



TRACI Reflections

Theological Research And
Communication Institute



IDEA OF INDIA

One of placards held by one of the protesters in the Citizens March organized in the city on 9th January caught my attention. It said, "Will someone return to me the country that I was proud of as a child." The words somehow resonated with me, stirring in my mind the pictures of that India that I too was proud of. An India- where we never thought of our friends and school mates in terms of their religious background. We grew up in an India where learning the stories of the valour and sacrifice of our freedom fighters like Bhagat Singh, Ashfaqulla Khan and Birsa Munda filled us up with pride and inspiration about our shared heritage. However in the vitiated atmosphere of our present where we are made to look at other communities with suspicion and differentiate the people on the basis of their clothes; when the shrill cry of shooting down our own students is heard on the streets and is supported by the political leaders, then we are jolted from our reverie that the India that we knew as a child has changed beyond recognition in the last few years.

What we are witnessing is not less than a war of ideas which is being fought on the university campuses by student and faculty members, on street corners by youth and ordinary women and children and by eminent personalities on the panel discussions in our TV studios and the voluminous content of the print media and social media. Whether we like it or not we the common citizens cannot escape being caught in this forced battle line because whatever we had so far assumed as the given and cherished as the democratic values of our Constitution are now being questioned, challenged and are facing a real threat of being snatched away from us, right before our eyes. A different vision of a nation which was rejected at the time of our independence is being projected as a glorified vision of a strong and developed nation with the idea of One Nation, One Culture and dominance of one religion and language. This idea is totally at variance with the Constitution that "We the People of India" gave ourselves- a Constitution that declared India as a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic with a commitment to secure all its citizens justice, liberty, equality and fraternity without any discrimination on the basis of religion, caste, color or economic status.

Therefore on this 70th year of our Republic all of us need to take a renewed pledge to guard and protect this Constitution which was bestowed to us as a Sacred Covenant marked by the blood of the martyrs of our freedom struggle. We must commit that we will not allow anyone to fiddle with its basic character and give ourselves totally to rebuild, reconstruct and re-vision our people to the cherished values enshrined in the Preamble to the Constitution. This time we are not facing any external enemy or a foreign rule this time but the attack to the Constitution and the idea of India that we know is from within. Against this onslaught we must reiterate and loudly affirm that unlike other nations in the world India is a nation of multiple nations, with multiple religions and cultures and languages. Our strength lies in the diversity of our people and mutual love and respect for one another and we will not let it be destroyed at any cost. This is the idea of India to live for and to be ready to die for. So help us and prepare us O Lord!



RAAJ MONDOL
CEO Salt Initiatives, India

"WHEN I WAKE UP TOMORROW"

*When I wake up in the morning
the rain will have fallen,
the ground would be wet
and the air fresh.
There would be singing in the Church,
bells ringing from the Temple
and ardent prayers from the Mosque:
all joyfully welcoming the new day.*

*When I rise in the early hours
the wind would have ceased;
song birds would be in choir
among peaceful boughs of greener trees.
The nightmares of war and hate
of oppression, corruption and disasters
would have ended with my dreams;
and a gentle breeze open my sleepy eyes.*

*Oh, when I wake up tomorrow
sins will have been forgiven;
my painful wounds healed,
and relationships restored.
I will walk with my neighbor again.
Yes! Laugh at our stupid mistakes,
and teach our children friendship.
When I wake up tomorrow
When I wake up tomorrow...*



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UPCOMING EVENTS

- ❖ Current Trends & Church Engagement: 23rd Feb in Chennai, To be decided in Bangalore & Kerala
 - ❖ Theological Student's Internship Program: 22nd April to 18th May 2020.
- Every 3rd Saturday : Pandita Ramabai Book Study
Every 3rd Saturday : Delhi Reflection Group

TRACI MISSION : "Facilitating integrated response and transformative engagements through theological reflections on contemporary and relevant issues, by communities of followers of Jesus Christ".

LOSS OF LAMENT

The theme of lament was indeed a very unlikely choice. As the year dawned, new year wishes to a friend of mine came back with a very startling and poignant response; '...it's been a difficult year. I almost don't have the courage to face the new year'. Caught by surprise though, how true he was to me and how often have we lost the freedom to express our anguish and aghast! In a treadmill of conquest, time seldom gives us those moments to be real and need be - lament.

Do we hear the laments around us; probably not if we are just living in contexts of praise and worship. But there are enough groaning's around us and they will be heard if we incline our ears to the voices: voices of lament. My friend was outright in his response, but not so with many. This calls for us to consciously incorporate songs and prayers of lament in our communities. We cannot lose our loved ones to live it all alone!

Is it ok to lament? Psalms of lament lead us to its settings (Sitzimleben). What else would a 'refugee psalmist, a captive of the Babylonian army, bound in chains and being marched.... far from the land of his people and the city of his birth hear'? He becomes aware, and many times helplessly, to 'the cries and moans of fellow-Israelites, many wounded, being herded from the soil that was once their own'. They are lamenting and its real. Duncan Maclaren shares that *"Lament provides us with a voice in which to speak to God in situations of endemic sin. It is the one response that enables us to keep talking to God with some integrity."* No wonder, the psalmist's turn their experiences into lament to a God who is gracious and able to deliver.

On the other hand, absence of lament, Walter Brueggemann says, is "the loss of genuine covenant interaction because the second party to the covenant (the petitioner) has become voiceless." Hence, "where lament is absent, covenant comes into being only as a celebration of joy and well-being. Or in political categories, the greater party is surrounded by subjects who are always 'yes men and women' from whom 'never is heard a discouraging word'. Since such a celebrative, consenting silence does not square with reality, covenant minus lament is finally a practice of denial, cover-up, and pretence, which sanctions social control." I find it very relevant to our times and to our communities. There can be no living in denial; in spite of the fact that our laments can be repetitive, running out of ideas, running out of friends and communities and even hope. Many times, we end up staring at the indefinite and the infinite wait! And hence the cry 'How long, O Lord?'

Yet how long? A beautiful reminder is that *'lament creates a transitional space, not a terminus'*. But as often desired the terminus may not be what we determine. Laments bring in relief not by way of solving the crisis always, yet it renders hope. In lament we transfer our concerns into the hands of a God who is sovereign, merciful, just and retributive. Laments lead us to trust and rest in the fact that the Lord will come through in the end.

The only way I can wish my friend will be in the words of Habakkuk. The fig has not bud, nor are grapes on the vine, the olive crops have failed, and the fields produce no food. But I have cried it to the Lord, he has heard me. I will rejoice, be joyful because He is my strength and he'll enable me to face yet another year.

- Sathish Simon, TRACI

Reference:

- Duncan Maclaren, "The Lost Language of Lament (Psalm 79:1-9), Volume 118 Number 11 Pages 551-552, 2007 SAGE Publications (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi And Singapore), DOI: 10.1177/0014524607081081, [Http://EXT.Sagepub.Com](http://EXT.Sagepub.Com)
- Walter Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament", Journal for the Study of Old Testament 36 (1986), Downloaded from jot.sagepub.com

'MEDIA & STORY TELLING'

The One-day Workshop on 'Media & Storytelling', conducted by TRACI, was led by well-known Photojournalist, Vishal Arora. We were also introduced to the works of a young journalist Harshita Rathore. Vishal walked us through 'The Art of Story Telling in Journalism' with a glimpse of the paradigm shift in the two schools of thought. The Old School gave emphasis on information/incident/what happened to the New School that becomes subjective with his personal experiences as a journalist. He also emphasized at length on the 6 components of 'what should an ideal story comprises of, the process of storytelling and how to write a story'. It's primal to note the positive impact it could make to the viewers or readers at the deepest level following those key components. The short video clip on 'Panic Attack' & another video made by Harshita and the team was all the more interesting and meaningful. We ended with a meaningful 'Q&A' before the lunch break.



In the post-lunch session, Vishal walked us through 'photography' with special emphasis on 'Framing'. He shared that, *"framing is not just pulling down the shutter rather it is filled with many thoughts, ideas, emotions, memories, etc. that goes along with the frame"*. To add to that, he took us through the necessary steps of framing with his personal journalistic photos and their stories and significance. Vishal also briefed us on the 'Art & Craft of Opinion Writing' with necessary tips on writing with suggested book readings.

To conclude, We ended the workshop with well-received testimonials from the participants.

- The workshop sessions rejuvenates the idea of hope & positivity in the midst of looming political and economic frustration.
- I am encouraged to catch hold what I have and start writing.
- These are great writing tips for stories, as for my job demands.
- My takeaway is to put the stories of people alive as academicians' not just theoretical excerpts.
- I take it to heart to keep writing without complications.

- Reported by Holkhomang Mate

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