendence and immanence, within the cultural frame of Hindu *dvaita* practices.'[46] She argues that it is this *dvaitic* mindset that helps us to remain free of the distortion of possessing the other, knowing the other, naming the other, and avoiding museumizing the other. Abraham clearly establishes Spivak's inclination to the *dvaitic* non-dualistic twoness and her hesitation to accept the experience of singularity. It is here that Dalit epistemology, as an indigenous knowledge system, takes a turn from the Spivakian planetarity.

44 Ernesto Laclau, *Populist Reason* (New York: Verso, 2005), 244.
45 Susan Abraham, Detranscendalizing postcolonial Theology, in *Planetary Loves*, 95.
46 Susan Abraham, Detranscendalizing postcolonial Theology, in *Planetary Loves*, 95.

7. *Lokayata/ Carvaka*: Grounding Dalit Epistemology in the Materialist Philosophical Tradition

Marking its own philosophical 'grounding' on the materialist thinking, Dalit epistemology hardly exhibits its inclination to transcendence. Dalit epistemology, as a radical break from the early Indian philosophical traditions, located itself in the ancient forms of 'heterodox' (*Nastika*) philosophical traditions such as Jainism, Buddhism, and *Carvaka* philosophy. These radical philosophical traditions emerged critiquing the 'orthodox' (*Astika*) philosophical schools (*darsanas*) which rejected the material reality of the world and body. Buddhism and Jainism rejected the ritualistic theology and practices of the Brahmanic-Hinduism which was meant for the propitiation of God. The *Carvakas*, otherwise known as *Lokayata*, on the other hand, established the materialist philosophy which rejected the very notion of transcendence or God itself.[47]

Carvaka philosophy or *Lokayata* is the most ancient school of materialist thought in India founded by Brihaspati. Etymologically the word Lokayata means "dealing with the world." It is said to be the materialist philosophy of the common people. In contrast to the Vedic epistemology and its transcendentalist philosophies of *advaita* and *dvaita*, *Lokayata* philosophy upheld

47 Representatives of the Carvaka school of thought were present in all ages. During the Ramayana period, there was sage Jabali the materialist. In the Harivamsa, Vena Raju, the follower of Carvaka was renounced by Vyasa. Asita Kesa Kambali was a contemporary of the Buddha. Payasi was a follower of Kambali. There were many others, born in slavery and who lived to propagate materialism like Makkali Goshala, Poorna Kashyapa and Prakruti Katyanana. For more details see, Subuddhi Charan Goswamy, ed., *Lokayata Philosophy: A Fresh Appraisal* (Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2010). The main problem with the details of the Lokayata philosophy is that we have to depend on the writings of the orthodox schools that oppose the materialistic philosophy considering it as hedonist. The other option is to depend the Western writers who search for their 'exotic others'. See, Richard King, *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought* (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2007), 16-22.

the view that there is no transcendence apart from the material and no soul apart from body. Life originates from four elements- earth, water, fire and air. For C*arvakas*, life is being formed out of the specific conjunction of the material objects. Contra to the Vedic theology, they held the view that self or *atman* means body and not soul. D.P. Chattopadhyaya explains that according to *Lokayata*, the body is made from a combination of material elements and in them consciousness exists within the body.[48] Just as intoxicating power emerges from the ingredients of an alcoholic drink, so also the sense of the soul and consciousness emerge within the body resulting from the combination of material elements. There is a gradual material change to the formation of human beings. It is the material cause that arises according to the laws of motion of nature, which determines the existence of everything. Everything that is mental or spiritual is the product of a material process. There is nothing outside of natural knowledge. The root of the world is nothing but the matter. The Body is nothing but material consisting of elements. After death, the body disintegrates to the elements and thus there is no life after death. This materialist philosophy emerged as a sharp critique against the Vedic epistemology that propagates vague ideals of transcendence and in turn devalues materialistic thinking and discriminates against Dalit bodies as untouchable.

Following this materialistic philosophical tradition of non-transcendence, Brahmanic-Hinduism had to face severe questions from the Dalit social movements in the colonial modern period. The hegemonic Brahmanic ritualistic theology was rejected and people like Jyotiba Phule, who believed in the process of secularization in the colonial modernity, critiqued the mockery of Vedic epistemology by creating contradicting

48 D.P. Chattopadhyaya and Mrinal Kanti Gangopadhyaya, *Carvaka/ Lokayata: An Anthology of Source Materials and Some Recent Studies* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1990), 160-163.

philosophical treatises like *advaita* and *dvaita*. Phule exposed the inability of these philosophical traditions to interrogate the caste epistemology and the practice of untouchability. The failure of colonial modernity and the modern nation-state to address the caste epistemology differently made people like B. R. Ambedkar go for better legal protection for the Dalits rather than the Brahmanic laws like *Manusmriti*. Gandhi became the representational figure of this transcendentalist, nationalist, Hindu-Brahmanic philosophical tradition in the discursive terrain of modern Indian nation-state. The conversion of Ambedkar from Hinduism to Buddhism is to be read as a political and epistemological desire to re-define Dalit life in the modern period based on a non-transcendentalized philosophy and theology.[49] The answer to the query, why didn't Christianity become an option before Ambedkar is his inhibition towards a transcendentalized theology that separates secularity as its other.[50]

Dalit epistemology grounded in the *Carvaka/ Lokayata* materialist philosophy turns to be a political philosophy in the post-Ambedkar period. Dalits in this new period try to define their social agency and status by searching for new socio-political and symbolic capitals which in turn help them to re-imagine them as a political community. The neo-liberal world has necessitated the need of new capitals through which the social agency is being determined. Dalits cannot be blind to the new situations and must search for new capitals in order to re-locate themselves in the neo-liberal context. It happens today as Dalits struggle for

49 Bebjani Ganguly argues that Indian modernity has, through Ambedkar's efforts, been rendered multivocal and less coercive. Modernity is not negated in Ambedkar, rather contested and unsettled. Conversion to Buddhism is to seen as a hermeneutical engagement to counter modernity is symbolic way. Debjani Ganguly, *Caste, Colonialism and Counter-Modernity: Notes on a Postcolonial Hermeneutics of Caste* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 129-154.

50 For a detailed study on Dalit epistemology in the modern period, see Y. T. Vinayaraj, *Re-imagining Dalit Theology: Postmodern Readings* (Thiruvalla: CSS, 2010).

land, right to education, and political agency. While referring to the ongoing Dalit land struggles in India, Sunny Kapikadu, a Dalit activist says, "these are not just struggles for some raw materials rather they are the new searches for new social capitals which in turn make us active social agents of a democratic civil society ."[51]

8. Toward a Dalit Theology of (No-) God

The question then is based on the non-transcendentalist philosophy of *Carvaka/ Lokayata:* what would be the Dalit theology of God in the contemporary postmodern/ postcolonial epistemological context? This Dalit theology is of no-God, does it does not negate God as in atheism; rather it re-defines God as an imminent experience of becoming. It is a non-transcendentalist theology of God. Richard Kearney calls it *Anatheism*. For Kearney, it is a 'third way' of experiencing God in between 'dogmatic theism' and 'militant atheism'.[52] In the same vein the theology of no-God offers us a non-'transcendent Other' God. Unlike eco-theology, it envisages an *embodied God* who is intrinsically connected to matter. It is an *enmattered God* in which the becoming of being or the body is envisaged within. It is an *enwombed God* out of whom the fluidity of life flows out. It is an experience of *chaosmos*, within which an internal evolution of creation is possible. It is here where the dichotomy between transcendence and immanence is being denied and tangled towards an open-materialism.

51 Dileep Raj, *Thantedangal* (Kottayam: DC Books, 2001), 14.

52 Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 20100, 3. Richard Kearney holds the Charles H. Seelig chair of philosophy at Boston College.

Though he calls *Lokayata* an extremist philosophical position, Arvind P. Nirmal, the pioneer of Dalit theology, affirms that Lokayata takes the empirical world seriously. Unlike the 'orthodox philosophical schools' which deny the world, matter and body, *Lokayata* signifies the materiality of body the human life on earth. Nirmal even proposes this materialist philosophy as the new turn in Indian Christian Theology.[53] Nirmal explains:

> *Lokayata* is a part of the Indian tradition-a forgotten part, perhaps, 'indistinct' lines of a picture, perhaps, but it belongs to the Indian tradition. It is forgotten only as a philosophical system, but its assumptions and emphases are living. It needs to be brought to memory more consciously. The secular India today is a developing nation, a nation struggling to overcome the problems of poverty, religious superstition, social caste-structure and so on. For development and progress it needs to understand material values. Its dominating 'spirituality' cannot provide an adequate philosophical and theological basis for such a quest. Where can it turn for such a base? Should it be drawn into the circle of 'Messianic faiths' as Thomas suggests?... I would like to suggest that Christian apologetic in India points to the contemporary situation and also to the now forgotten *Lokayata* and hope that a 'switch' will occur.[54]

Though this was suggested by Nirmal in the beginnings of the 1990s, this challenge still haunts Indian Christian Theology. The Materialism of the *Lokayata* is not a closed materialism; rather it is open. The materiality of the body is not an end in itself, rather, it is open to its own eternity. As Achille Mbembe writes, the 'thingness' of the body is not enclosed within it, rather, the poetical dimension of the 'thingness' is 'clothed in appearance'.[55] According to the Dalit epistemology, the eternity

53 Arvind P. Nirmal, *Heuristic Explorations* (Madras: CLS, 1991), 106.
54 Ibid., 106.
55 Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001), 223.

or the divinity is not an external 'anubhava'(experience) for the Dalit body. Dalit epistemology and its religious and cultural semiotics and semantics alludes to the internal divinity of the Dalit body.

Out of the above materialistic epistemology and philosophy, this study proposes three dimensions of a non-transcendentalist Dalit theology of God: An embodied God, No-God and Multi-God.

9. Dalit God as the Embodied God

The Dalit body affirms its internal transcendentability of the materiality of the body. It does not have any notion of 'transcendent beyond' or 'exteriority' or 'transcendent Otherness'. The internal transcendentability of the Dalit body is theoretically foregrounded on the *Carvaka/ Lokayata* materialist philosophy of no-God. Alluding to the Butlerian term-'spectral subjectivity,' the Dalit body signifies a political ontology of resistance.[56] As in the Agamben's notion of 'bare life', Butler talks about the spectrality of humanness through which the 'excluded others' envisage counter practices of transformation. The Dalit body is not just a static thing; rather, it is ever changing subjectivity in the historical process of its becoming.

The Dalit body as a political subjectivity denies the scars of its ontological discrimination, traces of epistemological violation, and the stigmas of its theological violence. This 'agonistic politics' of the Dalit body always keeps it vibrant, untamable, altering, and uncanny. The historicity of the caste experience, embodied in the Dalit bodies, becomes the haunting memories

56 Judith Butler in Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging* (London: Seagull, 2007), 15.

of transformation in the current situations. The past is not a fixed reality, rather, it is yet to be realized. Memories are not the baggage of the past: on the contrary, they are the ingredients of the unrealized future. Hope is not in terms of *telos* but in terms of the current experiences of living and resisting. In Derridean terms, Dalit Theology is a 'Hauntology' as it is haunted by the memories of rejection, oppression, and the historical experiences of resistance.[57] This notion of hauntology helps Dalit theology to go beyond its own fixed 'ethos' or 'pathos' that makes the Dalit body a 'self-enclosed' subjectivity or just matter. Hauntology envisages the Dalit body as flesh which has the inherent possibility of becoming. This becoming invokes responsibility, commitment, and indebtedness to justice and freedom that constitute its own transcendence-the 'glory' of God. It is a haunting experience of the 'Holy Ghost,' who is nothing but an embodied God and enmattered God.

10. Dalit God as the No-God

By denying the caste epistemology of ontological discrimination of human bodies, Dalit Theology advocates the sacrality of the material Dalit body. Departing from the sacramental theology of modern Western Christian theology, which offered sanctification of the materiality through ritualistic practices, Dalit theology celebrates the embodied sacredness of materiality or secularity. It denies the liturgical theology's emphasis to invoke the God of transcendence to come from above and to transform the 'sinful' materiality. Rather, it is to feel it by reliving the experience of 'transimmanence.' Zizekian Christology culminates in that idea which is well-expressed in these words:

57 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt and Work of Mourning and the new International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 11-12.

"what happened in the case of Christ [in incarnation] is that God himself, the creator of our entire universe, was walking around as a common individual."[58] In Christ we see a human being who successfully embodies the Divine flesh. In a nutshell, the Dalit theology of no-God envisages a 'God after God' as it denies the Christian philosophical discourse of the 'rhetorics of descent and ascent.' The Dalit no-God theology does not negate God but negates the Western notion of the 'transcendent Other.' No-God in Dalit theology rejects any kind of notion of beyondness, and at the same time it denies any notion of an enclosed materialism. As in the case of Deleuzian *chaosmos*, the Dalit theology of no-God is located in the univocity of life that is differentiated and becoming within it. Catherine Malabou's concept of *plasticity* is clearly connected to this understanding of the Dalit no-God.[59] According to Malabou, plasticity refers to the shaping, folding, and even explosiveness of form, our forms of thought, our situations, and even our brains. He contends that our concepts and our bodies are marked by polyvalent plasticity, and we possess opportunities for experimental modes of thinking and living democratically. The Dalit theology of no-God invokes new political practices of Dalit spectral subjectivity.[60]

11. Dalit God as the Multi-God

The word 'multi-God' is being coined in connection with the concepts of 'theoplicity' and 'mulitplicity'. According to Laurel Schneider and Catherine Keller, 'theoplicity' signifies

58 Slavoj Zizek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (New York: Verso, 2008), 133.

59 Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*, trans. Carolyn Shread (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

60 Clayton Crockett, *Radical Political Theology: Religion and Politics after Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 104.

the multiplicity of God.[61] The 'multiplicity' of the divine flesh doesn't fix a 'transcendent Other'. Contra to all theistic and monotheistic epistemologies/ theologies which try to fix a 'unitary-ritualistic-Other'or Omni-God as the backdrop to the horizon and try to legitimize the graded inequality of intra-human relationships, the Dalit theology of God is inherently an experience of multiplicity. The theology of 'multi-God' which goes beyond theism, atheism, monotheism and polytheism signifies the indigenous religious and cultural traditions that provides fecundity for multiple experiences of divinity within the materiality.

The theology of multi-God helps us to re-imagine a God of 'manyness'. The desire for 'One God' has always been political and totalitarian. The logic of One tries to accommodate the 'other' into the same and thus the 'other' becomes the extension of the 'same'. It was this 'One God' through whom the modern Western missionary movement located its 'missiological others' at the soteriological end of its Unitarian mission programs. In the theology of multi-God, Dalits are no more the 'missiological others'; rather, they affirm themselves as the agents of transformation of the whole world through their 'agonistic politics'. The Dalit body is a tortured body, at the same time, as Achille Mbembe recalls, the poeticality of the 'thingness' is still embodied in it.[62] Multi-God promotes multiple 'spectral practices' of "touching each other, the touch of their breaking down, and into, each other."[63]

61 Laurel Schneider defines God as multiplicity. Laurel Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism, A Theology of Multiplicity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

62 Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001), 223.

63 Jean-Luc Nancy, Corpus, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 37.

12. Dalit Theology as a (No-) Theology: Dalit Theology after Continental Philosophy

Departing from the Christian philosophical traditions, Dalit theology becomes a no-Theology-a theology without the logic of transcendentalism. Christian philosophy and Theology as a Euro-centric philosophical enterprise faces challenges from the Dalit no-theology based on its postcolonial epistemological imaginations. At the same time, it differentiates itself from the typical postcolonial theologies that tend to valorize the anti-imperialist, anti-colonial, nationalist knowledge systems and religious and cultural identities as we see in the case of Spivak. Postmodern theologies, since they are hyper transcendentalist in content, seem impotent in the Indian epistemological and political situation. Dalit epistemology, based on its materialist philosophy, infact overcome the deconstructive dialectics between transcendence and immanence and proposes a radical political ontology of resistance.

Unlike the post-transcendentalists of the Continental philosophy who remain tied up with the question of presence and absence of transcendence, Dalit no-theology locates itself in a non-transcendent epistemological position. Envisaging an embodied God/ enmattered God, Dalit no-theology signifies an elemental theology that destabilizes Western ecotheology. Ecotheology still remains a theology of the 'transcendent Other.' By rejecting the anthropomorphism of God and the theomorphism of human, Dalit no-theology proposes a theology of no-God. Divinity as a multiple experience, Dalit no-theology legitimizes its indigenous religious and cultural heritage. By going beyond the 'postcolonial methodologies' that sometimes romanticize indegeneity, Dalit no-theology offers the theopolitic of the 're-vivifying practices' in order to re-imagine Dalit subjectivity and agency in the contemporary context of violence and violations.

Dalit no-theology after the Continental philosophy signifies at least three specific turns in (Indian) Christian theology:

(1) An immanent theological turn: Dalit no-theology invokes an immanentization of theology. It is a theology that breaks down the mechanisms of transcendence. It is a theology that denies the hierarchical ontology even in the case of God. For the immanent theology, God is not a 'transcendent Other' but integrally related to our flesh. Unlike the liberation theologies that tried to bridge the gap between transcendence and immanence, the Dalit theology of no-God signifies the open-immanence which is internally becoming and differentiating. God, for this immanentist Dalit no-theology is nothing but an experience of relationality, plasticity, and fluidity.

(2) A theopolitical turn: Dalit no-theology invokes a theopolitical turn through which the theology becomes political and political becomes theological. Theology here takes a postcolonial turn and tries to listen to the silences of the subaltern. To listen to the silences, theology has to go through *teleopoiesis* and *training in the counter imagination* and become no-theology in order to deconstruct its proclaimed mission to the silenced people in history. Unlike the political theologies that invoke critical engagement with unjust social systems and seek 'progressive' democracy based on the modern logic of humanism and essentialism, the theopolitical turn envisages new practices of being, becoming and belonging in the contemporary post-identitarian context.

3. A Polydoxical turn: The Polydoxical turn in Christian theology signifies the multiple origins of theology. It invites Theology to seek multiple resources. It provokes theology to be interdisciplinary and inter religious. For Theology, it is an invitation to encounter, articulate, embody and contest the multiple

varieties of doxa, opinion, heritage, tradition and liturgy. It is here that Dalit no-theology becomes a common platform for all Dalits and all other marginalized communities irrespective of their religiosity and traditions to resist against all totalitarian knowledges and practices. It is the *anatheist* point where the so-called theists and atheists sit together, dream together and do theopolitic together. Religion, in this Polydoxical turn, becomes 'religion without religion' and it is the moment when Christianity provoked to be a kenotic Christianity. It is the polydox moment for the Christian Church to deny the fixity of its dogmatics, and the idolatry of the traditions. For the Church it is an invitation to validate the multiplicity of our being, becoming, and belonging in this pluriversity.

13. Conclusion

Dalit theology of God as it emerges out of the materialist philosophy of God envisages a theology of no-God. The absence of the notion of transcendence absolutely avoids the continental philosophical baggage for Dalit theology and provides a strong epistemological location in indigenous knowledges and practices. Caste as the hierarchical knowledge system and practice legitimates the othering of Dalit bodies on the basis of the notion of transcendence. The Dalit body does not remain as non-transcendent and thus not waiting for redemption from outside. The Dalit body is part of the flesh of God which is the fluidity of life embodied in it. The God of Dalit theology is an enmattered God. The Dalit body as 'spectral subjectivity' is re-imagined here as the critical space of resistance and hope. The Dalit body is not merely the tool of identitarian politics, rather, it is the 'tool to come' for an im/possible politics. The impossible politics re-imagines counter democracy and social practices. Here theology becomes immanentized, theopolitic and Polydoxical.