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EDITORIAL

Who will roll away the Stone?
Any Easter Hope?

The crucifixion and burial of Jesus in the tomb was not merely an individual tragedy. It symbolized something much deeper. *His death and entombment marked the end of the hope of the Jews of his time to be delivered out of the Roman bondage and of the vision of Messianic rule.*

> A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth (Isa.11:1-4);

The travellers on the road to Emmaus express this utter disappointment when they lamented, "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened."(Lk.24:21)The tomb-stone had dashed the hopes of the people for the coming of the reign of God. Even today people in India have been waiting expectantly for "*Achhe Din*!" Listen to a report from Abhinav Rajput and Prawesh Lama in Hindustan Times, updated on February 6, 2017:

> Rocking the youngest of his five children in his arms, street vendor Daata Ram watches his wife tend to two sick cows whose milk once supplemented their meagre income. The 66-year-old's family of seven survives on what he now makes by selling small quantities of puffed rice in Pandra Sikanpur, a one-street, hardscrabble town of 5,000 in Uttar Pradesh. "I took a loan of Rs 30,000 to buy those cows but I think they are no good now," says Ram, who uses a fourth of his monthly earnings of Rs.5000-6000 to repay the local moneylender.
>
> Across the street from Ram's thatched hut is the sprawling house of Neeraj Kumar Singh, a well-off sugarcane farmer who lost multiple crops to back-to-back droughts three years ago, and then suffered

when farm prices crashed last year. "It takes two harvesting seasons to recover the loss of one," says Singh who wants his sons to find jobs outside farming so that their lives wouldn't be held ransom to the vagaries of nature. But his four children have found no jobs, and the 60-year-old farmer is angry that he must now divide his 10 acres of cropland to secure their future.

The stone that sealed the tomb of Jesus was not simply a case of the silencing of a politically powerless person. It **signified the cruel end which thousands of common people experience at the hands of cunning scheming political rulers and economic powers** who consider them to be a threat to their vested interests and to the status quo of the empire.

> Caiaphas, the high priest had already declared, "'It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish.'. . . So from that day on they took counsel how to put him to death." (Jn.11:50, 53) From the day of the trial and death of Jesus "Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other."(Lk.23:12). Furthermore Caesar's position was threatened by the Jewish leaders, "If you release this man (Jesus), you are not Caesar's friend."(Jn. 18:12)

Watching the death of Jesus on the cross, the centurion who was supervising the crucifixion, declared,
"Certainly this man was innocent!"(Lk.23:47) **The stone closing the mouth of the tomb connoted the sealing and silencing of the cries of politically, socially and economical weak people.** Similar is the condition of the least and the last in our society today. An article of Jaya Rani, published on November 16, 2016, entitled "The Dalit Voice is Simply Not Heard in the Mainstream Indian Media" (https://sabrangindia.in/article/unheard-dalit-voice-rohith-vemulas-letter-would-have-gone-unnoticed-if-not-written-english), narrates the plight of dalits:

> The 'not so changing' statistics of National Crime Records Bureau say that a Dalit is assaulted every two hours in India. So we would get breaking news every two hours.
>
> At least three Dalit women are raped every 24 hours. Call it exclusive, mask the face of the woman or you can even leave it unmasked since

> she is a Dalit and keep breaking the news. Crimes against Dalits see a rise of 10-20% every year. In a just society, the media's space to violence against Dalits should have correspondingly increased too. But has it happened? We all know it has not.
>
> There is a term called *oozhikaalam* in Tamil. The closest English word to it is apocalypse. As a responsible journalist, I would call this era the apocalypse of the media world. The mainstream media is not for the poor, not for the oppressed. It has carved its kingdom out of loyalty to the powers, to bureaucracy, to domination. It is neither for minorities nor for women and children. Most certainly not for the Dalits.

The tomb of Jesus stood not only for the end of a great human being, but for the termination of the life of a loving human being, who radiated compassion and love, and in so doing cultivated edifying relationships. As Matthew 27:55 and John 19:25 put it there were many women following Jesus as he trudged along the road to Calvary. Among them was Mary the mother of Jesus, who had treasured so many uplifting memories of Jesus in her life (cf. Lk.2:51). Then there was Mary Magdalene whom Jesus had lovingly helped to get rid of the problems (the demons) that had plagued her life (Lk.8:2). She had regained dignity in life because of relating to Jesus. There was Joseph of Arimathea too at Golgotha; he had long been a secret disciple of Jesus (Jn.19:38). Also at Golgotha was Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews who had first come to Jesus at night (Jn. 19:39) and learnt the lesson of true spirituality. Jesus indeed had transformed lives of persons and had been bound with them in relationships of love. The stone on the tomb signified the cessation of a life of love.

> The India we live in today is one which seeks to put an end to compassion and love. Even the noblest of motives which Mother Teresa had in giving of herself in love for the poor, the diseased, the orphaned, and the aged have been derogated as a proselytization strategy. Commercial enterprises have given monetary, consumerist and possessive values to love whether it be Valentine's Day or Christmas or any other festivity.

Who will roll away the stone? The stone which blocks all movements for justice! The stone which silences the suffering lambs! The stone which smothers love! The stone which annihilates hope!

At Easter, we receive the good news that God intervenes to roll away tomb-stones!

"You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: *Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God* with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. (Acts 2:22-24)

But who will roll away the tomb-stones of our times? Is there any hope? ***God has called us to follow the steps of Jesus Christ and when we are committed to the gospel of justice and love, the stone will be moved!***

We call ourselves Christians. Are we willing to be committed to the cause of the gospel? If yes, the stone will be rolled away!

Hear the words of Jesus:

> Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy. When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. (Jn. 16: 20-22)

This issue of the NCC Review points us to the various stones that need to be rolled away in our society and churches. It is hoped that the assurance of God's presence in our struggles would empower us with vision and determination to persist and prevail until the moans of despair are replaced by the joyful noise of victory. Are we willing to give expressions to the Gospel message that leads to the experience of the Jesus of resurrection? Will you commit to rolling away the stones that you see?

- Roger Gaikwad
General Secretary, NCCI

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Information and Communication Technology with special reference to Social Media - Development Communication Perspective

*- Margaret Kalaiselvi**

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past eighty years many innovative and comprehensive theories have evolved in studying the role of mass media in development. In the 1930s Lazerfeld one of the known communication scholars believed that Radio can change the political values of the people. This idea was further strengthened by Daniel Lerner in 1941. He suggested 'the passing of traditional society to a modern society'[1] in the name of modernization. Because they were hoping that modernization is one of the means to development, and in this process they had a strong faith in the power of media. They expected that this would change the people's attitude and culture. The new millennium is already witnessing this change in people's life.

In 1962 Everett Rogers introduced the American model of Rural Development and strongly supported rural extension programmes for development. He argued that the channels of communication are the best means to get the best effect on the people. Therefore he introduced the 'diffusion of innovation theory'[2] through which many innovative tools and ideas could introduced to the people to bring the expected change among the people. Wilbur Schramm in his book *'Mass media and national development, The role of information in developing countries'* (1964), argued forcefully that the mass media has the potential to widen horizons, to focus attention, to raise aspirations and to create a climate for developing the communication system and developing the life condition of the people. This model of development created a dependency on the western world or the developed nations and their technology. However, the mobile phone revolution is converging all forms of communication methods and challenging today's world.

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[1] *Communication Research Trends,* Vol.9, Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture, London, (1988-1989) No.3, p. 2.

[2] Ibid., p. 4.

Mass Communication and Telecommunication plays a major role in the everyday life of the people. Information and communication technology otherwise known as the Computer Supported Collaborated Network (CSCN) has become centre of human existence. Millions of people are talking to each other through social media by using these networks. The most important aspect of Trade and the political participation depends on Information system. "Information and Communication Technology is the term widely used to explain the process of information by using microelectronic based system which is the combination of computing and telecommunication through which one can acquire process, store and disseminate any information. This is now field of study".[3] Later on all these technologies have converged in to a new form of technology called social media and people tend to lean more on these new media. A kind of integration is happening in the process of information. Time, Space and energy is saved by using social media. Moreover the theological understanding is also widening. The recent struggle for 'Jallikattu' (Bull fight) in Tamil Nadu is the best example. A well known film director, Samuthrakani was commenting that *'if you want to see God, go to Marina beach'.* This was a challenge to the religious structures of social media. People organized themselves and established a new information and communication order.

The computer-supported collaborated network system has grown at tremendous speed. Social Media are the outcome of such innovation in media development. Social Media like Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin, My space, Flicker, YouTube, blogs, WhatsApp, Podcasts are a few examples of social media. The convergence of mass media took place not only to process the information but also to create an information society in which human beings are well informed about what is happening around them and gain knowledge. The main purpose of all this new technological advancement is to enhance the human relationship, but for this, one has to face many challenges. Development should be looked at from the holistic point of view. It should lead to the total transformation of the human personality. In this particular paper an attempt is made to evaluate the issues and concerns related to development and communication in the growing scenario of social media.

[3] *IT challenges and opportunities of the XXX Annual Convention of the Computer Society of India.* By S.C. Bargava, Tata McGraw Hills Company Publication Ltd, New Delhi ; 1995, P. 4

Those who are using the new media in a proper and ethical way are tolerant of others' diversity and want to be treated in the same way. The younger generation wants their voice to be heard through the social media. The peer education happens between interested individuals on various issues. Online shopping is an important development in this millennium. The infinite choice of goods, price comparison and no pressure of sale are important advantages. In today's world, the smart phones with educational materials can be a tool in generating knowledge to the young people. Social media creates a space for online social entertainment. Information and entertainment is blended with value formation. There is a new generation coming up. They are called as generation X and generation Y. For the first one information processing is computer mediated; online communication is a must for their community existence. But for the second one social media and human interaction is a must for human survival. There is also a generation gap in using the social media in the developing nations as well.

In 1988, "the Internet had 70 million users worldwide. The United States and Canada accounted for 62 percent of all users, while Asia accounted for only 12 percent. Global Internet users were expected to rise to more than 325 million by 2000. By early 2000, India had an estimated three million Internet subscribers and about 15 million users. With the favorable Internet service provision policies of the government, these numbers are projected to explode to about eight million subscribers or roughly 40 million users by 2001".[4] These estimations have been becoming higher in the current scenario with boom of Technological development.

In the Indian context, this is a growing phenomenon. According to "2007 analysis, 42 million Indians had regular access to the Internet. The largest segment of Internet users is in the 18-35 age group; this comprises half of all users. But only 66% of these are 'active users', that is those who use the net at least once a month. Most are 'ever' 'users', those who access the net once in a way". [5]

In the western world "In social media, the percentage of adults who use social media (72%) is not that different from the youngsters in it (81%),

[4] Arvind Singh all Everett M.Rogers, *India's Communication Revolution from Bullock Carts to Cyber Marts,* New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2001, p. 235.

[5] Keval Kumar, *Mass Communication in India,* Mumbai, Jaico Publishing House, 2012, p. 577.

there is a difference in the type of social media applications that is favored. Youngsters (teens and young adults) seem more prevalent in social media applications such as Facebook and Twitter while adults dominate Tumblr, Instagram and Pinterest. Adults are largely passive or semi-active users of social media."[6]

II. THE SHIFT AND THE RATIONALE

History is not static: it keeps changing. Therefore the focus of development was also shifting from one phase to another. After the Second World War (1939-1945) the concept of development was also changing. For example, in the Fifties, the Economic dimension was emphasized; in the Sixties, Health and Education got attention; in the Seventies, the Ecological dimension was included along with other dimensions; in the Eighties, Population, Food, Employment, and Human potentials were focused; in the Nineties, Science and Technology became the prime attention in the developmental process; and in the Twenties : Cultural dimension was given importance.

In all these approaches one important aspect has been emphasized, i.e. Information. "Development is not only improving the life conditions, but also people should be well informed".[7] Therefore, in order to get a proper flow of information Wilbur Schramm a well known Development Communication scholar, proposed the idea of using Communication Technology at the maximum level. "It is hardly possible to imagine national economic and social development without some modern information multiplier; and indeed, without mass communication probably the great freedom movements and national strivings of the last few decades would never have come about at all"[8] Therefore a 'modernization' concept of diffusion of innovation was introduced by Everett Rogers in 1970.

So, the suggestion given by Schramm is well received by all of the developing nations. As a result, the importing of information materials and new

[6] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/suren-ramasubbu/from-gen-x-to-y-and-z-tec_b_7645410.html

[7] Denis McQuail, *Theories of Mass Communication*, Sage Publications, 2001, p. 560

[8] Op.cit., p. 5

Note: Converge means to move two things towards the same meeting point. It is also understood as to come from many places to meet in a particular place. For example there was once a big difference between the two politicians but now their ideas seem to be converging. Converging means becoming similar.

technologies are adopted. Multimedia and Internet are the major chunk in IT to be studied. There is transformation taking place by adopting technology for the development of people. In this kind of process, a convergence is taking place by integrating all forms of mass mediated technologies. Therefore the context, culture and the conceptual orientation are the rationale for studying social media.

III. THE CONTEXT

a. Communication Revolution

Communication is understood only as sharing of information. But in today's world, it is more than that. It is seen as 'system' through which the entire world is dependent. It is not only knowledge but also the core of human existence. The scientific development, social transformation, and the human growth is now serving on the basis of communication.[9]

b. Information Revolution

Information is understood as mere facts and figures. But, in today's context, it is seen as a 'commodity' and the 'power'. A well informed society means, that the people in the so called information society are educated, literate and know what is happening in and around them, informatization, information age, Information society, and information super highway are the outcome of revolution. In olden days, information was kept secret and skilled people controlled the knowledge. But in this information age, knowledge is explained and one can search for truth with the technological advancement. This is called as information revolution.[10]

c. Technological Revolution

Communication technologies, like telecommunication, computer and television is reaching the horizon, with advancement of super technologies. Robotic machines are invented to replace human resources. Gutenberg era is slowly taken over by digital era. The main line mass media like Radio, Cinema, Print, and Television are not stand alone media. They are now integrated in Computer Supported Collaboration Network. Technology is

[9] Denis Mc Quail, *Mass Communication Theory*, 6th Edition, New Delhi, Sage Publication, 2010, P. 39.

[10] B.K.Chaturvedi & Dr .S.K.Mittal, *Mass Communications Principles and Practices*, Vol.3 New Delhi, Global Vision Publishing House, 2004, p. 875.

taking the centre of human existence. Information Communication Technology (ICT) is emerging as a New Media and it is playing a key role in the operation of social media.[11]

d. Digital Revolution

From oral communication to written communication and then visual communication, it evolved as an invention at various stages in human history. Writing on slates is regarded as a primitive method. Sending emails, reading digital books etc., are the culture of this modern society. Reading offers multiple choices to people. But 'seeing' this means viewing culture is inevitably becoming the mass culture. Value loaded visual images are dominating one's mind and the thinking process. This has achieved tremendous speed in the last two decades. Digital divide, Digital library, Digital technology etc. are related terminologies. These are interrelated in social development.[12]

IV. CULTURE

Digital culture has made an impact on people's lives. Mainline media like print, radio, television, film are taking a form of convergence. People tend to adopt the new culture of information processing. Everett. H. Rogers explains that, "An adequate understanding of human communication as a process requires analysis of a series of cycles of information exchange over time. Convergence and divergence are useful concepts to describe what occurs during this process. Convergence is the tendency for two or more individuals to move toward another and to unite in a common interest or focus. Divergence is the tendency of two or more individuals to move away or apart"[13]

According to Denis McQuail, "it is a process of coming together or becoming more alike. It is usually applied to the convergence of media technologies as a result of digitalization (computerization). The distinctive physical characteristics of media cease to matter, at least for purposes of production, processing and transmission. The contemporary trend of convergence has been used as an argument of media deregulation, since most regulatory

[11] Op.cit., p. 40

[12] Keval Kumar, *Mass Communication in India,* Mumbai Jaico Publication, 2012.

[13] Everett.Rogers, Communication Technology *The New Media in Society,* New York, Press, 1986, p. 209.

regimes are linked to specific technologies (eg. printing, broad-casting, cable, projection, etc), despite the potential at the reception 'end' for convergence on a single apparatus, diversification seems to increase."[14]

According to Will Brooker, the new technologies like cable, satellite and especially the internet have facilitated the potential for greatly enhanced audience participation. He points out that "over flow of one media form into another, a core text, using the internet to extend audience engagement and encourage a two way interaction."[15]

From the new media point of view, digital code is the technological basis for media convergence. It was called by a phrase known as 'from atoms to bits' in which Micolas Negroponte recognized the transformative power of converting words, sounds, and images into bits of electronically stored information. He points out that "The possibility of merging the domestic television and PC became a battle between the TV channels, who were content rich but did not have the digital delivery technology in place, and the Internet Service Providers who have the digital means by transmission but not the content.

In the 1990s the TV/PC convergence was largely seen as being based upon the optical fiber cable network, which could also be used to receive fast connections to the Internet. The domestic television receiver was developed specifically to receive programmes. The Internet on the other hand, like the telephone, developed as a trans-mission system without any institutionally produced fixed content (programme). It is the World Wide Web, which has developed HTML pages with graphics, images and texts that can be said to be the content of the Internet.[16]

Henry Jenkins distinguishes three distinct kinds of convergence. It is between technological, economical and cultural convergence. First, there is social or organic convergence, which can be defined as social practices in

[14] Denis McQuail, *McQuail Mass Communication* (6th edition), New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2010, p. 553.

[15] Mary Talbot, *Media Discourse, Representation and Interaction*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 207, p. 169

[16] Andrew Dewdney and Reiter Ride, *The New Media Handbook*, special Indian Edition, New Delhi, Routledge, 2009, p. 251.

which we are engaged at more than one level of media attention. The second is cultural convergence as new forms of cultural creativity at the interactions of media technologies. The third is global convergence which recognizes that there is two-way 'cultural traffic' in global communication network, which leads to cultural hybridity. Technological convergence has re-ordered the toolbox, recasting the separate tool of analogue media into a common digital matrix, allowing sound, image and text to be captured, encoded, edited and the output brought in the same technical 'studio' using the same apparatus.[17]

From the development communication point of view this convergence is seen as an advancement of a Nation.

V. THE CONCEPT

Development Communication ultimately depends on the definition of development. Therefore we need to clarify ourselves with what is development? It is an integrated and heavily loaded term which is understood in different ways in different countries. In a country like India development is seen as whole. An integrated approach is infused in the term 'development'. But what happens in the planning and at the implementation level is to be discussed at the every milestone of the national development. Thus "Development ultimately is not only a matter of technology or gross national product, but the attainment of new knowledge and skills, the growth of a new consciousness, the expansion of the human mind, the uplifting of the human spirit and the infusion of human confidence."[18] Therefore the discipline of development communication is expected

- To provide a climate for attaining the "so called" change/ development
- To support a specific programme for sustainable growth.

In this process development communication scholars motivated and educated people to adopt different strategies. Those approaches are operating at various levels with various effects in different nations. And the researches are also going on. The role of New Information technologies in Social Development is the latest.

[17] Ibid., pp. 253-254.

[18] *Manual for Development Communication* By C. V. Rajasundaram, Asia Pasific Institute for Broadcasting Development, Malaysia, 1989, p. 15

Apart from educational institutions, business people, artist media industries, broadcasting institutions are also benefitting. For example Information Kiosk is one programme through which Hotels and Airports share their information. Kiosks means high speed fiber optic lines through which individuals also benefit. It is a glamorous and attractive idea offered for the so called social development, and India is already striving in promoting at all levels.

It is also our responsibility to confront the system for the betterment of the people. In order to understand the process of communication, Herald. D. Lasswell (1948) introduced a theory called "who; says what; through which channel; to whom; with what effect" (1948)[19]. He suggests that in order to arrive at a due understanding of the meaning systems of any communication process the above mentioned sequence of questions can be raised. We can also include the element of context i.e. in what context (social, economical, cultural, political and aesthetic) the development communication is offered. We need to study who is offering information and what are the effects. In that case, most of the programmes offered through social media should be studied from conceptual clarity and a holistic perspective.

VI. THE CHALLENGES

a. Technical Determinism is one challenge which means technology has become the central part of human existence. The idea behind this is "the view that if something is technically feasible then it is both desirable and bound to be realized in practice. In many quarters in the so called wired society of cable television, satellite transmission and video there is a degree of fatalism that these things are likely to be socially and culturally harmful."[20]

   Therefore, the possibility of dependency is created and in this process technology centred culture may devalue human existence.

b. Market oriented economy and consumer culture. "Increase of market economy and promoting consumer culture is the

[19] Kevel J. Kumar, *Mass Communication in India*, Jaico Publication, Mumbai, 2012.

[20] *A Dictionary of Communication and Media Studies*, second edition, by James Watson and Anne Hills, UBS New Delhi, 1991

important agenda of informatisation of economy which is reflected in the induction of information technology and related technologies, process in manufacturing, leisure and service activities by the public as well as private sectors".[21] It is expected that in 2020 the public will have improved and advanced communication system, through which all needs will be met and satisfied.

Therefore what is happening in India regarding devaluation of money is debatable from the public point of view.

c. New World Information and Communication Order. (NWICO). NWICO is proposed in 1980 by the Sean MacBride commission[22] which challenged the Communication Policies and the outcome of the uniculture. With this challenge the issues like, Human Rights, Human Growth, Human Fulfillment, Human Dignity, Human Respect, Human Existence, Human Touch, and Human Relationship are the main changes yet to be achieved.[23]

VII. CRITICAL CONCERNS

- Information and Communication Technology helps the process of human development and growth process while the misuse of it is a big hindrance to nurturing health, healing and maturity.

- Though the space can provide for better self-understanding and healthy behaviour, people experience disturbance due to conscious and unconscious creation of the pseudo identity, blocking the real and adapting fake identities.

- Multiple identities created in cyberspace could be a way of self expression, though unlimited and unrestricted freedom could lead to disastrous results and distractions in personal life and social interactions.

[21] Abraham Oommen and Paul Manalil, (Eds), *Media for Society,* NCCI Publication, Nagpur, 1996

[22] Ibid., p. 19.

[23] *Arasaradi Journal of Theology* , Vol .XI 1&2 January to December Madurai, TTS, 1998, p. 94.

- Personal interests, values and goals which focus on material achievement and satisfaction take priority over community and the wider society priority for self gratification with less interest for others around them.

- Religion and spiritual resources are pushed aside with the attitude that we know everything and we-are-in-control. We do not need anybody else to control our lives.[24]

VIII. EHTICAL CONCERNS

- Communication as a human right. Right to communicate as an ethical task.
- Public accountability of mass media, particularly transnational media corporations.
- Increasing trivialization of media content.
- Media, Violence and the representation of conflicts.
- Pornography and other acts of human degradation.
- Blurred boundaries between private and public.
- Data protection, copyright and intellectual copyrights.
- Old and new means of deception.

Advertising as the promotion of wants and the exploitation of consumers with negative effects on meeting genuine human needs.[25]

IX. ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONCERNS

- Imperialism: Cultural imperialism happens through mass media and social media.

- Media Imperialism: Control over material production. Sponsoring agencies can manipulate the media content and news flow.

- Control over Cultural institutions like schools, professional courses, art and culture, agriculture. Promoting the idea of modern and ultra modern culture.

[24] Imsutoshi Jamir, Temjen Jainr, C. Temjen Longkumar, Creative Communication, The Potential of New Media in Theological Education, Nagaland, CTC, 2014, pp. 119-120.

[25] Ibid., p. 101.

- Promoting consumerist culture via various mediums. This is called convergence in a developing country like India.

- Imperialism, consumerism, individualism, determination are the few economic and political issues related to social media.

I would like to conclude the paper with proposal of "Responsible communication" Proposed by WACC which to live and share life in a healthy way.

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Reading the Signs of the Times in India: Implications for the Church and its Mission

*- Roger Gaikwad**

We in India are living in critical times, when the values enshrined in the Constitution of India are being eroded. The Church in India has to be vigilant about this situation and has to engage in mission relevantly.

Reflective Voices on our Times in India

(1)

"India's inner voice has spoken. Just wait and watch. 31 December 2021 is the last for Christianity and Islam in this country. We will finish Christianity and Islam in this country by 31 December 2021. This is our aim," said Dharm Jagran Manch leader Rajeshwar Singh, of the Aligarh Christmas conversion programme fame, in December 2014.[1]

(2)

Furquan Ameen Siddiqui, Senior Correspondent (Multimedia), Hindustan Times, wrote the same period (December 2014),[2] *"Now, the battle for the hearts and minds of the northeast seems set to intensify with the growing presence of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliates in the region, who are working to further the Hindutva agenda there. Indeed, the saffron bodies seem to have learnt a good deal from the Christian missionaries they so deride and their message is being successfully propagated through education.*

"We consider every tribe to be a part of Hindu or Sanatan Dharma. We consider all Vanvasis [forest dwellers; tribals] a part of this larger Dharma," says Rajesh Das, Sangathan Mantri (organisation secretary) of Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, which runs a growing network of schools, hostels and temples in the northeast. Das, who supervises the ashram's projects in Tripura and Mizoram, believes the tribals of the region are being guided to the right path through a holistic and nationalistic approach. Das, just like

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[1] http://www.abplive.in/india-news/will-finish-christianity-and-islam-in-india-by-2021-rajeshwar-singh-28056

[2] http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/target-northeast-how-rss-plans-to-make-region-saffron/story-YZGPkOBXb6tS301BvpunpJ.html

other karyakartas in northeast, is not in a hurry either. "We'll see what happens to them [tribal identity] after 100 or 200 years.

"Ekal Vidyalaya is just one of the many initiatives run by RSS affiliates in the region. Others like Sewa Bharati, Vidya Bharati, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, Friends of Tribal Society (FTS) or Van Bandhu Parishad (VBP), Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bharat Kalyan Prathisthan (a unit of the VHP), Bharatiya Jan Seva Sansthan (BJSS) and the Rashtriya Shaikshik Mahasangh have also been running both formal and informal education units including balwadis (pre-schools), Bal Sanskar Kendras, hostels, residential schools, night schools, coaching centres and primary, secondary and senior secondary schools across the north-eastern states."

(3)

Writing in April 2015 about the Christian Community in India, John Dayal, an Indian Christian Political Activist stated,[3] "*The civil society report "300 Days Documenting Sangh Hate and Communal Violence under the Narendra Modi Regime" lists 168 targeting Christians. Desecration and destruction of churches, assault on pastors, illegal police detention of church workers, and denial of Constitutional rights of Freedom of Faith aggravate the coercion and terror unleashed in campaigns of Ghar Wapsi and cries of Love Jihad.*

Much of the violence, 54 percent, is of threats, intimidation, coercion, often with the police looking on. Physical violence constituted a quarter of all cases, 24 per cent, and violence against Christian women, a trend that is increasingly being seen since the carnage in Kandhamal, Odisha, in 2007 and 2008, was 11 per cent. Breaking of statues and the Cross and other acts of desecration were recorded in about 8 per cent of the cases, but many more were also consequent to other forms of violence against institutions.

Speaking at the 50th Anniversary of foundation of its religious wing, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Mr. Mohan Bhagwat, the RSS Sarsanghchalak bluntly stated that "Hindutva is the identity of India and it has the capacity to swallow other identities. We just need to restore those capacities." In Cuttack, he asserted that India is a Hindu state and "citizens of Hindustan should be known as Hindus". Sadhvi Prachi, a central minister, Members of Parliament Sakshi Maharaj and Adityanath [recently made the Chief Minister of UP] are among those urging measures to check Muslims, including encouraging Hindu

[3] http://johndayal.com/the-christian-community-in-india-a-2015-status-report/

women to have from four to ten children each. In Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and other states, the terror, physical violence and social ostracising of Dalit and Tribal Christians, in particular, continues."

(4)

On October 23, 2015, Ram Puniyani (a person opposed to fundamentalism and communalism, and committed to human rights and community harmony) observed,[4] *"These are not ordinary times. . .With this Government in power all the wings of communal politics, the RSS affiliates, have unleashed themselves in full blast. Communalism is not just the number of deaths due to violence, it is much more. The foundation of this violence begins with the manufacture of perceptions about the religious minorities. These perceptions based on history and some selective aspects of present society are given an anti human tilt and interpretation. This is used to create hatred for the minorities and that's where the communal elements can unleash violence either as a massive violence like Gujarat or Mumbai or Bhagalpur or Muzzafarnagar or the one in Dadri. This creates the divides in society which over a period of time is converted into polarization. And polarization is the foundation of electoral strength of party wanting a nation in the name of religion. As per Yale study, communal violence is the vehicle which strengthens BJP at electoral level."*

(5)

In the context of the Republic Day Celebrations on 2016, on the 68th death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, over 67 organizations, campaigns and movements representing youth, Dalits and Adivasis, religious minorities, sexual minorities, Dalits, the homeless, disability groups and others came together to speak in one voice against the growing attacks on the Indian republic incidence of caste and religious discrimination and several burning issues. In their Statement[5] they said,

"*We members of the Indian public are deeply concerned with the grave assaults that are being mounted on the Republic. This most diverse country in the world belongs equally to all persons who make it its own, regardless of their religious faith (or for that matter, their denial of faith), their caste,*

[4] http://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/OldNewsPage/?Id=5566&Three/Murders/and/a/Lynching

[5] http://m.dailyhunt.in/news/india/english/muslim+mirror-epapermuslimir/massive+protest+in+delhi+against+policies+of+modi+govt-newsid-49089661

gender, class, language, ethnicities, physical and mental abilities, gender identity and sexual orientation. This is the promise that we had made to ourselves during the Independence movement. This is the soul of India's secular, socialist democratic Constitution. This also is the meaning of Part IV--A of the Constitution of India that prescribes the fundamental duties of all Indian citizens: to respect 'the composite culture of India, to 'develop the scientific temper', 'spirit of reform' and 'critical enquiry' and to 'cherish the ideas that inspired the struggle for Indian Independence.

As people of this vast and diverse land, affirm, we uphold and defend the constitutional values of the Indian Republic as elaborated in the preamble of the Constitution of freedom, justice, equality and fraternity. In brutal contrast to these values, the political forces represented by the so-called Sangh Parivar are trying to subvert our Constitution by imposing upon the whole country their ideology of majoritarian tyranny, persisting caste and gender inequality, religious intolerance, and abolition of dissent. . . . Today they have entered into a dangerous alliance with neo-liberal market fundamentalists and a section of unscrupulous capitalists and financiers who see constitutional democracy as a hurdle in the path of so-called 'development'. This alliance of religious fanatics and neo-liberals want nothing less than an overthrow of the state's constitutional commitment to social welfare, the public provisioning of health, education and social security, affirmative action for women, Dalits and Adivasis; the freedom of belief and worship of religious minorities; and the subversion of the criminal justice system."

(6)

Neha Dabhade, writing in the Secular Perspective, made the following analysis, post UP State Assembly Elections[6]: "*The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) won with a thumping majority in the Uttar Pradesh State Assembly elections on 11th March 2017. It got over three-fourths majority in India's most populous state. The win is attributed to the charisma of Prime Minister Narendra Modi by the BJP leaders along with its policy of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' as one heard in PM Modi's speech in Varanasi. Though development for all was their stated position for the campaign, this win is attributed to other factors as well according to political pundits and election analysis.*

The official manifesto of the BJP had two items which were based entirely on

[6] Neha Dabhade, "Hatred, Polarization and Electoral politics" (Secular Perspective, March 16-31, 2017)

religion again and figures in highly provocative speeches. One was the issue of Ram Mandir and the other of triple talaq (The Hindu, 2017). The BJP Yuva wing state general secretary and party's candidate from Maat constituency of Mathura, Kunwar Singh Nishad said, ""Maa ka doodh piya hai to ek eent masjid ke naam par laga ke dikhao, phir hum tumhe tumahri aukat dikhayenge" (if you are really your mother's son, put one brick for the Masjid at the Ram Mandir site and then we will show you your real worth)" (Jaiswal, 2017).

The BJP promised to push for a ban of triple talaq in the Supreme Court after seeking the 'opinion' of Muslim women. Triple talaq also happens to their beating stick for the Muslims. The Muslim community is tainted as primitive due to the practice of triple talaq amongst other things. Sakshi Maharaj, BJP leader was in news for his controversial statement where hinting at the Muslims he said, "This population rise is not because of the Hindus. Population has risen due to those who support the concept of four wives and 40 children (The Indian Express, 2017)."

The manifesto also included issues of Kairana and cow. BJP MP Yogi Adityanath (now Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh) maintained consistently that the "exodus" in Kairana of Hindus due to a "particular community" if not arrested will turn the region into Kashmir. The attempt here is to create a fear psychosis amongst the Hindus that the Muslim community is posing a threat to them in Western UP.

A long standing campaign on the lines of hatred and Islamophobia is the campaign on "love jihad". In order to demonize the Muslim youth, a myth is spread that Muslim youth mislead Hindu girls and marry them in order to convert them forcefully to Islam. In this twisted propaganda, gender has taken a centre stage in the electorate politics of UP. In order to deal with what BJP terms as a "social evil" it has come up with a strategy to form "anti-Romeo" squads.

An Analysis of our Contemporary Contextual Times[7]

We are living in times when discrimination and violence are taking on serious forms:

Physical Violence: As far as physical violence is concerned, one sees a twofold strategy deployed by the communal forces. One is "Shock and Awe." Shock and awe is a military doctrine, technically known as rapid

[7] Data for this section is extracted, in a modified form, from **A Study on Discrimination and Violence against Christians and Muslims in India (2013 – 15)** undertaken by National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), which will soon be published.

dominance wherein overwhelming power is used to paralyze the enemy's perception of the battlefield and destroy its will to fight. This method was effectively used by the Sangh Parivar in two instances Kishtwar, J&K and Muzaffarnagar, UP.

The other strategy is "**Low Intensity Violence."** Low intensity violence comprises a variety of events from riots to attack against the minority communities as well as against homes and symbolic buildings such as churches and mosques. The idea is not to bring these incidents to limelight but to attack the psyche of the minorities. Therefore, frequency of such incidents and geographical spread is maintained.

Such incidents are carried out by the fringe elements of the Sangh Parivar and they are done with impunity. The incidents of violence are far more spread out, extending to newer areas and small towns like Hapur and Loni in UP and Gurgaon and Mewat in Haryana. Areas that were hitherto not known to have communal tensions have become centres of violence. The IRS (Institutionalized Riot System) of the Sangh Parivar is seen to grow, which is capable of producing communal riots whenever need arises and political conditions are favourable. The IRS activity could be seen in the *ghar wapsi* (home coming) events organized across the country; in intimidating the minorities and opposing their freedom to practice their religion.

Structural Discrimination/Violence**:** In India, structural violence against minorities can be distinctly seen in the many areas some of which are highlighted below:

State Policy**:** India is a secular State and the Constitution is committed to the equality of citizens and guarantees to all its citizens freedom of religion and beliefs. Therefore, the Constitution explicitly prohibits discrimination based on religion. Further, the State takes it as its responsibility to preserve, protect and assure the rights of minorities in matters of language, religion and culture. However, the State has inadvertently endorsed the divide between religions. For instance, the *denial of benefits to people of Scheduled Caste background* who converted to Islam and Christianity. The Constitution brings the SC population under the regime of reservation to uplift them socially, economically, and provide them legal safeguards against untouchability, discrimination and atrocities. The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order of 1950, also known as the Presidential Order restricted

reservation and the entitlements it ensured, only to SCs of Hindu background. This was discrimination in favour of religious majority. Hence the Presidential Order was amended once in 1954 to include SCs of Sikh religion and again in 1990 to include SCs of Buddhist background. Others (in particular, Christians and Muslims) were excluded. This is nothing but denial of equality of citizenship for SCs of Christian and Muslim backgrounds.

Attitude of the Police and Law Enforcing Agencies**:** Communal tension in any corner of the country leads to fear and insecurity among minority communities, particularly Muslims in the rest of the country. Riots could be spontaneous or planned, but the State is accused of being negligent at all stages of not anticipating the violence and taking necessary steps to prevent the violence; of not acting quickly and effectively once the riots start; and of not dealing fairly with Muslims once the riots are over. Invariably, in the riots, the number of Muslims killed is more (e.g. in Muzaffarnagar 42 Muslims and 20 Hindus were killed); the economic loss suffered by the Muslims is more (their homes are gutted, their means of livelihood destroyed); the people displaced and in camps are Muslims ("There are camps after camps full of people who fled their homes during the Muzaffarnagar riots. Why are they only full of Muslims?"); and they are discriminated against when it comes to rehabilitation and compensation.

Anti-Conversion Law: Violence, mainly against Christians is associated with allegations of religious conversions. The perception that Christians are congenital proselytizers is widely prevalent in India. This view is shared not only by legislators and administrators but also the Indian judiciary. This is evident in the Graham Staines murder case. The judgement of the case referred to the murder as an instance of reaction by the Hindu community because of fraudulent proselytisation practiced by Graham Staines.

Article 25(1) of the Constitution says "all persons," not just Indian citizens, are equally entitled to the freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practice and propagate religion freely. Legislative and legal history validates the argument that there is no need for a new anti-conversion law. The original intention of the Constituent Assembly and the interpretation of Article 25 by the Supreme Court later clearly differentiate the right to propagate from the right to convert other persons to one's own religion. The former is a Fundamental Right, the latter, if forcibly done and not by choice of the person converting, is illegal. Despite this, there are "anti-

conversion" laws in six states Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Madhya Pradesh, thereby alleging that Christians are engaged only in proselytization. (If that were true how come the percentage of the Indian Christian population, as per government census data, has been hovering around 2 for several decades?)

Educational Institutions: The Indian State has by and large ensured the cultural and educational rights of Muslims and Christians by providing the right to establish and administer institutions by way of Article 30(1) of the Constitution without much hindrance or interference from the State. This right enjoyed by Christians and Muslims is under threat at present. The new education policy proposed by the government questions and hence changes the understanding and usage of Article 30 of the Constitution which gives religious and linguistic minorities the right to establish and administer their institutions.

At the same time, the fringe elements in the Sangh Parivar as well as individuals in high positions make the necessary noises for Hinduisation or saffronisation of education. In January 2015, the Haryana Education Minister, Ram Bilas Sharmam said, "We want complete saffronisation of the education system and there is nothing wrong in this." He further said that the BJP government would introduce the Bhagwad Gita in the curriculum and it would be made compulsory from Class V to XII. *Yoga*, *surya namaskar, vande mataram*, reciting *Om* were increasingly imposed in the public sphere especially schools and colleges. In an obvious bid to influence young minds and change the way history is understood, a new course on "Indian Culture and Yoga" has been included in schools.

<u>Symbolic Violence</u>

According to Prof. Oommen, symbolic violence refers to the tendency on the part of dominant groups, in this case the religious majority group, to stigmatize the culture and devastate the habitats of the poor and the powerless i.e. the minorities namely Christians and Muslims. Symbolic violence works in two ways 1) it inflicts deep psychic wounds in the minds of victims resulting in collective alienation; and 2) it often triggers off physical violence both against them and by them.

Christians face symbolic violence mainly on three counts one, they are looked at as products of colonialism; two, they are perceived to have embraced Christianity for petty benefits; and, three, they are said to indulge

in fraudulent proselytisation. In most cases, there is no physical harm done to Christians but the institutions (churches and schools) and cultural symbols (icons, images, Bible, crib, etc.) are attacked. 25 December has been declared by the government, as "good governance day"; the celebration of the birthday of former Prime Minister of India, belonging to the BJP, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, may gradually be given more importance than the celebration of the birthday of Jesus Christ. The brutal rape of the 70 year old nun in West Bengal is nothing but an attack on the core of Christianity. RSS Chief, Mohan Bhagwat has declared that Mother Teresa's humanitarian work was motivated by a mission to convert. Muslims and Christians being followers of non-Indic religions are being presented as anti-nationals, not deserving to be equated with Hindus and followers of other Indic religions as citizens of India. It is a culture of impunity that is alarming - it is about showing Muslims and Christians their place in a Hindu Rashtra (nation).

How Should The Churches And Mission Bodies Respond to our Times?[8]

This strategic shift by Hindutva forces calls for serious and innovative rethinking on the part of the minorities in dealing with violence against them. On deeper study of political and self-styled cultural actors at play, it is seen that Hindutva forces take advantage of the stereotypical perceptions of minorities, most of which is contestable. By not taking visible actions to mitigate such perceptions, contested as they are, minorities, often play into the hands of Hindutva forces.

The other major issue is that the minorities, in view of their smaller numbers in Indian polity, play second fiddle to the Hindus, who uphold a majoritarian orientation. Secondly, most Indians are also often seen to be inward-looking as communities. Thirdly, sections of religious minorities tend to be confrontational, inviting heavy backlash from the majority community. They should not be initiators of violence. The challenge for the minorities, therefore, is to mainstream themselves in terms of social, political and cultural engagements, apart from development work health and education. The recommendations below emanate from the above understanding and aim at effectively countering the violence against minorities.

[8] This section too is extracted, in a modified form, from A Study on Discrimination and Violence against Christians and Muslims in India (2013 – 15) undertaken by National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), which will soon be published.

Immediate Measures

1. On an urgent basis, efforts should be made to bring about unity among Christian denominations and sectarian groups and the minority religious leadership to deal with the danger of violence against the religious minority communities.

2. It is necessary to secure justice for the victims of physical violence as soon as possible. This needs to be done within the legal mechanisms.

3. Minorities must actively participate in the political process at various levels from the local self governance to the Union. Politics is not about winning elections alone, which may depend on numbers. It includes many other things as well namely, contributing in ideas, active citizenship, and 'making politics matter' in peoples' lives daily; contributing to good governance, deepening democracy, etc.

4. One of the accepted definitions of secularism is equal treatment to all religions, which is not happening. Christians need to promote the constitutional spirit of secularism.

5. Mission bodies must be engaged in responsible evangelism. The emphasis should be of giving expression to the good news of Jesus Christ. At the same time pastors, missionaries and evangelists need to be provided basic constitutional and legal training.

6. Minorities should invoke international provisions in their support. Minority leadership should be fully aware of these laws. For example, Article 18 of UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights) declares: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. [Also refer Article 18, ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights)]

Deeper Measures

1. There is a need to work for reforms inside churches at least on two aspects one, to instil scientific temper among youth against gender,

caste, and rank prejudices; and second, to bring about civil action orientation for the sake of active citizenship in addition to preaching and fellowship, etc.

2. Perception: The perception of minorities as 'the other', 'the outsider', 'non-Indic', or 'aliens' by the majority communities should change. The perception that Islam came through conquest and Christianity through colonialism must be changed as they are historically unfounded. That Islam and Christianity follow alien cultures, is incorrect. This can happen by minorities inviting people from other faiths to witness and participate in religious discourse as well as cultural practices. Also, minorities could join, which they already do, in the cultural activities of others. This should not be seen as mere public relations activity but should be a genuine effort at cultural sharing and neighbourhood integration.

3. Inter-faith understanding at various levels, not just at the top, should be cultivated. Quite a bit of confusion and unease happens when people are ignorant of each others' religious precepts. Conflicts occur mainly from misunderstanding, not from clarity. Focus should be on the good that each religion does.

4. Peace Building: Peace consists of a set of conditions and behaviours that reduce or eliminate conflicts. Hence, to secure peace, building such conditions and instilling such behaviour is critically necessary. Peace conditions may consist of understanding and acceptance of the principle of equality of opportunity, inclusive development, fairness and transparency in the political and legal systems, rule of law, etc. The set of behaviours that act as connectors not dividers are attitudes and actions prejudices, hostility, exclusion, domination, and discrimination divide people. We need to do just the opposite to connect people, appreciation, brotherhood/sisterhood and solidarity, inclusion, recognizing and appreciating differences.

These initiatives must be taken by minorities by forming neighbourhood communities and other such groups. It must be driven home that peace is the pre-condition to progress, happiness and development. Fear, intimidation and violence retard the development of all individuals and groups. Hence, we need to prepare “peace-warriors” and pursue the peace agenda aggressively.

Conclusion

Living in such times let us be reminded of the words of the Bible:

"If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the worldtherefore the world hates you."(Jn.15:18-19)

"See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."(Matt.10:16)

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."(Lk.4:18-19)

"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." (Rom.12:14-18)

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How do we Communicate Christian Education in the Family?

*- Lanusenla**

When we talk about the Bible and family education, it immediately leads us to think of the inter-relationship between God and God's created beings, most importantly "the family", that is revealed through the Bible, the word of God. Family is one of the unique institutions created by God from the very beginning. The God of the bible deals with us not only as individuals but also as community members - in the community of marriage, as married couples, as parents and as children.

Deuteronomy (6:24; 10:13) says that commandments of God in the scriptures that have to do with marriage and sex, with home and children are "for our good always". We trust that God has given us such commandments because he loves us and wants us to have abundant life. That is, the commitment to God through Jesus Christ and commitment to one's own family.

The saving influence of God's Holy Spirit effects changes not only within individuals but also the relationships among wives and husbands and children.

The message has been divided into four sub-points. These are

1. The understanding of Deuteronomy 6:4-9
2. Relationship between the spouses
3. Relationship with the children
4. The role of the parents in this Mass Mediated world

The understanding of Deuteronomy 6:4-9

These verses set out the necessary attitude needed to maintain the centrality of the authority of commandments. They must be taught to children from their earliest days, worn as a sign on the body, and fixed permanently upon the door ways of every house.

Many of the most basic of the Deuteronomic characteristic features come to the surface in this chapter. Thus, it has quite appropriately become one of

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the most often repeated, and readily memorable, parts of the book. Of prominent interest is the command to love God (v5). From this point onward, the command to love God becomes a central aspect of the entire biblical tradition. And it has shaped much of the Jewish and Christian spirituality that has been built upon it. For Deuteronomy, this demand for a loving attitude toward God is closely related to the concept of moral obedience. It reflects an attitude of giving priority to the demands of God…. There is to be a strong reciprocal bond of affection and commitment between Israel and the Lord as God.

Love is vitally important in family life. And throughout the biblical tradition, there is widespread use of kinship metaphors to describe divine-human relationship. Therefore, the employment of the love concept by the deuteronomists is not surprising at all.

A further important aspect of the Deuteronomic teaching is evident in the injunction to teach "these words" to children. The phrase "these words" must refer to the Ten commandments. The inference is clear that those who are addressed are regarded as lay citizens of Israel who will carry out such instruction in their homes. Such a practice reflects an important similarity between the teaching of Deuteronomy and the biblical wisdom tradition (See. Eg., 4: 9; prov. 2:1)

In a good Christian family, our personal devotion to God and the relationship we build through our family devotion with God is of primary importance. The inter-relation between God- parents and children in the family is the basic Christian values.

To Guide and teach children with enriching bible knowledge, Bible stories, and bible memory is the basic necessity in a Christian family. "Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray" (Prov. 22:6).

Parents must educate the children according to their stages. As we all know the memory power of a child is very strong which we adult members do not posses. Accordingly we must equip them well because they will be able to memorise the long poems or bible verses and that will never go away from their minds. We know that the Hebrew children used to memorise the torah 'book of law' when they are young as we see in the Old Testament. We too have similar experiences if we recollect our childhood days. The songs and bible verses we memorised are still fresh and alive within us.

Therefore, family bible reading and prayer, prayer of thanksgiving, morning prayer/song when we rise up, evening prayer/song when we are about to take rest are all very important in our lives in the family.

Relationship between the spouses

It is vital to ask, how do we as spouses maintain mutual relation with one another? To have a profound and peaceful Christian family the first thing we should acquire as spouses is to have a firm relationship with one another. It is said that, "No marriage is likely to survive long unless there is total commitment on the part of the spouses. Commitment that says, "Come what may, we will remain together in love. Though you become blind tomorrow, I will be there. Though you be a 'success' or a 'failure,' I will be there. Though we suffer, fight, struggle, work hard, lose dreams, or fulfil them, we will go through it all together, and as Christ has never deserted us, so we will never desert one another." If all of us who are or would be spouses keep all that in mind and put it into practice, we will surely be a good educator we will have the fullness of life in the family.

When spouses do not understand each other, when differences in our thinking develop and when we tend to move on our own, then problems arise. Quarrelling and misunderstanding between the spouses: due to differences in views, opinions; and sometimes due to work overload done alone in the family leads to problems. Sharing the responsibility between the spouses is necessary.

Things that parents must avoid

Once, the father of a small boy was watching a cricket match on TV. Unfortunately that day the Indian team lost the match; the father was very upset and sad. At the same time, very unfortunately his son was around him without doing his homework well. So when the father came to know about his son not being able to do his homework on time, he got so furious and beat up his son very badly. Sometimes parents put on all our anger on our innocent children. Hammering out our anger and temper to our innocent children surely affects their life long psyche: Therefore, we parents must not use our anger upon our children.

In the family, problems and misunderstanding between husband and wife often happens. We too had such experiences at home with heated debates and arguments. Neither of us wants to lose, for me, I will staunchly make my stand saying that I am right, what I say is right. My husband would also

believe strongly that he is right and what he thinks is right. None of us wants to surrender; we argue and argue each other to the extent sometimes that it almost ends up physical fight.

It so happened that one day when I was trying to talk to my son he got annoyed with me and he started to shout at me with the same tone of voice (thundering voice) like I used to shout. Then, that very moment it struck my mind and I realized my mistake. I learned the lesson that I should change my entire attitude, my temperament, and my behavior in front of my children.

Children record and follow all our actions and habits that we parents do. Therefore, every movement and every action of parents become very important for our children's learning and education at home.

We realize that parents must never show any argumentative word or temperament in front of our children or else all that we do will be reflected back to us.

First parents must control our weaknesses in which areas we think we are lacking. We should seek God's wisdom and knowledge in order to equip ourselves fully so that we may be able to educate our children in a proper way.

There are also times when parents find it difficult to handle the children when they disobey us. Sometimes when our children trouble us the easiest solution that comes to mind is to use stick and control them with stick. Even the Bible suggests using sticks once in a while. But then, it is not always successful for me in the family to stop them from crying or annoying me. It is pointless to use sticks constantly on our children. Therefore, I realized that we should change our technique of handling the children by trying to avoid using sticks as much as possible.

Relationship with the children

One must ask, how do we as parents relate with our children in the family? One of the primary responsibilities that married people assume is the responsibility for the children. How do we as parents handle our children in the family?

One of the important things that we parents should keep in mind is that, we must know the attitudes of our children. Parents should try to read and understand the minds and moods of each child, the likes and dislikes of a

child. We as parents should be able to grasp and read the minds of a child and we should treat them accordingly. We must recognize the delicacy of each child, how to handle them, how to educate them, how to guide and bring them up according to the nature of a child's personality, because each child possesses different personality, some children are introvert, some are extrovert, some learn very fast and some are quite slow, some are shot tempered, some are jolly, some are gloomy and some are very emotional and sensitive. If, as parents, we are not able to understand our child's nature, then we will have difficulty in life, in our family.

In order to maintain a balanced life in the family, to mould and shape a balanced life of every individual in the family, it is the sole responsible of the parents to help shape their children in all walks of their lives.

Equal role must be played by the spouse: sharing the responsibility together in the family encircling with one heart, one mind and one soul enhances and that it bring success.

Today every parent is worried for their own children. Many parents ask similar question to self, what will be the role of the parents in this Mass Mediated world? One of the challenges that parents face today is on the modern technological advancement that is, the use of Media by children.

Today mobiles phones, internet connection, computers and TV channels are easily available to children. One year old child will be comfortably fiddling around in the mobile phone playing games with the internet facilities. Its influence and its impact upon the children are enormous.

For example, cartoon and children's channels :- The language, the speech they use, the character and manners they portrays, the action involved, their arrogance towards the opponent etc. The entire scenes which are shielded with full of violence effects children tremendously. In the daily television channel, Cartoon Network, programmes such as - *Roll No 21* which many children enjoy every day is full of insulting and abusive words in the dialogue between master and Krishna character, *Tom and Jerry*, *Spider man* all these depict violence in various forms. Children imitate those characters, they want to act and behave like them; it has ingrained into the children's psyche and absorbed them fully. Children imaginations become uncontrollably high. Most of the time children have exposure and access to all kinds of media without any parental care and control with no proper education and guidelines given at home.

The other day I saw few words written in a piece of paper words like *Baby Powder, Diaper Bomb* and so on. At home our younger son used to write, draw pictures and sometimes color them in a paper. The way it was written do not seem to be written by my younger son, I was curious to know about the writing. I asked my husband whether he helped the kids to write such words but he too did not know. Finally, when I asked my younger son a four year old, he confidently opened the computer and showed me how he copied such words from the movie called *Spy Kids All the Time in the World*. Very interestingly in that movie a lady hero carries a baby along and fight with the enemies. And the lady hero in that movie used baby powder and baby diapers as weapons for defense.

What I want to say here is that, today parents think that we are educating our children by providing all the modern technological tools, beginning from software to hardware, programs such as the latest kid's movies, cartoon, animation, films, games and many other kids show. We think that we are helping them by providing the best available programs to our children without realizing its consequences.

This is not the mistake of our children. This is the mistake of parents who had collected them and made the children avail of all the programs without properly rationalizing or censoring it. It is of course difficult to control, but still there are possibilities how to monitor and offer our guidance to our children. We must all give our efforts to lead and guide our children in a proper way. We parents must seek God's wisdom and knowledge on how to guide them.

It is the need of the hour to reaffirm and to recommit ourselves as Christian family before God and to seek God's continued guidance that we as parents, and future parents, will be able to live an exemplary life in the family, to be able to deliver and possess balanced lives, lacking in nothing on our personal and family growth and development including physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional life. By doing this we will acquire the greatest gift from God which God wants us to be "for our good always." As Deut. 6: 6-7 says Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.

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On the International Women's Day the World Salutes All Mothers, Daughters and Sisters!

*- J. S. Murthy**

All praise be to our Triune God, for granting another International Women's Day (March 8) in the lives of women across the world. The entire human society salutes all women this special day. More importantly India joins people to pay its sincere homage to the esteemed womanhood for their immense contribution to the well-being and joy filled life of the civil society. My intention is to deal with this important theme in three parts:

Part I: God Creates Man and Woman as Equal Human Persons

I believe it will be of benefit to briefly narrate from the sacred account of woman's special creation by God elucidating her full humanity but also her superiority to lower animal world which God created. Woman appeared as the counterpart and helper of man and being part of his inmost being a collective term for mankind includes woman. "Let Us make man in Our image… So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.(Genesis 1:26,27). Woman is the feminine of man. The evolutionist discredits the Biblical record of woman's formation from the rib of man (Genesis 2:21-24) but the passage emphasizes, most profoundly, the inseparable unity and fellowship of a man's life with that of man's. She is not only man's helper (Genesis 2:18), but also his complement and is most essential to the completion of his being.

Matthew Henry's comment on the creation of Eve is the most expressive -

> *If man is the head, she (woman) is the crown, a crown To her husband, the crown of the visible creation……. The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.*

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament times women were held in high esteem. "The Jews, according to the revelation given to Moses of women's endowment, worth and rightful possessions, held woman in high esteemed honor and affection. Later Christianity brought full

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emancipation to womanhood and wherever Christ is recognized as Savior and His truth is obeyed, woman is esteemed as man's loved companion, confidant and more importantly, his *better half*".

For example, look at the narrative of a few of the women of the Bible:
Eve: the mother of all mothers
Sarah: devoted and determined
Rebekah: a monument of fierce and doting motherhood
Rachael: whose easy charm vanishes into envious and bad tempered oldage.
Mary and Martha: Mary and Martha are sisters of Lazarus. Mary preferred to sit before Jesus for Spiritual instruction; Martha was most hospitable, ever active and impulsive.
Delilah: A character known to police and the legal profession.
Hannah: Her prayers and piety purified and vitalized the religious life of the entire Jews Nation.
Mary: The Mother of the Lord Jesus will ever be revered as the mostblessed among women because she believed that God would perform the miraculous.
The woman who poured very costly alabaster perfume on Jesus's head. There are those who criticized her act, but Jesus praised her for anointing his body and said to them 'wherever the Gospel is preached this woman will be spoken about as a memorial to her'. Mark 14:3-9.
About ***the widow's*** two mites, Jesus spoke about the offering as sacrificial giving of all that she had. Mark 12:41-46.

Part II: Rise of Patriarchy and Women's Status

Times change. Traditions take precedence in human society. With man-made religious laws people became superstitious and were compelled to practice them. These rituals and observances in most religious communities became 'opium for their religious needs'.

Following are some examples which happened over a period of time in history. We shall fast-forward and pickup with oft-quoted historical evidence.

- Traditions in human society do suffer from certain social aberrations and compulsions. About forty years ago in Rajasthan, 22 year old Rup Kanwar was forcibly tied to her husband's pyre and

burnt alive with her dead husband, a practice known as SATI which Lord Bentinck's Regulation XVII of 1829 condemned as a criminal offence. Raja Ram Mohan Roy recorded an estimated 80000 Sati cases occurred in Bengal alone.

- Sexual assault on women: On march 13th a Nepalese woman mother of two children was gang-raped by 5 men in Delhi. She jumped from the balcony and ran on the street naked and crying for help!

- By now most of us are familiar with the unfortunate girl "Nirbhaya" – a supreme example of the worst dehumanizing and blatant evil act of rape and murder. Even a ban on exhibition of a BBC produced film called "India's Daughter"from airing on NDTV news channel. The whole episode was national shame.

- After a few days there were the horrendous and shameful acts of rape and murder of the woman and her baby.

- Two months ago in Bangalore on New Year's Eve 2016, monstrous perpetrators commit ugly acts and fled the scene while passersby watching as if a game. No onlooker bothered to report this to the nearby police station for fear that police will hold such "Good Samaritans"and they themselves will be harassed and even dubbing them as predators of the act. The onlookers need to be sensitized about safety of helpless women.

- Similar stories of atrocities and police excesses are reported from several parts of the country like Manipur's Freedom fighter Irom Sharmila. There is the Armed Forces Special Powers Acts of 1959 in force in North Eastern India States (AFSPA).

- Issue of 33% reservation for Nagaland women who want it to be scrapped.

- Atrocities on the citizens especially in rural areas of Bastarby security forces so-called 'protectors of the law'. It's a case of Protector becomes Predator.

- Gurmahar a 20 year old Delhi university student who lost her father in Kargil war was trolled for a video about her martyr father. She, while expressing her views about war and peace, was convinced that there should be peace between two countries. Her mother says "my daughter Gurmahar is strong and confident that the situation on the campus will be faced by her daughter boldly on the strength of her character and patriotic determination". She has received support from Delhi Commission for Women and the Faculty of the English department of Lady Sri Ram College where she studies.
  Meanwhile Gurmahar tweets her message for all to see
  "Free of hate, Free speak,
  Free to hold opinions, Free to learn.
  This is my nation
  To a question "what is India?", Gurmahar replies "it is a beautiful mix of cultures. It's a democratic country where several 'nationalists' suffered; put all the effort to create its impression that the Constitution of India has seven basic fundamental rights – Freedom of Speech being one of them and my present favorite".

- On the economic front women constitute half of the world population, two third of work force they get only one tenth of world's income and one percent of the world's wealth (ref. Dr. Vibhuti Patel, Prof. and Head of P. G. department of Economics S.N.D.T Women's University Mumbai – in People's Reporter – Editor in Chief Prof. Mammen Varkey). The eminent Prof. Vibhuti has expressed her view on the problems confronted by Women in the fortnightly. Prof. Vibhuti has as expressed her views on other problems confronted by women in the fortnightly. Some of them are, according to her – *devaluation of women from womb to tomb, commodification of man – women relationship, Gender Pay Gap,subsidized social sector services replaced by User Fees, women and shelter, neglect of healthcare, Gender Equity* to mention a few. She is an ardent advocate for the removal of Gendered Obstacles.

Some enlightened leaders both men and women, and benevolent governing legislation following independence from the British, the nation began to acknowledge the deplorable status of women.International events, such as observance of "International Year of Women" and "Year of the Girl Child",

among others, brought much needed focus to the living conditions of Indian women and raised their confidence about their potential to achieve the best in life.

The process of empowerment is also supported by the Indian Parliament through legislation by the 73rd and 74th Amendments in the Constitution to include Panchayat Raj (rule of the people at the village level resulted in uplifting and empowerment of women). More than 80,000 women leaders are presently working among their illiterate sisters at the grassroots level to raise their self-confidence, according to the latest report. Still, the reservation quota of 33 percent for women is yet to become a reality.

Let me share my impressions of the action oriented programs related to empowering of women especially of rural and ethnic section in the State of West Bengal Episcopal Area. These projects were begun by the pioneer missionaries with commitment to educate, influence and inspire young women and provide educational opportunities for the underprivileged women, children and youth. The early missionaries such as Ms. Rachael Carr, Mr. and Mrs. W. P. Byres in Asansol established a home called *Asha Bari* (Faith Home) now called *Ushagram* (Village of Dawn). Isabella Meik, Alma Jacobson, Keventer, Ruth Eveland, Mrs. Beacon and Mrs. Ferguson at Pakur who had implemented programs way back in 1887, show a striking contrast to the empty platitudes of the Government which ruled.

Eighty-five years ago some strange phenomenon occurred in Bangalore. A few educated women were moved by compassion for the young child widows aged between 15 and 16 years who had to lead isolated life wearing white /dull colored *sarees* with no blouse, shave their heads and eat meager food once a day as per practice. Only the divine spirit must have emboldened the empathizers towards these young destitute child widows.

The pioneer women Mrs. Parvati Ammal Iyer, Mrs. R. Iyengar and others, supported by their educated husbands, arranged weekly classes for the children on 'home management' along with a clinic. Married women's attendance in the class increased. Their children began to learn needlework and Kannada and English languages.

The good work of the pioneers attracted the government to donate a grant for a building of classrooms. This was opened by the British Theosophist

Annie Besant. The success of the society encouraged opening of similar schools for women's education that led to their empowerment.

Mahatma Gandhi visited the society called *Mahila Seva Samaja* and encouraged the women to learn swadeshi and khadi and languages. The women learners were so happy that they donated their jewelry to Mahatma for his *Harijan* work. *Mahila Seva Samaj* has shown the way for women's empowerment and to rethink the issues of dowry, lavish weddings, women's rights, harassment including sexual assault at work places and gender bias. Perhaps this noble act of empowerment with hopefully sensitized the government to help ***women created as half of humanity*** to achieve liberty and development due to them.

In Bengal, Mrs. Francis Major as Head of Christian Institution contributed largely to initiate educational process in West Bengal. Presently, under the dynamic leadership of leaders like Mrs. B. Biswas, Secretary All India WSCS, Ms. Asha Paul (Lee Memorial), Ms. P. Ghosh to mention a few these institutions have become prestigious and much sought after institutes for higher education.

Women's literacy: Today, the Santhal indigenous women of the Saraidhala village in Pakur district have been influenced by the "outside" civilization in cities and towns beyond their horizon. *These women deserve attention and were accorded the highest priority, with education seen as a critically important tool in their development and empowerment.*

Women Icons in Diverse Fields: Ritu, Indian female wrestler, won medals at International games. The first Indian women wrestlers Geeta, Babita Phogat sisters are from Haryana.

Empowering women through special career- readiness training camps in film– making, digital sessions on basics of writing, film on line forms. The Indian Cricket Women Team has qualified for the forthcoming ICC World Cup matches.

There are senior legendary women icons young women can emulate such as Rani Laxmi Bai, the Brave Queen Rani Durgavati, Vijaya Laxmi Pandit, Pandita Rama Bai, S. Phule, Social Activist (Child Widows and their Marriage) Mahasweta Devi, Bharat Ratna M.S. Subhalaxmi, Bharat Ratna Lata

Mangeshwar, India's first photojournalist Padma Vibhushan Homai Vyarawala and First woman Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Youth's Aspirations and Achievements: In a recent announcement made by the US President Trump's office there was eminently exciting news about an Indian American lady Madam Seema Verma having been appointed by the US President to head 1 trillion dollar healthcare organization of America. Indeed, a great honor for Indians especially Indian women who can be justly proud of Madam Seema Verma.

Some significant changes are in evidence in youth of the area of West Bengal Episcopal Area in Kolkata, Darjeeling, Sonarpur high hopes and aspirations. *Smriti*, an eighth grade student wants to become a scientist. Her friend Ela's dream is to be computer engineer and develop software. Girls are enamored of the images they watch on the television: sports legends such as P.T. Usha, Deepa Karmakar, Badminton Champion Saina Nehwal, P.V. Sandhu, Sakshi Malik, boxing Champion Mary Kom and so on.

They also like to emulate female leaders in fields as authors Shobha De, or Arundhati Roy for her book **"The God of Small Things",** Bachendri Pal Himalayan mountaineer, or Kalpana Chawla, the first Indian woman to go into space as part of the Columbia Space Satellite Mission, Sunita Williams, Zaira the child actress in **'Dangal'** as Geeta and Ritika Phogat Common Wealth Games (CWG) Gold medal in 2010 followed by a Bronze at the 2012 World Championship. A first for Indian woman wrestler her sisters Babita (Silver CWG), Gold at 2014.

In Kerala, women are wielding wrenches and cutters as plumbers; in Maharashtra women climb the electric posts to check wires, women are also trained as masons in Kashmir, all these point to incredible transformations in the spirit of youth and women. They contribute to the development of the country and give hope to the posterity – *the new woman of India.*

As of 15th February 2017 India created World Record as being the only country to have successfully launched 104 satellites in a single mission at one go. Several women scientists were part of this team.

Another feat by all woman crew of Air India' on 27th February 2017 taken off Delhi – San Francisco around the world in celebration of International Women's Day.

Earlier a few months ago history was created at the Air Force Academy at Dundigal near Hyderabad as the Indian Air Force formally commissioned the First Three Women Fighter Pilots. "It is a golden day, which could create an opening for more women aspirants for joining Combat Forces," said Defence Minister.

In the medical field pioneer founders like Dr. Ida Scudder founder Vellore Christian Medical Center in South India, Dr. Esther Shoemaker established Ellen Thoburn Christian Memorial Hospital (ETCM) near Bangalore, more than 100 years ago.

The education field was fortunate to have Principals of the first women post graduate college in Jabalpur Madhya Pradesh known as the Hawabagh Women's College and Johnson Girls' School. Ms. Zilla Soule, Ms. A. Thomas, Ms. A. Gadre, Ms. Kashiram, Ms. Jasso Bose, Dr. Ivy Franklin. A well-known social and sports personality, Dr. Mrs. Sushila Robinson, President, National Association of Soroptimist International, Great Britain and Ireland, was appointed the Principal who brought fame to the women's college when the late President APJ Abdul Kalam advised her to encourage the youth students to join the Air Space Technology. She was succeeded by Dr. Mrs. Sunita Radhakrishan. The alumni will ever be grateful to these eminent educationists who shaped their life at the prestigious alma mater in Jabalpur. In Lucknow Dr. Mrs. Charles, President of Isabella Thoburn College, inspires the students to take up the emerging challenges of life in society.

Accolades heaped on the Brilliant and Heroine Daughters of India for their excellent performance to perfection creating world records in various fields of human learning and for having created history – President Pranab Mukherjee extending warm greetings to fairer set for India and in all parts of the world, on this International Women's Day. They have made an invaluable contribution to the development and progress of our country.

- "I call upon the people of India to reaffirm their commitment to gender equality and the true empowerment of women".
- Pope Francisgreets all women on International Women's Day
- Actor Anne Hathaway spoke during 2017 International Women's Day at UN Headquarters, New York City on Wednesday.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi:salutes spirits of 'Narishakti', vows initiatives to Facilitate Economic Empowerment and Social Equality'.

- Mamata Banerjee: "Women are Nation's pride."
- Nitish Kumar CM Bihar: "Table Women's bill in LS again".
- Mary D'Cruz noted Diabetologist:"Ensure complete women's healthcare."
- Celebrity salutes women power:"Hold her hand so that she can lead you. Happy Women's Day" – Shah Rukh Khan.
- On IWD, without 'HER" even 'HERO' is '0' – Amitabh Bachchan.
- "God gave women power to give birth to another life" – Anupam Kher.
- Strength, Inspiration, Love, Daughter, Mother, Educator, Social Worker, Companion – Hansal Mehta.
- 'Celebrate Womanhood' – Anil Kapoor and 'Pink' film stars.
- Advocate gender equally and protest violence against women on IWD in Kiev, Ukraine.
- Women's Day IRISH WOMEN display a poster by US artist Shepard Ferey reading "we the people defend dignity……" in Pristina.
- Beauty Khatoon: Stopped many a child marriage in Malda at 16 a savior!
- Icons meet on IWD: Legendary Indian classical singer Girija Devi with enchanting Vidya Balan.
- Mentor Rekha with Admirers Deepika Padukone and Alia Bhat exchange greetings on IWD 2017.
- Arti Doctorand N. Poonawala compare notes on IWD at Calcutta Turf Race course.
- Women's World Cup England v/s India to be played in ICC England.
- The first woman photojournalist of Padma Vibhushan Homai Vyrawala who documented in excellent visuals the entire period of freedom struggle of India until she took the last shot of the victory march on the first Republic Day Parade atopIndia Gate on Rajpath in Delhi.
- A Baiga tribal dance troupe from Madhya Pradesh was invited to perform at the end of the parade. As the dancers faced the salute base, instead of performing they ran helter-skelter. The reason being they were so terrified of the jet planes fly past and the roaring noise.The then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi took pity on them and ran after them and pacified them.Obviously the dancers were not told about the last item of the parade. Attending for the first time and coming from remote rural background they had no idea of the fly past. However, they were rewarded by Mrs. Indira Gandhi who invited them for subsequent Republic Day parade for performance.

From the narrative so far what heights women can achieve is hugely evident. Despite these amazing women achievers have to face social inequality, religion boycott, gender bias and personal embarrassment. Following are a few instances:

- Gender bias against Adivasi Women on their religious freedom!
  i) Muslim women not allowed to enter Haji Ali Mosque for worshipping. (Thanks to the wisdom of the Hon'ble courts have solved and ruled that the Constitution Law is above the traditional practices).
  ii) Similarly, the issue of the Triple Talaq among Muslim women has no place in secular India, the Hon'ble High Court pointed out. The learned Muslim clerics pointed out that Triple Talaq is not mentioned in the Quran. However, the hearing is fixed for 11 May 2017.
  iii) The Hindu women who were denied entry into the Sanctum Santorum of Shani Shingnapur temple, are expected legally to enter and perform their acts of worship on the strength of the truth, that the Constitutional guarantees full religious freedom and equality of women, thanks to Tripti Desai.
  iv) Again the Kerala High Court gave order to authorities not to stop women devotees from worshiping inside the Sabarimala Temple in Kerala.

Fortunately the vibrant and independent Judiciary is ever watchful over the affairs of the other pillars of democracy: Legislature, Executive as well as the Fourth Pillar- Media, called the watch-dog of the credible and factual reports are put out to public and civil society.

Guideline on Sensitization of the Issue Sensitize

Sensitize all women and men and the media through workshops, seminars, at local, regional and national levels. Enlist the support of people with talents in various communication skills for instance film making, theatre, dance and other forms of media.

Conclusion:

Here I conclude with some quotes from great legends –

"Pray for divine help in times of trouble and request church leaders to help with their counseling of the victims". "….. the spirit of Mother Teresa who was

Canonized recently inspires us for selfless service", said President Pranab Mukherjee addressing both the Houses of Parliament a month ago in the National Capital.

Queen Elizabeth praised (Mother) St. Teresa of Calcutta in her traditional Christmas message on 25 December 2016. Quoting Mother Teresa Queen said; *"She once said, not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love".*

Rabindranath Tagore by nature believed in gender equality as revealed in his writings.

Now read the wise words of Geoffrey Chaucer of the 13th Century who asked;

'what is better than wisdom – woman
And what is better than a good woman – nothing'

Given below is the comforting assurance to all human persons by our Lord Jesus Christ:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Jesus Christ's purpose was to build an inclusive community of people transcending class, gender and nationality. A Gospel of hope for liberation and salvation of the heavily burdened and exploited has sustained countless women, powerless and voiceless, over centuries. -Luke 4:18-19

Happy Women's Day for today,
Tomorrow and for the years to come.

May the spirit of compassion and Mercy of our Savior Jesus Christ be with all the mothers, daughter, and sisters of our great and vibrant Democracy that INDIA.

A look into the rapes of Tamar and Nirbhaya

*- Satish C. Gyan**

Rape of young girls and women, even of minors, have been committed all through human history. But they have hardly been recorded in writings. Perhaps, because writing of history has, by and large, been a male project. The writer would like to question and analyse the ideology-theology and socio-religious worldview and practices of a male dominated and centred and patriarchal Jewish society of that time as well as of ours which treats women and young girls as objects of entertainment, lust and sexual gratification and satisfaction.

We need to look into the cases of Tamar and Nirbhaya from the perspective of a social activist who carries an ideological perspective that questions the social, cultural, economic and religious biases and arrangements with regard to the poor, the deprived, the destitute, the exploited, the excluded and the marginalised especially women and young and minor girls. Here is an attempt to enter into a dialogue and discussion with the readers on the issue of 'rape' in the larger context of respect, regard, rights and freedom of girls and women created in the image and likeness of God, the Creator of all creation. The God who created women in his/her own image is the God of Life and Love, Justice and Compassion and Equality and Equity. God created the woman, the female species, as a companion/partner to/for man to carry on and keep the 'creative creation' alive and active. But sometime in the history of human relationship the man began to assert him-self over woman and usurped her rights, freedom and place and position in home and society. Thus depriving her of all rights and privileges God gave her. Man began to dominate over and command the female species and the weak and the powerless of the society. Man began to dictate, dominate, control and command the weak, the poor and the powerless, especially the girls and women, thus introducing the ideology of patriarchy which became the dominant ideology in the male centred society. This is typical of man-woman relationship all over the world. Women and girls feel unsafe, unfree, insecure, excluded even in the 21st century. Put differently, women and young girls, including minors, are victims of patriarchy and it must be attacked, questioned and defeated and destroyed.

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Both Tamar and Nirbhaya (not her real name), though belong to different social, historical and religious context, are victims of rape in a predominantly male dominant and centred social behaviour and society. Both are raped and shamed but the end results are poles apart. Tamar loses her virginity and is shamed but lives to see the consequence of her rape. The perpetuator of her rape is eliminated. Her own brother, Absalom, takes revenge by getting Amnon, their half-brother who committed the rape, murdered. Nirbhaya is raped by more than one person in a running public transport and left on the road side in the late night bleeding and unconscious along with her male friend who is also badly hurt. Despite best of medical care Nirbhaya succumbs to her internal and external injuries and dies in the hospital. Her rapists are alive in jail. One of the rapist committed suicide.

This article raises the question: Why choose the case of Tamar and liken her to Nirbhaya case? Why these two persons have become the focus of our discussion and reflection? The answer is simple: both of them belong to a socially, economically, and politically elite and bourgeois class. Tamar belongs to the ruling/royal class. She is the daughter of David, the king of Israel. Much is not known about Nirbhaya. A safe guess is that she comes from a middle class family who could afford university education, live in a reasonably good house and locality in Delhi and enjoy a life style that belongs to middle class. Her parents seem to be liberal in that they gave freedom to their daughter to have both male and female friends and attend and enjoy outings and parties. We know about Tamar from the Hebrew Bible, (OT), (2 Sam. 13:1-22) and we learn about Nirbhaya through electronic and print media. The story of Tamar has become a part of Hebrew Bible and, therefore, of Christian Scripture, (OT). The story of Nirbhaya may be found in the archives of News Papers. After some time she will be forgotten. Tamar attends her half-brother Amnon who feigns sickness and requests David, their father, to sendTamar to his house, prepare food and feed him. Tamar obeys and comes to Amnon's house. Amnon is so obsessed by her beauty and youth that he forces himself upon her and has sex with her. It is a forced sex and, therefore, rape. (2 Sam. 13: 1-22). Tamar is a victim of a well-planned sexual assault. Her shame and suffering takes a centre stage in the history of royal family and gets a place in the Jewish scripture, the Hebrew Bible, (OT). Strangely, the story of Tamar's pain and suffering remains within the four walls of royal courts. There is no public outcry. Even her brother, Absalom, could not muster up courage in defence of his sister's rape and disgrace. Yet it becomes a part of Jewish scripture and royal history.

The case of Nirbhaya is different. She is a student of Delhi University and lives in Delhi. Unlike Tamar, she enjoys the freedom of a college and a university life. Her parents seem to respect woman's freedom and rights and make her feel accepted not only as a daughter but also as a female individual. Unfortunately, one night while returning from a college function, her male companion and she board a public bus which was practically empty. She is physically assaulted, beaten and raped by the conductor, driver and a minor. Her male friend who tried to protect her also was beaten badly and wounded. Both of them were left on the road side to their fate. The male friend recovers to tell the ordeal. But the girl dies in the hospital. Her rape takes the centre stage in both the electronic and print media and becomes the rallying point leading to protest marches in Delhi and other places demanding justice to Nirbhaya and, protection, safety and security to girls and women, and enactment of laws that take rape incidents seriously leading to severe punishment to sex offenders and rapists. Ironically, her case does not and would not ever find a place in any religious scriptures or history!

Incidents of rape of minor and young girls and women, violation of female modesty, of sexual assault on girls and women are not new to the 21st century. It has been there for a long time. But it never became a public issue. Thanks to the electronic and print media that public comes to know about sexual assaults and rape cases committed in our society. Unfortunately, the male ego is so conceited, self-centred, depraved that it takes pride in raping and assaulting girls and women of all ages. All incidents and cases of rapes, sexual assaults, sexual harassments of women and girls lead to point out that the moral and ethical consciousness of man has become numb and impervious. Interestingly, studies on human sexual behaviour show that in majority of rape and sexual assault cases the culprits are known and familiar to the victim: family members, friends, colleagues and relatives and neighbors. It is the numbness and imperviousness of male consciousness, ego that needs to be dealt with, corrected and sensitised with the knowledge and understanding of the God who is just and compassionate.

What role can Christian education, Sunday schools, Pulpit preaching, Youth camps, Bible studies, Religious meetings, Evangelistic conventions play in educating our menfolk, both young and old, to take the female members of our society as gifts of and blessings from God who has created us in his/her own image and likeness seriously? Unfortunately, our male preachers,

pastors, religious leaders take pride in expounding the creation story found in Gen. 2nd chapter in which the woman is created from the rib of Adam and so she is secondary to man! Such ministers seem to forget that there is another creation story in Gen. 1st chapter which puts its finger on the critical point of creating both man and woman in God's own image and likeness and, therefore, equal. Some of the male priests and pastors even take pride in taking Eph. 5: 22-24, and I Peter 3:1 as texts for wedding sermons emphasising that wives should submit and subject themselves to their husbands! Why? The Bible says so! It is biblical! Is this the way we men preachers, pastors and presbyters welcome the new young bride to a Christian Home? How terrible? Remember, it is Paul and Peter who say so and write. Jesus never made such an exclusive and discriminative and male centred statement/s. How do we deal with the issues of denying freedom to and undermining the rights of girls and women in church and society? What do we, Christians, have to say with regard to sexual abuse of, harassment of and assault on minor, young girls and women, especially that of the Dalits, the Tribal and the poor? We, Christians hardly raise our voices when a Dalit or a Tribal girl or woman is raped or sexually assaulted and harrassed. In responding to these questions this writer deliberately avoids the expression 'biblical' but looks at the Jesus of history and takes his teachings and preaching seriously. Unfortunately, the term 'biblical' has been overused, misused as well as abused. Therefore, it is suggested that the task of Christian education is to bring to focus the person Jesus and his teachings. When that happens then our teaching, preaching, explanation and exposition and interpretation get rooted in the teachings and practices of Jesus of history who is called Christ. It is this Jesus who died on the cross and rose from the dead and not Peter, or Paul or the Bible.

This Jesus came preaching the good news of the kingdom, rule and reign of God saying the kingdom of God is near so repent and believe in the Gospel-the Good News. (Mark 1: 14,15). What we need is a theology-ideology that focuses on the person of Jesus. It is this Jesus who got involved in demolishing the male centred, dominated and controlled Jewish religion, rites and rituals, culture and worldview and interpretation of the Law that had become a burden to the common people, the *aam aadmi* and *aurat*, the ochlos. He challenged patriarchy and asked the religious hierarchy to come to terms with the God who does not have a name and form and so cannot be domesticated by and imprisoned into rites, rituals and laws that deprive people to have a direct access to this God. This was the God who revealed

him/herself to Moses and refused to tell his/her name. This is the God of justice, compassion, freedom, rights, equality and equity. And these are the cardinal values of God's kingdom, rule and reign Jesus initiated. He confronted boldly those men who brought a woman caught in the act of adultery and wanted to stone her to death as per the Law of Moses. He refused to listen to them and asked to stone her if they were without sin. The men left Jesus and the woman alone. Jesus did not condemn the woman but said "go in peace, sin no more." In not condemning the woman Jesus, in essence, was challenging the menfolk to change their mind-set, worldviews, and self-conceit asking them to look to the God of Justice, Love, Compassion and freedom. That is, in Jesus' preaching and practice a woman is God's creation and so her freedom, rights, and dignity must be respected and protected.

Interestingly, every encounter of Jesus with women of Jewish, Samaritan, Phoenician origin whether sinful or having bad reputation or questionable character or righteous he invariably made them feel accepted as a child of God. Unquestionably, it was an expression of God's love, compassion and justice. Jesus welcomed them into his fold, company and made them feel free to converse with him, touch and serve him. Thus Jesus allowed them to enjoy their God given freedom, rights and a sense of equality and equity and status in home and society.

Our theological education, Christian education, bible studies and sermons need to focus on the teachings and practices and values of Jesus who walked on the streets and roads of Galilee and the Province of Judea to bring back women and girls into the centre stage of God's rule, reign and kingdom. Once the followers of Jesus take his teachings, vision and mission seriously, there is all the possibility of their mustering up courage and come out in defence of women's freedom, empowerment, rights and place and status in church and society. And, thus demolish and destroy the patriarchy that has been ruling our churches, society and culture since long. Jesus of history calls us over the tumult to reject male centred, male-dominated theological-ideological positions and political postures and embrace the values of God's rule, reign and kingdom. And protect women and girls from sex/sexual predators, sexual harassments and humiliation and make them feel that they are also made in the image and likeness of God and give them the place, status, respect and dignity they deserve.

Christian education, sermons, bible studies and preaching should bring to focus that each girl child is a Gift from/of God and as a woman potentially a mother- Maa! All male are born of a 'woman'. Jesus was born of a woman. So were Moses, Mathew, Mark, John, Luke, Peter and Paul. Jesus gave every woman he encountered the respect, regard and place and position she deserved. We stand at the cross roads of the preaching and practice, ideology and theology and faith and action of Jesus the Christ who challenges and invites us to join him in transforming the present social arrangements that deprive the fifty percent of human race of its rights and freedom. It is time that the Christian educators, theological teachers, priests and pastors and religious gurus take the issues of rape and sexual assaults and patriarchy seriously and reorient their vision and mission in accordance to Kingdom Values and fall in steps with Jesus.

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REPORT

Church Leaders Consultation on
"Healing Ministry and the Role of the Churches and Hospitals"

Christian Medical Association of India as the official health arm of the National Council of Churches in India has the mandate to equip the churches in responding to the healing ministry. The National Consultation will bring Church leaders from various denominations and the leaders of hospitals governed by the church together for a time of introspection and review on the contribution of Christian health services to the health challenges. Moreover, it will also be a time to dig deeper into the issues preventing or stopping us from fulfilling our role in the healing ministry.

We as the network of Christian healthcare professionals, institutions and churches are facing real challenges with regard to persisting with our vision and mission. In today's context, we find most Christian mission hospitals – and some of its educational institutions –in a state of disarray, with out-dated infrastructure, poorly financed, equipped and staffed, struggling to eke out a living for those dependent on them. Our mission hospitals are closing down at a rapid pace. From the 900-odd thriving mission hospitals in the country at the time of independence, we are barely numbering 200 or so, most of which are struggling to keep afloat. And it is NOT for the lack of relevance of these institutions, as many are still situated in areas of tremendous need – it is simply that there is no one willing to man them, with courage and conviction that they are still tremendously useful tools in the Hands of the Master.

Based on these insights, the common platform will facilitate discussions on strategic ways for the Church to engage with the hospitals and communities around them in a beneficial and holistic way. The question "What is stopping us?" needs to be addressed constructively.

A publication of Christian Connections for International Health, titled "The future of Christian Hospitals in Developing Countries – The Call for a New Paradigm of Ministry" in the year 2000 came up with **3 scenarios and possible suggestions which are relevant today. They are as follows:

Scenario 1
What if competition diminishes the viability of Christian hospitals, including new government services that were not previously available?
Suggestion to the Church and its hospitals: Focus must be on primary and secondary level care keeping the community needs in mind. Creating of a local insurance system will be beneficial. A few years ago, the President of India's National Board of Examinations went on record as saying that about 90 percent of India's health needs could be managed by doctors trained in Family Medicine. About 5-7 percent could be managed by doctors trained in Rural Surgery. Only about 2-3 percent of India's sick needed to see a specialist!

Scenario 2
What if Christian Hospitals resources are dwindling and it is threatened with closure?
Suggestion to the Church and its hospitals: Discuss with the community to become more relevant to them from their perspective. Empower the community and create a sense of ownership of the mission hospital. For this to be realised some introspection and a change of objectives of the hospital may be required. Use of locally available resources including man power must be done. Training programmes by the hospital should be encouraged and increased in number.

Scenario 3
What if, in the communities it serves, the hospital has no impact on the health and the spiritual lives of people and has mission objectives that are no longer relevant to the needs of people.
Suggestion to the Church and its hospitals: An internal assessment to be done and assess whether the activities of the hospital are aligned clearly to its vision and mission. To take into cognizance the commitment of the staff and leadership. Quality Improvement of hospitals must be given priority.

With these scenarios in the background and still relevant 14 years later, in June 2014, 60 health professionals and representatives of churches, mission societies, church-based and secular organizations, academics in medicine, health economics and theology came together for the international symposium on "Christian Reponses to Health and Development" in Tübingen, Germany. As a result of the meeting, "A call to

health and healing – Declaration Tübingen III" was developed and published. The call clearly states that "The Christian Church continues to have a unique, relevant and specific role to play in Health, Health Care, Healing and Wholeness in changing contexts and in all regions of the world."

With this in mind, in partnership with the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), two Church Leaders Consultation on "Healing Ministry and role of Churches and Hospitals" were organised:

- Conference Hall of the CBCNEI at Guwahati on the 16th and 17th of February, 2017.
- Sadhu Sunder Singh Hall, CNI Bhavan New Delhi on 14th March 2017.

The main objectives of the Consultation were

- To understand the role of the Church in the healing ministry and to effectively address the gaps.
- To establish a strong network to support the Healing Ministry

The expected outcome is to have a clear picture how the structure of the church can enhance the Healing Ministry and to engage in sharing of good practices and meaningful dialogue on the way forward.

Conference Hall of the CBCNEI at Guwahati on the 16th and 17th of February, 2017

24 participants attended the meeting from various states of Northeast (Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland) representing 5 different Churches and 12 Mission Hospitals. There was a presentation on the uniqueness of Christian Contribution to Healthcare in India and the challenges. The presentation was based on the preliminary findings from the Member Institutions in the Northeast region of the CMAI Institutional Documentation exercise. The main highlights were that our mission hospitals were serving in an average of 2-4 districts, out of which few were the high priority districts as identified by the Government of India. They all served vulnerable populations and elderly care was a priority in all the hospitals. Palliative care was not done in most of the hospitals. The Governance structures were unique to each of the institutions. Outreach work was not present in all the hospitals and this was a concern.

This was followed by the session where all the Churches and institutions presented their Vision, Mission and Governance. During the presentation, all the participants were very much open about the challenges they faced and the difficulties in performing their duties.

This was followed by a session where the best practices in Healing Ministry from different churches and institutions were presented. The purpose of this session was to promote cross learning.

- Repositioning Ailing Institutions – Experience at Makunda (past 24 years) by Dr Vijay Anand of Makunda Hospital a unit of EHA.
- Best practice of Catholic Hospitals by Dr Gordon Rangad from Nazareth Hospital Shillong.
- Congregation based health activities by Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia (CMAI)

The last session of the day was the Panel Discussion led by Rev Dr Roger Gaikwad and facilitated by Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia on "Where do we go from here?"

Sadhu Sunder Singh Hall, CNI Bhavan New Delhi on 14th March 2017.

This consultation was mainly Church leaders from various Protestant and Orthodox denominations. 14 mainline churches under the NCCI were represented with a total of 28 participants. This meeting was more of a sensitisation on the challenges faced by the hospitals in the healing ministry as the Church leadership was unaware of CMAI and its activities as well as the challenges faced by the hospital. Rev Roger Gaikwad welcomed the gathering and pointed out the need for an integrated approach with the church and the hospital synergising and bringing about the much needed change. The General Secretary of CNI expressed his concern about the Christian medical colleges and their freedom to function as minorities. Dr Vijay Anand and Dr Gordon Rangad presented their experiences in the mission field after Dr Bimal challenged the church in its mission and vision, especially with relation to hearing

Some of the recommendations from both consultations include:

Focus and reach to vulnerable, poor and marginalized communities:

As our mandate, the institutions need to be more focused on involvement with the poor (poor-friendly, vulnerable - friendly) hearing the cries of the

poor, marginalized, psychiatric patients, people/children with special needs. The institutions should have more outreach work not in terms of mobile clinics but being present in the community. We should not wait for the poor to come to us but reach out to them. Identity is pro-poor institutions but continue to strive for excellence. Church can help by calling for donations- Eg Patient centric request

God has given us health and this has to be shared with the people. Church must share the need of the hospital. Church can request from the rich and give the poor. Better to change from a concept of giving out charity and progress toward empowerment.

Church leadership expressed that there is a very big need for human resource. Healing ministry goes beyond the hospitals and we cannot equate medical ministry with healing ministry. Many Christian doctors working in the private side, a mechanism to bring them as volunteers and a human resource pool is being envisaged by CMAI.

Engaging with congregations: There should be more programme focusing on Church and lay leaders training on healing ministry at different level for better understanding. There should be volunteers training in different aspect of healing ministry. There should be Sunday school materials on healing ministry to engage and sensitize youth from young age. There should be more community/congregation owned programme – encouraged, engaged and empowered in the healing ministry. Church should identify the need and identify people for the need

Governance and structure

To church Health Committees should include external person as part of the health committee formally and not only as invitee. CMAI can play a role of interface/facilitators between church and hospital board which should be strengthened. Church plays an important role in student, junior doctors, nurses, and healthcare professionals' mobilization. There should be exchange programme and exposure visit. Church and hospital leaders' consultation should be held on a regular basis – strategic planning on the need and how to respond to the unmet need. CMAI should take forward an Organizational Development process to develop hospital one on one basis. Research and innovation on best practices – documentation and dissemination should be conducted and made available for membership.

Self-assessment of integrity, ethical practices etc (non-negotiable – health of the institutions) through a credit rating of CMAI hospital – mission, meeting the unmet need, best use of funds, accessibility for the poor, insurgent and war area, mentoring process, quality of leadership, best practices documentation.

Networking role of the Church

As the Church, it is important to speak up and advocate for various issues. The churches must connect with and talk to their local MP and Bureaucracy about the challenges. Ownership of the healing ministry is crucial. In the area of health promotion and prevention of diseases the church can be more efficient and effective. Advocate for equality and equity for the poor and cooperate with the Government. CMAI can help and support this through technical inputs and creating platforms for discussion and dialogue between the church and hospital.

- Dr. Abhijeet Sangma

STATEMENT

Theological Education and Ministerial Formation
(A Dialogue between Church leaders and Theological Educators)

I. Preamble:

The March 7th and 8th 2017, Chennai Consultation on the theme titled ***"Theological Education and Ministerial Formation"*** is historic. The Indian church's leaders, Theological Educators and few Overseas Partners, together 47, met for a conversation to understand whether theological education is imparted keeping in mind the needs of the Indian churches. In that, the church and the Senate of Serampore College are called to work together as both the church leaders and theological educators belong to the church of God.

1. We understand that church is the people of God who are found in both inside and outside the church. The theological education is an education that trains and equips the ministers, leaders and ordinary people (the whole church) to enable to articulate their own faith and that of others, and lead the church and society to empower and engage in liberating praxis, particularly the marginalised.

2. Considering the new and emerging political, social, economic ethos at the grassroots level, the church needs to be the frontline prophetic, pastoral and diaconal voices for evolving new mission impetus and take responsibility for equipping all concerned with the underlying theological perspectives. The church should be a catalyst in providing perspectival guidelines to theological institutions in strengthening the ministerial formations by contextually relevant theologies.

3. While the Bible will remain to be the foundational importance for theological education; faith and character building, the core values; there is emerging need for theological institutions to restructure their orientation, curriculum, pedagogy, and systems of training to cater to the present and emerging ministries of the Church.It will be appropriate for theological institutions to shed their 'uniformity image'; and be open to initiating comprehensive

region specific theological education and training. The concept of community of theological college may also be thought of. In short, theological institutions can explore ways to do theological training of difference; and theological training differently.

4. Apart from being effective, Pastors are now called up to play different roles in the church – they need to be good communicators and counsellors; understand human dynamics; be effective organisers, perspective builders and goal setters; and engage in conflict transformation. Theological institutions to give serious consideration to the need for these new pastoral skills; and arrange to make them available as part of the curriculum.

II. Together we are committed:

1. We, as the Church and the Senate of Serampore College (SSC), come together to affirm our commitment to the ministries of the church by imparting theological education that are contextual, ecumenical and biblical.

2. We recognise that SSC, a major player in imparting theological education, is of the Indian Church. In that, SSC is mandated to provide theological education that is ministrydriven.

3. We, the Church leaders and theological educators, call the SSC to revisit its syllabi and courses that are offered particularly at the BD and other undergraduate programmes to reshape mission paradigms according to the new priorities and emerging possibilities.

4. We recognise that church as owners of theological education has the responsibilities in sponsoring students and teachers and providing financial and other administrative resources;but at the same time maintaining equidistance realising that the theological education is a specialised ministry of the church, and is entrusted to the theological colleges by the churches, church related bodies and unions to administer their programmes and institutions.

5. We accept that the goal of theological institutions is to creatively engage in ecumenism and pluralism; and evolve and promote Dalit, Women, Adivasi, Tribal, Minority, People with Disabilty and other Marginalised theologies, alongside ministerial training that is designed and defined by their respective churches.

6. We are committed and agreed to engage in interaction from time to time and build stronger ties between churches and theological institutions.

III. Called to deliver together:

1. The Church Leaders and Theological Educators are called to discern the signs of time and make the Gospel of Jesus Christ relevant to the church and society by being committed to ecumenical vision and the vision of wider ecumenism.

2. The Church Leaders and Theological Educators together are committed to the mission (missiodei) and ministry (missioekklesia) of the church.

3. Affirm that neighbourliness is rooted in being together, sharing our capacity and material through mutual openness, creativity and culture of learning together as an embodiment of loving and sharing community.

4. Planning, governance and management should be part and parcel of our wellbeing and it must manifest integrity, justice and equality without discriminating any one on account of their gender, caste, region, language and denomination while recruiting students for ministry and teaching staff for theological institutions.

5. Preferential option should have tangible manifestations in the enrolment of women in the seminaries as students, and employment opportunities for qualified women in the teaching faculty.

6. Learn to accommodate and accept all students and teachers from all denominations as solidarity with Christ's call for an inclusive community.

IV. Theological Institutions are called to act:

1. Called to renew our commitment for the cause of the mission and ministry of the church.

2. The theological educators are called to renew their commitment to the Gospel, wider ecumenism and unity and witness of the church.

3. The theological educators through their engagement and stronger bond with the church should help in bringing about change in the life of the church.

4. The task of theological educators is to equip ministerial candidates to build authentic communities of people of God.

5. The theological educators are to be committed to Religious pluralism and develop inclusive hermeneutics that are culturally, contextually and in faith relevant.

V. Church leaders are called to act :

1. The church must remain committed in sending and helping the poor and marginalised candidates who have genuine call for the ministry.

2. The church must encourage women candidates to come into ministry and sponsor financially even if employability is not available in the church.

3. As leaders belonging to faith community, we must offer hope, justice and peace to the world and must not be blinded by the globalised and colonised world powers.

4. The church needs to offer the way of liberation in Christ Jesus to the people with different sexual orientations and people with disabilities.

5. The church must engage in radicalising the Gospel for the sake of the God's people who are otherwise not welcome into the body of the church.

6. The Churches need to be open to learn from each other's traditions and denominations to promote one faith, one church and one Lord amidst our diversities in spirituality and humanity.

VI. We affirm together:

1. We affirm that theological education is of the church and there is no force that may divide us on the basis of caste, tribalism, gender, language, region and denomination. The church will strike down on faculty and students who divide the communities living in seminaries in the name of caste, tribalism, gender, language, region and denomination.

2. We affirm that the churches will not discriminate any one on the basis of caste, tribalism, gender, language, region and denomination.

3. We affirm that though some of the seminaries belong to denomination, we will still open ourselves to learn 'other' theologies and traditionsas an academic community; and for the future of building an inclusive community and together we dedicate ourselves for the common good of the church and society.

4. That the SSC initiates steps to strengthen fellowships among the denominations and strengthen ecumenical togetherness among its affiliated constituents; and be respectful to doctrinal and traditions' positions and convictions of all the churches.

5. That both the churches and SSC are committed to students' and faculty exchange programmes from among the affiliated colleges so that openness and learnings are mutually possible.

6. That pastors exchange programme may be facilitated between the churches.

7. Members of the faculty may be given opportunity to serve in the context of a church irrespective of denominational differences and diversities in traditions.

8. We affirm that churches engage theological educators in the selection processes of the ministerial candidates both for training and ordination in the church.

9. The Faculty of theological institutions could be encouraged to be attached to congregations for pastoral work; or be fully involved as regular pastors during their sabbatical as this will be a value addition to their understanding the needs of the Church and to provide contextual theological training.

10. Churches of the South and North East must come together to help the North India's churches to strengthen theological education and train ministers and leaders for their churches.

VII. Concluding Remarks:

The Participants appreciated the BTESSC for organising such a dialogue or rather a conversation between church leaders and theological educators. They expressed that the process of bridging the gap between churches and theological institutions should be carried forward and that such conversations could be organised in various regions between churches belonging to different denominations and theological institutions.

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AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

To
Shri Narendra Modi,
The Prime Minister of India

Dear Prime Minister,

Greetings!

Though a Christian pastor, and serving the National Council of Churches in India as its General Secretary, I am writing this open letter to you as an Indian citizen, joining all Indian citizens who are concerned about the state of affairs in our country, India

You have been giving the country very impressive slogans about its future, be it "Achhe Din!" or "New India!" Harping on "Development" you have been advocating and initiating schemes such as "Make in India", "Skill India", "Start-up India", "Digital India", "Smart Cities", etc.

The question which many would like to ask: *Achhe Din* for whom? *New India* for whom? The Preamble to the Constitution of India gives us a vision for all citizens:

We the People of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic, and to secure to all its citizens:

JUSTICE, social, economic and political;
LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;
EQUALITY of status and of opportunity;
and to promote among them all
FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation

However many people who belong to your government, party, and other likeminded bodies give us a different picture of *Achhe Din* and of New India where the values of Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity are stifled. "Vigilantism" has become a popular methodology of such persons and bodies.

Cow Vigilantism: Cow reverence and cow protection has become a very serious concern among such people. They claim that the cow represents their religion and culture. I appreciate the cow symbol as it represents love, compassion, service, sacrifice, and non-violent living. People, when they become politically emotional about this symbol, tend to give expression to hatred, cruelty, harm, murder, and violent life-styles. I wonder whether the cow would approve of such things done in her name.

Yoga Vigilantism: Yoga as you are aware is primarily a spiritual disciple which uses physical exercises to facilitate spiritual realization of oneness with the ultimate. You will surely agree that there are different ways of spiritual realization in India such as bhakti yoga, karma yoga and the like. However when yoga is imposed as the only means of spiritual realization, and when notes and reports are made about people and institutions who do not want to practice yoga (though government departments say that its practice is not compulsory), then the spiritual yoga of "oneness and union" of heterogeneous and different people in the country is shattered. Furthermore, you will agree I am sure, that commercial yoga for solely for physical benefits does disservice to the ideology of yoga.

Religion Vigilantism: India as we all claim is the "home" of people of different faiths and ideologies. We often quote the saying "*ekam sat, vipra bahuda vadanti"* (That which exists is ONE sages call it by various names) respecting the diversity of spiritual perspectives. Or again, we declare *"ayam bandhurayam neti ganana laghuchetasam udaracharitanam tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam"* (Only small men discriminate saying: One is a relative; the other is a stranger. For those who live magnanimously the entire world constitutes but a family). The constitution of the country recognizes the diversity of faiths and traditions and therefore the country prides itself in being secular. However distinction is still made in our country on the basis of religion. For instance, Christian and Muslim dalits are not eligible to receive affirmative action assistance which is provided to dalits of other religious persuasions.

A knowledgeable person like you knows how different religions have evolved in history. As you look at what we know of early civilizations in our subcontinent, there were different indigenous people with their respective social practices, cultures and religions. Even the people of Indus Valley Civilization had their own religion which scholars are yet to fully

comprehend. What the early Aryans followed could be called Arya Dharma. The term Hinduism was nowhere in use. Therefore do you think that the kind of strategy used in "ghar wapsi", making people 'return' to the Hindu religious fold be justified? Moreover the Constitution of India guarantees freedom to all to choose and follow the religion of their choice. The Constitution also allows persons to bear witness to their faith. This is not proselytization. Therefore do you think that the actions of politicized religious groups in disturbing worship services of Christians, showing no respect for their holy places, alleging that conversion is being attempted/done, physically assaulting pastors and evangelists, desecrating church buildings and symbols, with the tacit support of some of the police and other authorities, are justified?

You have publicly condemned the church bombings in Egypt on 9th April 2017 (Palm Sunday), but on that same day, in some of the states of India, Christian worship services have been disrupted. Will the government wait till church buildings are also bombed in India to make statements of condemnation? Please keep in mind that, every Sunday, thousands of churches in India pray for the President and the Prime Minister of India, as well as the Governor and Chief Minister of their respective states.

Citizenship Vigilantism: It is quite intriguing that today citizenship is being defined in different ways. If one abides by (and even praises) what the government in power says, one is a good citizen. If one is to criticize what the government says or does, one is termed as anti-national. In a democracy, there is space for expression of different and even opposing viewpoints; such expressions cannot be termed as anti-national unless they are against the very constitution of the country. To make matters worse, if a body's views do not agree with those of the government and if that body receives due partnership support from funding agencies abroad, then its FCRA registration is under threat of being cancelled.

Please try to imagine how hurting it is for Indian Muslims and Christians to be labeled as anti-national just because they are followers of non-Indic religions!

Caste Vigilantism: Caste atrocities are not a new thing in our country; they have been perpetrated right from the days when the "jati" system started governing society. However the casteist mindset still continues in 21st

century India. Dalits in particular are at the receiving end of all caste driven injustices and atrocities. Majority of the dalits are denied their right to dignity, to water, to education, to employment, to health care and so on. The religiously politicized powers see to it that the dalits remain crushed. You are also aware of dalits committing suicide as they see no hope in the system in which they are trapped. You also are aware how dalit women are exploited, even raped and killed by certain casteist forces. Women's bodies are "played with" to shame the dalit communities.

In today's India, one does see governments praising Ambedkar and introducing schemes for dalits in his name. Are the schemes really reaching the real dalits? More than schemes what is required is a change in the casteist mind-set of Indians. Stricter and stricter laws are being promulgated to curb the slaughter of cows. How about introducing stricter laws for caste atrocities?

Culture Vigilantism: Dear Prime Minister, we all pride ourselves in being a country of so many different and diverse races and cultures. It is but natural that we have heterogeneous expressions of cultures in our country. Yet once again we keep on hearing of attacks on certain groups of people because of their dress, their food, their way of celebrating festivals and events, and so on. Even couples in some places are now afraid of going out together in public lest they will be subject to police harassment.

One does not deny that diversity of races and cultures does not mean that people can do what they like; one has to be responsible in the way one conducts oneself in society. However culture vigilantes are seeking to convert the entire country into one regimented uniform society thereby reducing this country to a one coloured culture.

Dear Prime Minister, we all want India to develop. You have brilliant ideas and great schemes. We congratulate you for the same. But are your programmes and schemes really promoting the growth of the thousands of people languishing in poverty. While publicity and social media make bold claims about the poor being benefitted, the middle class to some extent and the rich are the main beneficiaries of development plans and projects. Part IV of the Indian Constitution which talks about Directive Principles of State Policy asserts that the state shall strive to secure a social order in which justice – social, economic and political – shall inform all the institutions of

national life; that the state shall strive to minimize inequalities in income; that operation of economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment; etc. These guiding principles are far more important today as your Government commits itself to development.

The culture of bribery and corruption still continues in many government offices all over the country. In order to see that files move smoothly, we have to pay a price. To get permissions and licenses, we have to give money. To avoid the harassment of frequent visits to police stations and to get our cases quickly resolved we have to grease palms. How then can development happen? When donations to political parties are exempt from certain restrictions how then can development of the ordinary citizens be ensured?

Dear Prime Minister, all of us, including Indian Christians want our country to develop. The Christian community has been continuing to make its contribution through educational, medical and technical institutions (Many of our great Indian leaders have come out of our institutions). We have been serving through orphanages, old people's homes, homes for women in distress, rehabilitation centres for drug addicts, facilities for the disabled, services to HIV infected and affected people, solidarity with dalits and tribals/adivasis, and offering help in times of natural calamities. All because of the ideology of some politicized people and the immunity they enjoy in taking the law in their hands that our development service spaces are being shrunk.

We all need to be vigilant about vigilantism!
May the Spirit of God envision and empower you in your commitment to just and inclusive sustainable development for all!

Sincerely,

Roger Gaikwad,
An Indian Citizen
ncciroger@gmail.com

14th April 2017
Good Friday (The Day commemorating the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ)

(This letter was sent by Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad to the Honourable Prime Minister of India on April 14, 2017)

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