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**Vol. CXLI****No.05****June 2021***Contents***EDITORIAL**Ending *Dil ki doori...*- *Abraham Mathew*

223

**ARTICLES**

Towards Resuscitating the Creation an Ecocentric

Reading of Isaiah 43: 16-21

- *Aravind Jeyakumar Moniraj*

225

Caring for the Earth - 'Telluric-Erotic Spirituality'

- *Abraham Mathew*

231

Disaster Funding and COVID-19 Response of MDB's in India

- *Anuradha Munshi*

237

Domestic Workers in the Time of COVID 19:

Agony, Anguish and Adversity

- *Manoj Kumar Jena*

242

Gain the Soul in Motion: Obligatory Stratagems for

Christian Mission to *Nomads*- *J.W. Prakash*

249

**BIBLE STUDY**

Climate Justice

- *John Samuel*

263

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**Editor, Publisher & Printer:** Rev. Asir Ebenezer, National Council of Churches in India, P.B. No.: 205, Civil Lines, Nagpur - 440 001, Maharashtra India, **Phone:** +91-712-2531312, 2561464 **Fax:** +91-712-2520554 **Email:** <nccreview@ncci1914.com> **Managing Editor:** Communication Secretary **Printed at:** Shyam Brothers, Near ST Stand, Ganeshpeth, Nagpur **Owner:** Rev. Asir Ebenezer, National Council of Churches in India **Place of Publication:** National Council of Churches in India, P.B. No.: 205, Civil Lines, Nagpur-440 001, Maharashtra, India **Place of Printing:** Shyam Bros, Near ST Stand, Ganeshpeth, Nagpur **Website:** <https://ncci1914.com/ncc-review/>

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## EDITORIAL

### Ending *Dil ki doori...*

In a recent statement, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his desire to reduce *Dil ki doori* (distance from heart) and *Dilli ki doori* (distance from Delhi). This statement holds relevance in contemporary times as the distance of people from each other's hearts and from the political process is increasing in India. There is mounting fear among people due to the obscurity of the political process and mutual distrust among communities. Hate is being sowed among communities with a political motive of polarising people. This would serve parties well in consolidating votes. Unfortunately, the existing pattern of democracy in India functions mainly by counting the majoritarian opinion, thereby encouraging political parties to side with majority communities. It is observed that from 1990 onwards, mobilizing majority communities in states and electoral bodies, as caste coalition or as religious communities, became a powerful idea. Detaching themselves from their ideals, political parties now aim to consolidate a legitimate political majority. Within such a complex situation, minority consolidation is also engineered. Therefore, we now see that elections are managed and politicians are after political strategists. The outcome is the growth of populism where the interest of the 'powerful and majority' will always be given preference. The unorganised and minority sections will continue to live with the feeling of being alienated. Addressing this feeling of alienation is the responsibility of the state and failure to do so jeopardises basic democratic values. The government has a duty to be vigilant and to safeguard the interest of the minorities. It is incumbent on the government to remove this feeling of alienation and only then will the slogan raised by the prime minister have a positive impact on society.

India has been ranked 139 out of 149 countries in the list of UN World Happiness Report 2021 and we are much behind even our neighbouring countries Pakistan and Bangladesh. In order to bring happiness among the communities, a sense of mutuality and co-operation among communities should be developed and the government has a great role in bringing this about. Rampant hate speeches by political leaders including the leaders of ruling political

parties and sometimes even those in responsible administrative positions of the state is harmful and shameful. Any act of homogenizing Indian culture and traditions, undermining the multiplicity within the Indian social rhythm and spreading prejudice against the cultural aspects of smaller communities will increase the *Dil ki doori* between communities. The growing insecurity and fear among the communities further confine groups of people to their respective silos, creating deep wounds in their minds and rendering a recovery from such malady virtually impossible. If at all the Government is committed to end *Dil ki doori*, it has to be worked out genuinely to give an impression that the government stands for all and that justice will be maintained in all sectors of its involvement.

Along with *Dil ki doori* the *doori* (distance) between human beings and the rest of creation has also been increasing. The antagonistic attitude of human beings to nature complicates the created order, resulting in a crisis in ecological relationships. The recent happenings in Canada are an example of how quickly the earth is warming up. A country known for its cold weather has become one of the hottest now, also causing casualties. More than disruption in the climatic seasons, global warming also leads to deadly diseases, deprivation and displacement. Anthropogenic emissions are the main cause of global warming and hence human beings are responsible for this tragedy. The poor and the vulnerable communities remain the main victims of the environmental crisis. Their stories inform us about the politics of the so-called developed countries of the global north in accelerating climate change. These countries need to take the responsibility for reducing emission along with the developing countries and together, we need to work to enhance life. We must remember that for climate justice it is important to have economic justice and social justice as well. This issue of *NCC Review* has some articles on ecological crisis and faith imperatives.

Let us try to reduce the *doori* between minds, people and nature in order that all may have life and life in abundance.

**Rev. Dr. Abraham Mathew**

*The Executive Secretary*

*NCCI - Policy, Governance and Public Witness*



# Towards Resuscitating the Creation

## *An Ecocentric Reading of Isaiah 43:16-21*

- Aravind JeyakumarMoniraj\*

### Introduction

The created order of the earth is gradually disintegrating since the time of the emergence of the unsustainable development models that human beings have initiated. Environmental scientists opine that the present COVID 19 Pandemic is also due to the ecological imbalances that humankind has created in the name of development projects which destroys and disturbs entire ecosystems and habitats. In such an alarming situation what could be the solution to reorient ourselves in order to preserve the entire creation? Keeping this question in mind this short article aims at understanding the reasons for the present pandemic in the light of ecological crises and an effort has been made to read Isaiah 43:16-21 from an ecocentric perspective in order to assert and affirm a new created order which will place emphasis on ecocentrism as opposed to the currently prevalent anthropocentrism.

### 1. The Nexus Between COVID19 Pandemic and Contemporary Ecological Crises

For the past many decades, the planet earth is undergoing many natural catastrophes apart from the recent COVID19 pandemic; and these calamities are painful reminders that the entire creation is facing an unprecedented climate emergency which is likely to worsen in the future.<sup>1</sup> There is a common assumption that there hardly exists a connection between climate crisis and COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore, they should be discussed as separate subjects. On the one hand numerous scientific theories prove that the unexpected catastrophes that are being experienced on a regular basis are definite reminders that climate change and the origin and spread of COVID 19

\*Dr. Aravind JeyakumarMoniraj is the Associate Professor and Head of the Dept. of Old Testament at Gurukul Lutheran Theological College Research Institute, Chennai.

<sup>1</sup> Henrik F Lorentzen, Thomas Benfield, and et al., "COVID-19 is Possibly a Consequence of the Anthropogenic Biodiversity Crisis and Climate Changes," *Dan Med J67/5* (April 2020): 1-5.

are anthropogenic or human-induced.<sup>2</sup> But on the other hand, fundamentalists from all religious perspectives are preoccupied with the unscientific discernments that the gods have imposed this contagious disease upon the earth as the punishment against human sin.

However, some of the recent scientific theories strongly attest that COVID19 is zoonotic in nature, i.e., it has originated from animals and furthermore, most of the infectious diseases that affect humans are zoonotic and they have their origin in wildlife.<sup>3</sup> It has been proved that the increasing number of new infectious diseases affecting humans is a symptom of a deep ecological concern as it may be linked to habitat loss due to reduction of land area under forests and the expansion of human populations into forest areas, which increases human exposure to wildlife.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, deforestation and habitat destruction are the main reasons why zoonotic diseases have multiplied in the last few decades.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, experts argue that the present pandemic is a result of the unsustainable model of economic growth which has given rise to the climate change phenomenon. Reynald D. Raluto states, “both the COVID19 pandemic and the global climate change have their common roots in the uncontrolled capitalist production and unlimited consumption patterns for the sake of infinite growth at the expense of the environment. The need for more natural resources has forced humans to encroach on various natural habitats and to expose themselves to yet unknown pathogens.”<sup>6</sup> The failure to contain the COVID19 is also due to the capitalist drive of the global economy.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Hari M. Shankar, Gray Ewart, Erika Garcia and et al., “COVID-19, Climate Change, and the American Thoracic Society. A Shared Responsibility,” *Ann Am Thorac Soc.* 17/9 (September 2020): 1052-1055.

<sup>3</sup> In the case of COVID19, it has been claimed that its transmission to humans took place at a “wet market” in the city of Wuhan, where wildlife was being sold. There is no consensus yet regarding its specific transmitter. Some researchers in China have suggested that pangolins are the probable animal source of COVID-19. Others say that “bats are the probable reservoirs of Ebola, Nipah, SARS, and the virus behind COVID-19.” David Cyranoski, “Did pangolins spread the China coronavirus to people?” *Nature* (February 7, 2020): 151.

<sup>4</sup> Jim Robbins, “The Ecology of Disease,” *New York Times* (July 14, 2012): 15.

<sup>5</sup> Reynald D. Raluto, “Integral Ecology: The Ecology of the COVID-19 Pandemic,” January 2021, accessed from <http://www.mindanews.com/mindaviews/2021/01/integral-ecology-the-ecology-of-the-covid-19-pandemic/> on June 26, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Raluto, “Integral Ecology.”

<sup>7</sup> Andrew P. Dobson, Stuart L. Pimm, Lee Hannah, et al., “Ecology and Economics for Pandemic Prevention” *Science* Vol. 369, Issue 6502 (24 Jul 2020): 379-381.

Hence, from the above varied perspectives it is clear that the integral response to the present COVID 19 pandemic should go beyond simply aiming at containing the spread of the virus. In fact, an integral ecological response to the pandemic challenges should simultaneously advance the climate agenda. It should involve listening and responding to the cry of the poor and the Earth. Such a response should not only be concerned for the health and safety of people but also reflect the eagerness to work for the preservation of the sustainability of the Earth's ecosystems.

## 2. Transformation of Nature: An Ecocentric Reading of Isaiah 43:16-21

*<sup>16</sup> Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters,<sup>17</sup> who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:<sup>18</sup> Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.<sup>19</sup> I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.<sup>20</sup> The wild animals will honour me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people,<sup>21</sup> the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.*

### 2.1. Interpretation of Isaiah 43:16-21 with Special Reference To vv.19b-21

Two things are mentioned in this passage, the first half (vv.16-18) reminds the people of Israel of how their ancestors were delivered by the mighty powers of Yahweh through the Red Sea and the second half (vv.19-21) predicts what God is going to perform in the near future and it is presented in a metaphorical way – “the creation or recreation of new things by Yahweh.” The adoration and worship offered by the animals and birds occupy a central position in this passage. The mentioning of “way in the desert, water in the wilderness, and praises by jackals and ostriches” should be comprehended with their deeper meanings although they are presented in a metaphorical sense.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Øystein Lund, *Way Metaphors and Way Topics in Isaiah 40-55* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 179-180.

Desert or wilderness indicates metaphorically the situation of dryness or thirst, which is experienced by the people of Israel and animals. The words מִדְּבָר (*midbar* – wilderness) and יְשִׁימוֹן (*yeshimon* – desert)<sup>9</sup> indicate the miserable situation of the people of Israel as well as the rest of the creation.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the combination of the words מִדְּבָר (*midbar* – wilderness) and דֶּרֶךְ (*derek* – way) along with the verb שִׁים (*sim* – to put/set) emphasizes figuratively, the transformation of nature.<sup>11</sup> The dry land or desert (יְשִׁימוֹן *yeshimon*) is a stronger figurative expression than wilderness (מִדְּבָר *midbar*) which expresses the situation of hostility.<sup>12</sup> Thus the transformation of nature or making way in the desert symbolizes the transformation of the present catastrophic situation of the people of Israel and the rest of creation. In the same way, ‘rivers through the desert’ signify life, blessing and salvation in the OT.<sup>13</sup> The verb שָׁקָה (*shqh* – to give to drink or to water) is used here in relation with satisfying both the thirst of the animals and the human beings.<sup>14</sup> The use of the expressions jackals and ostriches has a special connotation here. These animals

<sup>9</sup> This should be taken in analogy with the other pair of words occur in other instances of DI: 40:3; 41:18; 43:13; 51:3. In all these references, the words – desert, wilderness or dry land are used more in the figurative sense. Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 40-48* (Herdes Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament; Freiburg: Herder, 2008), 302-303.

<sup>10</sup> It refers particularly to the situation of Jerusalem after the fall in 587/6 BCE as a desert. Øystein Lund, *Way Metaphors and Way Topics in Isaiah 40-55*, 192.

<sup>11</sup> This occurs in other instances of DI (41:18-19; 50:2; 51:3)

<sup>12</sup> The hostility of life situation is expressed through wilderness and desert metaphors which depicts that these places are not suitable for prosperity. The absence of way or water in the desert symbolizes the pathetic atmosphere of the dry land where one can witness the absence of Yahweh’s presence and His blessings. In contrast to that way and water in the desert place symbolizes God’s saving act and His blessings. In many other occasions of DI Jerusalem is referred to desert situation and the transformation of the dry land is also emphasized. The situation of dryness can be applied both to the situation in Jerusalem and Babylon. Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 40-48*, 303-304; Øystein Lund, *Way Metaphors and Way Topics in Isaiah 40-55*, 193.

<sup>13</sup> The supply of water is interpreted conventionally in many OT passages as an image of salvation or blessing from Yahweh (Psalm 36:9; 42:2-3; 63:2-6; 107:4-9; 143:6-7; Isaiah 33:21). Similarly, several passages from DI equate ‘quenching of thirst’ with ‘the image of salvation (Isaiah 41:17; 48:21; 49:10). Drinking in itself is also an image of relationship with Yahweh. Øystein Lund, *Way Metaphors and Way Topics in Isaiah 40-55*, 195-196; L. Ryken, *et al.*, “Rivers” *DBI* (Downers Grove, III: Intervarsity Press, 1988), 729-731.

<sup>14</sup> Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 40-48*, 302-305.



namely תַּנִּיִּים (*tannim*) – ‘jackals’ and יַעֲנָב (ya ‘*anah*) – ‘ostrich’ are considered as threatening and unclean animals in the OT passages and they are seen as a symbol of punishment.<sup>15</sup> However, now the act of praising of these animals accentuates the total transformation of the devastated desert into a place of living – a place of curse is transformed into a place of blessing and prosperity in which the entire creation participates.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.2. Towards a Shift from Anthropocentric to Ecocentric Model of Creation

The two events “the old and the new” which are mentioned in Isaiah 43:16-21 should be studied in comparison. The first event is mentioned in the initial verses (i.e., vv.16-19a) and it talks about the liberative experience of the people of Israel who were led through the Red Sea. Specifically, two things happened here: in the first case, Yahweh creates a way through the Red Sea which saved only the people of Israel, but in the second, those Egyptian troops, with their chariots and animals, who followed the people of Israel were destroyed by the same water which paved the way for the people of Israel. Therefore, one can observe that creation and destruction happened at the same time although this was seen as a significant liberative experience exclusively in the history of ancient Israel.

However, the second section (vv.19b-21) presents the picture of a new thing or new creation and a few things in this new creation are highlighted. Yahweh is going to create a way in the wilderness to lead his people from Babylon to their homeland. God not only creates a way but God also makes rivers in the desert and brings forth springs in the wilderness. The purpose of this new creation is to give water not only to God’s people but also to the animals. The animals mentioned here such as jackals and ostriches according to some scholars are categorized under the rubric of unclean and threatening animals in the OT laws. However, the way the unclean animals and human beings are

<sup>15</sup> In all the occurrences they are used in a negative way and they represent all kind misery and agony one faces. (Isaiah 34:13; 43:20; Micah 1:8; Job 30:29; Jeremiah 50:39; Leviticus 11:16; Deuteronomy 14:15). E. Zenger, “Der Gott des Exodus in der Botschaft der Propheten – am Beispiel des Jesajabuches,” *Concilium* 23 (1987), 17.

<sup>16</sup> Øystein Lund, *Way Metaphors and Way Topics in Isaiah 40-55*, 197; Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 40-48*, 302-305.

presented in the Isaiah passage presents a new worldview, that of God's renewed or resuscitated idea of creation. In the reconciled or resuscitated new model of God's creation, priority and preference are not exclusively given to humankind but the rest of the creation is also placed on par with humankind. There is a shift or transformation from the anthropocentric model of created order to the eco-centric model of creation where each and every individual created being is given importance and, moreover, there is no binary division into clean or unclean creatures. There is no hierarchical structure rather there is companionship and coexistence among all the creatures. By taking the dominant role or master role, human beings have destroyed the interconnected web of relationship pervading the entire creation as ordained by God.

## Conclusion

The above lines underscored the importance of an integral response to the present ecological crises especially in the present pandemic scenario. It is time to revisit humankind's relationship with nature and it is the need of the hour to rebuild a more environmentally responsible world. It is time to better understand the web of life in which we live and to appreciate the fact that it functions as a whole system. It is time to reimagine our relationship with nature and put nature at the heart of our decision making.' We were not created to place ourselves above nature to dominate, but to be alongside, living together as brother and sister. It is necessary to heal the wounded earth by resuscitating it from the anthropocentric understanding to the ecocentric understanding – because when we heal the wounded earth we ourselves will be eventually healed.



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## **Caring for the Earth - 'Telluric-Erotic Spirituality'**

- Abraham Mathew\*

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Taking care of God's creation was never considered a part of Christian spirituality for long since humans were considered to be the crown of creation. The Bible and Christian theology had extensively been used to legitimise the prominent status of human beings in creation, considering the earth as a resource for their consumption. Those who countered this perspective traced the roots of this spirituality in Judeo-Christian traditions. Interestingly the spirituality of negating the binary between human beings and nature were also available within these traditions and hence a process of reclaiming the message of the Bible in caring for creation was initiated by many scholars. Sebastian Kappen was one among them and this article is an attempt to briefly explore how he developed his theological imaginations in his endeavour to address the ecological crisis.

### **Sebastian Kappen**

Sebastian Kappen (1924-1993), a Catholic Jesuit priest, was an eminent theologian in India. He was known for the distinctive theological positions that he had taken on different issues related to socio-political and economic realities in India. During the last phase of his life, he had emphasised the need to see spirituality as living expressions in totality especially by recognising humans and nature as intertwined elements of God's creation. In other words, for him, faith has to make possible the existence of everyone as part of the entire cosmic realities. Therefore, the spirituality driven by the vision of the Divine as in-dwelling the Earth has to be evolved. It is a spirituality instinct with the sense of reverence for, and solidarity with, the earth. Thus, for Kappen any forces that destroy the values of reverence with aggressiveness has to be identified and countered. He focused to identify the oppression that are existing and perpetuated through our relationship with the entire creation either through any religion or through the neo-colonial capitalist culture by the process of globalization.

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\* Rev Dr Abraham Mathew is the executive secretary of National Council of Churches in India.

## Modernity and its Influences Criticized

Kappen begins his search on relationship within the biological world based on his critique of modern worldview and its technology. For him, modern science brings technocratic hegemony over nature and entire human transactions. It is mainly due to its introduction of dichotomy between human beings and nature seeing them in subject-object manner, making nature an object for the benefit of human beings. Modern science is ‘cybernetic’<sup>1</sup> in essence and so it expresses its dominating character by controlling and subduing nature, which in turn provokes nature to vindicate its true being to resist outside manipulations. Modern science also reduces everything in nature to quantifiable, and so quantity above quality is elevated as a desirable model for the development of the society.<sup>2</sup> All expressions and transactions of human beings such as culture, economics, politics and art forms are seen by modern science in technocratic formula, reducing the domain of human activity to merely as rational. Kappen identifies that therefore modern science ends up creating more and more problems and ultimately finds that it cannot solve all the issues by using its own resources and that is what we see now in the contemporary world. The same competitive values of modernity can be seen, Kappen argues, in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the creation stories the creation is described as an outcome of the struggle between God and nature. This struggle could be perceived both the traditions of priestly and prophetic. In priestly tradition the presence of God is explained as a wind that blows over chaos (earth), water and deeps. Out of the power of wind the creation exists. In the prophetic tradition God is seen as a potter who exerts his power upon the clay to make the clay a proper human being. According to Kappen in both expressions, the power of God over nature is explained and hence the word ‘subdue’ (Gen 1: 28) becomes a reality in the life of people. Therefore, Kappen is raising criticisms to the Judeo-Christian traditions for perpetuating the value of domination that often rule over nature.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Greek word *Kybernetes* means helmsman, one who steers the course of a ship. see: S. Kappen, *Towards a Holistic Cultural Paradigm*, (Tiruvalla: CSS, 2003), 100.

<sup>2</sup> S. Kappen, ‘The Asian Search for a Liberative Theology’, in T.K. John (ed.), *Bread and Breath: Essays in Honour of Samuel Rayan S.J.*, (Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1991), 104f.

<sup>3</sup> S. Kappen, *Achristavanaya Yesuvine Thedi*, (Ettumanoor: Manusham, (1999), 2005), 50-1

## Primordial Worldview as an Alternative

In this context, suggesting a reversal model, which is claimed to be more holistic and reverential, Kappen is turning to Indian traditions. He strongly believed that the primitive society in India as any other primitive society has the resources to solve the present crisis. Its myth of creation and its view of life world provide adequate sources to counter the negative impact of modernity. His attraction to the primordial culture mainly derived from his observation to their God concept. The cult of Mother Goddess was prominent during that time. Within this cultic practice, there was projection of womanhood on to the Divine. Hence the role of women in that society was also derived with an understanding of the elevated position of womanhood. Her life is considered as productive and interpreted her productivity in biological economic and cultural realm. This was the outlook of people of the primitive period until the *Aryan* invasion and subsequent domination. During the *Aryan* period, Kappen observes, the women goddesses were subordinated through marriage alliance with *Aryan* male gods. The importance of Mother Goddess in the primitive culture, Kappen describes:

The Mother Goddess was thought of as the symbol and source of all fertility-vegetative, animal and human. She appears now as the cow, now as the plant, now as the river, all of which are in one way or other productive of wealth. She merges with the earth that receives the seed and the plants sprouting from it. Excavation at Harappa have unearthed a seal, on which depicted a nude goddess upside down and legs apart, with a plant issuing from her womb. The belief prevailed in those days that for cultivation to bear fruit, it was necessary to make the goddess herself fertile. And cult was meant to serve this purpose. It often took the form of ritual planting and sowing as well as ritual copulation. This explains why among many primitive tribes, even today, harvesting often is accompanied by sexual permissiveness.<sup>4</sup>

This close link between religious practices and the Mother Earth is the emphasis of Kappen from the primitive society. Calling everyone to

<sup>4</sup> S. Kappen, *Hindutva and Indian Religious Traditions*, (Chenganassery: Manusham, 2000), 23.

listen to the heart beats of mother earth Kappen is saying that a spirituality should be emerged that founded on primitive world views. In order to redeem primitive world view in the contemporary world Kappen is suggesting to depend on religion. In Kappen's view, religion is an original, primordial dimension of human existence and not a result of economic alienation.<sup>5</sup> However, Kappen identifies that religion now has been polluted with modern views and elite ideas. Hence Kappen recognizes dissenting voices within religions as a great source to redeem religions from obscurantism and imbuing them with a purpose to transform society. This redemption is meant to be attained through maintaining radical criticism of religion itself. Elsewhere he says; 'All religions have in fact betrayed the genuine insights in them and have put fetters on the human mind, and need to be subjected to radical criticism.'<sup>6</sup> He further elaborates his assessment on religion with a call to deconstruct our own religious selves in the light of our goal to redeem the society.

### **Reconstruction of Religions and Telluric-Erotic Spirituality**

The deconstruction leads to re-construction of religions and for which in the case of Christian theology Kappen proposes a combination of *eros* and *agape*. Since Indian primitive society views sexuality in a positive way as the source of fertility, *eros*, the sexual drive, is also seen positively. In India Kappen identifies erotic as a noble emotion that holds together the entire creation. According to him:

It is *eros* (desire) (*kama*) that makes everything strive each after its own plenitude. It is *eros* that drives men and women to seek completion through union with the other- with the other as nature, as kin, as friend, as the person of the opposite sex, as community. And where there is union, there is fruitfulness. More, *eros* is the mother of all human striving, individual as well as collective and, as such, the driving force of history. The supreme goal of desire is mystical union with the Being of beings.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> S. Kappen, *Marxian Atheism*, 92-93.

<sup>6</sup> 'Dr. Kappen's Response', in *Negations*, 10 (April- June, 1984), 34.

<sup>7</sup> S. Kappen, Spirituality in the New Age of Recolonization, in *Concilium* (4/1994), 34

In *Vedic* understanding ‘it is *eros*<sup>8</sup> that makes the sun rise and set, the waters surge up, plants grow and fruit, and buds blossom<sup>9</sup>’ and in that sense *eros* brings the communion within any community. While *eros* is the focal point in Indian philosophy, Christianity gives importance to *agape*, the selfless love. Certainly ‘*agape* represents a peak in authentic humanness’ Kappen argues, *agape* without *eros* lacks ‘cosmic depth and human warmth and is likely to prove impotent’.<sup>10</sup> Christian view of *eros* merely as sexual desire is reductionism and Kappen asserts that it is with Augustine it ended up within the brand of sin and so against spirituality. Therefore Kappen is proposing a synthesis of primordial emphasis of women hood, vedic thrust of *eros* and Christian choice of *agape* to formulate an adequate spirituality which takes care all sections of the society and the ecological matters. This spirituality is called by him ‘Telluric-Erotic spirituality’.

## An Appraisal

Kappen’s Telluric-Erotic spirituality is an outcome of the recognition of hybridised nature of religions. Although each religion has its own unique vision about life and its own spectrum of transactions, religions share some common ethos which edify human search for their meaningful existence. Kappen’s telluric- erotic spirituality explores this potential spectrum of possible perspectives on the teachings of religions or spiritual traditions, including how those teachings relate to the total healing of the entire world. Its application into Christian theology as explained by Kappen is based on Jesus’s words that ‘love your neighbour as you love yourself’. The word neighbour is explained as the one who is in need. In its elaborated meaning the category of neighbour can be the entire creation of God including human beings and nature. Thus, a spirituality which addresses the issues that not only affect human beings rather that which affects other creatures and nature will also become an issue of theology. With this explanation Kappen could bring a radical theology of synthesis which borrow selected life preserving elements from each religious

<sup>8</sup> According to Kappen a community’s life may be shaped by *logos* (reason), *ethos* (the ethical) or *eros* (the erotic). In the Greek tradition *logos* had been given emphasis while Hebrew tradition focuses on *ethos* and Indian tradition give stress on *eros*. See: S. Kappen, *Towards a Holistic Cultural Paradigm*, (Tiruvalla: CSS, 2003) 83.

<sup>9</sup> S. Kappen, *Towards a Holistic Cultural Paradigm*, (Tiruvalla:CSS, 2003) 82.

<sup>10</sup> S. Kappen, *Divine Challenge and Human Response*, (Tiruvalla: CSS, 2001), 143.

philosophy and practice with a motivation to enhance life. His innovations in this regard are appreciable.

*Eros* was a primeval God in Greek mythology and its Indian expression *Kama* is a vedic (2nd millennium–7th century BCE) personification of cosmic desire, or the creative impulse, and was called the firstborn of the primeval Chaos that makes all creation possible. What motivated Kappen to choose *eros* instead of *Kama*, an Indian version of it, remains a question but it can be inferred that his option might be due to his preference to primordial streams against the Vedic which has Brahminic origin. He seems to be in agreement with Gramsci, a post Marxian scholar who recognised the significance of primordial values of communities in shaping the cultural consciousness and behavioural pattern of any society. However, his call for reconstruction of Christian theology by proposing a synthesis between the *eros* concept within Hindu traditions and *agape* concept within Christian traditions without giving priority to both, poses the question of whether such a synthesis is possible. Anjali Prabhu, in her critical study of the Hybridity<sup>11</sup> concept highlighted by Homi K Bhabha, opined that the cultural strands within a hybridised situation cannot be treated equally. For her, one aspect will always dominate within the space of synthesis and such domestication is a real challenge before any theologians who advocate relativism in theological imaginations. In spite of these apprehensions, the theological explorations of Kappen are prophetic and they challenge all of us to have an alternate spirituality which encompasses cosmic relationships, irrespective of the so-called binaries of male- female, elite- subaltern and humans-nature.




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<sup>11</sup> Anjali Prabhu, *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007)



## Disaster Funding and COVID-19 Response of MDB's in India

- Anuradha Munshi\*

Over the years institutions like World Bank and other Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) have increasingly been using post-disaster situations and climate change as an opportunity to bring in policy reforms. Post disaster rehabilitation and recovery programmes provide institutions an easy entry with little resistance to the massive policy reforms that come along. Also, the language of resilience and sustainability is built into the narrative, which find very little resistance. Institutions like the WB are taking multiple roles of assessment, planning, financing projects through development policy loans and monitoring specially in cases of disasters. It is a classic case centralization of powers. World Bank's language of resilience, sustainability and post disaster recovery needs to be decoded. With increase in natural disasters in this decade and with climate change realities, disaster capitalism has also become a reality.

In an article on “The Rise of Disaster Capitalism” in *The Nation* Naomi Klein points out, “governments will usually do whatever it takes to get aid dollars—even if it means racking up huge debts and agreeing to sweeping policy reforms. But shattered countries are attractive to the World Bank for another reason: They take orders well. After a cataclysmic event, governments will usually do whatever it takes to get aid dollars—even if it means racking up huge debts and agreeing to sweeping policy reforms. And with the local population struggling to find shelter and food, political organizing against privatization can seem like an unimaginable luxury.”<sup>1</sup>

**In the recent years India has witnessed an increase in climate disasters and the World Bank has used every opportunity to bring in post recovery and rehabilitation projects, which come along with policy reforms.** From 2013 till now, India has witnessed some major disasters. The responsiveness of the Bank to these disasters has

\* Anuradha Munshi is the Research Coordinator of Centre for Financial Accountability... This article is adapted from CFA News Bulletin.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/rise-disaster-capitalism/>

arisen from its perception of an opportunity for implementing economic and governance reforms under the garb of disaster preparedness, rebuilding and building resilient infrastructure. The Uttarakhand floods, Cyclone Phailin, Cyclone Hudhud, flooding in Srinagar and the larger valley region, the Kerala floods have been some of the disasters for which the World Bank has supported the Government of India in conducting rapid post-disaster damage and needs assessments, especially in the first four listed disasters. The assessments provided clear guidance on the post-disaster recovery path that needed to be taken. Subsequently, emergency projects were prepared and are currently under implementation. These projects focus on recovery and reconstruction as well as strengthening long-term resilience and emergency response capacity at the State level in the affected States<sup>2</sup>.

In 2018 and 2019 Kerala saw floods and landslides paralyze almost the entire state. The disasters had a huge negative impact on the biodiversity of Kerala and the already fragile environment. In 2018, a prolonged southwest monsoon over the state of Kerala resulted in one of the worst floods in 100 years, causing estimated losses of US\$ 4.25 billion. This post disaster situation has been used as lucrative opportunity by institutions like the World Bank for financing programmes focused on disaster management with rehabilitation, post disaster recovery, building resilience as hook words. The Bank has found an easy entry point for development policy loans and other financing, which are coupled with policy reforms as well.

The World Bank in October 2018 extended a support of up to \$500 million to the Government of Kerala's comprehensive flood recovery efforts and to build greater resilience to future shocks<sup>3</sup>. In June 2019 the World Bank board approved The First Resilient Kerala Program Development Policy Operation as a Development Policy Financing of 150 million USD<sup>4</sup>. The proposed operation supports Government of Kerala (GoK's) resilient recovery from August 2018 floods. The proposed programmatic operation, the first in a series of two

<sup>2</sup> <file:///Users/anuradhamunshi/Downloads/world-bank-india-disaster-risk-management-program-2016.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/10/16/world-bank-commits-support-to-rebuild-a-more-resilient-kerala>

<sup>4</sup> <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/428421551979689773/pdf/Concept-Program-Information-Document-PID-Resilient-Kerala-Program-P169907.pdf>

Development Policy Loans (DPLs), will support policy and institutional reforms recovery, mainstreaming long-term resilience to disaster risks and climate change into sectors of key importance.

The most problematic aspect of the reforms is that they are expected to mainstream disaster risk reduction and climate resilience into critical infrastructure development and service delivery. The priority sectors include water supply, sanitation, solid waste management, transport, and agriculture. The World Bank's long-standing agenda of privatization is actualized through these reforms.

This case is very similar to what happened in Indonesia following the 2004 Tsunami disaster, where post-disaster funding pushed privatization. With project loans worth \$ 1.1 billion and the policy reform support loan, the Bank pushed for privatization and other new regulations that would support economic liberalisation. From this loan, came Indonesia's new law on oil, gas and electricity that allows for the privatization of respective state-enterprises<sup>5</sup>.

In the post-covid time the MDB's have already invested close to 5.5 billion USD in India as support for dealing with the crisis. The world bank's 1 billion USD supported COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness Project does not only look into immediate support for the public health systems, there is also considerable focus on integrating systems with push for private entities like health insurance companies to integrate with government schemes. We have already in India seen the fallouts of such systems.

India has also negotiated a Development Policy loan with the World Bank for 'Accelerating India's COVID-19 Social Protection Response Program'. Development Policy loans have strings attached in terms of a neo-liberal agenda. These are loans given by the World Bank on the condition of policy changes, which are promised by a country and in line with the Country Partnership Framework for the country. Many of the reforms, which were announced in the financial package, are directly from the reform book of International Finance Institutions who have been demanding a rollback of labour regulations, environmental regulations, power sector reforms and relaxation of the land acquisition laws.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.brettonwoodsproject.org/2005/01/art-108058/>

Asian Development Bank has funded a USD 1.5 billion COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support Program (CARES) project which will support the government in its efforts to mitigate the severe health, social, and economic impact caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. ADB with its operation in the health sector has been altering and influencing health sector policies in India for sometime now. This emergency operation is built upon previous and ongoing health sector operations and policy dialogues. Since the first health sector operation in India in 2013 through the support to the National Urban Health Mission (NUHM), ADB's health sector engagement has been increasing. Following the launch of Ayushman Bharat in 2018 and implementation of NUHM under the National Health Mission, ADB is now developing a program to support delivery of comprehensive primary health care in urban areas (2020 pipeline).

Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank has invested 1.25 billion in COVID response. They have funded two projects both co-financed, one with ADB and other with the World Bank. As usual AIIB is riding on the back of lead financiers, exhibiting its commitment to COVID without accountability on their end. New development Bank has provided a loan of USD 1 billion for Emergency Assistance Program in Combating COVID-19 through support in public health and social safety sector.

The total lending of USD 5.5 billion is not huge for a 3 trillion economy, whose annual budget is over Rs. 25 lakh crores. But the influence to change the economy and the mosaic of this country, through these investments, is huge and disproportionate to the value of their lending.

The World Bank and other MDBs are increasingly taking up all the roles of assessment, planning, financing projects and financing through development policy loans. The World Bank's language of resilience, sustainability and post disaster recovery needs to be demystified. With increase in natural disasters in this decade and with climate change realities, disaster capitalism has also become a reality. With economies globally in shambles and in need for additional support, this vulnerable situation should not allow MDBs like the World Bank to push their agenda of disaster capitalism with ease.

Institution	Project Name	Sector	Funding Type	Amount (USD)	Co-financiers
World Bank	India COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness Project	Health sector operations	Multi-phase Programmatic Approach	1 billion (US\$350 million under the Fast Track COVID-19 Facility (FTCF) and US\$ 650 million from the IBRD)	AIIB
World Bank	Accelerating India's COVID-19 Social Protection Response Program	Social Protection	Development Policy Loan	759 million	
Asian Development Bank	COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support Program (CARES)	Healthcare, social protection, labour and Public sector	Loan, Technical Assistance	USD 1.5 billion (Loan1- USD 500 Million Loan2-USD 1 billion)	AIIB
Asian Development Bank	Strengthening Universal Health Coverage in India: Supporting the implementation of Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana	Health sector development and reform	Technical Assistance Special Fund	USD 200,000	Republic of Korea e-Asia and Knowledge Partnership Fund- USD 500,000
Asian Development Bank	Regional Project (India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka): Support to Address Outbreak of COVID-19 and Strengthen Preparedness for Communicable Diseases in South Asia	Education sector development - Education sector development - social protection initiatives Health Sector- Disease control of communicable disease - Health system development	Co-financed Project, lead Financier -Asian Development Bank	US\$ 1.00 million	
Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank	COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness Project	Health sector operations	Co-financed Project, lead Financier-Asian Development Bank	USD 500 million	
Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank	COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support (CARES)	Healthcare, social protection, labour and Public sector management	Co-financed Project, lead Financier-Asian Development Bank	USD 750 million	
New Development Bank	Emergency Assistance Program in Combating COVID-19	Public Health/Social Safety		USD 1 billion	



# Domestic Workers in the Time of COVID 19: Agony, Anguish and Adversity

- Manoj Kumar Jena\*

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## Introduction:

The domestic workers of India have been among the most adversely affected sections of society due to the Covid 19 crisis. Since the beginning of a complete nationwide lockdown during the pandemic, there was a livelihood crisis as these workers found themselves without jobs all of a sudden. They were out of employment at most of the urban spaces, including megacities like Delhi NCR and other cities. The Covid 19 pandemic tremendously impacted all of us. There was a substantial economic loss in almost all sectors of the economy, which had resulted in a turning point to employability of the marginal labour force across India. The fear of death and the spread of the deadly virus had phenomenally impacted social communion and economic relations.

The minimization of economic activities and national lockdown severely impacted the informal sector, particularly the workers who were heavily dependent on informal work, including migrant workers as well as domestic workers. The domestic workers in particular, faced an unprecedented livelihood crisis and were compelled to leave the urban centers across the nation. Owing to the constant increase of coronavirus cases and the lack of a viable social security and health support system, domestic workers are on the verge of vanishing from the urban space which might lead to a structural transformation of a different kind. They will move further towards the margin, which may result in change of socio-political and economic structure in and around us and may also lead to some sort of hostility towards each other. It is a matter of worry and immediate and sustained measures are required at this juncture to deal with this crisis. This is a disturbing trend for our economic structure because in many ways domestic workers contribute enormously to the urban economy. In this context, the present paper tries to provide a contextual analysis of domestic

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\* Dr. Manoj Kumar Jena is Associate Professor, Center for the Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, JNU, New Delhi.

workers due to Covid 19. Secondly, it highlights the suffering experienced by these workers because of loss of employment. Thirdly, it tries to understand the kind of support system they have and what needs to be done for ensuring social protection.

### **Domestic Workers in India: Profile**

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has roughly estimated the number of domestic workers in India would be around 20 million to 80 million<sup>1</sup>. As per International Labour Organization (ILO), domestic workers work for private households, often without clear terms of employment, unregistered in any book, and excluded from the scope of labour legislation. Even though a substantial number of men work in the sector – often as gardeners, drivers or butlers – it remains a highly feminized sector: 80 per cent of all domestic workers are women<sup>2</sup>. In India as per “The Code on Social Security, 2020”<sup>3</sup> domestic workers fall under the category of “wage workers” with a monthly wage amount as notified by state government and central government. They work as part time labourers with very low wages and longer working hours. They often face discrimination because of sex, caste, and religious status. Unlike other forms of labour market activity, domestic work takes place in a non-formal place of work, i.e. the household<sup>4</sup>. Hence, there is a predicament in legal provision for these domestic workers because the home is considered their workplace<sup>5</sup>. Since this is a critical issue, there is a need for adequate policy intervention for recognizing the value of their labour. It is an undeniable fact that majority of the domestic workers in India are from marginal communities comprising weaker sections of the society, including women from minority communities, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other backward castes. It is an observable reality that the domestic workers are generally from rural and tribal areas of India. It

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/newdelhi/areasofwork/WCMS\\_141187/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/newdelhi/areasofwork/WCMS_141187/lang-en/index.htm)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/global/docs/WCMS\\_209773/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/docs/WCMS_209773/lang-en/index.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Please see The Code on Social Security, 2020, [https://labour.gov.in/sites/default/files/375\\_2019\\_LS\\_Eng.pdf](https://labour.gov.in/sites/default/files/375_2019_LS_Eng.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://in.one.un.org/page/rights-for-domestic-workers/>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.oit.org/wcm5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms\\_345704.pdf](http://www.oit.org/wcm5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms_345704.pdf)

has been argued by scholars that minors are also employed as domestic workers in India despite the inclusion of this occupation in the list of hazardous child labour (2006) by the Government of India (GoI), prohibited for boys and girls under the age of eighteen<sup>6</sup>. Most of these domestic workers are primarily migrants from rural and tribal areas who are constrained to migrate to urban spaces due to lack of livelihood opportunities in their places of origin. The non-availability of jobs in rural or tribal areas, such as Jharkhand, facilitates the continuous supply of women workers to Delhi and other cities.<sup>7</sup> The subsistence crisis, lack of work and aspiration for a better quality of life are some of the factors which push them towards urban centres.

### **Social Security and Socio-Economic Barriers:**

Most of these domestic workers have suffered due to lack of social security provision as well as regular employment and compensatory support system. The nature of their work is very complex and unique in terms of time, space, and wage. The work activities include handling all aspects of our household work, care work etc that constitute a critical component of urban economy. Mostly, they fall into the category of unorganized marginal workers. Claire Hobden argues that “the socio-cultural barriers to organizing are also often expressed through lack of legal protections. Domestic workers are often not identified as workers in law, resulting in a de jure exclusion from the right to organize and to bargain collectively”<sup>8</sup>. Though they are supposed to be covered under the Unorganized Workers Social Security Act, 2008,<sup>9</sup> yet the implementation of this legislation remains a major challenge. Further, their complexities have deepened because of COVID-19 leaving them helpless without social protection. They even fall prey to the private placement agencies since these placement

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/Domestic-Workers-Laws-and-Legal-Issues-India.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/Domestic-Workers-Laws-and-Legal-Issues-India.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.oit.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/genericdocument/wcms\\_345707.pdf](http://www.oit.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/genericdocument/wcms_345707.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/travail/docs/686/UnorganisedWorkersSocialSecurityAct2008.pdf>



agencies are not regulated under any national legislation in the country. They operate unlawfully and exploit the domestic workers and often engage in unscrupulous practices like trafficking<sup>10</sup>. The Delhi government had formulated a bill to regulate private placement agencies. It is called “The Delhi Private Placement Agencies (Regulation) Bill, 2012” and has not yet been passed. As per the bill a “Domestic Worker means a person engaged through private placement agency to do domestic work and includes guard working at the residence of person”<sup>11</sup>.

Owing to the informal nature of work the domestic workers bargain individually to get a job. The contract is informal in nature and the employer does not have any obligation to provide social security to the worker at the time of their difficulty. Their agony and pain is multifaceted, in several occasions they face multiple adversities including viciousness in urban households because of language, culture, colour and typical urban settings. Domestic workers many a time are prone to mental and physical exploitation at the work place. The Ministry of Women and Child Development in February 2014, published in response to a question tabled in the upper house of Parliament, track reports of violence against domestic helpers between 2010 and 2012. Overall, in India’s 28 states and 7 union territories, there were 3,564 cases of alleged violence against domestic workers reported in 2012, up slightly from 3,517 in 2011 and 3,422 in 2010.<sup>12</sup> The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (prevention, prohibition and redressal) Act 2013, states that the term “domestic worker means a woman who is employed to do household work in any household for remuneration whether in cash or kind either directly or through any agency on a temporary, permanent part-time full-time basis but does not include any member of the family of the employer”<sup>13</sup>. Though this is an important act implemented by the

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/Domestic-Workers-Laws-and-Legal-Issues-India.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <http://it.delhigovt.nic.in/writereaddata/Cir20126363.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://in.one.un.org/page/rights-for-domestic-workers/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/Sexual-Harassment-at-Workplace-Act.pdf>

Ministry Women and Child development, the limitation of this act is non-involvement of the labour departments in its implementation and lack of inspections, all of which weakens the process of enforcement of this legislation.

It is an unquestionable reality that most of the domestic workers are vulnerable and powerless in many ways; in fact they have been struggling against existing structural inequality. Ever since their birth, location and social position, they have not only faced discrimination, stigmatized practices, even in the work they have suffered due to lack of access to social protection and negation of work rights. Now, in a phase of troublesome pandemic COVID-19 crisis, it has opened up various critical issues pertaining to their social security as well as health protections.

### **COVID 19 Crisis, Conflict and Hostility**

This is a well-accepted fact that during the lockdown the workers were heading back to their native places, and if this process of reverse migration continues it will have the following ramifications. Firstly, the liberty and luxury compensated by the domestic worker's labour value will be no more with us and the growing capital may be doomed. The urban economy will undergo severe crisis with the missing domestic workers. Secondly, there is a possibility that unequal distribution of work activities among men and women within the family will further intensify role conflict in the urban households. The women in the family will be overburdened in terms of multi-tasking, which would further create imbalance in work and family life. It will have diverse impact in our household work activities and may be lead to chaos and disorder. Thirdly, when they will move out from urban space to rural space there will be a multi-directional impact both in the rural and urban structures. It is perceived that their enormous contribution to the urban economy will be hampered. This is an irrefutable fact that domestic workers are the base of our urban economy and also vital support to our home and hearth. Fourthly, in the rural social structure they will face multiple challenges for instance; challenges in securing livelihood and employment opportunities, discrimination stemming from rural folks' perception of urban centres, from which the domestic workers have returned, as red corona zone. Rural employment guarantee schemes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005<sup>14</sup> may not be sufficient to deal

with the livelihood crisis though the participation has gone up due to distress migration. Increasing reverse migration trends would create imbalance in power structure in rural India. The visible reverse migration trend will generate crisis for decent and sustainable employment in villages because of the surplus labour force, creating a challenge to provide job opportunities. This may further lead to a survival crisis, disrupting the socio-economic condition of domestic workers as well as strengthening the potential for conflict and hostility towards each other.

### **Conclusion: Policy Paradigm**

The international labour standards like the ILO convention C189 addresses various concerns about domestic workers around world. Convention No. 189 offers specific protection to domestic workers. It lays down basic rights and principles, and requires states to take a series of measures with a view to making decent work a reality for domestic workers<sup>15</sup>.

It is an undeniable fact that a basic and fundamental social security provision is absolutely essential for domestic workers across the globe. The idea of social security by and large emerged in the mid-twentieth century; however it was already an integral part of the ILO's original mandate in 1919, as stated in the Preamble of the ILO Constitution. The importance of social security was later underlined in the Declaration of Philadelphia in 1944<sup>16</sup>. The convention guarantees for minimum labour protection to domestic workers. India is not signatory to ILO C189 - Domestic Workers Convention, 2011<sup>17</sup> and till now only 29 countries have ratified it<sup>18</sup> though it is an important convention in the case of domestic workers. The countries which have ratified C 189 would be liable to provide legal recourse to the domestic worker. This will no doubt enhance the social security provisions for domestic workers.

<sup>14</sup> [https://nrega.nic.in/amendments\\_2005\\_2018.pdf](https://nrega.nic.in/amendments_2005_2018.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms\\_161104.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms_161104.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms\\_232552.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms_232552.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C189](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C189)

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11300:33308184061880:::P11300\\_INSTRUMENT\\_SORT:1](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11300:33308184061880:::P11300_INSTRUMENT_SORT:1)

Apart from Social security, health security provisions need to be strengthened in the face of a crisis like Covid 19. Few states in India have included domestic workers in the schedule of employment under the minimum wage legislations. The existing challenges including implementation and enforcement of minimum wage and other benefits would be difficult because there is no possibility of labour inspection in the private households. It is also necessary that domestic workers need to be a part of trade unions with greater representation so that their bargaining power could be enhanced with greater access to agency building and voice to fight for their rights and obtain justice.

In spite of governmental interventions for addressing the situation of domestic workers, much more needs to be done. The gaps in providing social security coverage under the labour codes need to be identified and adequate policy intervention in this regard need to be initiated. The agony and anguish of the domestic workers can be dealt with through better psycho-social and economic measures, including employment security. The difficult experiences of the domestic workers during COVID 19 need to be examined through empirical studies undertaken both at the urban and the rural areas for gaining deeper insight into the crisis. This would help in putting in place long-term gender sensitive social protection policy interventions, which will address the vulnerabilities of domestic workers and help them overcome the crisis that they find themselves facing.



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# Gain the Soul in Motion: Obligatory Stratagems for Christian Mission to *Nomads*

- J.W. Prakash\*

## Introduction

Nomads have been a mysterious people.<sup>1</sup> Anthropologists have made several attempts to unravel the mystique around nomads and they have been successful to some extent. However, to the Christian and secular world, nomads still remain enigmatic.<sup>2</sup> Nomads were prominent in olden times and several generalizations were made about them. Lindner declares that nomadic history was left to the fleeing literates to archive for the coming generations. The nomads kept an oral account and their story, usually confined to the family that is seldom told. Only a literate community can share their history to a broader group, especially to those outside the community.<sup>3</sup>

Salzman indicates that,

...the ‘nomad’ was a term given to pastoralists. The original Greek word meant people who care for animals. Nomads are, therefore, keepers of animals. There are areas in the world, “Where the production, harvest, and storage of fodder is not an available option because of shortages of capital or of labor, migration to exploit seasonal pastures represents the best strategy for maintaining a regular supply of food for livestock.”<sup>4</sup>

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\*Rev. Dr. J. W. Prakash is Presbyter, Church of South India, South Kerala Diocese. and Member of National Ecumenical Forum for Gender and Sexual Minorities-NCCI

<sup>1</sup> Dyson-Hudson, Rada, and Neville Dyson-Hudson, “Nomadic pastoralism,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 9 (1980): 15-61.

<sup>2</sup> Van der Walt, Bennie J. *On being Human and being a Christian in Africa: Communalism, Socialism and Communism in a Struggle for an African Anthropology*, (Potchefstroom: Institute for Reformational Studies, 1988), 39.

<sup>3</sup> Rudi P. Lindner, “What was a nomadic tribe?,” *Comparative studies in society and history* 24/4 (1982): 689.

<sup>4</sup> Philip C. Salzman, “Pastoral Nomads: some general observations based on research in Iran.” *Journal of Anthropological Research* (2002): 245-264.

Hence nomads become ‘peoples on the move’ and made use of pasture in its natural condition without enhancing them. Khazanov restraints that,

The sharing such blanket information is futile as nomads vary from place to place and region to region. This variety hints at the fact that nomads are not a people group. Here people group is the contemporary term for a tribe or nation. That is, they do not come from one ancestry. The fact that they live on every continent suggests they are not family. They do not form a cultural unit except that their lifestyles are similar.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, nomadism is not a culture per se rather it is a lifestyle, a way of making a living. Nomads are wanderers or people who roam around. The saying: “No man is an island”, holds true for them also as they do not live in total isolation but interact with other people in various degrees. The interaction with other peoples is diverse and varies from place to place and from people to people. Influencing factors could be security, food, health or land tenure.<sup>6</sup>

Several nomadic groups are seen in India. Among them, *Narikurava* nomadic tribes are dominant in South India, especially in Tamil Nadu. According to their oral history, they migrated from North India,<sup>7</sup> to South India half a millennium ago. The other argument is that, they originated in the *Kurinji* hills some 5000 years ago.<sup>8</sup> These *Narikuravas* are gypsies who wander from place to place for their

<sup>5</sup> M. Anatoly Khazanov, *Nomads and the outside world*, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 21.

<sup>6</sup> H. Thomas Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2002), 11-19

<sup>7</sup> ‘*Narikuravas*’ could have been the immigrants from *Aravalli* hills in North India, probably said to be from Gujarat. During the time of Islamic or Mughal warfare, they would have migrated, instead of following Islam. *Narikuravas* migrated from Maharashtra to other parts of India. ‘*Narikurava*’ claim that they are the descendants of ‘Lord Ram’, of the epic Ramayana. Some people claim that they are descendants of the king ‘*Raja Thesing*’ of *Gingee*. However, do not have any authentic evidence for these claims. There is no oral tradition stating that ‘*Ada*’ and ‘*Theeda*’ (brothers-in-law) were the forefathers who lived in ‘*Salooth Bithamar*’ town. Fifteen generations have gone by until now.

<sup>8</sup> Muhammed Atheeqe P. P and Rajathurai Nishanthi, “Explanatory Analysis of life style of *Narikurava* Community in Pudukkottai District,” *International Journal of Advanced Research and Development* 1/10 (October, 2016): 21.

livelihood. They used to receive the basic needs like food, water and clothes from wherever they moved. There is no permanent shelter for this community. They genuinely possess nomadic characteristics.<sup>9</sup>

Nomads have remained elusive to the church primarily because they have not been a priority for any Christian denominations. They are usually found on the fringes of societies and therefore, are not prioritized. Another reason is that the Church has become settled and merely aspires to the title of “pilgrim people,” journeying with God. The idea of “pilgrim people” is metaphorical, but the implication is that Christians do not belong to the present world.<sup>10</sup>

David J. Bosch comments that,

Nomadism incorporates the idea of belonging even though nomads systematically move about. Christianity has become sedentary and this has mitigated against any attempts to target nomadism with the Gospel message. Compounded to these challenges as mentioned, is the issue of orality.<sup>11</sup>

Since nomads are illiterate, it is not easy for Christianity to penetrate to them. After the invention of printing, Christianity has traversed the world on paper. Literacy has become an essential feature of Christianity and many mission projects emphasize education. These challenges suggest that God’s mission among nomads requires that Christians should experience the world differently.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, this paper suggests a different approach to share the word of God with nomads. That means, Christians cannot continue with traditional approaches when entering a nomadic environment. This task requires that mission practitioners think differently and to be led by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Wilson, “A Study of the Customs and Habits of the Kuruvikkarana,” (M.A. thesis on Social Work, University of Madras, Loyola College, Madras, 1975), 187.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Wilson, “A Study of the Customs and Habits of the Kuruvikkarana,” (M.A. thesis on Social Work, University of Madras, Loyola College, Madras, 1975), 187.

<sup>10</sup> T. Barfield, *The Nomadic Alternative*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 142.

<sup>11</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: paradigm shifts in theology of mission*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 374.

<sup>12</sup> Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 68.

As nomads have a totally different culture and way of living, one has to understand them properly, live with them to understand their worldview<sup>13</sup> and become a part of them in order to share the Gospel with them. To accomplish this task, missionaries will have to shed their intrinsic methods of sharing and adopt new methods. It needs special attention and proper planning to reach them.

## 1. Communicating the Gospel to Nomadic *Narikurava*

Missionaries and missionary organizations have to carve-out an action plan to formulate effective Christian communication. To carry out this mission, missionaries have to abandon their ethnocentric views. According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Church is the Church only when it exists for others.”<sup>14</sup> If one wants to share the Gospel with nomads, he should imitate the model of Jesus. He should get close to them, just like Jesus came close to the people, so he could best serve the people. His was an incarnation that experienced life as a man and not a theoretical undertaking. Thus, He identified with people and eloquently addressed their needs. The Incarnational approach is different from contextualization. Contextualization is about the missionary trying to know how to package the gospel for a specific context.<sup>15</sup> The emphasis is on the mission practitioner and his/her ability to contextualize the message and the application of the message. An incarnational approach is about living as a follower of Christ in a given context.

### 1.1. Nomadic Biblical Worldview

The Bible has to be re-read through the eyes of the nomadic *Narikurava* people’s world view. Tom Avery advocates communicating the Gospel through stories, since seventy-five percent of the Bible is in a narrative form, fifteen percent is poetry, while ten percent is organized.<sup>16</sup> Even though other biblical scholars such as

<sup>13</sup> Thomas J. Barfield, *The nomadic alternative...*, 145.

<sup>14</sup> Charles. Van Engen, *God’s Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 142.

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everywhere*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 110.

<sup>16</sup> Tom Avery, “Music of the heart: the power of indigenous worship in reaching unreached peoples with the gospel.” *Mission Frontiers bulletin* Special edition (1998): 7-8.



Robert Plummer lower the percentage to sixty percent, stories still dominate the Old and the New Testament.<sup>17</sup> Extensive historical information in narrative format can be found in books such as Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts. The other significant portion is poetry, which encompasses songs, proverbs and lamentations.<sup>18</sup>

In spite of the sixty percent stories in the Bible, literalism of Scripture has been given great importance. God has communicated and revealed Himself more through narratives than through abstract thoughts. Presenting biblical teachings in story format to nomadic *Narikurava* is in line with God's revelation. The *Narikurava* oral communicators can study and understand Scripture since it resonates better with their cultural communication styles.<sup>19</sup> *Narikurava* oral communicators can follow Christ and become His messengers, provided *Narikurava* orality is not a barrier to knowing God or telling others about Him. However, for this to happen, a relevant and appropriate strategy has to be formulated, both biblically and culturally.

## 1.2. A New Model to Mission

Jesus Christ used to travel from place to place and that was His character. God's freedom over His creation is His transcendence, and yet various details of pastoralism are recorded in the stories of the patriarchs<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, even if Abraham did not start out as a pastoralist and perhaps leaving his family did require him to leave behind his livestock, he soon became one on the journey in order to obey God's call. His life reflects the nomad's ability to adapt his lifestyle according to need and, in addition, his livestock represents his wealth.<sup>21</sup>

According to Wiseman, "It is clear that nomadic pastoralism was God's way of preserving the patriarchs' independence from the neighboring pagan powers of their day so that he could fulfill His

<sup>17</sup> Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications. 2010), 118.

<sup>18</sup> Samuel. Escobar, *The New Global Mission...*, 112.

<sup>19</sup> William J. Dibrell, "The prospector unconditionally in the Sinai tic Covenant...", 150.

<sup>20</sup> Genesis 12:8-9; 13:5-12; 21:22-34; Exodus.2:16-25; 22:10-13.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Escobar, *The new global mission...*, 107.

purpose. God could have chosen to send Abraham as a merchant to live in the cities of Canaan, but this method kept him and his people separate from their baneful influence.”<sup>22</sup>

Nomadic pastoralism was one of God’s ‘secret weapons’ to keep the people separate in order to fulfill His redemptive purpose.<sup>23</sup> It also demonstrates the importance of the nomadic *Narikurava* in Christian mission.

### 1.3. Jesus’s Model of Mission to the *Nomads*

Escobar states that it is only when Paul received a new vision of who Jesus is that he realized His own humanity and the humanity of others. This humanity is wrapped up in God, the creator and redeemer of humanity. It is only here that one will have a sense of who one is and of what one’s worth is. In seeing one’s personal worth to the creator of the world one cannot ignore the value of another person. The grace that stretches to one, woos the other. It is only the revelation of God that will transform my thinking of me and others. It is for this reason Jesus says “love for God” is the greatest command and the second is love for self and others.<sup>24</sup> It is only in realizing God’s love that true human nature will be realized.

God desires that each *Narikurava* becomes a person of value. That each person can experience Him and in doing so be transformed. Jesus recognized that without God, He had no purpose. Jesus wept for Jerusalem because He valued the people there. Seeing the world through God’s eyes allowed Jesus to go to the cross. The worth of *Narikurava* is centered in God. Knowing the true identity of the *Narikurava* gives Christians the ability and the opportunity to live in diverse circumstances.<sup>25</sup> The Christian will follow the call of God to incarnate in the world with the *Narikurava* people.

<sup>22</sup> D. J Wiseman “They lived in Tents”, in *Biblical and Near Eastern Studies...*, 199.

<sup>23</sup> Haron Matwetwe, “Principles and Strategies for Reaching and Discipling Nomads: A Case Study of the Pokot of East Africa,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, 12/2 (2016): 295.

<sup>24</sup> William J. Dibrell, “The prospector unconditionally in the Sinai tic Covenant...”, 294.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Escobar, *The new global mission...*, 157.

#### 1.4. The Contextual Message to Nomads

The message was to call people to repentance and salvation in Jesus. Such a message held no relevance to the people.<sup>26</sup> The *Narikurava* people are secular in their religious convictions. In talking about their need for salvation, the message is not relevant; this is not because it is wrong but because it is inappropriate to the audience. It requires learning new contextualization methods. Rather it requires a repackaging of the unadulterated gospel.<sup>27</sup> This applies to the message and the application of the message in the nomadic context of *Narikurava*.

#### 1.5. The Nomadic Medium

A pre-packaged message did not consider the target audience. In reviewing the example of Jesus and the apostle Paul, one notices that the message is essential and does not change. However, the medium of the message changes with different audiences.<sup>28</sup> Illiteracy among *Narikurava* is a major challenge to communicate. Their language *Vagiri Boli* allows them to receive the Gospel in a language close to their heart. This also affirms that God comes personally to His people. He does not need a foreign language or medium to speak to them.

#### 1.6. The Nomadic Audience

An appropriate medium has to be chosen to reach the audience. If the children alone are reached, it may not be fruitful as children are not allowed to make a decision for God without the parent's consent. This is a significant social dynamic that cannot be overlooked. Men, the movers and shakers of the family, are often on the move.<sup>29</sup>

#### 1.7. Oral communication

It is said that two-thirds of the world's communication is oral. That is, they learn through oral styles rather than through literacy. Havelock

<sup>26</sup> Rebecca Lewis, "The integrity of the gospel and Insider movements," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 27/ 1 (2010): 41-48.

<sup>27</sup> William J. Dibrell, "The prospector unconditionally in the Sinai tic Covenant. . . , 155.

<sup>28</sup> Myron Loss, *Culture shock: dealing with stress in cross-cultural living*, (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1983), 74.

<sup>29</sup> Samuel Escobar, *The new global mission. . . ,* 110.

states: “Orality, by definition, deals with societies which do not use any form of phonetic writing.”<sup>30</sup> This indicates that there are people who teach in different ways to illiterate people. It is not an inferior or superior method, but rather, a different method. Ong argues that, “In a literate culture verbatim memorization is commonly done from a text” and it is practiced until perfected. The individual will return to the text to check for verbatim mastery.”<sup>31</sup>

Paul Hiebert opines that,

When entering an oral society the missionary needs to put off his/her known learning styles and adapt to the oral community. This is essential as oral learners do not learn in the same way as a literate person. ‘As long as individuals are dependent on other people’s languages for their knowledge about God, Christian development will be less dynamic.’<sup>32</sup>

In recognizing the differences between a literate and an oral learning style, one acknowledges the need to be sensitive to the challenges around *Narikurava* communication.

## 1.8. Incarnational Communication

Incarnation as an ideal motif for mission is fundamental. In communication, the incarnation approach ensures that through critical contextualization, missionaries discover from within the community suitable objects and symbols through which to present biblical teachings rather than impose unfamiliar illustrations from an outside community.<sup>33</sup> For the *Narikurava* nomads missionaries are required to intentionally use and apply in their sermons and teaching, cultural proverbs, stories, songs, and riddles from the community that are not antagonistic with the Scriptures. Incarnated communication also includes the use of the local people’s language.

<sup>30</sup> Eric A. Havelock, *The muse learns to write: reflections on orality and literacy from antiquity to the Present*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 65.

<sup>31</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*, (London: Routledge, 1982), 130.

<sup>32</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, Daniel R Shaw, and TiteTienou, *Folk Religion*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 65.

<sup>33</sup> Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 112.

Charles Kraft indicates that, "...people generally get excited when they first hear God speaking in and through their language. The Pentecost experience when the apostles spoke the languages of the visitors to Jerusalem is just one example of many instances which affirm that God desires to speak through people's languages so that transformation can take place at a deeper level."<sup>34</sup>

### 1.9. Learning to Gain the Soul in Motion

If the compassionate love of missionaries is lost on nomads, then it is important to rethink and clarify the task in missions.<sup>35</sup> One must consider the mission statement as something that operates by demonstrating the love, the truth and the power of Jesus, desire to locate, evangelize and disciple *Narikurava* who will grow and lead the indigenous Church of Jesus Christ. God sends missionaries to peoples who have not heard the truth of the Gospel.<sup>36</sup> God sends them to proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ, to love the people with the love of the Father and to introduce people like *Narikurava* to the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The vision is to see people transformed into the image of God as His church germinates and grows. The *Narikurava* nomads can easily frustrate, as the same people in the same place cannot be found with any regularity. That does not mean to give up.<sup>37</sup> It means, find how the function of regular meetings in a settled culture might be adapted in a different way to a nomadic community.

### 1.10. Disciple Development

Our assumptions about the nature of both the church and worship have to be re-examined. Christians do not belong to a church, but the church

<sup>34</sup> Charles H. Kraft, "Contextualizing Communication," in *The Word among us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today*, edited by Dean. S, (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1989), 68.

<sup>35</sup> Paul E. Pierson, *The Dynamics of Christian Mission: History through a Missiological Perspective*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University, 2009), 133.

<sup>36</sup> D. J Wiseman, "They lived in Tents", in *Biblical and Near Eastern Studies...*, 200.

<sup>37</sup> Samuel Escobar, *The new global mission...*, 123.

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth, Pasadena, *Striking camp with Nomad...*, 6.

is derived from the relationship of the disciples to Christ. A conscious attempt to “plant a church” and then make disciples gives priority to an abstract concept with a lot of extraneous content.<sup>38</sup> The New Testament teachings are applicable to each individual Christian. The accountability of each disciple to Jesus is much diminished, and the authority of church structures substitute the Lordship of Christ. Christ Himself is more at home in a nomad camp, with its humble hospitality, its small group fellowship and its storytelling way of exchanging news.<sup>39</sup> Hence, missionaries need not look for the pattern of the church in a separate doctrinal treatment entitled ‘Ecclesiology,’ but should rather start with the nature of God Himself for nomadic *Narikurava* people.

### 1.11. Enter to the Life of the Camps

To consider Nomadic *Narikurava* strategy or probable methods, Kraemer says that, “there is no substitute for traveling with a group for a month or a season, or perhaps by regular arrangement for a week or more at regular intervals.” Only in this way can one be seen to share something of the *Narikurava* life, be party to their joys and problems, and taking time to share their hopes and thoughts. ‘In the market or at the watering hole, in the presence of others of different ethnic origins and way of life, they are on their guard, perhaps not even speaking their own language like entering into their camps’.<sup>40</sup>

### 1.12. Lead to Authentic Christian Life

A genuine Christian life can neither be hidden nor faked. Nomads are keen to observe the lives of those presenting the gospel to them. Like most oral communicators, nomads’ model their lives after that of their teachers. This reality challenges Christian witnesses to lead exemplary lives, showing by word and deed what followers of Christ should be.<sup>41</sup> A spirit-led life demonstrated by genuine love, humility, kindness, forgiveness, and mercy has more power to draw people to Christ than

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth, Pasadena, *Striking camp with Nomad...*, 7.

<sup>40</sup> H. Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, (London: James Clarke and Co Ltd, 1956), 93.

<sup>41</sup> Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. 2004. Making Disciples of Oral Learners. Lausanne Occasional Paper, no. 54 [https://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP54\\_IG25.pdf](https://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP54_IG25.pdf) (accessed 2 July 2021).

lengthy sermons and theological arguments. Authentic Christian lives should also demonstrate genuine love and care for God and people. Oral methods can also be useful in building bridges for sharing the gospel. In the context of *Narikurava*, stories have always been privileged places of God's revelation. The proverbs and myths of *Narikurava* people reveal that the Holy Spirit sowed seeds of the Good News in the *Narikurava* cultures long before the *Narikurava* people ever heard of Jesus' words and teachings.<sup>42</sup> By connecting biblical truths to local stories, the people can be encouraged to pursue the most important matters of life.

### 1.13. Rediscovery of the Nomadic Bible

There is a need to re-read the Bible through the eyes of the nomad. There is also a need to acquire biblical and theological training that equips one to look at the Bible's themes on providence and the environment, appropriate models of discipline and the form of the church, and economic activity and a multitude of moral issues in new ways that correlate with nomads' ethos and felt needs. The Old Testament should become more relevant than in ministries.<sup>43</sup> This is not a new 'contextualization', but a rediscovery of the Bible's own *Narikurava* nomadic message. Training should be imparted to develop skills in storytelling and oral communication as this is the way they maintain their own traditions and identity, and decisions are made by searching the memory rather than by reasoning. Ethnic music and poetry skills are also important with *Narikurava* nomads.

### 1.14. Tiling of Nomad Missionaries

Christians pastoring these small groups may fit partially into some local tradition of religious teacher. The nomad has learned to live with few personal possessions, is accustomed to being mobile and has experienced poverty, hunger and long periods of hard unpaid work. He or she has also known despair and fatalism and what it is to be despised.<sup>44</sup> Missionaries have to meet nomadic people without any

<sup>42</sup> Haron Matwetwe, *Principles and Strategies for Reaching and Discipline Nomads...*, 290.

<sup>43</sup> D. J Wiseman "They lived in Tents," in *Biblical and Near Eastern Studies...*, 201.

<sup>44</sup> Pieter A Verster, *Theology of Christian Mission...*, 99.

church building, and interact, share and pray with them wherever they travel. Such a Christian act would enable us to reach the larger sectors of *Narikurava* nomad community.

## Conclusion

God has a plan for nomads is to free them the restraints of ordinary society. The nomads are an important but often ignored part of humankind. The varied estimates of their numbers demonstrate the difficulty of knowing exact figures, but the total of nomads would be large enough to populate many countries. The significance of nomads is even greater because many peoples who have a history of nomad is more still in contact with their culture and may still be influenced by this history.<sup>45</sup> Nomadic peoples represent a unique challenge to Christian mission. It has been said that Christianity has had virtually no success in converting nomadic peoples. So, the Christian world has to find effective and diverse ways to reach the large and different nomadic populations.

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<sup>45</sup> Tim Matheny, *Reaching the Arabs: A felt need approach* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1981)



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## BIBLE STUDY

### Climate Justice

*- John Samuel\**

#### Love Towards Creation:

God created the universe and all the beings within it. God created in love and gave love as a gift to all the members of creation. God showed the potentials of living and relating with other beings in nature. God is the connecting force for all the members of creation. There is nothing in creation which does not deserve love. God gives us as much energy as we can to show love to our fellow creatures. Let us see the whole creation through the perspective of God's love. Climate justice is one form of love for the creation. Climate justice is an initiative to restore love between humans and the created order. Climate justice is a beautiful act, performed not only for the benefit of the members of creation, but also as a loving duty to God who has created both the visible and the invisible realms. Putting the problem in perspectives:

Once a woman went to a diabetologist. The diabetologist told her to add one more dose of insulin every day. The woman was unhappy and asked the doctor in frustration, "so should I take this until I die?" The doctor said, smilingly, "No, take it as long as you live!" Both statements amount to the same thing, of course. But the doctor introduced a positive tone into the conversation. It changed the attitude of his visitor. Even though the climate justice issue is worrisome, still we must work on it with love, beauty and faith.

Let me begin by mentioning *As Long as the Grass Grows*, a book in political ecology authored by Gilio-Whitaker. Her work offers a broad foundation for the ongoing struggle for environmental justice in the wake of a vast issue like climate change. "The process of the destruction of life (genocide), which began five centuries ago with the colonization of the natives and the extermination of indigenous people, has now spread to the planetary level, pushing two hundred species per day into extinction, and threatening the entire human species. The author makes brilliant connections, and focus on "the seeds of resistance, the seeds of freedom, and the promise of a future." This is the problem we will deal with now in a nut shell.

\*Rev. Dr. John Samuel is an ordained minister from the Church of South India. He is professor of Hebrew Bible in Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, Chennai.

## To Learn from Nature:

There is a beautiful story from the Jewish tradition. When Noah is loading the ark with animals like camels, water buffaloes, and goats, up the ramp comes a pair of tiny little gnats. Noah turns to God and says, : You want me to save the gnats? Of what possible value could they be? And God replies, “Yes Noah, save the gnats. They hold many secrets you may never know.”

Human kind must adore the secrets and mysteries of nature. The Bible says that there is an ontological relationship between humans and nature. Adam comes from Adamah (Genesis: 2:7), Adamah will look after Adam (human (Genesis 1:11). Adam (Human) will take care of Adamah (Genesis 2:15) and when Adam (human) dies, he/she will go back to Adamah (Genesis 3:18-19). There is an organic unity between Adamah (land) and Adam (human).

The Bible tells us about the lovely relationship between humans and nature in so many ways. The psalmist says, in Psalms 72:3, 8. “May the mountains bring prosperity to the people. The hills the fruit of righteousness. May He rule from sea to sea. And from the river to the ends of the earth.” These verses recall mountains, hills, sea and rivers as blessings to human beings and show us how God rules over them together from heaven.

However, over the centuries, huge damages have been inflicted on nature. Humans have mercilessly destroyed many species of animals and birds. Humans have destroyed forests and hence we see diminished rainfall. Humans have made our land poisonous through the use of chemical fertilizers. There is pollution of air, water and land. The emission of carbon into atmosphere, causes atmospheric warming. The climate has changed for the worse everywhere. The preferred expression these days is not climate change but climate justice.

Now, we are suffering under a severe pandemic that has spread all over the world. There is hostility between humans, land and other creatures. An invisible virus has taken hold of the whole world. Human beings have put a halt to their fast-moving world. They have been locked into their homes. Surprisingly, in spite of the sufferings and death, the waters are becoming cleaner. There is less heat in the atmosphere. There is good rain everywhere. Animals and birds notice what is happening and they are beginning to use roads that till recently were confined to humans. Epistemologically, there is an undeclared war going on. Overcoming the virus is no doubt important. But it is even more important to think of how we can reshape our life when normalcy returns. Everything has not yet been lost. There are ways to change our life.

## The Commandment, ‘Love your neighbor’:

Jesus once said, the greatest of all the commandments is ‘Love your neighbor’ (Deuteronomy 6:5, Mark 12:31). In earlier times, whenever people tried to understand the question ‘who is my neighbor’, it may have meant for them their immediate physical neighbor. As time went by, it may have meant the ‘tribes’ living next to their tribe. Later, it may have meant the ‘Samaritans,’ for the Jews. As time went on, it may have meant the ‘gentiles’ for the Israelites. Today, as the world has become even more connected, a truly globalized world, the matter of defining who a neighbor is will be decided not by geographical factors alone. For example, the presence of immigrants and refugees the world over, requires of us to re-define our understanding of neighbor.

However, in the context of climate change and climate justice, we are led to see ‘neighborhood’ in an altogether new way. Human beings have had a huge impact on earth and atmosphere. The technological and scientific developments have caused heavy damage to the earth. Can we begin to see all of ‘nature’ as our neighbor? Instead of being a loving neighbor to nature, have we not conducted ourselves as destroyers of nature?

In this broader context, there must be a widening of the understanding of what constitutes the ‘neighbor’ for humanity at an ontological level. The concept of neighbor must include not only non human - living beings, but all those non living things also, which together constitute ‘nature’. Humanity must come forward to think about how they will act and respond to the other entities in the created world. Apocalyptic texts are visionary creations pointing to the possibility of a perilous future. They are never meant to happen, but paint these scenarios vividly in order to help us strive to prevent them from happening. Today we are on the edge of survival and could perish if nothing is done to deal with the crisis.

We who are nurtured in the Biblical traditions have been taught to believe that anthropocentrism is the right attitude. The Bible has thus been misused as a basis for both the exploitation of the natural world as well as separation of the human from the created order. The concept of the ‘image of God’ has been misinterpreted as permitting the dominion of humankind over creation. Humanity has been viewed as ‘the centre’ and as ontologically ‘higher’ than other members of creation.

In contrast to the ‘human dominance model’, we can reflect on the opposite model, that of ‘coexistence’ with other life forms (the co-existence model). Human beings are only one of the innumerable species on this planet. The coexistence model thus requires the decentering of humans and the redrawing of new centers. This method

recognizes the symbiotic nature of life and a common development of all species in a shared environment. All living beings are aware of their dependence on a commonly shared land and its resources.

The creation narratives explain the egalitarian relationship that exists among and between all creatures. The Bible teaches the importance of the dependence existing between all the living and non-living entities. They plead for an attitude of mutual caring within the world. When we respect the whole creation, we will feel connected with all creatures and care for them. There is ample space for diversity and individualities in this plurality. We should value loyalty and truthfulness to our mother earth and all living beings in it. Then we will see nature beginning to communicate with us.

The Bible says,

“But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind. (Job 12: 7 -10)

### **Celebrating Sabbath:**

The Bible explains an important commandment, that of the Sabbath: “Six days shall work be done; but the seventh day is a Sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work: it is a Sabbath to the LORD throughout your settlements (Leviticus 23:3)“

The Prophet Isaiah says, “If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, The holy day of the LORD honorable, And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, Nor finding your own pleasure, Nor speaking your own words, (Isaiah 58:13)

In modern society, we find ourselves running, speaking, and thinking at an exceptional speed, and often times we continue all week long, without slowing down. We can get so caught up in these doings, that we could spend our whole lives on the go. If being too busy is the malady of modern man/woman, slowing down on Sabbath can come as a remedy.

Sages say, “your walking on the Sabbath shall not be like your walking on weekdays.” You shall try to walk slowly. When we are walking fast, we tend to think about our life and work. We keep thinking about what we have to do after finishing our walking. If we walk slowly, we begin

to feel about us, nature and around us. It frees us from the pressures of our life and the feeling that “we are very busy.”

When the Prophet Isaiah speaks about observing Sabbath, he says, “by not...speaking words.” The scriptures discourage speaking about our day-to-day activities. In order to practice this, on the Sabbath day, some Jews even go to the extent of speaking only in the present tense in order to avoid delving into the affairs of the future.

It is not only in our walking and in our speech that we are supposed to be mindful on Sabbath, but we must restrict ourselves in our thinking also. These religious observances may look too rigorous for an outsider, but it is actually the opposite: On Sabbath we are encouraged to free our mind from its never ending preoccupation. “When the Sabbath arrives, it shall seem to you as if all your work is done, that you shall not think about work.”

Rabbi Raphael, who lived in the early 19th century in Germany, wrote about the value of observing Sabbath in an industrial society. He wrote, “on Sabbath in our time! To cease for a whole day from all business, from all work, in the hurry-scurry of our time! To close the exchanges, the workshops and factories, to stop all railway services—great heavens! Every one claims, how would it be possible? The world will perish? On the contrary, it would be saved.” This is what has come to stay in the post Covid days also!

Scientists predict that “global consumption is putting unsustainable and increasing stress on the Earth’s ecosystems. 60% of the Earth’s ecosystems have been degraded in the past 50 years. Natural resource consumption is expected to rise to 170% of the Earth’s bio-capacity by 2040.” How can nature cope with the current pace of human society? Should we not slow down our mad speeding? Can we survive if we do not receive the life support from our planet earth and allied bodies? Who will initiate the life saving measures aimed at slowing down our exploitation of nature?

The Sabbath as a spiritual practice offers great potential for the reduction of consumption and thereby can benefit the natural world. Simple acts like keeping away from the computer or driving a car, even if it is for a day in a week, may have great impact in our environment. The energy saved from not using these devices for one day may amount to a huge saving on a global level. Researchers have noticed major improvements in air quality levels, especially in regard to nitrous oxide, a motor vehicle pollutant, when we rest even for one day. Human health and the natural environment benefit so much from the break in our activities for one day.

The human race is driven by pleasure, but does not recognize that the most pleasurable thing a person can experience is the time they spend with God. Sabbath is meant to be a day when we all can feel the presence of God. While we are aware of God's presence, we will also become more aware of our surroundings, and take better care of God's creation.

Sabbath rest is not just required because God wants it. It is not merely beneficial to humans. The world needs its rest. The animals, birds, and particularly, the work animals need rest. The poor and women cannot survive endless demands of their masters without rest (Exodus 23:12; Deuteronomy 5:14). There is a connection between Sabbath and the seven-year cycle of the sabbatical year (Exodus 23:10-12), regarding which we are told explicitly that the land itself desires to rest (Leviticus 26:34-35). In certain respects, this commandment acknowledges that the natural world has a voice and that we are not free to ignore it. Sabbath rest is not just required because God wants it. It is not merely beneficial to humans. The earth needs its rest.

### **Responding with Love:**

Now we must come forward to take up our responsibility for dealing with the climate challenges of our times. Often, we are not sure on whom these responsibilities should fall. It is certain that human beings must take up the responsibility as a species. This is due to humanity's exercise of power over other creatures. Particularly, when it comes to climate crisis, it is largely to be blamed on human actions and hence calls for responsibility to be taken by humans. Human beings can never be forgiven for the damages caused by them.

Technology has allowed humanity to accumulate huge power which not only affects the climate, but even threatens the continued existence of other life on the planet and harms the whole biosphere. The human sin has caused ecological destruction, climate crisis and, according to some scientists, it is even leading towards a massive annihilation of life in our biosphere.

Although the responsibility for mending the world, after so much mindless destruction, falls on entire humanity as a whole, certainly. Hence, it is also a matter of justice to say that it must be borne by some humans more than 'all others. The powerful must take more responsibilities in the ecological crisis. This is what we term as 'ecological Justice'. This is due to the prevailing imbalance in power in the world. While we struggle for climate justice, at the same time, we must also work for the democratization of power all over the world. The complex and diverse world in which we live must come forward to



oppose the normalization of any hierarchical society. We must begin to pave the way for a change of structures into a more egalitarian pattern.

### **Hospitality to Nature:**

Hospitality has been a very important aspect in life from the beginning of human civilization. We are all aware of the concept of ‘hospitality’ in our shared common life. The necessity of the conditions for living together in the planet has been brought forward more powerfully in recent times by the climate crisis. We must understand hospitality in the wide spectrum of awareness of who we are, with whom we share our planet, and to whom we need to show care.

More and more places on the earth are becoming inhospitable to life due to climate change and natural disasters. Hospitable places are becoming fewer in number. This will result in a vast number of climate refugees in future. Alongside these people, animals and birds are also losing their habitats due to destruction caused by humans. We must show hospitality to those who are losing their homes and land. It is a well-known fact that only a small portion of the world population, not the vast majority of the people, has been responsible for most of the damage. Hence, the responsibility for causing the ecological and climate crisis, albeit it belongs to all of us, must be borne substantially more by those who caused the greater part of the damage. We need to have a new understanding of the earth, our shared home, as we tackle the climate crisis and its future consequences.

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