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ETHICS OF INCLUSION AND EQUALITY

Economy, Education, Religion

Volume 2

John Mohan Razu

Globethics.net

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John Mohan Razu

Globethics.net Readers

Series editor: Prof. Dr. Obiora Ike, Executive Director of Globethics.net in Geneva and Professor of Ethics at the Godfrey Okoye University Enugu/ Nigeria.

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Managing Editor: Ignace Haaz

Assistant Editor: Samuel Davies

Globethics.net Head Office

150 route de Ferney

1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland


Website: www.globethics.net/publications

Email: publications@globethics.net

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INTRODUCTION

We live in tumultuous times. The world is gripped with fear, insecurity and uncertainty. Many reasons are attributed for the world to be like this. Out of some major reasons, the core reason that drives others is political economy. In tune to this, the world at large, since 1980s has been experiencing a new epoch called globalization—described by many names, analysed through varied prisms such as turbo globalization, corporate globalization, casino globalization and host of others. The common understanding of globalized world is a creation of a single, borderless and seamless world which is antithetical to the one that symbolizes an inward looking political economy based on closed and self-sufficiency and self-rule.

Countries that believed and rooted in democracy, human rights, constitution, liberal values, rule of law and others, now turning to populism and conservatism. Gone are the days that resonated comity of nations, one economic order, free-market economy, one shopping mall and one global family—a global village. For the last three or four decades countries of the world reposed their faith on the changing templates of political economy and accordingly embraced globalization and allowed the forces of globalization to enter into their political economy. But, after the fall of the citadel of global capitalism—the United States of America that used to take pride in corporate capitalism crashed. It was a rude shock and many particularly the middle-class that bulged during globalization lost their savings and jobs. Global economic crises followed by other linked problems impacted almost all countries of the world.

The proponents of globalization who premised their political philosophy and economy believed in free market economy meaning liberalization, privatization and globalization (LPG). The crash almost silenced

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the liberals and pro-globalization pundits. Liberal democrats, left leaning politicians and centre of the right could not firmly endorse their positions due to the failure of globalization and falling of the per capita income and GDP which resulted in unemployment, inflation and spiraling price rise. Internal and external migration and closed economic corridors kept propelling to appalling increase in widening disparities and inequalities. Factors that arisen out of the crises have given rise to move towards and in the process prompted the populists and right-wing politicians and ideologues who used the political climate to their advantage by pointing to the failures of liberalism.

We live in an epochal historical juncture wherein the phase of globalization is waning which has given rise to conservatism and populism. It is gaining momentum in the last few years and is all set to concretize and intensify in the years to come. Undoubtedly, the current phase should be seen as a result of backlash to globalization—has given rise to Conservatism and populist politics. Notably, what we see is growing reassertion of nationalist sentiments across the globe, accompanied by sharpening political shifts and deepening social polarization. As a consequence, spurt of changes in the political economy and other facets brought transformative changes that thoroughly changed the templates of the political economy.

The notion, such as *oikoumene*, derived from the Greek, means ‘all who inhabit the earth’ and ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘world without borders’ have become utopian and redundant. The new reality we are experiencing and thus live in is the rise of conservatism, ultra-rightist evangelicalism, Hindutva politics and aggressive nationalism. Political templates around the world including India gradually and intensely shifting to populism that convey aggressive nationalism, protecting borders from the refugees and immigrants, fusing religion with ideology and economy to preserve one race (dominant), one culture and one creed and one language. This book brings to the fore the super-structures such as reli-

gion, culture, politics, economy and others solidly hanging on the base-structure vis-à-vis political economy—manifesting the parts hanging on to the whole.

This book is an anthology—compilation of big and small articles that covers an array of my writings—published in the dailies and journals and unpublished ones. Political economy is undoubtedly resonates one politics based on ideology subscribing to either liberal or conservative. Both the political positions base their ideological tenets on economy (economics) because ‘*oikos*’ plus ‘*nomos*’ conjures with the images of the ‘Earth’, the Greek root *ecos*, derived from ‘*oikos*’ meaning ‘house or household’. Economy is derived from the Greek *oikonomia*—*oikos* plus *nomos*. Therefore, politics and economy combined together means activities associated with the governance of a country or area. Hence, politics in Greek means *politika* which means ‘affairs of the city’ is the process of policy and decision-making. According the modern nation-states and its political parties are using to present their ideas. Therefore, we cannot rule out the role of ideology in politics and ideology is still alive.

As against this back backdrop, in this book the articles have been thematically arranged and grouped in such ways that candidly reflects the themes and sub-themes. However, each section invariably underpins polity and economy—political economy. India is taken as a referral point for analysis and interpretation. This book analyses in-depth the rise of far-right Hindu nationalist party in India which bases its political economy by promoting crony capitalists and taking a few salient features of liberalization whichever are advantageous to them. Therefore, the party that is heading the Government at the Centre combines populism and ill of liberalism to suit its political project. Across the world the political parties including India the success of far-right conservative politics is sweeping through due to reaction against the liberal and ap-

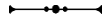
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peasement politics and bases its polity on identity politics that rejects multiculturalism and accommodative policies.

The political success of the nationalists in India is permeated in its ideology that subscribes to Hindu Rashtra, which means that the land of the Hindus should belong to the majority Hindus alone. This is reflected in their rhetoric and narratives—‘ghar wapsi’ (come back), ban on cow slaughter and eating beef, Hindu culture and re-building Ram Mandir (temple), renaming the cities, saffronising Indian history and text books. Along these lines the anthology engages into a number of issues and enters into discussions on crucial aspects that the people face in their day-to-day existence.

— John Mohan Razu

ECONOMY & ENVIRONMENT



A RICHER WORLD — BUT MANY ARE POORER!



Are ‘the rich grow richer and the poor grow poorer’ and ‘the gap between the rich and the poor is widening’ over-hyped aphorisms? These two have been truer and real happening world over more conspicuously since 1990s. A study by Oxfam revealed that the world’s top 80 billionaires in 2014 had a collective earth of \$1.9 trillion, which is close to India’s entire GDP in that year. Oxfam made headlines at Davos last year with the revelation that the 85 richest people on the planet have the same wealth as the poorest 50% (3.5 billion). The figure now is 80—an unbelievable change in the format from 388 people in 2010, and attesting to the growing wealth disparity in the wealth. The wealth of the richest 80 actually doubled in cash terms between 2009 and 2014.

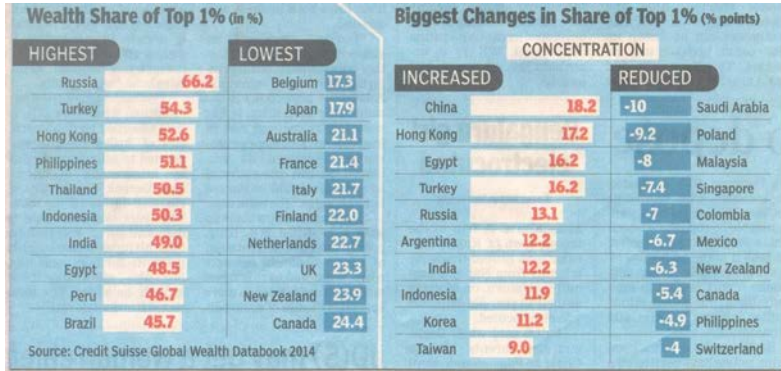
The study in detail shows that the super-rich people of the top 1% of the billionaires on the Forbes list have seen their wealth accumulate even faster over the past five years. In 2010, the richest 80 people in the world had a net wealth of \$1.3 trillion. By 2014, the 80 people who top the Forbes rich list, whose data Oxfam used, had a collective wealth of \$1.9 trillion; an increase of \$600 billion in just four years, or 50% in nominal terms. It should not be construed that the very poor have the remaining 52% of global wealth. It is being owned i.e., 46% by the ‘less wealthy’ the neo-bourgeoisie—the remaining richest 19% of the world’s population. How do they increase their wealth and riches by millions and billions every year? The Oxfam report in its analysis says that wealthy individuals have generated and sustained and their vast riches by investing, furthering and expanding their empires in important economic sectors including finance and pharmaceuticals/health care.

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Some of the global oligopolies and mega-corporations have increased their investments in R&D in the productions of arms and ammunition, pharmaceuticals and telecommunications. These oligopolistic corporations have horizontally and vertically control the global production particularly the essential life-saving drugs (pharmaceuticals) and food chains (agri-business). Inequality is widening at an appalling levels. For example, the bottom 80% shares just 5.5% and had an average wealth of \$3,851 per adult—that is 1/700th of the average wealth of the 1% since 2009. The middle-class that benefited due to globalization has an average wealth of 2.7 million. The other side portrays 1 in 9 people do not have enough to eat says the report Oxfam. The reports portrays that more than 1 billion live on less than \$1.25 a day.

The following schema portrays vividly portrays the global disparity and inequality:





(Source: *The Times of India*, n.d.)

Above paragraphs glaringly portrays the contrasting picture of our world. Our world characterizes vis-à-vis a minuscule minority that enjoys the maximum and the vast majority hardly gets anything. The sources that have been cited (Oxfam) traces inequality is on the rise and accelerating. Is there any recipe to the widening disparity? Melinda and Bill Gates who have pledged to give away most of their earnings and willing to give away billions have a different perspective. According to them the lives of the majority who live in abject poverty and squalid condition would improve in the in the next 15 years than any other time in history. ‘The rich world will keep getting exciting new advances too, but the improvements in the lives of the poor will be far more fundamental—the basics of a healthy productive life’ the billionaire couple predicted.

Elaborating further the Gates couple in a positive note asserted: ‘it’s great that more people in rich countries will be able to watch movies on super high-resolution screens. It’s even better that more parents in poor countries will know their children aren’t going to die’. According to the philanthropic couple said: ‘The poor will be living longer and in better health, with unprecedented opportunities to get an education, eat nutritious food, and benefit from mobile banking. These breakthroughs will

be driven by innovation in technology—ranging from new vaccines and hardier crops to much cheaper smart phones and tablets.’ Again all these involve patents, intellectual property rights, monopoly and taxes and so on. Are the big corporations prepared to follow ethical investments and practices?

The Gates firmly believe that: (1) children deaths will go down by half, and more diseases will be eradicated than ever before in the next 15 years; (2) reducing the number of women who die in childbirth by two-thirds; (3) wiping polio, guinea worm and possibly even malaria off the face of the earth; (4) mobile banking will help the poor radically transform their lives and (5) better software will revolutionize learning. They seem to have been fascinated by the development happening in India where the Gates Foundation has ploughed millions in health intervention with the software that points to the development of rotavirus vaccine (that addresses diarrhoea that kills millions of infants) by Indian companies. Praising India for the success over polio and thus showing a road map for other immunization efforts and all other primary healthcare initiatives Gates Foundation seem to have reposed their faith that philanthropic capitalism could respond effectively to all the problems that the people of India face.

However, the Gates couple offered sobering perspective by citing Uttar Pradesh and Bihar that have fallen far behind with huge populations. The facts they presented are alarming: ‘44% of infant deaths occurred in the first 30 days and the support data came from Viswajit Singh’s study showed that doing basic things—cleanliness, keeping the baby warm, and breastfeeding, cut infant mortality by 50%. ‘Melinda Gates said that the study: ‘Proved that it does not take all this great, expensive medical interventions to drastically cut down infant mortality.’ In addition they said, ‘India has a far bigger malnutrition problem than over-nutrition problem.’ More importantly Gates are concerned about, ‘In the meantime, India has got far more kids that are malnourished and whose brains

are not developed, way more than any other country. That's really the crisis.'

This is the world we live—one for the Rich and the other for the Poor. Fresh thinking is needed as we discuss equality and inequality. Wealth is generated at alarming levels. Wealth has increased by many times. The world has become rich, but for whom? Rich is getting richer and the poor remain the same or even become poorer. Therefore, inequality is on the rise and at its peak. Income poverty, abject poverty, relative poverty and unemployment are the inter-linked problems that many face around the world. People work hard and work long hours but paid low wages. There are no regulations and legislations for the implementation of minimum-wages. However, in the recent BBC's World Debate at Davos, the IMF chief made scintillating observations: 1) Excessive inequality retard growth; 2) Re-distribution policies are not counter-productive for growth.

Basically she pointed that widening inequality is not good for growth especially it impair women and their development. So whenever we talk about inequality there is a co-relation between sustainable growth and high levels of disparity. Inequality disintegrates people in any given society. Economy whatever it may be should clearly focus on social good and public good. In Davos, the mainstream economists, finance ministers, academics and CEOs reiterated their faith in capitalism and its free-economic market order. They by and large have an unequivocal faith in market, market capital and marketization that epitomizes in the current order of globalization. The new scenario warrants new thinking and so calls for judicious and ethical investment on social capital.

The main stream actors want the capitalists or producers of wealth should never be demonized as predators. Since capitalism is not opening up opportunities for all. Majority of people want to move up from the current economic ambit that enables the rich to become richer. But the

extreme wealth that is being generated by the global capitalists usurped by them who do not exceed 1% of the global population which is not right and so loses its moral slant. Obviously excessive wealth takes away the public distribution and public good. Capitalism via unchecked and uncontrollable market forces enables a few maximize profits and advances their quality of life. As a result creates poverty and unemployment for majority sections of people.

How do these big corporations and business spend their money? The Oxfam chief in the debate openly stated that in the United States the big financial and technological institutions spend more than \$400 million to influence the political and business policies decisions. For the 2012, US Presidential elections about 400 million was spent; the EU elections too quite sizable money was spent and for the Parliamentary elections in 2014 in India thousands of crores of rupees were spent for the election campaigns and lobbying. From where did they get the money and who paid for it? Once again the big houses and monopolies spent huge amounts so in turn they get favours in the allocation of licenses and host of other benefits.

The Oxfam chief in the debate advocated global tax system so that the rich and the powerful pay their due. As of now they evade by millions and trillions and do not pay their due. Public resources should benefit the whole population and should not only benefit the interests of powerful lobbyists and industrial houses. It is against the basic economic tenet that overrides the masses' trust. The fundamental tenets of economics or economy ought to be generating full employment and disburse fair wages. Wealth generated should be distributed equitably. Does the current global economic order have a human face?

BJP'S POLITICAL ECONOMY OF 'COW'



The word 'Cow' has assumed alarming proportions in recent times in the secular, democratic, socialist and independent India. Incidentally, cow has been elevated to the level that adds greater value than that of humans with the present dispensation. In comparison to the humans, cows have been given greater reverence and sanctity. The current BJP Government at the Centre has insulated its political economy with 'cow'. BJP's politics and ideology is intrinsically webbed with religion and in that 'cow' plays the centrifugal role. As former Union minister Arun Shourie a supporter-turned-critic of Narendra Modi, the PM of India, once again mounted scathing attack on the PM countering that he was not a section officer but a leader expected to lead by example and set moral standards for the country because he allowed the fringes.

Elaborating further, in a TV interview, Shourie said: 'PM is not a section officer of the homeopathy department. He has to show the country the moral path. He has to set moral standards'. This is the second time in the recent days Shourie has lashed out at the government and the PM for failing to act against instances of violence and the controversy over beef by comparing the NDA government as a copy of UPA, implying, '*It is Congress plus a cow.*' It is cow, cow and cow that echoes all over the country. Cow and beef have occupied the central position of the Indian politics. Day in and day out debates, articles and interviews on 'cow' and 'beef' and so 'cow' and 'beef' are the triggering and unifying point for BJP and in the process the Indian society is being polarized based on 'majority' and 'minority' equations. This has been clearly

schemed and systematically carried out by RSS-cadres, BJP-MPs and ministers.

‘BJP’s mega-politics and its grand-vision are constructed and grounded on Hindu Raj and to translate its vision it needs a symbol which culturally binds the Hindus that in turn promotes identity politics and thus creates segmentation between each other belonging to diverse communities and religious persuasions. Indian society after BJP taking over the reins at the Centre is striving to homogenize Indian culture in tune to Hinduized culture and saffronize the Indian history that sidelines and distorts others but glorifies the Hindu kingdoms and empires. Cow has always been considered as sacred in Hinduism. Nonetheless, this sacrosanct understanding is being increasingly exploited by the BJP-RSS and its fringes to push their political agenda by centring ‘cow’ in such ways that polarizes the Indian society which is plural in character and multi-cultural in format. BJP-RSS primary motive is to change the landscape of India as one monolithic resonating ‘Hindu culture’, ‘Hindu religion’, ‘Sanskrit language’ and ‘political economy of ‘cow’. It is bent on establishing ‘unity in uniformity’ and while establishing its vision it has to go all for the annihilation of plurality and eradication of cultural diversity. Co-existence of many cultures and belief-systems shall never be accepted in BJP-RSS’s blue print.

We have been witnessing now a ‘climate of intolerance’ we ever witnessed. This issue has penetrated into different quarters and sections of our society particularly on matters such as ‘cow’ and ‘beef’. This issue has fragmented the Indian society and furthered and deepened suspicion and enmity between communities. Labelling the spontaneous protests in different quarters as ‘manufactured’, ‘why now, why not then’, ‘joke’ so on and so forth do not justify the verbal tirade and physical attacks these Hindutva outfits are involved with. Basically the present government led by PM Modi by all means is desirous to eliminate or keep aside the Nehurivian ethos and notion of India and to bring-in

Modiean India premised on pan-Hindu Rashtra. The electorates and the people of India should not expect PM Modi to take action or he calling and warning his MPs, Ministers and fringes seriously because they are doing what has been told to do. He is just watching the 'fun' and RSS must be happy about it. FM Arun Jatley all of a sudden sprays few tweets rescuing PM Modi by saying that 'Modi is the victim of intolerance' and comes out with captions such as 'manufactured rebellion' and so on.

As usual Arun Jatley, Finance Minister of India recently commented that: 'I am grateful that the World Bank has recognized that India is now becoming an easier place to do business ... A large number of steps we have taken are going to reflected in the ranking next year'. But he should be more cautious of the FDI and other investments flowing to the country because NDA's political economy is couched in symbolism and pragmatism of 'cow'. Unless and until 'cow' gets out of BJP's political economy we cannot expect real economics entering into the country which in turn boost the economic facet. Infosys chairman R. Seshasayee has been cautiously optimistic about investments picking up in India but appear more confident when it comes to the future of the \$9 billion. Seshasayee, who also chairman of Indusind Bank and former CII President told TOI in an interview spelt out clearly a word of caution that '*The cow has to go out of politics and enter economics since right wing voices are a distraction.*'

The world is moving beyond digital to artificial intelligence. PM Modi has just started to make this country as Digital India and certainly a long way to go. PM Modi assured the electorates with numerous promises from left, centre and right. Tall promises, but hardly have we seen the results rolling down to the people at the grassroots. The economic sphere in particular continues to suffer in terms of employment generation implying jobless growth, growth without trickling down although

projected to 8% to 10% , but as of now shows staggering figures in GDP and GNP figures. There has been unprecedented rise in pulses, all kinds of dhal, vegetables and other essential commodities. Even the weather seemed to have let down our economy especially the agrarian sector. There have been floods in some parts of Indian and in others poor monsoon which has affected the poor and the lower middle-classes and would drastically affect the bottom layers in the year 2016. Although the incidence of poverty has come down a bit but inequality has widened between different layers of the Indian society. Economy will continue to stagger if the BJP government fails to take the signals seriously.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi must keep his party's motor mouths in check and fringe brigade not to delve into 'cow and beef politics' that has reversed the economic growth and progress. If he allows them to continue he would risk losing credibility domestically and globally. Moody's Analytics has warned in a rare but bluntly on the current climate of intolerance where the economy is set to go for a spin. The research and analysis arm of Moody's Corporation said 'crucial reforms have run into obstructionist opposition, but noted that the Government too hadn't helped itself'. It added that 'The government also hasn't helped itself, with controversial comments from various BJP members'. The report added that the investors have been less optimistic about India's economic prospects.

The report about the possibility of realizing the potential growth rate at 9%-10%, provided reforms takes swiftly to achieve this potential. It is now obvious but mandatory that progress, development and growth are possible provided numerous political outcomes and obstacles are overcome. In India we have too many 'holy cows'. Hence, the BJP government consciously and deliberately is trying to mix religion, law, governance, democracy and economy. It is this inter-connection that makes Hindutva more dynamic and vibrant. Its BJP's political economy which is strictly premised on 'cow' and it should be made 'holier'. This gov-

ernment is concentrating on 'cow' and 'beef' as rallying point, but for others these have become issues of contestation.

Cow in Hinduism is revered. Likewise other religions too prescribe certain restrictions and prescriptions, 'dos' and 'don'ts' that have to be stringently followed. At the same time forcing/compelling others not to eat 'beef' in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic Indian society is nothing but interfering into one's choice and communitarian rights. In such a secular and plural landscape whatever we do should be rational and scientific. Imposing what a section believes on others especially such as 'beef' and 'cow' is ridiculous and irrational. The tussle is between 'cultural homogeneity' and 'cultural diversity', it is between 'progressive ideas' and 'regressive ethos'. India is the one of the largest exports of beef and earns huge amount in terms of foreign exchange. Would the government ban on exports of beef? No because it is money, money, money. BJP lives on bundles of contradictions and they are gradually being exposed. Whenever it does not suit them they call those as 'vedeshi' whichever suit them 'swedeshi'. Indian citizens have started to read between the lines of the BJP-RSS statements.

Political economy of Hidutva is interlocked with 'cow' and this interlocking will have ramifying effect and disastrous consequences especially in the economic sphere. The climate that we are in posits intolerance and violence and thus reflects on 'governance' of the BJP government. The investors and CEOs of big corporations and business houses who PM Modi met during foreign jaunts did promise to them about the favourable climate to invest. Believing him many investors across the world expressed their willingness to do business in India. On the contrary, the climate that we witness in India shows 'culture war' that pitched 'cow' at the centre. It is raging in India today and certainly has derailed our economic progress and growth. Capital flows from one country to another primarily with an object to multiply. Multiplication of capital

needs an atmosphere of safety, security and other logistics. These are some pre-requisites that should be offered by the inviting government that requires flow of FDI. Political economy of 'cow' should break through its narrow confines and move beyond its fixations by accommodating and mutually respecting each other. India is known for plural culture and co-existence of religions. Banking on political economy of 'cow' would lead to devastating results.

C. P. Chinda writes:

'... PM Modi is using his oratory skills to expose opponents in Bihar. But the BJP cannot sail in two boats; its leadership has to cut itself off from fringe elements. Modi has failed to silence them and now the saffronites are hijacking the development agenda by focusing on religious polarization. This is affecting Modi's popularity graph. The party leadership needs a course correction to capture Bihar.'

Chetan Bhagat writes:

'... I am a Hindu. I don't eat beef. I consider myself a fairly scientific person. However, some of my reasons for not eating beef are not rational. My religion tells me that cow is revered. So I avoid cow meat. However, I wear leather shoes, watch cricket matches that use leather balls and I drink cow's milk taken against the cow's consent. Many other Hindus do, too ... I will eat a chicken or lamb burger, I won't eat a beef burger. It may not all make sense, but it's 'just one of those things'. Some religious practices we undertake out of faith, rituals, tradition and culture.'

As early as 1947, *Gandhi* said:

'In India no law can be made to ban cow slaughter... How can my religion also be the religion of the rest of the Indians?'

It will mean coercion against those Indians who are not Hindus... We really do not stop to think what true religion is and merely go about shouting that cow... In villages Hindus make bullocks carry huge burdens which almost crush the animals. Is it not cow-slaughter, albeit slowly carried out?

GLOBAL WARMING + CLIMATE CHANGING + NATURE RAGING = BEWARE!



The world leaders ever to stand together—151 heads of state and government—kicked off two week of high-stakes climate talks outside Paris on the 30th November, 2015, outside Paris (France). The challenge and the need of an international meeting have never been so great and dire because it is the ‘future of the planet’ and the ‘future of life’. The previous day, hundreds of thousands of people rallied around the world, urging the leaders to make real progress at the talks. It is hoped that there would be global agreement that ensures the planet’s temperature to rise no more than another degree Celsius from now, and possibly half that to spare island nations threatened by rising seas.

The environmental scientists and others warned that nearly 1 degree Celsius has been there since the beginning of the industrial age. Hence, the negotiators have been asked to negotiate and come to a consensus with a possible global treaty that no more than another degree Celsius will be allowed from now on by the end of the deadline. These are the expectations of billions of people across the globe too. The world leaders knew very well that the eyes of the world glued expecting these leaders who should make clear commitment towards climate issue. The Conference is almost at the most crucial one and an agreement has been reached tackling global warming. The last major agreement, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, required only rich countries to cut emissions, and the U.S. never signed on. Now, 181 nations have made pledges to combat human-made carbon dioxide pollution.

It should be noted that in Paris many leaders across the continents have shown keen interest and seriousness ever before. For example, the Secretary General of the UN lucidly said ‘Let me be clear. The fate of the Paris agreement rests with you implying that the future of your people and the future of our planet.’ The French President, François Hollande in his inaugural speech reinforced that ‘Never have the stakes of an international meeting been so high, because we are talking about the future of the planet, the future of life. The hope of all of humanity rests on all of your shoulders.’

Echoing similar sentiments, Barack Obama, the US President voiced ‘The future is one that we have the power to change right here right now, but only if we rise to this moment.’ Prince Charles reminded that ‘Your deliberations in the next two weeks will decide the fate not only of those alive today but also of generations yet unborn.’ Christiana Figueres, UN climate chief warned that ‘In the face of adversity, in the face of threats of many kinds, Paris must be where the world unites as one. Never has a responsibility so great been in the hands of so few.’ Along these leaders other heads of government and international bodies and CEOs of mega-corporations in unison convey similar messages in clear tones.

The tune and tenor is the same as we hear and read what they said and emphasized. Their messages are crystal clear and loud. All of them echo the same thing in different ways. The message that undergirds is ‘*the future of life and the humanity*’. What has gone to our planet? What would be the fate of coming generation, life of other species and humanity? Is the future of the generations is at stake? The future of generations to come is not that promising and bleak. In view of the impending danger, 195 nations had huddled in Paris to negotiate a climate rescue pact to rein in the greenhouse gases that drive climate change, global warming and rage of the nature. The following facts are mind boggling; if not addressed could lead to disastrous consequences:

Hotter temperatures:

- Without additional action, Earth is on track to heat up by about four degrees Celsius (7.2 degrees Fahrenheit) by the end of the century, compared to pre-industrial levels.
- A mountain of scientific evidence tells us this would be a recipe for disaster.
- Such as 'business as usual' emissions scenario would 'lead to a very high risk of severe, widespread and irreversible' impacts, according to the UN intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Rising seas:

- By 2100, the world oceans would rise 26-82 centimetres (10-32 inches) over levels seen between 1986-2005, the IPCC found in its most recent assessment, which includes data up to 2012. More recent studies suggest the increases could be significantly higher.
- Driving the rise are ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica shedding mass faster than ever melting glaciers, and oceans that expand as they warm.
- Even a 2 C rise as targeted by the UN would submerge land currently occupied by 280 million people, according to Climate Centre, a US-based research group. The change could take a few hundred years, or up to 2,000 years.

Extreme weather:

- Super storms, bone-chilling cold snaps and intense heat waves could become more common—and more extreme—due to global warming.
- While the link between specific weather events and climate remains hard to nail down, more research has teased out climate

change as an aggravating factor for deadly floods, snowstorms, typhoons and heat waves.

- Not all nasty hurricanes or heat waves, however, can be chalked up to climate change, scientists' caution.

Water dilemma:

- Global warming can lead to long-running droughts and devastating floods, which mean some parts of the world, will not have enough water and others too much.
- Droughts in Syria and California have been tried to climate change. Heavy rains carry the risk of flooding that can send people fleeing for their lives destroy home and crops.
- Global warming can spur disease, ravage crops and push more people into poverty. Conflicts over water or smaller harvests could instigate war or mass migration.
- People living on low-lying islands such as the Maldives, an archipelago in the Indian Ocean, or the Philippines could become climate refugees, forced to flee their homes due to rising seas.
- Impoverished people in the world are already being hurt by heat waves, drought and flooding, because they are both more dependent on the land and lack public services.

As against this backdrop, the 2015 Paris Climate Conference from November 30 to December was indeed a landmark in the history of environmental multilateralism that can lay a stepping stone for collective efforts to save the planet earth. With more than 150 heads of government and state participating, it was a gigantic diplomatic endeavour to mitigate and manage climatic disaster as average temperatures surge and extreme weather patterns get deadlier and more frequent. It has taken six-year to organize the 21st session of the Conference of Parties (COP21) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has been exhausting. Expectations started to mount and all the

eyes turned toward Paris because the comity of nations could come to a point where they agreed on basic norms to save the Mother Earth from carbon emissions and thus pave the way for green economic growth.

Paris 2015 would be more productive as many envisaged than Copenhagen in 2009. The reasons for the positive expectations were:

1. International opinions were tilted overwhelmingly toward accepting scientific consensus that increased mindless activities is the main cause for climatic disturbances and responding to it urgently for climatic disturbances is the need of the hour.
2. The world's largest polluters the United States and China in principle agreed to the very fact that the climatic change is one of the greatest threats facing humanity and so their role becomes important and thus have a critical role to play in addressing.
3. Prior to Paris-15, 183 had already agreed that they would reduce the emissions and reduce their carbon food print to meet the macro target of preventing the temperature from rising above two degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels.
4. Paris 15 unfolded the workability and feasibility of measuring, monitoring and reporting left to the respective governments within the purview of internationally agreed norms.
5. The UN's climate chief Christiana Figures reposed hope in 'a massive mobilisation of non-state actors', including business, to meet the Paris objectives. Paris has been regarded as a milestone rather than a 'green wash'.
6. In addition to the radical agreements that the countries signed, the communities and peoples' movements have the responsibility to take the recommendations more seriously so

that the basics would be addressed i.e., ‘the real issues by curbing our ‘wants’. In other words, it is not just declarations but follow-ups.

7. Paris 15 has been historic as described by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as ‘the floor, not the ceiling of our ambition’. Mostly, there have been laudable agreements and declarations but hardly being translated. It is the citizens and the people to set these into actual realisation.

The other side witnessed protesters linked hands near the heart of the Paris the previous day (29th Nov, 15). As hundreds of thousands of people joined protests worldwide primarily aimed to send a symbolic message to leaders worldwide on the eve of the official opening of a 195-nation UN climate summit in Paris that time was ticking away and act fast. Symbolically, the protesters instead of marching they left thousands of pairs of shoes—weighing more than four tonnes according to organisers—on Place de la République square. A pair of running shoes was left by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, and Pope Francis sent shoes to be placed on his behalf.

The rallies demanded curbs on carbon pollution have been growing around the world. Across the world numerous rallies were held pressuring the leaders and governments to grab the ‘historic’ opportunity to reach a deal. More than 325,000 people across 175 countries were involved in the rallies. The following pictures appeared in *The Times of India*, November 30, 2015, p. 14 and *Deccan Chronicle*, December 1, 2015, p.11 amply demonstrate the gravity and seriousness of the issues that propelled the people across the world to response to the climate change, global warming and the fury of the nature:

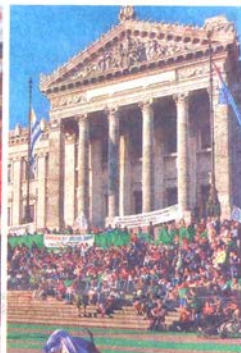


(Clockwise from top L) Hundreds of pairs of shoes are displayed at de la Republique in Paris during a climate rally on Sunday. Rallies were held in Melbourne, Berlin and London



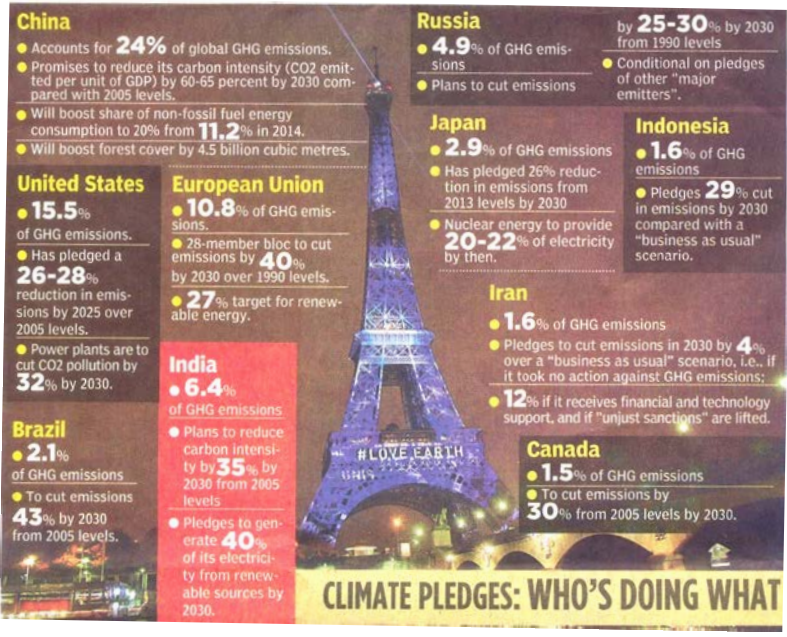
since Friday, with marches involving tens of thousands across Australia on Sunday kickstarting a final day of people-powered protest.

In London, where thousands of people rallied, Oscar-winner Emma Thompson called on world leaders to grab the "historic" opportunity to reach a deal. "I went to the Arctic with my daughter last year



People gather (above) at the Legislative Palace in Montevideo of Uruguay, during the Global Climate March; protesters hold a banner as they take out a rally near City Hall in New York City on Monday —AFP

The data and the pledges that the countries agreed upon ought to be observed and followed meticulously in the years and decades are:



(Source: *Deccan Chronicle*, December 1, 2015, p. 11)

Indian scenario shows somewhat disturbing facts. Irrespective of states, cities, towns and villages we may belong to. Due to global warming the climate is changing erratically at an unprecedented levels and the fury of nature is exhibited in different forms and ways. Let us not think that why should I (we) be bothered. Yesterday may be the places far off from where you live; today your neighbouring state and tomorrow definitely the city or state you belong to. It is serious and we should act upon.

The world on Saturday (12th December, 2015) at last agreed on a historic climate deal with almost 198 countries approving the Paris text that aims to transform fossil fuel-driven economies within decades and slow global warming. It would formally endorsed in New York on April 22, 2016 when the UN secretary general invites all world leaders for a high level signature ceremony. The deal would be sealed initially be ratified

governments of at least 55 countries—representing 55% of global emissions—and will take effect in 2020. At least this could be the turning point and it is hoped that all the conditions agreed upon will be met in the years to come. Bill Gates the world's richest person has put in a lot of money on fighting climate change but he is also one of the biggest investors in geo-engineering. Again it should be seen the measures the rich economies and the entrepreneurs take that reduces carbon emissions significantly while ravaging the resources.

Although India played a crucial role along with other nations it should be seen in the days and years to come how far India abides by its commitment since India burns huge proportion fossil fuel. As rightly point out by President Obama that 'Paris agreement represents the best chance we've had to save the one planet we've got. I believe this moment can be a turning point for the world. As a result of the climate agreement we can be more confident that Earth will be in better shape'. There has been change of heart at an epic scale amongst the developed economies. Paris summit with some major breakthroughs its agreement is far away to be realised on grounds. India although agreed continues to venture into many coal mines. We are aware of the fact that coal emits too much of carbon.

Many tend to think that climate change is somebody's problem and others should sort it out. Thousand and laths of people live in collecting coal and use it for cooking and other purposes. A quarter of Indian population lives on coal and somehow manages to subsist. Those who work in coal mines and their families live besides the mines suffer all sorts of respiratory problems and die at early age. Many suffer from air pollution and die out of this problem. We in India live on denials. However, world leaders welcomed the outcome of the climate deal to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius. French President François Hollande termed it a great day for the planet. 'In Paris there have been

many revolutions over the centuries. Today it is the most beautiful and the most peaceful revolution that has just been accomplished,' he said after the landmark deal was inked by 195 nations.

Nonetheless, Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) said the climate change agreement is 'weak and unambitious' as it does not include any 'meaningful' targets and has discharged developed nations from their historical responsibility'. UN chief Ban Ki-moon termed the Paris pact a 'monumental triumph 'for planet Earth that will set the stage for achieving an end to poverty and development for all'.

NATURE'S FURY AND PEOPLE'S MISERY: WHAT ARE THE FACTORS AND WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?



'Predicting rain doesn't count. Building arks does.'

— Warren Buffet



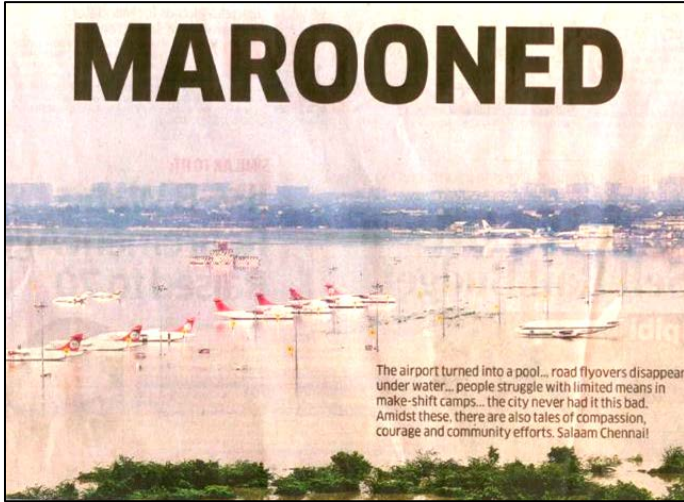


Source: pictures 1. Mc Key Savage, Chennai 2004; 2. Biswarup Ganguly: *Traffic Jam - Maa Flyover – Kolkata*. 3. Flood by S. Koilraj. 4-6: Flood in Amreli District Gujarat India, Indian Air Force, 2015; <<https://commons.wikimedia.org>>



The above clippings clearly portray the magnitude of havoc the State of Tamil Nadu recently. Heaviest rainfall over a century drowned Chennai and almost a large part of Tamil Nadu. Chennai and other parts of Tamil Nadu have been battered and bruised by the heaviest rainfall that brought the State of Tamil Nadu to a grinding halt. It has been unprecedented season of Northeast Monsoon rainfall in Tamil Nadu, particularly in its coastal districts, including the capital Chennai and Pondicherry. The worst deluge in living memory smashed several meteorological records and predictions that divided Chennai into several little Islands shutting the International airport, road, rail and suburban systems out of operation. It was horrendous to watch the water flowing like angry monsters. Since the rain continued for days all major reservoirs, lakes, tanks and ponds around the city opened their 'gates' to let the water out, destroying the habitats big and small. The middle and upper classes had remained indoors as they were terrified by the fury of water, whereas the poor and the vulnerable had to come out because of the fact that all their dwellings submerged in the water. Irrespective of their economic, socio-religious status everyone looked up the skies and kept praying to weather gods not to destroy them. Fear gripped the people of Tamil Nadu

intensely as they would be dead anytime if the rains continued. The clipping below shows the density of the havoc:





The damages have been colossal as shown above wherein essential supplies and ration have dried up and with the water level consistently rising, many have taken refuge on terraces and roof tops. With railway tracks disappearing under water, train services were suspended. Suburban services too crippled. Thousands of trains' passengers were struck at different points. Most of the roads have been turned into mini water bodies as the incessant downpour inundated them, rendering many useless. With water levels rising menacingly and almost drowning parked cars and suspension of the bus services. Hardly any inter-state buses have plied in the last few days and even highways leading out of Chennai have become unusable. Mobil phones and fixed lines were out of service and ATMs did not function. Chennai petroleum Corp Ltd of Indian oil shuts its 210,000 barrels per day Manali refinery because of heavy flooding. Roads turned out to be like rivers in Southern Metropolis. PM Modi made an aerial survey of the impact of the rains and announced an immediate relief of Rs. 1,000 crore to Tamil Nadu to deal with the devastation caused by the floods. This is over and above the Rs.

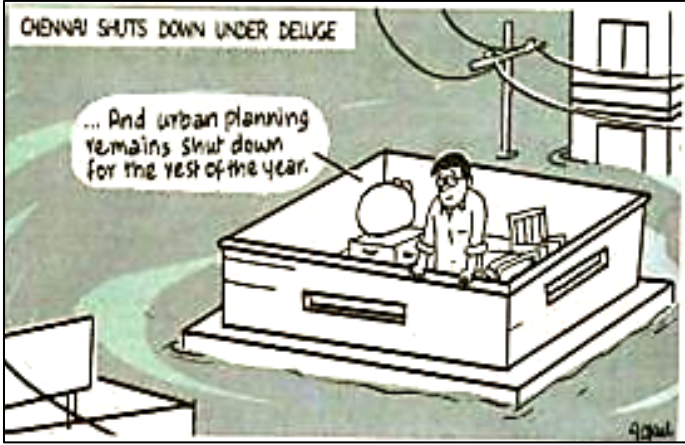
940 crore which was released earlier. Post-flood work is expected to be around 1 lakh crores of rupees or even more.



To bring back to functional levels the entire State of Tamil Nadu, it is would take several years. It is predicted that water-borne diseases and epidemics erupt that would create more panic among the people of Tamil Nadu. Chennai and major parts of Tamil Nadu were battered by record-breaking rainfall that pounded the city and its suburbs. The recent rains have triggered many to think and thus made them to probe into the factors that caused the deluge. For example,

WATERWORLD





ரெண்டாவது மாடி மட்டும்தான் போகும்..
முதல் மாடி, கிரவுண்ட் ஃப்ளோர் போறவங்க
பின்னாடி வர்ற நீர் மூழ்கி கப்பல்ல
ஏறிக்கோங்க.

The pictures and the cartoons on the recent deluge that the print and TV channels covered do portray and thus convey lots of lessons to all of us. The extent to which the fury of nature could go is beyond our imagi-

nation. Human control over nature went out of hand in the wake of nature venting her fury in a concentrated manner on a couple of cities. There is no doubt that monsoons are India's lifeline without which the mainstay of our country agriculture and its related activities would come to a grinding halt and life of all the people of India cannot go on. It raises a basic question: How prepared are we in the age of science, technology and human advancements? Are we well equipped to face the challenges of extreme weather events of which we will probably face much worse things in the years and decades to come as we keep tampering with the Mother Earth? We continue to boast of many things but when it comes to basic infrastructure of our metros and cities they depict pathetic scenarios.

Storm water drains aligned to channels and waterways are basic requirements of modern civilization in which the emphasis is on urban agglomerations providing livelihoods to millions. If these basic requisites and civic systems cannot be handled by the extremely corrupt civic corporations and concerned urban ministries and departments in any city in India, what else we are good for? The recent deluge has created fear amongst the people. The country is urbanizing at a rapid pace. If our leaders and the bureaucrats are incapable of placing the priorities, the services and facilities in a rapidly changing India, then the masses should decide what else can be done. The sudden change of events made people to think and go deep into the roots that the natural laws should never be tampered.

The floods in Tamil Nadu is yet another wakeup call and a reminder to all of us across the countries that the extreme weather events that we come across regularly. The scientists warned and cautioned the government of Tamil Nadu had ignored. This is what happens if the advance notice not taken seriously would certainly lead to serious consequences. Harjeet Singh, International Policy Manager on Climate change for

Action Aid International said, ‘The floods in Tamil Nadu are yet another example of the extreme weather events we were warned would become normal with climate change.’ He added that ‘It is vital that the central and state governments in India start preparing for similar devastating impacts in the future. Meanwhile, the events in India should send startlingly clear signal that the Paris climate deal must help reduce further loss and damage to our planet.’

In similar vein, the Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) also reacted on the issue and sought to draw attention to what they described as ‘the increasing frequency of such events’, citing similar incidents in 2010, 2013, 2014 and earlier this year. ‘While the increasing frequency can be attributed to climate change, our own urban planning is definitely to blame for the level of damage. Of the nearly 650 water bodies that Chennai had some decades ago, just about 27 are left. Large lakes have been encroached upon and so there is no water holding capacity ‘said Arjuna Srinidhi, programme manager, climate change, CSE.

STRANDED B’LUREANS WAIT TO HEAD HOME



What would happen if the same rains hit Bangalore and its suburbs? Similar questions are being asked by many who live in other Indian cities too. Certainly it is bound to happen and natural disasters strike in a variety of ways. Like Tamil Nadu even other states too are not prepared to face the eventualities. Every state in India in one way or the other facing natural disasters in big and small ways. Take for example, Bengaluru which has lost its sustainability. The reason being, 'the erratic and poor planning by damaging the natural topography of the city for the growth of city 'says environmentalist Suresh Heblkar. Substantiating further, 'The undulated landscapes made Bengaluru develop water bodies. The vegetation on the hills or elevated areas of Bengaluru and surrounding areas like Tumakuru, Kolar, Devanahalli and green canopy at Bannerghatta and Mysore region nurtured the water holding and filtering into the earth. This helped enhance the ground water table for the sustainability of the city.'

The politicians, builders, real estate owners, big businesses, bureaucrats and the technocrats allowed limitless growth without any thinking by totally ravaging the Mother Earth for their greed and acquisitiveness. The natural topography and the green cover have been ravaged by allowing the growth of the city with concrete structures, drains and road. There has not been a master road map and each government made its policies and the projects that led to mindless destruction of the nature. The ways with which we ransack the nature and the consequences we face shows that we have chosen a path that we are not bothered about the Mother Earth. It is very difficult to turn back the clock because the natural ecological wealth and assets has been destroyed recklessly. Allowing more and more industries in the name of industrialization, constructing one after another endlessly in the name of urbanization, industrialization and modernization by adding more and more housing com-

plexes and promoting commercial activities has almost plundered and ravaged the natural wealth.

Mushrooming of industries around Peneya, Dasarahall and right up to Nelamangala has resulted into reckless discharge of hazardous effluents into the natural streams and valleys. These lakes and streams such as Tippagondanahalli, Arkavathy and Kumudavathi have been contaminated beyond repair, says Suresh Heblikar. He blames the government for its priority and emphasis. As he rightly points out that the government gave undue priority for growth not the sustainable and development in sync with the ecological system. Heblikar adds that the priority should be given for sustainable development rather than unplanned growth.' He is firmly of the view that 'Although it is difficult to bring back natural glory, creating artificial tanks and allowing them to hold clean water may help to some extent. Besides, encroachments on drains and lakes should be evicted mercilessly' he added.

Though Bengaluru is located in a 'safe zone' geographically no city or state or country be guaranteed safety if it meddles with the Mother Earth. Safety and security will be guaranteed only when the nature is protected. Bengaluru is also undergoing rapid changes. These changes that have altered the city's environment and the changed the global climate change which as a result is bound to affect at some point or the other. Poor urban planning and mindless encroachment of wetland and storm water drain only would compound the problem. On these lines TV Ramachandra from the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, told Express that many parts of the city are often flooded after receiving 90mm of rain or so. 'Rainfall, as witness in Chennai, is bound to happen due to climate change,' he added. A recent study by IISc had warned that heavy rains could flood North Bengaluru due to the fragile storm water drain network there.

According to GS Sreenivas Reddy, director of the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre (KSNDMC) said even brief concen-

trated showers could flood many of the city's low-lying areas. The centre has identified 145 low-lying areas that are prone to flooding in Bengaluru. The areas that are identified as low-lying areas even 'Rainfall between 30 mm and 50 mm in the span of an hour or two would inundate these areas' The areas include Silk Board Junction, Sampangiramnagar, Parappana Agrahara, BTM Layout and Ejipura. According to him even a short spell of rain brings the city to a grinding halt causing traffic jams everywhere. He raises a question that 'How will it be if the city receives more showers over an extended period of time?' Over and above, rapid expansion of the outskirts of Bangalore made those areas more prone to floods.

Urban infrastructure expert V. Ravi Chander said little planning had gone into the development of satellite areas. 'In such areas, construction activities have been taken up over drains and lakes. The growth there has been haphazard and without any respect for nature or the local ecosystem,' he told the Express. He said 'If relentless rains pound the city, those living in the outskirts would be caught in the heart of the crisis. He thinks the worst-hit areas would be Yelahanka and Devanahalli segments. Another expert termed the Greater Bengaluru plan the 'biggest blunder on earth'. 'Outskirts of Bengaluru have become more vulnerable to flooding. Unregulated planning is not conducive to the health of the city,' he said.

Former Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) commissioner Siddaiah said the disappearance of lakes is the handiwork of public players like Bangalore Development Authority (BD) and private developers. Some lakes have been converted into playgrounds while buildings have been constructed atop others, he said. However, experts believe removing encroachments is the only way to ensure that a disaster of the scale of Chennai floods does not cripple Bengaluru. 'This is not a solu-

tion that is easy to execute. But drain encroachments must be cleared immediately,' Ravi said.

A variety of perceptions emerge from a various people of diverse vocations. A few merit examination. Professor GK Karanth of ICCSR National Fellow says: 'There is an urgent need to devise and implement urban watershed management... Shouldn't science, concern for safety and nature find its rightful place? It is not enough to regulate land conversion. We have to foresee the consequences of 'landscape conversion'.' An officer from the state town planning department observed that 'In 2005, Bengaluru also witnessed flood fury. But thankfully no rain related crisis has been reported in the city since then. But if Bengaluru receives rain like Chennai, our condition would be much worse as city infrastructure is crumbling. The Chennai floods are a warning for all other cities which have not given importance to disaster management.' Whereas Harish Bijoor, brand expert states that 'This is an act of God. It is a totally unprecedented situation that many of our mega cities are unprepared for. You can prepare for a calamity to the power of n! As of now, people must help people. That's the only thing to do. As of now, the need is for hot food. This will grow into a need for medicine, and soon enough for rehabilitation money. Bengaluru, and indeed every big city that has grown beyond its boots must learn a lesson from what can happen by an act of natural fury.



In English it means, at the time of deluge the above 'tele-evangelists' known all over Tamil Nadu and wherever Tamils live across the world were missing. When asked, their response could perhaps be: 'praying for the situation'! They have the hefty bank balance and with that can buy 1,000 boats in modest terms. When politicians, cinema actors and others voluntarily come to the spots and get involved in relief and rehabilitation work, where did these 'men of God' go? After some time (when normalcy returned) they would come again by showing their teeth shamelessly once the Chennaites become economically better-off. Let the Christians of Chennai at least now realize that seeking God is more important than going after these opportunists—who eventually become richer and richer all 'in the name of God'.

People from diverse backgrounds did perceive the catastrophe in different ways. The lessons learnt from it are: The Mother Earth that provides all that we require for our sustenance is being ravaged systematically. In the process the present and the future generations have been made more susceptible. Our Mother Earth is increasingly becoming fragile. Nonetheless, we want to consume and consume by ravaging the earth and its natural resources. Our wants are insatiable leading to consumerism, materialism and individualism. Many say that 'greed is good' and 'unlimited choice' is to be promoted. But the questions are: At what cost and whose cost?

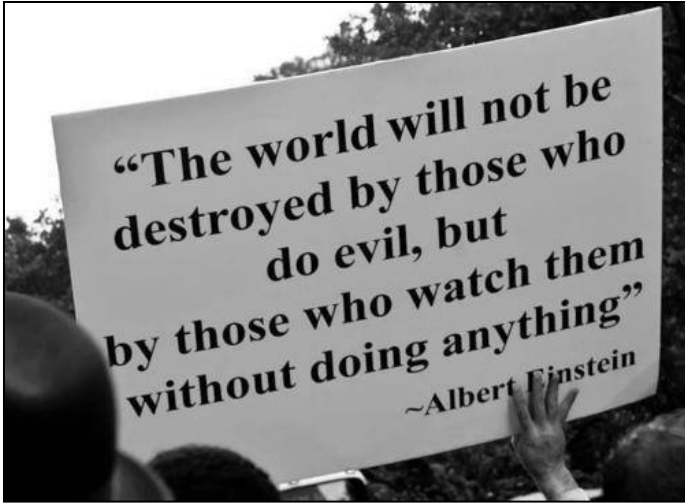
Paradoxically, many try to bring the God factor to suit their viewpoint by giving distorted interpretation to the calamity. What has God to do with this? It is human made and humans

will have to bear the consequences. We should remember always that the natural resources shall never be plundered to satiate our greed, wants and acquisitiveness. If we continue to do, the consequences will be beyond our comprehension and control. What did God do and why to unnecessarily bring God factor. Let us stop our accumulative desire, reduce

our consumption patterns and wants-based nature and move towards simple and sharing life style. Mother Earth has enough for all, but only a few enjoy by plundering the resources and many have to suffer.

‘In climate change, we often don’t fully appreciate that it is a problem. We think it is a problem waiting to happen.’

— Kofi Annan



‘I think the environment should be put in the category of our national security ... defence of our resources is just as important as defence abroad. Otherwise, what is there to defend?’

— Robert Redford

‘From today, treat everyone you meet as if they are going to be dead by midnight. Extend to them all the care, kindness and understanding you can muster, with no thought of any reward. Your life will never be the same again.’

— Og Mandino

FARMERS' SUICIDE: AGRARIAN ECONOMY IN TRANSITION OR IN CRISIS/DISTRESS!



Suicide by a young Rajasthan farmer at the kisan Rally of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in New Delhi on the 22nd of April, 2015, in full view of the police and those gathered including the CM of Delhi and others unfolds the callousness of our political system; pathetic conditions of our farmers (kissans) and the escalating crisis of the Indian agrarian economy is facing. Capitalizing the suicide of the young farmer, the BJP and the Congress used all sorts of blame-game against the AAP leaving the central and crucial factor: What were the reasons that prompted him to commit suicide? Apparently, thousands of farmers across the country commit suicide and in most cases with their families over the years for varied reasons. This is one among many and this ghastly incident should not be interfered with dramatic spectacle.

The political parties of India have reached a point of low ebb blaming each other as if the incidence was a 'political conspiracy'. Our political class has become so insensitive to the plight of farmers who have been relegated as 'ordinary' because their suicides have become regular feature. The farmers rally called by AAP was to focus the issue and to bring to attention of the nation on the grave situation our agriculturists are facing as a result of crop loss due to adverse weather conditions. More importantly, the prospect of their condition would worsen further, if the Modi government's amended land acquisition bill passed in the Parliament. The agrarian sector has been going through severe crises for

more than two decades and this incidence unfolds the helplessness of the farmers. It is believed that every 30 minutes a farmer commits suicide. So, for them the last resort could perhaps be committing suicide before the political class and the people of India.

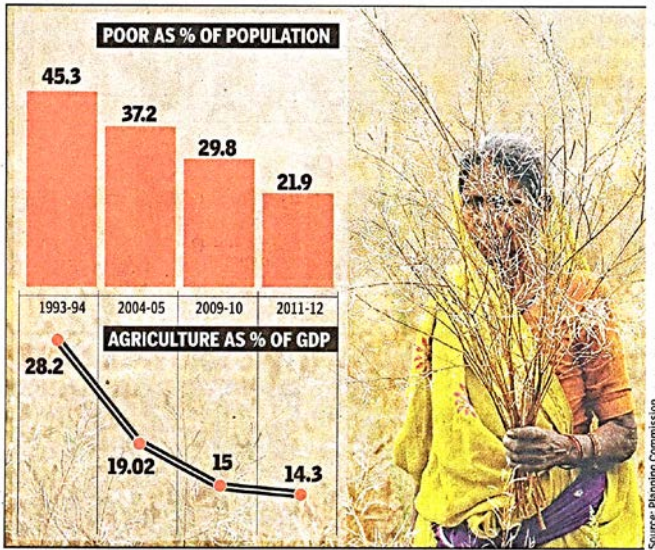
Our political class has reached a point of numbness, insensitivity and inhumanity that never bothers or pricks their conscience as the act was taking place in front of them. The political class considers farming community as ordinary citizens involved in some ordinary jobs, and not as people/citizens who are involved such an important productive activity that sustains our country. AAP was responsible because under its banner the rally was organized. To everyone's surprise its leaders showed not even an iota of remorse to the farmer who committed suicide and also showed no empathy for those engaged in agriculture, but continue to make political slogans by wooing the people furthering their vested interests. The suicide of a young farmer took place as the BJP government was about to table Land Acquisition Bill before the Parliament. It vividly portrays the plight of the farming community in India who are not that 'important' by BJP government and Congress government as well.

The suicidal act of this young farmer along with others over the years shows the gravity and severity of the problems that the farmers undergo in the agrarian sector. Since the onset of globalization there has been a clear shift from agrarian to industrial-service sector. The world is moving towards Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG) Along with the LPG the international financial institutions such as World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in their prescription advise the developing countries to integrate their economies with the highly industrialized economies by opening their economies to the market forces. What is happening is the transition from agrarian to industrial; from labour-intensive to capital-intensive, from traditional to modern. The West went through the profound changes in the 19th and the early

20th Centuries, and so it is logical and natural for all the agrarian economies to go through the profound changes from one to another.

For those who believe that in such transitions and transformative changes, episodes and catastrophes of such magnitudes does happen and so nothing can be done. They are of the opinion that these changes are part of the process and the transitions should be considered as progressive shifts from semi-feudal to capitalist and so no time is to be lost in this dynamic momentum. Further, they argue that in the process only a meagre per cent of the population would engage in agriculture and the major per cent of work force would be absorbed in service and industrial sectors. As example, in the advanced societies and industrialized countries less than 5 per cent of the population is engaged in agriculture, but they contribute for the national consumption and also surplus for exports.

The Indian agrarian scenario portrays a different proposition. Bulk of its labour-force is engaged in agriculture and its contribution to GDP is minimal. However, the face of Indian agriculture is also undergoing significant changes from labour-intensive to capital-intensive; from subsistence farming to market-triggered agrarian patterns- Nonetheless, majority of the population still live in the villages and somehow manages their livelihood in agriculture. And so, majority of the poor too live in agriculture. The following data (*Times of India*, April 23, 15, p. 10) amplify the state of affairs in the farming sector:



(Source: Times of India, April 2015)

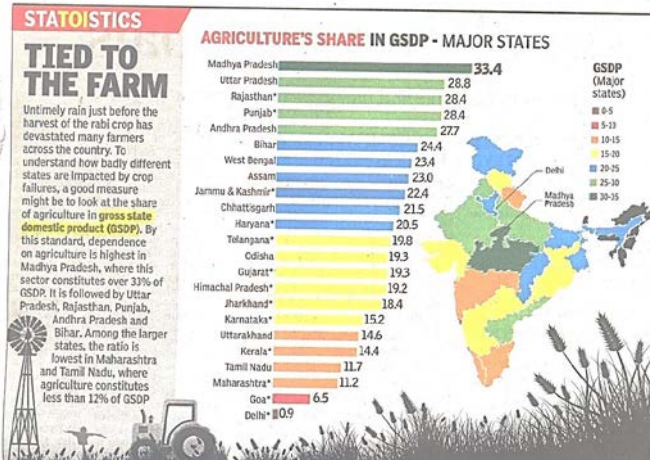
Except the first three-five-year plans, the governments at the Centre irrespective of political and ideological slants moved towards industrialization, modernization and urbanization. And the present BJP Government at the Centre has abolished the five-year plans. Whenever budget is presented in the Parliament or in assemblies, the opposition registers their disapproval and protest to the budget as anti-farmer. Expecting the oppositions' theatrics the ruling party offers a few freebees to silence the opposition. If we carefully look at the budgets both in the state assembly and in the parliament the chief ministers and prime ministers went ahead and move towards modernization and industrialization. Governments irrespective of ideological shades believe in generating employment and jobs; increasing the per capita income; developing infrastructural facilities by stating that it is keen on taking the economy to higher levels of growth and development.

Societies world over are going through transformative changes from one phase to another. Many view these changes from one to another is

natural and so there should not be any shock or bewilderment. So, for them what we are experiencing is not something unnatural and unexpected. Indian society too is in transition vis-à-vis from agrarian to industrial; from traditional modes to capitalist modes; from labour-intensive to capital-intensive; from subsistence-oriented to export-oriented. As the shift happens some set-backs and unforeseen consequences would and shall happen, but those factors should in any way deter the momentum. They look at these happenings as inevitable and so indispensable.

Over and above, there have been estimates and analyses that the rural landed gentry has shifted to urban areas for a better life style and eventually become absentee land owners. Farm labourers and share croppers are involved in agricultural activities. The landed gentry say that agriculture is no more profitable, and therefore is unsustainable. In an era of globalization skill, expertise and professionalism play an important role. In such a context even the face of the India's agrarian economy is changing at alarming levels. Capitalist modes of production are gradually replacing the traditional patterns of agriculture sector and in the process are modernizing. The pre-requisites are less-labour and more agribusiness in-puts. Obviously, more and more unskilled-agricultural labourers are being made redundant leading to migration from rural India to towns and cities in search of jobs and livelihood. It is like one-way mass exodus.

Many are of the view that the contributions of agricultural sector to the nation's economy have not been significant. Although majority people are engaged in agricultural activities the contribution of agriculture to the economy has been dismal. For example, the following data appeared in *The Times of India* (April 24, 2015), p.17 clearly reflects:



Indian farmers have been committing suicides for more than two decades. In tune to the globalizing economy the Indian agriculture too is modernizing at a rapid pace. Capital-intensive and market triggered cash-cropping dominate the current agrarian setting. There are many factors that contribute to the farmers suicides. Whatever may be the emerging factors there are some serious theories of suspicions about the Government's move towards the farming sector. The BJP Government at the Centre is being branded as the supporter of pro-rich, pro-corporate, pro-urban and its move on passing the land acquisition bill is a step towards that. In view of these many tend to suspect that the initiatives and efforts of the government that are not towards protecting farmers interests and developing rural India.

However, the most important thing that happened in recent weeks is that the government has been forced to take note of and respond to tackle farmers' distress appropriately and comprehensively. There have been several failures in the past such as monsoon failure that affected the farm produce; rural indebtedness; rural credit and host of other reasons. Since the onset of globalization we have been witnessing the suicidal distress as the only remedy for the farmers as seen and being witnessed in the

last two decades. One of the primary reasons is there is a new economic liberalization for the urban economic development, while on the other agricultural policies continue to be feudal. The slogan of the PM '*Maan ki Baat*' about his support to farmers and the need to interrogate and introspect the woes of the farmers remain meaningless and rhetoric because of the fact that the crises in the Indian agrarian scenario is deepening and escalating in the last 10 months.

Exactly eleven months ago, the BJP in its manifesto and the PM in his electoral speeches promised to extend to the farmers that he would give 50 per cent profit that would cover the cost of production and assured them the minimum support price. It remains a pipe dream for the farmers since then and yet to be translated. Failure of his promise has contributed and added to the farmers woes and distress because of the following reasons: the prices of cotton dropped and the soya and cotton crop in Vidarbha and Marathwada were destroyed by unseasonal rain; the moment agricultural prices drop, rural India is in distress because farmers not only have less money in their pockets but they pay higher prices for pesticides, fertilizers and seeds, all controlled by multinational corporations and crony capitalists.

In the wake of globalization and modernization of agriculture, the BJP government having a slant towards crony capitalism and market economic dictum could only be prompted to slashing farm subsidies and other incentives. It cannot initiate relevant and concrete plans that would sustain India's agricultural sector wherein millions of people and their families live on agriculture and agricultural-related occupation. Prior to opening of the Indian economy to the capitalist forces, agriculture accounted for 33 per cent of GDP; as of now it is just 15 per cent with 60 per cent of the population dependent on agriculture. A mass of people is still dependent on agriculture despite poor returns. The reasons for poor returns could be varying but one important thing should be borne in

mind that a sizable population is still dependent. Hence, the government's initiatives, preventive and precautionary methods should deter those who are dependent on agriculture not to commit suicides. Rather it should create conducive atmosphere so that they make their living and livelihood better.

THE TIMES OF INDIA, BENGALURU
FRIDAY, APRIL 24, 2015

Maha, AP worst hit by farmer suicides

HORROR FROM THE PAST

Year	Maha	Andhra	Karnataka	MP	All India
2004	4147	2666	1963	3033	18241
2005	3926	2490	1883	2660	17131
2006	4453	2607	1720	2858	17060
2007	4238	1797	2135	2856	16632
2008	3802	2105	1737	3152	16796
2009	2872	2414	2282	3197	17368
2010	3141	2525	2585	2363	15964
2011	3337	2206	2100	1326	14027
2012	3786	2572	1875	1172	13754
2013	3146	2014	1403	1090	11772



Agriculture sector needs urgent attention and reform. Farmers and agricultural labourers have not been given whatever is due to them. Rhetoric such as *Jai Kissan* from the political class remains as a slogan and it has become irrelevant. The policies of the government have dras-

tically cut down the farmers' and labourers' earning potential and not at all helped their livelihood. Agriculture suffers due to the poor vision of the government and fragmented the volatile market mechanisms. Further, they have adversely impacted the farmers' resilience. What we are witnessing is the cumulative policy failures of the successive governments that surfaces every decade and in recent times more in the form of suicides.

A comprehensive policy perspective and shift in paradigm are called for. In the name of taking the farmers' land through Land Acquisition Bill by paying poor prices by giving away the land to big corporations, crony capitalists, real-estates developers, private entrepreneurs who in turn help those to construct multi-specialty hospitals, international schools and professional institutions, SEZs so on so forth would not help PM Modi's vision of '*Make in India*' and '*Jai Kissan*' becoming a reality. Phase by phase response to the emergent agrarian crisis is important, rather than taking the farmers' need into one-off-settlement. The BJP government should not address the problem in such ways that all the farmers should be taken off the land and be rehabilitated to other occupations. Is it possible or practically feasible? This constituency by and large is unskilled, semi-skilled and traditional, but the globalizing economic order requires more skilled and highly professional expertise. PM Modi's *aache din* for the farmers has failed and is not going materialize. PM Modi should take it with utmost urgency. PM Modi should treat the farmers as those who have contributed to the livelihood, life sustainability and vibrancy of India. Undoubtedly farmers are the nerve-centre of India's present and future.

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MODINOMICS AND MODITUVA



‘Gujarat Model’ is being made to believe as the paradigm of India in terms of growth, development and progress. PM Modi, BJP and its outfits widely popularized and publicized the State of Gujarat as the most progressive, prosperous and successful state in India. So, it has been given maximum credit and undue weightage to its prime mover Modi, who was the then Chief Minister of Gujarat. BJP in its manifesto and campaigns categorically asserted that ‘development’ was the main motto and vouched to the people of India that if elected and formed the government, BJP under the leadership of Modi would translate and transform India like Gujarat. Accordingly, as soon as he became the Prime Minister of India he candidly made Gujarat as the ‘economic capital’ and Delhi as political capital. For example, when leaders and dignitaries visit India they are taken to Gujarat and the pattern is bound to continue.

The vibrant ‘Gujarat Model’ became the showcase as an investment destination since 2003-14(April) as CM and as PM from May 2014 onwards. A major Davos-type Seventh Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit was held this month where over 2000 companies, two million plus visitors and over 2500 international delegates attended. This Summit was the best and well attended wherein over 21000 MoUs worth \$25 lakh crore or about \$400 billion signed. These MoUs are merely wishes and need not be translated into reality. For example, of the 17, 719 MoUs that were signed in the last six summits from 2003 to 2013 together worth Rs. 39.6 lakh crore that translates only 9.14 per cent or less than Rs. 4 lakh crore which is just a miniscule of the total MoUs signed.

The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) known for integrity and data analysis came out with interesting findings on the two previous Vibrant Gujarat summits in 2009 and 2011. Incidentally, the 2009 summit witnessed rather slow return to the Modi fold of Ratnan Tata who in the aftermath of the 2002 Gujarat carnage vowed not to do any business with Modi there. In 2009, it was claimed by CM Modi that 3,574 MoUs were signed for investments worth Rs. 12 lakh crore or close to \$20 billion were signed. Analysing the available information for 220 projects worth Rs. 3, 94,700 crore, CMIE pointed out that ‘the number of projects captured were drastically low when compared with the official numbers displayed on the events website because of poor disclosure of basic information about the projects proposed. In most cases, the website does not provide details of a valid company name, location, product and capacity.’ So, on papers and websites many inflated figures and numbers may have been posted, but in reality the opposite is happening.

In most cases, the website fails to provide details of the valid company name, location, product and capacity. For instance, out of 220 projects, the CMIE found out that ‘there was no progress in 36 projects worth Rs. 1, 65,900 crore. Further, the CMIE reported that 33 projects worth R 45,000 crore were stalled. Interestingly, ‘There was no information at all on the progress of 31 projects worth Rs. 1, 07,800 crore.’ The truth of Gujarat’s industrial vibrancy was not at all that stunning as claimed. The data for the Vibrant Gujarat 2011 is even more damning. Out of the MoUs worth Rs. 20 lakh crores in 8,380 claimed only 175 investments worth Rs. 1,88,300 crore could be identified. If we take into account the bundle of contradictions the following paragraphs amplify testifies that the total industrial investment during 2009-12 at the national level was Rs. 24 lakh crore.

The symbiosis between Modinomics and Modituva is unfolding clearly now than before. In the 2013 summit, PM Modi echoing Mahat-

ma Gandhi's call at the time of Swadeshi campaign: 'not just mass production, but production for the masses!' Believing this slogan many dons of Indian industry turned out in numbers by paying homage without the future master's blessings the crony capitalism shall never prosper. But none was as effusive as Anil Ambani who described Modi as 'the king among kings' while announcing his trade-mark and mega investment. It is a well-known fact for all what prompted him to give Modi such adoration. Nonetheless, between the years 2009-2013, he had promised investments worth almost Rs. 85,000 crore of which not a paisa worth has been realized so far. Escalating MoUs has become the order of the day. We should not believe the number and volume of these MoUs unless and until they are translated in real terms.

Governments both at the Centre and in the States deliberately want to show to the people of India and their constituencies the number of MoUs have been signed. More the MoUs means more the production facilities which in other words mean more money, more employment and more growth, progress and prosperity. Every economic summits are advertised both on the TVs and in the News Papers carrying full page colour advertisements featuring the PM, the CMs, concerned ministers and others sycophants. Without industries, FDIs and innovative projects there cannot be growth and development. Take any part of the country everywhere we see some problems or the other concerning underdevelopment/mal-development, unemployment, poverty, illiteracy and ill-health. Hence, irrespective of the shades and ideologies, the Centre and the State Governments are competing with each other wooing the investors within as well as outside.

Competition amongst the states for investment is on the rise. But prevalence of better social and political climate for investments and enterprise are absent. In addition, for investment there should be good infrastructural facilities and speedier and amicable ethos, relatively no

bureaucratic bottlenecks and investor-friendly systems and processes. Even from the side of investors they expect a number of things such as skilled labour force, tax exemptions, non-interference from the government, free from labour unions and amicable social climate. More importantly uninterrupted power supply, ports facility (roadways, airways and waterways) are essential pre-requisites that investors look for. We do know the country as a whole is far behind in power, skilled workforce, social and political vandalism and host of others.

Modinomics and Modituva are two sides of the same coin. These two go together and thus form the political economy of BJP in the current dispensation. With the BJP in government at the Centre controls quite a sizable number of State governments. Modinomics and Modituva want to qualitatively transform the tenor, idiom and objective of government and business relationship. In a changed scenario, there is a need to interrogate the symbiosis of the political economy of Modinomics and Modituva. The relationship between the political class and Indian business class has changed over time and more specifically in the present times. We live in a post-Nehurian and post-Congress era. The present government wants to totally embark on a new path that could best possibly be understood within the context of a new format. Post-1990s reforms went ahead in inviting the private investors and FDIs by gradually opening the other sectors that were somehow stalled during UPA 1 and 11. While on the other, the present BJP government is keen on closing down the PSUs in the pretext of loss to the treasury and thus intends to hand over the vital public sectors that run on profits to the crony capitalists and transnational corporations (TNCs).

The business and the political classes are webbed with each other. It is not something new, but what is new is the convergence of crony capitalism and ultra-right fundamentalism. It reflects the merger between crony capitalists who subscribe to market-fundamentalism and Hindu-fundamentalists that endorses ultra-religious conservatism. The nexus is

evident as the PM Modi is talking about the privatization of Indian Railways, Banking Sector, Insurance Sector and other sectors that generates revenue for the government and also employs thousands and lakhs of people all over the country. It is expected that in the coming days there would be a move to open-up the sector to multi-brand retailing for the crony capitalists and multi-national corporations (MNCs).

The BJP government is all-out to bring-in FDI and the Indian capitalists to invest more and more in the core and productive sectors. Towards this end, PM Modi utters: 'Less Government and More Governance' and 'Make in India'. Keeping these in perspective, PM Modi candidly discarded the Planning Commission and made it redundant. To bring professionalism in the place of planning commission, PM Modi initiated Niti Aayog which is supposed to function as a bridge between government and the private sector. There are many questions that looms. However, we will have to see whether Niti Aayog would serve as a dynamic bridge between the government and the private sector or not? It is yet to be seen whether the government in the process be benefitted or the industrialists like Adani and Ambani.

The changed reality of our country propelled by Modinomics and Moditva are mutually supportive that converges the political economy of BJP. The government at the Centre has real hunger for growth, progress, development and for a large share in global markets for which they need new technological and joint ventures. But the common perception that rallies around is the government which seems to be keen in encouraging particular business houses. It is more visible nowadays that the Government at the Centre seems to be promoting Gujarat-centric and not keen on India-centric. Modi is the Prime Minister of India and not the CM of Gujarat, and also should be conscious of changing the public perception that he is keen in facilitating and promoting not only the business houses, but also profit-making public sectors.

However, the present BJP government at the Centre would not ignore or keep aside its ideological and political compulsions. Its base structure revolves around Hindu revivalism.. BJP's economic philosophy undergirds socio-religio-cultural facets of establishing Hindu rashtra. So, it has to function within this format and cannot deviate from it. So, Moditva as the reigning mode is primarily geared towards translating the Majoritarianism in letter and spirit. Consider the facts. During the elections, development was the favourite mantra of BJP and its PM candidate. But the priority of RSS and other ultra-rightists outfits was entirely different. Their agenda is to divide the country into majority and majority means those who subscribe to Hinduism. Accordingly, many of the BJP MPs and its ministers made all kinds of comments spewing venom against other religious communities such as Muslims and Christians.

In tune to the grand plan, BJP MP Sakshi Maharaj is able to get away with a series of provocative statements he uttered against the minorities. Likewise there are others who spoke ill of the minorities as they felt and have hardly been punished for it. The agenda of BJP and its parivar is clear. But the investments from inside and outside cannot come unless and until there is better social landscape in India. Gujarat-centric is not India's most vibrant state. Gujarat model cannot be transplanted as the paradigm for the whole of India. Gujarat is still way behind Maharashtra, Delhi, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Further, Gujarat has also fallen behind in terms of social indicators than the others states. India being caste-ridden society and BJP is using religion and caste as its tools to polarize and regiment the social landscape for its political project.

India's political economy is rapidly changing after the BJP taking over the government at the Centre. Religion and caste forms the major cementing factor for BJP. BJP's ideology has the combination of religion and politics. Within this rubric it has accommodated nation, nationalism, nationhood, culture, language, traditions, identity, and in all these

appropriated economy and enterprise. Its political economy has a combination of Modinomics and Moditva that reverberates the following: NRIs (who will benefit and who has the capital and entrepreneurial capability); NRIs could also vote by being wherever they are (which is again who will benefit and for who primarily this arrangement is being made); dual citizenship is made available and in that which section will be benefitted? These are the questions that arise. Let us not take for granted the contours of changing political economy of our country. Modinomics and Moditva have the tenacity, vibrancy and tenor to bulldoze the forces that come in the way. But it should be countered by all means and at all costs.

EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND SEXUALITY



PRIVATIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION AS AN EXCLUSIONARY PROCESS FOR THE DALITS AND TRIBALS



Liberalization, privatization, and globalization (LPG) are the main motors of the current phase of neo-liberalism. LPG roosts the world at large including India. The policies of LPG pushed aside the Dalits and the Tribals not only from the social and economic realms, but also in pursuing higher education. Since the beginning of 1990s the state/government has been associated with it and thus is gradually withdrawing from its responsibility. Consequently, education has already moved into the hands of private entrepreneurs. In such a context, future economic and educational policy advice must tilt the present trend of the role of the state so that the Dalit and tribal populations would be protected from the excesses of market forces. Towards this end, there should be rigorous analysis of the education particularly higher education for the Dalits and tribals so that other social impacts of LPG shall be averted. Hence, the important issues raised in this paper are: to interrogate the ways and means neo-liberalism via LPG particularly employs privatization as an exclusionary process depriving the Dalits and the Tribals from pursuing higher education. These are some of the issues to be probed, analysed, and evaluated with the help of analytical framework.

Keywords: Neo-liberalism, Liberalization, Privatization, Globalization, Higher Education, Dalits, Tribals, State, Government.

Introduction

Prior to 1990s seldom have we heard of LPG. But since 1990s Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG) have become buzz words across the world. Its socio, economic, political, and educational impacts are widely discussed and debated. More broadly, LPG refers to a whole series and processes that involve shifts in the socio-economic, politico- religio-cultural, and educational facets. The speed with which the shifts take place cuts across the geographical borders of nation-states with the motive of creating a borderless and seamless world. As a consequence there have been significant changes in the reach of media and communications technologies; relative decrease in power enjoyed by national governments and a corresponding increase in the influence of ‘supra-national’ entities vis-à-vis transnational corporations (TNCs); rapid urbanization, two-way migration between countries and one-way within nations; the spread of consumerist and materialist values; changes in the dress codes and eating habits amongst the middle class; widening inequalities between the haves and have-nots; rise in inequalities and inequities, hunger, poverty, homelessness and host of others.

Incidentally, Frederic Bastiat, a staunch proponent of neo-liberalism from France, wrote to one of the French newspapers in 1846 that ‘May all his nations soon throw down the barriers which separate them.’¹ Those words resurrected more solidly and thus started to echo from the last decade of the 20th century to the present. His words became prophetic. The protagonists of neo-liberalism are of the view that neo-liberalism is the only global economic doctrine that is capable integrating the nations of the world as one integrated whole. It is the one force that has the capability to establish one global economic unit, one market place, and a shopping mall.

¹ In-depth discussion in an article entitled ‘Tired of globalisation’ in *The Economist* November 5th 2005, p. 11.

Initially it was thought market forces premised on neo-liberalism could bring about progress, prosperity, and development. Many consider neo-liberalism as the powerful philosophical economic doctrine that had brought about significant changes especially by uniting the isolated economies under its ambit. Accordingly, all the nations of the world willingly or unwilling are forced to embrace LPG with all sorts of assurances that it would bring economic boom. Even though the political significance of this epoch far exceeded the economic, there was no holding back rolling back due to the hype the vanguard of the market revolution that neo-liberalism had generated. Global economy responded positively for a decade or so, but slumped in 2007, and thus started to crack down leading to burst. There has been unbelievable slump world over since 2007. It is thus predicted that it would take some more years for global economy to recover.

Incidentally a few economists namely Joseph Stiglitz, CT Kurien, and others who vociferously voiced against neo-liberalism, while many showed their commitment to the relative strengths of the market by predicting that the historical moment emerged which would provide a window of opportunity to the 'policy entrepreneur'. The advocates of neo-liberalism spoke very high of the market economy model and advised the nations of the world as worth pursuing. Free-markets and open economies are the only road for all the nations to follow. This perspective was again reiterated by the influential multilateral lending agencies such as IMF, World Bank, and WTO who in turn forced the governments to follow stringently as pre-requisites for lending loans for infrastructural projects, development initiatives, and structural adjustments. The stage was set to embrace LPG. The preponderant advice to the governments now became one that exhorted the implementation of policies friendly towards the international investors.

Three elements are to be identified in this package. First, removal of stringent procedures and move towards procedures for quick liberalization of policies that gives the foreign direct private investments (FDI) to invest in any sectors without bottle necks. Second, the state/government should not intervene in the fundamental of the markets. The climate for the markets by all means ought to be created. Market forces could operate only on market logic, when there is free play of capital, and so, the governments should refrain from investing in public sectors and allow privatization to take place. Further, LPG operates with efficiency, force, and speed. Its philosophy is based on 'win-win' for all, but in reality, it is 'survival of the fittest' or in simple terms 'laws of the jungle'. Similar to these, there are umpteen discourses on LPG. Higher education for the Dalits and the Tribals is one such area that falls within LPG. In a special way, this paper highlights the relationship that exists between LPG and higher education. Many are under the impression that LPG provides opportunities for the Dalits and the Tribals, especially in the area of higher education. While on the other, LPG is posing threats to developing or under-developed nations or societies in general, and to the Dalits and Tribals in particular.

The governments ought to play a central role in the lives of its citizens, particularly in the lives of the vulnerable communities. Since our governments have embraced LPG in absolute terms, many tend to equate privatization of higher education and LPG with government. Education in general and pursuing higher education are the basic fundamental and constitutional rights of any citizen. More importantly, providing educational facilities for the Dalits and the Tribals are the constitutional obligations of the governments. Paradoxically, it is far removed from the Dalits and the Tribals. It is an irony that LPG has further alienated the Dalits and Tribals from the mainstream. LPG has become one of the tools or instruments for the government to alienate the vulnerable communities from pursuing higher education.

In India, discerning the effect of LPG for long time was confused with economic dimensions only. Many did view LPG as a uni-linear and uni-dimensional process. But in recent times, social scientists and educationists tend to unravel the multi-dimensional and multi-layered process that LPG endowed with. Added to these, the social scientists and activists are focusing on LPG on specific groups like the Dalits and the Tribals. At this juncture, it needs to be reiterated that LPG as a process and a product of global capitalism has unleashed a powerful impact on Dalits and Tribals. It has accentuated the divide between the dominant class-caste categories and the Dalits and Tribals. The facts and figures show that the vulnerable communities have been pushed further to the margins since the introduction LPG. LPG as a process has deprived the Dalits and the Tribals even in pursuing higher education.

The state/government has the responsibility to deliver goods and services to its citizens. Good governance should be premised on democratic processes and rule of law, so that the citizens of India enjoy the fruits of equity, fairness, and justice. Citizens especially the down-trodden and the vulnerable communities must enjoy the basic and fundamental rights that are enshrined in the constitution. The concept of governability categorically emphasizes to state's capacity to govern. In our context the state/government does not give adequate attention to the vulnerable communities; rather it extends sops to the privileged classes and the so-called 'high castes'. The state/government is the major instrument that advocates LPG. It has the responsibility to translate the LPG to the people at large. It is supposed to solve the problems of the poor and the disadvantaged. When we say 'good governance' it implies ensuring the responsibility and accountability of various stakeholders. What is to be observed that the state/government being the instrument in the hands of the so-called 'high castes', the agencies and institutions of the govern-

ment dominated by the so-called ‘high castes’ do not want the Dalits and the Tribals to pursue higher education.

The state/government has totally abdicated its responsibility by not fulfilling its duties. It is gradually withdrawing from the service sectors and social security nets. Interestingly the corporate sector and other private agencies have been given the social responsibilities for which the state was responsible earlier. While doing this, LPG made it mandatory that the government should not continue to fund education and also stop with subsidies. The trend is that the state has withdrawn especially in the area of higher education as has been directed by the LPG. Now education is in the hands of private entrepreneurs and corporate who want to maximize their profits, rather than opening up the opportunities for all. Whenever we talk about government or governance it means that ‘In a developing country like India, governance concerns necessarily have a wider ambit. The recognition that² it takes place in domains other than that of exclusively formal institutionalized political and administrative structure, means that governance concerns encompass a variety of spheres ... include the political (equal application of rule of law, accountability and transparency, the right to information ...’³

Education in the Content of LPG

‘A global economy driven by increased trade, investment and mobility of people has forced many states to adapt their higher education to the transformed global realities. This has led changes in the occupational structure and enhancement of skills and knowledge requirements for employment. A paradigm shift has been noticed in higher education now-a-days

² Prakash Louis, ‘Governance, Reforms and Development: STs in India in the Era of Globalisation’ in Kameshwar Choudhary (ed), *Globalisation, Governance Reforms and Development in India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p.337.

from 'national education' to 'global education' from one time education for a few' to 'life-long education for all' from teacher-centric education' to 'learner centric education'. These changes make new demands and pose fresh challenges to the established education systems and practices in India.'³

Education per se is the hub and nerve centre of any society. For any society to be vibrant and dynamic, education plays the most crucial and vital role. Over and above, education is the most critical and pivotal instrument for the social transformation of any society. But LPG, its policies and processes have been systematically negated and excluded the Dalits and the Tribals from higher education because of the fact that,

Higher education is a means of social mobility and empowerment in a society, highly stratified by class and other traditional status markers. The notion about higher education is that it is a freeing and moulding process by which individuals learn to lead the 'examined life'. Social mobility, on the other hand is brought about in relation to two things: The first is the role of credentials acquired at this level in 'opening doors' in meritocratic societies. The second is of the specialised knowledge and skills invested in the individual at this level of education that entitles him/her to claim a larger share of the 'value created' in manufacturing and service sectors of the economy (Chandrasekharan, Sandhya, 2011).⁴

LPG was introduced in early 1990s and gradually spread to all the sectors of our society. There have been stupendous boost given by the successive governments to LPG. The growing culture of privatization and entrepreneurship in India accelerated the expansion of higher education, especially private education in the country. 'The post-1980 period

³ See UGC Recommendations.

⁴ See Raju Narayana Swamy, 'Technology Management in Higher Education in India' in University News, Vol. 50, No. 52, December 24-30, 2012, p. p. 2.

was the emergence of new types of providers of higher education in India. At the same time, barriers to entry and operation of these institutions were also involved with.’⁵ Precisely this is the reason for the Dalits and Tribals who could not enter into the institutions of higher learning. The challenges before our education system in India especially for the Dalits and the Tribals could be characterized as ‘Individual’s participation in higher education is dependent on her religious affiliations, socio-economic status and demographic characteristics (Basant, Rakesh & Gitaljali Sen, 2010), (Thanuskodi, s, 2011).⁶

The Dalits and Tribals are apparently way down in the socio-economic ladder, and also in human development indices. These projections open up serious concerns about the vulnerable communities pursuing higher education in India. Our country has not provided access to higher education for the disadvantaged communities. And those with economic power and those belonging to caste rungs have been accommodated well as the higher education gets privatized in India. It is nothing but the replication of social exclusion employed as a process by which Dalits and Tribals experience deprivation either of resources or social links to the wider community or society or State.

LPG has further deepened and reinforced the process of exclusion. This warrants us to go deep into the conceptual understanding of social exclusion. Social exclusion in recent times especially in the context of LPG needs to be understood as:

‘The first ... defines social exclusion in relation to social rights and to the barriers or purposes by which people are prevented from various rights provided to its citizens. The second definition reveals the Durkheimian frame of reference. It conceptualizes social exclusion as a state of social or nor-

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

mative isolation from wider society. Thirdly, the term has been applied to situation of extreme marginalization, especially in setting multi-cultural society.’⁷

Along with other dimensions social exclusion includes education where the Dalits and the Tribals are excluded from democratic participation in public good such as education. In sum, ‘The concept of exclusion generally in developmental literature has been defined as an inability to choose or lack capability to fully participate in the development of society.’⁸ How can our society by excluding more than one-third of its population claim as a developing or modernizing or progressing in socio-economic terms? When huge populations do not share the knowledge systems and deliberately kept out its knowledge domains then that society eventually is called as sick society. When Dalits and Tribals are denied and deprived of their due rights to partake in higher education, it means negation or denial of their constitutional privileges and fundamental rights. LPG is thus deepening the process, and as a result Dalits and Tribals are excluded.

The Growing Gap in Higher Education

Constitutional Provisions are invoked even in pursuing higher education. Article 15 (4) of Indian Constitution states that ‘Nothing in this Article or in clause (2) of Article 29 shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. Again Article 46 of the Constitution of India refers to the special care to be taken by the State for the promotion of education

⁷ Joseph Benjamin, ‘Social Exclusion and Higher Education Policy in India: Looming Questions’ in *Ibid*, p. 11.

⁸ *Ibid*.

among the STs and SCs. It elaborates that, 'The State shall promote, with special care, the education and economic interests of the weaker sections of people, and, in particular of the SCs and STs, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of social exploitation.'

Our Constitution provides all privileges to strengthen the education base of SCs and STs. For example, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has issued number of guidelines, directives, policy statements towards the implementation of this from time to time. Regarding higher education for SCs and STs, scholarships have been allotted. But what have been the outputs/results?

'The reports of the National Commission on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are a grim reminder that the vast majority of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes remain poor, illiterate, lack the requisite skills for competing in the modern world, enjoy unequal access to productive resources, and remain deeply tied to land and transitional occupations which offer limited possibilities of upward mobility. Education is the catalyst for upward mobility. 'Higher the educational profile, higher the upward mobility,' ... If Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes... are provided good education, then the education itself may lead to their social mobility. These were the group which was socially excluded in our Indian society for years together. Hence, education can serve as catalyst for upward mobility.'

⁹

Even after 66 years of Independence the Dalits and the Tribals are deprived of education. Caste discrimination and segregation continue to manifest in all spheres, particularly in higher education. After having privatized education the Dalits and Tribals are more deprived of and

⁹ Indira Priyadarshini N. Badiger, *Scheduled Caste Women and Higher Education: A Sociological Study*, 2015, p. 28.

segregated from the main stream. The so-called ‘high castes’ are in high places of authority and institutions of governance. By virtue of their birth the so-called ‘high castes’ exert their influence and thus stall affirmative policies meant for the vulnerable communities. They do manifest in covert and overt ways. They are socially excluded in our caste stratified Indian society for centuries. It was assumed that given the education, the vulnerable categories would climb the social ladder. The following Tables amplify the growing gaps in higher education:

Table 1 discloses the fact that there is a significant gap between SCs/STs and non-SCs and STs. So, the following Table glaringly depicts how the dominant caste categories deprived the education of the vulnerable communities. The education of the Dalits and the Tribals keep fluctuating and not constant.

Table 1: Trends in Literacy Rates for the Non SC/ST and the Population, 1961-2001

Percentage point difference between the Non-SC/ST and the SC population

Year	Non SC/ST	SC	GAP*
1961	27.91	10.27	17.64
1971	33.80	14.67	19.13
1981	41.30	21.38	19.13
1991	57.69	37.41	20.28
2001	68.81	54.70	14.11

(Source: Taken from the Census of India, 1961-2001 cited by Joseph Benjamin’s article)

Table 2: Literacy Rates for the Non SC/ST and SC Populations by Sex and Rural and Urban Situations 2001

Residence	Total on SC/ST	Male Population	Female	M/F Gap
Total	68.8	78.7	58.2	20.50
Rural	62.6	74.3	50.1	24.20
Urban	81.8	87.6	75.3	12.30
Urban-Rural Gap	19.2	13.3	25.2	

SC Population

Total	54.7	66.6	41.9	24.70
Rural	51.2	63.7	37.8	25.90
Urban	68.1	77.9	57.5	20.40
Urban-Rural Gap	16.9	14.2	19.7	

Non SC/ST—SC Gap

Total	14.1	12.1	16.3
Rural	11.4	10.6	12.3
Urban	13.7	9.7	17.8

(Source: Taken from the Census of India, 2001 as cited by Benjamin Joseph)

Table 2 portrays one common feature between SCs and STs is the internal gap between genders. In case of Dalits the gender gap is about 24 per cent when compared with the dominant caste categories by 16.3 per cent. Usually, higher education is generally measured by enrolment ratio for which three alternative methods are used namely Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) and Enrolment of Eligible Ratio (EER). These three concepts thus show the access to higher educa-

tion from three different angles. It is found that the SCs and STs, GER and NER in graduation and higher degree programmes are lower than other caste categories. For STs estimated EER is somewhat high, much of which could be attributed to incentives offered to them for enrolment and studies.¹⁰

Usually higher education is measured by enrolment ratio. The enrolment in post-higher secondary education by social groups in 1995-96 was 13.89 per cent. And this figure rose up alarmingly to 23.06 per cent showing 13.85 in rural and 33.3 in urban areas in the year 2007-2008. The GER overall level during this year was 23.06 per cent. But the GER for the so-called high castes' was 29 per cent, whereas 22 per cent for SCs and 9 per cent for STs. Similar pattern was also noticed in rural areas. As against 14 per cent GER at overall level, the so-called 'high castes' ' rate was 19 per cent, 12 per cent for OBCs and SCs and 6 per cent for STs. Comparatively the urban GER was 34 per cent for 'higher castes', followed by 30 per cent for OBCs and SCs and 18 per cent for STs.¹¹

What do the facts and figures infer? The vulnerable communities especially the Dalits and the Tribals have not benefitted at all despite radical policies and programs both from the Ministry of Human Resources and University Grants Commission. These communities still face all sorts of discrimination and are not allowed to go for higher education. Over and above, privatization of higher education has further derailed the upward mobility. For instance,

'As per National Knowledge Commission survey, only eight per cent of India's student-population goes for higher studies. According to educationists, the poor higher education graph in the country can be attributed to three things—the high

¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 14-15.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 16.

dropout rate at the high school level itself, not enough colleges and universities for students to go to and the poor economic background of parents, especially in the rural areas, because of which they cannot afford to educate their children. The need of the hour is to revamp the falling standard of education of Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes in India.’¹²

If this is the scenario, privatization of higher education is bound to create more problems for the Dalits and the Tribals. Enrolment of the Dalits and the Tribals in higher education does not show any upward swing since 2006 although it showed some positive glimpses prior to that in some pockets. LPG as a tool has thus far helped the ‘high castes’ to equip themselves professionally as well as to climb up the economic ladder successfully, and in the process by depriving the Dalits and Tribals. When the government at the Centre embraced LPG in early 1990s the dominant caste categories were ready to occupy the positions because they had the qualifications. LPG’ logic is premised competition. Competition is based on the survival of the fittest. Who could survive in the law of the jungle? It is only those who have economic power and who belong to the so-called ‘high castes’. They have been the beneficiaries of LPG, and therefore, caste and privatization of higher education works well in the present scenario.

Conclusion

With the advent of LPG, the Tribals and the Dalits have further been marginalized, not only in socio-economic aspects, but also in higher education too. Privatization is no more win-win situation for the Dalits and the Tribals. It is certainly a win-win syndrome for the so-called ‘high castes’, and in that the Dalits and the Tribals are virtually the los-

¹² *Ibid*, p. 18.

ers. While outlining the impact of LPG, in a market driven economy, the market forces in higher education has initiated a process of privatization wherein the moneyed classes and castes successfully staked their claims. Higher education in a world of market economy is globalised and in that the highest bidders will take whatever they want.

Education in general and higher education in particular is on sale. Market economy determines what type of education each society should have. If this trend continues, the Dalits and the Tribals will increasingly be isolated and deprived. They eventually become marginalized segments of Indian population. Keeping this fact in mind, the framers of the Constitution made specific provisions for their upliftment in the form of affirmative and pro-active policies. But, these have not really benefitted the Dalits and Tribal communities at large. With the introduction of LPG, the rights of these communities have been further violated. Yet, these communities continue to struggle to pursue their higher education, so that they lead a meaning life like others in a caste-stratified Indian society. The struggle will go on till we establish the egalitarian and casteless society.

EDUCATION: INDIANISATION = HINDUISATION!



For the past few weeks we have been reading and witnessing intense debates on education in the print and visual media. The core issues that surface in all these debates and writings are centred on ‘Hinduization’ of our education. How come and why is it all of a sudden spurt of heated discussions and contestations on this? Incidentally we have a new government at the Centre which is premised on definitive ideological and cultural slants. The Government at the Centre is backed by a party (BJP) driven by an ultra-rightist fundamentalist ideology. It has a clear political vision and a well-drawn road map to realize it. To realize its vision, BJP employs diverse means and methods. Education is one of its tools that the BJP intends to use and be employed as an effective means and methods to further its political project.

Apparently, the last debate in the just concluded Lok Sabha session, BJP’s Yogi Advaithnath of Gorakhpur frequently chanted and claimed that all Indians are Hindus. Before we agree or disagree, we should know their point of view and thus go deep into this subject-matter. Therefore, we need to delve into the root meaning of these two terms which would help us to understand the debate better. The term ‘Hindu’ comes from Arab al-Hind which the French pronounced ‘Inde’, and thus expanded to India. The people of (H)industan were named as Hindus or Hindis. When the westerners came to these shores, this term or designation given to a whole people, but has been morphed into a label for a broad spectrum of Vedic faith(s) by excluding the Christian, Muslim and certain other categories. Unfortunately many hardly know or vaguely understand the clear distinctions of these terms.

If we look at it objectively, carefully and trace the development of these terms all Indians are culturally and civilisationally Hindu or Bharatis. But these terms have gradually been appropriated by Vedic faith(s) and gradually elongated as Pan-Indian. In order to strengthen its expansionist agenda, RSS, a cultural wing of BJP furthers its Hindutva an exclusivist political ideology that visualizes establishment of Hindu Rashtra. RSS played the pivotal role in the recent Lok Sabha elections. RSS has always been crystal clear that: 'It is not an individual, but the party' meaning nobody is bigger than the party. Accordingly, as soon as BJP won the elections Modi paid his respects to RSS and visited a number of times in the formation of the government, even while allocating portfolios to his council of ministers. Major policy decisions and appointments for the top brass bureaucrats for various departments of the government are made in consultation with RSS.

RSS has umpteen plans to hinduise the Indian society. After BJP's victory RSS nowadays unfolds its intent on several fronts that creates controversies and contestations. The issues that RSS's top brass and its adherents utter creates unease to the very fabric of the plural fabric and multi-religious canvass of our society. RSS cleverly uses different strategies openly after BJP's landslide victory in recent elections. RSS's commitment to Hinduise reverberates and the logic put forth is it is a Hindu nation because Hindus are in majority. Those who are born in this soil are all Hindus and therefore have *bona fide* right to claim their citizenship of this country. Others with distinct religious identities should henceforth be called as 'Hindu Christians', 'Hindu Muslims', and 'Hindu Sikhs' and so on. So, RSS is gradually and systematically widening its tentacles on other identities (minorities and subalterns) to establish a Hindu Rashtra (nation).

RSS is amalgamating diverse religio-cultural identities within its Hindutva ambit. So the whole process that RSS applies should be viewed under the rubric of cultural nationalism. RSS is all out to rope in

other identities and religious persuasions. Amongst all the terms RSS's usage of 'Hindu' becomes the centrifugal word which is envisioned and enshrined in its Manifesto. RSS the cultural wing of BJP is vying to subsume other faiths and people outside its bracket. Once this distinction is understood, attitudes will change and the motif of RSS will be exposed. Further, the Sangh Parivar portrays Indians who adhere to secularism as 'pseudo secular'. BJP is not keen separating politics and Hinduism apart. In the coming days BJP may throttle religious freedom that all of us enjoy as guaranteed under Article 25 of the constitution. As against this background, let us visit our past and our history.

Two dominant streams emerged on the nature of an Indian nation in the late 19th century. One stream preferred India to be a Hindu country, while the other wanted a liberal, secular and socialist. Tilak belonged to the first view while Gokhale preferred the other. In literature, Bankim Chandra took a Hindu view, Tagore the liberal path. Parallel to these the same time RSS kept alive Hindustan. M.S. Golwalkar, the chief architect of the Sangh, wrote that 'foreign races in Hindustan' should adopt Hindu culture and language, must entertain no ideas but those glorifying the 'Hindu race' and should be wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, for less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights'. As we are aware of the fact that the framers of the constitution eventually opted for the secular stream as thus named the new territory as 'India, that is Bharat' that radically departs from that premises of Pakistan and Hindustan.

For more than 60 years of Independent India, the country has been following the ideals of secular, plural and democratic India. The 16th parliamentary election has unfolded a landscape that could take India to the other extreme. Prime Minister Modi as the Prime Minister of India was a full-time RSS man. RSS was in total agreement for Modi's candidature as the Prime Minister. He has been mentored by RSS and contin-

ues to draw inspiration from its broader vision of a resurgent India. Resurgence of India is not just in economic terms, but more particularly transforming India as Hindu Raj. More importantly, RSS leaders are aware of Modi's mandate. RSS has reposed total faith on Modi that he would by all means translate RSS's vision of Hindu Raj. This arrangement aided with aggressive and pragmatic approach of Modi make things easier for RSS-government to further their Hindutva project.

Increasingly the word 'Hindu' in recent times is being frequently uttered in the media, both as a political and cultural identity. RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat firmly believes that those who live in Hindustan irrespective of religious persuasions are Hindus. 'Hindu' is a firmly grounded term that resonates the culture of the land of all the people. The term 'Hindu' connotes the ethos of 'Hinduness' of the 'Hindu' land. Therefore, RSS via BJP is systematically deconstructing the India's notion of 'Hindu' as the past baggage that denotes the riposte of western imperialism. RSS is antagonistic towards the western cultural expansionism in India.

The cultural rightists believe that the modern post-Independence elite created an Indian knowledge system that suppressed and ignored Hindu traditions. Hence, the Hindu fundamentalists believe that it is their dharma to restore Hindu Sanskrit to the school curriculum. As part of it the BJP went all out to change the Teachers Day to Hindi/Sanskrit. In tune to this BJP and its cultural outfits are desperate to pull back the 21st century young India into an illusory 'Vedic' age which is regressive and backward-looking. Paradoxically, RSS and BJP some years ago vehemently opposed to inviting foreign capital and FDI, now in a hurry luring foreign private capital to India. Similarly RSS viewed especially through the eyes of 'Indian made' and 'foreign made'. BJP-RSS combine categorizes goods and commodities through its ideological and cultural lens and rubric of 'Swadeshi' vs. 'Videshi'.

Due to stagnant growth, depletion of foreign exchange reserves and exports, falling GDP and GNP and appalling economic indices the new BJP government realizes that India too is placed in an increasingly globalizing and competitive economic order. Accordingly, it is planning to open SEZ, EPZs and hosts of new economic initiatives and outlets to woo the foreign capital especially from the Western European and North American countries. So, when it comes to money and capital from the West, for RSS and BJP they do not pose any ideological and cultural problems because capital has absolutely no creed and colour and thus transcends its narrow cultural nationalism! For hundreds of years we have been part of the globalization cutting across the shores for trade and commerce. It is in this context, what is 'Indian' and what is 'western' in the current phase of globalization? As Amartya Sen rightly points out: Does the use of penicillin amount to westernization? Is paneer deeply anti-national because cottage cheese was first brought to India by European settlers in East India? Is chili non-Indian because it was brought to India by the Portuguese? Is tea non-Indian because it was bought to India by the British?

As against the backdrop, I would like to unravel the whole notion of education. Education is not about content, not just providing the right texts books, syllabi/curriculum or creating ideal Bharatiya/Hindu citizens. Education is all about the processes employed how we acquire knowledge, how we learn to ask questions. In order to acquire these components pedagogy is given the central facet in which the learner occupies the important place who eventually becomes free thinkers, reformers, change agents, interlocutors and iconoclasts. The outcomes of any system of education ought to be premised as stated and enumerated. Modes are varying i.e., localized/globalized/indianized, but certainly not hinduized. Indianization and Hinduization are not the same but entirely two different opposing constructs.

At this point of juncture let me reiterate that education should not be construed as Indianization hyphen Hinduization matrix. They are polar opposites. In the name of 'Hinduization' the Government of India and its paraphernalia such as RSS, Bajrang Dal, Hindu Munnani and ultra-right outfit are desperate to introduce their curricula and Hindu brand of education in education by giving preference to select portions of history eulogizing select individuals and thinkers, highlighting select historical events with glaring subjectivity by distorting certain facts, imposing particular languages such as Sanskrit and glorifying certain texts and discarding others are to be taken seriously because all these involves ideological and cultural colours to one particular world view as against other world views thereby creating fanatical, clouded and frenzied mind-sets and thus preparing pervert minds in the form of cultural annihilators.

Indian education by all means should create questioning spirit and interrogating of him/her and the world around. Compelling and enforcing based on one's belief system or world view tends to inhibit and constricts pupils' horizons of understanding. Educational system should facilitate intellectual freedom which would blossom many as innovative thinkers and translators. Suppression of knowledge in and through single mode and single world view is detrimental for the present and future of India. Education is for life and thus unfolds innumerable horizons of possibility, learning and understanding.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AT CROSSROADS: LOOMING QUESTIONS



Theological education is a process by which the students and pedagogues learn God's doings and interventions in the struggles of faith communities that are striving and aspiring for human dignity, social, racial and gender equality, economic equity and parity, justice and fairness in all facets of their existence. As they move on they tend to locate and capture how and in what ways God responded to them and how to weave God's response to their context specifics. The learning process primarily revolves around faith experience of people and communities as written and narrated in the Christian Scriptures and its relevance to their lives and existential experience. In theological education students and teachers learn to articulate about the Word of God and the ways with which God responded and intervened to the cries and agony of people in different epoch of biblical history in systematic and coherent manner.

Classical or systematic theologies have their place in theological education. Philosophical frameworks are being used to systematically explain the God-factor. The Western scholars to a large extent played remarkable part and significant role. However, in the 1970s and 1980s the contextual theologies emerged not as against systematics but more in response to the questions that were asked by the context: the faith communities and base congregations kept asking: What God is doing in our suffering and plight? In what ways is the biblical God relevant to their histories 'here and now'? Is God of the Bible being silenced or silent to their cries and sufferings? To these questions those who were seriously

engaged in theological education and pastoral/ministerial engagement were forced to respond.

At this point of juncture critical theologies emerged across the continents. Voices from the margins came out strongly and loudly that had to be answered and responded. The voices could neither be silenced nor the people who raised their voices be trampled upon. Their terrains from where the voices emerged and the context that raised questions need to be responded. The responses have not been at superficial levels but theologically grounded. As a result numerous theologies emerged from the unheard pockets and neglected terrains across the world. The theologies that came out from the margins and rustic terrains articulated God to their contexts and in the process their relevance to the faith communities reflecting in what ways God continues to hold and dictate the destinies of them. The contextual theologies invigorated their faith and reposed meaningful insights to their struggles and sufferings. They also ignited new hope and vigour to their existence. More importantly, these contextual theologies have brought about new levels of consciousness and horizons of understanding to move on in life in faith despite all sorts of horrendous hurdles and pitfalls.

Contextual theologies are life enlivening and hope propelling synthesis. In India it is undoubtedly Dalit theology, considered as one of the major contextual theologies that made significant inroads amidst a maze of theologies in India and around the world. Out of some Dalit theologians thus far we have it should be acknowledged at this juncture that Habbel Dr. James Massey was one of the pioneers of Dalit theology who has undoubtedly taken the Dalit cause to the national and international frontiers. Since the context became the vital arena for theologizing, theological education across the streams and beyond denominations and divisions has taken the contexts impregnated with oppression, exploitation, discrimination and injustices for theologizing. The landscapes where the

Dalits live are filled with anger, pain, and pathos, injustices of all sorts, discrimination and oppression and so on.

Social exclusion is a process by which Dalits are excluded and thus experience deprivation either of resources or social links to the wider community or society or State. During the late 70s and early 80s, the language of Social Exclusion emerged strongly to be used alongside caste, poverty, especially in the discussions of racial and caste justice for the Afro-Americans and the Dalits and others across the world. Social exclusion could perhaps be situated in relation to social right and to the human constructed divisions and barriers by which particular groups of people and communities are prevented from various rights provided to its citizens in the Constitution as well in other enactments. It further conceptualizes social exclusion as a state of social or normative isolation from wider society that reifies a order or system or a frame reified and justified by scriptural codes. It is usually applied to situations of extreme ostracization and marginalization of particular communities amidst multi-cultural society.

In the Indian society social exclusion as a principle revolves around the Dalits in particular. They are the victims of social exclusion by caste, culture and religion. Dalits are deprived of and discriminated for many things. Out of many they are socially in particular not given equal treatment and not at all considered as citizens with equal rights. It is to be taken into account that the main feature of social exclusion is denial of equal opportunities. Dalits are socially excluded category. Despite of 3000 years of continuous pursuits of civilizational and cultural evolution towards knowledge and higher levels of learning the so-called 'civilization movement' and 'cultural ethos' have failed to treat everyone on par with other. 'Dignity' and 'honor' these thousands of years remained within the prerogative of the select categories of people belonging to 'high castes'.

Free Independent India believes providing education to all is its obligation and fundamental rights. Even our educational system prioritizes education as one of its primary goals. Despite progressive affirmative policies the literacy rate of the Dalits continues to remain low and their presence in the higher education is appalling. When it comes to higher levels of theological education and their presence in the important academic positions it is a known fact covertly and overtly social exclusion operates in theological institutions and in ecclesia.

As against the background, this paper deals first with an overview of theological education by positing and identifying the objects and outcomes. In the process an analysis will be attempted exploring how the objects and outcomes are connect and linked ; if they fail to match the question that will be raised how. If they fail to match then the essence and relevance of theological education will be explored. Second, in spite of numerous revisions in the curricula incorporating and prioritizing sociological, ethical and theological understanding and other conceptual, definitional and perspectival considerations such as structural and systemic analyses like the system of caste and yet its heinous forms and manifestation in multiple ways in our day-to-day affairs which clearly shows that there have been no significant impacts in the ecclesial and societal levels.

The reasons for these have to be identified and ascertained. However, towards this end concerted efforts have been taken and attempted so that the present impasse could perhaps be addressed effectively and efficiently. How come all these efforts have failed to yield the required results? What could perhaps be plausible reason(s)? These are the central questions. So, the core of the paper is to enter into an inquiry by taking up rigorous analysis to the questions that are raised.

The aim and purpose of periodic revisions in the curricula is to make theological education contextual, relevant, authentic and dynamic to the world of reality. It should be carried out because of the fact that the faith

communities is constantly engaging and interacting with the societal and ecclesial forces. Periodic revisions of curricula is meant to quip and expose the students to diverse conceptual and theoretical understanding which in turn enhances the learning opportunities, providing tools and life skills. However, theological education ought to unfold the innate potentials of the learners thereby enabling them to engage with the material and spiritual reality around them so that meaningful engagement be applied against those demonic forces that brings about destruction to the families, communities and societies and also evolve strategies how are they to be changed. So in principle theological education is an instrument and should become an instrument/tool for change bringing about transformation amongst students, families, communities and societies. Whether the theological education providing all these or not?

Education should be for life. Does the theological education provide adequate critical tools to know about the self, the community, the society and the world at large? If some say that all these processes are being carried, the next query is having understood and known who am I; the community I belong to and the society I live, the church I belong or work with do they do to the problem the people and faith communities live, face and confront in their day-to—day existence. Are those with theological qualification in a position to engage with the impending issues vis-a-vis untouchability, discrimination, exclusion, difference and host of others entrenched in our social structure and in the system of caste in their respective places of work and in the neighbouring areas? Have they addressed the issues and expressed solidarity in whatever way they could?

Since theological education is directly connected to ministerial training which is represented in the form of church. Barring a few Church by and large is involved in carrying out its regular functions and failed in its mission and witness. If Church has failed in its vision and mission then

it automatically pre-supposes that the theological education in India has failed. If this is the case, where did theological education fail? Take for example the issues that the church in the society and the wider society are facing. To start with theological education is tailored in such ways preparing students to suit priestly functions in their respective dioceses/churches. If the theological institutions are primarily meant to prepare traditional functions that the poojars//priests does, then, something has drastically wrong. It has deviated from the very essence of theological education because,

‘Ministerial training or ministerial formation in general is concerned with educating men and women in the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and equipping them with theological understanding and proficiency in such a way which will enable them to minister to the people of God, to prepare them and to help them, so that they are able to fulfil their task for mission, which is to apply and proclaim in word and deed the mighty acts of God, through the life and the suffering, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ... It is to this whole *oikoumene* the whole inhabited earth that the church is called to fulfil its missionary task.’¹³

As reflected in the above quotation, the overarching purpose of the theological education is to prepare the candidates as echoed in the Gospel. It is the whole Gospel to the whole people of God and so it cannot be done in parts but in full. The church is called precisely to carry out this as part of its missionary task. In order to be effective and authentic, theological education is supposed to provide students the basic know-

¹³ See Judo Poerovidagto article ‘Asian Perspective of Ministerial Training’ presented at a International Consultation on the theme *Theological Education and Its Relevance to Ministerial Training* presented at UTC, Bangalore on 6th January, 1994, pp. 3-4.

how i.e., conceptualization and integration. In between these, we need to probe the area of application. Application per se means how to go about. For this, it is method/methodology that helps to conceptualize and also to coherently analyse, interpret, and evaluate the area of investigation. Theological education revolves around articulation about God in the world of humans. Clearer understanding and articulation of concepts and how these concepts come into play with each other play crucial roles by bringing different ideas and premises within theoretical frameworks.

We live in a world of diverse ideas and theories, methods and methodologies, theologies and ideologies, assumptions and pre-suppositions. All these tend to compete and clash with each other. As a consequence, polarization of all sorts does take place, irrespective of the nature of education. So, the theological education should not be construed as value-free or value-neutral, but indeed value-loaded. Invariably, theological subjects can never claim to isolate from the related areas because it is about God, world, and humans. In this scheme, context thus plays an important role in theological education. Obviously, the context is permeated with socio-economic, politico-religio-cultural forces, and so, we are expected to equip and thus expected to familiarize the students integrating all that has been taught in the class rooms.

Field education is being used as one of the vital pedagogical processes imparting action-reflection-action systematization. Paradoxically many colleges/seminaries use under the banner of 'exposures' to visit different places, little refined than tourism lacking praxis component. While prescribing or arriving at definitive positions it is essential to view the problems in integral ways. The ways with which the problems are approached in theological education especially in major assignments, research projects and in the integrated papers have been superficial by employing reductionist mode. By and large, the integrated papers lack

clarity, cohesiveness, and thus nebulous. The following quotation by Felix Wilfred amply substantiate what I am trying to say,

... the basic problem of theological education today is the oscillation between these two paradigms and a lack of consistency. I mean to say that there is a frequent jump from one plane to the other, in such a way that the same theologian may be employing one paradigm while addressing a different theological issue ... Therefore, for an effective theological education, there should be a clear choice of the theological paradigm we want to follow. When in the same theological institution different faculty members follow different paradigms, there results confusion in the minds of the students.¹⁴

Felix Wilfred questions the paradigmatic inconsistencies and perspectival variations amidst many theological teachers that resonates ‘inward looking ‘and ‘preservation of the status quo’ attitude. Theological education is fabricated and packaged to maintain and perpetuate the creedal, confessional, and doctrinal positions of the church. It continues to mystify and mythologize the Scripture, so that the understanding of God, the world, and human are not viewed in integrated manner. Hermeneutical principles are supposed to mediate between the Word and World. But they are not allowed to be employed freely and actively. Rather, the texts are interpreted to justify the actions of those who have the power and authority.

‘... theological education has not assisted the churches to move forward, to respond to hurting people, to relate holistically to the earth, or to be people-focused and Christ-

¹⁴ Felix Wilfred’s lecture entitled ‘Mission, Christian Witness and Theological Education’ delivered at the Pre-Council Seminar at UTC, Bangalore, on 20th August, 2008, p.2.

centred... We have sometimes ignored crucial insight about life and God in our work as theological teachers.’¹⁵

Hardly have we seen any interaction and intermingling taking place between them and the world which is outside the compounds of theological institutions/seminaries. Theological education in essence and in character is not an abstract subject that can be attempted and reflected in abstract manner. It requires a context.

‘Context is the starting point of theological reflection. Context is the here and now of the present situation, which ensures that theology will heed to the ‘cry for the recognition of the significance of this time and this place.’¹⁶

As of now theological education is ghettoized. Hence, theological education requires

‘... a context into which we interpret the ‘Text’— It is the context in and through which we can discern and respond to the signs of the Spirit, where we can discern the presence of God where God reveals God’s self in the lives of the people, in the society and in God’s own creation.’¹⁷

The context provides raw materials and bases for de-constructing and re-constructing our learning and theologizing. So,

‘The extensive context of theology includes the political, economic... Social, religious, and cultural realms... Beginning with the context rather than with the text ensures theology’s

¹⁵ See *Ministerial Formation*, Vol 77, April 1977, p. 38.

¹⁶ Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison, *Jesus in Global Contexts*, Louisville: John Knox Press, 1992, p. 15.

¹⁷ John Poervowidagdo, *op.cit*, p. 4.

relevance to any situation in which theological reflection is undertaken.’¹⁸

Theological education in India has never been context-prone and thus not context-driven. In the curriculum, disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, economics, psychology, few issues in natural and medical sciences are clustered, but while offering segregated as foundational courses and non-foundational. Further, methods and pedagogical process that are employed does not reflect any integration that takes all the parts into the whole. In the current theological scheme, students learn something especially some theories and concepts, but the integral way of understanding and viewing the subjects and issues in holistic mode hardly happens. Rather, the knowledge in the process is segmented and compartmentalized into parts and pieces. Each course stands as separate subjects without any connectedness and linkages.

Theological education per se is premised on certain assumptions with an objective of producing the students for ecclesial ministry. The administration and the congregation expect their pastors to do only the poojari jobs. Most of the theological institutions and sponsoring bodies expect their candidates to be trained only to serve as traditional pastors. Accordingly, the curriculum is tailored to suit the objective of the churches. For instance, the inter-disciplinary and integrated courses that are offered both at the graduate and post-graduate levels do not reflect the purpose for which these courses have been created. They are basically designed to enable the students to look at the issues or problems from integrated/inter-disciplinary perspectives. Integrated approach is another method/approach and how to go about has not been taught in practical ways because students are taught to handle problems from teachers’ areas of specialization. As a consequence, the so-called integrated or inter-disciplinary papers end up in superficial ways choosing methods

¹⁸ Pricilla Pope Levision and John R. Levision, op.cit. p. 4.

that shows superficiality by amalgamating a few disciplines by positing artificial merger of disciplines.

Theological frame commonly used is God-Church-World. It functions in hierarchical, top-down and segmented order. This frame invariably reflects our thought process and thus narrows our horizons of understanding and in the process conditions us and our world around us as separate entities and categories. Interestingly, God-world-human though independent categories but organically inter-twined with each other and thus functions in organic ways. Hence, they are not to be viewed as separate entities. It is unfortunate that our educational system (secular and theological) to think and look at everything in disjointed manner. What we see is the total negation and absence of synergy between disciplines. Pedagogues should be open to use of integrated approach.

Emphasizing one facet and leaving aside the other dimensions blurs the whole.. It should be taken into account that there is no single theoretical and practicable solution to any theological problem because issues are locked with each other. The habitat we live functions in integral and thus inter-related. The systems and organs of governance are structured in inter-connected manner and thus functions to perpetuate the caste-class interests. The framework on which the Indian society is premised revolves around clear ideological, physical and ethical moorings.

The major inquiry in this paper is to explore the reasons for not responding adequately to the burning problem that the Indian society as well as Indian church is facing. In spite of many attempts and breakthroughs in theological educations and ecclesial notions the ministerial candidates who are undergoing theological education presently and have already completed and thus serving in various capacities in the Church and related-bodies barring a few many remain passive to the inhuman indignities, injustices and cruelties inflicted on the Dalits the so-called higher castes of Hindu society for more than 2000 years? Shouldn't not

the theological colleges/seminaries and the Indian Church own up to the social, physical religious, spiritual and psychological deprivation the deliberately and systematically caused to them?

The wrongs that both the so-called 'high castes' and 'high caste Christians' against the Dalits and the Christian Dalits have been grave and sinister. The wrongs are similar, or a shade lighter than the wrong of the organs of the Indian state, but the forms, gravity and intensity are in no way different. The so-called 'high castes' of Hindu society treat the Dalits as 'untouchables'. Similarly, the so-called 'high castes' converted Christians who B.R. Ambedkar calls as 'Hindu Christians' have not abandoned their caste tags and continue to treat the Christian Dalits differently because they think that they are less inferior. There are many instances the Dalit Christians meted out both in the theological institutions and Indian churches as well. It is an irony that despite tall claims, creedal and scriptural affirmations there is a divide and subtle inhuman treatment extended to the by the 'high caste' Christians to their fellow Christian Dalits. It is happening in covert and overt levels. In sum, scripturally we may claim that in Christ there is neither a Jew nor a Greek nor a caste Christians nor Untouchables but in our day-to-day practices they are present and practiced.

The Dalits are condemned to live outside the vicinity of the villages and so not allowed to fetch water from the same wells; forbidden to enter into their temples; separate cremation grounds and cemeteries. Further, the system of caste functions on hereditary and difference. Generation after generation the Dalits are forced to live in such appalling and humiliating conditions on account of their birth based on Manu's law. Even now, Dalits are killed at the slightest pretext such as demanding for higher wages by landless Dalits, setting ablaze their hutments, rape of their womenfolk and molestation of young girls that we witness in alarming proportions in the free-independent India. In flagrant violations of the law, untouchability is still alive and being practiced in hun-

dreds of villages even today. Young school going Dalit girls were made to clean toilets in their schools and sporadic resistance takes place whenever Dalit children serve mid-day meal or eat with 'high caste' children. Seldom we hear that the theological institutions and churches making hue and cry over these happenings.

Barring a few the abuse unleashed to the Dalits in theological colleges/seminaries, churches and society have not been properly addressed and treated justly. The Dalits are treated as lesser human beings and untouchables in the churches in covert and overt ways and have hardly took firm actions whenever atrocities, difference, unjust and exploitative treatments meted out by the Dalits brought to their notice. What are the reasons for the prevailing apathy and dormancy? In spite of solid theoretical and practical in puts basic thrust with an emphasis of transforming the learners so that they in turn become change agents involving in transformative activities of both the church and society. The face of caste atrocities have changed in recent times and thus taken new avatars and thus characterize in sophisticated forms and formats, but the narratives have not changed. The levels of atrocities unleashed against Dalits are much worse penetrating deeper and thus tarnishing their very being creating deep-seated scars.

The Dalit terrains portray anger, resolve, resilience, despair, hope and volatility and thus raise a few questions: Does our theological education and seminaries engaged in theological education reflect symptomatic of deeper problems entrenched in structures that govern the entire system? Is there a gap that separates theological education and the existential issues that concerns the Dalits? Are the courses and contextual theologies offered to nuance and interpret on Dalit issues remain only at the epistemic levels? These are the questions that surface. For these questions answers have to be sought. For example, those who control theological institutions vis-à-vis church heads view their ministerial

candidates as mere repositories of churning out traditional poojaris to carry on the routine functions. The church heads and so-called custodians of theological institutions and the higher decision making bodies by and large do not want to consider and thus view them as centres of training organic poojaris and organic intellectuals.

Knowledge is important but what do you do with it. Accumulation of knowledge for research and innovation is good but the episteme obviously will have to become the basic materials and resources for bringing about inclusive, egalitarian and sustainable society wherein everyone is treated with equal dignity provided with opportunities. Knowledge eventually should result in action-reflection and in the process enhance critical consciousness to know about self and to discern the forces that operate around. Mere accumulation of knowledge without action is sterile. Knowledge acquires fuller meaning and thus complete only when it is converted to action. What do we do with abundant literature, innumerable data and voluminous works on Dalits? With all the abundant inputs and resources on Dalits it is strange that there has not been corresponding and measurable change amongst the seminary students (Dalits and non-Dalits) any significant change in the actions (within and outside).

In urban and rural settings Dalits face discrimination in several forms. Discriminatory practices are intertwined with caste and religion. Students and faculty keep churning out researches and papers in diverse areas year after year. What have we done with those findings? Have we availed those for action in the church and society? Inequality is created even through education too. We employ selective amnesia when it comes to Dalits and its discourses. The system is biased and the ways with which the curricula and pedagogy are designed and employed are not in the real spirit of changing the caste-ridden system. The theological seminaries, institutions and the Indian church have not sufficiently engaged with inequality. Many tend to live with an apprehension that nothing can be done and we should live with it. Why don't the students of

theological seminaries/institutions and churches want to engage with the forces that discriminate the Dalits?

Caste supremacy continues and yet Dalit communities assert their rights. Indian social structure is obsessed with the system of caste. Hegemony of dominant castes configures and re-configures to assert their supremacy and control over the Dalits. Narratives of caste and its forms of manifestations may have changed, but it is deeply entrenched. As long as theological education fails to foster students engaging in active facilitators of change it will continue to remain as the watershed between the church and the society.

EQUALITY IN AN UNEQUAL WORLD



We live in an unequal world dictated by an economic doctrine known as 'Law of the Jungle'. Its basic tenet is 'Survival of the Fittest' implying those who fall into the ambit of free-market economic order there is only 'win-win' situation and not 'win-lose' mode. On these lines the notions of 'economic freedom' are propelled by a doctrine 'greed is good'. This economic doctrine reached its pinnacle in 1990s. It is compressed in a capsule commonly called as Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG). Since then, almost all the nations of the world embraced free-market logic and then on there is no turning back. India too with open arms embraced it.

Free-market economics dominates the global economic order. Free-market economics is presently the creed and doctrine of the world. This is the brand of economics that dominates the world at large. However, this brand of economics has also been critiqued by other Noble Prize winners in economics such as Joseph Stieglitz, Amartya Sen and John Kenneth Galbraith who have branded it as insensitive to people. Free-market economics views economic freedom is neither about good government nor governance. It is not even about economic achievements. It is about the least government intervention in the affairs of nations' economy.

Advocates of free-market liberalism consider that the market fundamentals have the capacity to regulate and thus moderate supply and demand. In this free-market, non-state liberal economic ideology government has less-say or no-say at all. In this logic it is assumed that less or no interference of the government would help the market forces to freely function and as a result the economy boom. Since 1990s the Indi-

an government has opened up its economy based on this logic. The whole logic is compressed in the triune principles known as Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG).

Having completed 20 years of free-market logic, the performance of India in economic terms is dismal and shows lopsided and exclusive growth process. It has elevated about 200 million to the middle-class rung. The top super-rich bracket and a few even climbed up to Forbes list of billionaires. LPG may have also erased a few lakh of people living below the poverty line. It may have helped India and other developing countries to develop its infrastructure, communication technologies, SEZs/EPZs, opening up Government-owned Indian Railways, Air Lines such as Air India for foreign capital and host of other reasons. India may be termed as the third-largest economy in the world in PPP (purchasing power parity) and is predicted that by 2050 it will be a \$30.55 trillion economy depending on in what ways it furthers liberalization, privatization and globalization. They are all predictions which may become reality or false by 2050. Year 2050 is far away and in the meantime most of us are dead. We have 36 years from now and this period is for a nation like India is life-time.

In 1990-91, when PV Narasimha Rao dismantled the centrally planned state, the gross domestic product (GDP) of India at current US dollar was a little over \$200 billion. Twenty-three years later it is 10 times. Increasing 20-fold in 36 years is really not a tall order. But who benefitted and benefits the growth in GDP and GNP? How are these distributed? What are the modes and mechanisms employed so that all are partakers to it? As against this backdrop, let us look into the inequality between nations and within. Prior to embarking on that let me invoke two major economic thinkers. Adam Smith wrote his seminal book entitled *An Enquiry into the Wealth of Nations* that describes how the rich developed countries accrued its wealth and thus advocated laissez-faire capitalism. After a reasonable time Gunnar Myrdal wrote

equally befitting response entitled *An Enquiry into the Poverty of Nations* that analyses the factors that made the poor poorer and the rich richer.

Adam Smith's economic philosophy and theory became popular especially in countries of Western Europe, Japan and countries in North America. The proponents vociferously argued in favour of growth or modernization paradigm premised on Rostowian theory of *Take-Off*. A solid critique came from the Latin American theologians and development theorists who mooted Dependency theory that argues how neo-colonialism perpetuates dependency amongst the satellite states and banana republics. India embraced free-market capitalism as its doctrine and started employing it in its policy and planning processes. For more than two decades Indian economy follows free-market economics. Two decades is indeed a long duration to assess and evaluate the performance of our economy.

Some of the policy analysts such as Mohan Guruswamy say that the money the Central government spent had a direct bearing on the economic outcomes of states and on the well-being of their people. The evidence he shows that Right from the First Plan Bihar has suffered underinvestment by the Centre. If there was per capita development expenditure for each plan, Bihar was always furthest from it. Bihar consistently ignored by getting so much less in every consecutive Plan. Bihar has short-changed by as much as Rs 270, 000 crore. Bihar is still last in terms of per capita development expenditure, and industrial and infrastructure investment. The highest ranking states in terms of government investment get as much as six times more than Bihar in per capita terms.

The Human Development Index (HDI) of Kerala is India's highest 0.790, which would place it ahead of China, while the other end of the spectrum is Chhattisgarh with 0.358, which would place it just alongside Chad, one of the world's most backward countries. At 0.790, Kerala

would find a place in the High HDI list. Paradoxically in 2011-12 India grew at 6.88%, large states like Uttar Pradesh (6.23%) and Andhra Pradesh (6.44%) grew at less than the national rate. States like Gujarat excelled with 20.79%, while India's most prosperous state, Punjab languished with 5.79%. The government at the Centre favours those states that are their allies and represent their political party. So, the incidence of poverty, mal-development, and other socio-economic ills continue to plague most of the states in India.

The government tries to downplay the numbers by having a somewhat self-serving index (22%), other measures such as the UN Development Program's \$1.25 a day suggests that almost 37.5% of Indians live in dire poverty. At \$2a day as much as 70% of India is below an internationally determined basic standard of living index. It is a proven fact that one-third of Indians live in poverty or struggling one square meal a day. Other indices are just as damning. India's abysmal track record at ensuring basic levels of nutrition is the greatest contributor to its poverty as measured by the new international MPI about 645 million people or 55 per cent of India's population is poor as measured by composite indicator made up of 10 markers of education, health and standard of living achievement levels. The same indices is being reflected at the global level where more than half of world population live under 2\$ a day and without adequate basic amenities, education and health access.

The new data also shows that even in states generally perceived as prosperous such as Haryana, Gujarat and Karnataka, more than 40 per cent of the population is poor by the new composite measure, whereas Kerala is the only state that projects less than 20 per cent fall under 'poor' category. A person is defined as poor if he or she is deprived at least three six of the 10 indicators. All these indicators function on the sole criterion of economic freedom. It is solely premised on extending absolute freedom to market forces and not to the governments.

This doctrine is favoured by neo-liberal economists and other international financial institutions such as IMF and WB and the rich and development countries across the globe. For instance, the annual Economic Freedom of the World Report, published by the Fraser Institute in conjunction with members of the Economic Freedom Network, ranks countries on their level of freedom. In 2012, annual report released by the Fraser Institute the rankings had India at 111 along with Bangladesh, Nepal, Iran and Pakistan and way below countries with few real freedoms like UAE (11), Kuwait (19), Oman (20), Jordan (23) and El Salvador (56). Thus their index considers Saudi Arabia to be mostly free; it considers India to be mostly not free, like China!

The world in which we live shows that there are high performers and others seem to be not that good. The irony is all the countries of the world claim that they have opened up their economies to the market forces and integrated with the global economic order. And yet a question that arises why some belongs to the advantageous side and others fall on the disadvantageous side. Ironically these divides are seen within and between countries. An answer to this is still eluded, and yet to be pursued. For the first time, the 100 richest tycoons in India are all billionaires with Mukesh Ambani topping the league for the eighth consecutive years, according to *Forbes*. Ambani was followed by Dilip Shanghvi, who became richer this year by \$4.1 billion. Shanghvi is the new No.2, after he displaced steel baron Lakshmi Mittal (\$15.8 billion), who slipped to the fifth place.

Wipro's Azim Premji moved up one notch to the number three position as his net wealth increased to \$16.4 billion from \$13.8 billion previously. Pallonji Mistry, patriarch of construction giant Shapoorji Pallonji Group which is the biggest shareholder in Tata Sons with a new worth of \$15.9 billion was placed in the fourth place. *Forbes* said that 'good days are here' for the India's 100 Richest, as the top 100 richest Indians are

all billionaires with combined wealth of \$346 billion, up more than a third from \$259 billion in 2013. Propelled by the euphoria after BJP's landslide victory in May, the stock market has gained 28 per cent since January driving the net-worth of the uber-rich people in India.

The biggest dollar gainer is ports magnate Gautam Adani, who jumped 11 spots to 11th rank in the list, adding nearly \$4.5 billion to his wealth which reached \$7.1 billion on soaring share prices. Others in the top 10 include NRI businessmen Hinduja Bother who were at the sixth position with a net worth of \$13.3 billion, followed by Shiv Nadar (7th, \$12.5 billion), Godrej family (8th, \$11.6 billion), Kumar Birla (9th, \$9.2 billion) and Sunil Mittal and family (10th, \$7.8 billion). As many as 85 of the 89 who returned to the top 100 from last year are wealthier, and several are billionaires for the first time. Among them are Qimat Rai Gupta (ranked 48, net worth \$1.95 billion), chairman of Havells; V.G. Siddhartha (75, \$1.27 billion), founder of the E-café coffee Day chain; and brother Harsh Goenka (82, \$1.18 billion) and Sanjiv Goenka (69, \$1.4 billion), who run their own empires.

A sizable number of Indians have joined the billionaire club and some are vying to get into the club. These are the people although numbering negligible but controls almost all the production requisites, modes and processes and distribution facilities of our country. They are the economic power centres and thus influence the polity of our country. Never in the history have we witnessed such phenomenal growth. Progress and prosperity in all areas is being accounted.

The questions that emerge are: Have the progress and prosperity been equitably shared? Did these trickle down to those who are at the bottom? Who benefitted and how much? The free-market ushered capitalist order has created more wealth for some and in the process pushed many to the margins. Never in human history have we witnessed such an appalling Inequality. It is apparent that the gap between the rich and the poor is growing. Concentration of wealth and control of production and

distribution of good vests with a few families in India is visible. Naked display of wealth in all forms has become part of their ethos.

The state governments and the government at the centre in their budgets try to woo the top and middle classes and castes by providing all sorts of sops and concessions. The poor and the economically backward classes, Dalits and tribals have not been taken into account. Those immediately at risk are the 800 million people who have just about to be lifted themselves of hunger and want, but are constantly vulnerable to return to the brutal cycle of poverty. Income poverty continues to prove intractable, with 1.2 billion people still living below \$1.25 a day. Another 1.5 billion people in 91 developing countries live with simultaneous deprivations in health, education and standard of living as per the UNDP's Multidimensional Poverty Index.

India might be among the world's largest and one of the fastest growing economies but it has a lot of catching up to do for reaching the level of advanced economies. World Bank's World Development Report 2014 shows that during 2001-10, people with regular wage and salaries were only 17 per cent of India's total employed population. Although this was a little higher than the previous decade, but this ratio is abysmally low when compared to the large economies. Evidently, the high growth years following the 90s liberalization has failed to create jobs. It should be noted that World Bank does not count casual labourers as salaried employees. The recent statistics of homelessness people in India according to the 2011 census is as per the census of 2011, in India, 9,38,348 homeless people are living in urban areas of the country including 46,724 in the National capital Territory of Delhi.

People living in open areas like pavements, railways platforms, under the flyovers, parks and in vacant places are designated as homeless. It is estimated that one in every 100 people in India's cities is homeless. Total urban and rural population is still 1.77 million people without roof

over their heads in 2011. Delhi has become the world's second most populous city in 2014 after Tokyo, more than doubling its population since 1990 to 25 million, according to a UN report. The 2014 revision of the World Urbanization Prospects launched projected that India would add the highest number of people to its urban population by 2050, ahead of china. Four of India's cities Ahmadabad, Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad, with 5 to 10 million inhabitants presently, are projected to become megacities in the coming years for a total of seven megacities projected in the country by 2030. India's major cities Kolkata, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Ahmadabad, Pune and Surat will add a total of 27 million people to its population in 2030. Kolkata, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad will be among the world's top 30 cities by 2030.

As most of the cities and townships are going to be flooded by people due to many factors. India would thus become from a country of villages to a country of urban- centres. This radical shift from rural to urban is going to pose many challenges. The governments both at the centre and state are unable to meet the challenges that the mega-cities and metropolis keep posing. While releasing a book recently PM Modi said, 'We look at urban centres as a burden, a challenge, not opportunity, even though that's where the growth is'. He added that 'Indians should move beyond roads, highways and ports. 'New cities will be built where there i-ways, not only highways.' PM statements lack clarity and cohesiveness. They do not support each other, rather contradicts. A recent UN report projected that an additional 2.3 billion people would live in cities by 2050. At 25 million, Delhi is already the world's second largest city after Tokyo (38m). The UN expects 37 per cent of urban population growth to come from three countries—by 2050. India is projected to add 404 million urban dwellers.

The crucial missing part is the fact that there are no 'owners' for India's cities. Cities generate significant amounts of revenue, yet are denied a proportionate slice of the state's revenue. A McKinsey study

projects by 2030 Indian cities will generate around 70 per cent of its GDP. For all this, the municipal commissioner of Chennai can call on meagre sums like Rs. 10 crore. For urban growth a careful planning and forward looking ideas are important. Unless and until the centre and state governments look at development and under-development, poverty and progress, hunger and prosperity more pragmatically and view resource sharing objectively with apt approaches hardly anything be achieved.

It is just an Indian phenomenon, but global. For instance, the US Federal Reserve chief Janet Yellen said that ‘She is greatly concerned over the widening gap between the rich and poor in the United States.’ Speaking in the US city of Boston, Ms. Yellen said ‘Income and wealth inequality are near their highest levels in the past hundred years’ and have widened during the economic recovery. Speaking at a conference on inequality Fed chair did not mention monetary policy nor the current turmoil in financial market. She noted the wealth gap has grown steadily over the past several decades, despite a brief pause during the 2008 crisis when the richest Americans lost money and increased government spending and bail out plans helped the shareholders and less wealthy.

Elaborating further she said ‘But widening inequality resumed in the recovery as the stock market rebounded.’ She added that ‘wage growth and the healing of the labour market have been slow, and the increase in home prices has not fully restored the housing wealth lost by the large majority of household for which it is their primary asset.’ She also noted that ‘wide wealth disparities can make it harder for the poor to move up the income ladder. ‘She also warned of the burden of student loan debt, which quadrupled between 2004 and 2014.’ One of the striking comments she made was that ‘I think it is appropriate to ask whether this trend is compatible with values rooted in our nation’s history, among them the high value Americans have traditionally placed on equality of

opportunity.’ (US Fed chief Janet Yellen statements that appears in these two paragraphs appear in *Business Times*, 18th October 2014, p. 12).

Across the globe, within and between countries inequality and disparity keep widening and growing respectively. For instance, the richest 85 people on the planet owned as much wealth as the poorest half of humanity, a report released by OXFAM that calculates on the basis of a Forbes list for 2013. But, there is more that these super billionaires continued to earn \$668 million (about Rs. 4000 crores) per day between them and March 2014. Based on these calculations and data argues that ‘Inequality is growing across the world, threatening to push more people into poverty, heighten gender inequalities and cause increasing social strife.’ The report adds that ‘Absurd levels of wealth exist alongside desperate poverty around the world.’ The report views the current scenario as ‘One of the biggest economic, social and political challenges of our time.’

To substantiate the report quotes Warren Buffet, the world’s fourth wealthiest man who states that ‘There’s been class warfare going on for the last 20 years and my class has won’ said Buffet in a TV interview in 2011.’ Zeroing down to India, the report points out that inequality is growing in India too. While the richest 10% get about 30% of income in India, the poorest 40% get just about 20% of income. ‘If India stops inequality from rising, it could end extreme poverty for 90 million people by 2019. If it goes further and reduces inequality by 36%, it could virtually eliminate extreme poverty,’ the report says. Oxfam has calculated that a tax of just 1.5% on the wealth of the world’s billionaires, if implemented directly after the recent financial crisis, could have saved 23 million lives in the poorest 49 countries by providing them with money to invest in health care.

The number of billionaires and their combined wealth has increased so rapidly that in 2014 a tax of 1.5% could fill the annual gaps in funding needed to get every child into school and deliver health services in

those poorest countries. Disputing the popular perceptions that ‘inequality is somehow inevitable, or is a necessary consequence of globalization and technological progress’ the report asserts that two powerful economic and political drivers are the cause of present inequality—market fundamentalism and the capture of power by economic elites.’ (The quotes that appears in pp. 6-7) are cited by the Times Insight Group entitled ‘Wealth of 85 tycoons equals poorest half, says Oxfam’ in TOI, November 1, 2014, p.20).

Inequality is widening and more and more people are pushed to different forms of sufferings. It is the right time to invoke equality as one of the most cardinal principles so that the benefits of progress, growth and prosperity shall reach all. Everyone contributes to the growth and progress of nation. But a small minority continues to enjoy the contributions of many and so their comforts are at the expense of others. Everyone has the right to live and lead quality life. But some enjoy super-quality life, while many suffer and struggle for basic necessities of life.

The economic policies of UPA 1& 11 and the present NDA are propelled by free-market economic doctrine and thus in line with crony capitalists. The election campaigns are funded by the industrialists and it involves thousands of crores. Why should they fund and what are their motifs? The data that are presented through the pages clearly portrays the returns for the money invested. The inequality that is growing across is appalling and mind-boggling. This is how the political and industrial establishments control the lives and livelihoods of people. The nexus in recent times is apparent and open. It raises basic ethical questions and moral issues. The value premises on which business and polis premised are gradually ebbing out. Although there are overarching governing normative principles they are kept aside. As thinking and informed people we need invoke these for the sake of equality and fairness as again inequity and inequality.

Looming Problems a Framework for Reflection and Action

Sexuality

- The definition of one's sexual interest towards members of the same, opposite, or both sexes, especially a direction seem to be directed by physiologic, rather than sociologic forces that replaces sexual preference.
- 'Sexual orientation' is the preferred term when referring to an individual physical and or emotional attraction to the same, and/or opposite gender. 'Gay', 'lesbian', 'bisexual' and 'straight' are all sexual orientation.
- A person's sexual orientation is distinct from a person's gender identity and expression.

Gender Identity

The term 'gender identity,' is distinct from the term 'sexual orientation' refers to a person's innate, deeply felt psychological identification as a man, woman or some other gender, which may or may not correspond to the sex assign to them birth (listed in the bank certificate).

Gender Expression

Gender expression refers to all of the external characteristics and behaviours that are socially defined as either masculine or feminine, such as dress, grooming, mannerism, speech patterns and social interactions. Social and cultural norms can vary widely and some characteristics that may be accepted as masculine, feminine or neutral, in one culture may not be assessed similarly in another.

Transgender

Transgender—or Trans—is an umbrella terms for people whose gender identity or expression is different from those typically associated

with the sex assigned to them (e.g. the sex listed on their birth certificate). Not all people who consider themselves (or who may be considered by others as) transgender will undergo a gender transition.

Cross dresser

Cross-dressing refers to people who wear clothing and or/make up and accessories that are not traditionally associates with their biological traits. Cross dressers are come time called 'transvestites'. Many people who cross-dress are comfortable with their assigned sex and generally do not wish to change it. Cross-dressing is a form of gender expression need not be a necessary indication.

As the time go by, as the epochs of history keep changing sexual and social taboos are changing and in the process some tends to disappear. Sexual practices, rigid conditions and strict taboos are disappearing which were some time ago considered as impossible even a couple of decades ago. For instance, the courts in the United States and India have decreed the transgendered persons have the same equal rights as that of males and females. In the United States despite the conservatives Christians in majority and a powerful force the Supreme Court of the USA has upheld gay marriage as a fundamental right. The judgment by the Supreme Court has reverted, many state laws banning same-sex marriages. A few decades ago, homosexuality in the US was illegal. Even oral sex was defined as sodomy and carried a stiff jail sentence. All those taboos have gone.

In India, Delhi high court decreed that gay marriage was a fundamental right. But the Supreme Court later overruled that judgment, saying that only the Parliament can revoke the law against homosexuality, not the courts. But the pressure for legalization will continue in India, and certainly one day those who are struggling and fighting for it would succeed. It is also envisaged that polygamy will be the next taboo to go. If consensual sex between adults is not a problem for a couple, what is

wrong with those who come together in threes and fours coming together for sex? What is sacred about a pair anyway?

Monogamy historically has not been universal. Pagan and animistic tribes had both polygamy (multiple wives) and polyandry (multiple husbands). Muslims could have four wives and Hindus too can have many wives. Amongst some tribes polyandry still exists although illegal. If polyandry is legalized, some would call it regressive because we are going back to old tradition, and not a new social norm. To an extent it is partly true of transgender recognition as hijras always have a defined space in India, with Shikhandi playing a prominent role in the Mahabharata. Gay marriage is not really new either. Nevertheless some anthropologists have uncovered same-sex-marriage in some ancient cultures.

As the civilizations and societies move on and changes happen at drastic levels the take-off to different tangents having different roots. The new mores flow not from the traditions of old but from the concept of individual human rights which did not exist earlier. The rise of human rights flowed from the Glorious Revolution in England, the European Enlightenment, and the American and French revolutions. Initially it was ambiguous and hypocritical. The first American and French revolutions could not totally eradicate all the evils especially the women were not allowed to vote till the 20th Century. But the logic of individual rolled on and gradually aroused the consciousness of women though the decades. As the decades passed on people had to do away with the old political and social institutions as their consciousness started revolutionizing.

When it comes to male-female relationships, adultery was once punishable by death and divorce was an impossible proposition, but today divorce is not a big hustle and a difficult proposition. Today many children are born outside the conventional wedlock and are not called by derogatory names. Nonetheless it does not subscribe to the individual rights automatically leading to polygamy. Historically polygamy was considered as male dominance with the perpetuation of patriarchy so

that women are kept under subjugation and control. It is a case of gender oppression, not individual rights. Whereas consensual relations between adults is a hallmark of freedom, but traditional societies subscribing to patriarchy practiced strict domination over women and offered no real freedom of choice to women, so any consensus was forced.

Theatrically, it is hoped that as the time move by gender discrimination of all sorts would fade away and all male-female action would eventually become voluntary and consensual. If a situation arises, voluntary polygamy or polyandry may seem a genuine human right. In recent times we come across unmarried men have two or three mistresses and the affairs go on without any coercion or friction. Since society does not criminalize polygamous relations outside marriage, would the society accept or reject polygamous marriage? The answer is No for the present because male domination and patriarchy exists at alarming levels and therefore any movement that attempts to legalize polygamy would perhaps be condemned and scuttled the moves of the male chauvinists as a licence for oppression and domination. So the type of actions further opens up questions such as: Is it progressive or regressive and how do we look at the moves within the frames of human rights?

Does the same yardstick apply to polyandry? If a woman takes on multiple male lovers in a male-dominated society, if that relationship is consensual it would be considered not a form of gender oppression. It would become a problem only if non-consensual that too if the multiplicity of relations is kept secret. Polyandrous women face all sorts of problems and opposition and hostility of traditional patriarchal oppressive society and certainly there won't be any support offered to them in favour of them. Those who subscribe to that view can legitimately agitate or fight for polyandry as a civil right, following in the footsteps of gay and transgender rights. However, there won't be enough polyan-

drists in the foreseeable future to start a movement for legal recognition. As of now this issue remains highly theoretical.

Nevertheless, it is hoped and predicted by social analysts and cultural anthropologists that polygamy will be the next taboo to go. As the society progress some of these constructions such as polygamy and polyandry as the generations move on would certainly finds its way out. Sexual identity is now the trend and the present generation want to disclose their identity in clear terms. If we look around us each one of us probably nurses a secret—some fairly innocuous, some deep, others dark. Hidden under layers of clothes or between or within the books or book shelves or at the back of drawers full of papers, there may be letters that were never thrown away, a lost trinket, a scrap of cloth, a faded flower—reminders of that secret. Secrets of people especially when it comes to sexuality are of the intensely private, cloistered world of gay men in India. Those having different sexual orientation tinged with perturbation of discovering his different sexuality in a country where homosexuality has always been acknowledged to exist but rarely declared openly.

Many adolescents and grown up men in India push their sexuality underneath the carpet, agrees to their parents' wishes that they should marry, split up with their lovers have obviously difficult relations with their wives initially, but settles down to amicable co-existence and have sons they love. When it comes to their sons' sexuality their parents would not like to be probed further. Homosexuality does not often figure in conversation or Indian literature in English or regional languages. The complex issues of attitudes towards homosexuality, in a way the thread running through in clandestine ways and often through various encounters in some familial settings.

A boy's senses comes open by an encounter with or outside; discovering of her husband's sexuality and her reaction; finding out her husband's former lover when she meets him for the first time; sons' browsing on gay internet sites and their distressful and frequent engagement at

a gay party in the city. The pretensions of Don't Let Them Know are in the gentle, sensitive laying out of some difficult situations that life throws up where practicalities clash with traditions. Those young adults (sons) caught up with these issues are in dilemmas and do not want their parents to know or take their parents to places where they live.

India's Stance of LGBT Rights

The US Supreme Court has made marriage legal for gay and lesbian couples in all the 50 states. The victory was a victory for the GLBT movement and for the Obama administration. President Obama's personal support for same-sex marriage has resonated across the living rooms of America. He overcame many political, religious and personal barriers to demonstrate his support. As he contested for re-election, Obama offered support for same sex marriage, but personally while reflecting on it he might have faced serious problem and yet supported GLBT rights in general. However, data shows that higher numbers support rights for GLBT people.

In past two decades the rights of sexual minorities have moved at lightning speed through democracies in the world. Recently, a predominantly Catholic Ireland voted to approve same-sex marriage. In doing so, Ireland joins other members of the European Union (EU). Democracies in the developing world including Argentina, Brazil and South Africa protect the human rights of GLBT people. India may be the biggest democracy in the world but its stance on GLBT rights makes it ambiguous and not encouraging. Those who are for GLBT rights were in a state of shock and dismay in December 2013, when the Supreme Court of India upheld Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that criminalises homosexuality 'as against the order of nature'. Reacting to it, former Law Commission chairman Justice A.P. Shan, who as chief justice of Delhi High Court delivered the landmark judgment decriminalizing

homosexuality by reading down Section 377 of IPC, has slammed the Supreme Court for reviving the controversial penal provisions by quashing the High Court verdict.

Speaking for the first time on the issue, Justice Shah told TOI that the apex court had erred in entertaining petitions from various religious organizations and in overturning the HC verdict. 'It is very difficult to get consensus from the political class. So it really should be done by the court in this case.' Justice Shah said, adding that the High Court verdict was widely accepted by all sections of society and he saw no reason why the apex court could not have been more affirmative.

'What happened after the Delhi HC judgment? The then law minister said the judgment was a 'brave' judgment, and the government itself decided not to appeal,' Justice Shah said. The government made no effort after the apex court verdict to bring amendments in the law decriminalizing homosexuality. The former Delhi HC chief justice said it was difficult 'to turn the clock back' and hoped that curative petition pending in the apex court may have some effect. The curative petition is the last judicial resort available to petition seeking review of an SC verdict, though it has been pending in the apex court since April 2014.

The Delhi HC had, in a 2009 judgment, held that a person could not be discriminated on the basis of sexual orientation and the penal provision violated the fundamental rights of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) community and was unconstitutional. In its judgment, a bench of Justices Shah and S. Muralidhar had decriminalized homosexual acts between two consenting adults in private.

Historically this law originated in the mores and imperatives of a colonising Britain and upright Victorian morality. It is also a reflection of ultra-right-wing moralists belonging to regressive mind-sets and perverse culturists who have occupied important positions in the institutions of governance. For the millions of GLBT India it was a set-back and certainly in the years to come the reality has to be faced with.

India needs to move on from regressive laws to progressive resources to fight discriminatory policies. Unfortunately, sexuality remains a difficult subject-matter to talk about. It is considered as a taboo in most parts of India, and these even spills over to GLBT. This is understandable given the passing over of the Victorian sexual mores and religious opposition and the infiltration of archaic perverse mind-sets in places of governance. The silence on sexuality needs to be broken. To an extent it has been broken but the recent episodes that reflects pathological sexual violence in India side tracts or even dilutes the main issue.

Elaborate justification and reification that rationalises the rigid sexual and gendered roles interpreted by some religious and political leadership offer citing Indian scriptures are absurd and bizarre. Some ultra-Christian fundamentalist influenced by the concocted rationales in fundamentalist conservative-Evangelical America to subjugate gender and sexual rights in the name of God.

Lessons to be Learnt from Ireland

This year (2015) referendum saw the Irish become the first national electorate in the world to legalise same-sex marriage. In other countries, marriage equality has come about through acts of parliament or through the courts. In Ireland significantly, it has been through the ballot box, which will have far reaching consequences in the years to come. The results were unexpected in a predominantly Roman Catholic country and yet all the major Irish political parties were in support of equality. A broad spectrum of people across the society campaigned for it. Former president Mary McAleese, a devout Catholic deeply respected by older voters, spoke movingly about the experience of her son who is gay and stated that she would be voting for equality.

Top personalities and celebrities shared important testimonies of the discrimination suffered by Irish gay people in the past crystallising and

emphasising in the debates: ‘Are we going to say to our own people that they aren’t equal?’ Along with this issue, surrogate pregnancy which was illegal in Ireland was dragged into the debate and in the process given clarity that it ought to be considered in line with human reproduction and adoption law. The campaigners in their posters added with a slogans ‘Children deserve a mother and father’ and ‘A mother’s love is irreplaceable’. Interestingly, the Catholic hierarchy’s position was two-track, to say the least, ‘Offensive language’ was not to be used about gay people’ the bishops said. At the same time, gay marriage was ‘a radical departure from human nature.’

For Irish LGBT people, the victory is an immense relief. More widely, it has radically altered the dynamic between the gay and straight communities. This is a victory for humane citizenship and societal empathy. This would set the trend for the future societal changes. The voters voted in big numbers which shows that parochial interpretations and conservative thinking should go as the society is becoming hugely diverse. However, the country remains far from a liberal utopia—abortion is still illegal in all but the rarest of circumstances. The people of Ireland feel that it was deeply moving moment of liberation and hope.

Another classic case is till recently in the United States the Boy Scout association banned gay men from being scout leaders. Now the organizers have voted by 79 per cent to lift the ban. Scoutmasters, who declare to be gay, are to be integrated. The lifting of the ban has caused some dissension. The Church of the Latter Day Saints, the Mormons, who finance and run more scout troops than any other denomination, says it will now have to consider its position. They have declared: ‘the admission of openly gay leaders is inconsistent with the doctrines of the church and what have traditionally been the values of the boy scouts.’ The US Mormon objection has the element of confusing or confounding gay people with paedophiles. This is a pernicious conflation and, though the Mormons are not alone, they ought to be challenged on it.

The religious or specifically Christian objection to homosexuality has cast a shadow over British politics. In the UK election in which the Conservative Party won a majority, the Liberal Democrats, a party that shared power in the recent coalition government lost over 40 of their seats and were decimated to eight. Nick Clegg, their leader who had presided over the debacle, resigned. Tim Farron, the new Lib-Dem leader professes himself a devout evangelical Christian. As such he follows the teachings or directives of the Protestant interpretations of the Bible, which are strongly against homosexuality and very much against gay marriage.

Pope Francis, in his Jesuitical wisdom, speaking for the Catholic Church, when asked if homosexuality was a sin said he left it to God to decide. 'Who am I to judge' was his counter question? In recent times, Farron is persistently asked the same question. His interviewers on every TV channel and from the newspapers prompter press him to declare that he thinks homosexuality is a sin. He cannot declare his real position, whether homosexuality is a sin or not. The Lib-Dems would cease to exist as a party if their leader wanted to or attempted to steer their policy towards condemning gay marriage or gay civil rights of any sort. It is like RSS or BJP declaring that he or she was in favour of conversions to Islam or Christianity.

Politicians, church leaders, ultra-rightists and the liberals willingly state their positions on many other things and certainly not on this. In India the church leaders say about the issue of gay as 'non-issue'. Unless and until the 'gay' issue is brought within 'enlightened' view on human rights, the scope of discourse may not be logical and prudent. However, the state should have no jurisdiction over the sexual preferences of consenting adults. Neither of them be deprived of any human rights on the grounds of their sexuality. The Supreme Court of India placed Section 377 which bans homosexuality on the statute book overruling the Delhi

High court's judgment that Section 377, a Victorian law, was unconstitutional.

The Supreme Court may be technically right but it is now the Prime Minister Modi to decide. He cannot and should not invoke any religious doctrine and extrapolate, but the decision will have to be rational and logical. Can we expect from PM Modi who subscribes to RSS ideology and Hindutva politics. Consenting male gays are no threat to any individual or as the West has realised, to the supposed moral fabric of the nation. The state, its organs, institutions of governance and mechanisms should work assiduously towards the life-affirming means and forms.

Wombs on Rent

Thousands and millions of infertile couples want to have children and what is the way out. Medical science has opened up a possibility of having children through surrogacy. And those infertile couples are opting for it so that they could also become parents. For surrogacy the demand is soaring up. India's surrogacy industry is pegged at upwards of \$2 billion. Unfortunately, it has a seamy underbelly. A study of Delhi's infertility clinics by Delhi University, Jawaharlal Nehru University and Denmark's Aarhus University have found that doctors often implant a surrogate moth with multiple embryos—in one case as many as seven—to ensure better success rates.

The fact that this poses serious risks to the surrogate is ignored. The impoverished, illiterate and desperate women usually rent out their wombs for money are not informed or adequately warned about the risks involved. Those who agree for surrogacy are paid ranging between Rs. 2 and Rs. 3 laths. However there are instances where the promises have been kept. The vicious exploitation of surrogates continues to grow. India is one of the few countries in the world that allows commercial

surrogacy. It is an irony that there are no laws to govern commercial surrogacy. Since there are no laws to oversee the practices of surrogacy women especially those who want to rent their wombs gets cheated and exploited.

Presently the monitoring agency is a very loose knit organisation functioning with some general guidelines evolved by the Indian Council of Medical Research. However, a comprehensive Assisted Reproductive Technologies (Regulation) Bill is in the Parliament since 2010. It provides a range of medical, legal and financial safeguards to women who act as surrogates. It also contains measures to regulate fertility clinics, sperm banks and indeed, the entire apparatus of assisted reproductive technology in the country.

All these measures would become effective only when the bill is passed in the parliament. Undoubtedly surrogacy is break through in the medical sciences and also a technological marvel. Nonetheless there are some serious ethical issues involved. Many say that thousands of poor women who see this as a legitimate way of earning some solid money. They further contend that it benefits the would-be parents. And yet there are serious question that need to be addressed. In the ultimate analysis, we should regulate surrogacy to stop medical exploitation of poor women.

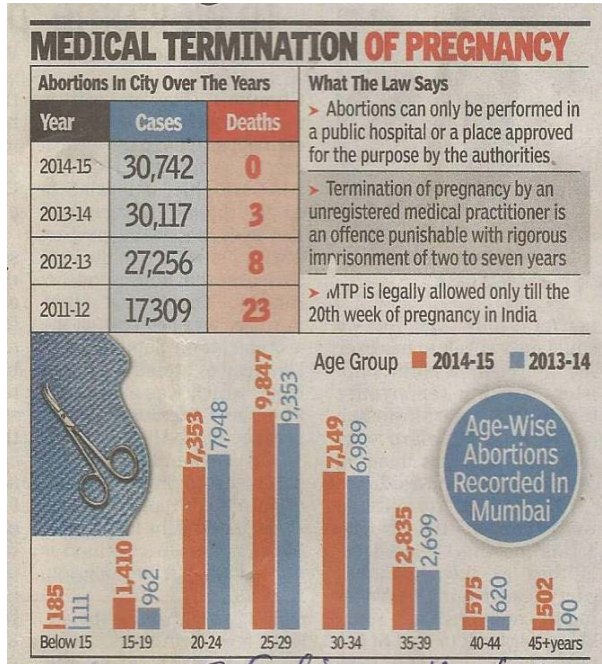
Abortion

There has been a rise in abortions among teenage girls below the age of 15 in India. For example, Mumbai have recorded an alarming 67 per cent in 2014–15. Civic data accessed through in RTI further shows that out of nearly 31,000 women who opted for medical termination of pregnancy 1,600 were below the age of 19. Health experts have called the trend of unwanted pregnancies alarming, suggesting the need for better sex education in schools and junior colleges. The BMC data, collated

from all licensed Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) centres in city, shows that in 2013-14 around 111 girls below the age of 15 had undergone an abortion. The number has risen to 185 in 2014-15. Even for the age bracket of 15-19, there has been a 47% jump when compared with the previous year.

Interestingly, Andheri east and west emerged as the abortion centres reporting nearly 6,000 cases. Civic officials have attributed the increase to better and more accurate reporting. Social and health experts however, say that the trend reflects the dire need for sex education, while also hinting at the possibility of young girls being exploited as well as the prevalence of under marriage in the Indian society. A senior doctor from a civic hospital said, 'Teenage pregnancies are becoming common, though most prefer to get it done in private ups for privacy issues.'

Dr. Suchitra Pandit gynaecologist and former president of Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecological societies of India said 'What is worrisome is these girls are just out of school. On one hand, we have more and more young girls walking up to doctors and asking for contraceptives and on the other we have these statistics.' Adding further she said reasons are manifold, from curiosity to exploitation to plain ignorance about safe sex.



Source: The Times of India, May 15, 2015, p.7.

Transgender—Blessing or Curse

India is known for its cultural plurality and accommodation. For centuries it has been celebrating rich cultural tradition around and accommodative of different people with diverse sexual orientations and attitudes. Take for instance eunuchs who were looked after in harems during Muslim times. They (colloquially called as hijras) not only danced then but even now dance at birth and also active providers of sexual pleasure to those who beseech them. Their presence adds a variety /dimension to the sex industry. It has been found out that most of the hijras were not castrated males at all. They were called as crypt orchids: born as males their testicles got trapped and crushed before puberty in their bone structure resulting in the production of both male and female

hormones as they grow. A simple operation to release the testicles would ensure that they grow as males, but in certain societies the condition was not identified and dealt with.

Hijaras are more prevalent India than other parts of the world and it is determined by culture and politics around it. Presently they are called as transgender. There is a growing awareness amongst all and they belonging to transgender category are now claiming their rights and dignity in society. Some in the Indian society look at them as 'untouchables', 'sinned' and as if 'abnormal'. Since most of the parents are ignorant of the tendencies with curiosity observe their movements and become anxious of their children when they see not at all competitive and creative and so out of desperation attribute their lack of performance to psychological condition which could perhaps absolve them from other forms of educational oversight or neglect in the upbringing.

Further, the parental anxiety over the performance or behaviour of their infant children becomes curious. Since we do not have psychiatric service or counselling facility for children with 'transgender 'tendencies' parents are forced to get involved in unscientific and crude practices just to tide over what they consider as 'problem'. Usually parents gets perplexed when their sons show the feminine tendencies such as playing with dolls, some kind of likings for the frocks and girls attires and so on and come to a conclusion that their children was born in the wrong body. Based on this assumption they go all out surgically mutilating it.

Some parents have taken decision and those who are at the verge of taking decision to change the sex of the boy/girl at the age of five should realise that he could not have had the discretion or experience to think and act on his own. If an individual after the age of maturity say 18 or 21, decides about sex change, it is entirely up to him/her based on psychological and medical advisers. In most cases the surgeons who carried out the gender transformation acted legally failing which they should be prosecuted for violating the rights of the child.

If five year plus boys wearing girls clothes, high-heeled shoes, and toddling about in them or imitating the females of the household by sitting before a mirror and smearing my mouth with lipstick or playing with girls all the time with dolls, it does not mean they have the feminine tendency and immediately refer them to transgender adviser or have their penis amputated. The idea that little children should be in years in which they are forming their personalities and proclivities, characterised as having gender confusions is as pernicious as the quack doctors say and fake religious maniacs utter that they can ‘cure’ who are gay.\

Dowry

The recent announcement by the ministry of home affairs that the government is planning to dilute the provisions of the Indian Penal Code’s Section498A due to its alleged misuse has alarmed many women across the spectrum. They are perplexed and worried because such a move would be detrimental to women, as this is the only criminal provision to ensure their safety. This section seem to have protected many women who happened to be the victims of dowry and repealing it would have adverse effects as this is the only criminal provision to ensure their safety. Though the popular project of this section is that it is an anti-dowry law, the reality is that the section was introduced to safeguard woman who are subjected to grave physical or mental cruelty for whatever reasons.

Sec. 498A clearly states that its objective is ‘to deal effectively not only with cases of dowry deaths but also cases of cruelty to married women by the husband, in-laws and relatives’. Surprisingly those who are for the repeal base the entire discussion about its misuse of the dowry act and hardly any attention being paid to the physical or mental violence that women face every day. United Nations data reveal that one in

every three married woman in India is a victim of domestic violence. For example, in Mumbai the total number of cases registered in 2014 under Sec. 498 A was a miniscule 524. In the same year, 113 women were either murdered or committed suicide in the homes where they went after marriage.

The irony is that in most cases of domestic violence, women who approach the police are driven away. In cases of extreme brutality, with severe injuries, at best a non-cognisable complaint is recorded. Instead of providing protection to the woman the couple is sent for 'joint counselling', which in most cases amount to reconciliation on husband's terms. No norms or guidelines are followed and 'save the marriage' appears to be the motto, even at the cost of the woman's safety and dignity. As against such a pathetic condition, how did the 524 women succeed in registering their complaints? For this question a police officer explained: 'They came to use with their lawyers, or referrals from higher officers, a politician or an influential community leader, and 'force' us to lodge a complaint.' Many women do not the influence or economic power and thus fail to exert such 'pressure' obviously fall out.

Whatever the severity and intensity of violence, women seldom go to the police stations and register complaints. The power of money and influence of those involved in dowry and the nexus between police and criminal lawyers do play the most vital role in the entire process. Two main contentious issues that seem to be misused under Section 498A are lodging of 'false' cases and 'arbitrary' arrests. However, there are a number of Supreme Court guidelines to curb both. More importantly, registering an FIR and arrest are not synonymous. Further the police have the final option of not filing a charge sheet and closing a case by filing a closure report before the magistrate. Nonetheless, 93.6 per cent of cases registered, under Section 498A, after investigating the offence, the police filed charge sheets, which indicates that investigations revealed that the complaints were genuine.

For a case to be categorized as a ‘false case’, it should go through a full-length trial and the judgment must contain a clear indictment against the complainant and criminal proceedings need to be initiated against such persons. The fact is that many reported cases get ‘settled’ due to a compromise arrived at between parties, or in divorce proceedings. This does not make the case ‘false’. All criminal cases have very low conviction rates as they have to be proved ‘beyond reasonable doubt’. Women happened to be victims of all sorts and in all facets and in this too they are blamed for misusing the section by registering false cases which to a large extent false. To blame women for corruption within the police is adding rubbing salt to bruises.

Euthanasia: Between Life Support and Death

By and large there seems to be some kind of fear of dying when someone we know hooked to machines especially a ventilator. Aruna Shanbaug, the young nurse who was raped and gagged with a dog chain that left her in a coma for 42 years and made her the face of a debate on euthanasia in India, died bringing to an end one of the most tragic journeys of a victims of sexual assault. Aruna Shanbaug, who was in a vegetative-state for 42 years, was put on a ventilator in her last days. As the KEM nurses toiled to keep her alive, a journalist Pinki Virani moved the Supreme Court with a euthanasia plea to put an end to her suffering and agony in January, 2011. Accordingly, the Supreme Court set up a medical panel to examine her. While turning down the plea of mercy killing on March 7, 2011, the apex court, however, allowed ‘passive euthanasia’ of withdrawing life support to patients in permanently vegetative state. It rejected out rightly active euthanasia of ending life through administration of lethal substances. Refusing to grant permission for mercy killing of Aruna, the court had laid down a set of tough guidelines under which

passive euthanasia can be legalized through a high court monitored mechanism.

Dr.R.K. Mani calls it the 'ultimate outrage'. Some kept raising questions such as: Why should she undergo such suffering on her and not let her die in peace? When a decision was made, have we applied the ethics and rationality of artificial life support when treatment is futile? In the US, the first Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order was written in 1973 and by 1988, it had been codified as law. And they did not call it 'euthanasia'. We might have advanced in curative treatment, but we are 40 years behind the developed world in end of life (EOLC),' says Mani. Euthanasia supporters reminded people of the country about the need for more compassionate laws. The support say euthanasia would have reduced suffering of victims like Aruna. 'If euthanasia were legal in India, Aruna Shanbaug would have been rid of the physical pain she went through for so long.

Life-support treatment requires a plethora of machines, tubes and medication, not just ventilators. Yet ventilators have become the focus of any EOLC discussion, with a general notion that people are forced onto ventilators by hospitals driven by greed. Quoting western studies, Dr. Aniruddha Malpani, who runs a patient education program in Mumbai, said, 'Around 40% of the patient's total medical expenditure is incurred in the last seven days of life. Yet neither the patient's relatives nor doctors will want to discuss the futility of putting severely ill patients on life support. Most relatives do not want to be haunted by the thought that they did not do enough for the patient even if it means their loved one dying in a sterile ICU hooked up machines.

The question is: Can a patient forgo intervention? The doctors cannot force a surgery, not even a life-saving one. This is what the law says so. But it does not seem to apply to life-support. Mani while responding to it adds 'This respect for choice—which is not construed as the patient attempting suicide—ought to apply to EOLC, where a person or his

family is allowed to choose or reject a particular treatment mode or intervention.’. Doctors could counsel extensively but should not act on the wishes of the patient or family since the law seem to be quite ambiguous and therefore the physicians tend to be apprehensive. On this, Dr. Shivakumar Iyer, president of the Indian Society of Critical Care Medicine (ISCCM) add that even the guidelines drawn up by ISCCM along with the Indian Association of Palliative Care are based on factors such as comfort, needs, and universal ethical principles. ISCCM is involved in special training for doctors to create awareness on EOLC decisions to families and in weighing a range of factors, particularly the patients going beyond clinical parameters.

In general the critical care specialists say that the decisions are to be taken in conjunction with the patient if possible or with the family that does not require court intervention as suggested by the Supreme Court in the Aruna Shanbaug judgment. A senior critical care specialist suggests: ‘Thousands die every day in ICUs. Can doctors be running to court every time? The organ transplant act allows a team of doctors to declare brain death and in conjunction with the patient’s family, get consent to harvest organs and withdraw life support. A similar clear legislation is required to allow a team of doctors to decide on futility of care and EOLC decisions in consultation with the family.’ ‘

Further, hospitals or doctors hardly could prevent a patient’s family from discontinuing treatment taking the patient home. It is called LEFT Against Medical Advice (LAMA). On this an intensivist points out that ‘The family does not take the court’s permission to do it. So, to assume that families cannot be allowed to take EOLC decisions as their intentions could be suspect makes no sense. Even if they have male fide intentions, they can discontinue treatment and take the patient home to die. In the supposed to be the ‘landmark’ judgment allowed ‘passive euthanasia’, no one has appealed for this option. In candid way Mani asks:

'Thousands of people might have wanted to forego life support treatment but the process laid down by the court is unwieldy and the unworkable. Of what use is a law that cannot facilitate, but only hinder, appropriate care of the dying?'

However many say that there is nothing passive about euthanasia. Currently, euthanasia defined as the administration of a legal drug by a physician as an act of mercy at the patient's request, is an option in only Netherlands, Switzerland and in Oregon in the US. What is allowed by law in India following Aruna Shanbaug judgment of the Supreme Court is 'passive euthanasia'. It is an obsolete term because euthanasia is a scientific act and there can be nothing passive about it, say doctors. The Indian Society of Critical Care Medicine and the Indian Association of Palliative Care and the Indian Association of Palliative Care have drawn up a detailed end of life care policy after studying guidelines from across the world. It is meant for patients dying with an advanced life-limiting illness. It lists procedural guidelines to limit inappropriate therapeutic medical interventions and to improve the quality of care of the dying within an ethical framework and though a consensus involving doctors and family/patient. Nonetheless, the foregoing or withdrawal of the life support is still done 'discreetly' and is a privilege available to a few who can reach a medical centre with doctors sensitive to the needs of patients and their families.

There are many who would like employ euthanasia for varied reasons. However, legalising euthanasia cannot be visualised in the near future. Some have fears that it could be misused and so stringent measures will have to be enforced. However, how long the judiciary of our country have to turn a blind eye to the problems of terminally ill patients and force them into the dungeon. Dr. Sulakshana of Vikram Hospital said 'The Indian law does not come to the help of terminally ill patients seeking euthanasia though there are legal guidelines in foreign countries.' 'More often, the decision to opt for euthanasia varies from

case-to-case and a final decision is taken depending upon the physical condition of the patient,' she adds.

Elaborating on this she adds 'We don't generalise or apply the same rule to all terminally ill patients. A patient or his family members' decision to opt for euthanasia also depends on monetary and emotional conditions. Of course, other factors like sentiments, moral beliefs and society concerns also matter.' Although euthanasia can put an end to the suffering of long-term 'no cure' illnesses, the debate on the right to one's life and death is subjective. However, there two positions continue to dominate. Dr. Ajit Benedict, Vice-President, Hosmat Hospital says, 'Euthanasia is not accepted as it does not seem to be a part of the Indian culture. Many feel it's something close to committing a murder.' While Dr. Sulakshana of Vikran Hospital views, 'Though there are legal guidelines in foreign countries concerning euthanasia, the law in India does not help the patients who are terminally ill to take the extreme step. Also, deciding to go for euthanasia depends on multiple factors like emotional and financial reasons.'

Meanwhile, in other countries such as the Netherlands issued rules for passive or involuntary euthanasia called Groningen guidelines in 2004. Rules were expanded in 2006 after reports that doctors were killing new-borns if found ill. Netherlands was the first country to pass such guidelines. In the United Kingdom the bill on euthanasia was rejected by the House of Commons in 2004 and House of Lords in 2007. In Switzerland Article 115 of the penal code does not consider assisting suicide for an honourable motive illegal. Lethal drugs can be taken with assistance. Germany in June 2010, Federal Court allowed passive euthanasia with the applicant's consent. France under the end of life law of 2009, doctors are advised not to take extreme measures to keep dying or brain dead patients alive.

When we read the landmark judgement in 2011, the Supreme Court issued guidelines that passive euthanasia could be allowed under assisted conditions in India. So, how different is passive euthanasia from active euthanasia? In passive euthanasia life-support and treatment or nutrition that would allow a person to live is withdrawn, whereas, in active euthanasia, lethal injection to snuff out life is administered. While issuing guidelines, the SC observed that when a patient seeks permission for euthanasia, certain conditions must be met. The Chief Justice of a High Court in a statement creates a bench of at least two judges to reach a decision. The bench must nominate three reputed doctors and a copy of the doctor's panel report must be provided to the next of kin and the state government. When these procedures are followed, only then can a verdict be reached, the apex court observed.

Though passive euthanasia has got a legal nod, our culture does not permit us to accept euthanasia, says Dr. Ajit Benedict, vice president of Hosmat Hospital. 'We still think choosing euthanasia is something close to committing a murder. Though a patient is suffering, many would not like to decide that euthanasia could be the solution. As for the patient's point of view, if a person is in vegetative state then he or she may not feel any pain or suffering. Hence, the question of suffering does not arise at all,' he added.

Childhood and Children

The present and future of any society will be good as the way it treats and nurtures its children today. In different forums both the national and international this topic has been widely covered and discussed. Sociologists, economists and political scientists as well as leaders of many countries emphasised this concern repeatedly. Given the pace of socio-economic development that the leaders of our country envisage it is imperative to proportionately augment budgetary allocations to ensure

the overall development of our children and ensure their protection. The policy makers and bureaucrats are also responsible in this endeavour. More importantly it becomes an added responsibility for the parliament to address the issues that confront our children.

Child Labour

The number of child labourers in India varies from 50 lakh to 5 crore in different estimates. The worst travesty is the fact that there are almost equal numbers of adults who are unemployed. It is also shocking that these unemployed adults are the very parents of these child labourers. Is it not a bad portrayal of our country and society? Child labourers are deprived of their fundamental rights—many of them being victims of trafficking, prostitution, forced beggary, illiteracy and subjected to the worst forms of exploitation. In the formative years they are deprived of parental love and education and then they drift into a vicious circle of illiteracy and poverty.

Child labour is an important concern that should be addressed immediately. The Parliament is yet to amend and pass child labour bill and bring the law on child labour which is more progressive and contextual along with a perpetual neglect in appropriate budgetary allocations for the welfare of our children. It shows the political apathy on the part of our lawmakers that the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Bill has been waiting to be taken up in Parliament since 2012. The law makers continue to neglect it despite the pressure put forth by many organizations because child labour encompasses economic, social, psychological rehabilitation and reintegration of children who fall with the ambit of law.

According to Census 2011, 41 per cent of Indian's population is under 18. Yet only 4.5 per cent of the total budget is earmarked for children. Expenditure on education was just 3.3 per cent of GDP in 2013-14.

With 1.4 million children between the ages of 6 and 11 still out of school in India, an increase in education's budgetary allocation and expenditure is a must. While the total Union Budget went up by 7.78 per cent in 2014-15, the budget for children increased by a mere 4.97 per cent. Cumulatively, average budgetary allocation for child protection related schemes was just about 1 per cent. Needless to mention, this allocation is utterly inadequate and is bound to jeopardise the very objective of sustainable development for children.

Both education and health receives no attention and the allocations to these sectors have been dismal. Half of the children in India are chronically malnourished and around 43 per cent children under 5 years are underweight for their age. In spite of the National Nutrition Mission there has been no change in allocation. India has a large number of working children. It is an irony that it has only one scheme that addresses child labour—National Child Labour Project Scheme that continuously witnessing a decrease of 12.5 per cent in allocation. It becomes an important prerogative and obligation to give children in need of care and protection a safe life by ensuring adequate fiscal treatment. It is high time India passes the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Bill and it must also increase budgetary allocation for the development and protection of our children.

Crimes against Children

Crimes against children are on the rise in recent times. A comparative analysis of NCRB data in 2010 and 2014 by CRY, an NGO working for children's rights, reveals a scary scenario with crimes committed on children witnessing a rise in the southern India. Shockingly Karnataka is among the five states in the country with highest incidence of child murder, with 87 murders in the year 2014. In addition, the number of registered cases of rapes committed against children in Karnataka have in-

creased manifold from 108 cases in 2010 to 694 cases in 2014. This is an increase of 542 per cent over the last 5 years. In fact, the total number of crimes against children in Karnataka in 2010 was 409 and in 2014 the numbers stood at a staggering 3,416—a nine fold increase in less than five years.

The chairperson of Karnataka State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR) Dr. Kripa Alva says, ‘The rising number of cases is indicative of the fact that more people are coming out and lodging FIRs’. There have been awareness campaigns that seemed to have changed the attitude of people. More and more people come and registering FIR which is compulsory for legal and judicial processes. However, the lack of social security in urban India pushing more and more people into various crimes. For instance 35 per cent of people are living in deprivation in urban India. The police is also not adequately equipped to handle this crime. They also lack technical expertise and human and financial resources.

Over and above, the rising crimes against children in general are on the rise. Experts feel it is time the state child rights’ protection committee gets more power rather than being a mere suggestive agency. National Commission of Women (NCW) chairperson Lalitha Kumaramangalam had recently pointed out that they have recommended that the government bestow some powers to these organisations as currently they are a mere commendation body and many a time when the party is serve notice, they do not turn up as there is no penalty. Dr. Kripa Alva, chairperson of Karnataka State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR) feels the same ways and says, ‘I share the same line of thought.’ However, Vasudev Sharma, who was a former member of the Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, points out, ‘The current commission ha various restrictions and they have a lot of dos and don’ts given by their parent organisation, that is, the women

and child department. They are mere puppets of the department of women and children. It is unfortunate but this is how it is and in these circumstances. I do not see them getting any more power than mere recommendations.' Voicing a similar opinion, child rights activist Nina Nayak says, 'It has been one year now and still the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights does not have a chairperson. They are supposed to be a monitoring agency. The members of this commission are mostly political appointees. Our country is part of the UN convention for child rights and they want to show that some things have been done in this direction and that is why these agencies are being set up.' Essentially crimes against children are preventable, but it calls for a comprehensive protection met that needs to be put in place.

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is about the trade of humans for the purposes of sexual slavery, forced labour or commercial sexual exploitation for the trafficker or others. An estimated \$31 billion of international per annum was involved in the year 2010. It must have doubled or tripled by now. It is one of the fastest growing activities of transnational criminal organization. In India, the trafficking is for commercial sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced marriages and domestic servitude is considered as organized crime.

It is an irony that the crime of human trafficking continues in India. It is a multi-billion racket that thrives on poverty and desperation of the most vulnerable sections of society. It is the illiterate and unemployed become easy targets. Particularly, it is children who are the victims and the most affected. Children are abducted and pushed into prostitution, beggary and bonded labour.

RELIGION AND TOLERANCE



SIN AND SALVATION: AN INTRIGUING FORMULA



Introduction

Sin and salvation are two-sides of a coin posing existential questions for the adherents of religion. Further, these two terms are dynamically and dialectically webbed with each other. The questions that arise are: Would the term ‘salvation’ exist without ‘sin’? Is sin a pre-requisite for salvation? Does the doctrine of ‘salvation’ acquire fuller meaning, articulation and justification due to the presence and practice of ‘sin’?

However, these two terms are widely and persuasively used in almost all the religions. The followers and the “so-called custodians” of religions are required to handle these terms carefully. Many tend to take them rather callously and thus interpret in accordance to their whims and fancies. Even those involved in exegetical and interpretative enterprises have understood and expounded these two concepts/doctrines based on their own perceptions. Even within the broader rubric of Indian Christianity we see divergences and polarizations.

Theologians from the early church to the modern period have discussed and deliberated on both the issues at length. And yet both the doctrines continue to pose diversity of understanding and perspectives. So, this paper explores the nuances and intricacies entwined in the understanding of sin and salvation and thus approach them from a perspective.

Sin as Alienation and Sins of Alienation

Over the past decades, biblical scholars have warned us... that we cannot understand the biblical message about sin and conversion unless we consider each individual writer and each book of the Old and New Testaments in its historical context. Each statement on sin has its *Sitz im Leben*. It is never abstract and timeless but is always integrated into the concrete message of salvation that calls man to conversion at a certain historical moment.¹⁹

The above quotation clearly reminds and informs us that we should never ignore the historical context of the biblical teachings on sin. Failing to interrogate history of the then context would lead our discourses on the subject tantamount to alienation from history, from life, and thus from the God of history. With our unflinching fidelity to the Bible and infallibility of the Scripture, we can speak of sin only with our yearnings on the salvation in which we are called to enter into saving-activity of God. Any discussion and theologizing about sin, its origin, essence and consequences which are professed and practiced that lead us to self-justification or to flight from reality is an alienation from God and also from our human vocation.²⁰

To talk about sin and salvation in an era of post-Christian, post-globalization and secularizing world means coming to grips with rationalism, atheism, Marxism and other such philosophies. In recent times religion has been under attack and contested on different fronts. Basic criticisms of religion are: It alienates people from real life and offers only the other-worldly solution for this-worldly problems. It has created binaries and polar opposites such as mortals vs. immortal, material vs. spiritual, hell vs. heaven and human vs. divine. Karl Marx succinctly

¹⁹ Cited by Bernard Haring in *Sin in the Secular Age*, Slough: St. Paul's Publications, 1974, p. 23.

²⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 23-24.

describes this arrangement as 'Religion is a soul of the soulless, heart of the heartless and sighs of the oppressed'. This calls for a proper understanding of sin as alienation and sins of alienation.

For those who are critical say that religion has been constructed on a set of doctrines for its adherents which represents a reaction to such other forms of alienation as unholy worldliness and equally unholy unworldliness, which is so deeply rooted in many forms of organized religion, including Christianity. It simply means the world in which we live is corrupt and exists with all sorts of sin. In such a context we need to renounce and disown the world because it begets sin and breeds sins. In view of these reasons they do not affirm the world and reject the world and look for a world 'up there' and 'out there' vis-à-vis heaven.

In such a fluid scenario Jesus intercedes: 'I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world' (Jn 17: 15-16). Jesus' prayer is we should not to be out of the world, but be kept out from the evil because we are mortals, susceptible and vulnerable to luring and tempting world. So, the concept of alienation could perhaps be a key concept for a theology of sin and a call to individual and collective salvation not only from the world of pulls and pushes, human nature of acquisitiveness, avarice and greed, and self-aggrandizements, but also from structural sins such as caste, race, patriarchy and others.

Not-knowing and knowing, believing and not-believing in God or about God is a matter of faith. Faith is again an intense and dynamic relation between the believer and the One to whom the belief is attributed. The believers tend to think that the unbelievers are alienated from not-knowing and un-knowing the existence of God. Therefore, what we observe believing and obeying go together in dialectical manner. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer rightly articulates 'the one who believes obeys and

the one who obeys believes'. This is how the dynamic and dialectical relationship swings between the believer and the One to whom the belief vests. So,

'A person's decisive moral and religious choice lies in whether or not he wants to know God more and more, and honour him who is the origin, centre and goal of our life. Today we not are interested in theoretical discussions and assertions about the existence or non-existence of God as 'a higher being' or 'prime cause' or whatever, if this has nothing to do with the ordering of man's life.'²¹

For the above quotation, Paul, in his letter to the Romans, sheds light on this theme. He emphatically asserts that those who negate the existence of God or refuse to know God leads to alienation in view of the fact that it distances and disturbs human being in their relationship to their neighbours and the world around them. If this is the crux of the matter then those who deny in the existence of God are alienated from being part of the integral human life: 'For we see divine retribution revealed from heaven and falling upon all the godless... they are stifling the truth... Thus, because they have not seen fit to acknowledge God, he has given them up to their own depraved reason. This leads them to break all rules of God. They are filled with every kind of injustice, mischief, rapacity, and malice ... They show no loyalty to parents, no conscience, no fidelity to their pledged word ... Not only so, they actually applaud such practices' (Rom 1: 18-32).

As we are aware of the fact that the epistle to the Romans presents the initial process of alienation found in the first few chapters of the book of Genesis. Being crowned as the jewel of God's creation the first humans desired to enhance their stature with an act that would give them discerning capacity between right and wrong, good and evil. In the pro-

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 27.

cess God's Sense prevailed and humans' sense faltered. The book of Genesis conveys that the alienation between God and humans started with that fall leading to grave consequences. The first fall of human in common parlance/usage is termed as 'sin' which has multiple facets. In that fall (sin) what we see is manipulation and exploitation of one another; using each other as objects, thus casting themselves as rational and intelligent humans.

Manipulation of fellow human beings manifests that alienation which begins with a refusal to honour God and to honour others who have the image and likeness of God. This is how humans and their personal relationships are disturbed by this fundamental act (sin) causing alienation. Nevertheless, the Jewish interpreters believed that Adam's glory would be restored to the righteous in the world to come. So, the structure of Genesis, from Adam to Noah (5:29; 9:1-2,7) to Abraham (12:1-3) and so on suggests that God was working to restore humanity, and from Abraham's line the deliverer of Gen 3:15 would finally come).²²

Sin, therefore, has ripped open the fragility and vulnerability of humans resulting in the alienation of him/her from neighbours, fellow human beings and the world around him/her. Hence, humans per se fall into the slavery and alienation of sinfulness. He/she becomes a temptation to neighbours and a source of alienation to his/her environ. So, anthropology and soteriology (salvation) are interlinked in the doctrine of sin. It is therefore, a common Christian teaching that God created humans in His image (*imago dei*). But the human nature filled with all sort of instincts and desires distorting that image that was given to us (6:1-4, 11:1-9).

²² See Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* New Testament, Illinois: Inter-varsity press, 1993, p. 473.

The Bible depicts this feature as sin which means failing in, falling short of, one's intention, the missing of the mark. In this sense, human beings failed because of their pride that prevented from establishing the communion with God and one another to which they are originally called. Sin could also be defined as the destruction of the totality, the break of positive relations -- indeed, of the human community—revolt against and violation of covenant, alienation between God and humankind.²³

The New Testament continues this line of thought stressing the failure to exercise love towards one's neighbour as sinful. In the final analysis, 'the Bible as a whole condemns any human approach and any mentality directed against God and humankind as sinful transgression of the boundaries and limits inherent in divine creation and human createdness.'²⁴ So, the doctrine of sin has been interpreted in numerous ways and understood differently. Out of a maze of definitions and theological articulations: 'This sin (singular) against God becomes concrete in the sins (plural) against his creatures. The alienation between God and God's creation is, however, part of the human condition, from which we cannot escape (Rom 3:23). Humankind does not just act sinfully; it is sinful.'²⁵

Having clarified about sin and sinful, Christian tradition throughout the centuries has deliberated and even now in most of the Christian traditions speak of original sin. Unless and until a broader guidelines and consensus is arrived at to the doctrine of sin in the Christian traditions particularly in India where people speak and preachers preach about the original sin in whatever ways they have understood. We need to arrive at a satisfactory understanding of the doctrine of original sin. 'This doc-

²³ For more detail See Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, Nicholas Lossky et.al, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002, p. 1039.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

trine expresses the conviction that sin, though universal, is not necessary, holding human beings, who have committed the breach of solidarity with their Creator and one another, paradoxically responsible in united solidarity of sin and guilt.²⁶ The most important aspects while defining and delineating sin are as follows:

It prevents us from misinterpreting sinfulness in moralistic terms and qualifies it is having primarily to do with human relation to God only derivatively with inter-human contacts. It asserts the idea of a free will, inherent in humankind's being created in the image and likeness of God, as the necessary prerequisite for individual and collective responsibility for sin, while at the same time claiming that human beings cannot but be sinful (Rom 7:18-19), because they fall victim to the temptation to be like God and thus lose the freedom that they were from the beginning destined to enjoy. The free will implies, negatively as it were, the possibility of distorting the likeness with our Creator into its demonic, contrast and the potential of orienting ourselves towards the idols, whom we, treacherous to God and ironically enough serve in an unending faithfulness. We commit adultery with other gods and distrust our own Creator. Thus sin can basically be understood as unbelief.²⁷

In view of our callousness, total decadence and arrogance totally depending on our intellect, free-will, uncanny discernment and erratic behaviour seem to be drifting away from our Creator. It in this context the Gospel calls us back to be in communion with God promising redemption and forgiveness of sin. This offer is made possible because

²⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 1039-1040.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

Jesus Christ who took upon himself the guilt of humankind and punished although he was innocent. Despite our fallings, failures and frailties, God remained faithful and showed solidarity with his creation, and Jesus' death on the cross brought reconciliation between God and the world. 'Christ did what human beings ought to have done—bore the divine condemnation merited by human sin—and thus through dying in their place, he won the righteousness required from them... Through faith in Jesus Christ humankind now participates in his justice... from having been instruments of and slaves to sinfulness into becoming instruments of and slaves to righteousness (Rom 6: 12-13).'²⁸

As against the backdrop Sebastian Kappan, SJ candidly articulated about sin in *Ingathering* in the year 1998: 'There is little realization even today of the havoc done to humans by the sense of sin, religions systematically and assiduously cultivate. How many millions of lives have been doomed, how many hopes frustrated, how much love smothered, how much joy turned into bitterness, how much beauty trampled underfoot by a morbid sense of sin parading as the peak of virtue.' Kappan's understanding of sin and its devastating effects sheds more light to the present times that challenges our understanding of sin.

Amidst a Maze of Understandings

'Sin is natural for man in the sense that it is universal but
Not in the sense that it is necessary.'

— Reinhold Niebuhr

A simple question but indeed crucial which is to be raised at this juncture: Is sin separate or different from neurosis, dysfunction, sickness or pathology? Whatever may be the response, this question impels us to incorporate human estrangement within contemporary religious under-

²⁸ *Ibid.*

standing of sin. However, sin is much broader concept. Sin cannot be zeroed down to a particular aspect such as psychological or physical or disease-prone or something else. Sin has always understood particularly traditionally perceived as a universal category, and not something which only a particular segment of the population experiences. Therefore, 'Sin has to do with a more generally shared human inclination.'²⁹

Psychotherapist and theologian Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger provide some stimulating suggestions for clarifying the differences between sin and sickness. For instance,

To accomplish this, she contrasts what shall the categories of 'sinner' and 'victim'. The first distinction is something we have already noted—namely, that victims of abuse and psychological disturbance represent a particular percent of the population while the concept of sin includes everyone. Psycho-pathology is accidental or a matter of unfortunate psychological conditions in our lives. Sin is part of more-general human condition. Related to this, sin involves culpability while being a victim does not; victims are innocent, sinners are not. There is a sense of personal responsibility for sin, which is not present in being a victim.³⁰

Sin is a theological category that can be discerned only by faith. It is in this context majority of the Christians tend to employ reductionist method by picking up and harping on some habituations by judging and moralizing the problems invoking passages from the Scripture. Who are we to judge? Gospel clearly warns us that nobody is perfect and every-

²⁹ A good analytical frame is provided and for more details See Terry D. Cooper and Cindy K. Epperson, *Evil—Satan, Sin & Psychology*, Bandra: St. Paul, 2010, p.67.

³⁰ *Ibid*, pp.67-68.

one is sinned in one way or other. Further, preachers in general and the Indian Churches consider and treat those who have been habituated brands them and bash them as sinners and thus instill on them a sense of guilt. Branding people and bashing people on something and equating those with sin leads to aberration. Let me cite a few renowned theologians and their standpoints on the notion of sin. For example,

We would suggest, however, along with Reinhold Niebuhr, that the traditional concept of sin as excessive self-regard is empirically describable. From a strictly Barthian perspective, Hunsinger wants to maintain a strong line of demarcation between what can be known by faith and what can be understood by empirical science. While we agree that faith is ultimately necessary to see sin's consequences and destructiveness. Related to this, Hunsinger argues that only God can rescue humanity from its sin problem ... Sin has a way of blinding us to our own complicity. Victimization, on the other hand, is capable of insight and greater self-understanding. Finally, Hunsinger argue that while salvation is an eternal issue, healing our psychological dysfunctions in a this-worldly activity.³¹

So, theologically speaking sin has a different connotation and understanding. The adherents and the Churches of various shades and denomination view sin differently. Sin as a Christian doctrine needs deeper probing, greater self-understanding and awareness. The following quote amply delineates that,

‘Ultimately, sin is a theological concept with psychological ramifications rather than a psychological concept with only human implications. The idea of sin makes sense in a larger

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 68.

theological context. In order to grasp it, one also needs to understand the nature of divine purposes for humanity, as well as divine grace and forgiveness. Thus sin points towards both a disruption in our relation with God and a distortion in our relationship with each other.³²

In tune to the above quotation in our society sin has numerous attributes, particularly amongst Christians and different ecclesial traditions. For the past few decades especially in recent times a great deal of attention is given to the dynamics of addiction such as alcohol, gambling, the Internet, shopping spree, pornography, profit-maximization, accumulation of wealth through dubious means, acquisition of unlimited wants, consumerism, abuse of power and others. Prior to inferring any derogatory statement we need to know the meaning and content of addiction. People are addicted to alcohol, tobacco products and host of other things. As Christians how do we look and treat those who are addicted? How does the Church view addiction and treat the addicts? These are the questions to be pondered and clarified? A comprehensive definition on this is given below:

‘While the term addiction was originally employed to describe a perpetual dependency on a mood-altering substance, it is now also used to describe an attachment to any mood-altering experience which has negative, damaging consequences for one’s life. In other words, the word has moved beyond chemical-dependency circles; it is now used to identify an activity or process which is making one’s life unmanageable ... The question becomes: Are we pushing the term addiction so hard that it takes away our sense of personal responsibility? Some think that what is so easily labelled ‘ad-

³² *Ibid*, pp. 68-69,

diction' should actually be called a bad habit. In such behaviour, there is not a loss of willpower and control as there is in chemical dependency. Others argue that chemical dependencies reveal a tragic, but a far more general, problem than we had previously thought.'³³

Addiction makes us get attached to our desires and in the process, we develop bonding to which we are addicted and get gradually enslaved. As the days go by our energy is zapped and lose our will power too. The objects of our attachment then eventually become obsessions and pre-occupations. Once we become obsessed and attached to these we apparently lose our resolve and resilience. In such a context the only hope for our addiction is the experience of grace. We being mortals are addicted to something or the other.

We should be cautious and avoid as far as possible branding or bashing individuals as sinners over against their addictions. As observed, sin has many facets such as personal/individual/familial, communitarian/corporate, societal and structural. Each facet is mutually connected and hangs on maintaining a delicate balance with each other. Therefore, we will have to balance all aspects and thus respond and treat them with apt care and diligence. Focusing and acting upon exclusively on individuals disfigures and distorts the larger picture of sin. Over and above, we should not assume that just by eradicating/annihilating social and structural ills we would protect our human heart from sin is wrong. It is important to bear in mind that we are individuals as well as social, and so, whenever one aspect is maximized and the other facet gets minimized, and in the process we end up in lopsided understanding of sin.

³³ *Ibid*, pp. 69-70.

Salvific Activity of God (Salvation)—A Continuous Process

‘Salvation’ should never be construed as exclusively a supernatural concept. It also implies liberation, healing and homecoming to God in one’s existential wholeness. On these lines the Old Testament view of salvation appears in passages which recount events of deliverance and liberation. And it also condones the blessings granted and promised, of peace and life. The basic feature we see in all the passages is that Yahweh never forsakes those who believe and follow him. Those who abide by Yahweh’s conditionalities shall enjoy the blessings granted and promised, of peace and life.

Further, salvation is not only deliverance and peace for the individual, but for the whole people of God. The fundamental paradigm is found in the exodus where the Israelites tasted their freedom from captivity as promised by Yahweh. In the liberation process from Egypt and the entry to Promised Land portrays that the Israelites live and lead life without hindrance in the service of Yahweh. It includes spiritual, physical and social well-being of the total community. In sum, the Israelites experienced the salvific activity of Yahweh that extends the idea of all-embracing shalom that exposes the Old Testament view of salvation and its character.

Another notable characteristic is one of promise and fulfilment that goes beyond the present and extends to the future. This is found in the late OT passages especially in apocalyptic texts that clearly projects a vision of salvation that goes beyond the bounds of this world, characterized as it is by death e.g. Isa 25: 6-8). However, in the New Testament we observe salvation for example in Acts 4:12 as an act of deliverance provided they meet the conditions of a fulfilled life into which deliverance leads. And this deliverance is coupled with the name and person of Jesus Christ as the deliverer, Saviour and Redeemer (Lk 2:11). Basically

such deliverance or salvation is attached to a few pre-requisites such as repentance, conversion and faith. Hence,

‘Salvation is ultimately a future event in which death will be overcome (Rom 8: 23-24)’ Rev 21: 4-7), but at the same time it is a gift granted and obtained in the present (Lk: 17:19; Rom 5: 1-5; John 5: 24-26), though accompanied by the continuing challenge from sin, suffering and dying. But it would be a mistake to attribute a purely individualistic view of salvation (‘the salvation of souls’) to the NT. Instead, it takes up OT promise which describe salvation in physical and social terms (e.g. Luke 4: 18-19).’³⁴

Many tend to interpret salvation in the churches and in theological seminaries in India by not connecting it to concrete issues that the people face in social, economic or even political realms. Most of the interpretations that we find are spiritualized or personalized formulation that do not relate to the world, rather attributed to other-worldly realms. On the contrary salvation in the Bible is a multi-dimensional gift of God that is experienced all the time. It is relational and thus acquires fuller meaning when it is applied in relation to the context-specificities. So, salvation is very much horizontally-g geared towards humanity. And in that God becoming human taking human form posits horizontal relationship and opens up the possibility of immanent-transcendent dynamic.

Further, ‘That justification by faith is the major expression of biblical salvation ... in Romans 1: 16-17. Here the apostle calls attention to the Gospel. God’s good news to guilty sinned. He unequivocally affirms that God’s righteousness has been revealed, and it has been revealed to the whole world in the Gospel which is ‘the power of God for the salva-

³⁴*Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, Nicholas Lossky, et.al, op.cit. p. 1009.

tion of everyone who believes.’³⁵ The doctrine of salvation impels far-reaching importance for us to-day than before. If the meaning and means of salvation is wrongly interpreted and understood, it would lead to alarming and dangerous consequences.

In the Bible we see the focus on justification by faith as the definitive image of biblical salvation. However, this concept appears under various rubrics with a variety of images and in a variety of ways such as forgiveness, redemption, reconciliation, victory over darkness of all shades and forms. The crux of the matter that we find in the Bible is God who forgives and accepts repentant sinners. It is by God’s sheer grace and our ardent faith we are saved. When it comes to means Paul delineates that ‘because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes ... For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last ...’ (Rom 1: 16-17). ‘This righteousness from God comes through faith in his blood ... he did it to demonstrate his justice at present time, as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus’ (3:22, 25, 26).

As Paul completely centred his understanding of salvation in Jesus Christ and even M.M. Thomas emphasizes Christ-centred life is to be lived out in our concrete situation that fosters true humanization. So, MM Thomas in a nutshell defines ‘Salvation is the spiritual inwardness of true humanization and humanization is inherent in the message of salvation in Christ.’³⁶ MM Thomas was fully convinced that for a multi-religious and plural country like India humanization plays an important part concerning salvation. For instance, MM Thomas reiterates that ‘My

³⁵ A collection of relevant essays on this theme and one such theme Rodrigo D. Tano, *Biblical Salvation: Justification by Faith*, Ken Gnanakan (ed.), *Salvation: Some Asian Perspectives*, Bangalore: ATA, 1992, p. 63.

³⁶ For a detailed account on humanization see M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, Bangalore: CLS/CISRS, 1971, p. 18.

thesis is that it is the theme of humanization which provides the most relevant point of entry for any Christian dialogue on Salvation in Christ at both spiritual and theological depths.³⁷ We need to move away from the Western legal interpretation of redemption that seemed to have missed the positive and the most important aspect of biblical understanding. We should not all the time bang on Fall-Crucifixion axis, rather move towards Creation-Resurrection dynamic.

We affirm in God in Jesus Christ who is at work in history. And so this divine work has its history. Since salvation is a historical reality, the salvific history of God should be presented appropriately so that we may perceive and interpret history in proper manner. Salvation is an ongoing continuum that shows the present in line with God's all-embracing design and purpose. God's redeeming activity never ceases. The concept of salvation history remains ambiguous and therefore ambivalent, and so we need to understand its character. Salvation history is a faith-filled history that opens up the vast expanse of history. Salvation history has the most cherishing and celebrative meaning. It presents God's creative and redemptive presence in this world.

The history of saving act of God shows the unflinching love (agape) that God showed on humanity so that the redemption is possible. It is the finality and unconditional love of Jesus Christ who assured us salvation through faith, forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of body. The challenges while explicating sin and salvation are enormous. The Christians in India need a more relevant and inclusive theology while proclaiming the doctrines of sin and salvation. The world is moving at a rapid pace as we are experiencing transformative changes. As the changes occur we are also compelled to look at our scriptures, culture, traditions, doctrines and dogmas through new and fresh eyes. We should go beyond St. Paul, St. Augustine, Martin Luther and even the traditional church teachings could go to the extent of saying that evil and suffering in this world have

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 20.

a theological significance namely sin serves only suffering and death. Even if carefully look into the basic participation of missionary preaching we find elements of eternal doom emanating from so many prescriptions.

The same message is even resonated and repeated in the churches and theological colleges. The churches in India irrespective of denominations and para-churches have not moved out from the traditional doctrinal frames. The churches should revisit the doctrines and dogmas in tune to the changing times. The biblical texts, doctrines and dogmas have to be re-visited, unfolded and interpreted afresh so that we may be in a position to appropriately locate from an inclusive theological perspective. For instance, viewing positively the structure of human destiny, history and salvation leads us to new horizons of understanding and fresh insights of the nature and destiny of humanity. As Pannenberg rightly point out that the positive nature of things around us is to be presupposed in order to describe human perversions. At the same time he asserts that we should strive for convincing interpretations of human situation.

The human contexts/situations have to be taken into account both the positive and negative aspects and in that in particular the human experience and behaviour be delved with. If we fail to enter into this inquiry we may be clouded with all sorts of negatives by not knowing possibilities and prospects. As a consequence we would get into imbalanced or lopsided picture of nature and future destiny. We in this world face hard realities of human nature that manifests in different forms and colours. However, it should be viewed as the positive vision of evolution. Therefore, our evaluation of the reality of the world and the humans should be ascertained in objective manner so that the present and the future of humanity will be filled with hope. As Oscar Wilde rightly

sums up that 'The only difference between the saint and the sinner is that every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future'.

RELIGION AND SCIENCE: TWO SIDES OF A COIN OR POLAR OPPOSITES!



In Genesis the first book of the Christian Scripture, under the section ‘Six Days of Creation and the Sabbath’ starts with: ‘In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light... Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude, And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done ... These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created’ (Gen: 1 & 2). The text clearly states that God is the Creator of the cosmos.

In one of the most prominent hymns in the Rig-Veda (the oldest of the four Vedas, dated c 1700-1100 BC) is titled the Nasadiya Sukta and is also known as the Creation Hymn. ‘Na asat’ which is the root of the word Nasadiya means ‘not the non-existent’. The hymn is a series of questions on the entire process of creation and more importantly, the Creator: A rough translation of a few verses of this hymn is as follows:

Who really knows?

Who will here proclaim it?

Whence was it produced?

Whence is this creation?

The gods came afterwards, with the creation of the universe.

Who then knows whence it has arisen?-perhaps it formed it-
self, or perhaps it did not
The One who looks down on it as the supreme arbitrator,
Seated in the highest heaven, only He knows
Or perhaps even He does not know?

Underlining the fundamentals of these two texts are the spirit of belief, scepticism, faith, agnosticism, hopes and rational, theism and atheism positing polar opposites. Questioning has always been the cornerstone of India's strength of secularism that respects and accommodates diverse religious belief system, faith persuasions and ideological-philosophical standpoints and perspectives. Indian society could broadly be categorized as a mixture of both heresy and orthodoxy. It has been there and become part of our ethos. History has witnessed and we have been experiencing and observing that the Semitic religions dealt with the heretics severely. It is unfortunate that many do not understand that when there are religions heresies are bound to be there. Unfortunately, even the non-Semitic religions have also been intolerant with the heretics in parts of the world where they are in majority.

Questioning, inquiring, probing and delving into the existing belief systems, rational and logical discourses and intellectual debates on some assumptions and pre-suppositions to what is considered as sacred and divine has always been the norm of our secular credentials. It is this climate and attitude that makes India tolerant, inclusive and accommodative. India for centuries has been celebrating inclusivity by respecting diverse faith, religious and ideological persuasion. It is this unique character and fundamental feature that add to the character of secularism. Secular principles are the foundational principles that gravitates people of varying religio-cultural and ethnic to live in harmonious relationship by respecting each other. Therefore, Indian society is premised of secular principles and its credentials undoubtedly vests with tolerance and mutual respect to each other. It is this tolerance and co-habitation that

makes our Indian to carry on for centuries and makes all us to live and enjoy in spite of poverty, hunger and other social, economic and other deprivations.

India continues to democratic, pluralistic, secular and socialistic because of its ethos of over-whelming acceptance of each other and mutual respect for one another. It is this liberalism, pluralism and in sum secularism that makes India to sustain its dynamism and vibrancy against all odds. Given the ethos of accommodation, assimilation and integration time and again in the name of 'religion' and 'belief' extreme-rightists keep lynching and issuing insinuating statements against those free thinkers who bring in reason and scientific temper into their discourse show the level of 'intolerance' time and time again. Over the centuries there have been intolerance, intimidation and liquidation of those who have questioned irrationality and unscientific positions. Mythologies and superstitious when countered with rationalism and scientific inquiry and in the process disproved and rejected will have to be accepted and the reason should prevail over emotions.

Indian society by and large feudal, believes in myths and belief systems insulated in religion. They are perpetrated hundreds of years without questioning. These 'stories' and 'myths' and the statements and utterances continue for hundreds and thousands of years and eventually acquire the status of 'infallibility' and thus become 'sacrosanct'. They are not supposed to be taken for public scrutiny and inquiry because these are the legends and stories couched in religious scriptures. For instance, Kerala, a state known for its outspoken intellectuals wherein a well-known critic and writer Prof. MM Basheer was threatened after his commentary on the Ramayana. The six-part series, written for a leading Malayalam daily came to an abrupt end after a spate of abusive and threatening calls made by Hindu fundamentalists. In view of constant

intimidation and telephonic calls had to stop at the fifth article because of the right-wing Hindu outfit named Hanuman Sena.

The same group was also responsible for vandalizing a coffee shop in Kozhikode in 2014 that triggered the Kiss of Love protest in Kerala. Supporters of the group sent Prof. B. Rajeevan a legal notice for making a comment on the role of Hindu fanatics in the assassination of Gandhi. Kerala is known for 100 per cent literacy and the left parties and rationalist groups have been involved spread awareness for decades. And yet continue to under the grip of religious fanaticism and irrationalism. Yet in another similar case in the state of Kerala an attack on TJ Joseph, a professor of Malayalam at Newman College, Thodupuzha. On July the 4, 2010, Professor Joseph's his hand was cut off at the wrist as punishment carried out by members of the Popular Front of India, a ultra-rightist Muslim Organization. He was accused of having made blasphemous remarks about the Prophet Mohammad in a question paper he set for graduate students. Kamala Das one of the India's best admired authors endured relentless hostility as she was about to embrace Islam. Paul Zachariah another noted Malayali writer had to face the ire of CPM supporters in Kannur.

There can never be one singular world that reiterates that this is the view and everyone should accept. In a world of multiple perspectives and understanding of the changing contours and frameworks there is bound to be clash of diverse understanding and in such landscape there ought to be spaces for all to inter-mingle, interject and interact with other. Voices and position can never be silenced with coercive tactics and physical liquidation. It just shows the 'intolerance' and physical force' and those with brute strength and majority are liable to do anything. If this goes on it just means 'barbaric' and 'fanatical'. India is moving towards 'intolerance mode' and 'aggressive note'.

Each time an MM Kalburgi, Godvind Pansare or Narendra Debholkar murdered in broad daylight; teachers like T.J. Joseph's hands are

chopped off; for their writings thinkers like Shireen Dalvi, James Laine or Permul Murugan are violently silenced or thinkers like Salman Rushdie, Sanal Edamaruku, M.F. Hussain or Taslima Nasreen are forced in exile, the basic freedom of thought and expression enshrined in the Indian Constitution is increasingly under threat. The very essence of to think free and write free and enter into discourses and interaction challenging and contribution to scientific inquiries has under severe test over a period of time. The very vibrancy of Indian thought and its essence is threatened which is also an attack on our civilizational belief that has sustained for centuries.

On Diwali day (11th November 2015) playwright Girish Karnad received a threat on Twitter that he would meet the same end as MM Kalburgi for having demanded to rename the Kempegowda International airport after Tipu Sultan. Bengaluru police received a complaint against the writer for 'insulting Hindus and the Vokkaliga community and disrupting social harmony'. Karnad had made the statement during the state government's Tipu Jayanthi celebrations. There have been protests in several parts of Karnataka against the celebrations, some of which turned violent. There have been different and divided prisms from scholars and historians. Some call Tipu as tyrant and bigot, whereas others call as inclusive person and freedom fighter. Similarly, Mysuru-Kodagu BJP MP Sinha, who also received a threat to his life in a Facebook post has approached Mysuru police.

In another form of intolerance shown against free thinkers that Facebook blocked the group Indian Atheists Debate Corner from being viewed in India. Facebook blocks pages or groups when it receives more than a certain number of complaints about the group, usually for reasons such as obscenity, identity theft, harassment, violent or harmful behaviour or sexually explicit content. Members of the group Indian Atheists Debate Corner said the group did not violate any of these clauses and

was a forum for peaceful discussion of atheism as a way of life, and debunking myths. 'Usually, atheist groups get pulled off when a counter group mounts a secret, concerted campaign, asking its members to ask Facebook to take it off citing a variety of false reasons. In the face of numbers, Facebook usually complies even if the group is not violating any community standards,' said a member of Indian Atheists Debate Corner.

The group was started by the organization Nirmukta Freethought Community, a society of rationalists and free-thinkers that also runs several online message boards on topics such as pseudoscience and superstition, secular humanism, atheism and agnosticism. The group has now mounted a petition on change.org asking Facebook to lift the ban. 'Users in India simply get an error page when they try to access it. Facebook has not given any reason for the block nor has it cited any violation of its terms and conditions,' says the petition on change.org. 'Rationalist activities in India have often been faced with numerous restrictions on line/offline. Following a series of attacks on public intellectuals, most Indian Atheists have chosen to use social media as their 'safer' area for discussions. Facebook, has been an integral part of this,' he adds.

Following the violent murders of rationalists such as Narendra Dabholkar and MM Kalburgi, social media is perhaps the only way atheists and rationalists can discuss issues. Open organized meetings could not be held because of the intolerance behaviour of the fundamentalists belonging to all religions. This is not the first time. A few months ago, the Facebook group Indian Atheists which has more than 40,000 members, was also taken off and restored after a few days because of the widespread demand from members and other Facebook users. In India apart the main stream scholars and academicians get amused at violent reactions to Indian atheists and rationalists by ultra-religious groups, as

there is a long history of atheism in Hinduism and some of its oldest scriptures.

In a 2006 interview, historian and economist Amartya Sen said, 'In some ways people (have) got used for the idea that India was spiritual and religion-oriented. That gave a leg-up to the religious interpretation of India, despite the fact that Sanskrit had a larger atheistic literature than what exists in any other classical language. Madhava Acharya, the remarkable 14th century philosopher, wrote this rather great book called *Sarvadarsthansangrah*, which discussed all the religious schools of thought within the Hindu structure. The first chapter is 'Atheism-a very strong presentation of the argument in favour of atheism and materialism.'³⁸ Such openness and frankness we see in our landscape where ideas crisscrossed, debated, argued and contested with respect and serenity.

As against this background the preservation of scientific temper assumes greater importance. The terrain we are in and the chain of events we have been experiencing that pitches and centres pre-religious and anti-science notions an inquiry with scientific temper becomes more pertinent at this point of juncture. It is also much talked about in a context we are placed with. Scientific inquiry and scientific temper have always enabled to unfold the hidden irrationalities and absurd belief systems that have been followed and pursued in society for centuries. The rationalists and others who believe in scientific temper do not contest religion but involved in demythologizing and deconstructing certain aspects that blind to look at reason and logic. Hence, science and religion could go hand in hand. It is amazing to look at the linkages precisely with scientific temper.

³⁸ See a brief write up entitled 'Protests on Social Media as FB Blocks Atheists Debate Corner' by Sharbonti.Bagchi@timesgroup.com.

‘I don’t see religion and politics as contradicting scientific temper,’ said Prof. Prajwal Shastri, an astrophysicist from the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bengaluru. ‘The scientific method, which is such an important part of our lives, has given us a new way to look at the world. The technology that we rely on so much today is an outcome of the scientific method. That understanding seems to have gone away. There seem to be a disconnect—we as a civilization embrace technology, but have forgotten the scientific method underlying it.’³⁹ Those belonging to scientific community have been trying to bring closer science to establishing social issues and problems. The social problems that we face presently in our country are to be approached with scientific temper employing critical social insights.

Prof. G.K. Karanth, one of the country’s renowned sociologist and former faculty member at ISEC, Bengaluru, says the very notion of scientific temper in India is always ambivalent. Elaborating the distinctiveness between science and religion, he draws it candidly that ‘Science is something people do for a livelihood and religion is what they preach for their existence.’⁴⁰ In the last few decades there have been heavy attacks on rationalists and atheists but in recent times the aggression both in verbal and physical terms increased at alarming levels. It is increasingly becoming impossible for the creative artists, thinkers, writers and intellectuals to express their views in the own ways. Ideas, thought processes, concepts and theories will have to be demolished with counter ideas, thoughts, concepts and theories.

Human society and civilizations have progressed and reached its zenith. Those societies that allowed freedom of thought process and encourage reason and scientific inquiry and temper have shown progress and development because of science and technology. Ideas are to be coun-

³⁹ See for example, Darshana Ramdev’s lead article that appeared in ‘Deccan Chronicle’ (12th June, 2015, p.4) titled ‘When Science is No Longer a Religion’.

⁴⁰ Quoted in *Ibid.*

tered and reasons have to be probed in not with violence but with rational thinking. Counter any book or article or ideas not with bullets and fists, but intellectual viewpoints and discourses. Reason should be given space in the true spirit of enquiry or scientific temper. The motive will have to be furthering answers couched with rationality and scientific temperament. It should provide enough space furthering more clarity and logicity to the beliefs and myths that surround us. Discourses will have to promote intellectual acumen leading to deeper probing and in-depth explorations.

We have been witnessing a number of incidences that concerns our understanding of history. For instance,

‘It is ironic that in a country where we have little or no regard for our own history, we get to where we have little or no regard for our own history, we get so touchy when it comes to historical characters and the way they are depicted or analysed by different scholars. As historian John Noble Welford says ‘All works of history are interim reports... what people did in the past is not preserved in amber... immutable through the ages. Each generation looks back and drawing from its own experience, presumes to find patterns that illuminate both the past and present.’

But how open is India today to a contrary scholastic view on say, a Basaveshawara, Shivaji, Tipu Sultan or B.R. Ambedkar? The violence unleashed on the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune for instance, for assisting American historian James Laine in his work on Shivaji, certainly shows we are not. The manner in which various linguistic, regional and caste groups have appropriated these figures as

icons for modern political discourse, does more harm than good for their legacies as it insulates from any kind of academic debate.’⁴¹

As Vikram Sampath narrates that

‘From personal experience, each time I have spoken or written something contrary to popular blind belief on Tipu Sultan, the 18th Century ruler of Mysore, I have faced a violent backlash. My lectures on the subject were shouted down, my family members threatened, my articles burnt in public and even an effigy consigned to flames! All this when I was quoting chapter and verse from documented and well-researched primary sources. But not a tear is shed by those same hypersensitive groups professing their violent love for the man, when the same Sultan’s palaces, armouries or forts crumble due to governmental or public apathy and indifference. Moreover, it is meaningless for us to sit in judgment of characters of the past by yardsticks and definitions of today. To certify an Aurangzeb as secular or communal as has been happening in the last few weeks, or a Tipu as a freedom fighter of the nation, at a time when concepts like ‘nation’ or ‘secularism’ never existed, is being grossly unfair to them. They were products of their times and circumstances and need to be judged and discussed in that very light. To err is human and a scholar is not immune to it.’⁴²

Our Constitution guarantees freedom of expression that can never be taken by anyone including the State or the government. As citizens everyone is entitled to express their ideas in whatever forms he/she wants to. Surprising and throttling or heckling someone’s expression: be it in

⁴¹ Vikram Sampath, ‘If this is faith, God is Weeping ...’ in *Deccan Chronicle*, 6th September, 2015, p.11.

⁴² *Ibid.*

any form tantamount to violation of one's freedom enshrined and guaranteed under the fundamental rights of the Constitution. As George Washington saying aptly fits here that 'If the freedom of speech is taken away then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter.'

'It is not the strongest of the species that survive; not the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.'

— Charles Darwin

'If we do not have the right to speak freely, we will turn into a society that suffers from intellectual malnutrition, a nation of fools.'

— Arundhati Roy

RELIGION AND REASON: IN CONVERSATION OR IN CONFLICT



Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free ...
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way ...
Where the mind is led forward by thee.
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father,
Let my country awake.

— Rabindranath Tagore

Questions loom such as: Does god Exist? Is god-factor real? How did the world come about? Who is the author of creation? Is God-notion only a belief or perception or faith or beyond our comprehension? Where do we go after death? Are heaven and hell real? Will there be bodily resurrection or something else? Is there such a thing called cycle of birth? If god is real why should there be evil/devil? Why do those believe in god face problems? Disciplines such as philosophy, religion, sociology and others tend to articulate and seeks to probe into these queries. But the atheists, rationalists and agonists raise series of questions about god-factor philosophically with the application of reason. Conversations amongst theists and atheists, believers and non-believers have been taking place at different levels.

Underpinning these questions is a spirit of inquiry, scepticism, agnosticism and reason and logic that has been pivotal and foundational to philosophy. Inquiring mind has always probed the religious belief systems, faith articulation and practices. Questioning the existing beliefs,

faith persuasions and religious observances should not be viewed as heretical and nonsensical. Semitic faiths and other belief systems have been probed and inquired. Critical questioning, rational probing and intellectual debates about the centrality of faith and its attributes as immortal, absolute, omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient by the believers although personal is subject to inquiry. Hence the debates and questioning are the attempts to know and understand each other views and so should not be construed as irreverence and stupid. Such kinds of debates and inquiries have helped both the believers and non-believers to grow and furthered their inquiry minds and facilitated exchanging the standpoints. Discourses of diverse perspectives and viewpoints are prerequisites for a healthy and vibrant democracy.

By questioning the sacred and the divine and entering into conversations and polemics has always been the most important norm for the argumentative Indians. It is this attitude to life and intellectualism that makes India vibrant and dynamic. When we talk about secularism it is bound by diversity of religion, assimilation of many cultures, co-existence of multiple streams of views, faith persuasions and philosophical strands. It is this diversity that makes India to amalgamate and evolve its distinct world view. By and large, our landscape accommodates a conglomeration of multiple views and standpoints that are being collectively shared and lived with. All these unifying and governing principles that strengthens our secular values and democratic principles comes to a grinding halt when we hear the brutal killings of M.M. Kalbrugi, Govind Pansare or Narendra Dabholkar in broad day light. And then the chopping of T.J. Joseph's hands; silencing Perumal Murugan, Shireen Dalivi and James Laine; issuing of Fatwa to Salman Rushde, Sanal Edamaruku, M.F. Hussain, Taslima Nasreen are forced to live in exile. In addition recently Rajni Kanth and A.R. Rehman have been issues threatening notices.

Eliminating and exterminating individuals who have been holding differing views that fails to subscribe to the views, ideology and faith persuasion of the killers is not an attack on those individuals but a blot on our civilizational heritage and pre-eminent value system that has sustained our plural mores for centuries. In recent times the intolerant bigots have started to attack, threaten and kill those creative artists, thinkers, researchers, scholars, cartoonists, and writers conveying a categorical imperative that what they consider sacrosanct, divine, holy and absolute shall not be diagnosed and never be brought to scrutiny and interpretations. They think that their belief systems and religious practices are sacred and whoever enters into their domains and interprets and in the process unfolds the latent meanings would either be silenced or exterminated. It is sheer absurd and irrational.

These bigots live in medieval age with archaic mind set. Any creative activity will have move forward be it art, literature, science or whatever. Unless and until there are new breaking grounds a society or a country cannot move forward. Science of hermeneutics and scientific inquiry of the material and religio-cultural world would take humanity further. Human beings are progressive endowed with creative and critical faculty. We are progressive beings and so we move forward only with critical inquiry and scientific methods. Without new ideas, new thought processes, new concepts and new methods we cannot demolish the old ones and therefore it is important to move from one phase to another. Ideas and concepts contribute to the changing nature of the society. Contexts go through phenomenal changes because of the changes in the ideas and others. Old boundaries, domains and frames are to be broken so that new boundaries, domains and frames emerge. The oppressive and exploitative belief systems, cultural practices and traditions have been systematically eliminated by through rationality.

Violence, intimidation and liquidation shall never be the rejoinder to rationality and intellectual discourse. In the modern India under the present dispensation discourses and debates on religion, history, education, culture and others have become the casualty and reached its lowest ebb. It is an irony that in country supposed to take-off to greater heights in science and technology now being caught up regressive thinking and irrationality. The debates on important areas of religion, culture, ethics, philosophy, history and so on are clouded with narrow parochial rigid irrational frames. Intelligent debates premised on reason hardly be carried out with the fringe and fundamentalist elements. Any society that stoops down to eliminating the intelligentsia and curbs the free thinking with force is bound to go backward. In history we have seen number of societies and countries that controlled free thinkers and creative intellectuals.

Take for example some of the historian, political thinkers and cultural anthropologists who viewed political history or culture or economy and host of others from the underside. Their presentations of history, culture and politics are viewed through the lens of subalterns and from the underside which obviously tilts the position of dominant discourses. Certainly the counter-discourses upset and tilt the domination of the status quo and dominant. In debates emotions should never rein rather reason. As the times go by researches have offered new findings that unfold areas hitherto not been explored. Silencing the 'thoughts' of thinkers, artists, and others is the order of the day. The state or the government or any political establishment or authority that abets and supports for political gains should be condemned and resisted. The political parties with ultra-fundamentalist shades could go to any extent by encouraging the fringe elements to thrust its ideological moorings and political programs.

Jug Suralya in his short piece entitled '*God As a 'Needless Hypothesis'*' in TOI (Sept 22nd 2015) convincingly and aptly quotes *Pope Fran-*

cis that 'It is not necessary to believe in God to be a good person. In a way, the traditional notion of God is outdated. One can be spiritual but not religious... Some of the best people in history did not believe in God, while some of the worst deeds were committed in His name.' It is astonishing to read the words of Pope Francis the head of more than one billion Roman Catholics across the world who without mincing the words candidly expressed his position. As the times pass by even the understanding of God need change and go deeper. What he infers is 'In the name of God the bigots carried out all sorts of crimes against humanity. Whereas those who reasoned out and logically presented their views are being hunted out, lynched, intimidated and liquidated. So, *'Faith minus vulnerability and mystery equals extremism.'* - Brene Brown, American author.

TOLERANCE OF THE INTOLERANT OR INTOLERANCE OF THE TOLERANT!



Ranjona Banerji in her column article titled *The cult of intolerance* in ‘Deccan Chronicle’ (25-22-25) starts with two statements: ‘tolerance of the intolerant’ or ‘intolerance of the tolerant’ which I picked and put it as a title of this piece. These two statements do convey clear positions of two diametrically opposing constituencies in the current scenario we are in. The battle in our Indian society in recent times is pitched one against another: ‘Tolerance of the intolerant’ or ‘intolerance of the tolerant’. It has been pitched on these lines and being battled to establish the supremacy over one against the other. These two statements are to be nuanced by situating few narratives and cases in order to acquire better clarity.

Recently, Bollywood’s icon Aamir Khan’s comments on ‘rising intolerance’ sharply divided polity sparking heated debates. Aamir Khan commented that his wife Kiran had asked him, whether they should leave the country as ‘she fears for her child’. Aamir’s ‘quit India’ comment should be seen within the purview of the two statements that the title of the paper depicts. The following amply demonstrates the perceptions and mind sets:

- ‘If somebody wants to leave (India), then has anybody stopped him? At least it would reduce the country’s population’—BJP MP Yogi Adityanath.
- ‘There’s no country like India, no better neighbour than a Hindu for an Indian Muslim’—BJP’s Shahnawaaz Hussain.

- ‘Some celebs complaining about intolerance should be the last ones to complain’—Ram Gopal Verma.
- ‘Instead of branding those who question government and Modiji as unpatriotic ... the government would do better to reach out’—Rahul Gandhi.
- ‘Every word he said is true. I am admiring him for speaking up – Arvind Kejrwal.
- ‘I know his heart is always with the country and he cares for it. He’s not one to run away’—Ranbir Kapoor.

Responding to actor Aamir Khan’s comments on the ‘growing disquiet’ in India many in their tweeter and face book expressed in the following ways: Sameep Parekh wrote. ‘Hello Mr Perfectionist ... the fact that you can condemn India on such a large platform and not get thrown out of the country reveals volume about our tolerance level. I challenge you to try speaking this in any country where you feel safe. We the youth of this country are working out ass-of to get our lives and economy back on the development track, we will not allow few of you to hold it back.’ Sumedha Saravadaman said ‘Only those who never considered India their own country would speak of leaving it, based on a completely fabricated ‘intolerance’ story. Get lost Mr. Khan ...’ While Dil Bahadur added, ‘ ... I think you should be in Syria or Pakistan or any Arab country to know what is intolerance ... What is intolerance ... you have been accepted, loved and applauded and now you are saying we are intolerant ... I did not know you were so stupid.’

The harshest attacks were from within the film fraternity. For instance, actor Anupam Kher who tweeted, ‘... Did you tell Kiran that you have lived through more worse times in this country and but you never thought of moving out.’ Film maker Ashoke Pandid: ‘Now that Aamir Khan also feels we are in intolerant Nation. Let us now go all out and prove once for all that we are really intolerant.’ Director Ram Gopal Varma tweeted that ‘India is the most tolerant country in the world. Such

statements send a wrong signal.’ Answering questions from the media and the audience at NFDC’s Film Bazaar at the 48th International Film Festival of India (IFFI) at Panaji, AR Rahman, Oscar-winning composer said, ‘I had gone through something similar a couple of months ago’ while sharing his concerns about growing intolerance in the country, ‘Nothing should be violent. We are all ultra-civilized people and we should show the world that we are the best civilization.’

Ustad Rashid Khan, Kolkatta-based singer feels that India is a safe country, but acknowledged that Aamir’s wife Kiran must have felt something ‘disturbing enough’ to make the comment, ‘Should we move out of India’. He said, ‘Perhaps, they sensed something. I wouldn’t know their exact feelings.’ Whereas the Hindu Mahasabha reacted after the Bollywood superstar joined the debate on ‘rising intolerance’ during an awards ceremony for journalists that ‘He should go to Pakistan for the benefit of India’ and its national secretary Munna Kumar Sharma said, ‘A case of treason should be filed against Khan and other traitors like Shah Rukh Khan, who too has made such statements before.’ As they gathered in Meerut at the party office to discuss Aamir’s statement suggested the actor should go in for ‘ghar wapsi’ (conversion), especially in light of the fact that both his present wife and former one (Reena Dutta) have been Hindus. ‘If not move to Pakistan, he should indulge in ‘ghar wapsi’ to free himself from the crimes of ‘love jihad’ said Sharma.’

Parliamentary affairs minister M Venkaiah Naidu said, ‘Some people are misleading and some people are misled... Some are propagating wrong things, some are coming under wrong propaganda. My suggestion is that the situation in India is better than any other country. People of India are tolerant.’ Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi tweeted that the Centre should try and figure out why people were feeling insecure. ‘Instead of branding all those who question the government and Modiji as unpatriotic, anti-national or motivated, the government would do

better to reach out to people to understand what's happening what's disturbing them.' Kiran Raju, Union Minister says, 'The record shows that the number of incidents of communal violence in the country have come down since NDA came to power. Just to make a blatant statement that during NDA rule, the country has become intolerant; it unnecessarily tarnishes the image of the country.'

Digvijaya Singh, one of the Congress General Secretaries opined that 'It's sad Aamir Khan, who is an icon among film actors not only in India, but across the world. Is feeling the same thing (rising intolerance)... His wife is Hindu, she has also felt it, that with this kind of uncultured and intolerant atmosphere, it looks like those who are fighting against this will have to leave the country. This is a serious issue.' 'Aamir Khan is a brand ambassador for tourism—incredible India—and that what's incredible... that he can be a brand ambassador for our government and he can be on a platform in front of the I & B minister and speak his mind shows that free speech thrives... I am a living example of Modi's intolerance he forgave me though I publicly attacked him' said Union HRD Minister Smriti Irani.

Renowned actor Om Puri said, 'If an ordinary person could have been arrested for making such statement.' Actor Rishi Kapoor said to Aamir Khan and his wife that 'When things are going wrong and the system need correction, repair it, mend it. Don't run away from it. That's Heroism.' Aamir Khan's comment on 'rising intolerance' has generated heated debates across the spectrum and the saffron party linked his statement to a 'deep political conspiracy' of Congress to malign the country, while others said 'he was speaking the truth'. Wadding into the debate on 'intolerance' particularly on Aamir Khan's utterance AIMIM chief Assadudin Owaisi said that Muslims will not leave India under any circumstances as they are Indians 'not only by birth but by choice.' Abhishek Singhvi, Congress spokesman said: 'What Aamir Khan one of the most respected actors, ha said in the presence of many senior BJP

people is what the whole world is saying, all of India is saying, all right-minded people are saying.'

Cutting across the spectrum a number of opinions and statements surfaced in the wake of Aamir Khan's comment. All the comments would certainly fall within the gamut of these two clusters: 1) Tolerance of the intolerant and 2) Intolerance of the tolerant. Both the statements convey messages that: we are tolerating although we are intolerant and others say that since we are tolerant we are tolerating the intolerance. Aamir Khan, as an ambassador of *Incredible India*, a government's campaign to promote tourism, Khan was at the centre of a debate a day after he expressed 'alarm and despondency' over the rise of incidents of intolerance in the country. He made this statement before a galaxy of the VVIP and union ministers particularly from I & B. He was bold and forthright that must have put the BJP government to shame. He said whatever he wanted to say.

Since it was an open statement from an icon and celebrity known world over for his creative acting and critical inquiry, the spokespersons of BJP and others came down heavily on him, while others belonging to different political parties and other streams tried to defend him. The base question that emerges is: Is India tolerant to the intolerance? Those who subscribe to ultra-rights' parties such as BJP and political fundamentalist ideologies say that India is tolerant and thus tolerates to intolerances. They argue the case in such ways that the freedom of expression has not been negated and those who want to say can express freely and therefore India is tolerant.

Substantiating their standpoint, Hindus are in majority in India. Despite the majority status, Hindus continue to tolerate others such as Muslims, Christians and others and are treated on par with others. Therefore India is tolerant to the core as compared to many other countries. To prove their point Bollywood is dominated by the Muslims and so India

is tolerant. A question that arises here is: what wrong did Aamir Khan commit by that statement? He joined the debate over ‘Rising Intolerance’ saying his wife Kiran Rao had asked if they would move out of the country as she feared for the safety of their son. The Bollywood star was speaking at the Ramnath Goenka Awards function of The Indian Express Group that ‘When I sit at home and talk to Kiran, she says ‘should we move out of India.’ That’s a serious statement. She must be thinking of their future, particularly of their child.

Aamir Khan being a serious person and a creative artist openly shared that his wife said. He added that ‘You feel why this is happening, you feel low. That sense does exist’. Then he cited a number of incidences that happened in the last six-seven months. Why should there be huge hue and cry over Aamir Khan’s utterance. He has all the freedom to give his opinion. He never backed out rather he firmly endorsed it. If we take the socio-political climate of our country in recent times what we see is the total degradation of civility in our society. For instance, Rajasthan chief minister Vasundhara Raje apologised to the artist after an art installation called the Bovine Divine was taken down in rage. The Jawahar Kala Kendra in Jaipur displayed the installation—a plastic cow suspended from a balloon—in an open area. The artist Siddharth Karwal was trying to draw attention to the plight of cows eating plastic waste. However pro-cow activists—a new power group in India—misunderstood, took offence, called the police who took the installation down. Is that tolerance of intolerance or the intolerant ruling the roost?⁴³

Our country has reached a point where political parties tend to extend patronage to those groups that echo their sentiments and ideology. These are the groups and people who decide and determine our cultural, political and social discourse and way of life. For every damn thing: be it writing, statements, art, cartoon, opinion, songs and host of others

⁴³ For more details See Ranjona Banerji’s article ‘The cult of Intolerance’ in ‘Deccan Chronicle’ 25th November, 2015, p.8.

there will be several groups of people who take offence. What happened in Jaipur shows the growing intolerance that the cow on a balloon was offensive because it was a cow and cows are holier than holy at the moment.⁴⁴ Incidences that portray intolerance in small and bigger ways are on the rise throughout the country today. There are high voltage points of the frenzy atmosphere we live in. These perverse mind-sets do not look for reason and logic, but are endowed with outrage that blurs common sense and rationality, but only ‘cow politics’ or something else that is linked to their majoritarian political agenda.

Intolerance in its zenith in our country and so counter-discourse are thwarted or even thrashed which apparently reduces the freedom of expression. Obviously, it does imply that we are unable to combat the forces that want to take us to a closed society.⁴⁵ So, the ideology of Hindutva and the political program of RSS-BJP are to make our society ‘closed’ in tuned to Hinduraj. The level of fanaticism manifested the way the plastic cow was later brought back out of storage and worshipped. It is an irony that the idea of the artist in naming his installation ‘The Bovine Dine’ was completely topsy-turvyed in the end.’⁴⁶ In the same state of Rajasthan a renowned sculptor Anish Kapoor also on the receiving ends of intolerance. Two days after his appointment to a cultural panel set up by the Rajasthan government, he was removed because he made some scathing, uncomplimentary comments about PM Modi.⁴⁷

The Hinduva forces are disturbed and in jittery by the recent happenings such as returning of their awards, open statements on the rising intolerance by the celebrities and icons. The crux of the matter is not whether he/she a Muslim or Hindu or Christian or Congress or some

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

other party, but who has done the killings or who has done the threatening. Aamir Khan's candidly stated that disquiet and unease are on the rise. Instead of looking into the statements uttered by analysing whether there is truth in it or not, the Government at the Centre and its allies in the state governments pay no heed to it. India is still tolerant and their tolerance cannot be taken for granted. In sum the word 'tolerance' is to be nuanced as against 'intolerance'. Those who talk of 'tolerance' bring in patriotism and nationalism into the argument and thus zero down their argument to Pakistan or sedition or anti-national. They want certain sections to vote for them.

Let us not stereotype India as tolerant always. We will have to acknowledge the very fact that India is gradually moving towards intolerance. The state seems to be the silent spectator to the recent happenings in our country that does not reflect the attitude and atmosphere of 'tolerance'. Paradoxically, PM Modi talks about 'tolerance' on British soil. The signals and trends that we are in now show the disturbing picture. It is alarming. It is incredible to see India becoming intolerant. Indians are tolerant, but how long is the question. More than 80 per cent of Indians want the freedom to practice their own religion. Only a minuscule wants ghar wapsi. The beauty of India is multiplicity and plurality of races, religions, cultures, communities and ethnicities. The duty of the Government at the Centre is to protect and promote tolerance. India is a country of great civilizations, cultures and religions. Let us not demarcate and polarise.

INTELLIGENTSIA THREATENED, SILENCED AND LIQUIDATED: FASCISM LET LOOSE



‘Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and argue freely
according to conscience, above all liberties.’

— John Milton

The flurry of writers and creative thinkers returning their Sahitya Akademi Awards has drawn sharp focus to what appears to be a significant threat to the freedom of speech and expression. The modes employed by the ultra-rightist choking the free-speech and expression of writers and artists in the name of ‘purging the cultural artifacts’ and protecting the authentic ‘Hindu culture’ continues unabated. The ultra-rightists have gone beyond the literary community in their mission. A number of artists and musicians have faced the brunt and yet openly defying the communal and fascist forces.

Returning the awards and calling upon the Sahitya Akademi to voice its concern and register strong criticism of the horrors being perpetrated by violent groups, such as the recent killing of rationalist-writer Prof. M.M. Kalburgi. These are the voices that illumine rays of hope for an India in which we are free to think and express our thoughts without being threatened, silenced and liquidated by fanatic mind-sets and lunatic forces that enforce bans after bans. However, Professor Chandrashekar Kambar, a member of the General Council, Sahitya Akademi said a meeting has been called on October 23 to discuss the issue. He did express his concern that ‘The Akademi has not produced the desired

response to Dr. M.M. Kalburgi's death, which has angered writers, for it is the foremost institution working on their behalf. The Akademi is a powerful body and functions with a fair degree of autonomy, despite being funded by the government.' The upcoming meeting will, hopefully, reach the desired consensus.

However, he reiterated that 'The Akademi is the main pressure point for writers who want to reach out to the government.' There have diverse opinions and viewpoint over the return of the awards. However, 25-odd writers while returning their awards candidly registered their protest. They are brave and their gesture generates a discussion on the freedom of expression and the larger milieu within which these writers function. Renowned poet and author Anjun Hassan, said, 'I'm not of the view that we should reject the Akademi outright, they have a certain role to play and a lot of resources as well. Still, the question we need to ask is how we can possibly bring in more autonomy, instead of bureaucratic, complacent institution it has become.'

Sculptor Balan Nambiar, recipient of Sahitya Akademi award in 1981, says the trend indicates that there are people who are sensitive to the larger issue, which is the increasing presence of right wing elements clamping down on opinions that differ from their own. He added that 'The creative community is getting more and more disturbed by the situation, especially Culture Minister Dr. Mahesh Sharma, who statements have grown increasingly atrocious.' Sharma has said in unequivocal terms that there is only room for 'tradition' which Nambiar sways will trickle down every aspect of culture. 'Sudheendra Kulkarni made a very strong point by attending the event cover in black ink.' He remarked further that 'It's more than words can say, really.'

Keki N. Daruwalla, a poet while airing his view: 'Sadly in recent months Akademi has not stood up as boldly as it should for values that any literature stands for, namely freedom of expression against threat, upholding the rights of the marginalized, speaking up against supersti-

tious and intolerance of any kind. The Akademi has also not distinguished itself in t standing by authors who are under political duress. Nor has the Akademi, under your dispensation, spoken out against organizations/ideological collectives that have used physical violence of the worst sort against authors.’ More and more Sahitya Akademi writers across the country keep returning their awards with a single voice as that of Sahagal who returned her Sahitya Akademic Award protesting against ‘growing intolerance’ in the country by firmly acknowledging that ‘This country belongs to all Hindustanis, not just Hindus. All Hindustanis need to be protected. Government must consider this its responsibility that each religious is respected and our pluralism is given its due. This is not happening.’ Many contend that PM Modi’s response to Dadri lynching and opposition to Ghulam Ali’s concert as ‘unfortunate’ is rather weak.

The return of Sahitya Akademi awards in big numbers happens to be the first time in the history of India. Writers and thinkers like Jean Paul Satre refused the Nobel prize and thus gave two reasons a combination of personal and objective: 1) My refusal is not an impulsive gesture. I have always declined official honors. In 1945, after the war; when I was offered the Legion of Honor, I refused it, although I was sympathetic to the government. Similarly, I have never sought to enter the College de France, as several of my friends suggested. This attitude is based on my conception of the writer’s enterprise. 2) A writer who adopts political, social, or literary positions must act only with the means that are his own—that is, the written word. All the honours he may receive expose his readers to a pressure, I do not consider desirable. If I sign myself Jean-Paul Sartre it is not the same thing as if I sign myself ‘Jean-Paul Sartre, Nobel Prize winner.’ In fact, Sartre had written to the Swedish Academy even before the announcement of the award, when he came to know that he was one of the candidates in the race that he would not

accept it and yet Academy rejected his plea and thus announced his name.

In India Arundhati Roy declined to accept the Sahitya Akademi award and journalist Nikhil charavarty refused Padma Bhushan that they would rob their independence. Sartre is the only one so far to have declined the Nobel Prize. The role of intellectuals in any society is vital and important, especially when it comes to freedom of expression, writing, art forms and host of others. But the emergency had exposed most of them. Most of the writers and other creative artists kept mum; some wilted and totally surrendered to the diktat of the government. The silence of the intelligentsia was baffling for the former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who clamped the emergency. Hence, some from the BJP government question: why now in NDA—BJP Government, and why not during UPA and Congress governments and so it is ‘manufactured’.

It is not ‘why not then’ and ‘why now’? As the years and decades passed by the consciousness of the Indian writers and literary figures have grown substantially in all facets vis-à-vis social, economic, political, cultural and religious. And so, the question why now does not arise and therefore, have any relevance. ‘Why now’ should not be asked now because the intelligentsia is in a situation that requires action and expression and for that we have a number of instances and narratives happening day in and day out. A classic example is a couple of days ago the Culture Minister Mahesh Sharma’s enlightened response was that if writers feel they cannot write in the present atmosphere, they should first stop writing—‘then we will see!’ Regrettably, the Modi Government has not even begun to understand what is at stake and how to control the fringe elements. The fringe carries out the political program of BJP-RSS!

Khattar, the Chief Minister of Haryana commented two days ago ‘to reside, give up beef’. ‘If Muslims want to live in India, Muslims should give up beef’. Continuing further, ‘Beef hurts Hindus. Freedom has

limitations'. The Majority decides what the Minority should eat, dress, speak and write. Majority wants the minority to follow them and minority should become like them. Only then minority would be allowed to reside in India because they are different and should become like the majority. These are the semblances of fascism. Freedom of speech and expression are the fundamental rights of the Indian Constitution. Any state or government or a junta that curtails the freedom of expression shows the fascist overtones. Further, despite reminders from different layers and people who are part of the Indian society, the government has done little to stand up for the right of people to expression of thoughts and ideas, and want everyone to live the way they want people to live, express and write in a free society. It is indeed undemocratic, communal and fascist.

Freedom of speech and expression is a hard-earned right that must not be dissipated and thus slip from our hands. In the history we come across those people who have sacrificed their lives to uphold the truth. Giordano Bruno was burnt alive on charges of blasphemy and immoral conduct for supporting the heliocentric theory of universe and saying that the stars were just distant suns surrounded by their own exo-planets. Galileo was awarded death penalty by the Pope for propounding that the earth was not flat but round which revolved round the sun. In jail, when he was belaboured, he would say that the earth is flat and the sun moves around it. But as the pain subsided, he would revert back to his original position. Certainly, in the current Indian context the role of the intellectuals has been edifying who keep defying fascist tendencies and thus openly challenging the government for the freedom of expression of citizens in the Indian society. The present context simply exemplifies: 'Writers oppose and the Government simply dismisses'.

Modi's government came under scanner once again by the US government. Just a few days ago a top man of the US administration ex-

pressing religious freedom in India has said that the US will encourage the Modi government to turn the ideals of ‘tolerance and civility’ into reality across the country. ‘Just after this controversy over beef incidents, the Prime Minister called for civility and tolerance between different communities. We are going to encourage the Prime Minister and the government to take those ideals and turn them into reality all across the country,’ said the US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, David Saperstein. He was responding to a question on the status of religious freedom in India after the State Department released its annual Congressional mandated report on International Religious Freedom for 2014. Fascist forces have become intolerant and uncivil in recent times.

The India section of the report, which includes the UPA rule till May 26, says that in 2014, India witnessed religiously motivated killings, arrests and coerced religious conversions and the police in some cases failed to respond effectively to communal violence. As usual India downplayed the report by Vikas Swarup spokesperson in the Ministry of External Affairs that ‘The report is internal to the US administration. It is widely acknowledged that the Constitution of India guarantees equal religious, social, political rights to all its citizens including minorities— Any abuses are handled by our internal judiciary, vibrant press, civil society, National Human Rights Commission.’ Everyone knows what is happening in the Indian society. BJP government is pushing its misdeeds under the carpet—how long the Government at Centre goes on like this? What are the ways to stop the growing menace of the fringe forces?

PM Modi recently went to the US to boost FDI and other military packages, but after some weeks badly hit by David Saperstein, US Ambassador-at-Large commented ‘We continue to push with the Indian government to take steps to ameliorate the conditions that lead to violence and to take steps where every community which is in minority and vulnerable in certain areas would have protection.’ Certainly the report

clearly implicated the government's failure by not protecting the minorities and the free thinkers that shows the rising tendencies of fascism. It is a slap on the BJP-government and a clear indication that things are not alright in India. In conjunction to these developments over 90 writers from West Bengal wrote to President Pranab Mukherjee, seeking his intervention in the Dadri lynching incident and recent attacks on rationalists, the list of authors protesting 'rising intolerance' in the country continues to grow. In their letter to the president, the writers and intellectuals said, 'We are horrified at the callous lack of support and apathy of the state in finding and bringing the culprits to justice. The stifling atmosphere of fear and uncertainty is fatal to the freedom of expression that is at the heart of our shared lives, and it is for the restoration of this common fabric that we urge you to intervene.'

The current scenario clearly posits fascist tendency which is one the rise that religious fringe group that terrorizes and lynches the free thinkers, writers, minorities so on and so forth. These fringe groups get the support of the BJP. All layers of our society including the commoners feel increasingly threatened in the present scenario where freedom of expression has been facing and thus challenging. The protests of the writers and the intellectual are against the religious and creative intolerance which is on the rise. Fascism first strikes the intellectuals and mute and cripple the public intelligentsia. The emergence of fascism in India under the present dispensation is all out in pushing the cultural nationalism forcing everybody to eat what they eat, to dress what they say 'Indian culture', to get into the stream of education which has been saf-ronised, interpret history what they interpret is history and to think what they tell us to think which according to them is right and logical.

Rewriting of history for the fascists is important, to reinterpret the stories of the past and to reconstruct the history in accordance to glorify fascist history. These fringe elements cannot think intellectually and

push their arguments systematically and sequentially, but want to silence the thinkers with brute force. Indian intelligentsia has come of age and shall not bow to the powers and principalities without reason and logic nor be bought. Freedom of expression is vital for those who think and come out with creative ideas and interpretation. The rise of fascist tendencies by ultra-rightists forces and fringe elements need to be exposed and challenged.

RELIGION AND POLITICS COVERGE — HOW, WHY AND FOR WHAT?



Humans in general want to maximise pleasure and minimise pain. To realise this objective they strive hard so that they live and lead a happy life. This is indeed a part of human nature. Certainly there is nothing wrong about it. However, if we start analysing or if we enter into probing it is rather intriguing. What then is pleasure and how do we understand pain? Despite in-depth ponderings and soul-searching pursuits we are bombarded with one central question: How to live a good life? The sages and philosophers with their profound thoughts and organic wisdom pursued and searched since time immemorial for authentic living and existence. Accordingly they did articulate on the notion of existence and shown innumerable ways to realise it from diverse understandings and perspectives. The principles and ethos of the sages and philosophers keep illumining with new breaking grounds from time to time.

Instead of entering into the converging and diverging dimensions of philosophic-theological-ideological discourses on pleasure and pain, I would like to exclusively delve into some facets of religion, which I think are the cores. Religions such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and others by and large revolve around the notion of happiness. Every religion teaches its adherents the ways to be happy and subscribes diverse modes to attain happiness. At the same time the usage of happiness is juxtaposed or pitched as against the terms such as misery/despair/affliction. Therefore, the usages of these terms are concrete and existential. Hence, we tend to employ these terms as against something that posits oppositional view that we confront or face in our day-to-day life.

The saints, the sages and the messiahs strived for happiness, tranquilly, joy and peace. Pursuing for tolerance, mutual co-habitation, loving one another, establishing human equality and equity have been regarded as the hallmarks of those who the humanity reveres. Their words and deeds continue to illumine many that go beyond time and space. But religions despite its doctrinal differences have systematically organised and thus institutionalised keeping aside the core principles and ethical moorings. Nevertheless, the fundamentals of religion continue to exist because they tend to illumine many and enable them to live and lead happy, joyous and righteous life. Religions continue to exist because of their enduring and ever-relevant utterances of those who each religion regards as central.

As years went by, their words and deeds have been packaged and organized in the form of religion. Further, the custodians of religion devised new ways to institutionalise religion and have been successful by adding more paraphernalia such as rituals, confessions, sacrifices, intercessory prayers and hosts of others into it. In the process the core principles and ethics have waned. The custodians of religion are the priests who act as intermediaries between god and faithful followers. The job of the priests is to keep the faith of their adherents alive and to sustain it so that their survival goes uninterrupted without any hitch. To protect their present and future the priests go to any extent involving in the act of tampering, manipulating, hoodwinking, inciting, luring, falsifying and add many to keep their flocks intact. Except a few, most of the priests have their own vested interests. For them it is a job and not a vocation, certainly not 'called out to serve the people'.

Paradoxically the faithful adherents keep striving for happiness and peace and for that they submit themselves to god to be saved. Over and above, human beings want to know where they would go after death. Religion promises certain paths that would lead them either to heaven or to hell. The doctrines such as 'salvation', 'heaven', 'hell', 'sinner' and

‘saved’ play the most crucial roles for the adherents. In order to make it simple and pragmatic there should be an agency or ‘in-between’ and for that the priests act as ‘intermediaries’ and project themselves as the ‘gate way’ promising or assuring ways to go to ‘moksha’/heaven.

However, a question that arises: Do they (priests) genuinely act as ‘intermediaries’ offering happiness, joy, peace and tranquillity to the adherents? Let us assume what would happen, if everyone relieved from pain and misery experiencing joy and happiness, peace and love? As long as people are kept under the captivity and illusion, myths and riddles and in a state of unhappiness, people in general submit themselves to the priests who act as custodians of religion. This scenario will continue for some time because religion and its functionaries have instilled false consciousness in order to protect and promote their interests. The vested interests shall not allow the humanity to be happy and joyous. They need miserable and damned human beings. For the sake of their survival and also the survival of religion miserable flock is needed. Religion with all its paraphernalia acts as blinkers and those who gets hooked fall as its prey.

Miserable and unhappy people are always willing to obey, ready to submit and open to follow the directives. A miserable person is so much soaked in miseries, unable to stand on his/her own because he/she is immersed and incapable of coming out on their own. So, whatever solace/exit/route they get are ready to follow. It is in this context, religion via the priests act as agents whose job is to hook those in damned situation alluring joy, peace, hope and salvation. Religion acts like a trap for the damned. Likewise, politicians make use of the situation to their advantage. For them the people should be miserable so that they could become leaders. Those who live in misery, hapless and hopeless conditions can be lured, promised and used as vote banks, sycophants, cronies and supporters.

In both the cases the points of reference are misery, turmoil, affliction and hopelessness that the priests and the politicians use these elements to their advantage. These two points of convergence take advantage of the damned situation. In this sense, any person who thinks as stupid or idiot or good for nothing could become one's leader: be it in politics or in religion. In the political and religious arenas the leaders emerge by exploiting the situation. Take for example, most of the MPs, MLA and others in higher rungs have criminal charges, tainted for corrupt dealings and other dubious practices. Most of them have become leaders and moved further up. Similarly take for instance the religious system right from top down we see the same traits. The politicians make promises for good life (this-worldly terms); whereas the religious priests promise its adherents a good life after death (other-worldly terms). Both live on hoodwinking its adherent and faithful flock and thus make their living.

Those who live in miserable situations and damned conditions trust and follow them. They need an escape route and religion provides that. They live day in and day out with a number of human-made maladies. Those who are happy and peaceful there is no need to believe false promises. When the people of the world live in joy and happiness there is hardly any place and space for politicians and priests. Misery, deprivation, human divides and differences are the creations of politicians and the clerics. Religious systems and political establishments tend to manipulate and extend all sorts of solutions to the problems that the humanity faces. They are the creators of all the problems that the world is gripped with. The irony is that the clerics and the politicians eventually pose and somehow hoodwink the people that they are the solvers of the problems that the humanity faces. In fact the religious and political systems and its establishments are the manufacturers and perpetuators of the problems the humanity face.

Religion and politics are webbed with each other, feeds and breeds on each other. These two are interdependent. The scenarios of the world particularly India posit the ugly face of this combination i.e. politics and religion. The world is gripped with all sorts of problems unleashed by ultra-religious fundamentalist and neo-conservative political forces. If maximum number of people is happy and joyous, then there is no need for the clerics and politicians. So, it is obvious that the so-called custodians such as god men, poojaris, clerics, and bishops would eventually become redundant. When people are unhappy religion and its agents come to their 'rescue' promising: 'May be the present life is wasted and the life after be devoid of all these'. The priests offer prayers 'at least in the next life there won't be any sorrow, misery, trial and tribulations and certainly be absolute joy and happiness'.

Similarly, those who are in misery and squalid conditions approach clerics and politicians for a better world where quality of life and basic survival needs be realised. The instantaneous response from the clerics: 'pray and lead a holy life and you will be blessed with all these'; the politicians retort 'if you vote for us and our party, if we get elected and form the government, you are assured that my government shall translate all your demands.' It is natural that when humans are entangled with problems, unhappiness creeps-in prompting them to meet priests, astrologers and soothsayers who take advantage of their desperateness and thus promise many things. Can the priests offer 'happiness' to those who are 'unhappy'? Even if they offer it is just temporal and momentary. They offer fake promises of 'good and happy life', instead they want to perpetuate 'unhappiness'.

The priests barring a few usually do not address to 'this life', but move on to 'the life after death'. It is also a natural tendency that those who live in miserable conditions almost give up hope of any betterment and so religion promises abundant life after death which is nothing but

false hope and promise with no clear mode. The politicians promise something good in the future in this life, and the priest promises something good to come in the other life. Both these categories keep promising and go one promising. But the fate of the people remains the same. The poor, the hapless, the vulnerable and the disadvantaged live on promises and the promises are extended by the priests and the politicians.

If people are happy and content why should they go after the priests and the politicians? If the world in which we live is transformed into a paradise where everyone enjoys quality life nobody would go near the priests and the politicians. When people are happy and live in paradise what is the necessity of approaching priests and politicians. Is there a necessity for these intermediaries (one between god and people and the other between state/government and people) to exist and certainly they would eventually become redundant. Religion becomes handy to those who are soaked in miseries and tribulations and thus takes along its adherents to ecstatic realms promising many things which are unreal. One may get a relief for some time and then ought to come back to the real world. Priests and politicians live on peoples' misery and unhappiness; while on the contrary use other miseries and unhappiness as controlling mechanisms.

Do the clerics face any miseries and tribulation? How do they understand life after death? Are the priests concerned and committed in establishing paradise 'here and now'/ 'on this earth?' Have the politicians even strived for a world devoid of inequity and inequality? Everyone wants to use the poor, vulnerable, and the neglected to their advantage. In this case both the politicians and the clerics belong to the same levels. These are the people who in the name of 'good governance' and 'extension of peace' exploit their subjects and flocks. Like leaches the priests and politicians sit on people suck their potentials and energies. They remain in power as long as people live in miserable conditions. So mis-

ery, turmoil, pain and pathos are pre-requisites for their survival, be it politics or religion. Remember to remember that politicians and priests exist and thrive by keeping the people as captives and in a state of false consciousness.

The politicians and priests point to the miserable conditions of people as something 'normal' and 'natural' and so extend all sorts of 'promises'. 'Promises' entails 'this-worldly' and 'other-worldly', 'material' and 'spiritual', 'present' and 'futuristic', 'hell' and 'heaven'. Whatever may be the situation or condition you are-in, you should firmly believe that the condition and the situation you see around have been created by humans. The politicians and priests make use of the situation by making huge promises. The appalling conditions that we see around are the creation of the mortals. We should have unflinching belief that we can change it and thus make the world better for everyone to be happy and liveable.

In conjunction to whatever has been said let me echo Osho's wise counsel: 'I am doing something really revolutionary, radical: I am trying to make you happy. It may not be very obvious to you how it is concerned with the revolution of society, but it is. A happy person beyond being oppressed exploited, because a happy person needs no promise. A happy person is already happy so he is not worried about paradise or afterlife. That is all nonsense. A happy person is not worried about tomorrow; the morrow takes care of itself.' In tune to this Osho adds: 'Priests and politicians create guilt in you. They do the harm and then they make you feel guilty. They destroy your capacity to live, to love, to delight, and then they throw the responsibility on you—'It is your sin, it is your wrong doing that has made you so miserable. But the basic problem is conditioning. Man should be helped to live a natural life, man should not be conditioned to live an unnatural life. The basic problem is how not to allow others to destroy that capacity.'

Osho's words are apt and quite persuasive to our present and future. The convergence between the priests ('god men') and the politicians is visibly manifest at varied facets. Let us not fall prey to falsity of these and use our critical faculty by employing rationality and common sense so that real and lasting peace, joy and happiness be realised here and now.

IT'S TIME TO SILENCE THE FRINGE OR THE FRINGE WILL SILENCE US



More than 3 million people converged in Paris on the 11th January, 2015 (Sunday) to express their unity and freedom of expression following the attack on satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo that resulted in the death of 17 people. More than 40 world leaders shoulder to shoulder marched through Paris on Sunday to rally for unity and freedom of expression and to honour the victims who died in those horrific shootings. The Interior ministry said the rally was the largest demonstration in France's history. It outnumbered the numbers who took to Paris streets when the Allies liberated the city from the Nazis in World War II. What happened then in 40s of the 20th century testifies the liberation of the World from fascist forces and what happened now in Paris in the second decade of the 21st century vivifies the resolve of the global humanity to crush the fringe elements.

'Today, Paris is the capital of the world,' said French President François Hollande. 'Our entire country will rise up toward something better.' Rallies were also planned in London, Madrid and New York as to condemn and to show to the fringe elements that the resolve of the humanity cannot be taken for granted. The heinous killings nullify any kind of justification and rationalization. The act was simply barbaric and cold-blooded. Those who executed the dastardly act may give numerous reasons, but certainly Charlie Hebdo consistently challenged the world of hypocrisy, fundamentalism and fanaticism. Charlie Hebdo basically challenged conformism and conservatism by unfolding the riddles entrenched in the world of archaic belief systems.

Those who carried out the attacks symbolically sent a clear message to the world that the progressive and free-thinking ideas shall no more be tolerated. Their aim was to silence the world of free-thinking and free-expression. There shall never be ‘other view’ or ‘dissent’ or ‘right to question’. You better fall in line, if not you will face consequences. It was absolutely an attack on democracy, humanity, basic rights and free thinking and expressions. Their acts symbolize violence and intolerance. If they were against the views subscribed by Charlie Hebdo they could have expressed their protest by taking legal course or countering it with a rejoinder or rebuttal or peaceful means. But by physically liquidating implies: ‘whoever defies should pay the price’. A clear signal to the world: ‘we shall not tolerate’ and if you continue ‘we shall kill you’. It was designed to strike fear in the hearts of those who oppose their views and programs.

The world at large responded to the killings in the strongest possible terms. However, time and time again, the fringe elements kill and keep killings in tens, hundreds and thousands and the world at large takes the wounded to the hospitals and the dead to the cemeteries. If the world had responded fittingly to the 2006 massacre in appropriate terms this incident would not have happened. The world wilted and fell flat to the dictate of the fundamentalists. The Western democratic countries at this point of juncture should review their policies because some of the fringe elements after careful interrogation were left out and given the total freedom to move around. Should not the terror suspects be treated separately? Should there be a special trial for the terror suspects? Should there be new clause of legislation to be promulgated to those who incite violence and get involved terror-related training and radicalization program?

The important point is about freedom of speech. Charlie Hebdo flourished in a country where secular and radical views, satires, cartoons and other forms of expressions are not only tolerated but celebrated. But

the world in which we live is no more the same including India which was several decades ago. World is shirking and moving towards neo-conservative levels. Many don't tolerate dissent and have no sense of humour. What happened to those who were part of drawing cartoons that provoked a section of Muslims? Should they be sentenced to death because of that? Of course not in a civilized society, but those who were involved in the drawing knew that a section of society would be hurt. Despite these they went ahead and within their limits, as per the law of the land and freedom of expressions.

Similar questions continue to loom in the post-Paris massacre. More importantly the concept of free speech and freedom of expressions cannot be divorced from broader ambits that include socio-legal-religio-cultural facets. For instance, a novel titled *Madhdorubagon* released four years ago written by a well-known and award winning author Perumal Murugam, Professor of Tamil Literature from Tamil Nadu who is no more is under attack by the fringe casteist and fascist ultra-rightists goons. The reason being the novel has desecrated and defamed the Hindu women and the rich Hindu cultural traditions. When he was alive, he has been receiving several abusing and threatening calls. Despite his request the state government failed to give him the police cover.

Before his death the irrational and idiotic fringe elements hounded him to quit from writing; made him to apologize and crushed and forced him to say 'Author in me has died'. The book has been translated into English and other languages and thus far women folk have not raised any objection, rather appreciated the ways with which he nuanced and developed the story and the message he wanted to communicate. The sick mind-sets that belongs to the fringe after four years rakes up this issue just to polarize the society and woo a few castes to their side for votes. BJP and its ultra-rightist fanatical outfits want to pump in irrationality and reinforce superstitious belief systems into the minds of the

Tamil Nadu people that witnessed reform, rationality and enlightenment movements by Dravidian party and EVR Periyar. If these fringe elements continue this way and given a free hand, then India would regress and continue to live in an irrational and mythological world. We should ask the fringe outfits: Will they ban Kama sutra and others that display all sorts of 'vulgarity' as per their understanding? They do not think and their actions have no merit, no rational and no logic, but employ selective amnesia that suits them.

Sakshi Maharaj, a Member of Parliament from BJP said that all Hindu women must produce at least four children. Media took it up and after lots of furor Amit Shah, the President of BJP issued a show cause notice to Sakshi Maharaj to respond within ten days. Nonetheless some of the BJP MPs and its functionaries make all sorts of statements against those who do not belong to their political project and ideological agenda. Everyone knows that in order to pacify the opponents and its critics this type of action seem to have carried out. It is nothing but an eye wash. Who is he to advise the Hindu women to bear so many children? Are women according to him machines or should women be treated as producers of children?

According to these fringe elements Hindu women are considered as child-bearing outlets. One of the spokes persons of Hindu Mahasabha wanted to support his claim by citing the demography of Muslims showing upward fertility trend which was contested and found untrue. According to the 2011 Census, the demography of the Muslims has gone down or fallen dramatically. Further, Sakshi Maharaj went to the extent of threatening The Times Reporters and seems to be not at all bothered about the show-cause notice. There are many Sakshi Maharajas in BJP and its cultural outfits. Whatever the leadership of BJP utters about the fringe groups it is just a cosmetic move. BJP is behind him and so he has thus far refused to apologize. He has been a serial offender and BJP

wants him. BJP think that it could fool people, but by now everyone knows that whatever they offer just tokenism.

Their four children logic has this format: one to the army to fight the enemies of... the other to protect the Hindu culture, the other to be given to VHP and the last one to Hindu religion. These four would decide what India should eat and dress; what type of education India should get and when should women in India use the phone and what types of phones; when to work and so on. Their madness has reached its peak: if a Muslim takes one Hindu girl, in return we will take 100 Muslim girls. These fringe elements have now received new lease of life after Modi became the PM. World is increasingly becoming multi-cultural and multi-religious. Integration of diverse orientations and cultures is taking place at a rapid pace. German Chancellor Merkel said after Paris attack: 'Muslims are part of Germany'. She further resolutely said: 'there is no place for those who believe in xenophobia, racism and extremism.'

India for centuries is known for having accommodated diverse cultures and belief systems. Those who are Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, atheists, secularists, agonists and others are part of India. PM Modi wants 'Make in India', but BJP the party he belongs to and other fringe elements of BJP do not want those who are 'born in India'. Those who are under attack have always been advised to 'ignore'. Accordingly many have ignored and failed to take these fringe elements seriously. Inaction and complacency of us have emboldened the lunatic fringe elements. The state/government failed on two principles: First, the state/government should never succumb to blackmail. Second, the state/government should defend the rights that are enshrined in the Constitution.

Former President and renowned philosopher S. Radhakrishnan said, 'Belief and behaviour go together. If we believe in blood, race and soil, our world will be filled with Buchenwalds, but if we believe in universal

spiritual values, peace and understanding will grow'. The values that are engrained in spirituality ought to be the guiding principles for the humanity of the world to grow and move on. It is not the fundamentalism, but the fundamentals of religion should govern its adherents. In conjunction to this— J Krishnamurti one of the most revered philosophers of our country remarked that since we are constantly being conditioned by beliefs, ideas and dogmas, they are bound to cause disquiet. While citing an example of two boys fighting over a toy; having grown they started to fight over new toys of power, position, wealth and ideology.

It is in this context, J Krishnamurti exhorts that one should learn to de-condition one-self from these external trappings by developing courage to be free of the fear of losing them. The manipulative and restless mind has to be anchored in love and compassion. When desires tend to dominate the other domains physically, psychologically or intellectually, then it should be understood as a power game of mind and in that we should consciously make genuine and rational attempt to extinguish prejudice and bias. Seeking freedom from fear and insecurities can resurrect our basic human values not 'up there and out there', but 'here and now'. We cannot ignore these freeing outwits. It is time to counter them firmly and fittingly.

Charlie Hebdo made a defiant return on Wednesday the 14th of January 14 with a new issue that sold out across France which would total around 5 million copies. Certainly this issue is symbolic that reifies their resolve and never succumbed to the dictates of the fundamentalists. Even in Tamil Nadu the free thinking people, civil society and the intelligentsia have been protesting against the irrational lunatic fringe groups. It is time to silence these ultra-fundamentalist forces. If we fail, then they will silence us. Never ignore and beware of these divisive forces.

PLURALISM AND TOLERANT VS. MAJORITARIANISM AND INTOLERANT



For the past couple of days TV channels and newspaper columns are filled with the remarks, comments and statements that the fringe elements make, the ministers and MPs of BJP utter and the ultra-fundamentalists recite. There have been serious debates being evoked across the country that demeaned our country and Indian society. The incidences that we witness; the levels of justifications that are made; the support and solidarity being extended by the ruling dispensation show clearly that the ultra-fundamentalists are determined to carry out systematic campaigns and strategies to deploy their ultimate vision of establishing Hindu Raj and Hindu theocratic constitution. PM occasionally condemns, but hardly his allies listen to.

Unable to tolerate the magnitude of the incidences happening across the country, the Chief Executive of the Constitution, the President of India made a significant remark on Wednesday in the context of the Dadri lynching exhorted that ‘the core values of India’s civilization that celebrate diversity, plurality and tolerance should not be allowed to wither away.’ Further, the President clearly made his point clear at a book release function at Rashtrapati Bhavan that ‘Over the years, our civilization has celebrated diversity, plurality and promoted and advocated tolerance. These values have kept us together over the centuries. Many ancient civilizations have collapsed, but the Indian civilization has

survived because of its core civilization of values and adherence to them. 'These were certainly candid, defining and definitive statements.

The President's remarks should be seen in the wake of intolerant comments, attacks and lynching carried out by the ultra-rightists and Hindu fundamentalists who want to see the secular India and plural Indian society gradually shift to Hindu-nation wherein only the Hindus shall have the rights and others be treated as secondary citizens having no constitutional rights and thus deprived of equal status and opportunities. Inflammatory comments and remarks against the minorities and secular-minded people by the lunatic elements have become the order of the day. President's remarks underlines the need for restraint as heated politics over the killing of Mohammad Akhlaq in Uttar Pradesh's Bisada village over rumours of beef consumption led to derogatory statements uttered by BJP and Samajwadi Party MLAs and MPs.

As against the background President Mukerjee reiterated that 'If we keep them (civilizational values) in mind, nothing can prevent our nation from forging ahead. Indian democracy is a marvel and we must prevent our nation from forging ahead. Indian democracy is a marvel and we must... preserve... and promote... its strengths.' His remarks show lots of punch and sensibility. His message essentialises that by all means pluralism and tolerance should be preserved and promoted. They are vital and important for the functioning of democracy. President's message has lots of implications to the Indian democratic values and ethos. For example, Ashok Vajpeyi, a literary personality has returned the prestigious Sahitya Akadami Award, joining a parade of litterateurs renouncing their prizes, to protest 'assault on right to freedom of both life and expression'. Pakistani ghazal singer Ghulam Ali's concert in Mumbai was cancelled a few days ago after Shiv Sena threatened to disrupt it, warning that no artiste from that country will be allowed to perform in the city till terror emanating from across the border is stopped. The concert is under serious threat. However many states have

openly extended invitations to Ghulam Ali to have concert held in their states.

The incidence that sparked condemnation by many took place in Bishada village of Dadri in Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh is certainly communal in nature. It has serious implications for our secular character and so be condemned on all counts. The shameful episode was carefully plotted and well-orchestrated. It added more surprise and shock when we read the comments of the Union home minister Rajnath Singh who called it as 'unfortunate', urging people not to give it a communal colour instead of arresting the communalists. The same logic and narrative has been parroted by Union tourism minister Mahesh Sharma, the MP from the area who is known for his habitual offence when it comes to making provocative statements.

Other BJP leaders who have made odious statements such as Sakshi Maharaj, MP belonging to BJP openly and loudly proclaimed that he is ready to kill and be killed to protect the cow. Sangeet Som, a BJP MLA in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly whose role in the terrible 2013 communal violence in Muzaffarnagar and also in western UP and not far from Dadhi openly said that the Samajwadi Party's government in UP was protecting 'cow eater' because the chief minister met the family of the deceased and offered compensation. Mohan Baghawat, the RSS chief openly proclaimed India is a Hindu raj. Provocative statements and utterances from these fringe elements appear all the time and should be taken seriously.

Nonetheless, their actions are ludicrous and totally bizarre. If a cow is slaughtered, the alleged slaughter is killed and punished. Should the life of any animal be placed above a human life? And who has given the mob the right to take the law into their hands? Although cow slaughter is banned until now there has not been any evidence that Akhlaq and his family had killed a calf and eaten the meat and thus broken the state law.

The act of mob lynching and destroying a family is based on floated rumors that seemed to have engineered and thus triggered communal violence. Strategically mobs are deployed so that it becomes difficult to gather evidence against those who perpetrated the communal crime. This has been the strategy these fringe elements always employ. Inciting communal conflagrations before elections has been the grand design of BJP to polarize public opinion and votes.

Once again, before leaving abroad, the President again reiterated that religion should not be used to usurp power and never be based on creating divide between communities. Tolerance and co-existence is the basic tenets of our constitution. Therefore, we need to amplify in our existence. Our lives should become part of our lives. We must respect other faiths and beliefs. The Prime Minister Modi had to break his silence the next day on the horrific Dadri lynching deftly reacting to President Pranab Mukerjee's observation that he made on Wednesday on the need for Hindu-Muslim unity and urged people to ignore all 'irresponsible' statements by politicians, even if he himself makes any. PM Modi under sharp attack from the opposition for remaining silent on the lynching and had to speak at an election rally in Bihar by asking people 'to shed all differences and join hands in their fight against poverty and nation-building'.

He said at a rally in Bihar that 'If you need to pay heed, it should be to the message and guidance given by the President. Whatever the head of country of 125 crore people has said, there can be no bigger message. No bigger direction, no bigger inspiration than that.' PM Modi exhorted the people to treat the path shown by the President 'only then India meets the expectations that the world has from us'. He endorsed that 'We have to decide whether Hindus should fight Muslims or poverty ... Muslims should decide whether to fight Hindus or poverty... The country will benefit only when Hindus and Muslims together fight poverty and defeat it. The country has to stay united.'

Bitter truth cannot be eluded forever. PM Modi has to budge to the ongoing fiasco go on in different parts of the country. RSS '*pracharaks*' and other fringe elements of that ilk went on the rampage against members of minority faiths, as well as critics, dissenters and rationalists, lynching and silencing—sometimes even celebrating the extinguishing of the life of those who dare question them following the Taliban-style. For PM it is difficult to dare the religious fundamentalist who had campaigned for his election and what he is now is because of them. Since he is under intense pressure he had to raise his voice. Remaining silent to the misdeeds the Hindutva-style goons flaunt on what to eat, wear or study has never been an option or even a priority for the PM Modi and all of a sudden raising noise about 'development'. President Pranab Mukherjee on Wednesday reminded the country of the core values of diversity, tolerance and pluralism which have 'kept us together over the centuries'. He did indirectly instrument the government and instructed the people to stand guard. PM Modi should silence the fringe elements. It is better late than never, otherwise people of the country will reject him.

BREAKING THE SILENCE OF BETHELEHEM: THE WORD BECOMING FLESH BROUGHT THE HOPES ALIVE



For Christians this is the season of Advent. On the 25th of December, the advent would eventually culminate in to Christmas—a day of celebration. It is firmly believed by the Christians that Jesus Christ about 2000 years ago was born in Bethlehem, in a manger—a rustic insignificant place. However, a number of attributes that describes Jesus Christ as: the Messiah, the Anointed, the Saviour, the King, the Life, the Living Water and the Light of the World. During this period candles are lit up--the advent that creates an atmosphere of anticipation--of welcoming a great event—the birth of Jesus, who is Emmanuel, God with us and so on.

However, the narratives about Christmas keep changing as the contexts—local and global in which we live also changes. Narratives have to be relevant and apt to the scenario that we face and the issues that the people experience and confront day-in and day-out. Therefore, the narratives will have to evoke, trigger and unveil the reality around us. It should propel new ways of understanding as Christ coming to this world—to live in our midst as one among us. A new awareness and realization should open our eyes and minds and thus lead to the reality in and around us. Christmas is supposed to rekindle the spirit and consciousness and thus create awareness and so it should not be considered as just ‘celebration’ or an annual feature. If we take the people of Palestine where Jesus was born and spent his time present an appalling picture.

The terrains where Jesus spent his early years; the temple he entered and cleansed; the locales he visited and ministered; those who came to him for healing, hearing, deliverance, caring and sharing now impregnated with anger, rage, violence, hatred, revenge, atrocities and injustices. Bethlehem where Jesus was born and the Palestine where Jesus spent most his time portrays all sorts of violations and injustices for the last decades. For instance,

- Palestinian school children were shot at, wounded and left to bleed on ground under claims that they attempted to stab Israeli soldiers.
- Israeli soldiers invade Palestinians communities who live in various pockets in West Bank District of Hebron and Jerusalem.
- Tensions rage in the Israeli occupied Palestinians' lands.
- Israeli settlers unleash dogs on Palestinian shepherds in Northern Jordan valley.
- Israeli military forces indiscriminately shoot at Palestinians at different points in the occupied West Bank.
- Conditions of Palestinian prisoners held in solitary confinement in Israeli jails.
- At least 6,700 held in Israeli jails for no offences which are in contravention to the violation of International laws.
- Injustice is inherent in its entire Israel's occupation of Palestine. In tune to it even the State of Israel's policies and practices are geared to subjugate the Palestinians.
- As a consequence, the State of Israel confiscated the land that belongs to the Palestinians by exploiting their natural resources, destroying agricultural crops, hampering governance and government, polluting the water through a system of racial segregation and hindering infrastructural development.

As against the backdrop, let us take into account the incarnation of Jesus Christ into this world. The forerunner of Jesus Christ, John the Evangelist announces the good news in John 1: 1-14: 'In the beginning was the WORD, the WORD was with God and the WORD was God' ... 'And the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us'. God becoming human in and through Jesus Christ is the centrality of the advent as we commemorate Christmas. In this way the WORD became complete in and through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus' incarnation, we gained the humanity. The WORD becoming flesh and in the flesh the humanity has become one. It simply means that in Jesus Christ we acquire the essence and meaning of our being and becoming. More importantly, the Divinity of God acquires its fullness and completeness in the Humanity of Jesus Christ as the WORD became flesh. Jesus Christ is thus the Alpha and Omega.

The place where Jesus was born and the terrains he journeyed is no longer the same. It has become the land of bloody conflict where blood is spilled and precious and innocent lives are lost. The state of Israel with brute power tries to silence the Palestinians who pursue and strive for justice, equality, statehood, self-governance, freedom, fairness and peace. Without the basic rubric of justice there shall be no peace. Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, the Emmanuel and the Anointed who came in to the world as a human to establish love, peace and humanity amongst all. The state of Israel with all their mighty state apparatus and paraphernalia tends to silence the hopes and aspirations of the people of Palestinians. How long can they go on is the question?

The hope that comes from the Gospels conveys the authentic message that the Incarnate Jesus the Christ who brought humanity and hope in a world of injustices and hopelessness. The eternal WORD became flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ--the fusion of Divinity and Humanity. 2000 years ago, Bethlehem broke its silence by accommodating the

Messiah Jesus Christ who by becoming human has assured us justice, peace and love to the whole world which is torn apart by human-made barriers and prejudices. Jesus sacrificed his life so that the whole humanity shall have life and in fullness. Let us commit ourselves striving for the oppressed as that of the Palestinians who have been lynched and dehumanized; negated their basic rights and dignity.

LESS RELIGION OR MORE RELIGION OR NO RELIGION



We live in a world of knowledge. Knowledge is exploding at a rapid pace and phenomenal ways. The growth of knowledge and its spread keep growing, intensifying and expanding because as Homo sapiens we enter into inquiry. By raising questions and entering into inquiries we have been sorting out the most difficult and once considered as ‘impossible’ now being made possible as pursuit of know-how multiplying relentlessly. Rational mind wants to know with the application of reason by raising how, why and what. It will continue and take the humanity to greater heights in the domain of human pursuits.

Alongside, we also see religion co-existing and thus offers or recommends certain guidelines without going into the details of why they need to be followed. Since we are imbued with ‘good’ or ‘to do good’ or ‘to be good’ religion accordingly seem to be ‘promoting’ a set of criteria for the Homo sapiens to lead and live good life. To the following question: How to be good? Religion offers some tips to be good. What then constitutes ‘good’? In addition, the Greek philosophers have brought in some other ways that since we are moral beings we should exhibit morality in our actions. Each and every person ought to be governed by moral values encompassing universal as well as particular. Further, religion addresses explicitly its adherents who have faith in god-factor who is super-natural and beyond human comprehension. It is faith and the belief in someone who they consider as omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient.

Religion is concerned with the cohesiveness of the society. At the same time believes in the upkeep and the welfare of the people. It focuses on the outcomes because its teachings and other activities will have to be reflected in personal, familial, communitarian and societal levels. Accordingly it formulates its methods and approaches. One should not ask for logicity and rationality since its explanations have not been convincing for those who search for reason and logic. Religious doctrines, traditions, belief systems and its tenets cannot be questioned and critiqued. So, its followers will have to simply believe and blindly follow because they believe and faith in god who they think above their human comprehension.

The main purpose of religion is to impart values that regulate orderly life and instils moral behaviour to be followed in their individual life, communitarian well-being and society's cohesiveness. Basically religion strives for good and moral life embedded with values that regulates wellness, goodness and happiness to individuals, families, communities and society as whole. But those who questions the explanations that are given to god-factor, probe into the mythological explanations and question the way the centrality of faith that engrained may find the path of religion absurd, vague, illogical and irrational. At the same time if offers explanations that authenticates its believers' faith in someone (s) who they affirm their faith in h/her/them.

To be precise, communities, societies and nations within and between are struggling to find ways to deal with religion, its religious thoughts and prescription. So, at this point of juncture most of the countries of the world are struggling with religion. On the one hand leaders of the world and people of the world at large are caught with the problems that religion creates, while on the other the ordinary folks get increasingly attracted to religion. The attraction is not uniform and religion is gradually losing its significance. Apparently the attraction to religious fanaticism is on the rise creating all sorts of divisions and animosity

between communities and nations and so religion is losing its essence and relevance. Nowadays we see religion is involved in 'Double Speak'.

The world is polarized and thus epitomizes with religious fanaticism, fundamentalism and extremism. The Semitic religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam have been under intense test than ever before. The world is gripped with all sorts of violent religious extremism. Even in others parts we come across fundamentalism and extremism of Hinduism and so on. In such alarming scenarios nations and those concerned are deeply worried about the emergent trends. Religion is transforming nations and societies at alarming levels. The fundamentalism of religion is at its heights spewing venom against those who belong to other religion.

Leaders and those who struggle for religious harmony and peaceful co-existence of people are perplexed about how to accommodate religion in their counter to extremism, fanaticism and fundamentalism. What are the strategies and ways to come out of the present fundamentalist trends? How to handle the growing intolerance and violence being perpetrated by the religious extremists and ultra-fundamentalists? It is in this context many are contemplating whether it should be: 'Less Religion or More Religion or No Religion! These three propositions leads to other difficult semantics particularly 'Less or More' because how to decrease/less or increase/more! It is not something like medication/dosage minimalizing or maximizing and so gradually people are moving towards 'No Religion' domains.

Religion has a place. It does play the most crucial part in individual, familial, communitarian, societal and national life. But mixing religion to politics and others to pursue one's political ends/agenda leads to fundamentalism/majoritarianism/fanaticism. As long as religion humanizes, harmonizes and transforms individuals, communities, societies and nations for better humanity sharing peace, justice, love, equality, fairness

and equity irrespective of nationalities, caste, class, gender, race, inclusivity then religion will have a place, otherwise people gradually drift and embrace some other forms/means minus religion. If any religion dehumanizes, segregates, excludes, dominates, exploits and oppresses individuals, families, communities, societies and nations as against the others is not religion at all. The values of religion should be the governing principles and not its twisted and manipulated doctrines and creeds.

POPE FRANCIS'S MESSAGE: NOT POWER, POMP AND GLORY, BUT, HONESTY, SIMPLICITY AND HUMILITY



Very few people in the world are charismatic. Undoubtedly, Pope Francis is one among them. He carries along with him a kind of appeal that inspires millions and billions of people across the world. Since he assumed the office of papacy three years ago, wherever he goes he creates ripples by his thought-provoking speeches and homilies. He is not only the leader of 1.2 billion Roman Catholics, but also recognized as a statesman by billions of people around the world. He is not only a statesman, but also a messenger of peace, love and justice. He is candid, straight and passes on the message without mincing words. His words certainly would disturb many those who are in positions heading businesses, politicians, bureaucrats and power wielders. But the poor and the marginalized, and those who pursue peace and strive for justice are overwhelmed by his speeches and homilies.

In his annual Christmas Eve Homily 2015, warned the world's 1.2 billion Roman Catholics against being 'intoxicated' by possessions. He called for sobriety in a world obsessed by 'consumerism and hedonism, wealth and extravagance'. The message was apt as many especially the Christians and the Christian world assume that more we have more we are blessed. Over and above, festivals like Christmas are meant to display our extravagance—the cars we use, the attire we wear, the houses we live, the luxuries we add on and the life-style we lead. The world we live is increasingly becoming materialistic and many nowadays think that 'Greed is Good' and 'Wants although unlimited and Insatiable, but

should become within our reach and Satiable'. Consumerism has taken over as a propelling ideology and thus bombards all the time 'consume, consume and consume'.

The Pope celebrated the Christmas Eve Mass in St. Peter's Basilica in front of about 10,000 people on the 24th December 2015. Pope Francis, while celebrating the mass said 'Christmas—the time to 'once more discover who we are''. Christmas is not to show our pomp and glory, power and authority, wealth and possessions, instead show the values of humility, simplicity and honesty. He made a clarion call to all the believers to show the same simplicity as the child Jesus, 'born into poverty in a manger despite his divinity' to inspire their lives. This is indeed the purpose of Incarnation. In the process of Incarnation, God the Divine became Incarnate in Jesus Christ by becoming human. In simple terms the Divine became human in and through Jesus Christ.

Pope Francis observed that 'Amid a culture of indifference which not infrequently turns reckless, our life style of life should instead be devout, filled with empathy, compassion and mercy.' Pope Francis did observe that we live in an age of cultural indifference where I, Me, and My and Mine play the most important part. It shows that the world has become selfish and self-centred and not concerned about the community which is around us and the society we are part of it. Most of us are hardly concerned about the community to which we are part of and the society we belong to. Pope Francis's observation is pointed to the world in which we live. The rich and the middle-classes want to lead life with all sorts of comforts and enjoy everything whatever is available. Their life-style show the wealth and possessions they have and over a period of time have grown to unbelievable heights. On the contrary, the have-nots continue to struggle for basic needs and necessities. Therefore, the gap between the haves and the have-nots has been widening day-by-day. We live in a world of these contradictions.

The homily of Pope Francis is the direct reference to those who are 'intoxicated with possessions'. Let us take CSI as a case in point. Most of the 'CSI-Bishops' and their cronies are intoxicated with money and material possessions. Increasing competition for the leadership positions is not to serve God and the congregations, but to make money. In CSI the dual-intoxication vis-à-vis power and material possession prevails. How much of money do they need? What do they do with crores of rupees? How much possessions one should have? These are questions that surface when we hear the ways with which these bishops go around intoxicated to make more and more. For them there is no limit because they are governed by the principle of 'unlimited Wants that can never be satiated'. We have hardly heard of CSI-Dioceses and Synod engaged and involved in relief and rehabilitation work in Tamil Nadu. People from different walks of life plunged into various activities helping the affected victims in recent floods, but not CSI-Madras and CSI-Synod that are based in the very heart of Chennai.

During this season the key-themes that are reflected are: mercy, compassion, empathy, love, peace and justice. We have hardly come across CSI-Madras Diocese an affiliate of the CSI-Synod is also presently responsible and CSI-Synod per se involved with the flood-affected victims. Doesn't the CSI-Madras Diocese and CSI-Synod have money or expertise or logistics to get involved? What prevented them not to get involved? Or is the tsunami-syndrome still haunting them? Most of so-called CSI-bishops and other functionaries come from humble and economically poor backgrounds. But after becoming the so-called bishops have added on and on the material possessions that run to hundreds and thousands folds. How did they get and from where did they get? The very position itself has become an intoxicant because of: property, power, money and pomp involved. In another case, bulletin with the title which sounds like: Sambandam or Mahabandam or Nirbandum or what-

ever of a theological college that carried lots of pictures about the renovated dormitories, new copier machine and many more of that sort, but not a word mentioned about their engagement or involvement with the flood affected victims. These are the state of affairs of the CSI-Synod and its affiliated institutions.

Pope Francis is undoubtedly a spiritual leader who clearly digs deep and brings to the fore the rotten that are filled underneath the society and the church. There should be change in the attitude and life-style. In a world of growing materialism people go all out for material benefits keeping aside the values of compassion, love, sharing, caring and giving. His message is crystal clear: what do we gain accumulating material things and fails to take care of our neighbours? He resonates Jesus 'and Gandhi's edict: not in accordance to our greed (wants), but to needs. The world has enough to all, but many suffer and live in pathetic conditions—poverty, hunger, mal-nutrition.

TOWARD A CRITICAL THEOLOGY OF RISK-TAKING: THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE AND DISCOURSE



Abstract

Historically the notion of risk occupies an important place both in theory and praxis. Risk as a concept is rooted in the socio-economic, politico-religious and cultural facets. Basically humans as autonomous beings tend to venture into the dangerous terrains and domains, despite knowing the nature of risks involved. Therefore, risk-taking has always been a part of human nature. However, it is not all who are interested or tend to take risks. Seldom have we seen many involving in taking risks. But those who firmly believe on transformation or change or any breakthroughs tends to take risks. It is that thirst or inner urge or yearnings propel them to take risks. For instance, they do not come to terms as to what is happening around them or in their work place or even in the societal settings. Therefore, they want to bring about change or transformation, and in order to realize and translate the envisioned strives and accordingly commit for that. I am not citing those who also take risks for destructive thing. However, invariably, those who take risks will engage in changing the present state of affairs or conditions of life that brings common good and maximum happiness for maximum number of people ensuring justice and quality of life for all.

The concept of risk-taking inseparably combines the objective reality (material and natural world) and social construction (religio-cultural). For instance, when faced with volatile situations like genocide, persecu-

tion, mass murders, repression, racial-ethnic cleansings, caste conflicts and atrocities that portray indefinite futures many remain as mute spectators as if they are helpless or incapable of doing anything. This tendency seems to be natural because causing harm and planting evil to others are intrinsically embedded in human nature. But those who believe in the value of life that too life of human beings, equality, human dignity, justice and human rights will strive to create better conditions of life for all by taking and facing risks. And those who are committed and prepared to sacrifice their life for alleviation or eradication of human constructed divides and human made problems take risks and thus are prepared to bear the costs which are costly.

Paradoxically, majority of those who suffer under the yoke of exploitation and oppressive conditions do not want to struggle to change or set right the conditions they are in, but rather keep asking how long to suffer; who would liberate them; and what is the way out? On the contrary, those who strive to change the asymmetrical order keep struggling to establish a just, equitable, humane, casteless and inclusive society. In the process of translating and concretizing, they build on and instill the confidence and ignite the spark that they are the subjects of history and makers of their own destiny. As against this background, contours of a critical theology of risk-taking emerge. For instance, in a caste-stratified Indian society all those who have been negated and deprived of equality, dignity and basic rights keep yearning for a better tomorrow; a few with determination and resolve commit themselves and accordingly struggle hard to translating the hopes and aspirations of the people. Apparently, the social landscape of the Indian society portrays precisely this phenomenon as millions of Dalits are not fully integrated into the institutions, mechanisms, and processes of governance. Religions particularly Hinduism play ambivalent and legitimizing role in perpetuating the system of caste. In is an irony that the Indian Christian theology too

circumvented caste. Hence, Indian Christian theology represents the ethos and frameworks of the dominant caste Christians.

It is in this context, let me put it lucidly that 'if' God is in full control of everything and the whole cosmos functions in accordance to His mandate, then the theological hypothesis of risk-taking God is at least plausible. Moreover, according to the Christian idea of incarnation God is not only taking risks, but is also bearing the risks by making humans to have complete dominion over the created order. Therefore, I thus argue for a two-fold divine-human Incarnation-redemption theological framework as well. Further, what are the conditions under which the notion of risk-taking God can be affirmed without giving a picture of who that God is? And what are the practical implications for the ways in which human agency that revolve around faith, hope, and praxis copes up with the dreams and aspirations of Dalits in the midst of hopelessness. In such a framework, Christ's coming to this world taking the human form, death and resurrection provide that possibility or viable option available for risk taking. Thus this paper articulates and discusses a critical theology of risk taking.

Key Words: Indian Christian Theology (ICT), Theology of Risk-taking, Dalits, Caste, stratification, exclusion, excluded communities, objective reality, material conditions, creation, emancipation, salvation, birth, death and resurrection.

Sifting the Rubbles

Theological enterprise in India for decades is being ventured by those who belong to the dominant caste categories. Theologies that had emerged and dominated the Indian canvas right from the beginning and until the mid-seventies of the 20th Century were by and large articulated by the so-called 'high castes'. Theologies that revolved around and

premised on philosophical, conceptual, doctrinal and creedal abstractions by and large have been questioned, critiqued, and subsequently rejected. Likewise, theologies that have condoned the system of caste and used the dominant Hindu philosophical frameworks and tenets are under intense scrutiny. Similarly, theologies that remained silent about discrimination, oppression, exclusion and exploitation of the Dalits, the indigenous peoples, and other excluded communities are scathingly reviewed and put aside as supporters of life-negating forces. But the survival of this type of theologies remains in the ventilators of the theological institutions and certainly invalidated by base ecclesial communities. Likewise, theologies with the middle axiom that fails to state its purpose and position by playing 'safe games' and 'opportunistic politics' have been side-lined by victims of societal, economic, political, cultural and religious forces.

The other side of the canvass portrays that those even after their theological education and ordination do believe and practice caste and thus are entrenched in the human-made divides and barriers. So, when it comes to power-sharing and representations to committees and positions in the ecclesial bodies they rather work subtly in favour of their castes. As the years passed by, theologies of those types have lost its fervor, significance and relevance. The shift from the centre to the periphery has taken in radical ways. It is indeed a historical shift. The theologies from the margins have broken new grounds. The theologies from the cherries i.e., where the Dalits and the vulnerable live delved into the unexplored terrains that the so-called 'high castes' deliberately thwarted and concealed. They are the ones who are involved in venturing new ways and developing relevant and authentic theologies from their own contexts. This shift is of course hard to accept and even be digested by so-called 'high castes', but is indeed a fact.

This shift has ushered radical reversals in the arena of the Indian Christian theologies. India is changing. However, as it changes it is also

posing a number of challenges to those who have been isolated from the forces of globalization. In such a fluid and complex scenario only those who are fit could survive. And those who are fit have been integrated and accommodated by the laws of social Darwinism. In the process, it has intensified and escalated the suffering of those who live on the margins. If this scenario is not altered, in due course of time, people on the margins would resort to new ways of engaging in struggles. The communities that are caught up in hopeless and agonizing situations tend to ask: what is God doing and where is that God who is our Servant-Saviour? This is where critical theologies from the margins play the crucial roles.

Theologies emerging from the underside are supposed to enliven the hopes and extend new meanings and interpretations for the struggles that the people on the margins undergo. If the theologies from the margins, by the margins and to the margins do not offer or cater to the needs and expectations of the people and communities, then those theologies and theologizing will have no value, relevance and authenticity. Theological enterprise in India ought to have an impact or bearing on the lives of people/communities. If there is no bearing or impact on the lives of people/communities, then, that type of theology is dead because the God who is talked about automatically is mutilated. In such an event the best place for that type of theology to remain is within the boundaries of theological institutions and be kept in the coffins of the libraries. Out of those, a few seemed to be good for casual reading, but are read only when compelled as required subjects. The theologies that are prescribed as something compulsory or required will have its existence till the completion of the course, and then they become redundant and subsequently forgotten.

The contextual theologies are living theologies because they respond to the challenges and take the readers to the real life situations. The

contextual theologies unfold the text and integrate the context where the faith communities live. This is where the victims who live on the margins find their God of the Bible who constantly interacts and intervenes in their affairs. They are given the assurance that their God of history and of the living Bible is with them and participates actively in their struggles. At this point of juncture, we are once again reminded by communities on the margins that the theologies constructed and produced by the so-called 'arm-chair theologians' are no more entertained because their God-talk is bundled with sheer abstractions and do not reflect the life-situations of people who strive for meaning in their existence. Therefore, any theology in order to be relevant and authentic is to respond to the changing contexts (micro and macro) to those who live on the margins and excluded. Accordingly, it has to change and cater to the dimensions of materiality and spirituality. So,

'We want theology to be a service to life and to human wholeness. It should be service to life at all levels—from the tiny blade of grass to the singing bird, to the growing baby, to the height of rigorous thought and warm friendships, to the depths of mystic joy and divine darkness. We want a theology that will be at the service of life with its many needs and spiralling possibilities as well as its transcendence and its endlessly expanding quest and onward thrust. Our theology will be at the service of those who work, suffer, and hope, those who struggle for justice and human dignity for all women and men.'⁴⁸

In conjunction to the above quotation a few questions surface. Do theologies that we propound and articulate take along with them the

⁴⁸ Samuel Rayan, 'Reconceiving Theology in the Asian Context' in Virginia Fabella et al, *Doing Theology in a Divided World*, Maryknoll, New York: OR-BIS BOOKS, 1985, p.124.

people's hopes and yearnings seriously as part of its content and essence? What should then be the aim and purpose of theology that we want to venture and articulate? From where do we take the materials for our theologizing? Does it have any bearing for the people who they are theologizing? Do they address to the context and extend hope to the people to who they are theologizing? Therefore, 'A theology capable of serving the wholeness of life will be ever springing force at the meeting point of faith and the reality ... The experience of faith and the experience of human existence meet in tension, love, and suffering; they illumine each other's depths, question and challenge each other, and enable each other to new self-understanding, to fresh interpretations of human hope, to committed action and profounder silence.'⁴⁹ It is this scenario that warrants the organic intellectuals and organic poojaris to take seriously the excluded communities of our society who undergo all types of risks in their day-do-day existence.

It is at this juncture, let me state that barring a few, a majority of 'cerebral' theologians and 'professionals' of theology have deliberately ignored the nauseating terrains where about 200 million Dalits live and survive in abject and sub-human conditions. The dominant theologies including the Indian Christian Theology deliberately concealed and camouflaged their topography and constructed its theologies on 'India Shining under the System of Caste'(Appendix 001 comprehensively explains the genealogy of Caste) by opting in favour of the so called 'pure people' who enjoys all sorts of privileges and powers. The raw materials and frameworks that have been used resonate and revolve around the classical/systematic theologies and philosophical methods and dominant frameworks. As against this background, I intend to unpack the latent motives of the Indian Christian Theology. Only then, constructing a critical theology of risk-taking is possible. It is unfortu-

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

nate that seldom we enter into the terrains of the excluded communities. At this stage, the abundant materials available in the field need to be retrieved and located from where our theological mandates come from. It is of course a historical necessity because the context where the Dalits live is impregnated with heart rendering metaphors and narratives. Hence, the confluence between contextuality and inter-contextuality are the primary locus and reality. If these are not taken seriously and undermined, then those who enter into any form of theologizing or theological enterprise in India become a futile exercise.

On the canvass of theologies in India the names that are projected as 'friends', 'comrades', and 'sympathizers' who articulate and theologize for the Dalits come from the so-called 'high caste' rungs. Under their patronage, some of the young 'Christian pseudo Dalit theologians' are lured and co-opted for petty gains. The strategies, plots and ploys devised and executed are detrimental for the Dalit communities in the long-run. The so-called 'high caste' Christian theologians in collusion with the pseudo-Dalit brokers want to institutionalize the contextual theology vis-à-vis Dalit theology. For them, the raw materials that are unraveled from the context posit potent volatility and so covertly ignored. The rationale they give is that the materials that are found are crude, filthy, raw, and close to their life and death mirroring their past and present. The materials and matters that come out while digging are from the volatile terrains and bound to create more ripples, disturbance and irruption. Precisely because of these reasons, they prefer to enter into discourses or conversations on any dogmatic themes or areas that obviously lead to sheer abstractions. Further, they conveniently and shrewdly enter into subject matters that are speculative and otherworldly that would lead to superficial effect and psychedelics promoting false consciousness. In the process, the real and impending issues and problems, contradictions and conflicts being faced by the excluded communities are neutralized and blunted.

Within the Christian domain there are some Dalits who by using Dalit identity have climbed up to the top echelon as theological educators, pastors and Church leaders. The same identity users when it comes to struggle and solidarity remain silent. And others living overseas who act as interlocutors, intermediaries, brokers and spokes persons for Dalits' cause state that 'there is no Dalit theology as such, but only International Theology'. For them, 'Dalit Theology has brought about divisions and fragmentation amongst communities'. For them, 'it has destroyed the 'peace', 'tranquillity', and 'harmony' amongst communities who once lived without any 'caste prejudices, biases, distinctions and divisions'. There are others who claim that the 'classical theologies from Barth down to Bultmann to Moltmann to Kaufman to all sorts of Manns gave us the theological grounding, showed us the theological horizons to understand and articulate about God and thus enabled us to construct global and transnational theological frameworks and perspectives cognitively and logically'. According to them, Dalit Theology has created a clear wedge within and between people and communities. Therefore, Dalit Theology or any other brand of contextual theologies will have to be shelved or if need be aborted. For them, the raw materials that are unearthed from the context are crude, stinking, filthy, and volatile, and therefore should as far as possible be not accommodated nor be considered.

In addition, there are a good number educated Christian Dalits who are engaged in the profession of teaching in the theological institutions and serving as pastors and Bishops in the churches prefer to renounce their Dalit identity because of the basic assumption that the moment they embraced Christianity everything has changed by quoting 'there is neither a Dalit nor a non-Dalit, and all are one in the Lord and before the God'. In principle their assumption could be right, but in reality it is just an illusion, a maya. While others use the Dalit identity that brings indi-

vidual benefits (economic and personal) aggrandizement. They tend to vacillate and oscillate by changing their perspectives and standpoints depending onto the situations that would suit their agenda. These are the pseudo-Dalits who are the enemies of the Dalits and also betrayers of the Dalit cause. For want of power and position this segment could go to any extent. Knowing their weaknesses, the so-called 'high-caste people' throw crumbs and are easily co-opted. For the sake of petty gains and incentives this category betrays their fellow Dalits.

This phenomenon prevails mostly in the middle-rung who have hardly encountered problems or lived and experienced with the Dalits either in the rural or urban settings or participated or shown solidarity in the Dalit struggles. So what we see is that their Dalit consciousness is not shaped by their Dalitness, but rather clouded by their pseudo imitation of the dominant values and ethos. In sum, this category tends to be over-ambitious, self-seeking, individualistic, slimy and naïve. Their presence and participation for the Dalit cause are by all means counter-productive and hence are the renegades of the Dalits' emancipation and freedom. A web of issues that are connected with these individuals manifests their state of consciousness that is being shaped by their false contextualization with which they exist. False contextualization and false consciousness thwarts critical Dalit consciousness. The moment false consciousness seeps it blunts the Dalit consciousness leading to uncritical accommodation. Authentic contextualization and Dalit consciousness are always connected and paves way for prophetic vocation arising out of genuine encounters between God's world and Dalits' world involving in challenging and changing the situations availing the opportune time the *kairos*.

Constructing the Risks

Dalits are the original inhabitants of this land. They constitute almost one fourth of the total population. Their contributions to the nation both mental and physical labour for the progress and prosperity of India have been noteworthy. But, it is a paradox that their 'domicile' is under threat and their 'personhood' is under question. Dalits as persons and as people do matter to the Indian society. Indian society enjoys the fruits of the labour of the Dalits, but has failed to treat them on par with them. Likewise, the Dalits are numerically more both in the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches. Like the secular world even in the Christian world for decades the Dalits have been denied of their dignity, personhood, and self-esteem and are treated as untouchable people with no human face or value. In the name of caste, Dalits have been excluded and shown all kinds of difference. Precisely because of these reasons the Dalits have moved beyond the pains and pains and determined to struggle against the casteist forces with grit and determination, resolve and resilience. These are the factors that ignite the Dalits both mentally and physically to come to terms and to struggle and strive against all odds that the system of caste and Indian Christianity inflicted on them.

The Christian Dalits who live in the villages and slums in their own ways ask: Can there be an Indian Christian theology or any contextual theology without us? What then will be our part in evolving or developing or constructing of this theology? Who would choose or determine its focus, its method, and guiding principles of its future? Would the Dalits be at centre or on the periphery? Would their role be simple or complex? Would their life experience of all sorts be the method in the construction of theology? In what way is this theology going to make their life, destiny, and history better or different? Would the change be radically different? The challenge of theology comes from the depth of the Dalitness entrenched in their hope for a co-human persistence of their

unshakable faith as well as varying strategies and emphases as they maneuvered and moved across the difficult paths of their terrains. The spirituality of the Dalits evokes them to ask that: what role did the non-Dalits play in history, in their struggles, and in their sufferings?

Are the non-Dalits genuinely have come to terms or convinced that without the Dalits there is no meaningful word about God can be spoken or undertaken in India? Don't they understand or apply their common sense that no theological enterprise be mooted or conceived or even envisioned for any contextual theologies or even contemplate of any change in the Indian society? Maria Arul Raja, SJ, while elaborating this aspect reiterates that,

‘...every attempt at doing theology begins with questions. These are raised neither from the textual world of the tradition nor from the rhetorical field of the theologians. They emerge from the particular human community, in context of the awakening of Dalits, endeavouring to become a better one upon the actual historical plane amidst the existing conflicts. That is why it gets itself rooted in the on-going dialectical interaction between structures (cultural symbolism) and social structures (power relations). This conversation is sought to generate new energies in transforming the present disorder into a new order in future.’⁵⁰

The ingredients and the basic materials needed for theologizing comes from the questions that are raised by the victims of the system of caste. Based on these questions one can enter into the activity of theologizing or from this point one's theologizing starts. One cannot construct theology particularly Dalit theology without the live materials that are

⁵⁰ A. Maria Arul Raja, SJ, ‘Dalit Concerns and Theological Education India’, presented at a workshop on Critical Pedagogy at Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, Chennai.

hidden in the terrains. A.P. Nirmal succinctly elaborates that ‘... theology is a human activity. It is written neither by God nor for God to read. It is written for the benefit of the humans. It is not a study of God but of the concept of God ... the primary datum for doing theology is human life.’⁵¹ The locus of theology revolves around human life that is to be respected with dignity and esteem. Each individual is endowed with personhood that should be promoted and protected. Hence, ‘The primary task of theology, therefore, is to make sense of human life and give it a certain direction and goal. The criteria of theology to them must be derived from human life and not from some other ‘givens.’’⁵² The so-called ‘high caste people’ do not give value to Dalits in the Indian society. For them cows occupy a better status than the Dalits. Being called by different names, the existence of the Dalits is one of lesser human being. The sites of the Dalits are filled with horrifying events and episodes. One should wrestle with the cherries or Dalit wadas and probe seriously the dynamic potential and vibrant tenor entwined in it.

One of the country’s leading dailies carried out an article in its magazine section entitled ‘*Night-soil Workers... Head-loads and Heart-break*’ written by India’s well-known journalist P. Sainath. He graphically narrates a live story of people who are destined to do this job because they are the Dalits. Patasi Bai, a Dalit woman collects a rot (made out either from jawar or wheat) from each of the 25 households in Sikar, Rajasthan. Once a month, some of them give her a few rupees. Those who give her the rotis would not eat with her. But the job she does is indispensable for them. But they are careful not to have any sort of contact with her. Who is she? She is a manual scavenger who cleans their dry toilets or to put it simply their shit. When asked: ‘Yes, I carry night

⁵¹ Cited by J. Russell Chandran, ‘A.P. Nirmal—A Tribute’ in *Voices From the Third World*, Vol XX No 1, June 1997, p. 142.

⁵² *Ibid.*

soil. The payment is one roti a household daily and may be Rs.10 a house each month. I clean around 25 homes every day. We do have to carry the night soil in baskets on our heads to the dumping place which could be half a kilometer from the latrine she cleans.’⁵³ She is one among many thousands of women forced to earn here living this way. As scavengers the name that is given by the casteist society, who clean out dry latrines by hand and who carry excreta which the so-called ‘India’s civilized society’ calls ‘night soil’ in baskets on their heads. The women use ‘parethas’ metal pans to scoop up the night soil with short brooms in their hands. The work she does earns her no more than Rs.250 a month. Some houses pay nothing because they consider the work they rends as karma since they were born as untouchables and by doing this job at least in the next cycle of birth they would be born in a better way.

Manual scavenging is a caste-based occupation and in many families it is almost hereditary. In the year 1993, the Government at the Centre passed the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry latrines (Prohibition) Act. The execution of this Act vests with the local governments’ subject and therefore the Central Government sought and gained the support of West Bengal, Tripura, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Goa for its legislation. Kerala ended this practice much earlier. Little later, Madhya Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh joined the fold. However, almost all the states barring one or two is continuing with this practice. For instance, the girls cleaning night soil in Sikhar in Rajasthan are often young. For example, Shakuntala 16, Lachchi and Reena both 14 years are just three among many. ‘For months, we abandoned this work. Nothing happened. No one came to our aid. We were given no other options. So we resumed, though we hate. Only women do this job.’⁵⁴ They keep demanding trolleys or wheel barrows and also longer brooms, but of no avail. Since they are given short brooms as they bend to sweep they get

⁵³ See the Weekly Edition 2 of The Hindu, October 3, 1999.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

into direct contact with the mouth leading to all sorts of health hazards. Different modes the casteist Indian society use to humiliate and shame the Dalits and this is one among many.

In conjunction to this, Susan E. Chaplin from her research points out that 'action on the law has been mostly confined to states that first supported the Act'. Since most of the states did not act on the act the act remained as a toothless tiger which ensured that the dehumanizing practice continues in no less than 2,500 towns across India. It was found out that as early as 1956-57 the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes made an open appeal that the practice be stopped such as the head-loading of night soil. He also reiterated that as thinking people we are responsible 'for the spread of evil of untouchability.'⁵⁵ The system of caste has given a tag and monopoly to the Valmiki community because no one can do it. It is ironic that the so-called 'high castes' do not want to or hesitate to clear their own shit, but expects others to carry their shit. Throughout the states of South India barring Kerala, dry toilets still exist. Nonetheless, like all other states Kerala practices the system of caste and all forms of discrimination. Manual scavenging is being carried out only by a particular category of people and this category of people is involved in this job for centuries. This is how castes work. As we have entered into second decade of the 21st Century, has there been any drastic change for the Dalits who are designated by the system of caste to collect the shit of others?

The cases that were presented happened almost at the end of the 20th Century and exactly a decade after the dawn of the 21st Century and at the end of the first decade in one of the captivating write ups in the same daily titled '*Enslaved by tradition: the Manual Scavengers of Vidisha*'. Vidisha known for thriving trade of ancient India being mentioned by Emperor Ashoka and also features in Pali Scriptures and Kalidasa's

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

romantic epic Meghdoots, a premier tourist destination in glossy brochures of Madhya Pradesh Tourism, and also the Parliamentary Constituency of Sushma Swaraj, the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha continues the banned practice of manual scavenging and is still a forced occupation for several Dalit families. About 200 families in this District continue to bear the brunt of caste discrimination primarily through the practice of manual scavenging. 'Every morning, I go to eight to ten households, collect the garbage of (shit) (mine) in a straw basket and dump it a mile away from the village. When it rains, the waste oozes through the basket over to my hair,' says Guddi Bai (38) of Neteran tehsil.⁵⁶ While the practice was banned by law in 1993 with the passage of The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, it still continues in several parts of India. The dead line for the eradication of manual scavenging from the country, after having been revised thrice (December 2007, March 2009 and March 2010) was recently set for 2012- end by the National Advisory Council, headed by UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi. NAC noted that it was 'deeply distressed to observe that the shameful practice of manual scavenging persists in India, despite being outlawed.'⁵⁷

Even after 67 years of Independence and 17 years after a law was passed by the Indian Parliament banning manual scavenging the practice continues. The so-called 'high castes' justify that they are destined to do by fulfilling their karmic duties. What do they get in return? Those who are involved in shit cleaning and clearance get at an average 20 to 50 kilos of grain annually and a few old clothes on occasions says Basanti Bai (40) who has been scavenging ever since she was handed the job by her sister-in-law after her marriage.⁵⁸ Contradicting the statement of the

⁵⁶ Mahein Pratap Singh, '*Enslaved by tradition: The Manual Scavengers of Vidisha*' in *The Hindu*, 16-12-2010. Op-Ep ii.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Collector, she said, 'If we quit, the upper caste women will ridicule us' ... (you seem to act like a Brahmin woman), they say. Moreover, 'that is the way it has always been going on,' she says.⁵⁹

The next striking and unbelievable narrative comes from Bangalore, the so-called Silicon Valley of India, the premier Outsourcing hub and cosmopolitan mega-city is plagued with manual scavenging which I consider is the crime against humanity. Under its very nose of Electronic City, sewerage disposal is being practiced in medieval forms. For instance, in Rammurthy Nagar, human excreta are manually removed from publicly maintained cesspools. The waste is transported on busy roads and is dumped at a convenient spot, usually in one of the city's lakes. Those who are involved over 600 of them engaged in scavenging work in Rammurthy Nagar using simple methods. Their only tools are a few drums, buckets, and pick-up vans used to transport the filth. Residents of the area, which lacks basic sanitation and sewerage facilities have to make phone calls to have their cesspits cleaned, says Vincent, a 28 years old who has been cleaning cesspits for over five years.⁶⁰

In view of the perennial sewerage problem, 'Most of the residents of this area have our mobile numbers. So whenever their sewage tanks are full, they call us. We get calls every day from the residents.'⁶¹ Adding further, 'We work in batches of three. One of us get into the pit and hand over a filled bucket to another standing on the edge of the pit. He relays it to a person on the pickup van who empties it into one of the drums on the van,' he said.⁶² For the work they do they charge between Rs. 700-900 to clean a single pit, but the residents feel it is reasonable for a

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ T.S. Srinivasa Raghavan, '*Shit, Scavenging, is Big Business*' in Bangalore Times, September 3, 2010, pp. 1 and 4.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

messy job. A resident by name JP John, (58), confesses that ‘It is a horrifying job and we engage them with a lot of guilt, but we have no choice. The BBMP has not provided us with proper drainage facilities, so what do we do.’⁶³ But the then BBMP Special Commissioner K.R. Niranjan blatantly denied the practice and prevalence of manual scavenging the city of Bangalore. ‘Today labourers engaged in other activities earn Rs. 400-500 a day. So, why should anyone do this scavenging job? As far as I know, manual scavenging does not exist in Bangalore,’ Niranjan said. All these clearly manifests and testifies that 5000 years of institutionalized social inequality has not ensured the Dalits and offered a solution to go beyond from that being shit collectors.

Atrocities against the Dalit in diverse modes are unleashed by casteist forces in systematic manner across the country. One such gruesome incidence that portrays a 38-year old Dalit woman forced by a mob to drink human excreta mixed with water in front of her husband and children. She had to undergo this punishment because she resisted the advances of a so-called ‘upper caste’ man towards her in Keela Urapanuar village in Thirumangalam block of Madurai District, in Tamil Nadu. Shocked and bewildered by the treatment, Muthumari, wife of a labourer, Pitchai narrated that a group of so-called ‘high caste people’ had also splashed human excreta on her family. It all started when she was returning home around 2.30 in the afternoon after cutting grass. Raju, son of a Sellathevar of the village, who had been making advances towards her for sometime waylaid her on that day and grabbed her hand. She managed the wrench, set herself free, and ran home saying that she would bring this incident to the notice of the village panchayat. When her husband Pitchai came home the same evening at about 7.30 and found her wife profusely weeping. When asked what had happened she narrated the incidence and he had assured her to take up this matter to the village panchayat the next morning. In the meantime, as Pitchai was

⁶³ *Ibid.*

having his super, a group of 15 persons barged into their house, abused her using all sorts of names, attacked her, and even tore her blouse. Raju's wife Vijaya accused her of trying to insinuate her husband and threw a bucket full of human faeces at the family. She then forced Muthumari to drink excreta-mixed with water.⁶⁴ And this incident took many twists and turns. Nevertheless, the whole family for no fault of them had to suffer because they are Dalits and she being a woman and a Dalit woman.

In equally horrifying incident occurred on May 22, 2002, at Thinniyam village in Tiruchi District in Tamil Nadu. Thinniyam is a tiny village located near Lalgudi where 100 Dalit families live. Apart from the other castes, Kallars numerically dominated the village. Two Dalits, namely Murugesan and Ramaswami were forced to 'feed each other' human excreta. The 'crime' they committed was that they supported Karuppiyah, a Dalit who was engaged in a prolonged struggle against a former Panchayat president who belong to so-called 'high caste' i.e., kallar caste to recover an amount of money paid to him to get a house site to his sister. When the husband of the Panchayat President Rajalakshmi flatly denied not taking the money, Karuppiyah told him that he would lodge a complaint in the police station. Enraged by this, Subramanian along with his son abused and assaulted him with footwear. Then, the following morning Subramanian and his relatives assaulted Murugesan and Ramaswami with foot wear and hot iron roads for helping Karuppiyah for making this problem public which damaged their 'caste honour'. It was at that time the two were reportedly forced to feed each other human excreta.⁶⁵ The Indian Christians are no exception.

⁶⁴ P. Krishnaswamy, 'Dalit Woman forced to drink 'excreta' for spurning advances' in Indian Express, 30th September, 2009.

⁶⁵ For the complete incident See http://www.fribtkube.com/fil_921/stories/2002105005103900/Lton.

There are exclusive caste-based cemeteries for caste Christian and separate burial ground for the Dalit Christians. In some of the traditions they are separate churches. Discriminatory practices are commonly found both in the life and witness of the Indian church. Some of the sites of exclusion and discrimination of Dalits are described comprehensively in Appendix 002.

Theologizing the ‘Risks’

The locus of theological conversations and discourses about God has shifted. It has shifted from the centre to the margins; from the casteists to the casteless; from the septic tanks/western commodes to dry toilets/cesspools; from the oorrus/villages to cherries/Dalit wadas, and from classical to contextual. This is one of the most important, significant and historic shift that ever happened in the whole gamut of the Indian Christian theology. It is a radical reversal that happened in the centre of gravity of the Indian theological systems. Most of the so-called ‘high castes Christians’ are aware of these changes that include the best informed mind, but deliberately pretend as if this shift has not happened or never taken place. This shift is not only from the West to the South, but certainly ‘main streets’ to ‘cherries’, from ‘main roads’ to ‘by lanes’ ‘urban’ to ‘rural’ and from the ‘centre’ to ‘under side’. The shift that has taken place in India is certainly from the casteist- centres to the world of the Dalits.

This shift cannot be construed as just demographic, but also theological, socio-economic, politico-cultural and certainly in terms of power equations. For instance, some time ago, in one of my casual conversations with some well-informed Christian leaders and theological educators who continue to subscribe to their caste tags blurted out that theological endeavor or enterprise in India has always emerged from their land. Therefore, any theological activity will have to emerge from their

locale and thus considered as their prerogative and pre-occupation. What they implied by this was theologizing and theological enterprise per se in India is their monopoly. I thought to myself that they lived in fool's paradise. Nevertheless, I retorted back saying that shift has already taken in India and they should come to terms with the changing scenario. Hence, caste is a state of mind. It is visible and invisible, covert and overt, subtle and direct.

The usage of 'shift' here basically connotes the context. Therefore, critical theology of risk-taking takes the context of the Dalits more seriously. Further, it takes the contemporary context more seriously for theological reflection and action. In the case of theology of risk-taking contextual reinterpretation of text plays the vital role. Therefore, context here is described as 'locale' which is essential to 'contextuality' of social interaction or structural knowledge. As seen in the previous section the social context of the excluded communities particularly that of the Dalits presents both the objects as well as subjects involved in the rugged situations that are always volatile. It is here the critical theology rips open the underside of the scripture and tradition not just as sources of reflection—but as the basis. Hence, more emphasis is given to the context which is increasingly visible in recent decades. For a critical theology of risk-taking the social context forms the basis and acts as an episteme. The social context of the Dalits is filled with human-experience and thus ignited by Christian faith and perennial struggles that the Dalits face in their day-to-day existence for centuries. In such a scenario, contextualization is nothing but an inherent dynamic of Christian faith and critical-praxis. So, a critical theology of risk-taking is rooted in concrete Dalit experience of a particular culture of caste-ridden social setting.

The experience of the Dalits in India cannot be exclusive as their unique social context emerged as a result of their descent and occupation in the caste hierarchy that pre-supposed the existence of so-called 'high

castes' in a hierarchical order. Their cumulative experience is an outcome of their sufferings and struggles emanating from an asymmetrical context in which more than 200 million Dalits live. It is grounded on and propelled by both the internal and external factors. Therefore, a theology of risk-taking is a critical theology which is not something optional, but a Christian mandate and a categorical imperative. A critical theology of risk-taking embarks by removing the theological blinkers so that the raw brutalized body and the battle-field of Dalit mind will be seen. It is in such a context a critical theology of risk-taking emerges to articulate the raw and rugged experience of the Dalits. It provides the required language and basic materials for theologizing. It is their raw flesh and blood thus acts as the anchor and foundational stone of the very nature of theology of risk-taking. In this sense, risk-taking theology is a radical critique of classical/systematic and Indian Christian theology. Peeling the social context of the Dalits layer by layer and as the layers gets cracked off, the materials that come out forms the constitutive element for a theology of risk-taking.

A theology of risk-taking emerges from this inter-subjective world of the Dalits. It is important to affirm their Dalit identity is not an individual identity but cumulative as being members of the shared subjective world. In that, their existential experience is mediated by a language that the Dalits speak which should be the language of the theology of risk-taking. The language that is used does constitute multiple meanings arising out of diverse context-specificities. The context is engulfed by a set of circumstances and conditions that determines their ideas, theories, theologies, propositions or concepts, thought processes and frameworks. These circumstances could be spatial, temporal, situational, social, economic, political, cultural, and religious. Since the Dalits' terrains are impregnated with anger, dejection, resolve and resilience their language and actions can only be understood when their social context is understood comprehensively. Only then, the interaction with text is plausible

and meaningful. However, the nature of the context of the Dalits is dynamic and vibrant. It is influenced by both the internal and external factors. Therefore, context is necessary which really determines everything.

In such a ruptured, devastated, ravaged and besieged context where the Dalits have been living for centuries opens up a number of possibilities. Some have totally wilted and succumbed to the forces of domination, while the others went all out defying, resisting and annihilating the life-negating forces. In such context modes of resistance, defiance and annihilation involve risk-taking. Succumbing or avoiding or remaining passive or being silent in the long-run is counter-productive and will further strengthen the casteist forces to align and unleash their venom. Most of the Dalits do not have security and safety and thus lead a life filled with all sorts of insecurity and risks. Security in the context of Dalits is a myth, a Maya. For them avoiding dangers is no safer in the long-run than outright combating. Faith involves risk and courage. In my own life many a times I have been challenged and opted to take risks. This is where the theology of risk-taking emerges. Risk-taking theology involves disappointments, failures, betrayal, insecurity and loneliness, desperation, exclusion and dejection. Dalits have been living in precarious conditions for centuries by risking their lives. It is their deep-rooted faith in God and total dependence on Him gave them the courage and resilience. If not for their unflinching faith and pragmatic spirituality, the Dalits would have been perished from the face of this earth long ago.

For many, theology is something which is beyond their understanding and comprehension. They tend to think that it for those who are professionally qualified should get engaged in theologizing. This is what the systematic/classical theologies that include the Indian Christian theology did by defining and elaborating about God within a complex system of ideas over centuries. On the other, God is not something relative-

ly fixed and untenable to be studied as a pre-formed and pre-fabricated body of knowledge. Critically commenting on the modes of these theologies such as Karl Barth's Trinitarian Christology and Christological Trinity, A.P. Nirmal said, 'If Barth were to be alive, I would have argued with him that his understanding of the richly diverse and inexhaustible nature of God and the sovereign and free love of God necessarily implies that God in his freedom is free to save men and women in more ways than one.'⁶⁶ For him, 'although theology is in pursuit of the Transcendent Truth, its conceptual and heuristic tools have to be derived from empiric and immanent realities.'⁶⁷ Theology is, in the final analysis, what we mean and regard God in our lives. Anyone can reflect upon God with God given sense that common. Therefore,

'The "given" in theology is neither some creed or doctrine handed down from the past nor a theology imported from outside, but our life. The "original" and the "given" in our context is our own situation, our own history, our own struggles, our own aspirations, our own fears and our own hopes. God is dynamically present in these. He is savingly active in these.'⁶⁸

Out of these encounters has emerged a critical theology of risk taking.

Theology of Risk-taking

The Dalits live in a world of risk-prone society. Since they live in a caste-ridden risk society, they are bound to take risks. Their risks arise as a consequence to the system of caste. The risks the Dalits face, in this sense, is absolutely theirs, and however, is not shared by others. As they

⁶⁶ J. Russell Chandran, 'A.P. Nirmal – A Tribute', Op.Cit. p. 144.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.143.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

continue to engage in countering the institutions of caste, its instruments and its processes, the risks keep multiplying, aggravating, and intensifying. Etymologically, the term 'risk' is derived from the Italian 'risco' or 'rischio' meaning 'danger'. Knowing the impending 'danger', 'if' someone jumps into it by succumbing to or venturing into or embarking upon for a cause is said as 'risk'. So, 'risk' is something which has to do for progress, change or advancement. Therefore, risks are 'human-made constructs' that combines politics, economics, socio-cultural, religio-ethical and technological dimensions. In this way, 'risk' has to do with social relations and political arrangement. Risks are thus inseparable from the 'abject realities' of hazard or danger. Risks are varying in dimensions and degrees, and so can never be uniform or the same. The degree, veracity, intensity and alacrity of 'risk' keep changing from one context to another. Hence, one should not jump to drastic conclusions till the context is analysed and thoroughly probed with.

Dalits face enormous risks because of the system of caste. For centuries they have been living in captivity, exclusion, volatility, oppression and exploitation. This is why Dalits venture into multiple-risks. As seen in the previous sections, they are bound to take risks because there is no other way and no option. When they are surrounded by the life-negating forces there is only one way out i.e., taking risk. Because the world of the Dalits does not reflect God's mandated values of equality, human dignity and freedom, the Dalits continue their struggles for these for centuries. God's created order has always been contingent, based on clear cut principles. It ought to reflect not 'domination', but 'dominion'; not 'feudalism', but 'relational responsibility', and not 'a select few', but all the humans.

God's creation exemplifies wholeness of all people. It underscores the basic tenet of trusteeship between God and humans with clear covenantal relationships. The base and the super- structures reflect this in its

essence and quality. Despite knowing the unpredictable, complex and conflicting nature of the human beings, God has taken the 'risk' by elevating 'humans' to such an extent that we shall have dominion over creation not by our domination but by our servant hood and stewardship. God indeed has taken risks despite knowing the human nature. Nonetheless, the world in which we live and all its resources are indeed the gifts from God. It is unfortunate that the core principles of which the whole created order hangs on has been trampled with. The rich and the powerful have appropriated and exercise their monopoly over it, and in the process pushed the majority to the margins. Humans have forfeited their right to have dominion over God's created order. Those who exercise their authority based on their socio-economic status show their domination over the Dalits and the vulnerable, and also ruthlessly involved in ravaging the natural resources for maximizing their profits. They will have to face grave consequence because for violating the core values of creation vis-à-vis 'imago dei' (Gen.1:26-27), 'not domination, but dominion' (Gen: 1:31). In both the cases God creates and accepts what could be termed as risks of highest order.

Knowing the fallible nature of humans and their tainted institutions, organizations, systems, processes, instruments and principles of governance, God went ahead by taking risks. God is aware of the constraints and limitations of the humans that by nature are complex, conflictual and sinful. However, God went ahead in delegating the supreme responsibility by brushing aside knowing fully well that He would be morally held responsible for His actions later. If God is all-knowing and all-powerful, can God be held in such a state of vulnerability to His creation? If this is the scenario, how could God be in control of everything? Having raised all these, it should be borne in mind that this does not mean that God is primarily the initiator of risks. Being aware of the sinful nature of humans and their institutions of governance Creator-God went ahead giving dominion over creation who would act responsibly as

stewards of creation. On the contrary humans failed to dispense justice and behaved not fairly to the fellow human-beings and nature.

God continues to absorb the pains being inflicted to the fellow human beings who are vulnerable and hapless. In this sense, God is both actively participating in the affairs of those who live on the margins and involved in humanizing the de-humanized world. The image of God is fractured the moment the so-called 'high castes' treat others as sub-humans. Nonetheless, God continues to be the co-participant by being and showing solidarity with the victims of the system of caste and those who are countering the life-negating forces. These are the rays of hope. In its entirety God is the prime source of risk. In tune to this John Sanders⁶⁹ has thus argued that the idea of a risk-taking God is consonant with several biblical traditions. These materials form the basis for a theology of risk.

Further, the Christian idea of incarnation elucidates that God is not only taking risks but also accepting the risks implied by the openness of creation. This is again a radical reversal. For example, throughout the Christian era, the dominant view of God has been that he is all-determining and all-controlling. The Christian traditions and conventions underscore God's sovereignty and control. They imply that God's will is final and supreme and human will at all costs and by all means have to be surrendered/subordinated before God's infinite power. But this understanding has been challenged and countered by the understanding that God is the prime-mover of risk-taking. In such a dynamic, the dimensions of creation and redemption come into play as two-fold dialectic. Understood in this way, the principle of risk claims its validity and relevancy at this historical juncture in every case of the Dalits. It is

⁶⁹ Careful, profound theological queries and challenging arguments expounded on the God who Risks by John Sanders, *The God who Risks: A Theology of Providence*, Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1998.

this theological principle which is the core of the riskiness in risk-taking theology. A critical theology of risk-taking has reached a new phase in history that the principle of risk as the surer way for freedom and emancipation, since God being the prime mover of risk-taking.

Throughout the Biblical narrative we come across people of God both women and men in faith have taken risks not for them but for the sake of others to establish quality of life for all. In Genesis, we see degrees of risks involved in the divine creation of human beings. In the Old Testament when Abraham was asked to leave Ur and leave everything i.e., all his possessions including his family (Gen 12). He had to take risks to edify his faith before God cf. Heb: 18-19. Abraham was a risk-taker. Moses represents a long list of risks who heeded to God's call in leading the people. In Exodus Moses had to confront Pharaoh on numerous occasions and safely led the Hebrew people out of Egypt and into the 'Promised Land'. His risks were significant and daring. Likewise, Joshua and others in Maccabees had taken great risks for the people. Prophets spoke against the oppressive empires, admonished the rich and the powerful, and daringly preached that 'another way was possible'. Standing upright before the Kings or Emperors and looking straight into their eyes and on the face uttered that their ways and modes were unjust and righteous God does not like and certainly they be punished. They went all-out and edified daringness and boldness to speak before the emperors, kings, powers and principalities without fear and favour for the poor and the needy. In this sense, they had taken risks at the cost of their lives. Truly they were the risk-takers.

In similar vein in the New Testament although Peter at the first instance hesitated to walk on water eventually jumped from the boat the moment he saw Jesus. Further, Peter denied Jesus three times, but instantaneously took the risk of going to the court yard. He did edify his faith by taking risks. Likewise in the New Testament we come across a number of personalities who have taken risks. Therefore, risk-taking is

an instrument and God's sign that characterizes God's covenant and our response representing the larger cause of God's care and human continuum. The list culminates in Jesus Christ who is the last Adam, the first born of the new creation. The ultimate risk-taker is God's Messiah who came to proclaim the Kingdom of God which is at hand. Jesus was the paradigm knowing well what would happen and yet took risks throughout his life and ministry. Jesus is the risk-taker for the last and least (Lk 4:16-21; Mt 9:31-38; Jn 8: 2-11). The very life of Jesus was the clear manifestation of taking risks for the sake of humanity. His life, works, teachings and actions clearly vivify this. Jesus took the ultimate risk and came out the other side.

The kind of risk-taking will have to be qualified and also be seen within the context-specifics. Without contextualization it is not possible to qualify the levels of risks people take. Therefore, we should exercise caution and prudence by not equating or simplifying 'risk-taking' with 'just trust in God'. Could risk-taking be synonymous with 'just trust in God' or does it involve much more than simple equations? Of course, it pre-supposes 'trust in God'. Nonetheless, trust and Christian praxis should go together. Risk-taking is obviously the demonstration of that trust in whom we affirm our faith. In other words, unless and until Dalits take risks their talk of trusting or having faith in God will be just empty rhetoric. As Dalits and as people of the crucified and risen Messiah, Dalits are expected to take risks. The organic Dalits who claim to provide an alternative or bring about changes to the way things that the Dalits experience should get involved in taking risks. Only in doing so, we will live into the story that shapes and sharpens us.

Those who have risked suffered the most in their personal, familial and professional life for seeking and speaking 'truth'. There are a number of Dalits within the Christian and secular domains in India who keep striving for fairness, justice, truth, equality; equity and quality of life

suffer because they did take all types of risks. The questions that arise here are: Why would a search for truth involve great risk? What motivates their personal or communitarian sacrifice? How have they suffered as a result? Taking a position against the dominant belief, caste oppression and exploitation calls for risks sacrificing one's profession and sometimes even life. As Christians the implications of risk-taking should be affirmed with full theological confidence that we are striving for 'New Heaven', and 'New Earth'. Jesus' incarnation as human in flesh and blood who confessed to be the Christ, something historically happened. It is the birth of 'New Humanity' in which everyone without any distinctions and divides living in harmony with self-esteem, human dignity and mutual respect. And this 'New Humanity' shall strive for realizing and establishing a new humane and just order reflecting God's righteousness and casteless society. Its aim is to establish 'wholeness' devoid from narrow, parochial, divisionary and nefarious tendencies. Towards this end a critical theology of risk-taking revolves around and aims toward bringing together the fractured, fragmented, segmented, divided caste-ridden Indian society. The 'New Humanity' in its effort will strive relentlessly dismantling the shackles of caste and thus build an inclusive society.

As I conclude let me reify a critical theology of risk-taking. Risks are not something that exists out there so that we can grab or enter/force into, but risks are rather always exists for somebody in a given situation. As posited, for the Dalits the context itself is filled with all sorts of risks. So the Dalits can never escape/avoid risks but ought to take risks, because their terrains are engulfed with volatility prior to the risk. Therefore, for the Dalits risks are part of life and nothing abnormal. Therefore, risks for the Dalits are existential and inevitable, and so cannot simply be replaced either with karma or fatalism or even insecurity. In similar ways, the risks of God take place within the ambience of creation-restoration. When God takes risks, these are always subordinated within

the rubric of incarnation-resurrection. Within this dialectic dynamic risk critical theology of risk-taking is grounded.

God in creation and redemption has taken numerous risks and continues to take risks even now in restoring the created order. The more risks God in Jesus takes, the more God is able to absorb the risks while restoring the lost and least, the hapless and the vulnerable. It is this saving activity that restores the fractured and tormented creatures. If not for this, the divine risk-taking and human venturing into a critical theology of risk taking loses its meaning, value and essence. It is this divine-human confluence that makes a critical theology of risk-taking more vibrant and dynamic. It is apparent that God often bears and endures the risks whenever humans out of greed and other compulsions abuse their free choices and responsible freedom.

In Jesus, Dalits are free and set free, because for Dalits Jesus means freedom. In Dalits' tradition God is also taking the brunt of a victim by identifying and showing solidarity with the Dalits. The story of the cross vis-à-vis death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the embodiment and assurance of abundant life for all. For the Dalits they symbolize the holistic restoration of humanity. The events leading to the cross are filled with all sorts of risks that culminate in Jesus' death on the cross. On the cross Jesus exposed and de-mystified the importance and significance of risk-taking. The sequence of events leading to death and resurrection vividly exposes the locus of risk-taking God in Jesus. God in Jesus while suffering on cross as a political revolutionary, socio-economic critic, religio-cultural transformer and a rebel against the state risked himself by exposing and challenging the powers and principalities, so that all shall have fullness of life. Therefore, cross and resurrection symbolize an ongoing life-affirming continuum for a theology of risk-taking. Jesus Christ is the unifier who represents the victims of risks signifying that God in Jesus actively involved in transforming those who

lose while taking risks. We are reminded time and time again that we should be prepared or willing to lose life, and then only we shall gain it. Therefore, a critical theology of risk-taking is clearly grounded on the dictum that ‘unless the seed dies it cannot bear fruits’ meaning ‘fullness of life is not possible’.

POSITING RESISTANCE AND SUBVERSION AS BIBLICO-ETHICAL CATEGORIES FOR DALIT PRAxis



Abstract

This essay explores the essence and relevance of ‘subversion’ and ‘resistance’. It also attempts to establish the fact that they are ethical categories and in the process locates and exhumes a few biblical texts by positing the praxis components of ‘resistance’ and ‘subversion’ as ethical categories that are employed by Christian Dalits in diverse locales. However, Dalits in their praxis use many approaches and certainly ‘resistance’ and ‘subversion’ occupies the most vital and important tools of praxis in their day-to-day existence.

Dalits: A Miserable Existence

The terrains of the Dalits are impregnated with anger, shame, hurt, lynching, destruction, hunger, poverty, unemployment, exclusion, violations, ridiculing, vandalism, inhumanity and loads of suffering. Their struggles for equality and humanity have not been recent but centuries of oppression and domination. A number of questions at this juncture may be raised in the wake of horrifying and mind boggling incidences we hear, see and witness: What makes the Dalits to live in such horrifying landscape without losing their hope and vision for a humane world? How could they dream of an egalitarian, casteless and inclusive society wherein they are excluded that treats them as different, untouchables and

the other? Nonetheless their hopes and aspirations are enmeshed with their struggles against all odds. Their struggles are unabated, and yet their yearning is unchanged and their hopes and aspirations can never be side tracked till they become real. How is it possible and what are the mechanisms that sustain their resolve?

The contextuality and inter-contextuality of the Dalits reflects the heinous forms of India's social structure. The incidences and narratives posit combinations of many facets such as social, economic, political, religio-cultural. For instance, probably a year ago, a ghastly incidence happened in a village in Utter Pradesh, a state which is the largest with the maximum per cent of Dalit population in India. Many versions surfaced and keep surfacing of what exactly happened in that village. The bodies of two women with their heads covered lay on the ground surrounded by women sitting around and men standing scattered all over the place. The on lookers are deeply involved in trying to sift the incidence and thus grappling to come to terms. What they saw was two bodies suspended from two sturdy branches of a mango tree.

One of the girls with her feet closer to the ground was wearing red kurta with white designs and blue loose trousers. The other girl taller and was found hanging from the branch diametrically opposite, was in a green salwar-kameez with white-and-yellow stitch work with bare feet. Both of them teenage girls who were raped and then left hanging from a tree in Katra Shadat Ganj village in Uttar Pradesh's Badaun district. They belong to Dalit community. The girls were gang raped, murdered and hung on the tree that carries a warning that they were Dalits. The five alleged perpetrators from the Yadav community feel proud that raping and killing their Dalit victims as their 'adhikar', a right.

Incidentally the Samajvadi Party (SP) is largely composed of Yadavs and UP's Chief Minister belongs to Yadav community. The academia and others may think that what is the point in debating over sitting in urban settings about whether such horrifying images should be put out

for general consumption? But the fact of the matter is that caste continues to be an indelible marker for game-hunter and thus eludes people who do not live under its thrall. The display in Badaun underlines that caste is not just demographic pie charts or identifiable target groups for social welfare programs, but also an all-too-visible bar code for higher castes in vast swathes of our sovereign socialist secular democratic republic to identify prey. Whether we like it not this dehumanizing tradition thrives in all the states of India whether SP ruled, Congress or BJP ruled or whatever may be the political party.

Sexual violence perpetuated against those women is, of course, manifests the caste mind-set and shows that Yadavs have absolute power and at any time unleash their power against the Dalits who occupy a sizable percent in the overall population. The girls were hung up and displayed because they were Dalits. The perpetrators of this heinous act from Yadav community had the audacity to profess to the casteist Bharath that raping and killing Dalits as their *adhikar*, a right. It is an irony how the rights questions get nuanced and subverted. Unabated violence leashed against the Dalits—sexual or otherwise are hardly reported or sometimes under-reported have no real disincentive as they are clubbed, if not in law than in practice, with the general acts of violence.

The rape and murder of two young Dalit women in Badaun, and those many other horrific acts of violence against Dalits sheds light and share many characteristics with equally horrific attacks/vandals/lynching that take place frequently across the nation. But it should be acknowledged that Badaun and countless other cases where Dalits are chosen as victims because they are Dalits. The casteist mind-set and their ongoing killing-spree testify Manu-given rights are being employed and supported by the castests with political patronage and protection. Those sitting comfortably may argue that the questions of caste and to state that the

Indian society is casteist are vague and outdated, and bit clannish, as if caste is simply being used to demean others and regressive.

The casteist mind-set always communicates and conveys its obnoxious motifs and moves in order to keep the Dalits under their control. But many tend to ignore and so much conditioned not to accept that the Dalits are also co-humans and co-terminus. So, instead of condemning the very act and the moves these casteists make we keep looking for data and other clues that are peripheral until we are horrified enough to do something. It is in this context the Dalit Christians look for their Scripture and in that texts and narratives. Hence for the Dalits Christians,

The Bible is at the heart of Christian worship and prayer. All that apparently needs to be discussed are techniques, discipline and appropriation, so that the Bible becomes as familiar and intimate as breathing, informing our thinking and imagination and even our vocabulary. However the question would not have been raised if there had not been lurking in the background some deeper issue. Once we reflect on the situation matters do in fact appear to be more complex and subtle than at first thought.

The Bible continues to inspire and illumine and thus instils determination and resilience to the Dalits who suffer under different modes of oppression. For the Dalit Christians, the Bible bears witness to a series of events in the history of humankind where God reveals Himself in redemptive activity. The word 'revelation' is a noun denoting what God is 'revealing' rather than 'has revealed' is indeed ongoing event for the God they believe. The God they believe is the continuum of the past, present, and the future. The importance of the Bible lies in its being the medium through which they see and grasp the significance of the mighty acts of God. Further, God became incarnate in Christ. His birth, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection and His giving of the Spirit posits God in Christ and in Spirit is active in their histories. This has to be set within the bounds of space and history.

For Dalit Christians the uniqueness of the Bible lies in the events which constitute the redemptive activity of God. These acts are embodied in events which constitutes God's redemptive and transformative activities. Likewise, the Gospel proclaims what God has done for the Dalits in Christ in the history of their world. The proclamation of the Gospel as the good news of what God in Christ has actually done in the history of the world of space and time. It is apparent that 'The Word becoming flesh' in the form of Jesus' incarnation that brought together the Divine and human separation.

Resistance and Subversion for Social Change

Indian Christianity is caste-ridden. In a caste-ridden society and caste-entrenched religion, the Dalit Christians ask the following questions: Has Christianity exhausted its avenues of resistance against life-negating forces and its resources of hope? These are the questions that surface. What are the avenues of protests available to the Dalits who wish to resist? Dalit movements and Dalit Christian's forum and organizations keep protesting and involve in subversive actions locally, regionally and nationally. By resistance I mean not just expressing dissent, but to effectively force change. Therefore, one of the pragmatic and plausible options is to explore 'resistance' and 'subversion' as biblico-ethical categories and thus become as bases for Dalit praxis.

At this juncture let me bring to the surface Orlando Fals-Borda, an organic intellectual, an active protestant layman committed for social change and also a leading Colombian sociologist was invited to join other notable intellectuals such as Buckminster Fuller, Norman Cousins, Lester Pearson, Pietro Nenni, Jan Tinbergen, and others to a consultation group on the future of the United Nations. He declined to be part of this by citing the urgent need to return to Colombia in order to contribute 'as far as I can, to the liberating effort to make my country a

better place for its people, and to its search for autonomy and dignity. For me this task is of the highest priority.' He happens to be an ardent follower of fellow sociologist, Camilo Torres, whom he labels 'a moral subversive'. However, Fals-Borda's life has exemplified three crucial choices:

- To be a detached scholar or an active revolutionary intellectual.
- To be an institutionally successful professional or a marginalized outcast. (One thinks instinctively here of Byron's tragic figure, 'self-exiled Harold.'))
- To be a 'maker of history' or a Christian witness to transcendence.

The above scheme sets a stage for ethical dilemmas and political choices. The labelling and branding of those who are against domination and exploitation by the state and the dominant as 'terrorists', 'militants', 'anarchists', and 'subversionists' is deliberate and by calling them by names clearly show that they cannot be questioned and disturbed. Those who challenge, resist and subvert injustices, exploitation and unjust order are branded as terrorists. These utterances and attributes are value-loaded that ought to be de-mystified. 'Accordingly, subversion, as newly defined, is the moving power behind a wide range of efforts at radical correction of social ills.'

However, 'Change becomes subversive only when it is fostered by rebel groups committed to the transition from one social order to another.' We have a number of people who belong to this stream, namely, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., Paulo Freire, Fidel Castro, Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, Marighela, Cabral, Torres, and Bonhoeffer. Their models of resistance and subversion are of course profoundly moral as evidenced in their lives, witness, writings and sacrifices so that others may have life in all its abundance. 'Hence the counter violence they are obliged to employ does not destroy social welfare; rather, it

removes obstacles to the construction of authentic social good...' On these lines, Fals-Borda warns,

The guardians of the established order often forget that many subversives have in time become the heroes of a new society and the saints of a revitalized Church. Their attitudes and beliefs had not been accepted in their own time because these threatened vested interests. With historical perspective, the anti-social elements are seen to be others: those who defend an unjust social order, believing it to be just only because it is traditional.

Subversion has been defined and explained by the forces of domination and oppression as 'unconstitutional', 'extra-judicial', 'violence-prone', 'anti-rights', 'anti-democratic' and so on. Subversion is usually connoted to militant and violent way of sabotaging the state apparatus. In general, the very word 'subversion' has been understood as a negative term that expresses and creates resentment and fear psychosis amongst the people. On the contrary,

Not only is subversion the forerunner of social construction; it is the vital moral force, which transforms passivity and exploitation into human dignity and liberation. A supreme sense of moral worth pervades the subversive enterprise in Latin America. 'Subversion represents a real possibility for renovation, freedom and collective fulfilment...

Hence, those involved in resistance and subversion should not be viewed as 'deviant', 'aberrant', or 'marginal' as characterized by the state and status quo, but rather as moral interlocutors or as constructive agents of social change. Resistance is a dimension of protest or defiance or mobilization. 'Resistance' and 'subversion' refers to the way a group or community or a coalition or a union might tackle a context of a given system from outside employing tools or strategies developed outside the system. At the same time, resistance and subversion could also work from within the system with tools or strategies fashioned from inside.

Sometimes resistance and subversion could also be extra-constitutional and extra-judicial. The means and ends employed do not concur with the constitutional propriety or the means employed justifies the ends. The interplay between resistance and subversion could lead to entirely different propositions.

The Interplay of ‘Subversion’ and ‘Resistance’

Let us recollect an incidence that took place many years ago wherein a series of resistance and protests that took place in different sites when B.R. Ambedkar’s statue was desecrated against the casteist forces. The Dalits cutting across political, ideological and religious affiliations garnered courage to speak out and protest in thousands and lakhs. The protests in different pockets of the country were spontaneous and sent clear waves to the casteists that vandalism and anger shall never be tolerated and ignored. For instance,

By the last two decades of the twentieth century, however, a gigantic process was set in motion—a process of taming unruly and recalcitrant civil societies; a process of de-politicization of people who had once been made aware of the possibilities of history.

No longer do we find any idea of struggle and emancipation in these political vocabularies, only ideas of resignation. In the middle of these political languages that call for social capital and for building networks of trust—vocabularies that conjure away the fact of political, social and economic oppression through semantic engineering. And we all know what happens to political struggles when they stand alone and bereft of support from attendant ideas of solidarity—they become isolated.

As the above quotation points out that the ruling government and the status tries to keep aside the Dalit movements and political organizations by isolating them by employing all sorts to mechanisms. The categories vis-a-vis ‘subversion’ and ‘resistance’ although interchangeably used,

for Christians they are grounded biblically, theologically and ethically. However, from the scriptures what we derive is that ‘subversion’ and ‘resistance’ is not mutually exclusive, but instead intimately intertwined and interrelated. In other words, it simply means that subversion-resistance dynamic entails complex interplay where they are tried out in the context-specifics. These two categories supplement and complement one another. Therefore, they are pragmatic terms. In short, these two do undergo numerous forms as and when the context demands.

Biblico-ethical categories such as resistance and subversion have the dialectic comprising word-flesh, human-divine, material-spiritual, this worldly-other worldly, immanent-transcendent element. So, they act the base, source, power, critique and a principle of alternative hope and vision. However, Christians are constantly reminded that resistance and subversion is unchristian and unbiblical. People at different epochs of history faced similar rhetoric, but faced hardships and in the process meted-out brutal violence. Forms and modes of oppression may be different, people survived because resistance and subversion marks the entire period throughout the human history and continues even today. Resistance and subversion continue and should go on when quality of life and sanctity of life is affected.

In such a context, Christian faith propels us to respond and act upon to the current state of impasse. Hence, the targets of resistance and subversion may be direct and take on a tangible form or that may be indirect in the sense of process. The issue at the bottom is control. The impetus for resistance and subversion politics is not only material or technical, but spiritual and decidedly intertwined with the ethical principle that overarches.

Biblical Subversion

The notion of certain race, class, caste, community or nation claiming to have a divine right to a particular geographical area of territory or beyond was prevalent in ancient societies and also prevails in the modern age too. On these lines, a forthright and uncompromising theological expression of the right of Israel to the land of Canaan is also found in the Deuteronomist literature. It is the subversive voice of God that we find in the book of Deuteronomy. The Deuteronomists admonished those who acted against those who violated and negated God's law and whose acts could be considered as subversive. In this sense Deuteronomy is by and large subversive. For example, Deuteronomy introduces another of its 'subversive' elements. We have seen how strong is its propaganda about the right of Israel to the land of Canaan. But, just as the Deuteronomists make the Davidic covenant a conditional one, so the Deuteronomists emphasize that the Sinai covenant, made with the whole community of Israel, is a conditional one.

In real terms, the land is not theirs by right. It is God's land and it is his gift to his people. But the gift has conditions attached to it. If they fail to observe equality and equity they will not find the land and the prosperous place they expected and might even lose it. This is expressed clearly in the blessings and curses which form the sanctions in chapter 28 for their behaviour in the land. The threats of loss of fertility of the land and of defeat by invaders lead up to the ultimate climax threatening that the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt will be reversed: 'Yahweh will bring you back to Egypt in ships, by that very way which I promised you would not see again, and there you will offer to sell yourselves to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will want to own you' (28.68). Thus there is an element of subversion even about the main plank of Deuteronomy's propaganda.

In the Old Testament there is a clear slant that God is in favour of the vulnerable and the afflicted. The prophetic books particularly deal with the structural injustices especially abused by the monarchical and religious institutions. This is where the 'prophetic subversion' takes a pivotal role to point out abuse of power and authority. The state always uses the ecclesiastical structures and religious institutions as means of controlling mechanisms. In spite of it, the prophetic books elucidates that God uses prophets to warn and instruct God's people. By these acts God exercises God's control over history. For more details on this see the foot note given below.

The Scripture especially the prophetic texts contain by and large the tones of 'subversion' and 'resistance'. The prophets engaged in their critical vocation and countered the dominant order. This critical vocation is nothing but 'subversive' and 'resistive', derived not only by divine right, but divine right they exercised in varied modes. Therefore, in the Old Testament we could discern 'prophetic subversion and resistance' and these two have proved to have powerful and lasting relevance then and also now.

From the New Testament perspective, there is a clear indication in John 9:39; 'Jesus said, 'For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind'. This verse could probably be interpreted differently that the humans have been indiscriminately exploited others who have the worth and dignity before God. Even the religious authorities in the process have reduced religion by including those who belong to high castes and pose what they are doing is morally right and therefore morally upright. Jesus gives a clear mandate that the rich and the powerful, and the religious authorities have become blind because of the power and wealth, but others clearly see what they are up to. In view of this, he warns that Jesus says 'For judgment I came into this world.'

The ‘Dry Bones’ of the Dalits Movement

The task of resistance and subversive ethical moorings is to ‘prophecy to the breath’ and ‘resist to the death’ that ‘blows from different directions’ so that dry bones may rise from the valleys and margins and come back to life with renewed vigour and added resilience so that they may stand firmly on their feet. It is like tornado or typhoon or gale that blows from all directions raising the valleys and the dry bones to life and hope.

A valley full of dry bones that we read in Ezekiel 37: 1-28 is indeed a good metaphor. God took Ezekiel to a valley. In this vision he saw the white bones of an army killed in battle. They were scattered across the valley and made white by the sun. God instructed the prophet to speak to these lifeless bones. When he did this there was a noise and the bones came together. As he looked flesh came on the bones and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. At God’s command, Ezekiel called on the four winds to breathe into the dead bodies they might become alive. In his vision, he did this and the dead men came to life before his eyes.

This has a historical connotation. In Babylon the sons of Israel felt like dry bones. They lost their hopes. Their spirit felt dead. God had to awaken them to new life before they could be one people again and return to their own land. This may be a picture of Israel and Judah coming together again as one nation. The context we live in is almost the similar to that. As against this, the biblical vision extends a picture of hope and a great promise. It means that the victims and the subjugated people around the world shall come back to life with renewed spirit. The wind blows with force from all the directions and the silenced and exploited people rise up like a mass or huge force from four different corners of the world with renewed rigor and strength like Dalits movements

and organizations combating the life-negating forces such as the system of caste.

Resistance and subversion is the locus of our very being and becoming as we respond to diverse powers and principalities. These two are nothing but normative principles that negate life and thus become the focus of one's faith articulation and theologizing. Ethical categories of resistance and subversion are grounded in a redemptive activity of the uprooted communities. It identifies with the life-affirming forces and shows solidarity with the forces that work against the pyramidal structure of caste.

A framework of resistance and subversion revolves around moral agency and closer relationship with the indwelling God. This moral agency generates and instils resistance and subversion in the face of systemic domination and expansion of the system of caste. The working concepts of 'moral agency' that entails 'resistance' and 'subversion' are central to Dalit Christians. Jesus is the locus of a theology of resistance and subversion that extends moral identity, purpose, vision, norms, and agency. The centrality of resistance and subversion as ethical categories posits moral agency that draws sustenance in the crucified and living Christ dwelling in and gradually transforming the community that yearns for freedom, equality, and dignity. Resistance and subversion impinges upon one another and thus linked with Dalit-praxis.

In this sense moral agency is 'subversive'. Resistance and subversion are categorical ethical imperative and thus ignites moral power for Dalit communities. Courage is an ingredient of subversive moral agency. It is a theology that unleashes the power of God who is righteous and tolerant, but vindicates justice. It is premised on moral agency for living toward the flourishing of creation and resists and subverts empire building that render death and destruction—flows from embodied communion in which God incarnate is received and given.

The power of the Spirit that raises the dry bones into life with flesh and blood instils courage and resilience spread like wild fire into all directions countering, subverting, and destroying the evil by establishing new heaven and new earth here and now. The force that is unstoppable flows from the indwelling spirit of the resurrected Christ, which is a historical continuum that sustains and revitalizes power for countering and resisting the forces of domination and exploitation. Resistance and subversion implies change and transformation. Ethical categories of resistance and subversion are grounded on confrontational Spirit. This confrontational aspect of Jesus' life and witness, mission and ministry, death and resurrection occupies the centre position. Resistance and subversion per se extends solidarity.

THE VISION: JESUS, BUDDHA, GANDHI AND AMBEDKAR



JESUS—THE SACRED WARRIOR



Some of the chants, shouts, and slogans that hit the air: ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’ (Mk 11:9), the ‘kingdom of our father, David’ (v.9), and ‘the Son of David’ (Matt 22:9) indicate that the multitude came to know who was Jesus and knew that Jesus was presenting Himself as the Messiah. Shouts of joy pierced the ears and echoed throughout the hills and valleys of Jerusalem in response to Jesus’ presentation and certainly the multitude declaration in line with Jesus’ claims that He is the King of Kings, Lord of Lords. But, in some corners the mood was sober, depressive and irritating. The wild chants across the mountains and the joyous response, however, was not universal, total, and massive, not from the ruling class, religious establishments, but selective, particularly coming from the multitude and simpletons.

In the Gospels, only the Gospel of Luke noted that the Pharisees asked Christ to silence the multitude and restrain them from such outbursts of enthusiasm (Lk 19:39). Why did the Pharisees ask Jesus the Christ to silence and restrain the multitude from such outburst of joy and happy sloganeering? What made them to resort to such ways so that the multitude who followed Jesus all along finally came to know Jesus the Christ was their Messiah and their Saviour? The outburst of the multitude disclosed the truth which the Pharisees all along tried to conceal, subvert and misrepresent. The Pharisees considered themselves as the most authoritative in the Law of Moses as well as Jewish tradition of the elders. They thought that the authority of the interpretation of Mosaic Law vests with them and assumed that they were firmly rooted in the Jewish tradition of Israel which they thought was authentic. So, the shouts, chants and screams of the multitude were against the beliefs,

tradition and understanding of the Pharisees that totally went against their authority.

The multitude started shouting as soon as they came to know that who Jesus the Christ was, their Messiah and King, the Pharisees became panicky and perturbed and asked Christ to silence the multitude and to restrain them from such outbursts of enthusiasms. How long could they hide Jesus' identity? Nonetheless, the presentation and the timing were so significant the event by all means ought to be recognized. Even if the multitude was silenced and not recognised Jesus, the Christ as the Messiah and the Saviour, God would give stones a voice (v. 40). So powerful and authoritative was Jesus that God would have given the stones that might have got a voice to tell to the world that Jesus, the Christ was the King and Messiah. In this way Jesus turns the table upside down and informs those who tried their level best to conceal His identity.

Verse 40 is such a powerful one that a testimony should be given to the whole world that Jesus the Christ is the Messiah and the Saviour of the world. That testimony neither came from the stones nor in other forms, but through the multitude, who shouted, screamed and in their loud voices confessed that Jesus the Christ was the Messiah and their King. God's covenant of faithfulness in Jesus the Christ was fulfilled, who had sent a Saviour-Sovereign in the world. Luke was so sensitive to the heart of the Son of Man that he alone recorded Christ's response as He approached the city of Jerusalem.

The shouts and slogans went high and Jesus Christ's ears perhaps failed to take the thunderous applause and voices probably became deaf to the Hosannas of the multitude. Jesus Christ responded as He approached the city of Jesus saw Jerusalem rejecting Him as Person that infers the entire nation. Moved by what was happening, He was in tears, and obviously 'he wept over it' (v.41), a clear manifestation of human pathos, agony and sheer response like any other human by Jesus Christ. The multitude accepted Him, but the nation, controlled by a small mi-

nority of power cliché rejected Him. In these two verses Fulfilments of prophecies and promises have been realised that brings the fusion of Jesus Christ as Divine and Human facets in totality. In conjunction to this passage, Mathew recorded the effect that this presentation had upon the city of Jerusalem: ‘The whole city was stirred and asked, ‘Who is this’? (Matt 21:10).

The Pharisees started the controversy which revolved around the question of the person of Christ. It would be sheer insanity for any mortal to make so clear a claim to be the Messiah as Jesus has just done in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy were He not the Messiah. The crowd responded to the question by identifying Jesus as, ‘the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee’ (v. 11). Since the Jews believed that prophets were men from God with His message, this may infer that He on this occasion was recognized as the Prophet whom Moses promised to Israel (Deut. 18:15). Jesus Christ responded to all sorts of problems that the multitudes faced as foretold long ago the works of Messiah (Matt 21:14).

Certainly those who did not like Jesus Christ were stirred from the chief priest and teachers of law to indignation and even the political authorities to hasten to complete their plan to put Him to death. Since the leaders could not silence the multitudes, they seemed to appeal to Jesus to quiet them. They in effect asked Him to deny that He was ‘the Son of David’ (v. 15). According to Jewish tradition, this was the day the lamb was selected to be slain and eaten for the Passover. Christ then was presenting Himself at the time that the Jews were selecting a Passover lamb for themselves. How tragic that they should pass by the Lamb of God as they searched for their own Passover lamb!

As we observe the Passion Week, we should remember and be reminded of the two occasions Christ revealed his authority during incidents that transpired early in the morning. In one incident He cursed the

fig tree; in the other He cleansed the temple. In the first incident as Christ began the two-mile journey from Bethany to Jerusalem he felt physical hunger. He saw a fig tree in full leaf along the road and came to it, expecting to find figs. But He found none. Mark noted, 'It was not the season for figs' (11:13). Because of this statement, Christ's action has been misunderstood. At a distance in front of Him, Jesus saw a solitary fig-tree and although the season at which figs ripened had not with verdure and as the fruit of it yet arrived, and yet this tree looked more than promising.

This is how one could probably understand what Jesus meant: On many grounds, therefore, Jesus might well have expected to find a few figs to satisfy the cravings of hunger on this fair-promising leafy tree, although the fig-seasons yet to arrive. Jesus found nothing but leaves. In that fig-tree so advantageously situated, so abundant in promise, yet fruitless, Jesus saw an emblem of Israel. When Christ found no fruit on the tree, He said, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again' (Mark 11:14). In this episode, we find Christ pronouncing judgment on that generation which John had exhorted, 'Produce fruit in keeping with repentance' (Matt. 3:8). Like the leafy tree, they had given external evidence of being fruitful but on examination there were seen to be barren and fruitless. Therefore judgement had to come on that generation.

Christ proceeded to the city and entered the temple. Three years ago, He had cleansed the temple (John 2:13-16) from its corruption because of Anna's bazaar. That corruption had now returned and the temple again was a place of merchandise. Christ drove out those who were buying and selling. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those who were selling doves. He would not even permit merchandise to be carried through the temple area. After He had cleansed the temple area, He stationed Himself as its guardian to prevent further desecration. In doing, Christ was demonstrating His authority, not only to cleanse, but to possess and safeguard His Father's house.

But, the religious authorities objected to what He was doing (Mark 11: 18), but were afraid to make their objections known because the people approved of what He had done and gladly accepting his teaching.

Christians all over observe this week as ‘Holy Week’ or ‘Passion Week’ which should never be considered, yet one more extension or repetition of our usual exposition, rather giving comprehensive treatment to the texts. Jesus Christ, as our Lord and Saviour, Redeemer and Liberator authentically demonstrate His authority in the above two incidences or occasions that have been deliberated in the previous paragraphs: 1) Cursing the fig tree, and 2) Cleansing the temple. Cursing the fig tree by Jesus Christ clearly and categorically states that ‘Produce fruits keeping in tune to repentance’ ‘Do not exist as a barren tree without yielding fruits’ and with that sort of existence there is no use. Jesus Christ was not ready to listen as well as to look at the externalities. Jesus was also not willing to go by exterior paraphernalia that covers the internalities. So, Jesus Christ cursed at those who cheat people in the name of God and religion like that of a fig tree, but extends an offer to those to ‘repent’ and ‘renounce’ what they have been doing all in the name of God and religion.

As Jesus Christ entered the temple He saw those termed themselves as the ‘custodians of religion and rituals’ in connivance with the merchants involved in merchandise turned the Temple into market dealing with all sorts of transactions. Jesus Christ was angry when he saw the power cliché who converted the Temple into den of robbers. He became angry entered into the Temple turned the tables used for a number of dubious money transactions and lashed them from the Temple. Those claiming to be the custodians of religion entered into dubious and clandestine transactions with the merchants and as a consequence converted the Temple into a den of loots and scoots. The very conversion of the Temple into a place of loot made Jesus Christ angry. His anger got con-

verted into punitive action that made those thugs and looters to run helter-skelter. Once again Jesus Christ demonstrates His authority over the Temple and the Principles He believed and wanted others to abide by them.

Those who were in power and authority, the so-called custodians of religion, Pharisees, Sadducees, political establishment and the wealthy could not tolerate what Jesus Christ spoke and acted upon. He was indeed the greatest threat to the ruling cliché /junta and was waiting for an opportune moment. The ruling cliché was further infuriated when the multitude started chanting and raising slogans when they came to know that Jesus Christ was the Messiah and King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Jesus Christ in both the incidences had established His authority over all. The multitude too affirmed their faith in Jesus Christ, their Saviour and Lord. So, the only option left for them was to kill Him. They tried their level best to quell the shouts of the multitude. They even tried Jesus Christ to silence the multitude. Their strategies and tactics wouldn't work and so the religious and political establishments had decided to put an end by physically terminating Him. They could not find fault with Him and initiate charges against Him. That was the irritant, the problem, the hitch and the block. Since their calculus and diverse modes miserably failed they eventually in unison decided to remove Him from the face of the world.

The same trend could be seen even now. They are some mortals who assume that they are indispensable and all-powerful, and in the process try to push their power and authority over the faithful. In the name of religion, religious power and authority, the religious establishments have converted the Church as their dens. The nexus between the political, judicial and religious by and large continues even now. But the multitude do know that Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour and none could play with that affirmation.

GANDHI AND AMBEDKAR REIMAGINING, REINVENTING AND RESTORING GANDHI'S IDEALS



‘Don’t lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty... The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.’

— M.K. Gandhi

Shiv Visvanathan in his recent column article appeared in Deccan Chronicle candidly starts his writing with the following: ‘Anniversaries are moments of conscience; they remind us of things we have forgotten. But, often, they are empty rituals which become a substitute for authenticity. But Mahatma Gandhi is not so easy to forget. He haunts in a different way, not because he is a burden or a debt, because his questions, his examples become a litmus test of every move we make or don’t make ... but Gandhi is the future we forgot to elaborate.’ He continues by raising the fundamental difference between Gandhi and others that ‘Gandhi resists a memorial ... you can have a Nehru museum but you can only have a Gandhi ashram. An ashram is a place to experiment, a laboratory where we assemble the self every day. In fact, Gandhi asks us to reinvent him every day.’

M.K. Gandhi’s philosophy is grounded on the practice of ahimsa or non-violence which played the most significant role for the India’s independence from the British colonialism. He was a pragmatic and grounded person. To cite an illustration when he was boarding the train one of

his shoes slipped and fell on the track. Gandhi couldn't retrieve it. He removed the other shoe and threw it next to the other lying on the track. When asked his response was: 'The poor man who finds the shoe lying on the track will now have a pair he can use.' He visualized and thus brought about a value which is utilitarian and need-based. He did transform the negatives into positives. The anecdote about Gandhi is also covers another important aspect vis-a-vis non-attachment. He had through his life disregarded attachment to material things and moved on life that brings maximum happiness to all. He moves on from the minimal possibilities to the maximum horizons that unfold better quality of life for all.

Reimagining and reinventing of Gandhi's ideals is important at this juncture where the world is moving on to material acquisitiveness and greed. Many are caught up in the web of materialism and greed. Money, name and fame have become the core values of many and to get these people go to any extent by employing unethical means and methods. Addiction to power and authority is gripping the people and by hook or crook want to acquire them. The cost could even be physically liquidating those who come in their ways. The ideal of non-violence is an ethical category which has the maximum potential backed with spiritual moorings should be reinvented and employed in a world of violence. Throughout the history of revolutionary movements and those who led the movements, it was *satyagrahi* played the most important symbol of non-violence that became virtually the logo in the histories of the 20th Century. Gandhi remains pre-eminent logo because of this philosophy which has more relevance and essence even now and the years to come.

Gandhi through his ideal of *satyagrahi* showed to the world that in one's vulnerability and fragility gains strength and power not because of anything but due to the adherence of truth for which the person and actions stands for. The broad shoulders, tall, muscular, z-security and commandos, laser-guided missiles, sophisticated arms and ammunitions

are not the means and so need not be the means to establishing authority over other nations. Gandhi gave to the world a thin-frame body insulated with truth that could stand before and talk truth and challenge militarily powerful empires. The truth that Gandhi evolved in the form of *satyagrahi* is not an abstract truth but lived one. Only in Gandhi we find truth that extends moderation and thus balances both the livelihood and lifestyles.

Shiv Visvanathan graphically articulate that ‘The *satyagrahi* could never be stereotyped or frozen. He was perpetually fluid between two notions of scale and ethics called *swadeshi* and *swaraj*. *Swadeshi* encompasses locality, neighbourhood, dialects, but it was never parochial.’ He continues by elaborating ‘It always spiraled out into infinite, creating a Gandhian idea of oceanic circles where both, a tear and dew drops, were planetary. Between *swadeshi* and *swaraj* a new geography of the imagination was created centrality, hierarchy, borders looked irrelevant. Both concepts were sliding epiphanies that could move from locality to the planet, sustaining infinity of possibilities which sustained the political.’

Gandhi’s concepts are a perpetual invitation to citizenship as invention and resistance. Shiv Visvanathan reiterates that ‘The ethics of memory has to confront the ethics of innovation to create a new framework of value.’ Elaborating further, ‘The ethics of hospitality have to combine with the ethics of everyday work and ethics of non-violence to create a new vision of peace, not as security but as a new idea of the planet where nature is a part of the constitutional contact.’ His philosophy of life encapsulates not only a nation-state or so but beyond and so his ideals are always global. Sadly, many have not understood him. His life has always been studded with clear actions and reasons. Shiv Visvanathan fuses Gandhian thought to the present days of affairs. He urges us to rethink and redefine the current existential paralysis that

needs not cosmetic but radical change. If at all we believe in Gandhian principles they are more relevant now than ever.

Shiv Visvanathan exhorts us that ‘We have to rethink democracy beyond its corrupt electoral and tyrannical majoritarian framework. We have to rethink technology beyond the current hagiography around IT and biotechnology and we have to rework the polity to include the diversity and equality of the oral, the textual and the digital. The Gandhian experiment never ceases and that is the Gandhian idea of citizenship—not a bundle of rights but a process of constant invitation with the community as a commons of ideas.’ It requires prayer, work and caring. He concludes, ‘A Gandhi for the future is a heuristic, a promissory note of possibilities not an embalmed claim to patents. Gandhi was a ganglion of connectivity and his relevance in this age of connectivity is not in doubt. The challenge is to avoid the official, the orthodox and dream new imaginaries. The playfulness and the challenge are there. Any child can begin the next experiment.’

Gandhi’s ideals of ahimsa and satyagrahi seem to have been forgotten. In a land where Gandhi was born and regarded as the Father of the nation, the nation without fail commemorates October 2nd as Gandhi Jayanthi. His ideals and philosophy have not been re-imagined, reinvented and retrieved in a world of cut-throat competition and aggressive consumerism. Violence in all forms is on the rise. A couple of days ago, the lynching of a 58-year-old man in Bisade village in Dadri, Greater Noida, owing to rumours that he had slaughtered a cow and stored beef in a horrific reminder that there are many pockets in India where vicious bigotry, rather than tolerance and non-violence. Violence and intolerance have become the order of the day. The world in which we live is indoctrinated with violence and believe that whoever has the military power and force could rule over others.

We live in a violent society where school and college going children and adolescents, young India that work in corporate sector, those work

in formal and informal sectors by and large are attuned to violence. Indian society is increasingly showing intolerance within families and between communities. It is in this context Gandhi's philosophy and values need to be articulated and re-imagined.



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Dr. Indukuri John Mohan Razu is a Professor of Social Ethics at the United Theology College (UTC), Bangalore, and is a prolific writer on Indian politics and social issues after having lived and served among the most marginalised communities in India. He was previously a William Paton Fellow at the University of Birmingham and Visiting Scholar at Princeton

Theology Seminary. He currently serves as the consultant and research fellow at ACTS Academy of Higher Education in Bangalore.