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EDITORIAL

Emerging with the Scar(s) of Bethlehem

Banksy's iconic 'scar of Bethlehem' (2019) depicts the traditional manger scene against the backdrop of a grey wall which is suggestive of the wall that separates Israel and the Palestinian territories. The mark of a bullet hole in the painting creates an image reminiscent of the nativity star on the wall.

This piece of art serves as a candid reminder of the call to recognise the holes punched into the projections of supposedly impregnable posts that have until today sought to perpetuate vampirical empires of the times. Many years after the British artist's work of resistance appeared in Bethlehem's Walled-Off Hotel and drew media attention to The Wall, many walls continue to haunt situations of self-inflicted contexts of wars, want and despair.

Twenty years after the Accra Confession introduced by the World Communion of Reformed Churches named (read nailed) the empire as the enemy, we still see projections of supposedly informidable and unsurmountable empires with their treachourous trap to enslave all. The Accra Confession faith centres on the Triune God—Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer—who invites individuals to engage in the ongoing process of creation and redemption in the world. It believes that the principles of justice, peace, and grace underpin the divine covenant, extending to all of creation, and Jesus Christ arrived to offer a complete existence to all, while the Holy Spirit equips believers to align their lives with this profound vision. The confession further asserts that the economy ought to uphold the dignity and well-being of individuals and the environment, rather than exert control over them; the divine embodies justice, standing firmly with those who are poor, exploited, and marginalised. As devoted adherents of this faith, the WCRC members hold a profound responsibility to confront injustice, protect the environment, cultivate harmony within the church, and embody lives of steadfast obedience, regardless of the sacrifices it may entail. The members acknowledge their role in perpetuating unjust systems and pledge to seek repentance, embrace transformation, and nurture the hope that justice and peace will ultimately triumph.

Consequently, Acca confession dismisses every type of economic, political, and theological framework—including neoliberal capitalism,

unchecked wealth accumulation, and imperial expansion—that subjugates the impoverished, exploits the environment, and violates divine covenant. Accra confession rejects the notion of consumerism, ideologies that place profits above the well-being of individuals, and any belief system that suggests divine favour is reserved for the wealthy or that condones exclusion, injustice, or harm to the environment. Accra confession terminates church practices that overlook the needs of the impoverished or neglect the stewardship of creation, as well as any efforts to dissociate justice from the church's unity. Accra confession opposes doctrines and frameworks that misrepresent the gospel and challenge the inclusive, life-affirming mission of Jesus Christ. The scar of Bethlehem transforms into a symbol of divine connection with those who suffer across the globe. It serves as a poignant reminder that the divine is not removed from suffering, but rather engages with it—transforming it through the assurance of tranquilly.

Our calling, after the manner of Jesus, puts us face to face with 'powers and principalities' underlying such empire constructs that deny life to all affirming it only to a few privileged ones. In these engagements we are invariably mauled and pressed from all sides by the unholy nexus of politics, religion and the market. Many have fallen resisting, but not without scars of the fight. Many since the Jesus of history, and in our own neighbourhood, have been crushed and/or have fallen in resisting the vampire. The vampires have inflicted grievous wounds in our struggles leaving many a scar, yet 'by those stripes we are healed' and recouped for pressing on.

Let us add meaning to the observance of Christmas this year by identifying and lifting the likes of the scar(s) of Bethlehem that will drive us to committing to a world with no walls, and a world that recognises and respects the dignity and rights of all individuals, groups and communities. In this process we too may be inflicted with many a scar; yet it is these scars of having stood up that can lead generations to the manger(s) of liberation and life-flourishing.

NCC Review has been the space for lifting up the scars that reveal the wounds inflicted. Over the last 10 issues we have been introduced to several such areas in which we were bruised and scarred, and to those acts of resilience through which we live.

As we end the year, we are invited to reflect on the stars of hope that we seek to look up to, and be guided to the birth of the new ways to/ of Life-flourishing.

Wish you all a blessed Christmastide, and prayers for a good start to the New Year 2025. Let us emerge with, and recognising such imageries as, the scar(s) of Bethlehem; rising to Life acknowledging 'failing' Babylon's of our times.

Rev. Asir Ebenezer
General Secretary, NCCI

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ANIMIST PRAXIS OF THE ANGAMIS IN PRECOLONIAL TIMES

- Petekhrienuo Sorhie[*] & Kelhouravo Kire[**]

Introduction

The Angami Nagas are an ethnic tribe living in the Northeast Indian state of Nagaland. They are one of the fifteen major tribes in Nagaland. Before the advent of Christianity in the land of the Nagas, the Angamis followed a religion called "*Pfutsana*"[1] or "*Tsana*."[2] They believe in the existence of a deity and refer to their God as "*Kipurhuo-u*"[3] which means the supreme God. As an ethnic group, they are very orthodox and share a common religion and culture before interference by other forces. The advent of Christianity in the land of Angami brought about changes in the social, political, cultural as well as religious beliefs. It brought about a transitional sweep over their traditional belief system. The extensive work done by the American missionaries to spread Christianity and bring about modernity and civilization to the Angami' who practiced Animism bore fruit and resulted in conversion to Christianity. This brought about a paradigm shift in religious ideology, philosophy, culture, and way of life.

As the new religion gained momentum over the Nagas, conversions ensued. Soon the sweep of the new over the traditional belief system despite the initial suspicions and resistance heralded a new religious outlook besides an overhaul of their social and cultural perspective. The immediate consequence was that in adopting and adapting to foreign culture, the erosion of many religious, cultural practices, and moral values of the Angamis also took place. Today according to the 2011 census Nagaland has a population of 87.93% Christians, hence constituting the majority population in the State. This paper aims to explore the pristine state of the Angamis in their realm of traditional

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[1] Shürhozelie Liezietsu, *U Niedimia* (Kohima: Ura Academy, 1989), 1.

[2] Mezhüvilie Liezietsu, Keduosievi Kesiezie, and Shürhozelie Liezietsu, *MKS Dieda: Tenyidie* (Kohima: Ura Academy, 2001), 226.

[3] D. Kuolie, Vilhouzhalie Lisimvü, *U Tsiepfumia Nanyüjako* (Kohima:Ura Academy, 2017), 5.

belief systems, which they call *Pfutsana* which connotes very close to the practice of *Animism*.

Objectives of the Study.

i. Deeper investigation of the traditional culture and religion of the Angami.
ii. To explore the significance of the Animist culture or way of living and history of the Angami Nagas.
iii. Identify and discourse on the cultural and religious transition of the Angami from Animism to Christianity which is an area not adequately studied.

Methodology of the Study

Research Method

The main purpose of the study is concerned with the examination and exploration of the historical events and social aspects of the Angami Nagas. Therefore, the historical and exploratory research methods supported by descriptive research methods were used.

Research Tools & Data Collection

Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Oral history and books containing the history of the Angamis fall under primary data. Personal discussions were held as well. Secondary data or sources are assembled from published texts and other literature available.

Data Analysis

The data collected are analysed qualitatively using the exploratory narrative analysis method.

Traditional Culture and Animist Praxis of the Angamis

The Angami are popularly known for having diverse traditional culture and festivals throughout the year with colourful traditional attires, dresses, ornaments, and varieties of foods. The physical landscape of the Angami is divided into four groups: Chazoucha Angami, Japfüphiki Angami, Niakracha Angami, Chakhro Angami. Having rich culture and tradition with favourable environment and nature, they lived independently with strict devotion to religious and cultural practices.

The Angami traditional religion is known as *Pfutsana* or *Tsana*, i.e. *Animism.* The word *animism* has its origin in the Latin word *anima* which means soul or life. This word was ascribed to connote the belief systems of indigenous peoples around the world by anthropologists during the 19th century. The Nagas in its entirety followed animistic religion traditionally and they believed extensively in superstitions and rituals. Beyond the animistic belief that all things possess a spirit or soul, the Angamis believed in the existence of a supreme God besides other spirit beings. They call their supreme God *Kipurhuo-u*.

In *Pfutsana,* the people believed in the existence of deities who were either benevolent or malevolent in their attributes. They believed that benevolent deities bring good fortune whereas malevolent deities bring suffering to mankind. The Angamis practiced various rituals and offerings to please their God or deities. They showed gratitude to the good deities and blame the evil deities for every suffering that happens in their life. *Chükhieo* is known as *Nhachüko Rhuou* (the God of animals). The people will seek the blessings of *Chükhieo* before they set out for any hunting expedition. *Miawenuo* is known as *Theguo Zuopfü morei Kinyi Zuopfü* (the spirit mother of luck or wealth). It is believed that whenever someone met *Miawenuo*, one can ask for luck or wealth and become wealthy. *Rutshe, Rhuolo* are some examples of evil deity.[4] In *Pfutsana,* they also believe in the afterlife whereby the spirit of a dead person transitions to a place called "*Terhuora*" (the abode of the spirit) to live.[5]

The Angamis followed the patriarchal social system where the father of the family is undisputedly the head of the household and thereby patrilineal inheritance system is followed be it in ancestral property inheritance or the family lineage. The youngest son is bequeathed the right to inherit the parental home. Everyone lives under one umbrella in harmony with socialization being the focal point in every sphere of life. The social structure of the Angami is decorated with variant categories; parent-children, husband-wife, relatives, clans, khels, villages, etc. Every villager helped each other in times of hardship, famine, physical work, etc., showcasing the spirit of brotherhood, cooperation, and community anchored in a strong sense of belongingness enhancing the uniqueness of the Angami culture.

[4] Vikielie Sorhie, *Tenyimia Kelhou Bode* (Kohima: Ura Academy, 1993), 75-77.

[5] Shürhozelie Liezietsu, *U Niedimia* (Kohima: Ura Academy, 1989), 1-2.

Bestowed with a rich agricultural landscape, the Angamis have always been predominantly agriculturalists. For livelihood, they are dependent on cultivation and livestock-rearing. In clothing, the womenfolk are adroit in their weaving skills using loin loom as their main weaving equipment. The Men folk would wear short kilt-like clothe called "*Neitho, Neikro and Keshünei*" to cover their hip till their knees. Women folks wear "*Neikhro, Chiecha, pfhemhou, Lohe*" a kilt-like longer wrap around to cover their hip till their shin; "*ketei vatshi, kekra vatshi*" a shawl-like form of shirt to cover their upper body.[6] Their mesmerizing traditional attires and ornaments add more uniqueness and colour to their culture. They made their own attires and ornaments and traditionally everyone is required to wear at least one attire or ornament.

Angamis' has their own unique structure of housing where everyone lives in thatched house called *Kitho* which consist of four rooms: *kifükhro* (corridor), *kiluo* (open room), *miphu* (kitchen) and *kinutshe* (last room).[7] Every door is structured facing the east in order to get sunlight as well as to stay healthy. They perform various sacrifices and rituals in daily life to please their God. Whenever natural disasters like lightning, storm, fire, earthquake, and hailstorm occurred, *penie*[8] a non-working day (*genna*) is observed to prevent further destruction. In instances of death incidents by drowning, fire, wild animals, *penie* is observed to appease their God.

The distinct and unique culture and Animistic beliefs dictate the hairstyle of the Angamis also. Man, and women are given different hairstyles. Women are forbidden from growing or having long hair before marriage. Men also follow certain rules to grow their hair as per their age; the older they become they can have longer hair but having a *tsükhru*[9] (pigtail) is common to all the men. The common hairstyle for men is called *daphi*[10] (rounded haircut above the ear). It is distinct that the ways of life for the Angamis are intricately cut along their religious belief systems.

Before Christianity, the Angami Nagas lived under one umbrella sharing a common culture and religion. From its inception and based on

6 Vikielie Sorhie, *Tenyimia Kelhou Dze* (Kohima: Ura Academy,1993), 97-99.
7 Vikielie Sorhie, *Tenyimia Kelhou Bode* (Kohima: Ura Academy, 1993), 22-23.
8 Mezhüvilie Liezietsu, Keduosievi Kesiezie, and Shürhozelie Liezietsu, 318.
9 Mezhüvilie Liezietsu, Keduosievi Kesiezie, and Shürhozelie Liezietsu, 487.
10 Mezhüvilie Liezietsu Keduosievi Kesiezie, and Shürhozelie Liezietsu, 43.

old oral tradition, the religion that the Angamis' believed and followed as aforementioned is known as *Pfutsana* (animism). They believed that there is a supreme God who is the creator of everything. From time immemorial, they believe that there is the existence of deities who are far more superior to mankind, everything within and beyond the universe is created and governed by one supreme God. Therefore, everything is done for appeasement as well as to invoke blessings from the supreme God. The Angami animism believes in an afterlife in a place called "*Terhuora*" (the abode of the spirit). Whenever someone died, it was believed that the spirit went to *Terhuora* and settled there. They also believe that when a renowned or good person died, their spirit appeared in the sky in the form of a star.[11] It is also believed that the spirit of a dead person used to appear in the form of a butterfly or other insects.[12]

i. Terhuomia/Ruopfü (Deity/Spirits)

In Angami traditional belief, everything possesses certain spirits in them. There exist many spirits both malevolent and benevolent. They believe that benevolent spirits bring good fortune, in contrast, malevolent deities bring suffering. "*Rutrshe, Rhuolo*" are examples of evil spirit while "*Miawenuo, Chükhieo*" are examples of good spirit. "*Chükhieo*" is known as "*Nhachüko Rhuou*" (the God of animals), people seek the blessings of "Chükhieo" before departure for hunting. "*Miawenuo*" is known as "*Theguo Zuopfü morei Kinyi Zuopfü*" (the spirit mother of luck or wealth). Whenever a person met "*Miawenuo*", one can ask for blessing of wealth and can become wealthy. They believe that unique figure of stone, trees, mountains, plants, flowers, rivers, and everything possess some spirits in them, and whenever one encounters such spirits people perform rituals, offerings and sacrifices to appease the spirits. To cross a river or fetch water from the rivers/ponds, firstly they pluck a leaf and place it in the river before crossing or fetching water with the saying "*a rie ho*" (I'm first). Likewise, whenever they come across certain stone figures, trees, or places, placing a leaf on it or the side is a must as a sign of offering to please the spirit as well as to inherit/own the path. Without doing this ritual people get sick, and become unconscious which can even cause death. These rituals are mainly carried out to

[11] Shürhozelie Liezietsu, *U Niedimia* (Kohima:Ura Academy, 1989), 1.
[12] Vikielie Sorhie, *Tenyimia Kelhou Bode* (Kohima: Ura Academy, 1993), 64.

prevent any suffering from the spirits. Listed below are some spirits in the Angami belief system[13]:

Kesüdi (The giant ferocious spirit)
Ketsierho (The spirit of stone)
Rothse (The killer)
Rapu (Ghost of nightmare)
Mechiemo (Gate keeper of death)
Chükhio (God of beasts)
Telepfü (spirit of intellect)
Dzürho (Goddess of water creatures)

ii. Nanyü (Rituals)

The Angamis were a highly spiritual people who believed in keeping the spirits appeased. The *kemevo* (community priest) performs all the public and religious ceremonies[14]. Almost all their work or activities would begin and end with the performing of various rituals. The sacredness of these rituals mandates it to be taboo in the case of their forfeiture by anyone. According to their belief that the supreme God governs and provides all their needs, prior to carrying out any activity, they perform rituals and make offerings in the form of thanksgiving to their God. During breakfast, lunch, dinner, or consumption of any food, firstly they will take a bit of cooked rice, and placed it on the top side of the cooking pot for the spirit pronouncing "*hau pie Kipurhuou/ Terhuomia ya chü tuo*" (this is the portion for the supreme God), only after which they will fill their plate with food. In terms of drinking, after filling their cups with *zu* (traditional rice beer) they will touch the top of the drinks with their finger or will pour a bit of rice beer on the ground by saying "*hau pie Kipurhuou/Terhuomia ya chütuo*" (this is the portion for the supreme God). Besides these, before consuming any food or drinks they will touch the given food or drink with their finger and will again touch their forehead with their finger to avoid food poisoning. This way, they live a life surrounded by rituals and offerings.

The Angamis in their pristine state untouched by colonial tentacles lived in a culture where rituals were intrinsic to their day-to-day life. For them, rituals begin from birth till death. As soon as a child is born,

[13] K.S. Zetsuvi, *Traditional Culture of the Angami Nagas* (Dimapur:Heritage Publishing House,2014), 40.
[14] ibid.

the father of the child will smear saliva on his fingertip and touch the forehead of the newborn child with the saying "*A rie ho*" (I'm first). This is done so with the belief that the father must take ownership of the child first for fear that the deity/spirits of evils or animals would claim the child.[15] If a child faces sudden suffering, the parents of the child will draw a mark on the forehead of the child with charcoal to protect the spirit of the child and to prevent further suffering or to chase away the evil spirit. If a person is suffering severely or is unconscious without any reason, people will burn either a clean cloth or a bunch of garlic to chase away the evil spirit and to bring the person's spirit back to their body. Whenever evil spirits disguise themselves in human forms and call a person by their name or talk with a person, people will burn the seeds of mustard leave or will talk loudly with the saying, "*tsie hieluo, a bu gakrie tsia chülie perie*" (wait, let me get the seeds of mustard leave), by doing so the evil spirit will vanish. Through these ways, the Angamis carried out many rituals to live a blessed life, to protect themselves, and to prevent suffering caused by malevolent spirits.

iii. Kenyü (Taboos)

The word "*kenyü*" (taboo) is instilled and ingrained in every Angami from the moment a child can think and learn. "*Kenyü*" means "*nanyü nu jotalie kevi la chü suo üdi khakecüu"* [16] (Forbidden to certain action and from committing sacrilege against rituals). There are many taboos in the Angami culture which consciously or unconsciously govern and guide the people from evil practices. Parents and elders explain the meaning and the consequences of taboos to a child the moment he/she can learn things. The word *kenyü* is inherently attached to every to the Angami society which helps in maintaining a peaceful society. Anything associated with violating "*kenyü*" will result in death, suffering, and bad omen. Examples: taboo to eat certain food, taboo to speak certain words, taboo to visit certain places; taboo to do certain works, etc during certain ceremonial or *genna* day.

There are numerous taboos practiced in the Angami culture, which can categorically be studied in three aspects namely religious taboo, cultural taboo, and moral taboo. Religious taboos involve people and their religion. Some examples of religious taboos are: "*nacünanyü chü keba teiki nanyü chü tsei mota kenyü*" (It is taboo to carry out

[15] Niechüriazo Chücha, *Tenyimia Kelhou Dze* (Kohima:Ura Academy,1989), 17.

[16] Mezhüvilie Liezietsu, Keduosievi Kesiezie and Shürhozelie Liezietsu, *MKS Dieda: Tenyidie* (Kohima:Ura Academy, 2001), 144.

incomplete rituals), "*nanyü chü keba teiki nanyüjako pu kekrüwa kenyü*" (It is taboo to utter wrong words of blessings during rituals). Cultural taboos are those taboos that connote the culture of its people. Examples: "*chapfüchaü kha kenyü*"[17] (it is taboo to block public roads), "*merünuomia pese mu kedo kenyü*"[18] (It is taboo to discriminate or deceive orphans), "*kerü kha kenyü*" (it is taboo to block streams/rivers). Moral taboos are those taboos that relate to the moral bearing of its people. Examples; "*nhicumia tieligali pemou cü kenyü*"[19] (it is taboo for children to eat straight from the pot), *phichümia gei u zuo suo kenyü* (it is taboo to misbehave with or disrespect the elderly), *u krünuo gei u zuo suo kenyü* (it is taboo to dishonour and misbehave with parents). These taboos were meant for everyone which echoes a generalized relevance to this day.

iv. Thekhruothenyi (Festivals)

The Angami culture abounds with *thekhruothenyi* (festivals) throughout the year where every festival is decked with rich cultural meaning and practices. The Angamis have seven major festivals; *Terhünyi, Sekrenyi, Ngonyi, Kerunyi, Chadanyi, Liedenyi, Khoupfhünyi*. All these festivals accord with their religion, culture, and lunar months demarcating a distinct timing for each festival. The main festivals of the Angamis called as "*Sekrenyi*" also known as "*Phousanyi*"[20] (purification of the body/soul) is regarded as the most significant festival where all menfolk perform rituals to purify their body/soul; the rituals also signify and predict the future events of the given year. The other festivals of the Angamis are also celebrated with different meanings and rituals to please their God. The rituals involved with the festivals are all interrelated with their culture, beliefs, and religion. The Angami believe that everything is provided by the Supreme God, therefore they celebrate every festival in the form of thanksgiving and appeasement to God beseeching for blessings of success and prosperity.

V. Ruotho (Sacrifices)

The Animistic Angamis performed many "*ruotho*"[21] (sacrifices) to appease their God and to ask for the return of a person's spirits. As an

[17] D. Kuolie, *Kenyü mu Menga* (Kohima:Ura Academy, 2018), 87.
[18] Kuolie, 92.
[19] Kuolie, 125.
[20] Shürhozelie, *Phousany* (Kohima: Ura Academy, 1981), 1.
[21] Mezhüvilie Liezietsu; Keduosievi Kesiezie; Shürhozelie Liezietsu, 375.

orthodox ethnic tribe, they strictly adhere to their cultural and religious beliefs and practices. In any unfortunate sufferings or death, they make sacrifices to their God for appeasement, for healing, and seek help to return the spirit of the sick person from that spirit who is ready to take the human spirit. Under such circumstances, without sacrifices, the spirit will take over the person's spirit and lead to the death of the physical body. Suppose a person suddenly becomes severely ill or is about to die without a reason. In that case, a sacrifice called *sieshü*[22] (a ritual performed to call one's spirit back in case a person's spirit is possessed by an evil spirit) will be performed. In such cases, the relatives of the sick person will seek *themoumia* (fortune teller) to ask what had happened to the person. The *themoumia* will perform some ritual and pronounce that the person met with an evil spirit who is trying to take away the spirit of the person. In such cases, the relatives or some elders will carry a clean iron rod or an unblemished hen without any stripe and will go outside the village gate to summon back the spirit of the sick person. After reaching certain places, they will dig the ground and place the clean iron rod and cover it with the soil, also they will dispatch the hen into the forest after which a certain man will utter some words in a loud voice addressing the name of the sick person by saying "Co..*!..Lhouchalie…tuo rieshülie…*" (Yes..! Lhouchalie.. walk ahead…), after which everyone will return home. The belief is that, after the performance of the ritual, the spirit of the sick person will return to the body and the person will be healed or regain his senses before the arrival of those people who had gone to perform rituals for his spirit. The Angamis believed that there are some plants and flowers that possess spirit and whoever touches, plucks, or comes across such things, these spirits will possess the spirit of the people and will lead them to dangerous and unknown places to possess their spirit which consequentially ends in the death of the person.

vi. Terhuora (The Abode of the Spirit)

The Angami traditional *Pfutsana* (animism) believes in afterlife. They believe that when a person dies, their spirits go to a place called "*Terhuora*" (the abode of the spirit). In Angami traditional religion, if a person dies, their spirit will travel from "*Rünyügei" (a place in the afterlife)* to "*Kezeirü" (a place in the afterlife)* and from *Kezeirü*

[22] Mezhüvilie Liezietsu, 417.

the spirit will go to *Terhuora*.[23] During the burial, a domestic pet dog or hen will be buried alive along with the dead body. It is done with the belief that when a person dies and transitions to *Terhuora* these domesticated animals or pets will accompany the spirit of the dead person into *Terhuora*. During the funeral, a big cow is slaughtered to perform rituals. The thighs, arms, and head of the cow are distributed to their close relatives, and the rest of the beef will be cooked for the funeral attendees.

It is believed that after a dead person is buried, his/her spirit will roam around within their house and the neighbours for around 30 days. After 30 days from the day of death, the family or relatives fill up a plate for the deceased with cooked rice and curries, after which the spirit of the dead person will be gone. The Angamis also believed that when a renowned or good person dies, their spirit will reappear in the sky in the form of a star.

Angami beyond Animism

As afore discussed, before the advent of Christianity in the Angami land, everyone shared a common religion called "*Pfutsana*" i.e. Animism. The Angami Nagas were very conservative and fiercely independent ignorant of the global populace existence and had lived free of external interference until the year 1832 when the Angamis had their first encounter with outsiders when British captain Jenkin and Pemberton while traveling from the Manipur side with their battalion saw an Angami village and out of curiosity, pointed at the Angami village and asked the people of Manipur about the Angami people who live in the hilltop. Manipuris replied to this by identifying these people as, *Ngami* which means *excellent*.[24] Following long years of tenacious resistance to the British intrusion into their land, on June 2nd, 1881 British were able to colonized the Angami land which brought about a halt to warfare and killings paving the way for the American missionary to come to the land of the Nagas. The American missionaries saw a wide undiluted mission field to evangelise a people who were thick in animistic way of life and they took formal education as a key tool to persuade the Angamis in giving up their old religion. C.D. King was the

[23] Shürhozelie Liezietsu, *U Niedimia* (Kohima: Ura academy, 1989), 1-2.
[24] Kiezotuo Zhale, *Tenyimia Kelhou Dze* (Kohima: Ura Academy, 1995), 2.

first American missionary to reach the land of the Angamis on February 25th, 1881.[25]

Under the American Baptist Missionary union, on July 11th 1878, C.D. King an American Baptist missionary was appointed to be sent to Angami area to spread education and the Gospel. By February 25th, 1881, C.D. King reached Kohima village to begin his work and settled down at Mission Compound in Kohima village. As soon as he reached Kohima village, he began his work by inaugurating a school in collaboration with the Government. C.D. King along with his wife, his helper Robi, a teacher named Henry Goldsmith, and Sarbey, run the school concertedly. However gradual the progress, it was through formal education that they managed to share the gospel leading to conversion from Animism to Christianity. It was only after a good five years of relentless effort that Lhousietsü became the first Angami to convert to Christianity and was baptized by C.D. King on 21st June 1885. Lhouselie, also received converted and was baptized by Rev. C.D. King on July 1885. Later, Sieliezhü Sorhie became the third Angami to be converted to Christianity and was baptized by Rev. C.D. King on 30th August 1885. Neirütsü, the fourth Angami who converted was baptized by Rev. C.D. King on September 1885.[26] To spread the gospel the first Kohima Christian fellowship was organized on March 29th, 1883 by Rev. C.D. King. As a result, the gospel spreads to different Angami villages as well as to other tribes and districts in Nagaland from Kohima Village.

Rev. C.D. King went back to his homeland in the year 1886. After the departure of Rev. C.D. King, the American Baptist Missionary Union sent S.W. Rivenburg and his wife to the Angami land in February 1887. S.W. Rivenburg quickly became a boon for the people rendering to the medical needs of the people which drew the interest and trust of the people. The locals who converted worked with S.W. Rivenburg as a result of which people began to receive Jesus Christ and embrace the new religion. According to the written literature and oral tradition, many Angami villages including other several tribes received the Gospel from Rev. Sieliezhü Sorhie. Therefore, Rev. Sieliezhü Sorhie from Kohima village is considered as the father of Christianity among the Angami. This is how Christianity particularly the Baptist was introduced all over Kohima as well as in many other districts of Nagaland. Steadily, with unwavering efforts, the conversion to Christianity from animism

[25] Shürhozelie Liezietsu, *U Niedimia* (Kohima: Ura Academy, 1989), 6-14.

[26] Neisevituo Sorhie, *Kewhira Kehou Kezha Puo Sede: The Beginning of a Big Church: Rev. Rivernburg* (Kohima: City Press, 2009), 195.

took place and more people were converted to Christianity which also brought about a change in their cultural and religious quintessence.

The acquisition of new religion heralded the accumulation of new knowledge and wisdom leading to the birth of different religious denominations on the line of different doctrines, teachings, preaching and interpretation among the Christians. People tried to balance the thoughts and voices of the Christians to come under one umbrella perhaps to hold tight on one religion. However, the different doctrines, ideologies, philosophies, teachings, interpretations from different members and Christian leaders paved the way for more religious denominations wherein people decided to move from Baptist to other denomination leading to the birth of different denominations such as Baptist Revival, Pentecostal, Catholic, Christian Revival, Assembly of God, Seven Day of Adventist, etc.

Conclusion

The radical nature of conversion in religious outlook saw a seamless percolation in the heart and mind of the Angami people today. Western influence has now been internalized in the natives so much so that some churches would not allow full traditional costumes to be worn besides prohibiting cultural and traditional folk songs from being performed in the churches. Proselytization and impartation of formal education by the Baptist has successfully overshadowed many cultural practices especially the belief system of the Angamis wherein studies record that 98% of its population has been Christianised. However, with notions of decolonization, and the promotion of localness in terms of its traditional culture and heritage, the Angamis, without compromising their faith as Christians, are making efforts to preserve, promote, and perpetuate their ethnicity in all aspects except the religious belief system. Every Naga tribe including the Angamis in the form of groups as custodians takes initiatives towards relearning, reviving, and documentation of traditional heritage. Moral values embedded in the age-old traditions of the Angamis continue to be relevant and practiced. Today, Angamis have adapted to Western religion while tenaciously preserving their ethnic identity. Apparently, the duality of this existential nature will inexorably be a description of the Angamis.

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EMERGING TRENDS AND CHALLENGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: E-EDUCATION AND DIGITAL DIVIDE

- Athira M. P.[*] & Mothi George[**]

Abstract

Schools and colleges were closed during the first week of March 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic started spreading across India. After a short hiatus, e-education was seen as the only way to 'reopen' the closed educational institutions. The paper examines the new digital or online study method among college students during this period. Also, it looks into the digital divide and its implications on students in a regional context. Information was collected from 150 students from urban and rural areas in Kerala. The data were analysed to check the association between variables. The study found that the pandemic revolutionized teaching in higher education by adopting methods like online learning modes and platforms. The study also revealed that E-education is going well through the accessibility of digital devices by providing e-platforms that disseminate to everyone. It also shows a digital divide in digital technology and the adequacy of stable network connections. Policymakers and the government should be concerned about ensuring the accessibility of the internet to everyone to utilize technology to engage their basic needs in civic and educational life.

Keywords: digital divide, e-education, e-learning, higher education, online platforms.

Introduction

The Indian higher education sector has shown tremendous development after independence, with a significant increase in the number of colleges and students. Recent estimates show that more than 25 million students are pursuing higher studies at about 900 universities (Saravanakumar & Padmini, 2020).[1] Literacy levels and education form the vital indicators

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[1] A. R Saravanakumar, and K. R, Padmini Devi, "Indian higher education: issues and opportunities," *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 7/2 (2020): 542- 545.

of the development of a society and keeping it as a major development goal, India has taken a giant leap to develop its educational system and structure to educate its population. For achieving this huge task, the government has set up many bodies and centres and started various ventures, creating lots of distance and online learning programs. India adhered to the three goals in its policy toward education like expansion, inclusion, and excellence. High literacy and academic development lead to greater awareness and acquiring new skills. Out of the total population, of those seven years and above, 74 percent are literate, and 26 percent are illiterate (population census 2011). Higher education is an influential factor in enhancing human capabilities and productivity levels, adding to the desired outcomes of economic growth and development. Kerala has a GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) of 36 percent, while the national average is 25.8 percent (AISHE report of MHRD 2017-18).[2]

In the Thrissur District of Kerala, on 30th January 2020, the first case of COVID-19 in India was reported. The government of India swung into action and took necessary steps to contain the spread of the deadly virus by announcing a twenty-one-day first phase of complete lockdown on 24 March 2020. The first phase of India's 21-day lockdown began on March 24th. The impact of the lockdown was immediately felt as there was a substantial reduction in visits to grocery shops and pharmacies, movies and shopping, transportation, and to parks and workplaces by 64.2 percent, 70.51 percent, 65.6 percent, 46.17 percent, and 60.03 percent, respectively, as a result of the lockdown (Pulla, 2020).[3] However, as the infection rate showed a rising trend, the union government extended the lockdown until May 3rd, which was subsequently extended until May 17th, then until May 31st (Ghosh *et al.,* 2020; Saha *et al.,* 2020). This disrupted the socio-economic conditions by inhibiting the growth of the entire economy (MoHFW, 2020). The government put forward a plan to control the spreading of the virus, which included lockdowns to stay safe at home without any other activities and public services, regulations to prohibit all movements by individuals except the health-related and urgent necessities, schools, and colleges were closed to ensure the social distance between individuals will be maintained.

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[2] MHRD India, *Aishe 2017-18*. https://epsiindia.org/wp- content/uploads/2019/02/AISHE-2017-18.pdf (Accessed on 2018).

[3] P. Pulla, *Covid-19: India imposes lockdown for 21 days and cases rise*, (Accessed on 2020).

E-learning gained popularity and acceptance as the Covid-19 pandemic forced the closure of all kinds of institutions, including educational institutions. The digital teaching mode in the higher education system includes online seminars, teleconferencing, e-books, online examinations, and teaching and learning in virtual platforms (Soni, 2020).[4] E-education went on well due to the reasonable accessibility of digital devices and the e-platforms like Zoom, Google meets, Skype, and Google classroom. (Patnaik. 2020). E-education is an alternative teaching method, and the learning process has now expanded into all fields of education. Worldwide, E-education was introduced as a facilitator in the learning process in almost all universities, and it has become a vital part of every student's life. The term "e-learning" is defined as "any learning that involves using the internet or intranet" (Fee, 2005).[5] The letter "e" in e-learning should not stand for electronic; but should be an abbreviation for "evolving, enhanced, everywhere, every time, and everybody" (Li & Masters, 2009).[6]

Objectives of the study

- To analyse the new study methods employed by college students during the pandemic.
- To examine the presence of the digital divide in Kerala.

Section one of this paper gives the introduction and a literature review. The third section discusses the methodology, while the fourth section deals with the results and the concluding remarks.

Hypotheses

H0: There is no association between residential areas and gadgets used for online classes.

Review of Literature

A brief literature review was done so that the basic premises of the study are sufficiently clear. Strielkowski (2020) states that digitalization

[4] V. D. Soni, (2020). Global Impact of E-learning during COVID 19. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, *June*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3630073.

[5] K. H. Fee, *Delivering e-learning: a complete strategy for design application and assessment* (London and Philadelphia: Kogan page, 2005), 12.

[6] H. Li, and J. Masters, E-Learning and knowledge management in the early years: Where are we and where should we go? *Knowledge Management & E-Learning: An International Journal*, 1/4 (2009): 245-250.

in higher education allows continuing lectures online. Hence the professors and students interact in virtual environments, and only some are ready for this. The study concludes that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on academia and higher education popularized online lectures, teleconferencing, or digital open-book exams. Arkorful and Abaidoo (2014) have investigated the effectiveness of e-learning in higher education. They reviewed previous contributions of various researchers and institutions on e-learning and used surveys and other observation methods for collecting data. The research underlines the need for the effective use of e-learning and its implementation in higher education to improve the teaching and learning process. Soni *et al.* (2020) analysed e-learning and its effects on education during the pandemic using only secondary data. They concentrated more on the concept of online education and its impact on e-learning. They have stated that the pandemic is critical to a country's economic future, significantly disrupting the higher education sector. Higher education students should mainly focus on e-learning through different platforms and government-provided websites. Alipio and Mark (2020) provided an explanatory assessment of the preparedness for e-learning in higher education among students in a less developed country during the pandemic. The online survey questionnaire was made to collect data, and 880 Filipino students responded to the relevant questionnaire. Most are from the lower middle-class living in rural areas, and private higher education answered 'no' to the e-learning readiness items. The ratings are analysed using averages and other statistical tools. They used the Mann-Whitney U and Chi-square tests to ascertain differences in the preparedness scores of the students. Simamora (2020) gave an analysis of the issues of online learning during the pandemic. The study used a qualitative approach to analyse the impact on the education of performing arts students in Indonesia. The research actively involved fifteen students who were in online learning activities. The paper gave different responses to the challenges and advantages as experienced by students during online classes. The respondents expressed that the pandemic's emergence has changed schools' and colleges' learning patterns. Subedi *et al.* (2020) did a descriptive study on the impact of e-learning during the pandemic among nursing students and teachers in Nepal. The study examined the benefits of e-learning and the problems they faced while learning through electronic media. It also aimed to evaluate the association of activities/issues faced by students/teachers during online classes with selected demographic variables. For data

collection, they followed an online questionnaire survey. Among 1116 respondents, 104 were teachers, and 1012 were students. This study found that most respondents suffered from online disturbances because of poor internet connectivity, electricity problems, and data packs for attending online classes.

Methodology

The secondary data were taken from various sources, such as reports published by MHRD, journals, and research papers. A structured questionnaire was designed to manage the primary data. The questionnaire had five parts. Part (A) comprised questions on the respondents' socio-economic background. Part (B) contained questions on the new study patterns since COVID-19, while section (C) included questions on the challenges faced by students during the lockdown. Primary data were collected from students from the University of Kerala and affiliated colleges. The respondents included both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Of the students, 103 were from rural areas, and 47 from urban areas. The respondents were selected using multistage random sampling. Out of the 415 participants, 150 responded to all questions in the Google form. Out of the 150 students, there were 94 undergraduates and 56 postgraduates. During the spread of the COVID-19 scenario, data collection was possible only with the incorporation of social media such as e-mail, WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, etc., from college students through the forwarded questionnaire. The collected data were analysed using tables, bar graphs, other statistical techniques, and mathematical tools like frequency, percentage, and chi-square tests.

Results and discussion

In recent years, online learning is gradually gaining popularity with the adoption of the internet and technological advancement. The e-revolution took place in mail, commerce, governance, and education. Many institutions worldwide have started online courses, and the traditional learning/teaching mode of students has changed a lot. People with access to the internet and gadgets has overwhelmingly favoured online learning. This makes the users prefer it due to the availability of rich resource materials, diversified learning methods, and flexible and convenient features.

Socio-demographic characteristics of students

Table **1** displays the age. gender, caste, and religion of the 150 respondents took part in the study. Among the 150 students, 64.7 percent belong to the 21 and below age group, and 35.3 are from the 22 and above age category. 70.7 percent were female, while 29.3 percent were male students. 44.7 percent are from the general category, 39.9 percent are from other backward classes, and 16 percent are from the scheduled caste category. Most belong to the Hindu religion, about 82 percent, 10 percent Christian, and the remaining 8 percent Muslim.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of students

Age		
	Frequency	**Percentage**
21 years and below	97	64.7
22 years and above	53	35.3
Total	150	100
Gender		
	Frequency	**Percentage**
Female	106	70.7
Male	44	29.3
Total	150	100
Caste		
	Frequency	**Percentage**
General	67	44.7
Other Backward Classes	59	39.3
Scheduled Caste	24	16
Total	150	100
Religion		
	Frequency	**Percentage**
Christian	15	10
Hindu	123	82
Muslim	12	8
Total	150	100

Source: Primary data (2020)

Basic learning status of students

Table 2 represents that among the students, 68.7 percent are from rural areas, while 31.3 percent from urban areas. It also means about 66 percent of students are from below Rs. 40,000 family incomes, about 23.3 percent are between Rs. 40,000 and Rs. 80,000, and only 10.7 percent represent are from above Rs.80, 000 monthly incomes. It is clear from the table that about 3.7 percent of students spend below 200 rupees, about 54 percent of students spend between Rs.200 and Rs.500, and only about 9.3 percent of students spend above Rs.500 for recharging internet data for their studies. Out of the respondent, 42.7 percent are arts, and 57.3 percent are science students. From the data, 62.7 are undergraduates, and 37.3 are postgraduates.

Table 2: Basic learning status of students

Residential area	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Rural	103	68.7
Urban	47	31.3
Total	150	100
Monthly family income (Rs.)		
	Frequency	**Percentage**
Below 40,000	99	66
40,000- 80,000	35	23.3
Above 80,000	16	10.7
Total	150	100
Amount spend on internet data in a month.		
	Frequency	**Percentage**
Below 200	55	36.7
200-500	81	54
Above 500	14	9.3
Total	150	100
Stream of Study		
	Frequency	**Percentage**
Arts	64	42.7
Science	86	57.3
Total	150	100

Program students enrolled		
	Frequency	**Percentage**
Undergraduate	94	62.7
Postgraduate	56	37.3
Total	150	100

Source: Primary data (2020)

Does there exist a digital divide among college students in Kerala?

Generally, the digital divide means the existence of a gap between those with and those without access to knowledge about Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and its usage. It also referred to the difference between students who have and do not have access to reliable devices or good internet. This paper aims to on various aspects of the digital divide in Kerala. This is evident because learning was done digitally during the pandemic. Online platforms such as WhatsApp, Google Classroom, Zoom App, Google Meet, etc., were helpful in online Access. Knowledge of the internet and ICT has emerged as a powerful tool for students, not for India alone but for every affected country in the world. Even though the digitalized world's access, knowledge, and usage have become more significant, the digital divide gap is alarming. Some facets of the digital divide are the rural-urban divide, the gender gap, and regional and intra-state. In the case of the rural-urban divide, the report by NSO (National Statistical Office, 2017-18), about 42 percent of internet-enabled households are in cities. However, only 15 percent of rural India is connected to the internet.[7] Due to the shift in education, all the students are possessed with gadgets. However, 6 percent of students from rural areas and percent from room urban areas still need their devices to attend online classes.

The emerging trends and learning patterns among college students during the pandemic.

The spread of COVID-19 led to the suspension of classes worldwide. This disrupted the traditional teaching-learning plans in these countries and regions. Soon, many countries started to offer online teaching. Due to the ongoing pandemic in Kerala, educational institutions were forced

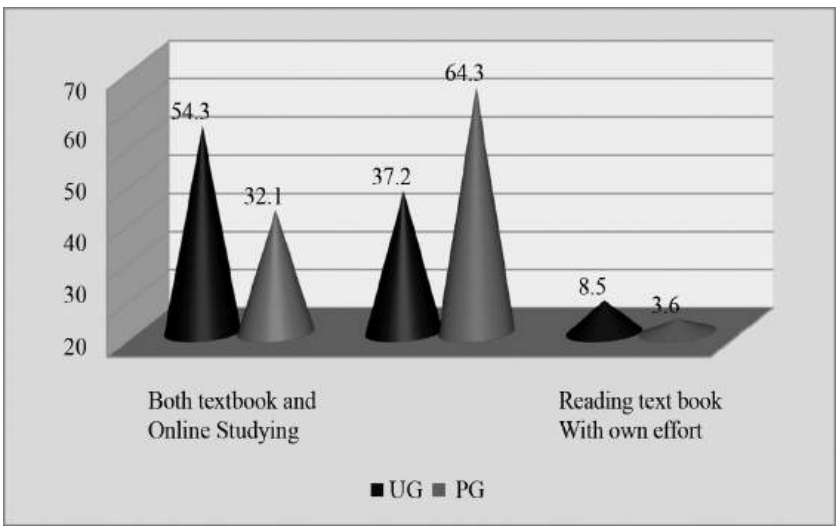
[7] NSO survey finds big rural-urban divide in computer, internet use - Times of India. (n.d.).

to close, resulting in an unplanned change from conventional learning to a framework that focuses solely on digital teaching and learning. This has changed the study pattern in delivering the courses for their students. In the case of time spent for study, during the lockdown, most students were studying less than normal, and only a few spend more time than normal. After the closure of colleges, more and more children were engaged in various other activities, and their focus on learning was diminished. Therefore, the time spent on the study was less than before.

Mode of learning during COVID-19 based on the stream of study

Figure 1 depicts the mode of learning based on undergraduate and postgraduate students in percentages. Regarding graduates, 54.3 percent found following textbooks and online materials, 37.2 percent followed online study, and 8.5 percent read texts with their efforts. In the case of postgraduate students, 64.3 percent followed books and online materials, 32.1 percent followed online study, and 3.6 percent read reasons with effort.

Figure-1: Mode of learning during COVID-19 based on the stream of study

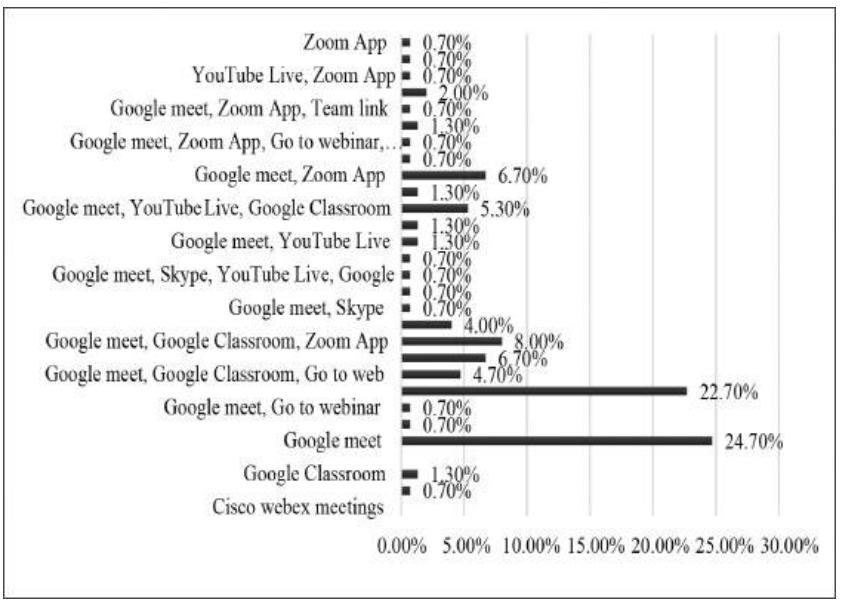


Source: Primary data (2020); Percentages in Parentheses

Students attending Platforms for online classes

Figure 2 portrays the multiple online platforms used by students during lockdown for attending their online classes. The students representing rural and urban areas reported that Google meets Google classroom, and Zoom is the most online platform. These online platforms are just a few of the many easy-to-use and accessible online platforms in India. Apart from these platforms, some colleges are using Moodle as the platform for their students to attend online classes.

Figure 2: Students attending Platforms for online classes



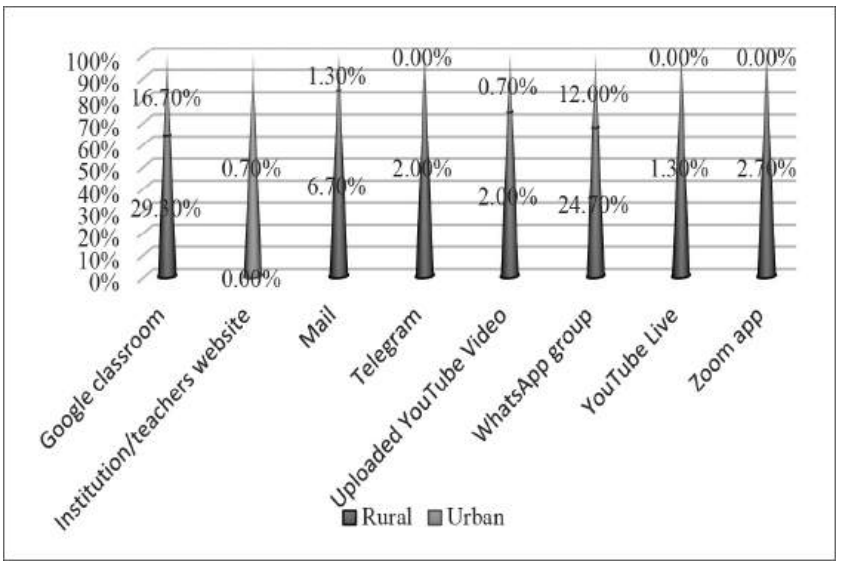
Source: Primary data (2020); Percentages in Parentheses

Platforms of Materials sharing based on a residential area

Figure 3 illustrates the material-sharing platforms based on a residential area in percentages. About 29.30 percent of students from rural areas and 16 percent of urban regions were using Google Classroom for

study materials. Another 24.70 percent of students from rural areas and 12 from urban regions depended on WhatsApp groups to get study materials. WhatsApp is the widely used social media platform for sending messages and other documents such as pdf formats. That is why most students depend on WhatsApp to get notes quickly. During the online classroom session, another widely used and accessible platform is Google Classroom.

Figure 3: Platforms of Materials sharing based on a residential area



Source: Primary data (2020); Percentages in Parentheses

Digital divide in Kerala during COVID-19.

Possession of gadgets and residential area

Even in the pre-pandemic era, families do not have a good economic status. The students from urban areas are more advanced with modern technologies and advanced facilities compared to families in rural areas. This table shows that most students are using their gadgets to attend online classes. Of this, 62.7 percent of students are included in rural areas, and 28.7 percent are from urban. They possess devices from

their relatives and other family members. Only 2.7 percent of students are from urban areas, and six percent are from rural areas.

Table 3: Possession of gadgets and residential area

Possession of Gadgets for online classes	Residential area		Total	$\chi 2$ (p-value)
	Rural	Urban		
Hired	9 (6.0)	4 (2.7)	13 (8.7)	.002 (.963)
Own	94 (62.7)	43 (28.7)	137 (91.3)	
Total	103 (68.7)	47 (31.3)	150 (100.0)	

Source: Primary data (2020); Percentages in Parentheses

As per the report published by NSO, across India, only one in ten households have a computer- whether it is a desktop, laptop, or tablet. In homes with internet facilities, accessed via a fixed or mobile network, almost 25 percent accessed using any device, including smartphones. In India, less than 20 percent of internet penetration exists even in the states with software hubs such as Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Kerala is the state where the difference between rural and urban areas is the least and has the most significant number of computers in rural areas.

Testing the association between the residential area and gadgets used for online classes.

The residential area of students is associated with many factors. In the present section, testing was conducted to determine the association between residential areas and gadgets used for online classes.

H0: No association exists between the residential area and gadgets used for online classes during COVID-19.

Table 4 showed .294 as the significant value for gadgets for attending online classes is more than 0.05, thus concluding that there is no statistically significant association between the residential area and devices used for online classes.

The chi-square test accepts the hypothesis of no relationship between the residential area of students and gadgets used for online classes during the pandemic.

Table 4: The gadgets used for attending online classes

Gadgets used for attending online classes	Residential area		Total	χ^2 (p-value)
	Rural	Urban		
Laptop/ Computer	6 (4.0)	5 (3.3)	11 (7.3)	1.100 (.294)
Mobile	97 (64.7)	42 (28.0)	139 (92.7)	
Total	103 (68.7)	47 (31.3)	150 (100.0)	

Source: Primary data (2020); Percentages in Parentheses

Findings and Concluding remarks

E-education includes synchronous learning methods, such as online webinars, and asynchronous learning, such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) tests. The study reveals that most students reported are from middle-income families with monthly incomes less than Rs. 40 000. Most of them follow both online and offline classes for up to three hours three days per week using mobile phones more than laptops/ computers for attending E-education. All students do not possess devices with extra storage space. So, they could not store accumulated soft copies, which created storage problems. There are also those students who still need their gadgets. There are the majority of students came from rural areas facing infrastructural shortfalls. It indicates the defects of schemes in this area. So, it is essential to provide and ensure infrastructural facilities by the government to continue the learning process during emergencies.

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DIACHRONIC THEMATIC REFLECTION IN SELECT DRAMAS ACROSS LITERARY AGES

- Rutvi Raval[*] & Prachi Sathe[**]

Abstract:

This research study examines the historical development of thematic issues in dramatic literature from the Restoration Age to the Postcolonial Period. This study examines the nature of socio-psychological, cultural, and traditional change communicated by chosen plays such as John Dryden's "All for Love," G.B. Shaw's "Man and Superman," Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House," Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot," and Girish Karnad's "Tughlaq." The research demonstrates a change from authority, obligation, and social order in the Restoration Age to desire, progress, and 'otherness' in the Victorian Age. It broadens in the Modern Age, with the play examining the characters' deep inner worlds and a quest for autonomy. Another stage in The Age of Absurdism exceeds the standards of the modern dramatic form, providing an existential and frequently gloomy outlook on existence. The final technology, known as the Post-Colonial Age, depicts a society that has lost its guiding principle as a result of colonization and is looking for a new path. Analyzing the transitions in the subjects, the study demonstrates how the two are interconnected, changing themselves, as well as the socio-cultural reality of the literary periods during which each was produced. As a result, the presented plays can be viewed as case studies that can assist show and analyze how the pieces of drama symbolize or remark on the sociopolitical climates of the respective periods.

Introduction

The diversity of the dramas researched in this research study, ranging from the Restoration Age to the Post-Colonial Age, provides for a diachronic evolution of the primary topics that are reflected in dramatic literature. Thus, each play is anthropological and thematically relevant. Each play is a historically significant piece that addresses

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societal, cultural, and psychological themes common to the distinct periods of literature. As a result, these works are interesting as study materials because they reflect the processes of human existence and how playwrights responded to new ideas socially, intellectually, and artistically throughout literary history.

Restoration Age: "All for Love" by John Dryden

John Dryden's 'All for Love' is a typical example of Restoration Age drama, depicting power struggles, political maneuvers, and challenges associated with the concepts of duty and desire. Dryden's work, set in ancient Egypt, addresses questions about the triumph of the state over personal interests, as well as the clash between Antony and Cleopatra's love. As Robert D. Hume points out, "Dryden's play exemplifies the Restoration preoccupation with political and personal dilemmas, underscoring the conflict between individual passion and state duty".[1] The 'Restoration Age' that followed the period of theater-hogging excluded monarchical authority was characterized by an enormous desire to construct a new positive order. This is seen in Dryden's work, where the characters' inner conflict of individual vices and desires is juxtaposed with society's duties and obstacles. As Harold Bloom notes, "The Restoration playwrights were deeply engaged with the tensions between individual desires and the overarching authority of the state."[2] These subject themes are crucial because they provide the playwright a notion of some of the fundamental issues that dominated Restoration culture and society, where the individual's independence was pushed aside in favor of the needs of the state and the existing social order.

Victorian Age: "Man and Superman" by G.B. Shaw

Moving on to the Victorian Age, G. B. Shaw's "Man and Superman" depicts the transformation in society and culture. As a drama, the 'life force' and the idea of the individual's purpose in the universe of the play echoes Victorian interests in the social evolution theory of Darwin, and the concept of psychology, which was just emerging at the time. Shaw himself explains, that the 'life force' represents a "dynamic

[1] Indore. Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 142.

[2] Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), 78.

principle of evolution and development" that influences human behavior and progress.[3] Shaw's play contradicts the Victorian morality that controlled society at the time. He presents Ann Whitefield as a woman who pursues her goals in life, which women of that era were not permitted to do. According to Judith W. Page, Shaw's depiction of Ann's assertiveness "directly confronts and critiques the restrictive norms of Victorian society regarding women's roles."[4] As a result, the play offers a powerful message about the fight for power in Victorian society and the concept of women's emancipation through Ann's subversive cross-dressing acts. As Michael Holroyd notes, Shaw's work "depicts the struggle for personal originality and self-realization in a society bound by outdated moral codes."[5] Shaw's work questions the roles of man and woman while also depicting the evolution of man as he strives for unique originality in life.

Modern Age: "A Doll's House" by Henrik Ibsen

It is worth mentioning that Ibsen's 'A Doll's House' is a Modern-era work that indicates the parallel shift in the theme of dramatic writing from mere personality to individual personality, with more emphasis on the process of cognition as well as the yearning for individuality. As Ibsen himself asserts, the play reflects a "realistic portrayal of individual personality and the psychological conflict inherent in human relationships."[6] It delves into the protagonist, Nora,'s disturbed inner state, as well as her struggles to reconcile with gender stereotypes and expectations in the male-dominated nineteenth century environment. As Eilert Sundt observes, Ibsen's play "exposes the oppressive nature of societal norms and the personal turmoil experienced by women constrained by these norms."[7] Ibsen's play not only questions the dynamics of male/female power relations in the Victorian age, but it also highlights many aspects of the looming Modernity of the turn of

[3] George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman* (London: Constable, 1903), 279.

[4] Judith W. Page, *G.B. Shaw and the Feminist Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 493-516.

[5] Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: The One-Volume Definitive Edition* (New York: Random House, 1988), 550 – 600.

[6] Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*. 1879. Translated by William Archer (Salt Lake City: Project Gutenberg, 2008), 3-11.

[7] Eilert Sundt, *Nineteenth-Century Feminist Perspectives in Ibsen's Plays* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1992), 154.

the century. At the same time, the work illustrates the growing interest in understanding a person's quest for personal identity. It is a theme explored by Lise-Lone Marker, who notes that the play reflects "a profound exploration of the personal and social quest for self-discovery and autonomy."[8]

Age of Absurdism: "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett

Samuel Beckett's play 'Waiting for Godot', which displays a fairly bizarre and existentialist vision of the world, best represents the Age of Absurdism. On stage, two characters, Vladimir and Estragon, are forced to an endless wait for the man known as Godot, a clear allusion to how meaningless human life appears to be. A notable example is the plot, in which Beckett used strategies such as no-plot, no orientation, and confusion of distinct meanings to disrupt the ordinary and make people think about existence. As Beckett himself notes, "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful."[9] Martin Esslin observes that the play embodies "the core tenets of Absurdism, where the characters face the absurdity of their condition in a world devoid of clear purpose."[10] He further explains that Beckett's work "illustrates the absurdity of the human condition through its depiction of characters caught in a seemingly meaningless wait."[11] The play is essentially a mirror of the postwar generation's sorrow and despair, as well as their world's loss of trust in everything once thought to be meaningful - the Age of Absurdism. As Charles Craig argues, Beckett's characters "embody the existential angst and disillusionment of the twentieth-century, portraying a world where traditional meanings have disintegrated."[12] Beckett's plays, which defy standard dramaturgical structures and present the world as meaningless and existence as futile, have established his work as a classic example of absurdist drama, particularly relevant to the twentieth-century existentialist dilemma. "Waiting for Godot" has had a long-lasting impact on the literary world because of its representation of the existentialist search for meaning in life in a harsh and hostile environment.

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[8] Lise-Lone Marker, *The Metamorphosis of Modernity: Ibsen's A Doll's House and the Quest for Selfhood* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 89.

[9] Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*. 1953 (New York: Grove Press, 1954), 39.

[10] Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), 43.

[11] Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 56.

[12] Charles Craig, *Beckett and the Absurd: A Study in Existential Drama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 112.

Post-Colonial Age: "Tughlaq" by Girish Karnad

Girish Karnad's drama "Tughlaq" belongs to the Post-Colonial Age since it attempts to chronicle the conditions, transformations, and re-definition of nation and nationality following the colonial period and the pioneering search for a new cultural identity. As a result, the author does an excellent job of showing the intricacies and, at times, instability inherent in postcolonial society via themes of power and political upheaval, as well as the tension between old and new. As Arundhati Banerjee notes, "Karnad's portrayal of Tughlaq's failures and vision represents a metaphor for the post-colonial state's struggle to reconcile its historical legacy with its ambitions."[13] Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq: A Preposterous Protagonist is the title of Karnad's masterpiece because Karnad has attempted to look into the minds of the strong and powerful Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq and decipher his understanding of the newly independent India's nation-building issues. Karnad's work serves as a "powerful allegory for the larger processes of nation-building and the challenges faced by newly independent states."[14] By depicting Tughlaq's struggles to change his kingdom and his subsequent self-destruction, the play offers a profound meditation on the constraints and contradictions of the nation-building process. As noted by critic R.K. Gupta, "Tughlaq embodies the inherent contradictions in the quest for a new national identity, making Karnad's play a quintessential text for understanding postcolonial socio-political dynamics."[15] In this play chronicle, Karnad's 'Tughlaq' is presented as the most typical text of the Post-Colonial Age, and it provides a prism through which one can discern the sociopolitical and cultural crosscurrents that distinguished that age of change.

Diachronic Thematic Reflection

The analysis of the selected dramas, which include works from various times, reveals a diachronic development of the theme in drama. It is explained further in detail:

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[13] Arundhati Banerjee, *Girish Karnad's Tughlaq: A Study in Post-Colonial Discourse* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2020), 43.

[14] Anil Chaudhury, *Post-Colonial Narratives and National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 112.

[15] R.K. Gupta, *Historical Re-imaginings: The Plays of Girish Karnad* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 89.

Social psychological shifts can be noticed as literary stages shift, as dramatic plays mirror the evolution of society's concerns and values. Thus, in the Restoration Age, power-related themes are most vividly expressed in response to the monarchy's overthrow and the overall need to affirm the required order in society by establishing political and subsequently social hierarchies. As Robert D. Hume notes, "Restoration drama often grapples with themes of power and authority, reflecting the political turbulence of the era."[16]

This thematic focus evolved into the Victorian Age, when writers began to complicate topical liberties, define categories of desires, and deal with shifts in gender roles. This era's plays dealt with debates over etiquette and the rising focus on self-desires as a symptom of a progressive shift toward self-awareness within society. As Linda M. Lewis points out, "Victorian drama explores the intricacies of personal desire and social etiquette, reflecting a period deeply concerned with moral and social reform."[17]

This trend would become even more apparent in the Modern Age, with narrative dramatists probing the tortured souls of the characters and their nature, which demands free will. This was consistent with the growing awareness of one's own mental processes and the desire to free oneself from the constraints and responsibilities imposed by one's culture's rules and norms.

Overall, the diachronic evolution of socio-psychological concerns portrayed in dramatic literature indicates a shift throughout time from maintaining society's stability to centripetal concern with personal entity and self-actualization. While Restoration writing emphasized authority, responsibility, and stability, Victorian literature examined society through the lens of pleasure seeking and social growth, and the Modern Age literature delved further into the human psyche and the yearning for self-realization. As Philip D. Griffith observes, "This progression in thematic focus mirrors broader societal transformations, from rigid hierarchies to the quest for individual authenticity."[18]

[16] Robert D. Hume, *Restoration Drama* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 32.

[17] Linda M Lewis, *Victorian Drama and Social Change* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 57.

[18] Philip D Griffith, *The Evolution of Modern Drama* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 123.

Such a shift in theme organization corresponds to societal trends observable across these literary eras, indicating the steady transformation of the individual's position and functions in the social environment. Each play depicts a specific era, reflecting different objectives and concerns of the respective societies in regard to the dynamic fight of the individual for self-realization while also seeking social acknowledgment.

By mapping out the diachronic phases, one can gain insight into how drama literature has been able to depict the dynamic socio-psychological features of the world, human experiences, and changing paradigms of life as they have been represented in various literary eras. As M.J. Harington notes, "Dryden's use of classical settings reflects the Restoration interest in historical and moral exemplars."[19]

The cultural-traditional changes, as seen afar in the chosen dramas, correspond to a significant shift in literary locations and subjects. The earlier plays, like Dryden's "All for Love," are set in a classical and historical environment, bringing in the concept of distant civilizational glory. For example, Dryden's play is situated in ancient Egypt, with a plot based on the story of Antony and Cleopatra. This classical context is consistent with the Restoration Age's primary focus, which was to look backward for source and substance.

The next plays show a noticeable shift in terms of aspects that are more typical of modern social topicality. The play may be considered one of the important works within the framework of the new dramatic realism of the late nineteenth century, with Norway's contemporary bourgeois culture serving as its backdrop. Similarly, 'Tughlaq' is set in the historical context of the Sultanate of Delhi in the fourteenth century; thus, the play's peculiarities are conditioned by the play's historicism in the sense of a historical specificity of the topic, which emphasizes the author's concern with the epoch's problems of power and authority. According to John M. Robertson, "Karnad's historical dramas often mirror contemporary issues through the lens of historical events."[20]

[19] M.J. Harington, *Restoration Drama: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 66.

[20] John M Robertson, *Girish Karnad: Plays and Beyond* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017), 78.

As a result of changes in playwrights' focus and style, there is a shift from the remote, classical setting to the more proximal and identifiable settings of the Modern and Post-Colonial Ages. As a result, dramatists were able to write works set in somewhat more modern and maybe identifiable locations, allowing them to form a tighter link with their audiences and alter their society's experiences through the literary works they created. As Bernard Shaw observed, "Modern plays increasingly reflect the immediate social and psychological concerns of their time."[21]

The cultural-traditional alterations shown in the selected dramas can be traced back to societal developments that happened during these literary periods. While the Restoration Age remained interested in the classical and historical approach, the Victorian Age became concerned with the present time, the contemporary social reality, as evidenced by Ibsen's dramatic focus on gender issues and the interiors of the bourgeois household. It continued all the way into the Modern Age, when other writers like Beckett explored the ludicrous and the existential vacuum, a kind of cynicism and fragmentation of the human experience prompted by the two World Wars. Finally, the diachronic order developed for the selected dramas within the cultural-traditional domains reveals much about the growing profile of priorities throughout the literary periods. As Beckett himself remarked, "The absurdity of human existence became a central theme in the wake of global conflicts."[22]

Psycho-sociological alterations are no longer excluded as the plays progress through the Ages, from the Restoration Age's emphasis on duties and obligations to the Victorian Age's conceptions of the 'life force' and individual agency. This shift can be explained by a greater understanding of the relationship between the individual and society, as characters are divided between personal desires and societal norms.

The Restoration Age liked stories that focused on principles such as duty, honor, and upholding the status quo, but the emphasis was tightened to provide the individual his or her proper place within the framework of society rather than limiting the function. Dryden's 'All for Love'

[21] George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*. Edited by Dan H. Laurence (London: Penguin Classics, 2002), 142.

[22] Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*. 1953 (New York: Grove Press, 1954), 65.

is an example of this earlier focus because its protagonist Antony is torn between his duty to the state and his feelings for Cleopatra. Within the play, people follow the rules and restrictions established by society and politics, and self-actualization is rarely prioritized over unselfish commitment to the cause.

However, as the literary eras progressed, a little shift occurred, with the Victorian era placing a greater emphasis on the 'vital spark' and a man's power to define himself. The plots of plays such as Shaw's "Man and Superman" dealt with man's dark tendencies and his battles for his own ambitions and aspirations, which battled with the values of society. This increased emphasis on the individual and concern with accomplishing one's own objectives and wants contrasts sharply with the strictness of the Restoration Age.

These psycho-sociological transformations found in these plays suggest that further psycho-sociological adjustments are taking place in society as a whole, as the subject's interaction with the social web changes. The Restoration Age marked a shift in the relative attitude to the concept of duty and stability, with humans viewed as seizures and reactants in the environment. In contrast, Ibsen, along with other playwrights such as Beckett, immersed the audience and characters in the new existential and absurdist ideas and themes prevalent in the Modern Age and the Age of Absurdism. Finally, the diachronic development of the selected tragedies is examined to demonstrate the changing concerns and attitudes of the literary periods.

Overall, the selected dramas provide a clear representation of the most significant societal development throughout the literary periods. The plays go from a focus on political control and social order in the Restoration Age to a greater emphasis on individuality in the Victorian and Modern periods. This trend, in turn, led to a questioning of that society's ideals and standards, which evolved into the philosophical stance of Existentialism and Absurdism during the Age of Absurdism. At last, the Post-Colonial Age witnessed a search for a new persona, notably a new national persona, as seen by playwrights' efforts to find the new self and the various concerns that characterize the colonial self in the process of constructing the postcolonial nation state. As noted by

Edward Said, "Post-colonial drama often grapples with the complexities of identity and nation-building in the aftermath of colonialism."[23] This article is a diachronic theme analysis of an original play, which represents a view of human experience as fluid and ever-changing within the context of theater.

Conclusion

Here, we examined original texts from the Restoration, Victorian, Modern, and Post-Colonial periods to determine the dialectical link between the plays and the communities to which they belonged. The shift from the emphasis on power and obedience in Dryden's tragedy "All for Love" to a critical attitude toward traditional conventions and the desire of a female character to discover her self-identity in Ibsen's play "A Doll's House" demonstrates significant shifts in thematic interest between these times.

Furthermore, the exaggerated existentialist anxieties and absurdity presented in Beckett's Waiting for Godot reflect critical intellectual shifts of the Modern Age. Finally, Karnad's "Tughlaq," a play about the postcolonial struggle for identity and the formation of a nation, demonstrates that dramatic literature, particularly international theater, is pertinent to modern socio-political concerns.

Despite variances in settings and playwriting, the selected plays demonstrate a diachronic change in the theme. They do, in reality, reflect shifts in overall culture and human awareness, as well as the fundamental conceptions of society and humanity as a whole, as well as an individual's place in the community. These theatrical pieces offer a significant perspective on the world that is ageless and cross-cultural in themes such as power, identity, change, and human existence.

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[23] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 102.

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INCLUSIVE SUNDAY SCHOOLS AND CHILDREN WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES[1]

- Jessica Prakash-Richard[*]

Engage Disability was invited to be part of the VIII Triennial Conference of the All India Sunday School Association (AISSA) that took place in Chennai. *Engage Disability* was grateful for this opportunity to participate in the Conference and be given the space to present on inclusive Sunday Schools, with special reference to the inclusion of children with intellectual (or developmental) disabilities

Why Inclusion?

Before addressing the broader theme of inclusive Sunday schools, it is essential to foreground a critical question: Who are excluded from the mainstream of church and society? Certain groups continue to be marginalised, while others exist entirely beyond the margins—rendered invisible. A church committed to justice bears the responsibility not only to welcome such groups but also to ensure they are recognised, heard, and integrated as vital and indispensable members of the body of Christ. Inclusion is part of God's call to the Church. The journey to becoming inclusive enables all individuals to become part of the body of Christ, and contribute their unique gifts for the mutual enrichment and witness of the Church.

Who Is Including Whom?

It is important however to keep in mind that 'inclusion' is not about the mainstream pulling in those on the margins into their version of 'mainstream.' It is about those in the mainstream stepping *out*, and stepping into the lives of those in the margins (with their permission),

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[1] This reflection was presented at a session in the VIII Triennial Assembly of AISSA, held at Chennai, 27-28 Nov 2023 and has been revised to include answers to the questions collated from participants during the activity that was part of the presentation.

to accompany them and understand how they may wish to become part of both society and church. So, the 'full and just participation' of those in the margins and those made invisible should be the motivation behind the spirit of inclusion rather than a 'us' including 'them' kind of rationale that polarises two groups in a hierarchical way.

In the Triennial Assembly of the All India Sunday School Association (AISSA), delegates were invited to critically reflect on the question of inclusion of children. A short exercise invited participants to identify which groups of children were absent in Sunday Schools and discuss some possible reasons why such children were absent.

The delegates highlighted children with Down Syndrome, children who are introverted and shy, children of divorced parents, children who always prefer to stay in the background of things, and children who were attached to parents and did not wish to attend Sunday school without having parents around, and children who were involved in other activities of the Church so that they missed the regular Sunday school session.

All these responses except the first one about children with Down Syndrome, highlighted groups of children who are part of a typical congregation and fit a certain socio-economic and 'ableist' demographic of our respective congregations – basically children in our congregations who are not very prominent but are still part of the group of children that we, by and large, usually cater to in our Sunday schools.

In this context it must be highlighted that the CSI Child Protection Policy that was approved in 2020 by the Church of South India has outlined some groups of children who are missing and absent in our churches: children with disabilities; children in trafficking, sex work, bonded labour and forced begging; children who are victims of child abuse; street children; children involved in child labour; children living with HIV, children in armed conflict, children from historically & sociologically disadvantaged communities (victims of the discriminatory and hierarchical caste system); children in conflict with the Law, gender non-conforming children, and children in the context of migration.

As Christian educators leading children's ministries across various churches in India and as members of AISSA, there is no excuse to

simply assert that such marginalised groups of children are absent in congregations and therefore the need to cater to them does not arise. Such assertions cannot serve as justification or excuse. Instead, the more pertinent question to asked is: why are these children not present in our churches? The concept of 'Inclusive Sunday Schools' must compel AISSA and its affiliates to intentionally broaden the ethos, content, approaches, methods, and pedagogical frameworks of Sunday school education, to ensure that it becomes a truly welcoming space for all children. Importantly, this inclusivity is not to be misconstrued as a traditional call to proselytise or assimilate marginalised children into the Christian fold. Rather, it calls the Church to transform into a space of genuine belonging for every child. This necessitates critical reflection on current practices—both to identify what has been neglected and affirm what is being done effectively. This calls for a commitment to foster the full and just participation of all children within Sunday school environments.

This reflection does not attempt to address the full range of strategies required to ensure the inclusion of all marginalised groups of children. Rather, it focuses specifically on one often overlooked group—children with disabilities. According to UNICEF:

Fifteen per cent of the world's population – at least one billion people – have some form of disability, whether present at birth or acquired later in life. Nearly 240 million of them are children.[2]

UNICEF also observes that "Despite international commitments, children with disabilities remain largely *invisible* in research and programmes meant to build more equitable, inclusive societies."[3] Sadly, this invisibility of children with disabilities is a reality within our churches in India as well.

Erik Carter says:

The call on congregations to be places of inclusion and belonging for individuals with disabilities and their families is clear and longstanding.[4]

[2] *Children with Disabilities Programme Page*, UNICEF, accessed 27 Nov 2023, https://www.unicef.org/disabilities#:~:text=Despite%20international%20commitments%2C%20children%20with,a%20consequence%20of%20their%20exclusion.

[3] *Children with Disabilities Programme Page*, UNICEF

[4] Erik W. Carter, "The Absence of Asterisks: The Inclusive Church and Children with Disabilities." *Journal of Catholic Education* 23, no. 2 (2020):168-188. http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.2302142020

Carter goes on to provide **biblical basis for the inclusion** of persons with disabilities:

The Scriptures are replete with commands to welcome the stranger (Matthew 25), to break down barriers to Jesus (Mark 2), to invite the overlooked (Luke 14), to affirm the image of God in every person (Genesis 1), to move the margins to the middle (Matthew 20), to upend societal hierarchies (Galatians 3), to see those who seem superfluous as utterly indispensable (1 Corinthians 12), and to love one another deeply (Matthew 22). [5]

Keeping this biblical basis in mind, let us also consider this insight from UNICEF which notes that, **"The extent to which children with disabilities are able to lead happy lives depends on our own willingness to confront barriers to change."**

So, what are the barriers, and are we willing to confront these barriers in our Sunday schools?

Theological and Attitudinal Barriers

We believe that all are created in the image of God, and our Sunday schools have over the years tried to instil this assurance in children. However, the image of God that we believe, imagine, and teach is one of an able-bodied, almighty, strong, and invincible God. We do not imagine or teach a vulnerable, broken, or disabled God. Just as there is diversity in all that God created, we have failed to see disability as part of diversity in creation as well. Disability is part of the diversity of human experience.

A theological commitment to the belief that all human beings are created in the image of God necessitates a rejection of negative perceptions of disability—as a curse, a consequence of parental sin, or a condition requiring miraculous healing. Yet, such attitudes and theological misconceptions remain prevalent within many church communities in India. These perspectives often place undue pressure on families of children with disabilities and reflect a broader need for critical theological engagement and pastoral sensitivity within congregational life.

People with disabilities and children with disabilities are whole as they are! They are not something to be 'fixed.' Their personhood includes

[5] Erik W. Carter, "The Absence of Asterisks: The Inclusive Church and Children with Disabilities."

their disability, but they are not defined by their disability. They are 'persons first'!

As a consequence of our theological views and attitudes about disability, Sunday schools too have traditionally followed a certain way of being and functioning that caters to children who are considered 'normal' or 'able-bodied.' Our spaces, lesson plans, teaching methods and resources have all been geared primarily for children considered 'normal.' (read as 'able-bodied'). Children with disabilities are the invisible children of our times not only in society but in our churches and Sunday schools as well because we have stigmatised disability and not understood it theologically to be part of diversity in creation and part of the diversity in human experience. We need to first break these barriers in our attitudes and our theological understanding of disability.

Barriers in Access: Physical Barriers; Information and Communication Barriers

Everybody is made in God's image, but not everybody can access a Church or Sunday school in the same way. There can be no 'one-size-fits-all' model of Sunday school for children with disabilities because there is a diversity of disabilities that requires different approaches to reach out to differing disabilities. Three types of disabilities and the barriers that children with such disabilities face, are highlighted in this section, along with possible ways the barriers could be addressed practically.

For children with locomotor disabilities and physical disabilities, and for children with visual and hearing impairment, the barrier or issue is one of access.

1) For children with locomotor/physical disabilities the barriers is one of access. This issue of accessing the physical Sunday school spaces can be addressed with assistive aids (Wheel chairs, assistive devices), and removal of structural/physical barriers (installing ramps, elevators/lifts, accessible toilets, providing unstructured spaces in the Sunday school space for wheelchair movement and crutches). Remember accessible toilets are crucial if you are serious about having a child with physical disability in your Sunday school for more than an hour or two.

2) The barrier to make Sunday schools accessible to children with visual impairment and hearing impairment, is issue is that

of access to both the physical Sunday school space, as well as lack of audio-visual access to the lessons/content that needs to be addressed to make their inclusion real. For children with visual impairment there is a need to provide the following: audio access, screen-reader friendly pdfs that their phones can read to them from, and install tactile flooring in the building so that they can independently navigate to the Sunday school area or arrange for navigation guidance volunteers to assist with this; illustrate in non-visual ways like reading the Bible aloud, have objects to feel, smell, and taste; provide alternate methods to learn memory verses with actions or with music rather than having to write it down. For children with hearing impairment, provide sign language interpreters in all Sunday school sessions or. if that is not possible, use projectors that can have captioning (in audio-visual aids that are used). Churches can also encourage their youth groups to learn Indian Sign Language (ISL)[6] so that the church will have sign interpreters in congregation who can volunteer for this on a weekly basis.

3) For children with Intellectual Disability the issue is not just about access but is more complex and needs special understanding, intentional special methods, and pedagogies. Creating a welcoming space of belonging for children with intellectual disabilities in Sunday schools lies more in the hands of organisers, coordinators, and teachers rather than in trying to 'fix' the children to fit into the existing methods of our Sunday schools.

Special Needs of Children with Intellectual Disabilities

Some intellectual disabilities are visible – like a child with Cerebral Palsy[7] or Down Syndrome[8] – there are visible indicators of the child's disability. But there are also invisible intellectual disabilities like brain

[6] The NCCI has introduced virtual ISL classes that all could learn more about by contacting the NCCI Executive Secretary for Ecumenical Fora Rev. Ribin John: ribin@ncci1914.com.

[7] A group of disorders that affect a person's ability to move and maintain balance and posture. Definition by Center for disease control and prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/cp/facts.html#:~:text=Cerebral%20palsy%20(CP)%20is%20a,problems%20with%20using%20the%20muscles. (Accessed on 27 Nov 2023).

[8] A condition in which a person has an extra chromosome or an extra piece of a chromosome. This extra copy changes how a baby's body and brain develop. Definition by Center for disease control and prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/birthdefects/downsyndrome.html. (Accessed on 27 Nov 2023).

disorders that are not obvious physically. Dyslexia[9] is an invisible learning disability that is often undiagnosed. More and more children are being diagnosed with disorders like ADHD,[10] autism spectrum disorder,[11] depression,[12] bipolar disorder[13] – these are "visible" only through their symptoms i.e., manifested in the child's behaviour.[14]

Sadly, often, our reaction as a church to the behaviour of children with such invisible intellectual disabilities has been:

> *"If only that parent would get better control of their kid"; "All that child needs is a good spanking;" or "What a bratty kid!"*[15]

Although we as a church may say "All are welcome," and that "we do not discriminate or exclude anyone," Erik Carter points out that

[9] Learning disorder that involves difficulty reading due to problems identifying speech sounds and learning how they relate to letters and words (decoding). Also called a reading disability, dyslexia is a result of individual differences in areas of the brain that process language. Definition by Mayo Clinic. https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/dyslexia/symptoms-causes/syc-20353552. (Accessed on 27 Nov 2023).

[10] Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

[11] A developmental disability caused by differences in the brain that causes problems in social communication and interaction, and restricted or repetitive behaviour, Typically, those on the autism spectrum have different ways of learning, moving, or paying attention. Definition by Center for disease control and prevention, accessed 27 Nov 2023, https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/signs.html#:~:text=Autism%20spectrum%20disorder%20(ASD)%20is,%2C%20moving%2C%20or%20paying%20attention.

[12] Also called major depressive disorder or clinical depression, it affects how you feel, think and behave and can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems. (WHO) (Accessed 27 Nov 2023).

[13] A mental illness that causes unusual shifts in a person's mood, energy, activity levels, and concentration. These shifts can make it difficult to carry out day-to-day tasks. (NIH) https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/bipolar-disorder#:~:text=Bipolar%20disorder%20(formerly%20called%20manic,three%20types%20of%20bipolar%20disorder.

[14] Wendy Cwiklinski with Addendum by Michele Karabin, "Church and the Child with Invisible Disabilities," *Department of Christian Service, Orthodox Church in America,* last modified 2015, https://www.oca.org/parish-ministry/familylife/church-and-the-child-with-invisible-disabilities#:~:text=The%20name%20%E2%80%9Cinvisible%20child%E2%80%9D%20is,looks%20like%20any%20other%20child.

[15] Wendy Cwiklinski with Addendum by Michele Karabin, "Church and the Child with Invisible Disabilities."

the church stories shared by many parents of children with developmental disabilities include statements that reveal ***the hidden limits of welcome:***

- *We just are not equipped to serve your child.*
- *We don't really do disability ministry here.*
- *Perhaps you'd feel more comfortable at a church with a special program for her.*
- *How can we be certain she actually understands the meaning of communion?*
- *We aren't really sure he will get much out of being in our regular classes.*
- *Her behaviours are a bit of a distraction.*[16]

Over the years although Sunday schools in India may have, to an extent, tried to address the access issues of children living with physical disabilities, visual impairments and hearing impairments by creating accessible spaces and accessible medium for bible stories and such, over the past few years *Engage Disability*[17] has discovered from the primary stakeholders – parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities (CwID) and CwID themselves – that ***we as a church have failed to address the needs of CwID and failed to include CwID in our Sunday schools***. So, from this year (2023) *Engage Disability* along with AISSA and other agencies involved in Children's ministries in India, initiated an exploration of how this could be addressed. This exploration seeks to interface creators of Christian education material for children in India with special educators who work with CwID, their parents, and care givers, to see how existing curricula for Sunday schools could be augmented with guidelines, methodologies, or training of Christian educators to make our Sunday schools a welcoming space of belonging for CwID.

While it may not be feasible for every Sunday school coordinator or teacher to become a specialist or trained special educator in the field of

[16] Erik W. Carter, "The Absence of Asterisks: The Inclusive Church and Children with Disabilities."

[17] The author is National Coordinator of *Engage Disability* – a movement and network of churches, Christian agencies and individuals, founded in 2014, who have come together "to strengthen the Christian response to disability." The Third National Conference of Engage Disability which is a triennial event and took place in November 2022 brought home this need forcefully through many of the sessions, deliberations, and plenaries that included families of children with intellectual and profound disabilities.

disability, there remain practical and accessible steps that can be taken to enhance inclusion of children with disabilities. As previously noted, there are ways to address the barriers faced by children with physical disabilities, as well as those with visual and hearing impairments. Valuable insights can be drawn from churches in other contexts that have developed inclusive practices for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. A range of practical resources is also available online. One such resource is the blog *Disorganisedsundayschoolblog.com*, which offers practical guidance informed by direct experience in working with CwID in church ministries. The following section highlights several simple and useful recommendations from this source:

For children in the autistic spectrum:

- **Being predictable helps** as they have anxiety and need extra help to settle down. So, a written down plan or pictorial plan helps them know what is going to happen next, and can remove worry, and allow them to concentrate on what is happening in the moment.

- **Communicate clearly**. Say what you are thinking. Not everyone reads facial expressions correctly. Sarcasm and insincerity are confusing. Metaphors too. On the positive side, giving sincere compliments helps them, so be generous with compliments and be specific why they are being complimented so everyone knows.

- **Be sensitive to sensitivity**. There are two types of sensitivity that children in the autistic spectrum may experience: *hyper and hypo sensitivity*. Hyper is when sensory experiences are processed too rapidly so some flavours and noises, patterns and sounds are too overwhelming; Hypo means the opposite – the brain processes information too slowly to be recognised, so they may need to touch and feel every object in the room to feel they know the place, and may feel the need to create experiences and sights and sounds, tastes, and textures, that may be considered extreme (which can be distracting for others.) So, know what you can do to help them feel secure, and give them time to settle.

- **Be prepared to do things differently.** It might mean changing your Sunday School room, writing a plan up on the wall, sticking to time exactly, not wearing certain patterns, or using emojis to clarify what you are thinking.

- **Start by talking to their parents** about what helps, **but end up by talking to them**: For example, ask "Hey, I noticed the debate (or the

memorisation test) wasn't fun for you today; what can we do to make it more enjoyable next time."

As the UNICEF observes insightfully: "**Children and adolescents with disabilities are the experts on their experiences and needs, and have the right to be heard in all matters that concern them."**[18]

So, build a relationship with the child and know their personal needs. Ask the child or the parent or caregiver for any plans drawn up by professionals for the child that you could use in your Sunday school plans. Above all "Maintain an attitude of love, compassion, and acceptance for the family. The stigma of having a child diagnosed with one of these disorders can be so hard to live with that some parents do not disclose their child's diagnosis, even to close friends."[19] So if they do disclose it to you in confidence so that you can make their child more welcome in Sunday school, maintain confidentiality. Offer to care for other siblings so that the parents can focus on the CwID or to care for the CwID for a few hours so that the parent can just take a break to catch up on sleep – Remember caregivers and families of CwID are doing what they do 24/7 without a break! Sunday schools in India should get better in offering support programmes and accompaniment to such families.

In conclusion, we always fear what we do not understand. We 'other' what is different. We stigmatise or discriminate what is 'different.' Let us not allow our ignorance drive us to fear, discrimination, and exclusion, but let us try to learn, to understand – by accompanying people and children with disabilities – to know how they wish to be 'included' in Sunday schools rather than deciding what they need and how they need it. As Sunday school teachers, church groups or church workers who wish to grow more in your own understanding of disability in general, *Engage Disability* (ED) has created some helpful resources: ED Disability Inclusion Toolkit for Churches, ED Audit Tool for churches (self-assessment and learning tool), Training for how to conduct Family Retreats that provide respite for families of persons living with disabilities, Luke 14 Gatherings, Bible Studies from the perspective of disability, and collation of other resources related to disability etiquette, sensitive terminology to use, legal frameworks, research reports, and guidelines for churches. Visit www.engagedisability.in to know more.

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[18] *Children with Disabilities Programme Page*, UNICEF.

[19] Wendy Cwiklinski with Addendum by Michele Karabin, "Church and the Child with Invisible Disabilities."

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EDITORIAL NOTES

IMPRESSIONS OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE NATIONAL CHRISTIAN COUNCIL

(Vol. XLIV, December 1924, Pp. 451-453)

The Kingdom of God and its righteousness- this was the keynote of the Tenth Annual Meeting of the National Christian Council. Forty elected delegates from the ten T Provincial Councils and twenty co-opted members met at Waltair. It was a representative gathering-people from the north and south, cast and west-Mr. Manilal Parekh with his red shawl and Mr. Augustine Ralla Ram with his ever-ready speech-bishops, priests, and laymen. Diversity of outlook there was. But this diversity disappeared in the supreme ambition of the Conference to see the ushering in of the Kingdom.

What are the marks of this Kingdom? It is the realm of God-where the God of peace, the God of all hope, the God of patience and comfort held sway. The Metropolitan of India in his own quiet way led the members of the Conference into that realm. And we found ourselves surrounded by the infinite patience and the abiding presence of our Father in Heaven. The meditations on the first day disclosed to our minds the foundations of our hope and the source of our comfort. The end of that season of prayer and meditation saw the Conference in the right mood to view with hopefulness the signs of the coming of the Kingdom. It was quite possible for the members to have said that these signs have been there all the time. No- it was in a spirit of great gratitude and true humility that the "willingness to listen was welcomed. As man after man rose and gave reasons for his hope, our hearts went forth in glad surprise. There was another note - that mentioned by Dr. Lucas, "Am I sufficient for this work?" "Is anything wrong with me?" Towards the end of the discussion of the present spiritual opportunity in India it was felt that "as individuals we have failed to express in life and practice the message of Him whom we believe to be the Lord of life."

The Unity Conference was referred to throughout the discussion. A definite desire was expressed that the results of that Conference should be welcomed. The Council was ready "to declare its readiness to co-operate in giving effect to any proposals that make for a better understanding among the peoples of India." What was lacking in the newspaper reports was made vivid by the two after-dinner speeches made by the Metropolitan and by Dr. Datta. They were members of the Unity Conference. The Metropolitan was taken into the inner counsels of the Indian leaders. As he emerged out of that group the people of India discovered in him the true peace-maker. And he left Delhi "as the first head of the Indian Church." The possibility of working with our non-Christian friends, the sincerity of their devotion to duty, the "deep desire for a new national order based not on fear but on love" - these were the impressions left on my mind.

What puzzles many a Christian is the difficulty of seeing any connection between Jesus Christ and the firm realities of life. Has the Gospel any relation to child labour and the enormities connected with Industrialism? Dr. Datta explained certain details which proved conclusively that a Christian can and does exercise the right influence in public life. Miss Wingate spoke about the appalling conditions under which poor people lived and worked in factories, her proposal that Miss Agatha Harrison should be induced to come out to India to study the problem was therefore opportune, That she should have the collaboration of an Indian man and an Indian woman was also important. All is not right in our cities and villages. As Dr. Griswold said, "It is time that we as Council took cognisance of the situation."

On the question of theological education, there was a very emphatic expression of opinion. That students in seminaries are not related to the movements of the day is a fact, though in certain places desirable attempts are being made. Further investigation was agreed upon. Upon the right solution of this problem will depend the future of the Church in India.

The reports on opium and rural education showed what had been accomplished by the full-time secretariat. Towards the end of the Conference- when it was just time for dinner-a strange desire took possession of the Conference. Appoint more honorary secretaries and give more work to the secretaries now present! This, incidentally, showed how much there is yet to be done. It further revealed the fact that

individual Missions and Churches felt that what a central organisation could do they can but do imperfectly or do not at all.

I went as a learner. This was the first time I attended the Council. A few thoughts occur to my mind. And they are as follows:

(1) We are surrounded by the love and care of an All-knowing Father whose abiding presence means peace, hope, and comfort.
(2) This God is the supreme centre of that realm where Christians, Hindus, and Muhammadans find their light and strength and happiness.
(3) This realm is the Church of Christ "the world-wide society"-of which "I am an Indian member."
(4) To make known the grandeur of this Society is my proud privilege. To make my friends and fellow citizens in this Kingdom is my vocation in life.
(5) In the service of the Kingdom there is room for the glow and charm of the individual personality. These are the chosen sons and servants of God. By their joint deliberation and united service what is done imperfectly may be fulfilled in great measure, what is lacking may be completed, and what is but dimly seen will be discovered in all its bearings
(6) In willingness to listen, in persistent effort, in concerted action, in taking account of diversities of opinion and in weaving them into a whole fabric- this is the right way of life, and therein lies the solution of our problems.
(7) This is what the National Christian Council stands for.

H. C. Balasundaram

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NCCI NEWS

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN INDIA

COMMISSION ON TRIBAL/ ADIVASI CONCERNS

NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON ADOPTION OF LAWS APPLICABLE TO 5TH AND 6TH SCHEDULE AREAS

STATEMENT

We, the 44 participants, coming prominently from Adivasi and Tribal communities as well as those seconded by the leadership of the churches, representatives of the Commission on Tribal/ Adivasi Concerns, Secretaries and staff of the National Council of Churches in India, met at the **National Consultation on Adoption of Laws Applicable to 5th and 6th Scheduled Areas** organised by the Commission on Tribal/ Adivasi Concerns, National Council of Churches in India on 2-4 July 2024, at NCCI, Christian Council Campus, Civil lines, Nagpur, India. We studied and deliberated at length on the provisions of the 5th Schedule [Article 244(1)], 6th Schedule [Article 244(2)] and the Article 371(a) of the Constitution of India, and other laws and stipulations like the P(PESA)-The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996; FRA-The Scheduled tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006;CNT- The Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act, 1908;SPT- The Santhal Parganas Tenancy(Supplementary Provisions) Act, 1949etc. along with Customary Laws pertaining to various Tribal and Adivasi communities. We also studied many laws and stipulations like the AFSPA- Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958; NRC- The National Register of Citizens; CAA- The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 and the proposed UCC- The Uniform Civil Code, which may have adverse effects on the 5th and 6th Scheduled Areas and the people therein.

We made the following observations:

- It is necessary to preserve the culture, language, land and identity of the Adivasis and Tribal Peoples of India.

- There are limitations in the implementation of the Constitutional and Legal provisions by the State agencies.
- There are connivance of the State agencies and institutions along with their officials with forces of market-economy and big corporates for devastation of the natural resources found in the Scheduled Areas and other territories traditionally inhabited by the Indigenous Peoples.
- There are devastating effects of irrigation dams, thermal power plants, mining and deforestation in the name of securing borders, new amendments in the Forest Rights Act and other legislations for ulterior motives favouring the market economy in the guise of national interest.
- Largescale displacement of the Adivasis and the Tribal Peoples are happening in the name of development and the compensation, rehabilitation, and resettlement measures are proving to be inadequate.
- Laxity in implementation of provisions of the PPESA Act. 1996 in the 5th scheduled areas. Though most of the States, except Jharkhand, have formulated the Rules required for the implementation of the provisions of the PPESA Act. 1996, the implementation of the same in letter and spirit, still remains a distant dream.
- Harassment, torture and killing of Adivasi and Tribal villagers, social activists and journalists is going on in the name of combating terrorism, separatist activities and ultra-left insurgencies.
- Rampant Land alienation is taking place due to non-committal implementation and bypassing of legal safeguards like the Chottanagpur Tenancy Act, 1908 and the Santal Parganas Tenancy (Supplementary Provisions) Act, 1949.

Therefore, we call upon the Churches, its Leaders and Church-based Organisations:

- To equip their local leaders with the information and knowledge of the constitutional provisions, legal framework and policies on the Adivasis and the Tribal Peoples.
- To combat the ideology of discrimination by promoting the principles of equity and inclusivity in the society.
- To be Just in matters of providing quality education and employment opportunities to the Adivasis and Tribal Peoples.

- To promote greater Christian unity and the prophetic role in society by facilitating transformational witness in leadership.
- To promote greater unity among followers of various faiths in the Adivasi and tribal societies through the process of dialogue, faith building and cooperation measures.
- To build an ecumenical network for communication and information exchange for capacity strengthening for development, to strengthen coordination among the Adivasis' and the Tribal Peoples' Institutions of Self-governance and the Church and its institutions.
- To adopt, endorse and implement, including customizing where required, the guidelines and national policy for the Adivasis and the Tribal Peoples of NCCI, through which they can strengthen the expressions of the Adivasis and the Tribal Peoples' political-cultural and socio-economic aspirations.
- To be a partner of Solidarity Networks at the local, regional and national levels for resisting any kind of inversion of the Constitutional provisions and Legal framework for the Self-governance of the Adivasis and Tribal Peoples, and other safeguards like the Labour Laws, Indian Forest Act etc.

We appeal to the Government of India, its Agencies and the State Governments:

- For immediate framing, adoption and implementation of a comprehensive National Policy Framework for the Adivasis and Tribal Peoples, with special emphasis given to the protection of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).
- To generate employment opportunities for the Tribal and Adivasi youth in their respective locations without the devastation of habitat of the Adivasis and Tribal Peoples and environment.
- To check the steady inflow of the non-tribal communities in the areas of Adivasis and Tribal Peoples.
- To take effective measures for debarring entry of such agents and forces in the Adivasi and Tribal areas, who are fomenting hatred and divisions among the Adivasis and Tribal Peoples.
- To immediately come forward and stop the violence in Manipur that is going on unabetted for more than a year.
- To ratify and adopt the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP 2007) by the Government of India.

- To ratify and adopt the provisions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 169 by the Government of India, to which it is a signatory, in order to that Adivasi and Tribal communities will also be benefitted.

We believe that by divine grace we have been enabled to arrive at these set of understanding and collective courses of action, and submit to God's guidance and wisdom for our leaders in State and Central Governments, Traditional Institutions of self-governance, Churches and Church-based Organisations for accomplishing these in cooperation and solidarity with one another for benefit and peace in the country and all its peoples, especially the Adivasis and the Tribal Peoples of our country.

We mandate the NCCI- Commission on Tribal/Adivasi Concerns as well as the NCCI Secretariat to take effective measures to implement, to oversee and annually review the recommendations of the present Statement of Consultation.

Rt. Rev. Sameer Khimla
Chairperson

Pradip Bansrior
Executive Secretary

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WCC NEWS

WCC CHRISTMAS MESSAGE: "A CALL TO NEW LIFE, HOPE, AND PEACE"

The World Council of Churches Christmas message raises the question, "Where is peace in today's fearful world?" Where is God in this situation? The solution lies in the arrival of the Prince of Peace. "The birth of Jesus signifies hope, the arrival of God's redemption, and a call to new life, hope, and peace," the message states. "The birth of Jesus highlights God's presence among us, sharing our vulnerabilities and enhancing our ability to promote peace and justice. The message highlights that Christmas marks the celebration of God's incarnation, our dignity, and the arrival of hope and courage in the pursuit of the angels' promised peace for all people. The message states, "Christians are called to condemn war and violence and work for peace." The World

Council of Churches, comprising 352 member churches, is driven by its legacy and the pursuit of peace in its initiatives.

The WCC actively promotes peace efforts in Ukraine, the Middle East, Sudan, Colombia, Korea, and numerous other regions. "We boldly campaign against violence towards women and children," the message states. "We work together to establish a fair international order, develop a more equitable financial system, and foster interfaith understanding and solidarity with diverse traditions." Disciples of Jesus emphasise his nonviolent approach as the genuine route to peace, according to the message. "We oppose the forces that jeopardise peace and confront the lies and falsehoods that divide people," states the text. "We seek peace, cultivate it within ourselves and our communities, and actively promote it daily."

The message concludes with a reminder that the Prince of Peace is with us. The text concludes with a message of hope, joy, and strength for daily struggles, aiming to bring joy to the world. "Inspired by our celebrations of the Saviour's birth, let us walk his path of peace and fulfil its promise in our time and world."

WCC GENERAL SECRETARY RECEIVES MEDAL FROM KAZAKHSTAN FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, received a medal from the Republic of Kazakhstan. The award, presented by ambassador Yerlan Alimbayev, recognises the WCC's efforts in promoting interreligious dialogue and cooperation. A meeting at the Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan in Grand-Saconnex on December 18 focused on the role of religions as peace agents, highlighting the contributions of religious leaders, communities, and civil society. The WCC promotes sustainable interreligious relations globally, fostering dialogue between Christians and other faith communities through both multilateral and bilateral efforts. The WCC promotes interreligious dialogue as a global expression of ecumenical fellowship, urging individuals of goodwill from all faiths to unite in their shared journey of faith, emphasising justice, reconciliation, and unity.

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CCA NEWS

CCA URGES MEMBER CHURCHES AND COUNCILS TO AMPLIFY EFFORTS AGAINST VIOLENCE TOWARDS WOMEN AND GIRLS

On the 25th anniversary of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) has reiterated its call to address the persistent issue of violence against women and girls (VAWG). Dr. Mathews George Chunakara emphasised the need for unified and strategic efforts to tackle the root causes of violence against women, highlighting issues such as entrenched gender inequalities, harmful cultural norms, restricted access to justice, and socio-economic disparities.

Violence against women takes many forms, such as intimate partner violence, human trafficking, exploitation, and femicide. These actions are frequently motivated by persistent patriarchal norms and systemic inequalities, perpetuating a cycle of harm. In multiple Asian nations, the situation is critical, as domestic violence, trafficking, and exploitation persistently impact vulnerable women. The CCA Ecumenical Women's Action Against Violence initiative is actively promoting advocacy and education, urging member churches and councils to implement faith-based strategies to fight violence against women and girls.

The EWAAV consultation in Bangkok focused on gender-based violence and forced migration of women, uniting Christian women from Asia to enhance advocacy for gender justice. Participants condemned the rising violence against women and stressed the importance of collaborative, inclusive, and transformative measures to tackle gender-based violence, social inequalities, and the forced migration of women.

ASIA REGIONAL CONSULTATION ADDRESSES STRENGTHENED FOCUS ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND HEALTHCARE ACCESS

The Asia regional consultation on enhancing social protection measures for HIV-affected children and teens, organised by the Christian Conference of Asia under the Action Together in Combating HIV

and AIDS in Asia initiative, highlighted the urgent need for inclusive policies, community-driven solutions, and sustained advocacy for vulnerable groups.

The three-day consultation took place from 29 November to 1 December 2024 at the CCA headquarters in Chiang Mai, Thailand. It gathered over 46 participants, including medical professionals, social activists, community health workers, members of PLHIV networks, and representatives from faith-based organisations. The consultation addressed systemic barriers, stigma, and inequalities, advocating for equitable healthcare and support for children and teens in the region. Consultation discussions highlighted the importance of child-friendly interventions, faith-based advocacy, and tackling gender inequality, while also focussing on the needs of marginalised communities. Participants discussed steps to reduce stigma, improve healthcare access, and advance social justice.

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BIBLE STUDY

MARY'S JOURNEY OF BIRTHING: A JOURNEY OF "SACRED' DEFILING"

- Vethakani Vedhanayagam[*]

On one of the Advent Sundays, I received an invitation to preach on the topic of Mary's conception (Lk 1:28-37). After situating myself and the congregation within the socio-cultural and gender-political context, I posed a simple yet thought-provoking question: "Would you accept a sister or daughter who claims to be pregnant with the power of the Holy Spirit?" The response from both gender groups in the church was uniformly negative. I then asked them, "Why is there an irony in celebrating and glorifying Mary, but not us?" In fact, it is the irony of the cultured me and the "other" within Christian spirituality that causes this paradox.

What was the primary reason to admit a vehement answer? Cultural gender norms, which prohibit pregnancy for those who are still virgins, influenced the women in the congregation more than the men. However, the birth narrative of Luke, in particular, features a significant number of volunteers who defy the prevailing "sacred" cultural norms and religiously imposed gender roles of the time. The narrative uses the question of purity and pollution as a problematising hermeneutical tool. The mission of Jesus' life and ministry demanded the hermeneutic of defiling, envisioning the establishment of God's kingdom.

Hermeneutic of Defiling

To comprehend the methodological argument of this text-based Bible study, the aim to establish a hermeneutical framework that enables us to follow the flow of this article's methodological imagination. In English dictionaries, the term "defile" or "defiling" refers to the act of making something unclean or impure, of corrupting purity or perfection, or of violating chastity or virginity.[1] It also refers to the act of spoiling something or someone, making them less beautiful and

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[1] DEFILE Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster

pure.[2] Additionally, it refers to the act of violating sanctity and causing physical uncleanliness, particularly through the presence of unpleasant or contaminating substances.[3] The primary Greek term which is used for defiling in the New Testament is *miaino* (μιαίνω), which figuratively means 'to defile' or to stain, of cultic and ceremonial impurity (defile, make unclean, cause to be unacceptable (Jn 18.28)); of religious and moral impurity (defile, deprave, corrupt (Heb. 12.15)).[4]

Taking into account the gender framework in Judaism, as well as the theological framework and gender in Judaism and Rabbinic Judaism, aids in our understanding of the defiling hermeneutic. To achieve this, the theological framework on defiling emphasises the concept of corruption and defilement resulting from sin and ungodliness, rendering a person unfit for worship and fellowship with God. Therefore, the Jewish tradition contains comprehensive regulations on cleanliness and defilement, designed to distinguish the Israelites as a sacred people. Therefore, purity was not just a requirement for a person in Jewish society, but it also defined the community's identity as "chosen" and "holy."[5] This was the reason why the Qumran community went to the extent of embracing largely celibacy, which was a result of exclusive, scrutinised, misogynistic interpretations of the Law due to the political context in which the community identity was a question of life and death in the Jewish world. In order to respond to the crucial political context of post-exile and diaspora, women's wombs became the centre of the community's concern and safety, as they could promise the purity of the holy lineage.

Indeed, the Jewish theological framework of God also reflects these same cultural norms of gender and purity. These gender cultural norms, which place the male as superior and create the female to serve both the physical and domestic interests of the male and male God, have shaped and nourished the understanding of God in Judaism. From the creation narratives to the rabbinic writings, no God, prophet, or law within Jewish theology appeared to challenge this framework. For

[2] DEFILE | English meaning - Cambridge Dictionary

[3] DEFILE Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster

[4] The concept of defilement in the Hebrew Bible is often represented by the word *tame* (אָמֵא) which means "to be unclean" or "to defile."

[5] Cf. Wives and daughters are consigned to make control by men of the family (Lev 20:10; Deut 22:13-28).

instance, in Luke 2:36–38, Anna, the prophet, lived almost her entire life as a widow, dedicating her life to fasting and praying at the Temple. However, within the birth narrative, among the characters who played major roles in the temple, such as Zachariah and Simeon, one of the two voices on Jesus' birth as redemption for Israel is Anna—a counterpart of the priest, Zachariah. (1:68; 2:38).

Therefore, the New Testament's birth narratives of Jesus, particularly Luke's theological narrative framework, serve as a correction to the pre-existing, well-established Theos (theology) framework. This bible study presents a framework known as "hermeneutics of defiling," which utilizes the *Lukan birth story as an illustration of a corrective theophany*. This framework questions and overturns the traditional understanding of God's being and all kinds of theophanies. It also lowers the value of religious and cultural demands that theophany be female-only.

Un-cultural Conception to Defile the "Modesty" of Conception

In Ketobot, the Mishnah, and the Talmud tractate, Rabbi Yosei, Rashi, and others discuss conception and birth control, emphasizing methods such as *mokh*/*moch* (an absorbent device) or "turn-ove" to control conception during sexual activity. It's important to note that they primarily attribute this responsibility to women. This is also the case in Hebrew narratives from the pre-monarchy and monarchy periods, where women such as Rachel and Anna faced difficulties with conception. These stories often depict women as the primary cause.

The other side of the case is that while Rabbis regard women as sexual beings, as Gemara remarks, birth control is a tool for women to shape their destiny.[6] In this line, Paul also highlights the opposing viewpoint that women can attain salvation through childbearing (1 Tim 2:15). Nevertheless, the gender dynamic in each of these perspectives emphasizes that women can only achieve destiny, or salvation, by actively controlling their sexuality and faithfully adhering to the prescribed roles. However, while the Greco–Roman world highly valued motherhood and honoured women for their role in childbearing and raising children, the Jewish society focused on children as blessings from God, not on women and their role as such.

[6] Further reading, read Ketubot 37.

Given the gender dynamics associated with marriage and conception, the traditional Jewish understanding of sex within the marital relationship is considered *Kiddushin*–holy when it comes to betrothal customs. The betrothal (*aras* - שׂרא) was a first step in the Jewish marriage (Deut 20:7) as an establishment of a marriage covenant which is a result of the bridegroom's *mohar*[7] negotiation. Jewish betrothal, being a formal covenant or legal contract, necessitates a formal divorce in all cases. Among the few Jewish customs associated with betrothal are the exchange of gifts from both families as a form of compensation and the ownership of a woman by a man.

Therefore, Deut 25:23 describes any evidence of unfaithfulness during this one-year period of betrothal as adultery, punishable by death. God exclusively selected this betrothal period for Mary's conception, demanding our hermeneutical attention. This period was crucial for the betrothed woman to maintain her virginity, a status that not only defined her family but also the bridegroom's. In these socio-cultural and religious contexts, Mary's often romanticised response to the angel, "let it be/be it unto me" (γένοιτό μοι-Lk. 1:38), reflects her optative mood and expresses her fear of accepting it. Her fear primarily stems from two factors: firstly, if she chooses to comply with the angel's demand, it would mean breaching the betrothal covenant or contract. In addition, the angel requires her to risk her life and that of Joseph, her contract partner. The story of Mary and Joseph provides valuable insight into the covenantal nature of marriage.[8] Therefore, she must prepare herself to embrace a defiled identity for her motherhood and for her two families, while also confronting the legal norms of the culture and religion she belongs to.

The birthing of Jesus did not transpire as our Christmas manger scenes aesthetically and dramatically portray. The families of Mary and Joseph demanded honour, social status, and religious purity. Mary was forced to conceive by sacrificing her virginity and chastity of the women and men of both families. But why? Why was her virginity and orthodoxy of marriage culture demanded in birthing Jesus? What issue does the current marriage ethos pose? The hermeneutic of defiling would

[7] The bridegroom's negotiation with the pride's family on price for purchasing the bride.

[8] A. "Stewart, Customs on Betrothal and Marriage in the Old Testament," *Christian Brethren Research Fellowship Journal*, (2024): 2-16.

answer these questions by showcasing the nexus between the gender norms, theology, and lives of the marginalized, such as women, with the following insights from Luke's birth narrative.

Redeeming Theophany from the Servitude of Gender Interests

Luke's birth narrative incorporates numerous contrasts and ironic elements, serving as powerful literary tools within the narrative itself. One such example is the angel's choice of social location during his encounters with the priest, Zachariah, at the temple sanctuary and with Mary at home. On one side, it was a centre of power; on the other, it was a powerless domestic sphere. To revert the framework of theophany to announce the world through the birthing of messiah, the power dynamics of the power centres are restructured by dissolving the gender power dynamics which had been sustaining this gendered framework. Hereafter, God need not inevitably choose a religiously driven space to encounter his people.

More interestingly, this new framework of theophany demanded the muting of patriarchal/dominant voices to reclaim those defiled and rendered powerless by the same religious theophanies. Zachariah's voice must remain muted if Elisabeth is to speak.

The Greek term *siopao* (σιωπάω) means an act of being silent as a deliberate choice to remain quiet as a response to what happened. The genitive preposition "until" indicates that Zachariah won't be able to speak until Elisabeth gives the baby the name John (v. 60). So, the new liberative theophany model did not follow the same hierarchical ethos of enabling someone at the cost of another. Instead, Zachariah, serving as a symbol for the privileged, both religiously and patriarchally, required a hermeneutical approach, as it involves God's correction rather than complete annihilation. The priest's voice is being muted, as it will no longer be "holy" to be heard; instead, the voice of a woman is being reclaimed, which used to be claimed as "defiled" voices not worthy of being heard by the sacred ears—the privileged ones, including God. Furthermore, the traditional "sacred" location of theophany underwent a transformation, moving from the religious arena to the domestic space, a process known as restructuring. Elizabeth, who was kept outside the temple as a woman with a defiled body, was now the only source to translate the vision Zachariah received inside the holy sanctuary. The

defiled arena began to translate and interpret the matters of "holy" space.

The role of the Holy Spirit in the narrative authenticates this reversal or restructuring of the theophany framework. Women were not included in the preview of either the Old Testament theophanies or the Jewish religious engagements until this period. The Old Testament portrays the Spirit of God as a member of exclusive male privileged groups, including kings, prophets, and priests. In the Jewish religion, the manifestation of God's power and work seems to demand a specific gender, a reality that became increasingly complex with the rise of post-exilic and diaspora Judaism, where celibacy began to gain more respect. In these socio-religious contexts, the women were birthing Messianic personalities (the Messiah and the forerunner of the Messiah) by being filled with and conceived by the Holy Spirit. The narrative's women, Anna, Elizabeth, Mary, and Rachel, imagined, conceived, bore, and birthed the new world order, or the Kingdom of God.

Every moment we dare to defile the so-called purity elements, faith systems, caste identities, gender spaces, and religious claims, we are truly continuing Mary's journey of birthing the Messiah and his visions.

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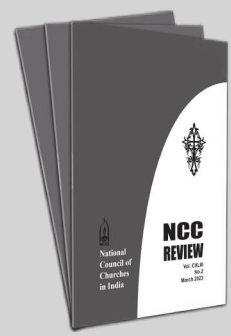

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