

Indian Journal of Theology

Volume 63:2, 2021

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Editorial

How do we live and practice the faith that we profess as Christians in an increasingly fractured and divided world? is a question that keep recurring in our theological articulation. If anything, the question has only become more relevant in the light of our current experiences. The essays carried in this issue seek to answer the question in some measure by the various authors from their own experiences.

D. Isaac Devadoss set the question in a sharper focus in the light of the recent experience of the Christians of Kandhamal in Odisha. Tracing the history leading to their persecution, he suggests that the rise of religious fundamentalism fed by Hindu nationalism legitimized atrocities against minority communities in Kandhamal. Communal politics that suited the ruling party at the Centre and advocated by its ideological mentor and their social and religious affiliates, the attempt was to subjugate religious and cultural minorities to enlarge its vote base and stick to power. Christian faith was perceived to be an obstacle to such an agenda. V. J. John looks at the hospitality scenarios where Jesus was engaged, as presented in the Gospel of Mark, a remarkable example of shared relationship to overcome hatred, marginalization and oppression in the context of discrimination and persecution.

The next two essays: P. S. Loly takes a closer look at what is commonly understood as a Particularistic Mission Command” (Matt. 10:5-7) from a Naga tribal perspective and contends that an ethnocentric or exclusive mission was an “experimentation or training for the future, but not yet the final and dedicated missional journey.” In fact, “mission instruction of Jesus does not denigrate the non-Israelite communities but his mission is

for all communities.” The same factor is reiterated in Jesus’ own mission by Isaac Franklin who looks at the Cana Signs of Jesus in the Gospel of John (2:1-11: 4:46-54) in his essay on “Johannine Community as Inclusive.” He argues that the first sign at the wedding celebration for a Jewish family and the second one of healing a son of a royal official, a Gentile indicates Jesus does not discriminate between persons on the basis of birth, riches, gender or culture. His mission was universal and included all.

Gifta Angeline Kumar focuses on the contribution of Śrīla Prabhupāda, founder of International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness (ISKCON) towards the empowerment of women. She argues that both by his teachings and opportunities afforded to women for leadership roles, Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraged women devotees for equal participation with men in the cultic and community leadership roles of the sect. It is presented as an example for other Indian social, political and religious traditions to strive towards gender equality in their respective spheres of engagement. In the last essay, based on the perspective of Islamic concept of peace, K. Tokivi makes an assessment of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In the light of the basic tenets of Islam as “a religion that ensures peace and security for everyone at all levels, individually and collectively” Tokivi finds ISIS wanting and concludes that “any violent acts that result in threatening the peaceful co-existence of human dignity is against the religion of Islam.”

V. J. John
Editor

Rise of Hindu Nationalism and Religious Communalism: A Brief History of the Kandhamal Experiment

D. Isaac Devadoss*

Introduction

Indian national tradition consists of various regional traditions. A region involves the integration of historical, linguistic, cultural, social and structural kind of variables. Hence, it is significant to know how the ideology of *Hindutva* (Hinduness) manifests itself in different contexts. Most of the territories of Kandhamal in the Indian state of Odisha are occupied by the people who speak the Odia language. They were brought together to form the Odisha province in 1936, which was also known as the Hindu province.¹ The census, which polarised religious identity in the Odisha province, indicated that Odisha as predominantly Hindu. According to the 1991 census, the Hindu population of Odisha was 94.67%. The census helped the RSS (*Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangh*) to regard Odisha as a Hindu province, so the RSS tried to fit *Hindutva* ideology into the existing structure. Odisha comprises mainly of two regions: the coastal plains and the highlands.² The coastal area and the river valleys were the homes of temples and monuments, testifying to the indigenous architectural work. This

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region was the hub of Brahmanical traditions and the rituals of ceremonial purity. The powerful caste Hindus dominated the lives of the subaltern lower castes and untouchables.³ In the highlands, a large tribal population lived in the forest. Tribals/Adivasis constituted one-fourth of the state population. These tribals had their own gods and goddesses and their own rituals. Odisha could preserve its indigenous cultural identity because of the geographical and topographical nature.⁴

Theory of Hindu Nationalism

Hindu identity is a conjoint creation of both contemporary construction and the givens of the past. The Semitic religions are reconstructed by some of the newly emerged cultural symbols and values. Some of the symbols and values are revived. On the one hand, it is this past–present linkage that gives the new identity its vitality and, on the other, its ambiguity and ambivalence.

There are a series of Hindu identities and not just one ideal type. There are three most prominent Hindu identities. Firstly, Hindus are the original inhabitants of Hindustan (India). The life values, ideals and culture of this country is built by them. Hindus are being a people of a designated land.⁵ Secondly, Hindus are all those who pursue religions of Indian origin, including all native primal visions.⁶ This conceptualisation is a political one designed to avoid possible conflicts between religions of Indian origin. The third conceptualisation of Hindu is more restrictive and substantially exclusivist. It includes only the people who come under the *Varna* (caste) system. It excludes the untouchables, tribals and the Dravidian race of South India.⁷ This definition accepts the division among the Hindus as well as different ‘nations’ in India. The caste and linguistic elements invoked in defining Hinduism erode the prominence of religions. Hence, a Hindu is defined in three different ways: territory, religion, and caste or language. Based on these theories, the RSS, Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Sangh Parivar groups tried to establish a Hindu nationalistic spirit among the Adivasis/tribals in Kandhamal.

The Impact of Jagannath of Puri

The gods of the Brahmanical Hinduism were worshipped along with the minor deities outside of the Brahmanical pantheon. The most significant feature of the pantheon, however, was the unique position of Jagannath (Lord of the Universe) of Puri in the religious-cultural and political traditions of Odisha. Though Puri was the chief seat of Brahmanical power in east India, Jagannath had a strong tribal connection. Originally, Jagannath was worshipped by the Munda tribe as Neelamadhaba in the Neelakandara.

The iconography of Jagannath is evidence of the tribal origin. Etymologically, Madala Panji⁸ had its root in the Mundari⁹ word ‘*mudala*,’ meaning ‘to establish with evidence.’¹⁰ The Hinduisation of Odisha incorporated the traditions of both Brahmanical Hinduism and the tribal cults. In the middle of the twelfth century, the Jagannath temple was built at Puri by Anatarman Codaganga, a Saivite, based on political considerations. From the beginning, the cult of Jagannath was conceived as a legitimising factor for the rulers of Odisha.¹¹

The Odisha province was divided into several political and administrative units during the periods of the Mughals, Marathas and British. However, throughout these periods, Jagannath remained the collective regional and ethnic identity of the Odias. Jagannath became a crucial unifying symbol of the Odias.¹² In the late nineteenth century, there was a quest for uniting the Odia-speaking areas into a single territory. During this time, two other variants of Hindu and Indian identities also emerged. Odisha experienced the interplay of these three different identities that developed three forms of nationalism: Odia, Hindu and Indian.¹³

***Hindutva* and the Jagannath Culture in Odisha**

The RSS considered the Jagannath–Odia–Hindu–Indian interconnection as an ideal framework for spreading *Hindutva* in Odisha. This framework utilised the positive implications of the

development of the Jagannath cult by the pre-colonial, colonial and the Oriya Hindu upper-caste middle class. It also utilised the symbolic importance of the Jagannath cult in the religious, social, cultural and political life of the Odias. The Jagannath culture was depicted as the culture of Odisha, which suppressed and dominated all the other small sects and traditions.¹⁴

The RSS cleverly implanted its *Hindutva* ideology in the Jagannath culture. It characterised Jagannath as a tribal (*Vanavasi*) deity and declared Odisha as a *Vanavasi* state. The Odias are proud to claim that they retain their tribal characteristic of primitive innocence, simplicity and honesty. This portrayal of Odisha easily influenced the poor, illiterate, religious and non-assertive people of this economically backward state. Actually, the characteristics of the people of Odisha were not fixed and immutable. It was very much changing due to natural calamities and change of religious and political dominance over the years. But the RSS gently portrayed Odisha as an unspoiled, pure and innocent *Vanavasi* identity.

The RSS further boasted that *bhakti* (devotion) constituted the core of the Jagannath culture and that the Odias were devout Hindus. Devotion to the nation is part of the *Hindutva* ideology, which they imposed on the Odia tradition. The Jagannath tradition of *bhakti* emphasised *puja* (worship), *bhajan* (devotional song), *upavas* (fasting), self-realisation of god and personal salvation. But, they did not have a similar devotion to the nation. The RSS continually tried to channel the devotional and spiritual energy of the Odias towards *Hindutva*.¹⁵

The Jagannath tradition had an inclusive nature which allowed the maximum philosophical and ontological freedom to the devotees. Philosophically, Jagannath symbolised that everything was broad and universal. Jagannath was the god of the downtrodden. He came out from the temple by the *Ratham* (Chariot) during the time of festival and moved around the streets breaking the barriers of caste, creed and religion. On the contrary,

Hindutva propagated a limited vision of the saffron brotherhood and universalism which was not embraced by all the Hindu sects and traditions. It also demanded the complete surrender of the devotees to the Hindu nation.¹⁶

The RSS trained its followers to tread the ordinary path into the dark world of desire, conflict, hatred and otherness. The RSS claimed that their *Hindutva* ideology promotes harmony and universalism as promoted by the Jagannath cult. Though every Hindu sect had a place under the Jagannath cult, there was also an extended list of exclusion. Muslims, Christians, Jews and also the low-caste Hindus, particularly the meat-eating aboriginals, were restricted to enter into the Jagannath temple.¹⁷

Emergence of Communal Politics in Odisha

In February 1938, the Muslim League¹⁸ opened a branch in Cuttack, Odisha. In May of the same year, they organised the Muslim students' conference at Cuttack. The Jamai-ui-ulema organised a meeting in Salepur, Cuttack District in December 1938. These activities of Muslims provoked Hindus to open the branch of Hindu Mahasabha on 24 January 1940 at Puri.¹⁹ The Hindu Mahasabha was against the non-violence policy of the Congress Party, and it encouraged the Hindu youth to join the army. The Mahasabha leaders were keen to strengthen the organisations like the Ram Sena (Army of Ram) for the advancement of military power, and they insisted on establishing a national military unit in every district to protect the legitimate interests of Hindus. On 15 May 1942, the Muslim League opened a branch of the Defence Committee which would safeguard the interest of Muslims and appealed to the Muslim youth to enrol.²⁰

In May 1944, the All-India Hindu Dharma Seva Sangha was formed in Puri. The Sangha also had a militant nature and called the Hindu youth to enrol in the army in large numbers, so that they would compete with Muslims in military achievements.²¹ Some Muslims in Cuttack characterised the Congress as a Hindu political party and responsible for observing the Direct-Action

Day on 16 August 1946. Direct Action Day, also known as the Great Calcutta Killings, was a day of widespread riot and killing between Hindus and Muslims in the city of Calcutta in the Bengal province of British India. The Muslim League called for public meetings and processions in Sambalpur and Balasore in order to support the creation of Pakistan²² for Muslims.²³

There were riots in East Bengal and Kolkata in October 1946, where Muslims were dominant. As a reaction to the riots, a section of Odisha Hindus proposed to form a Hindu militant group and set up a Defence Committee in each village. They printed leaflets in Odia to boycott Muslims in all respects and distributed them to Hindus which created panic among the minority Muslims in Odisha.²⁴ In 1947, the Muslim League raised funds to establish their own press and for the creation of Pakistan. They also formed a committee to obtain Muslim membership in the constituent assembly from Odisha. The Hindu–Muslim tension in Odisha was primarily a consequential effect of the communal situations outside Odisha. Not all Muslims in Odisha were supporters of the communal policy of the Muslim League.²⁵ Similarly, the majority of Hindus rejected the communal politics of the Hindu Mahasabha. There were occasional eruptions of communal tensions, but there was no incident of bloodshed recorded in the history of Odisha due to religious communal violence till 1949.²⁶

The Sangh Parivar's Entry into Odisha

The RSS was active and expanding its activities in the west, northwest and Northern India during the 1940s. After Mahatma Gandhi's assassination on 30 January 1948, the RSS was banned. A large number of RSS activists were arrested all over India which created panic among its sympathisers in Odisha. On 11 July 1949, the Government of India overturned the proscription on the RSS under certain conditions. Soon after the overturning of the proscription, the RSS declared Odisha as a separate *Prant* (Province) and deputed Baburao Paldhikar as the first *Prant Pracharak*²⁷ (Province Propagandist).²⁸

Paldhikar began to meet leading politicians, lawyers and educationists in Cuttack, Odisha. He started morning *shakha* (a Hindu theological school) at the Marwari Club ground of Manik Ghosh Bazar. He met Nilakantha Das, an important political leader who had links with Hindu Mahasabha and was expelled from the Congress in 1941 for his opposition to Gandhi's non-violence policy.²⁹ Nilakantha Das was elected as the President of the Utkal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha in 1943. He helped the RSS to hold *shakhas* in his Navbharat Press ground at Banka Bazar, Cuttack. The RSS used his prominence by inviting him to preside it's over annual Vijaya Dasmi Utsav in October 1950 at Nagpur. Nilakantha's speech on that occasion not only authenticated the RSS ideology but also boosted them to work more vigorously in Odisha.³⁰

Other notable Odia leaders who helped Paldhikar to establish *shakhas* in other cities were Prana Krishna Parija and Dinabandhu Sahu. Paldhikar strategically positioned an army of efficient Maharashtra *pracharaks* in the cities of Balasore, Puri, Berhampur, Bolangir, Rourkela, Sambalpur and Sundargarh. The *pracharaks* of these cities interacted with the local leaders and established *shakhas* and recruited young boys for their innovative methods.³¹

The RSS in Odisha regularly organised public meetings and invited its central leaders to propagate its ideology and encourage the youth to join the organisation. In 1956, the RSS launched 51 days *Jan Samparak* (Public Relation) programme in order to commemorate the 51st birthday of Golwalkar by organising a big function in Baripada town in which many *Prant Pracharaks* (Area Propagandist) and *Prant Sanghchalaks* (Area Associations) participated.³² In 1964, Deendayal Upadhyay started the Odisha unit of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (Indian People's Association) in Jharsuguda. The RSS started an Odia weekly named *Rashtra Deepa* in the same year to propagate its ideology. In 1966, the RSS undertook a signature campaign and reportedly collected more

than 20 million signatures from around the country in favour of the Prevention of the Cow Slaughter Act. In 1967, the Odisha unit of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) was established in Puri.³³

The Sangh Parivar entered into the tribal area of Kandhamal through the VHP and *Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram* (VKA) with the agenda of Hinduising the tribals and countering the activities of the Christian missionaries. From 1930 onwards, Christian missionaries from both Roman Catholics and Reform Churches were actively involved in evangelism. The VHP passed a resolution in 1966 to reconvert those who had left Hinduism. The intention of the VHP was to accustom the people residing in the hills and forests with the Hindu way of life and introduce simple ways of worship and devotion to Hindu deities and bringing them to the Hindu fold.³⁴ Lakshmanananda Saraswati³⁵ was appointed as Hindu missionary to the Kandhamal region in 1967.³⁶

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the BJP formed the government in the centre in 1998 and ruled the country for the next five years. The Hindu fundamentalists became very active. In 1998, about 5000 Sangh Parivar activists attacked Christians in Ramgiri-Udaygiri villages in Gajapati District. The houses of Christians, their church, a police station, and several government vehicles were set fire and destroyed during the raid. The mob entered forcibly into the local jail, and two Christian prisoners were burned to death. On the night of 22 January 1999, a shocking incident took place in Manoharpur village, Keonjhar District, Odisha. Graham Staines (aged 58), an Australian missionary, his sons Philip and Timothy (aged 10 and 6, respectively) were burnt alive inside their vehicle while they were sleeping. Graham Staines had served as the Director of the Leprosy Mission in Baripada, in Mayurbhanj District, Odisha since 1965.³⁷

The Sangh Parivar established about 40 major organisations with numerous branches operating in every level of society in

Odisha. In 1989, Lakshmanananda established his second *ashram* at Jalaspata in Kandhamal. He also co-opted existing social tensions between the Konds and Panas onto a religious nationalist framework. He also promoted the reconversion ceremony as a form of *Shuddhi*. From 1998 onwards, the BJP, the political party of the Sangh Parivar, was in power with the coalition government of Odisha which gave them an opportunity to execute their *Hindutva* ideology throughout Odisha, particularly in Kandhamal. All these developments increased the enmity and conflict between the Hindus and Christians in Kandhamal during this period.

During these two decades, the whole political climate of the country was changed. The Sangh Parivar's political strategy was well worked out by raising the Ram temple issue and anti-minority activities throughout the nation. After the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992, the whole nation was shaken and communalism was on the rise. In 2002, the Godhra incident again trembled the country, but this time the Sangh Parivar gained political mileage by winning the Gujarat State assembly election with a vast majority.³⁸ Since 1998, the BJP was part of the Odisha State government; the Sangh Parivar took advantage of their political power to suppress Christian activities in Odisha, particularly in Kandhamal.

By 2008, the Sangh Parivar consolidated their position and influence with the support of the institutions of the Government of Odisha and Hindu nationalists in the State. The RSS operated 6000 *shakhas* in Odisha with more than 175,000 cadres. The VHP had more than 150,000 primary workers, and the Bajrang Dal had more than 60,000 activists working as leaders in the State. The Sangh Parivar established about 40 major organisations with numerous branches operating in every level of society, ranging and connecting from villages to cities to Hinduise Odisha.³⁹ From 1998 to 2009, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the political party of Sangh Parivar, was in power with the coalition government of Odisha and got the government support to execute their

Hindutva ideology throughout Odisha. The religious and political development of the State of Odisha impacted on Kandhamal, since it was a part of the Odisha State.

The Activities of Hindu Fundamentalists in Kandhamal

Lakshmanananda Saraswati established his first ashram in 1969 at Chakapada, Kandhamal. He organised religious congregations once or twice a year in order to attract tribals to religious practices. He claimed that ‘the tribal Konds are Hindus’; he systematically introduced *satsangs* (sacred gathering) and *yagyas* (a sacrificial rite), Hindu gods and goddesses, Hindu scriptures and mode of worship. He organised mega religious congregations attracting and mobilising the Konds in a big way. He gave them hope under the larger Hindu identity by giving them new names of Hindu gods.⁴⁰ He started a model farm and a state-aided school where he conducted daily *shakhas*. He also established hostels, dispensaries and night schools with the help of the VHP. Beyond introducing religious rituals and philanthropy work, Lakshmanananda defined and promoted the identity of Hindu against the Christians as ‘others’ in Kandhamal. The Sangh Parivar promoted the perception of a binary opposition between Hinduism and Christianity. Hinduisation and projection of Christians as ‘outsiders’ were the two-pronged strategies of the Sangh Parivar.⁴¹

Lakshmanananda propagated the idea that the Christian missionaries were the main threat to the tribal identity and that they opposed nature worship and the local culture. He became a resisting force against the Christians who were converting people. In the meantime, he promoted Hindu rituals among the tribals who were animist. He organised anti-Christian religious ceremonies and rallies in Kandhamal. He started *yagna* at Katingia village in 1980 to launch his hate campaign against Christians. ‘*Yagna*’ (Sacrifice) is a Vedic rite. The enmity between the Hindus and Christians in Kandhamal was created by his inflammatory speeches.⁴²

In 1989, he established a second *ashram* at Jalaspata. His plan for Kandhamal consisted in appealing to the Konds by

addressing the local issues in a discourse. He framed the existing social problems onto a religious nationalist template. Since the Pana Christians were more in number, Lakshmanananda made use of the conflict interests between the Konds and the Panas.⁴³ On 14 January 1994, a Pana youth entered a Shiva temple at Khudutentuli which led to violent clashes between the Konds and the Panas, followed by a temple purification organised by the Konds.⁴⁴ This purification ceremony was as decreed by the Brahminic Hinduism which created a caste-based identity among the tribal Konds. In the competition over land rights and political power, the Konds’ attitude towards the Panas turned into a political project.

The Sangh Parivar in Kandhamal also exploited the competition over reservations in higher studies and employment to propagate communalism on the basis of religious identity. The Scheduled Castes (SCs) benefits were restricted for Hindus only. Once a person converted to Christianity or Islam, he/she was not eligible to get the benefits of the SCs. The Panas who had converted to Christianity were ineligible to get the benefits of SCs. For this reason, some Pana Christians kept their religion as Hindu in order to get the SC benefits.⁴⁵ The bitterness further increased when an Act was passed in 2002 which inserted the term ‘Kui’ into the list of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in Odisha. The Kui-speaking Panas claimed the ST status. Lakshmanananda strongly supported the Konds and protested against the Panas, as a result of which the Konds started to hate the Panas, particularly the Christians. He succeeded in turning the Konds against the Christians in Kandhamal.⁴⁶

Lakshmanananda used both anti-conversion and reconversion as a form of *Shuddhi* (*Shuddhi* is a ceremony). In *Shuddhi*, the tribals were admitted into the Hindu fold as Sudras. Sudras were in the bottom level of the caste hierarchy system. They were given a new surname in the names of the Hindu gods. Christians were forcefully admitted into Hinduism through a *Shuddhi* ceremony.⁴⁷ The communal tensions were kept alive, largely by spreading the fear of conversion to Christianity.

The Sangh Parivar vigorously worked among the tribals in Odisha and organised *yatras* (procession) rallies in different districts and converted the tribal Christians. On 8–10 April 2006, the RSS and VHP organised a big rally and conference at Chakapad. A total of 342 Christians from 74 families converted to Hinduism in that conference in the presence of the State government ministers.⁴⁸

Created Strategic Events

The Hindus and Christians in Kandhamal lived peacefully as good neighbours without any conflicts. There is no record of any communal violence in Kandhamal till the year 1980. Swami Lakshmanananda organised a '*Nama Yajna*'⁴⁹ at Kattingia village in G. Udayagiri Block, Kandhamal in 1980 which constituted the first attack on people of different religions living in harmony until then. Kattingia Church, which was established in 1883, was the first Roman Catholic Church in Odisha. Christians and Hindus (250 and 45 families, respectively) lived together in the village in 1983.⁵⁰ In 1980, Lakshmanananda launched his hate campaign against the Christians in the *Yajna* that he organised by delivering a series of inflammatory speeches. The '*Nama Yajna*' at Kattingia resulted in bringing about suspicions and misunderstandings between the communities.⁵¹

Roman Bastray, a Christian teacher from Kattingia who survived from a murderous attack in 1988 violence, recalled that at the beginning of the year 1983, the idol of Gramaya Devata, the god of Kattingia village was dislocated, which created tension between the Christians and Hindus. The Hindus accused two Christian youths and filed a case against them. A meeting was called, but it failed to settle the issue. The court declared that the two Christian boys were innocent. But the Hindu community members were not happy with the judgement.⁵² In the same year during the time of Dola Purnima⁵³ festival, hundreds of Hindus along with the local police marched towards the Kattingia Church to offer *Puja* (Ritual) in the Convent premises. The Assistant Sub-

Inspector of Police, Bamunigam police station in Brahmanigaon Block, asked the parish priest, Fr. Ajit Toppo, to allow the Hindus to offer *Puja* in the Convent ground claiming that the land belonged to the Hindu communities and it was their traditional worshipping place. Since it was the Passion Week, Fr. Toppo and the congregation members were also planning a special mass in the church. They resisted the offering of *Puja* in the Convent premises and proposed that the issue needed to be sorted out by a peace committee. So, the police did not allow the Hindus to perform *Puja* inside the compound. The angry mass pelted stones at the church and threatened to attack Christians some other time. In the meantime, the matter was taken to the court. The verdict was in favour of the church, and the Hindus were asked not to claim the land.⁵⁴

In May 1984, 94 Christian houses were burnt down in Kattingia. The Christians suspected that the activists from the Hindu community were behind the arson. But the police failed to arrest the culprits. Hostility between the two communities continued in Kattingia.⁵⁵ The Hindus celebrated Dola Purnima annually with great enthusiasm to create pressure on the Christian community. On 7 May, Sadhu Kisan Singh,⁵⁶ an evangelist from Punjab, came to Barakhama village in Balliguda Block along with his sister Shanta Kaur to preach the gospel. He was attacked by Hindu fundamentalists and asked to leave Kandhamal immediately.⁵⁷ It is reported that in August, the churches in Gudrikiya in Brahmanigaon Block and Simonbadi under the Daringbadi Block were destroyed and burned down by the Sangh Parivar. On 25 November, two churches in Simonbadi were attacked. On 10 December, Kishore Nayak from Balliguda was assaulted by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) activists.⁵⁸

Similarly, on 12th December, Kasian Montri from Sikeketa village under Daringbadi Block was mercilessly beaten by the RSS cadres. On 13th December, the churches in Kusukupda and Dabeni

villages of Tikabali Block were burnt down. On 14th December, Niranjana Singh of Alanjori village in Brahmanigaon Block was attacked and tied to a tree and thrashed by the RSS members. On 17th December, the churches in Balliguda Block at Brudakia, Salakia and Daringbadi were attacked by local Hindu fundamentalists, the RSS and the Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP) under the leadership of Swami Lakshmanananda.⁵⁹ On 24th December, at Bostingia village in Tikabali Block, Christian people participating in night prayers were attacked by a mob, and the mob also robbed their musical instruments. On 25th December, there was an attack on Christians who were on a peaceful Christmas day procession at Simonbadi. On the following day, Jitendra Pradhan from the same village was brutally attacked by the RSS cadres. On 31st December, a church was attacked with a bomb in Daringbadi while some Christians were observing night prayers. Pastor Saroj Digal was severely beaten up by the RSS cadres in December. Hindu fundamentalists also burned Phulbani presbytery, and they threatened the parish priest to leave the place immediately.⁶⁰

In 2002, the VHP converted 5000 people to Hinduism. In 2003, the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram organised a rally in Bhubaneswar in which 15,000 members participated, propagating that tribal and Dalit converts to Christianity be denied affirmative action. In 2004, seven women and a male pastor were forcibly tonsured in Kilipal, Jagatsinghpur District, and a social and economic ban was imposed upon them. A Catholic Church was vandalised, statues of Mary and Jesus were destroyed, and the Christian community was targeted in Raikia. In 2005, Gilbert Raj, a Baptist pastor, was murdered, and Dilip Dalai, a Pentecostal pastor, was stabbed to death at his residence in Begunia, Khordha District.⁶¹

During this period, the Sangh Parivar established and strengthened their organisations in every village of Odisha

particularly in Kandhamal by recruiting new cadres under the leadership of Swami Lakshmanananda. The political wing of Sangh Parivar, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) established a mighty presence in Odisha. Lakshmanananda came to be recognised as a spiritual guru and became a politically influential person. He used his power to motivate the local Hindus to act against Christians. Because of his constant preaching against Christians, the local Hindus began to hate Christians and started harassing the Christians in their respective villages. The Christians and the churches were mainly attacked during the time of festivals of either the Hindus or the Christians.⁶²

In Kandhamal, the Sangh Parivar under the leadership of Lakshmanananda was trying to suppress the Christians in the villages where Christians were the majority in number and became prominent and dominant. During this period, the violence was confined to particular villages which did not spread to other villages. Lakshmanananda strategically spread the hatred and tried to instigate violence through various means. For instance, the problem created in Kattinga village was projected as an issue of the Hindus of that area.⁶³ The number of attacks on churches and Christians increased dramatically. Many were injured though there was no report of causality during the period. Various incidents took place at different locations in different times for different reasons, sometimes for reasons other than Christian identity.⁶⁴ Lakshmanananda became a popular *Guru* among the tribals and Hindus in Kandhamal. He used violence as a means to create fear among the Christians and to polarise the Hindus.⁶⁵

On 23 August 2008, Lakshmanananda Saraswati was murdered together with his followers, Baba Amritananda, Mata Bhaktimayee, Kishore Baba and Puranjan Ganthi in his ashram at Jalespeta in Kandhamal District. They were shot by a group of unidentified armed men. Without any evidence, the Sangh Parivar held the Christian community responsible for the murders. Hindutva activists started to agitate and called for a 12-hour bandh

on 24 August. The local media supported the view of the Sangh Parivar and 'confirmed it' with the past records as evidence. The BJP, as part of the coalition government in Odisha, supported the strike. The Odisha government declared closure of the educational institutions across the state. On the afternoon of 24 August, a procession with Lakshmanananda Saraswati's corpse travelled from Jalespata to Chakapad Ashram for cremation. It halted for a night at Phulbani, the headquarters of the district. The procession reached Chakapad next day on the 25th.⁶⁶

The RSS took advantage of his death in 2008 by killing Christians in large numbers and demolished Christian structures including churches. More than 56,000 Christians lost their homes and property, about 30,000 people were displaced and became refugees in their own land. The local government administration and media openly favoured the Sangh Parivar during the violence. It was a successful experiment for the RSS in Kandhamal.⁶⁷

Conclusion

In India, the Hindu Nationalism or the ideology of *Hindutva* is based on the principles of the Brahminical Hinduism. This ideology is being imposed on those who are not practicing the same Hinduism in the name of nationalism. They make allegations against Christians and Muslims for rejecting the local culture and tradition of the locals. But in reality, the Sangh Parivar is practicing the same art of rejection. For example, they imposed Sanskrit on the tribal community in Kandhamal and they introduced new festivals which brought changes in their religious customs and traditions. They also created enmity against their own people in the name of religion. So, the rise of religious nationalism brought unrest and fear among the communities and it became a setback for their progress in life.

The ideology of the RSS was strategically promoted throughout Kandhamal by the selected well trained local *Pracharak*. It had mobilized people to organize religious *yatras* and new festivals in order to keep the religious spirit on a high.

It also had a long-term plan to promote the RSS ideology of *Hindutva* by establishing schools and colleges throughout Kandhamal region. They had periodically executed violence against Christians. Since these strategies were considered successful one for the growth of the BJP, they continued the same strategies in other States. The *Hindutva* ideology became a main political agenda for the BJP. It has succeeded in various States and finally in 2014, BJP became a ruling party of the nation. Since then, they are trying to destroy the secular fabrics of this great nation by passing new laws in the Parliament and creating fear among the religious minorities. Because of the unrest situation in many parts of the country the progress of the nation is at stake and the security of the religious minorities of this nation is under severe stress.

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Indian Journal of Theology 63:2, 2021, pp. 22-36

Jesus and Hospitality: Some Pointers from the Gospel of Mark

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Introduction

Hospitality in the modern world is viewed mostly from the perspective of an industry. No wonder that recent years have seen a manifold increase in hospitality providers such as hotels, guest houses, tour operators, etc. Tourism is an industry that adds revenue to the national exchequers. Hence hospitality plays an important role in the promotion of tourism. Hospitality can be bought and sold depending on the paying capacity of the person(s) concerned. Medical tourism is gaining ground these days as a tourist attraction in India. Those who can afford get the best of treatments at cheaper rates than what may be available at one's home country while the poor citizens can hardly afford basic health care.

Contrasted with the desire for travel, tourism and hospitality, though down at the moment on account of covid induced restrictions, there has been a steady decline in budgetary allocation in recent years towards rural employment (The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and other poverty alleviation programmes, affordable health care, despite *ayushman bharat yojana*, and free and universal education. Those engaged in the private sector in this regard whether activists, voluntary workers, or NGOs face several obstacles including

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recent strictures on receiving foreign contributions, impacting the smooth discharge of their functions. Coupled with it is a growing sense of alienation among citizens, particularly, those from the weaker sections and minority communities. The Covid-19 pandemic has only made the situation worse. It is heartening to note that many have ventured out voluntarily to provide care and support to those whom they have never known before when the government agencies were found awfully wanting.

It is in such a scenario of division, hatred, oppression and depraved feelings, that we are called upon to engage with the source of our faith, the scripture, to find resources for a healthy engagement of hospitable actions and care for the other, particularly those who are strangers and aliens and others who appear different from us in the current Indian setting.

Our focus in this essay, however, shall be confined to looking at the Gospel of Mark in general and the Galilean section of the ministry of Jesus in particular, to identify Jesus' engagement in hospitality. We shall begin with a brief recapture of the practice of hospitality in the Indian situation prior to the recent developments, then we shall look at the Markan setting where Jesus carried out his ministry, followed by a consideration of the ministry of Jesus in such a setting. We shall end with some suggestions that may be of relevance for the practice of hospitality in the current Indian situation.

1. Hospitality in the Indian Setting

India has had a long history of co-existence in peace and harmony with care and support to one another despite myriad differences among her people on account of religious and cultural practices, political affiliations, social and economic status and educational background. The Constitution of India in its Preamble states "We the People of India having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVERIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC . . ." The word Secular State means the State protects

all religions equally and does not itself uphold any religion as the State religion.¹

The many and varied religious and cultural traditions represented in the country did not all originate within India. However diverse traditions were welcomed with open arms and were accommodated with great respect and honour. Rulers of princely states of Kerala welcomed the Christians when they arrived on its shore in the early centuries of C.E. They even came to play a role in the preparation for the temple worship. Refugees of various religious traditions were received with much regard over the years. The Jews who were persecuted found asylum and support within the country. The Parsees are part of the great Indian community hailing from Persia, among whom are some of the prominent Indian business houses. The Islamic tradition became part of the great Indian cultural tradition since the arrival of the Mughals. The Tibetan refugees were welcomed and accommodated in the country and their spiritual leader Dalai Lama is received as a state guest whenever he visits. Refugees from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka were welcomed and treated well. It is this true spirit of Indianness, treating others with hospitality that the framers of the Constitution envisioned when they spoke of India as a secular State. Even though occasional aberrations to such harmonious living was witnessed at different times in the course of history, they were put down with a heavy hand by law-enforcing agencies.

Recent years however have witnessed a lack of interest and desire on the part of the ruling dispensation to welcome and shelter people fleeing from suffering and persecution within the country and outside even from our neighbourhood except when it is politically advantageous. The Rohingyas from Myanmar is the most recent case in point. The government of India not only persistently refused to receive Rohingya refugees, but also made every effort to deport people on mere suspicion of being Rohingya intruder. In pockets of conflicts such as Jammu &

Kashmir, Nagaland, Assam or Chhatisgarh, time and again people are treated with no humane consideration. Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) which enables the security forces to arrest people merely on suspicion has been often misused against innocent citizens disregarding human rights. The Citizenship Amendment Act 2020 and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) were aimed at granting citizenship to certain categories of people while deporting others who fail to produce certificate to prove their citizenship although they were residents of the country for far too long.

Ever since the current National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government led by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014 General Elections, there is a steady increase in wanton acts that disturbed peace and harmony in the country. Deep-rooted values of respect for diversities and differences were the strength of the nation that held together the fabric of the nation for long is being torn apart. People are being divided on the basis of religious affiliations and religious images are so blatantly used as a political tool for garnering votes. Food habits, clothing preferences, difference in religious and ritual practices etc. have become the cause of hatred, mistreatment, violence and death – a distortion from the *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* often boasted about Even a mere dissent with the ruling establishment and the Hindutva group is reason enough to brand ordinary citizen as anti-national.

Among the many instances of such examples are death of Rohit Charavarti Vemula, a young Dalit university student in the city of Hyderabad in controversial circumstances of caste discrimination raising issues of mistreatment he and his community received at the hand of upper castes. Recent events of cow vigilantism leading to lynching and mob violence, “love jihad,” chanting Jai Sri Ram and singing Vande Mataram have become the identity markers of true patriotism. Those who refuse are looked upon with suspicion and hatred leading to violence, inducing fear and helplessness among citizens. Many

have been arrested and imprisoned without fair trial. Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) is often used merely to keep opponents of the ruling regime locked up in jail. The death of Fr. Stan Swamy under police custody, arrest of journalists, student activists are among the glaring examples. It is in such a context that we once again look at the scriptures, particularly the Gospel of Mark and Jesus, the source of our faith, for credible answers in facing the challenges.

2. Breakdown of Hospitality in the Markan Setting

The Gospel according to Mark was written during the rule of the Roman Empire which heavily impacted the Galileans and Judeans, the scene of Jesus' ministry. While there may be several factors that contributed towards the rupture of relationship among the ruling class and the subjects, the following factors are worth considering. They are: Political subjugation, Economic hardship, Disruption of cultural practices and religious harm.

2.1. Political Subjugation

Talking about *Mark and Its Subalterns*, David Joy remarks that the people of Palestine were brutally colonized under the Roman imperial rulers and the Galileans were the most affected.² Wanton killings, burning villages and enslaving the able-bodied were the tactics of the Roman warlords to bring people under subjugation.³ The Romans and the procurators who ruled Palestine unleashed violence on the masses both to conquer and control the crowd and to subjugate them when resisted. They used violence oppression and marginalisation as the tool to achieve their goal. There was huge gap between those with wealth, privilege, power, and the common masses. Therefore, Mark was placed in a setting of conflict, marginalisation, and deprivation of masses. This ensured that the ordinary people lived in a continuous conflict with the ruling class.

2.2. Economic Hardship

People were taxed heavily by Rome for the support of their construction activities, maintenance of a huge army, lavish life style of the ruling class, all of which required money. The Temple which was the place of worship for all people taxed the people to support the temple structure and to meet the financial interests of the Temple and priesthood.⁴ People were forced to even mortgage or sell their farm land to meet the huge taxation requirements on them.⁵ This has caused alienation from the land; the source of identity and means of production which in many cases was the patrimony of the ordinary peasant.⁶

2.3. Disruption of Cultural Practices

The commonly spoken Aramaic language began to be edged out by Greek language, accompanied by Greek education and literature, leading to a Greek way of life. Education in gymnasiums and study of law etc. led to relaxation of life-style of the educated people giving up their own cultural practices.⁷ Greek language and cultural practices appropriated by native aristocratic rulers was looked upon with much suspicion by common masses.⁸

2.4. Religious Harm

Religious practices became oppressive for the common masses. Religious leadership used religion for the purpose of personal welfare and private wealth creation. Common masses, including widows and orphans, were under deep distress. The leaders who were responsible for executing justice became subverts of justice for personal gains. Enormous requirements of offerings and sacrifices for remission of sin were nothing less than the looting of the ordinary believer. The poor were deprived of their land and money in the name of religious welfare. No wonder Jesus had to come heavy on the polluted practices of religion as the faith and devotion of common masses was turned into a profit-making business (Mk. 11:15-17).

The response of the people to such exploitation was protest, resistance, and rebellion. There was breakdown in relation between the ruling class and the common masses with telling effect on their conduct which further deprived them of the possibility of mutual help and support. People were so much in distress that they hardly had enough to look after their own pressing needs, let alone to care for those of the others. Mark is therefore presented as a renewal movement, one of popular protest against the rulers of Israel.⁹

3. Pointers of Hospitality in Markan Portrayal of the Ministry of Jesus

Receiving others and those from outside and changing them from strangers to guests, preserving their honour is the biblical understanding of hospitality.¹⁰ Jesus came proclaiming the arrival of the reign of God in and through his ministry (Mk. 1:14-15). The words and deeds of Jesus as narrated in the Gospels concern this central aspect. His preaching, parables and teachings, as well as his symbolic actions including table fellowship with tax-collectors and sinners, healings and exorcisms, all testify to this. In his communion with out-castes, Jesus lives out the reign of God, demonstrating in action God's unconditional love for undeserving sinners (Mk. 2:17).¹¹

Gospel of Mark, perhaps, has the least of explicit actions of Jesus with reference to the hospitality among the Gospels.¹² However, it is not bereft of it altogether. We shall consider some of the actions of Jesus during the course of his ministry which may have something to offer us in terms of Jesus' role both as a guest and a host, as well as his disposition towards hospitality.

3.1. Jesus as an Uninvited Guest (Mk. 5:17)

Mark 5:1-20 has the story of Jesus in the country of the Gerasene where he heals a Demoniac.¹³ The Matthean version could be a doublet that talks about two demoniac instead of one in Mark and Luke. The pathetic condition of the man who lived in the tomb causing havoc among the people is described in greater detail in

these two Gospels. Jesus proceeds to cure him. He said, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit" (v. 8).¹⁴ As per their begging, Jesus let the demons enter the herd of swine, numbering about two thousand, feeding there. They rushed into the sea and were drowned. Offended by the loss of their property, people in the area begged Jesus to depart from their region. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighbourhood (v. 17). Jesus' act affected their economic interest and they feared a dangerous wonder worker.¹⁵ Waetjen remarks, The humanization of one individual is too costly for the wealthy elites.¹⁶ There were two kind of responses to Jesus' action. While the people who felt the act of Jesus was a disruptive threat to the established Roman order asked him to leave the place,¹⁷ the healed man who received mercy and desired to be with Jesus was told to return home and be a witness to Jesus among his friends. Jesus was kind to the demon possessed man though a stranger, leading him to become a witness to Christ.

3.2. Disciples as Invited Guests (Mk. 6:10)

Jesus sends out the twelve apostles for their mission, bestowing them with the power to preach the gospel, cast out demons, and heal the sick and infirm (Mk. 6:6b-13).¹⁸ They were strictly told not to carry anything on their journey: bread, bag, money etc., essential for their provisions. They were to totally depend on God. Wherever they went, they were to stay in the house that welcomed them.

Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place (Mk. 6:10). Hospitality for stranger was highly valued in the ancient Mediterranean culture. To welcome a person to one's home meant to show hospitality. The guest is now under the protection of one's host who remains a patron as long as one stays with the host. Having once accepted a house-hold's hospitality, they were not to dishonour the provider, searching for more comfortable accommodation.¹⁹ The guest will finally leave one's host either as a friend or an enemy for the experience shared. The public act of shaking the dust off one's feet on the part of a rejected person

was a great insult. It indicates, among other things, total rejection, enmity, an unwillingness to be touched by what others (the town household) touch. Even those of Israel returning to the homeland after travel in foreign land shook the dust from their feet.²⁰ The missionary was to depend on God for provision and be willing to be content with whatever hospitality was offered by one who received him/her.

3.3. Jesus as Guest

“Now Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with fever and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her and she began to serve them” (Mk. 1:30-31).

Jesus was guest in the house of Simon Peter and Andrew. There he found Peter’s mother-in-law was sick with fever. She probably was a widow with no male members to care for her. Peter took her in, as caring for one’s extended family was very common then than now.²¹ Jesus was requested to help. He lifted her up. The verb *εγείρω* used here is the same verb as Jesus employed when he raises Jairus’ daughter from death (Mk. 5:41). She was reanimated, revived, resurrected.²² After she was healed, she was restored to her place in the family and resumed her role there, an important aspect of healing episodes.²³ Her healing is followed by towns’ people bringing their sick ones to be healed by him and Jesus healed them (Mk. 1:29f).

3.3.1. Eating with Tax Collectors and Sinners (Mk. 2:16)

“And as he sat at table in his (Levi’s) house, many tax collectors and sinners were sitting with Jesus and his disciples, and there were many who followed him” (Mk. 2:15).

Levi was a tax collector who was called to be a follower of Jesus (Mk. 2:13-17).²⁴ Levi chose to follow him. As Luke records, Levi prepared for Jesus a great feast. He has invited a large company of tax collectors and other friends as guests for the feast. Jesus’ sharing meal with them raised several questions in the

eyes of the more scrupulous Pharisees and scribes. They asked, how come Jesus and his disciples having table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners? But Jesus’ association and relationships were not determined by the concept of purity and pollution of the Jewish society. The tax collectors had extorted money from the poor for the powerful and rich oppressors. Sinners did not meet the purity code prescribed by the Jewish society. But, Jesus became friends with such people and enjoyed their company. He came to serve and care for such people. He, therefore, had no scruples in sharing fellowship with them around the table. By dining with them Jesus communicates to them the family like relationship wherein intimacy, acceptance, love and life are shared. Jesus thus redefines hospitality as the hospitality was to be shared with the vulnerable, exploited, and marginalized persons and communities. Syiemlieh is led to call Jesus’ table fellowship as an “inclusive communion.”²⁵

3.4. Jesus as Host

There were occasions in which Jesus was invited as guest where perhaps he didn’t have much choice as to who would be his company. But as a host, he may have had more choice as to who would he share company and fellowship with. Neyrey calls “Jesus’ selection of table companions is no mere lapse of regard for the customs of his day but a formal strategy.”²⁶

3.4.1. Greatness is in Being Hospitable to the Least (Mk. 9:37)

“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me” (Mk. 9:37).

The context is the dispute among the disciples as to who was the greatest among them (Mk. 9:35-37).²⁷ Jesus who got a hint of the point of dispute among the disciples asks them, what was the point of contention among them. When they remained silent, he told them, service of others was the mark of true greatness. It was

illustrated to them by taking up a child. Welcoming a child was to show hospitality. Reversing the expected pecking order, Jesus challenged the assumptions of the values of the society in a very fundamental way. Children were the most vulnerable members of the society.²⁸ God's representatives were the weak ones. They had no status like the children, and were lowly and defenceless like them. Jesus, as the New Human Being, had come to identify and be in solidarity with them. In a society hierarchically ordered, children were vulnerable and defenceless, lowly and powerless. The disciples in participating in God's rule were to be oriented to the ones on the lower levels of the social ladder who were as weak and defenceless as children.²⁹ Unlike the wealthy, it was for the peasant and the poor that the rule of God was present.

3.4.2. Feeding the 5000

"You give them something to eat. . . . How many loaves have you? Go and see" (Mk. 6: 37a, 38a).

The Feeding of the Five Thousand (Mk. 6:30-44)³⁰ is the only miracle story of Jesus that appears in all four Gospels. Jesus with the disciples tried to get away from the crowd to a lonely place for some rest from the hectic ministry. But, the crowd would never leave them. They in fact reached the place ahead of Jesus and the disciples. He had compassion on them as he perceived the people to be like sheep without a shepherd. He began to teach them. As it became late in the day the disciples wanted the crowd to be dismissed to go to neighbouring villages to buy food for them. But Jesus had other ideas. He wanted the disciples to feed them. With the limited supply of five loaves and two fish available with a boy, Jesus made it possible to supply food for all those gathered and the remainder collected twelve baskets full. In his action, Jesus taught the disciples how to be good hosts and be hospitable to the crowd who were like sheep without shepherd. The needy and hungry crowd became guests of Jesus who not only taught them but also provided for their physical hunger.

3.4.3. The Lord's Supper

The account of the Passover celebration and the Institution of the Lord's Supper (Mk. 14 12-26) with their parallels talk about Jesus' table fellowship with his disciples. Jesus is the host who blesses the bread and wine for the disciples and he partakes of it with the disciples. Commenting on it, Keener states that Table fellowship was intimate at the Passover feast. That someone dipping in the bowl with a person would betray that person would have horrified ancient readers who saw hospitality and the sharing of table fellowship as an intimate bond (cf. Ps. 41:9 cited in Jn. 13:8).³¹ He further states, "The critical importance of table fellowship as both reality and symbol of social cohesion and shared values cannot be overestimated in this passage (Mk. 14:22-25)."³² For Manila and Rohrbaugh, "Moreover since the Passover more than any other meal was a family meal eating it with his disciples is recognition of the groups a surrogate family in the deepest sense of the term."³³ The Meal signified the renewal of the covenant.³⁴

4. Significance of Markan Jesus' Hospitality in the Current Indian Setting

Our brief and hurried examination of hospitality of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospel of Mark reminds us that the actions of Jesus emanated from a very complex socio-historical situation coupled with economic exploitation and cultural marginalisation. The way in which Jesus responded to such a situation was by working towards a reordering of the power equations. This called for being in solidarity with the victims of social system. He has not only befriended them; he broke the social barriers that held them under subjugation. Jesus expressed his solidarity with them by healing them, sharing fellowship with them, and forgiving their sins. He has always accepted people for what they were. He never attacked their honour. In solidarity and acceptance, he shared meals with them, thereby challenging the social and ethical values of the time and that of his own religious traditions. It's worth to

note here that reading the parable of the Rich man and Lazarus from a Mizo tribal perspective, Lalfakmawia is of the view that the fault of the rich man was that he refused to share his meal with the poor Lazarus while he feasted sumptuously.³⁵ Jesus accepted people as equals and worked for their good even disregarding his own inconveniences. Jesus was able to go against the prevalent socio-religious system which only exploited the poor and weaker sections. He condemned them and challenged them through his actions.

Hospitality in the Indian situation would require for us to cross the boundaries of our own social and religious make up. We should share the sorrows and pains of the other minority communities and identify with them in their struggles for equality and self-respect. Churches, church institutions, and our own homes should serve as places of refuge, comfort and solidarity with the victims of atrocities and attacks from the dominant communities. We should support the disadvantaged and marginalized irrespective of political ideologies and religious affiliations to overcome neglect and discrimination. Church's outreach should focus on the victims of violence and hatred. Church's educational institutions should cater to the marginalized communities, their education and upliftment. Sadly, Church institutions cater to the perpetrators of violence and discrimination in society because it is from them that the church is able to garner power, influence and wealth.

Church's mission should be redefined. Much of the religious dialogue church is engaged in is only philosophical discussions with those who are hardly engaged with the realities at grass root level. Church should enter into dialogue with the victims of current socio-religious bigotry and in solidarity with them work for promotion of justice and peace. Church should cooperate with social, political, and economic organisations at local and national level to promote equality, freedom, and fair play. Our engagement should not be determined merely by religious affiliations but commitment to justice, equality, and goodwill towards all, more

importantly the neglected ones. The fellowship of the Kingdom, as Soares-Prabhu reminds us, is to be preached and practiced a radical and absolutely universal concern for everyone in need³⁶ including those victimized for their faith, religious affiliations, political ideology, and cultural practices.

End Notes

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- 3 See Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis Fortress Press, 2003), 15-27.
- 4 A detailed description is given in Sam P. Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 102-16.
- 5 See for an elaborate discussion Douglas Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*, Studies in Bible and Early Christianity 8 (Lewiston, Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986)..
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- 11 George M. Soares-Prabhu s.j. "The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Vision of a New Society" in *Theology of Liberation: An Indian Biblical Perspective Collected Works*, Francis X D'Sa, ed. vol 4 (Jnana-Deepa Pune 2001), 225-26.
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- 33 Manila and Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, 267.
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Particularistic Mission Command in Matthew 10:5-7: A Tribal Reading

P. S. Loly*

Introduction

Who owns the Bible? Which Bible is it? Without doubt, one could say that the Bible is owned by and belongs to every Christian who affirms it as their Scripture and the word of God. Even though all Christians equally own the Bible many of its contents are not fully understandable and relevant to every context. The fact is that, the Bible was composed from the perspective of a specific sociological context in the antiquity from about 3500-2000 years back. Due to the factors of different sociological setting, time distance and literary features, many of the contents in the Bible cannot be relevant and meaningful to every community in the world today is reasonable. If Bible is to be affirmed and honoured as authoritative, scripture and word of God, reinterpretation and re-reading is inevitable for making it relevant and meaningful to one's own socio-cultural context. This article attempts a reading on the Matthean Jesus' particularistic mission command to his disciples (Matt. 10:5-7) from the perspective of the tribal people in general and the Naga people in particular. In this reading, it employs the tribal method of biblical interpretation, using an Antithetical Model.

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1. A Method for Reading: Antithetical Model

Antithetical Model is parallel to the models of resistance and post-colonial readings. Model of resistance is mostly employed by the oppressed communities like the women or the Dalits. Feminist reading of the Bible employs model of resistance to encounter the patriarchal culture, which professes male priority in the Bible.¹ Dalit hermeneutics is quite similar to this model of resistance. Its method of reading the Bible is to protest against the caste institution like prophetic ministry that challenges the priestly oppressive coerce.² Similarly, the model of resistance is employed in ecological reading. In this, it is used not only for discovering the positives out of the misinterpretation of the text but also resisting and escaping from the negative connotation in the text.³ Postcolonial Reading is a tool to change the legacy of colonists that was inherited by the third world countries. It's a tool to discard the socio-cultural norms of the colonists and to promote one's indigenous cultural values,⁴ to bring back their pre-colonial cultural values,⁵ to retrieve the lost culture and to inculcate nationalistic spirit,⁶ to liberate people from the bondage of unjust policy,⁷ and very importantly to read the Bible from the perspective of the margins.⁸

In relation to postcolonial reading, Angami developed a method of tribal reading i.e. "Decolonizing the Bible."⁹ According to him, the seeds of western traditions have sown effectively into the minds of the tribal people. This is the reason why the tribal people maintain that the tribal ways of thinking and living are inferior to that of the western thought and thus continue to subjugate themselves to the viewpoint of the western interpretation. It is also commonly believed that the colonial interpretation of the Bible is normative. But, due to the awareness of the tribal roots and values of local culture "Decolonizing the Bible comes in."¹⁰ Decolonizing the Bible is a tool to challenge the western hermeneutical hegemony and read the biblical texts from the perspective of the tribal worldviews, cultures and experiences.¹¹

At a first glance, the Antithetical Model can be assumed as constructed through the combination of all those said hermeneutical methods. In fact, Antithetical Model is more than those of the said methods, because its emphasis and attempt cover more areas. Bible was constructed under the parameter of racist hegemony, cultural superiority, exclusive hegemony, divinely elected race, high ethnocentrism, power struggle in races, imperialist mindset, holiest race, strict patriarchal hegemony, gender bias, androcentrism, and the like. In such a book many unhealthy connotations are inevitably employed like heathen nations, blemished race, ungodly community, sinful community, non-provision of God's salvation community, race rejected by God, community cursed by God, outcaste and untouchable community, etc. Its central aim is to change all those social and religiously polarized words in the Bible. Its model promotes and urges to read the Bible from the perspective of inclusivism and egalitarianism. That means, Bible speaks equally to the whole human races.

Colonist conquerors landed into the inhabited areas of the tribal community for the purpose of collecting or extracting the raw taxation and materials. At the same time, colonist conquerors forcefully made the tribal people as their corps' labourers and slaves. In such juncture of active operation of the colonist conquerors in tribal land, the then missionaries came in. The sad thing about the arrival of the colonist missionaries is that they radically reversed the socio-cultural and religious practices of the tribal people. Right after the colonist missionaries landed into the tribal soil without having even a second thought, they remarked on the tribal people as savage, heathens, barbarians, cannibals, animists, evil worshippers, and tribal socio-culture as satanic and non-normative.¹² Due to this attitude the missionaries hastily and coercively imposed upon tribal people the colonist socio-cultural practices as normative and civilized one. At the same time, when the Christian church was planted in the tribal land, the Bible was

strictly taught from the perspective of the Euro-western ways of thinking and living.¹³ This is how Euro-western socio-cultural life embedded into the life of the tribal people. Moreover, colonial way of reading the Bible became a main factor of abolishing tribal socio-cultural practices. Antithetical model, therefore, is making an attempt to challenge the colonial elements that was instituted in the life of the tribal community. In this attempt, the Antithetical Model is used to read the Bible according to the tribal socio-cultural practices.

One of the main forces of marginalizing and denigrating tribal people was by their own neighbours or brothers and sisters of the nation. Experiencing oppression within the nation is termed as 'Indian colonialism' by Rosiamliana Tochwang.¹⁴ Prior to the invasion of the tribal land by the colonists, the Brahmanical culture had been actively operated and it oppressed the tribal people inhumanly. In the post-colonist era, the Brahmanical wave came back and resumed its oppressive coerce. The tribal people have been oppressed on the ground of casteism; they have been denigrated and marginalized on the ground of hailing from underdeveloped areas; they have been prejudiced and verbally abused on the ground of different colours and looks.

Personality of the tribal people and the lack of development in materialistic aspects cannot be separated. Due to the lack of materialistic development in tribal areas, the dominant community or the so-called mainlanders thought that tribal people are naturally and generally dull, indolent, incapable, incompetent, shy and so forth. At the same time, because of this pre-meditated attitude of the dominant community, tribal people do not get equal privileges in any arena like political, educational, academic, job, or in any occasional event. Especially, the tribal people in the North East India face double forms of oppression and marginalization. They have been marginalized because of being tribal and their identity has been misunderstood because of their natural mongoloid appearance. Many of the non-North East Indians questioned the

identity of the North East people. It is often asked whether the tribal people in North East India are coming from China, Japan, Korea or Nepal. Tribal people from North East India have been experiencing racial discrimination in most of the major cities in India for ages.

In such a time of experiencing like this, Antithetical Model is constructed in order to combat against the present structure of oppression and unjust order. Therefore, this model will be effectively engaged in combating all the policy, order and nature of oppression, marginalization, injustice, inequality, and racial discrimination through biblical basis. The main purpose of this combat is for equal inclusion, participation in any opportunity, recognition of due respect, love and care as same citizens of Indian nation.

2. Mission Instruction (Matt. 10:5-7)

All the synoptic gospels similarly, yet differently, redacted the preliminary mission instruction of Jesus to his twelve disciples (Matt. 10:5-15; Mk. 6:7-13; Lk. 9:1-6). Among the three Evangelists, the Matthean preliminary mission instruction has been traditionally treated as ethnocentric and exclusive, particularistic mission instruction. The Matthean mission instruction had specific assigned place/community where the disciples had to minister. Traditional understanding and interpretation of the Matthean mission instructions, particularly verses 5 to 6, were contrary to what Matthew exactly meant. The portrayal of Israel in this specific instruction is not on its ethnocentric importance or superiority, but in the stubbornness, shortcomings, persecuted culture and unbelieving life in Jesus' messiahship, were what the disciples had to encounter now and in future.

Although, the Matthean preliminary mission instruction is commonly confined only to chapter 10:5-15, the whole chapter should be counted as detailed and elucidated mission instruction for now and the future. The word "now" means that the disciples

have to train or experience the hardship and persecution in the mission in the presence of Jesus. Hardship in the mission, in the light of Israel operating under persecution, starts from 10:16. Though this mission instruction is under the mission discourse of the Matthean Gospel, for our purpose we shall confine specifically to verses 5 to 7, which are commonly misunderstood.

2.1. It's Structure and Source

According to Davies and Allison Jr., the structure of the mission instruction consists of three shorter subsections (vv. 5-15; 16-23; 24ff). The first part is focused on the place to minister and possibility of “their reception and rejection by others,” the second is about the information on the hardship in the mission of the disciples, and the third is about initiating Christ despite ill-treatment on the part of others.¹⁵ Hagner classified the first section (vv. 5-15) into the following: (1) direction of place for ministering, (2) message to be proclaimed and deeds to be performed, (3) basic physical needs and free cost for gospel, (4) kinds of accommodation, (5) give and take model for receivers and non-receivers of the gospel, (6) retaliation to the rejection, and (7) an oracle of warning.¹⁶ The present study will focus on the place to minister and proclamation of the Gospel.

Mission instruction in the synoptic gospels creates one among the synoptic problems. It appeared in the differences, parallelism, order, omission and expanded forms in the mission instruction. Even in the present text, Matt.10:5-7 differs from that of the second and third gospels. For example, procedure of sending out particularly the twelve disciples, Matthew and Luke do not mention about sending alone, as partners or all together,¹⁷ whereas, Mark mentions two by two. Matthew mentions specific place to minister, but Mark (6:7-13) and Luke (9:1-6) are indefinite, i.e., wherever place or house they can minister. In the subsequent verses, Matthew and Luke similarly prescribed on no basic equipment on the journey, but Mark allowed to take staff. In viewing of their differences and parallelism, the Matthean source

can be noted as a conflation of Q and Markan materials.¹⁸ At the same time, verses 5 and 6 are unique materials of Matthew.¹⁹ It might have been derived from oral tradition.²⁰ Overall the source for these three verses is the conflation of the materials from Q, Markan and Matthean own redaction.

3. A Tribal Reading the Mission Text

V. 5 Τούτους τοὺς δώδεκα ἀπέστειλεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς παραγγείλας αὐτοῖς λέγων, Εἰς ὁδὸν ἐθνῶν μὴ ἀπέλθῃτε, καὶ εἰς πόλιν Σαμαριτῶν μὴ εἰσέλθῃτε

“These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: go nowhere among gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans.”

It talks about Jesus sending out the twelve disciples with a straightforward instruction where the disciples were prohibited to minister in certain communities. The δώδεκα “twelve,” obviously refers to the twelve disciples of Jesus. The purpose of employing the word “twelve” rather than disciples or apostles is because of Jesus’ instruction which has specified the mission only for the twelve tribes of Israel.²¹ It is very certain that Jesus sent out his disciples to the specific community for training and experiencing the hardship in the mission. Jesus sent them out with proper παραγγείλας “instruction or command.” The first instruction is prohibition in certain communities. That is, εἰς ὁδὸν ἐθνῶν μὴ ἀπέλθῃτε, καὶ εἰς πόλιν Σαμαριτῶν μὴ εἰσέλθῃτε “go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans.” The instruction of prohibition here is to the communities rather than its places.

A serious problem in this prohibition is, why did Jesus not allow his disciples to minister to the Gentiles and the people of Samaria? Did this prohibition justify the Israelite importance or reveal the weaknesses of the Israel? Many of the commentators are of the opinion that Jesus’ earthly ministry was concentrated in Israel, especially in the region of Galilee. According to his confined regional ministry, the disciples were also instructed to minister the same. The universal and inclusive mission was imposed only after

his resurrection.²² Why were Gentiles and Samaritans excluded in the preliminary mission of the twelve disciples?

According to the Semitic understanding, the term ἔθνῶν means “pagan,” “Gentiles” or “nations.”²³ Ἐθνῶν is employed in four categories, e.g., such as example of corrupt ethical behaviour, pagan or outside or non-followers of Jewish faith, faith modelers for Israel and equal heirs in the Jewish salvation.²⁴ Combining with the phrase εἰς ὁδὸν τοῦ ἔθνῶν, then it might mean “to a road leading to a Gentile city.”²⁵ This does not mean that the prohibition is on the road of the community but obviously to the people of the community. Since, Gentile is a collective or federated term; prohibition is imposed to any of the Gentile communities. The second prohibition is of the Σαμαριτῶν. The territory of Samaria was located between Judea and Galilee.²⁶ Samaritans were not only excluded from the mainstream Judaism or self-defined post-biblical Judaism but also treated as heathens like the Canaanites or other designated enemies of Israel.²⁷ The Aramaic word for πόλις is mēdīnāt; it means province rather than city.²⁸ However, city or town for πόλις is more appropriate and practical in this context than province.

At the same time, Gentiles cannot be treated as a place of a particular community, because Gentiles refer to all non-Jews. Jews generally considered the Gentile people as pagan and Samaritans as disloyal to the Law and racially intermixed with non-Israelites.²⁹ This consideration is not the main reason behind exclusion from the mission of the disciples. According to Gundry, the preliminary mission of the disciples limiting to the Jews in Galilee shows that they followed the pattern of the ministerial place of Jesus. Mission to Gentiles starts after the Pharisees engineered the crucifixion of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus.³⁰ David L. Turner claims that this verse is a part of indication on Jesus’ “priority of Israel redemptive history” and fulfilment of Israel’s history and hope.³¹ Views of some of the early church fathers with regard to this verse are like prohibition to follow Gentile and Samaritan way of life rather than prohibition to go to their community and first

Jews then the Gentiles.³² The restriction is not pragmatic but on theological ground, i.e., to fulfil the salvation history of Israel.³³

That Jesus and his disciples limited their ministry, especially in the Israelite community of Galilee, before the resurrection as the reason behind exclusion of non-Israelites, is not quite convincing. Most of the commentators failed to question, why this particular text seems so negative to non-Israelites, and why do the other passages (Matt. 2:1-12; 3:9; 8:10-11; 15:21-28; 21:43; 22:1-10; 24:14) mention the inclusion of non-Israelites? Moreover, they failed to read the whole chapter as the complete instruction for mission. Having considered all these passages, the prohibition of disciples’ ministry to the Gentiles and Samaria is not secondary to Israel. Prohibition here is rather indirectly revealing the negative factors of Israel. However, the perspective of the tribal people on the ministry of Jesus and the assigned mission to his disciples equally ministered to every community, will be discussed more on the following verse.

V. 6 πορεύεσθε δὲ μᾶλλον πρὸς τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴκου Ἰσραὴλ

“but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

This is a direct instruction on where the disciples have to minister to. The directed place is to the πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴκου Ἰσραὴλ “lost sheep of the house of Israel.”³⁴ This phrase “lost sheep of the house of Israel” is probably a redactional. “Sheep” is a figurative term for designating the people of Israel. Whether the figurative term of “sheep” is specifically employed by Israel alone or the whole Semitic communities is unknown. οἴκου Ἰσραὴλ can be understood in both sense of partitive genitive and explicative (epexegetical) genitive.³⁵ If the phrase is in the sense of partitive genitive, it refers to a group of Israelite people, such as sinners, outcasts, or despised class.³⁶ It, however, is the later, it refers to all Israel.³⁷ Most commentators endorsed the later one.³⁸ Their substantiation is based on the texts of the Old Testament, i.e., the Israel as lost sheep (Isa. 53:6; Jer. 50:6; Ezek. 34:30).

An answer is proposed on why the Matthean Jesus assigned the mission particularly to the lost sheep of Israel. According to Hagner, this particularistic emphasis was not because Matthew wanted to preserve the traditional material available to him, but he drew a significant attention to his Jewish-Christian readers. Jesus has pre-eminently come for Israel and Israel is saved through the church.³⁹ Stanton argues that this prohibition and directive was a past history of Jesus and his disciples, but during the time of Matthew his community engaged effectively in Gentile mission, and experienced the Jewish harsh treatment stated in verses 17 and 18 in reality.⁴⁰ According to Carter, the mission assigned specifically to Israel is temporary, after the resurrection the mission was extended to Gentiles.⁴¹ It is also to show the different understanding of mission of Jesus between pre-Easter and post-Easter periods: first, Gentile mission hasn't started before resurrection; second, Jesus' ministry was confined only to Israel proves the fulfilment of the messianic promise in the Old Testament; third, for Matthew, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus was an eschatological event and it stimulates a "decisive turning point in salvation-history, the dawn of a new era," and Gentiles are included in this mission.⁴²

With reference to the question on why only Israel, most commentators were hitting around the bush. In the sense, they were just in the parameter of speculating the different understanding between pre-Easter and post-Easter periods about the ministry and person of Jesus. Moreover, they had preconception that Jesus' earthly ministry was predestined to Israel alone. Their blatant mistakes failed to analyze the other passages in the Gospel which mentioned Gentile inclusion.

From the tribal point of view the present verses (5 and 6) neither despised the non-Israelites (Gentiles or Samaritans) nor portrayed Israelite's superiority or importance. Rather the texts "go nowhere to Gentiles and Samaritans but go only to the people of Israel," indicates the convenience of the disciples' ministry and weakness of Israel. This particular mission is first and foremost

experimentation or training for the future, but not yet the final and dedicated missional journey.

First, convenience of the ministry of the disciples includes safety and accommodation of the disciples and the context of the receivers of the ministry. Hagner rightly states that providing hospitality to the disciples in a Jewish town or city is not a big deal, but traveling outside Israel would not be convenient for them and receive the same treatment.⁴³ Having viewed the practical ground, probably the ministry of Jesus was running just for couple of years at the time of mission instruction. According to the synoptic gospels, the ministry of Jesus was confined in the territory of Galilee. Both Mark and Luke mentioned the rejection of Jesus by the people of his own home town (Mk. 6:1-6; Lk. 4:28-30). At the same time, the question on the identity of Jesus (Mk. 6:3) reflects the confusion and ignorance of the people about Jesus. In viewing all these factors, it may be concluded that Jesus might not have been well known or popular outside of Galilee (Israel). In such a time, how could Jesus assign his disciples for borderless mission? Second, as this was training ground for preliminary mission, the disciples were sent into the trial and hurdle zone, i.e., in the families and community of Israel. The evidence of the disciples facing hardship and persecution in the hands of Israel is mentioned in verse 16 following. In verse 16, it clearly spelled out the nature of the Jewish leaders; wolves referred to Israel and the sheep indicated the disciples. In such an ill-remark, according to tribal perspective, how could Israel be considered as superior to and more important than the Gentiles and the Samaritans?

Tribal people do not employ any animal for symbolizing the whole people of the tribal community. At the same time, sheep is not a domesticated animal of the Naga community in particular. Though the Nagas do not have substituted animal for sheep, it would be meaningful to use directly human or people rather than figurative words. Directly interpreting the lost or

perished persons would produce better expected result with its proper implication.

V. 7 πορευόμενοι δὲ κηρύσσετε λέγοντες ὅτι Ἦγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν

“you go, proclaim the good news, the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

After the instruction on where not to go and where to go, two activities of the mission were assigned to the disciples, i.e., message to proclaim and deeds to perform. This verse deals about the proclamation of the kingdom of heaven. The translation according to the NRSV for the phrase κηρύσσετε λέγοντες is “proclaim the good news.” Another closer to the literal translation can be “proclaim the words or message.” If following the NRSV “good news” then, what is this good news? Does this “good news” refer to the facilities or provisions in the kingdom of heaven? Most commentators maintain that “good news” or “message” refers to ἡγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν “the kingdom of heaven has drawn/come near.”⁴⁴ The proclamation of the disciples on drawing/approaching the kingdom of heaven near is unlike the proclamation of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2) and Jesus (4:17), because here message of repentance is excluded.⁴⁵ The word ἐγγίζω means “to approach,” or “draw near.”⁴⁶ Are approaching the kingdom of heaven and experiencing the four provisions (sick healed, death raised, lepers cleansed, demon cast-out) in the following verse two different things? The perception of the synoptists on kingdom of heaven/God is like two faces of the same coin.⁴⁷ One face of the kingdom of heaven is the continuation of the experience with its provisions installed by Jesus and the other face is its coming at the eschaton.⁴⁸

One concern in this verse for the tribal people is πορευόμενοι δὲ κηρύσσετε “go and proclaim.” Proclaiming any religious message from one to another was not part of the tribal milieu. Proclaiming any information or folktales took place at the public place (kind of waiting shed) or Morung (youth dormitory).⁴⁹

Moreover, as far as the Christian percentage of the Nagas is concerned, (which is very high 89%), “go and proclaim” is not much relevant within the Naga community. The more meaningful interpretation of the text within the Naga community would be to proclaim the message of the kingdom of heaven wherever you are. Nonetheless, the “go” is still applicable for outside the Naga community for their mission.

Concluding Remark

Preliminary mission instruction on go not to either Gentiles or Samaritans but go straight to Israel is not a portrayal of one’s ethnic importance and total restriction for other communities. In a particular occasion or period missional work confining in a particular community does not mean that mission for other communities is restricted forever. The root cause of misunderstanding on this text is all because of preconception, unawareness on the time factor of Jesus, and failure to critically read the whole chapter 10.

Most commentators and readers of the text had preconception that Jesus primarily came for Israel, for which his ministry was confined only in Israel; Jesus like his fellow Jews considered the non-Jews as secondary and inferior to Jews. Many readers and interpreters of this text were not aware of the time factor of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus had a very short time for his ministry, i.e., around three years only. It is necessary to look back to the system of full-time service and communication barriers during these years. When Jesus was not able to cover the entire Israel community and many people were ignorant about him, how could he send his disciples to outside Israel? After critically reading the entire chapter, the main purpose of this very mission can be construed. They were sent into the ethnocentric and exclusive cultural community for training. Having considered all these factors, mission instruction of Jesus does not denigrate the non-Israelite communities but his mission is for all communities.

End Notes

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- 17 With reference to the sending the twelve disciples out for the mission, both Matthew (10:1-5) and Luke (9:1-2) didn't mention whether they were sent out with pairs or alone. Whereas, sending seventy two others out for the mission in Lukan Gospel (Lk. 10:1), it mentioned that they were sent out in pairs.
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- 19 Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*. Trans. by James F. Crouch and ed. by Helmut Koester, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001, 71.
- 20 Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 268-269.
- 21 W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison Jr., *Matthew 8-18*: 165.
- 22 Jeannine K. Brown, *Matthew: Teach the Text Commentary Series*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015, 107-108.
- 23 The term ἔθνη in biblical context employs a sense of "Gentiles and λαός as chosen people. At the same time, ἔθνος is referred to non-Jews. Bertram, "ἔθνος, ἔθνικός," *DTNT*, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 365-366. ἔθνων is used in the sense of "non-Jews," or "Gentile world." Another interchangeable term for ἔθνος is ἔθνικός, means "nation," "foreign," or "Gentile." Karl Ludwig Schmidt, "ἔθνος in the NT," *DTNT*, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 371-372.
- 24 Glenna S. Jackson, *'Have Mercy on Me: The Story of the Canaanite Woman In Matthew 15:21-28* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 30.
- 25 W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison Jr., *Matthew 8-18*: 165.
- 26 According to the first Gospel, Jesus never entered into the territory of Samaria. Traditionally, the difference between the Jews and the Samaritans started at the time of Israel's political division. Later the difference was stimulated between the Israelites who were exiled and who were not during the Northern kingdom downfall in 722 B.C.E. However, recent scholarship claims that the big split between Jews and Samaritans took place during the period from the third century BCE to the first century BCE. This split was elevated to traditional enmity. Several factors involved for their

- enmity, such as, inclusion of regional prejudices, destruction of the Jewish temple and erection of temple on Mount Garizim by Hasmonian ruler (John Hyreanus) and theological differences. W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison Jr., *Matthew 8-18*: 165-166.
- 27 The Jewish common consideration on Canaanite can be found in the next text i.e. Canaanite woman. Ingrid Hjelm, *The Samaritans and Early Judaism: A Literary Analysis*, CIS 7 and JSOTSup 303 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 76.
- 28 Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 270.
- 29 Donald A. Hagner, 270.
- 30 Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, Second Edition, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994, 185.
- 31 David L. Turner, *Matthew: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 269.
- 32 Hilary: restriction no to go to Gentiles does not mean prohibition forever for the salvation of the Gentiles but it means to avoid works and lifestyle of the unenlightened Gentiles. In the same way, forbidden to go to Samaritans means not to go into the assemblies of the heretics. Jerome: this verse is not contrary to the so called great commission (28:19-20). The former instruction was given in pre-Easter and the latter is in post-Easter. Christ's first coming to Jews is part of preventing accusation that he sent the disciples to the Gentiles and Samaritans by ignoring the Jews; Gregory the Great: the proclamation of Christ was first offered to Jews alone and then to the Gentiles. Manlio Simonett, *Matthew 1-13, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament*, Vol. 1A (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 411.
- 33 Jesus' presence witnessed the fulfillment of the salvation history of Israel and thereby, he stood as their King and Redeemer. Jesus' claim of legitimate messiahship is not the only offense to his people but opposition increases due to his engagement in Gentile ministry. Therefore, "Jesus restricted his own ministry primarily to Jews. He himself was sent as their Messiah." D. A. Carson, *Matthew: Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 450.
- 34 NIV translation for this phrase πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴκου Ἰσραὴλ is "lost sheep of Israel." KJV and NRSV translation is more literal, i.e., "lost sheep of the house of Israel."
- 35 W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison Jr., *Matthew 8-18*: 167; Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew A Commentary*: 160.
- 36 Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary...*185; Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew A Commentary: The Christ Book, Matthew 1-12*, Vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 161.
- 37 W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison Jr., *Matthew 8-18*: 167.
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- 40 Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark LTD, 1993), 13-140.
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- 43 Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 269.
- 44 Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 271; W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison Jr., *Matthew 8-18*: 169-170; Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew A Commentary*: 162.
- 45 Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary...*185.
- 46 William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon*, 157.
- 47 See the exegetical comment of the Beatitudes.
- 48 Cf. Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew A Commentary*: 162.
- 49 According to K. Thanzauva, the youth dormitory can be used as community. K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community: Tribal Theology in the Making* (Aizawl: Research and Development of AICS, 2004), 171. Morung is a borrowed from the Assamese language but it is commonly used in Nagaland for the youth dormitory.

Indian Journal of Theology 63:2, 2021, pp. 54-72

Johannine Community as Inclusive: Witness of the Cana Signs

*Isaac Franklin**

Introduction

Signs play a very important role in the Gospel of John. The Johannine Evangelist uses the signs Jesus performed to establish Jesus as the promised Messiah and Saviour. He uses the word σημεῖον instead of the δύναμις commonly used to refer to miracles in the New Testament. Although, there are many signs in the Gospel of John, the Johannine Evangelist uses the word σημεῖον to refer to only six of them. For instance, the wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-11) is mentioned among τῶν σημείων (Jn. 2:11); healing the child (Jn 4:46-54) is noticed δεύτερον σημείον (Jn 4:54); healing the disabled (Jn 5:1-15) is included in the reference to πλείονα σημεῖα (Jn 7:31); feeding the five thousand (Jn 6:1-15) is called σημεῖον (Jn 6:14); giving sight to the blind (Jn 9) is categorized as σημεῖα in (Jn 9:16); and raising of Lazarus (Jn. 11) is identified with σημεῖα (Jn 11:47).

The signs used in the Gospel of John can be classified into two categories: miracles based on the city of Cana and miracles based on festivals. The terms ‘Cana cycle’ and ‘Festival cycle’ are used by Moloney as the first two signs are related to Cana and the other signs are in some way connected with a festival.¹

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The Johannine Evangelist mentions many characters such as individuals and groups of people, women and men, Jews and Gentiles, poor and rich, children and adults, Pharisees and disciples as the beneficiaries, and key role players of various signs. Through these signs, the Evangelist also deals with many concepts such as sin, salvation, faith, glory, resurrection, death, forgiveness, creation, judgment, Eucharist, and so on. The attempt here is to analyze the first two signs featured in the Gospel of John and thereby emphasize three main points. First, the Gospel of John was not for Jews and Gentiles, but was for all. Second, the Johannine community can be viewed as a boundary-less and inclusive community. Thirdly, the first-century salvific mission of the Gospel of John is continuing in the present world.

1. Background of the Johannine Community

To understand the message that Johannine Evangelist wanted to convey through the signs of the Gospel of John, it is essential to understand the Johannine community and its background.

Scholars have commented many things about the Johannine community. In particular, according to Meeks, the Johannine community is depicted as a small sect separated from the larger society, Jewish in nature and affected by division and conflicts of leadership. The expulsion from the Synagogue has formed a historical and firm basis reconstructing the social characteristics of a Jewish-Christian community.² Martyn suggests that the unrest between the two Jewish groups who have diverse views about the Messiahship of Jesus is the Gospel of John’s context. The split between the Jews has resulted in the formation of Johannine community being a minority group or Christian Church and the Synagogue being the larger society. The situation of the Christian Church after the split from the Synagogue was that it had to stand for its values that were opposed to Judaism. From a Church of this background has emerged the Gospel of John.³ One can observe from Culpepper’s hypothesis that the Johannine community was an ancient school in the first-century. The most significant

person who founded the school is the beloved disciple of Jesus but not the Apostle John. His followers were the members of the Johannine community.⁴ Rensberger contends that the Gospel of John helps the Johannine community overcome the difficulty of being rejected from the larger society, understand their predicament by comparing the sufferings of Jesus, and be sent out to the world with their renewed faith. Thus, the Fourth Gospel gives Johannine Christianity a universal mission.⁵ Malina views the Johannine community seemed to be a sectarian group that had parted itself from the Jews by establishing an identity and that the Fourth Gospel was written in an antilanguage for the anti-societal community.⁶ Some of the above views are agreeable while others may raise difficulties.

The following points may be helpful in understanding Johannine signs. The Gospel of John was not for Jews and Gentiles, and it was for all. It is a universal and inclusive Gospel. The Evangelist presents Jesus as the Sent One who, through his Salvific mission, brings redemption to whoever believes in him. It is the vision of the Saviour of the world (Cf. Jn 4:42), that people of different faith traditions would come and join the Johannine Church because of the testimony of his disciples. The followers of John the Baptist were the first members of the Johannine community. Those who joined later were the Greek-speaking Jews in Diaspora and the Christian converts from Samaria. The debate on the Messiahship of Jesus triggers continuous arguments and conflicts among the Jews in the Synagogue. This contentious situation first exists within the Synagogue and then after the expulsion. The Johannine community comprises different groups of people. The Evangelist has a universal outlook, and he treats Gentiles at par with the Jews. Going through different life stages and facing various issues, the Johannine community has attained maturity and the ability to deal with multiple problems. The universal vision of the Johannine community is the Salvific mission of Jesus. Each member of the community believes in

Jesus as the Saviour of the world. From the perspective of the Johannine signs, the Johannine community can be viewed as a boundary-less and inclusive society.

2. Context of the First Two Signs of the Gospel of John

Though there are many signs featured in the Gospel of John, the Johannine Evangelist has numbered only two of them (Cf. John 2:11; 4:54). One of them took place in a poor bridegroom's wedding house at Cana. The other was the miraculous event of Jesus' healing the son of a royal official in Capernaum while Jesus was still in Cana. In these first two signs, the Johannine Evangelist portrays Jesus as the common Saviour to the Johannine community. These two signs are presented to the Johannine community by covering all the major components in the salvific mission of Jesus, such as the role of women, the love Jesus had for the Jews and the Gentiles, the concern He had for the children and the poor, His loving attitude even towards the rich, His qualities of giving importance to nature, His emphasis on the Old Testament context, prophecies about Jesus' resurrection and the importance of discipleship. The first sign of Jesus was performed in a happy wedding home whereas the second sign of Jesus was performed in a sad environment, in the family of a royal official whose son was at the verge of death.

2.1. Economic Conditions of the Beneficiaries

The event of wedding at Cana mentioned in the Gospel of John as Jesus' first sign is likely to have taken place in a poor wedding house. The responsibility of the groom, especially at the wedding home, was considered to be the most important responsibility, and the groom had the obligation to give uninterrupted hospitality to all the guests who came to his wedding. According to the first-century custom, they fixed and announced the wedding dates well in advance for the relatives and the villagers to participate. All the people thus prepared themselves in advance and participated in the wedding function. So, it is clear that many people from the village

of Cana would have been present with the bride and bridegroom's relatives. Consequently, the crowd would have comprised both Jews and Gentiles.

It is apt to imagine that in the first-century, the wedding celebrations in the village were well arranged so that the family and the whole village or the entire surroundings could enjoy it. Getting the bride and groom ready and organizing hospitality for the guests were all part of the preparatory works of the beautiful wedding celebration attended by a large gathering. In particular, the wedding invitation was sent out to the relatives of the bride and the groom as well as everyone around them. The wedding was celebrated with splendour and with great joy. Almost all in the village were invited for the wedding feast as the function left no one out.⁷ Because of the size of the guests, weddings had to be conveniently held in public places as Williams testifies. It joined two individuals and converged two families, including their households and honour. He further states that the bridegroom's house would be kept open for the guests' visit during the wedding celebration.⁸

Describing the exciting moment of events and happiness, Brown recounts, "The usual festivities consisted of a procession in which the bridegroom's friends brought the bride to the groom's house, and then a wedding supper."⁹ In such a setting, there was always a danger of the wine running out making it difficult for all guests to enjoy full hospitality. The maintenance of adequate wine supply involved friends and relatives' contributions, and such contributions were reciprocated to one another. If there were a lack of wine, it would bring dishonour to the bridegroom's family as if they had failed in fulfilling their obligation to others. In ancient times a person was considered honourable within a community based on his social standing and his rights and responsibilities. A family attained fame by all its members' performance, and each member of the family tried to retain that honour. The circumstances of birth primarily decided on a person's

honour. The responsibility to bring honour to the family relied on the male head of the family who was supposed to earn, defend, and increase his family's reputation by his life in society. Shame, instead of honour would occur when the families were pushed into a situation where they could not do their duty properly in society. If they were so ashamed, they would lose the trust and reputation that this community had in them.¹⁰

There might be two main reasons for the shortage in wine. First the groom must have belonged to a poor family background. So, he must have failed to make arrangements to the extent that hospitality could be fulfilled for everyone who came to his wedding. His poor finances might have been one reason why he was not able to provide proper hospitality. This is because, according to Jewish tradition, the duties of the bridegroom to entertain those who come to the wedding house were already culturally regulated. Yet at the Cana wedding house, the groom was unable to fulfill his responsibility, especially in the matter of hospitality. Perhaps the family, especially the bridegroom would face the greatest shame, if the guests sat in the wedding house without the wine. But, Jesus performed his sign at the wedding home and saved the wedding family and especially the bridegroom from that catastrophe. A second reason for the shortage of wine would be, those who were first at the banquet, without a sharing mind, might have selfishly consumed too much wine, unmindful of groom's finances and needs, and caring nothing about those who would be at the banquet behind them. In that way, it can be understood that Jesus performed this first sign to save a poor bridegroom from disgrace. He also gave the best wine to those who were at the later part of the banquet, thereby teaching a lesson to the selfish guests about sharing. But as far as the groom is concerned, with regard to his economic status, he probably was a poor man.

The royal official featured in the second sign of Jesus was a person of great stature in the society. That he was superior in

economy and power is evident from the fact that he had many servants. From John 4:51, it is known that he had many servants. The cultural identity of βασιλικός is certainly unclear. It is generally believed that βασιλικός refers to an official in the service of Herod Antipas who was often given a title of tetrarch of Galilee, not technically a king.¹¹ McHugh opines “βασιλικός could be applied to any of a royal family.”¹² Mead states, “The term βασιλικός is also used in Acts 12:20 where it describes the territory and robes of Herod Agrippa; but he was a real king.”¹³ The Hellenistic kings used the term βασιλικός, which was mostly used in the Greek-language for their official designation as Roman emperors.¹⁴ The literary document, the term βασιλεύς and βασιλεύα were often used concerning the emperor.¹⁵ Sometimes βασιλικός can also refer to a soldier. These kinds of soldiers were allocated to the king in Josephus (*Ant* 10.7.6; 15.8.4; 17.10.3,4,7).¹⁶ It is also assumed the royal official was Manaen, the foster brother of Herod the tetrarch (Acts 13:1).¹⁷ It is noticeable that the royal official was Chuza, the administrator of Herod’s family mentioned in Luke 8:3.¹⁸ However, one thing is undoubtedly clear that the royal official lived in Capernaum holding a high position in the royal service. The Evangelist does not mention who the royal officer was or where he worked, whether he was a Roman soldier or a high official who served under Herod Antipas or any other high official in Capernaum.

2.2. Ethnicity of the Beneficiaries

The bridegroom in Jesus’ first sign was of Jewish background. The internal evidence that he was of Jewish background is found in John 2:6, where it is mentioned that six stone jars had been kept there as required for the Jewish ritual cleaning ceremony. And since Mary, the mother of Jesus, was at the wedding house in Cana before Jesus went there, the bridegroom may have been a very close relative to their family. Through this, it is learnt that the Johannine Evangelist has shown Jesus as performing his first sign in a Jewish family.

There are various opinions among scholars as to whether the royal official featured in the second sign of Jesus was a Jew or a Gentile. It seems that the royal officer must have been a non-Jew. To strengthen this view, Moloney describes that at the Jewish feast, a significant role was played by a Jewish woman in John 2:1-12. Jesus was encountered by a series of Jewish people in John 2:13-36. This concentration on Judaism disappears in John 4:1-42. A series of events took place in which Samaritans from the Gentile world came to Jesus. When Jesus returned to Cana, still the non-Jewish world was present in the person of the royal official. He was from the border town of Capernaum, not from Cana. He further adds that the royal official from Capernaum, a town where a military presence was called for, was considered as a Gentile.¹⁹ Also, according to the Johannine Evangelist, since the emphasis in the first sign of Jesus was on the family of a bridegroom of Jewish background, the emphasis in the second sign must have been on the family of a royal official of non-Jewish background.

3. Initiators and Key Role Players

A woman plays an important role in the first sign of Jesus at the Cana wedding house. Mary the mother of Jesus was a main reason for Jesus to perform his sign at Cana. It is seen that Mary was there in the wedding house taking care of important things even before Jesus went there. The imperfect ἦν (Jn 2:1) proves that Mary was there in Cana even before Jesus arrived. Mary was called ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ three times in this sign (Jn 2:1,2,5). John 2:1 marks καὶ ἦν ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐκεῖ. The term ἐκεῖ can be recognized in both aspect; she was at the wedding function or at Cana. When the wine gave out in the wedding feast, Mary who had been invited as a guest was concerned about it. Mary was well aware of the overall responsibilities and duties of the bridegroom and sought Jesus’ help to protect the bride and groom from the shame. She anticipated a shortage of wine and took steps to set it right, while no one was aware that wine was in short supply at the

happy wedding feast. If Mary, the mother of Jesus, had thought, she might have called on the bridegroom or the chief steward to discuss the lack of wine instead of approaching Jesus. On the contrary, Mary is said to have spoken only to Jesus and to the servants who helped her to serve the banquet, in order to make good the shortage of wine. Thomson opines, “She had seen the great signs and miracles that were accomplished over him at the time of his baptism, and after that he had revealed himself and gathered the ranks of disciples, consequently she hoped for signs and miracles to be worked by him.”²⁰

In response to Mary, Jesus’ answer “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?” may seem like a rebuttal at first, but at the conclusion of this wedding feast Jesus did the work of rescuing the bridegroom from the shortage of wine. The phrase *τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι* (Jn 2:4) has been under scrutiny in the past by many scholars. Now its meaning has been interpreted correctly to some extent. It either stands for avoiding attachment to the people and or the starting of diverse opinions. Commenting on how Jesus answered Mary’s request. Gundry observes, “Ancient Jewish, Greek, and Roman literature provides no example other than this one for a son’s addressing his mother with ‘woman.’” Further, in John 19:26-28, Jesus referred to his mother as ‘woman’ and asked her to consider his beloved disciple as her son. He also gestured to his beloved disciple to consider her as his mother.²¹ By calling Mary as ‘woman’, Jesus seems talking to a woman he was not familiar with. There seems to be something of a gap in the mother-son relationship that existed between Jesus and Mary. Some scholars suggest that Jesus, on many occasions, used the term ‘woman’ to refer to the common female in the Fourth Gospel (Jn 4:21; 8:10; 19:26; 20:15).²² And after Jesus decided to make wine from water, He used the servants who lived in the most ordinary conditions in the community as tools for performing this first sign. In the first-century, slaves worked as servants at homes,

businesses and public places. Glancy explains the condition of slaves as follows:

A slave might handle large sums of money for an owner, yet that owner could, at will, torture the slave. A slave might function as a trusted agent of a slaveholder, but his low status nonetheless left him vulnerable to physical abuse by those he encountered. Some slaves were overseers, exerting physical control over lower-ranking slaves. Lower-ranking slaves endured the violence not only of slaveholders but also of slave overseers. Food for slaves was often doled out as rations, or else slaves waited until slaveholders finished eating before consuming the leftovers. Slaves labored in agriculture. Slaves, male and female, labored in domestic settings. Some slaves enjoyed their owners’ trust. Perhaps all slaves lived in fear.²³

The opportunity was given to the servants instead of the chief steward. When the servants faithfully obeyed Jesus’ command to fill the six jars with water, the water turned into delicious wine. In wedding at Cana, the servants were used as a vessel by Jesus to perform his first sign in the public ministry. Varghese insists, “The words of Jesus’ mother to the servants express a demand for total obedience to Jesus and his orders.”²⁴ Jesus’ use of servants in his first sign illustrates the importance of the simple and the poor in Jesus’ redemptive work. Similarly, through this sign that Jesus performed in the life of a poor bridegroom at the Cana wedding house, it is learnt that through poor servants, Jesus brought redemption to the life of another poor man.

In the second sign, it is a person who acted as a stimulus for Jesus to perform a miracle. A person known as a royal official came in search of Jesus for his son’s healing, believed in Jesus and brought healing to his son through Jesus. This second sign of Jesus was performed for a small child. A child who was at the

verge of dying was healed and brought back to life through Jesus. One may assume that the meeting of the royal official with Jesus was not a random event but a planned one. As it is learnt from John 4:47, the royal official might have heard that Jesus was coming from Judea to Galilee and he planned to meet Jesus on behalf of his dying son. The Evangelist reveals that the royal official met Jesus and beseeched him twice (Jn 4:47, 49) to come and heal his son. Through this, it is known that he was determined to make a request to Jesus for his son's healing and to ask him to come to his place where his son was. The basis for his coming to Jesus and pleading with Jesus must have been the first sign Jesus performed in Cana or the events that Jesus performed during the Passover in Jerusalem (Jn 4:45).

The present infinitive form ἀποθνήσκειν (Jn 4:49) clearly reveals that the boy will soon die.²⁵ Progressively the Evangelist explains the illness of the boy. At first, he mentions, the son of a royal official was sick (Jn 4:46) and then he hints about the present condition of his son by saying that his son was at the point of death in John 4:47 and that he would die in John 4:49. The Evangelist focuses on the rapidly deteriorating health condition of the royal official's son. The present and active form of ἀποθνήσκειν brings out clearly that the boy would soon be dying.²⁶ In this sign too Jesus uses servants as instruments of deliverance. It was the servants of the royal official who came to Cana carrying the news of his son's recovery from Capernaum. Only after meeting them did the royal official confirm the news of his son's recovery. Thus, it is learnt that the first two signs of Jesus emphasized the role of servants.

4. Beneficiaries of the Signs

In Jesus' first sign, the direct beneficiary of that sign was the bridegroom. Jesus fulfilled the responsibility of the bridegroom and gave a perfect banquet of wine. In this context, Jesus might have accomplished the mission of fulfilling the bridegroom's responsibility through his first sign. Although, the obvious

reason for the shortage of wine in the wedding home could not be decided precisely, Jesus appeared as the bridegroom. He made the joyful wedding family to be continually joyful. Similarly, it cannot be condensed into a narrow circle by saying that this sign was performed only for the groom. As a result of this sign, the bride and groom and their parents must have recovered from humiliation. And through this sign, Mary's prayers must have been heard and she must have rejoiced. The chief steward must have had a reputation for acting in charge of that wedding house feast because of the delicious wine served at the later part of the feast. As a result of Jesus' use of servants in this sign, the Johannine Evangelist could have created in the Johannine community the understanding that servants who lived in lowly society were precious in the eyes of the Lord. This sign took place in a wedding house attended by all, both Jews and Greeks, so the Johannine Evangelist has strongly explained to the community the message that all people were benefitted by the first sign of Jesus. Through this first sign, the role of women, the poor and all non-Jews is confirmed in the ministry of Jesus. Above all, Jesus' disciples believed in Jesus when they saw this first sign that Jesus performed. That faith makes them rooted in their faith in Jesus until His death. Thus, through his first sign, Jesus revealed himself to be a Saviour common to all, including the bridegroom, the bride's family, relatives, friends, Jews, people of other races, men, women, children, and disciples.

The beneficiary of the second sign was the son of the royal official. By calling the royal official son as παιδίον, the Evangelist remarks that his son is a little boy. That might be the reason that the royal official as well as his family had great love for his son. That is why after the healing of the royal official's son by the mighty words of Jesus, all his family put their trust in Jesus. If so, it is known that the family had been waiting for his healing. The Evangelist called the son as παῖς in John 4:51. The term παῖς refers "a collective term of all members of a household."²⁷ The

child might be a small boy because the Evangelist mentions the official's offspring as *υἱός* and the official termed his offspring as *παιδίον μου*. Stibbe opines that "it is probable that the word *paidion* is to be taken as a catalyst for Jesus' change of attitude."²⁸ In his first sign, Jesus performed a miracle in the life of an adult who had reached the age of marriage while in this second sign, he gave comfort to a small boy and thus he expressed his love for the children. And just as the Evangelist does not give much reference to the royal official's son, who was the direct beneficiary in this second sign, he does not record the name and details of the bridegroom in the first Cana sign. In this way, it is learnt that the Evangelist places more emphasis on Jesus as Life-Giver and the faith that it brought, rather than those whom Jesus miraculously healed.

5. Jewish and Gentile Contexts in Both the Signs

The first two signs featured in the Gospel of John, which are centered on the city of Cana, are mixed with Jewish and Gentile cultures and religious beliefs. The word Cana has been mentioned in the Fourth Gospel only in John 2:1, 4:46 and 21:2, and this Johannine village is not mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament.²⁹ Regarding the city of Cana, as there are many places named as Ain Kanah, Kanah, Kefr Kenna, and Khirbet Kana, there is a question as to which of these places did Jesus perform his first two signs. However, it is believed that the Cana wedding house where Jesus performed his first sign is situated in a village called Khirbet Kana. It is located about nine miles to the north of Nazareth and about seventeen miles southwest of Capernaum, the hometown of Jesus.³⁰

Cana was a village inhabited by a wide variety of people, both Jews and non-Jews. In this perspective, the first two signs of Jesus showed Jesus as Saviour common to all people and not for a particular community, race or religion. Similarly, even though Jesus performed his first sign in a Jewish family, Jesus performed that sign in connection with the Dionysus cult system, which

was familiar to Gentiles. The Evangelist uses the wine imagery in the Cana wedding house in a perfect way in order to show Jesus as the Saviour to all the Jews and Gentiles at Cana. It is supposed that this notion of water turning into wine existed even before the Johannine tradition. Bultmann suggests that the date generally attributed to Cana's wedding was the sixth of January, which was also the Dionysus Feast's date.³¹ The Evangelist may have recorded this sign in a way that was understandable to the Johannine community, keeping in mind the many similarities that existed between Jesus and Dionysus. Because it is possible to know that Jesus and Dionysus had many connections in terms of birth, growth, death and redemption. Friesen presents the below common similarity:

[B]oth Jesus and Dionysus are the offspring of a divine father and human mother (which was subsequently suspected as a cover-up for illegitimacy); both are from the east and transfer their cult into Greece as part of its universal expansion; both bestow wine to their devotees and have wine as a sacred element in their ritual observances; both had private cults; both were known for close association with women devotees; and both were subjected to violent deaths and subsequently came back to life.³²

It is believed that Dionysus was originally from the region of Cana in Galilee. He may have been a well-known god to the people living in the Cana region, especially to all, both Jews and Greeks. It may be assumed that the Evangelist's primary purpose was to reveal Jesus as Saviour of the world by his signs based on such backgrounds.³³ Thus, the Evangelist, with his vast knowledge about the social context of the Gentiles in the Diaspora, effectively communicates the Fourth Gospel to people of all ethnic groups.

Jesus performed his second sign for the family of a non-Jewish royal official but he did that sign in a manner connected to the life of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa who was familiar to the Jews.

Thus, Jesus manifested himself as a common Saviour to all. While he was still in Cana, Jesus performed his second sign to heal the son of a royal official in Capernaum. Distance was not an obstacle to Jesus' healing power. Similarly, in the Rabbinic literature, it is believed that Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa who was far away prayed and healed a sick person. It is known that the people who lived in Galilee had many close relations with Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa, because he lived in the area of Galilee. His fame had spread throughout Galilee. During the time of pre 70 CE, Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa lived in Arav, a town in Galilee situated about sixteen kilometers to the north of Nazareth. He was once considered a student of Yohanan ben Zakkai, but on the sidelines, he associated with the Rabbinic society.³⁴ Thus, the second sign is believed to have a conceptual connection to the miracle that took place during the time of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa. In particular, it is possible to compare the significance of distance in healing, the nature of the disease, the manner in which the disease was cured, and the time of healing. Comparing royal official son's healing with Hanina ben Dosa's miracle, Vermes observes, "both Hanina and Jesus are said to have sensed the efficacy of their cures - Hanina, by means of the fluency of his prayer, and Jesus, who normally came into bodily contact with the sick, by feeling that power had gone out of him."³⁵ Thus, one may assume that the Evangelist had a clear understanding of the religious beliefs surrounding Cana in the first-century. Furthermore, the Evangelist has acted with great care to convey the sign of Jesus in a meaningful and clear way to the Johannine community.

6. Jesus as Saviour

Analyzing the first two signs of the Gospel of John, it is learnt that Jesus is a Saviour common to all. Jesus performed his first sign by accepting the request of a woman named Mary, the mother of Jesus, and he performed his second sign accepting the request of a person called royal official. The first sign of Jesus was performed at a glorious wedding home whereas the second sign was done for

the son of a royal officer who was suffering from a debilitating illness. Jesus performed his first sign for the benefit of all who were in a crowded wedding house and the second in a circle of small family comprising the royal official, his son and wife. Jesus did his first sign in a Jewish family by adopting the method of Dionysus cult which was familiar to the Gentiles. The second sign was done in the life of a non-Jewish royal official similar to the miracle that took place in the life of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa, that was familiar to Jews. The first sign took place in the family of a poor bridegroom and the second sign took place in the family of a royal official of high economic status. In both the signs, the names of the direct beneficiaries, namely the name of the bridegroom in the first sign and the name of the royal official's son in the second sign are not mentioned. Instead, in both the signs, Jesus was glorified when His time came. Jesus used the servants as a tool of deliverance in both the signs. Thus, the Johannine Evangelist shows Jesus in the first two signs performed at Cana, as a common Saviour and liberator of all people, communities and cultures.

Conclusion

The signs of the Gospel of John are the basis for showing Jesus as the Liberator for the people living in an environment of different religions, cultures, traditions and religious beliefs, such as India so that they can live in unity despite their diverse environments. In today's Indian context, the way in which the Johannine Evangelist presented the signs of Jesus to the Johannine community is still relevant for the emancipation of women, the advancement of children, eradication of conflict among the people due to their various castes, religions, languages and cultures so that there will be peace and happiness among the people. Jesus performed many signs in his ministry. Especially in John 4:45 it has been subtly mentioned that Jesus performed some miracles in Jerusalem. Yet the Johannine Evangelist deliberately enumerates and classifies these two miracles to show Jesus as a common Saviour for the Jews and Gentiles, the rich and poor, the children and adult and

the village and city. In doing so, the Evangelist seeks to free the enslaved people from slavery in the community. The signs in the Gospel of John are such that the same rules can still be used today to show Jesus as Saviour to the Indian society and to break the forces that enslave the nation.

End Notes

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- 13 A. H. Mead, "The βασιλικὸς in John 4:46-53", *JSNT* 7.23 (January 1985), 69.
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- 18 Cf. Köstenberger, *John*, 172; Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 256. Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 138.
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- 26 McHugh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 319.
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Śrīla Prabhupāda's Contribution to Women Empowerment and Its Relevance in Indian Context

*Gifta Angline Kumar**

Introduction

Women empowerment is an issue which we discuss every day, in life, newspaper and on television. But in reality, not much has actually been done to create equality between male and female gender. In the 21st century India is fast emerging as a global power, but for half of its population, the women across the country, struggle to live life with dignity continues. Women are facing problems in every sphere of life whether employment, access to health care, or property rights. The attention required is still not being paid to the issues that concern this section of the population as women empowerment in India still remains a distant dream. In this context this article is an attempt to delve with the teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda on women empowerment and its relevance in contemporary India.

1. The Life of Śrīla Prabhupāda

Śrīla Prabhupāda was born on September 1, 1896. Upon birth his father Gaur Mohan and mother Rajani named him Abhay Charan, which means "One who is fearless having taken shelter at Lord Kṛṣṇa's feet."¹

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Śrīla Prabhupāda's childhood was a rich mixture of devotion, education, and adventure.² Śrīla Prabhupāda had been a devotee of Lord Caitanya³ since childhood, and he was familiar with the life of Lord Caitanya through the well-known scriptures *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*⁴ and *Caitanya-Bhāgavata*.⁵ Śrīla Prabhupāda's early life was comfortable and headed toward the predictable future of a middle-class Bengali *Vaiṣṇava*.⁶

From childhood, Śrīla Prabhupāda worshipped Kṛṣṇa, understanding him to be the Supreme Personality of the Godhead, the source of all existence. And beginning at the age of twenty-two, after his first meeting with his spiritual master, Śrīla Bhaktivedanta Saraswati Thakura, Śrīla Prabhupāda became more and more active in spreading the teachings of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda was convinced that devotional service of lord Kṛṣṇa is a life goal and that to engage others in devotional service is the highest welfare activity.⁷ And these convictions drove him in his travelling and preaching on behalf of his spiritual master and Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda went to America in 1965 at the age of 69 years to fulfil the order of his spiritual master. In 1966, he established 'International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness' in New York.⁸ He guided the society and saw it grow to a world-wide confederation of more than a hundred *āśramas*, schools, temples, institutes, and farm communities.⁹ Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted to spread the teaching of Caitanya Mahāprabhu throughout the world. He established several centres for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, the ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) in different countries.¹⁰

2. The Teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda

Śrīla Prabhupāda was an Indian spiritual teacher. He is counted among the most prominent *Vedic* scholars, translators, and teachers of the modern era. Credited with translating and commenting on over 80 volumes of the *Vedas*' most important sacred *Bhakti* texts, including *Bhāgavata* and *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. He is also regarded as the world's most prominent contemporary authority

on *Bhakti-yoga*.¹¹ Despite some negative statements and teachings on women during his life-time, Śrīla Prabhupāda strived to uplift women to work for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. He did not discriminate against women as a class instead gave women same opportunities as men in his Kṛṣṇa Consciousness movement. According to Śrīla Prabhupāda to be either a woman or a man only involves one's bodily dress. Women in general, being very simple at heart, can very easily take Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, and when they develop a love of Kṛṣṇa they can easily attain liberation from the clutches of *māyā* (illusion), which are very difficult for even so-called intelligent and learned men to surpass. Since both the boys and the girls are trained to become preachers, those girls are not ordinary girls but are as good as their brothers who are preaching Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. Therefore, to engage both boys and girls in fully transcendental activities is a policy intended to spread the Kṛṣṇa Consciousness movement.¹²

2.1. Śrīla Prabhupāda on Empowerment and Disempowerment

Empowerment is the opposite of the forced "topiary" methodology. To empower means to recognize, encourage, and facilitate one's ability and then create a framework in which one can work in a stronger and more confident way. To empower, then, means to recognize the other's qualities, trust them, and offer them fresh challenges.¹³ In Śrīla Prabhupāda's words,

Our leaders shall be careful not to kill the spirit of enthusiastic service, which is individual and spontaneous and voluntary. They should try always to generate some atmosphere of fresh challenge to the devotees, so that they will agree enthusiastically to rise and meet it. That is the art of management: to draw out spontaneous loving spirits of sacrificing some energy for Kṛṣṇa.¹⁴

Disempowerment means to concentrate first and too much of the framework within which others work, without the requisite acknowledgement of their potential. Disempowerment is also known by names like sexism, racism, bureaucracy. Within the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement there is no limit to what can be done if we as society empower our members.¹⁵

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 6.18.14, purport says, whether one is a man or woman does not matter. Lord Kṛṣṇa personally says, *striyo vaisyas tathā sudras te 'pi yānti parām gatim* means, whether one is a woman, *śūdra*, or *vaiśya*, not to speak of being *brāhmaṇa* or *ksatriya*, everyone is fit to return home, back to Godhead, if s/he strictly follows the instructions of the spiritual master and *sastra*. We therefore request all the members of the Kṛṣṇa Consciousness movement – both men and women –not to be attracted by bodily features but only to be attracted by Kṛṣṇa. Then everything will be all right. Otherwise, there will be danger.¹⁶

Śrīla Prabhupāda in *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 6.18.14, purport states that, everyone should be allowed to render service to the Lord to the best of his/her ability, and everyone should appreciate the service of others. Since everyone is a servant, everyone is on the same platform and is allowed to serve the Lord according to his ability.¹⁷ Śrīla Prabhupāda was an expert encourager. He sometimes insisted that Yamuna lead Kīrtan, Himavati speak, Kausalya recite the *Īsopaniṣad*. As he wrote to Satsvarupa Dāsa in a letter, “Encourage them more and more.” One who’s encouraged can move mountains.¹⁸ Hence, insights can be drawn from Śrīla Prabhupāda’s teaching that empowerment means to encourage, to give new challenges, giving same opportunity to men and women and allowing them to serve according to their ability and talent, recognizing them despite of their gender and facilitate their abilities and creating a framework where they can work together with confidence. Therefore, this is very much relevant in Indian context.

2.2. The Vision of Equality by Śrīla Prabhupāda

Śrīla Prabhupāda says,

If we make unfair distinction between man and woman or black or white, then how in our temple are we all enjoying together? Because we are equal on the spiritual platform. We do not say that you are a woman, so you cannot become my disciple. Or you are black, therefore you cannot become my disciple. We welcome everyone. So, the people may not misunderstand, and you can just issue one statement that we say if you want to see everyone equally, treat everyone equally, then you have to come to the spiritual platform, Kṛṣṇa Consciousness.¹⁹

He continues,

Materially there is distinction. But when you come to spiritual platform, then when you discern the spirit soul within everything – that is equal. Like you are differently dressed in a red shirt, and I am differently dressed. This difference must be there. There are so many men and women, and they are differently dressed. You cannot say they are all equal by the dress. But within the dress, the living entities, they are the same. We make this distinction materially, but not spiritually.²⁰

According to Śrīla Prabhupāda to be either a woman or a man only involves one’s bodily dress. The soul in nature is the marginal energy of the Supreme Lord.²¹ Hence, in spiritual sphere there is no difference between men and women.

2.3. Opportunity for Women in ISKCON

Many ISKCON women appreciate the security and respect given to the traditional female roles, yet members of ISKCON note the challenge posed to this traditional scheme by the changing values of Western society. In response, it has been accepted that a woman

may have a career outside the home if she chooses. ISKCON women can serve the movement in a variety of capacities, including functioning as missionaries and ministering to the spiritual needs of ISKCON women and children. According to Kim Knott, birth into a female body is not seen as an indication of low spiritual evolution, and women are seen as being just as capable of salvation as men.²²

2.4. Women as Preacher

Śrīla Prabhupāda says, “I am especially proud of how my householder disciples are preaching Lord Caitanya’s mission. This is a new thing in the history of the *saṅkīrtana* movement. In India, all the *Ācāryas* and their descendants acted only from the man’s side. Their wives were at home because that is the system from old times. But in *Bhagavad-Gītā* we find that women are also equally competent like men in the matter of the Kṛṣṇa Consciousness movement. Please, therefore, carry on these missionary activities and prove it by practical example that there is no bar for anyone in the matter of preaching work for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness.”²³ In Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s movement, everyone is a preacher. Whether man or woman, it doesn’t matter. Everyone should go out.²⁴ Hence, the researcher understands that there is no gender discrimination in preaching Kṛṣṇa Consciousness in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s movement.

2.5. Women Leading *Kīrtans* and *Bhajans*

In the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement, Śrīla Prabhupāda had men and women chant *Japa* together, women-led *kīrtans* in the temple and public engagements, and the women gave classes. Śrīla Prabhupāda had Yamuna lead *Kīrtans* in front of crowds of guests and devotees, which included of course *sannyāsīs* and *Brahmacārīs*.²⁵ Hence, from this, the researcher understands that Śrīla Prabhupāda did not make any discrimination with regards to worship and singing in the movement. He included them despite their gender. Thus, this is very relevant in our society because in

the religious traditions of India only the man gets all the privileges and a woman is subjugated.

2.6. Women in Service

Śrīla Prabhupāda in his letter to Jayagovinda regarding lecturing by women devotees said,

I have informed you that in the service of the Lord there is no distinction of creed, colour, or sex. In the *Bhāgavata-Gītā*, the Lord especially mentions that even a woman who has taken seriously is also destined to reach Him. We require a person who is in the knowledge of Kṛṣṇa, that is the only qualification of a person speaking. It doesn’t matter what he/she is. If a woman can lecture nicely and to the point, we should hear her carefully. That is our philosophy. But if a man can speak better than a woman, the man should be given first preference. But even though a woman is less intelligent, a sincere soul should be given proper chance to speak, because we want so many preachers, both men, and women.²⁶

Hence, it shows that Śrīla Prabhupāda allowed women to preach if she is God Conscious and if she can speak well.

2.7. Women as Lecturer

According to Śrīla Prabhupāda lecture is also *kīrtana*, so just like a morning *kīrtana* is there, similarly, morning lectures can also be delivered. So as far as girls or boys lecturing in the morning, that doesn’t make any difference. Either girl or boy devotees may deliver a lecture if they choose to do. Kṛṣṇa Consciousness is on the spiritual platform. As such, anyone who is a devotee of the Lord, following in this line of disciplic succession, can deliver a lecture on the teachings of *Bhagavad-Gītā*, *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*.²⁷ Regarding lecturing by women devotees, he says “We require a person who is well-versed in the knowledge of Kṛṣṇa, which is the only qualification for speaking.”²⁸ From the above statements

by Śrīla Prabhupāda, it may be deduced that a woman also can be a lecturer if she has the qualification. Hence, there should not be gender discrimination concerning giving a lecture if a woman is qualified, she should be allowed to give lecture.

2.8. Women as *Guru*

According to Śrīla Prabhupāda, one who has attained perfection can become a *guru*. He gives the example of Jahnadevi who was Nityananda's wife. She became a *guru*. But man or woman, unless one has attained the perfection cannot become a *guru*. The qualification of *guru* is that s/he must be fully Conscious of the science of Kṛṣṇa. Then one can become a *guru*. In our material world, is it any prohibition that women cannot become a professor? If she is qualified, she can become a professor. What is wrong there? She must be qualified. That is the position. So similarly, if the woman understands Kṛṣṇa Consciousness perfectly, she can become a *guru*.²⁹

2.9. Teaching on the Position of Women

Śrīla Prabhupāda gave his female followers responsible service as heads of the *pujari* department and *pujaris*, preachers and book distributors, art department heads and artists, head-mistresses, and teachers, proof-readers and other Bhaktivedanta Book Trust staff, kitchen heads and cooks, and in several other areas. He based his appointments on their qualifications, not their sex. In his book *A Living Theology of Krishna Bhakti*, Tamal Krishna Goswāmī writes, "In addition to the many ways women contributed, Śrīla Prabhupāda credited his movement's success to their magnetic presence amidst the men, nearly all of whom, he reasoned, would not have otherwise stayed."³⁰ Hence, these kinds of attitudes of Śrīla Prabhupāda towards women are very much important in contemporary Indian society where women are neglected in every sphere of life not that they are not qualified but because of their gender, they don't get opportunity to work.

2.10. Responsible Women

Śrīla Prabhupāda made the women responsible for more traditional feminine activities but did not bar them from stepping out of these into other roles if those suited them better. After the setting up of the Governing Body Commission (GBC), women were included in its membership. Women also gave scripture classes. Like the men, they served him personally, even in India where Hindu women were generally denied equal participation in religious movement and a close involvement with the spiritual teacher.³¹

2.11. Empowering Letters to Women Devotees

There are many a time Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote letters to his women devotees to encourage them to carry on their work for the wellbeing of society or the mission work of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. Hence, Śrīla Prabhupāda's letters show that he did not discriminate women because of their gender rather he always encouraged them to do better in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. Some of his letters below provide a glimpse into what all possible ways Śrīla Prabhupāda was empowering women.

In his letter to Malati, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, please continue your devotional service, cooking, and you can also keep giving *Bhāgavatam* class if you like. Women in our movement also can preach very nicely. Actually, male and female bodies, these are just outward designations. Lord Caitanya said that whether one is *brāhmaṇa* or whatever he may be if he knows the science of Kṛṣṇa then he is to be accepted as a *guru*. So, one who gives class, he must read and study regularly and study the purport and realize it. Don't add anything or concoct anything, then he can preach very nicely. The qualification for leading the class is how much one understands about Kṛṣṇa and surrendering to the process. Not whether one is male or female.³² This letter indicates that Śrīla Prabhupāda never barred women to involve in devotional activities, rather he encouraged women to give

lecture on *Bhāgavatam*, he is also encouraging women to preach. Hence, this is an important resource in contemporary India where women are banned to involve in devotional service and to enter into religious places. It is important in the Indian context because, in Indian religious traditions, women always hold a secondary position, they are not allowed to be a preacher, or be a *guru*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda in his letter to Jayatirtha writes, the new *bhaktas*, they can be engaged in the *mṛdaṅga* making and also help Bharadraja with the doll making. The nursery school program is very good. That is good that the mothers are being freed to increase their devotional service. It is not that women should only produce children, but they are meant for advancing in devotion.³³

Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraged Govinda Dasi by the following letter, “you have a good writing capacity and good artistic ability. Now devote your life to chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and if possible, write articles on Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, as many as possible with your paintings and send it for publication to BTG. Engage your life fully for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness.”³⁴ Thus, this letter of Śrīla Prabhupāda to Govinda Dāsī shows that Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraged women to engage themselves in writings and paintings. He also advised them to engage themselves in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness.

From these above letters, it becomes quite evident that Śrīla Prabhupāda's Hare Kṛṣṇa movement is not only for men but it also includes women. Śrīla Prabhupāda's letters show that he never brought gender distinction in his movement rather he encouraged women to be part of his movement, to be active in devotional service. He had shown empathy on women, he never saw women as an object of producing children rather his understanding of women is as someone who could advance in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, to devote time in writings, paintings, preaching and lecturing on the scripture.

3. Relevance in Indian Context

Today women are lacking equal opportunities in political, socio-cultural, economic, religious, spiritual, and in the theological

sphere which would perhaps take long years to achieve. One can read daily in newspapers about the rape, gang rapes, and atrocity on women. Women, in general, continue to live under the bondage of age-old traditions, socio-religious practices, and prejudices. There are many ways in which women suffer and are made to suffer. In behavioural terms, violence against women ranges from simple suppression to abuse, aggression, exploitation, and service oppression.³⁵ Female infanticide, the abortion of a female foetus, the neglect and under-nourishment of the girl child, denial of education to girls, rape, pre-puberty marriage, wife-beating, the harassment of a bride leading to her suicide or murder. Indian women irrespective of class, caste, tribe, or creed living under the structure of the patriarchal society are facing oppression in various ways. Many social organizations and voluntary agencies are doing magnificent jobs in uplifting women's position in various ways.³⁶ Yet, today the reality of the status of Indian Women is still agonizing and the majorities are still under the clutches of poverty, oppression, and ignorance just because of their gender. In general, women all over the world irrespective of caste, race, class, and creed are victims of patriarchal or gender violence in some way or the other. Unique Indian culture has its negative realities, which is bound within the clutches of patriarchal norms and values. Thus, oppression in the socio-cultural, economic, political, religious, spiritual, and theological realms is an agonizing, inhuman, and shattering reality where women live and breathe their lives, where they can neither leave nor live out. There is an urgent need to realize that it is possible to transform the factors that cause oppression.³⁷ Women all over the globe should feel the dire need to work together for the liberation of women, especially the “Indian women” by keeping aside all the differences like caste, class, culture, colour, and creed.

3.1. The Empowerment of Women in Political Sphere

In the political sphere, the General Body Commission appointed a woman as a member, including female representation on

ISKCON's highest decision-making body for the first time. The GBC subsequently stated that it has no theological opposition to a woman serving as a *guru*, though it has yet to appoint any female *gurus*.³⁸ Its leaders have also pointed to cases where Śrīla Prabhupāda himself ignored strictures on women by encouraging them to preach and engage in public rituals performances of devotion.³⁹ Today in ISKCON women demand participation right. The list of participation rights includes social rights such as equivalent access to "visible symbols of advancement" that approximate things like equal access to titles and positions of authority like temple president and GBC. The list of participation rights also includes "significant numbers of women leaders" who engage in decision making "from the highest levels down to the local temple communities."⁴⁰ These are obvious demands for equal political rights. Hence, even in ISKCON the political participation and decision-making power of women is still lacking. Nevertheless, the openness and acceptability are encouraging. If these openness and acceptance are streamlined in our political context, women representation can change for better.

3.2. The Empowerment of Women in Socio-cultural Sphere

In the socio-cultural sphere, it is found that Śrīla Prabhupāda's instruction that women must be protected at every stage of life by their father, husband, or son.⁴¹ For example, proponents of this position would not allow women anywhere in ISKCON to perform temple deity worship, speak or lead *kīrtan* in public, or have any management or leadership role. In this context, Śrīla Prabhupāda's teaching on the protection of women which can be an important subject matter in contemporary India because in India violence against women is a common evil. A re-understanding of protection as protection from sexual violence, rape, gang rape, exploitation, sexual harassment, suicide, murder and oppression is the need of the hour.

3.3. The Empowerment of Women in the Economic Sphere

In the economic sphere, it is found that under Śrīla Prabhupāda's direction, devotee men and women served as artists, writers, typists, speakers, singers, managers, deity caretakers, book distributors.⁴² Though Śrīla Prabhupāda did not mention directly that all these skills will help women economically it may be noted that not all women are educated in India today. While educated women may try to achieve their dreams of a job, not all the educated women can get a job or empower themselves economically. In this context if women are having skills like art, writing, typing, speaking, singing, managing office, they can be empowered in that particular field or area which may help them to get their desirous job and which in turn may enable them to be economically independent. Hence, appreciating the skills and providing space for them may bridge the gender gap in the economic sphere.

3.4. Gender Equality in Religious Sphere

In the religious sphere, it is found that although religions state that men and women are equal, gender equality proponents stress that a lot of work needs to be done in this direction by religions. They point out that although women are considered generally more religious than men, many religions and denominations continue to treat each gender differently, including some leadership roles still restricted to males, in many religions, only men are ordained, protocols are more strictly applied to women, religious traditions, law, and cultural factors treat women differently than men and religion provide the structure on how women should live their day-to-day lives. Women are not part of the decision-making machinery, and even sometimes in some religious places, they are not allowed to enter and worship. But Śrīla Prabhupāda was willing to change tradition to shelter women. He gave *Dīkṣā* initiation to women. Further, Śrīla Prabhupāda gave *brāhmaṇa* initiation to women.⁴³ Both practices constitute a change from

tradition. Śrīla Prabhupāda allowed women to lead *kīrtan* and *bhajan*. In Śrīla Prabhupāda's words, In India, all the *ācāryas* and their descendants later acted only from the man's side. Their wives were at home because that is the system from old times that women are not required to go out.⁴⁴ It may be argued that in ancient India women were not required to go out but today in India women are competent to men in all the fields. They are educated and have the capabilities to work in all the fields. Hence, their roles should not be limited to home only rather we should look beyond that. As Śrīla Prabhupāda did not discriminate against women in giving initiation to them rather he gave *Dīkṣā* initiation to women, which shows that Śrīla Prabhupāda did not limit women's role in the home rather he saw women as someone who can actively participate in giving *Dīkṣā*. Giving *Dīkṣā* initiation to women in ISKCON shows that he has given them equal treatment, equal opportunity despite their gender.

This can be an important aspect that we may draw from Śrīla Prabhupāda's attitude towards women because, in contemporary India, still in many religious places the main seat of power for decision-making in the administration is rested among the male priest or male members, therefore, women participation is less visible. If the Indian religious places or organizations take the insight from Śrīla Prabhupāda on the above, they can help women for a rightful place in our society, and equal opportunity with that of men. In this way, the gender gap in religious places may be reduced, where no individual has to struggle for either identity or position.

3.5. Gender Equality in Spiritual Sphere

In the spiritual sphere, it is found that Śrīla Prabhupāda teaches spiritual equality between men and women. The goal is to reach a relationship of loving service to God. Thereby, devotional service, characterized by its attitude of submission, constitutes both the path and goal and is open to men and women alike. In principle, women can become leaders, take renunciation, or be *gurus* like

men.⁴⁵ It is not that women should only produce children, but they are meant for advancing in devotion. This can be an important resource for women empowerment in contemporary India where women are not being considered capable of being a leader or a *guru* and being degraded in a spiritual platform. The need of the hour is to create awareness about the religious virtues of gender equality. If any religious injunctions contradict the message of gender equality, they need to be reinterpreted. Women need to be educated about their rights. Religious zealots who promote gender inequality without any reason need to be reined in. To end the discriminatory practices, we need to spiritualize the social system. In the realm of spirituality, there is no differentiation based on caste, creed, religion, and gender. When we educate people in spirituality, gender equality naturally ensues.

3.6. The Empowerment of Women in Theological Sphere

In the theological sphere, it is found that ISKCON women can serve the movement in a variety of capacities, including functioning as missionaries and ministering to the spiritual needs of ISKCON women and children.⁴⁶ ISKCON's *Vaiṣṇavi* ministry currently has many service opportunities available, including regional organizers, website developers/managers, writers, and research assistants.⁴⁷ Lacking representation of women in the theological sphere and their leadership roles perpetuates inequality in multiple ways. A theology of gender needs to find the wisdom to support a way of understanding and living our being male and female that can celebrate the difference, that inspires justice and joy, and resists the distortion of gender difference into a means of oppression. The difference should be a source of life for us all, a source of maturity and humanity. It should be a place to find unity within humankind that can overcome separation and find joy in the 'other.'⁴⁸ Śrīla Prabhupāda's contribution towards incorporating women in ministerial functions should be an inspiration for various Indian religious traditions to pay more attention towards integrating women in ministerial roles along

with their male counter parts. The full evidence of scripture and an understanding of balance and consistency in interpretation mean that we must rethink some of our traditions and reaffirm with clarity and conviction the scriptural basis for the full participation of women in the ministry.⁴⁹ Śrīla Prabhupāda's inclusion of women in his movement and ministry is an insight for us to affirm the full and equal participation of both men and women in all spheres of ministry.

In contradiction to the teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda, Hindu texts consider women as inferior beings. Women are also considered as polluted/untouchable. The very biological nature of women, especially their menstruation is declared as polluting by Manu, the giver of Hindu Laws. During this period of about three days, she is secluded from all kinds of religious activities, and relationships with both family and society. In this way, women are portrayed as untouchable, and this enforces a sense of inferiority on her being.⁵⁰ Therefore women are not allowed in some of the temples in India.⁵¹ The Quran regards men and women as being equal in creation with equal rights and responsibilities. But a woman cannot be a Priest. Though equal as a believer of Allah, a woman cannot be a priest, nor can she lead the prayer. She has no right to enter the Mosque for religious gatherings.⁵² The discrimination of women is seen in various ways.⁵³ Since the founding by Siddhartha Gautama in the sixth century B.C.E., Buddhism has attracted many followers from different cultural socio-economic backgrounds. Yet, despite the religion's global appeal, the role of women in Buddhism has been a subject of public debate. Even though female Buddhist played important duties as nuns and motherly figures, Buddhist teachings have undermined women's access to religious spaces and roles. In contrast to their male counterparts, female nuns are subjected to stricter spiritual guidelines, which pose challenges in their monastic life. Overall, the lacking female participation and leadership roles in Buddhism have been the byproduct of the religious traditions that favoured

male adherents. As a member of a theoretically egalitarian faith, Buddhist leaders, mostly comprised of men, have yet to solve the limited spiritual engagement and opportunities of female followers ranging from commoners to devote nuns.⁵⁴

Like the rest of the religions mentioned above, the Christian tradition is a product of a patriarchal culture where women are found inferior to men.⁵⁵ In line with the above discussion the researcher also interprets that the teaching of Śrīla Prabhupāda's can be an important resource for today's church because they are excluded from being ordained.⁵⁶ In India, still many churches do not believe in the ordination of women. The subject of women's ordination is still a debate in many churches. The power of decision-making in the church administration is rested among the ordained pastors therefore, women's participation is less visible.⁵⁷ Today ordination of women is still a debatable issue but not to that extent because many churches have accepted women's ordination in principle. However, ordained women are not given parishes in many denominations. In Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church among the eighteen ordained women, no one was allotted an independent Parish.⁵⁸ Women are also excluded from decision making bodies of the churches. Rajaratnam opines that "The existing fact is with the church is, it is still men who dominate. The bishops, presidents, moderators all are men. In the council of churches, at the synod, diocesan, and parish level predominantly are men. Even at the local level, it is men."⁵⁹

Even though Indian churches are ordaining women, but their numbers are few when compared with men clergy. As a result, a few churches have opened ordained ministry to women, which was denied for ages. In other words, today in India women have access to enter all realms including space, and politics. Christian leaders were not willing to accept women's contributions in sacramental ministry fully.⁶⁰ One of the most grieving things in today's context is even though many denominations have accepted women's ordination in principle

but because some people are not convinced personally, they do not allow women to be ordained as pastors. While professing the equality of women, promotes the notion of assigning fixed roles to women, with women usually in passive and subservient positions in the church and in religious places. In this context, the above statement about equal opportunity for women by Śrīla Prabhupāda can be an important resource because women are qualified enough in the theological circle but still struggling to get ordination or to be a priest in the church or to become a priest in the temple or to become a *guru* because of their gender. Therefore, the teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda can be an important resource to maintain gender equality in the church.

Conclusion

Indian society is a multi-religious community. All religions have their myths and legends which are interpreted by the institution of patriarchy and provide traditions for the roles to be played by women in family and society. One basic problem that lies within this religious personal law is that women are not given equal rights along with men. Even though the Indian Constitution, Article 14 and 15 guarantees equality of all, Article 25 (1) which provides for religious freedom inclusive of the religious personal laws seems to nullify the right to equality. For example, many temples have forbidden women from various services, even women are not allowed to enter some temples due to purity and pollution concept. Today women are lacking equal opportunities in political, socio-cultural, economic, religious, spiritual, and in the theological sphere. One can read daily in newspapers about the rape, gang rapes, and atrocity on women. Women, in general, continue to live under the bondage of age-old traditions, socio-religious practices, and prejudices. There are many ways in which women suffer and are made to suffer. In behavioural terms, violence against women ranges from simple suppression to abuse, aggression, exploitation, and service oppression. Indian culture has its negative realities, which is bound within the clutches of

patriarchal norms and values. Thus, oppression in the socio-cultural, economic, political, religious, spiritual, and theological realms is an agonizing, inhuman, and shattering reality. However, it is an immediate, urgent need to realize that it is possible to transform the factors that cause oppression. Day by day position of woman becomes worst in India. The concept of gender equality is miserably failed in India. In such a context, Śrīla Prabhupāda serves as a beacon to bridge the gender gaps in the political, socio-cultural, economic, religious, spiritual, and theological sphere.

Unless women are empowered and gender equality is achieved so that women can play their legitimate role in political, socio-cultural, religious, economic, theological areas, the country the country achieving the desired development is suspect. Recognition and participation of men alone in all these areas is not good enough. Women constituting half of the entire population of the country makes empowering them to be an active part of all development initiatives in the country becomes a compelling reason. On the way, Śrīla Prabhupāda can serve as an added inspiration from within the Indian religio-cultural tradition towards empowering women in all spheres of life.

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An Assessment of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) from the Perspective of Islamic Concept of Peace

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Introduction

One of the desires of a human being is to live in peace and harmony with his/her neighbours of different religious affiliations, ethnic and linguistic identities, cultural traditions and so on. However, in the contemporary world, peaceful and harmonious living among people of diverse faiths and cultures are shattered by rapidly growing religious extremism and fundamentalism causing mutual suspicion resulting in disharmony and hostilities among people in the society. Any religion in its original form does not teach hatred or violence. This is also true for Islam. The careful study of Islam exposes that Islam is a religion revealed to human beings with the intention of presenting a peaceable life through which the infinite compassion and mercy of God manifest on earth. In the present age, however, through numerous acts of terrorism innocent people are being savagely killed in the name of religion. Over the past few years, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)¹ has increasingly gained popularity for its conservative interpretation of Islamic teachings, which in fact, has led to a series of infringements on human rights, acts of atrocity and abuses towards those who do not follow their ideology. Therefore, this article attempts to study the extremist ideology of the ISIS militants, in order to find

out whether the actions of ISIS such as mass killings, extreme brutality and cruelty towards civilians are being sanctioned or approved by Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad or is it against the teachings of Islam.

1. Islam: The Name and Concept

Islam (الإسلام) is an Arabic word meaning 'submission' or 'surrender.' The three letter root, *slm* (سلم), from which the word Islam is derived also means peace, soundness and safety.² It also has much wider significance such as, to escape danger, to be free from fault, security, welfare, soundness, preservation, to commit oneself to the will of Allah (الله), to lay down arms, to establish peace.³ The connection between the original and the religious meanings of the word is strong and obvious. Only through submission to the will of God and by obedience to God's law one can achieve true peace and enjoy lasting purity.⁴ This is why peace is so related to Islam that at times it appears to be synonymous to Islam. The individual who approaches God through Islam cannot fail to be at peace with God, with oneself, and with one's fellow being. Islam is a treaty between one to the other for the attainment of peace.⁵

Peace is integral to the meaning of the very word 'Islam' itself. The prophet is reported to have declared that a Muslim is one from whose tongue and hands people live safely.⁶ In other words, a Muslim, in the true sense of the word, is a person who does not harm anyone by his or her words or deeds.⁷ Islam is a religion of peace in the fullest sense of the word. The Qur'an calls its way 'the path of peace.' It describes reconciliation as the best policy (Surah 4:128) and states that God abhors any disturbances of the peace (Surah 2:205). Of the various names and attributes of God mentioned in the Qur'an one is *As-Salam*, or 'The Source of Peace.' That is to say, God is peace. God's guidance is referred to in the Qur'an as *subul as-salaam* or 'the ways of peace' (Surah 5:16).⁸

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2. Prophet Muhammad: The Exemplar of Muslim Life

The Qur'an⁹ clearly testifies that Islam has given Prophet Muhammad to the world as a shining example and has established him a role model for all time to come. Prophet Muhammad's daily life was a true picture of the Qur'anic teachings. The teachings of Prophet Muhammad and his exemplary way of living show that he not only projected the concept of peace, but that he was also able to develop a complete methodology of peaceful activism. The revolution he brought about was a practical one based on his ideology of peace.¹⁰

Prophet Muhammad was an embodiment of all that is enjoined in the Holy Qur'an. He was a liberator because he gave every human equal dignity and rights irrespective of ethnic, religious, linguistic or cultural differences and strongly defended the rights of the poor and the oppressed.¹¹ Just as the Book of God is a code of high morals for the development of the manifold faculties of human, similarly the Prophet's exemplar life, his actions of liberation, philosophy of patience, initiation of reformation and his life as a Prophet of peace is the demonstration of all those morals. Thus, a Muslim has a twofold guidance, firstly, the Holy Qur'an in the way of precept, and secondly, the Prophet Muhammad's life as a perfect example.

3. The Concept of Equality, Justice and Compassion in Islam

The idea of equality of all human beings is one of the central messages of Islam. Islam in no way supports that one individual can be intrinsically superior to another but the central message of Islam is to establish a society based on equality of all human being. Islam enjoined that Muslims and all others should be treated on a footing of equality.¹² Islam therefore, establishes a society that is free from all forms of exploitation, a society based on equality and human dignity including dignity of both the genders.

The emphasis of Islamic teachings is not personal salvation but establishment of a society that is just and free of oppression (*Zulm/ظلم*). Qur'an lays great emphasis on '*adl* (justice/عدل).¹³ Justice is fundamental to Islam; therefore, one should uphold justice even if it went against oneself and do justice even if enemies benefit from it. Nothing in fact should prevent a person from doing justice because Allah is just and exhorts a person to do justice. The religion of Islam also gives great importance to such values as 'mercy' and 'compassion.' The Arabic words *Rahman* (الرحمن) and *Rahim* (الرحيم), means "Most Compassionate" and "Most Merciful" are both intensive forms referring to different aspects of Allah's attributes of Mercy.¹⁴ In fact Allah sent His Messenger Muhammad as the compassion and mercy of the World. Thus, a true follower of the Prophet has to be merciful and compassionate to the extent humanly possible.

4. Islam and Non-Violence

According to the Qur'an, God does not love *fasad* (فساد), violence.¹⁵ Basically, *fasad* is that action which results in disruption of the social system, causing huge losses in terms of lives and property. The life of Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, reveals the perfect example of peace and non-violence. An important lesson to be derived from the Prophet's life is that the power of peace is stronger than the power of violence. The war becomes evident only when the patently aggressive behaviour of the enemy becomes obvious. However, even in the defensive wars, the Qur'anic injunction regarding war is not to transgress the limits (Al-Baqarah 2:190). Even in times of war the Islamic law protects those who are not combatants and are regarded as innocent. Muslims are even urged to show mercy to enemies when they are in a state that invokes their mercy¹⁶ and calls for their pity and not to get involved in destructive activities.¹⁷

5. The Concept of *Jihad* in Islam

The word *jihad* is derived etymologically from the Arabic root “*jahada*” (جَاهَدَ) meaning to strive against an undesirable opponent – an external enemy, Satan, or the base inner self. The concept of *Jihad* in Qur’anic teaching is a means to peace, safety and security of people irrespective of caste, creed, colour and gender and the term refers to a multi-layered concepts and meanings. As such, *Jihad* encourages the followers to make sincere and serious efforts to do good works and to help reform society in order to establish justice, peace and equality. Further, in the *Hadith*, the word *Jihad* is not used exclusively for fighting and killing for the sake of defending religion, but in multi-dimensional aspects such as, striving with one’s wealth,¹⁸ bearing hardships in worshipping Allah,¹⁹ and not waging war or seeking revenge.²⁰ It can also be an armed struggle carried out solely for purposes of self-defense. Hence, use of the concept of *Jihad* for acts of aggression against innocent people is unjust and a great distortion of its true meaning in Islam.

6. ISIS: Origin and Development

ISIS can trace its roots back to 2002, when Abu Musab al-Zarqawi – a Jordanian who was to gain notoriety in the Iraqi insurgency from 2003-2006 – founded a *jihadi* organization called *Jama’at al-Tawhid wa’ al-Jihad*²¹ (جماعة التوحيد والجهاد) a *Party of Monotheism and Jihad* in the north of Iraq. One of the most significant turning points in al-Zarqawi’s life is meeting one of the architects of *jihadi* Salafist known as Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. A close relationship with al-Maqdisi made al-Zarqawi to learn the strict tenets of *Jihadi*-Salafism. In October 2004, al-Zarqawi swore allegiance to al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, after which the organization *Jama’at al-Tawhid wa’ al-Jihad* change the name to *Tanzim Qaeday al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn*, or Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers, often simplified to al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).²² Al-Zarqawi targeted U.S. led coalition forces, but his main focus was to wage his genocidal war against

the Shia Muslims whom he viewed as the chief threat to Sunni power in Iraq and the wider region.

After the death of al-Zarqawi, al-Qaeda in Iraq branded its name to Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) on June 8, 2006, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi was announced the *Amir* of this self-proclaimed state. On April 18, 2010, when ISI top leaders, Abu Ayub al-Masri and Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, were both killed in a joint U.S. Iraqi raid near Tikrit the group announced the appointment of its new commander of the faithful, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi a native of Samarra.²³ On June 29, 2014, ISIS began to refer to itself as the Islamic State, declaring its occupied territory a new caliphate and naming Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as its ruler (Caliph).²⁴

7. Salafism, Wahhabism and ISIS

The ideology of ISIS resonates the ideology of Salafism and Wahhabism. Salafism was founded by Ibn Taymiyyah who believed that only of first three generations of Muslims followed the correct path of the Islam they are called “Pious Ancestors” or “*al-salaf al-Salih*.”²⁵ The way of the *Salaf* is to interpret literally the Quranic verses and *hadiths* and rejects other interpretations which are believed to have been done on the individual self-interests and have corrupted Islam. Salafist strictly adheres to the doctrine of *tawhid* or oneness of God and rejects the veneration of anything but God, including saintly worship and the Christian Trinity. Thus, those who did not adhere to the doctrine of *twahid* is considered as unbelievers (*kafir/kuffar*) or apostates (*murtaddun*), who can be excommunicated (*takfir*) from Muslim Community (*Umma*).²⁶ Ibn Taymiyya strongly holds that the Muslim *umma* must be ever-vigilant so that the Muslims will not return to the state of barbarism and ignorance that existed before pre-Islamic days (*Jahiliyya*).

The founder of Wahhabism, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, followed the classic Salafism where he condemned the acceptance of intermediaries between human and God, such as the veneration of the tombs of saints, holy trees, astrology and soothsayers. Ibn Abd

al-Wahhab also believed that the only way to achieve salvation and retrieve past glory was the re-assertion of absolute monotheism and the belief in the Oneness of God (*tawhid*).²⁷ According to al-Wahhab, any belief or practice which violates the understanding of *tawhid* is an act of *shirk*.²⁸

One of the Wahhabi's concepts that became radicalized is the condemnation of Shias as a heresy. Wahhabism became an ideological weapon in the hands of the Jihadi-Salafi Abu Musab al-Zarqawi who considered Shias as polytheist, grave worshippers, circumambulator of the shrines, infidels who distorted the Qur'an as a product of logic, cunning, and feverish who try to establish their political banners by allying with the enemy.²⁹ The Shias top ISIS's list of real and imagined enemies. ISIS soldiers commenced a vigorous campaign of ideological cleansing, demolishing sites of religious significance of Shias saying that it is taking active measures to prevent homage being given to others than to Allah.

8. The Establishment of the Caliphate

The re-establishment of the Caliphate has been a long-standing goal of Sunni Muslims, because for them the loss of the caliphate represented the end of Muslim political power and the triumph of the West. ISIS's declaration of the caliphate becomes an inspirational force and has been successful in mobilizing young Muslims worldwide. ISIS declared that the restoration of the caliphate is the promise of Allah and required all Muslims to pledge allegiance to it. Quoting from the Quran, Al-Baghdadi argued that the land of Allah belongs to all and calls all Muslims to perform *hijrah* to the Islamic State. He said,

Therefore, rush O Muslims to your state. Yes, it is your state. Rush, because Syria is not for the Syrians, and Iraq is not for the Iraqis. The earth is Allah's. Indeed, the earth belongs to Allah. He causes to inherit it whom He wills of His servants. And the (best) outcome is

for the righteous (Al-A'raf: 128). The State is a state for all Muslims. The land is for the Muslims, all the Muslims. O Muslims everywhere, whoever is capable of performing *hijrah* (emigration) to the Islamic State, then let him do so, because *hijrah* to the land of Islam is obligatory.³⁰

The declaration of the caliphate becomes a mobilizing factor to many Sunni Islamist to fight fearlessly for the Caliph which holds their imagination to see the caliphate as redemptive, a means to salvation, and a worthy cause for which to do jihad.

9. The ISIS Apocalypses

The literal approach to religious texts adopted by ISIS, including its apocalyptic vision of the imminent end of times, its message is stronger, clearer and more consistent than that of its opponents. For all its actions, ISIS promises its recruits, adventure and intense engagement with an exciting new venture. The role of apocalypticism and eschatology in ISIS ideology shows how ISIS generates theologically sound arguments to justify their actions and doctrines, and utilizes "End Times" theology and apocalypticism to legitimize its expansion and attract more recruits.

References to the End Times fill ISIS propaganda. It is a big selling point with foreign fighters, who want to travel to the lands where the final battles of the apocalypse will take place. As the ISIS fighters believed by saying, "We have here mujahideen from Russia, America, the Philippines, China, Germany, Belgium, Sudan, India and Yemen and other places. We are here because this is what the Prophet said and promised, the Grand Battle is happening."³¹ The foreign fighters died to capture the military unimportant town of Dabiq, Syria, because the fighters in Dabiq believed that the Grand Battle is happening there as it was prophesied by the Prophet.³² ISIS's apocalyptic inclination as well as its success in applying its ideology gives the group its unique

appeal to jihadists. This Islamic eschatological discourse has a strong positive impact on the organization as a whole.

10. ISIS and Its Strategies

By declaring statehood for Islamic State and the restoration of the caliphate, ISIS demonstrated the capacity to govern both rural and urban areas in Iraq and Syria that it controls. The Islamic State function like a real government and has been able to sustain satisfactory levels of governance.

The *Shura* (consultative) Council acts as a most powerful advisory body and oversees the affairs of the state and communicates decisions down the chain of command and make sure that they are carried out accordingly. The *Sharia* Council deals with all religious and judicial affairs.³³ *Sharia* Council enforces its *sharia* rules by the help of religious police such as *al-hisbah* brigade for men and *al-khansa* for women. The *sharia* departments, at both State and provincial level, are possibly the most important part of the administrative structure in helping the State to exert and maintain control. The council also oversees ideological outreach (*dawa*), both in areas under the State's control and beyond.³⁴

The Provincial Council oversees the administration of the provinces or *wilayat*, each with its own governor, and local governments beneath them. ISIS also has the military council which oversees the territorial expansion of the State and defends what it already controls. The most common feature of ISIS's military tactics and strategy is seizure of towns and cities which can facilitate the passage of money, arms and fighters and also which has rich natural resources such as, oil fields, water resources, dams (for power and water), and grain silos.³⁵

ISIS also has an Economic Council which deals with the State's impressive income. ISIS is considered as the world's best-financed organization. The funds come mostly from the direct theft of gold and cash from the banks of Raqqa, Mosul, Fallujah, and Ramadi and also from stolen oil produced on stolen oilfields,

kidnapping for ransom, black market antique selling, taxation, agriculture, and other illicit trades.³⁶

Another strategy that ISIS employed was kidnapping and assassination campaigns targeting local rebel leaders. It also systematically carried out ethnic, sectarian and religious cleansing by committing the atrocities against Shias, Yezidis, Kurds and Christians. According to Amnesty International report, ISIS has carried out ethnic cleansing on a historic scale in northern Iraq. It has found that the ISIS has systematically targeted non-Arab and non-Sunni Muslim communities, killing or abducting hundreds, possibly thousands, and forcing more than 830,000 others to flee the areas it has captured.³⁷

ISIS also has the methods of terror and atrocities to show what happens if you oppose Islamic law established by Islamic State. Some of the terror acts carried out by ISIS are, suicide bombings, destruction of prisons, execution of the soldiers who were taken as hostages and slavery of women and children, who were subjected to sexual violence. The advent of ISIS and its *modus operandi*, emphasizes the fact that the conservative interpretation of Islamic teachings has led to serious infringements on human rights, and its atrocious acts of violence and abuse of fundamental human values and dignity targeted against those who disapproved its ideology has created a fear psychosis among masses.

11. Accusations of Disbelief in Islam

ISIS's commitment to purify the world by killing vast numbers of people by following their *takfir* doctrine clearly contradicts with the general idea of *Takfir* in Islam because quintessentially in Islam, a Muslim who professes *Shahada*³⁸ continues to be Muslim and in no means can be declared a non-Muslim. A prophetic *hadith* in *Sahih al-Bukhari* states: The Prophet said, "Whoever swears by a religion other than Islam, is, as he says; and whoever commits suicide with something, will be punished with the same thing in the (Hell) Fire; and cursing a believer is like murdering him; and

whoever accuses a believer of disbelief, then it is as if he had killed him.”³⁹ Therefore, all the notorious actions of ISIS approved by their interpretation of *takfir* doctrine in fact contradicts with the teachings of Islam.

12. ISIS’s Contravention of Islamic Rules of Engagement

Qur’an is clear about the sanctity of human life. Murder is an abomination in Islam because the protection of life is given utmost importance. Quran says, “Nor take life – which Allah has made sacred – except for just cause” (Al-Isra 17:33). Islam clearly forbids mistreatment and killing people unjustly as it is considered as the greater sin both in Qur’an and *hadith*. Muslims are warned against killing of non-combatants, killing emissaries, hostage-taking, and destructions of mosques, as Islam is a religion of peace that guarantees the protection of life, property and honour for all members of society. Quran also says, “... Whether open or secrets; take not life, which Allah hath made sacred, except by way of justice and law” (Al-An‘am 6:151). The slaying of a soul is *haraam* (forbidden and inviolable under Islamic Law), it is also one of the most abominable sins (*mubiqat*). However, ISIS has gone beyond all these instructions in Islam and have killed many innocents who were neither combatants nor armed, just because they disagree with their opinions.

13. ISIS’s Justification for Jihad

ISIS’s projection of jihad as the integral part of Islam to fight against unbelievers and call for all Muslims to join the jihad is un-Islamic in nature. As for many traditional scholars, jihad is only permitted if Muslims have been attacked. It does not justify fighting against people who are not fighting them. In the Open Letter to Al-Baghdadi, the traditional Islamic view of jihad is clearly laid out in the following words of 126 eminent Islamic scholars:

The word “jihad” is an Islamic term that cannot be applied to armed conflict against any other Muslim;

this much is a firmly established principle... Jihad is a means to peace, safety and security, and not an end in itself... Jihad without legitimate cause, legitimate goals, legitimate purpose, legitimate methodology and legitimate intention is not jihad at all, but rather, warmongering and criminality. It also says that ...the greater jihad, which is the jihad (struggle) against one’s ego; and the lesser jihad, the jihad (struggle) against the enemy ... the greater jihad is the jihad against the ego and its weapon is remembrance of God and purification of the soul.⁴⁰

The acts such as killing civilians, women, children and the elderly on crowded streets, the act of suicide bombers who kill themselves and innocent people, cannot be seen as being jihad and in no way these people cannot be seen as being *mujahids*.

14. The Unlawfulness of Suicide

Suicide is forbidden in Islam. The one who commits suicide defies God and becomes a resident of Hell. Human life is neither owned nor acquired; it is a gift and trust from God. It is for this reason that Islam directs people to safeguard their lives and forbids suicide. Quran says, “O ye who believe! Eat not up your property among yourselves in vanities: but let there be amongst you traffic and trade by mutual good-will: nor kill (or destroy) yourselves: for verily Allah hath been to you Most Merciful” (Al-Nisa 4:29). As Islam regards each human being as possessing the worth of the entire species, killing one person is deemed as being the equivalent of slaughtering the whole humanity and conversely, saving the life of one human being is considered the same as saving the life of humanity as a whole (Maida 5:32).

15. The Declaration of Caliphate

The declaration of caliphate by ISIS and attempting to reintroduce the medieval practice of slavery by enslaving men, women, and children are illegitimate according to Islam because in the

religion of Islam all people are the subjects of God and hence all enjoy equal rights, equal status, and equal opportunities and no one has ever right to claim superiority over the other.⁴¹ Islamic scholars around the world pointed out that, ISIS mere declaration of caliphate is not enough to establish a caliphate because it is not Islamic in nature rather it has been a disaster for the public image of Islam. ISIS's claimed desire of unifying Muslims under its "caliphate" lacks historical exactitude because the leader of the Muslim *Ummah* (nation) should be "a representative" of the nation, based on the people's choice of that leader, or their representatives.

Conclusion

Islam is a religion revealed to humankind with the exclusive intention of establishing and enriching a peaceful life in the society of all people through which the infinite compassion and mercy of Allah manifest on the earth. Islam becomes perfect and complete religion only when it embodies peace, sanctity and protection for the whole of humankind. Prophet Muhammad clearly indicates that a Muslim or *mu'min* is the one from whom everyone's life or property are safe and secure without any discrimination based on faith and creed. Therefore, a person who do not consider human dignity worth any regard, and treads a path of violence, bloodshed and strife, cannot be a *mu'min*, despite his/her devout worship and pious efforts. If the inner self does not undergo any change and remains brutal, one cannot deceive God by adorning oneself with the outward trappings of piety and goodness. A *mu'min* should possess the trait of human dignity, co-existence, tolerance, moderation and love and peace. In sum, Islam, in its wider perspectives, is a religion that ensures peace and security for everyone at all levels, individually and collectively, therefore, any violent acts that result in threatening the peaceful co-existence of human dignity is against the religion of Islam.

End Notes

- 1 In its current form, the "Islamic State" is known by at least five different terms: i) Its Arabic name is transliterated as al-Dawlah al-Islamiyah fi al-Iraq wash-Sham. This name leads to the Arabic acronym Da'ish or DAESH. ii) The group's Arabic name translates in English to "The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham," or ISIS. iii) "Al-Sham" is another name for Syria, so that the organization is sometimes called "The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria," with the same acronym. iv) Since "Levant" is an academic term for the larger Middle East, some call the group "The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant," or ISIL. v) On June 29, 2014, it proclaimed itself as a Worldwide Caliphate, and renamed itself "The Islamic State," or IS. Although ISIS has adopted the name "Islamic State" we will call it ISIS in this article because that is the better-known name. C.f. James C. Denison, "The Islamic State: What You Need To Know," <http://assets.denisonforum.org/pdf/books/islamic-state-what-you-need-to-know.pdf> (26 June 2015).
- 2 Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *Islam: Faith and History* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 8.
- 3 Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Quran: Text, Translation and Commentary* (New Delhi: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 2007), 624.
- 4 Hammudah Abdalati, *Islam in Focus* (Aligarh: Crescent Publishing Company, 1975), 7.
- 5 Intakhab Alam Khan, *Peace, Philosophy and Islam* (Delhi: Academic Excellence, 2007), 20.
- 6 *Sunan an-Nasai* (The Book of Faith and its Signs) 47:11, <https://sunnah.com/nasai/47/11> (30 Jan. 2018).
- 7 Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, *Islam and World Peace* (Noida: Goodword Books, 2015), 8.
- 8 Wherewith Allah guides all who seek His good pleasure to ways of peace and safety, and leads them out of darkness, by His Will, unto the light, guides them to a path that is Straight" (Surah 5:16).
- 9 Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the Praise of Allah.
- 10 Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, *The Prophet of Peace: Teachings of the Prophet Muhammad* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2009), 29.
- 11 John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, Third Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7.
- 12 Sheikh Youssef El-Digwy, *Islam: The Ideal Religion*, translated by Aly Z. Husny (Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1978), 7.

- 13 Surah 5:8, "Be Just: That is Next to Piety."
- 14 Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Quran: Text, Translation and Commentary* (New Delhi: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 2007), 14.
- 15 Surah 2:205, "Allah Does Not Love Mischief."
- 16 Ahmet Gunes, "Views on the Rules of War in Islamic Law," in *Terror and Suicide Attacks: An Islamic Perspective*, edited by Ergun Capan (New Jersey: The Light, Inc., 2006), 127
- 17 Hamza Aktan, "Acts of Terror and Suicide Attacks in the Light of the Quran and the Sunna," in *Terror and Suicide Attacks: An Islamic Perspective*, edited by Ergun Capan (New Jersey: The Light, Inc., 2006), 31.
- 18 *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Book of Commentary), translated by Muhammad Mushin Khan, vol. 6, 60:41 (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1984), 33.
- 19 *Sunan an-Nasa'i* (The Book of Jihad), vol. 1, 25:3098, <https://sunnah.com/nasai/25> (15 May 2021).
- 20 *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Al-Maghazi), translated by Muhammad Mushin Khan, vol. 5, 59:354 (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1984), 234.
- 21 This organisation was different from all the militant Muslim organisations that preceded it in many ways. While many well-known Sunni *jihadist* had expressed anger at the actions of the Shia population of Iraq, none had taken any violent actions against them. Al Zarqawi was one of the first in recent history to order Sunni attacks against Shia. One of the most notable of these attacks is the bombing of the Imam Ali Shrine in Najaf, Iraq. Cf., Joseph Spark, *ISIS Taking Over the Middle East: The Rise of Middle Eastern Supremacy ISIS/ISIL* (Lavergne: Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), 13.
- 22 Michael Weiss & Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York: Regan Arts, 2015), 37.
- 23 Ahmed S. Hashim, "The Islamic State: From al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate," *Middle East Policy* 21/4 (Winter, 2014), 73.
- 24 Ahmed S. Hashim, "The Islamic State: From al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate," 79.
- 25 David S. Sorenson, "Priming Strategic Communications Countering the Appeal of ISIS," *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters* 44/3 (Autumn, 2014), 27.
- 26 Roel Meijer, "Introduction," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, edited by Roel Meijer (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd., 2009), 5.
- 27 Natana J. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (London: I.B.Tauris and Co. Ltd., 2004), 18.
- 28 *Shirk*, the association of anyone or anything with God or God's attributes, is one of the major theological theme in the writings of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, because in his belief *shirk* is clearly a violation of and departure from *tawhid* making it the polar opposite of *tawhid*.
- 29 Abu Musab al Zarqawi, "Musab al-Zarqawi Letter Obtained by United States Government in Iraq," U.S. Department of State Archive (Feb. 2004), <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/31694.htm> (27 July 2017).
- 30 "Khilafah Declared," *Dabiq* 1 (Ramadan 1435), 11.
- 31 William McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015), 101.
- 32 *Sahih Muslim* (The Book of Tribulations and Portents of the Last Hour) 41:6924, <https://sunnah.com/muslim/54/44> (17 Sept. 2017).
- 33 Richard Barrett, "The Islamic State," *The Soufan Group* (Nov. 2014), 29, <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TSG-The-Islamic-State-Nov14.pdf> (27 Oct. 2017).
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Book Review

The Spirit Shaped Church: A Spirit Ecclesiology in India
by Swarup Bar, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021, pp. 257.
ISBN: 978-1-5064-6689-7.

The book begins with a discussion on the effect of colonialism that has challenged Indian churches in two modes. One is to secure the identity of the church as both Indian and Christian and another is to stand for justice and liberation of the poor and the oppressed. Since the nineteenth century, the need has been felt for doing theology in Indian terms and cultural forms. Many have developed Christian theology and attempted to use Indian terms to convey Christian thoughts and doctrines, but the Western nature of the church largely continues. Hence, for Indian Hindu fundamentalist, the church remains anti-national, anti-Hindu and a foreign religion. The reason for this, according to Swarup Bar, is because Indian churches are too incarcerated in their own traditional concepts and doctrines. Hence, there is a need for the church to be permeable, that is, to have porous boundaries or borders in order to allow the passage of different perspectives or people to flow in and out.

Critically analysing the major internal and external challenges faced by the church in India, particularly, in the context of Hindu fundamentalism, dalits, tribals, women and eco-crisis, the author felt the need to revisit and redefine Indian ecclesiologies. Grappling with the thoughts of the Western thinkers and analysing the paradigms of permeable models, he proposed a permeable church which is pneumatologically conditioned, yet christologically defined. Although the relational ecclesiological approach of Jurgen Moltmann, the ecclesiocentric approach by Stanley Hauerwas and the christo-theocentric

approach by Kathryn Tanner have helped the author to articulate ecclesiological framework, yet, they were ambiguous in their idea of a permeable Spirit church. Nonetheless, the Spirit ecclesiological approach made by Amos Yong is found adequate to complete the lack of the above approaches. This approach has a relational potential that would offer basis for particularity and concreteness of the permeable Spirit ecclesiology rooted in its nature, ministry and mission. Drawing insights from the western theologians, particularly Amos Yong, the author felt the need for bringing them into conversation with Indian theologians. This is where, the book takes 'dialoguing critically with the theological conversation partners' as the methodological approach, in order to develop the idea of a permeable church in India (p.7).

Highlighting the historical-theological background of Indian ecclesiological approaches, the author opines that though the Indian churches have developed from an exclusivistic to inclusivistic nature, yet it does not do justice to a wholesome engagement in the society. This is because of the lack of competence in the way of defining ecclesiology by Indian theologians. Discovering the approaches made by P. Chenchiah on the need for a borderless pneumatological ecclesiology and M. M. Thomas on the diakonia and Christ-centred koinonia ecclesiology with open borders, the author found them inadequate for they do not engage with the concrete life of the people, especially those from the margins. However, Samuel Rayan's ecclesiology is found to be more adequate on all fronts because he maintains a decolonization and a self-critical approach. Rayan's church rooted on Indian foundations addresses the socioeconomic milieu to engaging the church with other religions and cultures, to be conscious of the ecological crisis with a liberative stance towards the poor and the marginalized. Rayan's permeable Spirit ecclesiology is found to be a comparatively appropriate church for India today.

According to the author, a church with a strongly pneumatological perspective coupled with its Christological dimension can be a viable way forward for the Indian churches to be more open to other traditions. For that the church is expected to be relationally-distinctive dialectic with other communities and religions in order to counteract the situations evolved due to the colonization. By “relational-distinctive dialectic,” the author refers to the church that needs to play out the features of universality-particularity, the spiritual and the concrete, the unity and diversity which are integral features of a permeable Spirit ecclesiology. In terms of hierarchical relationality in the church which continue to create barriers between Christian and other communities, the author offers the egalitarian approach as a methodological option to consider other religions and cultures on an equal footing, or as contributing to the Kingdom of God.

Although, there is consistency and compatibility in the thesis and arguments endeavoured by the author, yet the book leaves its readers with some practical and methodological questions. People in India live in a country where they can be easily influenced by religious beliefs and the environment around them. If the churches are to be permeable, there might be chances where the church will lose its members since many are ignorant about theological thoughts and doctrines. As pointed out by the author himself, whether this permeable Spirit ecclesiology is fully adequate for the context and theological perceptions in India? (107). How do common believers maintain their identity as Christians when allowing other religious teachings to penetrate their boundaries? Christianity in India is perceived as a foreign religion especially to the Hindu fundamentalists. They show their unwillingness to learn, which evolves into hatred against Christianity. How to interpret the concepts of the permeable/porous Spirit ecclesiology in order to invite them or the world religious traditions to shape and influence theological reflection about Christian life?

The book addresses issues related to the real-life situation of the people or the church in India and one of the those that caught the attention of the reviewer is the dalits upholding both Christian and Hindu identity. This have been long practiced and perhaps, it has led into a great confusion among the dalits themselves. In this regard, Swarup Bar’s view is that the church should keep its particular Christian identity, yet, be open and engaging with the ethnolinguistic, religio-cultural, and socio-political life of the people (p. 45). The Spirit ecclesiology will enable to engage across borders for effective witness and establishment of the Kingdom of God.

This is a substantial book and the reviewer highly recommends it to all the theologically trained and the laity to read this book and use it for the upliftment of the church and congregations in India.

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Socio-Economic Parables in Luke: A Mizo Tribal Reading by H. Joseph Lalfakmawia, Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2020, pp. xlvii + 420. ₹ 1500.00.

Dr. H. Joseph Lalfakmawia hails from the State of Mizoram, taught New Testament at Master’s College of Theology, Visakhapatnam, A.P., is currently engaged in Pastoral Ministry under the Mizoram Presbyterian Synod.

The book is an outcome of his D.Th. dissertation. The book has Six Chapters including the Conclusion, besides four useful Appendices, Abbreviations, Glossary of Mizo terms and Bibliography. In a Foreword by the Rev. Dr. V. J. John commends the book as a new attempt from the Mizo cultural context “using Mizo folk songs, folk stories and myths to read and interpret” the parables of Jesus.

The Introduction presents the book as an attempt towards re-reading selected Lukan parables focusing on socio-economic issues from a tribal perspective. It is a new venture as the author utilized the tribal hermeneutics making use of the liberation motif present within the cultural traditions of the Mizo community. The Mizos' Folk songs, Folktales, Proverbs and Socio-ethical practices are the hermeneutical sources, with special focus also on the Mizos' moral code on *hard work*. The problem identified by the author is mainly on *interpretation* of most of the parables, in which the real issue of socio-economic alleviation has not drawn the attention of many. There are three methods that the author employed in this study: 1. *Tribal Reading*, 2. *Redaction Criticism*, 3. *Socio-Economic Model*.

Chapter 1 concentrated mainly on the context of Luke's Gospel from socio-economic perspective. The author discussed the political scenario and how it affected tremendously upon the citizens and specifically those at the lower strata of the Greco-Roman Society. He noted that "the *religious leaders* were included among the elites who were socio-economically well-to-do." It was identified that the wealthy landowners and the urban elites (*religious leaders*) were a stumbling block toward the mobility of the poor to the preceding stratum. The author considered that the parabolic settings in Luke were both rural and urban. The reason of bringing in the urban setting is because of the *limited good theory* which was employed by other scholars but not applicable as the conditions of both the poor and the rich were quite different from the rural settings.

Chapter 2, the background of the author's own context was used as a springboard for a tribal hermeneutics. Besides tracing the origin of Mizos from the nomadic way of life till their settlement in Mizoram and how they sustained themselves through *jhum* cultivation, the author charted out a detailed social stratification in Mizos' community. Though stratification differs slightly from village to village, the common categories are: 1. The

Chief; 2. Council of Ministers (Usually they were the relatives of the Chief); 3. The Village Priest; 4. Village expert on *Jhuming*; 5. Blacksmith; 6. Village Crier; 7. Commoners; 8. *Bawi* (Only the Chief owns them. They are wards of the Chief.); 9. Slaves (the Chief hardly kept and possessed slaves). These social strata have an intrinsic link in terms of managing the economy flow within the Mizo tribal Society and help each other in times of need. Those that are in the forefront in terms of social obligation to help the lower strata are the Chief, the Council of Ministers and the Village Expert on *Jhuming*.

Things that were considered wealth are *Sial* (domesticated *Mithun/Gayal*); *Gun*; *Gong*; *Brass pots*; *Beads*. Those having these were obtained through various means but not through extortion, and they were considered to have a good social standing.

It is understood that the Mizos have rich and diverse folksongs and folktales. Out of these, only a few were selected to use as tools in tribal hermeneutics for the purpose of socio-economic reading on the selected parables. From the folksongs, the author chose three lullabies in which the theme of hard work, and becoming a hero/warrior of the community was emphasized. There were two songs that deals with success – whether in hunting (not for fun but for safety from wild animals) or in war. Five folktales were narrated and explained as to how they are rich in their implicit intention besides entertaining qualities. The discussion on *Dignity of Social Higher Orders (Thangchhuah)* deserved special attention as it is this concept that drives the author in subsequent discussion in his research.

In Chapter 3, the author discussed the current trends in interpretation of Lukan Parables. Here a significant point of interpreting the parables is brought to the fore from allegorical approach to one point approach. Besides, the author stressed the *plurisignificant approach* in which the parables "are not completely tied to their original setting of Jesus or Evangelists." It is through this approach that helps the author to move ahead in developing and applying the tribal hermeneutics on the selected parables.

Chapter 4 covered an exegetical study on three parables: 1. Parable of the Shrewd Steward (Lk. 16:1-9); 2. The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31); 3. The Parable of the *Mina* (Lk. 19:11-27). These were categorized under *the Parables of accumulation of wealth*. In all three selected parables, the author provided his own translation. There has been sufficient treatment of the textual issues and detail arguments of different scholars were brought into the exegetical discussion. All selected parables were viewed from different angles as the author can gather resources. Contextually, the author made use of the concept of *Thangchuaah* and also from the perspective of Mizos' work ethics in weighing the discussions on these parables. The Shrewd Steward may be praised for his act in "relieved the debts" of the oppressed people, but his unwillingness to work hard was not appreciated as per the Mizos' context. The Rich Man was in a position to be the patron for Lazarus, but chooses not to be so. Contextually, the Rich Man does not even qualify the status of *Ramhual* (The Village expert on *Jhuming*), of course, not forgetting the status of *Thangchuaah*. The third servant in the parable of *Mina* was the character that draws the attention for being the resistance voice against the rich and powerful. Though just a servant, yet dared to speak to his master as a person who is his master's equal! Considering the urban context while reading these selected parables, the author pointed that there is good news for the rich, that they can share their wealth with the poor to alleviate them from the current status by becoming their patrons.

Chapter 5 carries an exegetical study on three parables categorized as *Parables on Agriculture concern*. 1. The Parable of the Sower (Lk. 8:5-15); 2. The Parable of the Rich Fool (Lk. 12:16-21); 3. The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Lk. 13:18-19). Like Chapter 4, the author did a detailed textual analysis and also employed Source Criticism on the third parable. In the Parable of the Sower, the author showed how it reinforces the Mizos' idea of *hard work and persistence*. In the Parable of the Rich, the main focus is on the point of evil accumulation of wealth. In the Parable

of a Mustard Seed the author discussed the usage of hyperbole. Such usage is normal in any community. The hyperbole used in the Mizos' context when the farmers are sure of their expected harvest of the flourishing paddy is *spoonful* or in some other context *as big as the face of a hen/cock* or *as big as a half-sky*.

The author notes in his Conclusion "the teachings of Jesus on Socio-Economic issues in the Parables of Luke, when interpreted from socio-economic and Mizo tribal perspective employing Mizo traditional heritage as a hermeneutical tool, saw new meanings appearing, to enriching and enlightening us on the question of socio-economic problems prevalent in our world today."

There are a few drawbacks which I believe it will be taken care of in the subsequent edition. There is a need for (1). A comprehensive guide to the sounds of Mizo words. (2). A standard transliteration table for Aramaic Words or Hebrew or Greek words. (3). Spelling mistakes in a few words as noticed in page 33, 34 and footnote 27 on these words *Mizo/awng*; *Hrang/hiauva*; |iau river. (4). Breathing and accent marks are required in a few Greek text that are in the text and footnotes. (5). A clear explanation on how to read the table on parallel passages in pages 304-305.

The book is a new venture in Lukan studies. The author is to be appreciated in bringing a good discussion of different scholars on the specific parables, and also for his skills in weaving together the threads of different strands to produce a unique inclusive platform in incorporating the contextual resources emanating from his own cultural context. Re-reading the biblical text from a particular indigenous context enables the reader to overcome the colonized reading. The book sheds new light on the parables. For every indigenous budding scholar and those interested in understanding the parables of Jesus from one's own cultural context this book is valuable.

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Indian Journal of Theology 63:2, 2021, pp. 120-124

Documentation

North India Institute of Post-Graduate Theological Studies (NIIPGTS) (Jointly Sponsored by Bishop's College, Kolkata and Serampore College, Serampore).

D.Th. Dissertation Submitted to the Senate of Serampore College ("University").

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