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### 'Dangerous Memories…'

*I'm hurt and*
*I'm bleeding.*
*He's laughing,*
*Ignoring my pleading…*

These lines are part of a poem written by a rape victim.

All that the broken hearts could do was lament, yell and at last console themselves by saying it is our fate. As the 19-year-old girl's helpless cry from Hathras village echoes in our ears, we see her mortal body being consumed by flames. In the midst of darkness, through the strategical involvement of the administration, she becomes memory without her family even getting a chance to perform the final rites and without leaving a single evidence of the brutality she received.

Hathras is a remote village in Western Uttar Pradesh where on 14 September, a girl was found by her family in the fields, naked, bleeding, with multiple fractures and a gash in her tongue. There were evidences of her being sexually assaulted. She was taken to hospital at Aligarh eventually and over two weeks after the assault, she was transferred to Safdarjung Hospital in Delhi, where she died and her body was cremated on the night of September 29.

The nexus between police, politicians, patriarchy, power and caste-based bias make our country extremely pugnacious in disposition. Such incidents disclose how our individual rights are continuously being threatened and how the 'powerful' can intrude into our life situations and make it a disastrous affair. All these horrific memories may be easily erased by the Government agencies and administration from the files with the claim of 'no evidence', but it is difficult to erase these deeply marked memories from the minds of the victims of the

system. These memories will remain as 'dangerous memories' which has a subversive power.

'Dangerous memories' was a term first proposed by Herbert Marcus of the Frankfurt School. The dead can't narrate their heinous experiences but recalling their memories will enable people to generate the energy of resistance and hence 'dangerous memories' are exemplary memories that function as one of resistance and hope. Hope and the aspiration for full recognition of every human being's dignity requires us to strive for something more than what is currently in place. These memories are dangerous to those dominating and in positions of power because they are the seeds of resistance and change. They also function as markers of identity, personhood, agency, and hope to the marginalized.

Indigenous people in India are the ones who carry such dangerous memories with them. The common dominant notion about them is that they are meant for the comfortable life of the elites who claim caste and class supremacy in the society. By establishing the dominance over their land, body and their resources, they are being treated as objects. They are forbidden from accessing any rights and privileges in their local situations. This issue of NCC Review is addressing some concerns of indigenous people along with the significance of peace initiatives within communities to have a justice-oriented, peaceful community life. There are also some views about the New Education Policy along with democratic imaginations in the light of biblical narration included in this issue.

The context in India is contributing to dangerous memories to the life situations of common masses. A culture of mutual respect and mutual acceptance is annulled as identity-based ideologies get prominence in Indian polity and social systems and therefore leading a meaningful life becomes a traumatic experience for many. The politics of intensifying binaries between communities, class, caste and gender is significantly growing. Farmers are suspicious about the new laws that

allow national and international players in their fields which the Government says will benefit the farmers. The apprehensions within the minds of the vulnerable common masses as we discuss about 'a New India' induces lot of disturbing memories on every day basis.

"Do this in remembrance of me' was a commandment of Jesus through which Jesus movement sustained for centuries by celebrating Holy Communion as commemoration of their dangerous memories. All the faithful who participate have an opportunity to visualise God's eschatological moment of encounter (*Kairos*) transcending ordinary time (*Chronos*). Dangerous memories, therefore, ought to be nourished by communal and personal participation in the sacraments, emboldening us to see and change what is unworthy of the Reign of God and this is the real challenge before the followers of Jesus.

**-  Rev. Dr. Abraham Mathew**
*The Executive Secretary*
Policy, Governance and Public Witness

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# Folklores as a Source of Indigenous People's Epistemology

*- Lalnghakthuami\**

### Introduction:

This article is an attempt to delve into the authenticity of Folklores as indigenous knowledge against the dominant knowledge of imperialism which is imposed and regarded as universal. The indigenous people are informed about the inadequacy and limitation of their cultural resources as they did not possess written script to oppose them. The thrust of the paper is to research the potential and adequate knowledge which can be obtained from the folklores of the indigenous people. Folklores are the product of people's culture and history, orally handed down from generation to generation which the colonizers usually regarded as unscientific that are opposite to western epistemology. Attempt is made in this paper to rediscover indigenous epistemology from the folklores.

Until the word folklore was coined by W. J. Thomas in 1846, it was known as "popular antiquities". Folklore has been derived from the German word *Volklehre* i.e., people's customs. The anthropologist uses the term folklore to mean myths, legends, folk-tales, folk-songs, proverbs, riddles and a variety of forms of artistic expression whose medium is the spoken word.[1] Thus, we can say that folklore is the oral literature of the indigenous societies which is perpetuated by the oral traditions.

Epistemology may be said to be a particular way of knowing things and making sense of reality. For example, indigenous epistemologies often derived from teachings transmitted through storytelling, are rich in perceptual experiences e.g., dreams and visions, and arise from the close interconnection between humans, spirits and nature.

The term indigenous is used to refer to people known as the original inhabitants of the land, however, we will use interchangeably with the

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[1] Vinay Kumar Nulkar & M. K. Muthumani, *Tribal Traditions – Folklore, Art, Craft and Medicine* (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers Pvt, Ltd., 2014), 2.

term tribals who have a distinctive history, culture and religion in their own context.

## Understanding Indigenous Epistemology:

We generally understand epistemology as that branch of philosophy which enquires into the nature of human knowledge, as to how it develops and how far it is able to grasp reality. K. P. Eleaz has stated the main problems of epistemology as follows:[2]

(i)       How far can we know reality?
(ii)      How does knowledge originate and develop?
(iii)     What are the different sources of knowledge?

In addition to the above epistemological problems one more important question is – How do we know anything?  W. J. Marshall argues that ways of knowing may be divided into two kinds: First we may see for ourselves and second, we may accept what other people tell us.[3]   The first way of knowing is divided into reason and experience. Reason includes intuition (direct awareness of the truth of a statement) and knowledge through proof in a series of logical steps. Experience indicates knowing by means of the five senses. How do we know? We know from what others have told us, from the testimony of others, from what we have seen for ourselves, and from reasoning about something. These are the important questions for us to examine in the discourse of Indigenous epistemology.

The Indian philosophy recognizes six *pramanas* or sources of valid knowledge namely perception, inference, verbal testimony or scripture, comparison, postulation and non-cognition.[4]   These sources are well documented and expanded by the nine schools of Indian philosophy, however, "differing between themselves on epistemological questions".[5]   Unlike the Indian philosophy, "oral tradition" becomes the source of knowledge for indigenous people. As Sashikaba rightly asserts, "For us oral tradition is the prime literature and scripture because it serves as the source for our history, religious

[2]  K. P. Eleaz, *The Role of Pramanas in Hindu – Christian Epistemology* (Calcuttal : Punthi-Pustak, 1991), 2.

[3]  W. J. Marshall, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Madras: CLS, 1972), 62.

[4]  K. P. Aleaz, *The Role of Pramanas in Hindu- Christian Epistemology*, 3.

[5]  Ibid., 4.

beliefs, social ethos and mores and cultural milieus. It serves as one of the most valuable sources of information about people, their lifestyles, belief system and of their experiences of the manifestations of supernatural powers."[6]  Orality becomes a texture, foundation and source of knowledge for the indigenous community. Limatula rightly asserts, "It shapes the way a community interacts, the way the sacred is experienced and the way the self is understood."[7]  Renthy Keitzer also insists that "the oral traditions and customs are accepted as holy and authoritative for the faith and practice of the people".[8]  For C. Vanlaldika, the oral tradition is 'Ancestral Testament' which consists of unwritten instructions that have been transmitted orally from generation to generation. Therefore, it is formative, normative and authoritative.[9]

Thus, we can say that the indigenous society is shaped by oral tradition. It is a valid source of knowledge for people's history, culture and religion. It plays a vital role for indigenous epistemology in knowing who they are and what they are. Without orality one cannot trace their history and culture. Limatula rightly argues that abandoning oral tradition means losing our histories, cultural and religious values and denial of our existence.[10]  We also know our worldview, value system and lifestyle through oral tradition. For example: One of the proverbial sayings goes "Women and crabs have no religion"[11], gives us a clue to know the patriarchal mindset and the societal attitude towards women

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[6]   Sashikaba Kechutzar, "A Discursive Reading of the Oral Traditions: A Tribal Woman's Perspective," in *No More Sorrow in the Garden of Justice*, edited by Limatula Longkumer (ETC, Jorhat: WSC, 2007), 65.

[7]   Limatula Longkumer, "Sources and Authority of Indigenous Theology: A Naga Perspective" in *Doing Indigenous Theology: Towards New Frontiers*, edited by Hrangthan Chhungi, M. M. Ekka & Wati Longchar (Kolkotta: NCCI/GTC/SCEPTRE, 2012), 57.

[8]   Renthy Keitzer, *In Search of a Relevant Gospel Message: Introducing a Contextual Christian Theology for North East India*   (Guwahati: Christian Literature Center, 1995), 73.

[9]   C. Vanlaldika, "Reading the Mizo 'Ancestral Testament' as a Primary Text for Doing Tribal Theology" in *Contours of Tribal Theology: Issues and Perspectives*, edited by Lalramliana Pachuau, P. Mohan Larber & Wati Longchar (Kolkotta: BTESSC, 2015), 147.

[10]   Limala Longkumer, "Sources and Authority of Indigenous Theology: A Naga Perspective" in *Doing Indigenous Theology: Towards New Frontiers*, 58.

[11]   Laltluangliana Khiangte, *Tribal Culture, Folklore and Literature (Mizos of India, Bangladesh & Myanmar* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2013), 68.

in the society. This is an indication to know the societal values of the people and the reality of women' status in the society.

**Important Characteristics of Folklores:**

Folklore is one of the important dimensions of oral tradition which includes myths, tales, legends, riddle, proverbial sayings, song, etc. Shanbha Hayong asserts that folklores portray the worldview, practices, ways of life and daily life struggles and experiences of the people. Such folklore provides a picture of the various experiences and practices of the people including their community life.[12]

It is common to indigenous communities that the older people transmitted knowledge to the young generation by telling stories, solving puzzles, singing and dancing. It is assumed that "there are diverse functions of folklore which include aiding in the education of the young, promoting a group's feeling of solidarity, converting dull work into play."[13]  Nulkar and Muthumani argues that the functions of folklore are more important than its form as people care little about its origin or definition. The following points may be noted as the functions of folklore:[14]

(i)  The first function of folklore is that it educates. Folk-songs and folk-tales incorporating morals are introduced to inculcate general attitudes and principles such as diligence and filial piety and to ridicule laziness and so on.

(ii) It serves to validate culture, justify its rituals and institutions to those who perform them.

(iii) There are a number of legends which give fantastic idea about their traditional history, the creation of the world, sky, earth, sun, moon, thunder and lightning. Some of the myth reveals the wisdom of the people derived largely from their observations of animals.

(iv) The folk-songs and folk-tales reflect the joys and sorrows, problems and worries of the people.

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[12]  Shanbha Hayong, "Community Life among the Khasis in the Context of the Present Day Globalization" in *Tribal Cultural Resources for Christian Life and Ethics in North East India*, edited by Alphonsus D'Souza, R. Sashikaba Kechutzar & H. Lalrinthanga (Guwahati: NESRC, 2016), 220.

[13]  Vinay Kumar Nulkar & M. K. Muthumani, *Tribal Traditions – Folklore, Art, Craft and Medicine* (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers Pvt, Ltd., 2014), 13.

[14]  Ibid., 13 – 20.

(v) Riddles are socially significant as they provide amusement or entertainment. Many riddles are instructive as they contain references to historical events. They develop a sense of observation and often contain elaborate and rich linguistic forms.

There are varieties of folklores some of them explain the mysteries of supernatural beings, the religious ethos, ethical values, etc. They help us to understand the traditions, cultures, history and people's worldview in a broader and better way. Another important function expressed by Limatula is "Folklores are the markers of our identity." She continues to state that:[15]

> A peculiar character of myth/folklore is that it does not have an individual author. It is a collective creation of the folk. People themselves are interpreters of it, people do not depend on the experts to interpret for them. It is a common people's property and folk themselves control over it. Thus, a myth/folklore loses its credibility when it loses its communion character. It is never a static and fixed. It undergoes changes according to the context, performance and the audience.

Folklore in indigenous community has much significance as they continue to be an important part of life conveying meaning to the community. The value of folklore can also be seen in a research where they give a number of materials for the reconstruction of social, cultural history of the community. The indigenous folklore is rooted in their history, cultural context and worldview. "Worldview shapes consciousness and forms theoretical framework within which knowledge is sought, critiqued and understood. It is also an underlying principle that holds together people's vision, orientation and thinking in life as a community".[16] Thus, folklore informs and directs all dimensions of community's existence, their harmonious living with other living creatures and how they relate to one another in the

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[15] Limatula Longkumer, "Sources and Authority of Indigenous Theology" in *Doing Indigenous Theology in Asia*, 60.

[16] Ahao Vashum, *Ibid*., 31.

community. It also informs us the belief system and ideologies where there is no distinction drawn between the spiritual and physical, sacred and profane.

## Reclaiming Indigenous People's Epistemology:

If we investigate the indigenous culture, history and religion there are ample of instances that provide knowledge about God, world, and human being. Margaret M. Bruchac defines Indigenous knowledge as a network of knowledges, beliefs and traditions intended to preserve, communicate and contextualize indigenous relationships with culture and landscape over time.[17]  She distinguishes "knowledge" as factual data, "belief" as religious concepts and "tradition" as practice. However, she rightly states that these terms are often used imprecisely and interchangeably to describe Indigenous epistemologies.

In fact, there are rich resources in people's tradition but we are unable to "claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce"[18], because of the western scientific knowledge and power. Furthermore, we are denied of opportunities to be creators of our own culture and history. Ahao has rightly argued that indigenous knowledge and religious traditions have largely been dismissed by the Western world as unscientific and therefore, invalid as a way of knowing. Unlike the Western science they are not objective and cannot be scientifically verified, therefore they are described as superstitious, primitive and unreliable.[19]  It has been mistaken by people that it is too simple and not amendable to systematic scientific investigation. Limatula also affirms that unfortunately for a long-time scientific rationality and philosophical language which are the characteristics of modern academia labeled indigenous sources/resources as irrational and illusory.[20]  Moreover, as indigenous knowledge is mainly oral and

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[17] Margaret M Bruchac, "Indigenous Knowledge and Traditional Knowledge" in https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1172&context=anthro_papers (accessed on May3, 2019)

[18] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2012 (second edition), 1.

[19] Ahao Vashum, "Emerging Vision of Indigenous/Tribal Theology" in *Dalit – Tribal Theological Interface: Current Treeds in Subaltern Theologies*, edited by James Massey & Shimreingam Shimray ( New Delhi: TSC/WSC/CDS, 2007), 28.

[20] Limatula longkumer, "Sources and Authority of Indigenous Theology: A Naga Perspective" in *Doing Indigenous Theology in Asia: Towards New Frontiers*, 56.

people-centred it is looked down upon relatively to the written traditions. C. K. Rajagopalan even asserts that Indigenous knowledge is marginalized truth and till now ignored and its history is its struggle against the aggressive attitude by the written history, upper class culture and institutionalized research organizations.[21] Because of all these reasons, indigenous knowledge could hardly survive any more due to the influence of western rationalism and scientific knowledge that assimilate the whole realm of indigenous knowledge system. Let us look at the difference between indigenous knowledge and modern scientific knowledge:[22]

| Indigenous Knowledge | Modern Scientific Knowledge |
|---|---|
| Oral Tradition | Written documents |
| Born from nature | Taught and disciplined |
| Eco-centric | Anthropocentric |
| Embracing the whole nature | Pertaining only to physical world |
| Integral/holistic | Segmental |
| Eco-contextual and shared Knowledge | Power centred and monopoly of Scientific knowledge |
| Accumulation of knowledge Through ages | Partial knowledge collected During a short span |
| Qualitative | Quantitative |
| Intuitive and emotional | Analytical and de-personal |
| Decentralized knowledge of the People | Centralized knowledge of the Experts |
| Proved that is temporal and liable to change | Universal generalized rules according to context, |
| Local / regional | Individualistic. |

From this comparison we can say that the indigenous knowledge is inherently holistic and integrative, being rooted in human experience of the complex relationship of living and non-living being and of the

[21] C. R. Rajagopalan, "Indigenous Knowledge/CFS Experience," in *https://www.niscair.res.in/sciencecommunication/researchjournals/rejour/ijtk/Fulltextsearch/2003/October%202003/IJTK-Vol%202(4)-October%202003-pp%20313-320.htm* (accessed on May 2, 2019).

[22] *Ibid*.

universe. It is not wholly unscientific but has potential complementary ways of organizing human understandings and interactions with the natural world. It is naïve to ignore the indigenous knowledge, as attempts are going on around the world to reassert the importance of indigenous knowledge and recovering it among the indigenous scholars. Some of the treasures that we reclaim from indigenous knowledge could be delineated as follows;

**Folklores: Basis of Indigenous People's Epistemology:**

Indigenous folklores encompasses myriads of worldviews and epistemologies which are shaped by diverse cultural context. They are made up of complex information on human subsistence. Folklores as "an expression of local cultural values, beliefs and knowledge reveal conceptualizations of nature-culture interrelations that differ from Western epistemologies."[23]  This aspect is fundamental to indigenous people because they obtain knowledge through their interaction in and around nature. Their knowledge is creation-centered, characterized by interdependence and interrelatedness of all creations. In this context, Ahao affirms that Indigenous people all across the world believes that the whole of creation are our relatives.[24]  All these knowledges are obtained from folklores transmitted by the wisemen and women to the next generation.

The basic questions before us are – how can folklore be used as a source of Indigenous people's epistemology? Is it authentic to use oral tradition as a source of knowledge? How can we legitimize indigenous epistemology? What would be the criteria for the authenticity of people's epistemology in general and indigenous epistemology in particular? What/Who has epistemological authority? What is valid source of knowledge for indigenous community? In many of the Christian country or state the indigenous people regard Scripture as the source of knowledge, which is accepted as infallible for the Christian faith and conduct. The Bible becomes the ultimate source of knowledge as it leads to knowledge of reality and self.

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[23] Alvaro Fernandez-Llamazares Mar Cabeza, "Rediscovering the Potential of Indigenous Storytelling for Conservation Practice" in http://onlinelibrary. Wiley.comdoi/full/10.1111.12398(accessedon May 2, 2019)

[24] Ahao Vashum, "Emerging Vision of Indigenous/Tribal Theology", 32.

**Folklores as the ultimate source of epistemology:**

Verbal Testimony (*Sabda*) is accepted as an ultimate source of knowledge in Indian philosophy. *Sabda* means word or words as the source of knowledge. It would then correspond to 'authority' or 'testimony'. By establishing *Sabda* as an ultimate source of knowledge many of the Indian philosophers uphold the authority of the Vedas.[25] One of the Indian philosophical schools, called *Mimamsakas* would say that the *rishis* or seers apprehended the truth and transmitted them to others and thus the Vedas are super-human. This historical name occurring in the Vedas are of universal applicability and do not have any historical evidence as such.[26] Even the indigenous folklores can be considered in the same line of *sabda* or verbal testimony in the Indian philosophy. Some of the indigenous scholars proposed to accept the indigenous oral traditions as the 'prime testament' or 'ancestral testament' where the indigenous community derive reality of themselves, nature and the world. Folklores provide the necessary tools for obtaining knowledge – which are collective and community based. They would not have any historical or scientific evidence as such but they have applicability and authority over the community. Perhaps the proverbial sayings, stories, and myths have the intellectual and ethical authority and have the authority as well in the life of the community. Individual's intellectual norm is controlled by the societal norms as a person's identity is formed by the community. Such being the case, it is possible to state that folklores become a source of indigenous people's epistemology.

**Epistemology based on Life Experience:**

Long before having written script, the indigenous people's thought, emotions, aspirations and ideas were expressed in songs, stories and tales. Without the outsiders' influence, Laltluangliana argues that "folk songs and stories were crystallized into the living language of the people and were born out of such full and spontaneous expression".[27] Knowledge derives from people's experience cannot be divorced from their history, culture and worldview. ……rightly said, "Worldview

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[25] K. P. Eleaz, Ibid., 29.

[26] *Ibid*., 39.

[27] Laltluangliana Khiangte, *Tribal Culture, Folklore and Literature (Mizos of India, Bangladesh & Myanmar* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2013), 45.

shapes consciousness and forms the theoretical framework within which knowledge is sought, critiqued and or understood". Knowledge emerging from people's experience has cultural relevance but also inadequate to explain all the ways of knowing. However, all knowledge arising from people's experience are to be respected and valued because of their uniqueness. A brief analytical study of 'experience' may be helpful in this regard.

Panikkar interestingly situate the place of experience in human life by stating that human being has three organs or groups of organs relating them with reality. He has mention three dimensions of consciousness:[28] *Sensory* consciousness relates us by means of our sense organs to what we call the material part of reality. *Intellectual* consciousness opens us up to the intelligible world, to that web of relations which gives consistency to the material world and which we cannot equate with mere matter. *Mystical* consciousness identifies us in a special way with the very reality it opens up to us; it involves the total subject. He continues to assert that the senses are not only 'knowing' instruments, acting tools they are also part of the very reality they disclose. His arguments are useful for the clarification of the concept of experience. He states that if the concept of consciousness may be used to stress the overall character of this process and its supra-individual aspect, the concept of experience stands for the distinctive feature of the individual having or sharing in that consciousness. If consciousness is something in which we share, experience is something peculiar to each of us. He concludes that "by definition experience is the particular way one shares in a given state of consciousness".[29]

We can say that Folklores are the expression of people's life experience in which sensory, intellectual and mystery dimensions of consciousness bridge the two poles of the subject and the object. They are "prompted by natural reason, by a consciousness and sense of incontestable presence that arises from experiences in the natural world, by the turn of the seasons, by sudden storms, by the favour of spirits in the water....thunder in the ice, bear, beaver and faces in the

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[28]  R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporations, 1983), 292 -293.
[29]  R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, 294.

stone".[30]  A knowledge drawn from the experience of thousands of human generations is the collective heritage of human experience with the natural reality. Thus, folklores are rooted in sensory awareness and human experience of the complex relationships among multiple organisms and the knowledge emerge from them are holistic and integrative.

**Liberative Indigenous Epistemology:**

We cannot deny the fact that indigenous epistemology is rooted in cultural experience which is dominated by the patriarchal ideologies. Because of this the folklores and oral traditions have both liberative and oppressive potentials for wo/men in the community. Although women are the maker of history, culture and community, most of the oral traditions and proverbial sayings keep women in the secondary position. For example: the Mizo proverbial sayings go, "A Crab's meat is no meat so also a woman's word is no word"; "Crabs and women have no religion".  These sayings according to R. L. Hnuni, perpetuate the idea of women's subordination, reinforcing male chauvinistic attitude in the consciousness or unconsciousness levels. She continues to say that the sayings are dehumanizing, determining women's low status and inferior role both in the church and society.[31]  The community draws knowledge from these oral traditions as those sayings shape the societal attitudes towards women. They are used as the basis for their philosophy, ethical code and the moral foundation of the society.[32]  Therefore, the epistemic traditions need to critically analyze while drawing insights and wisdom for the betterment of the whole community. It is also necessary to rethink what we have inherited from the past as it shapes our mode of life and mindset.

In search of liberative potentials in the indigenous people's epistemology, it is essential to identify the life giving fragments and traditions from the socio-cultural practices. We shall take two

[30]  Margaret M. Bruchac Margaret M. Bruchac, "Indigenous Knowledge and Traditional Knowledge" in https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1172&context=anthro_papers (accessed on May 7, 2019).

[31]  R. L. Hnuni, "Gender Issues in Northeast India" in *Orients Journal for Contextual Theology*, 4(2013): 24 – 28.

[32]  Lalnghakthuami, "A Critical Re-Look at the Tribal Heritage from a Feminist Perspective" in *Theologizing Tribal Heritage: A Critical Re-Look*, edited by Hrangthan Chhungi (New Delhi: CWM/ISET_ECC/PCI/ISPCK, 2008), 220.

examples: "No rock can stand without being supported by pebbles"[33] In the indigenous Mizo community, a chief maintained social equity in his chieftainship. This saying denotes the foundation for a moral ideology for social equity in which everyone finds equal acceptance apparently because people are conscious of the value of a human being, mutuality and of the common human roots.[34]  A fundamental indigenous communitarian ideal is sharing one's possession with neighbors. The saying goes, "Share share, live live; eat alone – hoard for self - die die".[35]  This very popular proverbial saying underscores a moral principle to maintain an egalitarian community by sharing. According to Vanlalchhuanawma, it is scornful for an individual or family to have excessive material possessions while the majority try to make both ends meet and a few suffer half-starvation in a close-knit and so-called classless society.[36]  This traditional mutual concern for the general social welfare promotes a just society that dominates the entire formation of ethical code in the community.

The above few examples indicate the existence of liberative and oppressive elements in the indigenous people's epistemology. While drawing insights and knowledge from the oral traditions, we need to be sensitive to the liberative and oppressive dimensions of the traditions. It is because the oral traditions are the product of patriarchal mindset and ideology that do not acknowledge the presence of women. Thus, it is important to bring out the liberative elements from the oral traditions which can be instrumental for the transformation of the community.

**Conclusion:**

Indigenous epistemology can be gained and tools can be constructed from folklores which may not be systematic or scientific like the Western epistemology. As noted earlier the indigenous epistemology is exercised within the context of the social values and philosophies of the tribe. It is based on the worldview that all things are connected and

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[33] *Lungpui pawh lungte-in a kamki loh chuan a awm thei lo*.

[34]  Vanlalchhuanawma, "Tribal Maxims as the Basis of Moral Theology: The Mizo Context" in *Tribal Cultural Resources for Christian Life and Ethics in North East India,* edited by Alphonsus D'Souza, et.al., (Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, 2016), 183.

[35] *Sem sem dam dam ei bil thi thi*.

[36]  Vanlalchhuanawma, "Tribal Maxims as the Basis of Moral Theology: The Mizo Context," 188.

every activity is interpreted as belonging to a religious whole. Its simplicity and the fact that it is based on oral tradition, may be one reason for not being included to systematic scientific investigation. Moreover, the acquisition of indigenous epistemology is collective and social, quite different from the cognitive academic intelligence.

With respecting all forms and sources of knowledge, we explore the alternative ways of knowing through the indigenous folklores. It is our expectation that the epistemic traditions through folklores may enhance the process of constructing new knowledge in order to perceive and interpret the world more effectively. This alternate ways of exploring knowledge may also be considered as an important contribution from the indigenous perspective in our search for authentic knowledge in the contemporary world.

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# When Prayer Heals and Transforms: Stories of Indigenous Peace-Building

*- Renemsongla Ozukum\**

The stories of women's prayer are actions of living letters.[1]   This article uses prayer and the Fellowship of the Least Coin (FLC) as examples for reflecting on indigenous peace-building stories from the North East Indian Region (NEIR).

## The Fellowship of the Least Coin: Symbol of a Living Letter

The Fellowship of the Least Coin (FLC), also known as the "token coin without the pinch,"[2]   is an indigenous ecumenical movement for building peace and reconciliation. Ignited by a prayer movement, the FLC was envisioned by India's Daughter, Shanti.[3]   This movement eventually grew and was named as the International Christian Fellowship of the Least Coin (ICFLC) proving how the miracle of prayer multiplied stories of healing, reconciliation, and building communities across the seas and mountains, and helped women unite and overcome the tumultuous decade post World War II- the 1950s!

Dr. Rajeshwari Shanti Solomon hailed from Uttar Pradesh, India, and belonged to the Church of North India. Born on 10 June, 1920 Shanti was brought up in a Christian environment until her undergraduate days. While serving as a teacher in the North India, Shanti secured her Master's degree and got married to Reuben Solomon. Her travels to USA and to Asian countries during the post-World war II period as an ecumenical delegate were instrumental in shaping and giving birth to

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[1]  NRSV, 2 Corinthians 3:2-3.

[2]  Jessica Prakash-Richard, *"The Least Coin: The Coin without the Pinch!"* in *In God's Image,* Vol 35, No.1, June 2016.p. 44

[3]  Prakash-Richard, *The Least Coin*:44-51.

[4]  For further details, see Dr. Rajeshwari Shanti Solomon, http://www.icflc.ph, (accessed 6 September 2020) and Prakash-Richard, *"The Least Coin."*45.

the FLC movement.[4]  To further this self-reliant vision, Shanti's served at the United Church of North India (UCNI), in the Literature department after her husband died in 1960.  From 1991, Shanti was based in St. Stephen's Community along with her friends, sheltering and serving children for education. Leaving behind a unique legacy, Shanti entered eternal rest on 15 October 1998 in India.[5]

The act of setting aside the least "mite" is both a spiritual act and a commitment to lead a reconciled relationship. Anyone who wishes to join this movement must spend time in prayer for restoring strained relationships, and also to uphold others in prayers who are victims of jealousy, hatred, violence, and injustice in the personal lives and social relationships. Every prayer-driven act of FLC is a tangible token of a women's answered prayer. As a result, those who engage in setting aside the least coin experience healing and restoration.[6] The miracle of this jar-breaking prayer movement becomes a key initiative in Christian stewardship when the "least tokens" in each respective country despite appearing insignificant, are merged into a common international account, then bless for global women's fellowship. Besides serving as a catalyst of the World Day of Prayer and several Christian ecumenical bodies in the Asian regions, FLC also helped give birth in India to "two key Christian women's bodies which are under the National Council of Church in India i) All India Council of Christian Women (AIWCC) and, ii) Association of Theologically Trained Women in India (ATTWI)."[7]  A faith that is quintessentially Indian and Christian, and also truly Asian Christian, FLC embodies the spirit of living ecumenism which affirms people as subjects, of lives worth uniting, living together as communities of faith. Indeed, borrowing Apostle Paul, FLC is the symbol of a living letter.

### The Lord's Box: The Economy of Prayer

The spiritual discipline of tithing and giving portions of tangible economic resources toward building communities is not a new practice to indigenous communities in the North East Region of India (NERI).

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[5]  See http://www.voiceofthechristianministries.org. Shanti's Memorabilia, (accessed 6 September 2020). Also see Prakash-Richard, *"The Least Coin."* 50.

[6]  Shanti Solomon, FLC http://www.icflc.ph (accessed 6 September 2020).

[7]  Prakash-Richard, *"The Least Coin,"* 45

Since my childhood days, I've noticed a wooden box in all Christian families in my town called the "Charity Box", now popularly called the "Lord's Box." Similar to other churches in NERI, in Nagaland, most of the women also set aside a "handful of rice" every time they cook rice. They deposit this to the Church women department during the regular Thursday women's fellowship. This handful of rice is then converted to cash and used for several outreach ministries. Using the Lord's Box as the basis, women started the practice of collecting through an annual Thanksgiving Day, the proceeds of which they used to reach out to the needy as well as meet the needs of the congregation. In addition, Christian women would spend enormous amount of time fellowshipping, praying for the needs of others and for the world. Besides Thursdays as women's fellowship day among the Baptists, Fridays and Saturdays are most likely the best days to fast and pray for own family needs.

Joining the pilgrimage of peace and justice with the larger global community, the local FLC in Nagaland is in its nascent stage. Younger women from different denominations across tongues and tribes have been fellowshipping by reflecting on daily meditation texts. This year the jar-breaking blessing was able to reach out to around twenty non-profit local ministries owned and carried out by women to bless their effort during this COVID-19 lockdown moments, and the remaining amount were contributed to the central fund. This prayer movement of FLC beckons every Christian who ought to pray, "Forgive those who trespass against us, as we forgive them."[8] A prayerful life reminds us that baptism simply does not make a confessing Christian automatically a child of God. The "children of God" are those who make peace, strive to build peace, and live the peace of God.[9]

## Prayer as a Powerful Force of Reconciliation and Social Healing

Prayer manifests in varied ways; verbal and non-verbal, in the form of thanksgiving, lament, resilience, dance, and fellowship with others, or a moment worth spending with one's own Creator to dialogue about unanswered life's queries. To a child, prayer is a heavenly language used to talk to God and ask God to meet their daily needs. The profound

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[8] Luke 11:4 NRSV.
[9] Matthew 5:9. NRSV.

act of prayer is a healing source for the pain of the wounded, the suppressed, and the alienated.  As abuse, violence, and denials of basic rights surges, prayer is becoming even more subversive and a benevolent act for women who are suppressed in manifold ways. Prayer as a powerful force of reconciliation and social healing manifests among the NERI in two meaningful ways: firstly, when prayer becomes a therapy to dialogue in a context where many women are not given visibility in leadership and decision making in the public; and secondly, when women pray and fast constantly for family, society and institutions as everybody turn to them for comfort and as a source of hope for the society.

Sadly, the more that prayers are being offered, the higher the tendency for the communities to perpetuate violence and abuse against women. While we can't tell women to stop praying even as the violence against them continues; their prayers are taken as a passive benevolent ministry. This point is articulated in one of the media pages, which says, "but in Shanti's country, women are still kidnapped, stripped, raped in broad day light and murdered…despite stringent laws against female foeticide, millions are being murdered in her mother's womb."[10]   This observation calls the church to respond to the ugly realities of God's image being crushed and abandoned. The movement of "Thursdays in Black," advocacy toward eliminating violence against women, is a response to such oppressive realities.

## FLC and the Need for Reclaiming Shanti Solomon's Vision

Among the churches of North India, Shanti's legacy is being carried out exceptionally well.[11]   Further, numerous programs started under the guidance of Shanti have become full-fedged organizations such as the AICCW, ATTWI, ICFLC and the Asian Christian Women's Conference (ACWC).

The chief commitment of ecumenism concerns fostering and healing broken relationships between fellow Christians, churches, and with the

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[10] http://www.voiceofchristiansministries.org (accessed 6 September 2020).
[11] Annual activities revolve around Shanti's vision by the Salvation Army's Citadel Corps, Delhi, CNI and St. Stephen's Community, Delhi.  See for details http://www.voiceofchristianministires.org, (accessed 6 September 2020). Also see Jessica Prakash-Richard, *"The Least Coin*: 49-51.

whole world and the created order. Feminist theologian Jessica Richard laments, "I felt a twinge of anger that our [Indian] church history courses did not see it fit to include the stories of some women like Shanti Solomon, who have significantly impacted the world of Ecumenical history in our times".[12]    However, Shanti's visible and extraordinary effort must go beyond reading the biography of a certain woman, a narrative of her journey from birth to death. We need to reclaim afresh Shanti's spirit that worked to build fellowship and hope across the globe. There is a need for us to appreciate and wonder how the prayer and economy of the FLC has sustained over the years and impacted the lives of the commons.

As much as Shanti has envisioned this unique ecumenical fellowship of women uniting for prayers, it is time for the Indian churches and the ecumenical movement to dig for deeper roots, while paving a broader way toward the pilgrimage of peace and justice with the global community. How an ecumenical body such as NCCI (AICCW and ATTWI), can effectively facilitate such "prayers" and make healing more visible in the community? From *Koinonia* to *Diakonia*, in other words, the model of "partnership" as enshrined in the "Ecumenical sharing of resources."[13]   In fact, the coin is simply a token, a medium to translate the just-dialectic relationship with God and with fellow beings. One does not require a distinction degree on *pneumatology* to respond to such divine calls.

For Shanti, this conception of FLC movement is about responding to the *kairos* moment; the *kairos* of God's bounty meeting the *kairos* of the common people. The sustaining spirit of healing is therefore none other than the spirit and the power of prayer which invites us and indicates that if every activity, every fellowship, every pilgrimage opened with such "confessing prayers," must close with the spirit of "repentant prayer," with the assurance of God's abiding presence in the fellowship.

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[12]  Prakash-Richard, *"The Least Coin,"* 45

[13]   Huibert Van Beek, *Ecumenical Sharing of Resources,* in Dictionary of Ecumenical Movement, 2nd Edition, Nicholas Lossky. ed. WCC Publications, Geneva. 2002. P. 383

## The Way of the Spirit: Going Beyond Structured Ecumenism

Confession is easy as long as it is convenient to say that the Holy Spirit continues to work with us, in us and through us reconciling with the world. But how often have we encountered and embraced the "other" and the "unfamiliar" wholeheartedly and with ease? How did Shanti, during the tragic years following World War II, boldly envision and live out with others in multiplying God's abundance? I am convinced this effort is none other than the power of the Holy Spirit, the *Paraclete* working among the people across the seas and mountains through the power of prayer.

Despite the assurance of God's bounty which remains the same yesterday, today and forever, the issue of "fund crunch" for conducting church related programs and projects in the global south has become a real challenge. It makes one to wonder what deprivation is leading us into such a reality! Where today, is the power of those repentant prayers that were invoked during Shanti's time to realize genuine ecumenical fellowship?

One of the core ecumenical callings is to address and transform disunity among believers. Visible unity is realized when the diaconal aspect of justice; caring, sharing and growing together is realized. The prayer of Shanti's vision on the "mite" was convincing enough to prove that these sources were "to value the outcasts, marginalized, and those who have only the least coins in their hands."[14]    How do we respond when the ambivalence of religion and culture could pave the way either to strengthen the power of mammon or become a part of God's own people: from lie to truth, from fragmentation to reconciliation? Renewal of such spirit is about humility in the process of responsible ecumenical engagement, and therefore God's covenant with the "poor" should manifest concretely in all areas of life, addressing the needs of God's own people.[15]   This is the heart of the gospel.

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[14]  Prakash-Richard, *"The Least Coin,"* 51.
[15]  NRSV 2 Corinthian 9: 11-13.

# COVID 19 and its Implications for Indigenous Communities: Responding to the Insecurities and Vulnerabilities of Women and Children

*- Helen R Sekar\* and Ellina Samantroy†*

## Introduction

The ongoing pandemic COVID 19 has a significant impact on the population spreading vehemently across various communities including the indigenous communities. In India, most of the Tribal population are at the risk of impoverishment, food insecurity, indebtedness, acute health crisis, displacement, social exclusion, social discrimination and inequality. Devoid of economic growth stimulation to improve the healthcare, educational, industrial and other developmental infrastructure in their remote geographical habitats, their socio-economic backwardness is perpetuated.

The indigenous communities in many places have already been afflicted as a consequence of militant-insurgency, Naxalism, etc. and they live under the pressure from the armed forces in some regions. Tribal regions which are in a conflict situation are neither investment-friendly nor are compatible for infrastructure development. In the absence of productive investment and sustainable livelihood and without any mechanisms to cope and recover from stress and shocks, the tribal populations are the worst affected when exposed to pandemic and natural catastrophes.

Tribal and Indigenous people are generally engaged in vulnerable employment across the country and mostly in traditional occupations.

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*Views expressed in this article belong to that of the authors and not necessarily that of the organizations that they belong.*

Their precarious employment conditions mostly in low paying jobs often restricts them from decent employment opportunities and access to social protection. Since they have been subjected to a history of marginalization emanating from rigid social and cultural practices and their social position in the society, they are the most disadvantaged section of the society.

The pandemic and the unprecedented lockdown have led to loss of livelihood of many workers, particularly those in the informal sector who were not protected under social protection coverage. They tried to migrate back to their villages and a whole process of reverse migration was witnessed. These workers, several of them who belonged to indigenous communities had once migrated to cities along with their children in search of employment. In this process, the women and children particularly of the disadvantaged communities are worst affected as the loss of livelihood and closure of schools has led to a new set of challenges adding up to the already existing challenge of employment and health security.

A recent report by the Continental Network of Indigenous Women of the Americas stated that the vulnerable condition of indigenous women is exacerbated by the triple discrimination which they experience owing to their gender, ethnicity and scarce economic resources. Majority of the governments address the crisis in the biological area, attacking the virus and the physical sickness ignoring the sicknesses caused by social and spiritual trauma. (ECMIA,2020). As per Census 2011, the indigenous/tribal population (ST) in India is 104.3 million constituting 8.6 percent of the total population (GoI, 2013). Population of ST males is 52.5 millions and ST females is 52 millions. Due to low educational attainment and lack of skills most of the ST women are engaged in low paying jobs in certain sectors.

In this context, the present paper aims to understand the impact of COVID 19 on the indigenous population, particularly women and children. The paper tries to understand the work participation of ST women and the impact of pandemic on employment. It tries to understand the socio-psychological impact of the pandemic on women and children. The paper also tries to analyse the specific impact of the pandemic on children. At the end the paper tries to engage in a

discussion on policy perspectives to protect the well-being of women and children in times of crisis like the pandemic within a broader framework of women empowerment and child protection. The paper is based on the authors' interaction with the tribal communities during their visit to remote tribal regions in different states of the country at different points of time, a desk review of literature, and for secondary data analysis the reports of the National Statistics Office are referred along with reports from other governmental sources and international organisations. The paper is divided into four sections. The following sections discuss about the impact of the pandemic on women workers and children, particularly with reference to employment protection and child protection issues by highlighting the vulnerabilities during the pandemic for appropriate policy intervention in this regard.

## The impact of the Pandemic on Women from Scheduled Tribe and other indigenous communities

The work participation of women in India has been quite low and declining over the years as reported by the National Statistics Office (NSO).The recent Periodic Labour Force survey of the NSO, 2018-19 reported that the work participation rate of Scheduled Tribe (ST) women was only 26.7 percent in comparison to 54.1 percent men of the same community. Though it was higher when compared to women belonging to other social groups and the General category yet rural (women:28.0%, men:54.9%) and urban (Women:15.8%, men:48.6%) differentials were quite significant which raises a question on the quality of employment that needs further examination (GoI,2019).As evident in some studies, the higher participation of ST women in employment is due to economic necessity and compulsion of work at lower wages (Sorsa, et al 2015).Most of these women workers are self-employed mostly in informal sector with limited or no access to social security. The Economic Census (EC) had reported that entrepreneurship among the ST women had declined from 9.31 per cent during the 5th EC to 6.97 per cent during the 6th EC and women were operating vulnerable enterprises without any hired workers (Samantroy and Tomar, 2018).The recent pandemic has further accentuated these problems due to the unprecedented lockdown and emergency measures that adversely affected the livelihood

opportunities and has hit certain sectors of employment (manufacturing, retail, construction, services) where women were mostly engaged in low paying jobs.

A study conducted by the V.V. Giri, National Labour Institute in Tripura, one of the  States in the North-eastern region of India, revealed that ST women were working as daily wage workers in agriculture, construction, manufacturing or were self-employed and an extremely lower share were  employed in education, health and other sectors unlike the other social groups (Samantroy, 2019). ST women who had migrated to urban centres and were mostly engaged as domestic workers, home-based workers or other self-employed workers were the worst hit by the crisis and had tried to migrate back to their villages. The entire process of reverse migration was traumatising. The women who were returning to their villages faced discrimination and were socially stigmatised, affecting their social and psychological well-being.

## COVID 19 and issues of Child Protection

Negative effects of pandemic and natural disasters are generally greater for the poor and their children are forced into the labour market as a cheap source in the context of declining livelihood opportunities in the pandemic environment.[1] Census figures 2011 reported that the incidence of child labour among Scheduled Tribes (ST) was 6.7 per cent, which is the highest out of all social groups. Compared to the urban areas, the workforce participation of children belonging to Scheduled Tribes (ST) was more pronounced in rural areas, with 7 percent children engaged as child workers in rural as compared to 3.3 percent in urban areas.[2]  This indicates the extreme economic distress of Scheduled Tribe families in rural areas, which forces children to join the labour force at a tender age and the resultant educational deprivation.

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[1]  Sarkar, Kingshuk  and Sekar, Helen R. "Forgotten faces of India's Vulnerable Children during COVID-19: Will India respond to the surging Child Labour?', thestandpoint.in, August 9, 2020, https://thestandpoint.in/2020/08/09/forgotten-faces-of-indias-vulnerable-children-during-covid19-will-india-respond-to-the-surging-child-labour/ P.1

[2]  Ellina Samantroy, Helen R. Sekar, Sanjib Pradhan, (2017) State of Child Workers in India : Mapping Trends, VVGNLI  and UNICEF, P.20

Vulnerability of tribal children to labour exploitation is also reflected in the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2017-18. Social group wise analysis of Unit level data from NSSO reveals that the scheduled tribe (ST) households have the highest level of participation in the labour force (4.9 LFPR) and domestic duties (3.9) in rural areas and the second highest in the urban areas (3.8), the first being Scheduled castes (4.0). Lack of assets, *productive resources*, and employable skills coupled with unemployment, absence of alternative livelihood options, and non-accessibility to services and infrastructure, make the tribal population vulnerable to bondage and labour exploitation.

Covid-19 induced abject conditions of penury, food insecurity, starvation and hunger. The human traffickers induce the tribal, take advantage and succeed in trafficking away their children to far off places for labour exploitation in different parts of the country. Parents of these trafficked children hardly have any access to their children or get any information about their health, safety and well-being.

With bare minimum food and water to survive, the trafficked children are made to work in agricultural operations, manufacturing processes, in different illegal mines, road-side restaurants, domestic services and also in different other occupations in the informal and unorganized sectors' in hazardous and unhygienic conditions. Denied of the rights of childhood, right to decent living, right to education, right to protection against exploitation, and other rights, these children are virtually reduced to bonded labourers.[3]   Children in labour exploitation very often become victims of physical, psychological, sexual abuse and violence.

**Concluding Observations and Policy Framework**

In view of the above discussion, there is a need to conduct rapid assessment surveys to understand the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups. The institutional and social barriers which perpetuate inequality and also come in the way of under privileged socio-economic categories getting the benefits of growth and

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[3]  Sarkar, Kingshuk, and Sekar, Helen, R. "COVID-19 Adds Fuel to India's Bonded Labour Crisis", Eleventh Column, August 30, 2020 https://www.eleventhcolumn.com/2020/08/30/covid-19-adds-fuel-to-indias-bondage-labour-crisis/# P.1

development need to be removed. Government should take progressive steps towards a humane, caring economy by safeguarding the public good, provisioning on a permanent basis and should also strive for universal entitlements. Vigorous and sustained intervention is needed for the economic upliftment of the tribal community simultaneously backed by provision of good educational infrastructure in the tribal areas ensuring quality education of the tribal children. It is highly essential for all the stakeholders and social partners to work towards realization of the objectives of the ***National Child Policy 2013***[4] which states that it aims to:

> Ensure that *all out-of-school children such as* child labourers, migrant children, trafficked children, children of migrant labour, street children, child victims of alcohol and substance abuse, children in areas of civil unrest, orphans, children with disability (mental and physical), children with chronic ailments, married children, children of manual scavengers, children of sex workers, children of prisoners, etc. are tracked, rescued, rehabilitated and have access to their right to education.

Also, there is a need to conduct rapid assessment surveys to understand the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups. Developing gender responsive social protection policies by providing coverage to the informal sector workers is imperative. The NSSO needs to have a gender disaggregated data including migrant workers with specific focus on social groups (indigenous communities) to understand their problems and design appropriate policy action. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has recently announced developing a database for tribal migrant workers returning to their home states to give a push to livelihood generation amid COVID 19 as reported by the Indian Express on 9th July 2020.This is a positive step for promoting livelihood support opportunities through access to markets for the tribal women.

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# The Nexus between COVID-19 and the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Challenges and Opportunities in Church Life

*-Ben Jonathan Immanuel\**

## 1. Introduction

The Internet reduces the perceived space and time. A person can be in any corner of the earth and connect with another person in any place, at any desired time instantly through the internet. This reality did not strike us as powerfully as it did when the whole world was brought to a standstill by multiple lockdowns due to COVID-19. With self-isolation and maintaining physical distance being the only go-to options to thrive through a pandemic, human beings are forced to adapt to alternative ways of communicating with one another. Among all the realms of human life, religion is one of the most affected by this scenario particularly those whose spirituality primarily depends on congregating with one another. The Church worldwide has sailed through a few rough months trying to navigate the new normal, trying to use newer means of communing with one another, and trying to journey on as faith communities.

In this article, I wish to discuss a few challenges and opportunities that are to be encountered in Church life during a pandemic and in the era of the fourth Industrial Revolution. Throughout this article, the word 'church' is used in a multi-faceted sense. While some would prefer the word 'ecclesia', 'church' is the real-world term. It is what common people know and are familiar with. Church is a building. Church is a gathering of people. Church is an activity. Church is a feeling, an emotion, one that is very different with the current change in living conditions. Church is a "called out" community. Church is a community with expectations. Church is a change-making and influential social movement. Church is a prophetic community. Church is a dedicated time and space, physical or virtual, for communion with God and God's creation. From this understanding, Church life can be defined as communion with God, communion with oneself, and communion with the neighbor, which is all of creation.

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## 2.   COVID-19

Coronavirus disease, first reported in 2019, referred to as COVID-19 is the most recently discovered coronavirus that has found its way to almost every part of the world causing a pandemic. At the time of writing this, over two and a half crore people around the world have been infected by this virus. This highly contagious virus, spreads easily and is also life threatening, especially for those with comorbidities. India is among the top three most infected countries and has been under extended lockdowns and restrictions since March 26th 2020. Ever since India went into a lockdown, completely bamboozled by its magnanimity, there have been large-scale disruptions in social life. While the privileged sections of society have been able to adapt and move on, the vulnerable communities including migrants, daily wage laborers including construction workers have endured suffering of great proportions. COVID-19, in many ways, has exposed different facets of global systems of healthcare, governance, economics, polity as well as religion. It has provided a reality check for these systems. It has also marked the onset of a new epoch in human history.

## 3.   The 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR)

Epochs in human history have often been preceded by revolutions. A Revolution is a phenomenon that brings about a massive change in human living conditions. An Industrial Revolution[1] can be defined as "the period of time during which work began to be done more by machines in factories than by hand at home."[2] Human history has already witnessed three industrial revolutions.[3] The fourth industrial revolution (4IR) is the most recent form of replacing manual labor with

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[1] The first profound shift in human way of living from hunting to farming was made possible by the domestication of animals. This is called the agrarian revolution. Animals automated human labor. The next big shift was in terms of creation of machinery to aid mass production and to automate human labor. This is called the Industrial Revolution.

[2] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/industrial-revolution (accessed 18th August, 2020)

[3] The First Industrial Revolution used water and steam power to mechanize production. The Second used electric power to create mass production. The Third used electronics and information technology to automate production. R. Christopher Rajkumar, "Humanising '4th Industrial Revolution': A Mission Agenda", *NCC Review* Vol. CXXXVIII No. 04, May 2018: 44.

mechanization, only this time it is replaced by a much more complex force called "Artificial Intelligence." Apart from Artificial Intelligence (AI) itself, the 4IR covers a range of fields such as robotics, the internet of things (IoT), autonomous transportation, 3D printing, nanotechnology, biotechnology, materials science, energy storage, quantum computing and so on and so forth.[4]   It is leaps and bounds ahead of the previous industrial revolution. Here are some of the features of the 4IR that help us in understanding its importance in our current milieu.

- *Artificial Intelligence (AI)*

Artificial Intelligence is the phenomenon where technology seemingly has the ability to gather, perceive, analyze, process, and respond to data, in ways almost as humans do. One of the popular forms of AI is intelligent assistants on smart phones such as Siri, Alexa, and Google. With simple fingerprint or voice recognition, technology translates heard commands into desirable actions. Added to this are smart machines such as robots designed particularly to do most human tasks like cooking, cleaning, problem solving, memory management, and scheduling, among many others. As Klaus Schwab, the founder of the World Economic Forum and one of the first voices to speak about 4IR observes, our devices have become an increasing part of our personal ecosystem, listening to us, anticipating our needs, and helping us when required, sometimes even if not asked.[5]   Some of us may also be aware that most of our devices are listening to us unless we make sure permissions for the same are disabled.

- *From Information Technology (IT) to Data Technology (DT)*

One of the chief characteristics of the 4IR is the shift from Information technology to Data Technology. There is today, an unlimited access to knowledge not merely of Information (processed Data) but of Data itself. Jack Ma, the founder of one of the leading multinational

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[4]  Klaus Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2016), 7.

[5]  Klaus Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2016), 7.

technology conglomerates, Alibaba Group, says that "the IT era turned humans into machines while the DT era transformed machines into smart beings."[6]   What this means is that everyone's personal Data sooner or later will be on the public domain so that machines can access them and do everything humans ought to be doing. We already see this, for example, in our own Aadhar Card system in the country. With only a fingerprint, one can access all data about a person since most of our information is linked with the Aadhar system. Our data is interlinked with all kind of identity documents such as bank accounts, addresses, and so on. There are also ambitious projects being approved to transfer human intelligence onto machines and to preserve them even after the death of the person.

- ***Digitization***

Digitization means automation or computerization. It includes converting everything physical and tangible into digital versions of the same which can be seen and accessed through some kind of device. This cuts down on space, cost, as well as capital in terms of business investments thereby leading to easy profit-making. Educational institutions, academic journals, news and media companies are some sectors that are already moving away from print media to digital media. The New Educational Policy (NEP 2020) of India also has one of its ambitious focuses on digitalization of Education. Churches too are moving to online documentation, online meetings, and maintaining websites with necessary information. Digitization is an ongoing process which has become necessary for preservation of data and information and to survive in the new 4IR era.

- ***Space versus Cloud***

Data and Information are now increasingly being stored in the new space called 'cloud'. With a few data centers controlling most data of the world, cloud computing allows seamless workflow as seen in collaborative applications such as Google Docs, Slides, Forms, Sheets, etc. and other independent apps such as Padlet, Mentimeter to name a few. Moreover, with the advent of the 4IR, personal and inter-personal

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[6]     Mo Hong'e, "China is progressing from IT to DT era: Jack Ma". http://www.ecns.cn/cns-wire/2015/05-27/167059.shtml (accessed 19th August, 2020)

relationships today are masked with the image of the person portrayed in the virtual world. Humans are getting increasingly comfortable interacting with each other online than having physical meetings. Societal bonding happens virtually, more than in real time and space. Relationships are founded on online platforms including marital arrangements. Moreover, data storage has moved from physical hard-disk drives to the cloud.

In a way, the 4IR is characterized by a fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres.

## 4. The Church's dependence on 4IR during the COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 and the 4IR are the big world-defining contexts right now. All across the world, due to "social distancing" norms to control the spread of the coronavirus, churches have been forced to remain shut. But this has only meant that they have had to force open some lesser known windows so that the people of God can continue to commune with each other. Yes, there has been a "Zoom boom" as far as churches and church-based organizations are concerned. Almost every church in the world, which did not previously have an established online streaming platform, has taken to digital platforms to host services, prayer meetings, and other church routines. In many ways, the Church is indebted to the Internet and to online services such as Google, Microsoft, and platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and others including the archbishop of them all, Zoom itself.

A few months ago, when Church services and programs used to happen in Church buildings and halls, a lot of thought and hard work went into conducting a worship service or an event. From cleaning the sanctuary to setting up the altar, from arranging the hymnals to choir practices, from organizing the liturgy to having every element being led by designated people, from prayer and preparation to the worship service itself, a host of people were involved in the whole process. Over the past few months, most of these activities have been replaced or altered. Now, there's a 'host' or multiple hosts for every meeting and depending on what form of technology one employs, either Live or Pre-Recorded, different people have different roles. Even though it

seems fascinating, novel, and simple, for an uninterrupted worship experience so many things have to fall into place. In many ways, it is even more taxing and tiresome than previous times. Besides these, there are so many other issues that we have come face to face with as we seek the support of the Internet and Artificial Intelligence to continue with life during a global health crisis. Church leaders are almost totally dependent on virtual platforms to carry out the fundamental roles of the church, some of which are "to heal, to satisfy, to bond, and to give a future."[7]  Spirituality and Emotional needs of its members are needed to be addressed virtually and it is a demanding task, both for the priest as well as the member. With these things in mind, let us now turn our attention to some challenges and opportunities that arise from the current nexus between 4IR and COVID-19 and its impacts on Church life.

## 5.   Challenges to Encounter:

As mentioned in the introduction, Church life can be defined as communion with God, communion with oneself, and communion with the neighbor, which is all of creation. Perhaps the greatest challenge to encounter in the current situation is whether the physical church is at any point going to be replaced completely by the online church. An online event[8]  conducted by the World Bank in February this year primarily dealt with how much influence the 4IR has on job roles in society. Statistics presented at the event show that, at least in developing countries like India, there is still a huge need for skilled labor and it will remain this way well into the 21st century. In this light, a starting point for anyone to be able to do significant work in the 21st century is to be well equipped with certain skills. The 21st Century Skills adapted by global institutions thus becomes a necessity for Churches too. The 4C's of these skills which are Critical Thinking, Collaboration, Communication, and Creativity become vital for

[7]  Wes Avram, Connecting with a Theology of Technology. https://reflections.yale.edu/article/ibelieve-facing-new-media-explosion/connecting-theology-technology (accessed 17th August, 2020)

[8] Are robots coming for our jobs?, https://live.worldbank.org/are-robots-coming-your-job?cid=ECR_TT_worldbank_EN_EXTP (accessed 27th August, 2020)

[9] Paul Madsen, 21st Century Skills and the Responsibility of the Christian Teacher, https://acsieurope.org/cms/en-us/21st-Century-Skills-and-the-Responsibility-of-the-Christian-Teacher#:~:text=What%20are%20these%20skills%3F,on%20modern%20society%20and%20education. (accessed 27th August, 2020)

Churches to adapt.[9] Moreover, these skills are basic necessities for Church life. These skills lay a lot of emphasis on interpersonal relationships, technological ability and critical thinking, all of which have been encouraged and fostered by the Church's ministry through the ages. Perhaps, these skills are also the need of the hour to deal with a global health crisis. The Coronavirus pandemic has in many ways already brought the clergy and laity into an interdependent relationship. The clergy needs the collaboration of the laity to especially handle the technological tasks of the Church in many ways. This is what the future looks like and there is a need for up-skilling for the clergy in order to meet the demands of the future. With online church communities becoming a growing reality, there is a second set of challenges to encounter. Here are a few:

### a. Technology – A Privilege

On the technology front , to be a part of online Church life itself is a privilege. Whether it is to conduct or access a worship service, a person needs at least one of the following: a laptop, desktop (with microphone, speaker and camera), mobile phone, or a tablet. Apart from the hardware, one needs a fairly good Internet connection, and then the software that is being used by the Church. It is fascinating to see how quickly churches have adapted to this need. Churches have been able to conduct worship services and other meetings seamlessly through online platforms with additional options of live streaming and recording the proceedings. However, this has been the privilege of only a few. Unlike churches in urban areas with good technology and internet facilities, churches in semi-urban and rural areas have not been able to do the same. On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that members of the congregations are from different socio-economical situations. For some it is really a challenge to log in to one of these services and to accommodate internet-based church life. Sometimes logging in to church becomes a sacrifice if there is a child in the house who needs to attend online classes or a person who needs internet to work from home.

### b. Threat to Privacy and Security

One of the greatest threats of the 4IR is the threat of privacy and security. Hacking and cyber kidnapping for exploitation are major

concerns the 4IR places before humanity today. Human lives have become extensively connected through the internet to various devices like mobile phones, cars, security cameras, smart devices and so on and so forth. It has already come to the point where the Internet has more information about individuals than the family, friends, and colleagues of the individuals. With the syncing of bank accounts, mobile networks and other online mailboxes and social networking accounts, privacy is no longer a given. It is also very easy to steal identities of people and use them inappropriately. We have already witnessed that many online group sessions have been compromised with unwanted visitors. Moreover, there is room for stalking, cyber bullying, and inappropriate behavior on online platforms. These are some issues that need to be handled carefully with wisdom.

### c.    Lack of Embodied Communication and Communion

Church life is about physical closeness as much as it is about spiritual wellness. A handshake, a hug or even a smile can go a long way in edifying one another. Unfortunately, COVID-19 is not going to allow such things to happen for a considerable amount of time. While keeping a safe distance from one another is the necessity of our times, there is a danger of it leading to disembodied communication. Moreover, many Church traditions have decided not to share the Eucharist or the Holy Communion online and are longing for the day when everyone can come partake together at the Lord's Table. While this is a sensitive issue and different traditions have different standpoints on the same, it is an undeniable fact that this has led to lack of communion in ways many would not like to admit. Fortunately, churches are looking for alternatives to engage in embodied communication by using available and safe spaces and creative ideas such as virtual coffee meetings, virtual meals, and online game and icebreaking sessions apart from the regular children, youth, and other fellowships.

### d.    The rise of webinars and Content Fatigue

Since the normalization of online meetings, there has been a significant rise in its frequency. Excessive exposure to online meetings

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[10]   https://www.forbes.com/sites/marksparrow/2020/08/07/why-do-we-suffer-from-zoom-fatigue-its-all-about-the-sound/#9819a314d87a (accessed 31st August, 2020)

has caused a condition known as "Zoom fatigue."[10]  The Internet is filled with information and data and overconsumption of the same can mean harm to one's health. There are many reasons for this fatigue including connectivity issues, bad audio quality, intense concentration periods, and simply the lack of real face to face and person to person interactions. It is important to navigate these issues when it comes to Church life.[11]  There is a looming danger of wanting to both host as well as attend multiple online meetings just to stay in touch with friends and peers but it may not be in the best interests of everyone's mental wellbeing.

### e.    Technology - The New Empire

In addition to some of these challenges, it must be admitted that an overdependence on technology can lead us to become slaves to the same. As Christopher Rajkumar observes, "In permeating through technology, humans have not only found a new master to control over, but have subtly moved the authority to technology to enslave humans."[12]  There are reported incidents in the present time when AI has tended to control humans. It is seen in Robotics and even in Genetic engineering. On the other hand, even though robots are infused with artificial intelligence and machine learning ability and have become smarter and more autonomous, they still lack an essential feature – the capacity of moral reasoning. COVID-19 has exposed this and brought these out to the common person. There is also a threat of intelligence resulting in violence and injustice. We are staring at a new Empire in the 4IR which can perpetually and virtually control human beings if not handled critically, pandemic or not. Technology as Empire is like no other empire the world has seen and it has the potential to control and have monopoly over the very existence of humanity.

### 6.    Opportunities to Embrace:

The Church is no longer as it used to be. Church life has looked very different in the past six months. A pandemic and a technological revolution have come together to fundamentally alter the reality of the

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[11] https://www.vidyard.com/blog/zoom-fatigue-tips/ (accessed 27th August, 2020)
[12]   R. Christopher Rajkumar, "Humanising '4th Industrial Revolution': A Mission Agenda", *NCC Review* Vol. CXXXVIII No. 04, May 2018: 47.

Church. We have seen some challenges that this posits. Nevertheless, this nexus has also opened up many opportunities which if embraced can enhance Church life most important of which are the possibility of an open and outgoing church.

### a.    *Open Church and Wider Communion – True Ecumenism*

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the Church to go digital. Of all the possibilities that arise from this, one of the biggest is that of the shrinking of space and time. In regard to space, with this being the new Church, you and I don't really need to physically go to our churches anymore. It is only a click away. In regard to time, you and I can be in any part of the world in any time zone and still be able to access Church. This means something. Yes, the church is actually more open than ever before and yet if we look around, we are all still stuck to our own individual and personal churches. We are still involved in its life as before and we are still continuing its traditions even though the church itself has broken tradition and moved online. While there have been certain necessary changes including shortening of service timings, creative ways of call and response to liturgy, the need for familiarity and the obsession to maintain the previous patterns have been the focus. What we seldom consider is the possibility of wider ecumenism in the current situation.

The present reality is a perfect opportunity for church leaders to consider opening up their online windows and doors and let people who are not their own experience their traditions. Unlike before, there is an open opportunity to attend a worship service or Bible study or any fellowship of any Church as long as you are allowed to. It is encouraging to see the number of open events being hosted by different Churches where anyone can be a part, taking into serious account security and privacy concerns too. Nonetheless, it definitely does take courage on the part of the church involved to do so. On the other hand, it is a perfect opportunity for each one of us Christians to use this time to watch a service from churches whose traditions we haven't even heard of, or to sing a hymn in a completely different style, or to responsively read a liturgy and to listen to a preacher who in all likelihood wants to preach the one and the same gospel of Jesus Christ. This is an opportunity for all of us to commune in newer ways as the

one household of God in the true sense of the term 'Ecumenism'.

### b.   Church beyond the church

There has been a growing awareness that Church life is built on the interdependence between the pastor, the theologian, the teacher, the doctor, the counselor, the social worker, the sanitation worker, the IT person, the student, the elderly, in all the entire community. Right now, the greatest goal of humanity seems to be the search for a vaccine to eradicate the virus. As countries are doing their best in pushing for research and development, frontline workers such as medical workers, sanitation workers, farmers and vendors risk themselves in order that supply chains function well and people have the basic necessities for life. Nonetheless, COVID-19 has also exposed the victims of such a crisis such migrants, daily wage workers (some of whom have lost jobs and even lives), and vulnerable communities such as transgenders, and specific people at risk including terminally ill patients, children, the elderly, and pregnant women. This is a divinely appointed time for church life to go beyond the walls of the church into the needy places. Perhaps, it is an opportunity for the Church to serve the world's technological needs and to be visionaries in the era of the fourth industrial revolution. There is now an opportunity to live out the Christian life on the streets, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to shelter the homeless and to side with and embrace the victim.

### 7.   Conclusion

We live today during a global pandemic amidst a technological revolution that together in a nexus are fundamentally altering the way we live, work, and relate to one another. In its scale, scope, and complexity, this transformation is unlike anything humankind has experienced before. We are already witnessing it unfold and we must encounter it in an integrated and comprehensive manner. The response to this drastic change of world order involves all participants of the global polity, from the public and private spheres to academic and civil societies, from young to old, from human beings to all of creation. Since the stakes are so high, there must be a prophetic engagement from the Church. There is a need for Church communities, clergy and

laity, who would consciously engage with the current 4IR and to be prophetic voices that can both point out the dangers hidden within it as well as embrace its potential in enhancing Church life. There is a need for Church communities to be in the forefront of dealing with COVID-19 in a safe and integrated manner. Technological advancements and global pandemics drive transformation around the world and can cause ripple effects on societies, institutions and economies. They have the potential to bring a fundamental change in the identity of human beings in issues related to sense of self, mental health, privacy, notions of ownership, consumption patterns, times of work and leisure, careers, skills, inter-personal relations and so on and so forth. Here is an opportunity for the renewal of Church life, even amidst challenges, to create faith communities offering hope, grace and love to the world.

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# A Critical Review of National Education Policy 2020

*- George K. Alex\**

The National Education Policy (NEP) must cherish the values enshrined in the Constitution of India such as life, liberty, equality, justice and fraternity. India has a long trajectory of education reforms which hailed from the 1835 Minutes of Lord Macaulay. During the post-independence period, the Government of India introduced commissions and review committees to reorient our education policy as a part of nation-building. During the 1950s the Central Government stressed the democratization of Indian society and it became the core of the education policy. The report of the University Education Commission (1949) presented by Dr S. Radhakrishnan observed that the policy objective should be the general welfare of the nation and that education is not merely training the intellect of the students but shaping the nation. Thus, the first education commission's objectives were the modernization of Indian society, empowerment of democracy etc. The report envisioned, Universities as the organs of civilization, and argued that the study of social science is a pre-requisite to build consciousness in social justice, and above all, it heralded an epoch of scientific and technological revolution through the strengthening of science and technology institutions. The report stipulated to build national and international fraternity by the affirmation of the pluralist culture of the nation.

After the long-cherished seventy years of the trajectory of liberal education policy, we have entered into the age of globalization and techno-capitalist regime. There is no doubt that time demands qualitative changes in education. While we are critically scrutinizing the prime objectives of the National Education Policy 2020, we are raising a couple of pertinent questions. Is such a policy capable of coping with the lofty aims of the nation? Is it an inclusive policy which ensures equity and justice, deep-rooted in Indian Constitution? Will the policy nurture the composite culture of the nation? To what extent will the policy contribute to the spirit of the national and international fraternity? This paper seeks to find the answers to the proposed questions in a nutshell.

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**Thwarting the concept of 'Democracy'**

Indian constitution envisages a democratic nation. Its cardinal principles are pronounced in the Preamble. K. M. Munshi rightly observed;

> The content of the word 'democratic' in the Preamble was made explicit by emphasizing, 'liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship and equality of status and opportunity'. Without these words an independent sovereign State may well become dictatorial or develop what is euphemistically called 'People's Government.[1]

The new education policy, in essence, challenges the Indian constitution without proposing a constitutional amendment. Education was the primary concern of the Central and State Governments, but in 1976 it was incorporated into the Concurrent list. In case of a conflict of interest in education, the decision of the Centre will become the final word. Through the new education policy, the rights of the State are deprived and the Central Government becomes the chief executive of education policy. In this particular context, the primary objective of the Central Government demands a critical scrutinization. The final draft of the policy distilled the 480-page document into 66 pages, with camouflaged language. According to the newly proposed policy, the Central Government can control every aspect of education including syllabus and curriculum, teacher selection, student's enrollment to higher education, and the finalization of research projects. In the very process of enrollment to higher education meritocracy is the operational principle, at the same time the document vociferously claims that it provides due importance to local preferences and special support for Under Represented Groups. Moreover, there is no word on reservation. The policy has deliberately avoided the educational needs of SCs and STs along with the rights of minorities. Why reservation is a demand of the Indian society is a pertinent question. There is no ambiguity in this regard that because of the existence of social inequality we need a policy of reservation. This is not for the mere sake of social leveling but for the strengthening of Indian democracy. The word democracy is thus

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[1]  K. M. Munshi, *Indian Constitutional Documents: Pilgrimage to Freedom,* Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, (Second edition-2012), Vol 1, p.192.

animated through various policies in India. Education was a strong device to ensure a vibrant democratic system in the country.

## Strengthening "Social Exclusion"

The strength of democracy lies in its potential to operate in an inclusive manner. The establishment of National Testing Agency (NTA), and its stage wise assessment process will deny higher education opportunities to millions. Reduction of the number of educational institutions, time bounded phasing out of affiliated colleges, and the demand to increase number of students in colleges in between 3000-25000 impose major challenges to the existing educational institutions. Furthermore, minority institutions may be wiped out or have to surrender their autonomy. The policy document assured administrative and financial autonomy in word, but there is no mechanism to provide academic autonomy in the policy paper.

The linking of education institutions with industries and assigning too much importance to skill development will reduce educational institutions as an appendage of industry. Modern societies treat education as a process of shaping man not strengthening economy. The 1948 education policy said that universities must "provide leadership in politics and administration, the professions, industry and commerce". The primary aim of education is to "enable the country to attain, in as short a time as possible, freedom from want, disease and ignorance, by the application and development of scientific and technical knowledge." The new education policy claims to place Sustainable Development Goals at the core of the education, with a thrust to "transforming India, that is Bharat" on the basis of Indian ethos. Indianization of education system and Graded assessment without reservation will not promote the policy's vociferous claim of "equitable" and "holistic" education; instead it will strengthen an "elitist", "exclusionary" education system.

Exclusion is the fundamental operational strategy of the National Education Policy-2020. The policy claims that the curriculum must include basic arts, crafts…etc. The objective of this curriculum frame-work is to produce "skilled labour". At the operational level the policy proposes an option for multiple entry and exit possibility to reduce drop out rate in education. However, at no point the policy enquires the reasons of the increasing dropout rate. Satheesh Gouda and T. V.

Sekher have conducted a study on "Factors Leading to School Dropouts in India".[2]  The study pointed out that; "About 14 percent of the children never attended the school and 11 percent dropped out of school for various reasons. It was observed that the dropout was high among the children belonging to Muslim, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe families."

The reasons for dropout indicated in the study included illiteracy and unemployment of the parents.[3] The improvement of the economic status of SC/ST and minority families is essential for the improvement of the literacy level and educational progression. Unfortunately, the policy undermines the weaker sections and uses the term "Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups-(SEDGs)" to denote such communities (NEP pp. 25-26). Above all the policy recommends Special Education Zones (SEZs) for SEDGs. The policy observes that such groups are geographically oriented sections.  To improve the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), the policy paper suggests an integration of vocational education and skill development under skilled masters from the locality. The proposed examples of such vocational courses include gardening, pottery, weaving, …etc. This proposal consciously ignores the strategies of social inclusion of the SC/ST and minorities within the caste ridden social structure of India. At the same time the policy strengthens social exclusion, caste discrimination, and subjugation through the geographical and cultural demarcation of the communities in the name of SEZs.

The National Education Policy-2020 demands a thorough revision. It is a challenge to the federal structure of the nation. It marks the rise of a unitary state. A cultural homogenization is the under-pinning strategy of the policy which questions the plurality of the nation. Overemphasis on Hindi and Sanskrit denigrate the vernacular languages and denies the fundamental right to information for the majority. The policy will deprive many communities including linguistic and cultural minorities from the fuller participation in the political and economic life of the nation.

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[2]  Sateesh Gouda M , Dr.T.V.Sekher, Factors Leading to School Dropouts in India: An Analysis of National Family Health Survey-3 Data, IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME) e-ISSN: 2320–7388,p-ISSN: 2320–737X Volume 4, Issue 6 Ver. III (Nov - Dec. 2014), PP 75-83 www.iosrjournals.org
[3]  Ibid.

# The NEP 2020: A Road Map for Privatisation

*- Sunny Jacob SJ\**

The vision of the new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions "creating an education system, holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, and aligned to the needs of the 21st century and 2030 Sustainable Development Goals". This policy is all set to pave the way for a new education system in the country. The government claims that the NEP-2020 is a paradigm shift in India's education.

In order to understand the Policy, one must place it in the larger context of the Modi Government's overall policy framework. Policies such as- Foreign, Economic, Labour, Tribal, Industrial, Agricultural, Land, Environmental, Farmers, NE, Disinvestment, J&K, Defense, CAA, NRC are some of them. Education policy cannot be seen as a separate entity. All these policies have a Nationalist Political goal. NEP 2020 is actually a shift from the two previous Education policies.

*The Education Commission (1964-66)*, also known as the 'Kothari Commission', **called for equal educational opportunities in order to achieve national integration and greater cultural and economic development.** A few suggestions from the commission have found place in the NEP 2020 as well, *but two important recommendations have been left out:* They are- an educational approach that is based on *Universal human values.* Not only is this omitted, **it is replaced by "Indian values" in the NEP 2020,** along with Constitutional values (Stress on FD and not FR). Second is, **The *Common School System*** was extensively emphasized in the commission's report in 1968. However, **the NEP 2020 does not make any mention** of the same.

Dr. K. Kasturirangan Committee, submitted its report on May 31, 2019. It sought to address the challenges of: (i) access, (ii) equity, (iii) quality, (iv) affordability, and (v) accountability faced by the current education system. This was modified after suggestions received from the peoples and groups. Cabinet approved the revised Draft and declared the NEP 2020 on 29th July 2020. NEP 2020 is divided into 4 parts. I. School Education, II. Higher Education, III. Other Key Areas of Focus, IV. Making it Happen.

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**School Education (Part I Ch. 1-8)**

**Universal Access:** The NEP 2020 has provisions to ensure universal access to school education at all levels- preschool to secondary.

**Higher Education (HE):** Higher Education in India is going to have a series of reforms. (Part II, Ch. 9-19) All these reform proposals will be implemented from now on in a time-phased manner. The ultimate aim, as the document says, is "producing engaged, productive, and contributing citizens for building an equitable, inclusive, and plural society".  It is also aimed at "ending the psychological slavery imposed on us with British education!" All these proposals sound very progressive and innovative, however a deeper look at the provisions of the policy shows that it is not so illuminating. It is ironic that NEP's claims to 'provide education to historically marginalized, disadvantaged, and underrepresented groups' lays the roadmap for privatisation of higher education.

**Issues of Concern**
India's first visionary PM, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and our first Education Minister, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, pioneered the concepts of 'education for all' and 'education for social change'. Many social groups and minorities apprehend that they will be affected by the NEP if it is implemented in its present form. Minorities are a social reality that has been recognized by our Constitution. The Muslim community makes for a major chunk of that minority-pie and Christians contributed largely to the education sector India. Christians are only 2.4% of India's total population.

***One of the concerns*** regarding NEP 2020 is its non-inclusive approach. It confines itself for seeking inspiration through the institutions of higher learning only from Ancient India. Educational institutions that flourished in Medieval and Modern India seem to have been skipped altogether. There is no mention of the glorious progress made by post-Independence India in the field of education. It is intriguing to see the contribution of Aligarh Muslim University, Jamia Millia Islamia, Banaras Hindu University, Jawaharlal Nehru University and several top-ranking Christian institutions in the country, is missing in the policy document.

**The second concern** is the near absence of the word 'minorities' in the entire document. To be specific, it has been mentioned only once in the NEP 2020 (Section 6.2.4). 2 other times it uses the word minorities along with SC/ST. Minorities are also worried about the policy's silence on the Rights of Minority educational institutions enshrined in Article 30 of the Constitution. Ensuring Right to Equitable Access to Education for all citizens is the mandate given by the Constitution of India to the Government. The NEP talks of adopting creativity, rational thinking, and a holistic approach. It appears paradoxical in a political climate that crushes dissent, hates probing questions, and promotes majoritarianism.

**The third concern** is regarding the overarching tilt of the NEP towards centralization of the education system that will weaken our federal polity as a natural consequence. With the 'light but Tight' policy, the control mechanisms are going to be more bureaucratic in nature (CABE, PARAKH, RSA, SSSA, SCERT, HECI, HEGC, and a host of other standard setting and Accreditation set ups) will be in place.

**The Fourth Concern** is of School Complex. The policy is not specific about whether the Minority institutions come under the School Complex. In the chapter 7, it talks; "To further enhance cooperation and positive synergy among schools, including between public and private schools, the twinning/pairing of one public school with one private school will be adopted across the country, ……..". (Ch. 7.10). There is anxiety over the allocation of funds, maintenance of educational standards, the amalgamation of weaker institutions into some other entity, sharing of resources (both infrastructure and expertise), the location and accessibility of the proposed new education complexes.

**The Fifth Concern** is *of reservations or affirmative action(s)*. The NEP fails to recognize the social and educational backwardness. Historically, in India, educational backwardness of a particular community is not because of economic incapacity, but due to social oppression and denial of opportunity. Different communities suffer different levels of oppression and based on the level of oppression and backwardness, reservation and scholarships are provided. NEP 2020 fails to recognize this social reality, but talks only on the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs).

Concern for education is a concern for future generations and for the future of humanity. For us NEP 2020 is a call for self-introspection and setting priorities.

At this juncture Christian Educationists are called to show the way. Our institutions must be beacons of innovation and creativity, modernism based on our living tradition in the 21 Century. As the NEP 2020 talks about 8 Key principles, we must work on actualizing them.
1. Respect for Diversity & Local Context
2. Equity & Inclusion
3. Community Participation
4. Use of Technology
5. Emphasize Conceptual Understanding
6. Accepting the Unique Capabilities of students
7. Critical thinking and Creativity
8. Continuous Review.

They are excellent principles, in tune with the Christian Education. For government they may remain only in the document and may try to by-pass these. We must take the lead to actualize these. We must collaborate and network with all progressive educators and organisations to check the excessive push for corporatization at the cost of the poor, expose the ideological undercurrents in the policy and place alternate, progressive, inclusive and forward-looking education pedagogy for all.  **Pope Francis** urged us to "unite efforts in a broad educational alliance to form mature people, capable of overcoming fragmentation and opposition and rebuild the fabric of relationships for a more fraternal humanity".

We must plan out how we are going to empower our stakeholders, uphold diversity and unity as given in the Constitutions, reach out the marginalized, train our teachers, make education more relevant and in tune with Christian vision. As Christian educators, our task is to refresh and deepen our spirituality, so that we are able to face the challenges ahead with proper discernment, resilience and grit.

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# The National Educational Policy is Liberative or Enslaving - A Review

*- Latha Paul\** and *Joycia Thorat*†

## Introduction

Education is meant to be empowering, inclusive, equitable, liberative and accessible both in its content, pedagogy and logistics. What is expected from such a quality education is one which opens up the minds and thoughts of individuals in search of truth and facts of life, scientific and innovative skills, inventions and ventures that would add quality and value to the lives of people; that would build and nurture values of community in a mutually supportive, nurturing, empowering, liberative and fulfilling manner over against being exploitative enslaving and depriving. Such a quality education should necessarily have institutions that are accessible to every pupil in the country. There should be appropriate infrastructure that would facilitate learning and would help acquire information and knowledge. Well qualified equipped teachers are the essence of a quality education process. One of the most liberative empowering equipping part of a quality education is its content/ curriculum. Curriculum not to fulfill any political social or religious agenda of any community or political dispensation but one that would be independent, unbiased and scientific that would lead the students to the formation, that would make responsible, productive, innovative, creative and empowered citizens.

## The Indian Context

The current Indian context is the premise from which we need to look at the NEP to see how constructive or destructive it is. Is the policy liberative or enslaving? how scientific and traditional, how equitable, just or patriarchal or how egalitarian this act is? New Educational Policy needs to be seen vis-à-vis the above. Before going into the merits and demerits of the NEP we also need to look at few other related issues and the process adopted: NEP cannot be seen as an

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isolated policy. It needs to be seen in the socio-political context. Present Indian context is defined by varied experiences in relation to NEP. Socio Economic experience of large majority of Indian people remain hugely unchanged. Inequality, deprivation, exploitation and dehumanization continue to devastate people and communities. Education and higher education more specifically, thought to change lives for the better and help upward mobility of the marginalized, is still inaccessible to a large section of society.

There is a perceived fear of systematic annihilation of constitutional mechanism in the country including democratic polity, supreme court, election commission, human rights commission, Institutions of Higher Education and Research etc. that were supposed to be the last resort for the vulnerable to safeguarding the rights and freedom of the victims of systemic failures. Present establishment at the Center evidently exposes its philosophy and agenda that is majoritarian, fascist, communal and divisive. Everything that happens in the country seems to be in concurrence with this philosophy and agenda. Civil Society voices, dissent and disagreements are not treated as constructive but as enemies acting against the State. Plural and diverse ideas and thoughts that make any action comprehensive and inclusive have been systematically eliminated.

## NEP - A Liberative or Enslaving Policy

NEP can only be seen as another tool in concurrence with the philosophy and agenda of saffronization. Education being a central subject, the very way the NEP Ordinance was promulgated sidelining the State governments and other stakeholders defeats the purpose of such an act and it arrogantly displays the ulterior motives behind the exercise. Appropriating the rights of the States is a joke played on the Federal Structure of the Country and most dangerous aspect of it is that its effort is to centralize education and eventually bring the Nation centralized and saffronized. Centralizing education also means knowledge production and its distribution are under the control of the Central establishments and its agencies. Apart from all other destruction it would cause to eradicate plural system of education in the country, it unambiguously displays the dangerous dictatorial agenda. (Dictatorships in history started with controlling education, learning and thought, to have control over their citizens)

Even though we follow modern curriculum, the education in India always reflects the Socio Religious Cultural and Political ethos that was followed and practiced for centuries. Caste, Class, gender and Religion played crucial role in deciding who has the right to education, knowledge and free thought. Therefore, every effort in reforming Education in terms of content and pedagogy needs to make constant effort to make education more free, equitable, accessible to all, empowering and liberating. It should help liberate education from the clutches of caste, class and gender powerplay. However, what is visible in the NEP is an attempt to reinforce more hegemonically, all the evils of the past that deprived, excluded and kept enslaved the large majority of the population from impoverished Dalit Adivasi communities and women. Education as a means of upward mobility was appropriated by the minority from the dominant section of society constituted of 'upper class' 'upper caste' population. (A simple general assessment of representation of Bureaucracy, Judiciary, Defence and Police establishment, Private Industrial establishment etc. would demonstrate the fact that higher education has thus far been a privilege of a dominant minority and has been an effective tool of exclusion and deprivation for a large section of vulnerable society.

Accessibility to education is an important aspect to be taken care of by any education policy in India. The Government has a responsibility to make education accessible to all. Making Schools and Centers of Higher Education – Colleges and Technical Education Centers - available in every nook and corner of the country is called for. Infrastructure, Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff, Teaching Materials and Tools and Accessories and a Conducive and Inclusive Environment are necessary to ensure access to education. We cannot undermine the continuing influence of caste, class, gender and feudal dynamics on education. Unless concerted efforts are made these forces would continue to exclude and deprive a large section of the population. Unfortunately, NEP instead of addressing these issues seem to be colluding with the perpetrators of the agenda of exclusion denying access to millions their right to quality education.

It is nothing but an effort to dismantle all what has been achieved over the past many centuries of sustained hard efforts by the social and religious reformers to ensure social justice and offer dignity and life to millions belonging to the vulnerable section of the society and to

reinforce the very systems, structures and process that promoted exclusion and oppression based on the agenda of dominant communities. This effort can only be seen as an assault on the history and legacy of progress gained by the vulnerable communities in terms of social mobility, knowledge and free thought. World over when people question and unlearn some of the traditions and practices that divided and dehumanized people on the basis of race, caste class and gender the new education policy of India intends to go back in history and reinforce the very same enslaving processes and ethos.

**Critical Aspects of the Policy**

Privatization and greater autonomy to private institutions are two of the major thrusts of the NEP. Greater Privatization undoubtably would dismantle the public education system and commercialize education. This is nothing but abdication of constitutional mandate and an effort to bypass rights guaranteed by the constitution. With the enactment of Right to Education Act 2009, education became the fundamental right of children between 6 and 14 years. As elementary education came under the purview of RTE, private players have started moving to higher education which is more lucrative and free of RTE.. Opening up the 'Education Market' to private players both domestic and international and according to them greater autonomy is nothing but abdication of the Constitutional Mandate handing over this huge 'education market' to the private players.

Greater emphasis on privatization is an attempt to dismantle and bypass the constitutional provisions brought in the country over many decades of efforts to bridge inequality, address accessibility of education and restore dignity of the vulnerable sections of the society. Private players in higher education would be least interested in the provisions including reservation, affordability and the like.

As per NEP, research topics are to be decided by a national research association. Researcher's right to choose topic of their interest is thrown to winds. India is one of the Nations that have historically given least importance to research for various reasons and now spends just about 0.8 percent of GDP. This is too little investment for as enormous a country as India. Therefore enlisting topics of national significance in order to ensure research facilitated by a National Research

Association in every possible area of scientific research, say in chemistry, physics, biotechnology, medicine, aerospace, anthropology, social sciences, communication and the like to enhance quality of life, although may seem a welcome step, depriving the researcher of his or her right to the choice of topic and centralizing the same through NRA would at best be seen as part of an authoritarian agenda. Research has to be free and NRA's role could only be appreciated as a facilitator through and enlisting critical areas needing research and ensuring funds for the researcher, unbiased and devoid of any hidden agenda.

## Conclusion

Would we as Indians want a new parliament structure or well planned schools and educational institutions all over India including the remotest parts. Would we prefer Rafael and arms or children with happier childhood which can bring dividends? Wrong priorities will lead our nation into a nation of unequal citizens, disempowered people and weak communities. Let the nations power and strength be seen in our education and quality of the people we raise and not in the power of arms, symbolic structures and divided communities. The purpose of education is to develop sound minds and fine personalities with the highest values of an inclusive, just and peaceful society. Education policy has the power to overturn the quality of a nation in a generation if sufficient and quality resources are invested. What kind of India would we like to see? Let the education policy serve the purpose of upholding the values enshrined in the Constitution rather than create a nation of people who hate each due to the growing inequalities.

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### TEXT: ACTS 2:1-21

# Re-reading the Pentecost Narrative in the Light of Democratic Ideals
*- Swarup Bar\**

The Pentecost narrative in Acts 2:1-21 has been interpreted in various ways. It has been interpreted by various groups to highlight their particular emphases in the ministry and mission of the Church in the Spirit. As the primal event, ushering in the birth of the Church, the episode is of tremendous significance for the nature of the Church and the wider human community. The Pentecost event gave birth to a new type of community, a community featuring diversity and empowerment of especially the weak and the voiceless. Careful exegesis of the passage would reveal that it is not only about a miraculous event touching and transforming individual lives but also about forming a renewed community. The Pentecost narrative, coupled with its citation of Joel's prophecy in Peter's speech is rather a subversive event, overturning societal norms of who can prophesy or speak and about empowering the voiceless, vulnerable and marginalised. It is also about breaking down the barriers between race, language, ethnicity, culture and so on and so forth. Communities and nations have striven to realise these ideals through various means. One of the widely acclaimed ways through which countries seek to realise these goals is through the process of democracy. This Bible study would attempt to explore some ideals which are often linked to the establishment of true democracy.

## Democratic community: Remembering, Renewal and Restructuring

One of the significant ways in which a democratic community is envisaged is through reordering or restructuring of the society according to the norms of well-established democratic traditions and

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practices. At the centre of this project lies the important aspect of community-building. Communities not only form the core of any democratic process but are repositories of communitarian traditions which societies need to remember and recollect. Here the roles of cultural and religious resources are significant. The potential of the Pentecost narrative to provide us theological signposts in this sense, may be worth looking at. The narrative provides us a model for envisioning a new community by recollecting the past and ushering in a new community of radical renewal.

The remembering is done through linking the event with the Jewish festival of the Pentecost, also known as the 'Feast of the Weeks', which was one of the three harvest festivals. It observed the offering of the first fruits of the wheat harvest (Lev. 23:16) and celebrated seven weeks after the feast of the Unleavened Bread. In fact, the feast of the weeks, in which new offerings were made, came to be considered as the closing of the fifty days. Interestingly, the loaves offered in this feast were to be cooked with leaven signifying a return to normal living after the season of Unleavened Bread.[1]

The Pentecost festival seems to be one that turns away from the prevailing situation to inaugurate a new season and time for all. It was also a time when new members were welcomed in Jewish cultic communities. For example, the Festival of Weeks was very significant for the Qumran community, as it marked the time which celebrated the entry of new members in the community.[2] Therefore, the Pentecost festival is traditionally geared towards new beginnings, formation of new communities and renewal. Thus, renewal and restoration are at the heart of community-building.

Another significant tradition attached to this event in later Judaism was the giving of the Law at Sinai. Scholars have different opinions about the link between the feast of the Pentecost and the Sinai tradition. However, some scholars think that liturgical texts used for the feast show a covenant understanding of the same. Pentecost is therefore not only about the outpouring of the Spirit, but about receiving God's laws

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[1]  George T.Montague, *Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition, A Commentary on the Principal Texts of the Old and New Testaments* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 274,275.

[2] Montague, *Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition*, 275.

and renewal of the covenant.[3]   Significant for our purposes is the trajectory that ushering in a new community needs a restructuring of the order, according to God's values and God's laws. The remembrance of the covenant with God and the episode of the deliverance in the life of Israel provided an option to recall God's acts of justice and liberation.

The Pentecost event, with its Jewish associations of new beginning and inclusion of new members and the renewal of the covenant and restructuring thus become significant for envisioning a new democratic community. A truly democratic community similarly ought to recollect those well-proven democratic traditions, enshrined in the Constitution of any country, which represent the Law of the nation. A Constitution is "the harbinger of judicial, administrative, constitutional and legislative legal processes and institutions. The challenge of any Constitution is to be 'of the people, by the people, and for the people"[4]   Just as the Jewish community ought to recollect the Sinaitic covenant, any democratic nation ought to refer back to the Constitution, so that the nation may be constantly renewed and restructured according to its principles.

**Democratic representation: diverse and inclusive**

One of the important principles of democracy is that there should not be any discrimination based on the background of people. In a democracy there should be equal opportunity for those from different backgrounds, to participate in the wider processes of the society and the life of the nation. In other words, social and political life ought to have adequate representation of people from all different backgrounds.

In the Pentecost narrative we can safely say that the people in the upper room and the people gathered at the sound of the rushing wind bears a model for diverse and inclusive participation. The 120 people said to be gathered in the upper room during the Pentecost could be

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[3]  Thomas Venad, *Spirit, Word and Community in Acts: A Paradigm for Christian Life and Witness* (Delhi:  College of Theology/ISPCK,2011),126.
[4] Sudarshan Padmanabhan, "Democracy as Antimony: Procedural verses Substantive" in *Indian Democracy: Contradictions and Reconciliations* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2020), 23

representative of a motley group, mainly Jesus' disciples, supposedly of both genders, who were still trying to figure out the implications of their Lord's death and resurrection and his promises.

On the other hand, the crowd that gathered, hearing the sound of the rushing wind were actually Jewish, yet they represented the various nations of the world. They were actually diaspora Jews who immigrated to Palestine long ago or just had come to be part of the festivities. However, they seem to represent the whole world and some scholars think that the list of nations was not arbitrary but rather corresponds to the ancient listing of nations according to the twelve signs of the zodiac.[5]

According to some scholars the purpose of introducing the list of nations (around fifteen nations and peoples) is to symbolically represent the whole world.[6] Metaphorically, Jewish tradition held that when God gave the Law, he spoke in seventy tongues at Sinai to the seventy nations of the world. In Luke-Acts, it is the offer of universal salvation that is made through this imagery. Although the list represents the Jews, it makes an inclusive appeal to both Jews and gentiles.[7] So it is clear here that the new community of the Spirit is a diverse and inclusive one from different backgrounds and places. The community of the Spirit so to say breaks barriers of language, ethnicity, region, locality and so on. On the day of Pentecost then the whole community received the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not only for the prerogative of a select few but for everyone who believes in the Lord.[8]

Putting this into the context of our discussions on democracy, it can be said that representation from various communities and regions in the political process of a nation is of paramount importance. Equal opportunity for every section of the society to take part in elected bodies, from the lowest to the highest level, is one of the tests of true democracy. Here dominance of one region or people group on other or

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[5] Montague, *Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition*, 281.

[6] Venad, *Spirit, Word and Community in Acts: A Paradigm for Christian Life and Witness,* 154

[7] Venad, *Spirit, Word and Community in Acts: A Paradigm for Christian Life and Witness,* 155.

[8] Venad, Spirit, *Word and Community in Acts: A Paradigm for Christian Life and Witness,* 141.

suppression of one particular community in social and political representation is not what is expected. Often this process of equal representation is subverted due to power-caste nexus especially in Indian democracy.[9] The Pentecost narrative gives us a sure theological footing in equal representation of diverse people while we engage in any democratic process.

## Democratic empowerment: bold and prophetic proclamation

Envisioning a democracy always includes empowerment of the marginalised and options for sharing of powers among the public. In a democracy, power belongs to the people, especially those who are in the lower rungs of the society. Empowering and emboldening the vulnerable and the oppressed and the minority sections of the society are part of the project of democracy. It is a prophetic task of a democracy to empower the marginalised and proclaim the values of liberty, equality and fraternity.

We find the above trajectories in the Pentecost narrative too. Here the empowerment of the disciples happened through fire and the gift of the tongues. This also has reference to the Jewish Sinaitic tradition where the Sinai revelation is a voice out of the heavens and came to earth as great fire and everybody heard God speaking out of the fire (Deut 4:36). Interestingly, the Greek-speaking Jewish philosopher Philo, representing Hellenistic Judaism, speaks about flaming fire and breath, the power of God manifested in audible voice, which can be seen as part of the Sinaitic tradition.[10]

  The filling of the disciples with the Spirit leads to proclamation of the word. This proclamation of the word is primarily prophetic. The Spirit transforms them from a band of fearful disciples to a bold community of praise and proclamation.[11]  When we read in the context of Peter's reference to Joel's prophecy, the Pentecost event becomes a prophetic event bearing eschatological overtones. With the outpouring of the

[9]  Gurpreet Mahajan and Surinder S Jodhka, "Religions, Democracy and Governance: Spaces for the Marginalised in Contemporary India" *Economic and Political Weekly*, JANUARY 7, 2012, Vol. 47, No. 1 (JANUARY 7, 2012), 45

[10]  Montague, *Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition*, 278

[11]  Venad, *Spirit, Word and Community in Acts: A Paradigm for Christian Life and Witness,* 145, 146.

Spirit, the messianic age has begun. The significant dimension to this prophetic speech is the promise of God's salvation and the formation of the new community with a universal scope.

This pouring out results- in the promise of seeing visions and dreams by both young and old, by men and women, the downtrodden and the servants (Joel 2:28,29) - can be read in the context of democratic discourse. Political democracy should take into account social democracy as one of its core principles.[12] Without social empowerment, equality, upliftment of the marginalised, proper political processes cannot be set afoot as they are all interrelated. The Pentecost event encourages us not to neglect the empowerment of the marginalised while we argue for establishing true democracy.

## Democratic voice: freedom of expression and language

No democracy is complete without freedom of speech and expression. Suppression of our right to speak up and stifle dissenting voices cannot be part of any true democracy. Democratic processes, rather, should ensure that voices are heard, especially of those who are marginalised and oppressed. Additionally, people should be free to express themselves in the language of their choice. The hegemony of dominant languages has no place in a proper democracy.

 The Pentecost narrative is again a model of free speech expressed in diverse languages, even in foreign languages. The disciples were said to have been speaking in tongues. Now, scholars note that speaking in tongues (glossolalia) was not uncommon among the early Christian community. There are instances of these in the other portions of the Scriptures like episodes relating to Paul (Acts 19:6, 1 Cor. 12-14). But this narrative also involves other languages or in other words foreign languages other than their mother tongues.[13] So Pentecost for Luke is a

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[12] Surinder K. Shukla, "Democracy in India: Issues in India" *The Indian Journal of Political Science,* October - December 1994, Vol. 55, No. 4 (October - December 1994), 402.

[13] Venad, *Spirit, Word and Community in Acts: A Paradigm for Christian Life and Witness* 147.

miracle of proclamation of multilingual communication. It 'inaugurates the vernacularisation of the good news'.[14]

The Spirit empowers the disciples to carry out their witness universally and boldly in a variety of languages. In fact, the text suggests that each one heard them in their own language. This would perhaps mean that there was a 'miracle of hearing' too.[15]  But whatever the miracle, the Pentecost event seemed to be a reversal of the Tower of Babel story (Genesis 11:1-9) where confusion of tongues took place and people could not understand each other. This event, in contrast is marked by diversity of languages spoken which were intelligible and understandable for everyone. In this the Pentecost narrative cuts through language divides and supremacist tendencies of dominant languages.

In the context of democratic discourse, it is important that people of various regions and ethnicities in a country are able to express their social or political opinion in their own languages or languages of their choice. Moreover, voices of dissent and freedom of expression should be one of the paramount privileges given to people in a democracy. The democratic voice of the people which includes speaking our own mind in our own languages, is one of the significant ways in which a proper democracy is established.

Thus, the reading of the Pentecost narrative enables us to imagine theological foundations for our core convictions of true democracy.

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[14]  Venad, *Spirit, Word and Community in Acts: A Paradigm for Christian Life and Witness*, 148

[15]  Montague, *Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition*, 281.

# BOOK REVIEW

**Bethel Krupa. The Identity Struggle of Dalit Christians: Significance for Christian Education. Delhi: ISPCK, 2020. Pages 383. Price Rs. 475.00.**

Bethel Krupa has to be congratulated for bringing out her Doctoral Dissertation submitted to the South Asia Theological Research Institute, Serampore, in the form of a book. Her approach is descriptive, analytical and interpretative. She has used simple language to convey profound ideas. The style of presentation is both journalistic and scholarly, so that the reader would find it interesting and thought provoking. Certainly this volume will be beneficial to the theological community, parish ministers and lay people, who comprise the witnessing unit of the Church. As the title indicates the key theme of this book is: THE IDENTITY STRUGGLE OF THE 'DALIT CHRISTIANS'. The author feels that more than 'Dalit Awakening', 'Dalit Liberation' and 'Dalit Empowerment', the issues confronting the Dalit Christians today have much to do with their identity, as God's people, entrusted with God's mission in contemporary Indian context.

Hence, she explores the implications of that struggle for the Faith Education in the local congregations. That being the central focus of the Book, Bethel Krupa calls the several Christian denominations, not only to re-vitalize their Christian Education Ministries, but also to re-envision and re-invent the whole process of doing Christian Education, in such a manner as to contribute to the formation of the authentic Dalit Christian Identity, amidst several challenges and inhibiting factors. The content of the book is divided into six parts that are presented as six chapters. The *first* part is introduction, wherein the researcher highlights the specific concerns that are addressed here namely, *"This book seeks to address this dilemma (i.e. dilemma of identity) of the Dalit Christians. It understands the Dalit Christians Identity in India as a complex web of double alienation, double discrimination, double socio-cultural and religious displacement."(15). Further she adds, "It helps the church to reformulate its perception of its educational activities, to enable the Church to become relevant to the context by being people centered rather than content based."(8)*

After elaborating the concerns specified above, Krupa proceeds to make an in depth analysis of the Identity Struggle of the Dalit Christians in Part *Two*. She discusses the larger issues from the historical, religious, political, socio-economic and cultural perspectives. It needs to be stated that, in general the Dalit Christians share the plight of the entire Dalit Community. To summarize they are as follows: Historically, the Dalits have been a Displaced People. (28 & 305). Religiously, kept outside the purview of the organized religion. (35, 36 & 109). Politically, powerless (9 & 34). Socially, caste-less people, in a caste-ridden society (9). Economically, bound by the Varnashrama Dharma (27) and Culturally, the untouchables (14 & 29).

After scientifically investigating the roots of poverty and the enslavement of the Dalits to the oppressive caste-class power structure, the author gives a graphic description of the Dalit uprisings down the centuries. In this connection, she draws attention to the role of Mahatma Jothi Rao Phule (10) and Baba Saheb Ambedkar (36, 38 & 73), who had given an ideological foundation to the Dalit Struggles and fought for their rights. At this juncture, the researcher states that the Dalit Identity Struggle today has taken a new turn. First, it is an act of rejecting the given identities and forging ahead to acquire a new unique identity. She affirms that, *"Identities are no more considered as given rather they are the result of the processes of social construction and reconstruction. Dalits' struggle for identity is also a process of deconstructing and an attempt to reconstruct a new identity as human kind." (346).* Second, as in the former days it is not fighting for liberation, but striving towards an authentic identity in a casteist society. In order to support the claims Bethel Krupa quotes M.E. Prabhakar who had observed that, *"..Dalits are no more ashamed of being Dalits, they have a proud history and culture of their own from ancient times and distinct from that of their caste oppressors" (74).*

After a penetrating analysis of the complexities involved in the identity struggle of the Dalits, that are in some sense common to Christian Dalits too, the author reviews critically the Biblical, Theological, Sociological and Psychological responses, to the subject discussed above in Part *Three*.

First, the Biblical passages were interpreted by the early missionaries to serve the purpose of indoctrination, which developed an exclusivist mentality among the new converts and their posterity. Further, the focus was on Bible knowledge, without examining its practical implications. For value orientation they used residential schools, colleges and hostels. There was no people based Christian Education Program, to bring about a psychological revolution aimed at eradicating caste prejudices.  However, in recent years the 'Dalit Liberative Hermeneutics (89 & 107) propounded by K. Jesuratnam, Monica Melanchthon and Peniel Raj Kumar Rufus is contributing immensely to the Dalit Identity Struggle. Secondly, the Theological foundations of the Christian Nurture Ministries during the early missionary era were more pietistic in nature, geared inward purity. The content of Sunday School, Women's Fellowship, Men's Fellowship, and the Confirmation classes' curriculum, was so structured to develop interest in Evangelism and Church expansion. The Protestant Missionaries in general did not openly condemn untouchability. However, they planted churches and established schools in interior Dalit villages. In some sense it accounts for maintaining caste differences in the churches till date. However, the Dalit Theology that had emerged a few decades ago by the concerted efforts of A.P.Nirmal, James Massey, Kottapalli Wilson, V.Devasahayam and Sathianathan Clarke, is developing a new mindset among Dalit Christians. Their interpretation of the Exodus narrative (Deut.26:5-12) has inspired the Dalit Struggle for affirming their identity in the present context. Further, the suffering servant passages in Isaiah have enabled them to see Christ as a 'Dalit Christ', who made Himself one with the outcasts of His day and died as an abandoned person on the Cross. (96, 98 & 112). Thus, the Dalit Theologians have portrayed the God of the Bible as a God of Sensitivity, Solidarity and Liberty.

Sociologically, although as noted earlier the Dalit Christians in every respect share the humiliation, subjugation and ostracization meted out to the entire Dalit community in India, Kottapalli Wilson and James Massey have brought to focus, the further exclusion of the Dalit Christians at all levels of Indian societal life. Earlier when Kottapalli Wilson pointed out that the Dalit Christians are "twice-alienated" (11 & 49) it was a jolt to the Christian Community in India. Later the

studies of James Massey had shed a fresh light on the 'multifaceted suffering or oppression' that has become the daily routine of the Dalit Christians. His shocking observation was that, *"Dalit Christian struggle includes fourfold discrimination: a) from the upper castes, b) from the Church, c) from the State and d) against Dalit Christians as they did with non-Christian Dalits." (16)*. Although the predicament of the Dalit Christians is very alarming as a seasoned Christian Educator Bethel Krupa calls for a paradigmatic shift in addressing their life and death issues. She remarks that, *"It requires a change in the perception of the Dalit issue itself. The time has come to affirm that, Dalit issue as a faith issue because discrimination is contrary to the gospel and the purpose of the Church's mission in the world. Church needs to own the predicament of Christians and struggle with them for a community that is just and inclusive" (181).* The appeal of the author is to see the identity struggle of the Dalit Christians not only as a sociological issue, but as a faith issue, drawing inspiration from the 'Nazareth Manifesto' (Lk. 4: 18-19).

Psychologically, the Researcher outlines the factors that had contributed to the 'Low self-esteem, Low self-image and Lack of confidence' (121) of the Dalits, that are common to the Christian Dalits too. Religiously, it is the Hindu doctrine of Karma that had blunted the cutting edges of their struggle to liberate themselves from what M. Azariah calls 'the wounded psyche' (116), so that they could not stand erect and affirm themselves. Socially, the process of their socialization made them to accept the given status, occupational roles and demeaning caste names assigned by the casteist system, which through subtle psychological mechanisms have conditioned their minds. *Krupa quotes Manodeep Daniel who had stated that, "Such conditioning, which makes a person accept and internalize defeat, inferiority and meaninglessness end up gripped with a crippled state of mind. In the Indian context, the crippling grips of the mental state may be described as 'Dalitness' (138).* Economically, according to the author the inequalities in housing, educational and medical facilities and employment opportunities, affect the Dalit's self-concept in general and self-identity in particular (120). To resolve the identity conflicts Bethel Krupa restates the solution offered by M.C. Rajan that, *"Healing process should involve both the deconstruction of the wounded psyche and reconstruction of the psyche which leads from strength to strength (124).*

The author who had discussed the Biblical, Theological, Sociological and Psychological responses to the issues confronting the "Identity Struggle of Dalit Christians" in the above mentioned pages, proceeds to examine the efficacy of the existing Christian Education Ministries in the churches, to facilitate the whole process of the Dalit Christian Identity, which is a life and death issue for the grass-root level Christians in contemporary Indian society. In this connection, she has travelled to the selected city, town and village congregations of her own Church of South India - Karimnagar Diocese extensively to secure the necessary data using both qualitative and quantitative research tools, through a case study method. The analysis and the interpretation of the findings through the Qualitative Research are presented in Part *Four*. So also the analysis and interpretation of the findings through Quantitative Research are reported through the tables in Part *Five*.

In the Sixth part of the Book, which is also the final chapter, Krupa gives an evaluation report of the findings in the first few pages, evolving the criteria based on the Conscientization Model of Paulo Freire (332). To state briefly, first the Christian Education Ministries are content based and information oriented. In the words of Paulo Freire it is a "Banking Model" of Education (141). There is no room for "Action-Reflection" in relation to Socio-Economic realities. Second, it is predominantly a "Domesticating" pattern of Teaching-Learning process (333). It is not liberative, in the sense it does not equip the learners to develop an 'alternative consciousness'. Third, it is more of a 'Problem-Solving', rather than 'Problem Posing- questioning' type of a Teaching Ministry (334). Four, it reinforces the "Culture of Silence" (315), instead of helping the parishioners to acquire what Paulo Freire calls a "Critical Awareness" (332). Finally, the Christian Education Programs are still geared towards creating a pietistic bent of mind with other worldly concerns, without attitudinal changes and kingdom values that inspire the Dalit Christian Identity Struggle. So, the focus is on "ortho-doxy" right belief and not "ortho-praxis- right action" (309 & 321).

Bethel Krupa offers her "Jesus' Praxis Oriented" Christian Education Model spelt out in the introduction, to actualize her vision in the concluding pages of the Book. She introduces that model saying that, *"...the educational framework of Jesus' Praxis Oriented Pedagogy" is*

*similar to that of Paulo Freire's Educational theory of liberation and freedom. (338).* Krupa outlines the principles to be followed, when this model is operationalized. She is confident that it would address the concerns highlighted in this book effectively. It is hoped that through her Post-Doctoral research she would undertake to explore, what this Church education model would actually involve when it is implemented, by trying it out on a controlled group and refine/perfect it, for adoption in the several local congregations (339-341). Since this book would be of immense value to the Parish ministers and also grass root level Church workers, besides those who comprise the theological community, it is worth translating into other Indian languages, especially Telugu, as Bethel Krupa has chosen one of the Telugu CSI Dioceses in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh for her case study.

**-** *Reviewed by* **Rev. Dr. Prof. Arun Gopal,** Former Christian Education Director, CSI Synod & Former Head, Dept. of Church Ministries, Pacific Theological College, Fiji Islands.

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