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EDITORIAL

War and Peace: Unveiling Struggles in the Pursuit of Justice and Equality

War and violence extend beyond mere confrontations; they represent a profound human experience with extensive emotional, psychological, and societal ramifications. In *War and Peace*, Leo Tolstoy illustrates that the effects of war surpass physical devastation, leaving enduring scars that impact individuals and entire communities. This reality is still apparent in contemporary conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war, the Israel-Palestine crisis, and ethnic violence in regions like Manipur. While political leaders may pursue diplomatic solutions, the ordinary population endures the most severe consequences of war's destructive force.

The Russia-Ukraine war, which escalated in 2022, has caused immense suffering. Millions of Ukrainians have been displaced, cities have been destroyed, and families torn apart. As of February 2024, the United Nations reports over 10,000 civilian deaths, with more than 17 million Ukrainians crossing into Poland by December 2023. The damage is not just physical; it affects mental health as well. Civilians, especially children, endure trauma from fear, loss, and instability, with an uncertain future ahead.

The Israel-Palestine conflict, deeply rooted in history and ideology, continues to devastate lives. Recent escalations have resulted in more than 40,000 deaths, with civilians suffering the most. In Gaza, airstrikes have destroyed homes, hospitals, and schools. In Israel, the constant threat of attacks creates an atmosphere of fear, making everyday activities dangerous. Once again, ordinary people are caught in the crossfire of geopolitical struggles, with families losing their homes and lives.

Similarly, ethnic violence, along with religious tensions, in Manipur, India, has forced thousands to flee and worsened the divide between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities. The conflict has caused serious economic problems, disrupted services, and distressed many families. This shows that the effects of violence go beyond immediate damage, leaving lasting consequences.

These ongoing conflicts show that the consequences of war and violence extend beyond physical devastation. While the loss of life and displacement are immediate, the long-term effects can be even more damaging. Survivors often suffer from trauma, including anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and depression. The destruction of homes, communities, and livelihoods leads to despair, with the consequences lasting for generations. The disruption of education, healthcare, and social services deepens this suffering, preventing individuals from rebuilding their lives.

The economic toll of war is crushing. Local economies collapse, jobs vanish, and inflation skyrockets. Basic goods become scarce, and civilians must struggle to survive increasingly hostile environments. Vulnerable groups, already marginalised, suffer the most due to their lack of resources to escape or find alternative means of survival.

Indian anthropologist Veena Das argues that violence and peace are not opposites but deeply intertwined. Violence often generates a desire for peace, but true peace cannot be imposed from above. It is a process of rebuilding relationships, redefining social structures, and striving for justice and inclusivity. Peace is not just the absence of conflict; it is a journey of healing, understanding, and transformation.

Philosophers Antonio Negri and Slavoj Žižek offer important perspectives on peace in the context of war. Negri argues that genuine peace transcends the mere cessation of conflict; it requires the establishment of equitable social relations liberated from capitalist systems and state power. For him, true peace demands a profound transformation—an overhaul of systems that perpetuate violence and exploitation, creating a world grounded in justice, equality, and collective governance.

Žižek challenges the notion that peace is merely the absence of war. He believes that true peace involves confronting systemic violence embedded in global capitalism and inequality. For him, peace is a revolutionary project—one that dismantles unjust structures and builds a world based on justice, equality, and solidarity.

Both Negri and Žižek emphasize that peace requires a rethinking of global relations. It is not a passive state but an active, ongoing process of struggle and transformation. True peace involves challenging ideologies that justify war and creating a world where violence is no longer a means of resolving conflicts.

As global tensions rise and domestic strife intensifies, it is crucial to remember that the true cost of war is felt most acutely by ordinary people. The suffering of aged parents, women, children, daily waged workers, people with disability and farmers must not be overlooked. True peace will only emerge when societies commit to a collective, transformative process that prioritizes justice, equality, and human dignity. Until then, the cycle of violence will continue, leaving scars that last long after the wars themselves have ended.

Rev. Dr. Abraham Mathew
Managing Editor

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THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT AND THE QUESTION OF TWO-STATE SOLUTION

- Sebastian N.*

Abstract:

The Israel - Palestine conflict, one of the longest conflicts in the modern history, has created major economic, political and security implications to the region and the entire world. It is getting more multifaceted with the opening of new warfronts at Iran and Lebanon. What we see today in the region is the latest episode of one of the longest and most destructive conflicts in the post war world. The conflict has different dimensions; Arab-Jewish conflict (ethnic), conflict between Muslims and Jews (religious), Israel-Palestine conflict (territorial), and Arab-Israel conflict (political). There have been numerous efforts from the international community and international organisations to find a solution, but not succeeded. However, such efforts have been successful to bring peace between Israel and Egypt and Israel and Jordan, two external parties in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Nevertheless, the root cause of all the conflicts in the region – the invasion of Palestinian territory by Israel – has remained unresolved. The issue has become much more complex, as Israel invaded more territories and built many Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. The evictions of Palestinians from East Jerusalem and the infringement of Israeli forces at al-Aqsa Mosque have sparked conflict between Israel and Palestine in 2021. Further, the conflict got a violent turn on 7 October 2023 by the Hamas' attack on Israel and subsequent Israeli retaliation that caused the death of over 1200 Israelis and approximately 43000 Palestinians till now.¹ Of late, the conflict spread to Lebanon, Syria, Yemen/Red Sea region and Iran. Such developments have made serious questions on the possibility of a Two-State solution for the Palestine/Israel Question.

Introduction

After a year-long massive attacks on Hamas and Gaza, Israel has now moved battleground to Lebanon. With the recent Israeli attack on the

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¹ BBC, Israel-Hezbollah Conflict in Maps: Where is Fighting Happening in Lebanon? *BBC News*, 17 October 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9vp7dg3ml1o>

Pager based communication system of Hezbollah,² the focus of the Israeli-Palestinian war has shifted to Hezbollah and Iran. In response to their support to Hamas and constant rocket and missile attacks on Israeli cities, Israel launched Pager attack on Hezbollah. Subsequently, Hezbollah started rocket attacks against Israel which led to opening a new warfront at Lebanon.

Hezbollah-Israel conflict is closely connected to other conflicts such as Israel-Palestine conflict and Israel-Iran conflict. During the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, a large number of Palestinians came to southern Lebanon as refugees. Later on, when the Palestine Liberation Organization was formed, these refugees became the frontline fighters of PLO. The 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the Jordanian crackdown of PLO in 1971 had increased the flow of Palestinian refugees to Lebanon. Soon, the Southern part of Lebanon became the foothold of the resistance of Palestinians.

The Israeli army invaded Lebanon for the first time in 1978 to crack down the resistance of Palestinian refugees. The brief invasion ended after two months with the retreat of Israeli forces. In 1982, Israel once again invaded Lebanon and advanced up-to Western part of Beirut, made heavy casualties on the Palestinian fighters and successfully evicted them from Lebanon. But this time, Israeli forces continued in Lebanon, which attracted intense resistance from Hezbollah often inflicting heavy casualties on the Israeli army. The Israeli army continued to fight with Hezbollah in Lebanon until they unilaterally withdrew from Lebanon in the year 2000.³

In the subsequent years, Hezbollah became Israel's most serious adversary in the Arab world. In July 2006, Hezbollah militants crossed Israel's borders and captured many Israeli soldiers which end up with major deals between Hezbollah and Israel, including the release of many Hezbollah fighters from Israel custody.⁴ After the retreat of

² In an unprecedented incident, Several Pagers used by Hezbollah armed fighters for internal communication have been detonated simultaneously, caused death of hundreds of people and injured thousands. Hezbollah accused the hands of Israel intelligence agency Mossad behind the blasts.

³ ICRC, "Israel/Lebanon/Hezbollah Conflict, Human Rights Council," Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Lebanon 2006, <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/israellebanon-hezbollah-conflict-2006>

⁴ ICRC, "Israel/Lebanon/Hezbollah Conflict, Human Rights Council,"

Israeli army from Lebanon, Hezbollah announced that their goal was to expel Israel from Palestine, the Golan Heights and the Sheba farms. Hezbollah has been engaging in aerial attacks on Israel since October and made it clear that they will continue to attack Israel until Israel military withdrew from Gaza.⁵ It is widely believed that Israel has succeeded in limiting Hamas's striking capacity significantly over last one year. After destroying the military capability of Hamas, Hezbollah has become the main target of Israel's war strategy. To escalate the conflict with Hezbollah, on October 1, 2024, Israeli military forces started ground operations in Lebanon.⁶

Of late, the conflict spread to Iran when Hamas and Hezbollah leaders were killed within the territory of Iran⁷ through a suspected Mossad operation. Iran is an arch enemy of Israel and a strong supporter of Hamas and Hezbollah in their fight against Israel. It is the only country in the region which has not yet recognised the 'right to exist' of Israel. In retaliation to Israel's violation of her sovereignty, Iran launched ballistic missiles to Israel. Israel retaliated through air raids in Iran. The subsequent developments indicate the chance of a larger regional war in West Asia.⁸

Understanding the Palestine Question

Palestine had been inhabited by both Arabs and Jews for centuries. The Geopolitical equations of the region had changed after the Roman invasion of Palestine in the first century AD. Romans had expelled Jews from Palestine. Thereafter, Christianity and later on Islam (7th century AD) spread in the region. The region was part of Ottoman Turkish Empire during 1516-1918.⁹

⁵ CFR, "Israel Expands Operations into Lebanon," Iran Retaliates, <https://cfr.org/learn/timeline/israeli-palestinian-conflict-timeline>, 2024.

⁶ BBC, "Israel-Hezbollah Conflict in Maps: Where is Fighting Happening in Lebanon?" *BBC News*, 17 October 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9vp7dg3ml1o>

⁷ CFR, "Israel Expands Operations into Lebanon, Iran Retaliates,"

⁸ Nada Garrett and Robert Barron, "What is Next: Israel Iran and Prospects for a Wider Middle East War," Washington: United States Institute for Peace, (October 30, 2024). <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/10/whats-next-israel-iran-and-prospects-wider-middle-east-war>

⁹ Moshe Mao'z, ed., *Studies in Palestine during the Ottoman Period* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 495.

The Jews who were expelled from Palestine during the Roman invasion in the first century AD had spread across the world. The anti-Jewish sentiments in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries turned violent by the 19th century and first half of 20th century which led to massacre/genocide and persecution of Jews. This is the context in which Zionism had emerged as an influential ideology in the Jewish diaspora. The Pamphlet *Der Judenstaat*, published by Theodor Herzl in 1896 played a crucial role in spreading nationalist sentiments among the Jews. The World Zionist Organisation (WZO) formed in 1897 had provided an institutional platform to the aspirations of Jews for a homeland (Pappe 2003). Sooner WZO emerged as the vanguard of the creation of a Jewish state and it could effectively mobilise public opinion worldwide for a separate state for Jews. The organisation could generate enough resources through the Jewish National Fund meant for the creation of a Jewish state. Primarily due to religious and cultural reasons, they desired to have the state in Palestine.¹⁰

As a political strategy, the world Zionist Organisation had encouraged massive Jewish migration to Palestine. The Jewish National Fund was used for land purchase in Palestine from the ‘absentee’ land lords of Ottoman origin who were the legal occupants of the land in Palestine, though they neither lived in this land nor engaged in any kind of agricultural activities.¹¹ The Palestinian farmers - predominantly Muslims and Christians – who were residing in the land as tenet farmers for generations did not have any legal ownership of this land.¹² By extensive purchase of land in Palestine through proper legal process, migrant Jews became the legitimate owners of this land. In short, the immigration of Jews to, and their permanent settlement in Palestine became legitimate and easier through the land deal between Jews and Ottoman landlords.

¹⁰ Gershon Shafir, “Zionism and Colonialism: A Comparative Approach,” in *The Israel/Palestine Question: Rewriting Histories*, ed. Ilan Pappé (London: Routledge, 2003), 86.

¹¹ Beshara B. Doumani, “Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine: Writing Palestinians into History”, in *The Israel/Palestine Question: Rewriting Histories*, ed. Ilan Pappé (London: Routledge, 2003), 19.

¹² Ted Swedenberg, “Role of Palestinian Peasantry in the Great Revolt (1936-39)”, in *The Israel/Palestine Question: Rewriting Histories*, ed. Ilan Pappé (London: Routledge, 2003), 136.

Large scale settlements of Jews in Palestine had developed tensions between them and the native Palestinian farmers. Many Palestinians had to move out from the land as the new Jew owners started taking over the possession of land. The pace of purchase of land and Jewish migration to Palestine was much faster in the first half of the 20th century. This led to frequent conflicts between the native Arabs and the migrant Jews. Consequently, Ottoman authorities put restrictions and later banned the sale of agriculture land to Jews in Palestine.¹³ It was too late as no such measures could have been sufficient to stop massive Jewish migration to the region. The migration of Jews has decisively changed the demography and the pattern of land ownership in Palestine. The major victims of this were the native Palestinians (both Muslims and Christians) who lost their home, land and livelihood.

With the collapse of Ottoman Empire in the First World War, the administration of Palestine had been transferred to the British under the Mandatory System of UN. This had intensified the efforts of the Jewish Diaspora to create a State for Jews in Palestine. Through the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the British Government had given their open support for the ‘project Jewish State’ in Palestine. The sympathy towards Jews and the massive campaigns organised by the Jewish lobby in the Western Europe and United States had helped the Jews to gather more and more support from international community towards their demand for a separate state.¹⁴ They were successful in mobilising support through the campaign ‘a land without a people for a people without a land’. The campaign could successfully neglect the very entity of Palestinians in this land to bring the Jewish interest to the forefront. The ferocious conflicts between the Palestinian farmers and the Jewish settlers had become the order of the day in the Mandatory Palestine during 1930s and 1940s, under British rule.¹⁵

¹³ Pamela Ann Smith, *Palestine and the Palestinians 1876-1983* (London: Croom Helm, 1994).

¹⁴ The growing Anti- Semitism in Europe, and its violent outburst in the form of genocide of Jews by Tzars and later by Nazis were strengthening the demand for a separate Jewish state

¹⁵ Shafir, Gershon, “Zionism and Colonialism” in *The Israel/Palestine Question: Rewriting Histories*, ed. Ilan Pappé (London: Routledge, 2003), 89.

Two-State Solution and the Birth of Israel

The Jews who had migrated to Palestine could effectively put their hold in the region. Besides, they had mobilised enough resources from the Jewish Diaspora to lay down strong foundation of a state. By the time the Second World War got over, the settler Jews in Palestine could set forth a strong demand for a separate state. Moreover, they were competent enough to establish a state on their own in Palestine, if the situation demands so. This was coincidence by the UN decision to terminate the ‘Mandatory System’ in Palestine. In the midst of complete anarchy due to the failure of British to handle the ongoing conflict between Arabs and Jews for their own states, in 1947, United Nations organisation passed a Resolution (Resolution 181) proposed the division of the Mandate into two on ethnic ground for the creation of two different states, one for the Palestinians and one for the Jews.¹⁶

The proposed Palestinian state was having 11,500 square kilometres or 42.88 percent of the land and the Jewish state was having 14,100 square kilometres, or 56.47 percent of the total land¹⁷ despite the fact that two by third of the population was Arabs. Besides, it also proposed to retain the city of Jerusalem as an international city under the administration of UN. The Palestinians did not accept the UN plan so as other Arab states. Together they opposed the formation of a Jewish state in the Arab land. Jews accepted the partition plan, though they were having serious reservations on the status of Jerusalem as international city because, to get a legitimate state was their first priority. Nevertheless, both the UN and the British miserably failed to implement the UN partition plan. In the midst of chaos, on 14 May 1948, Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion made a unilateral declaration on the Independence of Israel and the formation of Jewish state in Palestine.¹⁸

Subsequently, Arab states formed a military alliance and initiated military action against Israel. But, the unified forces of Arab States had a major setback in the war. Israel had captured more territories of the proposed Palestinian state as per the UN partition plan. Besides, it also

¹⁶ The Peel Commission constituted by the British government to inquire on the Arab-Jewish conflict during 1930s had already given such a recommendation

¹⁷ Lorenzo Kamel, “Framing the Partition Plan for Palestine” *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, Winter 2022. <https://www.thecairoreview.com/essays/figuring-the-partition-plan-for-palestine/>, 1.

¹⁸ Jeff Halper, *An Israeli in Palestine: Resisting Dispossession, Redeeming Israel* (London: Pluto, 2008), 68.

annexed West Jerusalem. The Eastern part of Jerusalem and the West Bank (part of Palestine state) were annexed by Jordan. The remaining part of the proposed Palestinian state, the Gaza strip, was annexed by Egypt. The major outcome of 1948 Arab-Israel war was that Israel expanded its territory beyond the UN plan by capturing more than 78% of Palestine. With the annexation of West Bank, Eastern Jerusalem and Gaza strip by the neighbouring Arab states, the proposed Palestinian state had vanished from the political map of the region.¹⁹ In the nutshell, while the Jews materialised their long pending dream of own state, the Palestinians became landless-stateless-homeless people. Around seven lakh Palestinians who have been expelled from the territories occupied by Israel became refugees permanently as they were never allowed to return to home.²⁰

Arab-Israel Peace Initiatives

This situation remained for the next two decades as there was hardly any attempt for a resolution from both sides. The indigenous resistance of Palestinians has got more organised nature when PLO was formed in 1964. The 1967 war between Arabs and Israel and its outcome had changed the region's geopolitics. In the war, Israel defeated Arab forces taken over the control of the entire territories assigned for the independent state of Palestine by the UN partition plan along with East Jerusalem. Furthermore, the Golan Heights and Sinai Peninsula were also captured by Israel from Jordan and Egypt respectively. Loss of territory has forced them to negotiate with Israel for peace, which weakened the Arab stands for a separate state for Palestinians. Though Egypt's military action in Sinai in 1973 slightly improved the bargaining power of Arabs, they could not challenge the military superiority of Israel in the region.

Nevertheless, the Israel-Arab wars of 1967 and 1973 have facilitated discussions, peace negotiations which led to signing of treaties between Arab countries and Israel. Egypt was the first Arab country that initiated

¹⁹ Avi Shlaim, "The Debate about 1947," in *The Israel/Palestine Question: Rewriting Histories*, ed. Ilan Pappé (London: Routledge, 2003), 181-2.

²⁰ Benny Morris, "The Causes and Character of the Arab Exodus from Palestine," in *The Israel/Palestine Question: Rewriting Histories*, ed. Ilan Pappé (London: Routledge, 2003), 198-9. Also see details in Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-1949* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1987)

open negotiations which culminated in Camp David Accords in 1978. Israel handed over Sinai Peninsula to Egypt and got permanent peace and diplomatic recognition in return. Other Arab states also followed Egypt and Saudi Arabia and the United States mediated between Israel and Arab states.

In search of Two States: Israel - Palestine peace process

Normalisation of relations between Israel and its Arab neighbours had a critical impact on Palestine as Arab countries have diluted their position on creation of Palestinian state. In this situation, Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) has emerged as the legitimate voice of the Palestinians. They continued resistance to Israel and most of such resistances were operated from Lebanon as their own territory - West Bank and Gaza - were under the control of Israeli military. PLO couldn't do much on its own through military resistance, even though they were highly motivated and ready to sacrifice for their cause, due to the military superiority of Israel, the extensive support that Israel got from the US and other western allies, and also the lack of sincere support from the Arab neighbours. This has forced the PLO to negotiate with Israel for peace that eventually led to Madrid Peace Process of 1991,²¹ where both parties have agreed on the principle of 'land for peace'. As a result of the following Oslo Peace process, the Palestinian Authority was formed for self-rule of Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza. However, the regions with the Palestinian Authority still remained under Israel's political and military control. Therefore, the chances of creation of an independent Palestine state remained a distant possibility.

The Questions of Jerusalem and the Right to Return of Refugees

The conflict over Jerusalem, an Arab majority city, remained the major hurdle for the peaceful settlement of the Palestine - Israel conflict through creation of two states. The original UN Plan to keep Jerusalem as international city was not accepted by both parties. Later, Israel captured the city through two subsequent wars, in 1948 and 1967.²²

²¹ This was the first major peace initiative in the about a century long conflict between Israel and Palestine

²² Lorenzo Kamel, "Framing the Partition Plan for Palestine," *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, Winter 2022. <https://www.thecaireview.com/essays/fragmenting-the-partition-plan-for-palestine/>

While Israel kept on pressing for Jerusalem as its capital, Palestinians also claimed Jerusalem as the capital of their state.

Another complex issue remain as hurdle for peace is the Right to Return of Palestinian refugees. Lakhs of Palestinians who had been expelled from their homeland and their next generations are still refugees. Arab countries in general and Palestine organisations in particular have been insisting on the Right to Return of Palestinians. Israel declared that they did not allow the return of Palestinian refugees because such a move would be a threat to their national security. Correspondingly, Israel has developed many Jewish settlements in the occupied territories in West Bank and East Jerusalem. To close down such settlements for facilitating the return of refugees is not an easy option for Israel as the ultra- rightists in the country fervidly oppose it.²³ Therefore, the return of Palestinian refugees remains a major hurdle for a just and peaceful solution of the conflict.

In the last three decades, the rightist and ultra-rightist forces have been dominating in the politics of Israel. Any peace initiative is strongly opposed by their parties who are leading/part of ruling coalition. Former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, an advocate of peaceful resolution of the conflict and the architect of Oslo Peace Process was assassinated in 1995 by the militant Jewish groups. Afterwards, the right-wing Likud party leader Benjamin Netanyahu became the Prime Minister of Israel and sabotaged the Oslo peace process. He called Oslo Accord 'a mortal threat to Israel'.²⁴ On the other side, extremist elements in Palestine led by Hamas became powerful in Gaza. Hamas opposed the Oslo Accord and dismissed PLO's recognition of Israel. Hamas called for armed struggle for the creation of Palestinian state²⁵. All these have brought a major setback for the search for a peaceful resolution of Israel-Palestine conflict since late 1990s.

²³ More than seven lakh Jews are there in such settlements. When Ariel Sharon closed 21 Jewish settlements in Gaza and brought back 9480 people to Israel in 2005, that attracted strong opposition of rightist groups of Israel.

²⁴ Anthony H. Cordesman, "The War in Gaza and the Death of Two-State Solution," *Centre for Strategic and International Studies*, 11 October 2023, <http://www.csis.org/analysis/war-gaza-and-death-two-state-solution>

²⁵ Shaul Mishal & Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence and Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 50.

Despite such oppositions from right wing and radical elements, Israel Prime Minister Yehud Barak and PLO leader Yasser Arafat continued peace negotiations. The talks held at Camp David in the year 2000 created much hope for a peaceful settlement. In the proposed final status agreement in Camp David, Yehud Barak agreed hand over a significant portion of the West Bank for the creation of a separate Palestinian state. He also promised part of East Jerusalem for building the capital of Palestinian state. However, Arafat rejected this offer, which disrupted one of the most advanced moves to the long search for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.²⁶ Though the Clinton plan of 2003 also made similar promises,²⁷ all these initiatives have ultimately failed to find a logical conclusion due to over radicalisation of politics of both sides.

The developments such as fall down of Oslo Peace process and Camp David Negotiations 2000, the access of political power by right wing parties and radical elements in Israel, the death of Yasser Arafat in 2005 and the victory of Hamas in the 2006 elections to Palestinian Authority have further complicated the situation in the region. Tensions emerged between the supporters of al-Fatah and Hamas which even moved to an open, violent internal conflict. Meantime, in 2005, Israel closed down the Jewish settlements in Gaza and removed forces. However, Israel's moves to create new Jewish settlements in West Bank and East Jerusalem attracted violent opposition from Hamas and other radical groups in Palestine.²⁸

As part one of the peace negotiations, Prime Minister Netanyahu put some harsh conditions before the Palestinians such as, accept Jerusalem as the Capital of Israel; No Defence force for Palestine state; and no

²⁶ Shlomo Ben-Ami, "The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Conundrum" *Currents*, University of California Los Angeles, Issue 1 (Fall 2019), <https://www.international.ucla.edu/israel/currents/article/205993>

²⁷ Clinton had proposed that the Palestinians receive 100 percent of the Gaza strip and between 94 and 96 percent of the West Bank. A three percent land swap, a safe passage linking Gaza to the West Bank, and the right to use a wide array of infrastructure assets inside Israel amounted in effect to a return of 100 percent of the occupied territories to the Palestinians. For details see, Shlomo Ben-Ami, "The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Conundrum" *Currents*, University of California Los Angeles, Issue 1 (Fall 2019), <https://www.international.ucla.edu/israel/currents/article/205993>

²⁸ According to UN, more than 700,000 Jews are living in the occupied territories of West Bank (UN 2023). <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/news-media/meeting-summary/2023/03/afternoon-human-rights-council-hears-current-israeli-plan-double>

Right to Return of refugees to Palestine. He emphasised that such conditions are indispensable for the security of Israel. However, in 2015, Israel completely retreated from peace negotiations and the Two-State solution. There is every indication that Israel now completely back from the idea of independent Palestinian state because of the pressure from ultra rightists.

New Conflicts Since 2021 and the Future of Two-State Solution

There existed a relative peace between Israel and Palestine during 2015-2020 period. In April 2021, Israeli Defence Forces entered into Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, cut the cables of sound system, claiming that it disturbs the speech of President *Reuven Rivlin*. The Army also stopped people assembling at the plaza near the Damascus Gate in East Jerusalem for prayer in the holy month. Creating larger provocations, Israeli forces entered into Al-Aqsa Mosque.²⁹ This caused big clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinians. Hamas retaliated by launching rockets to Israel and, in return, Israeli air forces engaged in massive air raids in Palestine. The unprecedented clashes between the Israeli Arabs³⁰ and the Jews was another important development connected to 2021 Hamas Israel conflict.

The latest episode in the conflict started on 7 October 2023 with the largest and deadliest Hamas attack ever on Israel. The attack of Hamas on Israel was decisive as it has broken the myth of 'mighty Israel' and its unbreakable defence system. In this unexpected move, which is the deadliest attack in Israel's history, Hamas cadres had encroached into Israeli territory and killed approximately 1,200 Israelis, mostly civilians. More than 200 people have been taken as hostages Hamas and majority of them are not alive now, as per media reports.³¹

Israel retaliation to Hamas in Gaza is also devastating which eventually spread to Hezbollah pockets in Lebanon and also in Iran. Israel launched

²⁹ Patrick Kingsley, "After Years of Quiet, Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Exploded. Why Now?" *New York Times*, 15 May 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/15/world/middleeast/israel-palestinian-gaza-war.html>

³⁰ see Nadim Raouhana and As'ad Ghanem "Arabs within Israel and citizens of that country, constitute 21% of the total population of Israel," *Pappe* (2003): 226; also see Laurence Louer, *To be an Arab in Israel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 89.

³¹ "Israel-Hezbollah Conflict in Maps: Where is Fighting Happening in Lebanon?" *BBC News*, 17 October 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9vp7dg3ml1o>

its counter attack in Gaza with a declared aim of the elimination of Hamas. The attacks continuous even after one year with heavy human fatalities in Gaza. Though Israel could kill many top leaders of Hamas in this strike and also could destroy their military capability significantly, it is yet to achieve the declared aim, i.e., to eliminate Hamas from Gaza. Despite many efforts by international community, a ceasefire still remains unmaterialised.

While Palestine leaders (from al-Fatah and Hamas), Arab countries and the international community have been pushing for the creation of Palestine as the only viable solution to the crisis, but Israel rejects any such plan. However, it is not possible for Israel to integrate the occupied Palestinian territories (West Bank and Gaza) with it because that would make the Arabs majority in Israel. The Jewish character of Israel would be in question as Jews become minority.³² This indicates that the occupied Palestinian territories would continue to remain as colony under Israel's political and military control.

Conclusion

There have been efforts from many states and international and regional organisations for a peaceful resolution of the conflict under discussion. The partition plan of 1947 of the UN was the first attempt. The ultimate solution to the problem is the creation of an independent state for the Palestinians. But the boundaries suggested in the UN partition plan is no more relevant, as the Arabs and Palestinians demand for pre-1967 boundaries, not pre-1948 boundaries, for the proposed Palestinian state. Their demand is now limited to the territories that Israel occupied in the 1967 war - West Bank, Gaza and Eastern Jerusalem - which they wanted to be part of the future Palestine state. It means, the Arab countries and Palestinians are ready to accept an Israel state with the entire territory that was allocated in the partition plan and also the territories that Israel captured in the 1948 war (includes Western Jerusalem). Altogether it constitutes 78% of the area of the British Mandate of Palestine, 22% more than the territory owed for the creation of Israel under the Partition Plan. Besides, Hamas and al-Fatah have already recognised Israel and accepted its right to exist. But Israel still argues that an independent Palestine is a threat to its national security and therefore not accept it.

³² Nadim Rouhana and Ghanem As'ad, "The Democratisation of a Traditional Minority in an Ethnic Democracy: The Palestinians in Israel," *The Israel/Palestine Question: Rewriting Histories*, ed. Ilan Pappé (London: Routledge, 2003), 227.

To conclude, the ultra-rightist forces are in power in Israel where the liberal, left and centrist groups and the Arab political parties are gradually declining. In this context, the right-wing Prime Ministers in Israel representing the ultra-nationalist Jewish groups like Naftali Bennet and Benjamin Netanyahu have brought major changes in the Israeli policy towards Palestinians. These leaders have already declared that they prefer a military solution. In this context, the crucial questions remain is whether the two-state solution that the international community still insists would be materialised through the creation of an independent Palestinian state?

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REDRAFTING GULF STATECRAFTS: NAVIGATING BETWEEN WAR AND PEACE

- Priya Ranjan Kumar*

Abstract

Strategically, the Gulf region has been significant for many reasons, such as being a reservoir of huge energy resources, preserving capabilities of penetrations, and being located in the centre of great power politics. Recently, the changing dynamics of regional compositions of economic and political conditions of states in the Gulf have led to the diversification in the orientations of the states' statecrafts in order to confront the emerging structure of the international political system. There exist tendencies to replace traditional economic-political-strategic alliances with the newly emerging economic powers like China, Russia, and India primarily because the traditional allies do not seem compatible with managing the ongoing crises in the region. The entry of Israel into the Gulf through the Abraham Accords with UAE and Bahrain reshaped the political structure of the "Middle Eastern" system at large and the Gulf region in particular. Against this backdrop, the paper attempts to examine the emerging capabilities of Gulf States and analyse how these actors interact with the emerging structure of the international system. Significantly, paper argued that redrafting of the statecraft of the Gulf States is aimed at the diversification of relationships in order to preserve and protect vital national interests of states both independently as well as collectively navigating between war and peace.

Key Words: Gulf Security, Statecraft, Middle East, Abraham Accords

Introduction

Historically, the "Gulf"¹ region has been a strategically important region from the day of the discovery of oil and other energy resources. In fact, this is one of the richest regions in terms of energy resources

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¹ Iran calls it Persian Gulf and Arab world call it Arabian Gulf. Author refers it "Gulf."

in the world.² Moreover, the region experienced the involvement of great powers, which led to the artificial creation of boundaries of sovereign states, particularly after the First and Second World Wars. These artificially created boundaries actually became faultlines,³ which in turn facilitated capabilities for regional as well as international interventions. Thereby, Gulf also became reservoir of capabilities of penetrations⁴ by extra-regional actors like European powers, the United States of America (USA) and many Asian powers. In fact, the complex characteristics of state formation and the divided process of nation-building led to the very weak foundation of the nation-state in the region,⁵ that facilitated the conditions for the involvement of regional as well as extra-regional actors from multiple fronts. Consequently, many conflicts based on ethnicity, culture, loyalty towards nation-state and so on came into existence.

Additionally, the region entered into a perennial crisis when the Islamic revolution⁶ took place in one of the oldest civilizations, Iran and put forward the other version of the Islamic worldview view, challenging the very foundation of the Islamic view of custodians of two holy places, Saudi Arabia, primarily on beliefs and religious interpretations of Islam. These diverging views led to both the widening and deepening of ongoing strife along the sectarian line, namely, the Shia and Sunni ethnic divisions. Consequently, there had been a fight for eight years of bloody War from 1980 to 1988 between Iran and Iraq sparked by a river water dispute. Practically, various forms of confrontations exist on the ethnic line in the Gulf, even in the present context. For instance, ethnic violence in Iraq, Yemen and Bahrain.⁷ Moreover, Gulf states, particularly the small states, also experienced existential threats in the forms of invasion and occupations of the part or whole sovereign

² Anthony H. Cordesman, "Iran, Oil, and the Strait of Hormuz," *Centre for Strategic and International Studies*, (2007):2, March 26, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/070326_iranoil_hormuz.pdf.

³ Priya Ranjan Kumar, "A Comprehensive Security Regime in the Gulf Region: Prospects and Challenges", *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 13, no. 4 (2019):483

⁴ Buzan Barry and Ole Weaver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 35-37.

⁵ Kumar "A Comprehensive Security Regime," 483.

⁶ Hamid Algar, *Roots of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, (New York: Islamic Publications International, 2001), 86.

⁷ Maarten Gehem, at. el., *Balancing on the Brink* (Hague: Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2014), 202 <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep12608.9>.

nation-state. The basic principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty of the nation-state had been violated in the region. One may recall the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in the early 1990s⁸ and Saudi incursion on the Yemeni border⁹ in the present context to substantiate the argument.

Nevertheless, the changing dynamics of regional compositions of economic conditions of states in the Gulf have led to the diversification in the orientations of the states' statecrafts in order to readjust itself to the new realities emerging out of the transforming regional and international "political structure."¹⁰ There exist tendencies to replace traditional economic-political-strategic alliances with the newly emerging economic powers like China, Russia and India. Evidently, the regional actors also face new challenges emerging from new realities and thereby searching for alternatives in order to mitigate the cost of loss incurred.

The entry of Israel into the Gulf with the Abraham Peace Accords with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain reshaped the political structure of the "Middle Eastern" (for India the region is named as West Asia) system at large and the Gulf region in particular. This paper attempts to examine the emerging capabilities of Gulf States and analyse how these actors interact with the emerging structure of regional as well as international systems. The paper also interrogates the methods and approaches of interaction while making an attempt to explore the possibility of whether the redrafting of statecrafts, particularly in economic, political and strategic dimensions, has the capabilities to create a conducive environment for peace or become instrumental in making the region more insecure, leading to war. In the end, the paper makes a concluding remark while arguing that every state of the Gulf formulates statecraft oriented towards conformity of the perceived vital national interests, interplaying between war and peace.

Statecraft in International Relations: Conceptual Understanding

It is pertinent to have conceptual clarity about the "statecraft" before analysing the dynamic change in the Gulf Statecraft (meaning here is

⁸ Colin Warbrick, "The Invasion of Kuwait by Iraq," *The International and Comparative Law* 40, no. 2, (1991): 483 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/759738>

⁹ May Darwich, "The Saudi Intervention in Yemen: Struggling for Status," *Insight Turkey* 20, no. 2, (2018): 126 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26390311>.

¹⁰ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1979), 78.

the statecraft of Gulf States). The definition, meaning, and purpose of statecraft are important components discussed in this section. The fundamental questions arise: why do States need Statecraft? What are the purposes of statecraft? Who are the agencies that execute statecraft? Is the statecraft static or dynamic? What are the dilemmas that statecraft faces? In fact, it's not possible to discuss all the dimensions of statecraft in the paper. However, an attempt has been made to explicate the very fundamentals of the term statecraft and its significance in international politics. The final section analysed the Gulf region while putting the central questions mentioned here for the discussion.

Conceptually, statecraft has been one of the most ambiguous and highly deliberated concepts in the discipline of international relations. Nevertheless, the genesis of the term statecraft can be found in the Indian ancient texts as well. The very famous Indian classical text, *Arthashastra*, “encyclopaedic work”¹¹ written by Kautilya (also known as Chanakya or Vishnu Gupta), is considered as one of “finest, fullest and most cogently reasoned Sanskrit treatise rendered as the study of politics, wealth and practical expediency, of ways of acquiring and maintaining power” on this branch of learning.”¹² Significantly, Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, describes *Arthashastra* as the “Science of polity”¹³ while recognising the insightful thoughts and strategies of Kautilya that led to the establishment of one of the great empires, the Mauryan Empire in ancient India, in his famous book *Discovery of India*.¹⁴

In fact, it is argued that “Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* is key for understanding the politico-strategic culture of modern India in the multipolar world system.”¹⁵ This concept of grand strategy is homologous to Kautilya’s synoptic idea of statecraft in which *Mandala*, the circle of states,

¹¹ Joseph Campbell, *Philosophies of India*, (Princeton: Princeton 1951), 36.

¹² George Modelski, “Kautilya: Foreign Policy and International System in the Ancient Hindu World,” *The American Political Science Review* 58, no. 3, (1964): 549.

¹³ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1946), 123.

¹⁴ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 122-127.

¹⁵ Michael Liebig, “Kautilya’s Arthashastra: A Classic Text of Statecraft and an Untapped Political Science Resource” (2014), https://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/17144/2/Heidelberg%20Papers_74_Liebig_revised.pdf, p.2

Saptanga,¹⁶ the seven elements of States, and *Sadgunya*,¹⁷ the six principles of foreign policy theories evidently cover the basic principles of state, governance, economy, law, foreign policy/diplomacy, military affairs and intelligence comprehensively.¹⁸ For Kautilya, statecraft, encompasses “three forms power at work: the ‘power of knowledge’; the ‘power of the treasury [economy] and the army’; and the ‘power of [the ruler’s personal] valor’”¹⁹ In fact, the main objective of statecraft is to convert *vijigishu*, the conqueror²⁰ into the *Chakravartin*²¹ “the divine world-emperor”²² (ruler of the world,-”world” meaning Indian subcontinent). The *Chakravartin* connotes the hegemonic State²³ in the modern nation-state system.

Clearly, “statecraft is an art”²⁴ oriented towards “the construction of strategies for securing the national interest in the international arena, as well as the executions of strategies through diplomats and diplomatic efforts.”²⁵ In other words, the purpose of statecraft is to promote and preserve the vital national interests of states through various mechanisms such as alliance, cooperation, agreements, trade and commerce and so on. Hans J. Morgenthau, in his classical book *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace on International Relations*, writes that the statecraft is oriented towards the “struggle for power and peace” through policies of the status quo, imperialism and

¹⁶ Kajari Kamal, *Kautilya’s Arthashastra: Strategic cultural roots of India’s Contemporary statecraft*, (London: Routledge, 2023).

¹⁷ Mc Clish, Mark. *The History of the Arthashastra: Sovereignty and Sacred Law in Ancient India*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

¹⁸ Michael Liebig and Saurabh Mishra (eds.). *The Arthashastra in a Transcultural Perspective*, (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2017).

¹⁹ Michael Liebig, “Statecraft and Intelligence Analysis in the Kautilya-Arthashastra”, *Journal of Defence Studies* 8, No. 4 (2014), 33.

²⁰ Subrata K. Mitra., and Michael Liebig, *Kautilya’s Arthashastra: An Intellectual Portrait-Classical Roots of Modern Politics in India*, (Germany: Nomos, 2016).

²¹ Liebig, “Statecraft and Intelligence Analysis,” 35.

²² Coomaraswamy K. Ananda, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government*, (New Heaven, 1942), 127-139.

²³ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Powers Politics*, (London: W.W Norton, 2014), 83.

²⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Powers Politics*, 550.

²⁵ Morton A. Kaplan, “An Introduction to the Strategy of Statecraft,” *World Politics* 4, no. 4, (1952): 548

prestige.²⁶ Moreover, for Adda Bozeman statecraft “stands for the sum total of human disposition, doctrines, policies, institutions, processes and operations that are designed to assure the governance, security, and survival of the a politically unified human group.”²⁷

Additionally, statecraft is also understood as the “art of conducting state affairs,” which includes elements related to a country’s policymaking processes, as well as the selection of means in support of generic national policy goals.”²⁸ Further, the nature and scope of statecraft is dynamic and not static. It reconfigures itself in accordance with the emerging new realities and also encompasses various issues emanating from changing national and international politico-economic-strategic shaping. In fact, statecraft is not only oriented towards external affairs,²⁹ but it also provides the fundamental principles for governing domestic affairs and enhancing the internal capabilities of states in multidimensional aspects. Briefly, the statecraft of a state is “essentially an exercise in the choice of ends and means on the part of a nation-state in an international settings.”³⁰ Thereby, one can locate statecraft where “agents and structure” or “parts and whole” or “actor and system” interact in international relations.³¹ In another words, “statecraft is where structure and agency interact in international relations.”³² The policy orientations of statecraft are modified according to the demands of time and context. For instance, the policies for the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons by the Permanent Members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC: P-5), in reality, intend to establish a monopoly over nuclear technology and weapons. The main intentions of P-5 may be observed by their actions and policy

²⁶ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations the struggle for Power and Peace*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), 13-58.

²⁷ Bozeman Adda, *Strategic Intelligence & Statecraft*, (Washington: Brassey's, 1982), 1.

²⁸ Jennifer E. Jordan and et al., “Statecraft in U.S.-Russia Relations: Meaning, Dilemmas, and Significance,” *International Trends* 19, no. 1, (2021): 5.

²⁹ Jennifer E. Jordan and et al., “Statecraft in U.S.-Russia Relations: Meaning, Dilemmas, and Significance,” 6.

³⁰ Jayananuja Bandopadhyay, *The Making of India's Foreign Policy*, (New Delhi: Allied Publishers PVT. Limited, 2003), 1.

³¹ Alexander E. Wendt, “The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory,” *International Organization*, 41, no. 3, (1987): 335-36 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2706749>.

³² Wendt, “Statecraft in U.S.-Russia Relations,” 6.

formulations toward the prevention of nuclear weapons Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).³³

Moreover, dynamism in statecraft reveals the prominence of different components of states' capabilities. Prominent scholar of structural realist, Kenneth N. Waltz would say that ensuring survival in the international system is the most important objective of statecraft of sovereign states. He argues that "the first concern of state" in the international system is to "maintain their position in the same."³⁴ For small states, maintaining sovereign status in the international system occupies a prominent position in the statecraft. For instance, small kingdoms in the Gulf region design statecraft to ensure survival. The signing of security agreements and forming military alliances by the small Gulf States with the USA³⁵ and other powers after the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait validate the argument. Significantly, combining all of these factors, the widening gap among GCC, the increasing threat perception emanating from Iranian hegemonic statecraft, and the decreasing strategic depth of the US in the Gulf led to the quest for alternative security providers by Kingdoms. Practically, the Abraham Peace Accords are the culmination of the changing security and political environment of the region. While Diversifying engagements distancing from the Western and US-led framework of dealing with the Middle East, Gulf powerful actors Saudi Arabia and Iran seem to be redrafting statecraft to "capture the joint gains"³⁶ through transcending the regional confrontation and "prevent common losses"³⁷ and made an attempt to normalize the relationship brokered by Beijing on 10 March 2023.³⁸

³³ "Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)," United Nations, <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/ctbt/>.

³⁴ Waltz, *Theories of International Politics*, 126.

³⁵ Mohm Naseem Khan, "The US Policy Towards the Persian Gulf: Continuity and Change," *Strategic Analysis* 25, no. 2, (2001): 197-213.

³⁶ Charles W. Kegley and Gregory A. Raymond, "Normative Constraints on the Use of Force Short of War," *Journal of Peace Research* 23, no. 3, (1986): 213-227.

³⁷ Donald J. Puchala and Raymond F. Hopkins, "International Regimes: Lessons from inductive analysis," *International Organisation* 36, no. 2, (1982): 245-275.

³⁸ Talmiz Ahmad, "Saudi-Iranian 'normalisation,' new challenges emerge in West Asia," *The Hindu*, 15 March, 2023. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/in-saudi-iranian-normalisation-new-challenges-emerge-in-west-asia/article66619577.ece>

On the other hand, John Mearsheimer, an offensive realist, would argue that “survival mandates aggressive behaviour” for great powers “because they have to seek more power if they want to maximize their odds of survival.”³⁹ The aggressive behaviour of Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Gulf region substantiates the arguments of John Mearsheimer. The aggressive policies of Iran and Saudi Arabia towards the region are evident.⁴⁰ Further, “a state’s ultimate goal is to be the regional, continental and global hegemon in the system.”⁴¹ Chinese intensified policies towards Gulf crises seems oriented towards growing aspiration of playing a decisive role in the Gulf region.⁴² Briefly, the statecraft of regional actors in the Gulf is experiencing a dynamic change in various fields: economic, military, political, and security, and thus, it is engaging with emerging players in international politics.

Redrafting Gulf Statecraft: Navigating Between Peace and War

Historically, with rich resources,⁴³ the Gulf region also attracted external actors, which penetrated and established strong political, military and economic ties based on absolute gain calculations.⁴⁴ After decades of dethroning Saddam Hussein, the President of Iraq⁴⁵ Gulf region experienced American entanglement,⁴⁶ where attempts are being made by the US to reorient its policies. Strategically, the policy of the “indispensable nation,” the US,⁴⁷ is also understood as the American

³⁹ Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power*, 21.

⁴⁰ Dilip Hero, *Cold War in the Islamic World: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Struggle for Supremacy*. (New York: Harper Collins, 2018).

⁴¹ Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power*, 46.

⁴² Priya Ranjan Kumar, “The Converging Visions and Contrasting Strategies of India and China: Reflections on the Persian Gulf Region,” *Hemispheres Studies on Cultures and Societies*, no.35 (2020): 11.

⁴³ Joseph P. Riva et.al., “World Distribution of oil,” Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/science/petroleum/World-distribution-of-oil>

⁴⁴ Robert Powell, “Absolute and Relative Gains in International Relations Theory,” *The American Political Science Review* 85, no. 4, (1991), 1303 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1963947.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Daniel Lieberfeld, “Theories of Conflict and the Iraq War,” *International Journal of Peace Studies* 10, no.2, (2005): 1-21, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41852927>

⁴⁶ Augustus Richard Norton, “Making War, Making Peace: The Middle East Entangles America,” *Current History* 103, no. 669, (2004):3-7.

⁴⁷ Heather Neilson, “Big Words: Issues in American Self-Representation,” *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 17, no. 1, (1998): 3-21.

retrenchment⁴⁸ in the given regional strategic conditions. In fact, the US policy was purposefully designed with the objective of becoming more powerful through “offshore balancing.”⁴⁹ Perceptively, it is argued that the US should do less in the Middle East and more to confront a rising China.⁵⁰ Currently, practically, the US’s declining legitimacy and dwindling political engagement based on commitment in the Gulf region are turbulent one⁵¹ and have led to the redrafting of policies of Gulf States in order to preserve and promote vital objectives.

Pragmatically, “Gulf leaders worry about the credibility of American commitment to them, particularly given the fate of the Shah of Iran, and want constant reassurance.”⁵² Subsequently, Gulf States drew the statecraft “omnibalancing”⁵³ on multidimensional aspects, namely, economic, security and political. In other words, Gulf States began hedging⁵⁴ against the backdrop of the U.S. disengaging strategies in the region. The GCC states, for their part, see emerging powers as their economic future, even as they continue to rely on the United States and other Western powers on matters related to security and defense.⁵⁵ However, the strategic hedging option is being adopted by the extra-regional powers to advance vital interests while keeping the status quo intact.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ Albert B. Wolf, “Strategies of Retrenchment: Rethinking America’s Commitments to the Middle East,” *Comparative Strategy* 39, no. 1 (2020): 94-100.

⁴⁹ Christopher Layne, “From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America’s Future Grand Strategy,” *International Security* 22, no. 1, (1997): 86-124.

⁵⁰ Dalia Dassa Kaye, “America’s Role in a Post- American Middle East,” *The Washington Quarterly* 45, no. 1, (2022): 7-24.

⁵¹ Albert B. Wolf, “Strategies of Retrenchment: Rethinking America’s Commitments to the Middle East,” *Comparative Strategy* 39, no. 1, (2020): 94-100.

⁵² F. Gregory Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States*, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994), 121.

⁵³ Steven R. David, “Explaining Third World Alignment,” *World Politics* 43, no. 2, (1991): 233-256.

⁵⁴ Mohammad Salman, Moritz Pieper, and Gustaaf Geeraerts, “Hedging in the Middle East and China-U.S. Competition,” *Asian Politics & Policy* 7, no. 4, (2015): 575-596 and Jonathan Fulton, “China in the Persian Gulf: Hedging Under the U.S. Umbrella,” in Routledge Handbook of Persian Gulf Politics, ed. Mehran Kamrava, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 492-505.

⁵⁵ “Relations between China and the Arab Gulf States,” *Strategic Comments* 27, no.10, (2021), iv-vi.

⁵⁶ Brock Tessman, “System Structure and State Strategy: Adding Hedging to the Menu,” *Security Studies* 21, no. 2, (2012): 192-231.

Quest for Alternatives: China, Russia, India and Israel

Consequently, emerging China and resurgent Russia found a widening strategic vacuum in the region and intensified the engagement on the same from multiple fronts. China brought grand strategies⁵⁷ of Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI)⁵⁸ to integrate the region into it. Among the Gulf States, Iran is part of the BRI and China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor. Other Gulf States have also been integrated into this highly ambitious project along with the Maritime Silk Road and Digital Silk Road. China's well-documented and clearly demarcated Arab Policy is another comprehensive policy that has enabled Beijing to broaden the horizon of engagements in the region multi-dimensionally.⁵⁹ Practically, China's balancing act, friendship with all and enmity with none⁶⁰ on the principles of non-interference and impartial engagement with only the motive of doing business and ensuring the free flow of energy resources becomes instrumental in enhancing relations with the Gulf Region. Significantly, China wish to cultivate relations with the Gulf region without getting involving in sectarianism, inter-state conflicts and regional political rivalries.⁶¹

As a result, China maintains a friendly relationship with all GCC states and Iran at the same time. Evidently, China has established various strategic partnerships⁶² with all major stakeholders of the region. China

⁵⁷ Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, (NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 13.

⁵⁸ "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road," National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, with State Council Authorization, (2015), http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_669367.html.

⁵⁹ "China's Arab Policy Paper," *Xinhua*, January 13, 2016, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2016/01/13/content_281475271412746.htm#:~:text=China%20firmly%20supports%20Arab%20national,developing%20the%20national%20economy%20and

⁶⁰ Jon B. Alterman and John W. Garver, *The Vital Triangle: China, the United States, and the Middle East*. (Washington: CSIS Press, 2008), 4.

⁶¹ Priya Ranjan Kumar, "The Converging Visions and Contrasting Strategies of India and China," 13.

⁶² Jonathan Fulton, "China's MENA Presence" part of Report titled as "China's changing Role in the Middle East," Atlantic Council, (2019).

has a Comprehensive Strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia,⁶³ UAE,⁶⁴ and Iran.⁶⁵ Additionally, the Kuwaiti Emir made a state visit to China, where both countries scripted a strategic partnership, generating new avenues for Kuwait, which aspires to diversify its economy and seek investment opportunities.⁶⁶ Arguably, China built the partnerships to manage US pressure⁶⁷ and also to create a conducive environment for getting the legitimacy of China's peaceful rise.⁶⁸ These partnerships of various categories advance China's business opportunities and facilitate conditions for catering to the needs of a growing economy, particularly the free flow of energy requirements of Beijing. Simultaneously, China is also deepening its reach to expand the economic and commercial market in the Gulf Region. Evidently, the UAE is able to attract the largest amount of investment, US \$ 16 billion,⁶⁹ and both countries have a target of achieving US \$ 200 billion in 2030.⁷⁰ China played a significant role in normalizing the relationship between the decades-old rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran while bringing both to the negotiating table and conditioning them to sign the peace agreement on 10 March 2023 in Beijing.⁷¹

⁶³ "KSA, China Agree on Strategic Partnership," *Arab News*, (2016), January 21, <http://www.arabnews.com/saudi-arabia/news/868276>

⁶⁴ Mohamed Bin Huwaidin, "China's strategic partnership with the UAE: Foundation and prospects," *Comparative Strategy* 41, no. 3, (2022): 296-313, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/01495933.2022.2057734?needAccess=true>

⁶⁵ "China, Iran Lift Bilateral Ties to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership," *Xinhua*, (2016) January 23, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016xivisitmiddleeast/2016-01/23/content_23215522.htm.

⁶⁶ Mordechai Chaziza, "China's Strategic Partnership with Kuwait: New Opportunities for the Belt and Road Initiative," *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, (2022) July 19, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2347798920940081>

⁶⁷ Quan Li and Min Ye, "China's Emerging Partnership Network: What, Who, Where, When and Why," *International Trade, Politics and Development* 3, no. 2, (2019): 66–81.

⁶⁸ Feng Zhongping and Huang Jing, "China's Strategic Partnership Diplomacy: Engaging with a Changing World," *European Strategic Partnership Observatory*, (2014): 8.

⁶⁹ American Enterprise Institute, "China Global Investment Tracker," (2020), <https://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/>

⁷⁰ Song Lin and Shen Weiduo, "China, UAE Set Sights on Broader Cooperation," *Global Times*, (2019), July 22, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1158783.shtml>

⁷¹ Maria Fantappie and Vali Nasr, "A New Order in the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs*, (2023), March 22, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/iran-saudi-arabia-middle-east-relations>.

The Gulf States also purposefully attempted to maintain an amicable relationship with Russia. Given that the monarchies strive to maintain diverse options for geopolitical manoeuvring in light of a broader regional competition with Tehran, resurgent Russia provides another alternative destination for Gulf States for engagement and geo-strategically collaborative engagement. Therefore, the GCC countries consider that it is vital to maintain a stable diplomatic relationship with Russia to ensure that their interests are taken into consideration properly.⁷² Saudi Arabia recognizes the significance of Russia mainly for two reasons: the former see “Russia as an incremental asset in terms of its regional security interests” and secondly the more importantly, Saudi Arabia needs “Russia to administer the global oil market in accordance with its interests.”⁷³

Pragmatically, China and Russia engage in various strategies of balancing and rivaling the US, partly to meet their regional goals and partly to check it at the global level.⁷⁴ Evidently, the joint trilateral naval exercise among China, Russia, and Iran seems to be oriented towards the complex combination of regional and global objectives of all three countries.⁷⁵ Not to mention, “resurgent Russia” saw the retrenchment of the US as an opportunity to penetrate the region further and assert Moscow’s role globally. Saudi Arabia considers Russia as an emerging, rising regional power and wishes to maintain a friendly relationship in order to serve its long-term goals.⁷⁶ Factually, the historic visit of King Salman to Russia in 2017 became instrumental in advancing relationships in various fields.⁷⁷

Factually, 15 agreements were signed, including the buying of the S-400 missile defense system by Saudi Arabia from Russia. Saudi

⁷² Steve A. Yetive and Katerina Oskarsson, *Challenged Hegemony, The United States, China, and Russia in the Persian Gulf*, (Stanford: Stanford University, 2018), 86.

⁷³ Jens Heibach, “The benefits of neutrality: Saudi foreign policy in the wake of the Ukraine war,” *Global Policy* 15, no.4 (2024):789-793, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1758-5899.13355>

⁷⁴ Steve A. Yetive and Katerina Oskarsson, *Challenged Hegemony*, 176.

⁷⁵ “Trilateral Naval Drills Between China, Russia and Iran Start on Friday,” *Routers*, (2022), January 20, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2022-01-20/russia-china-and-iran-to-hold-joint-naval-drill-on-friday-isna>.

⁷⁶ Steve A. Yetive and Katerina Oskarsson, *Challenged Hegemony, The United States*, 87.

⁷⁷ Patrick Wintour, “Saudi King’s visit to Russia heralds shift in global power structures” *The Guardian*, (2017), September 5, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/05/saudi-russia-visit-putin-oil-middle-east>.

Arabia also planned to invest in more than 25 different projects valued at more than \$ 10 billion in Russia.⁷⁸ Arguably, it is stated by the Foreign Minister of Russia, Sergei Lavrov, that “Saudi-Russia relations reached a new qualitative level.”⁷⁹ Significantly, The Guardian had reported that the Saudi king’s visit to Russia heralds a shift in the global power structure.⁸⁰ Objectively, President Vladimir Putin has broken Russia’s relative isolation and is making it an “indispensable nation.”⁸¹ Moreover, arguably, it has been recognized by Michael Emerson, a former European Union envoy to Moscow, “Putin politik is doing well.”⁸² Put differently, Putin’s policy, which is based on “realpolitik,” is doing well.⁸³ Arguably, reluctant to come in the way of Russian ambitions, “U.S. policy has become increasingly erratic and disruptive for long-standing adversaries and allies alike.”⁸⁴

Additionally, the Gulf States intensified their political, economic, and strategic engagement with India. The relationship between the Gulf States and India has civilizational linkages of more than five thousand years of the Indus Valley and the Dilmun and thrived on interdependence based on positive-sum gain. For the Gulf States, India is important because of its historical-civilizational linkages, economic development, and vital source of energy export. All the states of the Gulf see India as an important strategic partner on many counts (economic, political and security) in the world. India imports around 42 percent of its oil from GCC, with the largest 20 percent from Saudi Arabia.⁸⁵ More importantly, Gulf states have also been home to more than eight million Indian

⁷⁸ Maria Dubovikova, “King Salman’s visit to Russia hailed a success on trade, investment and solving regional issues,” October 8, 2017, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1174156/saudi-arabia>

⁷⁹ Patrick Wintour, “Saudi King’s visit to Russia”.

⁸⁰ Patrick Wintour, “Saudi King’s visit to Russia”.

⁸¹ Paul Taylor, “Putin’s ‘realpolitik’ aims to make Russia indispensable,” *Routers*, (2015), November 24, <https://www.reuters.com/article/mideast-crisis-russia-indispensable-idINKBN0TD1RV20151124>

⁸² Paul Taylor, “Putin aims to make Russia indispensable,” *Kuwait Times*, (2015), November 25, <https://storage.kuwaittimes.com/pdf/2015/nov/25/kt.pdf>

⁸³ Paul Taylor, “Putin aims to make Russia indispensable,” *Kuwait Times*,

⁸⁴ Eugene Rumer, “Russia in the Middle East: Jack of All Traders, Master of None,” (2019), October 31 <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/31/russia-in-middle-east-jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none-pub-80233>

⁸⁵ Rahul Roy Chaudhury, “India and the Gulf region: Building strategic partnerships,” (2018), August 29 <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2018/08/india-gulf-strategic-partnerships>

migrants, a source of huge amounts of remittances to India.⁸⁶ From the strategic point of view, India and GCC share the desire for political stability and security in the region. The common political and security concerns of India and GCC translate into efforts for peace, security and stability in the Gulf region and South Asia.⁸⁷ Arguably,” the orientation of India’s Look West policy was ushered in the direction to establish a multi-dimensional relationship with the Gulf countries, particularly the Arab Gulf, Iran, and Israel.”⁸⁸

The first visit of the Saudi King in 2006 after 1955, and making him the chief guest of Republic Day on 26 January 2006 by India, proves that both interests are converging immensely. The “Delhi Declaration” signed during Saudi King Abdulla’s visit became instrumental in establishing a joint Saudi-India focus on combating terrorism, security, peace, and prosperity of the region,⁸⁹ and subsequently, “Riyadh Declaration” 2010 contributed positively, and both India and Saudi Arabia upgraded the ties into a strategic partnership.⁹⁰ In response evidently, the Indian Prime Minister’s visit to almost every Gulf State in 2015-2016 became instrumental in boosting economic, political and people-to-people collaboration. The visits included Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman, where multiple agreements were signed between India and the Gulf States.

Evidently, the First visit of the Indian Prime Minister after a gap of 34 years in UAE became instrumental in crossing the traditional area of cooperation and entering into a strategic domain while elevating the relationship to a Comprehensive strategic partnership through the strengthening of cooperation in all areas, including fields like

⁸⁶ Sunaina Chadha, “Remittances to India to hit record \$ 100 billion mark: What is driving this surge,” *Times of India*, (2022) December 6, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/us-replaces-uae-to-become-top-source-of-remittance-flow-to-india-report/articleshow/96025878.cms>

⁸⁷ “India-GCC relations”, (2023), February 12, <https://www.eoiriyadh.gov.in/page/india-gcc-relations/>

⁸⁸ Anisur Rahman, “India’s Emerging Strategic Relations with the Gulf,” *Financial Express*, (2022), September 7, <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/indias-emerging-strategic-relations-with-the-gulf-especially-the-uae/2658639/>.

⁸⁹ “Delhi Declaration,” (2006), January 27, <https://www.eoiriyadh.gov.in/page/delhi-declaration/>

⁹⁰ “Riyadh Declaration-A New Era of Strategic Partnership,” (2010), February 28, <https://www.eoiriyadh.gov.in/page/riyadh-declaration/>

counter-terrorism, joint defense production, and space cooperation.⁹¹ Subsequently, India extended the highest honor to Crown Prince Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan while making him the Chief Guest at the Republic Day celebration in January 2017.⁹²

Significantly, all states recognized India as a democratic order, which has preserved civilization for millennia, and they need to preserve civilizational linkages with the same and develop “strategic partnership.” India believes that there exist converging interests with the Gulf, and these interests need to be preserved, nurtured, promoted and promoted based on mutual respect and multi-sum gain principles. India values the Gulf as home to millions of Indians, sources of energy resources, and age-old historical civilizational connections.⁹³ Significantly, India’s balancing act towards Gulf political rivalry provides it with a unique space to have friendly relationships with all States, including the newly entered country through the Abraham Peace Accord, Israel. This unique position of India has been taken positively by the Gulf States. In fact, the I2U2 (India, Israel, US and UAE) also called as “West Asia Quad”⁹⁴ platform enhanced the intensity of the convergence of interests between India and the Gulf Region.⁹⁵

The redrafting of Gulf statecrafts is more visible in the historical events where decades-old opponents recognized the ground political realities and signed the agreements called the Abraham Peace Accords. In fact, the Abraham Accords resulted from restructuring the regional and international political systems where the Gulf States attempted to reorient and redraft the policies based on pragmatism in order to ensure their position in the system. The UAE and Israel have signed a major trade deal to boost trade and commerce between both, leading to the

⁹¹ Rajeev Agarwal, “UAE-India: Towards greater strategic partnership,” *Hindustan Times*, (2022), May 23 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/ht-insight/international-affairs/uaeindia-towards-greater-strategic-partnership-101653303678488.html>

⁹² Rajeev Agarwal, “UAE-India: Towards greater strategic partnership,”

⁹³ Kumar, “Converging interests”, 11.

⁹⁴ Husain Haqqani and Aparna Pande (2022), “The West Asia Quad continues to Gain Momentum”, *The Diplomat*, (2022), December 7, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/12/the-west-asia-quad-continues-to-gain-momentum/>

⁹⁵ “Joint Statement of the Leaders of India, Israel, United Arab Emirates, and the United States (I2U2), White House,” (2022), July 14, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/07/14/joint-statement-of-the-leaders-of-india-israel-united-arab-emirates-and-the-united-states-i2u2/>

free trade agreement.⁹⁶ There has been a record \$1.4 billion in Israel-UAE trade in the first seven months of 2022 alone, and over 450,000 Israeli tourists have already traveled to the UAE.⁹⁷ Bahrain and Israel have signed over 40 Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), the largest being a defense one⁹⁸ agreement growing engagement after the Abraham Accords. The Gulf normalized its relationship with Israel and materialized trade and commerce worth billions of dollars on multiple fronts. Strategically, the deals have been instrumental in decreasing the Gulf dependence on the US on the security umbrella and pacifying the Arab-Israel confrontations.

In brief, empirically, it can be observed that the Gulf States have not only redrafted statecraft in the non-militaristic fields, but they have also attempted to find strategic partners in response to the shrinking role of the US in providing conducive security and a strategic environment. In another words, Gulf States have recognised the coming of post-American Middle East⁹⁹ and attempted to respond to the same. The relationship of Gulf States with the mentioned countries has been multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral, including security, based on positive sum gain calculations. Thereby, one can say that redrafting the statecraft of the Gulf States is a timely intervention aimed at the diversification of relationships in order to preserve and protect vital national interests of states both independently as well as collectively navigating between war and peace.

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⁹⁶ "Israel signs major trade deal with Gulf States UAE," *The Economic Times*, (2022), May 31, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/uae/israel-signs-major-trade-deal-with-gulf-state-uae/articleshow/91910100.cms?from=mdr>

⁹⁷ YuliaSalomov and Mariah Smith, "Two years since the Abraham Accords: How the region is transforming," *Atlantic Council*, (2022), September 29, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/commentary/event-recap/two-years-since-the-abraham-accords-how-the-region-is-transforming/>.

⁹⁸ YuliaSalomov and Mariah Smith, "Two years since the Abraham Accords: How the region is transforming."

⁹⁹ Dalia Dassa Kaye, "America's Role in a Post- American Middle East," *The Washington Quarterly* 45, no. 1, (2022): 7-24.

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EMBRACING RESPONSIBILITY: A NEW ETHICAL PARADIGM FOR ADDRESSING THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS AND CARING FOR THE EARTH

*- Moilen Nyiam**

Introduction

The transformation of God's creation has been brought about by humanity's destructive actions, leading to devastating consequences for the environment and all living beings. The depletion of biodiversity and environmental degradation are the unfortunate legacies we are leaving for future generations. The fundamental issue at stake is the value of life itself. By acknowledging subjectivity in non-human beings, we can recognize our interconnectedness and reliance on nature for survival. Expanding our conception of subjectivity can help alleviate feelings of alienation that stem from viewing humans as the sole subjects in a world devoid of intrinsic value. Embracing a holistic perspective that places us within a continuum of organisms allows for a better understanding of our unique place in the natural world. Ethics of Responsibility encompasses the ability to discern, interpret, and act upon various principles and values within specific contexts.¹ It emphasizes individual's moral obligations to others and larger ethical codes, standards, and traditions. This succinct piece of literature aims to confront ecological challenges by embracing responsibility ethics as an alternative ethical framework while evaluating these issues through Christian ethical perspectives.

1. Uncovering the Underlying Causes of the Ecological Crisis

The term "environment" encompasses all the elements that influence an organism throughout its life, including both living (biotic) and non-living (abiotic) components. An ecological crisis arises when alterations in the environment of a species or population threaten its on-going

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¹ Peter Singer, "Ethics," accessed on 03 Sep 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ethics-philosophy>

existence.² Numerous scholars identify two primary factors that have led to the current ecological crisis.

1.1. Theological factors

1.1.1. The mechanical perspective and secularization of creation, rooted in the Western Enlightenment tradition, establish a stark distinction between nature and history. The entire created order began to be perceived objectively, leading to a view of nature solely from a utilitarian standpoint, which diminished its mystery and sacredness within the Western worldview.

1.1.2. In Hebrew thought, the hierarchical structure of creation places humanity at the top, governing family, women, slaves, and nature. Various Christian theologians have interpreted God's creation within this hierarchical framework, suggesting that inanimate beings exist for the benefit of living beings, plants for animals, and animals for humans.

1.1.3. The anthropocentric perspective of creation positions humanity as the central reference point for all things, attributing meaning and value to creation based on its service to human interests.³

1.2. Non-theological factors

1.2.1. The lopsided industrialization of economic growth through extensive industrial development has been significant.

1.2.2. The production of goods for sale and the growth of markets are crucial elements for sustaining a capitalist economy.

1.2.3. In opposition to the capitalist principles of capital privatization and competition, a socialist economic model⁴ emerged as an alternative but ultimately did not succeed.

² Ram Lakhan Singh, "Global Environmental Problems," accessed on 03 Sep 2024, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-10-1866-4_2

³ Ram Lakhan Singh, "Global Environmental Problems," https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-10-1866-4_2

⁴ Karl Marx argued that socialism failed to create a conducive environment for maintaining ecological balance and freeing the poor from exploitation. He viewed nature as simply a source of raw materials to be used in constructing an industrialized society. (Refer, George Mathew, *Dignity for All: Essay in Socialism and Democracy* (Delhi: Ajanta Publication, 1991), 5. (Hereafter cited as George Mathew...))

1.2.4. The scientific and technological revolutions have, in many ways, undermined the sanctity of nature, stripping away the mystery of creation.⁵

This perspective has fuelled the relentless exploitation and depletion of natural resources. Consequently, it is essential to respect the integrity of non-human creation and acknowledge the interdependence between humans and nonhumans, prompting us to live responsibly, preserve the current diversity of creation, and address the damage inflicted by human activities.

2. Current Ecological Challenges: Prevailing Ideologies and Practices

The root causes outlined above underscore the undeniable fact that the environment is constantly evolving. As it changes, there is an increasing need to be aware of the issues surrounding it. We are facing a global environmental crisis, with pollution, soil degradation, global warming, natural resource depletion, deforestation, melting of the Polar Ice Caps, biodiversity loss, climate change, ozone layer depletion, overpopulation and waste disposal demanding urgent attention. These challenges are largely the result of unsustainable use of natural resources.⁶ The rapid technological advancements stemming from the scientific revolution have disrupted the balance of our ecosystem. Human activity now threatens to deplete resources and alter the biosphere in ways that endanger life itself.

2.1. The Mapithel Dam Project: A Representational Case Study of Ecological Hazards

In pursuit of development objectives such as the Mapithel Dam Project in Ukhru District of Manipur has brought about severe climate changes in the region along with deforestation, land loss and health problems. The construction of Mapithel Dam (also known as the Thoubal River Valley Multipurpose Project) has been on-going for over thirty years. Initial investigations and surveys were conducted in the early 1970s, with a feasibility report submitted to the Central Water Commission in

⁵ George Mathew...

⁶ Rinkesh, "20 Biggest Current Environmental problems of 2024," accessed on 04 Sep 2024, <https://www.conserve-energy-future.com/15-current-environmental-problems.php>.

September 1976. The project aimed to utilize water from the Thoubal River for irrigation, drinking water, and electricity. With approval from the Planning Commission and assistance from the Central Government, Manipur's Irrigation and Flood Control Department undertook the project. In the 1980s, resistance against the dam grew, leading to talks between villagers and the government in 1993. A Memorandum of Agreement was signed that year, stipulating that rehabilitation and resettlement should be completed within two years; however, little progress has been made since then. The construction of Mapithel Dam led to submergence of residential areas, schools, churches, paddy fields, grazing grounds, and a significant forest area. Loss of biodiversity (wildlife and agro-diversity), floods (riverine/coastal/mudflow), damage to crops affecting food security; landscape degradation; soil erosion; deforestation; loss of vegetation cover; disturbance to hydrological systems; reduced ecological connectivity have all occurred due to this project. What was initially seen as a development initiative has now turned into a nightmare for those who depended on Thoubal River's resources for their livelihoods. The ban on wet field agriculture and other traditional practices has placed increased burdens on people's lives negatively impacting education support for children and causing physical/mental health struggles.⁷ Similar there are many large projects as this that has cause great destruction and trouble against balanced ecology; some honourable mentions that are posing a threat towards ecological crisis are- The Their Dam Project, POSCO Steel Plant, Ganga River Pollution, Coastal Road Project in Mumbai etc.

3. Creation from a Biblical Point of View

Ecological crisis as Creation crisis it becomes especially imperative for the believers to flip the pages of the Bible and find perspective among perspectives that sheds light to the biblical standpoint en route for this urgent conservation issue. Lynn White's article *The historical origins of our ecological crisis* attributed the modern crisis to Western Christianity and its anthropocentric traditions. This sparked intense discussion among biblical scholars and theologians regarding its assertion that the

⁷ Luchi Maran, "Hydropower Development and Right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of Indigenous Peoples: Case study on Mapithal Dam Project, Northeast India," accessed on 04 Sep 2024, https://aippnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/38.1.1fin al-_northeast-india1.pdf

exploitation of the earth was sanctioned by the dominion mandate of Genesis 1:26-28, where humans view themselves as superior beings (*imago dei*) at the centre of the cosmos.

However, Creation is described as a gift entrusted by God to humanity, with their duty under Genesis 2:15 being to cultivate and care for it.⁸ The interpretation of exercising dominion in Genesis 1:28 should therefore be understood in relation to Genesis 2:15. Viewing Genesis 1:26-28 through an environmental lens suggests that humans have a distinct role within Creation; however, this does not imply that they hold greater value than other aspects of Creation. As representatives of God, Genesis 1:26-28 implies more of a caretaking or stewardship role. An even more significant term is the Hebrew word *Shamar* which means “to keep”. The nouns “steward” or “trustee” signify vigilant care and preservation of the earth.⁹ From this perspective, creation encompasses all land, plants, animals and humans; each interrelated with their Creator and with each other. Thus, creation holds intrinsic value from a biblical standpoint because it is not entirely at humanity’s disposal- overcoming solely anthropocentric views despite humanity’s special dominion status and protective responsibility.

Co-creation is established by God; essentially linked to Him; it has provided far-reaching protective rights within the biblical legal system. Ultimately, this also encompasses adopting a long-term approach toward human intervention in nature to ensure successive generation’s well-being including the current species conservation efforts. For example, the directive in Deuteronomy 22:6 can be recalled, where it is permissible to remove eggs from a bird’s nest, but the mother bird must be safeguarded: “Let the mother go, taking only the young for yourself, so that it may go well with you and you may live long.” The assurance of a long life here and also prominently present in the parental commandment of the Ten Commandments can be readily interpreted as “preservation of future generations,” because sparing the mother bird primarily aims at ensuring species continuity.

⁸ Ken Gnanakan, *God’s World: A Theology of the Environment* (London: The University Press, Cambridge, 1999), 55.

⁹ Liz Jakimow, “Genesis 1:26-28 and Environmental Rights,” accessed on 05 Sep 2024, <https://rightnow.prg.au/opinion-3/genesis-126-28-and-environmental-rights/>

4. Justice towards Creation: Theological Implication

In Christian traditions, justice is grounded in the very essence of God. It is an integral aspect of God's community to love and calls upon human beings to make fairness the cornerstone of social relationships and interactions with other, with the species, and ecosystems. Justice in Christian thought is the social and ecological manifestation of love, signifying a special concern for establishing equitable relationships. Thus, justice is a biblical, theological, and tradition-based ethic that highlights four norms: Sustainability, Sufficiency, Participation, and Solidarity.¹⁰ This ethical framework addresses human-caused issues that threaten both human and natural communities and recognizes both as ethically significant.

4.1. Sustainability: Sustainability may be defined as the long-term provision of adequate resources to meet essential human needs while preserving intact natural communities. It reflects a concern for future generations and the planet as a whole while emphasizing that maintaining an acceptable quality of life for current generations must not endanger prospects for future ones. It essentially embodies good stewardship and is particularly relevant today due to human degradation of nature. It encapsulates an enduring view of nature and society, one in which ancestors and posterity are considered stakeholders in present decisions (Gen 1; Ps 145:15-16; Lk 12:42).¹¹

4.2. Sufficiency: The principle of sufficiency stresses that all living beings have the right to partake in the bounty of creation. This does not entail boundless consumption, hoarding, or an unfair distribution of the earth's resources. Instead, it is framed in terms of essential needs, communal sharing, and fairness. It rejects excessive and detrimental consumption while promoting modesty, prudence, and magnanimity (Ex 16; Acts 2:45; Lk 12:15).¹²

4.3. Solidarity: The principle of solidarity reinforces this sense of inclusion and also adds an important aspect to the integration of

¹⁰ James Martin Schramm, "Toward an Ethics of Eco Justice," in *Moral Issues and Christian Response*, ed. Paul T. Jersild (Forth Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998), 208.

¹¹ Robert L Stivers, *Christian Environmental Ethics: A Case Method Approach* (New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 37.

¹² James Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 179.

marginalized individuals. Solidarity emphasizes the interconnectedness and mutual dependence of all living beings, promoting aid and support for those who are suffering. It underscores the communal aspect of life as opposed to individualism, encouraging individuals and groups to stand in unity with those facing discrimination, mistreatment, and oppression. Solidarity demands that the privileged empathize with the underprivileged, the wealthy listen to the impoverished, and humanity acknowledge its inherent interconnectedness with all of nature. Humility, compassion, bravery, and generosity are all exemplified by the principle of solidarity (1 Cor 12:26; Rom 8; Matt 19:30; Mk 10:31; Lke13:30).¹³

5. Embracing Responsible Ethics as a New Ethical Paradigm for Addressing the Ecological Crisis

Responsible Ethics, informed by sound theological reflection, offers a methodological approach to addressing the ecological crisis by establishing ethical standards that guide human behaviour and decisions towards rights, obligations, societal benefits, fairness, and virtues.

5.1. Understanding Responsible Ethics

The term Responsibility, stemming from the Latin word *Respondeo*, originally referred to promising something in return or providing an answer when summoned to court.¹⁴ This concept of representing others was emphasized by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Christian Ethics*. Hoeffler viewed the concept of responsibility through the lens of Christ's actions, as He acted on our behalf. In various scenarios, responsibility entails acting in place of and for the benefit of another. Within our professional or vocational roles, we are frequently tasked with being thoroughly responsible regarding the values and duties associated with our societal positions.¹⁵

5.2. Features of Responsible Ethics

The idea of responsibility involves being accountable for our actions as individuals or communities. It also includes taking on responsibilities for

¹³ James Martin Schramm, "Toward an Ethics of Eco Justice," 37-42.

¹⁴ William Schweiker, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 55.

¹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Collier Books 1986), 224.

us or others while answering to ourselves and other people. Ethics faces the challenge of connecting these different aspects while understanding how they relate to one another. This is essential because responsibility defines how humans act in relation to others in the world.¹⁶ As moral agents, we are responsible not only for our own actions but possibly also those of others through accountability and representation.

5.2.1. Accountability: Accountability is essential for assigning blame or praise to individuals, as well as establishing the boundaries and justifications for doing so. This concept of moral accountability, as explained by William Kneale, originated from a broad use of words related to debts, encompassing all duties. It emphasizes that people are responsible for their obligations to others and must answer for them. The link between accountability and responsibility lies in the relationship between an individual's actions and their outcomes.¹⁷ We are accountable not only for our behaviour but also our influence on broader social and cultural aspects.

5.2.2. Answerability: Answerability is the aspect of responsibility that emphasizes our obligation to respond to someone or something, including us, which holds rightful authority to establish standards of behaviour. The entity we are answerable to may be another person, a community, the state, or in traditional belief systems, the inner voice of conscience and moral principles. As individuals, we are required to account for our actions in relation to whatever or whoever challenges us.¹⁸

5.3. Implementing Responsible Ethics against Ecological Crisis

The evolving nature of human existence and the world we inhabit necessitates a re-evaluation of ethics. The traditional theories of ethics, such as Deontology, Consequentialism, Virtue theory, and Social Contact theory, while valuable in their own right for understanding interpersonal relations within society, are insufficient in addressing the complex challenges we face today. The ecological crisis requires an

¹⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 65.

¹⁷ William Kneale, "The Responsibility of Criminals," in *Moral Problems: A Collection of Philosophical Essays*, ed. James Rachels (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 172.

¹⁸ William Kneale, "The Responsibility of Criminals," 173.

expanded ethical framework that encompasses all living organisms, the ecosystem, and the physical environment. Our responsibility to these entities adds a new dimension to ethics, compelling a fresh approach and understanding of human beings' role in relation to the consequences of their actions. Therefore, there is a need for a new ontology that reflects this changing landscape and informs an ethical system relevant to our transformed world.

5.3.1. Freedom and Responsibility

Today, we are increasingly aware of the interconnectedness of our local actions with global repercussions and future consequences. The capacity for freedom is accompanied by the responsibility to act, which is inherently valuable and serves as the foundation for an ethical imperative. Freedom enables individuals to transcend their self-interests and recognize values that extend beyond their immediate existence. This liberation empowers individuals to act in ways that honour the interests of others and the greater good. The fact that human beings are capable of responsibility indicates an essential role humans can assume in relation to nature, its protection, and preservation, and in relation to the future.¹⁹

5.3.2. Environmental Stewardship

Environmental stewardship involves respecting the integrity of non-human creation and acknowledging the interdependence between humans and nature. As stewards of God's creation, it becomes a calling to preserve and protect our environment. By embracing a dynamic concept of stewardship, we can encourage diversity and innovation while responsibly managing nature. The metaphor of a gardener from biblical texts underscores our duty to care for creation, fostering diversity while also promoting technological advancements that enhance our world. It is essential to acknowledge that all aspects of creation belong to God, emphasizing their intrinsic value beyond human utility.²⁰ As stewards granted responsibility over Creation by God, we must fulfil these duties through acts rooted in love, care, and respect. Our role is not solely about utility but also entails recognizing the inherent value within all aspects of Creation bestowed upon us by God himself.

¹⁹ Theresa Morris, *Hans Jonas' Ethic of Responsibility: From Ontology to Ecology* (New York: State University Press New York Press, Albany, 2013), 128.

²⁰ R. L. Sarkar, *The Bible, Ecology and Environment* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 155.

5.3.3. Call for Moral Formation

Moral formation begins by prompting individuals to perceive things differently, to recognize new challenges, and acknowledge moral issues that may have been overlooked in the past. It then requires people to assess their priorities, to feel a sense of urgency about new challenges, and minimize less immediate, less important, or less relevant matters. Moral formation emphasizes the importance of recognizing human power and agency; when individuals identify new challenges and prioritize addressing them, they must accept their own capacity to make a difference. Moral formative conservation aims at altering how people perceive biodiversity. It often calls for a different approach and a change in the moral attitudes of both individuals and communities so that they treat people and biodiversity with respect, demand improved laws and enforcement from leaders, and educate future generations on working towards a world where humanity acknowledges its place within the diversity of life.²¹

5.3.4. Re-valuing Nature

The notion that separates humans from nature leads to nihilism²² because when nature is viewed as mere material- detached, indifferent, and unresponsive, humanity is cast into a purposeless world. To address the crisis stemming from human actions impacting the natural world's use and misuse, value must be restored in nature while humans regain meaningful placement within it. Humans are organisms dependent on physical environments similar to other organisms within the biosphere; thus intrinsic value exists in nature as human are part of it rather than separate from it.²³ Since humans occupy a position alongside all living beings on this continuum; valuing creatures- intrinsic value is inherent in nature itself. Devaluing nature consequently results in devaluing ourselves.

²¹ Kevin J. O' Brien, *An Ethics of Biodiversity: Christianity, Ecology and Variety of Life* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2019), 132-133.

²² Nihilism is the belief that all values are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated. It is often associated with extreme pessimism and a radical skepticism that condemns existence. A true nihilist would believe in nothing, have no loyalties, and no purpose other than, perhaps, an impulse destroy; Alan Pratt, "Nihilism," accessed on 05 Sep 2024, <https://iep.utm.edu/nihilism/#:~:text=Nihilism%20is%20the%20belief%20that,perhaps%2C%20an%20impulse%20to%20destroy>

²³ Theresa Morris, *Hans Jonas' Ethic of Responsibility: From Ontology to Ecology*, 91.

6. Roles and Recommendations: Churches; NGOs and Individuals

Surely there is much role and recommendations human beings are required to act upon as the steward of God's creation. However, following are some among much that acts as a representation of what else we can do to save and conserve ecology in the midst of its horrendous exploitation.

1. The first and most crucial step is to evaluate our lifestyle, desires, goals, and our connection with the natural world.
2. Foster eco-spirituality by transitioning to a diet with fewer animal products, as this is one of the most impactful changes we can make.
3. Prioritize energy conservation practices such as reducing heat and light usage, minimizing air-conditioning use, and adopting eco-friendly driving habits.
4. Engage in tree planting initiatives and volunteer for local clean-up efforts.
5. Many churches today do not emphasize ecological responsibility; instead, they often focus solely on human needs without considering the well-being of all of God's creation.
6. Encourage a monastic way of life within the church that promotes harmony with nature and minimalistic living in order to demonstrate responsible stewardship of God's creation.
7. Recognize the dynamic nature of the Eucharist as a motivator for active engagement with the world rather than confining it to ritual observance alone.
8. Emphasize liberation in biblical terms that include not only political and economic aspects but also liberation for all creation; promote solidarity with the weakest parts of creation within church teachings.
9. Raise awareness about environmental issues by prioritizing it on government agendas as well as through environmental NGOs; efforts at public meetings, media outreach, and other means available.
10. Advocate for sustainable development concepts and corporate environmental responsibility to be integrated into formal education

systems nationwide through governmental policies backed by environmental NGOs and their influence.

11. Organize seminars, lectures, and group discussions on promoting environmental awareness in addition to protecting human rights for a clean environment alongside equitable use of natural resources.

Conclusion

The current advancements in economy, politics, society, and technology have led to a growth in human population and improved quality of life. However, these developments have also caused widespread deforestation, extinction of species, human suffering, overpopulation, and excessive use of natural resources. This threatens the natural heritage entrusted to us by God. Therefore, it is crucial for us to prioritize changing our economic, political, social, and technological ways of life towards a more ecologically sustainable world that benefits all living beings. We must be accountable for our actions in every aspect of our lives because every decision that harms the environment is ultimately a personal choice that aligns with or goes against the will of God. Our choices are moral decisions - they can either be virtuous or harmful. Recognizing this responsibility can guide and inspire positive choices as we acknowledge ourselves as stewards of nature and realize the power we hold to make ethical decisions that benefit both humanity and the environment.

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TOWARDS A MIGRANT REALITY: SURVEY AND PROSPECTS FROM A SPIRITUAL LENS

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Abstract:

Furthermore, the study of the present surroundings is insufficient: the history of the people, the influence of the regions through which it has passed on its migrations, and the people with whom it came into contact, must be considered” (The Mind of Primitive Man, Franz Uri Boaz). It is undeniable that migration has played a significant role in the shaping of human societies and their eventual evolution. Migration has been prompted by numerous factors and defined by numerous societal shifts throughout history. There has been a double impact of these human exchanges. The exchange of culture, practices, ideas, food, music, and knowledge has taken place on the one hand. In addition to disrupting an existing social fabric, migrants have also caused clashes, discrimination, and in the worst cases, bloodshed. In spite of this, people have continued to move across defined geographical boundaries. Modern society's interconnectedness makes the whole process easier than it was in the past. Consequently, understanding a group's culture is not a linear process. An individual's identity can be interpreted in more than one way. A closer look behind the scenes of current events as well as an examination of the history that defines the people and their history is necessary in this context. This paper attempts to go beyond the traditional cultural and economic aspects of migration, which are usually discussed. An emphasis is placed on the role that migration has played in defining and maintaining a community's beliefs. Syrian Christians of South India are being considered here as a group from the modern-day world.

What is the significance of migration in the Bible? What parallels can be drawn from the experiences of the migrants mentioned above? What are the exact origins of the Syrian Christians? How do they continue to follow the practices that they have always followed? Do they still draw

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inspiration from the traditions of another culture? Can migration itself be viewed as a spiritual experience? How does the migration experience continue to present challenges? This paper attempts to analyze all of these questions and shed light on the undeniable connection between migration and spirituality. In the present study, new spiritual dimensions will be created in the understanding of Syrian Christian migrant realities.

Keywords: Migrant Spirituality, Syrian Christian Liturgy, Inclusivism and Pluralism, Multiple Identities, Religious Globalization

Introduction

If we define ‘migration’ as merely a move from one place to the other to gain some advantage that will eventually enhance the quality of life, it is a risky endeavor. There are physical, psychological, economic, social and spiritual implications associated with this process. By weighing out the challenges and possibilities before embarking on such an adventure, we might attempt to play it safe and never make any move. There is an acute vulnerability associated with being a migrant, as there are unpredictable situations. Migration becomes an endeavor that can be both challenging and rewarding as one faces and overcomes the challenges that lurk at the door of unending opportunities. The Syrian Christians are the oldest migrant Christian community in India. Let us examine the context and intensity of the Syrian Christian migrant experiences from a spiritual perspective.

Biblical understanding of Migration

According to the biblical tradition, migration occurred as part of the process that enabled human beings, particularly those who are followers of God, with a place to live. Migration happens when people start searching for a place to call home, a place where they can enjoy the blessings of God and worship him. In the Old Testament tradition, we can see several examples of this. Joseph is sent into slavery to a strange land (Gen. 37- 46). Moses flees to Midian and finds shelter in the house of a priest (Exo. 2:15-22). Ruth accompanies Naomi to a foreign land and finds favor in the eyes of Boaz (Ruth 20). In the New Testament tradition, Mary and Joseph flee to Egypt with Jesus as a baby. The following lines were part of the confession that every member of Israelite has to recite:

A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down in to Egypt and live there as an alien, few in number, there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of the ancestors, the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power and with signs and wonders. And he brought us in to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me. (Holy Bible: Deut. 26: 5-11)

The God of Israel was a ‘migrant God’ who journeyed with his people. There was an ingrained ‘migrant spirituality’ among the Syrian Christian communities.

The Syrian Christians: Definition

As far as the term ‘Syrian Christian’ is concerned, there exists no precise definition. Some Syrians maintain that the term should only be used to refer to those who are descendants of Syrians. It is important to note that the majority of Syrian Christians today are descendants of converts from Hindu backgrounds. Although a few Syrian Christian families may possess traces of Syrian blood, the vast majority belong to one or both of the Indian races--Dravidian or Aryan. A more correct practice would be to define Syrian Christians as those who follow the ‘Syrian rite’ in their religious services.¹

Backdrop of the 9th Century A.D. Syrian Christian Migration

During that time, the migration of Persian Christians was led by Marvan Sabriso, a Persian merchant, along with Mar Sapro and Mar Prodh. It is believed that St. Thomas, a disciple of Jesus Christ, founded this ancient Eastern Church in India. There was a decline in the original community of St. Thomas Christians after a period of time. As a result of the arrival of the Christian group from West- Asia, this declining community was revived. So from the fourth century onwards, the St.

¹ K C Zachariah, *The Syrian Christians of Kerala: Demographic and Socio-Economic Transition in the Twentieth Century* (Thiruvananthapuram: CDS, 2001), 9.

Thomas Christians came into contact with the Persian Church or the Church of the East. Persian Christians migrated to Kerala and settled there. Among the important historical evidences of such migrations are copper plates, which describe the grants and privileges given to these Christians by local rulers. These migrations are well documented both in oral and historical records. The first occurred around 345 A.D. under Thomas of Cana and the second occurred in 825 A.D. under Marvan Sabrison. The second Persian Christian migration to Kerala started when the Persian Caliphs started Christian persecutions in 632 A.D.² A group of Syrian Christian merchants migrated to Kerala in 823 A.D. The second group of Syrian Christian migrants settled in Quilon and the local King, Ayyan Adikal of Venad provided grants and privileges that were enjoyed by the high castes to the Tharisa Church at Quilon and its members inscribed in copper Plates—three of the plates are in the Orthodox Syrian Church Seminary, Kottayam and two are with the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, Thiruvalla.³ Mingana rightly says:

Then in the year 823 the Syrian Fathers, Mar Sapor and Mar Prot with the illustrious Sabrison came to India and reached Kullam. They went to the King Shakirbirti and asked him a place of land in which they could build a church for themselves and erect a town in the district of Kullam, to which Syrian Bishops and Metropolitan used to come by order of the Catholicos who send them.⁴

It is evident from the inscriptions on the plates that the Christians were well received by the local Kings and were permitted to build churches. Christians were also considered as upper caste in that period as they were granted the privileges of the high castes. Moreover, it indicates a high degree of religious tolerance within the community. The copper plates substantiate the claim that the St. Thomas Christians have existed in Kerala since the early eras of the first century. A significant role was

² Joseph Daniel, *Ecumenism in Praxis: A Historical Critique of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church* (Peter Lang GmbH, 2014), 156.

³ Alex Thomas, "Commemorating the 1200th Anniversary of the Persian Christian Migration," *Unpublished Paper in Mar Thoma Syrian Church Archive* (Thiruvalla, 2018), 2.

⁴ Alfonsa Mingana, *The Early Spread of Christianity in India*, 45.

played by the East Syrian church in the emergence of the identity of St. Thomas Christians and the development of their faith and practices.

Survey on Spirituality of Migrants: West Asia to Oriental Regions

According to the Church historians A M Mundadan (1984), T V Philip (1998), Pius Melekanathil (2015), K C Zachariah (2001) and E M Philip (1950), there were two migrations of Persian Christians to India, one in the fourth century and one in the ninth century, which had a profound impact on Christian liturgical and religious traditions. The migrant spirituality contains values essential for the fullness of life. As a result of migrant spirituality, one can find values espoused by the group that have been essential in leading a fuller life.

i. Mutually Enriching Experience

In the oriental regions, Syrian Christian merchants maintained a good relationship with the people. They were primarily engaged in the pepper trade of the Quilon region and the 9th century migration became mutually beneficial. According to Mingana, “then in the year 823 the Syrian Father, Mar Sapor and Parut with the illustrious Sabrisho came to India and reached Kullam”.⁵ The migrants were given lot of privileges which included the land for construction of a church and a town by the local rulers. Thus, the Syrian Christian migrants were able to share the love of Christ to the local community.

ii. Hospitality and Openness in the realm of Spirituality

There was a real sense of openness in the spiritual sphere of the host country and of the Syrian migrants. It was believed that Syrian Christians were equal to the higher castes in society. There are numerous indications that they were treated with high respect and regard. In addition, they had adopted indigenous nature on numerous occasions. For example,⁶

⁵ Alfonsa Mingana, *The Early Spread of Christianity in India* (Manchester: Bull of John Rylands Library, 1926), 45.

⁶ F. Hrangkhuma, *History of Christianity in India* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 2018), 52.

- Religious meals were held on festive occasions
- Offerings were auctioned
- Church building architecture combined East Syrian styles and those of the host land

iii. Adoption of Syrian Christian liturgy

The liturgies are regarded as an integral part of Syrian Christian worship. All of the liturgies were written by divinely-inspired individuals. Most of the liturgies that Syrian Christians use are translations from the West Syrian liturgical traditions. The entire order of worship is composed of symbols and signs. Eastern worship traditions are characterized by a great deal of symbolism. It can either be an object or an action. We can see that the elements of worship used are heavily influenced by the Eastern and Syrian traditions.

Maintained the relationship of--One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church

It is the affirmation of the Syrian Church. Oneness implies that there is only one body and one church. Holy means set apart for a mission. It is evident that the Syrian Church is Catholic due to its universal nature. The word Apostolic literally means a “sent out community”. With respect to their faith, the Syrian Christians have adhered strictly to apostolic succession, which has been meticulously followed from the beginning.

iv. Episcopal Supervision of Persian Bishops

The Syrian Christians were under the ecclesiastical supervision of the *Catholico* of Persia. The Metropolitans and Episcopas were appointed for the oriental regions. Both spiritual and temporal authority was conferred upon them. In India, the Syrian Christians’ ecclesiastical structures were greatly influenced by migration.

v. Mystical Silence or Quietness in Syrian Christian Traditions

A notable spiritual experience which developed from Syrian Christian traditions is the mystical silence as part of its liturgical communication.

More or less, it was identifying with the Indian culture and spiritual ethos.

Migrant communities may have different cultures, languages and spirituality. As a result, they have struggled to discover their identity and express it in ways that are close to the ethos and pathos of the country in which they were raised. Their memories were cherished according to the St. Thomas tradition. It was important for the community to tell and retell its stories to the generations so that the faith of their fathers and mothers would remain fresh and alive for future generations. There are both positive and negative impacts associated with this migrating pathos. The people are happy or successful if they continue to experience God even while they are away from home. Spiritual realm and the worship become enjoyable for them and they continually praise God, who is their companion and guide.

Challenges and Prospects of Migrant Spirituality

We have to examine how the migrant spirituality challenges us in formulating Syrian Christian identities and the possibilities of its inclusive nature engaging with the other.

i. Spirituality of Accommodating the Other

The Indian Christians had already been living for centuries in a positive encounter with high caste Hindus and had developed a theological vision of Hindu religion which accommodates the other.⁷ The host country and the Syrian Christian migrants maintained peaceful co-existence with other religious groups, although it was a challenging endeavor.

ii. Paradigm of Inclusivism and Pluralism

Syrian Christian Spirituality affirms the existing missional paradigms which were so evident in the 9th century migration. It is opposed to religious fundamentalism and acknowledges the plurality of multi religious faiths, while holding on to its own.

⁷ George Menacherry, *Indian Church History Classics, The Nazranis* (Thrissur: SARAS, 1998), 62.

iii. Multiple Identities

Migration raises a lot of questions that are related to identity issues. It plays a decisive function in the definition and constitution of one's identity. Post-colonial studies help us to understand the migrant life as an experience of hybridity which rejects a mono or single identity in favor multiple cultural locations and identities.⁸ For Homi Bhabha, hybridity signifies 'the third space' or 'in between' which provides the possibility to live on both sides without allegiance to any.⁹ Can we position the Syrian Christian migration 'in between'? This is the challenge even today.

iv. Religious Globalization

A fundamentalist type of religious globalization aims to extend cultural homogeneity. Despite establishing itself in a new culture, it does not acknowledge it. However, the cosmopolitan type of religious globalization is intended to reduce the emphasis on differences in power between the new culture of the place to which it has migrated and the culture in the place from where it has migrated.¹⁰ In the context of migration, both experiences are challenging.

v. Homogeneity or Heterogeneity

Homogeneity is said to occur when culture of one religion is adapted in another religion without being affected by the changing surroundings. Whereas heterogeneity creates a space for the growth of diversity in existing religious beliefs and practices. Often, migrant spirituality has called for maintaining a balance between the practices of the new land and that of their own.

Conclusion

Migration has been a constant since the beginning of civilization. There is evidence of the Aryan influx into India, the arrival of the Jews and

⁸ George Zachariah, "Identity and Social Distinctions Among Indian Christians, At Home and In Diaspora: Some Theological Reflections," Unpublished Paper, 2014.

⁹ Jesudas M. Athyal, "Review Article to Prema Kurien, Impact of International Migration on Home Churches: Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 53/1 (2014): 109-129.

¹⁰ Peter Beyer, "De-Centering Religious Singularity: The Globalization of Christianity as a Case in Point." *Numen* 5 (2003): 357-386.

Zoroastrians, as well as the migration of Syrian Christians from West Asia to Oriental regions. These may have occurred for various reasons ranging from local persecutions, conquests, quests for prosperous living and trade interests and so on. When people migrate, their religious faith, spirituality, culture, mental attitude, traditions and even perspectives migrate with them. We often use the term ‘identity’ to establish how we are different from other people around us, but identity on the other hand, should contribute to the well-being of the community.¹¹ Liturgical communication itself an identity that has been established by Syrian Christians. For a majority of Syrian Christians, the Syriac version or the translated version of West Syrian liturgical traditions continues to be used in worship. Liturgy is the medium of expression of the spiritual practices. The 9th Century Syrian Christian migration was an authentic spiritual journey with a definite mission. However, it has also revealed a lot of challenges and prospects that continue to be part of the migrant experience.

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¹¹ M. Jesudas Athyal, *Metropolitan Chrysostom on Mission in the Market Place* (Thiruvalla: CSS, 2002), 112.

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EDITORIAL NOTES

MR. GANDHI ON CHRISTIANITY

(Vol. XLIV, October 1924, Pp. 359-362)

Many will have read with unusual interest the passage in *Young India* for September 4th in which Mr. Gandhi refers to the books his Christian friends lent him to read in prison, and his reflections upon both them and the Christian religion. The passage is worth quoting:

"Many Christian friends were most attentive to me. I received books from them from America, England, and India. I must confess that whilst I recognised their kind motive I could not appreciate the majority of the books they sent. I wish I could say something of their gifts that would please them. But that would not be fair or truthful if I could not mean it. The orthodox books on Christianity do not give me any satisfaction. My regard for the life of Jesus is indeed very great. His ethical teaching, his common sense, his sacrifice command my reverence. But I do not accept the orthodox teaching that Jesus was or is God incarnate in the accepted sense that he was or is the only son of God. I do not believe in the doctrine of the appropriation of another's merit. His sacrifice is a type and an example for us. Every one of us has to be crucified for salvation. I do not take the words Son, Father, and the Holy Ghost literally. They are all figurative expressions. Nor do I accept the limitations that are sought to be put upon the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. I can discover no justification in the New Testament for wars. I regard Jesus as one among the most illustrious teachers and prophets the world has seen. Needless to say, I do not regard the Bible as an infallible record of the life and teachings of Jesus. Nor do I consider every word in the New Testament as God's own word. Between the Old and the New there is a fundamental difference. Whilst the Old contains some very deep truths, I am unable to pay it the same honours I pay the New Testament. I regard the latter as an extension of the teaching of the Old and, in some

matters, rejection of the Old. Nor do I regard the New as the last word of God. Religious ideas like everything else are subject to the same law of evolution that governs everything else in this universe. Only God is changeless and as His message is received through the imperfect human medium it is always liable to suffer distortion in proportion as the medium is pure or otherwise. I would therefore respectfully urge my Christian friends and well-wishers to take me as I am. I respect and appreciate their wish that I should think and be as they are, even as I respect and appreciate a similar wish on the part of my Musalman friends. I regard both the religions as equally true with my own. But my own gives me full satisfaction. It contains all that I need for my growth. It teaches me to pray, not that others may believe as I believe, but that they may grow to their full height in their own religion. My constant prayer therefore is for a Christian or Musalman to be a better Christian and a better Mabomerdan. I am convinced I know, that God will ask, asks us now, not what we label ourselves, but what we are, i.e., what we do. With Him, deed is everything, belief without deed is nothing. With Him doing is believing."

This passage, written with all the perfect frankness and courtesy which we associate with the writer, is a very clear statement of Mr. Gandhi's position. No one will be surprised at the earnest desire of those Christians who number Mr. Gandhi among their friends that he should embrace the Christian faith. It is, we are persuaded, not because he is a man of so great influence that they desire his conversion; it is, rather, because he has seemed to many an instance of the *anima naturaliter Christiana*; and it is always hard to see how such souls refrain from the final act of discipleship. Some recent writers have gone the length of saying that really Mr. Gandhi is a Christian, only he doesn't call himself one, and that it is only a matter of words.

We confess that we have felt that such admirers of Mr. Gandhi are not really fair to him. We have a great admiration for Mr. Gandhi, but it has always seemed to us that he is a Hindu and that he has never given any ground for thinking that he is anything else. His Hinduism is not what many would call orthodox, but what is orthodox Hinduism? Who shall say? He has not only not concealed but has made widely known his deep reverence for the figure of Jesus Christ, and it is clear that from Him he has learnt some of the vital elements in the religion by which he lives. No one in our generation has done more to direct the attention

of that great multitude to whom his name is magic, to Jesus Christ, than has Mr. Gandhi. But he does not yield to Jesus Christ the place of lordship. He is "one among the most illustrious teachers and prophets the world has seen." And if he qualifies his reverence for Christ, he more than qualifies his regard for Christianity as he understands it. The passage immediately following that which we have quoted shows that he is at home and at ease in the universe of Hindu thought as he is not in that of Christianity.

We venture in this way to discuss the religious beliefs of Mr. Gandhi, because he is himself so anxious that his position should be understood. It is, moreover, impossible for Christians not to be intensely interested in what so honest and unselfish a spirit makes of Christianity. We forbear to comment on some of the books which appear in Mr. Gandhi's list. We might read them in prison, certainly nowhere else! There are elements in Mr. Gandhi's statement which suggest, that with all his reading, he has identified with Christianity certain views which are no longer held by most of those to whom he would be entitled to look for Christian guidance. What is perhaps more important is, that he has found a tendency to minimise elements in the teachings of Jesus which to him are essential. We confess that we agree with him when he is unable to find any justification for wars in the New Testament (so did the recent C.O.P.E.C. meeting in England), and when he protests that the Sermon on the Mount appears to be taken as true only with limitations. He almost appears to regard such an attitude as being orthodox in the sense in which a belief in the Trinity is orthodox. So far as Christianity, as a system, is concerned, we have often felt that it is the failure of many Christians to live up to their standards, or indeed to take them seriously, that has most prevented Mr. Gandhi from coming closer to the Christian religion.

Perhaps the prevalent fear of "proselytism" has influenced him in his suggestion that his friends want him to become "as they are. It may be that there is in some of us still the desire to make others like ourselves. But we would assure Mr. Gandhi that there is only one motive behind the missionary movement, and that is the desire to share with others something of infinite value. We do not want people to become like ourselves, indeed we hope that they may do much better than that, but we do want them to know the love of God as it is in Christ.

But while some of these things belong to the circumference, the centre is touched when Mr. Gandhi deals with the place of Christ. We do

not desire to emphasise the place of metaphysical formulation of the doctrine of the person of our Lord. There are many good Christians today who are unhappy with traditional formulations because they do not quite know what they mean. But a Christian is one who can say with St. Peter, even though he may not be able to say much else, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

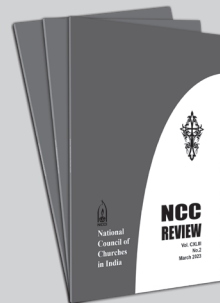
This frank avowal of Mr. Gandhi may, perhaps, remind some of us of the inscrutable mysteries which lie hidden in the work of evangelism. One sometimes hears men speak of the work of presenting Christ to mankind as if it were an enterprise which depended for its success mainly on organisation, money and effective address. We need to be reminded that the spirits of men are not to be seized by violence, nor even by the extremist reasonableness, but only by the Spirit of God, who bloweth where He listeth.

Meanwhile the man of whom we have been writing issues to India a challenge to find a way out of the terrible inter-communal tension, and states his own intention to fast for twenty-one days, not only as a penance, but also as a prayer to the Hindus and the Musalmans to take heed and hearken. There are many who will be anxious during these days; and surely none who will not recognise the utter unselfishness and courage of the act.

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-Rev Dr Abraham Mathew
Managing Editor

NCCI NEWS

GUSTAVO GUTIEREZ – A TRIBUTE

National Council of Churches in India mourns the passing of Rev. Gustavo Gutiérrez, a pivotal figure in liberation theology, who died at 96. His influential work, particularly his landmark book *A Theology of Liberation*, reshaped Christian thought, prioritising the plight of the poor and marginalised. Gutiérrez famously declared that poverty is not just an economic condition but a moral scandal, challenging the church and society to address this reality.

His insights encouraged the contextualization of theology rooted in God's liberating action throughout history. He advocated for theology as a "critical reflection on Christian praxis in light of God's word," inspiring the development of third-world theologies that emphasize the experiences of common people. Indian liberation theologies owe much to his vision.

Born in Lima, Peru, on June 8, 1928, Gutiérrez's early battle with polio deepened his empathy for human suffering. He rejected the prevailing Neo-Scholasticism of his era, instead promoting a theology grounded in the lived experiences of oppression and inequality. His work gained particular resonance during the political turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s in Latin America, where people sought justice.

Gutiérrez reimagined salvation to include human liberation and social justice as essential to the Christian message. His concept of the "preferential option for the poor" became a guiding principle, urging Christians to elevate the voices of the marginalized.

Despite facing criticism for the perceived influence of Marxian thought, Gutiérrez maintained that liberation theology should be subject to critical examination rather than outright condemnation. This approach enriched the understanding of faith in action.

His theological legacy serves as a call to actively engage in the struggles against poverty and injustice. Gutiérrez emphasized that Christian love must translate into action, challenging the church to address not only individual suffering but also the systemic structures perpetuating inequality.

As we reflect on Rev. Gutiérrez's life and work, we celebrate his unwavering dedication to advocating for the poor and marginalized. His

voice will continue to inspire us to seek justice, support the oppressed, and embody a faith deeply intertwined with humanity's struggles. May his memory guide us in our quest for a more just and equitable world.

On behalf of NCCI

Rev. Dr. Abraham Mathew

Executive Secretary, Commission on Policy Governance & Public Witness

FROM LEARNING TO ADVOCACY: THE 3RD BATCH OF THE NCCI IDEA ISL COURSE CONCLUDES

The 3rd batch of the Indian Sign Language course concluded with a call to use the learning to minister and advocate on issues and concerns relating to persons with speech and hearing disabilities. The ISL course is conducted by the Indian Disability Accompaniment (IDEA) Program of the NCCI. The first batch began on September 23, 2023, International Sign Language Day. The third batch ran from August 17 to October 20, 2024.

Through the 3 batches, over a period of twelve months, 80 students trained themselves to communicate with those who use sign language as their primary language. Participants included students, professionals, pastors, missionaries, and in the latest course from the services as well.

Pastor G. Shrihari from the Nellore Deaf Fellowship delivered the valedictory address challenging trainees to confront the misconceptions surrounding the deaf community. Rev. Asir Ebenezer, NCCI General Secretary, encouraged the trainees to continue their learning through community engagement. Ms. Madhuriya, the ISL trainer, significantly enhanced the course's experience.

Classes were held every Saturday and Sunday from 6 PM to 8 PM on Zoom, supplemented by daily homework via WhatsApp. It is hoped that this initiative will build friendships within the deaf community and inspires churches and public events to include sign language interpreters.

Reported by

Mr. Nelson Nag

Program Executive, NCCI-IDEA



WCC NEWS

WCC SIGNS CALL TO ACTION ON THE GLOBAL ALLIANCE AGAINST HUNGER AND POVERTY

The World Council of Churches joined other faith-based and civil society organizations in signing a Call to Action on the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, an open letter to the world's leaders to call for bold and urgent action to end hunger, malnutrition, and poverty.

The letter expresses concern that, without urgent action, we will not achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, especially the global goals to end poverty and hunger, with an estimated 582 million people hungry at the 2030 deadline. It calls on world leaders to strengthen social protection systems, build resilience to food crises, and transform food systems to deliver healthy diets equitably and sustainably.

Further it concludes with a call on all of the world's leaders to make a statement of commitment to the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty. It also calls on national governments to increase funding for food security, nutrition, and social protection in national budgets alongside sufficient funding for climate adaptation, and "to make new policy and funding commitments at the 2025 Paris Nutrition for Growth Summit and other global pledging moments."

CCA NEWS

1700TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST COUNCIL OF NICAIA COMMEMORATED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE TENTH CONGRESS OF ASIAN THEOLOGIAN (CATS-X)

A special event marking the inauguration of the Tenth Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS-X) and the commemoration of the 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea took place on 24 October 2024, at the Zion Cathedral of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia (ELCM) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Touching on the theme of CATS-X, Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara said, “The theme of ‘Echoes of Nicaea: Enduring Faith and Embracing Unity’ was chosen in connection with the 1700th anniversary of the First Nicene Council. This theme is particularly relevant as Christians around the world will soon commemorate this significant historical event. As those partaking in CATS-X, we are now entering the threshold of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea which took place in AD 325, which will be celebrated by Christians worldwide from now onwards.”

CATS provides a common space for theologians from a wide range of Christian traditions to come together, professing their faith in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. The unique summit underscores CCA’s ongoing commitment to providing a platform for theological dialogue across denominational lines, and an opportunity for Asian theologians to explore ways of strengthening ecclesial synchrony, revitalising the visible unity of the Church through shared mission and witness in the world.



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BIBLE STUDY

ALTRUISTIC COVENANT: GOD'S REALISTIC MERITORIOUS ACTION - JEREMIAH 31:31-34

- Epitoli Kinimi*

Introduction

A precise definition of covenant is still a scholarly debate. Still, many would agree that a covenant denotes a legal institution establishing or re-establishing a familial bond between two or more parties employing an oath expressed in words, rituals, or both. The covenant is a solemn promise made binding by an oath, or some would call it a duty or an obligation. Biblically, covenant becomes a central theme in almost every literature and theology. It is seen as a pact between God and the people. It is a partnership between God and humanity, in which God makes promises and asks for certain commitments in return. Our God who is the ultimate excellency created a covenant that is so real, practical and authentic that every individual is expected to live up to it. Altruism is often understood in terms of compassion, sympathy, and empathy. The other side of Altruism is a reciprocal and pure realistic pattern that gives space to every individual to act on it. Simply put, it is the Altruistic Covenant of God's Meritorious Act.

Background of the Text

The passage Jeremiah 31:31-34 is described as part of the Book of Consolation that offers hope and courage to the people. Before the exile, the worship of Yahweh was more or less the official religion of the state of Judah. Although there have been "pluriformity," as the recent discoveries in the history of religion have shown, eventually almost everyone in Judah would construe him/herself as a Yahwist. The fall of Jerusalem and the complex process of exile and return provoked a radical shift. During the exile and especially in the Persian period Yahwism was the religion of a tolerated minority in the empire. This religion was a means for a group of Israelites to make their own identity recognizable amid a principally multi-religious culture.

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Believe in God was no longer an automatism since there were real alternatives. Jer. 31:29–30 is a word on the threshold looking beyond the threshold. The stress on personal responsibility should be interpreted against this historical background. After the threshold of the exile, much will be changed. A new belief system is needed, as is reflected in the words of the new covenant. It would be incorrect to label that mentality as individualism or the expression of a ‘me-alone-movement’. The new covenant is a divine deed that can be promised in the future, like repopulation and rebuilding of the land promised.

This passage is a promise of a new and more intimate relationship between God and people, which is followed by the reliability of reality which signifies divine reliability- a new covenant. It signifies the act described or the situation when the people disobeyed God and the extended period of the rule of God to the present. It also includes the act assessed as iniquity and sin which took place in the period of past and present which would be abrogated later. God is construed as a singular who remains the same person throughout. The passage reiterates that how the old covenant was concluded such as by taking people out of Egypt by the hand, letting them go out of Egypt and God was master over them. However, in the new covenant, God will conclude a new covenant with the law including the people, write a covenant on their hearts, God for the people, forgive their iniquity and will no longer remember the sin of the people.

The people in the past stood in a conventional relationship, broke the covenantal relationship with God and sinned against God. The people in the present might or could still break the covenantal relationship and teach each other about God, but offer divine forgiveness to them. Thus, Jeremiah 31:31-34 contains the expectation of a renewed relationship with the divine. A divine assurance of God’s love for and redemption of the nation of Israel amid the chaos of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. It is a declared unfailing love for the people and a promise of a new covenant that they would not be able to break. The question is What made God give a new covenant to the people? If so, why do we need a new covenant? What pushed God to give a new covenant to the people?

There could be several reasons, some of which are to manifest a clearer revelation and to decipher the mystery of God Romans 16:25-26, Ephesians 1:8-9), to write it in the heart as in Jeremiah 31, and to have a fuller freedom to live by faith (Hebrews 11:4-11) and reflect on our faith through actions (I John 3:18), to be accessible to and for all the

people (Hebrews 10:19-20), and equal rights for all nations and peoples (Galatians 3:26-28).

To understand God's realistic meritorious act in and through Altruistic Covenant, let us consider a few pointers together:

1. Realistic Covenant to Relate Vv. 31-32

31 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

32 It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt- a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord.

Jeremiah 31:31 applies the covenant of individual responsibility to both Israel and Judah creating a literary continuity with the previous chapters 30 and 31. This covenant is of God's initiative and the relationship it would establish is to relate God's own self to the people which God expects reciprocal relationship from the people. It lifts the corporate culpability of northern Israel despite the earlier condemnations in Chapters 2-4 about their disobedience, emptiness, defiling God's land, adultery, faithlessness and idolatry. This new covenant does not reverse those words of judgment, but it releases the individual committed from their threats that the prophet must have viewed as still applicable to nationalists in Judah and Israel. The stipulations of the new covenant are brought into clearer focus in vs 32. It develops the individual accountability expressed in vv 29-30 which shows a day where each individual shall be accountable for the actions and sins committed. The closure of vs 32 when God says though I was a husband to them shows how God look for the allegiance of Israel, hence, offering the people gifts of grace, love, one-to-one relationship with everyone, and a full forgiveness of the past. The final gift over all of these gifts was a self-giving or sacrificial act of love. However, the people promised fair but did nothing right in the eyes of God. Their hearts were neither right with God nor were they steadfast in the covenant.

Therefore, God begins to restore a covenantal relationship that was lost in the debacle of obedience and destruction. Yes, the new covenant was still according to the Torah but in a way, each individual can relate to it. A practical and realistic covenant where everyone can approach it, it is close-knit yet open-wide for everyone to be a part of it. Relating with

others and realistically relating with others might seem similar, but it is not. We may relate with them but we may fail to relate it realistically or lie a difference between sympathy and empathy. It is like being able to understand and actually feel their pain. A realistic covenant to relate is built on an individual's responsibility towards our commitment by being responsible and accountable in our words and deeds. It comes with our inner discipline that is not forced by anyone but us. Personal discipline and individual commitment serve as an important pointer towards transforming to reform. The first step towards an Altruistic covenant is to have a personal commitment towards visualizing to transformation and reformation. This would help one to have a realistic vision to be able to relate to any situation and be ready to transform.

2. Transforming Covenant to Reform V. 33

33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Jeremiah 31:33 provides the solution of how to realistically relate and that is by God transforming the covenant to reform the people and society. This verse provides the solution that this new covenant will be placed in our midst but also inscribed upon our hearts, which in turn will re-establish the covenantal dynamic that was forged during the Exodus but has been lost through people and nation's apostasy. In this covenant, God assures the presence among the people by working with them, giving them better knowledge of the will and inner strength to carry it out. This new covenant also serves as a new hope. Within the existential uncertainty of times, covenant and law will function as symbols of hope. They are no longer construed as external, objective features, but will be seen as subjective elements of personal faith and commitment which will ultimately imply individual responsibility. It is based on divine reliability where God is the guarantor for the new relationship. The significance of the fact that the relationship formula will be the text written "on their hearts" expresses the faithful expectation from each one. It means to put the law or teaching in the seat of one's thoughts, emotions and will.

This covenant serves as a transforming of power by imparting righteousness of law in the central consciousness and will, which requires truth, honesty, transparency, and social and spiritual justice. It means to

transform oneself to reform the shared space we have in church, society, politics etc. A covenantal space begins within ourselves, it starts from our body as a temple of God I Corinthians 6:19-20, in our church where we work, belong to and are members of that congregation, our society where we classify into and a life we live day to day. It is sad to see that in many churches and associations, our visions and strategies are not aligned. There is less progress in our acceptance towards improvement and openness. We manifest a culture that is beyond our reach and beyond the understanding of the local congregation, which creates a culture gap and clashes. Sadly, most Christian ministers and churches end up choosing material riches, fame and power. We fail to see the real needs of the congregation and the people in it. If God can reside in the hearts and minds of people to teach law in a new covenant, the assurance of God anticipates us to accept the call to reform and not deceit God.

Technically, we observe Sundays like Dalit Sunday, tribal and Adivasi Sunday, for that matter we even observe Thursdays in Black in solidarity with women and their struggles. The question is How far are we seriously implementing it and standing not just for them but with them as well? When the situation comes to us to choose an option between our family versus the struggling dalit or a woman who has been abused or a tribal who is facing racism, disabled whose rights were overlooked or an LGBTQIA+ who is unwelcomed? Where would you and I stand? What rights would you and I fight for? Instead of choosing and discerning the real victim, most of us are likely to stand with the one we know such as family or someone we are connected with. Whether we like it or not, we talk about caste issue almost everywhere but at the end of the day, we still decide to give a little push and a favour to one's own caste or people. Is it not a deceit to the new covenant God gave us? Psalms 101:7 warns us that the deceit shall not dwell in the house of God. How transformed are we? Here in Jeremiah verse 31:33 God never says, I am your God and you shall serve me instead it goes I am their God and they shall be my people. By saying this God is ready to be involved in the business of the people irrespective of caste, creed, gender, class and status, yet it is us who interpret a covenant that blocks a path, thereby, the bridge of humanity falls with our every insane action and resolution.

Having said that, how do we transform to reform? There is a necessity to strive towards realizing God's meritorious act and act on it.

3. Striving towards God's Meritorious Act V. 34

34 No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Jeremiah 31:34 makes it clearer of a new covenant explained in the preceding verses that in future it would no longer be necessary to plead with others to know God. It does not mean there will no longer be people who teach others, but that everyone will know in their hearts what to do and what not to do in accordance with God's will. The sin that Jeremiah proclaimed in 6:13; 8:10, 17:1 and 9 which was beyond cure, the time has now come for the people to be transformed in their hearts. 'Know the Lord' indicates having not only cognitive knowledge but also experiential or relational knowledge. It means have a proper relationship with God, it also involves experiencing firsthand powerful acts of deliverance. Neither age, gender, caste nor sociopolitical status will determine who knows God and who does not. All those in the new covenant will know God for the new covenant will facilitate their ability to build connection between God and People. It also includes the divine forgiveness when a person connects with God. By saying I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more stresses that God is the one who establishes and continues the regularity of every person's relationship. The verse also includes the cancellation of any merited punishments and the reestablishment of a close relationship. Thus, opening ways to strive towards God's Meritorious act.

This verse specifies that covenantal knowledge of God will not come from official policy, religious hierarchy, or even philosophical postulation, but rather from individual commitment to and faith in the percepts of the Torah. Thus, one can see that that restoration is a wholistic approach of God and it is not contingent upon a covenant with higher authorities alone but rather it is for the subjects and other lower and unseen sections of a community ignored by many of us. It speaks to a community and not to a particular reign, it speaks to a congregation rather than a church. God will remove all barriers and bring the people into direct fellowship with Godself.

Striving towards God's meritorious act is to challenge the present reality by building possibility and awakens emotional yearning for a better world. It challenges the present reality by insisting on divine power as the enacting agent. God's covenant comprises these meritorious

acts such as cognitive, evaluative and emotional acts. The ability to recognize oneself and others which is to be able to relate, valuable attachment to discern, and a heart to act it out God's meritorious act towards any members. This is the Altruistic covenant of God. This is a promising word of an idealistic prophet who hopes for a better future.

Striving towards a meritorious act is to WALK THE TALK. I John 3:17-18 exhorts everyone to walk the talk, which is also supported by James 1:22 to be the doers of what we say, hear, preach and teach, lest we deceive ourselves. How good is our Christian value if it is not helping the people for whom we are writing and teaching for? We have been discussing these issues for a long time. If so, why the atrocities still continue? March 14, 2024 Times of India published a story In Ludhiana area where a person allegedly beats four Dalit women in village. Mazdoor Jodo Paidal Yatraa where after farmers' protest, now landless Dalit labourers in Punjab launched protest to walk village to village demanding their rights. NDTV also publishes stories such as on November 6, 2024, Dalit Teen was attacked with sickle, and beer bottle struck on his head in Tamil Nadu. November 14, 2024 Dalit Villages set on fire in Post-poll violence in Madhya Pradesh. There are countless news that show atrocities and violence against minorities, women, children and LGBTIQ+ that have been swept under the carpet. Such as, I happen to meet an auto driver in Dimapur who said that his son was killed by some people in Ahmedabad but they decided not to file an FIR because it would not help. The saddest part was they were anticipating his call to speak with his mother, since the first time he called she was in the restroom only to know that the next phone call was about his murder. What does God teaches us in a new covenant? How are we going to act out in situations such as these? These are the times when our education should work on it. But we keep on waiting for others to act on it or move towards our comfort of life.

Conclusion

How do we apply the Altruistic Covenant of God's Meritorious Act in our life? The importance of God's new covenant is to be Obligated to act or to have the knowledge of divine meritorious act. All throughout my life, one lesson my father taught me was when you do anything, you should do it as a divine sacrificial duty just as for him Teaching was his divine sacrificial duty. So also, this new covenant is the divine act of God and so we are to consider our actions as divine sacrificial acts.

A Buddhist concept of *Punnya* or Meritorious act encourages every devotee to perform good actions which will ultimately give rise to merit or *punnya* which are Charity, morality, mental culture, reverence or respect, service in helping others, sharing merits with others, rejoicing in the merits of others, preaching and teaching the *Dhamma*, listening to the *Dhamma* and Straightening one's views. The performances of these ten meritorious deeds serve as a tool to raise one's merit and benefit others. It not only deepens one's faith and spiritual life but improves the moral life and altruistic giving in every individual. Similarly, the *Nishkama karma* of Hinduism is not about renouncing action or becoming passive or indifferent to the world. It is about engaging in action with the right attitude, dedication, and awareness. It is about performing one's duties and responsibilities with a sense of purpose and commitment, without being attached to the fruits or outcomes of one's actions. It is about offering one's actions as a service to the divine, and accepting whatever results come as a gift from the Divine.

Thus, a new covenant demands a selfless act that sees beyond any differences and incompatibilities. It is a covenant that is solely based on divine acts for humanity in the divine ways of God. As fellow citizens of the creation, we are bought by the blood and spirit of God who requires reciprocation divine offering which is our gift to God in stewarding the earth and the people belonging to the planet. In a world that requires a new covenant, our life can be a new covenant where we selflessly put meritorious acts in the forefront without anticipation. God in a new covenant enables the people to decipher the divine God that exists for humanity by relating with the people as one of us. In the splendour of majestic presence, God chose to be a husband to Israel in vs 32, as someone who can be a part of a closely-knit family in a way that every creature is drawn towards the realistic act of covenant. As the new covenant is put forth, the readiness to transform is summoned for everyone to stand for what is truth, fair and honest and reprimand anything that is against our Christian values. It is to uplift humanity by raising the standards of the Godly covenant and striving for the altruistic meritorious act that is selfless. May God help us to realistically relate to the suffering and cry of the people, strengthen us to transform to reform the society and engage in God's meritorious act. May we also learn to discipline ourselves to improve our covenant with God and be ready to be altruistic in our ways.





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