



TRACI
Reflections
Theological Research And
Communication Institute



#BILKIS BANO CASE: TRIVIALIZED ON ALL ACCOUNTS

Shameful; disgusting; heart-breaking – these are some of the many dejected responses to the remission of eleven men convicted of the brutal murder and rape of fourteen members of Bilkis Bano's family in 2002. The killed included her sister-in-law (who had delivered a baby the day before), and Bilkis' three year old daughter, her head smashed to the ground; she herself was five months pregnant when she was raped multiple times and left naked and bleeding, presumed dead. Her story is well-known; how she pulled herself together, how she fought for justice, going from court to court, till eleven men, all her neighbours, were convicted, and sentenced to life imprisonment. It was one small victory; many of the anti-Muslim rioters got off scot-free.

We share in the sorrow and horror both of what happened in 2002, and in what has happened now, twenty years later. The legality of the remission is questioned – most lawyers agree that it broke all norms for remission, both of the Supreme Court, and also of the Gujarat state itself. The legal manipulation used to secure the remission may well be struck down. The immorality of the release of convicted men in such a heinous crime, is, however, unquestionable.

It is unquestionable because it trivialized the most serious crime of all – taking the life of others. The twenty men – seven were let off for want of evidence – killed fourteen people, including four women and four children. The killings were brutal and merciless, of small children, post-partum women and outnumbered men, who were all fleeing for their lives, terrified, as the anti-Muslim riots raged. If we wish to treat fellow humans seriously, murderers should not be allowed to walk free, as even the norms for remission clearly state. Forgiveness may be granted by the families, but the state must not remit such justified sentences.

It trivialized too, the disrespect and violence shown by men to women – the ultimate insult, sadly, of using the act of consenting love and turning it into an act of force, violence, hate, and bestiality. The irony was that the Prime Minister, who happened to be the Gujarat Chief Minister in 2002, had just that day given Indians a speech on respecting women.

It trivialized the value children and the elderly should have in society. Rather than protection, these frail members of society were victimized, subdued and killed.

Most of all, perhaps the remission was immoral because it trivialized the whole idea of equality, fraternity, justice and harmony that any humane society should be based on - an idea based on the creation picture of all humans, no matter the caste, religion, gender or race, being made in the image of God. Both the original killings and rape as well as the remission went against this. They were clearly majoritarian – where members of one community were allowed to express rage and violence, and then twenty years later, let off from their justified punishment by virtue of their religion. One minister went as far as to say the men were from the upper caste, and therefore “cultured” men.

A society which sides with the rich, the powerful, the majority over the poor, powerless and few, is a sick and sinful society. The Hebrew prophets clearly enunciate God's condemnation of such societies.

What should be our response?

Like Daniel, in Chapter 9: 1-19, we must be on our knees praying for God's mercy and forgiveness

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What Do We Measure?

Our call is to ‘explore the face of God in our society’, I hope I haven't confused you. Join me in meeting this man with a measuring line in his hand and in a hurry to measure Jerusalem. (Zec 2.1-2). We all measure, year against year and say, aha! here's proof of development. And as Church and Christian ministries, we have also followed suit to quantify the year's labour. But is there something amiss in our ‘measure’?

The Lord, through his messenger, brings a different perspective, a paradigm shift on ‘measure’. The young man needs a reminder that the Jerusalem he runs to, is totally different. Indeed the new Jerusalem is a city without walls because of the great number of people and animals in it. And much more; it's the city where God dwells among them (Zech 2.4-5, Rev 21.3).

The shift is not ‘how we measure’ rather ‘**what we measure**’. Today, nations rush to measure development in terms of GDP. It could be important, but human development fails when justice has been turned into bitterness, righteousness cast to the ground, innocent oppressed and poor deprived of justice in courts (Amos 5.7ff).

When we fail to explore the face of God in our nation, we stay content with our age old practices. Yet, time and again, the Lord will have to stop and remind us about ‘**what we need to measure**’. Our calling as envisioned in Revelations is to usher ‘Shalom’ where there wouldn't be any more tears, no more death, mourning or crying or pain (Rev 21.4). So, when ‘justice rolls like a river and righteousness like a never-failing stream, we indeed shall see God's face in our societies.

-Sathish Joseph Simon (Director-TRACI)

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for our society, for our many and horrific sins against God and each other. We cannot claim that we bear His name, as Israel did, but we can still pray for our people, as Daniel did, and for God's kingdom and kingdom values to spread and be internalized, transforming people and society from anger, violence and hate. We must pray for judges and rulers to follow "justice and justice alone" (Deut 16:18-20). We must live this out in our own lives, loving all communities and people, and bringing the message of fraternity and kindness (Romans 13: 7-10), and true neighbourliness, rather than revenge and bearing grudges (Lev 19: 18) – a problem which has created this never-ending cycle of hate among our people.

May the Lord hear and answer us in His mercy.

Dr Jamila Koshy, (Psychiatrist by Profession and Board member of TRACI)

TRACI ONLINE COURSE: GENDER CONCERNS AND BIBLICAL EQUALITY

We are happy to announce TRACI's next online course on '**Gender Concerns & Biblical Equality**'; the course duration is two months (2nd October to 27th November 2022). According to a UNICEF report, "Worldwide, nearly 1 in 4 girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are neither employed nor in education or training – compared to 1 in 10 boys". It also reports that "1 in 20 girls between the ages of 15 and 19 – around 13 million globally – have experienced forced sex in their lifetimes." Similar reports and other available statistics challenge us not only to seriously engage gender concerns or issues with integrity and honesty but also with an attitude of confession.

GENDER CONCERNS AND BIBLICAL EQUALITY 2nd October to 27th November 2022

This topic has global importance as the UN's fifth 'Sustainable Development Goal' (SDG) is Gender Equality & Women Empowerment (out of 17 SDG for UN Framework of Covid-19 Recovery). However, the Christian community in our sub-continent has generally failed to address gender concerns or issues relevantly and adequately from a biblical and theological perspective.

The lack of proper understanding and practice of gender equality could be seen as one of the major root causes of all social evils like dowry, abortion, sexual abuse, rape, female feticide, breakdown in marriage etc. So it is high time we equip our youngsters to face the various challenges of gender concerns in the home, work place, church and wider society, and thus represent God's concerns in this world as His image bearers and representatives. It is with this purpose that TRACI is offering this course. We intend to cover the following topics/themes in this course: Biblical understanding of Gender: Theological and Social Impact, Jesus and Women, Challenges & Barriers to Gender Equality, Influence of Culture and Patriarchy in Gender Roles, Gender-based Discriminations and Sexual Abuse, Gender in Christian Stewardship & Leadership, Biblical Texts and Interpretation, Gender Concerns of Marriage and Home, and Other Gender Issues.

We shall very soon release the flyer and application form with further details. Meanwhile in case you would want to ask for more details, kindly contact Mr Issacc Thomas (Director-Training).

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DO LOOK FORWARD TO THE UPCOMING PROGRAMMES

1. 02 October – 27th November 2022: Course on Gender and Biblical Equality
2. 22 January – 01 April 2023: Course on Integral Mission
3. Monthly Reflections: September & October (fourth Fridays of the month)

TRACI MONTHLY REFLECTIONS

(July-August 2022)

Conversation with Friends from Sri Lanka: Listening and Praying together

TRACI considered it important to stand with the people of Sri Lanka, listen and pray with them. We had five friends from the nation engage with the participants: Timandra Wijesuriya, Ruth Surenthiraj, Ruvian Weerasinghe, Savithri, and Yohan Abeynaikie. Coming from different social and professional spaces, they touched upon topics stretching from economy to academics in an attempt to help understand the emergence of the Sri-Lankan crisis and subsequent mass protests.

The church and the Christian community are assets for the nation and can respond to these difficult times by proclaiming the truth, and engaging with topics of politics, economy in order to sensitize the faith community. The Christian community cannot tackle these in isolation. Instead, we should be witnesses to Christ within the midst of the larger community. In short, it was a prayerful session that allowed for the realities of the Sri Lankan people to be discussed and understood while including the church in the conversation.

Biblical Reflections: Kingdom of God

Biblical Reflection on the Kingdom of God was led by Mr L.T Jeyachandran, a Bible expositor and apologist. This reflection is important in the context of the blind nationalism and Independence Day celebrations. The reflection helped us understand ways to integrate our faith in manners by which we can serve the nation.

Serving the nation will have a transformative effect as we properly understand the Biblical concept of the kingdom of God which is not only a New Testament concept but also rooted in the Old Testament. The first commandment (Gen 1:26-28) implies human beings 'ruling over the creation' as 'kings & queens' (stewards). Ex 19: 5-6 is a further elucidation affirming our calling as a 'kingdom of priests.' The book of Revelation emphasizes the cosmic design of God's purpose where we have to represent God and his concerns for the creation. But this call comes to us with an inherent challenge; cross-bearing is essential for faithful stewardship (Jn 12:24).

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FOREIGN CONTRIBUTION ACCOUNT

Account Name: "Theological Research And Communication Institute"
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IFSC Code : SBIN0000691
SWIFT Code: SBININBB104