



Cenbāntal

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On the Title: *Cenkāntal* - Red Malabar Glory-Lily, *Gloriosa Superba* – is one of the 99 flowers of the Tamil country enumerated in the poem *Kuriñcippāṭṭu*. C. J. Beschi compares Mother Mary's rosy-hands with kāntal flower. (*Kāntal nēriya cenkarattu ēntinal. Tēmpāvani* 965; also *kāntal-kai : kāntal-like ruddy hands*, in *Tirukkāvalūr Kalampakam* 23).

Front cover:

'Option for the Least.' The poor always have to wait and it is always the woman who is the victim. She waits in silence for the day when the life of equality and justice become a reality in life.

Back cover:

"Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame, so that my house will be filled." (Luke 14, 21-23). The scene is set against the injunction of disallowing 'polluted people' inside 'sacred space.'

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Cenkāntal online e-book.

Cenkāntal Sept 2020 issue – On Spirituality- Dec 2020 on Eco-spirituality - now live in the format of an online e-book. It will now easily be searchable on Google and can be read as an e-book on mobile devices.

https://issuu.com/cenkantal/docs/cenkantal_1_september2020__1_

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Message from the Coordinator:

Friends,

We are immensely pleased to receive the positive responses to the previous two issues of the Bulletin *Cenkāntal*. We are now happy to present the third issue of the Bulletin on *Option for the Least*, the core theme of the Jesuit mission today.

It is a collaborative venture and we gratefully acknowledge and gracefully appreciate all the contributors to this issue.

A Maria Arul Raja SJ

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Editor's Foreword



Man does not live by bread alone

The basic needs of human beings are said to be food, clothes and shelter. This would mean that human being is just reduced to material, physical existence. Human being is also spirit, which makes a lot of difference. Even when people have all these basic physical needs met, they are not fully 'human', they are not happy, content and fulfilled.

That means, there is another deeper need. That is, the human beings want to be accepted, recognized and appreciated by fellow humans. Man is social in the sense that s/he belongs to a community of people. This sense of belonging gives him/her security, worth, dignity. Even then the spirit longs for more, to reach out beyond this limited existence.

The human being is a person, which distinguishes him/her from the animal world. That is to say, s/he is unique, unrepeatable in any manner whatsoever, cannot be cloned; secondly, s/he is incommunicable, cannot be absorbed by another in any manner. That is the reason why we find it difficult to understand another person fully, even though we may be very close friends; thirdly, it subsists on its own. It is the core around which an intellectual being's nature is built. This nature has intellect and free will. This core is unperceived. From this incommunicable reality stems human equality, dignity, responsibility.

Option for the Least is Biblical

Option for the poor in the biblical sense does not mean that people with means enjoy the option of helping or not helping the poor; rather, the poor offer an option to those comfortably well-off to join or not join the company of the messianic king in the new Jerusalem (Zechariah 9, 9). For, the God of the Bible stands on the side of the poor. "Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do it to me." (Matthew 25, 40)

It is philosophical

The most important Indian symbol of the reconciliation of the opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*) is the Zero.

In mathematics it means 'naught', but for the Indian mind the Zero is *bindu* (in architecture), 'dot', 'seed', 'semen', an unlimited entity. Zero and Nirvānam are called *Sūnya*, the Void, which means 'excessive', 'swollen' (from the root, *śūn*). Richard Lannoy thinks that 'the Zero should be regarded as the matrix of negative and positive, the fulcrum, the hub of the wheel.'

It is aesthetic

Philosophically seen the Zero idea is a meditation on the paradox of the maximum potential contained within an irreducible minimum. This idea is expressed by Mies van der Rohe (member of the *Bauhaus* movement) in the technological realm as 'less is more'. The person who fully comprehends the mystery of the Zero is the one who has reduced himself to the egoless state under normal conditions. This is in simple terms 'weakness in power.'

It is economical

The phrase "Small Is Beautiful" came from a principle espoused by Schumacher's teacher Leopold Kohr (1909-1994). The concept is often used to champion small, appropriate technologies or politics that are believed to empower people more, in contrast with phrases such as "bigger is better". Schumacher's philosophy is one of "enoughness", appreciating both human needs and limitations.

It is ecological

As in the rain-forest, everything in the universe finds its place, flora and fauna, big and small. No one is excluded.

It is spiritual

St. Paul would say: "When I am weak, then I am strong," (2 Corinthians, 12, 10). Gandhi said repeatedly, "I must reduce myself to zero". Gandhi's choice of the spinning wheel as symbol of weaving the destiny of India had its aesthetic association with Kabir, the weaver-poet, (who stood for Hindu-Muslim unity). The Zero idea is aesthetically and theologically very significant.

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Option for the Least - A Biblical Perspective

Valan C. Antony S. J.



Ultimately, is it not true that the way one defines justice reveals the God one reveres? Of course, yes. Biblical justice basically means 'fidelity to the demands of relationship' between God and God's people. God has always been faithful to his part of the covenantal relationship, while humans simply "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). This fidelity on God's part is seen in the special care and love for the least, the lost and the last he has showered down the memory lane of human history. God, taking the side of the least, as their protector and sustainer is attested in the Prophetic literature, in the Psalms, and reinforced in the Beatitudes (Mt 5). In fact, the treatment of the least is the litmus test of a Christian affecting his/her manner of living and loving, the choices he/she makes and the commitment to the societal transformation.

The Bible emphatically affirms that God is not distant or indifferent or neutral, but opts for the least – the poor, the weak, the widows, the orphans, people with disabilities, and victims of oppression and the vulnerable who get a "hermeneutical privilege." It is not merely a compassionate feeling but a willing decision ("to opt") to do what is just and morally commendable. It is not arbitrary but rooted and grounded in the very being of God as love. This is what is celebrated in the foundational experience, the Exodus event (Ex 1:8-14; 2: 23-35; 3:7-10). God, hearing the cry of the poor (Ps 34), opts to deliver the least as a demonstration of his loving identity and fidelity, his 'universal embrace,' (therefore no one is left out). Again, this option is not based on merit or accomplishment on the part of the humans but on

the extravagant compassion of God, a gift for sure. This gift involves an invitation to the people to form a covenantal community, in which the same attitude of God towards the least would be evident (Ex 22: 21-23; Dt 16.11-12).

Jesus, who reflects God's heart for us, unequivocally opted for the least. He proclaims that he has been anointed "to bring good news to the poor" (Lk 4:18). He spends time with the marginalized, the outcasts, the lost ones which reveals God's 'choice.' He is not impartial in the face of oppression, marginalization, and assaults on human goodness and dignity. His priority is so emphatic that he makes option for the least and in fact, that alone serves as the kernel of the final consideration in the judgment scene (Mt 25:31-46). Such a choice, therefore, is not optional but obligatory; one has to read the parables of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) and of the rich fool (Lk 12:13-21) to grasp this perspective. Matthew Kelley is right when, in *Rediscovering Jesus*, he says that it is "impossible to separate the spiritual teachings of Jesus Christ from His social teachings, just as it is impossible to separate our Love of God from our Love of neighbor."

Millions of people, the least ones, are still 'crucified,' and the biblical demand is to bring "the crucified people down from the cross," (Jon Sobrino) something to be done in a holistic way. It is because they "tell us what the world is, and what the church's service to the world should be" (Oscar Romero). This "is not ideological but is born from the Gospel" and is "implicit in the Christological faith in the God who



became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8: 9)" (Benedict XVI). In short, we can safely affirm that it is consistently biblical that the least, the lost, and the last have always been the top "priority" of the Biblical God, whom Jesus Christ revealed.



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Who except God visits the poor?

THE DAY CAME for the image from the temple to be drawn round the holy town in its chariot.

The Queen said to the King, 'Let us go and attend the festival.'

Only one man out of the whole household did not join in the pilgrimage. His work was to collect stalks of spear-grass to make brooms for the King's house.

The chief of the servants said in pity to him, 'You may come with us.'

He bowed his head, saying, 'It cannot be.'

The man dwelt by the road along which the King's followers had to pass.

And when the Minister's elephant reached this spot, he called to him and said,

'Come with us and see the God ride in his chariot!'

I dare not seek God after the King's fashion,' said the man.

'How should you ever have such luck again as to see the God in his chariot?' asked the Minister.

'When God himself comes to my door,' answered the man.

The Minister laughed loud and said, 'Fool! "When God comes to your door!" yet a King must travel to see him!'

'Who except God visits the poor?' said the man.

– Rabindranath Tagore



Beside Quiet Waters

Dr. P. Dayanandan



'Option for the least or poor' is an idiom for 'equality'. Without equality how can people claim to be children of one God or brothers and sisters of Jesus? "Will you give me a drink?" was the pathetic cry of a tired man, a cry for equality with his Samaritan sister of an 'untouchable' land. 2000 years later we have similar stories to tell. When the poor 'untouchables' had no equal right to draw water to quench their thirst, Savitribai and Jotirao Phule invited them to take water from their well in 1868. One hundred years later in 1968 when Fr. Pedro Arrupe, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, was engaging with the concept of 'poverty', the Latin American Bishops institutionalized the Church's 'Option for the poor'. In 1983 when the Latin American 'Liberation theology' was influencing Christians across the world the Jesuits affirmed the Church's 'preferential option for the poor'.

"Preferential option for the poor?" Bishop Masilamani Azariah of the CSI Diocese of Madras asserted that the Church has only one option. He said God completely, not preferentially, sides with the least, oppressed, marginalized, poor, and victimized. Bishop Azariah's mother was from a tiny hamlet south of Sriperumbudur: Mettupalayam Kandigai (Christu Nattam). As a young girl Annammal dared not touch nor dip her pot in this water tank to carry drinking water for her family living half a kilometer away.

Neither was my father, a boy of 8, nor his parents and grandparents in the same village, allowed to touch the water for fear of polluting it. They were all Dalit Christians of the Free Church of Scotland Mission. They must wait till some Telugu caste Christian comes by who was willing to pour water into their pots. This was the only source of water for our family to quench their thirst or cook a meal. The Roman Catholic

Christians of Palnellore Kandigai who 'owned' the water tank came from Kilacheri. The Kilacheri Telugu Christians themselves were migrants who fled from Guntur district in 1786, unable to bear persecution by non-Christians. Rev. Fr. Manenti, an ex-Jesuit, led about 300 families out of oppression and settled them in Kilacheri.

Denial of access to water is absolute travesty of equality and justice. We must face it: caste Christians in India value the book of Manu more than the Gospel of Jesus, even today, even in their institutions and churches. "I am thirsty, would you give me something to drink" he asks. But we tell Jesus to "wait, hang on for some more time on that cross till some NGO fights for your access to water. We are busy drinking the Communion wine." On 20 March 1927, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar led the Mahad satyagraha to drink water from the Chavadar Tank accessible only to caste Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, but not Dalits. They did have other sources of water but they marched to Chavadar to challenge caste discrimination. Ambedkar said: "We are not going to the Chavadar Tank to merely drink its water. We are going to the Tank to assert that we too are human beings like others. It must be clear that this meeting has been called to set up the norm of equality." Jesus would agree! On Christmas day of the same year Ambedkar burnt *Manusmriti* because it is a symbol of injustice and oppression.

Jesus wanted freedom and equality. His commandments to love and treat others just as we would like to be treated, his compassion for the poor, needy, and least of his brothers and sisters is what





Dayanandan and his niece at the water tank where his father waited for water.

the church is all about. Hundreds of thousands of women and men went all over the world taking this good news, not because they were afraid of any hell for disobedience, but because the gospel is an overpouring force of goodness. The results are undeniably plain to see in the liberating power of evangelism, education, healthcare and empathetic option for the least. This is not only a story of the past, but also of the present and future.

The gospel values are not exclusively Christian. They are also inherently altruistic instincts of humans. These values can be found in every religion and spiritual tradition, secular teachings of literate and illiterate people, and in protest literature and folk ballads. Such values have given shape to how we govern ourselves. We now drink water from tanks because the Right to Equality is a Fundamental Right enshrined in the Constitution of India. Caste discrimination in Christianity remains mostly unchanged. For those who claim to follow Jesus, there is still plenty of work to do. People still cry out for equity and justice. But the Christian option for the poor is not a matter of handouts or charity, but of sharing life in the footsteps of a man who emptied and humbled himself to serve.

I am puzzled and so I ask: other than in the miracles, did Jesus ever give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, invite a homeless stranger, look after a sick person, or visit a prisoner? How am I to do all these? I cannot do miracles. Mathew 25 is not any threat of judgment but a

passionate command to figure out how to care for the least among us. Paul the Apostle expressed it eloquently: "Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.'" (2 Cor.8:13-15)

Come! We have clear, calm waters. Together we will fill our pots!



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Option For The Least: An Ethical Perspective

Dr. Basil Xavier S. J.

On seeing the sufferings and agonies of the last and least in the society, our hearts prefer to opt for them. Our souls also, stirred up by Jesus' option for the poor, move us to choose the oppressed. But our minds (always tricky!) question it saying, "Is it equality? Is it not one-sided approach?" Can we defend ethically the option for the least? One ethical theory (Equity) and two ethicists (Rawls and Ruskin) come to our rescue!

Firstly, the difference between the ethical theories of equity and equality is important. Although both promote fairness, equality achieves this through treating everyone the same regardless of need, while equity achieves this through treating people differently depending on their respective needs. In an unequal and unjust society like India, equity gets priority over equality. In our society, (refer the picture on page 10) people are not equal in height (not equal economically, socially, culturally, politically and so on). In order to witness the game, the shortest must be supported with the extra stools. It looks as if people not treated equally. But this is equity and option for the least. In the traditional philosophy of justice, it is restorative justice as the society has to now restore relationships to "rightness" and reinstate equality! We can even call this retributive justice as the least has been wronged by the advantaged (people are kept poor and made illiterate in an unjust social structure) and hence the latter has to bear the 'punishment' of compensating the former! The philosophy of



'reservation' is based on this principle of equity. This is also called 'social justice' spearheaded by Dravidian movements in South India.

Secondly, John Rawls an American philosopher introduced the concept of "Justice as Fairness" in his book *A Theory of Justice (TJ)* in 1971. He was constantly revising this concept and published *Fairness as Justice: A Restatement (JF)* in 2001. From the time of J. S. Mill until the mid 20th century, most philosophers who defended democratic principles did so largely on the basis of utilitarianism *i.e.* a greater amount of happiness for a greater number of people. The implication of this is that the greater happiness of the majority is achieved by unfairly neglecting the rights and interests of a minority. Radically Rawls attempted to develop a non-utilitarian justification of a democratic political order characterized by fairness, equality and individual rights.

His concept has two principles. The second principle runs like this, "Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: a. They are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of

fair equality of opportunity; b. They are to be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society (*the difference principle*)” (JF, 42–43). The second part of the second principle is the difference principle which regulates the distribution of wealth and income. This allows inequalities of wealth and income, so long as these will be to everyone’s advantage and specifically to the advantage of those who will be worst-off. This principle claims that any economic inequality must be to the greatest advantage of those who are advantaged-least. Those better-endowed are welcome to use their gifts to make themselves better-off so long as their doing so also contributes to the good of those less-well-endowed. “In justice as fairness,” Rawls says, “men agree to share one another’s fate.” (TJ, 102).

Amartya Sen’s *The Idea of Justice* (2009) is a critique and revision of Rawls’s theory of justice. While appreciating Rawls, Sen appends the following. He talks about *niti* and *nyaya*. The former relates to just rules whereas the latter refers to realization. *Niti* is an abstract exercise, if implemented completely, would result in maximum public welfare and justice. *Nyaya*, on the other hand, relates to the enforcement of laws and regulations. According to Sen, Rawls grappled only with the perfect theory of justice i.e. transcendental institutionalism. On the other hand, what we need is not an ‘ideal perfect justice’ (*niti*) but practical means to remove the injustice (*nyaya*). Sen’s ‘Idea of Justice’ in a way completes and moves forward Rawls’s ‘Theory of Justice’. So Sen’s effort should be seen as fulfilling the grooves of Rawls’s concept and not an alternate view.

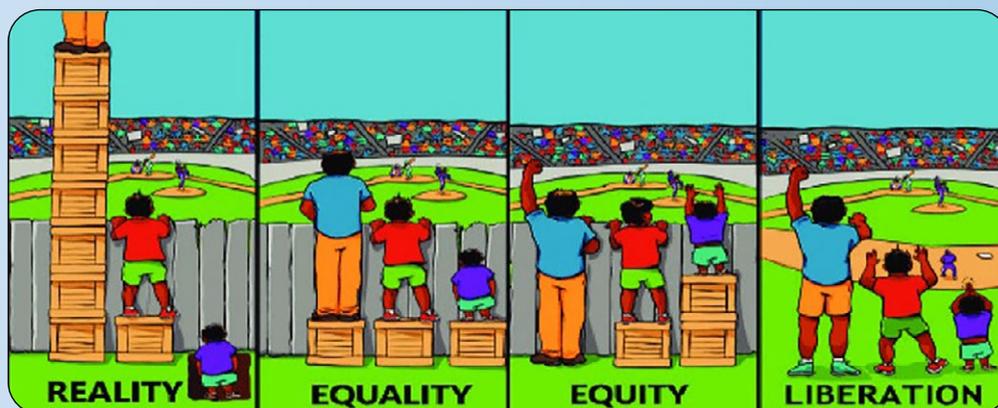
Lastly, the ethics of ‘*Unto This Last*’ and its Indian *avatar* is significant here. *Unto This Last* was written by John Ruskin in 1860. Gandhi had borrowed the philosophy of *sarvodaya* from Ruskin which he himself acknowledged. Gandhi summed up the teachings of Ruskin in three fundamental principles. Among them the first one goes like this, “That the good of the

individual is contained in the good of all”. Gandhi was concerned with the last and least in the society while explaining his concept of ‘*sarvodaya*’. Actually the proper rendering of the ‘*Unto This Last*’ would be ‘*antyodaya*’ (welfare of the least). Later, J. P. Narayan drafted *sarvodaya* plan inspired by Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave. The *bhoodan* and *gramdan* movement of Vinoba was successful in collecting lands from the land lords and distributing them to poor landless farmers (the least). This is a voluntary social justice from the side of the advantaged.

Actually we can accomplish ‘*sarvodaya* only through *antyodaya*’. The welfare of all can be achieved only by ensuring welfare to the least in the society. Will a mother feed equally a healthy and mal-nutritious child? Certainly she would give more to the neediest. Any society is judged by how the weakest and poorest of its members are treated. The most vulnerable people are our greatest responsibility. Therefore the need of the hour is a preferential option for the last and least of our sisters and brothers. This option is in fact an ethical imperative essential for effectively attaining the common good!



(Dr. Basil Xavier, SJ is former principal of Arul Anandar College, Karumathur, Madurai. He has been teaching philosophy there for more than two decades. He has recently published two books: *Ethnophilosophising in India* and *Philosophies of Margins*. basilxavier@gmail.com)



Option for the Least - An Economic Perspective

S. Arockiasamy S. J

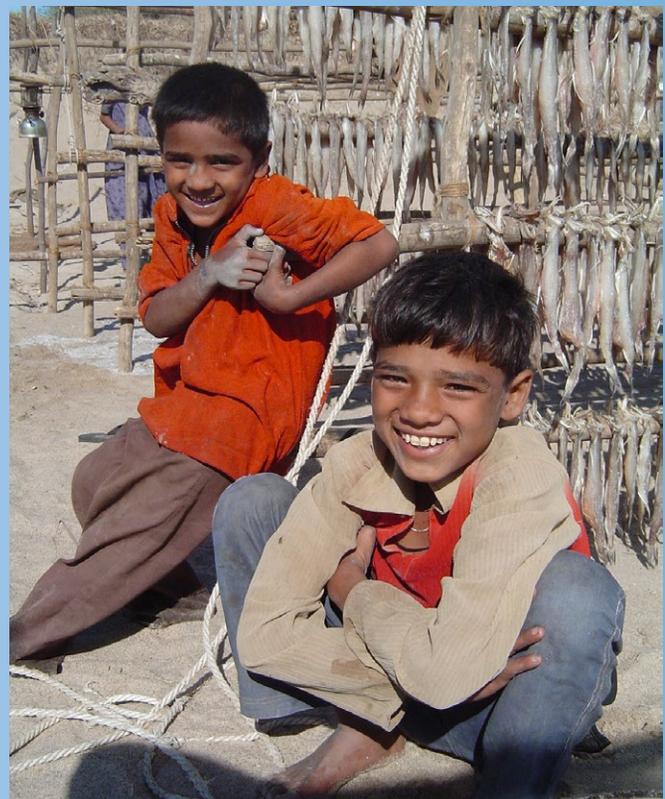
The constitution of India emphasizes that the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, in particular of the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all form of exploitation (Article 46, No.4).

In the backdrop of our constitution, The 'Option for the Least' may be perceived from economic, political, social, religious and cultural dimensions. The attempt is to look at the concept of the Least from the point of view of Amartya Sen, a Nobel laureate in welfare economics. In the words of Sen, "Poverty must be seen as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as lowness income, which is the standard criterion of identification of poverty" (Development as Freedom Oxford. 2000, p.87) .

The capability approach of Amartya Sen encompasses, expansion of health care, education, social security etc. contributing directly to the quality of life and to its flourishing (Sen, Development as Freedom 2000, p.144)". Let me analyse the capability approach in terms of Education, Health care and social security taken by the Government of India. If we focus on the Educational scenario of the country today, the education policy 1992 of our government geared towards "Education for all" and the universalization of primary education was very much stressed and an act was passed in the parliament in 2009 to promote primary education across the country. After 2014 the new education policy of the Government of India is moving towards the deprivation of education to the poor especially the socially and economically under privileged people. Thus the empowerment of poor is ignored and it is laid less importance now.



With regard to Health care of the poor people in the country, it is very shocking and disquieting. Nearly 60% of rural population in India is without nutritious food. Approximately 29% of men and 50% of women are malnourished in our country. (National Family Welfare Report 2019). From this analysis, we come to understand that the health care of the Least is undermined by the state and central governments.



When we look at the social security measures of the government, the situation of the poor population is deplorable and miserable in India. As per the Government of India's Census report 2011, it is obvious that only 34.5% of the scheduled tribe population of India work on their own land. The remaining 65.5% of them remain landless. Similarly, only 14.8% of the scheduled caste population is working on their own land. While the remaining 85.2% of them remain landless. Besides, the poverty level is 44% among the SC population in India, while it is 45.9% among the Scheduled tribal population in India.

In the light of the capability approach of Sen, when we analyse the state-wise poverty situation in India, it is alarming and disappointing, because it is very high in the northern states (40-47.7 percentage). Whereas, the poverty level is low (11-23 percentage) in the southern states of Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra, Telangana and Tamilnadu. Thus, the high percentage of the poor living in a miserable situation is a social concern and it is a big challenge to the empowerment of the Least. Hence, poverty of the Least must be tackled with empathy and concerted and concrete measures, programmes and schemes to eliminate it.

When we compare the poverty level of BC communities with the SC and ST communities of India, it is very high and disheartening among the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes across the country. Therefore to build and enhance the capabilities of the Least of the vast majority of the population of the India, our State and central governments should provide quality education, health care and social security to them.

When the Least are entitled to have access to quality education, Health care and social security, they will be liberated from all enslavement and exploitation and oppression in our country. They can walk with human dignity and freedom and self-respect in our country.

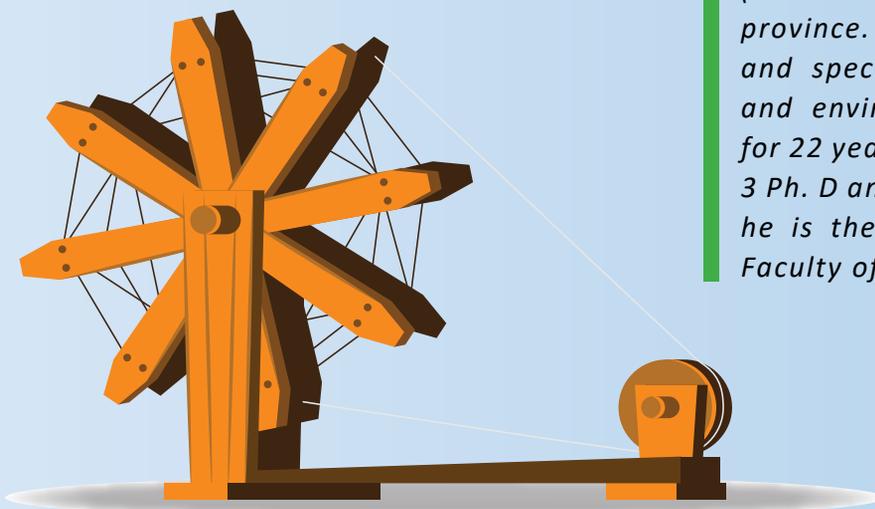
Poverty makes a person vulnerable and a helpless victim deprived of social, cultural and political freedoms: poverty is not just 'low income' and 'low consumption' but a multiple deprivation causing premature death, chronic undernourishment, Illiteracy, illness and social exclusion. (*The Sen Difference* article, 2005. P.4). Thus the capability approach looks at the Least of society in a holistic and comprehensive way. It paves the way for egalitarian society stressing the implementation of social, economic, political, religious and cultural rights, freedom equality and justice in all spheres of human life and society in our country.

To sum up:

"In the capabilities paradigm, poverty is understood as deprivation of basic capabilities. People may get deprived of such capabilities in several ways: Included in the domain of capability theory are all possible factors, that can possibly influence human capabilities, which is the prime measure of human well-being. The capability approach focuses on two things, *freedoms to achieve* and the *capabilities to function*."

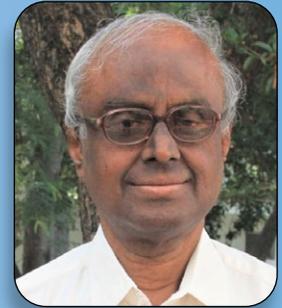


(Dr. S. Arockia Samy SJ is a Jesuit of Madurai province. He did his doctorate in economics and specialized in Managerial Economics and environmental Economics. He taught for 22 years in different colleges and guided 3 Ph. D and ten M. Phil. Scholars. At present he is the Registrar of the Satya Nilayam Faculty of Philosophy, Chennai.)



The Rain-Forests Provide Space for All Species

Dr. John Britto S. J.



'Our Solutions Are In Nature' was the theme of Biodiversity Day for 2020. The decade of 2011-2020 was devoted to Biodiversity by the UN. The decade draws to a close on 22nd May 2021. We are in a transitional phase for the beginning of other key decades related to Biodiversity *i.e.*, 2021-2030, UN decade of Ocean Science for sustainable development followed by a decade on Ecosystem restoration and then another decade on sustainable development.

When the New Madurai Mission was established, our founding fathers had an innate insight to safeguard and protect nature. They were truly naturalists with a keen sense of diversity occurring in natural resources. The terms we use today – biodiversity, landscaping, land degradation, sustainability, re-wilding barren or un-protective lands or the modern environmental movements were not in vogue then. However they were men endowed with a keen sense of the value of land, soil, water and mineral resources along with flora and fauna.

Hailing from an agrarian background of Toulouse province, they treasured the richness of our land, culture, indigenous knowledge and agrarian systems prevalent in the mission territories. Our institutions and parishes of today are telling evidences for their holistic and ecocentric approach. The campus of Sacred Heart College, Shembaganur is a masterpiece of landscape planning. The massive buildings mostly were from rocks around and plastered with adhesive soil of the area. The different avenues and alleys which

had both native trees and trees from the Eastern Himalayan range exemplify what we now term as 'arboretum'. The botanical garden with orchids, ferns and other plants were introductions from the rest of the Western Ghats and the Eastern Himalayas. Truly they were 'gene banks' of today's terminology. Our estates in the Palni hills and elsewhere were models of soil conservation and water management. Agricultural farms had adopted indigenous water storage technologies (percolation ponds and banks) reflected the practice of replenishing ground water level. In other words the founders of the New Madurai Mission were prophets ahead of their times regarding ecology and environment.

Most of our institutions in the hills and in the plains had established cattle forms with provision for grazing land (Itti Pallam). Our estates in the hills (the Palnis, the farms in St. Xavier's and verdant paddy fields of St. Joseph's Trichy and elsewhere) had the future in mind and served as measures of food security and also income generation means for the New Mission. We were pioneers in introducing viticulture in the plains along with varieties of temperate vegetables, fruits and potato cultivation the large estates of Perumal, Palamalai and Manalur florist with copious coffee plantations thus providing financial support to the newly established mission.



Referring to the faunal sector, our Museums, in Shembaganur and Tiruchy were exemplars of the scientific approach to document our bio-resources along with natural history holdings. The Relief Map, a novelty in those days gave a distinct expression to the topography of the hills. The plant wealth also found adequate means of describing the diversity of plant wealth of the Palni hills, and undertaken by the Shembag team of Jesuit naturalists. The lower group of plants such as Mosses, Algae, Fungi, and especially the Fern varieties were carefully collected and named. Many of them were new to Science. The enterprising excavation and subsequent in anthropology as seen in the dolmens of the lower Palnis by the same team set a direction to present day researchers. These enumerations prove that the New Madurai Mission had bequeathed to us a valuable heritage of ecological and environmental outreach. In other words they faced challenges of the New Mission but with divine assistance found solutions in Nature.

The global context of today is that we are slowly recovering from Covid-19. The Indian scenario is alarming: migration of labour because of Covid-19, the draconian laws of governance through CAA, NEP, EIA and much more the farmers' strike and the shock of our rate of mal-nutrition of children and poverty in India being in the bottom rank in the global index, dictatorial mind set of the rulers at the centre and state do not augur well. Our strengths are our past heritage that would motivate to conserve the wealth of natural resources and nature as a whole. India being one of the 17 mega biodiversity countries, accounts for 7 to 8 % of recorded species of the world. So far, biologists have documented 45,908 species of plants and 96,364 species of animals and 5650 microbial

species. India is one of the eight primary centres of origin of cultivated plants with about 375 closely related wild species including rice, pulses, millets, vegetables, fruits and fibrous plants. There are nearly 255 breeds of animals such as cattle, sheep, goat, camel, horse and poultry, together with richness in cultural diversity and in traditional knowledge of the tribal and rural populations. These features demonstrate clearly our rich natural wealth and our potential of being one among the global biodiversity hotspots. Such a mine of resources and knowledge-base needs to be safeguarded in collaboration with global, national and state level biodiversity boards. Jesuits of today especially in Tamil Nadu have to launch concrete action plans in documenting our traditional floral and faunal resources as part of our ecology mission. Such a step will not only serve as a tribute to the architects of New Madurai Mission but a fitting response to our commitment to Our Common Home, Mother Earth.



(Dr. John Britto S. J is an active researcher in the field 'botany of plant systematics' at classical and molecular level; pursues biodiversity conservation and restoration. As an authority in Taxonomy he has published the recent Flora of Central and North Tamil Nadu adopting Modern A P G classification. He has added 20 plant species new to plant science.confirmed by international association of plant taxonomy.)



Option for the Least - An Aesthetic Perspective



Anand Amaladass S. J.

It is significant to remember that a group of artists initiated the process in the Western art history, to choose the not-so-museum-worthy objects like the empty bottles, dilapidated buildings, withered trees as their themes for paintings and made them museum-worthy. (e.g. Kurt Schwitters, d. 1948), Giorgio Morandi, 1890-1964, Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945).

That is what Jesus did by calling the marginalized/ uneducated fishermen to be his ambassadors of peace and love. He wanted his banquet hall to be filled with people on the streets, who are not banquet-worthy and so not fit for royal treatment, thus creating space for the unqualified for the classical aesthetic sensibility.

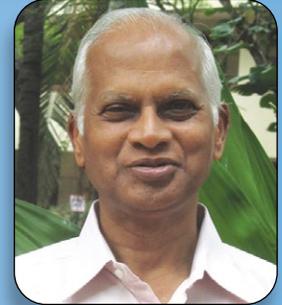
Art and protest

Protest in human history is nothing new. But then why do people protest? When there is obviously a discrepancy between appearance and reality, then a civil intervention becomes a necessity. If one understands 'protest' as a loud and public statement, then implicitly a communication must take place in public, in social context; it means that the primary intention is to bring about a denunciation. The perception of this discrepancy presupposes that there is an underlying ethical sense that prompts this.

The artists are quick to perceive this. Only when one is sensitive enough to recognize beauty or justice, he/she will notice what is ugly and unjust. Every human being by nature is aware what is to be done and what is to be avoided. In some societies this awareness is highly developed through education or through inherited cultural value system. This is reflected in their literary history.

Basic modes of protest:

The protests of artists and poets are well-recorded in history. There are artworks which are obviously



seen as protest artworks like that of Goya y Lucientes (1748-1828) who critiqued the social and political situation of his time. His "Disaster of the War" is a well-known protest-painting.

Humour is another form of protest, for example, *The Great Dictator* of Charlie Chaplin or the paintings of Mugilan. But humour requires some distancing, but it does not take away the pain of suffering. The victims could still laugh against their oppressive masters.

After all humour arises when one laughs in spite of everything and that could be extended to philosophy as well: Philosophy is, when one still thinks in spite of it. (Odo Marquard)

Faith and humour

Reinhold Niebuhr points out that there is an intimate relation between faith and humour. It arises out of the fact that both are concerned with contradictions of our existence: humour has to do with contradictions confronted in our immediate surroundings of life, whereas faith deals with the final contradictions. In both the freedom of human spirit expresses itself to place its ability outside of life's connections, outside of human being itself, to survey the entire reality.

Laughter is our reaction to contradictions surrounding us - such that they do not essentially touch us. Faith is the only possible reaction to the final contradictions of existence, which threatens the meaning of our life itself.

(Continue on Page17)



A Shaivite Perspective: An Enquiry into Vallalar's Jivakarunya Olukkam

Dr. Yesu Karunanidhi

When a year of spiritual orientation was introduced prior to theological studies as part of our priestly formation, and when we were initiated into it through various types of meditation, quite a few of our batch-mates were agitated saying, 'What is the use of sitting idle in an isolated place when the people outside are struggling for their livelihood?' 'Are not spiritual traditions blind to the world here and now?' 'Have the spiritual traditions of our soil ever contributed to the *secular* well-being of our people?' When a serious probe is done it is very vivid that the Bhakti traditions of our soil have a lot to enlighten us in our understanding of the preferential option for the poor. Here, let us take Vallalār's *Jivakāruṇya Olukkam* as the sample text and establish *jivakāruṇyam* ('compassion or mercy to all souls or lives') as the option for the poor.

Imperatives for the Option for the Poor

Vallalār's *Jivakāruṇya Olukkam* places before us three imperatives for the option for the poor:

(i) We are related to one another physically. "All souls are alike, because they are all brought to their physical body by the Lord. So, they are all equal and related to each other. When one sees, hears, knows that one of his brothers is suffering from some trouble he too suffers. This is because of the bodily relationship that exists between the two." (*Jivakāruṇya Olukkam*, Part 1).

(ii) We are bound to each other in a spiritual relationship. "Likewise, when one soul reflects the suffering of another soul, knowing the spiritual



relationship existing between them, we should understand this is a right exercised by the souls." (*Jivakāruṇya Olukkam*, Part 1).

(iii) We have shared emotional connection vertically with God and horizontally with one another. "When one soul is happy another soul rejoices in it; when one is unhappy the other suffers with it ... Grace is God's compassion ('*tayavu*'); mercy is a human person's compassion." (*Jivakāruṇya Olukkam*, Part 1).

Characteristics of a Vulnerable Person

Vallalār goes a step ahead when he expands poverty to eight vulnerabilities that a human person suffers from: "hunger (physical and intellectual), thirst (physical and emotional), ailment (disorder in physical harmony), craving (not being satisfied with anything), emptiness (lack of education and wealth), peril (that befalls on account of pride, forgetfulness, change of actions), fear (a tremor between body and mind), and extermination (letting a soul forcefully out of the body)." (*Jivakāruṇya Olukkam*, Part 1, 3). A person

who suffers from any one of the aforementioned vulnerabilities needs compassion from other persons.

Option for the Poor as the Worship of God

Vaḷḷalār parallels *jīvakāruṇyam* to the worship of God, and asserts that all the religious practices, rites, and rituals without compassion for the souls are mere magical actions (*Jīvakāruṇya Oḷukkam*, Part 1, 2). Tirumūlar in *Tirumantiram* 270 also strikes the same string when he says that he lifts love for one another equal to the place of God. To bring this concept to action he enumerates: “It is for all to offer in worship a green leaf to the Lord; it is for all to give mouthful to the cow; it is for all to give a handful of food to others before sitting down to eat; it is for all, good, kind words on others to bestow” (cf. *Tirumantiram* 252). Here, in the four steps, the first step instructs one to love and worship God; the second exhorts one to love all creatures; the third instructs to feed the other human persons; and the fourth step refers to speaking good and kind words.

Review of Jīvakāruṇyam

It is very strange to note that Vaḷḷalār asserts that one is born a vulnerable person (cf. eight vulnerabilities mentioned above) on account of his lack of *jīvakāruṇyam* in his previous birth (cf. *Jīvakāruṇya Oḷukkam*, Part 2). This understanding not only dehumanises a person, as it sheds him of his responsibility and discernment, but also justifies structural poverty or vulnerability.

(Continued from Page15)

Faith is the ultimate triumph over the contradiction, the ultimate confirmation of the sinfulness of our existence. There is no other triumph and there cannot be another, however much human knowledge may be broadened. (*Discerning the Signs of the Times*)

Beauty is a value which is the universal need of human being. Human life is prone to chaos. But beauty is the remedy. The artists at times may distort or disfigure in order to protest, to show their anger. But beauty matters. It calls us to contemplate and not to possess. Beauty calls us to divinity. It lies all around us. We need to recognize it in ordinary things.



Prerequisite of Jīvakāruṇyam

Vaḷḷalār proposes that only an enlightened person can embrace the vulnerable persons and practice *jīvakāruṇya oḷukkam*. That enlightenment is the light that is within him. When that light is bright everything within him shines, and when that light is dismal his entire house suffers from darkness (cf. *Jīvakāruṇya Oḷukkam*, Part 3). *Tirukkural*, no. 315, calls this light as intelligence.

In sum, Vaḷḷalār’s *Jīvakāruṇya Oḷukkam*, a sample text of Śaivite Bhakti Literature, expands the horizon of the poor by including different vulnerable persons, and invites us to embrace *jīvakāruṇyam* as the preferential option for the poor in action. Hence, in Vaḷḷalār’s writings, the option for the poor, does not remain a mere sentiment but becomes a sheer commitment.



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(Anand Amaladass S. J. after his Ph. D in Sanskrit (1981) started teaching in Satya Nilayam Faculty of philosophy, Chennai. His publications include a book on the Dhvani theory in Indian Aesthetics (1984), and five books in German: one on the Vainava tradition, two on the God of Dance, Shiva, the fourth one, on the Goddess phenomenon with a translation of *Abhirāmi Antāti* and the fifth one on Art and Religion. (2020). The Christian Themes in Indian Art (Documentation of how the Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Christians interpreted Christian themes in India) was published together with Gudrun Löwner (2012). His present research focuses on aesthetic spirituality and option for the least, Jesuit history in India and Tamilology).



Living in Harmony means Building Relationship

Ms. S. Henri Rita Mary

‘Two eyes - but a single vision. Five fingers - yet they function in unison. A great variety of organs - but they all make one body’. When the parts of our body are healthy and function normally, then the body is in order. If any part of the body is weak or unhealthy, it brings disorder. In the same way the society also should provide harmony to the people for their social development and welfare of the society, only then the society functions well. The extra concern for the least is not just a matter of choice, but it is a moral test of a society in measuring the level of maturity a society has reached.

Reason for Option for the Poor:

For a Christian, who seeks to imitate the life of Christ, it is a commitment connected with her/his calling to be a Christian life. But it applies equally to all in any society with their social responsibilities and hence to their manner of living. This leads to the logical decisions to be made concerning the ownership and the use of common possessions. The Bible gives us the story of the Last Judgment (*Mathew 25:31-46*), which reminds us that we will be judged by our response to the “least among us.”

Two-third of people live in poverty in our country, with people belonging to different religious, racial, cultural identities. However, in the current scenario, various events are affecting the harmony of the community. Harmonious community is the hallmark of democracy of any nation. In the harmonious



community the people of different religions, castes, and sex live together with love and peace among them.

All religions preach to us to live in harmony, peace, and togetherness and to spread out the fragrance of love. They inculcate tolerance and acceptance of all religions and faiths, with sacrifices. The time has come for all mankind to recall our heritage of living in harmony. Living in harmony is no longer an ethical principle; it has to be a way of life.

The references for harmonious society in our ancient scriptures speak in one voice: All human beings all brothers. The Constituent Assembly reflected the ethnically, religiously and linguistically diverse groups that made up India. The fundamental duty of the citizens in Part IVA. Article 51-A (e) of the Constitution says “it shall be the duty of every citizen of India to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities.” For achieving the goal of

fraternity as given in the preamble there is need of an emotional bond with the territory, its culture and traditions and the common ancestors.

The entire community must frame an action based on common interest and we have to make the fabric that assures every citizen of a life of dignity and self-respect with peace and harmony. We must all work shoulder to shoulder for the development of the nation. Other than this, the government has to take more concrete initiatives for taking the communities into confidence with socio - economic aspect also. But in reality the Government seems to be dividing the community, which is visible more in times of crisis as of now through its activities - lockdown, mass migration, the absence of transport, the growing of poverty, snub the farmers struggle, voting pressure etc.

Our role in creating a harmonious community:

By strengthening the respect for human beings and the sense of his/her dignity;

Putting ourselves in situations where we will meet people of other creed, cultures, castes etc.;

Promoting the understanding, tolerance, gender equality and friendship among all people and racial, national, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups;

Listening to people's stories to get a fuller picture of their feelings and the richness of their lives;

Appreciate the uniqueness of ethical values and their life style;

By enabling all people to participate effectively in a free society.

Conclusion

Living Harmony does not mean that we are all mathematically equal and say the same thing. Just like various instruments in an orchestra are not similar, but contribute to the harmony by building relationship to the total melody, so too when human beings are different, they could live in harmony by building relationship to one another. We could work together to develop and nurture the future generation, *to promote freedom, security and peace*. Each of us can build the kinds of communities we would dream of. In our families, organizations, institutions, neighborhoods, and nation we need not remain isolated from those who are different from ourselves. The three words BSC is the essence for the citizens of our nation that is *Bearing, Sharing and Caring*. Bear the inconvenience of others for us, share our views and news on harmony with others and offer our caring for the needy people in our mother land for harmony living community with diversity.



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“There is just one art:



the art of de[con]struction [of art].

There is just one art history:

the history of war against authority.

There is just one aesthetic, one art idea, one art meaning, one principle, one force:

to be intolerant towards any authority,

any oppression, any exploitation,

any injustice, any chains.

There is just one truth in art, one change, one secrecy: the striving for liberation.”

(Alexander Brener & Barbara Schurz).



David without the Sling!

Fr. Roy Lazar A

Option for the poor has become a byword for pastoral care since the emergence of Liberation Theology and it has been augmented by the teachings of the Vatican II especially by *Gaudium et spes*. Church understands that the primary purpose of her existence is the proclamation of the Good News that the reign of God is for and with the poor. "At the same time as it proclaims the Gospel of the Lord, its Redeemer and Savior, the Church calls on all, especially the poor, the oppressed and the afflicted, to cooperate with God to bring about liberation from every sin and to build a world which will reach the fullness of creation only when it becomes the work of people for people" (*Justice in the World* 1971, No.77). Pope St. John Paul II emphasized this option all through his long years of papacy. In his social encyclical, *Soillicitudo rei socialis* he said, "A consistent theme of Catholic social teaching is the option or love of preference for the poor. Today, this preference has to be expressed in worldwide dimensions, embracing the immense numbers of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care, and those without hope" (No 42). From the first day of his papacy Pope Francis has not minced his words to show very forcibly his concern for the poor to whom he asserts that the entire world has a grave social debt (*Laudato Si*, No. 30). This option for the exploited is reflected in every page of his recent encyclical, *Frateli Tutti*. 'We are made for love, hence it is the duty of a Christian to recognize Christ in the face of every excluded person' (Nos. 85-88).

Identifying *the poor* in general and specially in the Latin American context was much easier due to its homogeneous setting. The poor are pitched vis-a-vis



the rich referring to the economic advantage which ensures also political and cultural hegemony. The poor in Indian context has another unique tag attached for more than two thousand years, which makes the problem very complicated. It is the hierarchical caste system that categories the poor with pollution insignia and excludes them from the mainstream and stripes them off dignity and equality.

It was the strategy of Dr. Ambedkar, who fought before the independence for political equality of the Dalits by demanding 'double vote'. The Poona Pact (1932) ended his demand for separate electorate. But after 1947 he realized that mere vote could not change the flight of the exploited people. It is like the lad, David before Goliath equipped with metal armour, but which he could not handle. The sling that the Dalit needed urgently was a social reform especially demolishing the caste system, because 'there cannot be a more degrading system of social organisation than the caste system. It is the system, which deadens, paralyses, and cripples the people, from helpful activity. This is no exaggeration. History bears ample evidence' (Ambedkar 1936/2014, 17.7). Loyalty to caste has superseded any other affinity and loyalty even the parental love, which is demonstrated very frequently by the cruel 'honour killing' all over the country.

When Caste and religion are intermingled, it makes the issue ambiguous and ubiquitous. “Caste may be bad. Caste may lead to conduct so gross as to be called man’s inhumanity to man. All the same, it must be recognised that the Hindus observe caste not because they are inhuman or wrong-headed. They observe caste because they are deeply religious. People are not wrong in observing caste. In my view, what is wrong is their religion, which has inculcated this notion of caste. If this is correct, then obviously the enemy you must grapple with is not the people who observe caste, but the shastras, which teach them this religion of caste. ... The real remedy is to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the shastras... “You must have the courage to tell the Hindus that what is wrong with them is their religion – the religion which has produced in the this notion of the sacredness of caste. Will you show that courage?” (Ambedkar 1936/2014, 20.9-12).

The Christian churches in India are challenged in the context of religious fundamentalism and communal violence to find ways and means to safe guard peace and harmony at the same time uphold the dignity of the marginalised people by denouncing as a first and decisive step. The need of the hour is an effective and engaging dialogue among the various religions in defence of human dignity and communal harmony. The search for developing a meaningful and fruitful culture of dialogue has to be part of praxis of all the religions.

“For these reasons, the Church, while respecting the autonomy of political life, does not restrict her mission to the private sphere. On the contrary, ‘she cannot

and must not remain on the sidelines’ in the building of a better world, or fail to ‘reawaken the spiritual energy’ that can contribute to the betterment of society... The Church ‘has a public role over and above her charitable and educational activities’. She works for the advancement of humanity and of universal fraternity” (*Frateli tutti* 276).

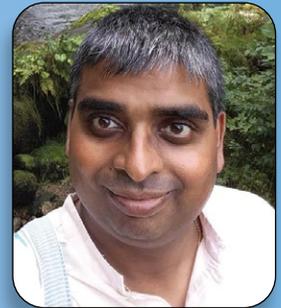


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Controversy about Creating Space for the Discriminated in the Christian liturgy

Mr. Paolo Aranha



“The assimilation of Christianity to the local social structures allowed a steady growth of the missions in South India, placed beyond the control of any Catholic power and subject to Hindu or Muslim rulers. However, it also caused the emergence of a spatial tension that is at the very heart of the Malabar Rites controversy. Theoretically, the neophytes belonged all to one and the same community: they attended the same Mass and all had equal access to the divine energy provided by the sacraments. In practice, the uniform space of faith had to cope with a fragmented social space. The low-caste *paraiyar* Christians were segregated in their cheris, at a safe distance from the centre of each South Indian village. In order to avoid social defilement the high caste Christians refused to attend the Mass under the same roof. The Jesuit missionaries, vocally represented in Rome particularly by their Procurator Brandolini, devised convoluted architectural solutions meant to allow the ‘plebeians’ to be separated from the ‘noble’ Christians during the Mass, even while making it possible for them to attend the sacred functions and receive Holy Communion. The liturgical segregation of the *paraiyar* could remind the Roman authorities of the walls and grilles separating cloistered nuns from the laity in conventual churches; however, while those nuns held a high religious status, the segregation of the *paraiyar* was due to their social stigma. Particularly difficult was the problem of providing the viaticum to the

moribund ‘untouchables’. The missionaries were not allowed to enter the huts of the low caste neophytes, lest they should be considered contaminated by the upper-caste faithful, who would not recognize them anymore as their own priests. On the other hand, the option of carrying moribund persons to the nearest church could easily cause death without the last rites.

The controversy about the missions of Madurai, Mysore and the Carnatic highlighted less a contradiction between the European and Indian ways of life than a more general early-modern tension between a certain Christian egalitarian space and one of social separation. As the Jesuits argued, the unity of the Church did not imply the abolition of social distinctions. Brandolini claimed even that an ‘ordered charity’ (*ordinata carità*) could not go against the principle of prominence of the public over the private good. The distinction of an ‘ordered’ from a ‘disordered’ charity emerged within a context of involuntary irony, as it is highlighted in one of the various manuscript memoranda that Brandolini submitted to the Roman Inquisition. Brandolini claimed that the problem of providing the last sacraments to the moribund ‘Paraiyar’ in their huts was similar to the situation of a moribund (male) infant whose parents would not accept his baptism.

On the basis of classical theological authors who had objected against forced baptisms, Brandolini concluded that even the provision of sacraments to the 'Paraiyar' in their huts should be ruled out, inasmuch as the public good should be preferred to the private one. As the forced baptism of an infant could cause perturbation to his parents, so the violation of the untouchability of the 'Paraiyar', argued Brandolini, could cause commotion among the community of the 'noble' Christians and subject it to a difficult trial. The conclusion of the analogy went so far that the Jesuit claimed that the forced baptism of an infant was as sinful as the provision of sacraments to the 'Paraiyar' in their miserable dwellings. An enthusiastic love of paradox probably led Brandolini to justify the discrimination of the 'Paraiyar' even in the conferment of the last sacraments, on the basis of the obligation that the 'plebeians' had of honouring the 'nobles', even if the latter were wicked or non-Christian people: it was not the specific virtue of a single individual that should be honoured, but a superior quality that could be seen reflected in a person, even if only in a figurative or symbolic way. Brandolini implicitly suggested to the prelates of the Holy Office in charge of evaluating the Malabar Rites that the hierarchical principles debated in the South Indian missions were finally not so different from the ones invoked in Europe to justify the power of the aristocracy over the other social groups, irrespective of the intrinsic merits or vices that each single European nobleman could have.

The rigorous spatial separation displayed by Brandolini's multi-view projection could then appear as a consistent understanding of a necessary and universal hierarchical organization of any given society. In this perspective it seems difficult to imagine that the acceptance by certain Catholic missionaries of Indian structures of hierarchical subjugation may be understood primarily as an effort to dialogue with a non-European culture or that the endorsement of caste segregation may have anticipated the ideas of inculturation elaborated during the twentieth century. Even more puzzling would be an interpretation according to which 'the choice made by the Jesuits of keeping the neophytes' community within the dynamics of Indian society, avoiding therefore the risk of triggering among the converts a sense of estrangement towards their common culture, made

it possible to keep open important communication channels for the future'.

The analysis of a specific visual source has shown us, on the contrary, that the sacramental discrimination of the *paraiyar* was located at the crossroads between a specific European hierarchical culture and the dynamic of social conflict that characterized early modern South India. The clumsy and paradoxical arguments of Brandolini, which should not be considered representative of a unanimous position among the missionaries of the Society of Jesus in South India, provided easy ammunition to anti-Jesuit critics. At the very end of the Malabar Rites controversy, the sacramental discrimination of the *paraiyar* was described by Abbe Jean Baptiste Gaultier (1685-1755), a Jansenist theologian, as a fundamental religious flaw: 'Il n'y a ni Dieu ni Religion où il n'y a point de charité'. As students of history, we should probably refrain from easy projections of the past into the present. However, if the expression of a moral protest is not in conflict with scholarly rigour, then it would be very difficult not to see in the *paraiyar*, segregated in less than one third of the social space, an emblem of the radical inequalities that characterize our own world."

(Excerpt from the article of Paolo Aranha, "The Social and Physical Spaces of the Malabar Rites Controversy", In: *Space and Conversion in Global Perspective*, edited by Giuseppe Marcocci et al. Brill: Leiden - Boston 2015, 228-230.)



(Paolo Aranha's main area of research is the early modern history of Christianity in India, especially the Catholic missions to South India, the Goa Inquisition, Indo-Portuguese religious and social history, as well as early-modern Catholic representations of Hinduism. His publications include the book *il cristianesimo latino in India* (2006) and several articles.)



*Fill the Banquet Hall with the
Socially Discriminated*

