Engaging the University and Nation: A Christian Perspective

Theological Research & Communication Institute

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Notes for Contributors

- Contributors are requested to follow Chicago Manual Style.
- Special articles must be between 5000-8000 words only. These articles may consist of researched material on specific topic.
- Commentary-length article should ideally be between 1200-2500 words only. These articles must pertain to Christian's response to contemporary issues and challenges.
- Biographical sketch and book reviews are invited. Submission should be 800-1000 words.
- Submission of 600-1000 words on music, films, painting and other artwork are welcome.
- Contributions should be sent preferably by email.
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Editorial Note

In 1666, the English Parliament introduced a Bill against profanity and banned so many books, including the famous, or rather infamous, book *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes. Though Hobbes' book was put under notice, the work grew in popularity and it came to be published over and over again, sometimes secretly. Yet for fear of being charged with heresy, Hobbes was compelled to subdue to his writings.

Even today we continue to hear of stories of books being banned, painting being defaced, movies screening being disrupted etc. Unlike the past, today stories that stifle freedom of speech travel far and wide. With the arrival of internet and the ease that it provides in disseminating information, it has become impossible to contain information outflow. Even then assault on freedom of speech continues and will continue, at least for eons.

The fear that freedom of speech engenders is the challenge to the prevailing ideas and thoughts that sustain the status quo; the fear that new ideas will subvert the current conditions and events. However, this works only because ideas have consequences. The British Parliament then was afraid that Hobbes' ideas would have destructive consequences; and so are today's non-state actors who deface and discolour human faces – pictorial or real. Such fear produces actions that threaten to silence the agent and the products of the agent's imagination.

Universities, Colleges and Academic Centres are thought spaces whose meaningful existence depend on freedom of conscience and freedom of speech. Ideas for human flourishing or otherwise are crafted, filtered and propagated in these settings, and they form the cradle of every democratic society. This publication will thus aim to foster and provide space for interaction of ideas to promote human flourishing.

The present issue is based on paper presentation during the Conference titled "Engaging the University and Nation: A Christian Perspective", held during April 17-18, 2015 in New Delhi, jointly organised by Salt Initiative, TRACI (Theological Research and Communication Institute) and UESI (Union of Evangelical Students of India). The Conference saw scholars from different academic background coming together to engage in a conversation on those topics that are being researched, critiqued and defended in the academic setting. The peer-reviewed papers were then revised before being taken up for publication.

Bridging the Two Cultures: Challenges to the Christian Education

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Abstract:

This paper proposes a dialectical pattern as an alternative method of Christian education to bridge the two cultures (the university culture and the culture at the university-student-ministry) with an aim to equip the Christian personal at the university (student, lecturers and administrators) that they may engage university and nation in a holistic way. Indian youth assume various roles amidst the depleting space and their training at multiple spheres creates fragmented and compartmentalized personalities. The intellectuals in India oscillate between traditional and scientific outlook and divergent ideologies converge at the concentric circles of Indian social landscape. The totalitarian ideologues, with the help of state, media and market, take advantage of this psycho-social attitude of the Indian youth and disrupt the logos and the ethos of the university. Amidst the swiping enculturation, the dialectical method of Christian education ensures the dialectic balance between the biblical and local cultural resources and secures the rationalist, secularist, egalitarian, and pluralistic vision of our universities, Constitution and society.

Key Words: Enculturation, Bridging Cultures, Dialectical Method of Christian Education

Introduction

Santi Kasyap and Dipika Pandey from Bijapur, Chhattisgarh, travelled by train for the first time in their lives when they came to Bengaluru to participate in the 7th Tribal Youth Exchange Programme.

- The Hindu ("Selling New Dreams" n.p.)

A 20-year-old youth from Noida in Uttar Pradesh allegedly conning a retired government school teacher of Rs. 30 lakh by promising her a bonus on an existing insurance policy.

- The Times of India ("Youth Held from Noida" n.p.)

"Youth should raise a voice for world peace," Sushma Swaraj (The External Affairs Minister)...encouraged youth to participate in international relations in the fifth International Youth Summit–2015.

- DNA ("Youth Should Raise a Voice" n.p.)

Love Fests...Youth Dialogue, Kerala had organised a national level get together of youths and secular activists based on the theme "Love" to protest against the communalist move to divide people along the lines of caste and religion... the huge participation and the stage was filled with at least 200 such interested participants.

- The New Indian Express ("More Love Fests" n.p.)

Any single day news on youth cover their socio-psychological panorama of idealism, enthusiasm, passion, aspiration, antipathy, protest, rowdiness, apathy, silence etc. Indian youth is vibrant, yet play cool. They are self-conscious and self-giving, versatile and volatile, deferential and defiant, westernized and traditionalist. The hotchpotch culture among postmodern Indian youth makes them pliable and perilous both ideologically and morally.

Religion, state, and market always interplay and sway the media and culture. The language, lifestyle and relationship in the universities and colleges of India; even the syllabi, the educational patterns, and the genre of research are greatly induced by such coercions. Amidst such enculturation, it is imperative to inform and equip the Christian personals at the university, that they may articulate and endorse the presence of God in the university endeavours.

First section of the paper appraises the culture at the universities of India. The threefold goal is: to probe the psycho-social state of Indian youth; to understand the socio-cultural landscape of Indian society; and to decipher the enculturation propagate by the right wing totalitarian ideologues that endanger the *logos* and *ethos* of the university. The second section critically analyses the culture we proliferate in the university-student-ministry. The aim is to identify reasons behind the unfitted-*ness*

of the Christian personals at university to articulate their Christian faith amidst the challenging enculturation. For making our Christian voice audible at the university, we have to bridge these two cultures. Our methods of Christian education need radical change, and we need to keep the dialectical balance between the biblical and our local cultural resources. Jesus and the Early Church drew on the local cultural resources and kept the dialectical balance with the biblical teaching. The third section proposes a dialectical method as an alternative method of Christian education to bridge these two cultures.

I

Depleting Space and the Roles of the Youth

The current socio-historical realities deplete the space for youth in the society. The pseudo-youth patterns of prolongation, variance and suppleness amongst the adults maintain their presence and influence in the socio-economic sphere as dominant consolidators. Amidst the shrinking space, youth choose three roles. *Firstly*, many youth disembark from the knowledge societies into the roles (sometimes 'new roles') offered by the dominants in the society. *Secondly*, the other youth, who are also gifted and trained, but are estranged by the unavailability to access to the defined space; conversely, exploited by the propagandists of the alternative space, repudiate the 'old' space totally and cruelly. *Thirdly*, few creative youth disestablish the defined space; they dream, strive, and construct new ways for a new space. Parul Bansal precisely states, "Youth, thereby, represent multiple possibilities from delinquency to creative deviancy, rebellion to conformity, alienation to vigorous involvement in the spirit of the era" (Parul Bansal 12). Therefore, our descriptions of youth should not end with the composed, consistent, and proficient ones; but we must take in the confused, ostracized, and tainted.

Dichotomy of Two Cultures – Training of a Person in India

In India, the training of a person happens at multiple spheres. Each sphere has its own text and images, and constructs its own symbolic world. One part of a person is trained in one's own home and the religious institutes. This sphere inculcates various traditions and socio-cultural expressions

acceptable in the social setting of one's own community. The other part of a person is trained in the liberal, scientific educational institutions. This sphere inculcates rational, secular socio-cultural expressions acceptable in the democratic social setting of India. The training of a person in these two spheres creates a fragmented personality because the text, images and the symbolic world these two spheres propose often contradict each other. This phenomenon is equally true in our patterns of Christian education either at the church or at the university-student-ministry. Therefore, our proposal for Christian education should reflect on the training of the whole personality.

Divergence and Convergence in Indian Society

The co-existence of divergent ideologies is a life-pattern of Indian religious and cultural traditions. Indian universities have accepted the fruits of the Western scientific rationalism; however, the analytical experimental approach is alien to the contemplative and intuitive Indian mind. Therefore, the scientific attitude has shallow roots in the monistic philosophically (अद्वैतवाद) oriented intellectuals of India. Unlike the West, where there is a succession of ideologies, the dominant ideology replaces the former; in India (and generally in Asia), the old and the new, the concurring and the conflicting ideologies coexist in a concentric manner. The Indians have accommodated themselves with both the scientific rationalism and the philosophical instinctive-*ness*. A story narrated by M. M. Thomas portraits such synthesising: "A Brahmin professor of mathematics; on a day of solar eclipse he explained the phenomenon scientifically to his students and showed them the eclipse through the telescope and then went home and has his purification bath for according to tradition it had defiled him!" (M. M. Thomas 27). This convergence has become obvious and customary with the influx of the postmodern outlook. Today Arts and Fine Arts, Fashion and Interior Designing, Hospitality and Management, Sociology and Media; almost all university disciplines, including theology, endorse this scientific-traditional convergence. The recent controversial symposium on "Ancient Science through Sanskrit" at the 102nd Indian Science Congress is a loud example of a political ideology hijacking such convergence [for more details on the controversy, see ("Agenda of RSS" n.p.)]. Our pursuit of engaging the university and society should not neglect this divergence-convergence aspect.

Dilemma of the Whole Person
and the Stagnation of the Society

The above discussed dichotomy of two cultures and the divergence-convergence aspect of the university and society have dual consequences. One affects the human personality and the other shapes the social landscape. Both these consequences are perilous if they fall in the hands of the totalitarian socio-political ideologues.

D. G. Moses analyses "an uncritical super-imposition" of the scientific outlook on the inherent traditional mindset. This unresolved, un-repudiated conflict creates "an intellectually split personality" both in university and in society. This "mental compartmentalisation" is a common spin-off in the Indian universities (D. G. Moses 138–41). For a common Indian, *logos* is limited to the educational institute, while in the society, the traditional Indian *ethos* direct her/his life and relationships.

The convergence of divergent ideologies, as mentioned above, shapes concentric circles of social landscape, where the old ideologies stay at the centre and check the development of newer ideologies.

The constant influence of the centric ideologies on the new ideologies makes the pace of social development slow; therefore, the Indian society seems stagnant. Amidst such social landscape, the spirit of rebellion, revolution, and accommodation co-exists.

The propagandists of totalitarian ideologies take advantage of these outcomes. The unstable, compartmentalised educated youths are easily accessible to be manipulated, and the fundamentalists take advantage of the social landscape of Indian society to impinge the old-traditional ideologies upon the new. India has witnessed (or is witnessing) both these consequences. The manoeuvring of the youth by emphasising the old-traditional ideologies is evident in the terrorist movements like IS, Lashkar, Al Qæda, and their Indian counterparts; while the subtle penetration of the *Hindutva* ideology in the socio-cultural landscape of the Indian society, gaining political upper hand in the disguise of 'development' and influencing the education system eventually target those unstable youths. It is obvious that social justice is ensured in the stable society. Recent uproar by the right-wing ideologues, which is sneakily supported by the state, disturbs the social stability in India

and jeopardizes the social justice. Our engagement with university and society must encounter these phenomena which disturb the rational, secularist, egalitarian, and pluralistic vision of our Constitution and society.

Disruptions and Enculturation

The commission of '*uni-versity*' is to train youth as a whole person, while connecting various ideologies in a coherent whole. In the task of uniting, the university has to evaluate critically both the old and the new ideologies, and instead of 'super-imposition,' these ideologies are to be received, repudiated, readjusted and redefined in the context of the place and the time. Rather than isolating the mind of the youth from their socio-cultural context, it is imperative for the Indian universities to take in the whole human context—physical, social, religious, cultural, moral, spiritual, aesthetic—and build a whole, intellectual human personality. For such purpose, the Indian universities should maintain their objectivity.

Conversely, the current scenario at the university illustrates a sway towards the dominant trends infused by media and market. Both the old-traditional ideology and the new postmodern outlook disrupt the objectivity of the university. Youth's language, lifestyle, relationships and their exposure to variant ideologies are regulated by these dominants.

The state is persuading both media and market with its right wing religio-political ideology. The rationalist, scientific outlook is compromised with "the infiltration of pseudoscience in science curricula". Ramprasad Gandhiraman warns that the accelerated pace with which the state infiltrating the university "will have disastrous effect on the future generation" ("Controversy" n.p.). It will also jeopardize the secularist and egalitarian make-up of the Indian society.

The anti-absolute campaign of the postmodernism, vividly propagated by music, movies, ads, the other digital media, and the peer group, has become a cultural landscape for today's youth. The postmodern worldview has unveiled new trends, like sex without rules; materialism; rise of substance abuse, risk-taking behaviour and violence; increase of depression and suicide; the muddle spirituality etc. [for

details, see (Walt Mueller 53–59)]. Today, the youth culture is changing at breakneck speed while the university education does not match with the current postmodern outlook. In this gap, media and market, while securing their own agenda, propose answers to their queries about reality around them.

Our task of engaging the university should secure the objectivity of the university at all cost. Our engagement with the university is like the culture watchers. When the traditional as well as the postmodern outlooks sway both the *logos* and the *ethos* of the university, our Christian commitment should lead us to endorse the spirit of the '*uni-versity*'.

Hence, to sum up; the depleting space for youth in society, the mental conpartmentalization between scientific and traditional outlooks, the accommodative way of life amidst divergent ideologies, the noxious manoeuvring of youth and swiping enculturation by the totalitarian ideologues, all of these shape the culture at the Indian universities and influence the cognitive, emotional, and spiritual construct of the Indian youth.

II

Disparity in the University-Student-Ministry Culture

The cultural landscape we proliferate in our university-student-ministry is both thin and centripetal beneficiary. It is weak to challenge the changing socio-cultural landscape of the university and nation. Our zeal to evangelise the university students has made our approach largely anthropocentric, while we have neglected to influence the whole system, called 'university,' where the students' personalities are moulded and nurtured. Our past attempts were limited to critique and counter the harmful and the 'unbiblical' endeavours of the university, but we have never been appreciative to the beneficial undertakings of the university. Our relationship with the university is rather antagonistic than friendly and supportive. Our evangelisation attempts at the university can be tagged as 'sheep-stealing'. We've given back to the university rather a few Christian personals, those who can really be 'the culture watchers' and influence and transform the existing system. Our Christian personals at the university are rather strong in their Christian dogmas but they are

less equipped to articulate their Christian faith amidst the disruption and the enculturation that occur in the university.

The reasons behind our unfitted-*ness* are many. Here, in this paper, our Christian educational methods are critically evaluated as one of the main causes of such disparity.

Depletion of the Mandate

The university is functioning at the macro level, comprehensively incorporating the global phenomena in its endeavours. Various university disciplines converge not just human but societal and universal contexts. On the contrary, in our methods of Christian education, the societal and universal aspects are missing. Our mission to evangelise the university students is confined to the human context. We nurture the students as disciples of Jesus, but we fail to train and to equip them that they may serve the university and society around them. All our interfaces with the university are either to counter the harmful and the 'unbiblical' endeavours or to de-contextualise university students and to conform them to our cultural landscape. These attempts of ours have toppled our presence and influence in these knowledge societies.

One such example is the Redemption Mandate (Matt 28:18–20), which is rather neutralized in its universal outlook. This mandate begins with an important prelude: "all authority has been given to me in heaven and over the earth" (28:18). The risen Jesus claims an authority which is "not categorically new but now depend upon a new basis— the arrival at a new stage of salvation history" (Donald A. Hagner). This claim is in line with Daniel's prophecy, which envisioned the all-encompassing and the "everlasting dominion" of the Son of Man (cf. Dan 7:13–14). The connection between Jesus' universal authority and the mandate that follows is rather crucial to understand our mission. The mandate has only one imperative verb, μαθητεύσατε (*mathēteusate*), "make disciples". The other three verbs (going, baptizing, teaching) are grammatically subordinate participles "that takes an imperative force because of the main verb" (Donald A. Hagner). Our emphasis on these three subordinate verbs confined our mission to the human context, while the main verb "make disciple" liberate us to reach and influence the whole university context.

The term 'disciple' means a 'learner,' or a 'pupil'. A 'pupil' is a human being who has her / his own personal, societal and educational affairs. In order to 'make' a pupil, all these aspects of a pupil's life should be integrated in the training exercise. The Redemption Mandate is not just about evangelisation, rather it emphasises the nurturing an individual into the experience of discipleship. Making disciples means, in fact, 'making students' and "teaching them to keep all that I (Jesus) have commanded" (28:20). Undoubtedly, Jesus' teaching converge the whole human context (cf. Matt 5:1–7:29). Therefore, alike the Creation Mandate (Gen 1:26–28; 2:15), the Redemption Mandate converge all aspect of human life. Consequently, our task of engaging the university is to articulate Jesus' teaching in all areas of student's life; comprising her / his personal as well as societal and educational affairs. In our interface with the university, we have to engage with this broad understanding of the Redemption Mandate, which concurs the Creation Mandate and also complies with the overall functioning of the university.

Hence, our interface with the university needs amendment towards more constructive and comprehensive engagement. It's a time to change the culture at the university-student-ministry, and the change should start with the way we educate our Christian personals.

<div align="center">III</div>

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Dialectical Method of the Christian Education

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In order to bridge the two cultures we need to endorse more comprehensive mode of Christian education, encompassing the whole human context and to build a whole, intellectual human personality. Moreover, while we challenge our methods of Christian education, we need to consider the divergence-convergence outlook of the Indian mind-set. The old and the new, the traditional and the postmodern should converge in our Christian educational pattern. It is good to study the Bible inductively, but when it comes to articulate our theology and way of life in the university and societal contexts, we have to take into consideration the local cultural resources available. The propagandists of the totalitarian ideologies dominate and manipulate these local cultural resources for their gains. The local cultural resources are in fact "the common property

of humanity" (Kalarikkal P. Aleaz 99) and are close to our inherent personality. Our local cultural resources may include everything that make the *ethos* our society. It is not just the written religious resources which are claimed by the fundamentalist ideologues, but all the oral traditions and written materials that countered the religio-cultual and the socio-political norms established by the dominants (eg. folklore/writings of the Bhakti Movement Poets, writings of the modern rationalist Indian thinkers etc.). Hence, our use of local cultural resources is beyond sanskritisation which the totalitarian ideologues promote.

In our methods of Christian education, by and large we neglect these local cultural resources; hence, in our theological perceptions we are expert in studying the biblical context, but we fail to articulate them in the context of our society and nation. Therefore, the Christian personals are less equipped and resourced to converge the biblical *logos* with the *ethos* prevalent in the university and society. We speak a different language, live an unusual life, and propagate a strange theology amidst our fellow citizens. The fundamentalists, like *Hindutva* ideologues, take advantage of this and tag us as 'outsiders'. The time is ripe to indigenise our theology (again!), and this movement should bring change in the method of our Christian education. Here in this paper, a dialectical method is proposed as an alternative way of Christian education from the small-scale Bible study to the structured theological education.

The dialectical method of Christian education can balance the biblical and local cultural resources while articulating our theology and way of life. Without compromising our biblical resources and rationalistic outlook of learning, we bring the local cultural resources, both the traditional as well as the postmodern; and instead of 'super-imposition,' these resources are received, repudiated, readjusted and redefined in the context of the Indian university and society. Hence, the dialectical method of Christian education can engender the following engagements:

- It converges the logos of our rationalist, scientific outlook and the ethos of our traditionalist, cultural attitude of our university and society.

- It withstands the 'otherness' of our theological articulations and offers space and voice in the university and society.

- It helps us to check the hijacking of the local cultural resources by the state, media or market for their personal gains, and to impede the disruption and the enculturation carried out by the dominants in the university and society.

- It makes our Christian theology coherent, cohesive, and indigenous.

- It secures the rationalist, secularist, egalitarian, and pluralistic vision of our universities, Constitution and society.

Dialectical Method in the Biblical Discourses

Two episodes from the Bible help us to understand this dialectical method of Christian education. One is Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman (John 4:3–42), and the second, Paul's Areopagus address at Athens (Acts 17:16–34). In both these discourses the local cultural resources are received, and when necessary, they are repudiated, readjusted and redefined to articulate an indigenised theology (Christology) for that place and time. This dialectical method stimulated learning and receiving to both the factions.

John 4:3–42

Surprisingly, in the first episode, Jesus and the Samaritan woman had high theological discussion about God, eternal life, worship, morality etc. The Samaritan woman brought some of the disputed issues between Jews and Samaritans. They converse on the local cultural recourses like water from Jacob's well (4:6, 11–12), Jerusalem-Gerisim debate of the true place of worship (4:20–24), and the moral issue about human sexuality (4:16–18). During the talk, Jesus revealed the truth about himself (4:10, 26) and about the living water (4:10, 13, 15), eternal life (4:14), and true worship (4:23–24). At times, Jesus was open to received the local cultural resources like drinking water from the hand of the Samaritan woman (4:7, 9); whereas, when necessary, he repudiated the Samaritan fallacy by saying, "for salvation is from the Jews" (4:22), he readjusted the place of true worship (4:21), and he redefined the local cultural resources like from temporal water from Jacob's well to the eternal spring of water he gives (4:12–14) and from the external form of worship to the internal worship (4:23–24). Jesus did these to articulate theology for the

Samaritans. The outcome of this dialectic pattern of Christian education was overwhelming for the town of Sychar (4:39–42).

Acts 17:16–34

Another episode of dialectic pattern of Christian education happened in the classical city of Athens, the heart of Greek philosophy, religion and culture. In Athens, prior to Paul, Socrates dialogued (διαλέγομαι; Acts 17:17) his philosophy everywhere, including the marketplace (17:17). At the time of Paul's visit, Athens was a Roman colony; however, it retained its cultural and intellectual importance. The meetings of the Areopagus were politically and philosophically important. Athens was a known intellectual city and it had its democratic and secular past; however, alike the contemporary India, Charles Talbert notes, "A university city like Athens bends enlightened philosophy and superstitious idolatry." (Charles H. Talbert 150). Therefore, Paul's encounter at Athens is important and guiding for us in India where the recent trend is to bend modern science towards the Hindu mythology.

The major contention of Paul at Antioch was the issue of the idol worship (17:16). His reasoning both outside (17:17) and inside the Areopagus (17:23–25; 29–30) was about this issue. However, Paul articulated his theology using many local cultural resources. At the Areopagus, Paul begins his conversation with his observant remark (17:23) about 'an unknown god,' and he develops his argument on the generally accepted facts about God: who God is – the Creator (17:24), the giver of life (17:25), and the maker of humans (17:26). With the help of these facts, Paul repudiated three things: temple, sacrificial cult, and idols. This critique might be appreciated by Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (J. B. Lightfoot 231–32) as well as by the Hellenistic Jews (cf. Acts 7:48).

Furthermore, Paul strengthened his theological articulation by receiving local cultural resources from two indigenous Greek poets (17:28). The first reference: "For in him we live and move and have our being," is from a Cretan poet, Epimenides [ca. 600 B.C.E.; who is also quoted in Titus 1:12]. The second reference: "We are his offspring," is from a Cilician Stoic poet, Aratus [ca. 310 B.C.E.] (F. F. Bruce 338–39). Although, Aratus penned this poem in honour of Zeus; Paul readily used

it to come to his point. These philosophical assertions were common among the Greek and the Hellenistic-Jewish writings in the first-century C.E. [for details, see (Charles H. Talbert 155–56)]. On the basis of his argument, Paul presented the living [resurrected] Lord Jesus. Using local cultural resources, Paul tried to bridge the two cultures at the university city like Athens. The outcome of this dialectic method of Christian education seems unimpressive (17:32–34), but Christianity had put down its roots in the intellectual centre of the ancient world. The successive centuries witness gigantic growth of Christianity in the city of Athens [Eusebius, *Church History* 4.23.2–3].

Jesus dealt with the debatable socio-religious issue to articulate theology for the Samaritans, while Paul used observant, rational, and poetic remaks to defand his case against idol worship amidst the intellectuals of Athens. Both of them have used the available local cultural resources and articulated theology for their respective place and time.

Conclusion

The Christian engagement should go beyond mere evangelisation and secure the *logos* and the *ethos* of the university, which is challenged by the totalitarian ideologues. A genuine Christian engagement with the university and nation begins with the training of the Christian personals. Jesus and the early church mission were dialectical and comprehensive. The dialectical method of Christian education takes biblical resources in one hand and the local cultural resources in the other, and converge them to articulate an indigenous theology and way of life in the changing scenario of our universities, society and nation.

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Missionary Scholarship in Colonial India

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In the second half of the eighteenth century, when the East India Company established its political control over parts of the Indian subcontinent, officials, 'scholar administrators', and non officials such as missionaries, began to study Indian society. They were trying to make sense of an entirely new social world, and they were confronted with a bewildering multiplicity of languages, dialects, customs and religions; and they were doing so through their own ways of knowing and thinking. The need to know, understand, classify, and map India and her people was necessary both for everyday administration of the territories under the company's control, as well as to establish cultural and ideological control over them. In this process a vast body of knowledge was created on Indian society, history, law, religion, language, culture, geography, etc.

There has been much debate on the nature of the knowledge constructed about India. Was it the result of merely an interesting encounter between cultures? Was the knowledge that was produced reliable? Were these works an accurate representation of society and culture in the sub-continent?

Edward Said's 'Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient' is a scathing critique of western knowledge and thinking about the 'orient' or the east, discussing the ways in which orientalist discourse, produced from a position of power, legitimated the imperialist agenda of the West, specifically that of Britain, France, and America. Said uses Foucault's notion of discourse to define Orientalism, which he says was a European cultural project to manage, and even produce the Orient- politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively in the post enlightenment period. The orient that was produced was

backward, weak, effeminate, unruly and despotic. The things that were written or said about the orient were not so much about the truth of its nature, but about its representation. The discourse thus created was not a neutral one, stemming from mere intellectual or imaginative curiosity. He points out that political imperialism governed the entire field of study, imagination and scholarly institutions of orientalism. So, philology, lexicography, history, biology, economic theory, novel writing, and even lyric poetry came into the service of Orientalism's broadly imperialist view of the world. Knowledge and power for Said are inseparably connected, and this nexus created the stereotype of the 'Oriental', obliterating him as a human being.[1]

Bernard Cohn's work on the relationship between knowledge and power in the context of colonial India has also been highly influential. He points out that the British in India conquered not just a territory, but also an epistemological space, the facts of which did not correspond with that of the invaders. The British therefore had to make this space known through translation. The first step in this process was to learn the classical as well as the vernacular languages, which was necessary to command, collect revenue, maintain law and order, and importantly to create other forms of knowledge about India and Indians so that they could be ruled. This knowledge was needed to classify, categorize and control the vast social world of India.[2] The works of scholars such as Bernard Cohn and Edward Said on colonial knowledge and its conscious and unconscious biases has spawned a great variety of studies on colonial discourse in the area of caste, communalism, women, the emergence of modern Hinduism, law and so on in colonial India.

In this context it is assumed in most scholarly writings that missionary records and missionary ethnographies are necessarily suspect and perpetuate the various orientalist stereotypes of Indian society and culture and that they are complicit with imperialism.[3] There is a rich variety of ethnographies, tracts, linguistic studies and so on written by

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1   Edward Said, Orientalism, (New York: Vintage, 1978), Introduction

2   Bernard Cohn, Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge, (Princeton University Press: New Jersey, 1996), p.1-15

3   Bernard Cohn, "Notes on the Study of Indian Society and Culture". Singer, Milton and Cohn, Bernard S. Ed. Structure and Change in Indian Society, (Chicago: Aldine Press, 1968)

missionary scholars on various aspects of society in the sub-continent. William Carey's *Dialogues Intended to Facilitate the Acquiring of the Bengali Language*, Bishop Caldwell's *Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages*, William Ward's *A View of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindus* and Stephen Hislop's work on the tribal peoples of central India, are some examples.

A detailed critique of Said's *Orientalism* or of post-colonial interpretations of missionary discourse is beyond the scope of this paper. The argument being made here, based on my readings of mostly secondary and one primary texts, is that though missionaries shared in the colonial discourse of the time and used terms and ideas that may be described as 'orientalist' in the sense that Said uses the term, their writings and their work often had objectives that were at cross-purposes with the concerns of empire. It is also being suggested that missionary writings are important sources of history, particularly social histories of those on the margins of society, and they were written through close collaboration and interaction with their 'native informants'. Missionaries often did critique the societies in which they labored, but their motives were more often than not to reform society, so that it would better conform to what their ideals were for a just society, which were often based, not on ideas of empire but on another vision, that of the Biblical idea of justice and righteousness.

It would be pertinent to discuss briefly some of the scholarly works that have been useful for thinking in a more nuanced manner about the whole question of missionary involvement in the generation of knowledge regarding society in colonial India, the nature of that knowledge, and the participation and response of natives, and the whole process of such knowledge formation.

Geoffrey Oddie argues that missionary comments on Indian society were motivated by various aims such as informing the public at home about the general social conditions and social structure of Indian society, attempting to contribute to a scholarly and impartial understanding of society, and finally making a reasoned and well informed case for social reform in very specific cases. The concern for evangelism was of course a theme that informed their work, and it was stated very explicitly, but more often than not this was accompanied by outrage and indignation

at the extent of injustice that pervaded the socio-economic system. The missionaries had to gather data that was reliable if they were to convince the British authorities to take reforms seriously. Oddie is careful to mention that there were problems associated using missionary archives, which is that their cultural biases as foreigners, and their eagerness to underscore the benefits of Christianity sometimes led them to dwell exclusively on the darker side of colonial society.[4]

Sujit Sivasundaram's work on William Carey's efforts at studying botany at Serampore is a an example. He argues that Carey's interest in botany and agriculture is a manifestation of a constructive and Christian Orientalism. The motivation behind Carey's work was that he genuinely believed that European knowledge and techniques could alter the "happiness of the country", by improving agriculture. The knowledge of botany and agriculture that Carey gained was developed in close collaboration with Bengali gardeners.. He also developed a network of naturalists that was quiet independent from the imperial networks that had their centre in the metropolis of London. It was his belief that understanding nature was a suitable occupation for the missionary, as it would help to improve the living conditions of people that he worked among.[5]

Richard Young gives us a nuanced understanding of the nature and process of colonial knowledge formation, particularly of Protestant missionary understandings of Hinduism. He points out that such knowledge was seldom imposed from above and passively accepted. He points out to the complex nature of local identities by examining an essay by Raghaviah, a Teluguised Maratha Brahmin from Seringapatanam responding to a highly critical essay written in 1802 on the practice of sati by Thomas Newnham who was later to be president of Fort William College. Raghaviah, who was English educated, tries to point out the complemetarity of the dharmashastric texts on this matter, and the need to distinguish between precepts meant for the karmic oriented and for the moksha oriented, and the relevance of this distinction in the area

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4   Geoffrey A. Oddie, "Missionaries as Social Commentators: The Indian Case" in Robert Bickers and Rosemary Seton (Eds.), Missionary Encounters, Sources and Issues (Curzon Press, 1996)

5   Sujit Sivasundaram, "A Christian Benaras: Orientalism, Science, and the Serampore Mission of Bengal", Indian Economic and Social History Review (Sage Publications: 2007)

of jurisprudence. He was trying to fill the "information gap" that he perceived in colonial understandings of the dharmasastras.[6]

Peter Anderson and Susanne Foss question the assumption of a 'latent orientalism' behind all western scholarship on India as claimed in the work of Ronald Inden. In the context of the creation of a Santal tribal identity in the course of the classificatory project of the colonial state in the nineteenth century, they argue that missionaries and administrators may have had a shared language about tribal identity they worked towards different ideological and political ends. Moreover, the 'tribals' too adopted the same discourse, but used it for their own ends, particularly for demanding political and economic rights for themselves.[7]

My focus in this essay would be on Samuel Mateer's *Native Life in Travancore*. Samuel Mateer, was a missionary associated with the London Missionary Society, which operated mainly in the southern part of the Princely State of Travancore on the west coast of India. His Native Life in Travancore and The Land of Charity give excellent accounts of the political and social life in Travancore from the perspective of the missionary work that went on there in the 19th century. Published in 1883, Mateer's *Native Life in Travancore* is an ethnography that describes in detail the different religious communities, castes and sub-castes and tribes in the Princely State of Travancore, and discusses the social ills that plagued Travancore, and what could be done to mitigate them. Mateer writes that his main purpose of writing was to address the educated natives of Travancore, who were interested in the welfare of their people, as to the state of their society, and suggest reforms that would lead to a social and moral improvement of the population as a whole.[8] Missionaries were the only people in Travancore who could freely interact with all classes of Travancore, as they were not bound by regulations of purity and pollution. This work then is able to give us glimpses into the life world of particularly the lower classes

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6   Richard Fox Young, "Empire and Misinformation: Christianity and Colonail Knowledge from a South Asian Perspective (ca. 1804), in Richard Fox Young Ed. India and the Inianness of Christianity : Essays in Homour of Robert Eric Frykenberg, (Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009)

7   Peter B. Anderson and Susanne Foss, "Christian Missionaries and Orientalist Discourse: Illustrated by Materials on Santals after 1855" in Robert Ric Frykenberg Ed., Christians and Missionaries in India; Cross- Cultural Communiaction since 1500 (Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003)

8   Samuel Mateer, Native Life in Travancore, (London: W. Allen and Co., 1883), Preface

of the people, which we may not have access to in upper caste accounts of Travancore's history and culture. It is evident from his writing that Mateer is a man of his times, a missionary belonging to the ruling British empire, and one who had certain ideas that may be called colonial. According to him, European civilization was the main dynamic factor driving change in the princely state. Europeans were manly and active, while the natives were inert, and lacking in a sense of manliness and industriousness. The British government according to him was a civilizing agent in the country. He points out that injustices would cease in the state if it was directly ruled by the British.[9]

But what is of interest to us is that Mateer also had a different vision, that may not have been shared by all colonial officials, which was, in his own words, "to train the future teachers and preachers, the future fathers and mothers and citizens of India; to help the poor and needy; to rescue the perishing; to proclaim liberty to the captives of sin, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound".[10] Mateer and his fellow missionaries believed that by seeking to improve public administration, fighting against caste prejudices, encouraging civil rights for all castes, decrying superstition and idolatry, empowering women, and encouraging primary education for all castes, missionaries were helping to build God's Kingdom. He writes with the conviction that the church had a role to play in the overall welfare of the land in which it was established. The people he is mainly addressing through his book are the 'statesman' and the 'philanthropist'- in other words, those in influential positions in government who had it in their power to make a positive change in the lives of the people they governed, as well as those influential members in society who were interested in ameliorating the condition of the weak and the defenseless in Travancore. This is the overriding theme of Mateer's book.

The structure of the book gives us some insight into what the author is trying to achieve through his work. Beginning with a description of the physical features of the country, he goes on to devote a chapter each to the different castes and religious communities of Travancore, beginning with those at the bottom of the social scale, whose very presence was considered polluting- the Pulayars, the Vedars, Kuravars and Ulladans,

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9   Ibid., p.287, 361

10   Ibid., p.425

who lived in slave like conditions, and worked as agrestic slaves on lands belonging to Nair, Muslim, or Syrian Christian landlords. He describes in detail their beliefs and customary practices with regard to marriages, births, deaths, care for the sick and so on. He describes also their suffering- standing barefoot in paddy fields for long hours, being given just enough to subsist on, being exposed to all kinds of illness, such as leprosy, rheumatism, cholera and so on. But he does not write about them in the detached manner of a traveler or an outside observer; he writes as one who has had close relations with them over time, and one who is eager that they should no longer live under the oppression of their masters, and under the darkness of superstition. He offers us also a sense of the changes that were taking place among the outcastes as a result of the labours of both European and Native missionaries. He recounts the words of a Sudra woman-"formerly the Pariahs and Pulayas were very afraid of demons, and spent all they earned at harvest time on offerings for them. But they no longer do so".[11] He points out that the slaves had natural abilities and when helped, many were able to learn, think for themselves about their degraded condition, become industrious, and lead a stable family life.

Mateer offers a trenchant critique of the notion of caste pollution and the difficulties that the former slaves suffered from even after the proclamation of emancipation of slaves in Travancore in 1855. He points out that the gulf which exists between castes is as great as that between distinct species of animals, and that it was not a mere division of labour as was sometimes made out by apologists for caste. He observes that though the slave castes were considered polluting, the rice they cultivated was not; otherwise the Brahmins would starve outright! The outcastes found it very difficult to get cultivable land in their name, and they would often get caught up in litigation.[12] We are given a picture of the other disabilities that the outcastes suffered from, as they could not use public roads or enter courts and other public buildings which were often located near temples, so that the low castes could not approach. Importantly, he appeals for civil liberties to be enjoyed by all classes of Travancore, and better access for lower castes to courts of justice, and

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11   Ibid., p.330-333
12   Ibid., p 341-349

a humane treatment for lower caste prisoners. He argues that public funds and institutions should be used for the welfare of all classes of people, including the outcastes, who made important contributions to the revenue of Travancore.

Mateer makes a powerful case for providing basic primary education for the lower castes of Travancore, who at the time that he was writing, did not have access to government schools. He pointed out that these too were subjects of the Maharaja of Travancore, and deserved to be educated like his upper caste subjects. An indirect benefit of educating lower castes, he attempts to persuade the upper caste natives, was that the industries and agriculture in the state would improve, and this would lead to the overall prosperity of the state.[13]

The concern for reforming the lower orders of administration, particularly magistrates and revenue officials so that they would act ethically, and act in a just manner towards all who came to avail of their services, particularly the poor, who would often be exploited by tehsildars and other officials, resounds in Mateer's writing. Mateer saw an important role for a value based education in achieving this goal. The role of modern education among the natives, he believed could go a long way in dispelling superstition and inculcating a critical mind, and creating an informed public discourse among the natives.[14]

The state of women of all castes in Travancore was yet another theme that occupied Mateer. Although women, particularly of the higher castes enjoyed much more freedom in Travancore than their counterparts in North India, he points that the state of education was dismal as only one in hundred women were literate. Lack of education made them prone to superstition and they lived in all kinds of fear of devils or malevolent spirits. Mateer recounts the different sayings about women that were common, which reflected society's attitude towards them. A Brahmin tells him that a woman should know only two things- the way to the bazaar, to buy household necessities, and the way back home! If someone is gloomy, they are asked "why are you sitting as though a girl has been born in the house".[15]

13   Ibid., p.350-352
14   Ibid., p.376,377
15   Ibid., p.200-216

Mateer came from a Methodist background and was formerly a book keeper at a linen and cotton manufacturing firm in Belfast, Ireland. For Mateer and other missionaries of the L.M.S, the gospel they preached did not stop short at forgiveness of sins for the individual, but aimed to transform social practices, inculcate ethics in public life, increased industriousness, fight for justice for the oppressed and increase comfort and prosperity for those lower down the social order. This is the context in which we can understand Mateer's critique of caste, superstition, idolatry and corruption in Travancore. His work has been cited in several significant social histories of colonial Kerala written over the last few decades, particularly works on the history of slavery in Travancore.[16]

Mateer's is only one example from a wide range of solid detailed works of observation, analysis and interpretation of the cultures and societies in which they worked, produced by the British missionary movement of the nineteenth century. David Livingston's *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (1857) and William Ellis' *Polynesian Researches* (1829) are well known examples. Andrew Walls points out that throughout the nineteenth century missionaries in pioneering situations were faced either with ineffectiveness, or with a course which, if it did not make them scholars, would give them scholarly instincts and disciplines. Their ability to cope with culture contact and its implications was central to their survival. Linguistics and anthropology, and comparative religion, and Medicine benefited greatly from the work missionaries on the ground.[17] Lamin Sanneh, writing from the African context, but offering a worldwide perspective gives us a glimpse into the role of mission, through its means and methods, in stimulating a revitalization of many vernacular languages and cultures, and thus going against the logic of colonial subjugation.[18]

Missionaries in colonial India, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries engaged passionately with the society, culture and even the natural world in the sub-continent. They brought with them their own

16   See K. Saradmoni, Emergence of a Slave Caste: Pulayas of Kerala, (People's Publishing House. 1980)

17   Andrew Walls, The Missionary Movement in Christian History; Studies in the Transmission of Faith (Orbis Books: New York, 1996) p. 187-198

18   Lamin Sanneh, Translating the Message; The Missionary Impact on Culture (Orbis Books: New York, 2009) p.123

distinct passions and skills, be it for languages, social activism, nature, or education.[19] The works of scholarship they produced often had a purpose beyond that of imperial control and reflect their passionate engagement with India.

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19   For a discussion on the changing nature of the relations between missionaries in Travancore and the state, see Koji Kawashima, Missionaries and a Hindu State, (New Delhi: OUP, 1998)

Engaging or Reclaiming the University?
Reflections from History, Eastern and Western

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Abstract

Our Christian engagement with the universities must include liberal arts programme. And to foster meaningful engagement and growth, there must be a vibrant community of Christian scholars. To that end, the church has a role to play in term of encouraging its members the life of the mind; and not consider the Universities as 'worldly', but to promote academic research activities as a vocation. After all as a Christian it is the will of Christ that one contributes towards nation building and the flourishing of human society.

> A university stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for the adventure of ideas and for the search for truth. It stands for the onward march of the human race towards even higher objectives. If the universities discharge their duties adequately, then, it is well with the nation and the people.
>
> Jawaharlal Nehru

I

When Pt Jawaharlal Nehru first visited the site chosen to build Chandigarh, the first planned city of independent India, he remarked, "The site chosen is free from the existing encumbrances of old towns and old traditions. Let it be the first large expression of our creative genius, flowering on our newly earned freedom" (cited in Kalia 12). That was year 1948. Late when the work on the city progressed, Nehru expressed his wish that the new capital city of Punjab be a city "unfettered by the traditions of the past, a symbol of the nation's

faith in the future". The seat of administration and governance of Punjab, however, had to grow along with progress in the field of intellectual achievements. It was but natural that the first university of the region, the Panjab University, originally founded in Lahore in 1882, was relocated to Chandigarh in 1956. A modern city, a modern nation is inconceivable without a modern university. Reestablished in the heyday of Nehruvian modernism, this university came to bear the imprint of the visionary prime minister. A plaque in the university library as well as the nearby restaurant that reminds the visitors time and time again that for Nehru the state of the nation was dependent on the state of the university. It is a symbol and promise of progress, both material and intellectual; and every visionary leader, in his mind, sees an inextricable link between the nation and the university—the latter acting as the guiding light in the tempestuous journey towards truth, tolerance, humanism and brave new future.

Another prime minister of another country picked out a key moment in the history of modern Europe, where the founding of a university urged on the birth pangs of a nation. Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), theologian and prime minister of Holland (1901–05), in his famous Stone's Lectures narrates in brief the beginnings of the Leiden University (1575). The founding of this remarkable university followed a bloody national battle between the citizens of Leiden and the might of the Spanish empire. Kuyper underlines perhaps the most remarkable outcome of this battle in these words: "[I]n recognition of such patriotic courage, the states of Holland did not present Leyden with a handful of knightly orders or gold or honor, but with a school of the sciences—the University of Leyden, renowned through the whole world" (Kuyper 98). Success in a battle was rewarded with a centre for advanced learning because passion for learning was seen to be central to the act of reconstructing the community life. This was not very different from the most popular story about rebuilding as told in the Book of Nehemiah. When the builders of the wall of Jerusalem began losing their confidence because they had heard that enemy was coming to strike them, Nehemiah stepped up: "And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, 'Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses'

… Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they work at construction, and with the other held a weapon." (Nehemiah 4:14, 17 NKJV). It is hard to say if Kuyper had this image in mind when he recounted the brave resistance of Leyden in these words: "The Spaniards offered peace and pardon to the dying people; but Leyden, remembering the bad faith of the enemy in the treatment of Naarden and Haarlem, answered boldly and with pride: If it is necessary, we are ready to consume our left arms, and to defend with our right arms our wives, our liberty and our religion against thee, O tyrant" (Kuyper 97). Nehemiah, along with Ezra, went on to institute learning and dissemination of knowledge, anticipating modern world leaders who would build their communities and cultures around the citadels of intellectual grandeur—the universities.

It can be noted in passing that the alumni of Leiden university went on to establish the other two leading universities in the Netherlands, the University of Amsterdam (1614) and the University of Utrecht (1636).

Universities have been central to the creation of the modern nations, much in the same way that Reformation had been central to the creation of the modern, global civilization. While Europe was embroiled in bloody conflicts in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, it also witnessed a parallel movement of founding of universities, inspired both by Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

One of Martin Luther's most pressing concern, as he led the battle for spiritual liberation of the European masses, had been the revision of the curriculum of the universities. He sought to reform not only the church but also the university. He attacked the preponderance of Artistotelianism within universities but his efforts weren't against the academia or in favour of an exclusively other-worldly piety. Historian George Marsden says that "Luther's attack on the Aristotelianism of the Scholastics was not an anti-intellectual attack on universities but rather *a critique from within*. Luther, after all, was a university man, a doctor on the theological faculty at Wittenberg" (emphasis added, 36). Marsden goes on to quote E. Harris Harbison stating that Reformation—a university-based movement—was "a combination of a spiritual struggle and '*a scholar's insight*'" (emphasis in the original, 36). The central role that universities and scholarship had to play in Reformation was so

deeply embedded in the minds of the reformers that the "[v]ery early in the Reformation Zwingli and Luther began wearing the scholar's gown for preaching and, although not all Protestant clergy had university training, 'the scholar's gown was *the* garment of the Protestant minister'" (emphasis in the original, 37). But symbolism apart, much thought and labour went into interweaving of socio-spiritual and educational reforms. Luther and later Philip Melanchthon made universities the first and the firmest base of the Reformation and at the same time "established the most important models for Protestant universities" (37). Melanchthon persuaded Luther to bring Aristotle back in the curriculum though not "as a reliable guide in theology and ethics". Classical humanist authors too became the part of the curriculum besides "greater emphasis on the sacred languages".

Reformation wasn't a piecemeal intervention of a few zealous monks confined to the religious sphere of the European continent but in its scope and ambition it was aimed at transforming the very foundations of the intellectual edifice of the Western world. Luther's disputations with Erasmus on whether education should be confined to the few or become universal was a key moment in the history of education with implications not only for the West but for the entire world.

It was left to Calvin, however, to make more significant and lasting impact on educational reform. Holland was one place that wholeheartedly implemented Calvinistic ideas of education by establishing free school in all districts as well as premier universities. University of Leiden, of which Kuyper spoke so glowingly, was one among many universities founded in The Netherlands. In fact, Kuyper contends that it was Reformation—or more specifically, Calvinism—that paved the way for a renewed passion for knowledge, including scientific knowledge that has become the hallmark of all subsequent modern universities. The fact that William the Silent gifted a university to the city of Leiden was the most logical and appropriate outcome of a mindset that treasured knowledge more than gold and silver. And it was the successors of Calvin like Scotsman John Knox and the English Puritans that created a formidable network of schools, colleges and universities across Europe, and later in the United States and in India.

II

Scottish missionary-educators had begun coming to India by the early 1820s. After 1833, when the ban on missionaries in British India by the East India Company was completely lifted, they got the freedom to do in India what their forbears had been doing in Scotland. Alexander Duff (1806–1878), John Anderson (1805–1855) and John Wilson (1804–1875) were three missionary-educators from Scotland who made pioneering contribution in educational advancement in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay respectively. These three Presbyterian missionaries laid the foundation stones of long-lasting educational in the three presidencies. Duff was, in fact, on the senate of the Calcutta University when it was founded in 1857. Wilson served as the vice chancellor of the Bombay University founded in the same year. Anderson died in 1855, two years before the University of Madras was instituted, but he had already established a premier institute in the form of Madras Christian College (1837).

Education work by missionaries, of course, preceded the above-mentioned trio. Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg (1683–1719) and Heinrich Pluetschau (1678–1747) had been students at the University of Halle in Germany (1694), which is considered to be the first modern university. It is at this university that they studied under the remarkable Lutheran teacher August Hermann Francke (1663–1727). Education for these German Pietists was aimed at moral transformation as much as on academic excellence. The schools set up by these and subsequent missionaries had done much of the spade work in pockets of the Madras Presidency where eventually great institutions were erected.

And in Bengal, a decade and a half before the arrival of Duff, William Carey (1761–1834), the Baptist missionary, and his associates had already established a university-level institution in Serampore College in 1818.

Modern education in India got impetus from the efforts of not only missionaries but also the officials of the East India Company. While missionaries sought enlightenment, moral transformation and conversion of all through education, colonial officials too had lofty goals—though within the confines of political and administrative necessity—for their Indian subordinates. A case in point is the beginnings of education in South India in the early years of British ascendency.

The governor of Madras Thomas Munro, for example, thought education to be the only way to ensure the loyalty of the Indian official towards the Company Raj. But he also sought "a common morality or a common humanity beyond loyalty to one's own community of kin and kind" (Frykenberg 28) from his Indian officials. Corruption among his Indian officials was a major challenge Munro experienced. Besides, Munro and his administration saw a link between corruption and lack of loyalty. His Indian subordinates were corrupt not only because they felt no loyalty towards British rule, they also had no sense of identification with their fellow Indians who were not from their caste and community. So, it was imperative to find a way to curb corruption, which, in Munro's views, was caused by, first, meagre salaries paid to the Indian officials thus paving the way for temptation and, second, because of a general lack of loyalty to the idea of a common humanity. The only way to overcome these failings in conduct and relationship was a common set of values provided by public education. Frykenberg comments:

> The way to achieve this vision was through education, which seemed to promise more than all other remedies (pay, pensions, dignities, and honors) combined. Education could integrate the diverse elements of the Indian social structure and forge many conflicting loyalties into more common bonds. Education could bring about what nothing else had yet produced: a class of civil servants whose values meshed with political visions of greater India (40).

The only trouble was that colonial officials, and indeed the governor, did not have a programme for education; they were dependent on the only successful model of education available—the model developed by the descendants of Protestant Reformers over the past two centuries: "The origins of modern education in South India lay in Northern Europe. It was there that new techniques evolved for building radically new social institutions and, therewith, for releasing unpredictable social energies" (Frykenberg 40–41). And while Munro had his protégé Alexander Ross advocated the educational advancement of "the Brahmans and other notables", the missionary-educators had been fighting the battle for universal education. For over past one hundred years German Pietists, beginning with Ziegenbalg and Pluetschau, were affecting the education revolution in the Madras presidency.

Their vision, forcefully set before them by Francke, contemplated nothing less than the total transformation of mankind through education, which they saw as the means to create a "universal realm of godliness." Schooling for the poor, a mingling of the highborn with the low, equal opportunity for each deserving student of whatever means, and a broad curriculum including practical sciences and skilled trades were goals of Germanic schools established along the Tamil Coromandel (Frykenberg 41).

Liberal British administrators like Munro and Evangelical officials as well as missionaries may have differed in their motives and objectives with regard to education. But they all breathed from the same spiritual ecosystem, which in turn was infused by Reformation. What these British personnel, from all backgrounds, sought was a kind of reformation through education that they had seen in Europe, and they sought similar kind of resultant transformation.

III

The first two sections of this paper that dealt—in broad strokes—with the history of development of education as a distinctly Christian concern both in the modern West and modern India. These could be considered as adjusting of lenses with which to begin a preliminary investigation into what the current generation of scholars may want to do as they engage the university. This brief survey, though somewhat superficial, becomes crucial in the background of "the scandal of the evangelical mind" that Christian scholars have been calling the church's attention to for the last three or four decades. This concise retelling of the Reformation and the missions history seeks to demonstrate that the very character of the reform and missionary movement has been education and knowledge oriented. The modern educational enterprise and institutes, especially the university, has been an inseparable and indistinguishable organ of the church and its mission. It is so because Christian church and mission has had an implicit belief in and commitment towards advancement of virtue with knowledge, character with learning, wisdom with skills—grace with truth. Modern evangelicals have battled hard, often at the cost of great personal risk, to advance virtue, character, wisdom and grace through their discipleship ministries, but have often neglected giving adequate attention to

knowledge, learning, skills and truth. Mark Noll begins his important study of this neglect with these words:

> An extraordinary range of virtues is found among the sprawling throngs of evangelical Protestants in North America, including great sacrifice in spreading the message of salvation in Jesus Christ, open-hearted generosity to the needy, heroic personal exertion on behalf of troubled individuals, and the unheralded sustenance of countless church and parachurch communities. Notwithstanding all their other virtues, however, American evangelicals are not exemplary for their thinking, and they have not been so for several generations (Noll Scandal 3).

What Noll says about American evangelicals is true of evangelicals in general and his "jeremiad" could serve as a prophetic advice as we seek to engage the university. The neglect of scholarship and eschewing an intervention in the academia is neither a natural nor a permanent state of affairs. The preceding two sections were an exercise is establishing the contrary. The neglect of the life of mind is, in fact, a relatively recent phenomenon in the long history of the Christian church; though the period of neglect in itself is not of a negligible duration. Mark Noll, for instances, says that "serious academic research guided by the explicit Christian norms has been thin on the ground for at least two hundred years" (*Life of Mind* 43). Why that happened in the post-Enlightenment West is a sobering story that Noll and others tell. For our purposes, we may want to remind ourselves that the relative ebb in Christian scholarship among evangelicals that has lasted for the last two hundred years is concomitant with the founding and growth of contemporary Christian church in India. Whether this contributed in hampering the life of mind within the evangelical movement in India requires a separate and more nuanced study. At this moment, the question we must limit ourselves to is how to engage the university. But in some sense, I find this phrasing a little problematic. It assumes that there is an entity called university, which is a stranger to us and is amenable to engagement. This is somewhat optimistic view, and largely untested. Universities across the nation are not quite enthused about what Christians have to say to them. The silence from the Christian quarters in the face of fierce socio-political upheavals that this country has gone through since Independence has reinforced the

general perception that Christians have nothing substantial to say in the matters of nation building, onward march of humanity, truth, tolerance and adventure of ideas—something that Pt Nehru alluded to when he spoke of the universities. In this scenario, what are the terms on which Christians will engage the university? And there are plethora of questions that follow this on question. What is current state of Christian presence in India? What is the nature of the recognition accorded to this very visible yet tiny minority? What contribution is it seen making in the country and what is general assessment of that contribution? What is its stand on all the burning issues of the day, including caste, communalism, violence, gender? The way the community and its thought leaders position themselves will determine the course this engagement will take.

Given the present, communally charged atmosphere in the country, Christians in the country are unfortunately are seen as only *seeking* something—freedom, security, rights, etc. To be sure, the academia looks at this phenomenon sympathetically. The subject of accommodating minorities in multi-religious society is a perennial concern with many a scholar in the university. The academia doesn't, however, expect or perceive Christian scholarship as *providing* any viable option or solution to this and other related concerns. Unless Christians have a robust, alternative paradigms, they are not worth taking seriously—and, in fact, they don't deserve to be taken seriously. And Christians will not be able to give robust, alternative paradigms if all they want to do is to tickle the existing knowledge constructs, and seek to infuse Christian values in them. Unless Christians are able to provide a significantly different model of doing academics, their engagement will be nothing more than trying to play catch-up with the current fads and seeking to tweak and baptize them. Christians who seek to engage the university must first demonstrate "human learning as a distinctly Christian enterprise" (Noll *Life of Mind* x). Learning is not an afterthought in the life of a Christian. It is not something that happens by imitation. It is the life breath of community that lives in the awe of glory of God, seeking and finding him in the world and nature, as much as in the scripture. At this stage, the most important thing is to begin to perceive the unity and sovereignty of God, and banishing all thoughts of divide between working out our salvation versus cultivating scholarship.

But if redemption of humans for the glory of God is the great purpose of the Christian story, that overriding telos encompasses many other purposes. Because of a series of contingent events over the last two centuries, it has become conventional to think that belief in the Christian story opposes serious commitment to intellectual explorations of the world. There are no good reasons for this opinion. It rests on misreadings of the Christian story and misapprehension of the intellectual life. The Jesus Christ who saves sinners is the same Christ who beckons his followers to serious use of their minds for serious explorations of the world. It is part of the deepest foundation of Christian reality — it is an important part of understanding who Jesus is what he accomplishes — to study the world, the human structures found in the world, the human experiences of the world, and the humans who experience the world. Nothing intrinsic in that study should drive a person away from Jesus Christ. Much that is intrinsic in Jesus Christ should drive a person to that study (Noll *Life of Mind* 41).

The "conventional" thinking of which Noll speaks has so permeated the Christian mind that even when there is any mention of scholarship within Christian circles, it is always thought of an additional component, and not integral and essential to living out a life of faith. In fact, those who identify themselves as evangelicals and wish to take the good news of Jesus Christ so that deep transformation may occur in lives of individuals and the contexts in which they live must take scholarship and the institution of the university extremely seriously. They must think of the university not as an alien territory but their home turf. We go there not only to witness or start a Bible study— important though it is—but also to participate in the life and logic of the university. If the historical survey is the previous two sections is anything to go by, the bearers of the good news of Jesus Christ must also be setting the agenda for scholarship and diffusion of the fruit of that scholarship. The university needs to be reclaimed. The university grew—in an organic fashion—with the rise of the church. Church and university must walk in tandem if His will is to be done on earth as in heaven. Charles Malik puts it this way:

The university is the clear-cut fulcrum with which to move the world. The problem here is for the church to realize that no greater service can it render both itself and the cause of the gospel, with

which it is entrusted, than to try to recapture the universities for Christ on whom they were originally founded (100–101).

Malik uses the much stronger word than *reclaim*. He says that universities must be "recaptured", a word that is intentional and carefully chosen. He uses the same word earlier in the book when he asks: "Can the university be recaptured for Christ? (32)". Much resources, prayers and effort have gone, in the last two centuries, into recapturing and rescuing individual souls from the father of lies. However, as Charles Malik reminds us, there have been "myriad counterrevolutions" taking place seeking to replace the "real revolution" that began with Jesus Christ and our universities have become the fertile ground for many of these counterrevolutions.

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When we say we need to engage with the university, we are not making a general remark about getting involved with the state or nature of higher education in our society. We are not even saying we need to discuss with the academic world certain important issues common to both the church and the civil society. We are certainly not saying that we expect the university to make this or that change in its curriculum, administration or pedagogy. We seek no piecemeal dialogue with the intellectual aristocracy of our times.

What we are saying is that, first of all, like the universal church, a universal university already exists. And though for the past few generations it has faced a lean period, it has survived. The participants in this conference and their varied intellectual engagements testifies to the existence of that. Now we need to realise it in more concrete terms in our midst, and possibly extend its frontiers.

What we are saying is that the counterrevolutionary universities that exist must be redeemed and, using Charles Malik's words, must be recaptured *for Christ*.

We are saying that we and our coming generations are willing to cultivate the life of mind because Jesus cares how we use it.

In the end, what are the trajectories that we can follow as we engage meaningfully with our own legacy and reclaim universities as part of a legitimate Christian mandate?

First, we should be part of the liberal-arts programme in the universities. Our best talent often goes for medical studies and now information-technology courses. We must be intentional in directing some of them to pursue BAs and MAs in humanities and social sciences in the hope that they would carry out research at the highest level and contribute in remaking of the thought world on our best campuses. Their research could be on "secular" topics but can also be conducted around the experiences, lives and history of Christian communities. For example, in the field of historical research John C. B. Webster and Robert E. Frykenberg present an eminent model where their work on Christian communities have received highest level of academic acceptance.

Second, be intentional about building a community of Christian scholars. The simplest and yet the most fundamental step is making the work of Christian scholars available to each other and then—more importantly—Christian scholars learning, quoting and citing from the academically sound work of other Christian scholars. This will also involve the older scholars mentoring the younger ones and peers critiquing each other's works. We could then hope for building cumulatively a body of Christian—even godly—knowledge structure that encompasses life of mind, body and soul.

Third, we must recognize that universities are not waiting there to be engaged—as of now. But they will engage, if we are able to build—and this will take a couple of generations—to construct and present a coherent and robust paradigm for knowledge. David Hill Scott in his perceptive essay talks about the "cosmic scope of the Puritan mind" that must be the focus of the Christian scholars today. We must seek and think big. The mind of Christian scholar or scholars must seek "intergrality of all knowledge, all learning and all life." We had earlier in the paper talked of Luther and Calvin; Scott takes us further ahead—to such luminaries as Alexander Richardson, William Ames, John Alsted, John Amos Comenius and Jonathan Edwards, who demonstrated a kind of cosmic sweep when it came to integration of all knowledge. And this is the word of advice for today's scholars that Scott garners from his study of the Puritan scholars:

> If Christian scholarship is limited by its definition to function merely as a perspective of faith, it will not fully mobilize its resources to fulfill its role in this construction of faith's reasoned

conception of the cosmos. I am arguing, therefore, that Christian scholarship needs to be not just a lens or perspective, but a metadiscipline with a unifying methodology.

Fourth, since a Christian scholar is also a member of a church, an environment that encourages learning must be created within the church. We need to readjust our theological lenses to recover our vision for the integrated mission of the church. The subject of knowledge must be carefully and sensitively handled in our churches—even in our Sunday sermons. There is a tendency in our homilies and off-hand comments to build and strengthen a case against "worldly" knowledge using verses such as 1 Cor 1: 19–21; Phil 3: 8.

Fifth, university, as we have seen earlier, have been foundational to the modern nation-states and in many ways act as barometer of the general well-being of the people. It is not generally advisable to set an agenda for the course knowledge creation and research must take in a university; it is much better to allow full academic freedom to scholars to pursue their interest meeting the best standards of the field and being subject to review by the experts. However, a Christian scholar who is guided by the moral compass provided by the Holy Scripture and is enlivened by the Holy Spirit, he or she would care for what God cares for. A Christian scholar would be a nation builder as God cares for our nations and communities—and for the least and lost in our nations and communities.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

All the virtues that Pt Nehru associated with the university—humanism, tolerance, reason, adventure of ideas, search for truth—are superfluous to the current intellectual fads but they form the DNA of Christian mission and, in fact, Christian lifestyle. These qualities are as much in need of being rescued as being engaged with. The task in front of us is nothing short of reclaiming the lost ground, or to repeat Charles Malik's words recapturing the university for Christ. And like Nehemiah, the call is to rebuild the walls but also guarding against assault of intellectual indifference carried out by our habits of mind and faulty theological presuppositions.

Like Nehemiah's builders, are we ready to hold Bible in one hand as we build the house of knowledge and scholarship with the other?

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Hindu Holism Under the Shadow of Postcolonialism

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Abstract:

Any engagement with the dominant cultural ideas in the contemporary academic scenario will have to take cognizance of Hindu holism, which is no longer a marginal movement in the scholarly corridors of the university. Hindu holism – the idea that Hinduism as a way of life has better answers to all of life's problems – began to gather momentum globally beginning with Swami Vivekananda and later with Dr S. Radhakrishnan. Today, Hindu holists have found favorable friend in postmodernism as well as postcolonialism. Thanks to the poststructuralist abhorrence of metanarrative, Hindu holists have succeeded in building a new narrative, which promises to offer an alternative lifestyle, more swadeshi and, therefore, more suitable to the Indian context. In this era of militant cultural relativism, the zealots of Hindu holism have exerted their efforts in reimagining politics (democracy, tolerance, and legal provisions), health (yoga, Ayurveda and vegetarianism) and science/astronomy (astrology). This has, in turn, helped Hindu nationalists, who too want to return India to her 'glorious past'. However patriotic this alternative may seem, it has actually strangled the local diversity to assert its own monolithic understanding of reality. This paper is an attempt to understand the relationship between the two and recognise the consequences of such relationship for a Christian scholar. It will trace a brief history of Hindu holism and critically discuss the thoughts of its main ideologues. It will then assess the influence of Hindu holism in various branches of knowledge. This paper, by taking the case of Hindu holism, will attempt to help Christian scholars to meaningfully engage with contemporary philosophical thoughts.

Key-words: Postmodernism, Postcolonialism, Hindu holism

Introduction

When the scholastics (1050-1350), forerunners of University movement[1], began to harmonize the truths of their learning, little did they know that the very definition of truth would be under scrutiny one day. Today in the age of extreme relativism, the thought of organizing and defending the truth seems appalling. Perhaps, David was prophesying our times when he said, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psalm 11:3). Postmodernism is one theory that has played vital role in 'deconstructing' all that was built before us, and uprooting the foundations. On the one hand, both postmodernism and postcolonialism have come to be liberally embraced in our universities, and on the other hand, our society is witnessing an overall rise of militant religiosity. Indian Christian scholars will do well to recognize the relationship between the two and address the consequences resulting from this alliance.

I. Hindu Holism

1.   Hindu Holism – Understanding the Term:

Holism is a term taken from medical science. It refers to "relating to or concerned with wholes or with complete systems rather than analysis of, treatment of, or dissection into parts."[2] Holism is opposite of reductionism, which traverses from parts to the whole. A simple example of reductionism could be a hospital modelled after Western medical science having different departments to treat different diseases, where one could be referred to once the disease is diagnosed. Whereas holism asserts that each disease is a result of fragmentation from the whole and hence the treatment is to restore the wholeness. Yoga and Ayurveda (working to restore the lost balance) could be good examples of holism. Meera Nanda calls holism "a trademark of Hinduism."[3] Nanda may be

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    1   For more on scholasticism and their influence on university movement, refer to Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 3rd edition, 1996), 226-238.

    2   "Holism" in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*.

    3   Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backwards: Postmodernism, Science, and Hindu nationalism* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 96.

too general in her remarks, ignoring the vast disparity that lies between each branch of Hinduism. It should be specified that when Nanda uses the term 'Hindu', her primary concern is Neo-Vedanta preached by Vivekananda and others, who directly or indirectly advocated his line of thought.[4] Hindu holism as a thought insists that if monistic/non-dual ideal is applied to the fields of human knowledge, it could yield better fruit for humanity. It assumes that the Western/Christian duality has failed the West, and hence the non-dual ideal is a better alternative. Hindu holism strives to erase all duality by absorbing the contradictions into a single monolithic vision of wholeness. In other words, it is practical application of neo-Vedantic philosophy of non-duality to other fields of knowledge, including arts, science, ethics and lifestyle.

2. History of Hindu Holism

The beginning of Hindu holism can be attributed to Shankaracharya, but it took the oratory skills of Swami Vivekananda to make it popular and acceptable to the world. Vivekananda's lecture in Chicago in 1893 is still considered one of the greatest achievements of the neo-Vedantic philosophy till date. Vivekananda fervently and fearlessly marched the Western universities, raising the banner of Vedantic Hinduism. He attributed duality in religion and science to the Western perspective. Meera Nanda attributes Vivekananda for "almost singlehandedly" beginning the "trend of reading modern science into mysticism."[5] While Christians in the West were still struggling to accommodate Darwin's evolution in their theology, Vivekananda took a different route. He claimed, "the idea of evolution was to be found in the Vedas long before the Christian era; but until Darwin said it was true, it was regarded as a mere Hindu superstition."[6] Reconciling science and religion, Vivekananda suggested, "Just as modern science seeks to understand the reality that lies behind appearances… so did the Vedic sages wanted

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4   Vivekanada had originally built up on the Advaitic philosophy of Shankaracharya, who thought of the world as an illusion and Brahman as the only reality. Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta, however, accepted the unity of the world, without considering the world an illusion. Neo-Vedanta's major role was in unifying Hinduism as one unified whole, despite several sects within it and preaching the 'mystical unity' of all religions.

5   Meera Nanda, P*rophets Facing Backwards: Postmodernism, Science, and Hindu nationalism*, 105.

6   Dermot Killingley, *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernization of Hinduism*, edited by William Radice (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), 154; quoted in Meera Nanda, Prophets Facing Backward, 119.

to go to the ultimate source of all that exists."[7] Vivekananda had already embraced the Advaitic version of single reality in his understanding on science. "Conclusions of modern science are the very conclusions the Vedanta reached ages ago… only in modern science they are written in the language of matter,"[8] said the charismatic guru.

If Vivekananda preached Vedantic philosophy, Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan could be attributed for systematizing it. He assumed that all religions were like rivers leading to the ocean, though he never considered Hinduism as one of the rivers, but the ocean itself. The one god in religions was God of Vedanta, and Hinduism merely proclaimed that god. "Vedanta is not a religion, but religion itself in its most universal and deepest significance,"[9] said the philosopher.

Over the period of time, Indian thinkers, including the likes of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Gandhi, influenced by the West and Christianity, have mostly been unable to break away from the holism. Instead, their efforts, influenced by their Vedantic vision and anti-colonial spirit, have always been to absorb all new knowledge into their non-dualist system and re-establish the superiority of Vedantic religion.[10]

II. Postcolonialism

1.   Postcolonialism vis-a-vis Postmodernism:

Before defining postcolonialism, it's important to understand postmodernism. Postmodernism, though popular, is a term difficult to offer strict definition of. However, it claims to herald a new age, which is in stark contrast against modernity. Through its many tenets, postmodernism rejects the norms set during the Enlightenment (1650s-1780s). It rejects certainty and objectivity of knowledge, individualism, scientific method of inquiry and progress based on such methods. [11]

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7   Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward*, 105.

8   Vivekananda, *Collected Works*; quoted in Nanda, *Prophets*, 94.

9   Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (New Delhi: Indus. 1st edition, 1923), 11; quoted in Nanda, *Prophets*, 61.

10   That the Advaitic philosophy is notorious in absorbing whatever contradicts it is a view is shared by Paul Hacker, Wilhelm Halbfass, Gerald Larson, Richard Fox and Ainslee Embree.

11   Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernising the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 18-19.

According Encyclopaedia Britannica, "postmodernism, also spelled post-modernism, in Western philosophy, [is] a late 20th-century movement characterized by broad scepticism, subjectivism, or relativism; a general suspicion of reason; and an acute sensitivity to the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining political and economic power."[12]

It is the last part of the above definition that helps us understand postcolonialism, an equally loaded term, and its relation with postmodernism. In line of postmodernism, postcolonialism assumes that knowledge is neither objective nor certain, but goes even further to suggest that the colonial representation of the native art, science, politics, lifestyle is always biased and colored by their own supremacy.[13] According to Brandon D. Rhodes, a scholar-writer, "Postcolonialism scrutinizes how history's winners have defined so much of our modern world, helps us see past victories still active today, and suggests how to develop as healthy communities and persons in light of all that. Postcolonial practices help keep residents of a colonized or colonizing culture aware of dynamics that are often assumed as the only way things could be, and validates marginal voices and peoples."[14] Hence, to put it simply, postcolonialism can be defined as a movement that critiques the colonial cultures for treating their subjects and their way of life as inferior, and tries to recover the native's culture as equally valid and authoritative.[15]

The beginning of postcolonialism is generally attributed to Edward Said (1935-2003), a Palestinian-American literary-theorist. Said in his book, *Orientalism*, argued that the European picture of the Orientalist as 'the other' and inferior, was a gross misrepresentation. Through its knowledge and the resulting power, the West has promoted Eurocentric

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12   "Postmodernism" in *Encylopaedia Britannica*.

13   For a good introduction to colonialism, refer to Rajesh James, *Postcolonialism: A Brief Overview*. http://www.academia.edu/2662908/Postcolonialism_A_Brief_Overview (accessed 12 February 2015).

14   http://www.christianitytoday.com/parse/2014/september/review-evangelical-postcolonial-conversations.html?start=2 (accessed 10 February 2015).

15   It would be good at this point to differentiate post-colonialism and postcolonialism. Though many do not see any difference between the two, Dr. Shrikant B. Sawant suggests that the term with hyphen marks a historical period as in 'after colonialism' or 'after Independence'. However 'postcolonialism', says Shrikant, refers to "all the characteristics of a society or culture from the time of the colonization to the present." Shrikant B. Sawant, *Postcolonial Theory: Meaning and Significance*, http://igcollege.org/files/pdf/3%20Post-Colonialism.pdf (accessed 21 February 2015).

universalism – a kind of metanarrative that has formed our conceptions of the native and has strangled native's right to present himself / herself.[16] Postmodern principles of suspicion and deconstruction are to be employed if this metanarrative is to be pulled down and native is to be empowered if right representation of one is to emerge.

2.   India's Tryst with Postcolonialism

Robert Young, in his book, *Colonial Desire* (1995), calls Edward Said, along with Homi K. Bhabha[17] and Gayatri Spivak Chakravarthy as "the Holy Trinity" of Postcolonialism.[18] Interestingly, both Bhabha and Charkravarthy have Indian connection.

Homi K Bhabha, former student of University of Mumbai, is the Director of Humanities Centre and professor of English and American Literature at Harvard University. Bhabha has built upon the Said's ideas, and applied Derrida and Foucault's ideas to it. His main contributions are his ideas of mimicry (that the colonized copies the colonizers), and hybridity (that the colonized lives as hybrid now with two cultures at the same time).

Gayatri Spivam Charkravarthy, a literary theorist and professor at Columbia University, was born in Calcutta in 1942. She is most famous for her book *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, in which she argues that the right of the native to be presented properly is violated by powerful. She calls it "epistemological violence".

Host of other writers, who consider themselves well-wishers of subalterns continue to inseminate post-colonial ideas through their writings and speeches. Some famous names include Ashis Nandy, Ranajit Guha, Gyan Prakash and Partha Chatterjee. Generally, it can be said that postcolonial criticism equates representation with power, and difference over hegemony. Since postcolonial discourse in India sees native's inferior image as a continuation of colonial legacy, every form of knowledge (Christianity not withstanding) that critiques the native and his forms of expression is looked upon with suspicion.

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16   Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Concept of the Orient* (Delhi: Penguin, 2001).

17   Not to be confused with eminent Indian scientist Homi Jahangir Bhabha.

18   Robert J C Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, first edition, 1995), 163.

III. When Hindu Holism Meets Postcolonialism

As seen under its history, Hindu holism has been proclaimed as the way of life from the time of Vivekananda and before, but the deconstruction introduced by postmodernism and postcolonialism has lent its hand of support to Hindu holism. Two examples would be helpful to understand this unholy alliance.

Take for example, Gayatri Spivak's concept of epistemological violence. To explain her point, she uses the example of condemnation of sati by the British and the missionaries. Explaining Chakravorty's work, Nanda says, "Spivak claims that in outlawing the practice of sati- that is, by classifying sati as a crime – the British committed an act of epistemic violence against the natives who tolerated and even 'adulated' the practice as a sacred and heroic ritual."[19] Spivak argues that a wife's self-immolation was actually an "act of martyrdom,"[20] which the British labeled as murder, thus committing epistemic violence.

Frederique Marglin, to take another instance, a social anthropologist, blames the British for mocking the locals for their belief that smallpox is caused by the anger of Goddess Shitala. Commenting on the argument, Nanda says, "Marglin has gone on to declare that the introduction of the modern cowpox-based vaccine by the British, and later the Indian state, was an affront to the local practice of variolation which was embedded in a ritual prayer to the goddess of smallpox. Even though the traditional practice of disease control was more likely to cause the disease rather than cure it, Marglin upholds it as rational in the context of non-dualist assumptions of Indic civilization"[21]

Both these examples are sufficient to show that Hindu holism is immensely benefited by such writings. In fact, Hindu holism is helped in two ways:

1. **Victory Abroad:**

The anti-Enlightenment temper, and the resulting relativistic culture in the West has provided a fertile ground to Hindu holism. "The

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19   Nanda, *Prophets*, 151.

20   Ibid.

21   Ibid., 129.

postmodern intellectual mood is pessimistic about the western path to progress which seems to lead consistently to gross economic imbalance and ecological disaster (and probably war)."[22] This has swung the door of the West open to Hindu holists, who are eager to prove their superiority to their previous masters. For instance, many in the West today see Vedic science as an equally valid alternative to the Western science. Camouflaging as an alternative science, Vedic science – including astrology, yoga, Ayurveda have successfully invaded the Western homes and universities. Consider David Frawley, an American who has turned Hindu, and taken Vamadeva Shastri as his new name, is the founder of the American Institute of Vedic Studies. He teaches yoga, Ayurveda and astrology and upholds Vedas as the authoritative text. Their website specifically mentions that the Vedas "contain keys to the Pre-Christian traditions of all Indo-European peoples- the Greeks, Romans, Celts, Germans and Slavs – whose ancient languages and culture resemble the Vedic. The Vedas reflect the ancient solar religions and enlightenment traditions that once dominated the world from Mexico to China."[23] Swami Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada of ISCKON, on the other hand, believes and continues to proclaim the Vedantic gospel in the West by giving scientific gloss to reincarnation and transmigration of soul.[24] Thus by vilifying the colonizers (British/ West/ Christian), these Vedic scientists and non-scientists, present Hindu holism as more authentic and truly post-colonial alternative.[25]

2. Victory at Home:

Projecting itself as an anti-colonial, and therefore suppressed identity, also helps it to become a truly nationalistic and pan-Indian ideology at home. The actual subaltern identities (including Dalits, tribals and minorities) are told that the West is the real enemy, and therefore, the real differences of caste and class should be forgotten to fight this invisible

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22   Richard J. Plantinga, Thomas R. Thompson, and Matthew D. Lundberg, *An Introduction to Christian Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 38.

23   http://vedanet.com/about-2/ (accessed 14 February 2015).

24   A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, *Coming Back: The Science of Reincarnation* (Mumbai: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 2014, first published in 1982).

25   Another such example could be the ecological concern. The pantheistic naturalism of the Hindu holism seems to offer better alternative to the exploitative nature of Christian dualism –separation of nature from God as responsible for the abuse of the former.

enemy. Contrarily, those who denounce English language as colonial trap to dominate continue to send their children to schools that bear the names of missionaries from colonizing countries, so that their children can continue to be on top of the ladder of power.

Thus, the friendship of postcolonialism and Hindu holism has created a unique, win-win situation for Hindu holism. The more unfortunate part is that the greatest beneficiaries of this unholy alliance are Hindu nationalists, who continue to cite the findings of post-colonialists and Hindu holists for their benefit. Take Narendra Modi, a *pracharak* of RSS and present Prime Minister of India, who unabashedly claimed that cosmetic surgery and reproductive genetics were used by Indians thousands of years ago, citing the examples of Karna and Ganesha.[26]

IV. Implications for Indian Christian Scholar

The bond between postcolonialism and Hindu holism can turn into a recipe of violence if in the hands of Hindu nationalists. This places several unique responsibilities on the shoulders of Christian scholars in India.

1.   Today, the ambience in our universities and educational institutes has become friendly to both postmodernism and postcolonialism. Indian Christian scholars have an important task to present the viability of truth in an age of extreme relativism and subjectivism.

2.   Christian scholars too seem to have embraced postcolonialism as it dovetails with their vision of liberating the downtrodden and marginalized. While postcolonialism has benefited us to speak on behalf of the subalterns, the Indian Christian scholarship needs to assess postcolonialism biblically and beware that it does not toe the line and surrender to the temptation of asserting cultural superiority at the risk of losing grip of truth. It is unfortunate that while Hindu holism rejects the Western dualistic categories, it takes the support of postcolonialism, which itself is founded on duality of the colonized and the colonizer. Postcolonialism, thus needs to be reflected upon and accepted cautiously.

3.   Indian Christian scholars have dual responsibility of not allowing Hindu holists to represent their ideology as the only authentic

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26   *The Guardian*, October 28, 2014.

pan-Indian ideology, while also carefully avoiding their identification with colonial powers – something that Indian Christians are already struggling with. Such challenge is not unique to our times. Christian thinkers prior to and during the Freedom Movement had similar struggles. An in-depth study of those who have walked before us may provide some important clues to decipher this dilemma.

Justice: Christian Concept vis-a-vis Capability Approach

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Abstract

Christian thinkers have always considered justice as an important category for Christian living. This follows from the narrative and the injunction of the Scripture that has been part of the community since ancient days. Though differences persist when it comes to theorisation on justice, right is an important category that has been recognised by Christians of all ages. But right based conceptualisation of justice has its limitation as a theory of justice. In recent times capability approach to justice has underscored an important aspect of seeking justice specially in the context of modern democratic state. This position seeks to develop capability of an individual by removing unfreedom that leaves choices limited. Thus illiteracy, starvation, movement restrictions etc are sought to be removed in the name of enabling people to exercise freedom of choices. Given that removal of such unfreedom is good for human flourishing, the paper underscores that if such measure is taken alongside the category – right – then the emerging theory of justice would be more comprehensive.

Key Words: Justice, Rights, Freedom, Choices

1.0 Introduction

There are different theories of justice that are being advanced from time to time. In recent times, the one advanced by the American moral philosopher John Rawls has emerged as the more prominent theory of justice. With the arrival of Rawl's theory, older theories like that of Utilitarians and Aristotle appeared to have been dislodged by a more sophisticated version that Rawls advances, which also is more appealing to the changing economic and political context. If there is one person to

acknowledge for discourse on justice to have emerged as a significant subject matter in our times, it goes to John Rawls. However, as more and more thinkers explore justice and its relevance for our lives today, more theories are made available for individuals, communities and policy makers to choose. Given the diversity in the world it has been an extremely difficult and slippery task to arrive at an *adequate theory of justice* – a theory that takes into consideration every category that a theory of justice needs to incorporate. Thus, this has led to a practice where one party or entity would apply theory A for situation X and theory B for situation Y and so on. Sometimes it so happened because theory A is not able to address situation Y adequately or theory B is not able to address situation X adequately. Other times it so happened because there is no coherency in one's own principle. Since human individuals are prone to 'blind spot' and prejudices, it is quite a possibility to fail to adhere to one principle though the context may demand such consistency!

Lately the capability approach to justice has emerged as a significant voice in discourse on theories of justice. Prominent among its proponent are the economist Amartya Sen and philosopher Martha Nussbaum. Like many other theories this is not advanced as an adequate theory of justice by its proponents. On the other hand, though not as prominent as other theories are, a Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff has advanced a theory which is inextricably Christian in its key philosophical components. This essay will briefly explicate the two theories, highlight key contrast between them as advanced by leading proponents today and then attempt to synthesise the two thereby underscoring that the two theories need not be mutually exclusive and yet they speak about significantly relevant themes.

1.2 Christian Concept

The Christian Scripture does not highlight justice as a theory no more than Eschatology is a theme for systematic theology. There is no doubt that justice is an essential theme in the Bible as much as eschatology is an essential theme in the Bible. But the idea of justice as a theory for moral and political thinking was not the concern of the authors. However, just as Eschatology has become a significant topic of study for systematic theology, so has a of theory of justice based on the Bible becomes an

important theme to study for moral and political theology / philosophy. Whether it is in eschatology or on a theory of justice, Christian scholars are not entirely speaking in one voice. Unlike an 'in-house' thematic study like eschatology, discourse on Christian account of justice presents a much more complex pattern of diversity[1]. Since justice has to address relations of and between different entities like individuals and political communities and also their relations with non-living entities like institutions, flora and fauna, artistic work etc., the diversity within Christian thinkers get all the more stretched. In the paragraphs below, a key component that is requisite for any theory of justice will be underscored thereby making an implicit point that a theory that fails to address this component cannot be taken as an adequate theory of justice.

1.2.1 Justice and Right

God tells the people of Judah and their king ' 'Act with justice (Heb. *mishpat*) and righteousness (Heb. *tsedaqa*) , and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place (Jeremiah 22: 3)[2].

And in sermon on the Mount that Jesus delivers ' Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' (Gk. *dikaiosune*) sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 5. 10)

And few chapters later alluding to Jesus Christ, Matthew writes ' Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice (Gk. *krisis*) to the Gentiles, He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick until he brings justice (Gk. *krisis*) to victory. (Matthew 12:18-20)

A person – say, Sonia – who has been robbed of her house has been wronged. Injustice has been perpetrated on her. Injustice in general can be committed on a person in various ways. It could be that Sonia is

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1   Not all Christian thinkers take this particular approach to arriving at a theory of justice. For instance, influential Christian philosophers like Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor favour what is commonly called the communitarian approach.

2   Quotations are from RSV

robbed of chastity or it could be that she is robbed of her liberty to take a walk on a ridge by a bully. In all of this what has happened is that her right has been undermined. It is her right to own that house or not to be raped by any man or to take a walk in the ridge. She might have come to possess this right in different ways; nevertheless it is her right. And to be deprived of her right is to wrong her; to commit injustice upon her. To act with justice then is to honour her right; and if there has been injustice, to act with justice is to rectify the injustice perpetrated on her. In the Old Testament, justice is denoted by the Hebrew words '*tsedaqa*' and '*mishpat*' while in the New Testament the same word is denoted by Greek words '*dikaiosune*' and '*krisis*'. But very frequently it is the word 'righteousness' that '*tsedaqa*' and '*dikaiosune*' are used to denote; and 'justice' that '*mishpat*' and '*krisis*' represent. A 'righteous man' is generally meant to denote a man who commits no sin, a man who maintains moral integrity in his personal life; we do not generally called such a man ' a just man'. When someone is raped and the culprit roamed around freely, we say 'justice has been denied to her'; we do not normally say 'righteousness has been denied to her'. This may be a fair way to put it. However, when Jesus was being crucified, and the centurion says, 'this man is *dikaios*', translators used various English words: innocent, righteous and just. And as Wolterstorff observes in his book *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*, people who are persecuted for '*dikaiosune*' are not often those who maintain moral integrity in their personal life – someone who does not rob, cheat, murder etc.; those are persecuted are rather those who speak up and stand up for justice in politics, economics etc. Characters in the Bible like Amos, Elijah, Jeremiah or Jesus were confronted and got into trouble not because they maintain moral integrity in their own personal life but because they speak about justice and exposes hypocrisy to king or religious leaders of their days. Thus, strictly speaking using '*tsedaqa/ dikaiosune/righteousness'* to mean personal moral integrity and '*mishpat/ krisis/justice*' to mean justice at the level of social and political interaction may not be accurate. The former group of words may also mean more than personal moral integrity depending on context. However, whether it is in the Bible or outside, one way of looking at justice being violated is when what a person deserves is being robbed or dishonoured. She has the right to take a walk in the park, but her right has been dishonoured; the house belongs to her, but the rich bully has snatched it away from

her possession. These are examples of injustice.

The right that an individual possesses are of different sorts. There is this basic sort of right called human right. In Christian thought a person comes to possess this sort of right because of the dignity or worth of his or her life. And this dignity or worth comes about because of the relation that each individual has with God, irrespective of the individual's acknowledgement of the relationship with God. That fact that God gives life to Sonia and loves her gives rise to this relationship. This is to mean that this sort of right is not given by any other human being nor by a state. But because it is not given by any human being nor by a state, this sort of right cannot be taken away at will by any human being or by a state. Thus to abuse or violate human right of any individual is to commit injustice on the person.

Sonia also comes to possess right by virtue of the legal system of a political community that she is a member of. The legal system of any political community confers certain right on a person. Violation of such legal right results in injustice.

Other kind of right could be moral right, which may arise in different ways. For example, Robin and Sonia might have a promise to each other to get married next spring. But then Robin walks out of the promise few months later because he has found someone younger. Sonia may rightly insist that she has been wronged; that he has committed injustice on her by violating the 'contract'. Yet even when there is no 'contract' or agreement, injustice can be committed on a person. A mischief, say, Jack may place a camera in the bathroom of the hotel where Sonia checks in. Sonia may never ever realise that her private moment has been captured on camera; and it may so happen that the video is never ever shared to anyone else by Jack. Yet her moral right to privacy has been violated. Injustice has been committed on her. From a utilitarian point of view, Jack's action may even be justifiable let alone condemn it. One may say Sonia's utility is never harmed, but Jack's utility is enhanced. Given that utilitarianism is all about maximising utility, this will be fine. However, from a right theorist's point of view, such snooping is unjust.

It is also worth noting that tot every form of right is explicitly laid out in the Bible. However, one need not undermine the different ideas of right just because they are not there explicitly in the Scripture. A theory

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of justice, based on right, will also have to take into consideration non-human entities like plants and animals, art and music, mountains and rivers and also institutions as they also have values and therefore right of certain sort. Weaving into a theory the well-being of such entities will require moving beyond what the Christian Scripture explicitly underscores in the text.

1.3 Capability Approach to Justice

In his book *The Idea of Justice*, Amartya Sen underscores in detail what his concept of justice looks like. In the book, Sen gives a lengthy critique of the contractarian approach to justice specially the one advanced by John Rawls. Many of the arguments developed specially in the book are advanced against Rawls' theory of justice. However, in the process Sen gives key components that any state or policy makers must take into account if justice is a virtue that it must pursue. This particular account of justice has come to be called *Capability Approach* in recent times.

In the theory of justice that Rawls advances, it is the fair distribution of the primary goods[3] that he is concerned for. In *Capability Approach* it is rather the enhancement of freedom to perform what one has reason to perform that is being sought, not the primary goods. In the words of Martha Nussbaum, it is about 'direct(ing) the development process to focus on enabling, or creating conditions for choice. For example, Rawlsian concept would seek a fair distribution of wealth whereas proponents of capability approach would insist that having wealth does not mean much if Sonia is incapable of moving out of her house, due to city's incapability to provide ramp to someone like her who cannot 'walk' without a wheelchair. Capability approach would, therefore, seek to advance the freedom or the capability of each one to do the sort of thing that one has reason to value. So the parameter to judge whether there is justice or not is not whether there is fair distribution of primary goods or not, but it is about how much of freedom to do what one values is there. Thus this theory would insist that policy makers or state work to enhance the freedom of each individual so that each one's capability

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3   Primary goods, in broad categories, include 'rights and liberties, opportunities and powers, income and wealth'. Rawls would include 'a good sense of one's own worth' too in the list.

to perform what one wishes is augmented. In the process there are two sorts of freedoms that must be pursued – well-being freedom and agency freedom. Well-being freedom is the sort of freedom 'to advance one's own well-being' whereas agency freedom is the sort of freedom 'to advance whatever goals and values a person has reason to advance'. The difference between the two can be illustrated with examples. If Sonia is illiterate, she is restrained in many ways to pursue what she values. Enhancing her well-being freedom would mean making her literate so that she can advance her well-being. In *Capability Approach* seeking justice would mean creating condition to increase her choices – giving her more freedom, and this would take place through providing her education. Agency freedom is about enhancing Sonia's freedom to pursue this goal or that goal, depending on what she values. It is about enhancing Sonia's choices to eat chapatti or rice or undertake fasting like Gandhi and Sharmila. Undertaking fasting like Gandhi and Sharmila would indeed harm her well-being or her health, yet enhancing this sort of freedom to pursue one's goal is an important aspect of capability approach to justice. This point underscores opening of freedom of choices to undertake fasting – say, due to religious or political reason.

1.4 Are the Two Theories Mutually Exclusive?

A comprehensive theory of justice must take rights into account. Without the category of rights, one simply cannot make sense how one may say 'you have wronged me by depriving me of the good that I have a right to enjoy'. This way of conceptualisation, however, is more helpful when one ought not to be deprived of the good one has a right to enjoy; it is more about putting restriction on the other from infringing on my right. A comprehensive theory of justice must also take into account the importance of enhancing the capability of individuals so that there is more freedom for each person to pursue what one has reason to value. Thus, rights based conception of justice does not go all the way to provide significant 'guidelines' on how state can enhance common good. For example, education is a good that enables people to live with less unfreedom. Though 'right to education' may be there in certain societies, this is more of a policy issue globally and specially when it concerns higher education, it ceases to be a right. On items of good such a this, right based theory of justice has a limitation; providing

education so that people will be able to pursue well-being they value is more suitably addressed by the capability approach to justice. Yet it is also true that a theory of justice that advances expanding the scope of freedom of an individual – as capability approach advances – does not take into consideration certain key state of affair that an adequate theory of justice must incorporate. For example, capability approach cannot provide 'guideline' on what a doctor must do to a patient who is in coma for whom category like developing the capability is meaningless. In such situation it must be the right based approach that must provide 'guideline' what just action must consist of. Given the kinds of constraints that right based concept of justice and capability approach to justice is riddled with as an individual theory, it is more plausible to take both the categories of right as well as developing capability in framing a theory of justice. Such a theory would be more comprehensive and would be more relevant in creating a more flourishing society.

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Waiting for Godot and the Existential Predicament of Modern Man

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Abstract:

The gloomy first half of the war-torn twentieth century was marked by a deep sense of the futility of life, more specifically in Europe where the two World Wars brought an unprecedented impact. The nihilistic and the 'atheistic' existential philosophy of Jean Paul Sarte and Albert Camus was wielding influence on the intellectual discourses in the mid-century. In literature this influence was also expressed in Samuel Beckett's play Waiting for Godot (1953). Being part of the "theatre of the absurd" that rose in the 1950s, the plays included in this genre largely revolves around the theme of absurdity, that there is no overarching moral order and hence life is meaningless. A 'tragi-comic' play that centres on the actions of the two tramps waiting for mysterious person called Godot, it points to the existential predicament of being torn between hope and despair. While Waiting for Godot undeniably reflects the social reality of the time, the question of the meaning of life is still a haunting subject for the modern man. With ample biblical allusion in the text it accounts for an interesting discourse while exploring the play.

Key words/phrases: Existential, absurdity, waiting, meaning of life.

Introduction:

Literature is essentially a form of cultural products of the society and hence, an understanding of the historical background to the society from which it is produced becomes crucial in order to understand the text comprehensively. (For instance, William Shakespeare's plays can fully be enjoyed if one first understands the Elizabethan period in English

history or the country/society where and when it was set. Or Charles Dickens' novels will best be appreciated if one studies the nineteenth century Victorian era or the Industrial Revolution.) Keeping that in mind, I shall try to introduce the context in which this paper attempts to engage. Considering the limitation of a paper, I've just used a literary text as example, to deal with a well-accommodating philosophy, Existentialism, that gets easily accepted as a human predicament.

Much of what has been discussed of modern 'Existentialism' in the University class rooms in the contemporary times has largely been dominated by the twentieth century 'atheistic' Existential philosophy of a few like Jean Paul Sarte (1905-1980) and Albert Camus (1913-1960). Often, very little effort is made to trace its root to the writings of the nineteenth century Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) or the 'theistic' Existentialism. The underlying link between the two, however, is that both sides delve on the condition of man's conscious choice of action to arrive on a meaning of life. While the theistic existentialism is deeply Christian theologically in that a complete surrender in God is the basis for finding the meaning to life, the atheistic existentialism's basic premise is based on the non-existence of God and so it argues that life lacks any objective purpose. The twentieth century atheistic existentialism owes a lot to the nihilistic philosophy of Frederich Nietzsche whose promulgation that "God is dead!" just a year before his dead effectively left the modern man in a Godless world where orderliness is far from sight. The tragedies caused by the two World Wars also added weightage to such thinking, and increasingly the influence was seen in the literatures produced during the early and the mid-twentieth century. That life is absurd because we're all simply doomed for death became a dominant theme. The pessimistic view of life was reflected in most of the literatures in the 'Modernist' period.

Waiting for Godot is the most well-known play written by the Irish playwright Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) and staged for the first time on 5 January 1953 in Paris. Originally written in French as En attendant Godot (While Awaiting Godot) the play was written immediately after the Second World War. (The English version was staged in 1955). Often referred to as a play where "nothing happened twice", *Waiting for Godot* is a two act play where the two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, waits

for the arrival of a mysterious person called Mr. Godot on a deserted country roadside sometime in the evening. They were even unsure if they were waiting at the right place; all they know was that they were to wait "by the tree" (p. 6). They do not know who Godot is nor were they certain of what they want of Godot. In fact, when Beckett was asked by the American director of his plays in America "Who or what does Godot mean?", he simply replied, "If I knew, I would have said so in the play."[1] Both the acts ended with the announcement by the boy-messenger that Godot will not be able to come that day but will certainly come the next day. Subtitled as "A tragicomedy in two acts" the play brings in both the tragic and the comic elements. While it is comical to observe the characters do funny things as they while away the time to kill their boredom as they wait for Godot, the tragic element is hinted by the uncertainty that prevails throughout the play leading them to despair. *Waiting for Godot* has been lauded as a classic example of "*the theatre of the absurd*". Popularized by Martin Esslin in his book Theatre of the Absurd (1968) the playwrights included in this category include Jean Genet, Eugene Ionesco, Harold Pinter, Bertolt Brecht, Isaac Adamov, among others (more or less a European phenomenon). The 'absurdist' playwright asserts that "our existence is absurd because we are born without being asked to be born, we die without seeking death" (Oliver 1963: 225).

Like many of the other literary works written during or immediately after the Second World War, *Waiting for Godot* displays the nihilistic worldview dominant of the period. [Though born an Irish, Samuel Beckett made Paris his home and most of his well-known literary works were written in Paris. He even joined the French Resistance in WWII for which he was decorated with Croix de Guerre and the Medaille de la Resistance for his valour.] The twentieth century existential philosophy held the view that human beings merely exist in a world where there is no overarching meaning of life. Sarte argues that man is born into a void and he has a choice to remain 'passive' there or become 'active' and give meaning to his existence. But for him, coming out of the void through a conscious effort is even more frightful because it leads one to the realization that life is meaningless. Camus also stresses on the absurdity

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1   Michael Worton, "*Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*: Theatre as Text" < http://www.samuel-beckett.net/Godot_Endgame_Worton.html > accessed on 18 April, 2015.

of life by saying that we are trapped between life and death. He likens our existence with that of the mythical Sisyphus[2], the Greek King who was condemned by the gods to roll a boulder up the hill only to see it roll down to the valley for him to roll it up again. Just like Sisyphus was condemned to a meaningless labour so is modern man condemned to live a life of futility, he said.

Biblical allusions in the text:

Waiting for Godot has lots of Biblical allusions or subtexts so some have even gone to the extend of analyzing it as a Christian allegory given the many imageries used in the text drawn directly from the Bible. Ann Bugliani (2001), for instance, argued with a definitive statement, "The richness and complexity of scriptural resonances in this encounter are remarkable and seem to suggest that Godot is indeed God; and not a God who is aphasic, for he communicates with man - he sends messengers." Interestingly, there are mentions of two boy-messengers in the play who come at each end of the two acts to announce that Godot will not be able to come that day. One of them tends the goats and the other, who is supposedly his brother, tends the sheep. Now, this imagery of the goat and the sheep also resonates with the biblical story in Matthew 25: 31-46 when Jesus prophesied about how 'the Son of Man' will separate the sheep from the goats, metaphoric of the separation of the faithful from the unfaithful. Again, the boy-messenger who tends the goat said Godot is good to him because he doesn't beat him unlike his brother

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2   Sisyphus was the founder king of Corinth. Legend has it that he was one of the shrewdest of his generation. One day the river god was perplexed for the mysterious disappearance of his daughter. Zeus, the king of gods, had kidnapped her. Sisyphus told him the secret for the promise of abundant water for his city. Zeus was furious and punished the mortal king by chaining him in the underworld. But before his death Sisyphus told his wife to dispose of his dead body out in the public square just to test her love for him. He thought if she loved him truly she wouldn't do so. He was, however, horrified to find out that his wife did exactly as was told. His body now lay mutilated by the dogs and scavengers to feast. Furious, he requested Hades, the king of the underworld, to allow him to go back to the world and chastise his wife. He promised to be back quickly after the duty is accomplished. But once back in the world he forgot what he came back for. He enjoyed the sun, the rain, and everything the world had to offer. Despite repeated warning to come back he refused. Hades, therefore, had to come back himself and dragged Sisyphus back to the underworld. There he was condemned to roll up a boulder up a hill only to see it roll down to the valley for Sisyphus to roll it up again. That became his punishment. Albert Camus, in his book The Myth of Sisyphus (1942), says that the workers of the world are also like Sisyphus, toiling ceaselessly and meaninglessly. Sisyphus is the absurd hero, Camus concludes, and "one must imagine Sisyphus happy".

who gets beaten. This again is worth noting as it goes well with what's written in Hebrews 12: 6-8 about disciplining those God loves[3]. Ironically, the goatherd admitted that he doesn't know if he's happy despite being fairly fed!

The term Godot has some similarity in pronunciation with God and various description of his character in the text lends support to this belief. For instance, when the boy-messenger came he was asked of God's appearance:

Vladimir: [*Softly*] He has a beard, Mr Godot?
Boy: Yes, sir.
Vladimir: Fair or... [*He hesitates*]... or black?
Boy: I think it's white, sir. (p. 85)

Often, the God of the Bible is also described to have similar appearance; "The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow" (Rev. 1: 14) or "his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool" (Dan. 7: 9). The two tramps also thinks that Godot will save them from the wretched condition. At the same time, they also fear that Godot will punish them if they don't wait. So, though unsure if they were waiting at the right place or the right day, they wait. Unfortunately, the wait was unbearable for them. So to kill the time, they decided to play some games so that they would forget their momentary predicament. As they wait, two other tramps, Pozzo and Lucky, came along. But they were in no better condition. They were symbolic of the master-slave relationship.

There is also the interpretation of the two tramps waiting for Godot as analogous with the Christians' wait for the second coming of the Messiah. At one point Vladimir even speak for all mankind, "But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not" (p. 72). The theme of 'waiting' dominates throughout the discourses of Vladimir and Estragon. But perhaps, one of the most referred to biblical allusions in the text is in Act I where Estragon and Vladimir talked about

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3   Hebrews 12: 6-8 "For the Lord disciplines those he loves and he punishes each one he accepts as his child." As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all. (NLT)

the Bible and two thieves who were crucified with Christ. Vladimir, the thinker of the two, concludes that "One of the two thieves was saved [Pause.] It's a reasonable percentage" (p. 3). {Or sometime later during the same discourse Vladimir said again, "Our Saviour. Two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other... [*He searches for the contrary of saved*]... damned" (p. 4)} This argument is borrowed from a quote credited to St. Augustine: "Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume: one of the thieves was damned." Vladimir further went on to point that despite the discrepancies in the writings of the "Evangelists" (the four Gospels), most people / everyone believes the version that told of one of the two thieves being saved[4]. One could interpret this comment by saying that Beckett is somewhat hinting on how Christian faith is at times hinged on the the lesser evidence and hence, in a way, questions the credibility of the story of the Saviour's death. But readers have read it otherwise, somehow. In the context of which the two tramps were talking, it pertains to how they have a reasonable percentage of being redeemed for their wretched situation, and thus, there is hope in their wait. Vladimir, being the thinker of the two vagabonds, sees the possibility that a change could come with hope. That hope was rekindled is also symbolically represented by appearance of four or five leaves on the tree that stood where they were waiting compared to the bareness of the tree the previous day.

Conclusion: The visible void in the heart of modern man

Interestingly, the opening line of the play is "Nothing to be done", a phrase which was repeated a number of times, and it suggests the inability of two tramps to improve their condition. The best they could do to escape the pain of 'waiting' is to play some games or be entertained. They even tried hanging themselves from the tree but they didn't find a proper rope and the tree too was too weak to hold them. The other couple that came later, Pozzo and Lucky, entertained them to some extend. But sooner, the reality of 'waiting' for the mysterious someone comes to haunt them: "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful" (p.

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4   Only Luke mentions of one of the two thieves being saved (Luke 23: 39-43). Both Matthew and Mark mentions that the two "crucified with him also heaped insults on him" (Matt. 27: 44; Mark 15: 32); John did mention of two others crucified with him but did not record any conversation between Jesus and them.

34) The irony is also that the play never mentions what the two tramps expects of Godot, nor do their talk give any hint at what they expect of him. Towards the end of the play when Estragon announces that "[t]hey are coming", Vladimir cried out triumphantly, "It's Godot! At last! It's Godot! We've saved! Let's go and meet him!" (p.65). What do they want to be saved from? Saved from damnation? There is no clue. But it may be noteworthy that somewhere in the beginning of the play Vladimir had suggested they repent like one of the thieves;

> Vladimir: Suppose we repented.
> Estragon: Repented what?
> Vladimir: Oh... [*He reflects*.] We wouldn't have to go into the details.
> Estragon: Our being born? (p. 3)

Though they didn't "go into the details" there is the hint that things are not alright with them. In the play Vladimir is shown to be obsessed with his hat and Estragon with his boots. So, in a way, they are symbolic representation of the mind and the body. In fact, in many instances this contrasting nature in them comes to surface – Vladimir is the more hopeful, thoughtful and sensible while Estragon more forgetful, blunt and shameless in expressing his needs. But as a thinker Vladimir is acutely sensible of the dreadful reality, and hence the wait is more tormenting for him than Estragon.

Some critics have also argued that Godot stands for death. Just like the existentialist argument that life has no meaning, the characters in the play seems to wait for death to arrive and end their dreadful reality. While they contemplated on suicide, somehow or the other the were unsuccessful; suggesting that it is not easy to trick destiny. But between birth and death they are trapped or as Vladimir puts it; "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. [*He listens*.] But habit is a great deadener" (p. 83). And so, the wait can only be tolerated by acquiring some habit. The games they play and the digression into discussing several topics that comes to their mind then becomes the 'habit'. And yet, the nagging question returns:

> It is true that when with folded arms we weigh the pros and cons we are no less a credit to our species. The tiger bounds to the help of his congeners without the least reflection, or else he

slinks away in to the depths of the thickets. But that is not the question. What are we doing here, that is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come -" (p. 72).

What this paper has tried to argue, in a way, is that the modern man is no different from the situation faced by the characters in *Waiting for Godot*. Let me just quote a review article that came in The Hindu in 2013 (the 50th year anniversary of the staging of *Waiting for Godot*), the reason is it echoes many peoples' predicament even today (or should I say more so, in the postmodern world!), the writer Sulekha Kumar says this: "*Waiting for Godot* encapsulates the human condition brilliantly. It connects with our life and our situation. It seems to echo our deepest fears, confronts us with our naked self and our predicament, our stark loneliness — conditions not imposed by any outsider but by our own selves." And she goes on to say this after watching the play once again commemorating the golden jubilee of its success in Dublin, "I have just witnessed a dramatic masterpiece, a timeless tale — a philosophical quest that is universal and eternal. I am out of the play but still in the play, haunted by the hopelessness of the human predicament."

One of the problems with modern man is that while most people lament at the existential condition, they refuse to prob deeper. Existential reality is a human condition, a condition of being conscious of one's own being. Both the theistic and the atheistic existentialism acknowledges this fact. And yet, the departure lies in one being able to take 'the leap of faith' and surrender to the sovereignty of God, while the other lament the tragic sense of being trapped between birth and death, and hence claim that life is absurd. This existential predicament is not a modern phenomenon, as many tries to put it. But the search for meaning in life is paramount to human beings. I think human beings have recognized this existential situation long before we can remember, but the modern man perhaps feel this more acutely because of various other situations. William R. Mueller and Josephine Jacobsen (1965) once said, "The human predicament described in Beckett's first play is that of man living on the Saturday after the Friday of the crucifixion, and not really knowing if all hope is dead or if the next day will bring the life which has been promised." I'm sure the disciples of Jesus also felt something like this. The Saturday of uncertainty,

between hope and despair, when the clock seems to tick too slowly, is a wait that seems forever! But don't we too feel that sometime?

If our premise of life is that we live in a Godless world then we certainly have no meaning in living. I've tried to explain this to my students by giving them a section of the first chapter of Ecclesiastes 1: 2-11[5] and asking them to guess who the author is. The answers from them are often wild guesses and hilarious but certainly far from the name of the real author. When I mention that it was written by a king who lived more than two thousand back, their jaws drop. Really? But I did not stop from there, the point of King Solomon's existential dilemma, but told them of what he concluded on (Eccl. 12: 13-14): "Now all has been heard; / here is the conclusion of the matter: / Fear God and keep his commandments, / for this is the duty of all mankind. / For God will bring every deed into judgment, / including every hidden thing, / whether it is good or evil." So, in God is where all things rest. He is the author of everything, including life. Without God there is no meaning.

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5   "Meaningless! Meaningless!" / says the Teacher. / "Utterly meaningless! / Everything is meaningless." / What do people gain from all their labors / at which they toil under the sun? / Generations come and generations go, / but the earth remains forever. / The sun rises and the sun sets, / and hurries back to where it rises. / The wind blows to the south / and turns to the north; / round and round it goes, / ever returning on its course, / All streams flow into the sea, / yet the sea is never full. / To the place the streams come from, / there they return again. / All things are wearisome, / more than one can say. / The eye never has enough of seeing, / nor the ear its fill of hearing. / What has been will be again, / what has been done will be done again; / there is nothing new under the sun. / Is there anything which one can say, / "Look! This is something new"? / It was here already, long ago; / it was here before our time. / No one remembers the former generations, / and even those yet to come / will not be remembered / by those who follow them.

Notes

Notes

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