



National
Council of
Churches
in India

NCC REVIEW

Vol. CXLI
No.06
July 2021

The National Council of Churches Review (NCC Review)
The Organ of the National Council of Churches in India
UGC approved Journal
 Formerly published as “*The Harvest Field*” since 1862

Vol. CXLI**No.06****July 2021***Contents***EDITORIAL**

- Interrogating Sedition Laws for the Sake of Justice
 - *Abraham Mathew* 271

ARTICLES

- Christian Representation in the Constituent
 Assembly: A Dalit Critique
 - *Johnson M. John* 273
- Hands that Serve: Testimonies of Faith and Resilience
 of Nurses During the COVID-19 Pandemic
 - *Hatchingthem Haokip*
 - *S. Grace Tinnunnem Haokip* 289
- Examining the Rationale and Relevance of Representation
 and Elections in a Democracy
 - *Arpita Rachel Abraham* 301
- Feasts, Christian Identity, and Nationalism
 - *Joseph Prabhakar Dayam* 309
- Fr. Stan Swamy: A Radical Disciple from the Indian Soil
 - *Salini Mulackal* 314
- Was Fr. Stan Swamy a ‘Marxist’ Jesuit?
 - *Cheriyen Alexander* 317
- Valiya Metropolitan Philipose Mar Chrysostom Episcopa
 (April 27, 1917 - May 05, 2021) – A Tribute
 - *Arun Gopal* 321

BIBLE STUDY

- Luke 18:1-10 The Parable of a Judge, a Widow
 and the Cause for Justice - *Arun Kumar Wesley* 323

NCCI NEWS

- NCCI remembers His Holiness Basileos Marthoma Paulose II 329

Editor, Publisher & Printer: Rev. Dr. 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: Rev. Dr. Abraham Mathew, Executive Secretary, Policy, Governance and Public Witness. **Printed at:** Shyam Brothers, Near ST Stand, Ganeshpeth, Nagpur **Owner:**

Rev. Dr. 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/>

Views expressed in the NCC Review do not necessarily reflect the official position of the
 National Council of Churches in India

Registration No. 33/2019

EDITORIAL

Interrogating Seditious Laws for the Sake of Justice

“Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live...”
(Deuteronomy 16:20)

Deuteronomic accounts in the Bible connect social justice with life, highlighting it as a means by which that relationship is lived out. Social justice is often understood as the overarching societal concern for what is right and wrong, fair and unfair. The concepts of correctness and fairness are read in social justice with the notion of equality or equal opportunity in society. Therefore, social justice stresses that every member of society, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, education, etc., is deserving of the same opportunities, privileges, and protections as everyone else. When the principles of right and wrong and fairness and unfairness are violated, it comes under the purview of criminal justice.

However, in a democratic set-up, when the role of dispensing justice has been entrusted to the judiciary, evidence becomes the key factor in determining justice. Punishment becomes the tool for criminal justice and hence justice ends up being measured in terms of punishing the guilty. This kind of repairing of justice through unilateral imposition of punishment is called retributive justice. Within this context, the possibility of creating false evidence and false allegations by state apparatuses, like police forces or investigating agencies, as part of larger political interests cannot be denied. The sad demise of Fr Stan Swamy became a catalyst for discussions on such questions since when he was alive, he would repeatedly highlight that the incriminating ‘evidence’ was planted by the investigating agencies.

The voice of Fr Stan echoes in our ears, creating ripples of disturbances. Will criticising the policies of Government or Government institutions come under the category of unlawful acts? Many experts of constitution including some judges have repeatedly criticised Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). The UAPA was originally a colonial law enacted in 1967 when Indira Gandhi was the prime minister and in the context of India’s wars with China and Pakistan. The law has undergone over half-a-dozen amendments, the last one in 2019 under the Narendra Modi government. The 1967 version of the UAPA gave the central government the power to deal with activities directed against the sovereignty and integrity of India

and terrorism was not covered under the UAPA till 2004. Now, the UAPA covers terrorism, money laundering for terror financing and designation of groups as well as individuals as terrorists.

The UAPA is controversial because it extends the pre-chargesheet custody period from 90 days to 180 days and it restricts the right to bail and makes the court depend on police documents to presume guilt of the accused. Therefore, it has been called by many a 'draconian law'. Its role during the colonial regime was to imprison freedom fighters such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, convicting them for sedition for speaking against the colonial government. Within this context we need to evaluate the observation of a Supreme Court bench headed by the Chief Justice of India N V Ramana about the 'enormous power of misuse' of the sedition law in India. He asked the union Government to explore the possibility of scrapping this anti-human law which curtails 'freedom of speech'.

Victor Hugo's statement "to open a school is to close a prison" is relevant when we talk about the entire range of judicial activities in our country. There are different schools of 'penological thoughts' in which the aim of punishment has been explained, namely, retribution, prevention, deterrence and reformation. Although in India, rehabilitation has been highlighted as the basis for punishment rather than the retributive justice model, some scholars opine that deterrence as a goal is well suited to the Indian social and cultural structure. According to deterrence theory punishment is awarded to offenders in the hope that it will deter other potential offenders. It works in two different directions; first by instilling fear in the minds of the offender, and second, by warning others of the consequences that could befall them if they committed the crime. But in reality, those penalised became more hardened criminals since they see the society as their enemy and also vice versa.

Therefore, it is imperative to have more comprehensive modalities for dispensing justice in this country. The aim of punishment should focus on restorative justice that will restore justice through reaffirming a shared value-consensus in a bilateral process. Most restorative processes involve the active participation of victims, offenders and their communities as primary stakeholders. In this way, punishment becomes a process of transformation and a catalyst in sustaining life.

Rev Dr Abraham Mathew
The Managing Editor



Christian Representation in the Constituent Assembly: A Dalit Critique

- Johnson M. John

Introduction

Dalits symbolize the struggle against inequality and injustice in India. Although interventions have been made by the government and other agencies to address the situation of Dalits, these efforts essentially remain tokenish. These processes of social interventions are to be studied in their historical contexts if the trajectories of their evolution are to be properly understood. This article is an attempt to revisit the historical context in which Dalit Christians' legitimate rights were negated by other Christians and Nationalists who were engaged in drafting the Constitution of independent India. In that light, this paper envisages the life and struggle of Dalit Christian communities.

Unending Legal Entanglements

On October 1, 1985, a division bench of the Supreme Court presided over by Chief Justice P N Bhagwati upheld the presidential order of 1950 that any Scheduled Caste Hindu, on conversion to Christianity, lost his caste label. The presidential order was challenged by Soosai, a Christian Adi-Dravida (scheduled caste) cobbler from Chennai city who was refused to free bunk by the state while a number of Hindu Adi-Dravida cobblers were provided with the same. He argued that the action of the state amounted to discrimination on the basis of religion and violated the equity provisions under Articles 14, 15 and 25 of the Constitution. But the apex court dismissed the petition.¹

On February 26, 2015, a bench of the Supreme Court delivered the judgment in a lawsuit in which K P Manu had pleaded that following his conversion to Hinduism, he had become a member of the Pulaya caste. Manu's grandfather was a Pulaya (A scheduled Caste in Kerala) before he became a Christian through conversion; his parents were also

*Rev Johnson M John, a research scholar in Christian History and an ordained clergy of Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church.

¹ M.S.S. Pandian, "State, Christianity and Scheduled Castes," *Economic and Political Weekly* 20/42 (October 19, 1985): 1776.

Christians. The bench accepted Manu's plea about being a Pulaya and allowed him to receive the benefits of reservation meant for the members of the Scheduled Castes.²

Dalitness of Indian Christianity

The Indian Christian community is multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-linguistic and therefore multi-cultural. An estimated seventy-five percent of Indian Christianity is from Dalit origin, historically belonging to the most oppressed section of Indian population.³ The origins of the modern Dalit movement can be traced to the nineteenth century when Dalits began to make concerted efforts to change their lives and Dalit aspirations began to be taken seriously.⁴ The mass movements attracted Dalit communities to Indian Christianity and thereby enhanced the social roots of the Indian Christian community to become predominantly of Dalit roots. The subversive culture of gospel offered the Dalits who converted to Christianity a new hope. But conversion to Christianity didn't change the social location of the Dalit Christians; in fact, the shift was from Hindu Caste system to 'Casteist Church'⁵ and they continue to bear the brunt of alienation.⁶ Even to this day, Dalit Christians are alienated by the dominant caste Christians in the ministries, ecclesial bodies, and everyday life of the church and the leadership of the Indian Christian community is silent to the suffering of the Dalit Christians, thus leaving the majority of Christians to misery.

² Padmanabh Samarendra, "Religion, Caste and Conversion Membership of a Scheduled Caste and Judicial Deliberations," *Economic and Political Weekly* 51/4 (January 23, 2016): 38.

³ James Massey, "Dalits and Human Rights," *Religion and Society* 49/2 & 3 (June-September, 2004): 4.

⁴ Prakash Louis, "Dalit Christians betrayed by State and Church," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42/16 (April 21, 2007): 1405.

⁵ V. V. Thomas, *Dalit and Tribal Christians of India- Issues and Challenges* (Nilambur: Focus India Trust, 2014), 198.

⁶ S.M. Michael reminds that, "Dalit Christians continue to suffer from fivefold discrimination, namely discrimination by government, by the caste Hindus, by fellow Hindu Dalits, by the [so called] upper caste Christian community and by the subgroups of the Christian Dalits themselves." S. M. Michael, "Dalit Encounter with Christianity: Change and Continuity," in *Margins of Faith – Dalit and Tribal Christianity in India*, edited by, Rowena Robinson and Joseph M. Kujur (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010), 71.

Dalit Critique on the Pre-Independence Political Engagements of Indian Christianity

It was during the Simon Commission's inquiry that the identity of the Dalit Christians was raised as a political issue for the first time. But that was never accepted and the argument against their case was that a Dalit upon conversion 'ceases to be an untouchable' and 'becomes a touchable' and there is no caste distinction within the Christian community. The Dalit Christians were denied the rights entitled for the Dalits. The report of the drafting committee to the All Parties Conference in 1928 also upheld no reservation to Christian Dalits. The Christian leadership who were preoccupied with the safeguarding of minority interests agreed to that recommendation. Moreover, leaving behind the Dalit interests, the dominant caste leadership of Indian Christian community joined the nationalist camp by participating in the Civil Disobedience movement on April 6, 1930. The All India Christian Council in 1930 said that "the place of minority in a nation is its value to the whole nation and not merely to itself."⁷ When it came to the issue of communal electorates to safeguard the interests of diverse groups, especially at the Round Table conferences, the Dalit Christians

⁷ M.M. Thomas, "Inter-Religious Conversion," in *Religion, State, Communalism – A Post-Ayodhya Reflection*, edited by J. John and Jesudas Athyal (Hongkong: Christian Conference of Asia, 1995), 102.

⁸ K.T. Paul, the AICIC representative at the First Round Table Conference, opposed communal electorates and suggested administrative safeguards in the form of a ministerial portfolio or a statutory commission to deal with Dalits and religious minorities. S. K. Datta, his replacement at the Second Round Table Conference, also opposed communal electorates on principle and denounced Minorities Pact. He was supported by Bishop Azariah as well. Together with these leaders the journals, *The Guardian* and *The Indian Witness* also opposed separate electorates. George Thomas, *Kristianikal Bharatha Swathanthrya Samarathil* (Kottayam: The Indian Centre for Mission Studies, 1999), 233-235. Bishop Azariah argued that the church in accepting the position of a communal political minority with special protection would become a static community and it would negate its self-understanding as standing for mission and service to the whole national community. Thomas, "Inter-Religious Conversion....", 102. In 1935, the Government of India Act promulgated the Communal Award, which was the brain child of Ramsey MacDonald, the British Prime Minister, decided that the separate communities be given separate constituencies. Gandhi opposed the communal award in the case of the Scheduled Castes, because of the fear of them getting separated from the Hindu society in general. Rajasekhariah A.M., *B.R. Ambedkar, the quest for Social Justice* (New Delhi, Uppal Publishers, 1989), 63. Atul Chandra Pradhan, "Depressed Classes' Uplift in the Gandhian Era," in *The Past of the Outcaste: Readings in Dalit History*, edited by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Yagati Chinna Rao (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2017), 368-369.

were completely silenced.⁸ In 1936, the Government published a schedule of castes eligible to benefits from the reserved seats and special help was promised to the Dalits by the Government of India Act of 1935 and this schedule had the significant provision that ‘No Indian Christian shall be deemed a member of a Scheduled Caste.’⁹ The engagement of dominant caste Christian leadership with the state in the pre-independent India not only denied the rights of Dalit Christians, but also was not willing to perceive the realities of Dalit Christians. This was in effect, a total negation of the Indian Christian leadership of the majority of the community.

Poignance of Colonial Past

The main play in the early politics was with the politics of numbers, employed to handle the diverse communities in the Indian fabric of demographics. The understanding of India in terms of the ‘majority-minority’ dichotomy was introduced by the British colonial rulers, who viewed people through the lens of religion and saw them as bounded and undifferentiated communities.¹⁰ The politics of numbers separated Dalit Christians from other Dalits, and the British rulers and the other constitution-makers considered their religion rather than their socio-economic circumstances to be their defining characteristics. Dalit Christians were placed in the Christian rather than in the Dalit constituency.¹¹ Moreover, both the British and then the provincial governments, when implementing the 1935 constitution, adopted a sacral view of caste.¹² This resulted in upholding the idea that caste is exclusively for Hindus and those who left the Hindu order through conversion were no more Dalits and therefore not entitled to Scheduled Caste benefits. The rigid categories used by the colonial power couldn’t handle the complex realities of the Dalit Christians’ situation.

⁹ Jose Kananakil, “The Scheduled Castes and their Status in India,” in *Inequality, Its Bases and Search for Solutions*, edited by Walter Fernandes (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1986), 90.

¹⁰ Rowena Robinson, “Introduction,” in *Minority Studies*, edited by Rowena Robinson (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.

¹¹ John C. B Webster. *The Dalit Christians—A History*. (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1992), 127.

¹² The sacral view of caste perceives each caste as a component in an over-arching sacred order of Hindu society. Marc Galanter, “Changing Legal Conceptions of Caste,” in *Structure and Change in Indian Society*, edited by Milton B. Singer and Bernard S. Cohn (Chicago: Transaction Publishers, 1970), 300, 301.

Christian Representation in the Constituent Assembly

Constituent Assembly

The post-independent India attempted to correct the historical mistakes, done to the exploited communities through constitutional rights promulgated in the Constitution of India. The Constituent Assembly was formed to write the Constitution of India and it met from December 9, 1946 to January 24, 1950 in different sessions. The members were chosen by indirect election by the members of the Provincial Legislative Assemblies, according to the scheme recommended by the Cabinet Mission. The arrangement was: a) 292 members were elected through the Provincial Legislative Assemblies; b) 93 members represented the Indian Princely States; and c) 4 members represented the Chief Commissioners' Provinces. The total membership of the Assembly thus was to be 389. As a result of the partition, the membership of the Assembly was reduced to 299. On August 29, 1947, the Constituent Assembly set up a Drafting Committee under the Chairmanship of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to prepare a draft Constitution for India. While deliberating upon the draft Constitution, the Assembly moved, discussed and disposed of as many as 2,473 amendments out of a total of 7,635 tabled. The Constitution of India was adopted on November 26, 1949 and the members appended their signatures to it on January 24, 1950. The Constitution of India came into force on January 26, 1950. On that day, the Assembly ceased to exist, transforming itself into the Provisional Parliament of India until a new Parliament was constituted in 1952.¹³

Christian Representatives in the Constituent Assembly

The Christian representatives in the Constituent Assembly were Fr. Jerome D'Souza (Principal of the Loyola College, Madras), T.J.M. Wilson (M.L.A., Provincial - Madras), Alban D'Souza (M.L.A., Provincial Bombay), Cecil Edward Gibbon (M.L.A., Punjab, Anglo-Indian – Central Provinces and Berar), Rajkumari Amrit Kaur (Indian Christian, Punjab), Frank Reginald Anthony (President, Anglo-Indian Association - Bengal), H.C. Mookherjee (Indian

¹³ "Constituent Assembly Membership," https://rajyasabha.nic.in/rsnew/constituent_assembly/constituent_assembly_mem.asp (20 August 2018).

Christian, Retired Professor, Calcutta University - Bengal) J.J.M Nicholas-Roy (Minister, Assam).¹⁴ The Christian members in the minority advisory committee constituted by the Constituent Assembly were, Rajkumari Amrith Kaur, Alban D'souza, P.K. Salve, H. C. Mukherjee, J. J. M. Nichols Roy and J. N. P. Roch Victoria.¹⁵ It is evident from the social location of the Christian representatives in the Constituent Assembly and its advisory bodies that they were far away from the vast majority of Dalit Christians whom they represented.

The Betrayal of Dalit Christians

While the Draft Constitution was being discussed in the Constituent Assembly, the Scheduled Castes were given a constitutional status and it was decided that reservation for the Scheduled Castes should continue and they were given a list of rights and privileges. In the initial phase, the Constituent Assembly didn't use any religious criteria for specifying Scheduled Castes.¹⁶ The Advisory Committee on Minorities, Fundamental Rights, etc., had earlier in their report of August 8, 1947 had recommended certain political safeguards for minorities, which were accepted by the Constituent Assembly and included in Pt. 14 of the Draft Constitution. But in the post-partition debates these rights were given up. The elite dominant caste Christian members of the Constituent Assembly did not raise the issue of caste within their community at any point during the discussions regarding fundamental rights. The Christian representatives consented to minority rights in lieu of caste claims. The Christian representatives traded the Dalit Christians' reservation status for the right to propagate and the minority status to run the institutions.¹⁷

¹⁴ "The Structure of Constituent Assembly of India," shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/72368/7/chapter%203.pdf (21 August 2018).

¹⁵ Robinson, "Introduction...", 8.

¹⁶ The draft proposal for the Constitution prepared by B.N. Rao included the exclusion of Dalit Christians, but the Constitution Drafting Committee under the chairmanship of B.R. Ambedkar on February 13, 1948, deleted and dropped such a proposal. The same committee also deleted the amendment moved by K.M. Munshi to specify the Scheduled Castes as a section of Hindu Community. M.E. Prabhakar, "The Politics of Religious Discrimination and the Christian Dalit Question," *Religion and Society* 45/3 (September 1998): 59, 60.

¹⁷ Rowena Robinson, "Minority Rights versus Caste Claims Indian Christians and Predicaments of Law," *Economic and Political Weekly* 49/14 (April 5, 2014): 85, 86.

The Christian representative Jerome D'Souza argued:

I now pass on to the next consideration and I beg the indulgence of the House to permit me to say a few words about the manner in which the Minority rights and Fundamental Rights are inextricably mingled together in this Part of the Constitution. Sir, I believe this is a right and necessary mingling. After all, what the minorities ask is that the right of the individual may be safeguarded in an inescapable manner. If that is done, 'minority rights' as such would not and need not exist. It is because in a democratic system of government where a majority vote may do injustice to a minority, that certain specific references to the minorities have to be made. But ultimately, in the last analysis, if the individual's right to his religious convictions, to his cultural preferences, to the rights which accrue to him as a man(sic) endowed with free will and reason and charged with the obligation of personal salvation, if these are safeguarded, 'minority rights' as such need not find expression. That is why, mingled with these general rights, references are made to minorities. I should like to say on behalf of my own community which I have the honour to represent here; I am sure I am also voicing the feelings of many others--that if these rights are really safeguarded in the manner in which they are sought to be safeguarded in this Constitution, if the Fundamental Rights including as they do minority rights, are assured in an absolutely indubitable manner, no kind of political safeguards will be necessary for us and we shall not demand them, as long as, I say, this part of the Constitution is enforced without any kind of 'encroachment' or misinterpretation. As far as the small Christian community is concerned we have gone a great way in giving up those political safeguards and we are prepared to go further and give up the reservations which have been made in certain provinces. And if we do so, it is because we know that in the spirit in which these fundamental rights have been guaranteed, there is for us an assurance of safety and a confidence which does not need to be propped up or further affirmed by political safeguards and privileges.¹⁸

¹⁸ Article 25 Volume VII (4th November 1948 to 8th January 1949) 09/12/1948, <http://164.100.47.194/Loksabha/Debates/cadebatefiles/C22111948.html> (21 August 2018).

H.C. Mukherjee further declared:

Sir, I tried to find out the views of the country. I may tell the House that it has taken ten years of unremitting hard work on the part of the Nationalist Christians all over India. I sent out a questionnaire and forty-two letters were addressed to my people and replies were received from thirty-five of them. I have consolidated the replies and I find that the enquiries were made, among other sections of the people, by Nationalist Christians who were friendly with Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Scheduled Castes. Their replies consolidated show the following results. So far as the masses are concerned my friends are united in saying that the masses do not want reservations....In my view the Scheduled Castes again do not require representation.¹⁹

In this context, the Constituent Assembly reviewed the status of Scheduled Castes and without opposition K.M. Munshi's proposal that Scheduled Castes belong to Hinduism was unchallengedly accepted.²⁰ The elite dominant caste representatives of the Constituent Assembly failed to highlight the plight of Dalit Christians and didn't struggle to gain SC status for them. Christian representatives in the Constituent Assembly focused much more on issues of freedom and autonomy rather than on real life conditions and alienation of Dalit Christians. Dalits in the community feel that the Christians in the Constituent Assembly sold out their interests for minority rights that only served the elites and their control over church assets, including the educational institutions. The constitution makers failed to identify the Dalit experience of Dalit Christians and recognised the dominant caste Christians as the legitimate spokespersons for the Dalit Christians, who in turn betrayed the Dalit Christians.

¹⁹ *Report of Advisory Committee on Minorities, etc. Volume VIII (16 May to 16 June 1949)* 25/5/1949, <http://164.100.47.194/Loksabha/Debates/cadebatefiles/C25051949.html> (21 August 2018).

²⁰ In the Constitution of India (Article 341), the power to specify who were the scheduled castes was conferred on the President of India with the parliament having power to include or exclude anyone from the list. Kananaikil, "The Scheduled Castes and their Status ...", 90. The 1950 order again specifies that no person professing a religion other than Hinduism may be deemed a member of an SC. Prabhakar, "The Politics of Religious Discrimination ...", 62.

Dalit Critique on the Dominant Caste Representation in Constituent Assembly

The Christian representatives in the Constituent Assembly were least bothered about the life and situation of the Dalit Christians. The failure of the dominant Christian representatives resulted in the severe suffering of Dalit communities in Christianity;

Homogenising Religion

Religious communities in India reflect a multiplicity of complex and intertwined local and regional variations in ethnicity and language, culture and religion, across and within groups. Combining minorities into macro-majorities is a political move. The attempts of macro Hinduism to bring into their fold Sikhism and Buddhism proved successful through constitutional arrangements.²¹ The Christian Representatives in the Constituent Assembly, while being silent to the claims of Hinduism as the patron of Dalits were in effect assisting in the homogenization of religion.

Communalised Conversion

The argument raised in the Constituent Assembly was that bringing SC status to Dalit Christians results in increased conversion.²² Often conversion was identified as conversion to Christianity as extension of western culture and of western Christendom i.e., the pattern of integration of church and community and politics in the medieval Europe. Communalisation of conversion has resulted in anti-conversion laws which contribute to militarization of the state through the enactment of draconian laws glorifying the culture of violence.²³ This indeed resulted in categorising Dalit Christian communities as lured by colonialists and aligned with anti-national agendas.

²¹ Laura Dudley Jenkins, "Scheduled Castes, Christians and Muslims," in *Minority Studies*, edited by Rowena Robinson (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 113.

²² This argument is baseless as the population of Christians in 1961 was 2.44% while in 2001 was 2.34%. Louis, "Dalit Christians betrayed . . . , 1405.

²³ V. Devasahayam, "Religion in Secular India: Rights and Responsibilities," *Religion and Society* 57/4 (December 2012): 2.

Stereotyping and Securitization of Dalit Christians

Hindu Cultural Nationalism employs stereotyping of the communities. The world-view and experience, history and culture of the dominant group get widely disseminated in society. Hence the perspectives of other groups are understood in terms of deficiency or negation. This stereotyping of religious communities is common in India often resulting in denationalizing. Stereotyping and demonizing are essential components of the process of posing minority as a danger. Dalit Christians were stereotyped as lured by missionaries and propagated as threat to the communal fabric of Hinduism.

Deprivation of Political Identity

At the dawn of the independent nation, religious communities became political units to be wooed by nationalist and fundamentalist forces and at this context the majority and minority communalism emerged stronger and active and assigned political identity to communities.²⁴ The political identity of Dalit Christians became ambiguous. Socially the Dalit Christians were no longer fully Dalits, as through exercising the option of conversion Dalits had chosen to move outside the order that had stamped for centuries Dalits. The Dalit Christians were not completely considered as Christians as well, because even in the churches the Dalits continued to suffer from caste discrimination. When the Dalitness of Dalit Christians were not represented and voiced out by the dominant Christians in the Constituent Assembly the political identity was deprived and no political parties considered Dalit Christians as a vital force.

Politicisation of the Quest for Dignity

The special rights are granted to the minority groups when the wider society does not respect completely the principle of neutrality in religion. The politicisation of minority rights obscures the constitutional guarantees that were seen as the bulwark to protect India's religious, cultural and linguistic diversity. The Indian politics has tried to confine socio-cultural problems into culturalist framework

²⁴Thomas, "Inter-Religious Conversion . . .", 100.

negating other concerns involved.²⁵ The interest shown by the political parties for the Dalit Christians and other Dalits does not necessarily mean that they have become a visible influence in the political process of the country and the quest for dignity by Dalit Christians were used by political parties in opportunist political deliberations.

Denial of Human Rights

The Dalit Christians are out of the purview of those fundamental rights and acts and rules those affirm human dignity and protection such as right of freedom of conscience and to profess and religion (Article 15, 25), the right to protect personal life (Article 21), Protection of Civil Rights Rule 1977, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989, etc.²⁶ Ambedkar mentions that the Indian Christians, comprising of Dalit Christianity need two things; safeguarding of their civil liberties and ways and means for their economic uplift.²⁷ The legitimate rights of Dalit Christians which their counterparts in Sikhism, Buddhism and Hinduism are enjoying are denied to the Dalit Christians.

Augmented Suffering of Dalit Christians

The ‘President’s Constitution Order’ issued on August 10, 1950 stated that, ‘no person who professes a religion different from Hindu religion shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste.’ The resultant denial of special rights and privileges of converts of the Scheduled Caste background generated considerable tension and struggle. In Indian context these rights were granted precisely to pre-empt the overwhelming of minority cultures by the majority.²⁸ Losing political, economic, and educational affirmative action benefits, as well as special protections from human rights abuses under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 added to the suffering of Dalit Christians.

²⁵ When culture becomes the only exclusive realm for deriving solutions for social and political problems, Dalit politics can become subject to the dominant social and political institutions which support hierarchies of social order. Bali Sahota, “The Paradoxes of Dalit Cultural Politics,” in *Claiming Power from Below*, edited by Manu Bhagavan and Anne Feldhaus (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 204.

²⁶ Massey, “Dalits and Human Rights ...”, 5.

²⁷ Vasant Moon, comp., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches Vol. 5* (Mumbai: Education Department – Government of Maharashtra, 1989), 453.

²⁸ Robinson, “Introduction ...”, 7.

The Trail Ahead

A subaltern critique of the Dalit Christian history exposes the integration of Dalit Christians with dominant caste Christians in the national debates. For the Dalit Christian, their Dalit identity is primary, as the Dalit Christians live side by side with Hindu Dalits and are treated as Dalits by caste Hindus and dominant caste Christians alike. The pathos of Dalit identity is common and religion is not a criterion to mitigate their pain and suffering. Christianity inspired the Dalit converts to change their social attitudes, it had not inspired them to take practical steps to redress the wrongs from which they suffered. Ambedkar has enumerated three points for the cause of Dalit Christians' suffering: the first reason is to be found in the complete absence of desire on the part of the educated among the Christians to take up the cause of the community and fight for it. There is a lack of kinship in Christianity between the educated and the mass. The second reason is the mental make-up of the convert where servitude is affirmed. The third reason is the teaching of the leadership that the fall of the Dalit Christian is due to his/her sin.²⁹ Reading Dalit Christians' history in India using Subaltern historiography starts with a critique of elitism of colonialists and bourgeoisie nationalists and the dominant Christians who represented Dalit Christians.³⁰ This juncture of exclusion demands a lot of dialogue and action plans as historical problems can hardly be solved by merely replacing one stereotype with another. Further it brings out perspectives on the future trail of actions for Dalit Christians.

Affirmation of Multiple and Overlapping Identities

Contemporary anthropological and sociological theories treat cultures and identities as historical constructs. Especially when it comes to minority identity, it is constructed as a result of historical context, circumstance and judicial process.³¹ This intersectionality in defining

²⁹ B.R. Ambedkar, *Christianizing the Untouchables – Research articles of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar* (Chennai: Dalit Liberation Education Trust, 1994), 76-77.

³⁰ K.L. Sharma, "Revisiting Subaltern Studies in India," in *Subalternity, Exclusion and Social Change in India*, edited by Ashok K. Pankaj and Ajit K. Pandey (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2014), 41.

³¹ Farhana Ibrahim, "Representing the Minority," in *Minority Studies*, edited by Rowena Robinson (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 123.

peoples and persons needs to be affirmed. Thus all identities are fluid and negotiable, rather than being rigid and bounded. There is space for contestation and conflict. The identity of Dalit Christians and any other communities can dissolve or break up to reveal other affirmations of caste, class, gender, or regional association.

Fluidity of Religious identity

What the constitution makers done was fixing the religious identities through defining the borders and boundaries of religions. The subaltern reading of Dalit history attempts at deconstructing the rigid identities of religions. Rather it affirms, fluidity of religious identities, where individuals and communities are not defined and understood on the basis of rigid compartments and binaries, but through the fluidity of identities.

Decommunalising Conversion

The individual's right of freedom to 'profess, practice and propagate religion', and to convert to another faith and religion inherent in it, is a condition and guardian of all democratic freedoms and fundamental human rights in state, society and culture. The conversion of Dalits, Adivasis and Tribals to Christianity is socially and culturally the most important response of India to Christ, through which the communities raise their protest against the prevalent culture in India which denies humanity and dignity to a great majority of its population. Modernity's gift of autonomy and globalization's offer of pliability of the self (both in its individual and collective representation) permitted Dalits to become less rooted in the traditional ideology and concomitant structure of caste and promised converts the chance to reconfigure themselves within a radically alternate postcolonial word-vision and world-way.³² Subaltern reading of Dalit Christians rights attempts at decommunalising Conversion through smashing boundaries and shaping boundaries. While keeping the need for legal provisions to check inter-communal conflict the right of conversion is to be safeguarded.

³² Sathianathan Clarke, "The Promise of Religious Conversion," in *Crossing Religious Borders*, edited by Christine Lienemann-Perrin and Wolfgang Lienemann (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), 601.

Upholding Indian Secularism

Indian Secularism was the result of the struggle among all sections of the country towards Indian independence. It had two basic elements—one, freedom of religion and freedom from religious discrimination in civil society on the basis of common participation in the struggle for Independence and later in nation-building; two, the promotion of change of traditional social structures and cultural values, even those sanctioned by religions, to bring about social justice for Dalits, women and tribals.³³ But the ideology of Hindu nationalism understands minorities as a threat to Hinduism because they reduced and weakened the Hindu majority. The continued relevance of secularism is upheld by subaltern reading of history of the drafting of Indian Constitution.

Active participation in Politics

Hindu nationalists often have expressed that the security of Indian nation lies primarily on Hindus, especially on the Hindus on the borders and others are supposed to have extra-territorial loyalties. The political authorities have often expressed their double standards on the issue of reservation rights for Dalit Christians. Indeed, the argument was that the Indian political parties could not withstand the communal forces' apprehension on conversion by standing with Dalit Christians.³⁴ This invokes the necessity of affirmation of the institutional identity of Dalit which in turn accelerates Dalit participation in politics, which makes the Dalit presence visible and active.

Call for New Leadership

Indeed, Church leaders were largely oblivious to the fact that the social base of the Christian church in India was predominantly Dalit and therefore the Church's destiny in India was bound up with that of the wider Dalit movement. Even to this day Dalit Christians are not represented according to the population. This calls a new leadership in the Indian Christian community even at this point of history where the Dalit Christians are to be represented justly.

³³ M.M. Thomas, "Moderator's Opening Remarks," in *Religion, State, Communalism – A Post-Ayodhya Reflection*, edited by J. John and Jesudas Athyal (Hongkong: Christian Conference of Asia, 1995), 13.

³⁴ See Indira Gandhi's double standards on the issue in Mathai Zachariah, *Inside the Indian Church* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 74.

Dalit Autonomy

The affirmation of rights of Dalit communities to decide on decisive affairs concerning Dalit issues calls for a recapitulation of the Dalit heritage for liberation.³⁵ This affirmation of Dalitness is the affirmation of Dalit particularity in the face of the Caste religion's universalizing propensity.³⁶ The historical mistake of the dominant caste Christians in not affirming the Dalitness of Dalit Christians has to be corrected. The Dalit autonomy doubts and questions the very capacity of the state in assuring the existence of Dalit communities. Further it places Dalit Christians as the subject and owners of existential questions and search for answers.

A Renewed Koinonia

A Renewed Koinonia calls for the vivification of the theological affirmations of both God and human community that are professed and propagated by Christianity; God is conceptualised creatively as saturated in Dalit pain-pathos and yet strong enough to save the broken and oppressed of the world and God is a subaltern being with the power that can deliver the Dalits from bondage to freedom.³⁷ On the other hand, the whole human race is conceived as one family of God, called to a relationship of fraternity with equal access to God, our parent.³⁸ The Koinonia of the church has not been real enough to expose the conditions of Dalit Christians and stand for and with the Dalit Christians. The communal self-centredness closes itself against any concern for social change. The heritage of Dalits is an important source for contextualisation of Christianity.

³⁵ Godwin Shiri, "Study of Religion: Ayrookuzhiel's search for a new approach in the context of Dalit Struggle," *Religion and Society* 45/3 (September 1998): 47.

³⁶ Sathianathan Clarke, "Dalit Religion as a Resourceful Symbolic Domain," *Religion and Society* 49/2 & 3 (June-September, 2004): 39.

³⁷ Sathianathan Clarke, "Dalit Theology: An Introductory and Interpretive Theological Exposition," in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century*, edited by Sathianathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala and Philip Vinod Peacock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 20-26.

³⁸ V. Devasahayam, "Rediscovering the Biblical Vision," in *Dalits and Women: Quest for Humanity*, edited by V. Devasahayam (Chennai: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1992), 214.

Conclusion

The penalization of the Dalits who have opted for a religion other than Hinduism through adopting restrictive and subjective Constitutional provisions is to be taken seriously. This attempts at a continued struggle for including the excluded and protecting vulnerable Dalit Christians in a just and secular state and a free and equal society. The constitution sought to do this with affirmative action and reserved quotas for the weaker sections and protective rights. But these Constitutional remedial actions were hijacked and the Christian representatives found themselves away from the social location of the Dalit Christians and Dalit experiences. The challenge at this juncture is to internalise these struggles and carry on this struggle towards the holistic wellbeing of each person and community. The greatest challenge here is not to stand up for the Dalit Christians, but to stand with the Dalit Christians. At this vantage point, the historical mistakes done by the dominant caste Christians in the constituent assembly gives new directions for reimagining and revisioning Indian Christianity in terms of leadership, representation and struggles and offers insights for the lives and struggles of the Dalit Christians.



NCCI Women's Concern promotes

THURSDAYS IN BLACK

Campaign

in Churches and Christian/Ecumenical Organisations

To address

GENDER INJUSTICE

particularly Domestic Violence and Rape

Need Help?

Feel Free to call: 9455059522 / mail us your concern:

[jyoti@ncci1914.com](mailto: jyoti@ncci1914.com); [ncci@ncci1914.com](mailto: ncci@ncci1914.com)

Hands that Serve: Testimonies of Faith and Resilience of Nurses During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- *Hatchingthem Haokip**

- *S. Grace Tinnunem Haokip***

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged nations across the world. In India alone, more than three lakhs of the population have succumbed to the virus. Even as India battles the lack of medical supplies and human resources in tackling the increasing variants of the Coronavirus, nurses and doctors also battle against time that takes one life after another with every passing hour. In a country known for its vast population, never has the nation seen a nemesis that threatens its future stability as the pandemic has during the past year alone.

While frontline warriors and healthcare workers have been hailed as heroes for risking their personal comforts and preferences during the pandemic, there has been a growing understanding that their sacrifice has come at a huge physical and mental cost. Studies on doctors and nurses during the pandemic have reported about how their experiences have been marked with moments of fear and anxiety as closely as feelings of joy and satisfaction. With this in mind, the present study was conducted with two objectives-

- i) To draw the attention of people to the experiences of nurses who served during the pandemic, to understand their joys, struggles and ultimately, the resilience that marks their vocation.
- ii) Since all the nurses who participated in the study are professing Christians, another objective of the study is to show how faith in Jesus Christ was and is a crucial foundation for their grit and compassion.

*Hatchingthem Haokip is a research scholar at the Department of English, School of Letters, Ambedkar University in Delhi.

** S. Grace Tinnunem is a research scholar at Department of Psychology, University of Delhi.

Context of the Study

For the present study, we interviewed registered nurses belonging to the Thadou-Kuki (a tribe from Manipur) community and who served in several COVID-19 hospitals across New Delhi during the pandemic. The participants willingly agreed to share their stories with the authors because a prior familiarity was established with the participants. The children of the nurses are regular attendees of the Sunday school conducted by Kuki Worship Service Delhi, where the authors serve as Sunday school teachers. Most of the nurses in the study are married and have been residents of Delhi for more than ten years.

Method

Using an empirical phenomenological methodology, semi-structured and informal interviews were conducted with female nurses who were providing their expertise for COVID-19 patients in COVID-19 Centres across New Delhi. Purposive sampling was used for the study. The interviews were conducted between 21st May and 18th June, 2021 and analysed using thematic analysis.

With the support of friends from the Kuki community, the first meeting was conducted online via Zoom with the intention to listen to the narratives of the nurses, to encourage them and pray with them. A total of twenty three nurses participated in the meeting. Some of them shared their testimonies. Keeping the schedules of the nurses in mind, the remaining three interview meetings were conducted individually. A major portion of each interview was conducted in Thadou-Kuki dialect and has been translated to English. This paper will be the first of its kind as an archival project on registered nurses done in the English language among the Kuki community. Thus, it is also an attempt to honour the legacy of faith and service rendered by Kuki nurses in Delhi.

Personal testimonials shared by nurses have two-fold benefits. In narrating their experiences, they are given spaces to pause, reflect and assess how far they have come. The act of narrating is an active way of discovering oneself. In their article “Why Doesn’t the Writing Cure Help Poets?” Kaufman and Sexton draw a connection between mental health and expressive writing. They “argue that the formation of a

narrative is a necessary precondition for expressive writing to have salutary effects” (Kaufman and Sexton 268). Much like writing, narrating is a form of expression. In narrating their stories, nurses access that space which enables them to pause, ponder and process the culminating experiences of the past year that has been ravaged by the pandemic. Secondly, the act of narrating helps them to find an escape from overthinking and ruminating on the disappointments and grief that came with losing patients they thought would recover.

From here on, the article can be broken down into two major sections catering to the two objectives we sought out to address. In the first section, common themes shared by nurses pertaining to the physical and psychological aspect of their experiences have been highlighted. The next section focuses primarily on the role of their Christian faith in impacting their decisions, their sacrificial service and resilience amidst coping with the effects of the pandemic. The themes identified and presented are in no way exhaustive nor is the paper an attempt to understand the scientific aspects of the pandemic and health care. Rather, it could be viewed as an effort to highlight their common experiences, their humanitarian endeavours and resilience.

I. Experiences of Nurses During the Pandemic

A recent study on psychological experiences of nurses in the pandemic observed that positive and negative emotions occurred and co-existed simultaneously (Sun et al. 592). The more negative emotions associated with the earlier stages of uncertainty and confusion around the pandemic gradually receded as nurses were moved by compassion for the patients and came to appreciate and value their irreplaceable role in a time of need. The narratives of the nurses in this study also revealed struggles, joys and adopted coping mechanisms and to a great extent, these were common among them. We have identified few themes that nurses repeatedly shared in the interviews and meetings-facing uncertainty and unfamiliarity, dealing with death, role of family support, staying connected virtually and renewed appreciation for their profession.

i) Facing uncertainty and unfamiliarity:

While describing the initial days when COVID-19 was just gaining attention, the nurses used words like ‘suspense, unpredictable, lack of clarity, confusion, overwhelming’ to express the uncertainty that

surrounded the pandemic and more so, their response to it as health care workers. Hospital administration protocols were changing by the day. There was confusion of roles and often, chaos in the wards. In intensive care units, it was tough to think straight with alarms going on and off. Lack of proper knowledge about the source, transmission and treatment of the disease proved to be a major source of further confusion and concern. Other challenges included shortage of hospital beds for patients, difficulty in breathing and perspiring while donning Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) gears, the fear of transmitting the disease to family members and friends. Such experiences have been consistent with those of nurses from several other studies across the world (Sun et al. 597; Thobaity and Alshammari 90; Huang et al.). Some of the nurses worked in hospitals with very few colleagues from North East India. This made it difficult to find common grounds in terms of linguistic mutual understanding and expression among co-workers.

ii) Dealing with death:

Nurses are not new to witnessing the death of patients under their care. Nonetheless, their experience of dealing with COVID related deaths has weighed heavy on their hearts as well as their mental health. During the peak of the second wave, Delhi faced a period of acute oxygen scarcity. Nurses recall patients brought into Emergency that on closer glance, turned out to be dead bodies. Stable patients in the ward suddenly developed complications and collapsed. When patients whom they treated passed away before their eyes, they expressed feeling remorseful and even guilty at times. For few others like Nurse Lily, the psychological impact was even deeper. She shares:

Everyone (doctors and nurses) would do their best but it was just not enough. It began taking a toll on my mental and physical health. Physically coping up was easier because we rested during the 10 days quarantine following our 14 days duty in the ward. But it was tough on the mental and emotional side. When you realize that even if you have given your 100%, it does not mean much, it gets really disheartening. Once the patient reaches the intubation stage, I have watched them mostly die. I started having nightmares where I dreamt of the ICU settings. That was when I knew I needed a break.

Experiences like that of Nurse Lily's have been echoed by Huang & colleagues who studied emotional responses of nurses during COVID-19 outbreak (Huang et al.). They describe that being unable to save a patient's life despite their best efforts can cause nurses to feel psychological self-defeat. They start to think that they are not a good nurse, which can result in strong self-blame and guilt. The message is strong and clear: being a frontline healthcare worker is heroic but the path is not a bed of roses. It comes not only at a great physical cost but also bears heavily on one's mental health. Experiencing loss and failing to see the desired outcomes can make nurses prone to guilt, anxiety, and feeling of inadequacy, depression and various forms of emotional distress. This has great implications for hospitals, churches and the society. It calls for our attention to ensure that there are adequate outlets for nurses and other frontline workers to pour out their experiences and draw emotional and spiritual support from.

iii) Support from family:

All the nurses in our interview shared that one of the greatest challenges in their line of duty stemmed from their concern about the well-being of their family. Except for Nurse Lily, all the other Kuki nurses we interviewed are married, have children and are residing with their families. During the first wave, most of them underwent extended periods of separation from their family members. They were provided hotel accommodation during their COVID duty and for their quarantine period post duty. Over time, as they began working from home, nurses expressed their fear of contracting the virus and transmitting it to other members of the family, especially their children, some of whom were just a few years old. Concern for family members had been identified as one of the major challenges of frontline nurses even in previous studies (Thobaity and Alshammari 90; Cui et al.).

In the present study too, nurses shared that their longing to be safe and be close to their loved ones led them at some point of time to question their choices of continuing to serve as a nurse. Yet their loved ones became their greatest cheerleaders. In the absence of their wives, husbands took up the role of managing the family and supported them in whatever way they could. These moments became pivotal in reassuring them to continue their good work. The role of their

husbands in taking care of their children was a grateful statement that was repeatedly mentioned by the participants who were married. They stated that they wouldn't have been able to serve effectively had they not received spousal support. Despite most of the nurses in our interviews and their family members contracting the virus at some stage of the pandemic, none of them reconsidered their decisions and are serving joyfully till today.

iv) Staying connected (via virtual platforms):

Long durations of separation from family and friends was made up to a large extent through video calls and other forms of technological advancements. These online platforms became a means to share their happiness, disappointments and be in touch with other co-workers too.

Prior to the conduction of the study too, a Zoom meeting was conducted to listen to the experiences of Kuki nurses in Delhi. The meeting lasted for nearly two hours. Even though a physical meeting was not feasible, the online meeting became a space for them to share their stories, to be heard and appreciated. Each of them left the meeting feeling grateful and encouraged. A mass prayer was conducted to conclude the meeting. Technology, therefore, played a crucial role in strengthening communal support for the nurses. The presence of technology reminded them that they were appreciated and honoured for their service.

v) Renewed appreciation for their profession

Participants of this study claimed that team work and appreciation for their colleagues have increased since the pandemic hit the country. Recalling her experience of being admitted in COVID-19 ward, Nurse Veikim smiles and recalls how her fellow nurses came and hugged her often during her intubation period. Though hugging as a physical touch was against medical protocol, it was the touch she needed. Being on the receiving end of a love like that touched her deeply and left on her a deep impression on the role of nurses' care towards patients. In her testimony, she mentioned that God showed her that she was not alone through the care and affection that she received from her colleagues. It elevated her view of nurses afresh even though she had been a nurse herself all along.

The awareness that they are not fighting the pandemic alone was crucial in helping the nurses in our study to maintain a balanced view of their work. It also gave them more opportunities to serve patients who may have otherwise been neglected. Being a part of a community enabled them to serve and simultaneously access facilities that otherwise won't be available easily.

II. Impact of Faith on Vocation

As optimistic as they tried to keep themselves, nurses had to face moments of burnout. Apart from living in constant threat to their wellbeing, being acquainted with pain and distress on a daily basis does not guarantee that one will be immune to burnout and emotional exhaustion. Fatigue slowly creeps in with each passing day as they care for patients who may have slim chances of recovery. King Solomon fittingly pondered upon the weight of spiritual wellbeing when he asked: "The human spirit can endure in sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?" (NIV Bible, Prov.18.14). How did nurses cope in these environments? How did they sustain themselves when fatigue overwhelmed them? And most importantly, what kept them from quitting and motivated them to keep loving, keep serving at the face of such looming uncertainty and danger? Once again common themes emerged- power of prayer (personal and communal), role of spiritual disciplines, joy of service.

i) Power of personal and communal prayer

Prayer served as an essential factor in strengthening the grit of the nurses. As practicing Christians, the first and immediate response of the nurses in our study was to turn to prayer. Nurse Lily shared about a time when she found herself emotionally overwhelmed. She dropped down to her hospital floor to catch her breath and managed to whisper a prayer to God asking Him to strengthen her. As soon as she got back on her feet, she felt empowered and could carry on her task effectively. Similarly, the other nurses also mentioned that when they were low, they strengthened themselves in God and through personal prayer.

All the nurses testified that through phone calls, text messages and WhatsApp chats, they were constantly reminded by friends, family members and fellow members of Kuki Worship Service Delhi that they

were being remembered in prayer. Knowing that they had a community of people lifting them up in prayer to God gave them immense comfort and courage to continue in the midst of trying times. Communal prayer reveals a holistic understanding of healing from traumatic events. It ministers to that part of a person's being that surpasses the visible and physical. Prayer could be seen as a manifestation of faith during times of crisis. That which is unseen such as depression, anxiety, fear is being encountered in the supernatural realm through prayer. Prayer also shows how the hand of God is able to reach where the human hand cannot.

ii) Role of spiritual disciplines

Each narrative reveals that the perspectives of the nurses are saturated with wisdom and not just knowledge alone. Each of their stories show a life where daily encounters with death and suffering have marinated in each of them a deep understanding of life. On being asked about how the pandemic has shaped her life and perspective, Nurse Nengngai responded:

Life is so short. The fact that life is short has become quite obvious. The second wave has been overwhelming. The patients whom I expected to recover succumbed quickly. I was surprised. We see in the Bible that life is like a mist that appears for a short while and vanishes. We knew this fact. We sang about it. However, seeing and experiencing death in the hospital has made me realise the brevity of human life. My husband and I sometimes jest about this but to love one another while being alive is very important. I am able to carry out my duty faithfully because my husband supports me emotionally and physically. He has retired from the army. He takes care of our sons. When I feel exhausted, he takes on the duties at home so that I can rest.

I attended a Mother's Camp conducted by KWSD in 2018. It was during that camp that I made some decisions. Irrespective of my duty days, I wake up early every morning between 4:00 am to 6:00 am. I have my quiet time of devotion in those early hours before having my breakfast. I surrender the day to the Lord. On the days of my duty, I leave home around 6:00 am. My husband wants to drop me off at the hospital but I insist on taking a bus ride. As a child, I saw my mother waking up at dawn to go and

work in the fields. She would return from the fields to feed the pigs at home. Till today, she has a healthy body because she was active. Maintaining our health is our responsibility. I tell my husband that walking from home to the bus stand is exercise for me.

While travelling on the bus, I think about how I will live through the day and how I can take care of my patients. While returning home, I reflect on the day and assess myself. Sometimes I ask God for forgiveness where I failed to give my best effort in taking care of my patients. Patient satisfaction is very important for me. All hospitals are not the same. In government hospitals, each nurse is given the responsibility for about thirty or forty patients. I don't know if the government does not have a sufficient number of staff but nurses have their limits. How can one person take care of that many patients? When our body has reached its limit, our mind also gets exhausted. This can also cause us to have short tempers. Sometimes we say things we shouldn't say when we are too exhausted.

Nurse Nengngai's response reveals that "faith is a durable and necessary solace for the lonely health worker" (Wani et al. 25). Along with her husband's support, prayer, reading the Bible and self-introspection are the factors that help her in maintaining a steady equilibrium. This further reveals how she maintains her spiritual well-being, which in turn affects her emotional and physical health as well.

iii) Joy of service

A recent study reported that while several healthcare workers chose to step down in the face of the pandemic, those who chose to voluntarily stay and serve showed signs of better coping and less anxiety (Cui et al. 12). This seems to be true even of the nurses in our study. COVID-19 has undoubtedly been a test of commitment, sacrifice and resilience in the face of looming uncertainty and danger. It has tried hard to break the strongest warriors. Irrespective of the factors that influenced their joining the nursing profession, all the nurses in the study described a feeling of contentment and testified to experiencing joy of service. They saw the pandemic as an opportunity to serve and care in a time when many wished to but could not. When asked deeper, it became

clear that their motivation, inspiration and joy came unmistakably from the love of God that was poured in their hearts.

Nurse Boineng shares:

At one point, when I was disheartened and contemplated quitting my job, it dawned on me that I could be in the position the patients are in but I was not. All these years, I worked comfortably as a nurse and was paid well but when the real situation called, why was I complaining and thinking of quitting? I realized that this is the opportunity where I was asked to live out the true essence of my profession. I was called to be a nurse for such a time as this. It is not that being a nurse was easy before but we did not face even 1% of the challenges we are facing today. Now was the time to be a nurse in the truest sense. What an honor it is to be on the serving side and not to be the one being cared for and served!

When I got this clear, all my laziness and excuses melted away. I was filled with joy and began to serve with passion. I felt true love and compassion for the patients who were in great suffering and separated from their loved ones. Driven by God's love, I was able to love others. When we can go out of our way and be of help to someone in need, we forget our own weariness. Instead of being cared for, we count it a blessing to be able to care for someone who needs our help.

The other participants of this study also claimed job satisfaction. They derive their satisfaction primarily from being able to serve in a community where help is needed. Job satisfaction for the nurses is closely linked to being a part of a community where their vocation transforms lives.

The Way Forward

In their work "Trauma, Religion, and Spirituality: Pathways to Healing" Harper and Pargament posits that traumatic events "do not merely endanger a person's physical, psychological, and social well-being, to the extent that these upheavals threaten or damage aspects of life that have been deemed as sacred" (352). The observations gathered

from the interviews clearly points to the need for any community to be “equipped with the therapeutic tools and skills necessary to effectively address the religious and spiritual dimension of trauma” (361). By encouraging individual and communal prayer, nurses were introduced to an alternative coping sphere that neither counselling, resting in hotels nor medicines could offer.

Different people react and respond to different events in their own respective ways. Nurse Lily managed to take a few days off her duty and traveled with her friends to a nearby hill station to take her mind off the hospital setting. Since she did not live with her family, it was an easy decision. Taking time to unwind herself in a different environment refreshed her exhausted body and mind. She shared feeling much better when she reported back to work. However, it may not be possible or feasible for everyone. Hence it is very important to create safe spaces where nurses can pour out their mental and emotional burdens. One of the nurses in our study stated that narrating her experience to us was therapeutic for her. She mentioned that she usually kept most of her experiences to herself as she felt that her family would worry more if they knew the details of what she was facing on a day to day basis. Hospital administration must also be equipped with how to deal with stress in nurses and seek to reduce confusion at workplaces should another situation like this come.

Conclusion

Over and over again, nurses have proved to be epitomes of love and compassion. Even as the anecdotes of the nurses emerge through active storytelling, the importance to curate and archive these pandemic experiences will increase with the passage of time. The present study is a testament to the compassion, grit and resilience of nurses in some of the most trying times in the history of our world. They have been the hands and feet of Christ when the world needed His touch. Through the compassionate services of caring women, the church has not been indifferent or detached. Just as Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with the expensive ointment, we are reminded that nurses continue to spend their precious lives to bring hope and healing to a world in need.

Works Cited

Al Thobaity, Abdullelah, and FarhanAlshammari. "Nurses on the frontline against the COVID-19 pandemic: an integrative review." *Dubai Medical Journal* 3.3 (2020): 87-92.

Cui, Shasha, et al. "Impact of COVID-19 on psychology of nurses working in the emergency and fever outpatient: A cross-sectional survey." (2020).

Harper, Anna R., and Kenneth I. Pargament. "Trauma, religion, and spirituality: Pathways to healing." *Traumatic stress and long-term recovery*. Springer, Cham, 2015.349-367.

Huang, Long, and HairongLiu. "Emotional responses and coping strategies of nurses and nursing college students during COVID-19 outbreak." *MedRxiv* (2020).

Kaufman, James C., and Janel D. Sexton. "Why doesn't the writing cure help poets?." *Review of general psychology* 10.3 (2006): 268-282.

Sun, Niuniu, et al. "A qualitative study on the psychological experience of caregivers of COVID-19 patients." *American journal of infection control* 48.6 (2020): 592-598.

Wani, Zaid Ahmad, et al. "'Faith versus Fear"—A Study in Medical Professionals in the Light of COVID-19 Pandemic." ● ● ●

NCCI-IDEA campaigns for

Rights of persons with Disability, and Accessibility and Inclusion in Physical and Mind space

Need HELP?
Call **7028 400 222**
or Write to **idea@ncci1914.com**



Examining the Rationale and Relevance of Representation and Elections in a Democracy

- Arpita Rachel Abraham*

Introduction

In the early city states of the western world, citizens were directly involved in the process of formulating political decisions. This form of direct democracy was argued to be the best way for political decisions to reflect the will of the people. However, direct democracy was seen to be impractical for anything other than a small community, and it was felt that ordinary citizens did not necessarily possess knowledge that was sufficient to make legislative decisions.

Following the transformation of city-states into nation-states, the most essential feature of democracy has been *political representation*. Instead of directly participating in political decision-making as in the Greek polis, the public through periodic competitive *elections*, selects representatives to represent them in government deliberations.

In this article, I will try to dig deeper into the rationale behind representation and elections in a democracy, and in doing so will try to examine its relevance in meeting contemporary political challenges faced by the world.

What is Democracy?

If we look at the literal meaning of the word, democracy comes from a combination of two Greek words, ‘demos’ meaning people and ‘kratos’ meaning rule. At its core, democracy is a form of government in which the “people rule”. However, Bernard Crick describes democracy as being promiscuous in nature, with varying meanings attached to it by different people in different contexts. He further outlines four broad usages attached to ‘democracy’ throughout history -

The first usage is found among the ancient Greeks and it was subject to Plato's critique and Aristotle's defence. Plato argued that democracy being the ‘rule of the many’ implied the rule of the poor and ignorant

*Ms. Arpita Rachael Abraham is a student of Political Science at Lady Sri Ram College, Delhi.

masses over the educated and the well-informed. Aristotle did not reject this view completely, rather he altered it. He suggested that a good government was a mixed government and it required a mixture of education and experience, with the few ruling with the consent of the many.

The second usage has its basis in Aristotle's suggestion, with the added opinion that the 'popular' element could prove to be beneficial in giving more power to a democratic state. It was believed that laws to protect all are not good enough unless the subjects themselves became active citizens in making their own laws collectively. This usage was prevalent in the Roman republic, in Machiavelli's great Discourses, in the 17th century English and Dutch republics, and in the early American republic.

The third usage is found in the rhetoric and events of the French Revolution and in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It emphasised that everyone, regardless of education or property, had a right to make his or her will felt in matters of public concern and saw 'general will' or common good as an alternative to the dominance of elite interest.

The fourth usage of democracy is found in the multiple constitutions that emerged in the 19th and 20th century as well as in the writings of John Stuart Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville. It suggests that in a democracy, everyone can participate, but they must then mutually respect the equal rights of fellow citizens within a regulatory legal order that defines, protects, and limits those rights. This is seen to be the thrust of 'modern democracy', a fusion of the idea of power of the people and the idea of legally guaranteed individual rights, where citizens have the opportunity to formulate their preferences, to signify their preferences and to have their preferences weighed equally in the conduct of government.

Conceptualizing Representation

Contesting Views

In conceptualizing representation, one of the most straightforward definitions is provided by Hanna Pitkin. According to her, to

‘represent’ is to “make present again”. In this definition, political representation is the activity of making citizens’ voices, opinions, and perspectives “present” in decision-making processes. This definition however, is inadequate as it leaves the concept of political representation underspecified.

Others, such as Michael Saward, have tried to shift the theoretical framework in the analysis of representation from spatial metaphors of ‘presence’ and ‘absence’ to ‘speech acts’ that establish a representative relationship. In such a relationship, potential representatives make claims, which ‘call forth’ a constituency. The representative ‘claim’ forms and engages people, and the members of a proposed constituency are challenged to accept or offer objections. He argued that representatives gain their democratic legitimacy by building constituencies through ‘claiming’ and ‘responding’.

Yet another view is advanced by Garsten, who argues that the ‘chief purpose of a representative government is to multiply and challenge governmental claims to represent the people.’ Representative institutions should ‘prevent any one interpretation of the popular will from claiming final authority’, accenting ‘the negative function of popular sovereignty’.

As is apparent from these arguments, the concept of political representation has varying and competing dimensions. When compared to the direct forms of democracy found in the ancient city-states, representative institutions today appear to be poor substitutes for the ways that citizens actively ruled themselves then. However, we should think of representative democracy not as an alternative to direct democracy, but rather as an intrinsically modern way of intertwining participation, political judgment, and self-rule. The new discussions emerging on representation indicate a constructivist turn, where representation is seen as a creative process necessary to democracy rather than an institutional arrangement that can at best only approximate ‘real’ democracy.

These discussions, along with the analysis of the clusters of meaning attached to democracy over time, leads us to another important question of what is expected of a ‘representative’.

Theories of Representation

There is no unified theory of representation, rather there are multiple competing theories, each based on certain ideological and political assumptions.

Edmund Burke believed that the government should be representative of its people by serving their common good rather than their constituent opinions. This is called the '*trustee model*' since an individual has been entrusted with formal responsibility for another's affairs. Burke believed that the government had a primary responsibility to use their 'mature judgement' to serve the government and the country as a whole;

Parliament is not a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests, which interests each must maintain, as an agent and advocate, against other agents and advocates; but Parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole —where not local purposes, not local prejudices, ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole.

However, this view of representative democracy is quite worrisome as it is contingent upon the assumption that the 'general will' is the will of all. Furthermore, the distinction between the national interest and the opinion of the people as two separate entities is questionable, having elitist implications. Additionally, the theory fails to fully consider that members of government may not always have a noble character and may be self-interested and overlook the common good of society.

Thomas Paine was aware of this tendency of politicians to pursue their own self-interests and advanced an almost counter-ideal of the '*delegate model*' of representation, where 'the elected should never form unto themselves an interest separate from elections'. In this model, delegates have little to no scope in exercising their own judgements and broader opportunities are made available for popular participation. However, Burke would argue that public opinion is prone to being easily swayed and may foster narrow outlooks and conflicts.

With the emergence of modern political parties and the view of representatives as essentially actors tied to their party image, new theories of representation also emerged. The *'mandate model'* takes into account the agency of the party as well as the role of party policies and party labels in election results. However, this model has a tendency to exaggerate the importance of policies while undermining the significance of a leader's personality, party images and social conditioning.

The *'resemblance model'* on the other hand gives priority to the social make-up of the political representatives. It is of the view that the elected representative should resemble or share the same characteristics as the people they claim to represent. It brings out questions on the 'representativeness' of politicians and whether they can be said to represent us in terms of their gender, ethnicity or class. While resemblance with a community can ensure that representatives are able to better grasp their issues and represent their interests, it also holds the shortfall of portraying representation in narrow terms. Placing too much importance on what a representative looks like can prevent those being represented from paying adequate attention to what a representative does.

When is Representation 'Democratic'?

Despite this general agreement on the importance of representation for democratic practices, there is relatively little discussion of what it means to represent in a democratic fashion. Difficulties may arise with one person representing many. There are also possibilities of citizens being marginalized by representative institutions.

This problem is articulated most clearly by Iris Marion Young who suggests that representative institutions can include the opinions, perspectives and interests of some citizens at the expense of marginalizing the opinions, perspectives and interests of others. Hence, it is said that a dilemma of institutional reforms aimed at increasing the representation of historically disadvantaged groups is that such reforms can decrease the responsiveness of representatives. Without an acceptable degree of responsiveness, the legitimacy of democratic governance would be questioned.

But it should be noted that the way in which responsiveness and accountability work in representation depends on the vision of democracy that is embedded in political institutions. This means considering whether the government should be responsive to the majority of people or to as many people as possible. This also leads us to a whole other discussion on the distinction between majoritarian Westminster democracy and proportional (consensus) democracy.

Currently answers to such questions and counter-arguments are unclear. However, what is certain is that democratic citizens are likely to disagree about what constitutes democratic representation.

The Role of Elections

Since representation is also thought to be found outside democratic regimes, it is believed that what makes representation democratic is the act of election under the equal principle of one man, one vote. In other words, representation starts and potentially ends in elections. This also indicates that the meaning of elections is closely linked to the factors that shape voting behaviour.

In democracies, elections serve both a practical and a symbolic role. In a practical sense, elections provide the primary means by which citizens choose their representatives. As such, they provide citizens with an opportunity to influence the government formation process, to reward or punish politicians for their time in power, and to shape the direction of future policy. In a symbolic sense, the legitimacy of a democratic government comes from the fact that it was chosen through an electoral process. Citizens have an equal opportunity to participate in selecting the people who rule over them and hence, have a say in the types of policies that should be implemented.

Manin viewed elections primarily as a means of judging the characters of rulers. He believed that the value of democratic election is that the 'many' are better than the 'few' at recognizing competent individuals, though worse than the 'few' at acting competently. However, he felt that electoral suffrage in itself, produced no change in the practice and institution of representation, which are substantially the same today as they were when only a few citizens had the right to vote.

Nevertheless, the importance of elections cannot be ignored as they provide the public with its clearest formal opportunity to influence the political process and help directly or indirectly to determine who holds power. This leads us to the judgement that elections may or may not 'make' representation, but they certainly do 'make' representatives. At a minimum, they make a responsible and limited government, even if not necessarily a representative democracy.

Changing Political Landscape and Challenges

The contemporary political landscape poses complex global challenges to democracies from outside and within. The landscape is shaped by pandemic-induced implications, geopolitical power shifts, changing roles and structures of (supra)national organizations and institutions, and the rise in modern communications technologies. Distrust of traditional political institutions, particularly political parties and politicians have led citizens to seek alternative paths of political dialogue and engagement, supported by new technology.

Democratic backsliding is an unsettlingly common phenomenon. Too often, competitive elections are undermined, citizens lose their rights to mobilize or voice their demands, and governments become less accountable. That is, changes are made in formal political institutions and informal political practices that significantly reduce the capacity of citizens to make enforceable claims upon the government. These changes may not lead to the complete breakdown of democratic regimes but they do degrade citizens' rights and their engagement with the state. For eg- in Turkey, Hungary and Venezuela elected leaders redesigned institutional checks and balances in order to consolidate their power and insulate it from popular control. The role of courts, opposition parties, as well as of the media is more and more limited, and elections become increasingly unfair.

Such democratic backsliding should not be met with a decrease in support for democracy. A democratic system can recover if it can react to these dysfunctions through democratic means. Elections in particular can provide the means for individuals and groups to compete for access to power through the currency of public support. For example, the recent triumph of Joe Biden over Donald Trump in the USA re-instilled hope in democratic institutions and elections for many.

In addition to this, another challenge we observe is that international, transnational and non-governmental actors have increasingly been playing an important role in advancing policies on behalf of democratic citizens. Such actors are able to “speak for,” “act for” and even “stand for” individuals within a nation-state— acting as representatives for those citizens.

Such transitions indicate that it is no longer desirable to limit one’s understanding of political representation to elected officials within the nation-state. As powers of a nation-state are often being disseminated to international and transnational actors, elected representatives are no longer necessarily the primary agents who determine how policies are implemented. Given these changes, the traditional focus of representation based on elections within nation-states, is insufficient for understanding the decision-making process behind policies.

The complexity of modern representative processes and the multiple locations in which political power is situated suggests that contemporary notions of accountability would be inadequate. The scope of political representation needs to be expanded in order to reflect contemporary realities in the international arena.

The bond between representation, democracy and elections is seen to have served the cause of both representation and democracy in its attempts to improve the effectiveness and legitimacy of government. The new range of global political developments do pose a challenge to the relevance of representation, elections and democracy as a whole. However, these challenges cannot and should not be seen as an excuse for their dismissal, for it has been rightly said- *'Man's inclination to justice makes democracy possible; but man's capacity for injustice makes it necessary.'*



Feasts, Christian Identity, and Nationalism

- Joseph Prabhakar Dayam*

Feasts are religious. Each feast evinces an aspect of faith and provides occasions to celebrate its meaning, so as to be renewed in our spiritual commitments. Therefore, we have feasts to mark the lives of various apostles and saints. We seek to be renewed in our commitment to Christ as we celebrate their memory. It is the Church's way of rooting itself in the faith of the apostles and participating in the historic faith of the Church. It is about faith and about keeping the tradition alive.

Feasts are cultural. They are occasions for aesthetic encounters and public entertainment. They also could become income generating mechanisms for the religious institutions, cultural units, and local political outfits to get by on.

Feasts are Political too. They form our identity. They contribute to a sense of belonging. They do include the communities by way of symbolically re-remembering the body politic of a society which otherwise is dismembered in its everyday life by various factors that stratify the society. They exclude too, particularly when these feasts become identity markers for a community. Feasts are political theatrical events. They could either help reinforce the status quo or seek to counter the hierarchy by their excessive mimicking of power. They could either be events of power negotiations or occasions for defiance of power. It all depends where they come from and what their agendas are.

Feasts in their observance have performative power. They could either transform the collective life of a community to become an open community of brotherly/sisterly embrace or degenerate the community into an exclusive triumphalist community over against the others.

According to the liturgical calendar in India, we marked three feasts to be celebrated during the month of July: the feast of Apostle Thomas on

*Rev. Dr. Joseph Prabhakar Dayam is a pastor of Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church and currently serves as Professor of Theology at Andhra Christian Theological College, Hyderabad.

the 3 July, the Feast of Magdalene on the 22 July, and the Feast of Apostle James on the 25th July. While the feast of Apostle Thomas for obvious reasons was observed with greater enthusiasm, the latter two went almost unnoticed. While Thomas was remembered for the assumption that he brought Christianity to India, Magdalene was willfully forgotten for being a woman apostle. A non-biblical myth prevailed over the biblical account of the first apostle, Mary, who was sent to preach the goodnews of the resurrection to the male apostles.

The feast of the Apostle Thomas is part of Church's tradition to commemorate his practice of Christian discipleship that included wavering between doubt and faith, having a universal vision of the reign of God, reaching out to the 'uttermost parts of the world' in love with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and his consequent martyrdom. The introit and the collect that are given in the Lutheran hymnal point to the call, the commission and the cost of discipleship that are involved in being sent into the world. The scripture text assigned refers to the resurrection appearance of Jesus to Thomas and the rest of the disciples. It makes a reference to Thomas's refusal to settle for the resurrection of Jesus to be a mere mystic presence. Not that he was avoiding unsettledness of faith and seeking certainty in the Cartesian sense. He had a greater vision of the resurrection than of its being a mere mystic presence or an existential co-travelling. He wanted the 'flesh-and-blood'ness in the resurrection of Christ, for that alone would be a divine vindication for the death of an innocent under the cruel empire, and that alone could dismantle any notion of body - spirit dualism and offer a wholesome vision of human salvation. His insistence on feeling the wounds with his finger was for him the only way to be affirmed in his faith that the resurrection of Jesus could truly be a ground for Christian hope. Once he has ascertained it for himself, he makes the confession that Jesus is the Lord, a confession that counters the imperial creed that Caesar is Lord.

Therefore, the feast of St. Thomas is about the historic Christian faith that God in the resurrection of Christ has vindicated all those innocents and all those who resisted the empire and suffered and got crucified. The Jesus movement needed this sign (with its physicality/materiality). It is about seeking Pax Christi over Pax Romana, and being aware of the cost involved in it while pursuing the peace of Christ. The feast of St. Thomas calls for a radical faith and a radical

spiritual praxis. It is political in its own way. The confession that Christ is Lord is a political faith affirmation that refuses any kind of allegiance to regimes of violence and hatred. To seek the ground for hope in the resurrection of Christ for all humanity and thereby to reach out to the oceans beyond is to open oneself in love to a vision that holds all nations together as one humanity. It calls for dismantling boundaries of 'race', gender, ethnicity and nationality and envisions a new heaven and new earth where all human beings participate in God's reign of love.

That which was celebrated on the 21 December is moved to 3 July and for some reason, the myth of St. Thomas 's visit, ministry and martyrdom found greater prominence than his confession that Jesus is Lord and the theological and spiritual implications of this confession. I used the word 'myth' not to suggest that it is fictitious, but to be aware of the complexities involved in establishing a 'fool-proof, evidence based' historical account of his visit. By suggesting that it is a myth, I mean that the St. Thomas story in India becomes a horizon of understanding and thereby functions as a meaning-making apparatus for those who seek to be identified as St. Thomas Christians. I used it in that positive sense. The life of St. Thomas -as it is accounted for by those communities who embrace him as the founder of their churches, - illustrates the meaning of Christian discipleship, that the idea of Christian discipleship is to confess Christ as Lord in the face of empire. It means to be attentive to the prompting of the Spirit and be led by Her to know the unknown and make known the known.

To observe the St. Thomas feast in India, therefore is to embrace that legacy of Christian discipleship that calls for an open embrace of the cultural, religious and ethnic other with the love of Christ and humbly offering the gifts of the gospel, and to celebrate the hospitality of the natives while conversing and converting. While observing the feast of St. Thomas, we also may have to bring to memory the lost opportunities of reaching out in love to all other communities in contrast with the way St. Thomas Christianity in India privileged the narrative of the conversion of the Namboodri brahmins and consequently became exclusive for several centuries.

The historic and universal tradition of St. Thomas feast now is observed by many Christians in India as 'Indian Christian Day.' Those who envisioned this 'event' clarified this as a celebration of the coming

of St. Thomas to India as early as in the first century and thereby established a claim that Christianity is 2000 years old and therefore native to the soil. The advocates of this suggested that this is Church's way of countering the Hindutva ideologues' claim that Christianity is foreign to India. They further insinuated that "by marking it in 2021 and every year henceforth, we, as followers of the Lord Jesus, can preserve our identity within India's cultural heritage, while uniting with all those who wish to celebrate it, irrespective of language, custom, creed, region or religion." Father Babu Joseph, a former spokesperson of CBCI assessed the value of this endeavor as "this would be an important step in making Christianity as part of Indian history and ethos,"

The aims of this effort seems to be

1. to make a claim of indigenous status for Christian faith,
2. to impress upon the majority in present-day India that Christians are Indian enough,
3. to prove to those who insist upon nationalism as a requirement for anyone to be a citizen of this country that the Indian church is nationalist.

These are all certainly well meant. But the question is whether these politics of accommodation are theologically and politically legitimate.

I want to place before my friends who want to observe this day as Indian Christians Day the following concerns:

1. To call St. Thomas Christianity as Indian Christianity is perhaps an anachronism. The India of the first few centuries of the common era was certainly not the India of our times. India is a colonial construct. To call the ancient Christianity of St. Thomas tradition as Indian is perhaps to succumb to the Hindutva's claim of the ever present Akhand Bharat.
2. The Church is not merely a sociological unit, but it is a theological category. As a theological category, it is rooted in time and space, yet it is universal (catholic) in time and space. Its identity is time and space bound, yet its call is to transcend that identity. The question is whether we are Christians in India or Indian Christians.
3. The nomenclature 'Indian Christians' has its state-ascribed meaning. It refers to those who are 'caste converts' to

Christianity. This term excludes the majority of the Christians in India (Dalit/Tribal/Adivasi Christians). This term primarily identifies one not by their faith but by their caste location. A Christian identity can never be a caste identity since one cannot serve caste and Christ at the same time.

4. The Indian Church's tendency to succumb to the pressure of nationalism is an ethical dilemma that the church needs to give serious thought to. Indian Christian theology, until the rise of Dalit/Tribal/Feminist theologies, had succumbed to nationalist pressure and consequently had become exclusionary -resulting in the narrative absence of the Dalit/Tribal Christians in 'Indian' Church History, and its theology lending its ideological premise to exclusionary practices.
5. Nationalism as we see it today has become hegemonic. We also are aware of its genocidal character in many several expressions of nationalism in different parts of the world. The Church perhaps has to resist such nationalist ideology rather than fall into its trap. Perhaps we need to remind ourselves of the wisdom that comes from Paul Tillich who wrote after having witnessed the church's collaboration with nationalism that, when nationalism is raised to the level of ultimate concern it becomes demonic.

I am drawn to an understanding that the recent Christian nationalist tendency and its accompanying events like National Prayer Day and Indian Christian Day are consequent to the rise of evangelical Christianity in the West that often provided the needed theological legitimacy to White supremacist nationalism. I am afraid that these efforts are becoming the Church's way of getting closer to the powers that be and of becoming allies to the state; instead of being a prophetic witness to justice and righteousness. At a time when human rights defenders are branded as anti-national, the Church perhaps needs to bring the idea of nationalism under critical theological and ethical scrutiny.



Fr. Stan Swamy: A Radical Disciple from the Indian Soil

- Salini Mulackal*

Fr. Stan Swamy was in news ever since 8 October 2020 when he was arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and chargesheeted under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, under which bail can be denied. He was soon sent to Taloja jail in Mumbai where he remained until a few days before his death. With many other activists and journalists, he was implicated in the 2018 Bhima Koregaon violence and was accused of being a Maoist sympathiser. Fr. Stan repeatedly denied the charges.

In the passing away of Fr. Stan, the Church in India lost a courageous, committed, compassionate follower of Jesus. Fr. Stan was prepared for a prestigious institution but opted to work with the poor. He worked as director of Indian Social Institute, Bangalore in the late 70s and 80s. He used to conduct a three-month course on social analysis for anyone who wanted to know how to understand the Indian situation critically. In addition to young people, many priests and religious attended this program.

As a result, they became critical of the socio-economic and political situation of our country. That program had a transformative impact on most of the participants. That is why in the late 70s and 80s, many religious congregations belonging to the Roman Catholic Church opened houses in rural areas and city slums to work with the poor. They moved from institutional to insertional communities and ministries. Fr. Stan played an important role in the church at that time for creating critical consciousness among many church leaders and members.

He did not remain as an armchair academician. After helping many to read the reality critically, he moved on to grass root activism. He spent

*Prof. Sr. Shalini Mulackal is a Presentation Sister and a Professor of systematic theology at Vidyajyoti College of Theology, Delhi. She is also a visiting professor to a number of other Seminaries and theological faculties. She is member of the Indian Theological Association (ITA) and has been its first woman President. She is also a member of the Indian Women Theologians Forum (IWTF), Ecclesia of Women of Asia (EWA) and Indian Christian Women's Movement (ICWM).

almost thirty years of his life working with the Adivasis of central India. He fought for the release of those who were falsely implicated in crimes which they did not commit. For instance, Lalit Manji, 44 was arrested in 2001 for a murder he did not commit. Jiten Marandi, 38, was arrested in Hazaribagh in 1999 because he shared a name with a Maoist. Bhuvneshwar Singh, 79, was falsely arrested in connection with a murder. According to Aloka Kujur, a social worker from Jharkhand, Fr. Stan filed a petition in the high court when 500 innocent Adivasi youth from Jharkhand were put in jail by the police, who claimed they were Naxals. He fought for them for a long time.

Fr. Stan always raised his voice against oppression. He became a voice for the Adivasis of Jharkhand. After the Pune police raided his residence twice in 2018 and 2019, Fr. Stan in an interview to Newslandry on 17 June, 2019 said, “The Adivasis, who are the owners of this land, are not getting any share of the natural resources. Corporates and industrialists are getting rich by mining the minerals from here when the Adivasis are dying of hunger. Young Adivasis are kept in jail on false accusations of being Naxalites. I write and fight for these issues which is the reason behind the attempt to implicate me in the Bhima Koregaon case.”

He sharpened the people’s voice against government oppression. He continued to do research and write about people’s movements. He strongly opposed the government’s oppression of people. He wrote about the government’s role in matters of water, jungle and land and supported all the movements related to these issues. The raid on his house by the Pune police and the eventual arrest by NIA is part of a political conspiracy. His action on behalf of the poor was disturbing the political powers.

After his prophetic stand and actions, his passion began when he was arrested on 8th October, 2020. Being 84 years of age, he had all the difficulties of old age. Besides, he had impaired hearing in both ears, had undergone two hernia operations, and had lumbar spondylosis. He had Parkinson’s disease and suffered tremors in both hands. His fellow inmates had to help him with tasks like bathing, eating and dressing himself, and he had frequent episodes of memory loss. He also tested positive for Covid on May 30, 2021.

While in prison, he often spoke about bail, even when he was severely ill. He wanted to be surrounded by his own people in his final days but he never got the chance. At the time of his death, he was still in custody though admitted in a hospital a few days prior. At every turn the jail authorities were reluctant to provide him with basic amenities like a straw and sipper. His request for a full-sleeve sweater, a blanket, and two pairs of socks was denied. On May 21 this year, Fr. Stan himself summed up his condition during a medical bail hearing saying,

“Eight months and my health and bodily functions have severely deteriorated...Before I was lodged in Taloja prison, my body was functional,” he told the court. “I was able to walk, eat, bathe and write letters by myself...I am requesting you to consider why and how this deterioration of myself happened?”

“One day at a time, sweet Jesus. That’s all I’m asking of you. Just give me the strength to do every day, what I have to do.” This was the hymn sung by activist Arun Ferreira for Fr. Stan at Taloja jail, during their time together behind bars. Ferreira too was accused in Bhima Koregaon case. Whenever Stan asked Ferreira about the status of his bail, Ferreira would sing these words to him to cheer him up.

Though Stan is no more physically present, he lives on in the hearts of many. Truly he lived as a radical disciple of Jesus. He is a model placed before us in our time, showing us how to live our Christian life meaningfully. Like Jesus, he reached out to the least, embraced their cause, stood by their side, and became a threat to the political powers of our time. He endured his passion of nine months in prison with calm yet stood by the truth and died for the truth.



Was Fr. Stan Swamy a ‘Marxist’ Jesuit?

- Cheriyan Alexander*

It is very interesting to see the trajectories taken by the debates and conversations around Fr. Stan Swamy in the days and weeks after his death in custody earlier this month. Those who have known him for four decades, closely observing his activism on behalf of Adivasi rights, maintain that he was framed in a politically motivated false case. Others, who came to know about his existence only a year ago, are more or less sure that the yet unproven charges against him are true and that his activism was only a front for the gameplan of the banned CPI (Maoist) organization, which is committed to armed uprising against the Indian state. The fact that he was a Christian priest who belonged to the Jesuit order, has also led to critiques centred on suspected ulterior motives of the religious kind.

The latest iteration of this has been the view that Fr. Stan Swamy was a votary of ‘Liberation Theology,’ a fairly recent school of Christian thought, originating in Latin America, which shares some key concerns and convictions with classical Marxian thought, although its proponents assert that it is based on the radical, egalitarian and emancipatory teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, Fr. Stan has been labelled a ‘Marxist Jesuit’ and this is used as the basis for explaining his affinity for the Maoist path. It is further argued that the Jesuits in India, until not so long ago, generally confined themselves to running prestigious schools and colleges in tier-one and tier-two cities and kept themselves aloof from any kind of political/socio-economic activism. But over the last few decades, a younger breed of Jesuits, so the argument goes, their minds ‘poisoned’ by Liberation Theology, fanned out into the villages and tribal lands of India and began to upset the harmonious apple cart of Indian society by instigating the socially marginalised and the downtrodden to agitate, (if necessary, even violently) for their rights. Once entrenched in this domain, it is claimed, they made common cause in many places with ‘lefties’ of all hues, all ‘anti-national’ to varying degrees, and particularly with the Maoists, the sworn enemies of the nation.

*Dr. Cheriyan Alexander taught English at St. Joseph’s College (Autonomous), Bengaluru, for 36 years, and retired in 2018.

As one who studied in a Jesuit-run school and college for 13 years and then taught in a Jesuit college for nearly four decades, I have observed the Jesuits at close quarters, and I find this assessment to be a gross distortion of the facts on the ground. In this article, I hope to offer a balanced perspective regarding the Jesuits in general and Fr. Stan Swamy's work in particular.

First, some thoughts on Liberation Theology. The image that is sought to be created through the recent narrative about it in some quarters of our media space – the image of Catholic priests, mostly Jesuits, holding secret planning meetings with Naxalite guerrillas, with a view to ushering in the revolution through the violent overthrow of the legitimately elected government – is a figment of a biased imagination, entertained by those who have never observed at close range the kind of social activism Jesuits are actually engaged in. The Jesuits I have known across these five decades, especially those who have been living with, and working for the uplift of, marginalised communities, very rarely invoke the ideologues of Liberation Theology, although most are well acquainted with their writings. Much more often I have heard Jesuits citing not just Jesus, their main inspiration, and Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of their order, but also Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule, Gandhi, Tagore, Ambedkar and even earlier Indian social reformers like Narayana Guru and Basava – all of whom were driven by a passion for justice and were known for speaking out against the unjust and oppressive social structures of their times.

Incidentally, just take a look at the recent trend of sticking the label 'anti-national' or 'urban naxal' on anyone who articulates a critique of the ruling dispensation, or organises a protest against a perceived injustice perpetrated by the powers that be. Apart from being an utterly infantile attitude, it is also extremely unhealthy for Indian democracy and will in the long run impede progress. It will sap whatever idealism is left in our youth to question brazen injustice wherever they see it and to stand up for just causes. And without idealism, no serious nation-building can happen. After all, this is the civilization that produced the Rg Veda, which states: "*Aanobhadrakrtavoyantuvishwatah*" (Meaning: Let noble thoughts come to me from all directions). In the light of this, constructive criticism from all quarters – and that, in today's terms, includes the Left – should be welcomed and deliberated on. In this country, historically speaking, the work of championing the

cause of the underprivileged and the oppressed, and of agitating for their rights, was being carried out by individuals and groups long before the Left appeared on the scene. Gandhi and Ambedkar were on the scene quite early as well. Even in post-independence India, the Left holds no copyright on leading protests and agitations and movements for justice. In 1974, a young Narendra Modi himself was an agitator, taking part in the Navnirman protests and responding enthusiastically to Jayaprakash Narayan's call for Total Revolution. Given this venerable pedigree, how can agitation and protest and dissent suddenly become anti-national?

Then there is the other belief that unfettered capitalism is the panacea for everybody's problems. Its proponents say "allow market forces free rein and everybody's problems, including those of the Adivasis, will be solved because nothing lifts people out of poverty like the free play of market forces". But such an argument seems to be based on a very short-term view of history. If the market lifts people out of poverty in one place or in one era, it just as easily plunges people into poverty in another place or in another era. In fact, market capitalism has had to be rescued by socialist/Keynesian measures at least twice in living memory – once through Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and then again, more recently through massive taxpayer-funded bailouts in 2008. By the way, when it comes to the Jesuits, they are by no means hostile to private business, entrepreneurship, or the free market per se. In fact, they themselves run a host of excellent business schools in India and around the world. All they insist on is that businesses be run with the utmost regard for ethics and fair play.

Thus, in keeping with their philosophy of 'discernment' they are ever ready to move into domains where they perceive that right is being trampled down by sheer might. And so it was that Fr. Stan Swamy, five decades ago, discerned the voice of God calling him to leave his comfort zone and be in active solidarity with a non-violent movement of resistance to the exploitative forces (corporate and statist) that sought to deprive the tribal people of their collective rights over their ancestral lands. Similar, for example, to the way Gandhi felt the inner voice calling him to lead the Champaran Satyagraha. The movement Stan Swamy led also had an Ambedkarite dimension to it: "Educate, agitate, organize" (Ambedkar's words). So, if one wants to invoke a model of social action to describe his activism, then labelling it Maoist or even Jesuit Marxism is to bark up the wrong tree. Fr. Stan has been

on record condemning the violent methods of the Maoists. The movement he led was clearly built along Gandhian and Ambedkarite lines and, to the extent it shared common ground with the worldview of those on the Left (the non-violent, constitution-honouring Left, mind you), their solidarity was not unwelcome either.

It should not be forgotten that Fr. Stan, and Jesuits like him, who are being damned as "Marxist Jesuits", actively sought and continue to seek justice from the state, seeking legal redress within the framework of the Constitution. Just look at the sheer number of court cases filed by Fr. Stan and his colleagues. This speaks of their faith in an important arm of the state, the Judiciary. If they were committed, Maoist-style, to the violent overthrow of the state, that would be the last thing they would do.

There is another matter that the new, more 'intellectual' strain of the anti-Stan narrative almost completely avoids discussing. It leaves in a zone of silence the real grievances of the Adivasis, the indigenous people whose cause was so ably championed by Fr. Stan. It assumes that the current status of the indigenous people is all perfect and hunky dory. Which is far from the prevailing reality. If Fr. Stan's kind of movement is seen as a problem or as the wrong way of going about it, then what are the alternatives? Because, if you think that the state through its functionaries is providing everything needed for the well-being of our Adivasi fellow-citizens, then the ground realities will quickly disabuse you of that notion. If the corporate takeover of Adivasi zones is the emancipatory blueprint (visualise happy Adivasis working for private coal mines and living in comfortable quarters) then the track record of such takeovers is nothing to write home about. The key to a just solution lies in honouring the indigenous people as people with dignity and a distinct philosophy of life, as people whose lifestyle has been immensely more sustainable in ecological terms than that led by us middle-class Indians, and as a people who legitimately own the resources of the lands they have lived in for millennia and who are now rightly refusing to be pushed over or short-changed by those with greedy eyes on their ancestral lands, be they agents of the big business corporations, or of the state, or of the two in cahoots with each other. This is the issue - and the cause - that needs discussion now. It was the cause for which Fr. Stan strove so nobly and so passionately and the cause for which he gave his life.



Valiya Metropolitan Philipose Mar Chrysostom Episcopa (April 27, 1917 - May 05, 2021) – *A Tribute*

- Arun Gopal*

Bishop Philipose Mar Chrysostom (originally Philip Dharmistan Oommen) was the hero of the younger generation, especially of college students in the 1960s. He was the youngest MarThoma Bishop at that time, others being Bishop Alexander Mar Theophilus and Bishop Thomas Mar Athanasius, consecrated by the then Metropolitan Juhanon Mar Thoma in 1953. Bishop Chrysostom was known for his higher theological learning, original Biblical hermeneutics, proficiency in English, chaste Malayalam, bronze voice and eloquent oratory. But, those that had attracted the young people to flock around him were his *Humour, Humility and Humanity*.

It will not be an exaggeration to say that wit and humour were part of his nature. In every situation His Grace looked for the humorous side and a reason to smile. This was very evident in his interactive Bible studies, dialogical sermons and penetrative analyses of several theological concerns. He did so with an intention to present religion as something pleasant, and not as that which would create aversion in the minds of the youth. Thereby the Thirumeni not only developed “Church-mindedness”, among the college students, who are exposed to a wide variety of ideologies, secular values and changing cultures, but also strove to challenge them to reflect and think theologically, according to their grasping-capacity, and explore ways to “act-out” their faith in their families, hostels and college campuses.

Humility is a value that the Valiya Metropolitan greatly upheld all through his life. It is true that he had travelled widely, participated in national and international consultations and conferences, and held responsible positions in ecumenical agencies. Yet, in all his talks, sermons and even informal interactions, he never referred to his experiences in any of those programs or quoted from the speeches or presentations therein. His illustrations and anecdotes were drawn from the day-to-day experiences of ordinary people in the society

*Rev. Dr. Prof. Arun Gopal is Former Vice - President, CSI Madras Diocese, Director, CSI Synod Dept. of Christian Education & Head of the Dept. of Church Ministries, Pacific Theological College, Suva Fiji Islands

around and those sitting in the pews in front of him. Further, I have noticed him communicating his profound faith-perspectives and Biblical insights, explaining the theological concepts and philosophical categories in simple language, understandable to the youth and adults in his audience. I also observed during my one week stay with him at the “Olivet Aramana”, Chengannur, in summer 1967, and by watching videos of his talks on my smartphone over the years, with the little Malayalam I knew, that the attentiveness of those who listened to him and the smiles on their faces, spoke volumes about the endearing environment and his emotional attachment to the listeners. Before I took leave of him I requested him to give me his business card. Thirumeni replied saying that he never uses business cards. If I needed I could copy his address from his letter head. When I looked at his letter head I was surprised to see that there was no reference to his Episcopal titles or degrees. It was just indicated as – “Philipose Mar Chrysostom: Missionary Bishop,” with his residential address. That was the humility of this unassuming Servant of God.

Finally, that which stands foremost in my memory whenever I remember Chrysostom Thirumeni, is that he was genuinely human. He had the rare gift of reading the minds of those who sought his counsel and, more than that, an understanding their inner struggles. Human sensitivity was, precisely, the hallmark of his personality. That sensitivity led him to offer tender care and loving service to his octogenarian father - former Sabha Secretary the Very Rev. K.E. Oommen, living in Kottarakara, through his periodical visits. I had the privilege of receiving his blessings when I accompanied the Bishop to his house in 1967. Whenever possible, amidst his busy schedules he would spend sufficient time with his diocesan people at his residence, to the extent of inviting one or two of them to share his frugal meal. Before his visitors parted company, he would take them to his private chapel and pray with them. Ever since I first met the Thirumeni in the American College, Madurai in May, 1966 at an SCM conference, my affinity towards him grew stronger and it continued for several years. Whenever he visited Chennai I used to meet him at his sister’s place in Perambur railway quarters. Further, each time I wrote to him seeking answers and clarifications on subjects/issues related to my Ministerial Training and Ministerial Formation, the Valiya Metropolitan would patiently respond, nurturing my commitment to the ordained ministry. I always cherish with gratitude to God, those moments of learning and mentoring I have received from this great man of God.



BIBLE STUDY

Luke 18:1-10

The Parable of a Judge, a Widow and the Cause for Justice

*- Arun Kumar Wesley**

Jesus in course of his teachings narrated many parables. These parables were concerning many things that concerned life and living, and mostly of living with grace and forgiveness, love and honesty. They were miniature stories borrowed from mundane living of a sower, fisherman, shepherd etc., teaching one how to live in the presence of God. These parables are alive to impart teachings of Jesus to us even today. To that end these parables are relevant to our own context.

Of the many parables, there were some about prayer in which Jesus taught how to pray; and how one ought to be persistent in prayer. In one he taught about praying in faith, the faith being that of the size of a mustard seed; in another instance, he taught about the power of prayer with fasting, and so on.

This parable in Luke is also about prayer. It is in fact about persistence in prayer. It is also about a Judge who was 'impartial' - he 'neither feared God nor men'. The widow was persistent in pleading before him for justice.

One would not know the circumstance of the widow. We don't know how she came to be in that situation, nor do we know - further the reason for her pleading before the judge. However, one can guess that the widow was in distress because of some injustice done to her.

The Parable

This parable has been interpreted in various ways. Although Jesus narrated this parable to teach the importance of prayer and that of being persistent in prayer, some scholars believe that this parable also points

*Rev. Arun Kumar Wesley served as Editorial Consultant for the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, (CISRS) Bangalore.

out to the person of the judge. In fact in some John translations the judge is rendered as unjust and also being corrupt. So some scholars point out that this parable contrasts the unjust judge with the just God we have. So the rendering - if the unjust judge could render justice to the widow, how much more the just God will be, and render justice, speedily.

It is also pointed out that persons in positions of authority such as judges or national leaders, should be honest and accessible to people, and render justice. Would the leaders in authority today heed this? And Yet what is justice?

Justice

Justice has been defined as the maintenance or administration of what is just by the impartial adjustment of conflicting claims, and the establishment of rights according to the rules of law or equity. It is further the quality of being just, impartial, and being fair, according to truth, reason and fact.

Justice being so defined, it encompasses all aspects of life on earth, in terms of living equitably with dignity, having rights of freedom - of speech, of religion etc., the concern for health, environment and all creation. It would also mean social justice - establishing a just society, with equity and plurality. Further that would mean instituting laws and rules that would help build up a just society, and a judicial, executive and a legislative avenue to process the redressal of injustice.

Cause for Justice

Justice being thus encompassing all aspects of life and living, there are many areas that need the cause for justice. In our own days the cause for justice can include the need to uphold fundamental human rights, freedom of religion, freedom of expression and the freedom to have access to the media of one's choice and so on.

The cause and struggle for justice has been immemorial in human history. But of late injustice has been blatant as many areas of life and living have endured injustice, suffering, discrimination, deprivation

etc., engendering individual, collective and national uprisings, legal processes and struggles to claim justice.

There are a few aspects of justice that concern all of us: social, restorative and redemptive justice. Social justice concerns the establishment of a just society where all are equal, with common rights; where plurality of life is recognized and where institutions of governance exist to uphold justice. Restorative justice exists to uphold the restoration of life and living, the reason for living while upholding the meaning of life. Redemptive justice upholds the reason for redeeming life and its cause for vicarious action.

The conservation and the preservation of the environment is another concern as ecological justice today, since natural resources are being exploited.

The Bible speaks of these aspects in various ways. Its unique features tend to emphasise the overall redemption of the human and all creation from their 'injustice' by enabling them to turn to God and thus enabling them to find justice to their very existence. This 'turning' to God for justice has been variously explicated as being 'born again'; the action being transformative, redemptive and so on, in repentance and penance. However, it is caused by God who works through the Spirit, in and through Jesus Christ; and not achieved merely due to human effort. Thus the Bible speaks of the transformed person in Christ and he or she is reckoned as being just and redeemed.

In turn the redeemed ensure justice to all creation - to all humans, the earth and nature, in society and community, so that they all exist enjoying the fundamental rights, in diversity and peace. Thus, the Church as embodying the redeemed community - the body of Christ, ensures the establishment of justice within the Church at first and then in the world at large. In that effort the redeemed as made in the image of God who is Himself just and righteous, continues this redemptive and restorative activity as individuals and as a community. Thus the cause for justice is derived from who God is; the one who Himself is just and good; as He requires all of us to uphold justice as His children and as bearers of His image.

Justice and the Bible

The Bible emphatically stresses that God is just., and He establishes a just and a fair community of equity, dignity and plurality. The Bible in various verses emphasizes that God being just, He requires His people to be also just, holy and honest.

In brief, the Bible begins with an account of a just creation, where God is the Creator, to enable life on earth to be fair and square. He establishes a just society through Noah by annihilating the wicked people. Further, God liberates the Israelites from the oppression of Egyptians thus causing freedom to His people, and holding the Israelites to be responsible in the cause for justice to others in injustice. This theme of justice reverberates in the teachings of the Prophets and the Psalmist, and moves further to the New Testament in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles too. Thus the theme of justice runs through the Bible - the reason and cause for which is God Himself. He being just, His creation also stands for justice in all its spheres. Humans and all creation as the creation of God are thus held responsible to bring about justice in all aspects of life on earth.

For example, the Prophet Isaiah thunders about the requirement of every one to be just thus echoing the pleadings of the widow in the parable:

“Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, and please the widow’s cause” (Is 1:17).

In a way, it speaks of the ‘religion’ of every believer - to do good; to be just and to impart justice.

Isaiah is not however the only one to admonish his people; Micah and others continue it in the same vein:

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic 6:8).

“But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your good always” (Hos 12 :6).

“When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers” (Prov 21: 15).

“Evildoers do not understand what is right, but those who seek the Lord understand it fully” (Prov 26: 5).

“But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream” (Amos 5: 24).

“For the Lord is a God of justice” (Is 30:18).

“Listen to me, my people, my nation;...my justice will become a light to the nations.....my arm will bring justice to the nations” (Is 51: 4-5).

“For I the Lord love justice; I hate robbery and wrong doing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them” (Is 61: 8).

“This is what the Lord Almighty said: Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another” (Zach 7: 9).

The Psalmist continues in the same vein:

“Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute” (Ps 82: 3).

“Turn from evil and then you will dwell in the land forever. For the Lord loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones....The righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever” (Ps 37: 27 -29).

“But Woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others” (Lk 11:42).

The cause for justice has had two aspects - one through a direct action for justice by approaching the authorities or anyone who has defrauded, and the other through prayer. And here too, the cause for justice goes along with fasting and prayer, as Jesus admonished his disciples. As with the widow in the parable, her pleading before the judge went along with her persistent prayer for redressal of injustice.

In sum, as we uphold God as just and righteous, let us work towards the cause of justice. As bearers of His image, may our actions be just and righteous; and that our prayers for justice where injustice prevails be an individual as well as a collective effort. As we pursue the cause of justice, may our efforts be just and persistent for God is our cause in the efforts to bring about justice. To that end we depend on God and God enables and equips us to be the reason for justice in the world.

May the Church as the redeemed community in God, as the body of Christ and as one which depends on God the Just and thereby derives its redemptive justice from Him leaven the society at large to assist the process of bringing about justice in all its aspects to impact all creation and the world at large.

The world today needs our prayers for peace, justice and harmony. As we uphold the authorities in our prayers, may good governance prevail; as we strive and plead for justice, may the authorities give heed and bring about justice; may the suffering, the panic and the anxiety caused by Corona 19 be removed; may all those who have lost jobs, wages, shelter and the hungry find respite; and may the leaders of our country bring about prosperity and peace to all people. May God's justice be maintained!



***NCCI Dalit And Tribal/Adivasi concern
campaign against Caste in Church***

**"No One can serve Christ and Caste"
Practise of Caste is Sin, and Untouchability Crime**

Discrimination based on Caste in your Church?
write to : dataconcerns@ncci1914.com

NCCI NEWS**NCCI Remembers His Holiness Basileos Marthoma Paulose II**

The National Council of Churches in India is saddened to receive the news of the demise of H H Basileos Marthoma Paulose II, Catholicos of the East, Malankara Metropolitan, Supreme Head of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church who has entered eternal rest on Monday the 12th July 2021. May his memory be eternal and blessed.

We remember with gratitude to God the ministries of His Holiness within the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, in the global orthodox communion and in the Indian and global ecumenical settings. We thank God for the spiritual leadership that His Holiness has given to the Church and in particular to the Episcopal synod and the clergy of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.

The leadership of the National Council of Churches in India has fond memories of being warmly received by His Holiness during the many visits to the Catholicate Palace in Kerala. His Holiness' visits to the St. Thomas Orthodox Theological Seminary in Kalmeshwar, Nagpur, were always occasions for close interactions on issues relating to the Church and ecumenism. His Holiness' visits to the NCCI headquarters have been joyous occasions of warmth and friendship.

The warmth and friendliness, and the smile on his face that puts one at ease, endeared His Holiness to one and all. Despite the important and venerable position he was bestowed with, His Holiness was accessible on all matters of ecumenical interests and was keen to dialogue on matters that were of concern.

The Most Reverend Dr. P C Singh, President of the National Council of Churches in India has conveyed his deep sympathies and condolences at the death of His Holiness. He said, "The death of His Holiness Basileos Marthoma Paulose II, Catholicos of the East, Malankara

Metropolitan, is a great loss to the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and to the NCCI family. We pray to God to give peace and solace to the members of the Episcopal synod, the clergy and the members of the church at this time of grief and mourning”.

We pray to God Almighty to bestow the Church with wisdom and guidance at this time of mourning to remember with gratitude the life of blessedness of His Holiness, and rededicate oneself individually and together as the Body of Christ, to a life of faithful obedience and relevant witness to our common Lord and Saviour Jesus the Christ.

Rev. Asir Ebenezer

General Secretary, NCCI

13th July 2021



ADVERTISEMENT RATES IN THE NCC REVIEW

	<i>Full Page</i>	<i>Half Page</i>	<i>Inside Cover</i>	<i>Cover</i>
Single	Rs. 1200	Rs. 800	Rs. 1400	Rs.1600
Multiple*	Rs. 900	Rs. 650	Rs. 1050	Rs. 1200
*Multiple rates applicable per insertion for at least three consecutive insertions. All other terms and conditions shall remain same.				

NCC REVIEW REVISED SUBSCRIPTION RATES FROM 4/2016

	1 year	3 year	5 year
Indian Subscriptions (<i>Regular</i>)	INR 250	INR 500	INR 800
Indian Subscriptions (<i>Discounted for Theological Educators, Pastors, Evangelists, Students - Individuals only. NOT for Organisations, Institutions, Librarians, etc.</i>)	INR 200	INR350	INR 550
Bulk order (over 50 copies for Indian Subscriptions)	10% off		
UK Subscriptions	GBP 31	-	-
USA, South America, Canada, Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Subscriptions	USD 45	-	-

PAYMENT MODES:

VPP: Place your subscription order by email: [<ncci@ncci1914.com>](mailto:ncci@ncci1914.com) or [<nccreview@ncci1914.com>](mailto:nccreview@ncci1914.com) (Rs.20/- added to subscription cost)

Demand Draft: To be drawn in favour of "National Council of Churches in India" payable at Nagpur.

Cheque: To be drawn in favour of "National Council of Churches in India" (Please add Rs. 20/- for outstation cheques).

Money order: To be sent to: The Editor, NCC Review, Nagpur.

Bank Transfer: Bank name: INDIAN BANK
 Branch: NAGPUR
 IFSC CODE: IDIB000N007
 A/C NAME: NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES REVIEW
 A/C NUMBER: 496991073

NCCI COMMUNICATIONS

*Get NCCI news updates and stay connected
on our network through your comments*

Website: www.ncci1914.com

Facebook: facebook.com/nccionline

Twitter: twitter.com/nccionline

YouTube: youtube.com/nccinet

SMS: Register your mobile number to get NCCI alerts/updates on your phone. Details on our website

News Update: Register your email address to receive NCCI news updates by email. Registration details on our website

NCCI NEWS app for Android devices
NCCI NEWS app for Android™ devices
on Google Play™

Download the app on your mobile device.

Search for "ncci" on Google Play on your device.



NCC Review : To subscribe to India's oldest (*since 1862*) Ecumenical journal **NCC Review** download the subscription form on the link: <https://ncci1914.com/ncc-review/>