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Editor, Publisher & Printer: Rev. Dr. Asir Ebenezer, National Council of Churches in India, P.B. No.: 205, Civil Lines, Nagpur - 440 001, Maharashtra India, ***Phone:*** +91712-2531312, 2561464 Fax: +91-712-2520554 ***Email:*** <nccreview@ncci1914.com> **Managing Editor:** Rev. Dr. Abraham Mathew, Executive Secretary, Policy, Governance and Public Witness. **Editorial Board:** Dr Y Pammeleena, Dr. Ella Sonawane, Rev Dr Y T Vinayraj, Dr Shiju Sam Varughese **Printed at:** Shyam Brothers, Near ST Stand, Ganeshpeth, Nagpur **Owner:** Rev.Dr.Asir Ebenezer, National Council of Churches in India **Place of Publication:** National Council of Churches in India, P.B. No.: 205, Civil Lines, Nagpur-440 001, Maharashtra, India **Place of Printing:** Shyam Bros, Near ST Stand, Ganeshpeth, Nagpur **Website:**https://ncci1914.com/ncc-review/

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EDITORIAL

My kingdom is not of this world. . . Christmas 2023

The Gospel according to Matthew starts with the question about the birth of the King of the Jews: "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" (Matthew 2:2). Legend holds that the fourth Magi's search for the Messiah ended when he ultimately reached Golgotha much after the Messiah was crucified. "And sitting down they watched him there; and set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS." (Matthew 27:36, 37).

While being questioned about whether he was the king of the Jews, Jesus responds, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). This resonates with what the writer of the fourth gospel records earlier, that Jesus' followers are in the world but not of the world (John 17:13, 14, 15).

Matthew presents Jesus as the king of the Jews amidst the shining star and Magi, while Luke portrays Jesus' birth with the angels and the shepherds, as a matter of great joy to the world. The writer of the Gospel according to Mark, however, starts with Jesus' wilful enrolment into the call of John the Baptist. With no reference to Joseph (except Joseph of Arimathea) and without any reference to Mary as Jesus' mother, Mark presents Jesus as saying, "Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother" (Mark 3:31-35), indicating working the will of God as the primary purpose of mission in the world. While migrants and the marginalized find a place in the Christmas story of Matthew and Luke, Mark and John sharpen the focus to challenge us to remind ourselves of working the will of God.

This year, the birth of Jesus is observed amidst war and conflict, contexts that are sub-human, to say the least. Left unchecked, these contexts lead to a depravity of the human mind that is self-annihilating.

Amidst all the clamour surrounding Christmas, let us recognise the still small voice that calls us to introspection of where we are vis-a-vis working the will of God a call to fall in line with the mission of Jesus, that call to which we have responded in faith through baptism. May the observances of Christmas propel us toward witnessing a barrier-free, non-hegemonic, casteless world that affirms diversity in pluriform in the world but with an out-of-the-world experience of joy and peace - a

kingdom that is not of this world. Let us Rejoice in hope, Review our life mission, Re-orient our foci, and Relocate ourselves amidst people.

Throughout this year, the NCC Review has been a great resource. We congratulate all those who have contributed papers to be published. We thank those who supported the publication of the Review. It is our desire that those of us who value the NCC Review as a major resource will be able to pass on the legacy to one or more of our associates and acquaintances.

We also complete 100 years of the publication of the NCC Review. We look back and thank God for this yeoman task of bearing witness to the Gospel of Jesus in print. The Editorial Board has plans for a year-long celebration in 2024 as we step into the new century. We invite you to share with us what the NCC Review has meant to you and your work. You can write to us at nccreview@ncci1914.com. We deeply appreciate your support throughout this journey of a hundred years.

Wish you a meaningful observance of Christmas, and a blessed year ahead.

Rev. Asir Ebenezer
General Secretary, NCCI

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

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

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

CLIMATE GOVERNANCE IN INDIA: TRACING THE EVOLUTION OF INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

-Nirupama A. K.[*]

Abstract

The enduring challenge of climate change is set to remain a significant issue for decades, potentially spanning multiple generations. Both India and the global community must persist in formulating environmentally conscious policies to decrease emissions and tackle developmental issues. This article aims to explore the practical aspects of governing and executing these policies. It will delve into the array of institutional frameworks accessible in India to confront the persistent and extensive challenge of climate change. Furthermore, this paper seeks to examine vital strategies for adaptation and mitigation, categorized by sectors, to effectively combat the complexities of climate change.

Keywords: *climate change, climate governance, institutional mechanisms, NAPCC, India*

Introduction

Given the prolonged nature of the climate change challenge, the importance of maintaining a stable system is paramount. Establishing institutions that facilitate and reinforce interconnectedness across various sectors is crucial. This is of particular significance as Indian climate policy is based on the concept of simultaneously achieving multiple advantages. Climate-focused institutions must also furnish frameworks that enable the seamless integration of strategies and actions across different levels, spanning global, national, and local tiers. When a consistent and structured process is established, spanning from policy creation to practical implementation, the likelihood of successfully enacting initiatives and plans increases. This applies to both the initial stages, such as policy formulation and knowledge development, as well as the subsequent phases, like coordination and execution. These functions rely on well-established institutional frameworks.

[*] Nirupama A. K. is a Research Scholar at the Department of Political Science, University of Kerala, Trivandrum.

Considering the intricacies involved, promoting interactions between stakeholders and policymakers becomes essential, allowing information exchange beyond the confines of traditional policy structures. Grasping the role of climate institutions is imperative for comprehending climate policies. In recent times, India has witnessed a surge in the adoption of policy tools directed at combatting climate change. Since the inception of the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) in 2008, its multiple component missions, totalling eight in number, have been sanctioned and are now being put into practice. Furthermore, numerous states have initiated the process of crafting their own climate plans.

Institutional Mechanisms for Climate Governance in India

Origin

Before the initiation of the NAPCC, climate policy primarily encompassed foreign policy concerning climate change. This was managed in partnership by a limited group of experienced officials from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). Notably, Parliament, the cabinet, and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) had minimal engagement or oversight in this realm (Jakobsen, 1998). During consultations prior to international meetings on specific matters (IPCC), sectoral line ministries like the Ministry of Power (MoP) and the Department of Science and Technology (DST) offered scientific insights and general support. In the initial stages of climate negotiations, informal and loosely structured connections existed between these key ministries and a few research institutions. Consequently, institutionalization was limited, and formalized institutional relationships were scarce during this period. During this period, although significant efforts were made in areas such as energy, competence, electricity improvement, and construction regulations within the country, there wasn't any obvious endeavour to integrate such initiatives into the national climate change agenda. India actively championed the principles of fairness and the notion of "differentiated responsibility," emphasizing that developed nations bore the principal burden for mitigation[1].

[1] Sandeep Sengupta, "International Climate Negotiations and India's Role." In *Handbook of Climate Change and India*, edited by N. K. Dubash, 101-117, (New Delhi: Routledge, 2011).

The National Clean Development Mechanism Authority was launched under the MoEF in 2003, to assess and approve Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects. During this period, industry associations in India, particularly the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), played a pivotal part in facilitating communication between the MoEF, individual companies, and sectors. They were also involved in tasks such as managing greenhouse gas inventories, monitoring, and meeting CDM requirements[2]. Consequently, stakeholder engagement in policymaking during this era was limited and lacked a structured framework. Aside from the MEA and the MoEF, there was a minimal necessity for coordination, partly due to a small group of individuals and an established collaborative relationship between these entities. During this time, strategic planning and development were not deemed significant aspects of climate governance.

In 2007, there was a significant turning point in international climate talks. The developing nations resumed calling for developed nations to reaffirm and strengthen their obligations under the Kyoto Protocol. At the same time, major developing countries also faced growing demands to take action on mitigation measures[3] [4]. Climate change turned out to be a more prominent topic of discussion in forums such as G8+5 and G20, especially in the run-up to the 2009 Copenhagen Conference of the Parties (COP). These global developments, particularly the Copenhagen Climate Conference, brought greater focus to the issue within the country[5] [6].

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[2] Chandrashekhar Dasgupta, "Present at the creation: the making of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change." In *Handbook of Climate Change and India Development, Politics and Governance,* edited by N. Dubash, 89-97, (New Delhi: Routledge. 2011).

[3] Navroz K. Dubash, "Copenhagen: Climate of Mistrust." *Economic and political weekly*, (2009):8-11. https://www.epw.in/journal/2009/52/commentary/copenhagen-climate-mistrust.html.

[4] Lavanya Rajamani, "The Durban Platform for Enhanced Action and the Future of the Climate Regime." *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, (2012):501-18.

[5] Namrata P. Rastogi, "Winds of Change: India's emerging climate strategy." *International Spectator*, *46*(2), (2011):127–141. https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2011.576179.

[6] Aron Atteridge, Manish K. Shrivastava, Neha Pahuja & Himani Upadhyay, "Climate policy in India: What shapes international, national and state policy?" *AMBIO: A Journal of the Human Environment*, *41*(S1), (2012): 68–77. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-011-0242-5.

Creation of the NAPCC

The appointment of Jairam Ramesh as the Minister of Environment and Forests in mid-2009 sparked an intensified focus on the climate change issue within India. This was driven by a combination of heightened international pressure and enhanced domestic interest, leading to a repositioning of India's stance on the global climate stage, along with changes in domestic policy. Around mid-2008, the Indian government introduced the NAPCC, which encompassed eight "missions" encompassing various aspects like solar power advancement, energy efficacy promotion, water management, and a dedicated goal for Himalayan states. During this period, there were notable institutional reforms centred on the Prime Minister's Council on Climate 199Change (referred to as "the Council" or "PMCCC") and the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Climate Change. These entities held responsibility for high-level policy formulation and coordination. Additionally, several auxiliary supporting bodies and processes were established within the MoEF. Furthermore, inter-sectoral collaboration mechanisms and bodies were established, largely facilitated by the NAPCC. These reforms led to a substantial strengthening of institutional connections and interactions.

The formation of the PMCCC in mid-2007 was probably driven, at least partially, by the acknowledgement that India required a more efficient strategy to tackle international concerns regarding climate change. During the G8 summit in Heiligendamm at that time, India had proposed capping its per capita emissions to match those of industrialized nations[7]. However, there was no concrete plan in place to achieve this goal. The council's official responsibilities encompassed formulating a national climate change strategy (ultimately known as the NAPCC), coordinating the development of action plans, and overseeing significant policy assessments. Led by the prime minister, the council constituted 26 members, encompassing ministers from diverse ministries, prominent non-governmental experts, and retired government specialists. All members contributed ideas that were incorporated into the final NAPCC. The NAPCC was released in June 2008, conveniently coinciding with the G8 meeting in Tokyo, proposing that the document had an international audience to some

[7] Robert Mizo, "India, China and Climate Cooperation." *India Quarterly*, *72*(4), (2016): 375–394. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48505519.

extent. The core team in the council, consisting of the head scientific advisor, a former secretary of the MoEF, and the director general of The Energy and Resources Institute, had a substantial influence on the document's content. Additionally, the office of the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Climate Change played a crucial job in both domestic and international climate policy matters, particularly in facilitating the intricate process of drafting the NAPCC.

The special envoy's office held a crucial responsibility in effective coordination. The office's primary focus was navigating the complex landscape of diplomacy and bureaucracy rather than solely high-level policy planning. An illustrative instance of this coordination was evident in the growth of the National Solar Mission. A challenge arose when determining funding for a subsidy for new solar power through a creative reverse auction process. Given budgetary constraints, an innovative solution emerged—integrating solar power with affordable thermal power from the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) to reduce average power costs. This solution necessitated NTPC's approval and the finance minister's support. Through personal visits, groundwork, and the backing of the PMO's authority, the Prime Minister's special envoy successfully secured the necessary agreements. The special envoy's office also extended support to other ministries. As an example, during the formulation of the National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency, the Bureau of Energy Efficiency requested support from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to secure funding for energy efficiency initiatives. In response, the PMO collaborated with public sector banks to secure the necessary funding for the plan. Subsequently, in 2009, the council granted approval for the National Solar Mission, the National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency, and the National Himalayan Mission. While coordination had been informal, the special envoy's tenure formalized and strengthened this process. However, differences arose over the scope of the special envoy's authority in international climate policy, leading to tensions with the newly appointed MoEF minister. Consequently, the office was disbanded after just two years[8] [9].

[8] Siddarth Varadarajan, "*Shyam Saran's exit suggests changed policy climate*," *The Hindu*, February 19, 2010, https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/columns/siddharth-varadarajan/Shyam-Saranrsquos-exit-suggests-changed-policy-climate/article16816663.ece

[9] Nitin Sethi, "*Environment Ministry Writes to Plan Panel, Asks It to Rework Climate Change Chapter," Times of India*, 2012.

During this phase, sectoral ministries also began addressing climate change. For the missions outlined in the NAPCC, respective nodal ministries had to acquire expertise in climate-related matters and appoint personnel to oversee the tasks. The NAPCC comprises of eight missions, which include: the National Solar Mission (NSM), National Mission for a Green India (GIM), National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency (NMEE), Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA), National Mission on Sustainable Habitat (NMSH), National Water Mission (NWM), National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE), and National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change (NMSKCC). Initial efforts were primarily focused on creating mission documents. The specific approaches to mission development varied among ministries. While most ministries relied on internal staff, some missions received input from the special envoy's office. Despite being initiated as a result of global negotiation pressures, the NAPCC facilitated connections between climate change and domestic sectoral concerns. This led to the emergence of crucial institutional spaces that played a pivotal role in integrating climate change into various aspects of India's policies. Some missions emphasized this integration more than others.

The leadership of Jairam Ramesh brought about a notable shift towards focusing on domestic climate policy. One of the key initiatives was the establishment of a comprehensive science information infrastructure, known as the Indian Network on Climate Change Assessment (INCCA), consisting of 127 institutions with a mission to function like an "Indian IPCC." INCCA's primary objectives included researching consequences due to climatic aberrations, creating greenhouse gas records, and creating a framework to manage various investigatory efforts that were previously fragmented. INCCA's significant achievement was the production of a report that evaluated the consequences of climatic changes on critical sectors of the Indian economy in various climate-sensitive zones by the 2030s. This report examined the impact on areas such as agriculture, water resources, natural ecosystems, biodiversity, and public health in regions like the Himalayas, the Western Ghats, coastal areas, and the northeast. Another approach involved strengthening the involvement of scientific organizations in addressing climate challenges. For example, the Indian Space Research Organisation was encouraged to utilize satellite technologies for monitoring purposes, while the Indian Council

of Forestry Research and Education was tapped for its extensive expertise in forest-related research.

Over time, Jairam Ramesh became increasingly involved in shaping India's international stance on issues related to global climate change, which led to conflicts with established climate envoys in India [10]. He sought to position India as an active participant in climate dialogues, advocating for a "yes, but" approach that emphasized prerequisites for reaching agreements [11]. He also proposed a shift toward a "per capita plus" strategy[12]. However, this perspective clashed with the prevailing sentiment in Indian climate politics upheld by experienced diplomats and influential civil society organisations. These stakeholders believed that climate policy in India at the domestic level should have minimal connections to the international course[13]. These differences are significant in the context of institutionalizing climate governance in India. Whether climate policy aims to integrate climate concerns into its domestic policy or primarily serves as a signal of international credibility while safeguarding domestic interests has implications for the need for institutional changes.

In summary, the initial stages of Indian climate policy lacked adequate strategic planning and policy design. The creation of the PMCCC and the Special Envoy's Office sought to fulfil this role. The PMCCC mainly served as a conduit for multiple perspectives, while the Special Envoy's Office, leveraging the PMO's authority, played a significant role in convening and coordinating efforts. However, both institutions did not fully function as a platform for strategic planning or substantially improved research capabilities. During the period from 2007 to 2009, there was a proliferation of institutions in a restricted sense. Firstly, the number of personnel engaged remained relatively small, often

[10] Chandrashekar Dasgupta, "Raising the heat on climate change," *The Business Standard*, July 7, 2014. https://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/chandrashekhar-dasgupta-raising-the-heat-on-climate-change-114070701144_1.html

[11] Jairam Ramesh, "The Two Cultures Revisited: The Environment-Development Debate in India." *Economic & Political Weekly*, (2010): 13-16.

[12] Dipankar De Sarkar, Slated at home, Jairam Ramesh is praised by US, Britain. *Hindustan Times*, October 20, 2009. https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi/slated-at-home-jairam-ramesh-is-praised-by-us-britain/story-mQSl8NXSInszDFLxlv59PP.html

[13] Anil Agarwal, and Sunita Narain, *Global warming in an unequal world: a case of environmental colonialism*, (Routledge 2011). https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203153284.

involving the integration of climate change responsibilities into existing roles. Secondly, technical expertise was incorporated informally through interactions with researchers and by forming working groups. Thirdly, because this expansion of institutions occurred solely within the government and did not result in structured processes for consulting with a diverse range of stakeholders, these institutions had limited effectiveness in disseminating climate concerns more broadly. Ultimately, the non-uniformity of this institutional framework reflected the ongoing debate regarding India's international climate stance, spanning the spectrum from deep integration of climate issues to a mere signal of intent to do so. During Jayaram Ramesh's tenure, which extended until July 2011, numerous new initiatives were launched. In addition to the NAPCC, efforts were made to establish State Action Plans on Climate Change for every Indian state. Moreover, climate governance once again became a focus of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) during this period. However, following Jayaram Ramesh's departure from the MoEF in mid-2011, there were few new national climate policies introduced in the first half of 2014, with no indications of substantial structural reforms or growth in climate policy-making. These variations in the background resulted in four distinct sets of changes within institutions during the early 21st century, leading to further modifications in the climate governance landscape.

The disbandment of the special envoy's office left a void in high-level collaboration and strategic planning. Efforts were made to improve knowledge generation and strategic planning to some extent. Meanwhile, the NAPCC missions made initial endeavors to strengthen institutional capacity within sectoral ministries, although these efforts were not extensive enough. Simultaneously, dedicated climate units were established at the state level to develop and implement state-level climate plans. Strains persisted between the MoEF and the special envoy's office, particularly in the lead-up to the Copenhagen summit. The special envoy's office ceased operations in March 2010 due to escalating inter-institutional conflicts, impacting the government's coordination on climate policy. Diplomatic policy coordination at the international level reverted to an informal mechanism between the MEA and the MoEF, at times seeking advice from external consultants, notably retired civil servants.

Figure 1: Institutional arrangements for climate change policy in India (Adapted from Dubash end Joseph 2016)

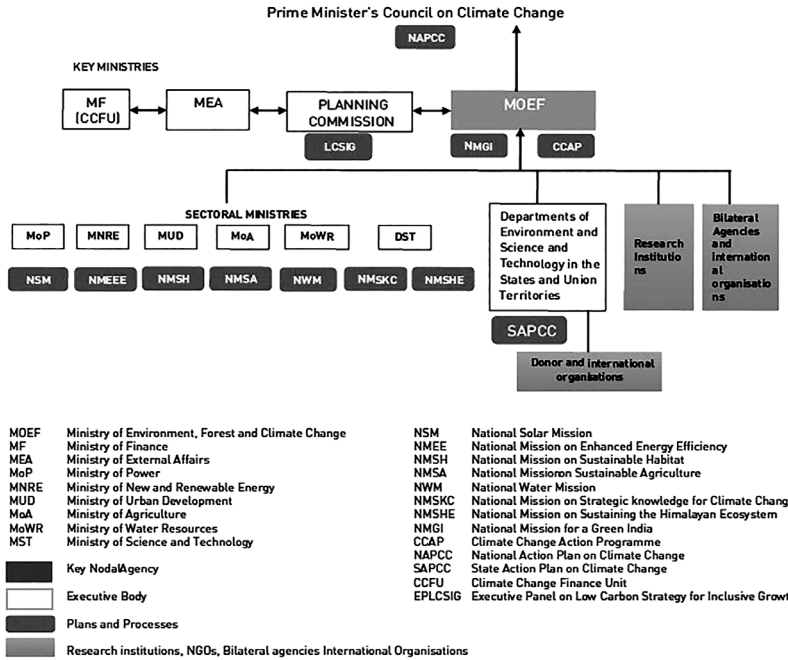

Figure 1 represents institutional arrangements in India's climate policy (source: Economic and Political Weekly)

Other Institutional Changes

Another group of institutional changes arose from different efforts to enhance the knowledge foundation and strategic insights for fulfilling the Copenhagen commitment. A prominent move in this regard was the creation of an Expert Group on Low Carbon Strategies for Inclusive Growth, commonly known as the "Expert Group" or "LCEG." This initiative was organized together by the MoEF and the Planning Commission. The establishment of the LCEG intended to offer a more holistic approach by integrating technical input into a broader conceptual framework. The Expert Group comprised 20 experts from both within and outside the government. However, the approach to technological feedback remained ad hoc, with individual participants relying on their respective institutions' existing resources. Limited

dedicated or focused new research was conducted, as reliance was primarily placed on existing research. Unfortunately, the Expert Group's progress was slower than anticipated, taking over four years to finalize its report instead of the expected nine months. Consequently, its impact on policy formulation during that period was negligible. Furthermore, the group operated concurrently but separately from numerous sectoral working groups that were drafting the Twelfth Five-Year Plan. This led to distinct committees for power planning and environmental planning, each functioning independently from the Expert Group. As time passed, and especially following a leadership shift within the MoEF in mid-2011, the MoEF's involvement with and support for the Expert Group dwindled. In fact, it eventually became critical of the group's work, thus limiting its effectiveness as a policymaking input. The Ministry of Finance (MoF) of the central government also became involved in climate discussions. Climate finance discussions, encompassing both the amount of funding and its allocation, were poised to become a focal point for negotiations and held a crucial position in India's negotiation strategy. As a response, the Climate Change Finance Unit (CCFU) was launched within the Ministry of Finance in 2011.

From its establishment, the CCFU primarily focused on international climate finance matters. This involved India's participation in talks related to the Green Climate Fund and the inclusion of a chapter on climate and sustainable development in the annual Economic Survey. Simultaneously, efforts to enhance India's capacity for project development and the utilization of climate finance within the country were centered around the MoEF and the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). However, there are coordination challenges that impede effective involvement with climate finance[14]. For instance, there is no negotiator organization streamlining the conversion of numerous schemes arising from state plans into financially sustainable climate finance projects. During this phase, the most significant challenge was moving from a broad national agenda to the practical planning and execution of specific missions. Under various nodal ministries, mission directorates were established, each led by a mission director with administrative and financial authority, along with other officers, specialists and advisors. The establishment

[14] Vyoma Jha, "The coordination of climate finance in India." 2014. Centre for Policy Research. https://cprindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/The-coordination-of climate-finance-in-India.pdf

of these missions led to an enlargement in staff within the official apparatus dedicated to tackling climate change. However, this increase is probably due to the reassignment of the prevailing staff rather than the recruitment of people with specialized expertise.

The Green India Mission is noteworthy for its initiatives to engage people and involve multiple levels of government. It established steering committees at the state level and integrated its implementation with existing forest institutions at the district and village levels. The monitoring mechanisms employed vary among missions, partly dependent on whether the mission's scope falls under central government jurisdiction or state governance. For instance, the Solar Mission is monitored by an executive committee presided over by the secretary of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy. The Green India Mission incorporates remote sensing and third-party monitoring. There was an increased integration of climate-related apprehensions within line ministries in this period. Nevertheless, a challenge remains to assert that the outcomes are sufficient, given the magnitude of the task.

The development and execution of State Action Plans on Climate Change have led to the establishment of an additional layer of institutions at the state level, signifying a substantial enlargement of the climate policy framework. Although these plans at the state level have substantially widened the possibility of endeavours to integrate climate concerns, they also exhibit systemic drawbacks as planned documents [15]. These weaknesses consist of the generation of extensive lists of potential implementation actions without corresponding strategic guidance, insufficient capacity-building for implementation, resulting reliance on external donors and consultants, a failure to encourage holistic thinking across departmental boundaries, a limited basis in climate impact science, minimal focus on the energy sector due to strategic considerations in climate negotiations, and generally, a lack of participatory processes. Regardless of these drawbacks, the state plans have initiated discussions at the state level and, in some instances, prompted greater positions from key state officials. In essence, the period after 2009 saw the strengthening of institutional infrastructure,

[15] Social Science Research Network. "From margins to mainstream? State climate change planning in India as a "Door opener" to a sustainable future." Accessed September 24, 2023. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2474518.

with increased capabilities introduced in central ministries like the Planning Commission and the Ministry of Finance, as well as in line ministries and state governments. While policy creation, execution, and management were central during this period, strategic planning remained an essential but relatively underemphasised task in practice.

Challenges and Limitations

The establishment of climate change institutions in India appears to have been disorganized and lacking alignment with the country's development-oriented climate policy approach. Historically, the strategy has involved launching institutions without a clear focus, often in reaction to international events. This approach has been mirrored by states, where some hurriedly set up climate-related units following federal directives to create state climate plans. However, these institutions have often been short-lived and unstable. For instance, the office of the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Climate Change, responsible for coordinating climate policy, was dissolved after just two years. Consequently, the responsibility for climate policy often falls on individuals rather than organizations. This method can lead to erratic engagement with the problem and result in a void if no strong and committed leader arises.

The capacity of individual government organizations to address climate change remains limited, reflecting a dual challenge. Firstly, the overall number of personnel dedicated to climate change within established institutions remains constrained, leading to an overwhelming workload. Overseeing the formulation and execution of the NAPCC and its missions, monitoring state-level climate policies, and participating in international discussions pose substantial demands for this small community. Secondly, the multifaceted temperament of the climate challenge demands that officials understand its connections to other sectors like energy, urbanization, agriculture, and more. Addressing these challenges involves increasing the absolute number of personnel and nurturing specialization within the civil service. Additionally, complementing the civil service with a group of specialists who possess both targeted expertise and institutional memory over time is essential. Establishing a sustainable and stable approach to enhance capacity is a necessity for successful climate institutions in India.

The process of policy design and establishment of institutions in India has generally lacked substantial chances for public contribution and

consultation. The creation of the NAPCC took place in a relatively limited manner, the LCEG did not involve discussions, and the missions exhibited varying levels of engagement with the public (with the Green India Mission being a notable exception). Additionally, state plans have predominantly been driven by bureaucratic processes. Some other emerging economies, such as South Africa and Brazil, have implemented mechanisms for public deliberation in their climate policy development[16]. India's institutions could draw lessons from these experiences by moving beyond viewing climate change solely as a technical challenge and instead involving the public in efforts to bring about the kind of developmental alteration emphasized in the NAPCC.

Conclusion

Despite having numerous institutional mechanisms, India lacks proper coordination among them when making decisions. Establishing a well-structured institutional framework is essential for the successful execution of climate policies in India. The continuity of these institutions is as crucial as their initial establishment, ensuring that the implementation process remains consistent over time. The mechanisms put in place should be designed to seamlessly integrate climate policies and actions across international, regional, and local levels, enabling broader and more inclusive benefits. The NAPCC is marred by various shortcomings, including the absence of well-defined targets, strategies, action plans, schedules, and budgets. It remains unclear how the information contained in the NAPCC and its missions will be effectively communicated to the general public. This requires an inclusive and transparent discussion to create actionable plans for addressing climate change. Sector-specific adaptation strategies at the state level within India hold the potential to bring about significant advancements in climate change adaptation and mitigation. To achieve this, a proactive approach is needed, focusing on tailoring policies and actions to address the unique challenges of specific regions rather than adopting a generalized national approach. Achieving meaningful outcomes from climate policy requires a balanced approach that combines both top-down and bottom-up strategies.

[16] Kathryn Hochstetler & Eduardo Viola, "Brazil and the politics of climate change: Beyond the global commons." *Environmental Politics*, *21*(5), 2012: 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2012.698884.

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INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE BODOS OR MECHES OF VALKA PARGANA (PRESENT KUMARGRAM BLOCK OF WEST BENGAL) AND ITS SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACT.

-Joylal Das[*]

Abstract

Kumargram Community Development Block (earlier Valka Pargana) is an administrative division of the Alipurduar district in the Indian state of West Bengal. The indigenous communities like the Rajbanshis, the Bodos (also called the Meches), the Ravas, and the Garos have been living in that remote tract since time immemorial. The introduction of the tea plantation and the resulting importation of Dravidian and Austric tribal labourers from other regions in the colonial period made the complex mosaic of demographics more diverse. Another milestone in cultural diversity was reached with the introduction of Christianity. Since its inception in Kumargram block with the conversion of Jagat Singh Basumata, Christianity has been a magnet that gradually draws other members of the Bodo community towards the light of truth, love, and justice propagated by the new religion. The analysis of the socio-cultural history of colonial Valka Pargana shows that since the Gospel was first preached to the Bodos, they have experienced positive change and development in many aspects, including social, cultural, and economic.

Keywords: *conversion, church, missionary, tribes, bathou.*

Introduction: The Magnetic Appeal of Christianity to the Bodos:

Due to its unwavering belief in the inherent goodness of every culture, every society, and every community, Christianity has always advocated for the adoption and celebration of every member's respective cultural norms and values. As a religious institution, the Christian churches have been helping the Bodos throughout their history for social and

[*] Dr. Joylal Das, is an Assistant Professor of English at Alipurduar University (Erstwhile Alipurduar College), West Bengal.

individual development in this remote region of Valka Pargana, at present Kumargram block. The genuine concern of the Christian missionaries for the people of this backward region is demonstrated by the numerous educational institutions established in the remote villages, the health centers to care for the sick and suffering, the vocational training centers to prepare the young generation to face the future with confidence, and the progressive socio-economic and social initiatives undertaken to improve the lot of the poor. "The socio-economic and developmental programmes undertaken to improve the lot of the poor people are proofs of the genuine concern of the church for the people of this vast and backward region"[1].

Since its inception in Kumargram block with the conversion of Jagat Singh Basumata, Christianity has been a magnet that gradually draws other members of the Bodo community towards the light of truth, love, and justice propagated by the new religion. The analysis of the socio-cultural history of colonial Valka Pargana shows that since the Gospel was first preached to the Bodos, they have experienced positive change and development in many aspects, including social, cultural, and economic. The traditional religion of the Bodos, *bathou*, was unable to forestall the need for modernization and progress that every tribe and community inevitably faces if it is to survive and thrive. This led many people to believe that Christianity was the answer to their deepest desires. It is also found that a lot of Bodo people had taken refuge in Aryan ideology and practice. Forsaking their traditional culture and religion of *bathou*, some even embraced Hinduism. Again, the Brahma cult was an effort to preserve tribal customs while adopting Hindu beliefs. Hinduism, *bathou*, and Brahma sects were not sufficient to quench the spiritual thirst, yearning, and desire for material advancement of the Bodo people of the earlier Kumargram block. Christianity offered them a chance to be a part of a global family. "Some of them sought out alternative ways of thinking about the universe, the meaning of life, and even religion as a result. Christianity was the perfect faith for them. The Bodos saw in Christianity a way to unite as a people without sacrificing their tribal identity"[2] .

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[1] Bimal Kanti Basumatary, "Influence of Christianity to the Bodos Society" . *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)* 9.3(2021)2285-2289. Web 5 June 2023.2288.

[2] *Ibid.*, 2287

Early History of Kumargram Block and Emergence of British Rule as Background for Christianity:

Kumargram block is an administrative division of the Alipurduar district in the Indian state of West Bengal. Gosaigaon Revenue Circle or Tehsil in Kokrajhar district in Assam to the east, Tufanganj II CD block in Cooch Behar district to the south, and Alipurduar II and Kalchini CD blocks to the west surround Kumargram block. The indigenous communities like the Rajbanshis, the Bodos, the Ravas, and the Garos formed the population of Kumargram block in the pre-colonial period, and even in the early colonial period. The establishment of tea plantations and the resulting importation of tribal labourers from other regions in the colonial period made the complex mosaic of demographics more diverse. Another milestone in cultural diversity was reached with the introduction of Christianity.

Hearsay and legends form the basis of the history of naming the place as Kumargram. Traditional hearsay mentions Hangsadev Singh Kongar, a *jotedar* and tax collector called *katham* on behalf of the Bhutan raj, as the source of the name Kumargram. The Bhutanese called this area Kungargram after Hangsadev Singh Kongar. Gradually, the name Kumargram evolved through linguistic changes. An alternative source of hearsay refutes this opinion. According to this hearsay, the naming of Kumargram relates to Kungar Deo, the God of the Meches[3] . This hearsay regarding the naming of Kumargram testifies to the high concentration of the Bodo people in Valka Pargana in the pre-colonial period.

The present Kumargram block came into existence as an administrative division of ancient Valka Pargana, which was surrounded by Kanchugaon forest in Assam to the east, Buxaduar to the west, Bhutan to the north, and Jorai in Cooch Behar to the south. Pargana was a previous administrative division of the Indian subcontinent during the Sultanate period, the Mughal period, and the British Raj. Valka, or Valuka, is named after a bear, as it is called *valuk* in Bengali. Deep forests and rivers covered this area, and wild animals like bears dominated the forest area and even, the human settlements[4]. The Rajbanshis, the Ravas, the Garos, and the

[3] Umesh Sharma, *Barater Swadhinata Sangrame Alipurduar*, (Kolkata: Deepshikha Prakashan, 2016), Print.353-354

[4] Lahiri Shantanu, "Kumargramer Itihas". Kar, Arabinda. Ed *Kirat Bhumi: Jalpaiguri Jila Sankalan Vol I*. (Jalpaiguri: Kiratbhumi), N.y.Print.(625-632).Print.625.

Meches lived there with agriculture as their main occupation. After the establishment of colonial rule, Valka Pargana came under British rule.

Ancient Valka Pargana forms a part of the ancient Kamrup kingdom, whose history is considered to be the history of Valka Pargana or present-day Kumargram Block. Pragjyotish, as mentioned in the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, and the *Srimadbhagwat Gita*, covers a large tract of present-day lower Assam and North Bengal. Hence Kamrup is identical with Pragjyotish. Sandhya (c. 1250–1270), a powerful king, rose to power, and formed a new kingdom that was known as Kamata, under which the Kumargram Block came. After the decline of the Kamata kingdom, this region became a part of Koch Kingdom. The allied force of Cooch Behar, and the British got defeated in the 1st Anglo-Bhutan War fought in 1772. Thus, the entire Dooars, including Kumargram Block, came under Bhutan. But in the 2nd Anglo-Bhutan War in 1864–65, Bhutan was defeated by the British, and the Treaty of Sinchula in 1865 ensured British rule in Dooars as well as in Kumargram block.

The establishment of tea gardens in Kumargram block in the colonial period heralded the commencement of trade and commerce, economic development, the evolution of the communication system, the introduction of Christianity and the resultant spread of education, and cultural assimilation in Kumargram Block. Newlands Tea Garden in Kumargram block was the first tea garden to be established in Alipurduar district. A Sterling Tea Company with its headquarters in London named Assam Dooars Tea Company Limited, established this garden in 1894. This same company established Kumargram Tea Garden in 1896. The Imperial Tea Company founded Jayanti Tea Garden. Raidak Tea Syndicate Limited Company, in collaboration with Jardan Skiner and Co., founded two tea estates at Raidak and Kartika[5]. The British tea planters were followed by the Christian missionaries in that region. In a way, the establishment of tea gardens formed fertile ground for the germination of Christianity.

The Bodos and their Traditional Religion:

S.K. Chatterji, referring to the Bodos, wrote, "The Bodos, who spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley and North Bengal as well as East Bengal, forming a solid block in North-eastern India, were

[5] Supam Biswas, "Cha Bagicha Shilpa O Alipuduar Jela". Debnnath, Sailen.ed. *Alipurduar Jela: Atit Theke Bartaman, (*Kolkata: Readers Service,2021), P.216.

the most important Indo Mongoloid people in Eastern India, and they form one of the main bases of the present day population of these tracts"[6]. Before the settlement of the Aryans in the Indian subcontinent, one group of Mangoloid people crossing the Burma border and the Brahmaputra basin built their habitation in present-day North Bengal and lower Assam. Another group of the same clan reached this same region via Tibet, Nepal, and Bhutan. These people are mentioned as Kirat in mythology and epics. "The Kamarupa people were predominantly Mongoloid in their physical features, largely composed of Mlechcha-Kirata populations outside the Varnashama mould[7]. They speak a language that belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family and are descended from Indo-Mongoloid ancestry. In the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, the Bodo language has been included as one of the recognized Indian languages.

The Bodos follow the religion of their ancestors, known as *bathou*, which is very ancient in origin. It has been passed down orally from one generation to the next without the aid of a priest or a canonical text. Unlike other cultures, the Bodos have never had an institutional worship place such as a temple or church. A *bathou* is a bamboo enclosure with a Sijou tree, Jatrashi, and Tulsi planted in the middle. Sijou, Tulsi, and Jatrasi will flourish in an environment with bathou. The God of the Bodo people is known as Bathou-Bwrai. Bathou-Bwrai, the highest God, cannot be seen by humans. The Sijou tree, representing God, is planted in the middle of the bathou, flanked on the right by the Tulsi plant, representing chastity, and on the left by the Jatrashi, representing knowledge and wisdom[8] .

Introduction of Christianity in Valka Pargana:

About the introduction of Christianity among the Bodos of Terai and Dooars, Hiracharan Narginari observes, "The Gladdening River of Divine Grace from the garden of God did not flow directly to the

[6] Munmi Baro, "An Analytical Study on Bathou Religious Folk Belief and Traditional Knowledge of the Bodos" *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research (JETIR)* 8.5(2021):28-43 Web 6 June 2023.qtd.30.

[7] Saikhom Ronel Singh, "A Study on The Socio-Political-Economic Cum Cultural Aspects of Ancient North East India Vis-À-Vis Bengal". *History Research Journal* 5.4(2019). 1197-1205. P. 1205.

[8] Basumatary Kanery, "Archetype of the Bathou Religion: An Analytical Study" *Language in India* 19.10(2019): 34-42. Web 6 June 2023.36.

land of the Meches. After flowing into Scotland, the River of Divine Grace flowed into Gaya in Bihar, from where it changed its direction towards the north and flowed up the hills of Darjeeling. A small tributary of the River of Divine Grace took a downward direction in 1870 from Darjeeling and flowed into the plains of Duars in the land of the Meches" [9]. Jagat Sing Basumata's conversion to Christianity and establishment of a church at Dhantali village in Kumargram block in 1904 was a milestone in the social, religious, and cultural history of colonial Kumargram block. Along with the colonisation of the Eastern Dooars, the Christian missionaries targeted the aboriginal tribes to spread their religion. Additionally, the missionaries took initiatives for the socio-cultural development of different backward tribes. This progressive initiative and preaching of human religion attracted the Meches or Bodos towards Christianity, and they converted themselves. This brought about a socio-cultural change through cultural assimilation and the spread of education.

The Church of Scotland took initiatives to spread Christianity in India, and William MacFarlane rendered the missionary work at Gaya, where the mission did not appear to be successful; rather, he found that some boys hailing from Darjeeling and residing at Gaya were more enthusiastic about the new religion. So he decided to leave for Darjeeling, and the mission at Gaya was given up. Mr. Bechtold and Mr. Beutel arrived in Kolkata in 1870 on behalf of the Church of Scotland in an attempt to preach Christianity. Then the trio went to Darjeeling, where they were encouraged to start their missionary work among the Bodo people of Terai and Dooars. After a few months, Bechtold remained alone in North Bengal, toured the Bodo-concentrated villages in North Bengal and lower Assam, and learned the Bodo language. He thought of opening missionary schools but left for home on account of illness. But no record of conversion to date is found [10].

Written accounts of the activities of the missionaries in North Bengal after Bechtold's departure are not found. However, Jagat Singh Basumata, the first member of the Bodo community, converted to

[9] H.C. Narginari, "A Brief History of the Mech Church(1870-1970)". *Eastern Dooars Duars Bodo Christain Mission: Centanary Souvenir 1904-2004.* (Eastern Duars Pastorate Sangha, 2004), P. 7.

[10] *Eastern Dooars Duars Bodo Christain Mission: Centanary Souvenir 1904-2004, (*Eastern Duars Pastorate Sangha. 2004), pp. 8-10

Christianity in 1896. Jagat Singh, trying in vain to get peace in Hindu holy places, met an American Baptist missionary in Jalpaiguri named Rev. James, and was impressed by his religious preaching enough to convert himself. Then he went to a church in Kalingpong to get Bible training, and was sent to Odlabari as a catechist.

Due to demographic change in Western Dooars and a number of socio-economic reasons, Jagat Singh's family, along with others, went eastward and settled at Dhantali village in Kumargram block. They established a church at Dhantali in 1904, and Jagat Singh was appointed the catechist. "In 1906, Kamakhyaguri church was established, and Nayan Sing Mochari was appointed as catechist. The same year, a church was established at Chokchoka, and Raja Singh Narginari became the first catechist... During the following years, two more mission stations were opened at Bhalka and Barobisha" [11]. With the establishment of churches and the preaching of Christianity, the number of converts increased in Kumargram Block. Forsaking their traditional religion, bathou, the Bodo people were attracted to Christianity.

"Rev. Macmicheal was stationed at Gorubathan. Formerly Duars was a part of the work supervised from Kalingpong, but when Rev. Duncan Macmicheal came in 1898, it became a separate division with headquarters at Garubathan. From Garubathan, Rev. Macmicheal used to go forth in long journeys among the tea planters, the coolies, and the Meches"[12]. At the initiative of Duncan Macmicheal, Christianity began to spread among the Austric and Dravidian tribes in the Western Dooars as well as Kumargram block. The reformative and evangelical activities of the Christian missionaries attracted these tribes, which had so far followed their traditional religion, Sarana. Thus, gradually, the tea belts of Kumargram block came under the sway of Christianity.

The Lasting Influence of Christianity on the Social and Cultural Life of the Bodos:

The Bodos imbibed a new and fresh life with the arrival of Christianity, with its global appeal and transformational potential to enhance and elevate every culture and language. Before the advent of Christianity,

[11] H.C. Narginari, "A Brief History of the Mech Church (1870-1970)". *Eastern Dooars Duars Bodo Christain Mission: Centenary Souvenir 1904-2004,* (Eastern Duars Pastorate Sangha. 2004), P.10

[12] Ibid.

the Bodos were rapidly losing their cultural distinctiveness and political influence. Sadly, many people no longer dressed in ways that reflected their rich cultural history. Many Bodos were losing their culture to Assamese and Bengali cultures. To hide their tribal origins, some Bodos took surnames that were not traditionally used by their people. This trend would have further harmed Bodo culture if the spread of Christianity had not intervened. It is true that the Bodo people experienced a rebirth after their conversion to Christianity. They were able to recognize their unique creativity and ethos thanks to the education they received from the missionaries. "The history of the Bodos would have been something different but for the Church that imparted education and made them realize their own worth. It can be rightly said that Christianity brought new life and vitality to the Bodo people"[13].

The introduction of Christianity to the Bodos of Kumargram block has had a significant socio-cultural impact on the community. Prior to the arrival of Christianity, the Bodos had their own indigenous religion centered on ancestor worship. The adoption of Christianity has led to changes in the way the community practices religion, social behaviour, and worldview. One major impact of Christianity has been the conversion of many Bodos to Christianity. Christianity has provided the Bodos with a new way of expressing their religious beliefs and fulfilling their spiritual needs. The Bodos have also given up their traditional religious practices. Christianity advocates for egalitarianism, gender equality, and democratic principles of governance, which conflict with the traditional hierarchical social structure of the Bodos. As a result, Christianity has led to the creation of a new class of educated elites who have emerged as spiritual leaders for the Bodos. The introduction of Christianity has also led to a cultural exchange between the Bodos and the wider Christian community. Overall, Christianity has had a significant impact on the traditional culture and practices of the Bodos in Kumargram block. It has brought about positive changes both in their social and in their religious lives. While the Bodos have benefited from the adoption of Christianity by gaining access to education and healthcare, they have also lost some aspects of their traditional culture.

[13] Bimal Kanti Basumatary, "Influence of Christianity to the Bodos Society" . *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)* 9.3(2021)2285-2289. Web 5 June 2023.2288.

Christianity and the Spread of Education:

Christian missionaries also made significant contributions to the fields of education and healthcare by founding several schools and providing medical facilities. Numerous Bodo intellectuals benefited from the education provided by these missionaries because of their dedication and selflessness.

Jitnal Narginari, a relative of Jagat Singh Basumata, was appointed Pastor of Eastern Duars, where he concentrated on reformative works like setting up schools and training teachers for these schools[14] . "The advent of Rev. Jitnal Narginari as a Pastor in the eastern Duars should be called a landmark event in the history of Eastern Duars churches. Under his powerful leadership more Bodos became Christians, and many more churches sprung up all over the area. By the time about 20 congregations and 13 Guild Mission Primary Schools had been set up, there were two bodies, viz., Eastern Duars Kirksession for the ministration of the churches and a regional Church Board for the ministration of the G.M.P. Schools and other church-connected social affairs"[15] .

The initiatives of Jitanal for spreading education resulted in the establishment of some G.M.P. schools and lower primary schools in Kumargram block. The names of the primary schools established at that time are given below, along with their years of establishment.

1. Kamakhyaguri Lower Primary School-1908.

2. Dhantali Lower Primary School-1911

3. Dobashree G.M.P. School -1918.

4. Kamakhyaguri G.M.P School- 1925.

Hindi was the medium of instruction in these schools; however, the medium of instruction was changed from Hindi to Bengali in the

[14] H.C. Narginari, "A Brief History of the Mech Church(1870-1970)" in *Eastern Dooars Duars Bodo Christain Mission: Centanary Souvenir 1904-2004,* (Eastern Duars Pastorate Sangha. 2004), P. 11

[15] *Eastern Dooars Duars Bodo Christain Mission: Centanary Souvenir 1904-2004 (E*astern Duars Pastorate Sangha. 2004) P. 16.

primary schools in 1939[16]. "In 1911, two more schools were opened, one at Mahakalguri and the other at Dhantali. The school at Mahakalguri remained a lower primary school up to 1924, and in 1925 it was raised to upper primary school… it was during the ministry of Rev. A.F. Williams that the school was raised to the position of a permanent Middle English School in 1931" [17]. This school at Mahakalguri became the light bearer of education in Alipurduar as well as Kumargram block. The students from all over Kumargram block came there after completing their primary education at the existing primary schools in the block. According to Rup Kumar Barman, "With the foundation of Mahakaguri Mission High School, the Meches of the Raidak basin had come into the direct influence of the modern world. In fact, Mahakalguri Mission High School has appeared as a center of cultural attainment for the Meches" [18].

Conclusion:

The advancement of humanity has traditionally been an integral aspect of Christian missionaries and churches. As it has done everywhere else, an awareness of human dignity and the love of neighbours as a commandment have prompted Christian missionaries to fight for the uplift of the Bodo people of earlier Valka Pargana and present Kumargram Block. The churches are responsible for the education of thousands of graduates, leaders, and teachers, among other professionals. The church has been the only driving force behind change and progression throughout history. According to Rup Kumar Barman, "Growth of Christianity in the Raidak basin (Kumargram block) has appeared as a marker of cultural change, more precisely as a tool for educational development of the people of the region. With their conversion to Christianity, they have discarded many evil practices and customs from their society. On the other hand, they have come into contact with the western knowledge system"[19].

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[16] *Eastern Dooars Duars Bodo Christain Mission: Centanary Souvenir 1904-2004.* Eastern Duars Pastorate Sangha. 2004.Print.38.

[17] H.C. Narginari, "A Brief History of the Mech Church(1870-1970)"In. *Eastern Dooars Duars Bodo Christain Mission: Centenary Souvenir 1904-2004,* (Eastern Duars Pastorate Sangha. 2004), P.11

[18] Rup Kumar, Barman, *The Raidak: A Transnational River from Bhutan to Bangladesh through India.* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2021), P. 49.

[19] *Ibid.*, P.68.

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MISSION OF THE CHURCH TODAY

-Reni K. Jacob[*]

Jesus himself became the good news by giving His life for the whole of humanity. The mission of the Church and Christians can never be anything other than the mission of Jesus Christ himself. The Church, as the body of Christ, cannot but continue and carry out on this earth, wherever it is located, the mission of Christ: bearing the cross, the same method of the crucifixion and the risen Christ. At the heart of Christian Mission, therefore, is the cross, a symbol of the inevitable suffering, sacrifice, struggle, love, and servanthood, which characterizes the foundation of the Church's mission in Christ's way (ref: Mark 10:45, Luke 9:23). Therefore, the mission of the church is to become a sign and sacrament of the kingdom of God, not just by proclaiming but by becoming and living the good news.

Church and Salvation

For a long time in the history of the church, there prevailed the idea that salvation meant almost exclusively the salvation of the soul. It actually means salvation from death, sin, and hell. Missionary reports would speak primarily of so many thousands of souls saved. The main missionary task was the preaching of the word of God and the dispensing of sacraments, and everything else the missionary did was for 'material welfare' and was considered as 'Pre-evangelization'.

The current understanding of salvation, on the other hand, sees salvation as the liberation of the whole human being: from sin, death, hell, and everything that dehumanizes him, including oppression, exploitation, injustice, and poverty. The process by which this is to be achieved is by integral evangelization, which is the preaching of the gospel in the context of man's social, economic, and political context and enabling him to participate meaningfully in the decisions that define his destiny.

As we engage in the process of integral evangelization, we come to experience the strength of the poor to evangelize the evangelizers. We imbibe the values of the Kingdom of God as we go on struggling with

[*] Reni K. Jacob is the former Director of World Vision India and International Justice Mission.

the poor. The poor really have the power to evangelize the evangelizers who take God into the midst of the poor in the remote villages without knowing the fact that God is already present there in solidarity with them. We only have to walk with them and help the people to recognize the living God for themselves.

It seems that the concept of salvation is understood and interpreted in a very narrow sense by many Christian communities, without taking into consideration the totality of it. The idea of salvation has a lot of societal implications in its wider sense and hence Dr. M. M. Thomas stated that 'Salvation is a humanization process.'

Salvation and Faith (Acts 16:30-31). Paul told the jailor, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved—you and your family.' Individual confession that Jesus is the Lord is the most important element of salvation.

Salvation and Social Responsibilities (Luke 19:1-9). The assurance of salvation is offered to Zacchaeus at the moment at which he decided to become upright in his attitude – his attitude towards his wealth and his brethren.

Social Dimension of Salvation (Luke 4:18-19). The Nazareth manifesto openly declares the mission of Jesus as bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, setting free the oppressed, and announcing the Lord's time to the people. If the mission of the Lord is this, then this also can be the mission of His followers. We are saved to continue this mission which the Lord has already inaugurated.

Individual Salvation and Institutional Transformation

Over the years, we have put individual salvation at the centre of the Gospel, leaving out the redemptive plan of God for all creation. All things were created in Christ and for Him. The Gospel message is a message of reconciliation of all things in heaven and earth, which includes not only us as individuals but the church, communities, nations, and creation! Over-emphasizing the individual, as important as this is in itself, results in an image of the church as a container for souls, rather than a living demonstration of the transformation that God intends for the whole of creation.

Jesus turned against the money changers as a group, not as individuals, and drove out not only those who 'sold' but also those who 'bought'

(Mark 11:15-19). In fact, he was questioning the whole system and was not simply acting against individual merchants. Immediately after that, 'the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them' (Matthew 21:14). Christian discipleship demands that the ministry of healing and the mission against institutions that perpetrate injustice go together.

We see Jesus in his engagements with people touching the wounded psyche of those in the margins, healing the sick, bringing those in the margins to the centre and make them heroes. What we usually ignore is that while healing the sick He engages in discourse with the people around, the oppressors and perpetrators and heal them too by reminding them of their responsibilities and the need to place the spirit of the law as prime importance.

In the present day, individual salvation and institutional transformation are very much dichotomized. It is important for us to see the individual's healing and transformation of the systems with equal importance. We need to see that a culture of salvation prevails in the church and society.

The Gospel message always integrates faith and obedience, and hence we need to ask ourselves, can we really believe the Gospel and not live it out? One of the biggest obstacles to sharing the Good News is the scandal that many who profess to believe show no evidence of living this belief out. The world then looks on and calls us hypocrites, and our message lacks authenticity and integrity. Theologian Karl Rahner said, "The number one cause of atheism is Christians. Those who proclaim God with their mouths and deny Him with their lifestyles is what an unbelieving world finds simply unbelievable." We need to remember that our calling is to transform the world by creating a counter-culture of life, against the powers of sin and death.

The following are excerpts from Prayer Focus - Micah network: "Up to now, we have almost entirely emphasized personal sin, with little notion of what John Paul II rightly called "structural sin" or "institutional evil."

There has been little recognition of the deep connection between the structures that people uncritically accept and the personal evil things they also do. The individual has usually received all the blame, while what Paul called the powers, the sovereignties, and the principalities (Romans 8:38, Colossians 2:15, Ephesians 3:10, 6:12) have gotten off scot-free for most of Christian history. We tend to demonize the

individual prostitute, but not the industry of pornography at many levels. We tend to hate the greedy person, but in fact, we idealize and try to be a part of the system that made them rich.

For example, people tend to support and even idealize almost all wars that their country wages. In fact, few things are more romanticized than war, except by those who suffer from them. At the same time, we rail against violence in the streets, the violence of our young people, and the violence on the news every night. We are slowly learning that we cannot have it both ways. If violence is a way to solve international problems, then it is a way to solve problems at home too. We can't say "it's bad here but it's good there." We know how to name individual sin and evil, but we do not know how to name corporate sin and evil. We have ended up with a very inconsistent morality, which few take seriously anymore or even know how to follow. That is why we need a consistent ethic of life. Personal sin and structural sin. (Adapted from Prayer focus - 11/03/13 Micah Network prayer@micahnetwork.org).

Salvation and Environment/Nature (Romans 8:21)

All creatures groan with pain, like the pain in childbirth, to be set free from their slavery to decay and to share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. The whole of creation is longing for a total transformation in the kingdom of God. We read in Mark 16:15, 'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.' Hence, salvation is for the whole world.

Theologians, mission leaders, and development practitioners from across India met at the outskirts of Chennai, Tamil Nadu, from 10 to 12 February 2014. This National Christian Leaders' Consultation was organized by EFICOR, World Vision India & EHA to discuss our mandate on Creation Care. Their declaration on creation care starts with confession statements and commitments; "We have destroyed forests, many species, contaminated water, earth and air – often irreversibly. We have served our selfish lifestyles with over-consumption, uncontrolled industrialization and rampant exploitation of natural resources. This has contributed to the current global environmental crisis that has affected the poor and vulnerable the hardest and put ourselves and future generations at risk. Therefore, we commit to:

• Bear witness to God's redemptive purpose for all creation. • Intercede before God for those most affected by environmental degradation and

climate change, and for those who cause this harm, acting with justice and mercy. • Restore and build just relationships among human beings and with the rest of creation. • Change our lifestyle to live sustainably, rejecting consumerism and reducing our carbon footprint. • Stand and act in solidarity with the churches across India in acting on their environmental commitments. • Join with individuals, agencies and People Movements to call on local, national, and global leaders to meet their responsibility to address climate change and environmental degradation. • Encourage the development of new, environmentally friendly, non-exploitative clean technologies and energy sources and to provide adequate support to enable poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups to use them effectively. • Develop and promote evangelical theological engagement on caring for creation as Mission; and take our role as part of the redemption of creation. • Encourage and work with local churches to engage in environmentally active outreach."

All development students would benefit greatly from first studying and reflecting on the letter written by Seattle, the Native American leader, to Franklin Pierce, 14th President of USA in 1852. When President Franklin Pierce wanted to buy land owned by Native Americans, Seattle replied, 'Can land be sold? How can you buy or sell the sky? She is our mother. The freshness of the air, the sparkle of the water, the shadow of the trees and the right of birds to make a nest on a tree, can that be sold? The chirping of the birds, humming of the insects and the air we commonly share, can the land be sold? The earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. We love the earth as a newborn loves its mother's heartbeat. The earth is precious to us. It is precious to you too. One thing we know, there is only one God, no man, red or white man, be apart, we are all brothers; we are all one tribe, the human tribe.' Reflection on this letter deepens the cosmic and spiritual dimension of our understanding of development.

Mission Development and Justice

God is the God of Justice, who seeks to establish justice in the world. With Abraham and Sarah, God began a community that was meant to demonstrate justice. When justice is denied to his people, He intervenes in history and restores justice, as seen in examples like the Exodus—Liberation of the Israelites from slavery. "For the Lord your God is God of Gods and Lord of Lords, the great God, the mighty and the terrible God. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing" (Deu.10:17-18 RSV).

Christian mission in our world today is understood as working for justice for all people. Peace in the whole world and the integrity of all creation are the revealed will and purpose of God in Christ (Francis Dayanada T. Ed).

Jesus emphatically announced the Kingdom of God. His message brought good news to the poor. The Kingdom of God is an inclusive society where widows, orphans, aliens, and those who were socially ostracized are full and central members. It was a call for a reversal of the social order of the day. Instead of respecting the powerful and the rich, the Kingdom of God called for upholding the rights of the marginalized. The idea of the kingdom as taught by Jesus was a critique of the powers and principalities of his day. God is King and Lord because he executes justice for widows, loves orphans, and gives food and clothing to refugees (Deut.10. 17, 18). The Kingdom of God will protect the weak and the powerless (Moses, Manohar: P. Ed.,).

Poverty is sin and injustice. Hence any effort to alleviate poverty should be understood as the mission entrusted to us by our Lord in liberating people from all forms of sin—poverty, injustice, and all dehumanizing social, economic, and cultural situations. Poverty is mainly caused by the evil that people do to each other, to themselves, and their environment. Efforts may be taken to find out the causes of poverty and the ways and means to tackle them in the context of the area of our work.

Development is a process of 're-peopling the de-peopled.' We should accept the worth and dignity of each individual and listen to them genuinely and sincerely. As Mother Theresa said, 'We may be short of funds but never of love.'

The majority of Indians are kept away from the mainstream of social, economic, and political life in the country. People should be given the right to make decisions pertaining to themselves and their community because change is effective only if it comes from within. The forces that cause and perpetuate poverty operate on global, national, local, and personal levels. Every local issue has to be understood in its national and global perspective. We have to think globally and act locally.

Development is a humanization process, seeking to create a new social order based on the pillars of human welfare and social justice. According to the UN Commission on Environment and Development, sustainable development is 'that which meets the needs of the present

without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' The development process, whatever the context, should consider the ecological and cultural dimensions with special focus on Dalits and women. People should ultimately own the development process with a cosmic vision that all are brothers and sisters and children of one God.

The Christian perspective on development suggested by the Christian Conference of Asia is that 'Development is participation in God's redemptive plan for mankind.' With the fall of man, he was alienated from God, others, nature, and himself. Hence restoration aims at bringing him back to the original position where man enjoys fellowship with God, others, and nature. He should be at peace with himself too.

The tendency to keep development processes secondary to 'spiritual activity' is not, in fact, biblical. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10.25-37), the lawyer raises the most spiritual question one can ever ask, 'what shall I do to inherit the kingdom of God?' The answer which Jesus affirms is 'Love God and love your neighbour.' If the question is spiritual, the answer cannot be otherwise. Hence we should understand that loving our neighbour is a spiritual activity.

There are three approaches to development in the context of evangelisation of the church today: They are -Development process as a medium of evangelisation, Development efforts as an expression of evangelisation and Development process and evangelisation are inseparable and complimentary.

The third approach to evangelisation is understood as not just proclamation but the actualization of a better life becoming the holistic good news. The mission of the church today is to witness the Lord by our own lifestyle, by becoming a sign and sacrament of the kingdom of God. As stated in Matthew 5.16, 'your light must shine before people so that they will see the good things you do and praise your father in heaven.' "To give only... spiritual content to God's action in man or to give only a social and physical dimension to God's salvation are both unbiblical heresies." Samuel Escobar.

Below is a resolution adopted by the Lausanne Covenant on Christian Social responsibility (http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lausanne-covenant.html):

"We affirm that God is both the Creator and Judge of all men. We, therefore, should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men from every kind of oppression. Because mankind is made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex, or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless, we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression, and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead."

Present Context in India

India is an economic superpower, with plans to go to Mars and to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. At the same time, we are the world capital of hunger and malnutrition. The Global Hunger Index ranked India in the 111th position out of 125 countries in 2023. The gap between rich and poor is widening day by day. In accordance with the Human Development Report 2021-22, the rank of India is 132nd, among 191 countries. This means that our courtyard is beautiful, but the backyard is stinking.

The greater the investment in infrastructure and industrial development, the greater the disparity between rich and poor. Disparities are also enormous among the different geographical regions, between social groups, between income groups, and between men and women. The present economic growth model leaves behind many, including children, women, and tribal populations. Though inclusion is the buzzword of the government, exclusion is the reality. The poverty gap in India is ever-widening, and disparity is what we see all around.

India is very progressive in having rights-based policies such as the Right to Information Act [RTI] 2005, Right to Education Act [RTE] 2009, etc. However, there are no proper budgetary provisions for these policies, nor the capacity to implement them. Rampant corruption, poor absorption capacity of states, and poor governance are major issues pushing development to the back seat.

We live in a world of injustice where the victims of injustice are the materially poor—those who have little or no control of economic resources and therefore also little or no control of the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Our commitment to the Kingdom of God leads us to care about the options for the poor. As we are aware of the economic and political structure and its implications, we can no longer limit our concern for the poor to aid and dole outs, but we have to come to grips with the structural obstacles that keep the poor in material poverty. The depth of our concern is measured by our willingness to confront these obstacles and bring about significant structural changes.

Empowering children and communities to enhance governance accountability and transparency at district, state, and national levels is the need of the hour. People should address the issues of corruption and poor governance by knowing their rights and entitlements and encouraging system activation.

In order to accomplish all of this, India should have development indicators to measure things such as stunting and wasting of children, quality education for all children, and quality of family life, instead of merely per capita income and GDP growth.

Ideas of justice need to be rooted in ethics. Our involvement in justice issues demands personal discernment on the concepts of justice and ethics. Evictions of slum dwellers and displacement of tribals from their homelands are taking place in the name of industrial growth. Many of these actions happen within the parameters of rules and government orders and are usually unethical since the rules are made by the rich and powerful. The tribal and the scheduled class community continue to support extremism due to injustices suffered by them over many generations. The unholy alliances between politicians, bureaucrats, and the private sector need to be broken. We need to consider our stand as a Church when it comes to issues like this, which have an ethical dimension.

Christian Dalits-Thrice Alienated

The Dalit Christians are thrice alienated in the society. The Government is not ready to treat them as a group eligible for the constitutional protections such as reservation enjoyed by their Hindu counterparts even though the problems faced by both of them are the same. The Hindu Dalits discriminate against them as they belong to a different religion and oppose their struggle for social justice. The upper-caste Christians also discriminate against them vehemently on the basis of caste, and hence they are thrice alienated by the government, society, and the Church.

Traditionally it is believed that the Church in Kerala was founded by St. Thomas. The first converts were Brahmins. Later, by the work of CMS Missionaries and Syrian Christians, a lot of so-called backward people embraced Christianity. Many of them were converted to Christianity with a hope to live in equality with Christians. But the Syrian Christians of Kerala consider the newly converted Christians as low castes. Their social contact with converted Christians is meager. The Syrian Christians consider themselves as those who belong to the upper castes. The Caste Christians are provided with separate centers of worship. The older generation seldom worships with them. The younger generation of the Syrian Christians has developed a more positive attitude so far as the caste Christians are concerned. Economic progress would perhaps bring about a change in the attitude to one another. Mainline churches have separate chapels for backward class Christians. There are a few churches like Salvation Army, Church of God-B Division, CMS Anglican Church, and a few independent churches, which have only backward class people as members.

Role of the Church

Despite the majority of the membership of the church consisting of the marginalized, it has been primarily serving the interest of the elite and the upper class through the educational, medical, and other institutions. The church generally reflects the culture and values of the dominant system. Unless a structural change in the life of the Indian Church will not follow, it will be impossible to play the role assigned by Jesus Christ to preach the good news to the poor, offer release to the captives, recovering the sight to the blind and enable liberation to the oppressed or Dalits. The Churches in India are caught in institutional concerns

though seem to pay lip service to Dalit issues. People's issues are left to special departments/agencies and availability of foreign funds.

Culturally, socially, and economically inclusiveness is still a dream though attainable. The concern of the people is to be included in this process as partners and not just as onlookers. The call to the church is to take up the challenge of poverty (dalitness) as an expression of love and solidarity with the Dalits. The church in India has even today not evolved a theory and practice to oppose the forces of injustice, feudal elements, casteism, gender inequality, and religious fundamentalism. The Churches in India must make use of the progressive ideas of liberation much more seriously and effectively (NCC Review .Nov 2006).

Instead of fighting for the rights and privileges of the Church by projecting itself as the microscopic minority, the church should respond to the larger problems of the poor and the downtrodden. The church needs to question the caste problems within itself and in society. The Church should be a credible voice to engage power centers to address inequities both nationally and globally, and to influence stakeholders, power centers, corporates, donors, state and national governments by advocating for the rights of the marginalized, to address the gap between the poor and the non-poor. It is imperative for the Church to mobilize collective voice and action, to address the long-standing issues of poverty, inequality, marginalization, and other impending issues such as drastic climate breakdown.

The Church can and should inspire and strengthen community-led movements to inform and influence the issues of hunger, malnutrition and childhood illnesses, education and child protection and participation at state and national levels. Such local level movements also need to be connected with national movements. The church should regain its original character of the church of the poor; symbols, theology, paradigms, and praxis ought to emerge making the church, the church of the poor in India.

Conclusion

According to Rev. Dr. E. C. John, former principal of UTC Bangalore, "Our experiences of working with people should ultimately lead us to the realization that seeking to provide bread for the poor and giving

the heavenly bread at the Lord's table are expressions of the same spirituality, which should not be held in separation."

The Gospel needs to be heard and seen. When we narrow our focus on the former, we reduce the Gospel to an "otherworld" dimension and lose sight of the here and now. Similarly, if we focus on the latter, we become social workers, but the transformational work of God is limited. Without the proclamation of Jesus as Lord, there is no integral Gospel, and without an integral Gospel, there is no integral mission.

As followers of Jesus and members of the church, we should live justly and seek justice. There is no option for non-involvement in this case. Our involvement should be a sign of God's salvation upon our lives and of our desire to empower people towards an understanding of His justice. This demands that we work not only with the victims of injustice but also with the persons responsible for such acts of injustice, to establish His kingdom marked with justice in this world. God's call is to establish righteousness where there is unrighteousness; love where there is hatred; unity where there is division; and peace where there is war.

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PERUSING LEFEBVRE'S SPATIAL TRIAD IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS

-J. Judith Gracia[*] &F. Shophet Peter Benedsingh[*]

Abstract

The concept of space is examined via the lenses of mathematics and geography. Over the past two decades, the term 'space' has garnered significant attention from a multitude of groups. In the realm of literature, space is perceived through a kaleidoscope of microscopic shards that create ordered patterns. The concept of space affords individuals to create their own identities and derive personal meaning in their lives. This article provides an academic analysis of the book of Psalms from the Bible, specifically the King James Version (KJV), from a spatial perspective with Henri Lefebvre's spatial triads. Spaces like Zion, the holy hill, the fortress, the presence of the Lord, courts, and houses are transformed architecturally into meaningful spaces. Lefebvre's theory stands as the bridge connecting real space and literary space.

Keywords: *Lefebvre's Spatial Triad, Perceived Space, Conceived Space, Lived Space, Book of Psalms, King David*

Henri Lefebvre proposed a structure known as a spatial triad to give the creation of space meaning. The first space in the spatial triad is the perceived space (espace percu); the second space is the representation space; and the last is the representational space (Lefevbre). Edward Soja has also written about the concept of space, wherein he says "perceived space" represents "the practical basis of the perception of the outside world in psychology's terms."1,2,3This perceived spatial practice is

[*] J. Judith Gracia, Tirunelveli is a research scholar.

[**] Dr. F. Shophet Peter Benedsingh is an Assistant Professor at St. John's College, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India.

[1] Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space (Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 40.

[2] "Perceived Space - Geography," n.d., https://geography.ruhosting.nl/geography/index.php?title=Perceived_space.

[3] CMS College Kottayam, "The Production of Space: Henri Lefebvre | Ani Merly Paul | Department of Sociology," November 27, 2020, 10:15–11:20, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BH-p9H43AiA.

similar to Edward Soja's "first space".[4] The first space of Soja, which is "the physical nature, the cosmos... perceived space, can be seen as measurable and quantifiable constraints." [4]

Humans are the producers and creators of space. In Psalms, the holy hill of Zion is a "perceived space". To an ordinary man, Zion is a hill or a place in Jerusalem, and it is a significant place to the people of Israel and the poets of Psalms. Lefebvre emphasizes that space is produced "either by nature or by society, either through their cooperation or through their conflicts." [5,6] Zion is none other than the city of David, as it is written in the second Samuel chapter five verse seven: "Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion; the same is the city of David." After conquering many cities, David felt compelled to build a temple or a place for God in his heart. But God planned to make his son Solomon build the temple for Him. In Psalm 2:6, the anonymous poet thirsts to justify his thoughts: "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." This poem is an anonymous one, and there is a clue that it must have been written by a person who knows God and King David. It begins with a rough tone and a rage of people against God, but God laughs at the behaviour of the people. The speaker is ambiguous while saying, "My king upon my holy hill." This "my" could refer to someone from the Israelites, or to God. Because the holy hill belongs to God and was set by King David, the poet exclaims that the speaker owns the place. The reference to Zion connects with people and shows the relation to space. Zion represents the dwelling place of the Lord, as it is said, "Sing praises to the LORD, which dwelleth in Zion; declare among the people his doings." [7]

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[4] "15 First, Second and Third: Exploring Soja's Thirdspace Theory in Relation to Everyday Arts and Culture for Young People Exploring Soja's Thirdspace Theory in Relation to Everyday Arts and Culture for Young People from Developing a Sense of Place: The Role of the Arts in Regenerating Communities on JSTOR," www.Jstor.Org, n.d., 244, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1453kbw.23.

[5] Christian Fuchs, "Henri Lefebvre's Theory of the Production of Space and the Critical Theory of Communication," Communication Theory 29, no. 2 (October 1, 2018): 129–50, https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qty025.

[6] Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space (Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 101.

[7] "OFFICIAL KING JAMES BIBLE ONLINE," n.d., sec. Psalms 9:11, http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/.

The next space mentioned in the book of Psalms is the holy hill. This is another term used for Zion. The evidence seen in Psalm 3:4 shows that Holy Hill and Zion are the same place. "I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah." From the superscription, it is said that this Psalm is by David. David has a rebellious son, Absalom, and he has his eyes on his father's kingdom and wants to take it for himself. He plans to kill his father, but David escapes from him and sings this poem. A common thought is that God listens and answers our silent prayers, and most people look to God in silence and tears. Here David cries to God with his voice, and it must be somewhat loud. He is confident that God has heard from the holy hill.

David begins with the question in Psalm 15:1, "LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?". In the previous Psalm 3, David says that God heard him out of His holy hill. Thus, it is true that the holy hill belongs to God, but the question "Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" makes the reader rethink and ponder this particular space. Again, Psalm 43:3 makes a reference to the holy hill: "O send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill and to thy tabernacles." The anonymous poet, who is among the unjust and wicked people, wants to be saved from them and cries out for help.

Yet again, the anonymous poet of Psalm 99:9 says, "Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy." He mentions the holy hill as the inhabitation of God. The word holy hill occurs thirty-eight times in the Book of Psalms. God resides on a holy hill, but he also dwells in the midst of praise, an abstract space, which Lefebvre refers to as the lived space. "But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel."[8]

Holy Hill is synonymously used as "holy hill of Zion" or "Mount Zion" as well. Gardner writes in his research that "the word holy hill of Zion appears one hundred and fifty-four times throughout the Bible.

[8] "OFFICIAL KING JAMES BIBLE ONLINE," n.d., sec. Psalms 22:3, http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/.

It is mentioned as a place and transcends to a substantial one for the people."[9] It is the most beautiful place on earth and a place where God's beauty shines. "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great king." [10]"Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined." [11]

In Psalm 137, the people remember it as one of their favorite places close to their hearts. Mount Zion is used not just as a place, but it is also mentioned as a stronghold where people's trust is compared to it and, what is more, as the dwelling place of God. "Sing praises to the LORD, which dwelleth in Zion: declare among the people his doings." [12] Mount Zion is an anchor to whom they trust, and the poet knows the actuality. "They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever."[13] The poet of the Song of Degrees writes it as the place chosen by God, "For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation", [14] and David compares Zion to the precious ointment to the dew which never gets dry "As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore."[15] Therefore, the space Zion is not just a place on earth, it is the most sacred space to the Israelites and others.

Sinai serves as an additional illustration of spatial practice or perceived space. Sinai is a mountain that occurs twice in Psalm 68, and it is not mentioned many times like Zion. This is also a sacred space to the Israelites. "A sacred place is a place of clarification (a focusing lens) where men and gods are transparent to one another."[16,17] Space

[9] Ryan S. Gardner, "A History of the Concepts of Zion and New Jerusalem in America from Early Colonialism to 1835 with a Comparison to the Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith," BYU ScholarsArchive, n.d., https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/4706/.

[10] Psalms 48:2, http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/.

[11] Psalms 50:2, http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/.

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[16] "Sacred Space | Encyclopedia.Com," n.d., https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/sacred-space.

[17] Ronald L. Grimes, "Jonathan Z. Smith's Theory of Ritual Space," Religion 29, no. 3 (July 1, 1999): 262, https://doi.org/10.1006/reli.1998.0162.

can be anywhere under the sky. It can be a building, mountain, tree, or anywhere where people gather to seek God and converse. Grimes explains the place as an "empty receptacle." [18] In Psalms 68:8 says about heavenly bodies, "The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel." David describes Mount Sinai as not a strong one before God, and he says that it moves in the presence of God. From this verse, one can imagine that God's presence is stronger than the mountains. Like Mount Zion, Sinai is a holy place because Moses and the Israelites felt the presence of God there. Sinai is the place where the Lord gave Moses His commandments, laws, statutes, and judgments. [19] On another occasion, David refers to the fact that the Lord is in Sinai, as "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place." [20]

A fortification serves as another illustrative instance of perceived space. Fortress means "fortified building or town." [21]To the poets in Psalms, God is their fortress, and they use it metaphorically in poems. David uses it three times in his Psalms, whereas two anonymous poets also use the physical space as a fortress. (Psalms, KJV). For instance, in Psalm 18 verse 2, the poet David says, "The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." The space fortress and high tower are related to a military base. Being in the army of King Saul, these places are familiar to David. David has been on a run from Saul, and he sings this poem. The background of the Psalm is in II Samuel 22:2. "And David spake unto the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul". Thus, David finds a space in God and refers to him as his fortress. The dictionary of the Bible refers to the fortress as a "fortified city, a symbol of self-reliance," a place of refuge, and a stronghold shelter.

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[18] Ibid p. 260

[19] Exodus 19 and 25, http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/.

[20] Psalms 68:17, http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/.

[21] "5316 Fortress - Dictionary of Bible Themes - Bible Gateway," n.d., http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/dictionary-of-bible-themes/5316-fortress.

David's other Psalm 31 mentions the fortress again in a similar context. "For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me." [22] David finds a comfortable and safe zone in God, calls him a shelter and a secret hiding place, and confesses that God is his fortress. In Psalm 144:2, the poet is thankful for God delivering him from all his foes. He thanks God for teaching him how to fight and use his hands at war. "My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me." David's trust is always in God, whom he adores at all times. Here he affirms his faith by saying that God is the fortress and the high tower. The space that he uses is close to his heart.

Not only David, but the other two poets also use fortress in the same context. They both symbolically use the fortress as protection. "Be thou my strong habitation, where unto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress."[23] and "I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust." [24] Thus, this perceived space belongs to an anonymous poet's everyday life and has an underlying meaning.

Other two spaces from Lefebvre's spatial triad are similar to Soja's secondspace and thirdspace. But Lefebvre's representation of space, which is the conceived space, espace conru, is the same as the perceived space that happens in our mind. [25] The conceived space found in Psalms is the presence of the Lord. This "presence" is experienced only by the poets in the Psalms. In Collin's dictionary, presence is "someone's presence in a place is the fact that they are or a presence is a person or creature that you cannot see, but that you are aware of." [26] Therefore, presence is nothing but a reality, though it is not seen physically; it is a kind of feeling.

[22] Psalms 31:2, http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/.
[23] Psalms 71:3, http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/.
[24] Psalms 91:2, http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/.
[25] CMS College Kottayam, "The Production of Space: Henri Lefebvre | Ani Merly Paul | Department of Sociology," November 27, 2020, 11:00–11:17, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BH-p9H43AiA.
[26] "PRESENCE Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary," in Collins Dictionaries, December 8, 2023, https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/presence.

The conceived space is created by humans from their experiences. It is like a map, blueprint, ideas, and mindmaps created in one's mind. In Psalm 9:3, David says, "When mine enemies are turned back, they shall fall and perish at thy presence." 'Thy presence', in this context, alludes to God's mighty and magnificent nature when David's adversaries have fled or withdrawn. The Lord's presence is fearful, but at the same time, it is full of joy. In Psalm 16:11, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." David in Psalm 68:8 shows that nature reveres before God and His presence: "The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God; even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel." Also, the anonymous poets describe how nature reacts to the presence of the Lord: "The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth" Psalm 97:5; also, he exclaims Psalm 114:7, "Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob" mentions the presence of God. Thus, these anonymous poets and David find peace in the presence of God, which is spiritual existence. The presence of God is unique because enemies perish, the earth shakes and trembles, the skies drop, the hills melt, and the mountain moves. This space is created in the poet's mind, and he attempts to compare it to nature. This space transcends the distance and links the space in the reader's mind. Spatial alienation is a concept of space experienced by David. He uses the space of the dove to escape from his troubles in Psalm 55:6, "And I said, Oh, that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest."

In the spatial triad, the third space is the representational space, which is a lived space (espace vecu). [27] "Everyday life forms representational spaces" explains Fuchs from Lefebvre's space.[28,29] Lived space is an

[27] Edward W. Soja, ThirdSpace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places (Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), 29.

[28] Christian Fuchs, "Henri Lefebvre's Theory of the Production of Space and the Critical Theory of Communication," Communication Theory 29, no. 2 (October 1, 2018): 136, https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qty025.

[29] Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space (Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 116.

actively participating space by the people. It is more of a common space occupied by people. "Lived space is the experience of a common man."[30]

The cherubim serves as an exemplary illustration of lived space. Asaph the Levite observes that Cherubim is a place for the Shepherd of Israel, who is the Lord: "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth." [31] In the same way, the anonymous poet in Psalm 91 gives a place to the Lord: "The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved." [32]

The court's space, too, serves as the best illustration of the lived space. According to the King James Version dictionary, the court:

in scripture, an enclosed part of the entrance into a palace or house. The tabernacle had one court; the temple had three. The first was the court of the Gentiles; the second was the court of Israel, in which the people worshiped; and the third was the court of the priests, where the priests and Levites exercised their ministry. Hence, places of public worship are called the courts of the Lord. [33]

David desires to reside in God's house, and he says in Psalm 65:4. that only then will he be satisfied: "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple." The importance of people's lived space and everyday practice is proven by mentioning these space terms, such as courts, houses, and temples. As sons of Korah are always in the Lord's temple, their longing increases, as he mentions in Psalm 84:2, "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh

[30] CMS College Kottayam, "The Production of Space: Henri Lefebvre | Ani Merly Paul | Department of Sociology," November 27, 2020, 11:18–11:28, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BH-p9H43AiA.

[31] Psalms 80:1, http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/.

[32] Psalms 91:1, http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/.

[33] "COURT - Definition from the KJV Dictionary," AV1611.com, n.d., https://av1611.com/kjbp/kjv-dictionary/court.html.

crieth out for the living God." By way of mentioning earlier in the KJV dictionary, the temple has three courts. These "courts" said the sons of Korah, are the second court where people worshipped.

In a similar vein, Psalm 84:10 also makes allusions to the courts of the Lord, employing the imagery of dwellings and tents. "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." The son of Korah humbles himself and makes himself low to the position of a doorkeeper. He doesn't feel holy enough to step inside the house of God. Even the anonymous poet of Psalm 96 knows the importance of the Lord's courts. These poets know the customs and practices of King Solomon's temple. As it is written in the Bible, Exodus 25:2, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering; of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering." This practice has become the culture of God's people, bringing offerings to his courts. Thus the anonymous poet of Psalms 96:8 says, "Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts." The same thought continues in Psalms 100:4 by an anonymous poet. He sings, "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name."

Yet again, the anonymous poet from Psalm 116:19 conveys that the people of Israel use the courts' space to praise the Lord. The poet gives a call to the entire Jerusalem, and there is no restriction on an individual. "In the courts of the LORD's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD." Following these contexts on courts and the house of the Lord, the "lived space" house is being mentioned in a different context. The anonymous poet mentions the house of two birds: a sparrow and a stork. Sparrow is mentioned in 102:7, "I watch, and I am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop" and "Yea, the sparrow hath found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God." [34] Birds and storks are mentioned in 104:17: "Where the birds make their nests, as for the stork, the fir trees are her house." In these

[34] Psalms 84:3, http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/.

two verses, the space "housetop", "nests", and "trees", are something that humans observe or see in everyday life.

The anonymous poet portrays a binary opposition between a barren woman and a mother. The poet of Psalm 113 verse 9 writes that the Lord provides and wishes a barren woman to have a house. "He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the LORD." The home brings joy to all living beings. This example shows that the house is the treasury. It is the space for storing the valuable needs of the speaker. David likes to offer his space entirely for love as he says in Psalm 8:7. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned."

The importance of space kept the poets moving forward for generations after generations, securing their identity even when they were captives and were on the run from enemies. They created their space not only for themselves but also had a place to have a rapport with their creators of heaven and earth. Zion, holy hill, fortress, and presence of the Lord showcase the poet's daily lives, historical richness, importance to their religion, and having a centre wherever they settle down.

The concept of space holds considerable importance in shaping the identity of every living creature. The utilization of spatial resources contributes to the construction of society. These spaces: the holy hill, the fortress, the presence of the Lord, courts, and houses, stand as the as the initator of life, the beacon of hope, and as the protector of the communities. Lives thrive and multiply when space takes its place of importance.

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BIBLE STUDY

PROPHETIC JUBILATION : FROM DRY BONES TO LIVING HOPE

*- Smriti Priyansha**

Introduction

"Those are just bones, they cannot come back to life", I said to my curious niece who once visited a Geological Museum and called me to share her excitement and fear. Her cracking voice was a sign of both disbelief and possible assumption as she questioned "what if the dinosaurs come back to life when I am at the museum?"

This conversation with a seven year old child has been stuck in my head for a long time now. It prompts the visionary experience of prophet Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones. In Ezekiel 37:3, the prophet is being questioned by God "Son of man (sic), can these bones live?" Standing in the midst of a valley where the surface is covered with the remains of people who were once alive and moving, now turned into dry bones, what could Ezekiel have said? The question of death, reality of life and a conscious faith must have taken over him. Perhaps, a hesitant cluelessness and overwhelming curiosity is all a human can experience when the question is against the reality of human life and authority of God.

Historical Context

In 598 BCE, the Babylonian army captured Jerusalem, taking its skilled citizens into exile (2 Kgs 24:1-7). In 586 BCE, during a rebellion, Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and its temple, deporting another group. Ezekiel, part of the first exiles, witnessed the peak of Israel's crisis—Judah's collapse, Jerusalem's ruin, and leaders' exile to Babylonia. The destruction of the temple and the removal of the House of David from kingship marked a significant historical change (2 Kings 25; Jeremiah 39–41, 52; Lamentations 1–5; 2 Chronicles 36). The exile's endurance surpassed relentless physical torment, challenging faith when Babylon loomed overwhelmingly formidable, and misery seemed

* Ms. Smriti Priyansha is Program Executive, Documentation and Research in the Communication department of National Council of Churches in India. She has completed her MTh studies in the Department of Christian Ministry: Pastoral Care and Counselling from Union Biblical Seminary, Pune. She belongs to the Methodist Church in India.

insurmountable and unyielding. The conquest and the subsequent displacement of people would have undoubtedly resulted in casualties, as well as hardships and suffering among the exiled population. This narrative depicts the harsh realities of war, conquest, and exile.

Immediate Context

Ezekiel 37 is a fulfilment of Ezekiel 36 as it continues the prophet's theme of restoration and renewal, reflecting a sequence of divine promises and their fulfilment. In Ezekiel 36, God pledges to restore the land of Israel, cleansing it from its defilement and bringing the people back to their homeland. This sets the stage for Ezekiel 37, where the prophet envisions a valley of dry bones symbolising the desolation of Israel. As Ezekiel prophesies, the bones come to life, representing the revitalization of the nation. The connection lies in the progression from the promise of physical restoration in Ezekiel 36 to the dramatic illustration of spiritual and national revival in Ezekiel 37 which can be broken down to three major cores.

1. Reconditioning

During the exile, Ezekiel likely experienced profound psycho-social distress. Displaced from his homeland and community, he grappled with a sense of displacement, loss, and cultural disconnection. The trauma of exile may have fueled a complex emotional state, marked by feelings of alienation and yearning for familiarity. Ezekiel's prophetic role, emerging amidst adversity, could have been both a source of purpose and an added burden, shaping his mental landscape. The socio-political upheaval and the challenge of conveying divine messages to a disoriented audience might have intensified his inner turmoil. The existential struggle in the face of exile possibly influenced Ezekiel's visions and messages oscillated between personal turmoil and spiritual conviction (2 Chronicles 36:20, Ezekiel 3:15, 9:9-10, 11:13b).

The vision of the valley of dry bones may have triggered Ezekiel's vivid recollection of witnessing the lifeless Israelite bodies scattered outside Jerusalem or strewn along the desert road, a haunting memory from their journey into exile. Ezekiel witnessing bones assemble evinces profound reconditioning. The skeletal metamorphosis became a metaphorical balm, mending the fissures of his soul, forging a narrative of restoration from the fragments of despair. This divine manifestation became a catalyst for emotional restoration, fostering a profound healing that echoed beyond the physical realm, shedding the weight of exile's traumas, and embracing a renewed faith in the possibility of restoration and resilience against the backdrop of past afflictions.

2. Reversal

The decomposition of the human body is a complex and natural process that occurs after death, involving the breakdown of tissues and organic matter. The process can be divided into several stages: fresh, putrefaction, decay, and skeletonization. In the fresh stage, immediately following death, the body undergoes changes. Cellular and enzymatic activity continue for a brief period, but without the support of a living organism, the body begins to deteriorate. Putrefaction follows bloating and the liquefaction of organs. Skeletonization is the final stage, characterised by the reduction of the body to bones. This scientific process of decomposition can take years with no prospect of reversal.

While the specific term might not be used in this biblical passage, the imagery of dry bones in a valley suggests a state of profound desolation and decay before divine intervention (Ezekiel 37:3). The usage of dry bones instead of corpses indicates a long-drawn-out affair, deliberately illustrating a scene of prolonged period of demise; symbolising the desolation of the people of Israel. Ezekiel 37: 7-8 describes the step-by-step restoration of a lifeless, dry bones body, a reversal of skeletonization. Initially, bones connect, sinews wrap, and flesh covers. However, they remain lifeless. The emphasis in these verses is on the miraculous reversal and rebuilding of the physical ruins rather than the symbolic emphasis on facelifting the nation. The narrative focuses on God's power to reverse extreme situations of despair. This is weaving the tapestry that although it was only 'bone to bone' with no breath, it was a significant transformation, flagging the possibility of growth and hopefulness; growth, however small, is still growth. Hope is an ever-maturing element especially in situations that seem utterly devoid of it.

3. Restoration

Then, when he prophesied, the breath came into them, so that they received life, and stood upright upon their feet. In Ezekiel 37:9 and Ezekiel 37:10 חוּר is rendered by some "wind," by others "spirit;" but neither of these is in conformity with what precedes it. חוּר does not mean anything else than the breath of life, which has indeed a substratum in the wind, perceptible to the senses, but it not identical with it. The wind itself brings no life into dead bodies. If, therefore, the dead bodies become living, receive life through the blowing of the חוּר into them, what enters into them by the blowing cannot be a symbol of the breath of life, but must be the breath of life itself - namely, that divine breath of life which pervades all nature, giving and sustaining the life of all creatures (cf. Psalm 104:29-30).

God's breath of life here holds profound significance in the restoration of the human spirit and our willingness to embrace life anew. This divine breath symbolises not just physical revitalization but a spiritual awakening—a rekindling of hope, purpose, and resilience. It is a metaphorical call to rise from despondency, echoing the notion that even in the direst circumstances, divine intervention can breathe life into our dormant aspirations. The imagery of rising as an army implies collective strength and purpose, highlighting the transformative power of unity and shared conviction. Embracing the breath of God becomes a choice, an act of faith and surrender to the divine will, signalling our readiness to participate in a higher calling. Moreover, the breath of life suggests an ongoing, dynamic process—a continuous renewal of our commitment to life, faith, and community. In essence, the importance lies not only in the restoration of life but in the conscious choice to embrace it with fervour, resilience, and a shared sense of purpose—an army of individuals united by the breath of God, breathing life into a world that is continually reborn through faith, hope, and collective determination.

Contextual Relevance/Implication

The account of bringing dry bones to life in Ezekiel's vision was an allusive representation of God's intention to recondition, reverse and restore. In the Gospel of John, we find the timeless truth encapsulated in these words: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). This was an authentic, symbolic and somatic manifestation of God's faithfulness towards the creation. The hope found in Ezekiel's vision and the hope of Jesus' incarnation converge in the truth that God is the source of life, restoration, and transformation. Moreover, the incarnation challenges us to see the divine in the ordinary, the sacred in the mundane. The birth of Jesus is the fulfilment of God's promise to breathe new life into our brokenness. The incarnation is God wrapped in human flesh, entering our valley of dry bones, and bringing about a transformation that surpasses all human understanding.

In the shadow of festive lights, wars persist, casting a sombre contrast to Christmas joy. Amidst celebrations, the haunting reality of conflict persists, stealing innocence and claiming young lives.As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, let us remember that our hope is not found in the material trappings of the season but in the Savior who came to recondition, reverse, restore and breathe life into our dry bones.

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