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EDITORIAL

Celebrating Democracy without Dominance

No community, organisation or ideology has ever succeeded, or can ever succeed, in establishing complete dominance over others. Yet it is a reality that politically or economically dominant communities have found certain ways of imposing various aspects of their own culture onto the less dominant communities. Domains such as education, religion, and politics are vehemently being used for this imposition. Media too becomes a powerful tool in this regard as it further enables the demonisation of the other. Colonial impositions are an example of the same and therefore have been subjected to scrutiny and analysis, especially through assessing the ways that imposition had been coordinated and operated.

The irony in many of the post-colonial countries is that foreign dominations have been replaced by various 'native dominant forces.' Whether 'foreign' or 'native', forceful imposition of the way of life of a dominant community/ communities by either transforming or replacing aspects of the nondominant community's culture is imperialism and hence to be countered. The vibrancy of Indian democracy lies in its constitutional provisions to respect diversities. The unmatched diversity of India is also reflected in its geography, social structure, cultural landscape and political life.

R Gopalakrishnan, a top corporate executive, in his book *Doodles on Leadership: Experiences Within and Beyond TATA*, describes how diversities are important for businesses to flourish in India. For him diversity exists in harmony in India. He has highlighted five examples which are, Hussaini Brahmins, who observe Hindu festivals, worship Shiva and also observe Muharram; Siddis of Karnataka who spoke Kannada, but looked like East Africans and originally came from the Bantu tribes of Africa; the Parsis who came from Persia but are now an integral part of Indian society; Saurashtrian Tamils with their own distinct traditions; the Gadi Bero Tamils in Bengal who speak Bengali but follow customs of Tamil Brahmins.

Since diversities exist in harmony here, any attempt to homogenise diversities will only destroy India. Therefore, we need to recognise the imposition of dominant cultural values upon the nondominant communities as being against the very ethos of India. It is disgraceful that

during the month of December- the month when Christian communities celebrate Christmas- there were many attacks against Christians in different parts of the country. We would like to see these attacks as violent acts by fringe elements. Additionally, the constant placing of one community under the scanner based on suspicions and false narratives about them is unacceptable and against the spirit of India. Therefore, we hope such attempts will be curbed by the intervention of the concerned Government bodies.

Christmas is a festival that celebrates the love of God which was manifested in the birth of Jesus. In other words, the birth of Jesus could be perceived as the result of God's love in action. In Paul's view as explained in his letter to Philippians the birth of Jesus was an incarnation process through which God wanted to identify with the common masses as part of God's mission of redemption.

When the Bible says that God is love, it is delightfully linked to the love of God in action in incarnation, self-giving and identification. The birth narrative of Jesus which describes his birth in a stable implies that it was because there was no room in the inn. The stable and 'no room in the inn' are good symbols which point towards the subalternity of God who identifies with the common people in the world. In the midst of dominating forces and their expressions, the one who is born in a manger reminds us to be in solidarity with the marginalized in order to experience redemption.

This issue of NCC Review is the last one of the year 2021. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of all the authors and researchers. Being a journal which supports researchers, we try our best to give adequate space for young research scholars to express their thoughts. We would like to encourage more researchers to concentrate on themes which foster mutuality and harmony within communities since the year 2021 had witnessed some of the worst hate campaigns and the presence of fast growing othering viruses amidst the lock down due to COVID. May the year 2022 bring new initiatives that will help rejuvenate life with the aim of fostering life in abundance equally for all.

Rev Dr Abraham Mathew
Managing Editor

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Towards a Queer Reading of the Lukan Birth Narrative and its Missiological Implications

*-Nishad Issac Chandy**

1. Introduction

The birth of Jesus invites each one of us for an embracing of God's love and to share God's desire for the redemption of humankind. A queer reading of the birth narrative in Luke helps to unravel the experiences of transformative justice and missional hope, in the midst of the disadvantages and domination enforced by the Roman Empire. Its implications today aim to performatively entail all gender identities to unravel intermingling layers of oppression and to proclaim the liberative motives revealed around the manger for a meaningful mission in the post-covid world.

2. Understanding Queerness

'Queerness' or the experience of being queer intends to problematize the multiple differences in the production of dominant and normative categories of sexuality. The word 'queer' is used as a collective term referring to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, questioning and other individuals who identify with non-normative sexualities and/or gender identities.[1] It may include 'allies' who may not identify with the above but stand in solidarity with the queer seeking honour, justice and equality. The word 'queer' is also used as an umbrella term to describe people with marginalized gender identities who articulate marginalized experiences challenging the norms of putative centres.[2]

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[1] Patrick S Cheng, *An Introduction to Queer Theology: Radical Love* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011), 3.

[2] Kathleen T. Talvacchia, Michael F. Pettinger and Mark Larrimore, eds., *Queer Christianities: Lived Religion in Transgressive Forms* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 3.

2.1 Etymological Study of the Word 'Queer'

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines 'queer' as differing in some way from what is usual or normal.[3] The word 'queer' is both an anti-normative signifier produced through the 'intersectionality' of identities, practices and institutions.[4] 'Queer' understands itself to be an open frontier, a radical hospitality, a hope and even expectation that whatever we take for granted as maps of human experience will need to be redrawn again and again.[5] Thus queerness is not only an identity but a playing with identity and identities in the great moments and relationships of actual lives.[6]

3. Constructing a Queer Hermeneutical Lens

A hermeneutical lens, embedded in queerness helps us to see the biblical texts beyond the dominant, normative and heterosexist interpretations and leads us to fulfil the missiological task translated through the birth narrative of Jesus.

3.1 Dismantling Heterotextuality, Freeing Missional Voices

Heterotextuality has silenced and erased the lives of queer people by creating cultural images of heterosexual normalcy and by pathologizing[7] all deviances from those images and has also pervaded and dominated the particular reading strategies of interpretative communities[8] thereby creating textual silence about the queers.

Robert E. Goss has been successful in appropriating and widening the usage of Phyllis Trible's "texts of terror"[9] from its initial application

[3] "Queer," *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/queer (accessed 12 February, 2020).

[4] Martin F. Manalansan IV, "Queer Intersections: Sexuality and Gender in Migration Studies," *International Migration Review* 40/1 (Spring, 2006): 225.

[5] Kathleen T. Talvacchia, Michael F. Pettinger and Mark Larrimore, eds., op. cit., 3.

[6] Ibid., 4.

[7] regard or treat as psychologically abnormal.

[8] See Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in the Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

[9] A book authored by Professor Trible, which focuses on four variations upon the theme of terror in the Bible. By combining the discipline of literary criticism with the hermeneutics of feminism, she reinterprets the tragic stories

to women to how churches have used scriptural texts against queers.[10] Boswell and other authors challenge the mainstream heterosexist interpretation and control of the text, critiquing its cultural biases and arguing for a closer reading of the text within its social context. Only through dismantling violence from the texts of terror can an honest queer hermeneutics be formulated.

3.2 Reforming Biblical Heterosexism, Freeing Missional Texts

Many queers are resistant readers who struggle against heterocentric privilege that erases them from the text, and they have adopted a strategy of "outing the text" or "befriending" queer voices within the text as a way of countering the heterosexist use of the Bible to justify oppression and exclusion.[11]

"Outing" is a transgressive strategy, forcing queer out of the closet by speaking the unspeakable and disrupting the codes of silence. Nancy Wilson wants "to move the queer community from its experience of religious abuse and exclusion to a positive interpretation of the Bible, thereby reclaiming the text for the queer community."[12]

Also, the text of queer lives must interact with the text of scripture because queer critical readings of the scriptures transform texts into "narratives of resistance."[13] Befriending the scriptures, queer readers can find their voices and subversive memories of God's insurrection against human oppression and the promise of liberation, which needs to be an essential facet of our missiological outlook today.

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of four women in ancient Israel: Hagar, Tamar, an unnamed concubine, and the daughter of Jephthah. In highlighting the silence, absence, and opposition of God, as well as human cruelty, Trible shows how these neglected stories - interpreted in memoriam - challenge both the misogyny of Scripture and its use in church, synagogue, and academy.

[10] Robert E. Goss, *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993) 88-94.

[11] Goss, *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up*, op. cit., 210.

[12] Nancy Wilson, *Our Tribe: Queer Folks, God, Jesus and the Bible* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 112.

[13] Goss, *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up*, op.cit., 105.

3.3 Transforming Biblical Coercion into Liberative Mission

Ecclesial authorities have appropriated the Bible as their book. The Bible is the centre of their discursive field.[14] Biblical discourse is part of the political struggles of power; it has specific social effects in excluding queer voices and legitimizing homophobic oppression in other discursive fields.[15] The Bible when used thus becomes a condemnation of queer voices.

Queer Christians use their liberating practice to read the Bible anew. The Bible bursts with claims about a God who is passionately partial to the poor, who enlists people in justice-doing, and who promises a just society for all. Queer Christians can use these scriptural claims as an empowering resource for their liberative practice: they can shape their lives to God's manner of doing justice. They need to take the battles for truth about queers from the area of biblical and theological ethics to the practice and struggle for justice.

3.4 Empowering the Nonperson in Missiological Task

The nonperson in the Scriptures includes the poor, the ill, the socially dysfunctional, the prostitute, the tax collector, the woman without social status, the outcast and the social deviant who is labelled sinner. The importance of the nonperson to a queer is that it provides a means for dismantling biblical interpretations that are heterosexist/ homophobic.[16]

To recover the nonperson in the Bible is to surface the oppositional tensions and conflicts that are inherent in the biblical text. Such an approach can reclaim identity with the leper, the homeless Jewish peasant displaced by a privileged economic system, the woman caught in adultery and the shunned. The nonperson becomes a powerful symbol of our own oppression and the need for God's practice of justice.

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[14] Fred W. Burnett asserts, "The phrase 'the Bible is the Church's book' establishes boundaries which can be shown to be ideological and arbitrary, but also have material discursive effects." See Burnett, "Postmodern Biblical Exegesis: The Eve of Historical Criticism," *Semeia* No: 51 (1991): 67.

[15] Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 90.

[16] Robert Goss, *A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 105.

3.5 Intersectionality as a Queer Tool for Mission Legitimation

Applying an intersectional lens to biblical interpretation is essential for disrupting dominant readings of the text that reproduce social hierarchies and power and for imagining liberating readings that spur action and reflection toward justice.[17] Our contribution then is to encourage a thorough intersectional lens at the centre of biblical interpretation that recognizes the significance of interlocking oppressions within the text and within the use of the text.

Intersectional queer readings ask us to bring both our subordinate and dominant identities to the reading of the text so that we are made aware of how the invisibility of our privileged assumptions may keep us unaware of the workings of race or gender or social class in our readings, even as we queer the text.[18] It helps us to unpack the context, culture, and the "behind the scenes" to get a deeper understanding of the multiple layers of identities and issues that add to the layers of oppression within the Bible and the cultures that read it.[19]

4. Queer Reading of the Lukan Birth Narrative (Luke 2:1-7)

Queer hermeneutical tools of the above are implemented in tandem to dissect the Lukan birth narrative in three phases: Joseph's and Mary's journey to participate in the census, their mutual acceptance and preparations in Bethlehem, and the event of the birth of Jesus in the manger. This fluid and justice-oriented reading reveals relevant mission models, which helps to safeguard and promote solidarity in all body identities lingering in the post-covid world.

4.1 Repurposing the Empire's Census for a Divine Disruption (vv. 1-4)

The decree to carry out a census in the Roman world by Caesar proves to be a dominative numbering of the slaves, the silenced and the sojourners. This decree was meant to glorify the heteronormative underpinnings of the Empire at the cost of the displacement and denigration

[17] Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan M. Shaw, *Intersectional Theology: An Introductory Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), 70.
[18] Ibid., 73.
[19] Ibid., 75.

faced by the suffering communities in its control. Yahweh instructs the Israelites to conduct a census during their journey in the wilderness[20] and also another census just before the Israelites commit to building the Tabernacle.[21] This intervention from Yahweh is for the preservation of all bodily identities, protection of the marginalized ones and the proliferation of their faith as minorities. This is unlike the Empire's census which is intended as a basis for recalibration of their taxes and further ingraining of their patriarchal domination. Here Joseph's and Mary's journey to Bethlehem inaugurates a pilgrimage of resistance, a drama of fluidity, where they shall honour the memories of King David, who himself was anointed by the prophet Samuel at Bethlehem.[22] The family's presence at Bethlehem awakens them from a politics of minority interest in the census to a politics of knowledge and difference through the remembrance of King David. David was one who come out of the closet sensing the bruises of a shepherd, the torture of a servant musician at the hands of King Saul and alienation suffered as a refugee running from him. Now Jesus' birth at the same Bethlehem is a new birth for all the unheard, the dismembered and erased identities. Joseph's and Mary's journey is thus empowered and enabled to be a protest of brewing resistance against the prejudice of empire, causing it to be a divine disruption.

4.2 Redirecting the Societal Creed for an Affirmative Selfhood (vv. 5-6)

Joseph's partnership with Mary, betrothed to him, empowers them in a subversive proclamation of the birth of the Saviour for all. Joseph exhibits queerness when accepting Mary who is filled with divine blessing before they are together, yet the one to be ostracized by the familial creeds of her own society. For the same reason, they experience the pain of a queer family having no secure or safe place to rest and finally having to give birth to Jesus in a lowly manger. Angela Yarber is keen to picture Mary as a queer saint with a belly full of divinity embracing us in all our beautiful diversity.[23] Mary and Joseph are now engaged in an unsafe journey which begins with the birth of Jesus, travelling far from

[20] Numbers 1:2; 26:2.

[21] Exodus 30:12.

[22] 1 Sam 16:1-13.

[23] Angela Yarber, "Queering Mary Queering Christmas," *Believe Out Loud*, accessed on 25 November 2021, https://www.believeoutloud.com/voices/article/queering-mary-queering-christmas/.

home and being haunted by the order of the dominant Herod to kill all the new born in Bethlehem who were two years or under. The ones who yearned for care and compassion now are further queered as they soon turn into refugees and immigrants in Nazareth. All of here, Mary's body functions as a 'relational' body that enters into dialogue with hitherto marginalized categories or even the excluded sexualities of our times.[24] Mary, as Bohache asserts, serves as the paradigm of the "queer empowerment."[25] Her bodily cries and pains in the manger culminate and resonate with many queer people who feel lost and abandoned, yet are strengthened through the greeting of the angel of God to Mary, "God is with you."[26] She is queered to explore, exhibit and exponentiate an affirmative selfhood in the very empire that attempts to erase her.

4.3 Reimagining the Lowly Birth as the Deviant Celebration (v. 7)

As the time arrives, Mary gives birth to her firstborn, the baby Jesus. Jesus' birth in the manger happens to be a liminal experience, giving meaning to the birth and lives of all non-heteronormative individuals and the freedom to transcend structural constraints and to refashion their identities in contrast to the empires of their times.[27] Though Mary and Joseph are constrained and confined to the meagre space of the manger, Jesus' birth transforms the rigid boundaries of Jewish expectations of the Messiah and Roman imperialistic desires for power into a liminality of possibilities for freedom, social change and the emergence of a community of support as seen in the shepherds and the wise men later. The birth of the firstborn son is a fulfilment of the divine promise. It is a challenge to normative orders of the Empire. It reminds us how divine presence is evident in the bodies of all non-conforming individuals in this world. Jesus' birth in the manger though at odds with the systemic interventions of Rome provides tremendous hope for all peo-

[24] Maria del Mar Perez-Gil, "Undressing the Virgin Mary: Nudity and Gendered Art," *Feminist Theology* (January 3, 2017), 208-221, accessed on 25 November 2021, https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735016679907.

[25] Thomas Bohache, *Christology from the Margins* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 238.

[26] Luke 1:28.

[27] Dianne Dentice and Michelle Dietert, "Liminal Spaces and the Transgender Experience," *Theory in Action* 8/2, (April 2015), accessed on 25 November 2021, DOI: 10.3798/tia.1937-0237.15010.

ple crossing boundaries of social, cultural and religious oppressions.[28] His birth is that of an outcast, the marginalized and the powerless, yet brimming with hope and embracing the suffering entailed by the struggle against the political hegemony of the Empire. The birth is a protest against the traditional cis heteronormative births of the Empire in that it offends the patriarchal assumptions regarding the Messiah. The baby Jesus, having not been able to find a place in the inn, becomes the basis for a transgressive politics.[29] Acceptance denied in the inn is reclaimed in the manger, honour lost is adorned to Jesus' family by the lost, least and last at the manger and power in powerlessness is revealed to all broken families. Thus, Jesus' birth is the birth of a friend not an alien, an ally not a stranger, making it encompassing and emboldening as a deviant celebration.

5. Missiological Implications in a Post-Covid World

The queer reading of the Lukan birth narrative prompts us to engage and envisage relevant missiological models in the post-covid world. Firstly, a divine disruption in the mandatory purpose of the Empire on census recommits Joseph and Mary to a *mission in prescience*. The prescient outlook of Joseph and Mary is both an 'awareness of their present subjugation' in the empire as well as a farsightedness and preparation of non-heteronormative solidarity and justice-oriented proactiveness for Jesus' future. These Covid times have displaced and disintegrated the many body identities of the migrants, transgenders and minority communities. It is here that we need to dislocate our journeys from safety zones to presciently locate the foci of mission in the scars and pains of the non-normative for collective healing and reconciliation. Secondly, the affirmative selfhood of Joseph and Mary calls us to a *mission in stasis*. Mary becomes the epitome of suffering at this critical juncture of her life. Her commitment and Joseph's acceptance bring variant shades of queerness which culminate in the birth of Jesus, which exemplifies radical love. A mission in stasis is a mission in the 'now'. Each phase in the couple's journey becomes a locus of mission to fulfil the divine mandate with mutual respect and dignity. The post-Covid world has frozen parents alone in homes, children in foreign lands and

[28] Mariska Lauterboom, ""Queering Jesus" A Breakthrough in Doing Theology in the Indonesian Context," *Theologia*: *Jurnal Teologi Interdisipliner* 1, accessed on 25 November 2021, ris.uksw.edu/download/jurnal/kode/J00854>.
[29] Lisa Isherwood, "Queering Christ: Outrageous Acts and Theological Rebellions," *Literatim & Tlifology* 1/3 (September 2001): 257.

unnamed people in destinations unknown. It is essential that we replace mission on the move with a commitment to mission in the 'now of time and space.' Then interconnectedness and the reclamation of missional voices becomes ever more meaningful. Thirdly, the deviant celebration of the birth of Jesus in the manger queers us to practise a *mission of convergence*. The manger, which otherwise was the feeding ground for sacrificial lambs, becomes now the radiating ground of joy, oneness and redemption for all who are frail and unworthy. Jesus' birth becomes the queering point for all those who would wish to lay down their brokenness, chaos and perils at the manger for a celebration beyond boundaries. The post-Covid world has brought with it online spaces which have become mangers to disseminate the radical love of Jesus. Our mission strategies today should create appreciation and empowerment over these spaces such that all body identities become perpetual participants in the fellowship of the nativity, making all lives matter. Thus, the missional models of Joseph and Mary, bring about a queerness, that makes the birth of Jesus transgressive, inclusive and celebrative to all.

6. Conclusion

What begins as a hetero-patriarchal order of the Roman empire in numbering the oppressed, the subjugated and the weak turns into a pilgrimage to honour, protect and assert the promises of God through the bodily interventions of Joseph and Mary. A queer lens helps to liberate the Lukan text of heterosexist and heterotextual domination, empowering the non-person through a liberative motive and reflecting on layers of intersectionality in the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. This opens out a worldview for all who embrace queerness to involve themselves in the Jesus event, recalling the divine disruption, affirming each one's selfhood and engaging in the deviant celebration. In the post-Covid world, queer bodies have been displaced and disjunctured but Jesus' birth event provides them with integrity, healing and assurance through a mission in prescience, stasis and convergence. Where queerness becomes a pathway of life for all, Jesus' birth becomes the divine hope for all today.

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The Influence of Christianity as a 'gift' or 'conquest'? A Critical Study from a Historical (Christianity) Perspective on the Evolution of the English Language and of Literature in English in India's North East.

-Masoom Islam and Kulanand Yadav***

Abstract: The North East Indian English literature is relatively a new literature in terms of its origins and occasions. This corpus of writings came to the limelight with effective implications and as a repr583e-sentational entity in the literary circles of mainstream Indian literature and beyond from India's Independence in general and from the region's pressing times, of the eighties and nineties in particular. The possible reason behind acquiring certain distinct identities and affirmations is probably due to its variant ethnic and cultural assimilations, its geographical location and the involvement of the region's evolutionary history, habits and habitations. Christianity played a significant influential role in helping them maintain their distinctive identity and at the same time preparing them to function effectively within the new order introduced by the British administration. With that, the acquisition of English language, literature and the adoption of Christian faith and practices are undoubtedly considered to be the main reason behind the emergence of world class literary figures and their literary output. In this regard, the English-speaking British colonial power and their simultaneous establishments of Christian Missionary schools in that region, specially in the hill areas, played crucial roles in bringing about certain transformational conversion in terms of language, literature and religion. The cumulative impact of all these factors has greatly influenced the shaping literature in the English language in India's North Eastern periphery.

Keywords: language, literature, history, Christianity, assimilation, acquisition, North-East India.

North East India is an umbrella term that is coined for convenience by the rest of the nation to refer to the eight states of India's North Eastern

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parts which were once seen as a part of the South East Asian region. Later the region was divided and demarcated with the passage of time in such a way that geographically it became an almost 98% border-locked land with the already cartographed South and South East Asian nations like Bhutan, Bangladesh, China, Myanmar, Nepal and Tibet and it now remains as a small portion of (almost 2% land possession) with hills, plains, plateaus, rivers, and lush green forests with ecological balance of flora and fauna. The region is characterized by its ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity with mixed people being linked to mainland India only through a narrow corridor (only 60kms long and 22 kms wide) through Siliguri termed as 'Chicken Necked

Corridor'. Hence Bengal's Siliguri is called the 'Gateway of the North-east'. Hazarika says in "Introduction" from *Strangers of the Mist:* "India's Northeast is a misshapen strip of land linked to the rest of the country by a narrow corridor just twenty kms wide at its slimmest which is referred to as the Chicken's Neck." (Hazarika xvi).

The eight states that are formed with increased population and time's demand since pre-independence to post-independence period are Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. Since the eight states of the region hugely vary from each other in terms of everything from ethnicity to language, from religion to cultural credo except the common 'North East' tag and its rich heritage, it might seem to be an injustice to homogenize the whole region into a single body. Satpathy says describing the Northeast as - "- - - -homogeniz(ing) a location where no homogeneity can ever be imagined." (Satpathy, Museindia). However, in spite of multiplicity and heterogeneity, the whole North East zone irrespectively and unanimously seems to be putting forth the message of peace and progress through the restoration and reviving process of their lost cultures and collections which were greatly affected by the imperialistic and hegemonic invasions, ethnic movements and outsiders' infiltration as well as the power politics of transformational nation-state formations. However, with the passage of time and transformation, it is realized that all these occurrences, in some way or other, barring the negativity, has brought about certain good and positive things too for the entire region that is clearly reflected in the attitudes and etiquettes as well as the overall changed social structure of the region's populace and in their personalities. And in this regard, Christianity and Christian faith have played an instrumental role in polishing and upgrading the lives of the people of North East India

in general and the hill areas of Khasi, Mizo and Naga in particular. This polished and patient attitude is reflected in their manner and literature very distinctively and nostalgically as well. Naga poet Temsula Ao in her poem *Songs from Here and There* reverberate:

> They came from across the oceans
> These tellers of tales
> Telling us old tales
> And in the telling
> Made us find new ones. (Anthology… 43)

Christianity has played a very influential role in shaping and reshaping the entire North East regions' language, literature, culture, customs, religious beliefs and the overall behavioral patterns of its peoples and positions. It is not that the entire transformational process took place in one day or in one year. It took many years right from the British intrusion into the region as a branch of East India Company to its total conquering and capturing of the region to the level of monopoly. In the meantime, Christian thought and threads of English education became so embedded and embossed in the mind and activity of the common people that they themselves, at one point of time, started preaching the good thoughts and education to others. Lalthansangi Ralte in her seminal article *Poetry on the Lips of the Earth: An Analysis of Poetry from the North-East India* rightly says with regard to the influence of Christianity on the North East peoples:

> The influence of Christian thought had spread alarmingly far and wide especially in Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. It becomes difficult for the people who were greatly influenced by Christianity to differentiate between the 'gift' of progress and the 'conquest' made on their hearts and minds. (111).

Though, it is only many years after the departure of the British from India that a poet like Desmond L. Kharmawphlang while searching for the lost roots and culture realizes what the British had given and what they had conquered amid the power-pacts programme. In his poem *The Conquest*, Desmond writes:

> Later came the British
> with gifts of bullets, blood-money
> And religion.
> A steady conquest to the sound of
> Guns began. (Anthology 134)

It is a fact that the waves of cultural invasion and ethnic assimilation from time to time from the pre-colonial to post-colonial period in that region have significantly changed the living as well as the overall patterns of life and society. From the ancient clan politics and cultural movements to the recent influence of Christianity and foreign missionaries, the region has experienced a lot of changes and challenges with respect to culture, language, habitations and even its geographical borders and boundaries, starting from the erstwhile shared and open boundaries of South and South East Asian nations. Each of these of experiences resulted in different forms of resistance as well as appropriations which eventually helped in the adoption and shaping of new cultural practices, replacing the hereditary traditional forms of culture and customs. Therefore, the cultural, linguistic and anthropological history of each state is so variant and vibrant that it would be a grave injustice to make any generalised statement about them.

Prior to the advent of the British and their colonial culture, the different areas of the entire North East region were ruled and regulated by different kings and local chiefs. All belonged to a certain clan or tribal community following their own set of indigenous systems and social structure. They exercised their kingship by following these systems and structures, their dealings with neighbouring kingdoms or tribal communities being for the most part characterised by racial enmity and hostility. The gradual spreading of colonial power by the British over these scattered tribal clans and communities brought them under a single administrative rule. The introduction of Christianity and Christian culture with English education helped them to embrace modernity and mobility, thus helping them transition away from primitivism and insularity. It is, however, also a fact that in Assam, Manipur and Tripura, the process of cultural intermixing began long before the advent of colonialism in comparison to the rest of the states, which were mostly undivided then. They were exposed to Sanskrit and Hindi literature amid the process of cultural intermixing which, by default. assimilated in their mixed cultures and societies too. Apart from these states, the literary history of newly formulated states like Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and their tribal communities is fairly new and imitative. With the arrival of the British and their hegemonic invasion through their administrative and missionary education, the tribal and indigenous communities so long practicing their own indigenous culture and language now diverged into two groups – the traditional minded and the moderns, each living life

according to their respective worldviews. The invasion impacted the regional language, literature and the literary practices too. Nongkynrih and Ngangom's lines from the "Introduction" of the *Dancing Earth: An Anthology of Poetry from Northeast India* in this regard is worth mentioning:

> The literary legacy of the missionaries can be said to be double-edged. While, on the one hand, they gifted the tribes with a common literary heritage, on the other, they made them deny the existence of their own literatures in their rich oral traditions and taught them to be ashamed of whatever was theirs, as something pagan and preposterous. (xi).

Yet, with all these confusions and contradictions, literature from this zone deserves a distinct recognition. Whatever the ups and down, rights and wrongs of history, one cannot deny the fact that literature from this zone has undergone a significant change right from the time of the colonial cultural and linguistic invasion. In the words of Tilottoma Mishra from her "Introduction" in her Anthology:

> Colonialism, however, superimposed a Eurocentric concept of modernity derived from the Enlightenment on the literatures of the region, thereby creating a rupture between the past and the present. The Christian missionaries took the lead in ushering in a print culture by establishing printing presses and bringing out textbooks, books on grammar, and Christian literature and journals in the local languages. (xiv).

Tracing the history of influence of Christianity upon the tribal populace of the India's North East region, one finds it being asserted that the introduction of British administration followed by the reformists - American Baptist Mission and the Welsh Catholic Methodist and their subsequent opening of schools as a part of their missionary works to civilize the tribes through imparting Western education and spreading of Christianity, brought about a socio-cultural change of far-reaching consequences in the entire North East region. It was after the Treaty of Yandabo (1826) between the British and Burma and after the defeat of the latter and the subsequent annexation of Assam proper as per the treaty, that the East India Company had a firmer grip upon the region's socio-political status, which was rather low in all aspects. Hence, the Company started upgrading their status by focussing on the core issues

and facilitating the basic amenities of education and civilization. While narrating history of the the influence of Christianity in North East India, Rev. Dr. Woba James writes:

> The Treaty of Yandabo between the British and Burma on 24 February 1826 introduced a different scenario for the people of the North East. This treaty and the subsequent extension of the British administration toward NEI brought the entire area under control of one government and exposed the region to the outside world. Thus, the History of Christian activities in NEI was also accompanied with the administration. (A Brief History of Christianity…3)

It was as part of this process that the Christian missionaries in the form of American Baptist Missionaries, who arrived in the mid-30s, and later the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists were allowed in and with them began the establishment of educational institutions operating both in English and vernacular languages. In fact, the first Christian missionary venture that began in the erstwhile undivided Assam was Bengal's Serampore Mission of William Carey in 1800, which as a branch of the English Baptist Mission began by deputing its earliest convert, Krishna Pal to be a missionary to the entire North East region. During this mission, William Carey introduced the Bengali script for Khasis in 1813. Alexander B. Lish, a missionary from this mission established three schools at Mawsmai, Mawmluh and Sohra. After the closure of the Mission and its missionary works for some reasons, the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists Mission Society decided to send Thomas Jones along with his wife to the region and they arrived at Sohra in 1841. Thomas Jones introduced the Roman script for Khasis which continues till date as a learning and writing medium and which has been instrumental in formulating and establishing Christian faith and belief among the Khasi community. It also helped in the acquisition of Western culture, languages and literatures, which began co-existing with the local vernacular languages and literatures. Ngangom and Nongkynrih write:

> Thomas Jones of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists' Mission cast the Khasi language in written form using the Roman script. As scholars on the subject have remarked, the success of Thomas Jones' alphabet also inspired the Garo, the Mizo and the Naga tribes to adopt the Roman rather than the Bengali script, and later by almost all the tribes except for the Kokboroks and

> Chakmas of Tripura, who use the Bengali script, and some in Assam, who use the Assamese script. (Dancing Earth… x).

With the passage of time, the missionary endeavour of spreading Christianity and imparting English education in the region expanded in proportion to the expansion of the colonial regime of their counterparts in British-ruled India. This ultimately proved instrumental in making a new generation of English-speaking people amidst the tribal communities, irrespective of whether they were from the hills or the plains, who excelled themselves in different fields of life and livelihood. They and their successive generations adapted and followed this new model of Christianity-influenced Western life and livelihood patterns, which later helped to give birth to a group of literary circles of Western English educated intellectuals writing profusely in both vernacular and colonial languages to express their ethics and ethos, writs and rights. This writing practice continues till date and now has become a 'body' transitioning from the pre-Independence period to the post-independence period through an evolutionary process. As this 'body' of literary circles started spreading from Shillong city, the city become the literary hub and destination of the writers. A lot of credit for the introduction of Christian missionaries to this region goes to the earliest East India Company civil servant of this region, David Scott and to his successor Captain Jenkins, who made the path easy for their successors by initiating the spread of Christianity.

It is, however, very interesting to note that the missionary activities played an important role in the history of the undivided Assam specially in the Khasi, Jaintia, Garo, Mizo and Naga Hills of the present Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland states respectively. They ushered in significant development in the field of education, language and linguistic identity, culture, emancipatory thoughts and many more other good aspects that were considered to be civilized as well as humane exercises. Establishments of village schools and imparting of basic education was the second most important task of these missionaries, apart from the religious conversions. David Syiemlieh writes in his essay *Christian Missions and Tribes in the Hills of North-East India:*

> Christianity brought in a new way of life – Christians were expected to have character, conduct, to abstain from intoxicants – (the Catholics were more liberal in the consumption of liquor);

> where slavery was in vogue, Christianity advocated its end and personal hygiene was encouraged. (151).

Prior to this, the tribal people were completely ignorant of education and tended to remain illiterate under the stratagems of the local priesthood and religion. They indulged in internal ethnic clashes and enmities along with superstitious beliefs and activities. They were addicted to various social and regional evils and practices. The Christian missionary believed that imparting education and generating knowledge could constituted a way out for them from these social evils and negative indulgences. Rev. Dr Woba James asserts: "Education and Christianity came to be closely identified in North East India. Education is one of the most powerful agencies for bringing transformation in the life of the people of NEI. ...The education imparted by the Christians lifted the people from ignorance, illiteracy, savagery and superstitions." (19) Though it is a fact that by opening schools and imparting education to the tribal people of the region, the missionaries, in other ways, were helping their colonial counterparts in preparing human resources that in future could help the colonialist power in spreading Christianity and expanding their regimes, thereby confirming their grip on the soil permanently.

Hence, the seed of the cultural and colonial transformation, English language and literature adoption among the tribal communities in the undivided Assam and the entire North-east region was planted at the time of British imperialism and the simultaneous missionaries' intrusion. The cultural and religious hegemonic invasion over the ignorant tribal masses of the region worked for both good and bad purpose. They were good as the adoption and accommodation of western culture, education, language helped make them civilized, educated and polished, thereby modifying their lifestyle and livelihood in more judicious and respectful ways. On the other hand, they were bad as the new changed lifestyle and livelihood helped erase some of their traditional good cultures, customs, languages, religious faith and regional beliefs. Hence, the tribal people are divided in their opinions on the matter. In the words of Lalthansangi Ralte: "The people become divided; there are those who insist on maintaining a pure culture free from foreign influence and there are those who support the 'progress' brought forth by the foreigners." (Poetry on the Lips… 114).

Though it is a fact that the tribal populace of the region did not have written script of their own prior to the introduction of the Roman script. Hence, they had to use Bengali script for written communication. Their regional dialects were used only for oral communication. Therefore, their fables, folk-tales, folk-cultures, myths and mythologies and even the historical events and records were carried forward orally which became their folk-literature and records. Over time, with the association of imperialism and hegemonic trends as well as the influence of foreign and Bengali language and literature and the gradual adoption of foreign religious practices like Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, their culture, language and literature started getting shaped and reshaped with the existing trends and ethos on the one hand and on the other hand, their indigenous oral literature and folk-tales were gradually reduced to limited reach and practice.

However, Christianity has been able to transform the society of the North East in all aspects. What the British had exploited and taken away from the region in their colonial regime, their counterparts, Christianity and the Christian missionaries had amply compensated the region with all sorts of things and thoughts that are benevolent and benign to the tribes. They played the role of a catalyst in civilizing the tribes. Subba, Puthenpurakal and puykunnel rightly says:

> Undoubtedly, Christianity has been the single most important catalyst in the lives of millions of tribes living in Northeast India today. …The tribes of the region have come a long way from the time they first came in contact with the missionaries. The changes that have taken place in their material culture, cultural beliefs and practices in particular are quite revolutionary. (Christianity and Change…v)

While one still finds some of the decadent remains of negative influences that stemmed from colonial hegemon, the positive and progressive aspects of Christianity that missionaries infused into the region as a part of their educational, civilizational and other servicing processes have remained intact and expanded with the passage of time. For instance, the Christian faith, cultures and practices and the introduction of Roman script by the Welsh Missionaries is still in vogue in some parts of the region. Again, the present demographic data, literacy rate as well as the percentage of religiously observant sections of society in the region are evidence of the positive influence of Christianity in the region. Kailash

C. Baral in his seminal article "Articulating Marginality…" says:

> Christianity, a powerful force, has deeply touched the lives of many communities in the Northeast. The advent of Christianity in the region is an important historical event, for the missionaries have been instrumental in giving the hill tribes their script as well as educating them. What emerged the creative writers in a quest to know who they are and in what way their culture is predicated. The influence of Christianity is viewed with some ambivalence by some poets, but its contribution to the shaping of the ethnic and cultural imaginary cannot be underestimated. (9)

To conclude, it can be said that the influence of Christianity and Christian culture and education upon the literature from India's North East region serves both as a boon and a bane if set beside the colonial curse of oppression and suppression. It is a boon as it helps immensely in redefining and reforming the cultural and linguistic ethos and ethics of the region through the medium of the English language and culture and the introduction of the the Roman script. It is, on the other hand, a blow to indigeneity as it destroys the belief of the natives in their culture, abilities and their very being. Exploiting the simplicity and serenity of the tribal communities, the British had taken drastic measures to suppress the traditional customs and practices within the community. Christianity acted as a form of social control which would further convince the natives to willingly remain under the power of the British. However, with all these allegations and appropriations, when it comes to the matter of the region's literature in the English language, the Welsh-Khasi intimacy is worth mentioning. Around 1994, the Welsh poets Dafydd Rowlands and Nigel Jenkins visited the Khasi Hills and other parts of India's North East region to renew the Welsh-Khasi ties that date back to the colonial era and were eulogistic after meeting and reading the emerging English poets-writers from this zone.

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M. M. Thomas – The Indian Ecumenical Icon

-Aruna Gnanadason *

To honour MM Thomas on his death anniversary, I have decided to focus on MM, the ecumenical icon – he was, without a doubt one of the foremost Indian theologians and thinkers who has made a decisive impact on the national and global ecumenical movement. Recently I reread his ecumenical autobiography entitled simply as "**My Ecumenical Journey**" (Ecumenical Publishing Centre Private Ltd., Trivandrum, 1990). His simplicity and humility shines through this story about a man who has left an indelible impact on several ecumenical organisations starting with the Student Christian Movement of India even as a student in Kerala, and then on the World Student Christian Federation; the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society and the World Council of Churches (WCC) among others. In the WCC his term as Moderator of its Central Committee from 1968-1975 is memorable. What he has written as his ecumenical journey filled me with awe – his important contributions at a crucial stage of ecumenical history cannot be minimised. He chaired the ground breaking world conference on Church and Society held in Geneva in 1966 and was the main speaker at the WCC Assemblies in New Delhi 1961 and in Uppsala 1968 apart from many other important events.

He was affectionately called MM by many in the ecumenical movement – he was always MM to me. We could call him that even though he was one of the most revered and respected theologians in India; a committed leader of the Christian community and the ecumenical movement; a sharp and courageous commentator on matters of the church and state; and most importantly one who contributed to the contours of a new church and a new society in India. Throughout his life he developed new theological visions of how the Church in India and globally should respond to the political and economic developments of the society they are in the midst of. With this as his commitment, he began his journey in the Youth Department of his Church (the Mar Thoma Church)

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and became its first full time secretary in 1945. While working for his church he inevitably engaged with the Student Christian Movement of Kerala (of which he became Secretary). His reflections on the ecumenical and social implications of the gospel were planted in his heart and mind and with conviction he has nurtured many young minds. Many of us in the ecumenical movement in India would vouch for what we have gained from his life and writings.

His engagement with political events at the grass roots coupled with is sharp mind and extensive reading were the basis for his political acumen. This was tempered by MM's deep faith that propelled him to explore the meaning of Christ and Church in the world. One cannot forget his encouragement to Christians and the church to resist the national emergency India was led into (1975-1977) by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, by writing courageous opinion pieces and blogs to educate readers and the churches. These were done surreptitiously as there could have been consequences he could have personally faced by a government which brooked no resistance. Most of the churches and Christians in India, in fact took a contrary view – afraid to speak out against a regime which could hurt their minority interests and institutional power. Even the official leadership of the National Council of Churches in India supported the Emergency. MM expressed concern about this position which he felt writes was "impelled, I presume, by narrow communal rather than broad human interests and by their non-political spirituality." (My Ecumenical Journey, 1947-1977, p. 432). But he goes on to affirm the role of some Church leaders including the then Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church, Juhanon Mar Thoma, who wrote to PM Indira Gandhi asking that political detainees be released and that the Emergency be lifted.

MM first openly wrote his critique of the Emergency in the CISRS' journal, The Guardian, which was then censored by the government; and so, he continued to write his political and Christian response privately, to a circle of friends in India and abroad. It was in such a context that he was invited to chair the Kerala Branch of the People's Union for Civil Liberties, from which position he was able to organise important discussions. He was also asked to Chair a Convention of Christian Social Action Groups that was held in New Delhi, in 1977, immediately after the Emergency was lifted. This gathering was called out of a concern that the social movements had been unable to speak out during the Emergency and felt the need to organise themselves more. At that

gathering the Delhi Forum of Christian Concern for People's Struggles was born, announcing the presence of a "radical non-communal Christianity" in India. (MM in My Ecumenical Journey, p. 434).

I give special attention to this contribution of MM, as he had so much to teach the churches. Perhaps today is another moment when the churches ought to go back to his life and writings and be inspired by what he has written and all that he said so that we as Christians can once again forge a "radical non-communal Christianity" in these troubling times. Today we need his vision of a non-communal Christianity more than ever before, when religion and caste play such a pivotal role in dividing the people of India and in inviting communal tensions and violence.

A few months after MM passed away, I was asked to write an article on MM and women – my research showed me that he had not written directly about women in any of his writings; though he would here and there mention women and he has quoted from the writings of a few women. But, he was one who genuinely believed in the role of women in church and society. When I was on the staff of the NCCI working with women we invited him twice to speak at meetings of the then All India Council of Christian Women (the AICCW, what now is the Women's Unit of the WCC). He was always obliging and came for our meetings. He addressed an Assembly of the AICCW in Kottayam at the Mar Thoma Church's Sevika Sanghom headquarters. He was open to dialogue with the women on some of what he said. I remember a point of controversy – to paraphrase his words, he said; "now that men are also coming into the kitchen and engaging in household chores, the country ought to invest in the mechanisation of equipment used in the home." This made some women angry – was he implying that it is only because men have condescended to do household chores that the burden of housework needs to be made lighter? He did not have a response to that challenge and was humble enough to acknowledge that he had not thought of it that way! Always willing to change his position he made the effort to convince himself that he needed to acknowledge the patriarchal world he too functioned in.

An even more telling example of his flexibility and willingness to recognise that he had to change, was when he once visited Geneva on the invitation of the World Council of Churches to address the Central Committee of the WCC a few years after his term as Moderator of the Central Committee. He accepted the invitation on condition that he stayed in my home – he did not want to stay in a hotel. We enjoyed his brief stay with us. He had discussed what he was going to say in his

speech first with Jonathan, my husband and then with me. As always he was focused on calling on the global church to take cognisance of its role as a global Christian movement to address the urgent global economic and social challenges they face. He drew on the role of Abraham as a fearless leader of the people of Israel in Old Testament times. I urged him to speak of Abraham **and Sarah** (and Hagar too) as leaders of the people in those times. He simply dismissed my request to begin with saying it was not important. I decided that this was not the time to remind him of the significant role women had played in the Bible, and in church and ecumenical history and left my disappointment there. He was up very early the next morning – in a few hours he was to deliver his speech - and had got ready and was restlessly walking around the apartment. At 6. 00 am we got up to make his coffee and breakfast ready. I was in the kitchen to which he came and just said, "It is very important to you that I add Sarah, isn't it?". I smiled and said, "yes, to me and to the ecumenical movement and to the Church."

As the written speech had been sent ahead to the WCC and was in the hands of the interpreters etc, he could not make any change to the text. However, MM being the ecumenical leader he was, did add the name of Sarah verbally in his speech as he delivered it to the Central Committee. This was met with a round of loud applause and cheers, especially from the women in the hall. He acknowledged the approbation with his usual humility and turned to the then General Secretary Dr. Konrad Raiser and said, "someone else corrected me and gave me the idea and I am getting the praise!". That humility and openness to acknowledge that he was always learning marked him for the great man he was.

To him, the inclusion of women was not just a matter of token representation or an afterthought – he believed the Christian community is incomplete without the inclusion of all on the edges of society. This is confirmed in the warm way he affirmed the role of Dr. Pauline Webb, who was the vice-Moderator of the WCC when he was Moderator. She speaks of MM's leadership style and his affirmation of her role as leader, in her book "World Wide Webb: Journeys of Faith and Hope." (Canterbury Press, Norwich. 2006). Dr. Pauline Webb who was then head of religious programming, in the BCC London, speaks of her relationship with MM, as friend and co-worker. He preferred the consensus style of decision making and did not hesitate to turn the chairing of some crucial sessions to Pauline - he told her she was better than he was at the parliamentary system of decision making. So, she has to her name the moderation of the sessions for the formation of the WCC's Programme to Combat Racism and in the setting up of the Special Fund

to Combat Racism among others. One of the crucial sessions Pauline chaired was the discussion on the controversial and unpopular decision for WCC on the question of funding the newly formed African National Congress in South Africa. Susannah Herzel in documenting the history of women in the WCC says that for Pauline such an experience as this was rare. She writes:

> Thomas was a chairman who estimated his burden of responsibility with sane soberness, but he did not attempt to protect Pauline from her share of difficulties. His expectations from women were entirely free from a patronizing attitude. If there was an important or particularly difficult subject for debate on the agenda, he did not suggest that under the circumstances perhaps he should resume the chair. As a result, Pauline chaired some complex and controversial WCC debates. (Susannah Herzel, A Voice for Women: The Women's Department of the World Council of Churches, 1981, WCC).

In preparing for this article, I read again MM's record of his life from 1947-1975, **My Ecumenical Journey** that covers that period of time when he began as a youth in his local setting to his time with the WSCF, the WCC, with the CISRS and his many experiences in world-wide ecumenical studies on society and religion. Respected wherever he made a contribution, he was constantly in demand to write, lecture and teach all over the world. His humility and laid-back style as well as his readiness to be available to students, to youth to church leaders, and pastors as well as leaders in the ecumenical movement is what endeared him to all. The personal relationships with the staff of ecumenical organisations with whom he was willing to dialogue and negotiate made his contribution invaluable. There were difficult moments on his journey, he was keenly aware that the presence of Third World churches and Christians was not always welcomed, especially when their participation was critiqued for not toeing the European line. He is quoted by Time magazine for courageously saying "Christianity must transcend Western civilization" as well as the "evils of denominationalism that discredits Christianity in Asian eyes". (Time magazine Dec.21, 1953).

His book has many references to such a sentiment and his unease about the pressure on the people from the two-thirds world to keep within the framework set by the Europeans and North Americans. He describes the many occasions on which he was the sole representative of the global south; and of the concern of those from the South that many documents were couched in "paternalistic language" (one example of this he describes in My Ecumenical Journey p. 310). He speaks of

the questions raised about his own election to the Chairmanship (later known as Moderator) of the WCC Central Committee; a Bishop from Norway was concerned that it was a disaster that they were appointing a chairman who was not "a professional theologian"! (My Ecumenical Journey p. 324). And yet, MM took every step on his complicated ecumenical journey with self-confidence and clarity of purpose. He was not cowed down by the many rules and procedures the WCC used for decision making processes, which was derived out of the context in which the WCC was formed. He writes, "I warned them that I had not read Roberts Rules of Order and had no intention of reading them, but hoped to build up more informal procedures, enabling fuller participation of those who are not adept at parliamentary procedures in the processes of corporate thinking." (My Ecumenical Journey, p. 316). One could say that it was he who began the search for the consensus model of decision making that became the rule some 50 years later. The Anglican Archbishop Woods, thanking MM for his chairing of a particularly difficult Central Committee meeting, characterised his style as "cheerful, informal, fair and firm." This was met with a standing ovation from the Central Committee. Even Visser't Hooft the then General Secretary of the WCC, who at a point gently chided him for not wearing a well-tailored suit as behoves his position, did appreciate MM "for combining informality with formality." Metropolitan Hazim of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch praised MM for the humanity he brought into the Central Committee "without the tyranny of rules". My Ecumenical Journey p. 347.)

One last word about the man, MM Thomas. Through all the years of travel and hard work, he saw to it that he accompanied his wife Pennamma (Elizabeth) who obviously had a deep impact on his life and had inspired him both spiritually and in his theological journey. He writes about her with great affection in several sections of My Ecumenical Journey. Unfortunately, she was diagnosed with cancer and died in 1969. Losing her was of course very hard for him, but he honoured her wish that he should keep all his ecumenical commitments going.

I have very intentionally focused this article on MM the man as an ecumenical icon whose life and work has deeply impacted the church in India and the ecumenical movement. I have not included in this article his theological gifts – the courageous theological insights and contributions he had made. My memory of his ecumenical journey focuses on the impact that the man MM Thomas had on all he encountered and the impact his ecumenical passion had in all he did. To him I am eternally grateful.

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Flannery O'Connor's Replication of the Bible in Wise Blood

*-Moyuri Dutta**

Abstract: Christianity has greatly influenced the works of the American writer Flannery O'Connor and her ideas. In her work *Wise Blood*, O'Connor has mainly tried to bring society and her readers in close communion with God, helping them to seek his grace. Issues like religion, ideas of redemption and damnation, and faith in Jesus as found in her fiction, have been discussed in this article. O'Connor, through her text, discusses the White South, which has got distracted and chosen a path of damnation, evil, and sin. Most inhabitants of the region neither believe or have faith in Jesus and neither seek redemption. By making her characters face certain situations, she has attempted to give an evangelical message to her readers through her text. There is no room for further discussion, and one can choose either redemption or damnation and Jesus or the world of evil. The article mainly focuses on the intertextual relationship between the novel and the Bible. It focuses on the need for spirituality in one's life with spiritual insight into everything. While the article does not deny the strength of O' Connor's Catholic convictions it emphasizes the spiritual regeneration of the white Protestants.

KEYWORD: Christianity, damnation, Redemption, Ressurection, Spiritual rebirth.

Flannery O'Connor's works always show an impact of Christianity in it. Her views and notions about reality have all been influenced by her religiosity. She has been committed to the Catholic church and in her essay "The Fiction Writer and His Country" O'Connor has stated that "I am no disbeliever in spiritual purpose and no vague believer. I see from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy. This means that for me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and what I see

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in the world I see in its relation to that" (32). Her intertextual use of the Bible distinguishes her from other writers like Faulkner, Hurston, and Wright. These authors struggle with the White South's dominant religiosity, but in her novel *Wise Blood*, O' Connor has endorsed all the tenets of that dominant religion. Through her text, she has tried to evoke a kind of commitment of the reader towards the ideologies of Christianism. She attempts to influence her readers, who she thinks, have lost faith in God's grace. While writers like Faulkner, Hurston, and Wright have tried to show the racial inequalities of the dominant White South, O'Connor has instead tried to focus on issues like piety and salvation through her use of the Bible.

She sought to bring her Southern readers to confront Christ and bring back the regions' diminishing faith. For example, the character Solace Layfield in *Wise Blood* could have been redeemed from his sins but got murdered at the hands of Hazel Motes with his Essex. Layfield dies taking the name of God on his lips and asking God to forgive his sins. In this novel, violence can be seen in the theological context, not the social, and it also serves as a metaphor for Christian conversion. O'Connor, through her work, tries to give her readers the message that they will be left doomed if they do not seek salvation through Christianity.

In the novel, O'Connor makes her characters experience violence so that her evangelical message reaches her readers. Timothy P. Caron in his essay "Evangelicalism in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*" explains that "To paraphrase the litany of many Southern Protestant preachers practicing baptism by immersion, O'Connor's fiction illustrates her characters' death to their old way of life and their rebirth into Christ to walk with Him" (50). O'Connor's work delivers a Christian message and her stories can be seen through the lens of evangelical Christianity. *Wise Blood* mainly focuses on the endeavor of true believers trying to claim the "kingdom of heaven."

Through the relationship between her novel and the Bible, she has attempted to link the supernatural world of Christ with her known world; Christ's redemptive death and His resurrection. In her article, "The Nature and Aim of Fiction" O'Connor declares that "The kind of vision the fiction writer needs to have, or to develop, in order to increase the meaning of his story is called anagogical vision, and that is the kind of vision that is able to see different levels of reality in one image or one

situation" (72). Through her work she has tried to reveal "the Divine life and our participation in it" (O'Connor, *Mystery* 72). The novel in a way delivers the message of the Bible and insists on its individuals' salvation through God because one day everyone would have to stand accountable to him. Biblical stories, characters, and figures have been made use of in her text in a way that resembles the message of salvation so predominant in the scriptures. The novel and its supernatural realities mediate between her reading of the Bible and intertextual acquisition. The intertext of *Wise Blood* portrays the obsession of Southern White with personal sin and salvation.

In *Wise Blood,* the two characters Enoch Emery and Hazel Motes who resemble unbelief and belief explain O' Connor's strong belief in terms of spiritual rebirth. In her fiction, every individual needs to choose either Christ, like the character Hazel, or the world, like Enoch. Hazel's grandfather's fundamentalist and mother's evangelical theology have been reflected. His grandfather "Every fourth Saturday" drove "into Eastrod as if he were just in time to save them all from Hell, and he was shouting before he had the car door open" (*Wise Blood* 21). The message that the old man delivered was that all the listeners had to surrender and follow the path taught by Jesus or else all would have to face Hell.

O'Connor has tried to show a connection between Enoch and Haze, who were moving to Taulkinham and the Bible through two ways. Both their names suggest a kind of meaninglessness of life in the absence of Christ, and their deeds disclose their desperate longing for a spiritual and some supernatural inclination in their lives. The name Enoch Emery represents two contrasting characters of Enoch adapted from the early chapters of the *Genesis*. The first one is the son of Cain who was born after Cain killed Abel. The religious temperaments of the white people in the South represent this image of Enoch (as Cain's son) who is a wicked man. Enoch Emery's name reflects the name of the "son" from the Bible who signifies wickedness and separation from God after the Fall. Timothy P. Caron in his essay "Evangelicalism in Flannery O'Connor's Wise Blood" has explained that " "Like his intertextual biblical predecessor, Enoch Emery is a man living under a system of rituals, outside of the Grace of Christ, completely clueless about Jesus' redemptive mission. Despite Enoch Emery's boast that he knows a "whole heap about Jesus," he fruitlessly seeks to fulfill his spiritual

impulses through a series of rituals in the park, such as his viewing of the shrunken mummy, without an evangelical faith in Christian redemption" " (58). These rituals performed by Enoch reveal his belief in religion, but it is mainly "Christ-haunted" and not "Christ-centered." Enoch does not practice the Christian ideals that he acquired in the form of knowledge in Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy. For O'Connor, faith in Christ is not just knowledge or some facts about the life of Jesus.

The second Enoch that Enoch Emery resembles is the one descended from the third son of Adam and Eve, Seth, from the Old Testament. This Enoch is portrayed as a righteous man and is a Hebrew patriarch. Noah is said to have descended from such a Hebrew patriarch. The description of Enoch walking with God has been mentioned in Genesis 5:24, where he avoids death and is in communion with God. In *The Holy Bible* (1974) the New Testament shows how the Hebrew writers give a new voice to the story of Enoch in order to demonstrate the gift of God in one's life: "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5).

But this book by O'Connor, in a way, ironically retells the biblical story where we see that the character Enoch does not have the ability to be in communion with God. His religiosity has been greatly affected by the consumerist world in Taulkinham. His goal is to be "THE young man of the future, like the ones in the insurance ads" (*Wise Blood* 191). If we look at the text from a theological framework, we will see that Enoch has turned himself into an animal, translating himself into a gorilla for his self-advancement. O'Connor now addresses him as "it" and not as "he" after he has dressed himself in the gorilla suit:

> In the uncertain light, one of his lean white legs could be seen to disappear and then the other, one arm and then the other: a black heavier shaggier figure replaced his. For an instant, it had two heads, one light and one dark, but after a second, it pulled the dark back head over the other and corrected this. It busied itself with certain hidden fastenings and what appeared to be minor adjustments of its hide. (*Wise Blood* 197)

This image of Enoch Emery being translated from a man to a gorilla reveals *Wise Blood*'s prevailing racist image in the minds of Southern whites where blacks are regarded as sub-human beasts. But this idea of the Southern racists has been sought to be hidden by O'Connor. At the end of the transformation, we see that Enoch Emery is black and ruled by inhuman animal desires. O'Connor, in her work, has tried to shift attention from the racial considerations prevailing in the story of the novel.

As Enoch Emery is being intertextually linked to the Old Testament, so is Hazel Motes to the New Testament. Hazel's name signifies the imagery of blindness in the New Testament because at first, we see that he is blind towards Jesus' call. But later we see that he blinds himself and surrenders completely to God so that he is no more distracted from his newly acquired spiritual outlook. If we look at the theological framework developed by O'Connor in *Wise Blood*, we will find that Hazel from Eastrod does not give attention to God because of the "haze" of his rejection in society. He thinks that he has not done any sin and does need to undergo salvation. This metaphorical and literal blindness of Hazel Motes represents the images found in the New Testament where it is all interlinked to the white South's ability to see and distinguish the teachings of Christ and also how one follows it. For example, in *The Holy Bible* (1974) a mention has been made of what Christ once predicted that " "the light of the body is the eye," and if it is filled with light, "then thy whole body shall be full of light" " (Matthew 6:23). Haze was guilty of his actions and realized that before his conversion, though he had his eyesight, he lacked spiritual insight.

Like their names, Enoch Emery and Hazel Motes, O' Connor has tried to reveal a kind of biblical intertextuality through her character's actions. O'Connor, through her text, has tried to show the uselessness and meaninglessness of life without God's grace and encourages her readers to build a bond with Christ. She laughs at Enoch for being a "moron and chiefly a comic character" (O'Connor, *Mystery* 116).

Though there is humour in Enoch's actions, Hazel took the path of salvation out of fear. He not only goes blind but wraps barbed wire around his chest and puts pebbles and broken glass inside his shoes. His struggle against disbelief in God is connected to the religious legacy of his family. If we analyse his early phase of life, we will see that

he earned his knowledge about Christ from his grandfather whom he always feared: "a waspish old man who had ridden over three counties with Jesus hidden in his head like a stinger" (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 20). Hazel's grandfather described Jesus as "soul-hungry" who would chase sinners "over the waters of sin," and "would have him in the end" (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 22). Harold Fickett in his book *Flannery O'Connor: Images of Grace* (1986) have explained that Hazel's fear with regard to his grandfather's act of denunciation was "a sense of sin. . . . This sense of sin is the only key he has to finding a sanctuary and he begins unconsciously to search for God through sin" (39). This search for salvation forms the basis of the religious kinship that is formed with the Protestants of the white South.

O'Connor has portrayed three scenes that would describe Hazel's encounter with the otherworldly Jesus. First of all, he destroys the Jesus covered with dust; secondly, he kills the false prophet, named Solace Layfield; and at last, we see that a patrolman destroys his car.

Hazel always had been searching for God with a body and soul. But it is suddenly presented before him like a mummy, a lifeless object. So, he rejects its significance because it was not what he was searching for. This momentary insight is not enough to attain salvation; it has only brought him a step closer towards redemption.

The second event that helps Hazel for his conversion is his murder of Solace Layfield, who is also his narrative twin. Hoover Shoats hires a look-alike of Hazel when he felt that Hazel would not compromise his Church in the absence of Christ to gain money. Hazel moves towards his redemption as he strips away the costume of a Guerilla from his narrative twin:

> [Layfield] The Prophet began to run in earnest. He tore off his shirt and unbuckled his belt and ran out of the trousers. He began grabbing for his feet as if he would take off his shoes too, but before he could get at them, the Essex knocked him flat and ran over him. Haze drove about twenty feet and stopped the car and then began to back it. He backed it over the body and then stopped and got out. (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 204)

In the text, Hazel's image as a murderer is not being portrayed as something violent as much as it portrays the violence present in the exorcism of his sinful acts because these acts have been preventing him from attaining salvation. Hazel's final step toward his conversion is the destruction of his car by the patrolman. Hazel had the confidence that not even a thunderstorm could stop his car. But it was the mysterious patrolman who prevents him from getting away from God. The officer throws his car into an embankment and destroys his ability to run away from God. "Haze stood for a few minutes, looking over at the scene. His face seemed to reflect the entire distance across the clearing and on beyond, the entire distance that extended from his eyes to the blank gray sky that went on, depth after depth, into space. His knees bent under him and he sat down on the edge of the embankment with his feet hanging over" (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 209). He has finally crossed his third step toward redemption with the help of Jesus' grace.

These scenes represent an intertextual bond between Hazel and the apostle Paul, as portrayed in the New Testament, specifically in the Acts of the Apostles. We see that both Hazel and Paul experienced God's grace in the form of violence while traveling the country roads. After his encounter with the Patrolman, Hazel runs back to the city and blinds himself with a mixture of quicklime and water. This scene where both Paul and Hazel turn blind marks a difference between their old and their new selves. After his rebirth, Paul had to suffer from a "thorn in the flesh" which made him polite before God. Similarly, Hazel wraps his body with the thorns of a metallic barbed wire around his chest. These measures brought him closer to God and towards redemption.

The ways that Hazel used to self-mutilate himself focuses on two most important theology of the white South's redemption - first, his blindness has removed all kinds of distractions that kept him away from Jesus, and, secondly, it provided him with spiritual vision for his upcoming actions. After turning blind, Hazel began to move back to Bethlehem for a spiritual union with Jesus as he was nearing death. Thus, through her book *Wise Blood*, O'Connor has tried to present the religiosity of the White South and use her protagonist Hazel's blindness as a metaphor that signifies the spiritual insight of people that has got blocked.

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Delineation of the Challenging Microcosm of Youth in R. K. Narayan's *The Bachelor of Arts*

-V. Chandra and J. Dharageswari***

Abstract: R.K.Narayan (1906 – 2001) was one of the famous trio of mid-Twentieth Century Indian novelists writing in English, (the other two being Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao) and his fictional range is characterised by a rich variety of themes. His works reflect a keen observation of the textures of everyday life in small-town South India. Characters are credibly represented and their social milieu is depicted with verisimilitude.

In keeping with this, his second novel, *The Bachelor of Arts* is a development of his first novel, *Swami and Friends* and displays the blossoming life of a youth**.** Youth is the phase when an individual develops his or her concept of self. This particular phase is influenced by various factors like family, peers, society, lifestyle, culture and working environment. The choice made during this period shapes one's future fairly decisively. Thus, the period of childhood is in contrast to the period of youth. The former is rather innocent and dependent, whereas the latter marks entry into society and the initiation of personal autonomy. The vicissitudes and challenges of youth are depicted fairly convincingly by R.K.Narayan in his novel *The Bachelor of Arts*.

Keywords: Challenge, childhood, adulthood, bachelor, Adolescence[1]

R.K.Narayan's second novel *The Bachelor of Arts* represents the life of youth, which is the period of spring and challenges. The story spins

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around a young man, Chandran, who belongs to the upper middle-class in pre-independent India. According to John Thieme, *The Bachelor of Arts* takes "the portrait of a young man to the threshold between adolescence to adulthood and has consequently been seen as a bildungsroman that speaks across cultures with a universalist appeal" (79). The passage from childhood to adulthood is effectively exhibited by the author, along with a special focus on the engagement between tradition and modernity.

The novel *The Bachelor of Arts* is divided into four parts, based on the stages in the progression of Chandran, the protagonist. The first part of the novel introduces Chandran as a college student doing a B.A. in History. During the early period of an individual, college life is often seen as the golden period of one's life. It is the period of freedom and a time for making friends. Unlike in childhood, learning never happens under compulsion, but is more freely sought. The initial part of the novel comprises Chandran's ambitions, attitude, pride and sense of superiority.

The subsequent part of the novel exhibits Chandran's experience of love at first sight with Malathi. Love is an inevitable experience in the life of a human being. Regardless of whether romantic love succeeds or fails, it changes the lives of the persons involved. Chandran encounters a drastic change in his life and the harmony of the family is lost. The third part of the novel throws light on the aftermath of his failure in love. It is a period of temptations. But, with the traditional upbringing his parents give him, the protagonist manages the situation. He then tries to become a sage, and fails in that attempt too. The final part of the novel is about the rehabilitation of Chandran. Experience is the best teacher and time gives the answers for complicated questions in our life. Accordingly, the period of youth with ups and downs, provides Chandran many experiences, which strengthens his mind and heart, leading him to maturity. Thus, the author brings out the progress in the life of Chandran, during the period of youth, which is quite challenging and interesting.

Through the character of Chandran, R.K.Narayan clearly drafts a few phases in the life of youth. The immediate youth stage after the childhood offers independence with responsibilities and risks. Distractions and temptations are the pathway of youth. Meanwhile, life experiences

teach the significance of the people around one and impart the confidence one needs to live a fruitful life on earth. Finally, the novel displays world of youth, with all its experiences.

R.K.Narayan is very choosy in fixing the title of his novels. The same goes with *The Bachelor of Arts,* which relevant to the content of the novel. It sketches the life and career of the protagonist Chandran. He is the Bachelor of Arts and hence the novel is named after him. The first part of *The Bachelor of Arts* presents a vivid picture of the college life of Chandran.

R.K.Narayan has covered virtually every aspect of college life to illuminate the personality of the hero Chandran. The author put forth the activities of college in a realistic manner. Through the depiction of college incidents, R.K.Narayan delineates behaviour characteristic of the young people of that period, their responses to certain situations and handling of human beings. College is the place where each and every young student considers himself a hero and possesses high self-esteem.

Albert Mission College, Malgudi, is the locale of the opening scenes of the novel. Chandran is a final year B.A., History student at the college. Natesan, the Secretary of college union asks Chandran to be the prime mover for the debate which is to be conducted that evening on the topic 'Historians should be slaughtered'. Though he is not an outstanding student, he is a good speaker. As a youth, he is ready to accept the challenge and the opportunity that comes his way.

Being a history student, Chandran is in two minds about accepting the role and worries about how his history professor, Ragavachar, will react when he hears about the topic. "He tried to be off, but Chandran caught his hand and held him: "I am a history student. I can't move the subject. What a subject! My professor will eat me up" (Narayan, The Bachelor of Arts 5). But, Natesan guarantees Chandran that the professor will not be present at the debate. Though he is a history student, he is ready to participate in the debate and talk against historians. Youth generally tend to be responsible in their public commitment. They know that their status lies in their performances. They rarely accept a responsibility right away, but when they do they work hard to do an impressive job.

Accordingly, after accepting the request of Natesan, Chandran visits the library for gathering the points for his debate. But there are not enough books on the topic of the debate. However, he somehow manages to accumulate ideas for the debate and also plans for a humorous anecdote at the end of each section of his speech. He toils to organize the ideas for the debate. During the speech, He presents well and receives applause from the student audience. Chandran is very happy.

Soon after the debate, Chandran expects Natesan's view on his speech. But, Natesan is very busy winding up arrangements after the Union programme. After the work is done, Natesan is indifferent to Chandran. These are the sort of situations that help Chandran learn the facts of life. "He (Natesan) cringed for Chandran's help before the debate, and immediately the thing was over did not trouble to make the slightest reference to the speech". (7) This is the way of the world, full as it is of indifferent people, and in course of time, Chandran learns to tackle people.

Many younsters are not very expressive when they are scared or in fear of anything. But they are ready to manage situations and learn things. When Professor Ragavachar informs Chandran to meet him, Chandran becomes nervous, but internally he pampers himself and gathers confidence to face him.

> Why this cowardice? Why should he be afraid of Ragavachar or anybody? Human being to human being. Remove those spectacles, the turban, and the long coat, and let Ragavachar appear only in a loin-cloth, and Mr. Ragavachar would lose three-quarters of his appearance. Where was the sense in feeling nervous before a pair of spectacles, a turban, and a black long coat? (26)

In an unexpected turn, Professor Ragavachar asks Chandran to start a Historical Association in the college and names him as the secretary of the same.

> My purpose in calling you now is to ascertain your views on the question of starting a Historical Association in the col-

> lege."Saved! Chandran sat revelling in the sense of relief he now felt.... "You will be the Secretary of the Association. I shall be its President (26)

He instructs him to make arrangements for the inauguration of the association. Chandran is not an excellent student, but when the responsibility is imposed on him, he is ready to contribute his best. He works smart and seeks the help of Natesan, the Union Secretary, to proceed with arrangements for the inauguration. Meanwhile, Chandran learns to handle people and uses strategies to get his work done.

Chandran knows well that being a secretary of an association is not an easy task. The secretary is responsible for arranging all the meetings and decide on whom to invite as guest speakers. And it is mandatory that he conducts six meetings before March, have paper presentations, and organize a few other programmes. The association secretary is to deliver the vote of thanks at all the programs organized. Chandran is much worried about the works he has to carry out as a secretary. He has to listen to each lecture till the end, as he is the organizer of the programme. Later, he has to put everything back in order at the venue and be the last person to leave the hall after locking it late at night, by when he is usually afflicted with a headache. Actually, all he wants is to be a regular college student, attending classes, writing exams and enjoying with friends. Unfortunately, he holds the position of Secretary of the Historical Association. Anyhow, Chandran prepares himself to carry out the work. R.K.Narayan thus quite effectively portrays the conflict within a young man torn between duty and pleasure.

When a person leaves childhood behind and enters the stage of youth, he observes a lot and learns the ways of people in the external world. Sometimes they indulge in funny activities which provoke humour. When Chandran tries to meet Professor Brown to get an appointment from him on behalf of the Historical Association, Aziz, the peon, gives some fake reasons for not allowing him to meet Professor Brown. Immediately Chandran tells Aziz that he is ready to offer him an old coat and he can pick it up at his home the next morning. This does the trick and Chandran meets the Principal and gets the appointment. When he comes out of the room, Chandran troubles the peon for a moment.

> Chandran marched out of the room. When he passed Aziz he said: "What a bad fellow you are, you wouldn't let me in!"
>
> "Master, I do my duty and get a bad name. What am I to do? Can I see you tomorrow morning?"
>
> "I shall ask the peon at our gate not to let you in."
>
> "Oh, master, I am a poor old fellow, always shivering with cold. Don't disappoint me. If you give me a coat, I shall always remember you as my saviour."
>
> "All right. Come tomorrow," whispered Chandran, and passed on. (28)

From this incident onwards, Aziz voluntarily helps Chandran in making arrangements for the Inaugural of Historical Association, like arranging the chairs in the front row, placing the table on the dais and all other chairs in the hall. He also takes the initiative to brighten up the hall. “He spread a red cloth on the dais, and a green baize on the table. He illuminated the hall with petrol lamps. (29)

Chandran creates a comfort zone for the people he is in touch with. This the admirable aspect of youth. They welcome strangers and accept them as friends. Though they lack knowledge, they come forward to learn things with confidence. They initially depend on others but finally they prove their mettle. Chandran is no exception. Though he intially struggles to accept the post of Secretary, he later accomplishes his duty without any flaws. His contribution to the inaugural of Historical Association is unbelievable. He makes use of his contacts and friendship in the college and successfully completes the function to the satisfaction of Professor Ragavachar, Professor Brown and the entire audience.

An important aspect of the period of youth is the keenness to build friendships. Friends from one’s college days usually remain friends till the end of life and this is the perception of Chandran. He believes that friendship creates the space to share both personal and academic expereiences. Chandran finds a good friend in Ramu, who is also his neighbour, living as he does in Lawley Extension. Ramu is the one with whom Chandran shares his happiness and griefs. According to Chandran, Ramu means everything to him.

Chandran shares with Ramu his experience at the debate. As Ramu had accompanied his mother to the market, he had missed the Union debate. But, when Chandran tells him about his successful presentation and about the applause from Brown and the audience, Ramu feels very happy for him.

> Ramu came out. "Didn't you come to the debate?" Chandran asked.
>
> "I tried to be there, but my mother wanted me to escort her to the market.
>
> How did it go off?"
>
> "Quite well, I think. The proposition was carried."
>
> "Really!" Ramu exclaimed, and shook Chandran's hand. (7)

Chandran feels happier about the appreciation he gets from his friend Ramu than what he gets from his father. Youth is indeed the time when one loves to celebrate one's success with one's friends. Chandran decides to take Ramu to the second show cinema to celebrate his successful presentation in the Union Debate and also tells Ramu that he will pay for both of them. Chandran tells Ramu telling him to be ready to be picked up after dinner. As it is only rarely that Chandran visits the movie house, his father allows him to go. Friendship is thus more than worth the expenses involved in such expeditions.

Chandran and Ramu's visit to the picture house is an aesthetic high point. They love exploring new things together. Chandran enjoys the company of Ramu and their visit to the picture house is preceded by the fun things they indulge in - chewing betel leaves, smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee. By the time they reach the picture house, they find that the show has already begun. They find their seats in the darkness and settle down. During the interval, Ramu notices Professor Brown sitting in the first row accompanied by a girl. Chandran makes a remark about the way Europeans enjoy life. "The white fellows are born to enjoy life. Our people really don't know how to live. If a person is seen with a girl by his side, a hundred eyes stare at him and a hundred

tongues comment, whereas no European ever goes out without taking a girl with him." (18) He advises Ramu not to stare at others as it is ill mannered.

This is the stage where youngsters listen more to their friends' advice than to that of their elders. Chandran enjoys the company of his friend Ramu. "Chandran squeezed the maximum aesthetic delight out of the experience, and Ramu's company was most important to him. It was his presence that gave a sense of completion to the things" (13) Thus R.K.Narayan sketches the world of youth as a fun filled one with the company of friends. In Ramu, Chandran finds a friend whom he can confidently share his joys and sorrows with. Through the friendship of Chandran and Ramu, R.K.Narayan reminds us of the inestimable value of friendship in college days.

Like society, family also contributes in shaping the life of a youth. Peace within the family is the most important factor that contributes to the development of an optimistic attitude in a youngster. The mutual understanding among the members of the family and parental trust in children ensures a happy family. Chandran is gifted with such a family. Chandran, his father, mother and younger brother Seenu get along really well with each other. Their mutual relationships are rarely visited by friction all through Chandran's growing up years. It is only much later that Chandran becomes the sole reason for chaos in the family because of his love affair with Malathi.

For the children and the youngsters, the earliest life lessons are learned within the four walls of the home. Narayan through his novels mostly presents wholesome family relationships as the fit soil to nurture resilient personalities. Added to this is a measure of financial adequacy, which in Chandran's case, makes the home a place without the stresses of financial precarity.

The domestic bond in the life of a youth helps to maintain a genuine attitude with the family members. The space of understanding that is given to the youth enables him to talk about his problems without hesitation. The relationship between Chandran and his father is healthy and ideal. There is perfect coordination between them. Chandran is free to

express his desires to his father without any hesitation and his father is ready to solve his problems and always concerned about his happiness.

When Chandran completes his graduation, everyone around him offers him advice regarding his future, which bothers him a lot. As an angry youth, he shares his feelings with his father, "Why should everybody talk about my career? Why can't they mind their business?"(53). Chandran's father, being empathetic with his young son, clarifies with much patience. "It is the way of the world. You must not let that upset you. It is just a form of courtesy, you see". (53) Hence, the family of Chandran is an ideal one marked by utmost sharing of love and care. Chandran remains a dutiful son to his parents, steering clear of the vices young people of his age often fall prey to. The family provides emotional strength to Chandran and he enjoys a carefree life until he falls in love with Malathi, daughter of a head clerk.

The period of late teens and early twenties is often referred to as "emerging adulthood". This is a very important phase of life, as it involves transitions of several kinds. Many life experiences at this stage have pronounced effects on the thoughts, emotions and behaviours of youngsters. It is also a period of struggles with self-esteem, including hero fantasies. Above all, the attraction towards the opposite sex is an inevitable part of this period. Falling in love can be an overwhelming experience at any age, but for youngsters the feelings are likely to be even more difficult to manage.

Chandran's love affair with Malathi is the unexpected turning point in his life, which spoils the peace of the family and Chandran's own peace of mind. According to R.K.Narayan falling in love is a natural part of human life and the same happens in the life of Chandran. There are many changes within Chandran, after he falls in love with Malathi. He pays much greater attention to his dressing style and his mannerisms. He had always relished the company of friends at the river, but now he sees their presence as an inconvenience. He drops his reading habit. He avoids the company of his family members and wishes to be alone in his room. He ponders only about the girl and gives space for critical thinking. Even after his several visits to the river, Chandran is not ready even to go up to her to find out her name. His infatuation is

completely one-sided and based only on sight. Even Malathi does not know who Chandran is. It is mere attraction towards her innocence and grace. Chandran is simply unable to manage the experience, lacking the maturity to process the welter of feelings that course through him. Thus, R.K.Narayan effectively portrays how love changes the life of a youth. But the fact is it not only affects the particular person, but also the family. Accordingly, the same happens in Chandran's family.

As the youngsters stand between childhood and adulthood, many struggle to find the necessary balance between thoughts and actions. Often, they fail to control their emotions. Some are even ready to quit long-term relationship for a fleeting pleasure. he unbalanced Chandran is ready to throw away his parents for a girl. Though Chandran's mother sticks to old customs and tradition, his pitiable condition makes her give up her beliefs one by one. As the happiness of the youngsters depends on family members, for the sake of her son's happiness, Chandran's mother is ready to consider the proposal. Finally, Chandran's parents call Ganapathi Sastrigal, the match-maker to analyze the match between the horoscope of Chandran and Malathi. Later, they receive the message from Malathi's father that the horoscopes do not match. To discuss further, Chandran's father invites Malathi's father D.W.Krishna Iyer to his house. During the visit, he clearly states that the marriage is not possible as the question of longevity cannot be ignored at any cost.

After a few weeks, Chandran learns that Malathi has married someone else. Following this, he withdraws himself from thoughts of Malathi. Chandran is completely broken and loses all his interest in life. He loses the hope and remains in distress. Before his meeting with Malathi, Chandran had been a lovable son, obedient student with positive energy and an admirable friend. But later, after the loss of his love, he becomes a tough boy and remains as an unhappy and hopeless fellow. R.K.Narayan thus explores the mental instability of youth due to lack of worldly experience.

Chandran's love quest finally ends in failure, as the horoscopes are ill-matched. Like the 'love failure' heroes of the movies, Chandran also starts to lead a life bereft of enthusiasm and hope. He leaves home and stays alone for a few years. Chandran's period of vacillation comes to an end when he finally accepts to marry Sushila, a Brahmin girl chosen

for him by his parents. Chandran decides to take up the main distribution agency for a newspaper called Daily Messenger in Malgudi. He does his job with utmost satisfaction. He liberates himself from his fantasies about friendship, Malathi and England. He comprehends reality. At the same time, he becomes a devoted husband to his wife Sushila. Thus, R.K.Narayan sequentially sketches the phases of a youth, which commences with a care-free college life, continues with a happy family, develops with friendship, shatters over failure in love and culminates in a mature engagement with life's realities.

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BIBLE STUDY

Mirroring Christmas: Bethlehem @ Lakhimpur Kheri

(Matthew 2:17–18)

*-Mothy Varkey**

"*Amar shahidon ka balindan, yaad rakhega Hindustan*"[1]

("India shall remember the sacrifice of the immortal martyrs")

Most Christians prefer not to sully their sentimental and mawkish version of Christmas with the account of king Herod's slaughter of thousands of innocent male infants in and around Bethlehem in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 2:1–18). The historical task of the church is to exposit the ferocious side of these Christmas stories and their meanings in first-century Roman colonial context, which are historical, political and theological. It concerns the conflict between the imperial ideology of Rome and a theology grounded in the liberative God of Israel. It disentangles the darkness of imperialism, tyranny, oppression and militarism into which shines the light of the birth of the world's saviour (John 1:14; cf. 2 Cor 4:6; Isa 60:20; cf. Ps 118:27). This Bible study, therefore, is an attempt to juxtapose the Herodian massacre of the virtuous children in Bethlehem and the recent mass murder of the farmers in Lakhimpur Kheri in Uttar Pradesh. In doing so, it aims to argue that the Herodian repressive mindset continues as the rulers display a relentless obsession with power, hegemony, elitism and exert control on the upheavals triggered in protests by the helpless and oppressed victims, even in contemporary times in democratic India.

When greed, authoritarianism and power unanimously rule every cell of

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[1]The people who attended the funeral of Gurvinder Singh, one of the eight people who had died in Tikunia village in Lakhimpur Kheri on Sunday, October 3, 2021, declared all the killed farmers 'martyrs' through their slogans at the funeral.

the body and mind, ethics and sensibility take a backseat. King Herod was inflicted with self-divination and infatuated by power. Herod's fear and distress were irrational as the birth of a child outside the palace, and that too into a poor family, would not have had any immediate consequences. Nor was there any divine prophecy to Herod that a child would be born to kill him, unlike in Hindu mythology, where the king of Mathura, Kamsa, was warned by divine prophecy that his sister Devaki's eighth child would be responsible for his death.[2]

Herod's extensive and colossal building projects which were in homage to Caesar, many impressive benefactions for foreign cities in Syria and Greece, and the expenditure for fortress, army, and court, placed heavy burden on the Jewish peasantry. He was in fact bleeding his country and people to death (Josephus, *Ant.* 13.56). More importantly, Herod's many dedications to Caesar and the temple honouring Caesar were anathema to Jewish religious traditions (Josephus, *Ant*. 15.328, 339–340, 364–65). He imposed suppressive politics and treacherous laws to curb resistance and retaliation movements. Because of his illegitimacy, offensive violation of traditional Jewish spirituality, and oppressive exploitation, Herod was fanatical in his suspicion and brutal in his stringent control of Jewish society. After suffering military conquest, economic destitution, and the devastation of the Jewish ethical creeds

[2] On hearing the prophecy, an angered and equally petrified Kamsa, imprisoned his newly married sister and brother-in-law, Vasudeva. He had actually intended to kill Devaki but Vasudeva pleaded with him not to do so. Vasudeva promised he would himself hand over their children to Kamsa, so that the latter need not fear death. Kamsa killed 6 children of the helpless couple. When Devaki was carrying the seventh child, a miracle happened. Lord Narayana summoned Yogamaya and asked her to transfer Devaki's four-month-old foetus to the womb of Rohini, another wife of Vasudeva. When this was accomplished, everyone thought that Devaki's foetus had aborted. Now Kamsa, naturally, was in a state of confusion. The voice warning him had not spoken of such a situation. Should he count the aborted foetus as number seven? Or should he not? Kamsa did not know, and lost his peace of mind because of this. The foetus transferred to Rohini's womb was born at the appropriate time and was named Balarama. So the seventh child of Devaki was safe and sound. When Devaki became pregnant for the eighth time, Kamsa wondered if it would not be wise to kill her and be rid of the threat to his life once and for all. But he did not. Kamsa deciding to spare Devaki's life was the Lord's doing and was one of Krishna's leelas. Devaki carried the eighth child full term and Krishna was born.

under the utterly illegitimate "king of the Jews" appointed by Rome, the people must have longed intensely for a liberator and liberation.

The story of the Magi visiting the palace of the king Herod comes to life vividly against this backdrop of Herodian corruption and dictatorship. Therefore, the early Christian exegetical observation of Matthew 2 as representative of Gentiles accepting Jesus is highly questionable as it is a gross simplification and homogenisation of a complex historical event. The Messiah, for Matthew, is the 'king of the Jews'. But what is most striking is that Matthew never uses that title again until Pilate judges and executes Jesus at the end of the Gospel: the governor asks, "are you the king of the Jews?" (Matt 27:11). Matthew alone makes this juxtaposition of Herod and Pilate. If the Magi and Herod are representatives of the Gentiles and the Jews respectively, then Pilate in Matthew 27 should be a representative of the Gentiles too. More importantly, the notion that Matthew is pursuing an apologetic purpose which is derived not from Matthew but from the dispute in John 7 (Jn 7:40–43). Herod and Pilate are rulers, not representative figures, who recognise the challenge posed by Jesus "the king of the Jews." It is Roman power alone that designated and supported Herod the Great as "king of the Jews" (Josephus, *JW*, 1.282). The royal Herodian and aristocratic priestly families that dominated Jewish Palestinian society would hardly have been entertaining any messianic expectations, which would only have been threatening to their position. It is therefore very significant that Matthew calls Jesus by the pointedly anti-Roman title "king of the Jews" (Matt 2:2), and not, say, "king of Israel". In this respect, the title in Matt 2:2 is another overture-to-gospel theme.

The 'slaughter of the innocents' is entirely in character for the suspicious if not pathologically paranoid Herod. When an entourage of distinguished Magi from Persia (the likely descendants of "the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans [Babylonians], and the diviners" [Dan 1:20; 2:2; 4:7; 5:7]) arrived in Jerusalem with the portentous news that a child had been born king of the Jews (not *made* king, but *born* king), Herod was filled with dread. Herod himself might have expected to receive homage as the reigning king. The fact that Herod has to inquire of the chief priests and scribes where the 'anointed one' was to be born indicates that he himself was not definitely the divinely anointed king of the Jews. As the traditional ruling class, now dependent on Roman power and Herod's favour, the high priests and the scribes who worked

for them in the Temple-state apparatus would have also been 'troubled' at the news of any nascent challenge to Herod's kingship ("When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him" — Matt 2:2). The citizens of Jerusalem were well conscious of how perilous life can be when an authoritarian sovereign with a fragile ego is terrified. 'All of Jerusalem' was on edge — anxious about what the awful king might do. Matthew tells us that the skeptical king sent 'death squads' to Bethlehem — a tiny village just three miles from the Herodium palace — with the outrageous orders to kill all male children below the age of two.

Offering a prophetic perception on king Herod's horrific infanticide, Matthew subversively redefines the message of the birth of the Messiah of the world: "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more" (Matt 2:17–18; Jer 31:15). Rachel, the wife of Jacob, died in childbearing and was buried on the road to Ephrath, just outside Bethlehem (Gen 35:19), and not in the inherited sepulcher at Machpelah where her husband Jacob and her sister Leah were buried (Gen 49:31; 50:13). In the midst of her suffering, the midwife tries to comfort her with the news that she is giving birth to another son (Gen 35:16–20). In this way, Rachel's kid is both her reason of lamentation and her courage for the future.

Likewise, in Jeremiah's time, Rachel, a patroness of Hebrew children, weeps over her children once more, anticipating the ruthless carnage that would befall even their children with the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar's armies (Jer 31:15). For Jeremiah, it refers to two significant defeats of Israel by imperial powers: the exile of the people from the northern kingdom following their defeat in 722 BCE by Assyria (2 Kings 14–20); and, the exile of those from Jerusalem and the southern kingdom ensuing their downfall in 587 BCE by Babylon (2 Kings 25). They will be led into captivity and exile near the very spot where Rachel is buried. In Jer 40:1, Ramah is a marshalling place for exile to Babylon, associating the place with the loss. Her weeping for the exiles continues in Bethlehem's weeping. She is then consoled with the hope that her children will return. Once again, her children are both her source of lament and her hope for the future.

In Matthew's day, Rachel weeps yet again (Matt 2:17–18): this time over the killing of the children at Bethlehem who had the cruel misfor-

tune of being born a little too close to the birth of King Jesus. Matthew evidently assumes a location for Ramah near Bethlehem which combines the two biblical traditions on the location of Rachel's tomb (1 Sam 9:5; 7:17; 8:4; Gen 35:19; 48:7). No words of consolation are given to Rachel in Matthew's Gospel, but the very succeeding verse tells of Herod's death and the coming back of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to the land of Israel. There are, of course, additional historical equivalents in this passage. When the wicked king Herod orders the slaughter of innocent children to protect his rule, we naturally draw a parallel to the Egyptian pharaoh who ordered the massacre of Hebrew children. One child, Moses, escaped the carnage and went on to deliver his people from captivity and exile. In a similar way, Jesus circumvents the bloodbath of the innocents—paradoxically, by going into exile in Egypt. Like the Israelites, Jesus is directed into Egypt by his father Joseph. Like the Jews whom Rachel bemoaned during the time of Jeremiah's prophecy, this child experiences the pathos of living in exile, and like the Israelites, he undergoes his own trajectory of exodus from Egypt. Just as Rachel was cheered with the expectation that her offspring would be brought back, and just as the birth of Moses was a symbol that the Israelites' liberation was nearby, so Matthew's faith community is meant to comprehend that the long-awaited Messiah has been born and the hope of salvation is close at hand.

The new historic counterparts to Nebuchadnezzar, Pharaoh and Herod are the people who are responsible for the fierce murder of the farmers in Lakhimpur Kheri. Just as Pharaoh and Herod were fearful when they sensed a potential threat to their throne, a year of sustained protest movement named *Dili Chalo* ('Let us go to Delhi')[3] against the three farm acts that were passed by the Parliament of India in September 2020[4] also impelled hysterical or frantic reaction from the authorities.

On Sunday, October 3, 2021, hundreds of farmers in the area of Lakhimpur Kheri district had gathered at Tikunia to protest against the ag-

[3] The farmers, mostly Punjab, Haryana, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh have mobilised under the *Samyukt Kisan Morcha* banner for this 'Dilli Chalo' agitation.

[4] The Farm Laws Repeal Bill, 2021 is aimed at rolling back three Bills passed into law in 2020 – Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, Farmers' (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

ronomic laws passed by the BJP-led Union Government. According to the farmers, they had assembled there to protest Uttar Pradesh deputy chief minister Keshav Prasad Maurya's arrival, since he belongs to India's ruling party. A little after midday, when dissenting farmers got the news of Maurya travelling by road, they blocked the Tikunia-Banbirpur road. Around 3.30 pm, as they were wrapping up, a Mahindra Thar in a cavalcade belonging to the minister, rammed into a group of farmers returning after the protest. Two other cars followed the first car and crushed the injured who were lying on the ground. "They came at us really fast, and mowed down the people sitting by the side of the road," said Karanjeet Singh, a resident of Chokra Farm, 60 km from Tikunia. Several other farmers gave similar accounts. Later, some video footage emerged that seemed to corroborate these eye witness accounts. Four farmers died in the reckless attack, while several others were seriously wounded.

Protesters present at the scene accused Union minister for home affairs Ajay Misra Teni's son, Ashish, of leading the violence, alleging that Ashish and his men ran their SUVs over the farmers. The opposing farmers were reportedly angry with Union minister Ajay Misra Teni over his remarks during his visit to Lakhimpur Kheri on September 25, 2021, incidentally his birthday, when he addressed a farmers' gathering in his Lok Sabha constituency: "*Sudhar jao, nahi toh hum aapko sudhaar denge, do* minute *lagega keval*" ("You better mend your ways, or we will teach you a lesson, it will only take a couple of minutes"). The protest during his visit incited Ajay Misra Teni to warn the farmers over the 'unlawful' conduct.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP-led NDA finally yielded to the farmers and agreed to abolish the contentious agricultural laws that the government, claiming that they would transform agriculture, had imposed without wide consulatation, sparking a year-long protest by tens of thousands of farmers.

Just as the birth of the "king of the Jews" startled Herod, so did the birth of a liberative movement by the farmers perturb the Herodians in contemporary India. Although the sacrifice of male children in Egypt and Bethlehem was extremely painful, it became the beacon of hope and light for the future. Likewise, the blood shed by the farmer martyrs was also not in vain and turned out to be a torch that burned brightly,

echoing their subdued voices loud and clear. Instead of the shining star in the sky in Christmas narratives, a new hope resounded in slogans such as "Dharti Mata Ki Jai", 'Narendra Modi Kisan Virodhi", "Hum Honge Kaamyab" and "Chahe Kuch Bhi Karlo Hum Badhte Jaenge" during farmers' protest. Just as Herod in the Roman empire slaughtered the male infants, the democratically-elected Herodians crushed the innocent farmers by mowing them down with an SUV. The weeping of Rachel for the exiles continues in the weeping of Bethlehem and Lakhimpur Kheri.

Weeping expresses pain, outrage and sorrow over the unacceptable events. Humans weep to protest the deplorable realities and invasive physical experience or to try to cope with or to make sense of the punitive realities. Jer 31:15 highlights the pain, as Jeremiah 31 on the whole arouses hope that God will deliver and return those in exile. Herod's cruel actions do not have the final say. While they reflect typical imperialistic actions, it is in sharp contrast to how God rules the world. God's reversal is underway in Jesus who embodies God's presence, love and justice. The establishment of God's kingdom will overcome the oppressive Herodian and Roman colonial forces and their tyrannical regimes. Thereby Christmas in part mirrors what it rejects. Ramah, Bethlehem, Lakhimpur Kheri continue in history, so does the birth of Immanuel movements. Let the cry of the innocent children in Ramah and Bethlehem and the blood of the victims in Lakhimpur Kheri be reverberated in our Christmas celebrations. When will the 'christian' Christmas become good news for ALL, for whom God gave his only begotten son (Jn 3:16)?

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NCCI NEWS

Unity Octave (Week of Prayer for Christian Unity)

Unity Octave (Week of Prayer for Christian Unity) is a joint global initiative of the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. In India, NCCI joins with all Episcopal and Confessional traditions in coming together to observe the Unity Octave and to pray for Christian Unity. Policy, Governance and Public Witness department of NCCI is coordinating the Unity Octave observance this year.

The days between the feast of St Peter (18 Jan) and St Paul (25 Jan) cover the Unity Octave / Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The week-long prayers are envisaged as part of this observance and hence Pulpit exchange, cottage meetings, public ecumenical gatherings, youth concerts, symposiums, etc can be planned. These prayer meetings are meant to foster togetherness among us especially in the grass root level with an intention to encourage each other to renew our commitment to God and to the entire creation. It should also be a time to express ourselves as part of the body of Christ through which we work together for bringing healing in the midst of brokenness.

The theme for this year's Unity Octave is 'We saw the star in the East, and we came to worship him.' (Mt 2:2)

Worship this year has been prepared by Middle East Council of Churches based in Beirut, Lebanon. Their context of unstable political situation coupled with the present crisis of pandemic brings hopelessness in life which shrouds their future with darkness. Yet the community in this geographical region would like to recapture their hope by pursuing a shining star in the East which reminds them of the birth of Jesus. This year's Unity Octave may enable us to rekindle hope in the midst of despair.

The Sunday which falls during the Unity Octave is observed as **NCCI Sunday**. Therefore, we request you to observe **23 January 2021** as NCCI Sunday. While remember NCCI and its activities on this Sunday, NCCI encourages you, wherever possible, to send the offertory of the day to NCCI office to finance Dalit Solidarity Support Programme. **Cheques/Demand Draft can be drawn in favour of National Council of Churches in India.**

This year also we are not printing booklets instead we are making the worship order available in PDF format so that it can either be projected or be copied and distributed according to your own convenience. You are also free to contextualize this liturgy considering the needs of your local context. **We strongly encourage all our constituents to observe unity octave along with members of other Christian denominations and be part of the World Christian Community initiative to have ecumenical expressions through worship.**

With Prayers

Rev. Dr Asir Ebenezer,

General Secretary

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X'MAS MESSAGE

Telling the stories of christs and christmases of our times …

Sparked by the sheep-farmers' vision of the birth of a new age, and affirmed by the wisdom from the 'east', the message of 'christ-revolution' comes to us in the birth of the Jesus movement for over 2020 years.

During these 2000 years and more we have also had many such stories – of events and people that have changed history. There have been significant stories in India and outside that have changed the course of debilitating histories and channelled to life.

The movement to abolish trading in human persons for slavery, the uprisings to free people of colour into the mainstream, the many movements to independence and self-governance, birth of the Dravidian movements and that of Neo-Buddhism against the practice of the perpetuation of caste, nationalisation of public assets and services of common good, the upper cloth movement, the abolition of sati, right down to the victory of the farmers over the farm laws, are only some of the many shining examples of *christmases* of our times that brought good news, new life and hope to many.

History abounds with stories of liberators who have to be celebrated. There are also many such people that are branded and banished – all because of their professed conviction and stand on the side of the excluded and against perpetuation of hegemonic oppressive structures for organised individual and corporate loot of public wealth and resources.

This Christmas, even as we celebrate Jesus the Christ, let us remember, acknowledge and celebrate the *christs* and *christmases* of our times in order that we and our posterity will have contemporaneous memories to cherish and the power to create moments of celebration of life – the life that is made vulnerable and laid bare by the ongoing pandemic of our times.

Wish you a meaningful and memorable Christmastide. Let Hope prevail in us through every day of the New Year both through the pandemic and beyond.

Rev. Dr Asir Ebenezer
General Secretary, NCCI

NCCI condemns killing of civilians in Nagaland, calls for a fresh rethink on AFSPA

The National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) joins the people of Nagaland and all citizens of the country who mourn the killing of civilians in Mon district in condemning the act of aggression on the part of the para-military force personnel. All actions initiated to bring the aggressors to book have to be followed up with earnest and brought to its logical conclusion.

The NCCI once again calls for a rethink on the AFSPA, and that all policing in the areas in which AFSPA is in vogue be subjected to independent human rights scrutiny.

We offer the prayers and support of the Churches and Christians of the Protestant and Orthodox tradition in India to the people of Nagaland and to the families of the deceased in particular.

Let us join in sincere prayer during this season of Advent when we reflect on the coming of Jesus as judge, that Peace be granted in the hope and promise of requital to all those who are wronged.

Rev. Dr Asir Ebenezer
General Secretary

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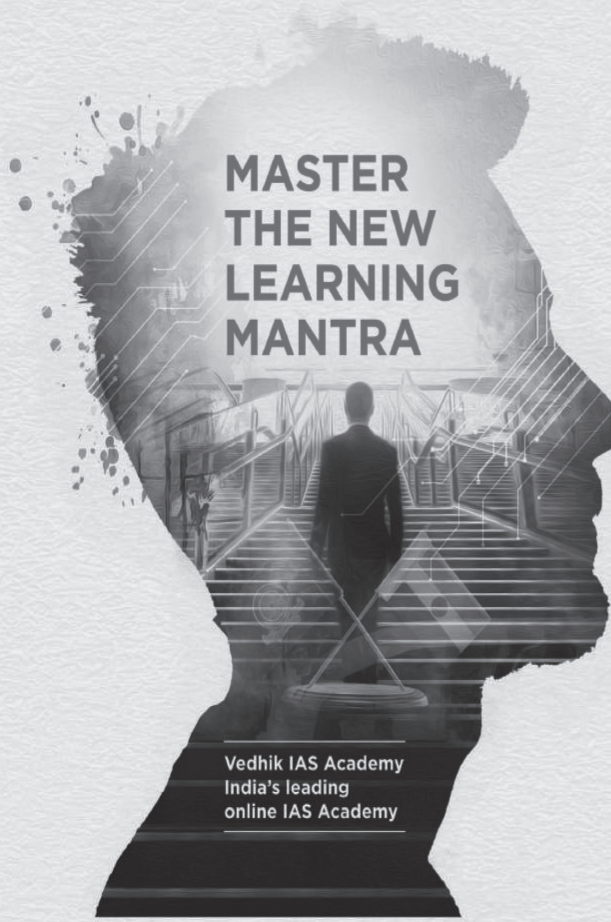

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