100 Years
A Century of Literary Witness in India.

NCCI
National Council of Churches' Review

NCC REVIEW

Vol. CXLV
No. 1
January-February 2025

UGC-CARE List ISSN 0975 - 1882

The National Council of Churches Review (NCC Review)
The Organ of the National Council of Churches in India
UGC approved Journal
Formerly published as "The Harvest Field" since 1862

Vol. CXLV No. 1 January-February 2025

Contents

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

Registration No. 33/2019

EDITORIAL

The Need for Just Taxation: Addressing Economic Disparity in India

February and March mark the budget season in India, when both the central and state governments announce their fiscal plans for the coming year. While tax hikes are inevitable to fund government expenditure, these increases often disproportionately burden the common masses. To address this imbalance, government must focus on imposing higher taxes on the affluent classes, who are more capable of shouldering the financial responsibility.

The global financial system has long perpetuated inequality, with historical injustices like slavery and colonialism continuing to shape economic disparities. Wealthy nations and corporations that benefitted from these systems have not been held accountable, while marginalized communities continue to suffer. A global tax system based on equity and justice is essential. Inspired by biblical figures like Zacchaeus, who repented for his exploitation, organizations such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) are working to raise awareness about these global disparities. As part of the global ecumenical movement, the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) is also committed to this cause.

Zacchaeus, a figure familiar to churches and Christians, was a tax collector allied with the colonial financial and military systems of his time. His encounter with Jesus, when Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus' home, prompts Zacchaeus to convert, repent, and make reparations. Zacchaeus' transformation is symbolic of the changes needed in our systems so that the fruit of our work and wealth lifts the poor and compensates those who have been exploited. The call for reparations and debt cancellation is grounded in the belief that a fairer economic order can be built by addressing the harms caused by slavery, colonization, climate change, and the present taxation systems of governments.

India's tax system, particularly indirect taxes like the Goods and Services Tax (GST), contributes to the rising cost of living, disproportionately impacting lower- and middle-income groups. Indirect taxes are

regressive, meaning everyone pays the same rate regardless of their income. For instance, an increase in the GST rate on essential goods like food, medicine, or fuel directly affects those struggling to make ends meet—farmers, daily wage labourers, and small shopkeepers. As the cost of essentials rises, so does income inequality, deepening the divide between the rich and the poor.

In contrast, direct taxes, such as income tax, are more progressive as they tax individuals based on their income and wealth. Wealthier individuals pay a higher percentage of their income in taxes, which helps redistribute wealth and fund welfare programs that benefit poorer segments of society. India has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the world, with the top 1% holding 22% of the country's total income, while the bottom 50% earn only 13%. This stark contrast underscores the urgent need for a more just tax system.

Taxation, law, and the protection of personal property are deeply interconnected, yet many remain unaware of their implications. A deeper understanding of tax policies—both globally and nationally—is essential. The growing wealth disparity, highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the number of billionaires soared, stands in sharp contrast to the increasing need for basic goods. Philosopher Harry Frankfurt describes the principle of alternate possibilities (PAP) as follows: "A person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise." Based on this theory, Prof. Dr. Praveen Jha of JNU opined in a public address that a "Neo-Patrimonial State" is needed, where public goods like education and healthcare are seen as rights, not charity.

India's tax-to-GDP ratio remains low compared to other emerging economies, limiting the government's ability to invest in crucial sectors like education, healthcare, and infrastructure. A more effective tax regime targeting the wealthiest individuals and corporations could generate additional resources to improve the lives of the poor. These funds could be used to enhance access to quality healthcare and education, implement poverty alleviation programs, and invest in infrastructure development, particularly in rural areas.

Taxation is an important tool for sharing wealth equitably within and across countries and for holding corporations and citizens accountable

for their responsibility towards upholding the common good, including the care of the global ecological commons. It should be the mechanism through which restorative and reparatory action can bear fruit. Churches can and ought to play an important role in encouraging national and international systems of taxation that reward work, redistribute gains, promote gender justice and ecological sustainability, and penalize "public bads" such as speculative, polluting, and resource-depleting activities.

Rev. Dr. Abraham Mathew
Managing Editor

●●●

CASTE, JUSTICE, AND INEQUALITY: EVALUATING THE SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF DALITS IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

- Amardeep[*]

Abstract

India attained independence from British rule in 1947. Independence is a fundamental requirement of any person or group for it survival and further development. This paper is an attempt to explore the paradox of independence for Dalits, focusing specifically on Haryana and more broadly on India as a whole, during the formative years of independence and later and early decades of 21 century. Despite constitutional safeguards and promises of equality, Dalits have faced continual systemic oppression, social exclusion, and violence. The first decade of independence i.e. 1947–1956 witnessed Dalits continue to endure caste-based discrimination, with practices like beggar (forced labour) and denial of basic rights. New India, despite noteworthy progressions in literacy, education, and economic development, has witnessed rising atrocities against Dalits, such as lynchings, arson, and social boycotts. The paper highlights key incidents, from the advancement of independence including the Beggar practice in Panipat (1948), social 'curfew' in Dagrauli (1948), Bithmara firing (1949), to the 21st century like Dulina lynching (2002), Mirchpur violence (2010), and the Sunped tragedy (2015), which highlights the growing brutality of caste-based violence. The paper opines for the urgent need to dismantle caste structures and build an egalitarian society. Despite constitutional framework and progress, the lack of substantive social transformation reveals the incomplete realization of independence for Dalits.

Keywords: Dalits, caste-based violence, independence, equality, constitutional rights, social justice, egalitarian society

Introduction

The Indian independence movement promised liberty and equality for all citizens. Yet, for Dalits, the reality of post-independence India

[*] Dr. Amardeep is an Assistant Professor in the P.G. Department of History at Govt. College Birohar.

has been far from ideal. The transition from colonial rule to self-governance brought little relief to Dalits, who remained trapped in the web of caste hierarchies and social marginalization. Early reports from the 1940s and 1950s reveal the prevalence of atrocities like forced labour, displacement, and denial of access to resources. Leaders like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Jagjivan Ram highlighted the hollowness of independence for marginalized communities, questioning the sincerity of promises made by the ruling elite. The introduction of the Indian Constitution in 1950 marked a significant step toward equality by outlawing untouchability. However, these legal provisions failed to translate into meaningful social change on the ground.

In contemporary India, the situation remains dire. While literacy rates have improved significantly—from 12% in 1947 to over 74% by 2011—the societal mindset remains rooted in feudal attitudes. Caste-based violence continues unabated, with numerous incidents highlighting the inability of dominant caste groups to relinquish their hierarchical privileges. The persistence of such atrocities reveals the enduring impact of casteism and the inadequacy of democratic institutions in addressing systemic oppression. This paper seeks to analyse the historical and contemporary struggles of Dalits in India, highlighting their fight for a more inclusive and equitable society. It also examines the cultural and ideological barriers that hinder this transformation, emphasizing the need for collective action to achieve true independence for all.

The Promise of Freedom and Its Limitations

Freedom, as described by Jawaharlal Nehru in his iconic speech on the eve of India's independence, represented the promise of ending poverty, ignorance, disease, and inequality of opportunity. Nehru emphasized that serving India meant addressing the struggles of millions, working to eliminate social and economic injustices. However, for the Dalits, or untouchables, this vision of freedom remained out of reach. While political independence liberated the nation from colonial rule, it failed to immediately dismantle deeply entrenched caste-based oppression and inequality that had marginalized Dalits for centuries. True freedom for them requires more than political rights—it demands the eradication of caste-based discrimination and the establishment of dignity, equality, and the opportunity to fully participate in all aspects of national life. As Jawaharlal Nehru mentioned in his famous *Tryst with Destiny* speech:

> *"Long years ago, we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge... At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom... Freedom and power bring responsibility... The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity."*[1]

India' independence on August 15, 1947 marked a turning point for every citizen. It symbolized hope and further, the promise of justice, with democratic foundation for equality and representation. By adopting the Indian Constitution on January 26, 1950, it further laid down the fundamental rights, guaranteeing freedom and, more importantly, equality to all citizens. Yet, the persistence of systemic discrimination and rigid social hierarchies revealed the challenges of achieving true equality in a deeply stratified society. For the Dalit community, the hopefulness surrounding India's independence swiftly gave way to disillusionment. They encountered entrenched societal resistance and systemic obstacles that restricted their access to the promised freedoms. Caste-based discrimination continued, making the vision of independence incomplete for many Dalits. While legal equality was established, as Dr. Ambedkar opined, the deeply rooted structures of caste-based oppression remained intact, leading Dalits to view independence not as an achieved reality but as an ongoing struggle.

This paper explores the challenges faced by Dalits in Haryana and across India during two pivotal periods: the early post-independence era (1947–1956) and the early 21st century (2002–2016). In the aftermath of independence, incidents of violence and institutional discrimination underscored the limited impact of political freedom on marginalized communities. The continued social and cultural exclusion of Dalits undermined the essence of independence. The second section focuses on the 21st century, a time characterized by significant advancements in literacy, economic development, and technology. Despite these achievements, caste-based violence and discrimination have persisted, highlighting the enduring nature of these issues. This ongoing struggle reflects the concept of an "alternative independence" for Dalits—a

[1] "A Tryst with Destiny," India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's Inaugural Address at Midnight 14 August, 1947, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125396/1154_trystnehru.pdf (Accessed 20 Sep 2024).

quest for freedom that extends beyond the political liberation of 1947 to encompass social justice and cultural equality. By examining these dynamics, the paper aims to critically assess the paradox of independence for Dalits, challenging conventional notions of freedom and justice in India.

Freedom and Responsibility: Nehru's and Ambedkar's Diverging Perspectives

Jawaharlal Nehru once remarked that "freedom and power bring responsibility," but for many, these words felt hollow. At the time of India's transition to independence, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar expressed concerns about the implications of this freedom for the marginalized communities. Even Jagjivan Ram, a prominent Dalit leader and Labour Member of the Interim Government, voiced his disillusionment. Reflecting on the period since the Poona Pact of 1932, he noted,

> *"It was in 1932 that the Poona Pact was signed and during the past 15 years, except for the opening of a few schools for the Harijans, nothing has been done. We have, therefore, per force to doubt the honesty of our benefactors…. Freedom from the British rule as hoped for in June next year did not mean freedom for Harijans of India as they were labouring under two-fold slavery of the British and the Hindus. It was proper for Hindus to declare independence for the Depressed Classes also as the foreign rulers had done for them."*[2]

Despite being portrayed by the Congress as a "true" representative of Dalits, Jagjivan Ram was sceptical of the party's commitment to uplifting the untouchables. He criticized the Congress' claims of progress for Dalits and highlighted the hypocrisy in slogans like Bal Gangadhar Tilak's declaration that "Swaraj is my birthright." For Dalits, freedom appeared to be reserved for the caste Hindus alone. Jagjivan Ram's call for caste Hindus to recognize the independence of untouchables underscored this disparity. This irony persisted even decades later.

---

[2] "Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi," *The Pioneer: English Newspaper* (Lucknow; Tuesday, April 20, 1947).

Dalits' Disillusionment with Independence and Atrocities in Haryana and Punjab: A Grim Reality

The struggles of Dalits reveal a deeper irony within the traditional Brahmanical order. For caste Hindus, the subjugation of Dalits was not seen as a problem but as a traditional state of affairs. Dalits were not considered as human and they kept only serving without question or demand. The very act of asserting their rights was perceived as a revolt against their old aged traditional societal set up. Real freedom, therefore, remains an unfinished promise until such structural injustices are addressed. This section explores the early years of India's independence, a period marked by continuous atrocities against Dalits and other marginalized groups, reinforcing their exclusion from the promise of "true" freedom. For instance, a monthly letter (November, 1947 of the Harijan Sevak Sangh) reported severe repression of Dalits by Jats in the villages of Rohtak district in Punjab. Mahatma Gandhi found nothing new in this news. He pointed out that constraints on the liberty of Dalits were prevalent in British times too. The new thing that he noticed was that after independence persecutions had become more pronounced instead of dying out.[3]

In another monthly letter of January 1948, reports of harassment of Dalits by Jats were received from Panipat, East Punjab. Although *Beggar* had been prohibited by law, the '*Harijans*' were being forced to do *beggar* labour by the Jats. Upon refusal, they were turned out of their houses, their women-folk molested, their cattle not allowed to graze on the common land and they were denied access to public wells. They were also victims of unjust tax.[4] Gandhi's observation that such violations were "nothing new" underscored the normalization of such injustices, even in an independent India. Jagjivan Ram, then Minister of Communications, explicitly criticized this ongoing exploitation. He remarked, "though the Constitution has made the exaction of forced labour illegal and though it has no longer any legal sanction, involuntary or forced labour is still prevalent in the countryside in many States. Customary rights are used whenever *Harijans* refuse to work and they are harassed in various ways. They have neither the skill

[3] All India Congress Committee Papers (hereafter AICC Papers), File No. CPD-2, CPD-6/1947-48, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

[4] AICC Papers, File No. G-19 (KWI)/1946-48, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi

nor the resources to go to law courts. Another difficulty is that they do not get witnesses to support their case."[5] His statement highlighted the glaring failure of the legislative and judicial systems to protect the most vulnerable. These systemic shortcomings left Dalits feeling abandoned and helpless, shattering the hopes they had placed in independence. Instead of ushering in opportunities for progress, the post-independence period often worsened their hardships, with their livelihoods under constant threat. This stark reality revealed the gap between the ideals of independence and the lived experiences of marginalized communities.

In June 1948, the Chamars of Dagrauli village in Jind State wrote a desperate letter to Jagjivan Ram, the Labour Member of the Government of India, highlighting the severe hardships imposed on them by the village zamindar. They described how the zamindar had effectively placed 400 Dalits under a "curfew," cutting off their access to the village well and denying them drinking water. They warned that both their people and animals faced starvation. Additionally, the zamindar forced them to sell shoes at a drastically reduced price of 14 annas, instead of the usual Rs. 5 to Rs. 10. Despite their grievances, the Tehsildar of Dalmia Dadri, influenced by the zamindar, refused to take up their case.[6] Similar type of incidents occurred in Bailali village in Jind State and Rani village in Patiala, where Dalits reported caste Hindus blocking roads, locking them in their homes, and refusing to let their animals graze.[7] In Punjab as well, such acts of oppression were common.[8] It is significant that the Dalits found the courage to formally lodge complaints against caste Hindus, despite the overwhelming dominance of the latter in administrative positions. This alone underscores the severity of their plight, as the systemic imbalance often discouraged Dalits from speaking up against their oppressors.

---

[5] Presidential address at All India Scheduled Castes Legislators and Workers' Convention in Nagpur on 1/1/52 in Ministry of Home Affairs – Public – File No. 74/124/52, (New Delhi: National Archives of India, 1952), 11.

[6] "Alleged ill-treatment of Harijans in Patiala & East Punjab States Union," in *Ministry of States – Political – File No. Prog, 326-P/48*, (New Delhi: National Archives of India, 1948), 5.

[7] "Alleged ill-treatment of Harijans in Patiala & East Punjab States Union," 21-22 & 25

[8] Ronki Ram, "Untouchability, Dalit Consciousness and the Ad Dharm Movement in Punjab," in *Reading on Dalit Identity: History, Literature and Religion*, edited by Swaraj Basu (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd, 2016), 345-46.

The Paradox of Freedom: Persistent Inequality in a Democracy

The condition of Dalits worsened when they began refusing *beggar* (forced labour) in post-independence India. Despite gaining freedom, the distribution of resources remained highly unequal. Land, wealth, and other assets were still monopolized by caste Hindus, creating a system where the majority maintained unchecked dominance over marginalized communities. This dynamic fostered a lingering sense of colonialism, even within a framework of formal democracy.[9] *Beggar* continued to be a major obstacle to the progress of Dalits, perpetuating systemic oppression. The adoption of the Indian Constitution on January 26, 1950, formally abolished untouchability through Article 17, making caste-based discrimination a punishable offense. But in practice, there was a little difference.[10] Caste Hindus, and even government officials, continued to demand *beggar* from Dalits. In one tragic instance, when Dalits in Bithmara village (Narwana Tehsil) refused to comply, a Police Sub-Inspector shot and killed three individuals. No action was taken against the culprit."[11] This highlights the failure of the justice system to protect Dalit rights. During colonial rule, the police were a primary instrument of oppression, and this pattern was expected to change in an independent India. However, such incidents revealed that the police still functioned as agents of terror rather than protectors of citizens. The Ministry of Labour also acknowledged the ongoing practice of *beggar*, noting that its rejection by Dalits often led to tensions with caste Hindus.[12]

The Persistent Curse of the Caste System

More than four decades earlier from independence, Lala Lajpat Rai had criticized the caste system in July 1909, stating, "There can be no

[9] Gyanendra Pandey, "The Time of the Dalit Conversion," in *Reading on Dalit Identity: History, Literature and Religion*, ed. Swaraj Basu, (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd, 2016) 365.

[10] "Measures suggested by the Labour Federation for SCs," in *Ministry of Home Affairs* – Public – File No. 51/69/49, (New Delhi: National Archives of India, 1949), 2.

[11] "Shooting incident at Bithmara, Tehsil Narwana, District Sangrur (Patiala Union) resulting in the death of three Harijans," in *Ministry of States – Political* – File No. Prog., Nos., 512-P/48, (New Delhi: National Archives of India, 1948), 7-8; "Death of three Harijans in Village Bithmara (Tehsil Narwana)," in *Ministry of States – Political* – File No. Prog., Nos.3 (76)-P/49, (New Delhi: National Archives of India, 1949), 1-2.

[12] "Measures suggested," *Ministry of Home Affairs* (1949), 3.

denying the fact that the rigidity of the caste Hindu system is the bane of Hindu society. It is a great barrier in the way of the social and national progress of Hindus. It confronts them at every step and slackens the speed with which, otherwise, the nation would climb up to the heights of national solidarity. The condition of the 'low' castes... is nothing short of disgraceful."[13] Unfortunately, these words remained relevant even after independence. While some progress has been made—such as improved education rates, better access to jobs, and gradual economic upliftment—the social and cultural status of Dalits has not changed significantly. The deep-seated caste prejudices and systemic barriers continue to hinder their full inclusion in Indian society. Although there are signs of improvement, the journey toward true equality remains incomplete.

The final section of this paper focuses on the contemporary realities faced by Dalits in India. Since independence, India has witnessed significant transformations. For instance, the literacy rate rose from a mere 12% in 1947 to 74.04% by 2011. Literacy is often considered a key indicator of societal progress and serves as a foundational step toward building an inclusive nation. Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee emphasized that *Bharat* or the Indian nation is basically a cultural unit. It was on the basis of this cultural unity that we have attempted to establish political, economic and social unity. Furthermore, he argued that who are true to India are all Indians, whatever their religion or language… we have to rise above small loyalties and make our country our prime loyalty.[14]

While much is said about the greatness of India as a nation that belongs to all its citizens, the reality of nation-building has been fraught with challenges. As highlighted earlier, constitutional provisions and safeguards for marginalized communities, particularly Dalits, have frequently come under attack. The need to judge individuals based on their abilities rather than caste remains pressing. Despite the progress

[13] Extract from Lala Lajpar Rai's article "the Depressed Classes," *Modern Review*, Calcutta, 1909 in Hindu Nationalism: A Reader, edited by Christophe Jaffrelot (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007), 235-36.

[14] Extract from Atal Behari Vajpayee, "The Bane of Pseudo-Secularism," in *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*, edited by Christophe Jaffrelot (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007), 315-16

reflected in the improved literacy rate, a large segment of the population still clings to a feudal mindset. For many, literacy has been reduced to basic reading and writing skills without fostering broader social awareness or challenging entrenched prejudices. This persistence of a feudal mentality is evident in the rising number of crimes committed against Dalits by members of so-called higher castes.

The Endurance of Caste in New Forms

Sociologist Jayaram aptly noted that caste has not been abolished but has adapted and survived in new forms. He argued that caste can persist even without the traditional purity-impurity ideology or its association with Hinduism.[15] Similarly, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar observed that caste is not merely a social institution but deeply intertwined with religion, making its eradication exceedingly difficult. He asserted that caste is embedded within the very structure of Hindu society, and without addressing this root issue, true social transformation remains elusive.[16] Even 75 years after independence, the oppressive structures of caste remain intact.

These recurring incidents of violence against Dalits reflect a deliberate and systematic effort by dominant caste groups to suppress marginalized communities. Sociologist Dalia Chakrabarti from Jadavpur University insightfully remarked that while we often claim to live in a society rooted in equality, caste hierarchy and casteism (*jaatiwad*) continue to be deeply entrenched.[17] She viewed this as a power struggle, with dominant groups resisting any challenge to their historical authority. Whenever an educated and economically improving Dalit community seeks to break free from the oppressive status quo, it faces backlash from these groups, who fear losing the privileges they have enjoyed for generations. While the Constitution abolished untouchability, it did not eradicate caste itself. Post-independence governments allowed caste

[15] Debjani Ganguly, *Caste and Dalit Lifeworlds: Postcolonial Perspectives* (New Delhi, Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd, 2016), 238.

[16] Narendra Jadhav, *Ambedkar: Awakening India's Social Conscience* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 2014), 362.

[17] Why crime is rising against Dalits and Tribals, access 25 Sep, 2024), https://www.thequint.com/india/2016/07/04/why-crime-is-rising-against-lower-caste-and-tribes-discrimination

divisions to persist, undermining efforts to achieve true social justice. As Ambedkar asserted, political democracy cannot succeed without social and economic equality.

Toward an Egalitarian Future: Learning from Saint Ravidas' Vision

India's future cannot be built on caste-based divisions. The construction of a truly egalitarian and casteless society is essential for the country's overall development. This vision recalls the utopia imagined by the 15th-century saint Ravidas in his depiction of *Begampura*, a city free of suffering, oppression, and inequality. In saint Ravidas' words:

> Where there is no affliction or suffering
> Neither anxiety nor fear, taxes nor capital
> No menace, no terror, no humiliation …
> Say Raidas the emancipated Chamar:
> One who shares with me that city is my friend.[18]

The realization of such a society requires collective effort, empathy, and an unwavering commitment to dismantling caste-based oppression.

India's aspirations for progress cannot be realized without addressing its deeply entrenched caste divisions. The persistence of caste-based inequalities continues to undermine the ideals of freedom, equality, and justice enshrined in the Constitution. Saint Ravidas' vision of *Begampura*, a utopian city free from suffering, oppression, and inequality, provides a powerful metaphor for the society India must strive to build. Saint Ravidas imagined a community where fear, humiliation, and exploitation were eradicated, a place where all individuals could live with dignity and equal opportunity—a vision strikingly relevant to modern India.

For Dalits, independence in 1947 marked the beginning of a political struggle but failed to deliver the social and economic emancipation necessary for true freedom. Despite legal safeguards like the abolition of untouchability under Article 17 of the Constitution, caste-based

[18] Arundhati Roy, Introduction as "The Doctor and The Saint," in *B.R. Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*, edited by S. Anand (New Delhi: Navayana Publishing Pvt. Ltd, 2014), 48.

oppression persists in both overt and systemic forms. This is evident in recurring atrocities against Dalits, the denial of basic rights, and the resistance they face when attempting to assert their independence. Realizing Saint Ravidas' vision requires more than legal reforms—it demands collective action, transformative policies, and a shift in societal attitudes. Education, economic empowerment, and the dismantling of caste privilege must go hand in hand. Only then can India move toward an inclusive, egalitarian future where saint Ravidas' dream of *Begampura* becomes a reality.

Conclusion

India gained independence in 1947, bringing with it a surge of hope for the future. The newly adopted Indian Constitution granted citizens the fundamental right to live free from oppression, barring any involvement in criminal activity. However, for a significant portion of the Hindu population, particularly Dalits, true freedom remained elusive. Despite some efforts to uplift the marginalized, Dalits continued to face systemic oppression under the weight of Hindu social and cultural traditions. Those who challenged these deeply entrenched practices were often met with severe punishment. This situation calls for a re-examination of Jawaharlal Nehru's iconic *Tryst with Destiny* speech, in which he emphasized that the promise of freedom must be upheld for all citizens, regardless of religion or caste. Nehru declared, "we shall never allow that torch of freedom to be blown out, however high the wind or stormy the tempest. We have work ahead. There is no resting for any one of us till we redeem our pledge in full, till we make all the people of India what destiny intended them to be… All of us, to whatever religion we may belong, are equally the children of India with equal rights, privileges and obligations."[19] The struggle for Dalits to attain true independence is far from over. It requires the collective effort of citizens, policymakers, and institutions to eradicate casteism and create a society like saint Ravidas' dream of *Begampura* where every individual can live with

[19] "A Tryst with Destiny," India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's Inaugural Address at Midnight 14 August 1947, accessed 20 Sep 2024 https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125396/1154_trystnehru.pdf

dignity. Only by achieving this transformation can India honour the ideals of its Constitution and ensure that independence is not a privilege of the few but a right for all.

References

All India Congress Committee Papers, File No. CPD-2, CPD-6/1947-48, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

AICC Papers, File No. G-19 (KWI)/1946-48, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi

Ministry of Home Affairs – Public – File No. 74/124/52, National Archives of India, New Delhi

Ministry of States – Political – File No. Prog., Nos., 326-P/48, *Alleged ill-treatment of Harijans in Patiala & East Punjab States Union*¸ National Archives of India.

Ministry of Home Affairs – Police – File No. 8/3/48, Question in the Constituent Assembly by Prof. Yashwant Rai regarding harassment of Harijans in East Punjab and Steps proposed to be taken in the matter, National Archives of India.

Ministry of Home Affairs – Public – File No. 51/69/49, SCs – *Measures suggested by the Labour Federation for SCs*, National Archives of India.

Ministry of States – Political – File No. Prog., Nos., 512-P/48, Shooting incident at Bithmara, Tehsil Narwana, District Sangrur (Patiala Union) resulting in the death of three Harijans, National Archives of India.

Ministry of States – Political – File No. Prog., Nos., 3 (76)-P/49, *Death of three Harijans in Village Bithmara (Tehsil Narwana),* National Archives of India

Ganguly, Debjani. *Caste and Dalit Life worlds: Postcolonial Perspectives*. New Delhi: Orient Black swan Pvt. Ltd, 2016

Jadhav, Narendra. *Ambedkar: Awakening India's Social Conscience*. New Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 2014

Pandey, Gyanendra. "The Time of the Dalit Conversion." in *Reading on Dalit Identity: History, Literature and Religion*. ed. Swaraj Basu. New Delhi: Orient Black swan Pvt. Ltd, 2016

Rai, Lala Lajpat. "The Depressed Classes." in *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*. ed. Christophe Jaffrelot. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007

Ram, Ronki. "Untouchability, Dalit Consciousness and the Ad Dharm Movement in Punjab." in *Reading on Dalit Identity: History, Literature and Religion*. ed. Swaraj Basu. New Delhi: Orient Black swan Pvt. Ltd, 2016

Roy, Arundhati. Introduction as "The Doctor and The Saint." in *B.R. Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*. ed. S. Anand. New Delhi: Navayana Publishing Pvt. Ltd, 2014

Vajpayee, Atal Behari. "The Bane of Pseudo-Secularism." in *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*. ed. Christophe Jaffrelott. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007

The Pioneer, 1947, The Indian Express, 2017, The Tribune, 2016, Accessed 15 October, 2010, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125396/1154_trystnehru.pdf.

●●●

SECONDARY VICTIMIZATION WITHIN INDIAN EVANGELICAL CULTURAL CONTEXT- A PILOT, FEMINIST AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT

- Joanna Pearl[*] & Aditi Arur Ashok[**]

Women who are victims of sexual abuse are particularly vulnerable to further victimization by formal and informal social systems, a phenomenon referred to as secondary victimization by Ahrens.[1] These negative responses, including disbelief, victim-blaming, and minimization of experiences, exacerbate the original trauma and constitute a form of secondary abuse. The objective of this paper is to explore secondary victimization experiences through the narrative of a participant, contextualized within theoretical frameworks and employing a feminist socio-cultural lens to understand the interplay between culture and secondary victimization within Christianity. Traditional psychological studies utilizing attribution theory frameworks based on those proposed by Kelley[2] have revealed negative attributions assigned to victims based on various factors like resistance level, relationship with the perpetrator, physical attractiveness, previous experiences of abuse, socio-economic status, clothing, past sexual history, and occupation.[3]

[*] Ms. Joanna Pearl is a PhD research scholar in the Department of Psychology at the Christ Deemed to be University, Bangalore, India.

[1] "Being Silenced: The Impact of Negative Social Reactions on the Disclosure of Rape," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 38, no. 3–4 (December 2006): 263–74, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-006-9069-9.

[2] "The Processes of Causal Attribution.," *American Psychologist* 28, no. 2 (1973): 107–28, https://doi.org/10.1037/h0034225.

[3] Maisie Hall, Agata Debowska, and George K. Hales, "The Effect of Victim Attractiveness and Type of Abuse Suffered on Attributions of Victim Blame and Credibility in Intimate Partner Violence: A Vignette-Based Online Experiment," *Violence against Women*, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012221150272; Jennifer Wareham et al., "Complainant's Physical Attractiveness and Juristic Judgments of Blame and Punishment in Physical, Domestic, and Sexual Assault Scenarios," *Https://Doi.Org/10.1080/01639625.2018.1443877* 40, no. 8 (August 3, 2018): 912–29, https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2018.1443877; Katherine A. Black and Kathy A. McCloskey, "Predicting Date Rape Perceptions," *Violence Against Women* 19, no. 8 (September 17, 2013): 949–67, https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801213499244; Jesús de la Torre Laso and Juan M Rodríguez-Díaz, "The Relationship between Attribution of

However, Anderson and Doherty argue that cultural members' judgments are influenced by beliefs and presumptions rather than objective reasoning, suggesting the need for alternative frameworks like Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory. Feminist literature further enriches the exploration by investigating the socio-cultural elements dictating and perpetuating rape culture, emphasizing language and narrative styles as key components of cultural production.[4] Feminist perspectives highlight the power dynamics inherent in narratives and the role of patriarchal ideologies in shaping rape myths, which blame the victim, justify the abuser, and normalize sexual violence.[5] This cultural context contributes to the perpetuation of rape culture, where sexual violence is tolerated, accepted, and trivialized.[6]

Blame and the Perception of Resistance in Relation to Victims of Sexual Violence.," *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2022, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.868793; Suzanne St. George, "Perceptions of Common Rape: How Rape Myth Acceptance, Victim Gender, and Victim Resistance Affect Victim and Perpetrator Blame Attributions in Party Rape and Date Rape," *Violence Against Women*, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012211068058; Eric Sprankle et al., "The Role of Sex Work Stigma in Victim Blaming and Empathy of Sexual Assault Survivors," *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 15, no. 3 (September 1, 2018): 242–48, https://doi.org/10.1007/S13178-017-0282-0/TABLES/3; Gillian E. Mason, Stephanie Riger, and Linda A. Foley, "The Impact of Past Sexual Experiences on Attributions of Responsibility for Rape," *Http://Dx.Doi.Org/10.1177/0886260504269094* 19, no. 10 (October 1, 2004): 1157–71, https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260504269094; Bettina Spencer, "The Impact of Class and Sexuality-Based Stereotyping on Rape Blame," *Http://Dx.Doi.Org/10.1177/2374623816643282* 2, no. 2 (April 25, 2016): 237462381664328, https://doi.org/10.1177/2374623816643282; Jane E. Workman and Elizabeth W. Freeburg, "An Examination of Date Rape, Victim Dress, and Perceiver Variables within the Context of Attribution Theory," *Sex Roles* 41, no. 3–4 (August 1999): 261–77, https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1018858313267/METRICS.

[4] Eva Magnusson and Jeanne Marecek, *Gender and Culture in Psychology: Theories and Practices* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139086318; Michael Agar and H. Michael Agar, *Language Shock: Understanding The Culture Of Conversation* (Harper Collins, 1996).

[5] Sandra Lipsitz Bem, *The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality* (Yale University Press, 1993); Susan Brownmiller, "Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape" (United States: Bantam Books, 1975); Martha R Burt, "Cultural Myths and Supports for Rape," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 38, 1980.

[6] Nicola Gavey, *Just Sex?: The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape* , 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2018); Anastasia Powell and Nicola Henry, "Framing Sexual Violence Prevention: What Does It Mean to Challenge a Rape Culture?," in *Preventing Sexual Violence: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Overcoming a Rape Culture*, ed.

Christianity As a Sub-Culture and Secondary Victimization

Clifford Geertz defines religion as a cultural system shaping deep-seated emotions and motives through symbols, constructing a sense of reality.[7] I explore Evangelical Christianity as a subculture using Geertz's notion, which can significantly influence daily life values, fostering community and shared belief.

Androcenetricism of Biblical Texts

The origins of the Hebrew and the Christian texts are emphatically from a patriarchal society.[8] Reuther[9] notes that patriarchy is sanctioned because the Divine is imaged as 'The Great Patriarch.' The coherent implication and maintenance of patriarchal ideology can be observed throughout the biblical text. Consistent with the patriarchal ideology, gendered violence and subjugation of women can be witnessed in various genres of biblical texts.[10]

Since the Bible, as an authoritative source, shapes Christians' fundamental Christian beliefs, exploring the nature of texts could perhaps inform the impact of androcentrism in the treatment of women. Cultural presuppositions while reading texts could further tell us about the reinforced androcentric interplay between the culture and the texts.

Rape Narratives in the Bible

Several narratives of rape (rape of Dinah, Tamar, Bathsheba, the concubine) and imageries of rape are recorded in the Bible. However, the narrative style is devoid of women's voices or agency. Violent rape

---

Nicola Henry and Anastasia Powell (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), 1–21.

[7] Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation Of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

[8] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Changing Horizons: Explorations in Feminist Interpretation* (United States: Fortress Press, 2013), https://doi.org/10.2307/J.CTT22NM7T3.

[9] "Feminism and Patriarchal Religion: Principles of Ideological Critique of the Bible," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 7, no. 22 (August 19, 1982): 54–66, https://doi.org/10.1177/030908928200702207.

[10] Fiorenza, *Changing Horizons: Explorations in Feminist Interpretation*; Eryll Wynn Davies, *The Dissenting Reader: Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible.*, 1st ed. (UK: Taylor & Francis, 2019); Esther Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman* (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003).

of female imageries was often used as threats by prophets to depict the consequence of people's unfaithfulness to their God. Furthermore, women were often portrayed as immoral, seductive, and vain.[11]

Complementarian Doctrines/Theologies

In the context of evangelical gender ideologies, it's essential to recognize the distinctive nature of patriarchy within Christian beliefs, diverging from secular definitions and significantly influencing the agency of victim-survivors.[12] Christian patriarchy, in contrast to secular forms, centers on women's limited submission, perpetuating dominance while marginalizing their voices.[13] Notably, research indicates that Christian religious men and patriarchal institutions endorse rape myths and exhibit victim-blaming attitudes.[14]

Against the backdrop of evolving feminism, Knight[15] repackaged patriarchy as 'role differences,' a concept now known as complementarianism. This perspective suggests equality in worth between males and females but mandates adherence to rigid gender roles, with males assuming a ruling role and females expected to obey.[16] Complementarian theologies, legitimizing male authority, have

---

[11] Davies, *The Dissenting Reader: Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible.*

[12] Jeanne Braham, *Crucial Conversations: Interpreting Contemporary American Literary Autobiographies by Women* (Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1995); Robyn Fivush, "Speaking Silence: The Social Construction of Silence in Autobiographical and Cultural Narratives," *Memory* 18, no. 2 (February 2010): 88–98, https://doi.org/10.1080/09658210903029404; Janice D. Yoder and Arnold S. Kahn, "Toward a Feminist Understanding of Women and Power," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (December 24, 1992): 381–88, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1992.tb00263.x.

[13] Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Baker Books, 2021).

[14] Michael D. Barnett, Kylie B. Sligar, and Chiachih D.C. Wang, "Religious Affiliation, Religiosity, Gender, and Rape Myth Acceptance: Feminist Theory and Rape Culture," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 33, no. 8 (April 1, 2018): 1219–35, https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516665110; Thaeda Franz, "Power, Patriarchy and Sexual Abuse in Churches of Christian Denomination.," *Traumatology* 8, no. 1 (2014): 4, https://doi.org/10.1177/153476560200800102.

[15] *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Baker Book House, 1977).

[16] Kevin Giles, *The Headship of Men and the Abuse of Women: Are They Related In Any Way?* (Cascade Books, 2020).

been linked to issues such as 'toxic masculinity,' attributing problems of abuse and domestic violence to factors like demonic forces or the inherent sinfulness of humanity.[17] Numerous studies have highlighted a higher acceptance of rape myths and increased victimization, as well as secondary victimization of women within complementarian contexts.[18]

Purity Culture

Purity culture within evangelical Christianity emphasizes sexual abstinence until heterosexual marriage, enforcing strict dress codes and emphasizing girls' responsibility for regulating male behavior.[19] Purity culture promotes shame and enforces rigid norms regardless of consent, using metaphors of contamination to describe individuals.[20] Purity culture is associated with endorsing rape myths and victim-blaming attitudes.[21]

---

[17] Jennifer Garcia Bashaw, "View of '"Woman's Head Is Man:" Complementarian and Egalitarian Perspectives on Biblical Gender Roles,'" *Sage Journals*, 2020; MarieAnn Leah. Klett, "Al Mohler: Complementarian Theology 'can and Has' Led to the Abuse of Women in the Church | Church & Ministries News," *The Christian Post*, October 20, 2019.

[18] Jennifer Garcia Bashaw, "'When Jesus Saw Her . . .': A Hermeneutical Response to #MeToo and #ChurchToo:," *Reviewer and Expositor* 117, no. 2 (June 28, 2020): 288–97, https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637320919135; Kevin. Giles, "Complementarian Theology in Crisis," CBE International, 2018, https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/article/complementarian-theology-crisis#_edn6; Giles, *The Headship of Men and the Abuse of Women: Are They Related In Any Way?*

[19] Katie Cross, "'I Have the Power in My Body to Make People Sin': The Trauma of Purity Culture and the Concept of 'Body Theodicy,'" in *Feminist Trauma Theologies : Body, Scripture and Church in Critical Perspective*, ed. Karen O'Donnell and Katie Cross (SCM Press, 2020); Madison Natarajan et al., "Decolonizing Purity Culture: Gendered Racism and White Idealization in Evangelical Christianity," *Https://Doi.Org/10.1177/03616843221091116* 46, no. 3 (May 5, 2022): 316–36, https://doi.org/10.1177/03616843221091116; Bretlyn C. Owens, M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall, and Tamara L. Anderson, "The Relationship between Purity Culture and Rape Myth Acceptance:," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 49, no. 4 (November 27, 2020): 405–18, https://doi.org/10.1177/0091647120974992.

[20] Natalie Collins, "7 Lies That Purity Culture Teaches Women," *CBE International*, 2015; Samantha Field, "How We Teach Purity Culture Isn't the Problem—Purity Culture Itself Is the Problem – Rewire News Group," Rewire News Group, October 24, 2016, https://rewirenewsgroup.com/2016/10/24/teach-purity-culture-isnt-problem-purity-culture-problem/.

[21] Kathryn R. Klement and Brad J. Sagarin, "Nobody Wants to Date a Whore: Rape-Supportive Messages in Women-Directed Christian Dating Books," *Sexuality & Culture 2016 21:1* 21, no. 1 (October 14, 2016): 205–23, https://doi.org/10.1007/S12119-016-

Theology of Endurance and Forgiveness

Although religion is said to be a compelling coping method in the aftermath of sexual assault for several victims, the possibility of a negative impact is also true.[22] Heggens notes two core beliefs about suffering and forgiveness within Christianity, women have "been designated to be suffering servants," and Christians ought to forgive and be reconciled.[23] Christian emphasis on the ethical obligation of willing suffering and forgiving minimizes the victim's experience significantly without due acknowledgment or relief from their suffering and implied guilt for not being able to follow the mandate.[24]

Christianity and Secondary Victimization

A significant relationship between Christian religiosity and acceptance of the rape myth has been observed.[25] Studies also revealed that victims of abuse or assault least preferred clergy or pastors for support or found them to be least helpful.[26] Increased religious fundamentalism and conservatism are related to increased negative attitudes toward rape

---

9390-X; Owens, Hall, and Anderson, "The Relationship between Purity Culture and Rape Myth Acceptance:"; Jessica. Valenti, *The Purity Myth : How America's Obsession with Virginity Is Hurting Young Women.* (Canada: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

[22] Beth Crisp, "Spirituality and Sexual Abuse: Issues and Dilemmas for Survivors," *Theology & Sexuality* 13, no. 3 (2007): 301–14, https://doi.org/10.1177/1355835807078263.

[23] Carolyn Holderread Heggen, "Religious Beliefs and Abuse," in *Women, Abuse, and the Bible: How Scripture Can Be Used to Hurt or Heal*, ed. Clark Catherine. Kroeger and R. James Beck (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF & Stock Publishers, 1991), 15–27.

[24] Pamela Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar: Violence against Women and the Church's Response*, 2nd Ed. (Fortress Press, 2012).

[25] Owens, Hall, and Anderson, "The Relationship between Purity Culture and Rape Myth Acceptance:"; Francesca Prina and Julie N. Schatz-Stevens, "Sexism and Rape Myth Acceptance: The Impact of Culture, Education, and Religiosity," *Psychological Reports* 123, no. 3 (June 1, 2020): 929–51, https://doi.org/10.1177/0033294119826896.

[26] Jacqueline M Golding et al., "Social Support Sources Following Sexual Assault," *Journal of Community Psychology* 17, no. 1 (July 22, 1989): 92–107, https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198901)17:1<92::AID-JCOP2290170110>3.0.CO;2-E; Eric J. Bruns et al., "Clergy Members as Responders to Victims of Sexual Abuse and Assault," *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work* 24, no. 3 (September 22, 2005): 3–19, https://doi.org/10.1300/J377V24N03_02.

victims and, in general, sexism.[27] A study on clergy attitudes revealed that their attitudes towards the victim were impacted by the victim's resistance, provocative behaviours before the rape, and the relationship between the victim and perpetrator.[28] Besides the negative attitudes towards the victim, other practices, such as forced reconciliation, justifying the perpetrator given his broken past, contribute to secondary victimization.[29]

Methodology

This study aimed to explore secondary victimization experiences through the narrative of a female survivor. Employing a feminist ethnographic interview approach, it theorized secondary victimization within cultural contexts, emphasizing the influence of unequal gender relations on cultural production. As a pilot within the broader doctoral research, this study utilized feminist ethnographic concepts like self-reflexivity, deep hanging out, and field notes to ensure the victim's agency in storytelling, contributing to feminist epistemology. Purposive sampling involved interviewing one victim for the pilot study. Procedures included feminist ethnographic interviewing, utilizing formal and informal dialogues, field notes for emotion observation, a self-reflexivity journal, and the review of questions by a research advisory panel and field expert. Interview questions covered the victim's experiences post-disclosure, perceptions of sexual abuse, and societal responses contributing to secondary victimization. Ethical considerations prioritized obtaining informed consent, ensuring participants understood the study's objective, their role, and the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality.

Results and Discussion

The interview was voice recorded with consent, later transcribed, and coded thematically using the software Taugette. The analysis of the interviews generated three main thematic categories: markers of

[27] Bob Altemeyer and Bruce Hunsberger, "Authoritarianism, Religious Fundamentalism, Quest, and Prejudice," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 2, no. 2 (1992): 113–33, https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327582IJPR0202_5.

[28] Jane P. Sheldon and Sandra L. Parent, "Clergy's Attitudes and Attributions of Blame Toward Female Rape Victims:," *Http://Dx.Doi.Org/10.1177/10778010222183026* 8, no. 2 (June 30, 2016): 233–56, https://doi.org/10.1177/10778010222183026.

[29] Cooper-White, The Cry of Tamar: Violence against Women and the Church's Response."

secondary victimization and theological implications that minimized pain. Each of these main categories yielded more subthemes—analysis of these themes allowed for theorizing culture and tentative generalizations. To maintain the participant's anonymity, the pseudo-name Jane is used.

Markers of Secondary Victimization

Victims of sexual abuse experience several negative responses, causing secondary victimization.[30] Jane has walked out of many churches, but the instances mentioned in this interview occurred in her childhood Church— an Orthodox conservative church.

Seeking God's Forgiveness

Upon her disclosure, Jane received responses asking her to seek forgiveness for her abuse. Coming from a conservative heteronormative background, anything sexual outside the bounds of marriage was implied as adultery. She has struggled with guilt over the years and often felt God was upset with her because she was responsible for her abuse.

> "I was asked to confess and beg for forgiveness from God too because I am also equally responsible for it…even though I was a minor."

Jane had internalized the implied blame, which made her doubt her experience of abuse; she began to question her sanity at some points, wondering if she was making a "big deal" out of nothing.

Narratives of 'Good Character'

Jane was perceived to be at fault because of the many presuppositions that would constitute rape myths.[31] Jane recounts how she was "character assassinated" and was asked if she liked sex; her fashion sense was blamed, and her pictures on WhatsApp were stalked.

---

[30] Ahrens, "Being Silenced: The Impact of Negative Social Reactions on the Disclosure of Rape."

[31] Gerd Bohner et al., "Rape Myth Acceptance: Cognitive, Affective and Behavioural Effects of Beliefs That Blame the Victim and Exonerate the Perpetrator," in *Rape: Challenging Contemporary Thinking*, ed. M.A.H Horvath and J.M Brown (Taylor and Francis, 2013), 1–353, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781843927129.

Jane also shared her observations about typical responses she had witnessed within her culture that ranged from quieting the victims down, finding fault with the girl, twisting the story, calling girls liars, prioritizing the reputation of the institution or the person, or even finding ways to discredit the experience by being labelled as "crazy." She says that when it comes to abuse, the girl's "character…conduct…dressing" is taken into account, and she is labelled as having "loose character."

Narratives of the Devil's Fault

Furthermore, it was even suggested to Jane that she may have been the means for "Satan's evil crafty plans… to get the other person because the other person is so much holier." The perception of respectability of the perpetrator is said to have caused disbelief in Jane's story. She was asked to "take into account all the wonderful things they do." She recounts how often she spiralled down in false guilt and often thought of what she could have done differently.

Sex, Sin, Abuse—same or different?

Studies say that some women do not report because of the difficulty in identifying their experience as abuse. One factor that made articulation of her experience difficult was the demarcation between sexual abuse and sexual sin. Sexual abuse is seldom considered a crime. On the other hand, the oft-used labels are sexual sin and misbehaviour. She says sexual sin is regarded as a common sin, like "lying and cheating. "Sexual abuse is perceived as just sex, "so it doesn't matter how [a] man gets it." She believes they may have refused to use the right word because they would have been forced to do the right thing.

Shame, Who will marry you?

Jane recollected how several young girls and women in her circle had been abused but do not discuss it because it is "shameful" to do so. She was often told to be discreet with her story because it may hurt her prospects of getting married. "Nobody will marry you." Jane also struggles to believe that no man would want her because of her abuse. She talks about how women's job in her circles was to protect the man's reputation.

Re-victimization following disclosure

Jane was inappropriately asked questions about her sexuality and if she was open to having sex by one of the pastors she had approached for help. She says she experienced inappropriate comments (sexually suggestive) because they knew she had not reported any of the previous abuses she was subjected to. She narrates how pastors were viewed like gods and trusted to do good, but in her experience, they often exploited her because of her story.

Theological Implications That Minimized Pain

God allowed it for a purpose.

On the rare times when Jane was not blamed for her abuse, she was encouraged with statements like "God allowed it [sexual abuse]" and "this [is] the training that God provided you for a greater purpose." She was visibly angry, saying, "What kind of screwed up God is that" Her empathy was often construed as a gift or purpose that resulted because of her abuse, and she says she could have still been empathetic by being a "human being." She expressed that she is "partly mad at God." "It shouldn't have happened in the first place, and that's all, and there is no hidden meaning to it, but unfortunately, it did happen," was her remark to responses that forced her to see silver linings.

Forgiveness— the first step.

Jane showed distress, recollecting when she was forced to forgive her abuser by a pastor and was not allowed to leave the place until she did. In several instances, forgiveness was suggested as the first step, and she was told to be right with God, she had to forgive. The obligation to forgive was justified as follows: "…we are all sinners. Even if you are abused, you are also sinful." Her suffering was compared to the suffering of Jesus on the cross, and she was told that in comparison it was "like nothing."

Markers of Patriarchy

Feminist perspectives of rape view it within the confines of patriarchy and see sexual abuse as a result of more expansive male power

structures.[32] Johnson defines patriarchy as a society that "… promotes male privilege by being male dominated, male identified and male cantered… organized around an obsession with control and involves… oppression of women."[33]

Men call the shots, not women.

Jane was amused by the question, "What roles did women play in your church?" with a chuckle, she answered that the responsibilities given to women were very different from those of men; women were involved in cooking, cleaning the toilet, serving food, and in children's ministry. She narrates how she gave up pursuing music because there was no point in learning because women weren't allowed to sing on stage in the church. She talked about how the committee members were only men, and men were the face of the church, carrying out essential responsibilities like preaching and "calling the shots." Some of the justifications she heard were:

> "One thing is Eve was created second, so women are second… So that is one and secondly in the case of the 12 disciples, there was no woman."

Sexual abuse- a minor issue

Jane further explained how the all-male committee and leadership affect the victims of sexual abuse. She describes that issues like sexual abuse are considered "minor" and "casual." She talks about how men are considered "sexual beings" and "dominant" and as those who cannot control their urges, and women are expected to be "submissive." She says women were often considered "commodities" made for the sole purpose of meeting the needs of the man, and therefore abuse was acceptable. Remarking on consent, she said she was told that asking for consent would make a man feel "not man enough."

Men lead, women submit.

Jane expressed her honest doubts about the accuracy of the Bible because of male authorship, but she still holds on to faith in Christianity

[32] Rebecca Whisnant, "Feminist Perspectives on Rape," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. N. Edwards Zalta (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017).

[33] Allan G Johnson, *The Gender Knot: Unravelling Our Patriarchal Legacy* (Temple University Press, 2005), 5–6.

in her own way. She spoke about the differences in how men and women are taught; sermons for men were usually themed around authority and leadership, and for women, it was generally about submission and humility. When asked about sermons about rape narratives in the Bible, she says she does not recall any and thinks they could be either ignorant or may consider such texts unimportant.

Implications and Limitations of the study

The need for larger studies within the Indian Christian Evangelical Church is crucial to advance our understanding of secondary victimization. Exploring diverse survivor experiences and intersecting identities, such as race, socioeconomic status, and caste, can reveal the compounding effects of multiple oppressions. However, limitations in this pilot study, with only one participant, constrain its ability to capture a diverse range of experiences within the specific context of the Indian Christian Evangelical Church. Findings may be context-specific, limiting their applicability to other religious or cultural settings, and the absence of longitudinal data impedes the analysis of long-term effects and dynamics of secondary victimization.

Conclusion

Secondary victimization complicates recovery from sexual abuse and deepens the trauma of abuse. Christianity as a patriarchal culture was explored for markers of secondary victimization. Jane's story indicates undercurrents of patriarchy, which has visibly affected the attitudes towards the abuse victim. Inequality in power and problematic gendered myths about men and women were evident in the victim's story. Wrongful attribution of blame to the victim, justification of male behaviours as the norm and as being expected, and striving to silence the victim, prioritizing the person's reputation but shaming the victim indicate the need for a critical cultural lens. Within Christian institutions, a rethinking of harmful ideologies and trauma sensitivity is recommended. The lack of resources and of safety to disclose or seek help has to be problematized to ensure women's well-being.

References

Agar, Michael, and H. Michael Agar. *Language Shock: Understanding The Culture Of Conversation*. Harper Collins, 1996.

Ahrens, Courtney E. "Being Silenced: The Impact of Negative Social Reactions on the Disclosure of Rape." *American Journal of Community Psychology*

38, no. 3–4 (December 2006): 263–74. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-006-9069-9.

Altemeyer, Bob, and Bruce Hunsberger. "Authoritarianism, Religious Fundamentalism, Quest, and Prejudice." *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 2, no. 2 (1992): 113–33. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327582IJPR0202_5.

Barnett, Michael D., Kylie B. Sligar, and Chiachih D.C. Wang. "Religious Affiliation, Religiosity, Gender, and Rape Myth Acceptance: Feminist Theory and Rape Culture." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 33, no. 8 (April 1, 2018): 1219–35. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516665110.

Barr, Beth Allison. *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth*. Baker Books, 2021.

Bashaw, Jennifer Garcia. "View of '"Woman's Head Is Man:" Complementarian and Egalitarian Perspectives on Biblical Gender Roles.'" *Sage Journals*, 2020.

———. "'When Jesus Saw Her . . .': A Hermeneutical Response to #MeToo and #ChurchToo:" *Reviewer and Expositor* 117, no. 2 (June 28, 2020): 288–97. https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637320919135.

Bem, Sandra Lipsitz. *The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality*. Yale University Press, 1993.

Black, Katherine A., and Kathy A. McCloskey. "Predicting Date Rape Perceptions." *Violence Against Women* 19, no. 8 (September 17, 2013): 949–67. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801213499244.

Bohner, Gerd, Friederike Eyssel, Afroditi Pina, Frank Siebler, and G.Tendayi Viki. "Rape Myth Acceptance: Cognitive, Affective and Behavioural Effects of Beliefs That Blame the Victim and Exonerate the Perpetrator." In *Rape: Challenging Contemporary Thinking*, edited by M.A.H Horvath and J.M Brown, 1–353. Taylor and Francis, 2013. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781843927129.

Braham, Jeanne. *Crucial Conversations: Interpreting Contemporary American Literary Autobiographies by Women*. Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1995.

Brownmiller, Susan. "Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape." United States: Bantam Books, 1975.

Bruns, Eric J., Charla Lewis, Linda M. Kinney, Leah Rosner, Mark D. Weist, and Joyce A. Dantzler. "Clergy Members as Responders to Victims of

Sexual Abuse and Assault." *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work* 24, no. 3 (September 22, 2005): 3–19. https://doi.org/10.1300/J377V24N03_02.

Burt, Martha R. "Cultural Myths and Supports for Rape." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Vol. 38, 1980.

Collins, Natalie. "7 Lies That Purity Culture Teaches Women." *CBE International*, 2015.

Cooper-White, Pamela. *The Cry of Tamar: Violence against Women and the Church's Response*. 2nd Ed. Fortress Press, 2012.

Crisp, Beth. "Spirituality and Sexual Abuse: Issues and Dilemmas for Survivors." *Theology & Sexuality* 13, no. 3 (2007): 301–14. https://doi.org/10.1177/1355835807078263.

Cross, Katie. "'I Have the Power in My Body to Make People Sin': The Trauma of Purity Culture and the Concept of 'Body Theodicy.'" In *Feminist Trauma Theologies : Body, Scripture and Church in Critical Perspective*, edited by Karen O'Donnell and Katie Cross. SCM Press, 2020.

Davies, Eryll Wynn. *The Dissenting Reader: Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible.* 1st ed. UK: Taylor & Francis, 2019.

Field, Samantha. "How We Teach Purity Culture Isn't the Problem—Purity Culture Itself Is the Problem – Rewire News Group." Rewire News Group, October 24, 2016. https://rewirenewsgroup.com/2016/10/24/teach-purity-culture-isnt-problem-purity-culture-problem/.

Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schüssler. *Changing Horizons: Explorations in Feminist Interpretation*. United States: Fortress Press, 2013. https://doi.org/10.2307/J.CTT22NM7T3.

Fivush, Robyn. "Speaking Silence: The Social Construction of Silence in Autobiographical and Cultural Narratives." *Memory* 18, no. 2 (February 2010): 88–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/09658210903029404.

Franz, Thaeda. "Power, Patriarchy and Sexual Abuse in Churches of Christian Denomination." *Traumatology* 8, no. 1 (2014): 4. https://doi.org/10.1177/153476560200800102.

Fuchs, Esther. *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman*. United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003.

Gavey, Nicola. *Just Sex?: The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape* . 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2018.

Geertz, Clifford. *Interpretation Of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

George, Suzanne St. "Perceptions of Common Rape: How Rape Myth Acceptance, Victim Gender, and Victim Resistance Affect Victim and Perpetrator Blame Attributions in Party Rape and Date Rape." *Violence Against Women*, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012211068058.

Giles, Kevin. "Complementarian Theology in Crisis." CBE International, 2018. https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/article/complementarian-theology-crisis#_edn6.

Giles, Kevin. *The Headship of Men and the Abuse of Women: Are They Related In Any Way?* Cascade Books, 2020.

Golding, Jacqueline M, Judith M Siege, Susan B Sorenson, M Audrey Burnam, and Judith A Stein. "Social Support Sources Following Sexual Assault." *Journal of Community Psychology* 17, no. 1 (July 22, 1989): 92–107. https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198901)17:1<92::AID-JCOP2290170110>3.0.CO;2-E.

Hall, Maisie, Agata Debowska, and George K. Hales. "The Effect of Victim Attractiveness and Type of Abuse Suffered on Attributions of Victim Blame and Credibility in Intimate Partner Violence: A Vignette-Based Online Experiment." *Violence against Women*, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012221150272.

Heggen, Carolyn Holderread. "Religious Beliefs and Abuse." In *Women, Abuse, and the Bible: How Scripture Can Be Used to Hurt or Heal*, edited by Clark Catherine. Kroeger and R. James Beck. Eugene, Oregon: WIPF & Stock Publishers, 1991.

Johnson, Allan G. *The Gender Knot: Unravelling Our Patriarchal Legacy*. Temple University Press, 2005.

Kelley, Harold H. "The Processes of Causal Attribution." *American Psychologist* 28, no. 2 (1973): 107–28. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0034225.

Klement, Kathryn R., and Brad J. Sagarin. "Nobody Wants to Date a Whore: Rape-Supportive Messages in Women-Directed Christian Dating Books." *Sexuality & Culture 2016 21:1* 21, no. 1 (October 14, 2016): 205–23. https://doi.org/10.1007/S12119-016-9390-X.

Klett, MarieAnn Leah. "Al Mohler: Complementarian Theology 'can and Has' Led to the Abuse of Women in the Church | Church & Ministries News." *The Christian Post*, October 20, 2019.

Knight, George W. (George William). *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*. Grand Rapids Mich.: Baker Book House, 1977.

la Torre Laso, Jesús de, and Juan M Rodríguez-Díaz. "The Relationship between Attribution of Blame and the Perception of Resistance in Relation to Victims of Sexual Violence." *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2022. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.868793.

Magnusson, Eva, and Jeanne Marecek. *Gender and Culture in Psychology: Theories and Practices*. Cambridge University Press, 2012. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139086318.

Mason, Gillian E., Stephanie Riger, and Linda A. Foley. "The Impact of Past Sexual Experiences on Attributions of Responsibility for Rape." *Http://Dx.Doi.Org/10.1177/0886260504269094* 19, no. 10 (October 1, 2004): 1157–71. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260504269094.

Natarajan, Madison, Kerrie G. Wilkins-Yel, Anushka Sista, Aashika Anantharaman, and Natalie Seils. "Decolonizing Purity Culture: Gendered Racism and White Idealization in Evangelical Christianity." *Https://Doi.Org/10.1177/03616843221091116* 46, no. 3 (May 5, 2022): 316–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/03616843221091116.

Owens, Bretlyn C., M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall, and Tamara L. Anderson. "The Relationship between Purity Culture and Rape Myth Acceptance:" *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 49, no. 4 (November 27, 2020): 405–18. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091647120974992.

Powell, Anastasia, and Nicola Henry. "Framing Sexual Violence Prevention: What Does It Mean to Challenge a Rape Culture?" In *Preventing Sexual Violence: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Overcoming a Rape Culture*, edited by Nicola Henry and Anastasia Powell, 1–21. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014.

Prina, Francesca, and Julie N. Schatz-Stevens. "Sexism and Rape Myth Acceptance: The Impact of Culture, Education, and Religiosity." *Psychological Reports* 123, no. 3 (June 1, 2020): 929–51. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033294119826896.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. "Feminism and Patriarchal Religion: Principles of Ideological Critique of the Bible." *Journal for the Study*

of the Old Testament 7, no. 22 (August 19, 1982): 54–66. https://doi.org/10.1177/030908928200702207.

Sheldon, Jane P., and Sandra L. Parent. "Clergy's Attitudes and Attributions of Blame Toward Female Rape Victims:" *Http://Dx.Doi.Org/10.1177/10778010222183026* 8, no. 2 (June 30, 2016): 233–56. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778010222183026.

Spencer, Bettina. "The Impact of Class and Sexuality-Based Stereotyping on Rape Blame." *Http://Dx.Doi.Org/10.1177/2374623816643282* 2, no. 2 (April 25, 2016): 237462381664328. https://doi.org/10.1177/2374623816643282.

Sprankle, Eric, Katie Bloomquist, Cody Butcher, Neil Gleason, and Zoe Schaefer. "The Role of Sex Work Stigma in Victim Blaming and Empathy of Sexual Assault Survivors." *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 15, no. 3 (September 1, 2018): 242–48. https://doi.org/10.1007/S13178-017-0282-0/TABLES/3.

Valenti, Jessica. *The Purity Myth : How America's Obsession with Virginity Is Hurting Young Women.* Canada: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010.

Wareham, Jennifer, Brenda Sims Blackwell, Bonnie Berry, and Denise Paquette Boots. "Complainant's Physical Attractiveness and Juristic Judgments of Blame and Punishment in Physical, Domestic, and Sexual Assault Scenarios." *Https://Doi.Org/10.1080/01639625.2018.1443877* 40, no. 8 (August 3, 2018): 912–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2018.1443877.

Whisnant, Rebecca. "Feminist Perspectives on Rape." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by N. Edwards Zalta. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017.

Workman, Jane E., and Elizabeth W. Freeburg. "An Examination of Date Rape, Victim Dress, and Perceiver Variables within the Context of Attribution Theory." *Sex Roles* 41, no. 3–4 (August 1999): 261–77. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1018858313267/METRICS.

Yoder, Janice D., and Arnold S. Kahn. "Toward a Feminist Understanding of Women and Power." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (December 24, 1992): 381–88. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1992.tb00263.x.

●●●

IS SOCIAL THEORY IMPORTANT FOR THEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION?

- Shiju Sam Varughese[*]

Recently, while travelling in Kerala, I met a young priest who was pursuing his PhD in theology. In our brief conversation, I enquired about his research topic. He told me that he was working on Giorgio Agamben's political theology. I tried to explore what he was exactly doing, and understood that the political-theological implications of Agamben's 'theory of messianic time' was his topic. I further probed how he critically engaged with that 'theory', but to my surprise, I found that with each of my curious questions, he shifted from one jargon to another, while miserably failing to explain what he was exactly researching.

I do not think that he was trying to evade answering me, being cautious about my possibly vile intentions to steal his original ideas! In our half-hour long conversation, I became convinced that this theological scholar had completely mistaken what research was all about; not to mention his misunderstanding of what social theories have to offer theology. I was already aware of the pestilence called 'social theory' that has afflicted theological writings of even perceptive theologians with international repute. Recently, I read a book by a theologian who employed Agamben's theory of messianic time to analyse the ecological crisis. To my surprise, this theologian too was surfing on the current wave of 'Agambenising' theology by employing a pompous theoretical language that has become fashionable since the advent of post-structuralism and post-modernism in the 1980s and 1990s. 'Theory', that mid-twentieth-century conviction in academia about building scientifically accurate, objective and universal means of making sense of reality, is still rampant in theological circles (the secular academia is no exception) even after so many 'post' turns (postmodernism, post-structuralism, postcolonialism, etc.) in contemporary philosophy and

[*] Dr. Shiju Sam Varughese is an Assistant professor at the Department of Studies in Science, Technology and Innovation Policy, Central University of Gujarat, Kundhela, Vadodara.

social sciences! There is actually no 'theory' in social sciences; only some partial, situated perspectives and standpoints which coexist in constant dialogue with other views and vantage points. Therefore, understanding social scientific arguments as 'theories' itself is a farce, thanks to the hangover of logical positivism and scientific Marxism.

Political theology is the new talk of the town. An eruption of theological books and articles on Agamben's 'theory' of the messianic is an indication of this. I wonder why the Pauline discussion of the messianic in his epistles has become a concern for theologians only after a celebrity-philosopher's engagement with it! The same is the case with many other contemporary philosophers (Spivak, Mbembe, Deleuze, Negri, Hardt and Zizek, for instance). If age-old and well-known theological ideas become an intellectual concern for theologians only in the wake of a debate in social sciences and philosophy, there is something seriously wrong with contemporary theological scholarship! Take any current trend in social sciences; be it posthumanism, new materialism, or the Zizekian coffee table book on 'the new normal', or the idea of 'post-truth' or the writings of the contemporary theory divas such as Alain Badiou and Bruno Latour: why are theologians so excited about the so-called 'social theory'? Why do they cherry-pick some thinkers and some 'theories'? What do social sciences have to do with theological imagination?

This is what worries me: why do theologians, especially in India, want to be known in the first place as social theorists and philosophers by risking their commitment to theology? As a student of social science hailing from a strong faith background, it intrigues me — especially when I fail to see anything theologically meaningful coming out of this theoretical muscle flexing. Let me also inform the reader that I myself engage with some of these celebrities of social theory and philosophy, for many of them the theologians find exciting and fashionable are from the field I specialize in: Science and Technology Studies. Also, I have learned a lot from and referred to scholars like Agamben and Deleuze while doing my own research. However, what I have observed in the contemporary Indian theological field is an almost complete absence of new theological reflections on the current social reality and

a mindless, inane reiteration of social scientific ideas and concepts without any consistent and deep engagement with them. Many of such writings reveal that their authors do not even have the basic training in social sciences and philosophy. This worries me both as a social science student and a strong believer who constantly searches for fresh theological insights for my own spiritual edification.

There is nothing wrong in conversing with social sciences for theologizing a problem. Social sciences can offer great analytical tools for theology to understand social reality. Similarly, philosophy can help theology by mooting new aporias and standpoints. However, in both these cases, theologians' primary duty is to craft sound theological imagination by carefully and critically engaging with the social scientific and philosophical debates they are interested in. This would have been a meaningful conversation for both sides. Let me explain it with the help of the example of Agamben's conceptualisation of the messianic. Any serious theological pondering over Agamben's reading of the Pauline epistle to Romans in his *The Time that Remains* (Agamben 2005) should critically look at his arguments against the backdrop of a long debate on the messianic in social sciences and theology. In social sciences, the debate on the idea of the messianic is primarily drawn from Jewish theology. A major turning point in the debate is Walter Benjamin's reflections that were deeply influenced by his thick friendship with Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), a Jewish theologian. This context cannot be avoided if Benjamin's idea of the messianic is to be properly understood. Also, there is another problem; Benjamin's oeuvre begins and ends with his thinking on the Messianic. One of the early pieces he wrote that owed much to his intellectual interaction with Scholem was his "Theological-Political Fragment" (1923). His last piece titled "On the Concept of History" (1940) was again on the messianic time, but with a much different understanding of the historical time from the former. So, a close, critical understanding of this rich background that shaped the debate amidst the rise of the Third Reich is essential to understand Agamben's engagement with Benjamin.

There are also other issues. Why is the messianic important for Agamben? What is the nature of his political theology? How does he frame his

engagement with the Pauline conceptualisation of the messianic within his larger research project on the state of exception? This must compel a theological student to read and reflect on the *Homo Sacer* series, which fundamentally argues that all contemporary juridical-political ideas and practices are secularised eschatological thought (Agamben 2017). Agamben's conception of the messianic has to be situated and understood in connection with this humongous project and his subsidiary writings on related themes. For example, messianic time is a concept deeply connected with a more central formulation he brings forth called the 'form-of-life', which again, has a long history in Western philosophy including Ludwig Wittgenstein's conceptualization and its subsequent uses and critiques in philosophy and social sciences. This would also compel any serious student of theology to engage with the long history of debates on political community and its contemporary variations.

We should be extremely cautious here: Agamben is not a theologian. His interest is in political philosophy, in which he is making a critical intervention with the help of theological resources. Why is he engaging with Judeo-Christian theology? This is because he believes that the vocation of political philosophy (analysis of power and government) is to expose the political theological traditions and discourses that undergird the political constitution of the modern, secular West. This, for him, would help us understand the nature of the constitution of liberal democracy and the than at a political paradigm that it has inaugurated. This then leads to new issues: can a theologian from a non-Western social location mindlessly replicate Agamben's conclusions without carefully examining the unique and culture-specific process of profanation? Are all the underlying layers of theological discourses that constitute politics outside the west exclusively Judeo-Christian? Following the method of Agamben, shouldn't an Indian theologian investigate how the metaphysical and theological ideas and practices of the South Asian religions and faith traditions inform our political paradigm? Is messianic time a sufficient eschatological metaphor to understand the emancipatory practices that delay/suspend/defy/resist the unfolding of than a to politics in South Asian communities? Such an inquiry will help us move beyond Agamben and open fresh lines

of thought on political theology apposite to our political contexts and realities, instead of being enchanted by and naively retelling Agamben's arguments.

The buck does not stop here. Any good student of theology would also ask whether there are other contemporary philosophers engaging with Pauline letters. There are at least two other major contemporary philosophers who have offered unique interpretations of Paul: Alain Badiou (2003) and Michel Serres (2006). Our theology student is supposed to read these works to understand how they have interpreted the Pauline messianic vocation and how their approaches differ from that of Agamben. The concept of the messianic has also been given a different spin by Jaques Derrida, whose understanding of the "messianic without messianism" (Derrida 2012: 74) indirectly challenges Agamben's interpretation. Derrida's intervention complicates the genealogies of the messianic by travelling back to Shakespeare and Marx while presenting a more radical and emancipatory eschatological vision of 'coming democracy'.

In a nutshell, there is a dynamic discursive field being constituted in contemporary social sciences and philosophy around the concept of the messianic. As you all are aware, theology has a long history of engagement with this idea too. Without engaging with this multi-layered, multi-contextual field of knowledge, how can we make sense of the messianic in Agamben? The same is the case with many of the current buzzwords in theology: empire, multitude, becoming, assemblage, necropolitics, actor-network, capitalocene, chthulucene… This long list loses its significance for theology every ten years (may be even less!) only to be substituted with a fresh list of intellectual jargons.

My intention here was to briefly demonstrate how a genuine and serious theological inquiry might proceed. Instead of this, many theologians seemingly end up mindlessly reproducing the social theoretical and philosophical jargons without any new theological insights to offer. This is astonishing amidst the stark political reality we face in recent years in India that really necessitates new theologies and faith assertions and reflections. We need fresh and radical theological imaginations to encounter the crises; unfortunately, our theological scholarship is

deeply tainted by its self-proclaimed servitude to Western social theory and philosophy.

I think we should seriously conduct an intellectual audit of how our future theologians are trained in the seminaries and theological colleges. It seems that these institutions have been intellectually compromised. The new academic mantra is 'publish or perish'. One's self-worth as a scholar is understood on the basis of the number of books they have authored, while there is no academic infrastructure in place to critically assess their content. There is no serious peer review system in Indian theological academia; nor any productive and critical engagement with fellow scholars (hate-talk, yes; listen to any academic seminar). It is not the everyday contexts and experiences of the faith communities and social movements that inform our theological imagination. The pestilence of social theory is spreading through the veins of the theological community so that it is fast becoming numb and inane. This pestilence is going to constrict the theological nourishment essential for the church and it will soon be wilted. We need to reform theological education with new content and commitment so that these institutions will stop producing westward-looking, jargon-loving empty theoretical chatterboxes who speed up brain rot by writing and publishing three books every year.

References

Agamben, Giorgio. 2005. *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Agamben, Giorgio. 2017. *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 2012. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Translated from the French by Peggy Kamuf. New York and London: Routledge.

Badiou, Alain. 2003. *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. Translated from French by Ray Brassier. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Serres, Michel. 2006. "Ego Credo". *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 12/13: 1–11.

●●●

BEYOND DOMINION: TILLICH'S ECOTHEOLOGY AND THE ETHICAL IMPERATIVE OF ECOLOGICAL CONCERN

- Suresh Frederick[*]

Abstract

Paul Tillich's theological framework for addressing the contemporary ecological crisis. While Tillich himself did not explicitly engage with ecological concerns, his core concepts of reason, participation, love, and ultimate concern offer a rich resource for developing a robust and transformative ecotheology. This paper argues that Tillich's emphasis on reason as participating in the divine Logos provides a foundation for valuing both scientific understanding and ethical reflection in addressing environmental challenges. His concept of participation challenges the anthropocentric worldview that has fuelled ecological degradation, emphasising instead the interconnectedness of all beings and the intrinsic value of the natural world. Furthermore, Tillich's understanding of love as the driving force of creation inspires a sense of kinship with all life, urging a move away from the instrumentalisation of nature towards a posture of care and responsibility. By grounding environmental ethics in the broader context of ultimate concern, Tillich's thought aligns with and strengthens emerging ecotheological principles such as stewardship, sustainability, and ecojustice. This paper concludes that Tillich's theological vision, though developed in a different context, offers invaluable resources for navigating the complexities of the ecological crisis and fostering a more harmonious and sustainable relationship between humanity and the natural world

Introduction

The contemporary ecological crisis has prompted renewed interest in the intersection of theology. The intersection of Christian theology and environmental ethics is a crucial area of study in the contemporary world, as humanity grapples with the consequences of its treatment of the natural world. In this context, the thought of renowned theologian Paul Tillich offers valuable insights for the development of an ecotheology

[*] Dr. Suresh Frederick is an Associate Professor and UG Head of English, Bishop Heber College, Trichy, India

that is both intellectually rigorous and spiritually meaningful. Tillich's emphasis on the concepts of reason, participation, love, and morality provides a robust framework for understanding the human relationship with the divine creation and our ethical obligations to it. In an age of unprecedented environmental degradation, what wisdom can Christian theology offer in guiding humanity towards a more harmonious relationship with the natural world?

Literature Review

Tillich's philosophical theology seeks to "correlate philosophy, driven to ultimate existential questions, with a theology alone capable of giving an answer."[1] This approach allows him to ground his theological reflections in the concrete realities of human experience, including the pressing environmental challenges of our time. Scholars have recognized the potential for Tillich's thought to inform the development of ecologically-oriented theologies, with one recent study suggesting that his ideas may be integrated into Christian practice in the East Asian context to address the climate crisis.[2]

A key aspect of Tillich's theology is his concept of "participation," which emphasises the inherent interconnectedness of all beings and the need for humans to recognize their place within the larger web of creation. This perspective stands in contrast to the dualistic tendencies of much Western thought, which has often placed humanity in a position of dominance over nature. Tillich's theology also highlights the importance of "reason" in discerning the divine presence within the world, a faculty that can be employed in the service of environmental stewardship and the responsible management of natural resources.

Furthermore, Tillich's emphasis on "love" as a central theological category has profound implications for ecotheology, as it calls one to extend our concern and care beyond the human realm and to recognize the intrinsic value of the natural world.

Ecotheology

Ecotheology represents a burgeoning field of theological inquiry that grapples with the pressing ecological challenges of our time. It seeks

[1] P D H. Freeman, "The Philosophical Theology of Paul Tillich," *Brill* 22/2 (1957): 77.

[2] A. Kirkpatrick-Jung and T. Riches, "Towards East Asian Ecotheologies of Climate Crisis," *Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute* 11/7 (2020): 341.

to articulate a theological response to the environmental crisis, drawing upon the wisdom of religious traditions to foster a more harmonious and sustainable relationship between humanity and the natural world. Ecotheologians explore a wide range of themes, including the interconnectedness of all beings, the concept of creation care, the ethical implications of human actions on the environment, and the spiritual dimensions of nature. By bridging the gap between religious belief and ecological concern, ecotheology offers a framework for understanding the environmental crisis not merely as a scientific or political issue but as a deeply spiritual and moral one, demanding a transformation of values and practices.

Reason and the Ecological Crisis

Tillich's philosophical theology is grounded in the belief that reason, properly understood, is a crucial tool for addressing the existential questions that confront humanity.[3] In the context of the ecological crisis, this emphasis on reason is essential for developing a clear-eyed assessment of the causes and consequences of environmental degradation, as well as for proposing rational, evidence-based solutions. By approaching the ecological crisis through the lens of reason, theologians can leverage Tillich's insights to craft an ecotheology that is intellectually compelling and responsive to the demands of the modern world.

Participation and the Interconnectedness of Creation

At the heart of Tillich's theology is the concept of "participation," which speaks to the fundamental interconnectedness of all things in the divine creative process. This perspective resonates powerfully with the insights of modern ecology, which emphasises the web of interdependence that binds together all living organisms and their physical environment. By embracing a Tillichian understanding of participation, ecotheologians can develop a profound sense of reverence for the natural world and our responsibilities as stewards of creation

Reason and Participation

At the heart of Tillich's theological anthropology is the idea that human beings are uniquely endowed with the capacity for reason, which allows one to transcend the immediate circumstances and engage in critical

[3] P D H. Freeman, "The Philosophical Theology of Paul Tillich," 77.

self-reflection.[4] However, Tillich also recognizes that this rational faculty is balanced by a deep longing for participation in the greater whole of existence. Whereas traditional Christian thought has often emphasised human exceptionalism and dominion over nature, Tillich's vision of the human person situates us within a web of interdependence, where we are both distinct from and intimately connected to the natural world.[5] This perspective aligns well with the ecological imperative to recognize our embeddedness in and reliance upon the natural systems that sustain us.

As one scholar notes, Tillich's "theory of relational value is a truly ecological approach to values,"[6] as it challenges the Cartesian divide between subject and object that has historically characterised Western attitudes towards the environment. By recognizing the inherent worth and interconnectedness of all created things, Tillich's theological anthropology provides a robust foundation for an ecotheology that rejects human exceptionalism and embraces a sense of humble kinship with the natural world.

Love and Ecological Concern

Tillich's theology is also characterised by a deep emphasis on the transformative power of love, both in the human relationship with the divine and in our relationships with one another and the natural world. This understanding of love as a unifying force that transcends the subject-object dichotomy can serve as a wellspring of ecological concern, inspiring a sense of kinship and care for the natural environment.

Morality and the Ethical Imperatives of Ecotheology

Tillich's concept of morality, grounded in the notion of "ultimate concern," provides a vital framework for developing the ethical imperatives of ecotheology. By situating environmental stewardship within the broader context of humanity's moral responsibilities, Tillich's thought can help ecotheologians articulate a compelling vision of our duties to the natural world that is rooted in the deepest wellsprings of religious and philosophical ethics.

---

4 A. Kirkpatrick-Jung and T. Riches, "Towards East Asian Ecotheologies of Climate Crisis," *Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute* 11/7 (2020): 341.

5 P D H. Freeman, "The Philosophical Theology of Paul Tillich," 77.

6 P D H. Freeman, "The Philosophical Theology of Paul Tillich," 77.

Love and Responsibility

Building upon his dialectic of reason and participation, Tillich articulates an ethic of love that is foundational for his ecotheology. Love, for Tillich, is not merely a sentiment, but a manifestation of the divine ground of being that undergirds all of existence. This understanding of love as a cosmic principle challenges the anthropocentric tendencies of much Western ethics, calling us to extend our moral concern beyond the human realm. Furthermore, Tillich's insistence on the inseparability of love and morality - that true love must be rooted in a sense of ethical responsibility - provides a crucial bulwark against the instrumentalisation of nature that has characterised much of modern human-environment relations. Tillich's ethic of love and responsibility resonates with the growing ecological consciousness that recognizes the intrinsic value of the natural world and our moral obligation to steward it with care. Tillich's "ethic of response, which begins by asking what is going on, with the complex reality of the natural world, can create an ethic that is fitting for the land."[7] By grounding environmental ethics in a theology of love and moral accountability, Tillich offers a vision of human-nature relations that is both spiritually profound and practically relevant.

Discussion

Tillich's concepts are still relevant for ecotheology. The key Insights recognizes human capacity for critical self-reflection and transcendence, but balances this with emphasis on participation in the natural world. It avoids human exceptionalism and embraces embeddedness in nature. It advocates participation. Situates human beings within a web of interdependence with the natural world, challenging the Cartesian subject-object divide. Provides a foundation for recognizing the intrinsic worth of nature.

Understands love as a cosmic principle that calls one to extend moral concern beyond the human realm. Inspires a sense of kinship and care for the natural environment. Environmental stewardship is rooted in the deepest wellsprings of religious and philosophical ethics. This theory grounds environmental ethics in a theology of moral accountability and responsibility. This provides a compelling vision of the duties to the natural world.

Tillich's theological framework, with its emphasis on reason, participation, love, and morality, offers a rich and compelling foundation

[7] P D H. Freeman, "The Philosophical Theology of Paul Tillich," 77.

for the development of an ecotheology that can speak to the urgent ecological challenges of our time. Morality Grounds environmental ethics in the broader context of humanity's "ultimate concern" and moral responsibilities. Articulates compelling ethical imperatives for ecotheology. The theological thought of Paul Tillich offers a rich resource for the development of a comprehensive ecotheology. Tillich's dialectic of reason and participation situates the human person within the natural world, avoiding the pitfalls of both human exceptionalism and a reductive naturalism.

Reason: Tillich's understanding of reason transcends both the pitfalls of anthropocentrism and the limitations of a purely materialist view of the natural world. For Tillich, reason is not merely a human faculty but participates in the divine Logos, the ordering principle of creation itself. This understanding has profound implications for how we approach the ecological crisis.

Firstly, it affirms the legitimacy and importance of scientific inquiry. Because reason participates in the logos, scientific understanding becomes a way of deciphering the divine rationality embedded within the natural order. Through scientific methods, one gains insight not only into the physical mechanisms of the planet but also into the wisdom and beauty of the creative process itself.

Secondly, grounding reason in the divine logos safeguards against a purely instrumental approach to nature. Ethical reflection becomes essential because our understanding of the natural world is not merely about accumulating knowledge but about aligning ourselves with the divine purpose woven into the fabric of creation. One is called to exercise his/her reason, not for the sake of domination or exploitation, but for responsible stewardship and care for the intricate web of life.

This expanded explanation highlights the dual aspects of Tillich's concept of reason: its capacity for scientific understanding and its grounding in a larger ethical framework rooted in the divine Logos. This nuanced approach provides a strong foundation for a Christian ecotheology that values both scientific knowledge and ethical action in addressing the ecological crisis.

Participation: Tillich's concept of "participation" directly challenges the Cartesian subject-object divide that has often alienated humanity from the natural world. This resonates strongly with contemporary ecological

thought, particularly with ideas like Aldo Leopold's "land ethic" and James Lovelock's "Gaia theory." Leopold, in his seminal work *A Sand County Almanac*, calls for an ethical framework that extends moral consideration to the land itself, recognizing the interconnectedness of all members within the biotic community. Similarly, Lovelock's "Gaia theory" presents earth as a self-regulating system, a complex entity in which living organisms and the physical environment are inextricably intertwined. Both of these perspectives echo Tillich's understanding of participation, emphasising that humanity is not separate from nature but rather embedded within a larger web of interdependence.

This expanded explanation not only mentions Leopold and Lovelock but also briefly explains their key ideas and how they connect to Tillich's "participation." This strengthens your argument by providing concrete examples of how Tillich's thought aligns with and enriches contemporary ecological thinking.

Love: Tillich's concept of love, rooted in the very being of God, offers a powerful antidote to the instrumentalisation of nature that has fuelled the ecological crisis. For Tillich, love is not merely sentimentality but the driving force of creation, compelling all beings towards unity and fulfilment. This understanding has profound implications for how we view the natural world.

When one views nature solely through the lens of utility, asking only what it can provide for human consumption or comfort, one reduces it to a mere resource to be exploited. In contrast, Tillich's concept of love calls us to recognize the intrinsic value of all creation, to see the inherent worth of every creature and ecosystem, not simply their usefulness to humanity. Love compels us to move beyond a transactional relationship with nature, where we calculate our own gain, and instead embrace a posture of care, respect, and responsibility for the flourishing of all life.

This expanded explanation emphasises how Tillich's concept of love transcends a purely utilitarian view of nature. It highlights the inherent worth of all creation, encouraging a shift from exploitation to a relationship characterised by care and responsibility.

Responsibility: Tillich's emphasis on moral responsibility, rooted in our "ultimate concern," finds strong resonance in emerging ecotheological principles such as stewardship, sustainability, and ecojustice. For Tillich, aligning ourselves with our "ultimate concern" means ordering our lives in accordance with what we recognize as ultimately meaningful and

valuable. When we recognize the sacredness inherent in creation, our "ultimate concern" necessarily extends beyond our own self-interest to encompass the well-being of the entire planet.

This directly supports the principle of stewardship, which calls for responsible care for the Earth and its resources, recognizing that we are entrusted with their well-being for future generations. Furthermore, Tillich's emphasis on the interconnectedness of all things underscores the importance of sustainability, reminding us that our actions have far-reaching consequences within the delicate balance of the biosphere. Finally, by grounding our moral responsibility in a love that encompasses all beings, Tillich's thought provides a foundation for ecojustice, demanding that we address the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on marginalised communities and work towards a more equitable and just distribution of environmental benefits and burdens.

This expanded explanation directly links Tillich's "ultimate concern" to the principles of stewardship, sustainability, and ecojustice. It shows how his ideas provide a strong theological foundation for these core concepts within ecotheology.

Ultimately, the theological resources offered by Paul Tillich have much to contribute to the development of a robust and transformative ecotheology, one that can inspire both intellectual rigour and spiritual renewal in our engagement with the ecological challenges of our time.[8]

While Tillich's concepts resonate with contemporary environmental concerns, he was not directly addressing the same scale of ecological crisis we face today. To fully realise the potential of his thought for ecotheology, we must carefully consider how his ideas can be applied and extended to meet the pressing needs of our current context.

This resonates with Albert Schweitzer's concept of "reverence for life,"[9] which similarly emphasises the interconnectedness of all living beings and the ethical imperative to respect all life. This challenges the dominant Western paradigm of human dominance over nature, a paradigm already being questioned by early voices in the wilderness

[8] E. Twumasi-Ankrah, E K E. Antwi and F. Wiafe, "Re-Examining the Christian Ecological Models in Light of Eco-Theology and the Old Testament," *E-Journal of Humanities Arts and Social Sciences* (2023): 892.

[9] Roman Globokar, "The Ethics of Albert Schweitzer as an Inspiration for Global Ethics," *Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne Śląska Opolskiego*, 40/1 (2020): 71.

movement like John Muir and Henry David Thoreau, who emphasised the spiritual and intrinsic value of the natural world. By drawing on Tillich's dialectic of reason and participation, ecotheologians can craft a vision of humanity's place in nature that transcends the subject-object dualism that has so often characterised the Western relationship with the environment. Further, Tillich's concept of love as a unifying, transformative force can inspire a sense of kinship with the natural world, challenging the instrumentalisation of nature and imbuing ecological stewardship with profound spiritual and ethical significance.

In this way, the theological resources offered by Tillich can help ecotheologians develop a comprehensive framework for addressing the ecological crisis, one that integrates rigorous intellectual inquiry, moral responsibility, and a profound spiritual connection to the web of life.

Conclusion

In an age of environmental crisis, the theological resources of the Christian tradition have much to offer in the development of a robust eco-theology. Paul Tillich's concepts of reason, participation, love, and morality provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the human place within the natural world and our ethical responsibilities to it. By rejecting human exceptionalism, embracing our interdependence with creation, and rooting environmental ethics in a theology of love and moral accountability, Tillich points the way towards a Christianity that is both intellectually rigorous and spiritually transformative in its engagement with the ecological challenges of our time.

Bibliography

Freeman, P D H. "The Philosophical Theology of Paul Tillich." (Brill, 22(2), 1957.

Globokar, Roman. "The Ethics of Albert Schweitzer as an Inspiration for Global Ethics." Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne Śląska Opolskiego, 40(1), 2020.

Kirkpatrick-Jung, A., and Riches, T. "Towards East Asian Ecotheologies of Climate Crisis." Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute. 11(7), 2020.

Twumasi-Ankrah, E., Antwi, E K E., & Wiafe, F. "Re-Examining the Christian Ecological Models in Light of Eco-Theology and the Old Testament." E-Journal of Humanities Arts and Social Sciences. 2023.

●●●

NCCI NEWS

NCCI DISABILITY AWARDS 2024 WINNERS ACKNOWLEDGED AND APPRECIATED

On February 1, 2025, the monthly online Persons with Disabilities Fellowship 2025 revealed the winners of the NCCI-IDEA Disability Awards 2024. The awards included four categories for persons with disabilities: individuals, innovative interventions, institutions, and a special category for PWDs.

Mr. M. David Jeyasekar, a special educator with 30 years of experience from I.E.L.C. Church in Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, has won in the Individual category. The church recognised him for his impactful contributions to individuals with disabilities.

Mr. Rongsen Jamir from Ao Baptist Church in Dimapur, Nagaland, has been awarded the Persons with Disabilities category for his remarkable achievements in the rehabilitation and support of individuals with disabilities.

Engineering student Aashish Samuel from Sion Fellowship Church in Telangana has won the Innovative Interventions category award. He received an award for his innovative initiatives designed to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities by creating devices that alleviate pain.

CSI VHS&HSS School for the Deaf in Valakom, Kollam, Kerala, has been named the winner in the Institutional category. The school was recognised for its notable contributions to the care and sensitivity towards individuals with disabilities.

The NCCI-IDEA Disability Awards 2024 recognised outstanding contributions by individuals and institutions improving the lives of people with disabilities. Winners showcase resilience, innovation, and compassion through groundbreaking inventions and years of dedicated service. Their contributions uplift communities and promote an inclusive, accessible society, inspiring many through their efforts.

UNITY OCTAVE 2025: CELEBRATING THE SPIRIT OF ONENESS IN THE INDIAN CHURCHES

On January 19, NCCI Sunday was observed, focussing on supporting the activities of NCCI through prayer. During the week, regional

councils of NCCI and CBCI conducted worship services and gatherings, promoting a spirit of unity and fellowship among Christians from diverse denominations. This unique occasion allowed participants to enhance their faith, reconnect with their common Christian heritage, and dedicate themselves to the ideals of Christian unity, reinforcing the connections among believers throughout India and beyond. The NCCI extends its gratitude to all who dedicated their efforts to translating the liturgy into various vernacular languages, as well as to those who worked hard to coordinate numerous events at the regional level.

WCC NEWS

WCC GENERAL SECRETARY ADDRESSES 130TH MARAMON CONVENTION

Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay spoke to a crowd exceeding 100,000 at Asia's largest Christian event on 9 February. The 130th Maramon Convention has happened from 9-16 February along the picturesque sandy banks of the Pampa River in Maramon, Kerala, India. This annual event, organised by the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association, is celebrated as one of the largest Christian gatherings in Asia. "The divine has summoned me, the clergy here, and you as beloved children of the divine." Pillay remarked, "Throughout the Scriptures, there is a divine call for individuals to serve in various capacities." "What is my divine purpose?" What is the divine calling for you? What is the divine message urging us to pursue? "At some point, we must make the choice to follow Jesus, to evaluate and contemplate the calling that God is presenting in our lives." I urge you today: Embrace the path of Jesus. Embrace the teachings of Jesus. Embrace the path of Jesus.

The Maramon Convention remains an important gathering for Christians around the globe, providing an opportunity for spiritual renewal, fostering community connections, and engaging in conversations about relevant social matters.

WCC SEES OPPORTUNITIES IN NEW INITIATIVES OF INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP ON RELIGION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

PaRD is a partnership involving governments, intergovernmental bodies, faith-based organisations, and academic institutions. It aims to harness the social capital and moral influence of religious actors

to promote the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The program featured a meeting with Indonesia's Minister of Religious Affairs, Prof. Dr K.H. Nasaruddin Umar, who also serves as the grand imam of the Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta.

The PaRD flagship project aligns with the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, which was established during the Brazilian G20 Presidency last year. Peter Prove, director of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, stated that the project aims to enhance food security through sustainable, culturally-sensitive, and locally-driven interventions. It will tackle hunger, malnutrition, and extreme poverty by fostering partnerships, advocacy, and engaging faith-based actors within the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty.

The partnership's Statement of Commitment to the Global Alliance outlines plans to leverage existing work streams and task forces focused on gender equality, health, water, environment, climate action, sustaining peace, freedom of religion or belief, localisation, and evidence. The statement calls for inclusive strategies that empower women as food producers and key stakeholders, enhancing their roles in food security and nutrition. It highlights nutrition as essential for health and emphasises coordination with other health initiatives to foster overall community wellness, among other priorities. The partnership pledges to enhance collaboration among religious actors, faith-based organisations, and governmental bodies in three target countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

●●●

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

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

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

BIBLE STUDY

RESISTING POWERS: A CONTEXTUAL READING OF JESUS 'TEMPTATIONS' NARRATIVE - MATTHEW 4:1-11

- Nelavala Gnana Prasuna[*]

Introduction

In the Indian context, where poverty remains deep-seated alongside the rise of the prosperity gospel, Jesus' temptations (Matthew 4:1-11) are strikingly relevant. The prosperity gospel, often propagated by megachurches and many televangelists, promises material wealth as a sign of divine favour, despite the lived realities of marginalized Dalits, Adivasis, and the economically oppressed who endure structural injustices. On the other side, political parties use religious discourse to keep power, frequently stifling opposition and worsening economic inequality. Added to that, many churches have aligned with parties, surrendering their prophetic witness for institutional security and selfish personal favours. Rereading Jesus' temptations in this context reveals his resistance to economic messianism, religious messianism, and political messianism as a prophetic critique against regimes that use faith to oppress the poor.

Introducing the Narrative of Jesus' Temptations

All synoptic Gospels narrate the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Although their narrative frameworks differ, Luke's story (4:1–13) closely resembles Matthew's (4:1–11), while Mark's version (1:12–13) is the shortest. The temptation narrative in Matthew shifts from the wilderness to Jerusalem and finally to the world's kingdoms. Luke, on the other hand, arranges the wilderness, the world's kingdoms, and Jerusalem in that sequence. Luke's structure has more thematic consistency since Jesus' ministry comes to an end in Jerusalem, where he experiences both his greatest trial and his ultimate triumph.

[*] Rev. Dr. Prof. Nelavala Gnana Prasuna is an Associate Professor and Dean for Graduate Studies at the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, Chennai.

The narrative of the temptations in the wilderness raises several significant questions: What was the nature of these temptations? Were they real experiences or merely symbolic? If these were historical events, where and when did they take place? Traditionally, the Church and many theologians have regarded Jesus' temptation in the wilderness as a real and profound event. Yet, their precise nature remains a subject of theological inquiry. However, a contextual rereading of the temptation narrative allows readers to see Jesus as a powerful liberative figure. Garry Wills, in What Jesus Meant, describes Jesus' temptations as "career tracks," prompting the question: What was the Jewish context of his Messianic mission? These career tracks correspond to three key areas of temptation: economic, religious, and political.

In the first century, common Jewish expectations of the Messiah were deeply tied to liberation from Roman oppression. The crowd's wish to make Jesus king after he fed the five thousand reflected the widespread belief that the Messiah would free the people from hunger and social injustice (Jn 6:14-15). The Pharisees and temple authorities, on the other hand, anticipated a religious Messiah who would restore the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, the central place of worship and the manifestation of God's presence (Ek. 38:26-28).

The people engaged in extensive debate about this type of Messianic expectation (John 7:41-42). Thirdly, most Jews in Jesus' time expected a political and military deliverer rather than a spiritual saviour. His disciples also shared this expectation (Acts 1:6). The tempter, drawing from these widespread hopes and in the wilderness, tests Jesus in ways that reflect these messianic aspirations, challenging him to conform to prevailing visions of power, authority, and kingship. But Jesus emphasises the importance of scripture in resisting the tempter and the temptations by quoting from the book of Deuteronomy in answer to each temptation (8:3; 6:13, 16).

The Theme of Temptation in the Gospels

The theme of Jesus' "temptation" is a recurring motif in the Synoptic tradition, underscoring its theological significance. While the wilderness account is the most well-known, the Gospels depict multiple instances where Jesus is tempted/tested. The New Testament uses the Greek verb *periazo*, which means "to tempt" or "to test." Mark explicitly identifies

a dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees as an instance of temptation (Mark 8:11-13). Throughout the Gospels, the Pharisees repeatedly test him, attempting to entangle him in legal and theological dilemmas. For instance, they present him with a woman who has committed adultery and enquire if the Law of Moses dictates her stoning (John 8:3-11). They also challenge him on the legality of divorce (Matthew 19:3-9). Along with the Herodians, the Pharisees try to trap him politically by asking whether it is lawful to pay taxes to Rome (Matthew 22:17). Luke recounts a lawyer posing a question about the requirements for inheriting eternal life (Lk 10:25).

These encounters demonstrate that Jesus' temptations persisted throughout his ministry, not just in the wilderness. Gospel narratives present that Jesus repeatedly faced tests designed to undermine his authority, distort his mission, and force him into compromising positions, while Jesus consistently rejects paths of power, spectacle, and self-interest. His responses reaffirm his commitment to justice, his vision of God's reign, and his role as an advocate for the oppressed and excluded.

From Stones to Bread: Resisting the Economic Temptation (Matt 4:3-4)

The wilderness where Jesus was tempted is traditionally called the Judean Desert, a harsh and dry region located between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. It is characterized by barren terrain with steep hills, an extreme climate with hot, dry conditions during the day and cold temperatures at night, no vegetation, and no fruit-bearing trees; only small shrubs and desert plants survive. It is a place of isolation and desolation, serving as a testing ground for spiritual growth and solitude. In this wilderness, Jesus fasted for forty days and experienced extreme hunger.

Many common Jews suffering under Roman domination longed for a deliverer who would free them from economic hardship, particularly hunger and poverty. Their expectation of a Messiah bringing economic freedom was closely associated with the temptation to transform stones into bread. The tempter exploits both the people's messianic expectations and Jesus' own dire hunger in the wilderness, provoking

him to prove his divine identity by performing an economic miracle—"turning stones into bread."

Jesus resists the temptation, refusing to validate his divine identity through a self-serving display of power. He resists the economic temptation to become a messiah solely focused on material provision. He responded, saying that people will not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God, quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3. His response affirms a vision of liberation that goes beyond temporary relief, calling for a transformation of both the heart and society, that people cannot live by bread alone but by every word of God.

The 2024 Global Hunger Index ranks India 105 out of 127 countries, highlighting a 'serious' hunger crisis. While corporations and the government promote multinational companies in the name of economic growth and employment, this has often resulted in land grabs, displacement of indigenous and Dalit communities, and the destruction of traditional livelihoods like farming and fishing. This forces the poor and marginalised into unstable, low-paying, and exploitative labour, further entrenching them in poverty.

Churches and Christian organisations respond to the resulting poverty in India with charity by offering food relief and temporary shelters. While these efforts provide immediate relief, they often fail to challenge the oppressive structures that create such poverty. Secondly, some churches, particularly those that rely on corporate donations, choose to remain silent about injustices due to fear of potential consequences. Jesus' resistance challenges the church and her leaders to resist the economic messianic temptation by refusing to work for their own personal gains and engage in advocacy rather than just providing charity that sustains the system of oppression.

Rejecting Spectacle: Resisting the Temptation of Religious Power (Mt 4: 5-7)

The second temptation transports Jesus from the wilderness to the temple's pinnacle, where a tempter implores him to plunge into the depths for miraculous salvation. The wilderness represents human vulnerability due to hunger, isolation, and loneliness, while the Temple

represents God's presence. The tempter shifts from tempting Jesus **in the wilderness** to **tempting him in the Temple—the divine presence. The tempter** challenges Jesus to throw himself out of the presence of God, twisting the scripture to suggest that God will save Him.

The Pharisees expected a Messiah who would restore Israel through religious purity rather than overthrowing oppressors. Samaritans also expected a Messiah who would bring Israel back into divine favour and reestablish the temple on Mount Gerizim. A Samaritan woman mentions this expectation during her conversations with Jesus (Jn 4: 25). Using the aspirations of people, the tempter tempts Jesus to leap from the top of the temple, citing a biblical verse (4:6) that promises God's salvation. However, Jesus resists and refuses this type of religious messianism, which involves demonstrating supernatural signs and miracles to test God's faithfulness. Jesus responds, saying, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test" (Deuteronomy 6:16).

Prosperity Gospel parallels the **temptation of religious messianism,** which reduces God to a transactional figure. **T**he prosperity gospel in India claims that **material wealth, physical healing, and success** are guaranteed signs of God's favour, provided that believers demonstrate their faith—often through p**ublic displays of devotion, extravagant giving, or unquestioning submission to religious authority.** This parallels the temptation Jesus faced at the Temple (Matthew 4:5-7), where the tempter urged him to **descend to demonstrate God's protection.**

Jesus demonstrated his role as the Messiah; instead of throwing himself down from the top of the Temple, he was cleansing the temple, where religious leaders had turned God's dwelling place into a marketplace, exploiting worshippers under the guise of religious duty. He directly confronted a system that prioritised religious power and economic gain over true worship by overturning the tables and declaring, "My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers" (Matt. 21:12-13). This act was a rejection of a religious messianism rooted in religious control, restoring the focus on God's justice and inclusion.

By redefining worship not as rigid legalism but as a relationship with God rooted in justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Matt. 23:23), Jesus challenges the church to resist the temptation of religious institutionalism. His

rejection of a religious messianism based on spectacle and legalism disrupts the notion that salvation comes solely through religious observance, instead calling for a profound transformation of both heart and society.

Rejecting the Crown: Resisting the Temptation of Political Power (Mt 4: 7-9)

The Zealots, another influential group among Jews, expected a military political leader who would free Israel from Roman rule. They anticipated a revolutionary figure who would overthrow foreign oppressors and restore Israel's independence. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the crowd greeted him as a king (Mk 11:10), echoing Zealots' aspirations for a military Messiah to restore Israel's freedom. The statement "Blessed is the King" was more than just a religious declaration; many people anticipated Jesus to lead a rebellion against Roman tyranny. The tempter, knowing the expectations of people, tempts Jesus for the third time by taking him to the highest mountain, where he can see all the kingdoms of the world around him, and by offering all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for worship.

Jesus, resisting the temptation to worship the tempter in order to gain political power, responded by saying, "Worship God alone." The church's relationship with political power in India often exemplifies the temptation of trading political power for compromise. In various instances, the Indian church has faced the temptation to **align with ruling powers** to secure protection, resources, or influence. For example, in certain regions, churches have remained silent about issues like caste oppression, religious discrimination, and violence against minorities in order to maintain favor with the government or dominant social groups. Churches compromise the gospel of Christ for personal security or political gain. Jesus' rejection of Satan's offer reminds the Indian church that true discipleship means resisting the temptation to seek power or to compromise with the dominant political power at the cost of justice, integrity, and the radical love of Christ for the marginalised.

Jesus clearly articulated his mission in the Nazareth **manifesto,** where he proclaimed liberation for the oppressed and the arrival of God's justice. The **Lord's Prayer** further reflects his mission, instructing his

followers to address God as **Father/Mother**, glorify God's name, and seek daily bread—a reminder of relying on God instead of self-serving power. He also instructs them to pray for **strength to resist temptation**, emphasizing that just as he triumphed over these trials, his followers must do the same. The **Lord's Prayer and Jesus' temptations** are deeply connected, both pointing to a vision of **faithfulness, justice, and trust in God's provision** rather than succumbing to the lure of power, wealth, or spectacle.

Conclusion

Jesus resisted the temptations of economic, religious, and political messianism, remaining committed to establishing God's reign. He refused to prove his identity through miraculous provision, rejecting a mission focused solely on material needs. He also rejected a transactional view of God, refusing to link faith with prosperity or financial gain. Likewise, he chose servanthood over political dominance, rejecting power-driven leadership. We must resist the temptations of personal gain, power, and the misuse of religion to oppress the poor as disciples of Christ. Instead, we must follow Jesus' model, standing firm for the liberation of all people from oppression.

●●●

OCRPL
Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life

2025 ADMISSIONS OPEN

NECU
NORTH EAST CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
TRUTH & LIBERTY

M.A CHRISTIAN STUDIES
M.A RELIGIOUS STUDIES

(will be offered from July 2026 onwards)*

Offered by Oxford Center for Religion and Public Life (OCRPL) in partnership with the North East Christian University (NECU)

KEY FEATURES:

- University-validated degree
- Online, flexible format
- International expert faculty
- 2-year program
- Cost-effective

REQUIREMENTS:

- BA in Theology or any equivalent degree (minimum second class)
- BTh from ATA, Serampore and other similar institutions will be required to do additional credits.
- BA/BSc recognised degree or BTh.

This program helps existing and aspiring leaders within the Church to pursue an academic degree while remaining in their ministry setting.

*Scholarships available for eligible students

Last Date to Apply: 30th May 2025

North East Christian University

necuvarsity@gmail.com | www.necu.ac.in

Phone: 03862-295300 | WhatsApp: +918131062849

Anchor Complex, Burma Camp, East Block, Post Box-109, Dimapur-797112, Nagaland

Scan for more info!

Concordia Theological Seminary

Nagercoil

Affiliated to Senate of Serampore College [University]
An Institution of India Evangelical Lutheran Church

Applications are invited from Christian men and women for

Bachelor of Divinity (BD)

Duration: **Five Years of Plus 2**
Four Years of Degree Holders

Medium: English

Our Features:

- ✪ **Legacy of 101 Years**
- ✪ **Dedicated and Efficient Faculty Members**
- ✪ **Clean and Green Campus**
- ✪ **Spacious Class Rooms**
- ✪ **Beautiful Chapel**
- ✪ **Separate Hostel for Men and Women**
- ✪ **Low Budget Tuition Fee**
- ✪ **Blessed Environment for Spiritual and Ministerial Formation**

Last Date to Receive Application: May 25, 2025

Contact the Principal Office for Application Form

For Further Details Write to

The Principal
Concordia Theological Seminary
K.P. Road, Nagercoil – 629 001
K.K. District, Tamil Nadu, India

e-mail: principalctsn@gmail.com

Phone: 04652-279755, 274407, 9894398694, 6380044358, 7598090609

ADVERTISEMENT RATES IN THE NCC REVIEW

	Full Page	*Half Page*	*Inside Cover*	*Cover*
Single	Rs. 1200	Rs. 800	Rs. 1400	Rs.1600
Multiple*	Rs. 900	Rs. 650	Rs. 1050	Rs. 1200

*Multiple rates applicable per insertion for at least three consecutive insertions. All other terms and conditions shall remain same.

NCC REVIEW REVISED SUBSCRIPTION RATES FROM 4/2016

	1 **year**	3 **year**	5 **year**
Indian Subscriptions ***(Regular)***	INR 250	INR 500	INR 800
Indian Subscriptions ***(Discounted for Theological Educators, Pastors, Evangelists, Students - Individuals only. NOT for Organisations, Institutions, Librarians, etc.)***	INR 200	INR350	INR 550
Bulk order (over 50 copies for Indian Subscriptions)	10% off		
UK Subscriptions	GBP 31	-	-
USA, South America, Canada, Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Subscriptions	USD 45	-	-

PAYMENT MODES:

VPP: Place your subscription order by email: <ncci@ncci1914.com> or <nccreview@ncci1914.com> (Rs.20/- added to subscription cost)

Demand Draft: To be drawn in favour of "National Council of Churches in India" payable at Nagpur.

Cheque: To be drawn in favour of "National Council of Churches in India" (Please add Rs. 20/- for outstation cheques).

Money order: To be sent to: The Editor, NCC Review, Nagpur.

Bank Transfer:

Bank name: INDIAN BANK
Branch: NAGPUR
IFSC CODE: IDIB000N007
A/C NAME: NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES REVIEW
A/C NUMBER: 496991073

ISSN 0975 - 1882 RNP/NPCity/237/2018-2020
PRGI Reg. No. 72101/99. Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers for India
Price: ₹ 23/- ***Date of posting 20th of every month***