



# Asian Journal of Religious Studies

“The Lord is truly among us.”

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# Asian Journal for Religious Studies

“The Lord is truly with us.”

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## Editorial

# Hope in the New Year

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As we begin a new year, some of us focus on the possibilities and others focus on the probabilities; some of us hope for the best, and others expect the worst. Part of this is just personality, but religious traditions have a way of shaping these attitudes as well. Does your experience of your faith tradition generally see the world with a spirit of confidence, or does it weigh the world and find it wanting? What spiritual lens does it bring to the great tragedies and triumphs of life today? What do you anticipate in 2019 and why?

Against this grim backdrop, we come upon a new year. What ought we to expect for the next twelve months? What will we encounter on the way? A Christian can and must go forward with hope. “The one who has hope,” Benedict XVI tells us, “lives differently.”

Of the three theological virtues – faith, hope, and love – hope is often the one that receives the least attention, left to some vague supporting role, which is often confused with mere optimism. St. Paul, in particular, communicates time and again his preference for faith and love over hope.

“If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains,” he writes to the Corinthians, “but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”

Still more: “Faith, hope, and love remain, these three. And the greatest of these is love.”

But it’s time for hope to be lifted up again in 2019. When we walk in faith but that faith wavers, and we aren’t sure where to

go, all we can do is hope. Hope is the attitude of heart that is most humble because its very presence tells us that in this life there is more than meets the eye.

It's important to note that this hope isn't blind. It isn't thinking that everything is okay and will be okay because it always is, and because good people somewhere will always do the right. It isn't cheerful nor naïve. It isn't the refusal to see the somber realities ahead and instead dream of a world without such obstacles. Hope doesn't deny an awful reality; it looks it in the face and hopes. It acknowledges that there is good in this life even if it can't be seen right here and now," tells Christopher J. Hale in *Patheos*.

Hope is not blind; rather, it changes how we see the situation. It does this not by averting our eyes from a difficult reality, but by drawing our eyes to it so that something different can reveal itself.

Hope arises most brightly through suffering. Why? It offers us a vision that is not limited to what is immediately at hand. It allows us to find meaning in our suffering, to see that although God does not will our suffering, God is fully committed to creating good from it.

Whether we are see it or not, hope is alive. It is alive in anyone who has suffered intense loss and kept moving, who has made the decision to love another with no promise of a return, who has doubted the existence of God and yet prayed anyway, and who has endured suffering for the sake of someone else and actually found great strength in doing so.

The two main articles in this issue of journal were part of Papal Seminary Jubilee Essays on the topic of "Ministering to the Contemporary Church."

The editorial team wishes you a blessed and enriching New Year!

Kuruvilla Pandikattu  
Editor

# Restoring Draupadi's Dignity: For the Church and the Nation

**Stephen d'Almeida**

De Nobili College, Pune

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## 1. Vasudhaiva Kuṭumbakam

“Ayam bandhurayam neti gaṇanā laghucetasām  
udāracaritānām tu vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam”<sup>1</sup>

*Only small men discriminate saying: One is a relative;  
the other is a stranger. For those who live magnanimously  
the entire world constitutes but a family.*

Isn't it appalling that the spiritual masters from India have had a deep insight into the world-citizenship? It is, and rightly so; because we've been bombarded with nationalism stuff ever-since the BJP has come to power. The Upaniṣadic text also sheds plenty of light on 'xenophobia' and 'parochialism' inviting people to live magnanimously in the world that constitutes just one family. Were our ancestors so generous as to accept any stranger into their family? Did they have no fear of being betrayed or cheated by the other? Were these spiritual masters naïve? No, they were not. They were simply 'enlightened' and lived in the bliss of 'world-citizenship'. They knew so very well that the unity of the world had to be maintained and sustained for the generations to come. The intellectual elites are re-

discovering this treasure of inter-connectedness, and inter-dependence of the past. This profound understanding of the world as a single family of the eastern scholars make our head put down in shame when we think in terms of serving the Church, and serving the nation; which is a parochial understanding of the world. Be that as it may, parochialism can indeed help us in focussing a particular region, section of the society etc. So, it has its advantages. It does not matter whether you serve the Church or the nation as long as you have the ‘good’ of the world in mind; and one doesn’t lose sight of Vasudhaiva Kuṭumbakam. The principal reason why Jesus came to earth was “not to be served but to serve, and give his life a ransom for many.”<sup>2</sup> The emphasis ought to be laid on the word ‘serving’ rather than what follows it, be it mother Church or Nation, the Bhārata Mātā.

## 2. Bhārata Mātā: The Draupadi

The eastern scholars use down-to-earth analogies, they have used Kuṭumbakam (family) for world, then there ought to be a mother. A family is incomplete without the mother. Very often the nationalists call India, Bhārata Mātā, the goddess. Many wouldn’t like it, if I call Mahābhārata’s Draupadi, the Bhārata Mātā. But that is the truth Draupadi is the Bhārata Mātā. Mahābhārata was fought for this lady. She was the prettiest among all women (nations), the Queen. She was bestowed with the honour of Queen of Indraprasta, and at the same time was publicly disrobed (vastraharana). In the dice-game the Pāṇḍavas were tricked into losing all that they had, even the Queen. What constitutes the country is the lower-castes and the Tribals, the upper castes are a minority. The Kauravas have reduced the Queen Draupadi, the dignified Dalits and the Tribals, and the low-castes to slavery. As long as Draupadi was the Queen they couldn’t abuse her, they did when she was reduced to a slave. Deg-

radation of royalty to slavery. The Church in her pristine form is of the poor and the ordinary. The Church is where the poor are. So, serving the poor is serving the Church as well as the Nation. Would the Hindu-nationalists agree to this sense of serving the Nation? Definitely not. For them 'serving the Church' and 'serving the Nation' are incompatible; because of their Hindutva agenda. Now this calls for disrobing the Hindutva agenda. Before we do that let us know what Christians think about their identity in India.

### **3. Purva Pakṣa I: External Challenge:**

#### **3.1 The Starting Point: Christians in India vs Indian Christians**

The roots of Christianity in India could be traced back to Thomas, the apostle. Christianity did not originate in India. It was brought from outside and offered, given, and even forced by the colonizers/missionaries. Though the arrival of Christianity in India has apostolic origins it could never be called Indian territorially. We '*are*' Indians by birth; but we '*become*' Christians through baptism. The former gives citizenship while the latter gives membership of the organization called the Church; or theologically one becomes part of the mystical body of Christ. Therefore, we are Indians first, then Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Agnostic, or an Atheist. Serving the Nation is prior to serving the Church. The Nation ought to take precedence over Church. Article #25-28 of the Indian Constitution enshrines and guarantees the freedom of religion, to flourish, to profess and to propagate one's faith in India. We are Indians, and have embraced Christianity; that is to say we are Indian Christians. The Indian Christians today are alert as ever, Julio Ribeiro came heavily on the intolerant attitude of the government towards minorities; on the other hand,

Hilda Raja wants Church to introspect as to what they've done for the poor. The RSS also need to know this; for they keep making derogatory remarks such as, "the minorities have no place in India, it belongs to the Hindus." So, it is clear that when the obligation towards one's Nation and the Church are in conflict, one ought to go with the Nation. The territorial belonging precedes the religious. But Savarkar thinks otherwise, for him religion is the deciding factor for one to be a nationalist.

### **3.2 Pitṛbhumi Vs Puṇyabhumi: Nation Vs Church**

"Hindutva rests on racial features, i.e. possessing pure Hindu blood or 'inheritance of the Hindu blood',<sup>3</sup> geographical unity where one considers India as his or her 'Father Land' and 'Holy Land'.<sup>4</sup> In order to establish the fascist ideology of Hindutva and to keep the Muslims and the Christians out of this nationalism, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar cleverly constructed the terms Pitṛbhumi and Puṇyabhumi (Holy Land). The Muslims and the Christians qualify themselves in every aspect of Hindutva but 'Puṇyabhumi'. So, Hindutva is incompatible with minorities, which is why they become a 'misfit' according to Savarkar's Hindutva and hence detrimental and dangerous to the 'Hindu-Rashtra'. Whereas, patriotism on the other hand has nothing to do with one's religion or culture, it takes into consideration only the 'Pitṛbhumi'. Patriotism can stand its own ground, it does not need a religion. But the nationalism the RSS propagates is one that links the patriotism with religion.

### **3.3 Pseudo-Hinduism and Pseudo-Patriotism**

Hindu-nationalists associate religion with patriotism to serve their purpose of cultural nationalism. Lancy Lobo writes: "My analysis shows that Hindu nationalism is in fact



the nationalism of upper-castes or middle-classes. The loud cry ‘Hinduism is in danger’ should be interpreted as the fear of upper castes and middle classes saying their economic interests are in danger.”<sup>5</sup> Or rather a foul-cry to maintain a *status quo* of the Hindu-social order. When they speak of Hinduism they never speak of Philosophical Hinduism one that is pluralistic and accommodative of the other, instead they propagate Hindu-pride, cultural-caste elitism that re-instates Brahmanical supremacy. Savarkar’s was the time of socio-religious reforms which was an after effect of the British rule and the missionary activities coupled with prior Muslim invasions. This is where Hindu-cultural nationalism originates to save the Brahmanical Supremacy.

### **3.4 Hindu-Nationalism**

The greatest challenge that India faces today at this crucial juncture, especially when the 2019 general elections are approaching, is Hindu-nationalism. Right-wing politics has gripped the world, and India is also party to that movement. The Vedic Sanātana dharma is in no way fascist, rather it is pluralistic. “Hindu-nationalism has been a reaction to the anti-Brahmin movement. The pendulum has swung to the other extreme and in Hindu-nationalism, Brahmins are re-asserting their hegemony once again.”<sup>6</sup> Today’s intolerant, shattered, and fragmented India on the basis of religion, which is an outcome of Hindu-cultural fascism termed as nationalism; and often misconstrued as patriotism of the majority. So, going by the ‘Hindutva Agenda’ serving the Church and serving the nation are not compatible; the Church has extra-territorial allegiance. Need we subscribe to this view or we have better examples in the past?

### 3.5 Serving 'Hind' vs 'Hindutva'

Bhagat Singh's name is synonymous to patriotism for a reason, every Indians' heart, irrespective of their caste, creed, culture and religion bled when he was executed by the British-Government for murdering Saunders during the freedom struggle in 1931. Bhagat never sought a mercy petition though he was just 23 then, instead he asked the British-government to execute him by firing squad rather than by hanging; for he thought the former was most respectable and valorous. Through his heroic execution he inspired thousands of youth to participate and liberate the country from the shackles of the oppressive British Government. Bhagat fought for his Pitṛbhumi till the last breath, thus united all his fellow-Indians under the banner of 'Hind', Jai Hind were his last words. Whereas Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the proto ideologue of 'Hindutva' before his final release filed a mercy petition stating that he would never betray British government again. "Savarkar was an atheist, which possibly explains why Hindutva is stripped of Hinduism's admirable pluralistic religious ideals and ethical principles".<sup>7</sup> Bhagat too was an atheist but a sound patriot who united India under 'Hind', and Savarkar divided India with his 'Hindutva.' The choice is with us whether to serve the 'Hind' or the incompatible 'Hindutva.'

### 3.6 Territorial Nationalism vs Cultural Nationalism

The RSS didn't participate in the freedom struggle, only because the minorities were part of this struggle, and preferred to support the oppressive British government, undermining the heroic anti-colonial struggle. Deendayal Upadhyaya, an RSS theoretician, writes: "territorial nationalism implies that the Indian Nation is formed of all those people who reside in this land. An effort was consistently made

to look upon Hindus, Muslims, Christians, etc. as ‘nationals’ and forge them into an integrated force against the foreign rule.”<sup>8</sup> The RSS rejected the ‘territorial nationalism’ and propounded the ‘cultural nationalism’ just to suit their Hindu-fascist motives. ‘Territorial nationalism’ is the right form of ‘nationalism’ for India, given its multi-religious and multi-cultural ethos. The territorial nationalism makes serving the Nation and serving the Church compatible. If they are compatible, how has the Church served the Nation in the past?

### 3.7 Serving the Church, Serving the Nation:

**Mixed Motives:** The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary,<sup>9</sup> which means Church was predominantly implanted by the Missionaries. The colonial patronage was a great boon to the spread of Christianity in the new world. All the good work these missionaries took up was solely for ‘soul harvesting’, be it dictionaries, study of the Vedas, putting up of educational institutes, framing the grammar of Indic languages, so on and so forth. Be that as it may, India as a Nation was the beneficiary of those motives. The English education opened the plethora of opportunities and the freedom struggles of the other nations. This in turn helped the Indians organize themselves to fight against the oppressive British Government. The literature of Indian languages was enhanced, preserved, and propagated, because they wanted to be proficient in those languages. Besides they gave us classics like Christa Purana, Bulcke’s Hindi Dictionary and its ilk.

**Purified Motives:** When the colonial powers withdrew, the poverty and the devastation caused by them were exposed. The missionary activities took a new turn, justice. Social-justice motivated the Church to reach-out to the

poor and the marginalized. This was the era when Church ripped itself of its mixed motives, conversion was just a by-product, focusing on the dismantling of the unjust hierarchical social-order. This in turn empowered the marginalized and the Tribals, but unfortunately threatened the high-caste of their Vedic hegemony as spoken before. Fr Jerome D'Souza had a great role to play in framing the constitution of the Church to safe-guard the rights of the poor and the marginalized.

**Countering Hindu-Nationalism:** As the RSS brain-washes the country in believing that Hindu-culture is the Indian culture the Church has the following response in rooting out the anti-national elements.

- The recent arrests of a Jesuit Priest Fr Stanny and other human activists throughout the country is a sign that Church is active in putting up a fight.
- The Church has to look at the present situation of atrocities of right-wing politics, as the unfinished task of freedom struggle.
- Mahatma Gandhi wanted to make India a fundamentalists free India, a task that Church can take up.
- Fight against Love-Jihad; it has Christian origins sadly.
- Focus on constitutional values as central tenets in contrast to the agenda of the communalists.
- Having a think-tank (professional group) to continuously monitor the current socio-political situation and recommend ways to effectively respond to it. Counter every post that put on social-media.

- Promote a rural/agriculturally based economy as against Modi's market-based economy.
- Creating networks with Church bodies, maintain good relations and collaborations with government institutions/bodies, bureaucrats, professionals etc. who share a vision of a pluralistic society.
- Conduct programs and activities that stand by the victims of injustice and marginalized people irrespective of caste, creed, race etc.
- Promote programs and activities that sensitize students and teachers to the plight of the poor and victims of injustice.
- Forming a team of professionals that would go to the people, to schools, parishes etc. and talk about constitutional rights, and history.
- Foster diversity – multi religious, multi caste, multi class etc. at our institutes.
- Changing our social action approach from Project based to people's right based approach.

**Socio-ecological Justice:** The Church has not been oblivious to ecological crises, she has plunged into this realm with all her might. The *Laudato Si* speaks extensively about everything is connected, and the social justice is linked to ecological crises. The poor are always caught off guard with meagre means to cope with the ecological crises. This is where the '*ecological debt*'<sup>10</sup> exist that the rich owe to the poor. Gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.8 Ecological Crisis: Vastraharana of the Poor is the Vastraharana of the Mother Earth

Leonardo Boff uses the analogy of social fabric and cosmic fabric and how the respective wounds of poverty and ecological degradation weaken the common fabric. Though India is a third-world country there exists a first-world, methodically structured and perpetuated by the clever caste construct by the first-world or rather the high-caste. The indigenous and the Dalits are

pushed to the margins and confined at the peripheries perennially with no or little hope of getting to the center. The third-world is created to stroke the ego of the first-world, at the expense of the

Disrobing Draupadi was an act of adharma, gravest of grave breach of dharma in the presence of the elites and the elders.

poor. Poor are not born poor they are made poor by the rich. Draupadi, a Queen is reduced to a slave, just like the dignified aboriginals and the Dalits are reduced to slaves by the upper-caste. Pāṇḍvas and the Kauravas play the dice and Draupadi has to bear the brunt. She has no voice, utterly helpless pleading for mercy.

Disrobing Draupadi was an act of adharma, gravest of grave breach of dharma in the presence of the elites and the elders. The poor are condemned to die before their time. Letting the Vastraharana take place was also the adharma. Vastraharana, an act of adharma, has a direct impact on the cosmic order. So, the Vastraharana of Draupadi had a direct connection to the cosmic fabric. Exploiting the poor is also the exploitation of the mother earth. Today we are pierced with the acute cry of the oppressed, the excluded and the mother Earth for action. The social injustice towards the poor has its repercussions on the environment. The envi-

ronmental crises have ripped the poor apart from the little that they had; the nature is cruel to the poor. The *'throw-away culture of the rich'* abuses the natural resources and deprives the poor of their resources; the resources of the earth belong to the poor too. This is where the *'ecological debt'* exist that the rich owe to the poor. Gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest. The day the rich realize this debt and start paying the poor what belongs to them, there will be environmental social justice, justice done to the poor is justice done to the environment.

Hindu-nationalism is a challenge that is external the Church is facing the internal challenges of universal nature, the child-sex abuse, moral corruption and dwindling numbers of the faithful. Having delivered the justice to the poor in India, let us introspect a bit and see whether we have delivered justice to our faithful.

## **4. Purva Pakṣa II: Internal Challenge:**

### **4.1 Caesar's Wife Must Be Above Suspicion:**

In 63 BC Caesar gave no evidence against Clodius, who disguised as a woman and entered into Pompeia's closet intending to seduce her, at his trial; and he was acquitted. Nevertheless, Caesar divorced Pompeia, saying that 'my wife ought not even to be under suspicion.' Caesar's life event has two lessons for the Church, the bride of Christ, as it sails through the turbulent waters of child-sex abuse.

1. Never spare the person who breached the code of conduct
2. The close associates of the Church ought to be

above suspicion

There is a cancerous growth of sex scandals and child sex abuse by the catholic clergy. A Church-commissioned report in 2004 said more than 4,000 US Roman Catholic priests had faced sexual abuse allegations in the last 50 years, in cases involving more than 10,000 children - mostly boys. The image of the Church has undergone an irreparable damage devastating millions of children and their childhood. To all this India is not an exception, Indian clergy too is sexually active. There are cases which come to the fore and others do not or they are just put under the carpet. The taboo factor has been protecting the predator priests in India. The way the Church has been protecting the pedophile priests and the scamsters is deplorable, especially for an organization that preaches faith and morality. Today the Church needs to have the audacity to dissociate herself with the perpetrators and never to protect them, rather have them arrested and prosecuted by the civil authority. Because the Church is the bride of Christ it ought to be above suspicion. Caesar knew it very well that his wife Pompei was not guilty but he left no room for people to tarnish his governance and the empire. That is how a Pontifex Maximus protects himself from moral corruption; for he is the high priest.

## **4.2 The Church is Lagging Behind 200 Years**

It might shudder the heart of a faithful to know that the Church is 200 years behind. It is incomprehensible because the organization that is responsible for educating the elites of the world is herself behind time. As the world is progressing and achieving new heights, the Church on the other hand achieving new milestones one after the other in child-sex abuse. Cardinal Carlo Martini gave a deep blow



to the slumbering catholic Church posthumously. He isn't wrong when he says "The Church has been left 200 years behind. Why doesn't it rouse itself? Are we afraid?"<sup>12</sup> Our empty Churches, dwindling vocations, sexual immorality among the clergy and nuns alike, exodus of the faithful from the Church, conservative views on marriage, abortion, divorce, family life, homo-sexual relations, ecological crisis, etc. are signs of Church being an outdated organization that will die her own natural death if it doesn't catch up with the world that she is supposed to serve. Pope Francis is actively doing the clean-up but the truth is that Francis would need one more papacy to do that, such is the expanse. The globalization, materialization and the consumerism, scientific revolutions have changed the face of the earth of which the Church needs to keep track of. The Church has to introspect her present state of affairs. What could be the possible reasons? Have we neglected Vat II?

### **4.3 The Spirit of Vat II is Long Forgotten**

The hierarchical Church still relies heavily on the council of Trent for its doctrine and governance; she hasn't yet embraced the Vat II fully. Pope John XXIII had great vision to take the Church forward with the changing world, he called the council amidst strong opposition. He stood his ground firmly leading the Church to a new horizon. The reforms of the Church are implemented gradually; the Church has been accused of being retrogressive because of this. the ultra-conservatives have been watering down the fruits of the Vat II by just 'memorializing' it, and unwilling to reform. The conservatives are of the opinion that all the councils are to be taken into consideration. The Vat II does not cancel out its previous councils. The conservative participants, Ratzinger and John Paul etc., of the Vat II council came out with the magazine called '*communio*' and the lib-

erals had the ‘*concillium*’ of which Karl Rahner and others were proponents. Not letting the spirit of the Vat II perpetrate into Christian living is the reason why the Church has regressed that too by 200 years. Karl Rahner once said, the 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian will either be a mystique or nobody. The choice is ours.

## **5. Uttara Pakṣa: Opportunities**

Every challenge is potent with opportunity, it depends so much on one’s attitude towards it. The Church has felt the unprecedented heat from the BJP-led government. It posed a challenge; but hasn’t that led us pull up our socks? Have we not become a little more transparent? Every challenge brings with itself an opportunity to grow. We can either go through it or grow through it.

### **5.1 Formation: Incubation and, the IIT’s and the IIM’s**

Incubation is the lingo of the academic world these days when it comes to excellence. The IIT’s, IIM’s provide the best facilities, infrastructure, resources, international exposure, novel avenues, to their students so that they excel. Their basic needs are taken care of; they just have to focus on the academic task at hand. They are grilled and ground so well in their academic pursuits that they are raring to go in the world and make difference. Isn’t our formation an example of incubation? Why can’t we train world-class leaders? We have everything at our disposal; the only thing lacks in the formation is proper motivation. The IIT’s and IIM’s have cut throat competition and thorough screening. The mediocre will never make it to any of these prime institutes. Our men and women are under-trained, and under-performed, the human resources of the Church are not utilised properly. The world is full of opportunities, the

mother earth is expectantly waiting for her able children to make a difference in the lives of her people. When our men and women serve the under-privileged we serve the Nation in its truest sense.

## **5.2 Right Based Approach: Tapping into Government Resources**

The expanse of the government policies, schemes, and projects is enormous. Their out-reach is praise worthy. The Church personnel need to tap into these resources especially when the foreign funding to our missions and projects is curbed. If we can collaborate on some projects with the government we can work wonders and marvels given our expertise. Government schemes and projects are great sources of opportunities to serve the Nation. Economic wellbeing and development of the rural populace as against Confrontational Social Action. The former is suitable for rural masses whereas the latter is apt for the city crowd. To lift the rural economy from sustenance economy to sustainable economy would be a great challenge and opportunity to build the Nation at the same time. It is time for our Church social-activists to work along the right based approach rather than the project based.

India is the second most unequal country in the world. Fortune, the agriculture sector, lies at the bottom of the pyramid. Does the Church work for the farmers and contribute her might in the agricultural sector has the most labourers? Agricultural GDP has gone down of the country that has 50% agricultural population. Agriculture's contribution to the GDP is just 12%. The solution to GDP problems lies at the agricultural sector. This sector poses a great opportunity and challenge to the Church. That is our calling today to go the regions where the others find it difficult to.

### **5.3 Going to the Frontiers: Trend Setters**

It would be interesting to recall a student movement that began in 1960's in Germany and they rose to national politics with their ecological crisis agenda and called themselves a Green Party. They ruled for about two terms and then they were not in the politics at all, because by then all the parties had taken up the ecological crisis as their agenda and all had become the Green parties. We get to see similar trends when we see the works that the Church used to do, be it empowerment, advocacy, education, or health-care are taken up by laity and other NGO's. Isn't that an amazing development? Our work of so many centuries is bearing fruit. The Church had taken up those activities when no one else did. Is that why we were so relevant then? Why is our presence, to an extent, redundant today? Isn't that a sign that we need to do something that is relevant for the contemporary world and the generations to come? Our times are full of opportunities, we just need an eye that spots and capitalises them under the guidance of the Spirit. Our future lies on the frontiers, the works that no one else is doing has been crying aloud for attention. The Church ought to move or else it will stagnate and die a natural death.

### **5.4 Occupying Spaces vs Participating in Processes**

The Church has structures all over India, be it edifices of the majestic Churches, towering colleges, reputed schools, active social centres, 24x7 health services, and other significant institutes. They occupy prominent places in the cities, educating the elite, and serving the middle class which are still unapproachable for the poor. We could participate in umpteen number of social movements led by the lay people. Some are even government sponsored. Can we be participating in the processes rather just have the pres-

ence institutionally. Have we the audacity to enter into the unknown. The opportunities lie at our door ever knocking to be opened and be part of the change. We being an organisation that runs educational enterprises for the elite of the society can have such a great impact on the young minds and root out the fascist ideologies from the face of the earth only if we could participate in these processes.

## **5.5 Bearing Witness vs Preaching the Gospel**

St Francis of Assisi once lovingly told his friars to proclaim Gospel all the time and preach only if need be. Let our lives proclaim the Gospel. How true it is for a pluralistic country like ours. It is true that we need not be aggressive with conversions as the 16<sup>th</sup> century missionaries. But instead follow the advice of the saint and bear witness. That is the true test of our Christian living. How easy it is to give a scholarly discourse on what Jesus said as against putting into practice what Jesus said. That is the true proclamation. What a privilege to be surrounded by the non-Christians, all the more reason for us to be more like Christ and bear witness to the Kingdome values without even preaching them. Only then we would be in a true sense the salt of the earth and light of the world. Or do we find ourselves like the rich young man who went away sad when Jesus called him to be his disciple?

## **5.6 Spirituality is Our Fortress**

Poverty is not an opportunity to do charity, instead poverty is an opportunity to see things from the perspective of the poor, let God reveal himself through the poor to us. Developing an inner life of spirituality is far more important for a Church personnel than anything else. Spirituality ought to be the priority everything else falls in place,

including our heinous scandals. The secular world is getting spiritualised. The secular people seek spiritual depth while the clergymen go after secular things. There's a kind of role reversal. In the past the religious, the monks made policies, they were the pioneers, the secular world imitated them. Today the religious world imitates the secular and longs to be like the secular in the garb of a religious. That is the point of crisis. The Church has enormous challenge to renew herself and reform for the laity are seeking the depth in spirituality. Can we leave them unattended in our secular pursuits? They are sheep without the shepherd. But Today India has just two do we have the shepherd major concerns: the poverty and the ecology. Lau- who are out there to shepherd rather than exploiting dato Si' precisely focusses the sheep using the power of on these two concerns. being the shepherd. Spiritu- ality is our fortress and we ought to guard it.

### 5.7 Melting Point: Bridging the Gap

The Church's prime educational institutes are at the service of the Nation. Though the Church is guilty of being exclusively for the urban rich; lately, she has opened herself up to the oppressed and the poor. The ecclesial institutes are committed to an extent where she reserves the 50% of the seats for the underprivileged.<sup>13</sup> Our schools and colleges have become the interface of the rich and the poor. The rich come to know the plight of the poor. The poor get to study with the rich, which was something unimaginable in the past. The Church has reduced the gap by providing opportunities to the poor. The Nation develops when her poor develop.

Today India has just two major concerns: the poverty and the ecology. *Laudato Si*, the papal encyclical precisely focusses on these two concerns of the world. This is where the Church and the nation meet. This is the melting point. The richer countries are worried about the ecology and the poorer countries are worried about their poor. If the present trends continue, this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us.<sup>14</sup> ‘The culture of the satisfied’<sup>15</sup> can ignore the devastation of the poor masses; for they are concerned about their profits. Only if the rich think of the poor in terms of the degradation of the environment there would be bridging of these two concerns.

## **6. Conclusion: Restoring Draupadi’s Dignity**

Rendering justice to Draupadi would call for a radical change in the social structure as envisaged in *Gaudium et Spes*, the document is not content with a conversion in the mentality and attitudes of peoples, but calls for reforms in the socio-economic realm. “Numerous reforms are needed at the socio-economic level, along with universal change in ideas and attitudes”.<sup>16</sup> In many situations there is urgent need for a reassessment of economic and social structures.<sup>17</sup> Because, “excessive economic and social differences between the members of the one human family or population groups cause scandal, and militate against social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person, as well as social and international peace.”<sup>18</sup>

Restoring justice, the dignity of the poor and the oppressed is so divine. Jesus went about preaching, healing and teaching; every-time he did that he restored people’s dignity by forgiving their sins and restoring them to God,

healing their sicknesses and making them ritually complete, preaching and bringing them to God. Lord Kṛṣṇa did the same thing when he saved Draupadi of public shame at the Vastraharana and restored her dignity. Justice to the poor translates into justice to the mother earth too.

As we serve the nation, taking care of our mother earth is a top priority. The earth is not something that gives life, but life itself. Earth is a co-creator. The human persons have lost the sacred dimension towards the earth. Earth is not just for tilling, it is to be respected. Once we lose the sacredness of a being then we misuse and mistreat. As it happened to Draupadi, she was mistreated once she was reduced to a slave in the dice-game. The Dalits and the Tribals are ripped of their dignity therefore the upper-caste take undue advantage of them. Once we recognize the sanctity of the earth, we need to get into personal relationship to love the mother earth. It entails a new covenant between human beings and other beings, a new gentleness towards what is created, and the fashioning of an ethic and mystique of kinship with the entire cosmic community.<sup>19</sup> Once this connection of love is established with the humans and the earth then we may never mistreat the mother earth and her children. Thus, we shall restore the dignity of Draupadi who represents both the poor and the Bhārata Mātā. This takes us back to Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. India is a jewel of the earth, a force to reckon with; a potential super-power if only it actualizes the maxim *Sabka Saath Sabka Vikaas*, and the environment included.

## Notes

1. *Maha Upaniṣad* 6: 72.
2. Mark 10:45.
3. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Hindutva. Who is a Hindu?* (New Delhi:



Hindi Sahitya Sadan, 1923), 130.

4. Ibid., 110.
5. Lancy Lobo, *Globalisation, Hindu Nationalism and Christians in India* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2002), 171.
6. Ibid., 172.
7. Ram Puniyani, ed., *Fascism in India*, (Delhi: Media house), 40.
8. C. P. Bishikar, *Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya: Ideology and Perception* (New Delhi: Suruchi Prakashan), 11.
9. Ad Gentes, 2.
10. *Laudato Si'*, #51.
11. *Bolivian Bishops' Conference, Pastoral Letter on the Environment and Human Development* in Bolivia El Universo, don de Dios para la Vida (23 March 2012), 17.
12. Cardinal Carlo Martini says Church '200 years behind', *Corriere della Sera*, 1 September 2012, Sec III, 5.
13. Loyola College Chennai, one of the best in the country reserves 50% of the seats for the underprivileged.
14. *Laudato Si'* #24.
15. Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 113.
16. *Gaudium et Spes*, #63.
17. *Gaudium et Spes*, #86.
18. *Gaudium et Spes*, #29.
19. Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 112.

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# **Serving God and People: Challenges and Opportunities for the Indian Church**

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## **Introduction**

Service is a word used in different senses in our ordinary conversation. For example, a person is called a Civil Servant if he/she is an employee of the government. We have the Service sector, which includes the Customer Service. We have the domestic Servants who help out in the household chores. Military Service is serving in a country's armed forces. Table Service is the food served by waiters and waitresses and Voluntary Service is an action taken to benefit others for no benefit to the one performing the action. In Christian perspective the word Service has many meanings too. For example, 'Service' or 'Divine Services' are used to speak of worship. A formal or organized prayer programme may also be called a 'Service' or a 'Prayer Service'.

When dealing with the word Service in this essay we shall limit ourselves to the meaning of Service as - *A loving action for one's neighbor which is derived from divine love and is an expression of fellowship*. True Service is voluntary, not forced. One must be willing to serve and willing to place oneself at the disposal of others.

## 1. How Does Christianity Understand Service?

We can understand the spirit of Service in the Church by focusing on Jesus, the early Church, the documents of the Church and the various institutions in the Church that are dedicated to Service of the people of God.

### a. Jesus: The Model of Service

The Evangelists present Jesus as one who serves. Jesus himself saw his mission as Service. He spoke of Himself: *“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.”* (Matt 20:28). His Service sprang out of his compassion to the sick and suffering. Jesus showed himself as a servant in a very important way when he washed the feet of his disciples at the last meal with them and asked his disciples to follow his example of humble of Service (Jn 6:3-5). Jesus made Service an important aspect of his teaching: The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37); the commandment of love God and love neighbor (Mk 12: 28-31); on the Day of Judgment, one is judged on the Service one renders to the needy (Mt 25: 31-46). Jesus’ Service sprang out of his compassion to the sick and suffering.

### b. Service in the Primitive Church

The New Testament attests that Service of one another was a hall mark of the life of early Christians. Those who had would share with those who had needs. Service as material assistance extended from the Church in one place to churches in other places which needed help. The book of Acts describes how the Christians in Antioch extended help to Christians in Judea during a famine. (Acts 11:29)

### c. Service in the Church

The spirit of Service was concretized in many creative expressions in the history of Christianity. Many religious institutes of priests, and lay persons emerged within Christianity which cared for the sick, supported widows, orphans and refugees, looked after the welfare of prisoners, and educated boys and girls. An iconic figure in recent history, St. Mother Teresa of Kolkata, dedicated her life serving the destitute, poorest of the poor rejected by families and society.

Following are the various documents of the Church that expresses its social concern towards the service of the poor and promotion of human dignity:

- *Rerum Novarum* is an encyclical issued by Pope Leo XIII on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1891 that addressed the condition of the working classes. It focused on the rights and duties of Capital and labor.
- *Populorum Progressio* is the encyclical written by Pope Paul VI on the topic of “the development of people” and that the economy of the world should serve mankind and not just the few. It was released on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1967.
- *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, “The Social Concern”, is an encyclical promulgated by Pope John Paul II on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1987. It deals with development on two fundamental lines: The failed development of the Third World and the conditions and requirements for a development of a worthy person.
- *Evangelium Vitae*, “The Gospel of Life”, is an encyclical promulgated on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1995 by Pope John Paul II. It deals with issues pertaining sanctity of life.

## 2. The Church in India

Although India is a secular society, religion is publicly manifested on the streets. Hinduism has made the most profound religious imprint on Indian society but India is tremendously pluralistic, and there are significant numbers of Muslims in India. In contrast to many western countries that privatize and interiorize religion in order to cope with religious pluralism, pluralistic India puts religion in all forms very much in public view, in vivid color for all to see.

Catholicism in India is characterized by intense devotional practice that draws from Hindu, Syrian, colonial Portuguese and contemporary Catholic practices. The connections between Indian Catholicism and the rest of Indian culture are often on display, and at times the boundaries between these practices can seem thin. One maybe a Catholic but at the same time he/she is also a citizen of India and holds a responsibility towards one's motherland. When Jesus says: "*Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God that are of God.*" (Matt 22:21). Jesus teaches that we as Christians enjoy double citizenship: we are citizens of our country as well as citizens of Heaven. That is the reason, though Catholicism is very much a minority religion, it is quite visible in India. Catholic schools, hospitals, and colleges are widely revered in India, sought after by Hindus, Muslims and Christians alike. Christian communities run 20 percent of the private educational institutions and more than 30 percent of the private medical Services in the country.

There have been significant political efforts by Hindu nationalists to marginalize Catholicism as "foreign." This is not true at all! India is an integral part of Asia. In *Ecclesia in Asia*, Pope John Paul II speaking about the wonders of

the land of Asia says that Asia is a land of great importance as Christ was born, lived and died in Asia along with the entire History of Salvation taking place in Asia. Missionary work began in Asia and then spread out to Europe and America. St. Thomas, the Apostle came to preach in India, especially South India, as early as 52 AD. That's the reason Catholicism is more a part of the social, religious and political order in the south of India. The Church is not foreign on the contrary it is totally at the service of the Indian society and I substantiate this claim by enumerating the contribution of Christianity in India.

### **3. Contributions of Christianity in India**

The Vice President of India, Venkaiah Naidu, in a meeting organized by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), expressed appreciation for the work of the Church, emphasizing that Christians are a peaceful community, whose work represents a great contribution to the nation's growth. Following are enumerated a few of the numerous contributions of the Church in India -

#### **a. Contributions of Christianity to Reformation, and Modern Democracy**

We can document the contributions of Christianity even before India was united as a country and when she existed only as different princely states. For example William Carey, a British Christian missionary, studied the Indian languages and translated the Bible. He did not stop with the Bible only; in 1802 he published the Bengali translation of Mahabharata and Ramayana. In 1818 the Bengali newspaper was published in vernacular language as a means of social education. He pioneered the movement that led to the abolition of the inhuman practice of Sati and relentless-

ly fought against other social evils such as infanticide and caste system that plagued the Indian society.

There is a false notion of identifying the Church in India with the Westerners. On the contrary, we would be surprised by the fact, which is mostly ignored and overlooked, that during the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Bombay Christian Movement in its first resolution stated that members of the Indian Christian Community were one with other communities in their desire to win complete *Swaraj*! Swadeshi Movement of 1905 and Non-cooperation movement of 1920 were supported by Christians heralding that, *"It is not religion, but human values and Patriotism stand first."*

#### **b.Contributions of Christianity to Social Education**

The Educational Service of Christianity has been admitted as a highly valued Service to the nation. Many of the Christian schools and colleges mainly cater to the children of the migrants and the poor. In addition to that there are 1,524 Technical Training schools and Polytechnics run by the Church in India. There are thousands of schools and hundreds of colleges run by the Church. The Christian mission in the education sphere helped in elevation of the status of women by being the pioneers in female education.

#### **c. Contributions of Christianity in Uplifting Tribals and Dalits**

Most of the tribes were exploited due to their ignorance and were under the clutches of money lenders causing them to forfeit their land and lose control over their community. The scene changed by the arrival of the missionaries who focused on formal education, alternative employment and introduced many socio-economic measurers such as estab-



lishing Catholic co-operative credit society, cooperative societies, and mutual help societies, which made the tribes self-sufficient.

#### **d. Contributions of Christianity to National integration**

Christianity has helped to lay the foundation for a wider and deeper fraternity based on love, justice, forgiveness and solidarity. In the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman, as also in the other diocese across India, various Inter-Religious programmes are organized both at the state as well as at the parish level, to promote religious harmony. These inter-religious activities effectively serve in building bonds of love, understanding and fraternity in the society at large.

The Church tries to reach out and help the people who are neglected and are utterly vulnerable. They include the migrants, refugees, orphans, destitute, old age people rejected by their families, mentally and physically disabled persons, those affected by HIV/AIDS and street children. Thus I state that when one serves the Church one serves the nation as the Church is an integral part of India.

### **5. Issues Confronted by the Church in India**

A desire to serve others is not free from difficulties and challenges that thwart one's path. There are several types of needs and situations which the Church may respond to in its desire to serve-

#### **a. Inequality, Poverty and Social Exclusion**

Social exclusion refers to the exclusion of groups of people from access to such things that are considered normal or taken for granted by others in society. Divisions are drawn on lines of caste, religion, and gender; it includes discrimination against minorities, Dalits, tribals, widows,

sex-workers, migrants, nomadic tribes, etc. Exclusion is also the fate of the communities displaced by pro-business development projects, the slum-dwellers, the poor, the homeless, the child labourers, and the street children. A recent estimate put the number of street children in India at 15 million – 15 per cent of the global count!

### **b. Urban and Rural Poverty**

Earlier, poverty was only looked upon as a rural phenomenon. However, India faces problem of both rural poverty as well as urban poverty. This was one of the grounds on which Rangarajan Committee reported on urban poverty and rural poverty separately. The Committee estimates that the 30.9% of the rural population and 26.4% of the urban population was below the poverty line in 2011-12. The All-India ratio was 29.5%. In 2011-12 363 million were below poverty.

### **c. Lack of Sustainable Development**

India has not been successful in carving a sustainable path that leads to development. India's developmental policies have resulted in degraded soils, depletion of water tables, increased floods, desertification, waterlogging and salinity, pollution of water and air, loss of biodiversity. The recent Kerala flood that killed at least 360 people and caused damage of property worth crores of rupees is an indicator of the rampant ecological damage as it was mostly caused due to rampant and ill planned quarrying, mining, illegal repurposing of forests, and high-rise building constructions.

### **d. Violence against Women**

Women suffer domestic violence which largely goes un-

reported. Apart from this, women are also victims of public violence like gang rapes etc. Rapes are not just the individual act of a man against a woman but they also manifest the hegemony of the patriarchal mindset in the society.

### **e. Mob Lynching and Vigilantism**

The judiciary system has taken a backseat in India as now justice is being delivered by the anti-social vigilantes. *No FIR's, No Arrests, Faista on the spot!* This appears to be the new judicial justice system. "Justice" is delivered within seconds just by a click of the WhatsApp message! This sickening act has already claimed 27 lives in 9 states in one year! The law enforcers appear to be mute spectators or silent participants in this drama. More often than not they arrive for the clean up after the stage is empty when only the mangled body remains.

### **f. Drug Culture Among the Youth**

The menace of drugs and alcohol has woven itself deep into the fabric of our society. More Indian youngsters struggle with addiction than ever before. Peer pressure, adolescent immaturity and irresponsible parenting are the three-headed monster luring teens towards addiction and a life of suffering and regret. In Punjab nearly 75% of its youth are severely addicted to drugs. Mumbai, Hyderabad and other cities around the country are quickly gaining a reputation for their drug usage.

## **6. Future Prospects of Service in the Church and India**

- The Youth are the living force of our Church and the society. We need to empower our youth to play an active role in the Church by equipping them with the knowledge of the Word of God and with the teachings of the Church.

As well as, encourage them to involve in important areas of our national life such as politics, Civil Services, defense, law and judiciary. All religions must encourage and inspire their young adherents to imbibe the spirit of Service to humanity. The youth have great potentials and can bring much positive change in society.

- The Church cannot go a long way if it goes alone. Wherever possible, it must serve with other religious groups and secular agencies. For example, opening orphanages in collaboration with NGO's, and other state agencies who work for similar causes.
- We ought to continue our work in the field of education and health services despite the numerous oppositions. Being the voice of the voiceless is one of the important missions of the Church. We should work for and stand by the farmers, fishermen, migrants and other deprived and exploited communities by providing care, comfort and hope to them in their distress.
- We are the stewards of creations and so we should make people aware of the importance of ecology through our preaching, catechesis and by organizing an ecological drive in the parish. This will help to educate people about caring for the nature which is an integral part of our Christian commitment and spirituality as beautifully enumerated by Pope Francis in his Encyclical, *Laudato Si*.
- We should seize every opportunity to promote dialogue across religious boundaries. Visiting our Hindu and Muslim brethren during Ganesh, Diwali, Eid are some of the means to build fraternal love in our societies. I can proudly say that in our Seminary we make it a point that all of us go to visit the Hindu brethren on Ganesh

Chaturthi. As it has been a few years since we have been doing this; the Hindu brethren eagerly wait for our visit. This is a pleasant and very effective way to build a bond of love and compassion in our society.

## 7. Conclusion

Service is a universal principle and cuts across religions and societies. All religions and religious beliefs have the potential to curb sufferings and conflicts in the society. But sadly, religions often add to social conflicts and human suffering. The vision of equality and universal fraternity which religions espouse is not empirically realized in the world.

This must change. Followers of different religions and ideologies must find areas of common purpose where they can work together. The Church in particular should live in the spirit of Service to one another and be a beacon of hope and light to the Indian society. Though some

When the Church becomes a symbol of Service as Jesus himself, then we can all work together to build our nation because *in Serving the Church we will be Serving the Nation!*

may differentiate between 'Serving God' and 'Serving people', in the perspective of Jesus, both are closely and inseparably linked. Thus, when the Church becomes a symbol of Service as Jesus himself, then we can all work together to build our nation because *in Serving the Church we will be Serving the Nation!*

# The Conservative and Liberal Values

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“When it comes to moral judgments, we think we are scientists discovering the truth, but actually we are lawyers arguing for positions we arrived at by other means.” The surprising psychology behind morality is at the heart of social psychologist Jonathan Haidt’s research. He explains “liberal” and “conservative” not narrowly or necessarily as political affiliations, but as personality types — ways of moving through the world, reports Krista Tippett, host of “On Being,” an award winning podcast.

In his acclaimed book, *The Righteous Mind*, he examined the conundrum behind good people divided by religion and politics. Professor of Ethical Leadership at New York University’s Stern School of Business, Haidt writes about his life: “As a kid who always loved science, and when I first read the bible in college, the Old Testament, I was horrified when I read the whole thing. And so I went through the phase that many young scientific types go through. I’m the sort of person who would have been a New Atheist if I hadn’t taken a very different turn in my own research.”

He refers to the negative psychology which focusses almost exclusively on problems. It dealt with pathologies, violence, drug addiction, racism, all those sorts of things. He recalls what Martin Seligman, a psychologist at Penn,

said, when he was president of the American Psychological Association, “Well, what about the positive side of life? Most people are doing pretty well. And when they go to the bookstore, all they have on offer are books by Deepak Chopra. So we should be having psychologists doing research on the positive side of life.”

When Heidt started doing research on morality and how it’s based on the emotions like disgust and anger and shame, he asked himself: “Well, what’s the opposite of disgust?” And I started – what do you feel when you see somebody do something beautiful or uplifting? And it felt to me as though there’s such an emotion, but there wasn’t a word for it, at least not in the psychological language – I mean you can say “uplifted” or “touched” or “moved.”

“So if you go with me that morality is part of human nature, that it is something that evolved in us as our primate ancestors became cultural creatures that lived in larger groups, then these groups competed with each other, and the groups that were able to hang together and cooperate are the ones that succeeded and became our ancestors.” Further, heads: “So if you are with me that morality, just like the love of our children or the sense of humor or language... You begin to see morality as this amazing ability that binds groups together in groups that are larger than kinship.”

We cooperate “so brilliantly, and that’s because we have this moral psychology that binds us together.” It’s most effective when we have a sacred value, something that we all worship or circle around. “So it’s clearest in religions, where the sacred value is literally God or the Torah or whatever, but you’ll see it in any political group too. So on the left, nowadays, just in the last year or two, it’s become over-

whelmingly marriage equality and rising income inequality.”

Heidt suggests that human beings are born with moral “receptors.” Just as our taste buds organically incline us to like and dislike certain tastes and textures, our minds come equipped to feel pleasure or displeasure at patterns in the social world.

He describes five primary moral foundations, accepted by all cultures. People who are liberal and conservative, he says, value two of these in common, compassion and fairness. But conservatives juggle three other moral values – of loyalty, authority, and sanctity.

May we liberals and conservatives, maintaining our distinct viewpoints, protect and promote life, which has become so fragile today! May we, in this New Year, find life as pure and unalloyed source of joy. For me and for all of us!

[Adapted from an article for *The Financial Chronicle*]