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Dalit Christians Demand Inclusion in the Scheduled Castes List

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A large protest at St. Mary's Cathedral in Madurai has reignited calls for the inclusion of Dalit Christians in the Scheduled Castes (SC) list, a demand that has gone unanswered for the past 75 years. Demonstrators gathered in significant numbers, hoisting a black flag as a symbol of dissent and demanding that the government extend constitutional protections and reservation benefits to the community.

The protesters highlighted that Dalit Christians, despite sharing the same socio-economic hardships and caste-based discrimination as other Dalits, have been excluded from SC status solely based on their religious identity. This exclusion denies them access to affirmative action in education, employment, and political representation, which many believe perpetuates systemic inequality.

Speakers at the rally emphasized that caste discrimination does not vanish upon religious conversion. They cited numerous examples of continued social exclusion, economic marginalization, and limited upward mobility faced by Dalit Christians in both rural and urban areas. The rally drew attention to the fact that while Dalits from Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist communities are recognized under the SC category, Christians and Muslims from Dalit backgrounds remain outside its scope, despite recommendations from various commissions and human rights groups.

Activists argued that the existing policy contradicts the principles of equality enshrined in the Indian Constitution. They urged the Union Government to act on longstanding demands and implement amendments that would ensure fair treatment for Dalit Christians. Many also pointed out that the issue has been raised in Parliament multiple times but has yet to result in concrete legislative change.

The protest's symbolic black flag was meant to signal frustration over decades of inaction and to send a clear message that the community will continue to organize and advocate until its demands are met. Religious leaders, social activists, and community members present at the demonstration stressed that this is not just a religious rights issue but a fundamental human rights concern.

The demand for inclusion in the SC list has been supported by multiple reports, including those by the National Commission for Minorities and the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, both of which have acknowledged the social and economic disadvantages faced by Dalit Christians. However, legal and political hurdles, which are often intertwined with sensitive debates over religion and caste, have stalled progress. With renewed public pressure from events like the Madurai protest, the push for policy change could gain momentum. Whether the government will address the issue in upcoming parliamentary sessions remains to be seen, but for Dalit Christians, the fight for equal rights and recognition under the SC list continues with unwavering determination.