



National
Council of
Churches
in India



NCC REVIEW

Vol. CXLII

No.7

August 2022

UGC-CARE List ISSN 0975 - 1882

The National Council of Churches Review (NCC Review)

The Organ of the National Council of Churches in India

UGC approved Journal

Formerly published as "The Harvest Field" since 1862

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| Vol. CXLII | No.07 | August 2022 |
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Views expressed in the NCC Review do not necessarily reflect the official position of the National Council of Churches in India

Registration No. 33/2019

EDITORIAL

Christ's Love Urges us to Love...

The 11th General assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) is taking place at Karlsruhe in Germany. This is an occasion for delegates and members of the global Church to meet and raise their voices to make heard the pertinent issues and needs of our times. Being a signpost of the kingdom of God, the Church holds the responsibility to address contemporary challenges, with an intention to equip the people of the church to face them with confidence.

The assembly meets in a context of the unending global pandemic through which many people, countries and communities have been going through profound trauma. Climate catastrophe in different countries, including rising temperatures and devastating floods, is another alarming challenge that the world faces as we meet at Karlsruhe. Climate change exposes how our planet continues to suffer under human domination, causing irreversible damage and necessitating immediate action. This assembly also meets in a context where the world is still dominated by a global economy that deepens inequalities between and within nations.

In the European context, the havoc created due to war between Ukraine and Russia is ongoing, even intruding into the ecclesiastical relationship within both countries. The strained relationship between Taiwan and China is growing to the levels of a cold war, giving the impression that it will further destroy peace in that region. Altogether, it is a context of lost hope and confidence in the possibility of a better future.

In such a time of hopelessness, what the Church can offer to the world is a significant question to be discussed. Therein lies the importance of the theme chosen for this assembly, 'Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity'. The theme is directly inspired by 2 Corinthians 5: 14.

Highlighting the expression of God's love, that extends up to the cross, Paul is calling the church in Corinth to keep on loving even if they have to face 'Cross experiences' in their day-to-day life. Love can be meaningful and relevant only when we have a different understanding about life. God's love should administer us as a controlling component in shaping our consciousness and through which govern our life patterns and life expressions. Therefore, Paul is hoping that we will not merely be inspired to love but be blessed with the gift of love. It is here that we see the inevitable role of the statement, 'the love of Christ urges all' in 2 Corinthians.

Stressing the role of faith in constructing our life visions beyond what we see, Paul in 2 Corinthians reminds the believers to be confident to have the experiences of new creation. Filled with the love of Christ one can initiate the reconciliation process through which all can experience a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. However, how we perceive the love of God is significant in imagining the characteristics and politics of reconciliation and love.

The prevailing understanding of God's love is unfortunately passive and reductionist in nature. It is interpreted as a way of perpetuating the status quo even at the cost of justice. This simplistic version of God's love is defined often as nothing more than self-emptying and selflessness, thus compelling us to accept and internalise all kinds of subjugations and inequalities without questioning them. The subaltern communities are mainly the victims of such an understanding of love.

The crucified Jesus exposes the role of wickedness behind the crucifixion. The nexus between the empire, elitist infrastructures of the state and religious leaderships played a vital role in the crucifixion of Jesus. A cross was imposed upon him by the state as a reward for his struggles against the structures of sin. While he received the cross, he showed us how he could resist the

impositions by exposing their wickedness even though he was in a vulnerable situation.

The challenge before us is to love and to continue to love in the context of acute violence and suffering, so as to transform those responsible for imposing violence and suffering, and in this way to redeem them. This is not passive love but active love which exposes injustice and the agencies of injustice before the moral public even while experiencing subjugation. This is the only way to maintain reconciliation and peace in the world.

Rev Dr Abraham Mathew

Managing Editor

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DISCRIMINATIONS TO DALIT CHRISTIANS AND NEED FOR RESERVATIONS

- Ashu Sharma*

Abstract

The fundamental social institution of caste, which is built on the idea of inequality and has split individuals into low and high ranks, is present in Indian culture. It is an undemocratic system in which one caste is given preference over another caste and takes advantage of the caste at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. It has a distinct Hindu religious foundation, and the Hindu religious scripture confers validity and sanctity to it. All religions have been impacted by the Hindu religion's caste system, which discriminates based on birth. Therefore, prejudice towards the downtrodden exists regardless of one's religious beliefs. In addition to the advantages of reservation not being granted to them in violation of constitutional rules, Dalits who have converted to Christianity also discover that the church and the non-Dalit Christian society openly discriminate against them. Even their environment has not changed since they became Christians; they are still impoverished, landless rural labourers who are subject to landlords and moneylenders. These Christians are members of those marginalised communities that turned to Christianity to acquire an emancipatory identity, but who now face horrors on several fronts.

Keywords: Dalit Christian, Reservation, Conversion, atrocities, Caste structure.

Introduction

Like other religions, Christians in India do not constitute a monolithic group since they are further split along caste lines in addition to congregational distinctions. In India, caste has come to dictate how Christians interact socially and economically. Numerous studies have highlighted that the Dalits were typically the ones to convert to Christianity. The decision to convert to

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Christianity was made in an effort to escape the oppressive caste system and achieve greater social and economic mobility, but evidence suggests that even among converted Christians, caste-related practices such as residential segregation, limited social interaction, caste-based occupations, and graded ritual purity and pollution persisted. The extent to which Dalits who became Christians have been able to overcome caste-based prejudice and experience qualitative improvements in their lives is thus a challenging subject. This essay is an attempt to foreground the issue of Dalit Christians' reservations in India as well as caste identification.

The Caste system in India

The caste system has been in existence for centuries in India. Hinduism in India supports the division of individuals into two classes, the pure caste and the polluted caste. The Hindu god *Brahma* is said to have produced Brahmins from his mouth, making them claim equal rank with God, according to Indian Brahmin literature. Kshatriyas, the warrior caste, were born from his chest. The commercial caste of Indian civilization, the Vaishyas, was descended from Brahma's thighs. God formed the fourth caste, known as the Sudras, from the feet of all the castes that perform physical labour to generate food and goods. The Dalit class in Indian society includes the "ex-untouchables." According to the Brahmin writings, they were not even remotely born from God's body and were compelled to work with animals, dead corpses, scavenging, and leather. (Vincent, 2003)¹.

The caste system is a religious institution that is founded on the idea that it was a system that was divinely designed, rather than just a social or economic order of the community. It is so strict that it prevents people from moving up from one caste to another. (Raj, 2001)². According to the Mandal commission, "myths shape people's consciousness. The downtrodden are forced to accept

¹ A. Vincent, A Theological Reflection of Church's Mission in India, in *Global Religious Vision*. Vol.3 (4).(2003), 266-283.

² Y. Antony Raj, *Social Impact of conversion: A comparative sociological study on the Christian of scheduled caste origin and scheduled caste Hindus*, (Delhi: I.S.P.C.K., 2001)

their low social rank. The Brahmin (the priestly elite at the top of the caste structure) maintains its dominance, but the real achievement of the caste system comes in moulding the lower castes' conscience to accept their inferior position". (Raja, 1996)³

Dalit Christians

Before analysing the conceptual elaboration of the phrase "Dalit Christian," it is crucial to explore the term "Dalit." The term "Dalit" refers to a member of a group that is marginalised in Indian society. The efforts of a Maharashtrian social reformer named Jyotiba Phule during the 18th century can be used to trace the origins of the term "Dalit." Omvedt (2006) asserts that the word "Dalit" refers to a group or society that is subjected to political and economic exploitation in the name of religion⁴. The word "Dalit" refers to the oppressed or shattered victims who are denied and dehumanised, according to Prabhakar (1989). Caste, which they are born into, determines their possibilities in life and their access to essential resources. (Prabhakar, 1989)⁵. Indian Dalits, by and large, lack their own manner of thinking, acting, and living. The region's dominant caste forces onto individuals their motivating aspects about thought patterns about themselves, society, and worldviews.

In India, Christians make up roughly 2% of the overall population. There are over 20 million Christians, of whom 14 million, or approximately 70%, are of Dalit descent. Christians from Dalit origins are individuals who converted to Christianity. The pulayans of Kerala, the Tigalas of Karnataka, the Chamars of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, the Malas and Madigas of Andhrapradesh, the Vankars of Gujarat, the Mahars of Maharashtra, and the Chuhras of Punjab are among these

³ M.R. Arul Raja, *Jesus the Dalit: Liberation Theology by victims of untouchability, An Indian version of Apartheid.* (1996), p-12.

⁴ Kumuda Chandra Panigraha, *Human Rights and Dalit Christians in India*, in *International journal of research in social sciences*. Vol. 8(1). (2018), 889-904.

⁵ M. E. Prabhakar, *Towards a Dalit Theology*, (Delhi: I.S.P.C.K, (1989), pp-35-36

tribes. They are still referred to by their caste names despite having converted to Christianity.

In India, the process of converting Dalits to Christianity has gone on for many centuries. Conversions occurred among some castes in south India over 400 years ago, and in others approximately 200 years ago. (Lobo, 2001))⁶. According to various studies on Dalit Christians, they continue to experience everyday suffering and injustice. According to John Webster, even though they make up the majority of the Christian society, they have long faced oppression. As a result of their conversion, Christian Dalits continue to live in a caste-based society (Webster, 1999)⁷. The majority of Punjabi Christians are still poor, landless, and dependent on landlords and moneylenders; little has changed since their conversion. Despite sporadic support from the missions in their early years, the landowners have frequently opposed this effort to establish an emancipatory identity⁸.

Dalits who practise Christianity and Dalits who do not are equally frequently victims of atrocities perpetrated by the upper castes. Caste Christians place a strong focus on the covert benefits Dalit Christians receive from being followers of Christ as a result of the overt plan for their emancipation and empowerment. They yet continue to see Dalit Christians as former "untouchables." As a result, even after becoming Christians, Dalit people are still seen as Dalits by Christians from other castes. On the other hand, the ruling class denies those from SC backgrounds who became Christians any genuine benefit. The country's governing class solely considers conversions when examining the problem of Dalit Christians. Even the so-called upper caste leadership in the church made claims about how Dalit Christians were subject

⁶ L. Lobo, Visions, illusions and dilemmas of Dalit Christians in India, in *Dalit Identity and Politics*, (2001). 242-57.

⁷ J. C. Webster, *Religion and Dalit liberation: An examination of perspectives*, (Delhi: Manohar, 1999).

⁸ Prakash Louis, Dalit Christians: Betrayed by State and Church. *Economic and Political weekly*. (2007).

to discrimination by the state as a result of their conversion to Christianity. All of these schools of thought failed to recognise the Christians of SC background as SCs or Dalits first and foremost, rather than just Christian converts (Louis, 2007)⁹

The Discrimination of Dalit Christians

The discrimination experienced by Christian Dalits is pervasive and multifaceted. The Christian Dalits face three types of discrimination, according to James Massey, a prominent researcher in this field and a Christian Dalit: "one at the hands of members of Indian society in general; two, from the government of India...; and three, from Christians of upper caste/class background"¹⁰. Generally, the discrimination against Dalit Christians can be divided into following categories:

1. **Discrimination by Fellow Indians:** When it comes to the prejudice that Christian Dalits must endure, they are special. They are treated unfairly on a big scale much like other Dalits since they are Dalits, too. But it goes deeper than that. Christian Dalits appear to get harsher treatment than Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist Dalits. First of all, most non-Dalit Indians believe that Christian Dalits committed the "crime" of accepting Christianity in addition to their "crime" of being born into an untouchable caste¹¹. As a result, Dalit Christians face double discrimination since they are both Dalits and Christians¹².

⁹ Prakash Louis, *Caste-based discrimination and atrocities on dalit Christians and the need for reservations*, (Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, 2007).

¹⁰ James Massey, *Dalits in India: Religion as a Source of Bondage or Liberation with a Special Reference to Christians*, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1995).

¹¹ Godwin Shiri, *The Plight of Christian Dalits: a South Indian Case Study*, (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997), 240.

¹² Ibid. 114

2. Discrimination in the Church in India: Dalits remain Dalits despite becoming Christians¹³. Surprisingly, this also applies to Indian churches. This implies that Dalits who follow a religion that ought to grant them freedom don't really receive any freedom. Early missionaries were responsible for the establishment of discrimination in the church since they were unable to abolish the caste system in the churches and instead chose to uphold the status quo¹⁴. Ambedkar, unquestionably the most significant figure for Dalits, was motivated by this and condemned the Christian missionaries for "going to such great pains to condemn idol worship" yet failing to accomplish anything to destroy the caste idol¹⁵. And when time elapses, it gets more and more difficult to do something about it. So today, Churches have a hard time fighting it. Moreover, there are still many people who don't want to change the situation, mainly because they still believe in their hearts that Dalits should be downtrodden¹⁶.

3. Discrimination by the State: According to the National Commission of Scheduled Caste, untouchability is exclusively widespread among Hindus and hence, it does not exist among Christians¹⁷. Considering what we know today, it is discriminatory to even say this. Furthermore, the effects of these remarks on the day-to-day existence of Christian Dalits and their prospects for the future

¹³ John C. B Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History*. (Delhi: ISPCK, 1992), 234.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ David Haslam, *Caste Out!: The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India*. (London: CTBI Inter-Church House, 1999), 23.

¹⁶ Satish Deshpande, *Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities: a Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge*. (Department of Sociology: University of Delhi, 2008).

¹⁷ Indian People's Tribunal on Untouchability, Text Editor: Abid Shah, *Untouchability on Trial*. New Delhi: Human Rights Law Network (HRLN) (2008), 132.

are grave. The fundamental problem here is that the Reservation System does not include Christian Dalits. A percentage of seats in the public sector are allocated for the Scheduled Castes, or the Dalits, under this system, which is mandated by Indian law¹⁸. However, due to a 1950 presidential directive, Muslims and Christians are not eligible for these benefits; they are only available to Dalits who are Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist. They are not given the Scheduled Caste designation, despite the fact that Article 17 of the Constitution expressly prohibits anybody from inspiring untouchability¹⁹.

In its publication "Untouchability on Trial," the Indian People's Tribunal on Untouchability, states the following regarding this: "In such instance, the SC/ST Act should be used to bring charges against the religious authority. Untouchability, according to the National Commission of Scheduled Castes, is exclusively inspired by Hinduism. This position is contradictory²⁰ in which the state is breaking its own laws designed to protect everyone's

¹⁸ Sukhadeo Thorat explains the system as follows: "The government's approach towards the SCs primarily draws from provisions in the Constitution, which legally abolished the practice of untouchability and the discrimination arising out of untouchability (article 17). The Constitution guarantees equality before the law (Article 14); provides for the promotion of the educational and economic interests of SCs and for their protection from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46); provides for special measures through reservation in government service; and also reserves seats in democratic political institutions (Articles 330 and 335, 73rd Amendment Act, 1992). Finally, the Constitution provides for the establishment of a permanent body to investigate and monitor the social and economic progress of SCs on an annual basis." Extracted from page 1 in his book *Dalits in India: Search for a Common Destiny* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2009). Farther on, on page 5, he writes: "Both the scope and extent of the reservation policy are confined to the state-run and - supported sectors. The SC workforce in the private sector, which employs more than 90 per cent of the SC workers, remains unprotected from possible exclusion and discrimination."

¹⁹ Indian People's Tribunal on Untouchability, Text Editor: Abid Shah, *Untouchability on Trial*. New Delhi: Human Rights Law Network (HRLN) (2008), 132.

²⁰ Ibid.

equality regardless of caste and creed disparities by denying the Muslim and Christian Dalits such advantages²¹. But that's not all. Shiri Godwin found out that Christian Dalits not only get this treatment when they plead for Scheduled Castes benefits, but also when they make a request for ordinary state benefits, meant for Other Backward Classes and for economic weaker sections²². In this sense, the state not only denies religious liberty by discriminating against people based on their faith but also punishes Dalits who have the temerity to enjoy that freedom by becoming Christians or Muslims²³.

One such method by which the government discriminates against Christians is through the seven state-level Freedom of Religion Acts in India, sometimes referred to as the "anti-conversion legislation." Religiously motivated violence and discrimination against Christians in India, according to a briefing by CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide) from 2008, "pose a threat to freedom of religion through their restriction of religious conversions and their damaging normative effect on religious minorities²⁴."

Constitution and Reservation

To promote equality and dignity, the social category known as SCs was given some unique benefits and rights when the Indian constitution was being written. It served as restitution for the past injustices and discrimination the SCs had to endure for so long. The constitution's drafters believed that by granting them access to reservations, their lives would be improved and the SCs would rise in social and economic position. Article 46 grants the right to financial and educational advantages. Caste-related violence and atrocities are prohibited by Article 17. The SCs have

²¹ Godwin Shiri, *The Plight of Christian Dalits: a South Indian Case Study*, (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997), 239.

²² Ibid. 240.

²³ John C.B Webster, *Religion and Dalit Liberation: an examination of perspectives*, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1999), 90.

²⁴ Dick Christian Kleinhesselink, *Dalits: A research on Christian Dalits in India*, (2009).

a reservation under Article 15(4) in educational institutions. Reservations for seats are made in the parliament and state legislative bodies under Articles 330-334. Reservation was encouraged in government services and positions by Articles 16(4), 335, and 320(4). The Untouchability (Offences) Act of 1955, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989, and the Social Safeguards and Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) Act of 1976. However, these benefits and rights were denied to the SCs since they practised other religions besides Hinduism. Therefore, the call for the inclusion of Dalit Christians and Muslims within this scope has gained attention recently.

In 1956, the president issued a constitutional order.

According to article 341(1) of the Indian Constitution, the president of India is given the authority to name the castes and ethnic groups that would receive compensating discrimination on behalf of SCs. The constitutional (scheduled castes) order, 1950, was issued by the president. Only the Hindu Dalits are recognised as SCs in the third paragraph of this decision, and they are given the benefits and rights accorded to SCs by the constitution. These protections were not available to Dalits who converted to other religions.

The legality of the 1950 presidential order

Since the law's adoption, there has been intense concern and discussion over the exclusion of other SCs who practice religions other than Hinduism from their basic and fundamental rights. If offering reservations is a means of incorporating the excluded, it is unlawful to refuse this chance on the basis of a person's faith. Both Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians have had their constitutional rights violated by the third paragraph of the ruling. Later, Dalit Sikhs received these rights and advantages once the constitutional decree of 1950 was amended in September 1956. Sikhs from the Dalit community were added to this group in order to qualify for reservations under the SC designation. In 1990, the constitution was changed once more, and the Buddhists were now covered by reservations. This demonstrates unequivocally the bias displayed by the ruling class for SCs.

The SC designation and privileges should be extended to Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims so they can benefit from the same political freedoms and socioeconomic advantages as all other SCs. The national and state governments were advised to grant Dalit Christians SC reservation benefits by a number of state governments and bodies, including the Mandal Commission and the Backward Class Commission of Andhra Pradesh. According to Dr. Jose Kananaikal, the presidential order had two significant restrictions when it was implemented in 1950. One of these clauses limited the SCs to particular places, while another one restricted the faith they may practice. This means that a certain SC member will only be an SC for as long as he remains in the prohibited region or practices a specific religion²⁵.

Conclusion

Although the request for Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims to be included in the protections of the reservation is reasonable and lawful, it is unlikely to be granted easily because several entrenched interests have opposed and will continue to resist this righteous action. The Sangh Parivar has opposed reservations for Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims under the argument that if these Dalits received reservations, a significant portion of them would abandon Hinduism and convert to other religions. Dalits who practise Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism will be opposed to this action because they believe they will have to share reservations with other communities. Caste Christians would be against this because they worry Dalits will be treated as their equals. Caste Christians have always rejected efforts to end the discrimination against Dalit Christians. The bureaucracy will also be against this because they are worried about retaliation from caste Hindus and Christians as well as Dalits who practice Sikhism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Finally, because Dalit Christians and Muslims do not make up a sizable portion of their voter base, politicians will continue to be uncommitted on this subject.

Because Christianity is a despised faith in India, Christian Dalits experience more prejudice than other Dalits. Because Christian

²⁵ Ibid

Dalits belong to a religious minority, which is treated similarly to being a Dalit in terms of prejudice, and because in the eyes of their fellow countrymen, switching to a western religion betrays them, the persecution against them is severe. Dalits who identify as Christians are not recognised by the state since, according to them, caste is not a component of Christianity. As a result, the state engages in a number of discriminatory practices, such as withholding reservation rights. Despite these challenges, it appears that Christian Dalits do not have the poorest welfare conditions. They are more able to combat this injustice and their oppressors than other Dalits. They may use Christianity as a means of emancipation, which might be one explanation for this. This is especially evident in the liberation theology that has been developed for Dalits. This theology encourages Christian Dalits to struggle against their social condition and advance economically.

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ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN BORO SOCIETY: A GLIMPSE OF GENDER SENSITIVITY

- Jagadish Basumatary*

Introduction

Boros or Bodos are one of the indigenous tribes of North East-India. In 1846, B.H. Hogdson for the first time used the term 'Bodo' to refer to this racial group (Goswami, 2014).¹ They constitute a very important section of the ethnic spectrum of Assam and have their own identity regarding their language and culture. Racially they belong to the Indo-Mongoloid and linguistically to the Tibeto-Burman group of Sino-Tibetan speech family (Boro, Folk Literature of Boros, 2001).² The majority of them are found in four districts of BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Area Districts).

Bodo social structure is basically patriarchal but partly matriarchal too. Usually, women and men are treated equally in society, but the birth of a female child is not so much desired and favoured as much as that of a male. Bodo women pursue education just as much as men and often participate in some philosophical debates although lesser importance is given with regard to female education compared to male education. They are also allowed to take part in political affairs. The role of Bodo women in the Bodo Liberation Movement in the late 1980's is very significant. Bodo women are said to have kept the cultural identity of the Bodo community by wearing their traditional dress called Dokhona. They are smart in weaving and their beautiful products are sold even in markets, thus making weaving an avenue for economic development. Women actively engage in agricultural activities

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¹ Uddipana, Goswami, Conflict and Reconciliation: *The Politics of Ethnicity in Assam* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 20.

² Anil, Boro, *Folk Literature of Boros* (Guwahati: Adhunik Prakashan, 2001), p.1.

together with their men and work for collective development of family as well as society. Bodos perform various pujas and rituals for individual as well as community well-being along with their supreme God Bathwu. The role of women in the religious life of the community cannot be underestimated.

I. Participation of Bodo Women in Various Spheres of Society

Bodo women have been playing crucial role to ensure the smooth functioning of society as much as their male counterpart. Their status in the society cannot be measured only from their work participations, it is also interesting to take a note on that how they are praiseworthy for their honesty and ability in maintaining family and society.

1. Social Life

The contribution made by Bodo women to the social progress of their community is highly appreciable. They are required to prepare food, weave clothes for all members of the family, collect firewood and gather edible vegetables from the nearby jungle. Moreover, their active participation in rites and rituals from child birth to cremation or burial of the dead reveal their talent, ability and value that contribute towards the integrated composition of the society. Regarding the role of tribal women, M. Hazowary says, "Tribal women do not have any leisure since leaving her bed early in the morning and till going to bed at night" (Hazoary, 2007).³ Bodo women, being tribal women, are also extremely hardworking. Bodo women are considered praiseworthy for their warm hospitality, sincerity, and for their affectionate dealing with everyone within and outside the community.

³ M. Hazoary, Role and Status of the Tribal Women in Their Societies Through Ages in N.A. Hazarika (Ed.), *Tribal Women and Development*, (Assam Institute of Research for Tribals & Scheduled Castes 2007), p.322.

2. Economic Sphere

Bodo women share the financial burden in the family and hence they usually do not depend completely on their guardian economically. They engage themselves in various activities in order to make their livelihood easy and economically sound. They work in agricultural fields, rear cattle, poultry, and pigs for economic purpose. These days, many Bodo women contribute to their family income by means of various business activities like selling garments, green vegetables, fruits, meat and fish etc.

3. Educational and Political Sphere

In the recent days, most of the Bodo families are becoming aware of their right to education and need to educate their children. Therefore, there is a significant rise in the educational qualification of a number of Bodo women. Some of them are engaged in active working and creative writing not only for the empowerment of Bodo women but also for the overall development of the Bodo society. They are also active participants in political spheres and they have organizations through which they engage themselves in working for Bodo women and society as well. Some of those organizations are- AATWWF (All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation), ABWF (All Bodo Women Welfare Federation), BWJF (Bodo Women Justice Forum), which are formed for the welfare of the women and of society at large. Such organizations work for all round development, for solutions to burning problems in society, and especially for reducing the plight of women. Anjali Daimary, and Pramila Rani Brahma are prominent Bodo women leaders in the recent days.

4. Religious Practice

Bathou is the Bodo traditional religion which is being worshipped by the society. Along with this religion, Bodos perform many religious festivals throughout the year where female attendance is very essential. One of the most important religious festivals of Bodos is *Kherai*. "Kherai is a religious cum cultural festival of Boro community. It is a festival of respect and propitiation to souls of deities who incarnated into embodied souls at the

beginning of the world.”⁴ In *Kherai*, a female priest called *doudini* plays central role. ‘Doudini performs most of the essential rites during the Kherai worship with the help of oza and gidal’ (Boro, Folk Literature of Bodos, 2001).⁵ In the absence of *doudini* (female priest) Kherai cannot be performed. There is no restriction for women in enjoying religious festivals except Garja Puja.

5. Participation in Agricultural Activities

Agriculture is the sole means as well as source of livelihood of Bodos. Without womenfolk cultivation is impossible for a Bodo family. They are mainly wet cultivators. The Sali (Maisali), Asu (Ahu), Bao (Baowa), and Maibra varieties of paddy are grown in their field. During cultivation, Bodos observe various ritual ceremonies where the female guardian of a family plays main role. Gasa saonai (lighting festival), Mai naihwainai (visiting of the paddy), Mainao borainai (welcome to the goddess of wealth) are such festivals which are performed by Bodo women in connection with cultivation. They also cultivate varieties of vegetables in the front yard or backyard of the house. They grow coriander leaves, potato, brinjal, chilly, ginger, garlic, beans, turmeric, lady’s finger (okra), etc. which are generally required for domestic consumption. By doing this they reduce the difficulties and financial burden of the family a lot.

6. Cottage Industries

Weaving is the most popular household and cottage industry of Bodo women. The art of weaving is a special skill of the Bodo women. They rear silk cocoons, spin fine yarn out of them and make lustrous cloth, dye with blue, red, yellow pigments. This expertise of Bodo women was highly prized and appreciated by Hiuen-Tsang, the Chinese traveler to Assam in the seventh century A. D (M. Nath, 1948).⁶ Dr. Mangalshing Hazoary said

⁴ Sankhang, Basumatary, “Mysticism and Spirituality in the Bathou religion of the Bodos,” in *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, March 2022, Volume 9, Issue 3, pp. 37-46.

⁵ Anil, Boro, *Folk Literature of Boros* (Guwahati: Adhunik Prakashan, 2001).

⁶ R. M. Nath, *The Background of Assamese Culture* (Guwahati: A. K. Nath, 1948).

that 'there is no single woman or young girl who is not expert in weaving among the Boros as well as Mishings in Assam' (Hazoary, 2007).⁷ Bodo women earn money by selling the clothes woven by them at a reasonable price in the local market. In this way, Bodo women also help in family progress reducing financial burden to a great extent.

7. Bodo Women in Marriage

The Bodo marriage system is well structured for women. Though Bodos have as many as six types of marriage, they formally prefer the arranged marriage most. Without consulting with the bride and taking consent from her, parents do not settle marriage for their daughter. A lot of deadly attack and torture on women are matters of concern even in the 21st century. The dowry system, which is deeply rooted in many Hindu societies, often brings the fate of unnatural death to many women very frequently in India. But there is no dowry system in Bodo society. Rather, during earlier times there was a system of marriage where a bride price had to be given by the groom. For this, the groom was bound to give a large sum of money to the parent of the bride if he wanted to get the bride as his wife. Bride price (phon thakha) often exceeded rupees one thousand in the past, but gradually it was brought down to rupees one hundred and five only (Brahma K., 1992).⁸ Widow re-marriage is socially allowed and solemnized with great respect.

Divorce is permissible by mutual consent of both husband and wife with certain formalities. It is done only through traditional procedure and custom. The separation of husband and wife takes place in a symbolic act of tearing a betel leaf into two pieces which is called "Phathwi lai bisisnai" (S. Shashi, 1995).⁹ Afterwards she is at full liberty to live with a second husband.

⁷ M. Hazoary, Role and Status of the Tribal Women in Their Societies Through Ages in N.A. Hazarika (ed.), *Tribal Women and Development*, (Assam Institute of Research for Tribals & Scheduled Castes 2007), p.322.

⁸ K. Brahma, *A study of Socio-Religious Beliefs, Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos*, (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1992).

⁹ S. Shashi, (ed.), *Tribes of Assam and Manipur*, (New Delhi: Anmal Publications, 1995).

The Bodo-Kacharis belong primarily to a monogamous race although rare instances of a man married to two women have been recorded. In normal circumstances, the community recognizes only the union between one man and one woman. However, when the first wife proves to be childless, the Bodo custom permits to him to take a second wife, mainly with a view to handing down the father's name to posterity (Endle, 1990).¹⁰ Polyandry is strictly forbidden.

II. Where Boro Women are Still Deprived of

Despite the significant contribution of the Boro women to society, the question of Bodo women participating in various activities with as much freedom as their menfolk is still open to debate. Bodo women suffer from some serious problems like economic backwardness, negligence of women education, victimization through superstitions etc.

Education is a creative force that brings change in society in every aspect of human life. It is the process which enables every individual to effectively participate in the activities of society. But it is generally observed that girl children in Bodo society are not given due importance with regard to achieving higher education. The majority of the girls are married off before they can start higher education. Parents often say that girls need not be educated much because they are usually sent to bridegroom's family after marriage and they can depend on their husband in financial matters and hence it seen as a kind of burden to educate girls. As a consequence of such unbecoming beliefs and practices in most Bodo families, many girls in Bodo society are illiterate or insufficiently educated. This has resulted in gender discrimination which has hindered the human development process to a great extent.

While it is true that girl children are welcome in Bodo families, parents still long for male children, impelling many families go on having children one after the other until they get a male child. It is often the case that a husband throws the entire blame of not getting a male child upon his wife and continues to mete out mental or physical torture, which often leads to the break of

¹⁰ S. Endle, *The Kacharies*, (Delhi: Low Price-publication, 1990) P. 30.

marriage tie even when it is the wife who is the victim of worst kind of suffering. As long as this reality exists in Bodo society, it will be wrong to blindly claim that Bodo women enjoy equal status with their male counterparts.

It is the celebrated opinion and a matter of pride that Bodos have a rich cultural heritage which is unmatched by many other cultures. Bodos have reason to be proud of their culture, but it is women that have to bear the greater part of the burden of keeping the cultural identity alive. For example, weaving and wearing Dokhna (traditional dress for women) are important aspects of Bodo culture but at the same time it is a difficult task for women to be continually engaged in. Meanwhile if any Bodo girl does not have knowledge of weaving, she is looked down upon in society and hence a feeling of inferiority haunts such girls, which is mentally disturbing. In most of the Boro villages if any grown-up girl does not wear Dokhna, the traditional dress, while at home or outside, people criticize her and hurl words of abuse at her while their male counterparts can dress the way they want and walk around without fear. This shows that freedom of women is curtailed and burden of bringing the cultural identity forward is not equally shared, which is nothing less than discrimination against women.

Decision making is another area where women have a weaker voice compared to their male counterparts in Bodo society. Most of the significant decisions of the family as well as on social matters depend on the male members. Bodo women are merely expected to follow what the male counterparts decide. If any problem is to be solved either in family or community, the males are usually in the driver's seat with regard to voicing opinions while women have power only to make some suggestions in most cases. This shows that freedom of women is only nominal and thus a clear example of the violation of women's rights.

There are also many other areas in Bodo social structure where women still remain under male domination. Most Bodo women are expected to take care of the entire family and take responsibility of child-rearing, kitchen activities, weaving, collecting firewood, and being engaged in various agricultural

activities. Women under such circumstances get no time to think for themselves and hence they remain ever subjugated.

While problems are easy to identify, it is quite another thing to come up with lasting solutions to them. Each evil practice must be destroyed at its very foundation. Whatever has been traditionally practiced is quite difficult to be stopped and hence we must be ready to face and counteract any obstacle in liberating women from inhuman male subjugation.

The Bodo social structure is patriarchal in nature. Gerda Lerner, the leading historian and pioneer in women's studies, says that patriarchy is only a social construct that has been historically continued. She argues that male dominance over women is not natural or biological, but the product of an historical development begun in the second millennium B. C. in the ancient Near East. As patriarchy as a system of organizing society was established historically, she contends, it can also be ended by the historical process. Focusing on the contradiction between women's central role in creating society and their marginality in the meaning giving process of definition and interpretation, we can explore some questions such as - what can account for women's exclusion from the historical process? What could explain the long delay in women's coming to consciousness of their own subordinate position (Lerner, 1986)?¹¹ Answering such questions will make us understand the intensity of male dominance and inhuman enslavement of women in the human history.

Is it not the responsibility of women to open their eyes? If there is the chance for some women to rise, then why not all others? Is it not self-imposed immaturity as has been suggested by Immanuel Kant? Women should ask themselves and rise from the so-called self-imposed immaturity and be enlightened. According to Kant, "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance

¹¹ G. Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

from another. *Sapere Aude!* 'Have courage to use your own understanding!' --that is the motto of enlightenment" (Kant, 1784).¹²

Whoever enters a realm first or whoever does a given thing first, he/she ends up making the rules in their own favour. This is egoistic attitude can be broadly divided into community egoism and individual egoism. If we deconstruct community egoism, then we will ultimately end up in individual egoism. First, egoistic purpose is achieved strategically by means of traditional cultural norms of society. Secondly, the biological aspect plays important role. If physically strong or more members in the family, then goal is achieved. Egocentrism must be checked and decimated in everyone's heart at its initial stage in order that natural rights and freedom of each one remains unaffected.

We need de-structuring of social structure and it can happen if there is knowledge about their state of life and their rights and opportunities, for knowledge produces power to exist in freedom. This will lead us to realize Foucault's idea of power relations. According to Foucault, power exists only in relationship and hence the right use of power is not when it is used to dominate but when it is used with moral integrity to build people up and empower everyone else.

So let us share our responsibilities and recognize the rights of others. Let us be the people of practice and not the people of ideas alone and transform our societies towards a step of better humanity.

III. Conclusion

The status of Bodo women is easy to be measured from different angles of their social life. Their participation in various activities and social affairs shows that they are well equipped with necessary skills. Women have the capacity to regulate their day-to-day lives in social, political, and economic terms. Hence there should be equal status between men and women. Empowerment of women is the greatest way to reduce the gap of gender equality

¹² I. Kant, *Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?* (Berlinesche Monatsschrift, 1784)

in the Bodo community. Problems of education, as well as social and political issues, should be solved through conducting different kinds of awareness programmes in villages. There is a great need to create a social environment in which women can make decisions and choices individually or collectively for social transformation. Empowered women can contribute to the health and productivity of whole families and communities, and they improve prospects for succeeding generations.

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THE KHASI INDIGENEOUS BELIEFS AND CHRISTIANITY: AN ENCOUNTER OR A NEGOTIATION

- Ruth I Kharbamon*

Abstract:

The world today is characterized by a rapid blurring and blending of cultures. Cultural boundaries have become increasingly blurred for cultures have become both more globalised and also more fragmented and de-centered.

The Khasi tribe in the pre-colonial era had a unique social, cultural and political system. They followed an authentic culture just as exotic and primitive as any tribal society. They had their birth naming ceremonies, their ancestor worship, their bone collection rituals and their megalithic culture. There were legends, myths and tales, dances and choral chanting. Theirs was a unique identity.

The changes in the cultural patterns of the Khasi society was affected especially by the advent of the Christian missionaries who brought in a totally new and alien world view in the spiritual and emotional beliefs of the natives, which challenged the very foundation of the people's notion of themselves.

The present paper explores the possible encounter or a negotiation between the Christian and indigenous cultural practices among the Khasi tribes of Meghalaya.

Keywords: Khasi, Beliefs, Christianity, Negotiation, Encounter

The world today is characterized by a rapid blurring and blending of cultures. Cultural boundaries have become increasingly blurred for cultures have become both, more globalised and also more fragmented and de-centered. The relentless process of globalization has made in-roads even into the distant and remote hill state of Meghalaya. Camouflaged with the spread

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of trade and cultural exchange in the name of development, globalization has manifested itself and has made phenomenal inroads in the state. The diffusion of western values, consumer goods and lifestyles has affected the identity of the hill tribes through a neglect of whatever is local or traditional. To have an identity is to have features that are both relevant and enduring. Today, the local tribal cultures if not careful, are in the process of slowly and steadily sliding away into cultural irrelevance in a fast-changing technology-driven world, losing out on their fantasized traditions and beliefs.

The paper briefly highlights some of the forces which have led to this state of affairs and attempts to understand the relationship that exists between the indigenous traditional faith of the Khasis and Christianity which in a way has initiated the process of globalization of thought, as well as spiritual and social practices.

The Khasi tribe in the pre-colonial era existed with a social, cultural and political system of their own and followed an authentic culture, common features of any tribal society. They had their birth naming ceremonies, their ancestor worship, folktales or folk stories, their bone collection rituals and their megalithic culture. There were legends, myths and tales, dances and choral chanting. They had an identity that could be called their own. However, the process of change in Khasi society began with the British and their annexation of the Khasi Hills in 1833. With the Charter Act of 1813, which allowed the Protestant missions to preach the Gospel in India, the Baptist Missionaries of Serampore were the earliest to extend their activities to the North-East Frontier. Krishna Pal, the first convert of William Carey was indeed the first missionary to the Khasis and the North East. He propagated the Gospel among the Khasis in their own vernacular using the Bengali script (Syiemlieh 2013: 36).

The mission work was carried on by Alexander Lish, but because of his ill health, he had to leave Cherrapunji in 1883. The evangelization process was left to Thomas Jones of the Welsh Presbyterian mission who through his sustained labour and untiring zeal managed to bring about a transformation and

enduring mark on the religious, educational, social and cultural life of the tribes. Though the initial purpose of Jones and his colleagues was to preach the good news of salvation they also brought with them western values and culture, which were to cast long shadows on the life of the Khasi tribals. The use of the Roman script to preach and teach the people was also a landmark in the history of the evolution of the tribe. Hence urbanization, new administrative orientations, the emergence of new trade structures and social contacts culminated in bringing about a radical social and cultural transformation. The changes no doubt eradicated to a great extent the practices and customs of sorcery and superstitious beliefs but at the same time, they brought in a totally new worldview in the spiritual and emotional beliefs of the indigenous Khasi tribe which challenged the very foundation of their previous notion of themselves.

Bareh in his *The History and Culture of the Khasi People* highlights the impact of the British missionaries among the tribes when he says:

Christians no longer observe their old religious beliefs and rituals... In Christian areas, old practices of megalithic erections, community religious celebrations and festivals have become obliterated. Christianity has caused reversals in marriages, naming, funerals, house building and village ceremonies... connoting abandonment of the old religious faith and belief. With them several social festivities, sport games and other aspects of cultural heritage have also been forgotten (Bareh1985:405)

When the old rites and rituals became disused, the singing of folk songs suffered too. Earlier no occasion was complete or meaningful unless accompanied by the lore of folk songs and choral chanting. The themes of the songs are varied. They talk of war and peace, prowess, of heroic characters and legendary lovers. This abandonment of folk singing among the Khasi converts in a way diluted the otherwise interesting traditional practices.

The transformation through proselytization brought about a renewed mindset and while the attachment to their roots remained, the relevance and interpretation changed. With a change of spirituality also came a change of meaning.

Unlike the other tribes of the North East where even Christian converts are very much a part of the cultural and traditional ceremonies and festivities, a serious drawback among the Khasi community is the misunderstanding that persists between the Khasi Christians and those still holding the indigenous Khasi faith. It is worth mentioning here that the Christian way of living which is followed in the neighbouring states Nagaland and Mizoram is different from what was proposed by the first missionaries. Unlike the Khasis, the Mizos and Nagas have not forfeited their tribes' main festivities. Traditional dances and songs continue to be a part of their lives and Christians are a part of all festivities ranging from the State's Day to the Baptist centenary celebrations. This unfortunately does not happen among the Khasis and Jaiñtias. The participation of the Khasi Christians in the traditional festivals has in a way been distanced.

The present generation of Khasis is beset with questions of identity and relevance. The academic curriculum as well as social practices have of late put issues and discourses related to culture on the back-burner. Khasi folk songs and dance have not been popularized in a manner that would befits a thriving tribal society. This is predominantly more significant with the Khasi diaspora. The export of culture has not happened simultaneously with the migration of the people. The identity has no doubt been respectably maintained in terms of conventional practices like matrilineal lineage or the familial connection, but due to the challenges of location and resources, Khasi folk songs or dance or even food been subjected to limitations. Media and political development have not been used to their full potential in the Khasi society in comparison to other societies. Even the vernacular printing press was not used in any meaningful way with the result that the present generation lacks the knowledge and quality understanding of its own culture and identity. For

instance, other societies like those of the Bengalis, the Assamese and the Tamils, take their culture very seriously. We can see their culture and identity being displayed in the television set twenty-four hours a day. Songs and dances always have that cultural essence connected to folklore, when it was played in movies and short videos. The masses have that nostalgia feeling and a feeling of belonging of the past when they listen to it, connecting with their own ancestors. The Khasi language has still a long way to go with regard to its being recognized as one of the official language of India. Presently, serious efforts are being made by the political representatives of the State for the inclusion of the Khasi language into the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The move is genuine. It certainly is a good move. But the question is – should that be all? More than this, the Khasis will have to be aware of their identity – they should know where they come from, who they are and what they are. They should be familiar with their culture, their tradition, and their roots so they can be in every sense a Khasi with a unique identity and with a deep sense of belonging to the community. In a globalized world, it will be a tremendous challenge to the present generation in a world where diffusion and assimilation play an important part. If they are not rooted to a firm ground, then they are liable to be influenced or invaded by other cultures, especially by the ones that reside outside the peripheral of its own area and society.

The missionaries had done much to help enlighten the hill people, often dubbed “Noble Savages,” from their backwardness and to confer upon them the blessings of civilization through education. They ushered in rational thinking, scientific temper and growth mindset with the educational and spiritual interventions. This was the policy adopted by Thomas Jones. He wanted to educate the Khasi first and then, to evangelize the tribes gradually. “The only plan which appears to me likely to answer a good purpose,” he observed, “is to establish schools in the various villages to teach the Khasi children and adults to read their own languages and to instruct them in the principles of the Christian religion. In this way we shall not only bring up the young people in the knowledge of the gospel doctrines but we shall also teach them to

read" (Jyrwa 2011:96). This according to Jones was an important step towards the evangelization of the tribes. The establishment of schools and the adoption of the Roman script had a major impact on the psyche of the people. In fact, the selfless service and dedication of the missionaries won the hearts of the people so much that the Khasis openly expressed their keen desire of learning the language of '*U Dohlieh*', 'the white man' and adopting their way of life.

Yes, certainly a change was effected and the transformation was phenomenal, and it cannot be denied that the missionaries made a great contribution towards the educational and socioeconomic development of the tribes. It is remarked that, "Christianity is the story of how it lifted and gave a sense of dignity, equality and identity to the so-called backward classes, the lower castes and the untouchables of the Indian society". But there are certain sacrifices involved and certain reservations one will have to reflect upon despite the development and advancement in all major aspects of the Khasi tribes.

It may be safely stated that, though Christianity has impacted considerably on the thoughts and beliefs of the Khasi tribes, leading to almost a blurring of their cultures, and despite the profound and unquestionable impact of Christianity, there are some rituals that have persisted and detached from Christian beliefs. It is very much apparent in the community that some of the indigenous beliefs are still adhered to and have not been mixed up with spiritual extensions. Hence, there can be instances of both conflict and negotiation.

The objective in taking up this topic for the paper stems from the curiosity of finding out if there are conflicts or negotiations rather between the Khasis who belong to the indigenous faith and those who have converted and embraced other faiths including Christianity. Generations of Khasis are exposed through interactions and conversations both in the family and the community at large, with those belonging both to the indigenous belief and other faiths. It will indeed be interesting to study and examine the interface between the traditional beliefs and the

transformation through conversion and of course the attempts at synthesizing the traditional practices and Christianity.

In matters related to birth, marriage and death, conflicts and negotiations occur to either be solved amicably or to also result in unpleasant encounters. Within families there can be conflicting opinions and perspectives on these important practices. Following a case study, there is an instance in a family when on the death of a lady, whose children were partly Christian converts and partly followers of the indigenous traditional practices, there were conflicting arguments. The lady was neither a church attendee nor practiced the traditional rites and rituals. But when she died however, there was a misunderstanding. The children belonging to the Christian faith wanted her to be buried while the others wanted her to be cremated.

Further, a few of her children wanted all the formalities of the traditional practices to be completed before she was carried out of the house, while the others wanted the reading of the Bible followed by a Christian prayer. In the end it was a compromise - a hybridized kind of a ceremony-neither this nor that. The traditional rituals of breaking an egg and chanting by the priest were done. This was then followed by a reading from the Bible and a Christian prayer before the body was taken away to be buried and not cremated. Back from the cemetery, the Christian children wanted to clean up the house for the condolence prayer service. Those of the traditional faith wanted everything to be as it was, till the third night, '*ka laitia*' was over. This incident resulted in an encounter and a conflict that appeared to be subtle but no doubt created a certain uncomfortable strain and unwanted rift among the family members.

Again, there are certain practices, even if not so significant, that often create differences in a family where members belong to two different belief systems. For instance, in death, after a body sponge, if it is a woman, the left side of the *jainsem* (woman's traditional attire) will have to cover the right and not in the usual manner of the right covering the left. This practice however

creates a tension between the Christians and the Khasi indigenous believer as the Christians believe that this is no longer important.

Another example of an encounter within families is the situation of an unnatural death. It is a common belief among the Khasis that those who die unnatural deaths will have to go through different rituals which includes the '*mait tyrut*' to ward off the so-called generational curse. Interestingly there is a divided opinion among the Khasis where this is concerned. Most Khasi Christians do not consider this important anymore since they affirm that their faith with prayer has cleansed away any kind of curse. They believe that spiritual armors defeat culturally biased superstitions. Again, in such nature of deaths, the deceased is not usually kept indoors but kept outside in a specially prepared enclosure. This is strongly practiced by the Khasis following the indigenous faith, but again most Christians follow this practice. However, this can create an unnecessary encounter and sometimes an unpleasant misunderstanding between the families since those who are more orthodox in their Christian beliefs ignore this as not significant anymore.

In the indigenous belief, a woman in the family way is advised not to visit a cremation site or visit the house where an unnatural death had taken place. This is emphasized strictly by the indigenous believers but though many Christian converts do not adhere to this practice, some families still do.

Again, in most Christian houses where a death has occurred, the placing of food both mornings and evenings and a lighted candle or lamp beside the deathbed till the body is carried for its burial are very much indigenous practices, but are practiced in some Christian homes.

Further, '*u kwai u tympew*' (betel nut and leaf) which is distributed to all funeral attendees on reaching the crematorium is an important indigenous practice. The same is done even among Khasi Christian converts though with a difference, since in the indigenous practice, the betel nuts are not cleaned but cut into pieces and the betel leaves are not smeared with lime. The

practice of leaving all doors and windows unbarred till after the third night and the night watch called '*ka laitia*', for three consecutive nights, since it is believed that the spirit of the dead is still in the house is again practiced not only among those of the indigenous faith but even in some Christian homes.

In relation to marriages, beginning with the engagement there are practices followed by those of the indigenous faith which are incorporated in the Christian ceremonies while some can raise conflicting perspectives within a family. To cite an instance, in an engagement ceremony of a male member of a family, the mother of the groom was present for the engagement dinner though according to traditional beliefs, the mother or any female member are strictly exempted from being part of the engagement ceremony. The visit of the to- be mother -in -law to the girl's house is absolute taboo since only the male members were to accompany the person. This presence of the to- be mother -in -law was strongly resented leading to an unpleasant misunderstanding between the family members.

The arrangement for the wedding was even more complicated since the younger members of the family wanted a combined reception of celebration, while the seniors insisted that the wedding be celebrated in separate venues since according to the traditional beliefs the mother of the groom should not see the daughter- in law on the wedding day. A subtle conflict was very much inherent between not only the senior and younger members of both the families but between those who follow the indigenous faith and those who are Christian converts.

But there are also instances of negotiation in the rituals of marriage. In the morning, before the groom leaves his house to go to the bride's, it is customary for the family of the bride to send a pot of white plain rice (*ja synlar*) and a pot of unsalted boiled pork (*doh jynlat*) to the groom's house. The groom will have to have a serving of this before he leaves his mother's house to meet his bride. This is practiced not only by believers of the indigenous faith, but by Christians as well.

Further, the smearing of the oil on the forehead of both the groom and the bride by the bride's mother, a gesture symbolic

of a welcome to the family to the bride's home is a traditional practice which is followed till date by Christian Khasis.

On the third day after the marriage, the groom takes his wife to his mother's house. The couple is accompanied by the female relatives of the bride. The bride takes with her gifts, fruits and most often '*u putharo*', the rice cake, as a token of respect to her in-laws. This custom is followed by all Khasis alike, irrespective of their faith.

In relation to birth, there are certain beliefs that can create encounters between the two faiths. For example, during pregnancy, the father is forbidden to hunt, complete the weaving and plaiting of a basket or bamboo work, or fire a piece of red-hot iron, or use it, as such actions are believed to adversely affect the health of the child (Mawrie1981:74). This conflicts with the understanding of most Khasi Christians. Interestingly however, some Christian still observe these practices which have been handed down over generations.

These are some of the events which has set one to think and reflect upon the efforts of the Christian church in proselytizing because the indigenous practices still continue to be manifested in many situations. Though a number of studies have been done on the impact of traditional cultural practices on the Christian religion among the Khasis, there is still further scope for study to find out if there are possible cultural encounters or negotiations between the local Christianity and indigenous practices.

One can say that "Despite the real differences and even disparities between culture and religions, there is a basic stratum of human commonalities that can make it possible for people to communicate with one another and to discover points of contact with others" (Gort 2008 : 756). Culture is intertwined with the religious aspect and beliefs of the Khasi people. So much so, it becomes very complicated for the present generation to clearly understand their own stance on their own identity, which has led them to re-assert some aspects of tradition and to look for answers from the past and history. It becomes more intriguing for

researchers, intellectuals, folklorists, archeologists and historians in dealing with this topic. Today, the Khasi society is like a melting pot where cultures from elsewhere co-exist with Khasi culture. It's interesting and also challenging to analyse, as we also know that it is also a time where globalization is in a process of 'homogenization' by which the world becomes increasingly uniform. The world is undergoing changes and 'New World Order' elicits dependence on information technology in the name of "connecting people globally".

Richard Barnet and John Cavanagh write that the global shopping mall is a planetary supermarket with a dazzling spread of things to eat, drink, wear, and enjoy. Dreams of affluent living are communicated to the farthest reaches of the globe, but only a minority of the people in the world can afford to shop at the mall. Of the 5.4 billion people on earth, almost 3.6 billion have neither cash nor credit to buy much of anything. A majority of people on the planet is at most window -shoppers (Cavanagh and Barnet 1995:15). A new discourse will be needed to study the widespread development of globalization, culture and religion. Khasi indigenous religions have undergone rapid changes, as for instance in the fact that choral singers perform local songs in a manner similar to choir singers in a Christian worship setting. Youths also participate with zealously in their services in their modern-day attire and using their hi-tech gadgets. The Christian religious service now deploys traditional music. Uncertainty is prevalent in the Khasi society, but in spite of it, this will open new doors to a world of opportunities for researchers and scholars. Especially, in aligning and studying the unknown and untouched areas, which will ultimately lead to further understanding on new ventures. Folklore studies hold a lot of promise when it comes to the quest for an understanding of cultures intersecting with each other. Using theories such as the *Motif- Index of Folk Literature*, *psycho-analytic theory*, *structuralism* *theory of Levis Strauss etcetera*, scholars can find possible answers to puzzling questions regarding identity and cultural conflict . It is believed that by analyzing folklore, one will discover the patters of culture which will further lead to knowledge

of such patters that can provide the means of raising levels of consciousness. Ultimately, this will lead to understanding of the Khasi worldview, on how the Khasis looked at the world before the influence of the outside force that brings along with it widespread influence or more specifically, an invasion of ideas and cultural space.

There is also the need therefore to have a healthy dialogue and find a common ground that focuses on peace and the true meaning of human life. Snaitang (1993), aptly states, "The introduction of an inclusive religion did not undermine the traditional social structure or polity. It rather served as a means of bringing together the fragmented parts of the society into a new whole, under the auspices of a new ideology" (1993: 161). There is indeed ample scope for delving deeper into this narrative to define, describe and explain conversion and conviction in the backdrop of the present social setting.

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DELVING DEEP INTO THE DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIANITY FOR DAZZLING DISCOVERY IN C. S. LEWIS' THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA

- A. Sophiamary*

"And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

-Philippians 2: 8

Objectives:

To explore the secrets of the Christian faith and the universal truth through the characters of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and to take a trip into the world of myth and deep magic.

To bring out the Christian implications in the writings of C. S. Lewis and to discuss the fascination seen in children and adults for learning scripture through fantasy.

Historical Background:

C. S. Lewis was more than a master in storytelling, he was devoted to the Christian faith and took seriously the prophetic writings of scripture. He was a distinguished Oxford professor who began his academic career as an atheist but after his thorough research in the Holy Bible he became a theologian, describing himself as the most reluctant convert in the city of London. His reputation has only grown after his death in 1963. Today his works, rich in Christian themes, are treated with high respect and admiration and are cited worldwide.

The British writer Clive Staples Lewis also known as C. S. Lewis is best known for his series of seven fantasy novels *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Published between 1950 and 1956 these novels gained great popularity among people of all ages, especially children.

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Lewis' best-selling works which sold a hundred million copies in forty-seven languages are considered to be among the best classics in children's literature. In 1939 Lewis for the first time entertained the idea of writing a tale for children. Due to the threat of bombing during the Second World War, many children were transported from the main cities of England to the countryside. Lewis helped them by opening his heart and home to these young refugees. One of the children felt an attraction to his wardrobe, imagining that there a way out on the other side. Lewis could recollect *The Aunt and Anabel* by Edith Nesbit in which he first read about the magic wardrobe this served as the seed for the masterpiece *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

The seven books of the Narnia series are as follows:

- *The Lion, the witch and the wardrobe* (1950)
- *Prince Caspian* (1951)
- *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952)
- *The Silver Chair* (1953)
- *The Horse and His Boy* (1954)
- *The Magician's Nephew* (1955)
- *The Last Battle* (1956)

There are various Christian allegories and symbols in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Though he uses the pattern of mythology the storyline goes parallel to Genesis and some parts of the Old Testament in the Holy Bible. The Christian faith is well portrayed in the background of the novels. Many Christian themes and incidents can be seen and felt throughout the books.

Illuminating the essential Christian facets:

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (1950) is a fabulous tale that recalls the nucleus subject of the Holy Bible. It is an incredible story that discusses the fall of man and the ransom sacrifice of the Son of God. The lion king Aslan symbolises Christ Jesus, and the novelist reveals the fact in an explicit manner that Aslan stands for the Lamb of God. Also in scripture there is a reference

that Christ Jesus is the lion of Judah, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has triumphed..." (Rev. 5: 5). This symbolism is so identical and extremely rich that through the character of Aslan the earthly life of Jesus Christ is well depicted. It encapsulates the life, death and resurrection of the redeemer. As Jesus gave his life as a ransom for Adam and for the whole fallen mankind, Aslan also sacrifices his life on the stone table to save Edmund the betrayer, "Then I saw a lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne" (Rev. 5: 6).

Children are much impressed by this imaginary character, Aslan, introduced by C. S. Lewis. They learn and become familiar with the scripture through this fantastic fantasy tale. As it is a well-known fact that the lion is the king of the jungle and very majestic in appearance and attributes, Christ is also the mighty king of the whole universe. Kingship and rulership is represented through the portrayal of the lion. Aslan is a talking lion who loves children like Christ Jesus, "Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these'" (Matt. 19: 14). Aslan always inspires everyone with his magic, mystery, love and respect.

The stone table in *The Lion, the witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) symbolises the stone tablets brought by Moses with the inscription of Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai as described in the Old Testament. After the death sacrifice and resurrection of Aslan the stone table is completely broken into pieces. Likewise the sharp, strict and inflexible laws of God the Father during the time of the Old Testament are lightened by the ransom sacrifice of his son Jesus Christ. It also symbolises the veil of the temple of Jerusalem. During the death of Jesus on the holy cross, an earthquake occurs and the veil which is sixty feet in height and four inches thick, standing for the separation between God and humans is torn into two from the top to bottom.

As Aslan pays for Edmund, Jesus gives his life for the redemption of the whole of mankind. As Christ is allowed to die a shameful death by the Heavenly Father, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole'" (Gal. 3: 13). Aslan also receives humiliation, torture and shame by the troops

of the White Witch. He is bound, gagged, shaved, beaten and dragged to the stone table where the White Witch executes him with her stone knife. As Aslan is innocent and guiltless he is also resurrected like Christ Jesus. By his endless love, Aslan frames the exact image of the saviour Jesus Christ.

The White Witch obviously represents the fallen angel Satan. Jafter the fall of man, Satan started his reign on earth which is indicated by sin and death, the reign of the White Witch is marked by never-ending winter and snow. She gives the cruel punishment of turning the people of Narnia into stone and so everyone is unhappy under the curse. There is a prophecy, an ancient prediction in the world of Narnia that foretells that the unending winter and snow will come to an end by the roar of Aslan. This is also known as the Golden Age Prophecy. The tables turn after the arrival of Aslan, a symbol of the Messiah.

The White Witch takes efforts to prevent the prophecy from being fulfilled. The prophecy says that the spring will come again when Aslan shakes his mane and so she shaves Aslan's mane during the process of ritual sacrifice before killing him. The same happens in the scripture. Satan tries his level best to stop Christ's victory over sin and death. During the forty days of fasting in the desert place after the consecration Satan brings the temptation to Christ, he persuades him to compromise, kneel and submit to him. Then Satan uses the weak-minded Judas and the powerful Roman government to crucify Jesus, likewise the White Witch uses Edmund as prey to kill Aslan.

Aslan dies due to the treachery of Edmund; similarly, Jesus is arrested and undergoes death by the betrayal of Judas, "wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6: 23). The Turkish delight provided by the White Witch represents sin. Edmund cheats his family for thirty pieces of Turkish delight offered by the evil queen just as Judas betrays Jesus for thirty silver coins. Just as Edmund is driven by greed, Judas is also greedy for money and betrays his master and the twelve disciples for the silver coins. Turkish delight also acts as the symbol of the fruit of the forbidden tree of knowledge of good and evil. In the book *The Magicians Nephew* (1955), the White Witch who is addressed as Queen Jadis steals fruit from the garden of Aslan although it is forbidden by him. In the genesis of the Narnian world, Jadis plucks and eats a silver apple

from the tree of youth and that becomes the source of her great powers and immortality. She gives terrible punishments to the inhabitants of Narnia and heartlessly imprisons them through her wolves.

Peter, the high king of Narnia, is a symbol of Apostle Peter. Saint Peter led the apostles after the ascendance of Jesus to heaven. King Peter is also named the wolf's bane after the resurrection of Aslan because he becomes the great scourge to the wolves in the land of Narnia that serves as the secret police system for the White Witch. Not aware of the danger, the Pevensies children enter Narnia. As mentioned in the Holy Bible, "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matt. 10:16). After the resurrection when Jesus visits the Apostles he instructs Apostle Peter to take care of his sheep but Jesus is the shepherd, pastor and the supreme master:

Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord, he said, 'you know that I love you.'

Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs'.

Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'

He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.'

Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep'

The third time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'...

Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep'. (John 21: 15, 17)

The stone table is surrounded by the evil spirits, beasts, demons and witches during the ritual sacrifice of Aslan just as during the crucifixion of Jesus Christ he is surrounded by the fallen angels, evil-possessed people, crucial religious leaders and Roman government officials. The stone table also represents the stone altar where Isaac was to be sacrificed by his father Abraham, the father of faith. Isaac is the type for Christ Jesus while Abraham is the type for the Heavenly Father. Isaac's sacrifice on the stone

altar is a model of sacrifice shown by God Almighty for offering his only begotten Son in ransom sacrifice.

The Magician's Nephew (1955) provides the backstory of the White Witch and her origin. She is referred to as Queen Jadis of Chan. The story runs parallel to the first book of the Holy Bible. Satan enters God's Eden Garden, and parallelly Jadis also enters Aslan's Garden. It is only by eating the silver apple that she gains inexhaustible strength and steals immortality. The arrival of the Pevensie children - Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy - is marked in the ancient prophecy as the Golden Age of Narnia. The Pevensie children are mentioned as the Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve. The Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea creates the first man and woman in Narnia. He is a symbol of God the Father.

The stone table of Aslan also symbolises the cross of Christ Jesus. After the death of Aslan, Susan and Lucy are seen holding the dead body of Aslan this is an echo of Mother Mary holding the body of Christ after he was brought down from the cross. The tying of Aslan with a rope to the stone table is similar to the tying of son Isaac by father Abraham for the sacrifice and also the tying of Christ Jesus to the cross for crucifixion. C. S. Lewis' treatment of the crucifixion theme is a model of animal sacrifice as the ram was bound with a rope as a substitute for Isaac. Adding to this there are many more Christian symbols in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. For example Susan's horn and mice biting Aslan's ropes enrich the readers with powerful messages. Susan is given the ram's horn by Father Christmas as a symbol to show how Isaac is spared. Her horn is also considered a prize possession when she becomes Queen Susan the Gentle. Mice in Narnia are a symbol of kindness, as it is said in the scriptures, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5: 5). They are similar to the hobbits of Tolkien in Narnia; they are the smallest animals that change the future.

Lucy and Susan visiting the broken stone table is a symbol of Mary Magdalene and another Mary visiting the tomb of Jesus. They are so surprised to see the resurrected Aslan like the two biblical witnessing women. Aslan's resurrection is a symbol of Christ's resurrection. The honest and trustworthy Lucy is a symbol of true and faithful believers of Jesus Christ. She believes in Aslan when her own siblings stay as unbelievers. Professor

Kirke who defends Lucy in *The Lion, the witch and the wardrobe* (1950) represents C. S. Lewis himself.

Like the devilish talking serpent and the talking donkey of Balaam, Narnia too has talking animals. As the donkey is given the miraculous power to speak to Balaam, "Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Balaam..." (Num. 22: 28) there are various speaking donkeys in Narnia. In *The Magician's Nephew* (1955) the first animal that is given the speaking ability is a donkey. In *The Last Battle* (1956) the donkey Puzzle acts as the symbol of sin, contrition and reconciliation. The foxes are people who are not religious but will give their lives for their beliefs. Mr. and Mrs. Beaver who helps the Pevensie children in their escape from the secret police of the White Witch symbolise the guardian angels that guide, protect and safeguard God's children. Mr. and Mrs. Beaver are also a representation of Moses; Just as he led the Israelites through the wilderness of Sinai they help and lead the Pevensie children through the wilderness.

Mr. Tumnus the faun is a symbol of Judas the betrayer of Christ Jesus and he also represents Apostle Paul. When he was Saul, a Pharisee and a Roman citizen, he persecuted many Christians. He leads the stoning of St. Stephen. After the martyrdom of St. Stephen, he regrets his faults and sacrifices his whole life for Christ Jesus. Likewise, Mr. Tumnus betrays the Pevensies in the beginning but later he regrets his action and does not want to betray them any further. At last, he is turned to stone by the White Witch.

The River God in Narnia is a symbol of Moses. When delivering the people of Israel from the land of Egypt with the help of God Almighty, Moses divided the Red Sea, led and travelled through the dry bed of the sea to reach the other side. But the troops of Pharaoh are drowned in the middle of the sea. Here God used the Red Sea to destroy his enemies. Likewise, during the War of Deliverance in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the River God who resembles Moses stands by the side of Pevensie children and helps them by killing their enemies.

When the ship of the Dawn Treader goes closer to the country of Aslan the sun starts to shine brighter. Everyone acquires a very clear vision and the ocean water also becomes sweeter. The light

in Aslan's country is a symbol that Jesus Christ is the light of the world, "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8: 12). The symbolism of water is so rich, as Jesus tells the Samaritan lady near the well, "Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4: 14). As Noah's family was carried in an ark to a whole new world, the Dawn Treader also carries a few characters to see a new heaven and new earth. In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952), Aslan says that he is a lamb. Here again, there is a biblical reference that the lamb is a symbol of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who gave the ransom sacrifice for the sin of the whole world. There is also a testimony given by John the Baptist, "The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1: 29). It also refers to the sacrifice of Isaac wherein he is replaced by a ram as sacrificial offering.

When king Caspian dies, Aslan appears to Eustace and Jill Poe. He weeps over the body of the dead king which lies in the stream. Likewise, after the death of Lazarus, Jesus also wept for his friend. Aslan instructs Eustace to prick his paw with a thorn and to allow his blood to fall on the body of Caspian. Through the thorn, C. S. Lewis remembers the crown of thorns which pierced the head of Christ Jesus and the holy blood flows from his head during his crucifixion and passion. Although Caspian's body lies in the water of the stream only Aslan's blood resurrects King Caspian. This is a reflection of the Christian belief that though one is washed by the water of baptism, only the blood of Christ can redeem and resurrect them. C. S. Lewis again uses many Christian allegories in the book *The Last Battle* (1956). The title *The Last Battle* itself symbolizes the final battle of Armageddon, "Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon" (Revelation 16:16).

When Lucy is hiding in the wardrobe she experiences a strange new world called Narnia. After seeing many new creatures in the Narnian world she returns to her siblings excitedly to share her adventure but no one believes Lucy, thinking that she has some mental problem or has been hallucinating. In the scriptures too we see that when the women return and report

Christ's resurrection from death, no one believes them. Themes like hospitality, sacrifice, disobedience, redemption from curse, wickedness, deception and resurrection are well seen throughout the novels. When the spell is broken the Narnians can enjoy all four seasons instead of having only winter. Aslan killing the White Witch by the end of the war is a symbol that Jesus Christ will put an end to Satan and his reign after the Great Tribulation on earth. After the death of the White Witch, the land of Narnia enjoys real freedom just as after the death of Satan and the fallen angels the earth will be free from the clutches and curse of sin and death and will be transformed into Eden again.

Prince Caspian the second of the seven books of C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* displays a battle between good and evil. Just as the Narnians who are faithful to Aslan hide for their lives in the woods, the true believers of Christ are also unseen in this evil world and are waiting for their time to come:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm. (Eph. 6: 10- 12)

The faithful Narnians are determined to follow Aslan even at the cost of death; likewise the true believers of Jesus Christ will not step away or shrink away in following his footprints until death. As Apostle Paul says:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we consider as sheep to be slaughters'. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Rom. 8: 35- 37)

There is a stark difference between believers and non-believers. The old Narnians like Telmarines and some dwarfs like Nikabrik remain true to Aslan. Even the dwarf Trumpkin loses his hope wondering if it is pointless to believe in Aslan in the present

times, but later he meets Aslan face to face and feels sorry for his words. As Apostle Paul says, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1: 18). It is certain that the true Christians will face oppositions from all directions while following Christ in his path of faith and obedience.

Lucy has to protest her family and friends to follow Aslan who appears to her one night and asks her to follow him on his path which others cannot or will not see. Lucy becomes broken-hearted when her own siblings do not believe her; she stays with them by abandoning Aslan. But when Aslan comes to her for the second time with love and compassion, he makes her understand that she should have followed him at any cost. She repents for her mistake and gains the strength that she needs by burying her head in Aslan's mane and also intends to hide from his face. But after experiencing the amazing magic of his mane she feels the mighty lion's strength penetrating into her. Suddenly she sits up and says sorry to Aslan, and assures him that she is ready for the course of action. Lucy gains the courage to follow Aslan irrespective of others' companionship. Lewis provides wonderful life lessons and morals for Christians of all ages, especially children. Through the character of Lucy in the first three books, children learn three valuable lessons (i) the cost of following Christ Jesus (ii) dangers and trials in the Christian life (iii) the faith towards our saviour will lead and take home the loyal ones to the reward of immortality, "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him" (James 1:12).

Another predominant theme in *Prince Caspian* (1951) is the universal question about God's timing and purpose. Many times, the important characters wonder why Aslan does not come to help them during their struggles and battles, why he is invisible to them and why he is missing from Narnia for a very long period of time. But faith can be rebuilt for the true believers of Christ from the words of the Psalmist, "As for God, his way is perfect; The Lord's word is flawless, he shields all who take refuge in him" (Ps. 18: 30). Through these verses it is so clear that whatever God does or whatever timing he chooses is always perfect. At

the end of the book, High King Peter proclaims that they do not know when Aslan will act but in his time no doubt he will. In the meantime, he likes to view whatever they can do on their own. The same way our Lord Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father work in their perfect timing; till then they just love to watch their followers whether they really try their level best, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might..." (Eccles. 9: 10).

The substantial theme in *The Horse and his Boy* (1954) is the absurdity of pride and the wisdom of humility. The characters who exhibit pride face all sorts of problems and difficulties. The novel ends with the moral that the proud ones are punished and the humble are rewarded, "God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble" (James 4: 6). But the book ends with a glorious message that Aslan's love is for all of his creations. Though published as the sixth book in the series, chronologically *The Magician's Nephew* (1955) is the first book written by C. S. Lewis. It speaks about the creation of Narnia, the beginning of the story, the making of the magic wardrobe, the lamp post and professor Kirke a young boy named Digory. Aslan is a powerful creator, artist, lover, and a kind-hearted lawmaker who also acts as a type for Christ Jesus.

In the last book of Narnia *The Last Battle* (1956) there is a clever ape and a donkey who both use the opportunity of the invisibility of Aslan. The ape makes his donkey friend to look like a lion by stitching and sewing a dress that resembles Aslan. Many Narnian creatures are fooled by the fake Aslan. This particular novel symbolises the end of the reign of terror, sin and evil kingdom of Antichrist after the arrival of Christ King Jesus in His second coming to establish his new kingdom from Jerusalem to worldwide:

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: 'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a dwelling for demons and a haunt for every impure spirit, a haunt

for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable animal. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The king of the earth committed adulteries with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries'. (Rev. 18: 1-3)

This book contains some speculative details about the Lord's second coming. It has multiple instances of suspense, twists, turns, imaginative writings and intrigue for readers of all age groups.

In *The Silver Chair* (1953) the third book of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Eustace Scrubb after learning some hard lessons returns to Narnia. He and a girl Jill tries to rescue the prince to save Narnia from the evil malicious witch. Under the curse of the Emerald witch, Prince Rilian the son of King Caspian suffers a lot. For ten years she has captivated him with the help of an enchanted chair. Aslan sends Eustace, Jill and Puddleglum, an amusing melancholy creature to find Prince Rilian and to bring him back to the land of Narnia. Aslan also gives four adventurous signs which are to be obeyed and remembered, but unfortunately, soon they forget them and so the children undergo many perils. It symbolically represents the scripture which is enriched with wisdom and helps people to always take the right path in life. But when one forgets or diverges from it they will get entangled in messy real-life issues. In the end, the chair is destroyed and grace prevails by setting free the miserable captives.

The major theme in *The Silver Chair* (1953) is truth versus falsehood. This book gives the significant lesson that falsehood often appears to be true. As Aslan instructs Jill in chapter two, do not pay any attention to appearances. Remember and believe in the signs and nothing else counts or matters. Other examples of false appearance in the book are the disguise of the witch, the duplicity of the giants and children's misreading of the gnomes. Aslan as a symbol of Christ serves as a wise guide who demands obedience but patiently forgives those who go astray. The other themes in the book are forgiveness and encouragement. The book also picturises the fountain of life beautifully. As said in the holy Bible, "... To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life" (Rev. 21:6).

Conclusion:

Just as a coin has two sides, good and evil prevail everywhere and in every era. By reading this incredible works of C. S. Lewis one can benefit from the divine wisdom they present to the reader. This magnificent tale stands as a feather in Lewis' cap forever. The life lessons that one can gain from these chronicles are many: that it is in Christ that one should find his/her identity; one should embrace a childlike faith in God; perseverance is the ultimate quality that one should possess till the end; one should always follow the spiritual disciplines; and by staying obedient one is often prepared to face more battles; Satan is always a liar and he never changes; this earth is not the permanent home for the true believers of Christ, since after proving themselves loyal they will attain the heavenly reward. *The Chronicles of Narnia* gifts the readers with inspiring moral values like honesty, integrity, forgiveness, courage and self-sacrifice. It also educates about evil and its curse, and good and its rewards and blessings.

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BIBLE STUDY**GENESIS 50: 15-21**

*-Nishad Issac Chandy**

The book of Genesis invites us to journey in the world of relationships. Relationship finds its golden expression in the love of God for humankind. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are recipients of this directional, empowering and sustaining love from God. God's love is directed towards life. God's love preserves life. God's love removes fear and reinstates trust in our lives.

Rick Warren says, "When the Bible speaks of God's love for us and the kind of love we are to have for God and for other people, the word is always commitment to act." Genesis 50 portrays Joseph's commitment to be a bearer of God's love- forgiving his brothers, reminding them of God's providence and helping them in the path to reconciliation and renewed assurance.

This chapter is the conclusion of a lengthy story of Joseph's suffering, which begins in Chapter 37. The son who is his father's favourite becomes the ire of his brothers and is eventually sold into slavery, escaping the jaws of death in a close encounter. Deliberate rejection by his own family, unwarranted rebuke from Potiphar's home and the consequent remand in prison all deny Joseph the possibilities of a young shepherd, the warmth of family relations and the dignity of an honest servant. He is cast away into the darkness of loneliness, the dilemma of a foreigner and the dejection for the sake of being upright. Joseph is forced to adorn the cloak of suffering.

Though Joseph is not directly responsible for the consequences in his life, yet it is up to him to own the sufferings bestowed on his mind and body. To own the sufferings of life would be not to build upon the bitterness of the past, but to unfailingly relate his sufferings with greater loyalty to God. Sufferings hurt us, hurt our faith and hurt our relations. Sufferings make us think, "Why is God allowing me to suffer?", "How long should

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I suffer?" and "Why are others so happy while I am suffering always?" Confusion, chaos and contrasting experiences make us see suffering as a spiral downwards. Suffering makes us see a limited version of ourselves. Possibilities, potential and promises are quite easily forgotten, giving way to a disoriented outlook on life.

Joseph's long years of suffering through foreign lands does not demoralize him to the point of being a slave forever. Nor does the pain of loneliness or the accusations of his master make him lose his faith in the God of his ancestors. Rather he is transformed to be a saviour not only to his brothers but also to the famine-burdened people of his father's lands. Does suffering hold within itself a relational power? Does suffering pave the way for a new pathos of body identities? Does suffering coronate those who experience it to be bearers of grace?

Joseph uses his suffering as a means of steering his brothers and their families across famine, an uncertain future and livelihood insecurity, becoming for them a missional embodiment of divine providence, divine redemption and divine freedom. This embodiment of God's choices for Joseph makes him transform his struggles of sufferings into strides of strength, as his role as Egypt's second most powerful ruler becomes a channel of safety and survival in the spreading famines of their lands.

Missional embodiment is a constant desire to prioritize, preserve and propagate godly convictions. It is a fulfilment of God's love to restore relationships, renew the spirit of reconciliation and revive unity that is long lost in a broken world. It is a conscious effort to rejuvenate memories of divine promise, relive fellowships of diversities and recollect possibilities to be salvific voices beyond boundaries. Missional embodiment is a call to act adorning the cassock of divine humility and faithfulness. Joseph imbibes this responsibility through three statements of authentic love.

1. Missional Embodiment as Tearful Acceptance (vv. 17, 18)

The death of Jacob creates a void for the brothers in their closest encounter now with Joseph. Jacob acted as the linkage of continuing love, affection and eventual blessing of the sons of Joseph. His absence now has brought immense realization

for Joseph's brothers who remember well their wrong doings towards him. Before they encounter Joseph for forgiveness, they are to encounter their own sins.

Acceptance becomes a virtue only when we genuinely participate in the many steps that lead to acceptance. Joseph's brothers had once deceived their own father showing the blood-soaked ornamented robe, making Jacob believe that his son was devoured by a wild animal. Now it was their turn to confess to Joseph that their father was well aware of the treachery of the sons and cared to plead for Joseph's forgiveness. Their acceptance of their father's realization and the acceptance that they committed crimes, not only as Joseph's brothers but as servants of God, brings them to the threshold of Joseph's mercy.

Joseph is now left to accept certain new realities: years of bitterness and loneliness have to pave way for forgiveness. The crimes, wrong-doing and the harm that he was forced to endure could not hinder the larger mission that God had in place for him. Joseph garners strength to refrain from punishing his brothers but his missional embodiment has gracefully transformed him to accept years of restitution with tears.

Joseph's tears are met with the weeping of his brothers. Their common pain now is of a greater mission that their God intends, not punishing or deceiving each other anymore but a common embodiment of divine hospitality, compassion and kindness for each other as servants of God.

Pope Francis highlights that the world today has lost the capacity to "cry with the heart" at the tragedies of our times. He says "We must not be ashamed of crying, on the contrary, the saints teach us that tears are a gift, sometimes a grace, a sign of repentance, a liberation of the heart". Pope Francis says, "We should ask God to grant us 'the grace of crying' at what we see: not only wars, but also at people, like the poor, the elderly and even unborn children, being discarded." "The miseries of our time should make us cry and we need to cry", he emphasizes.

Joseph invites us to gracefully accept the power of weeping to sensitize and embody the missional concerns of our times.

2. Missional Embodiment as Conscious Spirituality (vv. 19-20)

Joseph continues his efforts at forgiveness, reassuring his brothers 'not to be afraid'. Fear of each other had denied them all the strength of familial relations, as well as the ability to be a worthy worshipping community before God. Fear can only be conquered through an ethos of equality in spirituality. Joseph being a powerful leader in Egypt has now a hierarchical advantage over his brothers, though he is younger to them. Fear is at his disposal to be imposed on his brothers who are at his mercy for their livelihood and survival. Fear can be the psychological tool to cement his dominance and mastery over the lives of his brothers.

It is here that Joseph is alert enough to declare a conscious spiritual proclamation saying, "Am I in the place of God?" These were the same words which Jacob spoke to Rachel when she pleaded, "Give me children or I shall die." Joseph is clear in his spirituality stating that a position of power is not a guarantee to wield divine retribution over the weak and needy. Joseph is wary of the dynamics of the Empire of his time and is humble enough to announce that he does not have the right to exercise the kind of judgment that belongs only to God.

A conscious spirituality is a redefinition of worship, calling those who partake in it to redefine the concepts of power, peace and progress as purely an inheritance from God, to fulfil God's well-defined missional purposes. A conscious spirituality transgresses the boundaries of fear, oppression and segregation to open pathways to an inclusive embodiment of the mission of God. A conscious spirituality is to care for the 'other' reminding ourselves that we too would remain an 'other' if it were not for the mercy of God.

Steve Pavlina in his book "Conscious Spirituality" reminds us of experiences that bog us down when we are victimised by the abuse of power. As power is directed to one's attention, Steve reminds us of the urgent need to direct and focus attention on more desirable experiences. Here one has to decide to no longer be the victim but an active participant in the process of exploration.

Joseph disconnects himself from years of being a victim of circumstances. Rather his conscious spirituality redirects him to embrace and explore the ways of God. Now he invites his brothers too in this active involvement to transform evil into good such that this spirituality would confer life not only on the chosen ones but on all who have come to seek of Egypt's food and provisions.

Joseph today calls us to imitate this conscious evaluation of our emotions, making it a desirable choice to redirect them to consolidate life as a missional effort to do good to all.

3. Missional Embodiment as Reformatory Nourishment (v 21)

Joseph reassures his brothers once again to have no fear. He reforms their understanding further with the promise to provide for them and for their little ones. For it is the promise of God to Abram, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." Joseph safeguards this promise when he reveals his desire to settle his father Jacob and his brothers in the land of Goshen when they first arrive in Egypt.

Now God has a plan for these brothers. They are to be reformed to be the heads of the various tribes of Israel. The blessings of Jacob, who appropriately blesses each of his sons, appoints them to be catalysts of reformation as they grow as the people of God. Now it is Joseph's turn to fulfil this missional task and nourish his brothers with kindness.

A nourishing mission is a mission in continuity. Nourishing mission calls for an interweaving of responsibilities. It calls for a timely display of our genuine efforts to adopt a lifestyle that favours the building up of God's community. It is through a reformatory spirit that we are reminded to see God's mission as having an eternal dimension. Both God and humans are actively involved in a nourishing mission to establish, embrace and edify God's plans for humankind.

The Thai Poet Len Gasun, in his poem 'Life's Water' poetically reminds us of quenching the thirst of life, through spiritual nourishment, relying on the source of all blessings, reforming our

thoughts and humbly presenting ourselves as having fulfilled the divine call.

*Midst the scorching heat of the sun
Lots of day's work, still left undone
Profuse sweating never consoles
Life's water, hear my urgent call*

*My throat has sore at drying up
Seems bringing me a big mishap
I need you badly fresh and cool
Life's water, hear my urgent call*

*My plants are dying, less flowers
Dried leaves on the ground are towers
I'm so desperate like a fool
Life's water, hear my urgent call*

*My life too - seems drained and empty
Nourishment I then asked to Thee
God has cleaned and quenched my parched soul
Life's water heard my urgent call*

Joseph today invites us to fill our worship tables with spiritual nourishment. that strengthens us all in a journey of reforming ourselves to fulfil the mission of God.

Joseph is the legend of suffering. His embodiment of sufferings is fervently cast as being directed by God to be a blessing for others. God's love is relished by Joseph in making the missional choices that guide him and his brothers to reaffirm and reflect God's providence in unity. His tearful acceptance of his brothers' confessions, indwelling in a conscious spirituality to preserve life for all and portraying a reformatory nourishment for the generations to come are missionally embodied to honour and celebrate life in fullness. May we too strive to cultivate this missional culture to move the world towards reconciliation and unity, now and always. AMEN.

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NCCI NEWS 1

GREETINGS TO THE NEWLY ELECTED PRESIDENT SMT. DROUPADI MURMU

National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) congratulates Honorable Smt. Droupadi Murmu on being sworn in as the 15th President of India.

National Council of Churches in India is a fellowship of 30 Nationally net worked Churches belonging to Protestant and Orthodox traditions in India along with different All India Christian organizations, agencies and councils.

It is indeed a very proud moment for all of us since her journey from a humble beginning to become the First Citizen of the country is inspiring and remarkable. It also reveals the power of democracy which provides spaces for the common citizen to dream big about dealing creatively with their challenges and rising above them.

Being a person who has had grassroots experiences in the rural context of India, we hope and pray that her role in the highest Office of the country will spark more initiatives to accompany the poor and marginalized people. We hope that the teacher within her will bring more emphasis on education in India through which the oppressed in India, as Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar dreamt, will come up in their life and annihilate discrimination.

We welcome references to affirming the significance of sustaining the diversities of this country in her first message as the President of India. Her emphasis on the existence of many languages, religions, sects, food habits, lifestyles and customs as a strength of India evokes a sense of belonging to different communities in India. Also her message of leading a life imbued with reverence for nature is inspiring and hopeful.

Our prayer is that this country would stand to benefit from Honorable Smt. Droupadi Murmu's contributions as the President of this great country. We will continue to uphold her in our prayers.

Rev Asir Ebenezer

General Secretary

National Council of Churches in India

NCCI NEWS 2

SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS IN REALISING THE 'HEAVEN OF FREEDOM'

The country is agog with completing 75 years of journeying as an independent country. We have truly excelled in many spheres despite several odds of evolving and struggling to grow out of a colonial mindset of 'ruling over subjects'.

We as a people have demonstrated from time to time that the People prevail before power and that *power* devolves from People.

We celebrate the huge strides we have achieved in the field of science and technology, education and culture, infrastructural development, growing in self-sufficiency in food production and several other sectors.

We celebrate the resilience that we have shown in existing and living in a market driven world with the pre-eminences of capital and devaluing labour as a means of production.

We celebrate resistance that challenges us to learn from dissent and to carry on together as a People 'leaving no one behind'.

We celebrate the richness of living with nature evidenced in every ethnic sociological group and tribe that live as human libraries even while moving to live in the 'cloud' which for now has become the space in which we live and have our being.

And, as we move on . . .

We need to celebrate living traditions amidst us, particularly in the distressed and suppressed *dalit*, tribal and *adivasi* communities, as a source of internal and abiding strength and spirituality for peace and security vis a vis valorizing weapons and militarization based on perceived threats that stem from othering.

We need to celebrate and hold high the democratic-secular traditions as well as the ideals of participation which are now presupposed as people's mandate in a continuing colonial and totalitarian mindset.

We need to, as conscientious peoples of all faiths, ideologies, ethnicities, varying physical and mental abilities, different generations, gender identities and sexual orientations, celebrate and continue singing the '*songs of deliverance*'- *while seeking out*

and affirming the deliverance of every person, group and community who feel estranged in their own lands and contexts (a suggested deconstructed reading of a possible Zionist presupposition of Psalm 137 in The Bible).

We continue to celebrate all these daily so that everyone and all of creation will in their 'very own and this' lifetime awaken into that 'heaven of freedom'.

God bless India

Rev Asir Ebenezer

General Secretary

National Council of Churches in India

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THE UNITED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE BANGALORE

CALLS FOR APPLICATIONS FROM QUALIFIED CANDIDATES FOR THE FOLLOWING
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| | |
|---|---|
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Qualification: An earned doctorate from a University recognized by the Senate of Serampore College, in the field of specialization, preferably with teaching experience and competence in teaching at the post-graduate level.

For **Religion (Primal Religion)**, The candidate should have at least one of the following qualifications as per the Senate of Serampore requirement (These qualifications are all Senate degrees/approved degrees or its equivalence).

1. M.Th and Doctorate in Religion specialized in Primal Religion.
2. M.Th and Doctorate in Religion and Doctoral research in the area of Primal Religion.
3. M.A. and Doctorate in Anthropology and Doctoral research in the area of Cultural Anthropology. Such a teacher should also have a basic theological degree.
4. M.A. with at least a subject with Cultural Anthropology along with D.Th. in Religions.

The appointment for the posts will be for a period of three years, the first year being probationary year. Application should include curriculum vitae with a bibliography of published works and, at least, two selected samples of scholarly publications as well as photocopies of the degree certificates. Three reference letters are to be enclosed along with the application.

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The Principal

The United Theological College

No. 63, Millers Road, Benson Town, Bangalore-560 046

on or before **Monday, 21st November, 2022 by 12 Noon.**

A scanned copy of the application is to be sent to:
unitedtcprincipal@gmail.com

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