

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Religious pluralism, from Indian point of view, is the peaceful coexistence and active interaction of multiple faith traditions, characterized by deep-rooted syncretism. As the birthplace of four major world religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism—and the home to large populations of Muslims, Christians, and other faiths, India's pluralism is enshrined in its constitution. Articles 25–28 of the Indian Constitution Guarantees *all citizens the freedom to profess, practice, and propagate their religion, and gives religious denominations the right to manage their own institutions*. Article 30 *Protects the rights of religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer educational institutions*".

Though India is credited as the *cradle of religions* and religious pluralism as one of the fundamental characters of Indian ethos, it is always entwined with caste which by the very definition divisive, hierarchical and built on pollution and purity theory and unalterable from birth till death. This has given rise to negative *syncretism*¹, i.e., even Christianity and Islam which deny the existence and practice of caste or any hierarchy as their teachings and principles have adapted caste system in India for their survival and retaining power with elite minority of these two religions who hail from dominant or intermediary castes.

Contemporary India has been defined and designed by the fascist Hindutva² ideology which would like to establish Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation). It is a combination of religion, caste, class and political power. As majority of the people in India are Hindus, the state wants to declare India a Hindu nation which is against the Constitutional mandate.

Social Doctrine of the Church (SDC) needs to address issue of caste-based discrimination both in the society and in the Church, poverty as a systemic violence against the marginalized and minorities and religious fundamentalism and majoritarianism. Catholic church also suffers from Negative Ethnicity which expresses itself in caste hierarchy, ethnic prejudice and regional favouritism.

Educating people in peace and social harmony, peace and justice, faith and justice are the way to live very authentic Christian and human dignified life.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

¹ *Syncretism* is the blending of different beliefs, cultures, or philosophies to create a new, unified system of thought or practice. By *negative syncretism*, I mean that the negative elements of caste practices like pollution and purity, graded inequality and constructing power systems and structures based on caste hierarchy.

² Hindutva translates literally to "Hindu-ness" and refers to the predominant right-wing political ideology of Hindu nationalism in India. It defines Indian culture, history, and national identity primarily through the lens of Hindu civilization, distinguishing it from Western secularism. Hindutva is an assertive political and cultural ideology aimed at nation-building and reshaping India's secular constitution into a Hindu-majority nation-state (Hindu Rashtra).

Good governance, as I understand is the responsible, corruption-free management of public and institutional affairs. It ensures that decisions are participatory, transparent, and legally sound while prioritizing equitable resource use and safeguarding human rights and dignity. In a land, where even the right to be human is stifled with, defending human rights and human dignity becomes even more difficult and unrealizable.

The perennial and pernicious issue like patriarchy, caste hierarchy, and religious majoritarianism corrode Indian moral fabric. These issues give rise to other issues like poverty, women oppression, untouchability, cultural degradation and overall collapse of governance system. As a result, issues that affect the poor and the marginalized are there for decades, even centuries.

Good governance means establishing equitable justice; participatory and dialogical decision-making process, people centred policies and implementation process in all of which the people in the margins become the central focus. To establish such a people centred governance, and bring about justice, equality, fraternity and liberation, the model that Jesus proposes is the best model as I understand. A good governance model will keep the last, the least and the lost as its main focus. This is the Jesus model. Jesus went in search of the lost sheep (Lk 15: 4 -7) , lost coin (Lk 15: 8 -10), spoke in favour of the least (Sermon on the Mount Mt 5: 3 -11 and on the Plains (Lk 6: 20 – 27) and the last (Mt 20: 16). It is a lesson on God's grace and humility, indicating that earthly status and worldly achievements will be reversed in the Kingdom of Heaven. Similar model of equitable society was proposed by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the father of modern India who chaired drafting Indian Constitution. He takes inspiration of Lord Buddha to visualize a society that is governed by equality, liberty and fraternity which were deeply Buddhist cultural ethos.

Hence a good governance from Indian /Asian point of view will be establishing a governance system that has its roots both in the model proposed by Jesus and Buddha which enshrines Indian Constitution.

RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP

Use of power and responsibility is the basic tenets of leadership. Responsible leadership is that which keeps the people / followers as the focal point, not himself / herself. A closer scanner of Indian leadership is generally that of the pharisees and Sadducees in the Bible. ***“They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them (Mt 23:4).***

Indian history gives us an array of great leaders starting with Buddha who showed us the Golden Mean, popularly known as the **Middle Way**. The Middle Way is not simply a theoretical compromise; it is an active, pragmatic lifestyle. The Buddha outlined this balance through the **Noble Eightfold Path**, which serves as a practical guide for ethical living, mental discipline, and wisdom. They are, 1. **Right View**: Understanding the reality of things,

specifically the Four Noble Truths. 2. **Right Intention**: Cultivating thoughts of renunciation, goodwill, and harmlessness; 3. **Right Speech**: Abstaining from lying, harsh language, and divisive or idle chatter. 4. **Right Action**: Abstaining from harming living beings, stealing, and sexual misconduct. 5. **Right Livelihood**: Earning a living in a way that does not cause harm to others. 6. **Right Effort**: Striving to prevent unwholesome states and fostering wholesome ones. 7. **Right Mindfulness**: Maintaining awareness of one's thoughts, body, and feelings, and 8. **Right Concentration**: Developing deep mental focus and meditation. Mahavir who established Jainism preached *Ahimsa* as his core philosophy. He preached a path of deep spiritual liberation based on *strict ethical discipline, non-violence, and self-restraint*. In the line these great leaders we had two great giants one of who followed Mahaveera (**M. K. Gandhi**) and the other Buddha (**Dr. B. R. Ambedkar**). Dr. Ambedkar envisioned a Constitution for India which would be deeply indigenous and cultural. Hence, he adapted the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity, while Gandhi followed Ahimsa of Mahaveera. Both visualised a new India which would be built up non-violence, justice, equality, fraternity and liberty. The core of Indian Constitution is these inalienable principles that are universally applicable.

But today, there a strong move and attempt to replace the constitutional nationalism that is given to us as the gift of the founding fathers of new India by cultural nationalism which will be followed by the social divisive policy called caste system. Being the largest democracy of the world, only a proper, people centred proactive and futurist leadership can foster peace and reconciliation between communities and classes. Jesus model of leadership will be known by its outcome. As Jesus says, not to be served but to serve. According to Jn 10: 45, “even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”.

Once again, Jesus shows the servant model of leader which is becoming rarer both in the society and in the church. India needs urgently such a leadership model.