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NCCI
National Council of Churches' Review

NCC REVIEW

Vol. CXLV
No. 3
April 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. 3** **April 2025**

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Registration No. 33/2019

EDITORIAL

Remembering Resistance, Reimagining Justice – Dalit Histories and the Struggle Ahead

Each April, **Dalit History Month** invites us to remember, reflect, and recommit. It is a time to honour the lived experiences, intellectual contributions, cultural expressions, and unyielding resistance of Dalit communities in India. This is a call to interrogate the present and envision a future where dignity, justice, and equality are not aspirational slogans but lived realities.

The roots of caste-based oppression in India run deep, infecting institutions, social relations, and religious structures. While the Indian Constitution, drafted under the leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, promises justice and equality for all, Dalits continue to face systemic exclusion and violence. Educational spaces remain hostile for Dalit students, caste-based atrocities go underreported or unpunished, and economic opportunities remain limited for vast sections of the Dalit population.

Dalit History Month challenges dominant narratives that have long excluded or distorted Dalit voices. It creates a space for reclaiming history—not as passive memory but as active resistance. It reminds us of the intellectual legacy of Dr. Ambedkar, the radical insights of Ayothidasa Pandithar, the pioneering activism of Ayyankali, the educational reform of Savitribai Phule, and the countless unnamed women and men who resisted untouchability and asserted their humanity in defiance of a rigid caste order.

Yet, we must ask: Are we truly listening to Dalit voices today? Are we creating spaces within our churches, institutions, and public discourses where Dalit perspectives are not only included but prioritized? Are we prepared to confront our own complicities in the continuation of caste-based discrimination?

Within the Christian community, too, caste has remained an insidious reality. Despite proclaiming a faith rooted in the liberating message of Christ, churches across India have often mirrored the social hierarchies of the dominant culture. From pews to pulpits, Dalit Christians have experienced marginalization, both socially and theologically. The

struggle of Dalit Christians for Scheduled Caste status continues to be met with bureaucratic apathy and institutional silence.

True solidarity demands more than statements of support. It calls for a radical reimagination of theology, mission, and discipleship from the perspective of the oppressed. Dalit theology, grounded in the lived experiences of suffering and struggle, reminds the church that God stands with the crucified, not the powerful. It challenges us to dismantle the stratification and hegemony of caste structures within and around us, to name injustice, and to work towards the transformation of our social order, where all castes are equal to the other.

As a publication committed to justice, *NCC Review* stands in solidarity with the ongoing struggles of Dalit communities. We affirm that remembrance is not a passive act—it is a political and spiritual commitment. This month, let us do more than celebrate. Let us learn from Dalit histories, amplify Dalit voices, and support Dalit movements. Let us examine how we can contribute to structural change—be it in theological education, church governance, public policy, or social action.

Dalit History Month is not just about what happened in the past—it is about what must happen now. It is about ensuring that the struggles of the past are not in vain and that the dreams of justice and equality are carried forward by every generation.

This issue of NCC Review features four compelling articles that resonate with the spirit of Dalit History Month. Minta Mariam Varghese's "Marginalised Voices" exposes how caste discrimination persists within Christian communities, especially against Dalit Christian women. S. Sangeetha and K. Shanthi's "Agrarian Myth and Harsh Realities" draws parallels between exploited immigrant labour in American literature and the lived realities of Dalit agricultural workers in India, critiquing the myths that mask systemic injustice. Avijeet Kumar Biswas' "Non-Dualism Over Binary" offers a spiritual framework where Dalit resistance is seen as righteous and dharmic, challenging the church to stand with the oppressed. Finally, Jeevaraj Anthony's Bible study "A Cry of the Cast Out One" presents a Dalit reading of Hagar's story, connecting it to Anitha's tragic death and affirming a God who hears the cries of the cast out and marginalised. These four contributions, diverse in discipline and context, come together to support the editorial's central argument: Dalit voices are not only to be remembered—they are

to be reckoned with. Their stories expose injustice, demand theological honesty, and call us into deeper solidarity. Dalit History Month is not a ritual—it is a radical reclamation of memory, mission, and the church's moral responsibility. Together, these articles embody that call.

This Dalit History Month, *NCC Review* reaffirms its commitment to amplifying Dalit perspectives, documenting their struggles, and holding space for their visions of a just India. Let us be reminded that history is not only about what has been but also about what could be—and that the future will be shaped by those who dare to challenge injustice in all its forms.

In remembrance, in resistance, and in hope,

Consultant Editor,
NCC Review

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MARGINALIZED VOICES: DALIT CHRISTIAN WOMEN IN THE SYRIAN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

- Minta Mariam Varghese[*]

Abstract

Syrian Christians are an ethno-religious community of Indian Christians. It is believed that St. Thomas visited Kerala during the ACE 52 and converted members of Brahmin families to Christianity. Syrian Christians themselves claimed their lineage to Namboodiri Brahmins. From this claim and the resemblance of many of the customs and practices of Namboodiri Brahmins, it is understood that they practised casteism. Dalits, always considered the lowest stratum of caste, became part of the Syrian Christian community through the conversion practices of missionaries during the 18th century ACE. Like women in every other patriarchal community, Syrian Christian women were also facing issues of identity crisis. Hence, the problem with women who are Dalit Christians is twofold. The twice cursed lives of the Dalit Christian women were miserable. They need to face discrimination as women and as Dalits. Major fundamental rights are denied to these people. There is a glass-top seal that didn't allow these women to raise their voices against these evil practices. This paper aims to discuss the social mobility and identity crisis faced by Dalit Christian Women inside the Syrian Christian community, along with church marginalisation and the politics of assertion. It's a bibliographic and historical descriptive research that collects data from both primary and secondary sources.

Introduction

Marginalized voice often represents those who face multiple layers of discrimination based on factor such as caste, gender, ethnicity, class and religion. The caste system deeply engrains in Indian society, has historically led to the marginalization of Dalits, regardless of their religious conversion. Even after becoming Syrian Christians, Dalits often continued to face discrimination due to their lower caste origins.

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This discrimination can be seen as a continuation of the hierarchical structures that existed before conversion.

Applying the Inter-sectional perspective, one can analyse the overlapping layers of discrimination faced by Dalit Christian women under the Syrian Christian category. They may experience prejudice not only due to their caste status but also because of their religious minority identity and also as a woman. This multi-dimensional discrimination can have complex and lasting effects on their social, economic, and political well-being didn't always guarantee liberation from discrimination. Instead, it sometimes led to the transference of caste-based biases into the Christian Community. This phenomenon can be understood through the lens of identity negotiation and adaptation.[1]

Identity theory explores how individual and group identities influence behaviour and experiences. Dalit Christians navigate complex identities, balance their caste heritage within their Christian faith. This duality can shape their interactions and treatment within both Dalit and Christian communities. Discrimination can limit access to social networks, resources and opportunities. Dalit Christian have reduced social capital due to discrimination, affecting their socio-economic conditions and challenge systematic bias.

Critical Race Theory is a framework used to examine and challenge the ways in which race and racism intersect with social, legal and cultural structure. in case of Dalit Christians in Syrian Christian category the crisis is twofold. Like women in every other patriarchal community, Syrian Christian women were also facing issues of identity crisis. Hence, the problem with women who are Dalit Christians is twofold. The twice cursed lives of the Dalit Christian women were miserable. They need to face discrimination as women and as Dalits. Major fundamental rights are denied to these people. There is a glass-top seal that didn't allow these women to raise their voices against these evil practices. This article titled Marginalized Voices: Dalit Christian Women in the Syrian Christian Community aims to discuss the social mobility and identity crisis faced by Dalit Christian Women inside the

[1] Etaf Rum, *A Woman is no Man* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2019), 1-337

Syrian Christian community, along with church marginalization and the politics of assertion.

Syrian Christians

Christianity arrived in India from various regions and at different points in history, driven by distinct motivations. It is essential to distinguish between the periods before British influence and during the British Rule, while also making finer differentiation within these eras. These distinctions hold significance due to the close connection between the conversion methods and the changing political contexts and the historical situations, along with the opportunities and constraints they presented.[2]

The oldest and most renowned Christian Group in India is the Syrian Christian Community of Kerala, whose story has been recorded in numerous early records. According to Syrian Christian Traditions their community's beginning trace back to the missionary work of St. Thomas, who is said to have reached the Malabar coast in the year ACE 52. These Syrian Christian identify themselves as the successors of the upper caste *Namboodiri* Brahmin individuals converted by St. Thomas. From this claim and also the resemblance of many of the customs and practices of *Namboodiri* Brahmins, it is understood that the Syrian Christians practiced Casteism.

Upon their, arrival at Kozhikode, the Portuguese encountered a Christian community known as the *Nazranis*, who were scattered throughout the Malabar region. In the 16th century, Portuguese records indicate that these *Nazranis* held a social position equivalent to that of Brahmins. Among the upper-caste Hindus, the act of touching a *Nazrani* was considered enough to cleanse items tainted by contact with individuals of lower castes. Hindu rulers often settled *Nazranis* near their palaces, utilizing their ability to purify contaminated objects through their services.

The Syrian Christians known for their focus on trade and military activities, offered substantial backing to the ruling Perumal, contributing manpower and resources during both wartime endeavours and periods of tranquillity. Consequently, the leaders and local rulers

[2] Rowena Robinson, *Christians of India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), 18-21.

where they resided acknowledged their contributions by granting them exemptions, special rights, and even distinguished positions. These acknowledgments were frequently documented on copper plates, ensuring their preservation for future generations.[3]

In contemporary times, the Christian community in India continues to be predominantly male dominated. As more women pursue employment and attain financial autonomy, they are increasingly recognized as having the potential for worldly achievements and self-sufficiency. While this acknowledges their intelligence and resourcefulness, it doesn't necessarily imply complete virtue.

The St. Thomas Christians were involved in agriculture, commerce and military activities. As men engaged in military service, women adhered to the traditional roles of nobler castes, primarily tending to household duties within the confines of their homes. As per Monserrate: "These people are of high rank and greatly reputed, well-formed and of good behaviour. The men are warriors; the women being honourable and rich, do the household works."[4]

Dalit Christians

Dalit Christians refers to individuals from the Dalit community, which is historically associated with the lower rungs of the caste system in India, who have converted to Christianity. These individuals continue to face social and economic challenges despite their change in religious affiliation, as the caste-based discrimination often persists even within Christian Communities. Dalit Christians within the Syrian Christian community pertain to individuals from Dalit background who have become part of the Syrian Christian Community. Despite their conversion to Christianity, they might still confront social and economic hardship linked to their previous caste-status, as caste related inequalities can persist within the broader context of the Syrian Christian community.

Caste functions as a type of subjugation that has historically serving as a means to differentiate between distinct tribes and races inhabiting the same region. Numerous ancient civilisations, such as those in Africa,

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3 Leslie Brown, *Indian Christians of St. Thomas* (Cambridge: University Press, 1956), 2.

4 Antonio Monserrate, *The commentary of Fr. Monserrate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), 150.

Greece, Rome and China, adopted caste like structures to establish hierarchies of superiority and inferiority. What sets apart the Indian caste system from most other nations is that the caste divisions in India are legitimized by religion, resulting in a hierarchical inequality that is graded.[5]

Dalit, also previously known as untouchable, is the lowest stratum of the castes in Indian Subcontinent. Dalits were excluded from the four-fold varna system of Hinduism and were seen as forming a system of Hinduism and were seen as forming a fifth varna, also known by the name of Panchama. Dalit entered to the nominal Syrian Christian category with the conversion of 18th century by missionaries. Apart from the upliftment of Dalits, there was also an agenda behind this conversion process to have more members to the church. They were known as Dalit Christians. Caste discrimination not only existed among Hindus. Clear caste discrimination also existed among the Syrian Christians who were the "purifying caste" of the period.

Conversion is closely linked to the opposition against caste-based discrimination, but it's important to avoid an unquestioning idealization of this resistance by overly romanticizing Christian perspectives. The Syrian Christian community, as an indigenous Christian group that holds both upper caste and privileged social positions, challenges conventional notions of Christian Subordination. This unique community narrative adds complexity to the typical portrayal of conversion and its role in resisting caste-based prejudices.[6]

In 1924, W.S. Hunt, a missionary of the C.M.S Travancore, expressed his concern about the significant divide between Syrian Christians and Dalit Christians. He lamented that in many regions, village Christians tend to feel a stronger connection with the outcaste community from their own locality, particularly the segment to which they originally belonged, rather than with the broader Christian Community. This situation creates an enclave like existence within the Christian community, where they identify more with outcastes as their brothers, rather than fellow Christians.[7]

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5 Valeire Mason, *Broken Voices: Untouchable Women Speak Out* (New Delhi: India Research Press, 2008), 1.

6 Sonja Thomas, *Privileged Minorities* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2018), 5.

7 W.S. Hunt, *India's Outcasts- A New Era* (London: Church Missionary Society,1924), 57.

Dalit Women in Syrian Christian Community

Dalit women writers play a significant role in introducing and spreading new ideologies that challenge conventional stigmas. Bama's work *'Karukku'* (1992) and '*Sangati'* (1994), represent the voices of a Dalit woman recounting the life experiences of a group of Dalit Women. These Narratives inspire her to embrace and assert her Dalit female identity. She discusses how the introduction of Christianity has introduced intricate dynamics within the caste system. For instance, even nuns from dominant caste backgrounds, often exhibit prejudiced attitudes towards Dalit Christian women.[8]

Dalit households adopted Christianity not merely for convenience but as a societal expression against a branch of Hinduism that marginalized them as untouchable and outcaste individuals. To shield their families from the burden of a disgraceful status, many Dalits Christians choose to keep this fact hidden from their children. This conversion served as a shield against overt bias and feelings of inferiority within the broader community, safeguarding their children from potential influences that might undermine their self-assurance. Syrian Christians are known as a privileged community over time. So, whenever the possibility of conversion happens Dalits chose to be part of Syrian Christian in order to get away from their miserable life. In case of Women who were converted to the category of Syrian Christian need to suffer the agony which were given to both women and Dalits by the Syrian Christian Community.[9]

Crisis Faced by Dalit Women

The extent of discrimination and violence faced by Dalit women, remains distressing even after their conversion to Syrian Christianity. This situation demands a deeper examination and exploration. We can call the traditional Kerala society a "birth system." One of the basic principles of this was the requirement that a person should live in the general rules of that caste, whichever caste he was born into. Both the Syrian and Dalit Christian Women inside the community was subjected to do so. There was some rules and regulation inside the church which

[8] Mary Gray, *A Cry for Dignity: Religion, Violence and the Struggles of Dalit Women in India* (London: Routledge Press,2010), 7.

[9] Roja Singh, *Spotted Goddesses Dalit Women's Agency-Narratives on Caste and Gender Violence* (Berlin: Lit Verlag Press, 2018), 188.

were forcing the women of Syrian Christian to be part of a patriarchal society. Inheritance rights are one of that. Syrian Christian women are subservient to social institutions. For a time, women remained passive, living within the institutions. Women who live under the rules of family and community live with their individuality at bottom.

When coming to the family structure of Syrian Christian community, the maternal uncle and father was considered as the supreme. Men and women would not sit and eat together, and husbands and wives didn't constitute an exception to this. Wives would not speak to their husbands addressing them by their names. Daughters would not to be made heirs to family property. One without male issue would adopt as his heir a male related to him in male line.[10]

When coming to the Dalit Christian women under the Syrian Christian Community they are forced to live under the birth system. Even though they are converted, they were not allowed to enjoy the privileges that the Syrian Christians hold in the society. They remained as underprivileged one among the privileged community. They lack property rights, democratic and basic fundamental rights. Dalit Christians were seen as 'Slave Families.'[11]

Here the fact is that, while the aware Women of the Syrian Christian community focussed on preserving and limiting their tangible sense of self, the marginalized outcastes, known as the Dalit Christian women under the Syrian Christian Community, were marginalized and forced to live on the fringes in a subhuman and marginalized manner.[12]

Dalit Women were excluded from key community events and decision-making processes. This marginalization can lead to feelings of isolation and dis-empowerment. They have limited representation in community leadership roles and institutions, leading to a lack of voice and influence in shaping community policies and practices. Negative stereotypes and

[10] C.V. Cherian, *Orthodox Christianity in India* (Kottayam: Academic Publishers, 2003), 103.

[11] Mohan P. Sanal, "Women and Religiosity: Dalit Christians in Kerala," in *Economic and Political weekly*, edited by Guha Thakurtha (Mumbai: Sameeksha Trust, 2017), 50-57.

[12] Ajay Sekhar, "Older than the Church: Christianity and caste in The God of Small Things," in *Economic and Political Weekly*, edited by Jayati Ghosh (Mumbai: Sameeksha Trust), 3445-3449.

stigmatization may lead to the perpetuation of biases and discriminatory attitudes against Dalit Women, affecting their self-esteem and social interaction.[13]

From the outside it looks like everything is one but there is definite sectarianism among Syrian Christians towards Dalit Christians. Many places have separate churches for Dalit Christians. Most of them treat Dalits as second-class members of what they call their 'traditional church.' The fact is that there are no organisation or adequate benefits for them on Church basis. All these miseries are affecting Dalit women badly.

A Ray of Hope

In 1880, a suggestion was made to integrate Dalits into Syrian Christian Community especially into the Orthodox Church, leading to the commencement of conversions. By the early 20th century, a distinct church was founded for Dalits. Instead of including Dalits in their own church, a separate church was established for them. During this era, the Pulaya community was granted certain rights and privileges. A governmental role known as the 'Pulayan Special Officer' was created, empowered to apprehend individuals displaying discrimination against lower caste individuals. The extent of mass conversions during this time is questionable, given the presence of only a few missions dedicated to uplifting lower caste group.

The movement of Parumala Mar Gregorios, a bishop of Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church was commendable. He didn't focus on conversion but focused on the empowerment of Dalit women. He took role to provide them with education. Till that time education was only meant for upper caste people. It was challenged by Parumala Mar Gregorios and insisted church to open education for all including Dalit women. He again raises his voice to participate Dalits in all aspect of society. In 1880 March 22 he wrote at Malayala Manorama Newspaper about their importance.[14]

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[13] Interview with Leela Saji on 03-07-2023 at Konni, Pathanamthitta.

[14] John Thomas Karingattil, *Parumala Thirumeni Malayala Sahithyathil* (Kottayam: MOC Publications, 2002), 66-75.

Poikayil Yohanan was another Dalit emancipator joined the Marthoma Church, but realised the church treated Dalits as an inferior class, and so left it and founded the socio religious movement '*Pratyaksha Raksha Sabha*' in 1909. PRDS emphasized the significance of women's role across various domains, introducing female priests- an innovative and progressive act not only for its era but also by contemporary standards. Yohanan asserted the equality of men and women, firmly rejecting any notion of female inferiority. In 1930, PRDS forwarded a request to the Travancore Government, advocating for women's representation within Sree Mulam Praja Sabha.[15]

Pathrose Mar Ostathios, a bishop of Orthodox Church founded a community called 'Servants of Cross' in 1924 in order to accommodate the converted Dalit Christians. During his time 25000 families were converted. Now there are over 60 parishes of the same. He was also a freedom fighter as he was a part of Vaikom Satyagaha, against untouchability and Caste discrimination along with Mahatma Gandhi.[16]

Apart from this there may occur some petty movements regarding the upliftment of Dalit women under Syrian Christian community. But the result is that none of the movement gives a complete result and the Dalit women are still living in the miserable condition.

Conclusion

Gender inequality is a pressing issue in Indian society. Despite a constitution that guarantees equal rights for men and women and decades of legislations, some deep-rooted gender discrimination in India takes a brutal role on women's lives. Gender inequality was prevalent in India and in due course of time some changes are seen because of the approach of women towards society. One such problem that affect the gender equality is mentioned in the paper. Addressing the crisis faced by Syrian Christian women including Dalits requires a multifaceted approach, including awareness and education, legal support, representation, social support networks, economic empowerment, cultural sensation and policy reforms.

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[15] N. Padmanabhan, "Poikayil Yohanan and Anti-Slavery Spiritual Revolutions in Kerala," in *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, ed. P.S. Shukla (India: IJCRT, 2020).

[16] Jasleen James, *Caste in Kerala Churches: Annihilation, Conversion and the Orthodox* Church (Delhi: Ambedkar University, 2020), 23.

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AGRARIAN MYTH AND HARSH REALITIES: LAND AND LABOUR IN WILLA CATHER'S AMERICAN WEST THROUGH ECOCRITICAL AND MARXIST LENSES

- S. Sangeetha[*] & K. Shanthi[**]

Abstract

This paper explores how Willa Cather's portrayal of the American West, a region known for its rugged terrains and vast prairies, reveals the entangled dynamics of land, labour, and capitalist exploitation through the dual lenses of ecocriticism and Marxist theory. Cather's novels portray the land as a nurturing and constraining presence, underscoring its profound influence on human experiences. While ecocriticism highlights the environmental degradation driven by capitalist expansion, Marxist theory draws attention to the socioeconomic disparities and alienation of labour inherent in such systems. Through her works such as O Pioneers!, My Ántonia and One of Ours, Cather critiques the unsustainable entanglement of capitalist growth and ecological degradation, showcasing the conflicts between human desires, economic structures, and ecological realities. By integrating environmental and economic critique, this study illuminates the socio-natural tensions that shape Cather's vision of the American frontier—the West.

Keywords: Entanglement, Stewardship, Capitalist Imperatives, Industrial Capitalism

Introduction

Willa Cather's novels, including *O Pioneers!*, *My Ántonia*, and *One of Ours*, both evoke and challenge the 'agrarian myth' of the American West as a land of boundless opportunity. Through ecocritical and Marxist

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lenses, this article examines how Cather exposes the tensions between this idealized vision and the realities of environmental degradation, labour exploitation, and capitalist expansion. Ecocriticism reveals the land as a dynamic force shaping human experience, while Marxism uncovers the class struggles and alienation driven by economic systems. By integrating these perspectives, this study reassesses Cather's portrayal of the frontier, highlighting the conflict between its mythic allure and the harsh truths of ecological and economic strife.

Willa Cather's novels offer a richly woven tapestry of personal narratives, socio-economic tensions, and ecological consciousness within the landscape of the American West. Through the combined lenses of ecocriticism and Marxist criticism, her work reveals a nuanced interplay between human labour, land, and exploitation. While these critical approaches differ in emphasis—ecocriticism foregrounding the human-nature relationship and Marxism focusing on class struggle and economic systems—they intersect in Cather's portrayal of frontier life. Her narratives articulate the deep entanglements of environmental constraints and capitalist imperatives, shedding light on how nature and labour shape, and are shaped by, systems of power.

Methodology

Ecocriticism, a literary framework that examines the dynamic interactions between human societies and the natural environment, finds a compelling site for analysis in Cather's depiction of the American West. In her novels, nature is not a passive backdrop but an active agent determining human experience. The rugged terrains and vast prairies of the American West become more than settings—they influence identity, economy, and survival, offering a captivating site for ecocritical analysis. In Cather's works, the land is not just a backdrop but a character in its own right, shaping destinies, testing resilience, and embodying promise and peril. This concept, central to ecocriticism, positions the environment as an agent of narrative tension. The land, representing opportunity and challenge, tests the settlers' resilience, inspiring us with their determination. The American West has long been a place where nature dictates the terms of human survival, forcing settlers to adapt or perish.[1]

From an ecocritical perspective, the novel portrays the human struggle against and in harmony with nature. *In O Pioneers!* Alexandra's success

[1] Robert F. Sayre, *Ecocriticism in the United States: Toward a Critical Framework* (N.P.: Ecological Studies Press, 2000), 45.

contrasts sharply with the failure of other settlers, underscoring the tension between human aspirations and the unforgiving environment. While progressive, her land stewardship also points to the long-term consequences of agricultural exploitation. The gradual depletion of soil fertility reflects the environmental costs of capitalist farming practices, critiquing unsustainable land-use approaches. Similarly, in *My Ántonia* (1918), the landscape and the characters' relationship with it are central to the narrative. The Shimerda family's tragic failure to adapt to the prairie reflects the vulnerability of immigrant communities, who often face ecological and economic hardship. "For many immigrants, the land is both a dream and a nightmare, offering promise yet demanding an unrelenting toil that exhausts both the body and the spirit."[2]

Their labour on the land mirrors the broader pattern of environmental degradation as they struggle against the harshness, making us feel the weight of the environmental challenges they face, accompanied by the colonial expansion. Eco critically, the land's harshness is a physical challenge and a metaphor for the broader consequences of colonial expansion and environmental exploitation.[3]

As Cheryll Glotfelty suggests, "land in American frontier literature is often 'the site of struggle' where environmental destruction is entwined with human desires for dominance and control."[4] This concept is evident in Cather's portrayal of the American West as a 'promised land' and a space where natural forces often thwart settlers' dreams. The environmental destruction that occurs due to agricultural practices in *O Pioneers!* and *One of Ours* reflects the unsustainable tendencies inherent in capitalist approaches to land management.

Environmental Exploitation and Capitalism

Cather critiques environmental exploitation, highlighting the capitalist economic forces that drive settlers to extract resources from the land with little regard for ecological sustainability. In *Alexander's Bridge* (1912), the protagonist, Alexander, constructs a literal and metaphorical

[2] M. Chase, "Class and Land in Willa Cather's My Ántonia," *Prairie Studies* 7/4 (1991): 60.

[3] Yi-Fu Tuan, "The Geography of the American West: Nature and Culture," *American* Geographical Society 45/3 (1991): 200 - 215.

[4] Cheryll Glotfelty, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 112.

bridge, symbolising human efforts to conquer and control nature. Cather's work reveals an acute awareness of industrial expansion and its potential to ravage the natural world.[5]

This act of technological advancement, while a triumph of human ingenuity, also underscores the broader issue of industrialisation and its tendency to exploit the environment for economic gain. Cather's portrayal of nature as something to be conquered and exploited critiques an approach to land that emphasises short-term profit over long-term ecological health.[6]

In *One of Ours* (1922), Cather critiques the rise of industrial capitalism and its disconnection from the land. The protagonist, Claude Wheeler, seeks meaning in a world increasingly alienated from its agrarian roots, evoking a deep sense of loss for a harmonious relationship with nature. Industrial capitalism fosters a profound alienation from the land, rendering it an economic resource rather than a living entity. The novel provides an ecocritical perspective on transitioning from an agrarian to a capitalist economy and the consequences of alienation from nature, as people prioritise industrial progress and material wealth over environmental harmony. The shift from farming to mechanised production is one of Cather's most significant critiques of the industrial era, revealing how technological advancements often lead to environmental degradation and the loss of a harmonious relationship with the land.

As Robert F. Sayre argues, "American literature often reflects the tension between nature and industrial capitalism, a theme that Cather captures eloquently in her portrayal of rural communities fighting for survival against the march of modernity."[7] Cather's vision of nature as both threatening and sustaining speaks to the broader struggles that defined the development of the American West.

Marxism in Cather's Novels

Marxist literary criticism emphasises class struggle, economic exploitation, and the distribution of societal power. These themes are

[5] M. Nixon, "Class and Conflict in the American West: The Works of Willa Cather," *Journal of American Studies* 39/1 (2006): 51.

[6] G. Williams, "Capitalism and Transformation of Rural Communities: Willa Cather's Analysis of Industrialisation," *Rural Studies Journal*, 29/5 (2006): 455-71.

[7] Sayre, *Ecocriticism in the United States*, 49

central to Cather's works, particularly in her depiction of the lives of immigrants, farmers, and landowners in the American West. Cather's exploration of class conflict can be effectively examined through a Marxist lens that highlights the tension between labour and capital.

Class Struggle and Economic Exploitation

Many of Cather's novels focus on the economic struggles of immigrants and the working class, exposing the exploitation embedded within capitalist systems. In *My Ántonia*, immigrant families, such as the Shimerdas, are depicted as labourers working the land for minimal reward. Despite their relentless efforts, they remain at the mercy of economic forces, and their struggles highlight the inequalities inherent in the capitalist system. The characters' labour on the land is undervalued, as they are essentially pawns in a more extensive economic system that enriches landowners and speculators.[8] In *A Lost Lady* (1923), the Forrester family's wealth is derived from the exploitation of land and the speculative practices linked to the railroad industry, emblematic of capitalist ambition. The novel critiques the class divide between the wealthy Forrester family and the rural labourers who work the land.

The Forrester family's prosperity, built on speculative and capitalist ventures, highlights the intersection of capitalism and exploitation, with the labour of others fuelling their wealth. Cather's narrative suggests that the capitalist class perpetually exploits the working class, leading to alienation and a loss of community.[9] This critique of capitalist exploitation is also evident in Cather's portrayal of how industrialisation impacts America's rural landscape and social structure.

Alienation and the Loss of Agrarian Ideals

Cather's critique of the capitalist system is most evident in her portrayal of the alienation of individuals from both their labour and the land. In *The Professor's House* (1925), Professor St. Peter reflects on his past connection to the land and the rural community, lamenting the loss of a more straightforward, more authentic way of life. "The novel's rise of industrialisation and its alienating effects on the individual are central concerns. Once a source of sustenance and meaning, the land becomes a commodity in the capitalist system, no longer connected to the lives of those who worked it."[10]

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[8] Chase, "Class and Land," 56–78.

[9] Nixon, "Class and Conflict," 47–63.

[10] S. O'Brien, "*The Professor's House* and the Decline of Agrarianism in Willa Cather's World," *American Studies Quarterly* 16/ 2 (1992): 101–19.

This sense of alienation is a key Marxist concept explored in *One of Ours*. Claude Wheeler, searching for meaning in the face of industrialisation, represents the alienated individual whose labour no longer connects him to the land or his sense of self. "The novel critiques the capitalist shift that erodes personal fulfilment and human connection to nature, a key aspect of Marxist thought regarding the dehumanising effects of capitalism."[11]

Cather's novels also address the colonial dimensions of the American West. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), the French missionaries' efforts to colonize and Christianize the Native American populations can be read through a Marxist lens as an extension of colonial exploitation—the narrative critiques how colonial powers manipulate both the land and the Indigenous people for economic gain. The missionaries' project can be seen as part of the more substantial capitalist exploitation of the land, driven by the desire to control resources and labour.[12]

Synthesis of Ecocriticism and Marxism in Cather's Novels

Both ecocriticism and Marxism illuminate the complexities of human life in the American West as depicted in Cather's novels. The land, often portrayed as both a nurturing and brutal force, is a site of exploitation, labour, and alienation. The tensions between human desires to tame nature and the environmental consequences of these actions are central to ecocritical readings. At the same time, Marxist analysis reveals how capitalist forces shape class relations and the economic exploitation of people and nature.

In novels such as *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*, the land symbolises opportunity and exploitation, mirroring the broader social and economic systems. The characters' efforts to work the land often led to economic inequality and environmental degradation, highlighting the intersection of capitalism and ecological destruction.

Ultimately, Cather's works critique the effects of industrial capitalism on human and environmental well-being, revealing how labour,

[11] Williams, "Capitalism and the Transformation," 455–71.

[12] M. Schultz, "Colonialism and Exploitation in Willa Cather's Death Comes for the Archbishop," *Journal of Western Literature* 21/2 (2003): 89–102.

exploitation, and alienation intersect with the natural world. By blending ecocritical and Marxist perspectives, we can better understand the complex social, economic, and environmental forces that shape the lives of Cather's characters and the American West in which they reside.

In *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia* Cather paints the American West as a place of promise and hardship, where the land is both nurturing and harsh. From an ecocritical view, she shows how capitalist farming harms the environment, like soil depletion in *O Pioneers!* or prairie changes in *My Ántonia*. Through a Marxist lens, she highlights class struggles, with characters like the Shimerdas exploited by a system that favours landowners. Cather's stories critique industrial capitalism's damage to people and nature, weaving personal struggles with bigger issues.

Cather nails the tension between opportunity and exploitation, reflecting real economic and environmental challenges of her time. But she misses some things—she barely includes Indigenous perspectives and doesn't fully explore how gender ties into class and ecological issues. Her tendency to romanticize settlers' grit can also soften her critique of systemic problems.

Here the researcher agrees with Cather's take on how capitalism and environmental harm are linked, seeing the land as central to human struggles. She builds on her ideas by adding modern concerns like Indigenous rights, global environmental justice, and the role of gender and race in exploitation. While Cather's work reflects her era, she can connect her insights to today's issues like climate change and corporate greed, making her critique even more relevant.

Conclusion

By applying both ecocritical and Marxist perspectives, Willa Cather's novels can be understood as profound critiques of the historical and economic forces that shaped the American West—forces that often lead to exploitation, alienation, and environmental degradation. Her depiction of the land as nurturing and contested foregrounds the complex interplay between capitalism, labour, and the natural world. Through this dual lens, readers gain a deeper appreciation of her literary vision and a more nuanced perspective on the historical and socio-environmental realities of the American frontier-West.

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NON-DUALISM OVER BINARY: INDIA'S PERENNIAL APPROACH TO WAR AND PEACE

- Avijeet Kumar Biswas,[*] Arjun,[**] & Man Norbu[***]

Abstract

The discourse on peace and conflict has been vast and varied in the West as well as in India. While India is often equated with peace and non-violence, an objective study of Indian history reveals that neither peace nor conflict has dominated the centrepiece of this ancient land. However, there has been a distinct value system that gave shape to public policy throughout the ancient Hindu civilization up until now. Consequently, to equate India solely with peace and non-violence does not provide a complete and clear picture of India's ancient ethos. Major Hindu scriptures such as the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita, and Arthashastra are a gateway to the realist and strategic thinking in ancient India. Modern Indian leaders have not broken this lineage of thinking and have moulded it to their way of functioning according to the needs of the situation in which they found themselves while leading the nation. While India focuses on peace and non-violence and has a distinguished record of being tolerant, the subcontinent has seen its fair share of violence. This paper attempts to decipher India's perception of peace and conflict which may provide some clarity to this paradox.

Keywords: India, War, Peace, Non-Violence, Non-Dualism, Nuclear Weapon

Introduction

To understand India's perception of peace, it is vital first to know how the Indian and Western cultures differ. The basic difference lies in West's perception of human personality as dichotomic, consisting of body and mind. It must be noted that 'Spirit' is considered part of the mind. On the other hand, India perceives human personality as

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trichotomic, which includes the body, mind and the pure consciousness or spirit.[1] For millennia great sages of India have indulged in deep introspection about the inner world within one's own being. This great exploration during the Vedic period led to the revelation of the Vedas to the sages who discovered the Brahman, "the supreme, indivisible, and boundless universal consciousness."[2] This consciousness is found to be the 'Universal Ultimate Truth,' and all actions and experiences are based upon it. The pure consciousness also known as the *Atman* in the individual is a faithful reflection of the universal consciousness.

Observing Indian history in chronological order, the experience of the universal consciousness came first and next came the development of explanations, dialectics, theories and numerous schools of philosophy. Finally, various methods were formulated to achieve the supreme experience. The discovery of the highest levels was made at a very early stage of the Indian civilization, and later generations went as far as to only verify and revalidate these findings. In the West, the trajectory of evolution is in the opposite order. First, methods were formulated through physical and mental practice; next, philosophies were developed, followed by material development and finally sensuous experience.

The West perceives mind and intellect as the best tools for human advancement; while Indians perceive heart, intuition, contemplation and other methods which are perceived to be in tune with the *Atman*. The focus of the West and that of India differs too. The West has primarily put its focus on the external world to satisfy basic needs, fulfil aspirations and find solutions to problems in the society. The mind utilizing the senses beholds the outer world as diverse, contradictory and conflictual. The Western approach has led to the perfection of analytical and scientific approaches rooted in division and classification. While India does not dismiss the external world, it regards the inner world to be equally or perhaps more significant. The inner world is identified with synthesis, unity and peace; thus, an approach in this direction leads to convergence and integration. Sri Aurobindo, an Indian political and spiritual thinker from the preceding century, saw religion and spirituality as the fundamental aspects of Indian culture and civilization. While

[1] Rajendra K. Patil, "International Peace in the Light of Indian Philosophy," *International Journal on World Peace* XXXV/4 (2018): 10-12.

[2] Patil, "International Peace," 9-10.

examining the Indian polity in its historical context, here too he found spirituality to be a fundamental tenet, with utmost importance given to the upholding of *Dharma* or the duty of an individual in his respective position in society.[3] The West and India certainly differ in their cultural approach to human advancement and resolving human differences and problems. Nevertheless, neither approach can be dismissed if applied in the appropriate context. They can well be complementary.

India's Ancient Ethos

The discourse on peace and conflict in India is guided by diverse philosophies and world views that allow the synthesis of divergent and even contradictory viewpoints. To reconcile diverse viewpoints, the quest for a middle path seems practical. This flexibility has deterred binaries and instead has encouraged non-dualistic understandings.[4] Thus texts and narratives of outstanding martial traditions and warfare can be found alongside equally impressive discourse on peacebuilding practices. It is not unusual to discover immensely violent episodes in Indian heritage juxtaposed with marvellous acts of non-violence, or vice versa. The *Mahabharata*, an ancient Hindu epic, with the *Bhagavad Gita* as its core philosophical and spiritual text set out the non-dualistic schema. It underscores how "Many apparently conflicting beliefs are worked into simple unity to meet the needs of the time, in the true Hindu spirit..."[5]

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, there are several instances were killing in warfare is justified. Sri Krishna declares that "[t]here is no greater good for a warrior than to fight in a righteous war."[6] The negative consequences of war and violence too are discussed "with much care and sympathy"[7] during the dialogue between Sri Krishna (the Divine)

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[3] Subhankar Samanta and Reshmi Bokshi, "A Study of Global Peace: Based on Sri Aurobindo's Political Thinking, Integral Yoga and National Integration," *International Journal of Scientific Research and Management* 5/6 (2017): 5591-5615, https://ijsrm.in/index.php/ijsrm/article/view/645/565

[4] Priyankar Upadhyaya, "Peace and Conflict Reflections on Indian Thinking," *Strategic Analysis* 33/1 (2009): 72, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09700160802518585

[5] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagvadgita* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1963), 15.

[6] Juan Mascaro, *The Bhagavad Gita, Trans.* (London: Penguin Books, 1962), 51.

[7] Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 3-6.

and Arjuna (the warrior). Before the culmination of the war between the *Pandavas* and the *Kauravas*, Sri Krishna sought genuine attempts at addressing the predicaments by resorting to negotiations and dialogues to reach a peaceful settlement. When such attempts failed to bear fruit, Sri Krishna advised the Pandavas to fight a war.[8] The non-dualism in *Mahabharata* is evident when within a same chapter victory through war is condemned, and elsewhere treacherous and ruthless behaviours by the kings are condoned. During the formative phase, Hindu kings fought wars among themselves to acquire power, wealth and territory and prepared for wars to thwart invaders from the northwest frontiers. Despite the dominance of wars, the *Mahabharata* also brings to the fore the negative consequences of violence and warfare. This is evident from ideas such as "A wise ruler should always avoid war...," "Victory through a war is deplorable if it could be achieved without a war" and "One should cease fruitless enmities."[9]

According to Sri Aurobindo, the *Gita* signifies an era of transformation and turmoil in human history, characterised by the conflict of formidable forces leading to both devastation and rebirth. These crises originating from intellectual, social, moral, religious, and political dimensions, frequently resulted in violent upheavals such as conflict, warfare, or revolution. The *Gita* recognises the inevitability of crises in nature and addresses both the ethical dimension of the conflict between righteousness and unrighteousness and the tangible feature of armed conflict or other forms of physical struggle between opposing forces. The *Gita* was written in an era when warfare was an integral aspect of human existence, and the notion of eradicating violence from life would have been illusory. The doctrine of worldwide peace and goodwill among humanity has never successfully manifested in human existence throughout this historical period, since humanity was unprepared for such elevation.

Humanity as a whole has yet to advance beyond the viability of a system that accommodates conflicting interests to mitigate the recurrence of severe conflicts. To achieve this goal, humanity has resorted to a method characterised by an unprecedented mutual slaughter; a global

[8] Sathya Sai Baba, *Summer Roses on the Blue Mountains* (Anantpur: Sri Sathya Sai Books and Publication Trust, 2003), 79-100.

[9] Kotha Satchidanda Murthy, *Indian Foreign Policy* (Calcutta: Scientific Book Agency, 1964), 37-38.

conflict, rife with animosity and insurmountable hatred, is the direct path and the prevailing means that contemporary society has identified for the attainment of universal peace. A day will inevitably arrive when humanity will be spiritually, morally, and socially prepared for the establishment of universal peace; but the realities of conflict and the inherent nature of humanity as combatants must be acknowledged and integrated into any pragmatic philosophy or religion.

The *Gita* is consequently directed towards a warrior, an individual of action, whose obligation in life encompasses warfare and safeguarding, with warfare serving as a governmental function to protect those exempted from such responsibilities, unable to defend themselves, and thus vulnerable to the powerful and the brutal. Furthermore, it advocates for warfare, by moral extension, to shield the weak and the oppressed, and to uphold righteousness and justice in the world.

Sri Aurobindo views that Indian civilisation's primary objective was to reduce the occurrence and devastation of war. To this end, it restricted military duty to only a select class distinguished by their lineage, character, and customs, who discovered their inherent means of self-actualization through the cultivation of virtues such as bravery, disciplined strength, altruism, and noble chivalry, which the warrior's existence, driven by a lofty ideal, provides ample scope and opportunities for development. The remainder of the community was meticulously shielded from violence and turmoil; their existence and endeavours were minimally disrupted, and the aggressive and destructive inclinations of human nature were constrained within a defined arena to mitigate harm to the collective well-being of society.

Concurrently, by adhering to elevated ethical standards and comprehensive humanitarian principles, the role of warfare was compelled to contribute to the ennoblement and elevation of its participants rather than their brutalisation. It is essential to recognise that the *Gita* addresses a type of war characterised by inevitability within human existence, yet constrained and governed to facilitate ethical and spiritual advancement, which was perceived as the ultimate purpose of life. This war is destructive within specific, meticulously defined boundaries of individual existence, while simultaneously fostering the inner life and ethical upliftment of humanity. The historical conflict has, when aligned with an ideal, contributed to this elevation, akin to the evolution of knights and chivalry, the Indian concept of the *Kshatriya*, and the Japanese notion of the Samurai, which can only

be refuted by the extremists of pacifism. Upon fulfilling its purpose, it may indeed vanish; for if it attempts to persist beyond its utility, it will manifest as an unmitigated brutality of violence, devoid of its ideal and constructive elements, and will be repudiated by the progressive intellect of humanity; however, its historical contribution to the species must be acknowledged in any rational perspective on our evolution.[10]

The tangible reality of battle is merely a specific and external expression of a broader principle in existence, and the *Kshatriya* is only the external embodiment and archetype of a fundamental trait essential for the attainment of human perfection. War exemplifies and manifests the physical nature of conflict and struggle inherent in all existence, encompassing both our internal and external lives, within a world characterised by the interaction and contention of forces that advance through mutual annihilation towards a perpetually evolving equilibrium, indicative of a progressive harmonisation and aspiring towards an ideal unity rooted in an as-yet-unrealized potential for oneness.

The *Kshatriya* represents the archetype of the warrior who embraces this principle in life, confronting challenges with the intent of achieving mastery. This individual does not recoil from the annihilation of physical forms but, amidst this, aspires to realise a foundational principle of righteousness, justice, and law that underpins the harmony towards which the struggle aspires. The *Gita* acknowledges the reality of war that it represents, addressing the man of action, the striver and fighter, the *Kshatriya*. War epitomises the stark contradiction to the soul's profound yearning for inner peace and external harmlessness. The turmoil inherent in struggle and action appears to oppose the soul's lofty ideal of serene mastery and self-control. The *Gita* endeavours to find a resolution to this contradiction, seeking a convergence point where these opposing elements align, establishing a foundational equilibrium essential for harmony and transcendence.[11]

In a nutshell, the *Mahabharata* is a creative and realist narration of the need for wars during the formative stage of state formation as well as the realisation by the rulers of the salience of peace in a post-combat order.

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[10] Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1997), 46-56.

[11] Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, 50-51.

Arthashastra

Arthashastra, literally means the science of polity, a treatise on statecraft, stands out as a prime example of realpolitik in ancient India. Composed by Kautilya sometime during the 4th century BC, it records the critical and impending instances of the Mauryan Empire in relation to the strategic problems in uniting the subcontinent and defending it from foreign invaders.[12] Most importantly *Arthashastra* is a manual of statecraft with the goal of acquiring or maintaining power. It is a work similar in inspiration to *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu and *The Prince* by Machiavelli.[13] *Arthashastra* spells out crucial advice on the forging of military alliances to strengthen the security of the kingdom. Unlike the *Mahabharata*, *Arthashastra* dismisses ethical and moral considerations, values and obligations on the basis that states should act in accordance to aggrandise power and self-interest. Thus, tendencies such as territorial ambitions, rivalry, the art of chicanery in diplomacy and brutality in warfare are considered princely virtues.[14]

Some of the strategies prescribed to the rulers are *Matsya Nyaya*, the *Mandala* doctrine and *Chakravartin*. *Matsya Nyaya*, its literal meaning the Law of the Fish, concerns the struggle for power in an anarchic internal and external order. To crush anarchy within the state, Kautilya prescribes *danda* or punishment. *Danda* is also deployed externally to maintain a worldwide anarchy. The *Mandala* doctrine is utilised in relation to external action. It views neighbours of a state as its enemies. However, the states which are on the other side of the neighbours are considered as friends. The doctrine in essence aims to achieve a balance of power by exploiting tensions between neighbours. Ultimately as the ruler conquers the entire world, he becomes the *Chakarvartin* and establishes world peace.[15]

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[12] Stephen Philip Cohen, *India: Emerging Power* (Washington, DC: Brooking Institute Press, 2001), 9-12.

[13] George Modelski, "Kautilya: Foreign Policy and the International System in the Ancient Hindu World," *American Political Science Review* 53/3 (1964): 550, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1953131.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A5e935e2d94cf05ff8f23b14f1316cce0

[14] Kautilya, *The Arthashastra, L. N. Rangarajan, Trans.* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1992), 676-679.

[15] Benoy Kumar Sarkar, "Hindu Theory of International Relations," *The American Political Science Review* 13/3 (1919): 400-414, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1945958.pdf

Kautilya preferred peace over war. Realist as he was, he did not see wars as immoral but as expensive propositions with no certainty of victory. Hence, it is to be undertaken as a last resort. Kautilya wrote, "When the degree of progress is the same in pursuing peace and waging war, peace is to be preferred."[16] He believed that world peace could be achieved through the conquest of the whole world.[17] A comparative study of *Mahabharata* and Arthashastra would reveal that while the former prefers war over the adoption of amoral means, the latter prefers amoral means to war, but definitely not wars to moral means.[18] Both texts give importance to pragmatic peace.

Religions of Peace

Religions that find their roots in India have contributed to the discourse of peace, through religious traditions that hold peace and harmony in high esteem. There are numerous ideas and practices in Hinduism that advocate peace and global citizenship. In the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* there are many instances where peace and harmony among all beings are cherished. Concepts such as *Kshma* which stands for patience, forbearance and pardon,[19] peace mantras such as *Sarveshaam Shantir Bhavatu* prays for peace for all, *Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam* promotes the idea that the world is one family, and *Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti* which means "Truth is one, the wise perceive it differently,"[20] epitomise the importance of peace in Hinduism. However, violence too has its place in Hinduism as is evident from certain Hindu traditions and texts, a number which has been mentioned earlier.[21]

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[16] Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, 565.

[17] Narasingha P Sil, "Political Morality vs. Political Necessity: Kautilya and Machiavelli Revisited," *Journal of Asian History* 19/2 (1985): 123, https://www.academia.edu/33315164/Political_Morality_vs_Political_Necessity_Kautilya_and_Machiavelli_Revisited

[18] Murty, *Indian Foreign Policy*, 137.

[19] Veda: *Vedic Knowledge Online*, http://veda.wikidot.com/kshama

[20] "The Tenets and Philosophy of Sanatan Dharma," last modified November 17, 2018, https://sanatanmission.com/tag/ekam-sat-vipra-bahudha-vadanti/

[21] Denis Vidal, Gilles Tarabout, and Éric Meyer, "On the Concepts of Violence and Non-Violence in Hinduism and Indian Society," *South Asia Research* 14/ 2 (1994): 196-213, https://doi.org/10.1177/026272809401400204

Jainism and Buddhism on the other hand were explicitly committed to the application of peaceful means and the methods of non-violence. Both these religions categorically termed violence as a sin and non-violence an important aspect of their faith. Mahavir, the founder of Jainism, incorporated non-violence as one of the essential virtues to achieve inner peace and happiness.[22] Buddha, highlighted love, compassion and true faith. Mauryan Emperor Ashoka, the grandson of Chandragupta Maurya who was counselled by Kautilya, converted to Buddhism and spread the Buddhist virtues of peace and non-violence beyond the Indian shores. This constituted an invasion through peace rather than war, as the imposition of a spiritual civilisation through coercion and military conquest—often touted as the rationale for contemporary imperialism—would have been incompatible with India's ancient mindset, temperament, and the principles inherent in its *Dharma*.[23] While Indian leaders often refer to Emperor Ashoka's achievement for the propagation of peace and non-violence, Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru among other contemporary leaders have shaped the political discourse in post-colonial India.

Gandhian Peace

The *Atman*, which was briefly discussed earlier, has three aspects: *Sat* which stands for Truth and Existence, *Chit* stands for Consciousness or Knowledge, and *Ananda* stands for Bliss. Since *Atman* is a reflection of the supreme universal consciousness, its aspects are immaculate and thus unfailing. Mahatma Gandhi, from a very young age, started to experiment with truth. As he was convinced that truth in itself is a force, he began to utilise it as a mean to fight injustice and atrocities within the society. His experiments with truth led him to create a principle called *Satyagraha* by which he led his passive resistance against the British colonial power. *Satyagraha* means to hold firmly to the truth. Since truth is a power, he believed that it would propagate by the means of its own weight. Gandhi also utilised the force of love, which is derived from the bliss aspect of the *Atman*, to resolve conflicts. He held that love needs to be extended even to one's enemy as the aim is not to eliminate the enemy but the hatred within him.[24] With these ideas, Gandhi presented to the world an alleged morally superior and peaceful India.

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[22] Arthur Llewellyn Basham, "Jainism and Buddhism," in *Sources of Indian Tradition, Theodore de Bary ed.*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958): 62-63.

[23] Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1997), 427.

[24] Patil, "International Peace," 1-2, 21-22.

Gandhi drew ideas from Hindu and other religious sources to envision a sustainable peace. He firmly believed that peace, be it internal or external, can only be realised through peaceful means and not through force of violence which has become the preferred means of modern states to resolve conflicts.[25] He also found peaceful struggle to be a pragmatic option, while recognising the awe that brute force inspires in the contemporary world. Gandhi believed if India had the capabilities to fight the British with the sword, his gospel of non-violence would have fallen on deaf ears.[26] However, Gandhi did prescribe violence over cowardice. He wrote, "I would risk violence a thousand times than risk the emasculation of a whole race."[27] On another occasion, he wrote:

> I do believe that where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. [...] I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour.[28]

Gandhi's gospel of non-violence did not go well with all sections of the Indian community as it went against traditional Indian thinking of following a balanced or middle path. Ashish Nandi, a sociologist and clinical psychologist whose research interests centre on the political psychology of violence among others, noted that Gandhi's insistence on pacifism was a rejection of the *Kshatriya* or the warrior identity within the Indian society.[29] While Gandhi was aware of the violent streak within the Indian ethos, he strived to keep Indians non-violent to maintain national self-respect and strengthen India's cause for independence. The communal violence in 1946 and 1947 made

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[25] Anima Bose, "A Gandhian Perspective on Peace," *Journal of Peace Research* 18/2 (1981): 159-164, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/424207.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A0837830c35e4703c0cc2697c593e494a

[26] Mukund R. Jayakar, *The Story of My Life, Vol. 1* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1958), 395.

[27] Mohandas K. Gandhi, ed., "Crusade Against Non-Co-Operation," *Young India* 2/31(1920): 4, https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/journals-by-gandhiji/young-india

[28] Mohandas K. Gandhi, ed., "The Doctrine of the Sword," *Young India* 2/32 (1920): 3, https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/journals-by-gandhiji/young-india.

[29] Ashish Nandy, "Final Encounter-The Politics of the Assassination of Gandhi," in *At the Edge of Psychology*, *Ashish Nandy, ed.,* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), 78.

Gandhi doubt the genuineness of India's non-violent freedom struggle. Rajmohan Gandhi, a historian and the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, remarks that "India absorbed the courage Gandhi taught but did not accept the futility of anger and hate that he also taught."[30]

Nehruvian Idealism and There After

Jawaharlal Nehru followed Gandhi's path of non-violence during the Indian independence movement but as he took political control over independent India, in line with modern nation-states, he resorted to instruments of violence to meet security imperatives.[31] He was nonetheless concerned with international peace and security. His experience of freedom struggle against a colonial power made him averse to imperialism and found a reflection of it in the Cold War. The search for an alternative paradigm led Nehru along with other leaders from nascent Afro-Asian countries to enunciate the non-aligned movement which stood against imperialism and for a strong commitment to global peace and security. The signing of the *Panchsheel* agreement with China in 1954, laid down a new code of conduct in "international relations that would reflect the aspirations of all nations to co-exist and prosper together in peace and harmony."[32] Nehru was also successful in portraying India as a peace making country by providing channels of communication between conflicting parties during the Korean Crisis, facilitating prisoner swaps during the Indo-China Crisis, and taking initiatives to diffuse the Suez Crisis and the Laotian Crisis. India's peace making credentials took a hit due to the Sino-Indian War of 1962, jolting the entire non-aligned movement. As conflicts continued to flare in the non-aligned world, the euphoria regarding an alternative paradigm fizzled out.[33]

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[30] Rajmohan Gandhi, "Peace and Identity: Some Reflections on the South Asian Experience," *Institute of Conflict Analysis*, *George Mason University, Occasional Paper 10* (1995): 8-11, http://activity.scar.gmu.edu/sites/default/files/ICAR%20occasional%20paper%2010.pdf.

[31] Richard Falk, "Mahatma Gandhi and the Revival of Nonviolent Politics in the Late 20th Century," *The Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research* (1980), http://www.oldsite.transnational.org/SAJT/forum/meet/r_falk_gandhi.html.

[32] Panchsheel means five principles: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence. Panchsheel, External Publicity Division, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 1, 9, http://www.mea.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/191_panchsheel.pdf.

[33] Upadhyaya, "Peace and Conflict Reflections," 77.

The brief but devastating war with China pushed India to a self-introspection. Nehru's idealism came under scrutiny as India faced heightened security threats. With the Chinese testing of nuclear weapons in 1964, India drifted further away from the Nehruvian idealism and Gandhi's gospel of non-violence. In the late sixties under the premiership of Indira Gandhi, India began to show more pragmatism regarding matters of national security and actively pursued a nuclear weapons programme which was tested in 1974, termed as the Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE).[34]

Non-Dualism in the Nuclear Era

India's embrace of nuclear weapons is often seen as a contradiction to its pacifist claims.[35] However, the presence of non-dualistic streaks within Indian strategic thinking allows India to reconcile with its nuclear capabilities as well as its commitment towards global peace. This commitment is visible in India's strategy for the deployment of nuclear weapons: minimum credible deterrence, no first use, and resort to retaliation only if there is a nuclear attack on India first.[36] At a 2007 international conference on Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, Sonia Gandhi, the then president of the Indian National Congress, stated that India possesses nuclear weapons due to strategic compulsion, and also since India has failed so far to convince the world to abolish their nuclear arsenal. She also reiterates that India remains "committed to a comprehensive, universal nuclear disarmament."[37]

The presence of non-dualistic streaks in Indian thinking might explain why its first nuclear test in 1974 was code-named "Smiling Buddha," and the second series of tests in 1998 *Shakti* or the Divine Power. It is not a mere coincidence that both tests were conducted on the day

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[34] Andrew B.Kennedy,"India's Nuclear Odyssey: Implicit Umbrellas, Diplomatic Disappointments,andtheBomb,"*InternationalSecurity*6/2(2011):120-153,https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/41289700.pdf?refreqid=excelsior %3Ac7af4d183f65ad1a712263754106fb46.

[35] Jeff Knaebel, "An American War Resistor Appeals to the Conscience of India Say No to 123 Nuclear Deal Oblivion," *LewRockwell.com*, September 6, 2007, https://www.lewrockwell.com/2007/09/jeff-knaebel/an-appeal-to-the-conscience-of-india/

[36] Toby Dalton and George Perkovich, "India's Nuclear Options and Escalation Dominance," *Center on Contemporary Conflict (CCC)* (2016): 4, https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/48706/CP_273_India_Nuclear_Final.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

[37] K. V. Prasad, "Committed to Nuclear Disarmament: Sonia," *The Hindu*, January 30, 2007, https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/Committed-to-nuclear-disarmament-Sonia/article14713201.ece

of Buddha's birthday.[38] Priyankar Upadhyaya, the UNESCO Chair Professor for Peace and Intercultural Understanding at the Banaras Hindu University, does not judge these invocations as hypocrisy but rather "a conviction that despite the explosions, India is not deviating

from the policy of peace and disarmament."[39] The non-dualistic thinking has diluted the binary of war and peace. This has permitted Indian leaders to evoke Mahatma Gandhi, Buddha or Ashoka for propagating the message of peace and non-violence, but on the other hand, it has not handicapped them from defending the nation from external aggression, thus enabling India to afford transit "between pacifism and pragmatic recourse to warfare."[40]

Conclusion

Despite India's rich tradition and culture of dialogue, its ideology of peace and non-violence, the subcontinental history is rife with violence. This is against the very grain of India's record of tolerance. The partial answer to this paradox may lie in the importance given to the inner peace rather than the outer one in Indian culture.[41] It is evident from ancient Indian texts and culture that neither peace nor violence dominated the centre stage. Even though there have been oscillations between violence and peace, it is the aspiration for peace through millenniums which has made a deep impact on the popular imagination. Major General Vinod Saighal asserts that "whatever the present ground reality, the [...] resonance of the Indian civilization for the majority of the people of India as also for those who come to it for spiritual sustenance is one of nonviolence, in the mould of the Buddha, Ashoka and Gandhi."[42] It also needs to be noted that while India has seen many invaders pillaging its wealth, the reverse did not happen.

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[38] David J.Karl, "Lessons for Proliferation Scholarship in South Asia: The Buddha Smiles Again," *Asian Survey* 41/6 (2001): 1002,https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.1525/as.2001.41.6.1002.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ab819602083f1f30b51c0028340ddb2cb.

[39] Upadhyaya, "Peace and Conflict Reflections," 78.

[40] Upadhyaya, "Peace and Conflict Reflections," 78.

[41] Richard Salomon, "Ancient India: Peace Within and War Without," in *War and Peace in the Ancient World*, ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007): 63.

[42] Rajmohan Gandhi, *Revenge & Reconciliation: Understanding South Asian History* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1999), 394.

Gandhi's adherence to non-violence against all odds put India morally on a higher ground vis-à-vis its colonial master and established it as a global leader for the propagation of non-violence. As India gained independence it was thrown into a bipolar world and seeking policy independence it found non-alignment to be a pragmatic alternative for achieving peace and development. When its national security came under increasing threat from China, India adjusted its strategic position accordingly while adhering to its goal of global peace and harmony. In a post-bipolar world, non-traditional threats have especially preoccupied India's strategic thinking.

India's commitment towards peace is visible in the existence of the *Shanti Sena* or the Peace Army, a brainchild of Gandhi, up until 1974.[43] What further strengthens India's position as a peacebuilder is its harmony or unity in diversity approach. As per Indian understanding, peace does not merely come from compromising or abolishing differences. Neither does it come from tolerating differences which is nothing more than suppression of hatred. Peace comes from assimilation by broadening the outlook through an enlightened and transcendent viewpoint.[44] This deep philosophical understanding of peace makes India more compassionate and understanding towards other viewpoints to achieve sustainable peace.

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[43] Thomas Weber, *Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 155-156.

[44] Patil, "International Peace," 22-23.

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NCCI NEWS

VOICES OF BELONGING: NEFGSD'S RAINBOW WEEK 2025

From April 13–20, the National Ecumenical Forum for Gender and Sexual Diversity (NEFGSD) led Rainbow Week, a nationwide celebration affirming gender and sexual minorities through worship,dialogue, and cultural expression.

The week opened with a Transgender Day service at CSI Church Palavakkam, where Rev. Christopher Rathnaswamy preached on radical inclusion. St. John's Lutheran Church, Gudur, warmly welcomed trans women Laxmi and Sandhya into worship, affirming belonging with gifts and blessings.

Public campaigns in Bangalore and Nagpur marked National Transgender Day and Ambedkar Jayanti on April 15. CSI Kurnool honoured local trans advocate Prashanthi with sweets and prayers on April 16, launching a new ministry.

The week concluded with an Open Mic at UELCI Kelly's, Chennai, where 27 participants shared songs, poems, and stories of hope. Handcrafted rainbow badges symbolized unity, echoing the theme: true Christian unity thrives in diversity.

NCCI OBSERVES WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY 2025

On April 2, 2025, the National Council of Churches in India—Indian Disability Ecumenical Accompaniment (NCCI–IDEA) marked World Autism Awareness Day by equipping churches with vital knowledge and resources to foster inclusion for neurodivergent individuals.

A special awareness poster was circulated among constituent churches, featuring the theme "Advancing Neurodiversity and the UN Sustainable Development Goals." The poster included resource links, such as www.autismconnect.com, to support churches in becoming more inclusive and informed spaces for individuals on the autism spectrum. Through this initiative, NCCI continues its commitment to promote understanding and inclusion within the faith community.

WCC NEWS

WCC EXPLORES PROPHETIC DIAKONIA FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

"The presentation recognizes that although there are references to the prophetic here and there, not much thought has been given to full ambit of the prophetic as it refers to diakonia," said Mtata. "Since diakonia only happens in context, the first part of this paper will name and examine the contemporary fragilities and vulnerabilities that provide the context diaconal practice and reflection."

The second part of Mtata's paper reiterated some contours and anatomy of diakonia based on some biblical and theological ideas, implementation models, and institutional structures. "It will be shown here that the relationship between the biblical ideas of diakonia, its practical application, and how it is organized, tends to determine the sharpness or bluntness of prophetic diakonia," he said. "The third and last part of draws on a re-reading of Acts 6:1-7 as a paradigmatic text on prophetic diakonia as transformative response." Mtata shared that his own reflection is shaped by his hybrid identity of being Zimbabwean and African, and yet shaped in his education and professional life by the global ecumenical diaconal discourse and practice. "I am acutely aware that my understanding of diakonia remains influenced by Eurocentric logics—from which I can free myself, only with concerted effort," he acknowledged.

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BIBLE STUDY

A CRY OF CAST OUT ONE: A CALL FOR GOD'S INTERVENTION
(GENESIS 21:8-20)

- *Jeevaraj Anthony*[*]

A 17-year-old Dalit girl, S. Anitha, achieved an impressive score of 1,176 out of 1,200 in her Class XII State Board examinations. However, she faced a heartbreaking obstacle when her NEET scores prevented her from pursuing the MBBS course she desired. Tragically, she took her own life in Ariyalur district on 1st September 2017. The daughter of a labourer, a coolie, from Trichy, Tamil Nadu, aspired to pursue a career in medicine. In a heartfelt interview, she expresses, "It is… my ambition." I aspire to serve the community through my work as a physician. My beloved companions, would you kindly assist me in my pursuit of medical knowledge? In a family with four siblings and their father as the sole provider, Anitha triumphed over the challenges of her circumstances, achieving an impressive 1,176 marks out of 1,200, with perfect scores in both physics and mathematics, leading to an outstanding cut-off score of 196.75 out of 200. She expresses this with joyful pride -- "I am the only student achieving such marks in the district." Yet, no matter how justified the pride may have seemed, it was destined to be fleeting and overshadowed by sorrow.

In the tumultuous clash between Tamil Nadu and the central government regarding the NEET, the Centre emerged victorious. In May 2013, the NEET was introduced for the first time, replacing the All India Pre Medical Test (AIPMT) and facing significant resistance from the state educational boards of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh. In July 2013, the highest court ruled that the NEET was not in accordance with the constitution. In February 2016, the late former chief minister J. Jayalalithaa reached out to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to express

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Tamil Nadu's strong opposition to the proposed reintroduction of the NEET in the state.[1] She characterised this move as a breach of federal principles and an unfair measure for Tamil Nadu students, who, due to their educational background, would struggle to compete with CBSE students in a national eligibility examination.

The concern was overlooked as the highest court sanctioned the NEET for entry into MBBS and BDS programs, thereby displacing the dominance of 'Plus Two' scores given by state educational boards. On May 24, 2017, the Madras High Court issued a restraining order against the CBSE, halting the announcement of results – an order that was later stayed by the Supreme Court. The matter of the NEET emerged as a pivotal element in the state's political landscape, characterised by a struggle for influence in the political void left by Jayalalithaa's demise in December 2016.[2]

Former Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswamy reached out to the Centre seeking an exemption for students in Tamil Nadu, and an ordinance was issued accordingly. However, it ultimately did not receive approval due to the complex involvement of the Attorney General of India, KK Venugopal. On August 22, 2017, the Supreme Court directed those medical admissions in Tamil Nadu commence through the NEET. She was presented with a promising opportunity to obtain a place in the medical field. Given that the cut-off for Scheduled Caste candidates in the MBBS program last year was merely 191.25, it is highly likely that she would have secured a place in a prestigious government medical college.

However, since admissions were determined exclusively by NEET scores, Anitha did not qualify, having achieved only 86 marks out of 720 in the examination.

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[1] R Rajaram, "Girl who filed case against NEET commits suicide," *The Hindu* (December, 2021). https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/dalit-girl-who-filed-case-against-neet-commits-suicide/article61857652.ece (Accessed on 03.02.2025).

[2] K. Sambath Kumar, "Medical aspirant commits suicide after failing to get admission," Times of India (September, 2017), http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/60324877.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst (Accessed on 03.02.2025).

Life can bring pain at times. And with that pain, there are moments when the tears are shed. Let us turn our attention to the passage and discover how the Divine responds to the sorrows of those who are often overlooked.

I. Denial of the Voice of the Oppressed

Hagar was a young servant from Egypt who found herself among a wandering group of people. Abram's wife, Sarai, gave her a new name, Hagar (meaning "a stranger, one that fears") and appointed her as maidservant. She endured mistreatment from both the Master and the Mistress, as they exploited her for their own ends. Her autonomy was not contingent upon the approval of others regarding her purity, which belonged solely to her. She was not consulted; instead, the passage clearly indicates that her mistress took her and provided. A person finds herself in a situation where decisions about her life are made for her, leaving her without the opportunity to choose her own path. It was not Sarai; even Abram did not enquire of her regarding anything, and he mistreated her because he held authority over her. The established structure seems to overlook the perspectives of those who are marginalised. He brings about a new life; she had many aspirations for her future, which now seem to be in disarray. She may have wept and implored Abram for her freedom, her voice hushed in the shadows of the dimly lit space.

Death is a quiet matter. When it comes to the matter of ending one's life, the quietness invites conjecture. What is it, one might ponder, that renders existence so unbearable that to continue living feels like a choice to relinquish it? The heartbreaking loss of Anitha, a young girl who symbolised the deep discontent and sorrow of Tamil Nadu regarding the National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET), renders the stillness of death too elusive to fully comprehend the depth of this tragedy. The tragic passing of a hopeful young woman from a marginalised community, driven to despair by her circumstances, highlights a harsh reality where the struggle for recognition often comes at a devastating cost.

II. Depression leads to Decision

Feeling down can lead us to choose poorly. Once again, Hagar encountered the trials of exile and departure. Early in the morning,

Abraham took bread and a skin of water, placed it on her shoulder, and gave it along with the boy to Hagar before sending her away. Then she left and roamed through the desolate expanse of Beersheba. And the water in the skin was exhausted, so she laid the boy down beneath one of the bushes. She was sent away. She was cast aside. She received a directive to leave the premises. She could no longer dwell in the home filled with its surrounding comforts, securities, and blessings. The individuals dismissed her, casting her aside as if she were to blame for their troubles. She was destined to be overlooked and set aside. Her contributions were no longer required. Her presence had become increasingly difficult to bear. She faced rejection. She found herself separated from all that was known and comforting. Consider the feeling of embarrassment. Reflect on the pain and degradation. She likely experienced a deep sense of being taken advantage of and let down. She could comprehend and anticipate Sarah's actions, but Abraham was an entirely different matter. She gave birth to Abraham's first son. In her heart and mind, Abraham had, on numerous occasions over the years, expressed his love and hope for Ishmael. How could Abraham act in such a way towards her? How could He permit this to occur? Didn't she hold any significance for him? How could he possibly send his own son out into the world alone? Wasn't this a chilling and unfeeling deed? He sends her away. Now she and Ishmael find themselves alone, journeying through the wilderness. She feels lost and without direction. No guardians to discover. There are no siblings available for assistance. This felt akin to a separation. At the request of Sarai, Hagar became the wife of Abram (Genesis 16:3). Separation can be profoundly painful as it divides individuals and relationships. Individuals who undergo the dissolution of a marriage frequently navigate through various phases of sorrow and loss. Her life was chaotic, yet her name brought joy. Hagar signified "El Roi," which translates to the God who observes. The name of her baby, Ishmael, signifies the One who listens. What became of the experiences and promises that were bestowed upon her by the divine? She finds herself in a state of turmoil, perhaps wandering through a desolate place filled with overwhelming thoughts.

In this instance, the Lord permitted Hagar to be sent away—yet He assured Abraham that He would provide for Ishmael. She did everything within her power to rescue her son, yet the water has run dry. As a

servant, she possessed deep knowledge of the desert, a place where survival becomes impossible without water. A woman who has endured violence is one whose spirit has been deeply affected and diminished. She is struck down until her happiness is completely drained away. She is struck down until her spirit is diminished. She is an inspiring figure until her strength falters and her spirit fades. She finds herself in a state of deep despair, prompting her to consider abandoning her sole source of hope, affection, and existence: her son. Hagar reached a point where she felt she could no longer endure her situation; she left her son behind and disappeared from view.

Anitha expressed to the court in her petition on several occasions that the NEET question paper was predominantly based on the CBSE curriculum, which she argued was unjust to students following the state syllabus. She was unable to replicate the brilliance of her Class 12 scores in NEET 2017. She exerted every effort within her reach.

III. Destitute voice calls for divine intervention.

Hagar's struggle emerges with a brightness that contrasts her experience of separation. She faces challenges as the separation has left her without a home and in financial distress. The sole sustenance she was given consisted of bread and water, and it was temporary. Abraham possessed great wealth in livestock, silver, and gold (Genesis 13:2), yet Hagar was unaware of any of it. Hagar found herself without any means. Hagar the Egyptian reached a point of utter despair. The challenge drained the vigour from her soul. Hagar found herself in a place of utter despair. Her son was enduring hardship. She was unable to provide for him. She was unable to shield him. She moved away and settled at a distance, contemplating, "I cannot bear to witness the boy's suffering." And as she sat there, tears began to flow from her eyes. Her concern is not for herself this time; it is for her son. The Lord listened to her plea, and an angel from above spoke to Hagar, asking, "What troubles you, Hagar?" Do not fear; the Lord has listened to the child's cries as he rests there.

The passage reveals that she was weeping, and the Lord listened to her lament. The plea of the downtrodden calls forth divine action. The cries of the Israelites in Egypt led God to send Moses as their deliverer, freeing

them from their suffering. Rise up, take the child in your arms, for I will establish him as a mighty nation. Then the Lord opened her eyes, and she beheld a well of water. And she went and filled the container with water and offered the boy a drink. And the Lord was present with the young man, and he flourished, living in the wilderness and becoming skilled with a bow. In her time of greatest need, just when it was clear that divine intervention would shine through, the answer she sought came to her. The Lord's timing is always perfect. The timing of the Lord was perfect. Observe how the Lord listened to Ishmael's plea.

In her time of suffering, Hagar realises that there is a divine purpose at work! The challenge paves the way for the answer. In moments when despair feels overwhelming, the divine presence provides a renewed opportunity. We are not meant to navigate our challenges in solitude. The Lord provided Hagar with precisely what she required. The Almighty cares deeply for every one of our needs. The Divine will provide all that is necessary for us to fulfil our calling. The Divine listens closely to the cries of those in pain. Every individual holds great value in the eyes of the Divine. The Lord made His voice known when the water bottle was empty. The Lord listened to the cries of the hurting young person. The thickets cannot conceal the fading. The divine listens even when others may not. There exists a source of refreshment in your desolation.

Implication

Hagar found herself in a state of silence, vulnerability, and despair, among other things. Her plea prompted divine intervention in her life to restore justice and fairness. She is familiar to us. She expresses her emotions in every possible way. The congregation listens to her plea as if it were a melody, yet silences her expression. She weeps over her circumstances at home yet is kept from discovering her deliverer within our congregations. The Lord listened to the cries of Hagar and her child in the desolate wilderness. He listened to Hager's plea and brought her sight to life. Suffering speaks to us all in a way we can understand. Every church bench holds a story of struggle. Every refuge carries its own heartache. There is disorder in every home. In every community, sorrow can be found. In every community, there exists a sense of uncertainty.

In her silent departure, Anitha has gifted us a powerful reflection on societal structures, learning, and the essence of our identity as a community. One now awaits to be informed, as following the passing of Rohith Vemula, it was sorrow that consumed Anitha, transforming into a 'Blue Whale Challenge'. However, Anitha's sorrow stems from a deeper societal issue, shaped not by natural circumstances but by systemic disparities, an educational framework designed to exclude, and harmful notions of what constitutes true excellence. A nation that regards this loss as mere silence commits the utmost injustice. It is, as Anitha would affirm, a fractured nation. NEET has transformed from a simple educational concern into a matter of significant political importance, as the student community's Justice for Anita campaign calls for earnest responses not just from the government, but from each of us as well. The community is intertwined with the fabric of society; daily, we hear the echoes of injustice resonating through our streets, roads, villages, and nation. Remaining in a place of comfort and merely understanding the circumstances is no longer required from us. When we fail to advocate for those without a voice or assist those in need, the stones will bear witness in our silence. Divine intervention through our actions is essential in this moment; let us put an end to our pretence

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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
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