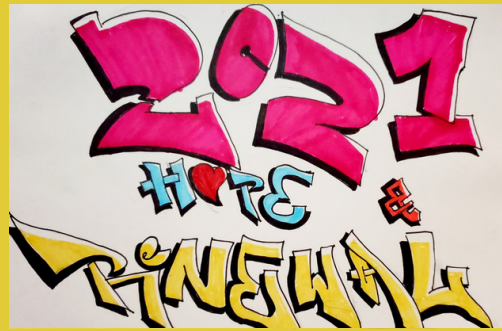


AIKYATHA



DECEMBER 2020

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COVID-19 Perspectives

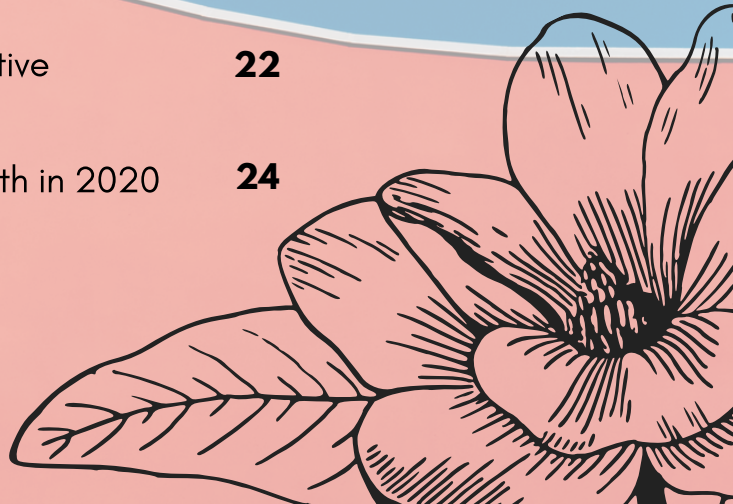
AIKYATHA

2020

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*Cover Art: Thiago,
a curious and ambitious 13 year old.*

Editorial Collective

Inbaraj Jeyakumar Manjulie Vaiphei

Dakerlin Mukhim Ibatista Shylla

Ben Jonathan Immanuel



Editorial

To say that 2020 was an eventful year would be an understatement. As a global community, humanity went through one of the biggest crises in history. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted every aspect of everyday life throwing the world into chaos and systems of life into disorder. While the economy struggled, social life saw many changes in the form of maintaining physical distance between one another leading to new levels of ostracization. Politics saw shifting changes as forms of governments including democracies faced unprecedented challenges.

Lockdowns brought everyday life to a standstill before forcing each one of us to alter our ways of life. In doing so, the poor and the vulnerable were left behind in alarming ways and the privileged and rich among us thrived. In our own country we saw some serious issues coming out into the open including but not limited to the migrant crisis, spread of fake news, and the like.

Students were the most affected section of society in this particular year. With colleges and universities being shut since late March, students' growth has been stifled in many ways. At SCMI, we continued to find new ways to engage with our students, keeping them active through various means of communication and interacting with them even as many struggled with mental health issues.

This edition of Aikyatha carries articles from different perspectives relating to life during the pandemic. The authors are none other than the programme staff of SCMI who have journeyed alongside the students through this time. Each perspective is fresh and meaningful and comes from real life experiences. We hope Aikyatha 2020 will be an enlightening read for each one of you.

Leaving behind a year of fear, uncertainty, and anxiety, let us take a leap of faith with hope into a new year!

Have a meaningful Christmas and a Hope-filled new year 2021.

Inbaraj Jeyakumar

General Secretary
Student Christian Movement of India



INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AND THEIR STRUGGLES DURING A PANDEMIC

The Covid-19 pandemic is one of the global health crises that we had been facing at present. It had also led us to a dramatic loss of human life world-wide and also a challenge to public health, food system and in the world of work. But the most vulnerable people at this point of time are the Indigenous communities. As the pandemic continues, indigenous people experience high degree of risk in public health emergencies, food insecurity, and losing of jobs.

With less job opportunity in their hometown/villages most of the indigenous people had to migrate to cities to earn their livelihood. As the lockdown was imposed, people working in the cities and towns had to suffer tremendously. Many had to leave their jobs as many business and offices were shutdown. with no means of income and support from humble families back home, unable to pay their bills, house rent and meet their daily needs many of the indigenous people were compelled to leave the cities and had to go back to their hometown. Without the means to earn an income during lockdown many were unable to feed themselves and their families.

Not only did the indigenous people suffer in losing jobs but they had also been

facing a great impact on economy because of the pandemic, the lockdown imposed on the countries had brought a great loss to the indigenous farmers since the crops and vegetables which is supplied in the market was halted with no/less means of communication to transport the product and with no proper place for storage, the products were either rotten or damaged, villagers selling their traditional crafts in the market were also affected, which has drastically impact their income . Since the demand in the market was dropped because of the lockdown.

As the pandemic continues, some part of the indigenous communities has been affected with food security. The indigenous people who are displaced from their land and those who are suffering conflict at this time are the most vulnerable during this pandemic. Across the world, the overall disruption of food and commodities value chains is being felt by indigenous communities are struggling to deal with health crises and maintain access to food.

The Covid-19 pandemic also poses a great health threat to indigenous communities. The indigenous people do not have adequate support from the government; indigenous people already

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AND THEIR STRUGGLES DURING A PANDEMIC

experience poor access to health care. Since indigenous people are geographically far away from cities they lack in proper health care facilities to combat the corona virus and without the proper health care many indigenous communities will have to face the consequences in the coming days.

The only way we can help the indigenous communities is by providing them with necessary means of prevention in relation to COVID-19, including preventive mechanisms, access to adequately equipped and culturally appropriate healthcare facilities, indigenous people livelihood and local economies should be strengthened in order to ensure the sustainability of their communities.

Tolly T Yeptho,

*Programme Secretary,
North East India Region, Zone II*

THE MIGRANT CRISIS DURING INDIA'S COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

People all over the world were living life despite being having lot of problems and difficulties in everyday life until COVID-19 and lockdown hit the world. COVID-19 pandemic, loss of life, and livelihoods demonstrates a very scary disaster in the life of people. All the countries have seen the disaster of their socio economic status that has left all countries of the world in disarray. All very powerful countries have been the victim of COVID-19 which has led the countries to tragedy and which will take years to recover. Especially India is already wrestling with economic slowdown, poverty and now India has been attacked by COVID-19 and lockdown.

When India announced lockdown in the country doctors, nurses, health workers, anganwadi and police had to suffer a lot since the country was not prepared for this tragedy, the down-trodden sections of the society have had to bear the brunt of it as always and no one bother about migrant workers and daily wagers. Poor migrant labourers had nowhere to go, nothing to eat and no one to help. Corona virus not only revealed the selfless contribution of the health workers towards the people in India but it has highlighted many realities of the country especially it has enhanced public

awareness and the role of migrant workers in the country. When people from different states travelled to other states for study purpose they are treated differently. Sadly we have not learnt to accept people from our own country. During my study in Kolkata I have witnessed my friends from North-east states who were treated differently by the people there; people will simply pass comments, calling them Chines and laugh at them. In the case of migrant workers it is even worse.

Migrant workers are the people often move from villages to cities to look for work in industries or at someone's house as domestic helpers, drivers, gardeners or as daily wagers on construction sites, building malls, flyovers and homes, or as street vendors. Economic globalization is growing and the number of migrant workers is also increasing rapidly. Migrant workers do not have bright future as their children's are not given quality education to progress in life. Unemployment, poverty and divisions among the rich and poor have prompted many Indian workers to seek work in different places.

Migrant workers have been fully ignored by the government, by the rich people of India and by the main stream media

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despite of contributing so much to the country through their hard work, and they are struggling very hard for their survival in the country. The sudden announcement of lockdown in the country have divested the life of migrant people, they are being ignored in such way that they were not even informed about it ahead of time which let the migrant workers to suffer a lot. These migrant workers come from the most socially marginalised categories and vulnerable category of workforce, they contribute so much and earn very less, but during COVID-19 pandemic the authorities also start discriminating them by not giving them proper guideline or support.

They realised that they have no money to stay in the city as the lockdown is imposed all over the country and they had no work or income, some migrant workers may have been allotted room by the honour of the company but most of them stays in rental houses. Thousands of migrant labourers without having food and shelter were compelled to leave cities where they were working. There were many poor migrant workers with luggage on their heads and children in their arms were seen walking on the roads to return to their villages because no one cared how they will go back home

the government did not arrange transports at the right time. As they walk on the road to go home many have lost their lives out of hunger before reaching homes and no one even noticed that. Many children died on their way to home out of hunger and others becoming more susceptible to the viral disease. Though the government has taken some efforts to provide rations, shelters and relief to pay rents, but it wasn't done in a strict manner and there was no proper guideline for them so most of them couldn't get what they supposed to get. If a migrant is not having ration card they won't be getting ration so some lost their live out of hunger.

The prime minister of our country announced to run 'Shramik special trains' to send the migrant workers back to their native states but it wasn't free of cost, from where will they bring the money to perches the train fare? Migrant workers also faced problem in getting a medical certificate as prove that they have no symptoms of Corona virus from local clinics and doctors which is not available and they are charged for it also. After facing all extreme level of humiliation, they also had to go through the brutalities and injuries by the police officials on their way back to home.

THE MIGRANT CRISIS DURING INDIA'S COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

Therefore, it is high time that we realize migrant workers are very much from our own country and society they are not just mere labours but very powerful group of people who are making or helping in the process of development of this country. Migrant workers should not be treated differently from the rest of the people of this country as they are also equal citizens of this country. The government must take immediate count of the disastrous consequences faced by the migrant workers and a lot more effective and necessary actions required to be taken. There should be proper guideline, a proper method to help these migrant workers survive in this country. The government of India should create more jobs and employ as many people as they can in the companies and industries. India has to have a very secure and friendly environment in the working places.

Migrant workers should be treated with humanity and dignity in every work place. There should be some facilities for the children of migrant workers to have proper education so that their future is secure. India should learn to accept people from different states, we should respect everyone whether they are coming to our states for study purpose or job purpose than only discriminations towards migrant workers will end, and we can claim that India is a secular country and we have freedom to go anywhere and live life freely and happily.

Megha Naik

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Odisha Region*

TRIBAL WOMENS' ISSUES AND RIGHTS

Introduction:

The word "Tribal" is being used by scholars to characterize a lineage-based society and mode of production. Some people feel that the word "tribal" has a negative connotation, other disagree. Studies of tribal societies show that women initially played a greater and more equal role in them and that their subordination to a patriarchal arrangement came about only in the course of developing division of labour in connection with the development of a new type of methods and production. Tribal communities, living in a subsistence economy of sharing have distinct cultural and religious characteristics.[1]

Status of Tribal women in India

The tribal women, constitute like any other social group, about half of the total population. The tribal women, as women in all social groups, are more illiterate than men. The status of women in a society depends to a large extent on the social structure and the type of society. In Indian social context, there is a predominance of patriarchal family structure where males predominate in all settings and social contexts. However, among many tribal communities, predominance of matriarchal families could be found. Contrary to patriarchal

societies, status of women is found to be higher in matriarchal families. Various studies (Mitra, 2007; Burman Roy, 2012) have suggested that the Garo and Khasi tribes of the North East India assign relatively higher position to women due to the system of matrilineal descent, matrilocal residence and inheritance of property through the female line. But other tribal communities which follow patriarchal norms, the status of women is not as high as it is in matriarchal societies. For some other tribes, such as, Ho, Gond, the husband does not always enjoy a dominant role. Gond woman enjoys equal status with their male counterparts in many aspects of their social life. A study on the Naga women by Hutton (1921) indicated that they have substantial freedom and higher social status. This indicates that the status of tribal women are not same in all places, rather they vary according to the tribal group and the social structure. However, in tribal societies, tribal women are more important than women in any other social groups because tribal women are very hardworking and in almost all the tribal communities they participate in economic activities almost equally with men or works harder than men and the family economy and income also depend on women. Status is also determined by health conditions.

TRIBAL WOMENS' ISSUES AND RIGHTS

The tribal groups health status is lower compared to that of the general population. They have high infant mortality rate, higher fertility rate, lack of awareness regarding diseases and health care, drinking water provisions, hygiene. In many parts of India tribal population suffers from chronic infections and water borne diseases, deficiency diseases. Incidence of infant mortality was found to be very high among some of the tribes.

Problem encounter by Tribal women:

India is home to the largest number of tribal populations in the world. Yet they are a disadvantaged lot. Furthermore, tribal women of India face a dual-pronged social handicap; one of being a woman in traditionally patriarchal society, and the other, of being a member of a marginalized section of the Indian society. They face discrimination in almost all spheres of life, right from prenatal period, until the graveyard. India is known to be patriarchal from the very beginning of its history. Regardless of region or religion, women have always been the disadvantaged lot. Even when the power of decision-making is not with them, the amount of responsibilities cast upon women has been enormous. The power-houses of our patriarchal society have always denied women equal access to education as well as health and

nutrition. Nevertheless, in the areas from financial management to resource procurement for the whole family and from relationship management to 'honour-keeping', women have always held the greater burden in the family. Incidences like the issuing of deplorable patriarchal diktats by the khap panchayats which place a lot of Victorian-era restrictions on women, the continued occurring of honour-killings, etc show that our society is slanted towards placing unjust and unjustifiable demands on women, even when stripping the bare minimum rights off them. This is a very serious power imbalance which has to be addressed urgently, but is mostly neglected by policy makers.[2]

Challenge Issues of Tribal women:

The similarly is true for women. Women are the centers of creation in this world. Women do not even know themselves for which they have created. Woman has played a stable and defined role in the society, from daughter, sister, wife and mother. The true evaluation of their contribution to the family, society and the country is scarcely done or counted till date. In this intense changing society and the world, women have to get aware about themselves, responsibilities, and their right.

TRIBAL WOMENS' ISSUES AND RIGHTS

Women are the first teacher of the child in the whole world. Therefore, education of women is certainly considered the most important part of the development of the society. Napoleon was asked once, what was the great need of France. They replied, "progress of the nation is impossible without educated mother .if the women of my country are not educated the about half of the people will be illiterate. Mothers duty does not end with giving birth to many children, In our society has not even seen distinguished. It is quality which is currently needed by society. Therefore, our human community must also understand the need of their education for the improvement of the society. Women education can help solve their problems, such as birth control, drug, poverty, dowry system, bridge burning case, inequality of women in society and child labor etc. Education is the only most important instrument by which individuals and society can improve individual endowments, build a level of capacity, overcome obstacles, and expand opportunities for continuous improvement in their welfare. It is not only applicable but also for tribal women.

Conclusion: The social fabric of our society is not conducive to the sustainable development of the weaker sections of the society – tribals in this case. The discrimination forced onto females starts from childhood itself. Girls are not provided with adequate opportunities to have education. The highest frequency of the term education itself is very important. Gainful employment which can bring social upliftment can only be achieved through inclusive education system based on a policy sensitive to cultural factors. Forcing a colonial type schooling system on the tribals may only backfire. The work domain is also not supportive for the tribal women to have their rights accepted and granted by the society. The role of women in economic and social spheres is yet to be accepted for its real value. Health has not been found among the frequent themes, even though health problems is an important issue concerning women in general. This study is explorative in nature, which aims to act as a starting point to further –and deeper- analyses of the issue in question.

TRIBAL WOMENS' ISSUES AND RIGHTS

The findings suggest that some core areas where thrust has to be given in addressing problems of tribal women are education, social roles, child rights, etc. Welfare measures designed for tribal population in general and women in particular, should keep these areas in focus.

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[2] Chinchu C, Problems Encountered by Tribal Women: A Text Mining Analysis.

Shongkunmysiem Diengdoh

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WOMEN IN POLITICS: HOW WOMEN LEADERS ACROSS THE WORLD ARE CHANGING THE DYNAMICS OF POLITICS

Introduction

Women around the world at every socio-political level find themselves under-represented in government and far removed from decision making levels. Throughout the world women face obstacles to their participation in politics. Because of these obstacles, most of the women are also not interested in entering into politics. But due to the dynamic changes in the world in every field, some of them (women) are started participating across the world and becoming leaders. Now we will look into how women leaders across the world are changing the dynamics of politics.

1. Women in Politics

Status of women in politics can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in the shaping and sharing of power and in the value given by society to the role of women. The UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said on the eve of International Women's Day that "the role of women in decision-making was central to the advancement of women around the world and to the progress of humankind as a whole. ..."

2 Why Women in Politics?

In the words of the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) Chairman Madeleine Albright, women in power "can be counted on to raise issues that others overlook, to support ideas that others oppose, and to seek an end to abuses that others accept." The full and equitable participation of women in public life is essential to building and sustaining strong, vibrant democracies. And also gender equality is also the notable key feature in women entering into politics.

3. Women as National Leaders

The first woman to enter a position of national leadership who was not a monarch was Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who became prime minister of Sri Lanka in 1960. Later in the same decade, two other prominent women, Indira Gandhi of India and Golda Meir of Israel, also rose to power as prime ministers. However, it was not until 1974 that Isabel Perón of Argentina became the first female president. In general, the progress in the early decades was slow: three women became national leaders in the 1960s, followed by six in the 1970s, and seven in the 1980s. In contrast, dramatic change began to occur in more recent decades: 26 women first obtained positions of top executive leadership in

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the 1990s, followed by 29 additional women through August 2009.

4 Global Commitments

Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) explicitly mentions women's political equality (Articles 7- 9) and discusses women's equal participation at all levels (Article 7b): "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women on equal terms with men, the right to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government" (Part II, Article 7b). These commitments collectively express that women's right to equality cannot be reached without equality in political decision-making positions.

5. Women changing the dynamics of Politics

5.1.Changing Laws

In 2014 Tunisia adopted a new constitution, which includes a clause guaranteeing women's rights, a milestone for gender equality. Among the people who brought this Constitution to life was women's rights activist Mehrezia Maiza

Labidi. "I chaired a majority of the plenary sessions on Tunisia's new constitution," she says. "It was my first time in politics, and I ended up writing a constitution!" On being a role model to young women in politics, Mehrezia says women to speak up and give their opinions, but also stay true to themselves. "Women in politics are still women. We can laugh and be joyful and still be in politics. We do not want to be like men, we want to be ourselves and still engage effectively in politics."

5.2. .Speaking up for underrepresented communities

Like most women in her rural community, Nuriya Temirbek kyzy, a 40-year-old mother of three worked all day, taking care of her family, but had less decision-making power since she didn't earn an income. Today, her situation is vastly different. In 2016 she was elected to local council in the in the Naryn region of Kyrgyzstan. After attending an economic empowerment training, Nuriya felt she could use her new skills to help other rural women. "After the training, my view of life changed. I realized that I could also make a difference and help bring about positive change, not only within my family, but also in my community," Nuriya says.

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5.3. Empowering each other

Coumba Diaw grew up hearing that woman didn't belong in politics. But that never stopped her. She found inspiration in other women leaders in her country and worked closely with her community, educating women on issues of hygiene and reproductive rights, as well as working to help rural women with income-generating activities. Now, she's the only woman mayor in the Louga region of Senegal and she wants to use her experience to benefit other women in her community. "One of my first actions was to install drinking water taps ... This freed up women's time that used to be spent fetching and collecting water from distant sources," she says. "I also set up a weekly market for women to increase their income." Columbia is also working to make sure that women's leadership is valued. "I finished training on women's leadership and local governance. I will deliver the training to all the elected officials in my area so that they too see the value of women's participation in public life and promote their leadership within institutions."

6. Positive Outcomes from Women's Leadership

Women's political leadership has been shown to have several societal benefits, such as inequality reduction, increased

cooperation across party and ethnic lines, and increased prioritization of social issues, like health, education, parental leave, and pensions. Additionally, women's political participation has been shown to be particularly influential to women in their communities. Factors such as female voter turnout, female political participation, and public service responsiveness towards women have a positive relationship with the presence of women in decision-making positions across the public and private sectors.

In India we have seen that with every election, more women MPs are occupying the center stage, however 78 women MPs are elected to the parliament out of the 700-plus female candidates who contested the 2019 general elections, 43 percent of the women coming from a political class, more and more independent candidates fighting their way out in the most controversial seats and women like Remya Haridas, 32 year MP from Kerala (second ever Dalit MP) and Pramila Bisoyi, 69 year old MP from Odisha who belongs to a economically lower class are now representing their constituencies in their parliament.

WOMEN IN POLITICS: HOW WOMEN LEADERS ACROSS THE WORLD ARE CHANGING THE DYNAMICS OF POLITICS

Conclusion

Women have made dramatic gains in world politics in recent years. Although women still do not occupy half of all positions of executive and legislative leadership, a survey of global trends is encouraging: women appear to have shattered the political “glass ceiling” in countries with a diverse array of social, economic, cultural, and political characteristics. Further, these developments appear to have spilled over into other realms of political leadership. This can only come through ‘Awareness, Recognition and Demand’ of the women, by the women and for the women.

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Gandham Raju

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CASTE AND CHURCH: IS CASTE AN ISSUE EVEN IN ONLINE CHURCHES?

The church of modern India continues to struggle with the reality of caste much than ever before, not only limited with Catholic church but has also extended to others. Church around the world are seen symbol of 'Love, Humanity, Peace and Equality' moreover it's also considered to be the place to get rid of evils like discrimination, adultery, bias, untouchability and so on. Church teaches the principles of equality, fraternity, love of Jesus Christ which all of us have heard about. It is absolute truth that the church is to teach and practice humanity but it is sad as the Church in Indian context are also an institution where caste politics is practiced which may be visible or invisible to us.

Caste is something that every Indian citizen is well aware and experienced about. 'Like all ethnicities caste is both a gift and a barrier' (N.J.Ganiah). Caste in India gives identity to an individual and the other hand it snatches away the identity of an individual as a human being. In India caste has been seen something rigid and discriminatory social custom where some are high and some are low caste. Downtrodden communities like SC/ST's are the most vulnerable in Indian caste system. Having called as outcaste or the Shudras Dalit in Hindu religions are

always been suppressed in history and at present as well. Deprivation from right to live, suppression from upper caste, torture leads them to find a way to get rid of all inhuman system.

Conversion of lower caste Hindus to Christianity took place in order to escape the discrimination. Christianity was taught to be egalitarian and could provide mobility away from caste. The only hope for many such communities has been a church but sad to say that the Churches in modern India have definitely transformed but not equipped with teachings of Christ our Lord, its purely a materialistic transformation. In our Western India context specifically speaking about Maharashtra, Catholic priest the head of any diocese is someone with the name D'Souza, Verges, D'brito not with the names Gaikwad, Salve, Waghmare because all these names belong to Dalit communities. Only 12 of the 5000 bishops are Dalits (Times of India, December 16 2016). All of us are aware of this, it is because church want to attract members from high caste and not to let Dalits be the part of church administration. Even the space for burial is different on the basis of caste in churches. Many a times untouchables or Dalit get converted into Christianity are

CASTE AND CHURCH: IS CASTE AN ISSUE EVEN IN ONLINE CHURCHES?

not given burial ground but the rituals are done on common burial space of their community. Churches never allow inter-caste marriages. Churches will find appreciating high caste people who got converted into Christianity but lower castes are taken as casual, Why? Aren't they human being to appreciate or welcome? When a Marathi joins church, church will welcome them with bouquet at the same time if a person from Mahar or Mang(Dalit Communities from Maharashtra) community joins church will take them as usual. Caste issue in the church is visible but not addressed within church. Nowadays we will find caste-based churches also. Churches in today's era really need to revisit our principles and need to equip all as one brotherhood.

Online Church and Caste issue,

The power within the church still lies with the upper caste that control all the institutions of better education. So, it is true in a sense that the church in large part has remained with the control of upper caste. Due to Corona India had been in lockdown since the month of March 2020 which caused the Online churches. Online church took place in all over the country which had both positive and negative impact. Dalits Christians were not been the part of the online church but purely to get fund to run the

project under their names.

Online churches In India were meant for only selected people not as common church as our brothers and sisters from lower castes in many places were not even aware that online church takes place every week as they were considered to be illiterate, backward in using online platform. Online churches have brought more castism than ever before by projecting Lower caste family's photos while giving them 10 days ration which really makes our dear brothers and sisters feel down. Church members from downtrodden castes are not there to participate in church activity but used as means for funding for projects.

If they are known then also, they are deprived from online church as it is not affordable for many to join online churches. Priest knows only some names who are usually rich people or orthodox Christian who are called for online churches as the lower caste members in church are there to only fulfill the number of memberships nothing to do with participation. Beside online church home visit too happened during lockdown but only to the closed families or so-called upper caste Christians who are rich. Many churches even did not give a hand of

CASTE AND CHURCH: IS CASTE AN ISSUE EVEN IN ONLINE CHURCHES?

support to such families though the church is knowing that such families need support. Some churches provided only 10-15 days ration with photos and responsibility there the responsibility is over.

Moreover, due to lockdown and online churches, church around India have given importance to rich families where Caste & economic discrimination comes in. This has again brought the economy and caste-based discrimination among church than ever before. We should not forget that the economy based or class-based discrimination is more than any other where indirectly caste comes in. Church has given importance to rich members as they have paid the tithes, donation to the church every month in lockdown but poor Christians could not because of the loss of job.

We, as a SCMer need to take stand against this, need to reach out to the churches and help them to revisit the definition and the principles of a church which would help our brothers and sisters from lower castes to really get their hope of equality fulfilled in church. We need to stop the materialistic development of churches and need to begin humanity-based teachings in church. Caste discrimination in church particularly with power structure needs to be changed. Let us bring faith in action ...!!!

Ajay Gajbhiv

*Programme Secretary,
Western India Region*

THE PLIGHT OF POLITICAL PRISONERS AND THE UN-FREEDOM OF SPEECH

India was able to receive the news of Stan Swamy, who is suffering from Parkinson's disease and other ailments, pleading for his straw and sipper while in the NIA custody only with a little pain. The 83 year old activist was arrested on October 8th for alleged involvement in the Elgar Parishad case. Varavara Rao was arrested on 28 August 2018 for his alleged connection with the same case and is denied bail till date. Sanjiv Bhatt, former IPS officer from Gujarat, has a different ordeal. He has been in jail since September 2018 in a case of custodial death. Interestingly, Sanjiv Bhatt is a while blower of the 2002 Gujarat riots and had filed an affidavit in the supreme court alleging Narendra Modi of instructing Police officers to let the Hindus "vent out their anger". Journalist Siddique Kappan was arrested on his way to Hatras on October 5th this year and was claimed to have denied basic rights and legal representation in the Police custody for a long period. Gautham Navlakha, an ardent advocate of peace in Kashmir, is also in jail associated with the Bhim- Koregaon case. The fate of Dr. Kafeel Khan is no different. He has spent his last 3 years mostly in jail for different cases. Activist Arun Fereirra and Bhim Army co-founder Chandrashekhar Azad are in home detention. After scrapping

article 370, the peoples' representatives of Jammu and Kashmir were let free only recently. The list of the current political prisoners of India goes on. With this quantum of cases against human right defenders and activists, it should be assumed that we are in an 'emergency' like situation.

What enables the government to book people with such ease? In most of the cases, activists are charged under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). UAPA was introduced in 1963 to counter a wide range of internal disturbances. Originally enacted as a tool to curb the activities of separationists, UAPA had undergone many amendments over time. The 2008 amendment gave more tooth to the act by including a wide range of terrorist activities into its limits. The 2012 amendment enabled its surveillance over to companies, NGOs, organisations etc. In 2019, the government brought in radical changes in the act granting it the power to arrest anyone and keep them in police custody for 180 days without filing chargesheet and denying the right to bail. Surprisingly, the first case under UAPA after this amendment was charged against two students from Kerala, Alan Shuhaib and Thaha Fasal, for allegedly possessing books and brochures that sympathises

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with maoists. It must be taken into notice that this amendment was done just before the introduction of the Citizenship Amendment Act. And, everyone knows what followed - student leaders Umar Khalid, Meeran Haider and Safoora Zargar are still in jail. UAPA simply strips an accused of his privileges as a citizen of India.

It is evident from this experience that the government is stubborn in eliminating any voices that rise against it. Parallels of the current circumstances can be seen in the past too. In 1870, the British brought in the sedition law to curtail opinion forming among Indians in order to curb the spread of nationalist feeling among the people. When the nation tripped down to almost an autocracy in 1975, the fundamental rights of the citizens were trifled. Freedom of expression was severed. Today, not just people who are critical of the government but the people who are outspoken about dalit, tribal and minority issues are getting targeted by the government. The constitution grants every citizen the right to freedom. It is these freedoms that give meaning to democracy. Among the freedoms, the freedom of speech and expression provided for in Article 19(1)(a)

of the constitution is the most compromised these days. Writers, film makers, journalists, activists and groups who don't comply with the whims of the majority are under watch. This is the country where in the last 4 years a writer had to declare his 'literary suicide' and a journalist was murdered in daylight. Freedom of expression is the essence of democracy. It empowers even the weakest citizen to raise their opinion.

Mutually respecting opposite voices is an indicator of a mature democracy. In that sense, we should be doubtful if, in the last 75 years, we have ever accomplished the aspirations of the Independence movement, which is clearly penned in the preamble of our constitution. The issues discussed here are not just the case of our nation. The last 10 years have witnessed a decline in democracy in many parts of the world. The growing inclination of the world nations to the right poses not a small challenge to democracy. But there is hope because there has always been a 'creative minority' that held the pillars of the civilisation intact.

Christy Mathew John
Programme Secretary,
Kerala Region

PANDEMIC FROM DALIT'S PERSPECTIVE

Life is full of surprises, not all these surprises are pleasant, so we need to be ready for what life brings us. I am Princess shamili, one of the millions of youth who kept thinking of surprises what the new year 2020 brings but as it is mentioned not all the surprises are pleasant. When I started 2020 like all common people excited to meet a new year with different people, different situations, different surprises, etc. but no one has ever imagined this Coronavirus pandemic. I heard about the pandemic before in history but facing that is extremely a life or death situation.

This virus has overturned our perspectives of high and low, rich and poor, black and white, male and female, educated and uneducated and so many discriminations. Many countries in the world were under lockdown, many people died, many were affected psychologically because of fear, many employees lost their jobs, many families were broken, many students education and their future has become hopeless, but this coronavirus scare has not stopped casteist forces from committing atrocities against the marginalized, especially against Dalits. Who will the Dalits be afraid of? To the deadly virus? Or To the deadly humans? Tragically Corona and lockdown are not able to prevent these atrocities against Dalits in India.

I started hearing the word "Dalit" only after college, before that, I never know the real meaning and emotions of the word "Dalits" because I have never visited more places except for school, college, and home until I finish my graduation. Who are "Dalits" why they want to suffer a lot in this Independent country? Many questions were running in my mind. Speaking of which Dalits mean oppressed, broken or, crushed to the extent of losing their original identity. There are 200 million Dalits in India. They are working as leather workers, street sweepers, cobblers, agricultural workers, manual Scavengers, some are digging village graves, disposing of dead animals, and some Dalits are used to clean human excreta. Why especially they want to do such works, is not only my question but of many organizations and groups who raised their voice for the voiceless. We have more questions unanswered but this Pandemic took even this job from them and now their life is hopeless.

Looking at Dalit's perspective this pandemic changes many things. In General, it has changed how we work, learn and interact as social distancing and also it has triggered a wave of mental health issues whether it is managing addiction, depression, Anxiety, Loneliness, social isolation, and mental stress.

PANDEMIC FROM DALIT'S PERSPECTIVE

But the poor Dalits will always be one step higher in getting the problems. because of coronavirus spread many people have died but what brings me more grief is Dalits and their children died because of hunger, Migrant workers from different places of India have lost their job and they walked back to their home town and died on the way because of heart attack, this happened because they were not informed earlier about the lockdown. We can't understand their pain until we are the ones facing it. Many social media covered the celebrities who were affected by coronavirus but none of us know the sufferings and the problems faced by them, The All India Survey on Higher Education for 2018-2019 reports that Dalits account for only 14.9% of the 37.4 million students enrolled in higher education but due to this pandemic Dalit students education is becoming hopeless because the government has not released their scholarship amount and the students were forced to drop out from college.

Whenever a Natural disaster hits our country the most affected people are Dalits, hence Government needs to ensure that Dalit issues are included while developing long-term strategies and early recovery package to respond to the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, because Dr.Ambedkar who viewed from Dalit's perspective quoted "Equality may be fiction but nonetheless one must accept it as a governing principle".

Princess Shamili

*Programme Secretary,
South Tamil Nadu Region*

YOUNG PEOPLE AND MENTAL HEALTH IN 2020

According to the survey India have 356 million youths population which is the most by the country, and we know that the young minds are the future of the world they have talent and potential to change the world. In today's generation we have seen youths they self-motivated, they are updated with what is going on in their surroundings and they are very confident in their life.

What is Mental Health? :- Mental health includes our emotional, Psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make choices. "Year 2020 The Pandemic " January 1, 2020 it was the brand new year with new hopes people were celebrating New Year like every year, but end of the year from everyone's mouth you have or you will hear that 2020 is the worst year of their life. A lot has happened this year from corona virus pandemic, Australia devastating bushfire to Locusts attack.

Year 2020 will be remembered for many coming years in coming day children will study about year 2020 how one virus has changed the entire world, once people used to say nothing can stop this running world the world which is working day and night but this virus has stopped the world for many days, so now we can say nothing

is impossible in this world. You might be thinking I am only talking about the pandemic but this the harsh truth everyone got affected by this virus many of them have lost their life, many lost their belongings, lost their job etc. and our whole year has been evolve around the virus.

"Young People and their mental health" at the starting of the year every young mind had some dreams and aim that they wanted to complete and they were slowly heading towards it. Before the lockdown we have seen many meme (Joke) around us that youths need 6 month holidays 2 times in a year and then the lockdown happened. When the Lockdown happened youths were prepared for themselves they have planned what they have to do in this time. Many of them were happy that they will get more time to study and more time to spend on themselves, and we have seen many of them have come up with new hobbies and talent in themselves, youths became more self-dependent during this lockdown.

First one month of the lockdown was going very well for everyone, everyone was prepared mentally but the real problem starts after one month there was nothing to do as its seems to be doing same thing daily in one small area, many students they started thinking of

YOUNG PEOPLE AND MENTAL HEALTH IN 2020

their studies and those who doing jobs in private sectors they were in a fear that in any moment they can be fired from their job. Due to lockdown there was restriction to move around, to meet their friends hang around this things affected the most to the young minds.

Main problem of today's generation is they don't talk to about their problems with their family and this is one main reason of addiction (alcohol, Drugs etc.) this is the reason youths don't get right direction/path, and another reason is peer pressure due to this today's generation they don't try face or solve the problem they just run away from the problem.

This year many incident took place in all over the world that has put negativity in the young minds, we have started year with a Australia bushfire it was getting normal then lockdown happened, migrant crisis, locust attack, cyclone at West Bengal, gas leak at vishakapatman like this bizarre incident took place that kept some negativity in the young minds and we have heard many suicidal news of young people in 2020.

New normal studies were started via online method, work from home was allowed. But do you think online studies have helped out the students, personally I was very happy that now the education

system will changed but after some time I realised people are not having food to eat then how come they will buy phone or how they will recharge their phone, and we all know studying is our fundamental right according to this I think it was unjustified for the students those who were from poor background, and we have seen in the news due to online class many students have left their studies and now they are being working as an labour, by organising online classes our institution they thought they have done their part but in reality students are suffering a lot and we see the result in coming year.

Some of the youths have really done good job in this pandemic we have seen many youth's volunteers those who were working for poor people without any expectations. Raise of stress level in the work field, studies we can see youths are suffering very bad from the mental health due to this only world health organisation has decided to celebrate as a World Mental Health Day to aware people about this. Let's not just ignore if we see something suspicious in someone let's make some time to talk, together we can.

Shashikant Horo

*Programme Secretary,
Jharkhand & Bihar Region*

EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON FOOD SECURITY

Food security was already a standing global concern even before considering the effect of COVID-19 pandemic. And there are warnings of massive hunger and widespread starvation globally. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report show India with the largest population of food insecure people. India already has a worrisome 48.86 crore hungry people in 2019. It is accounted for 22% of the global burden of food insecurity, the highest for any country, in 2017-19.[1]

The growing agricultural crisis has really come to the surface during COVID-19 pandemic with the worsening food security situation. And to rub salt to the wound, agricultural bills which are anti-farmers are being brought in by the parliament. Lakhs of farmers and agricultural laborers are on the streets at a time when they should be in the farm planting crops for next season. The state is calculatedly withdrawing from its obligation towards ensuring food, nutrition and livelihood security for its people. And there is a fear of massive landlessness, bondage and starvation that might take a turn of famine. This phenomenon affected and will continue to affect food insecure population the most; women, children, socially and

economically disadvantaged groups who are working poor.

The pandemic is bringing to the forefront the already existing structural poverty and inequality. While it has already limited labor mobility, market accessibility, transportation and disruption in new planting season. In October 2020, cost of food has increased to 11.07%. Prices of vegetables jumped to 22.51%, meat and fish to 18.7%, pulses to 18.34%.[2] In such case, it makes it difficult to afford food and people's ability to access food is greatly hampered. If the price hike continues, over a period of time, many people will not be able to buy food even for their survival. And there is a fear that food grains might be exported if people of the country cannot afford to buy and the working poor especially women and children will continue to remain hungry.

Many poor people, women and children in India already suffer from chronic hunger because of their very low income and inability to buy nutritious food. Large proportion of children and women are malnourished. The latest data of National Family Health Survey in 2015-16 indicate signs of chronic undernutrition in children and adult. The data suggest that 38% of

EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON FOOD SECURITY

children under age 5 are stunted (short for their age), 21% wasted (thin for their height) and 36% underweight (thin for their age). 50% of women and 20% of men are anaemic. The statistics further pointed that 58% of breastfeeding women, 50% of pregnant women and 52% of women who are neither pregnant nor breastfeeding are anaemic.[3]

According to United Nations' Committee on World Food Security, food security is "when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life irrespective of class, gender or region." Therefore, food security is nothing but the availability of affordable nutritious food and the ability to access to it. Food is understood not just in terms of a substance for human beings to eat, drink and absorb to maintain life and growth but as a Right as well.

Right to Food which is Universal Human Right can be guaranteed only with the availability and accessibility of food by all people at all times. Putting the definition of UN Committee on World Food Security at the backdrop of India's food insecurity scenario, India doesn't seem to be on track to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2.1 Zero hunger target by 2030. Yes, it is a monumental task for India to achieve food security. But that does not mean there is nothing we can do about it. There are ways in which we can contribute as a citizen of this country and as an SCMer. We, as an individual or a group can adopt and advocate the Ten Commandments of Food developed by Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit and the WCC- Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance's Food for Life Campaign Strategy Group. With these ten commandments, they try to "address the existential challenge of hunger and inequity in an innovative and spiritually engaging manner". Else, we will have to live through a situation of hunger and starvation.

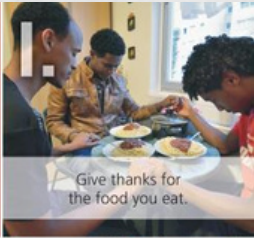


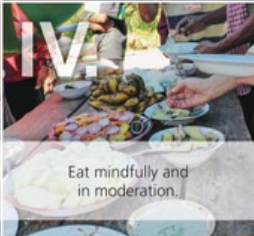


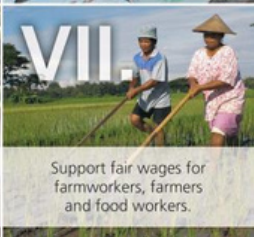

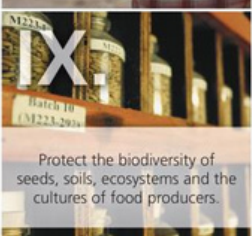

Manjulie Vaiphei


*Executive Secretary,
Gender and Social Justice Desk*

EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON FOOD SECURITY

- [1] FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2020. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020. Transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9692en>
- [2] India Food Inflation 2012-2020 Data. <https://tradingeconomics.com/india/food-inflation>
- [3] International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF. 2017. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015-16: India. Mumbai: IIPS.


TEN COMMANDMENTS OF FOOD


<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">I.</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Give thanks for the food you eat.</p>	<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">II.</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Eat food grown as close as possible to where you live.</p>	<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">III.</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Strive for all people to have knowledge about and access to affordable, nutritious food.</p>
<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">IV.</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Eat mindfully and in moderation.</p>	<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">V.</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Do not waste food.</p>	<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">VI.</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Be grateful to those who grow and prepare food for your table.</p>
<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">VII.</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Support fair wages for farmworkers, farmers and food workers.</p>	<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">VIII.</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Reduce the environmental damage of land, water and air from food production and the food system.</p>	<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">IX.</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Protect the biodiversity of seeds, soils, ecosystems and the cultures of food producers.</p>
<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">X.</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Rejoice and share the sacred gift of food with all.</p>		



www.oikoumene.org/foodweek

Photos: Paul Jeffrey, Mike Garcia, Nicole Benz, Sean Hawkey, Armin Passafium, Catherine Ngabuh, WCC-EAA | Design: Nicole Benz





DEMOCRACY AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

During the year of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the world's oldest democracy (USA) went into General Elections in novel ways, India - the world's biggest democracy, continued to display only a shadow of what true democracy is. Take for example US Senator Kamala Harris who contested the Vice Presidential election in the USA hoping to become the very first woman, as well as person of color to take up the post. Her Indian descent made headlines especially in South India where even a group/caste claimed her ancestry celebrating such a huge moment in history. Instead of looking at this achievement as a plunge into the future, as a beacon of hope for women empowerment and for equality, all we could manage to do was pull caste, regionalism, and pseudo pride into the picture. All this happened at a time when India herself went through an ill-timed, and what experts think of as a poorly executed, lockdown to curtail the spread of the coronavirus.

Democracy is defined as a political system as well as an ideology that takes into account the people's needs and voices with special importance to individual voices. This is a system where each person has a say in the affairs of the everyday life of the country directly or indirectly.

But the COVID-19 pandemic only revealed the ugly side of the Indian Democracy. The moment the Prime Minister of India announced a 'Janata Curfew' followed by a 21-day lockdown within hours' notice, one could see how democracy took a hit in India. Migrants panicking and having to walk hundreds of kilometres to get back home because of a sudden halt to transportation will be forever remembered as one of the greatest blunders of the current administration. This is only one of the many ugly incidents that dented the legacy of India's democracy during the ongoing pandemic.

As the saying goes, Democracy is a government "by the people, for the people, and of the people." But as many would agree, democracy as far as India is concerned has become "buy the people, 'far' from the people, and 'off' the people." As part of election campaigns in some states in India, announcements of free COVID-19 vaccine to the people in due time have been made. This is a shameful way of buying the people's votes. This is also a sham considering the exorbitant amounts charged for COVID-19 tests in the country. This public health crisis has managed to reveal how far off the government has been from the people. The media and a free press are foundational to a healthy democracy.

DEMOCRACY AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Disbursement of foolproof news and information are the rights of the citizens of a country. However, since the pandemic struck, we have seen how muddled the sharing of information in India has been. It is true to a great extent that social media and other free information platforms have doctored news concerning the Coronavirus. However, the media, having been controlled by the government in many ways, put forth many distracting news during a time when people were losing lives and the poor and vulnerable people kept being marginalised even further.

In the past nine months, many dramas have graced Indian politics. From introduction of laws without any debate and dissent, to the continued aim to saffronize the country by controlling media and supply chains, the Indian democracy is far from what it should be. The recent farmers' protests against the newly introduced farm bills proposed by the government and the hostility with which it was met are signs of danger that our democracy is dying. One of the fundamentals of a democracy is a citizen's ability to exercise rights and freedoms.. In India, the Constitution clearly states the rights, freedoms, along with the duties of a citizen. Peaceful protest and Dissent are foundations of

democracy. But in India today, there is silencing of voices in a debilitating manner. Freedoms are curtailed in the name of culture and tradition and patriotism. Rights are thwarted through false information or no information. Duties, in isolation from freedom and rights, are forced upon the people as though that was the only important thing.

Globally we are seeing a rise in authoritarian regimes that are majoritarian and oppressive. Autocratic and power-centric governments and leaders are sprouting across the world. At the same time we are also seeing a rise in women representatives and people from diverse people groups in politics, more open and free laws in regard to human well being coming up as topics of discussion. Global bodies coming together to hold democracies responsible especially in efforts to combat climate change, discuss nuclear pacts and envisioning a sustainable future are signs of good hope. The World Health Organization (WHO) has never before been this important as they have been critical in handling this global pandemic. The need for collaboration and peace in fighting disease and war is immense in our times. Democracies are already in the forefront in this regard. There is still hope for democracy. Even

DEMOCRACY AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

though we are silenced, we must find fresh and new ways to speak and make our voices be heard.

The numbers will tell you that India is one of the youngest countries in the world with the highest demography being people between ages 20 and 40. India can be considered a young democracy in that sense. We must be aware that we are sometimes fed with misinformation about our own democracy. It is therefore imperative for each one of us as SCMer, especially as students of this great democracy, to uphold its ethos. India is a democracy the world looks up to. We have also helped many other countries frame their own democracies. As young people, we must look up to those ideals and go back to the roots. We have to read our Constitution wisely, we have to discern all matters of our nation keenly and we have to make our democracy alive again.

Ben Jonathan Immanuel

*Executive Secretary,
Communication Desk*

PALESTINE'S CRY FOR HOPE: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

In May this year, prior to the observance of the Nakba day on the 15th of that month, I was asked by a few students as to why SCMI is observing the Nakba and supporting Palestine. The question being a valid one, I wonder if the response provided engendered their support for the Palestinian cause. For many Christians, there is more to 'Israel' than what it is politically as a nation. The word has biblical references that point to a community of people 'chosen' by God to inherit the 'Promised Land' Canaan (present day Palestine). 'Palestine' rings a foreign tune and we are quick to associate ourselves with Israel by virtue of our conditioned faith.

But there is more to Palestine and Israel than what we know about them from biblical accounts and narratives. More than 70 years ago, Palestine suffered injustice at the hands of the colonial powers who had allotted unequal share of land between Palestine and the then Jewish community who had migrated from Europe and other parts of the world. Palestinians received the lesser share while Israel the larger share (even though their population was smaller than that of the Palestinians). Despite being the original inhabitants of the land, Palestinians were driven off their land, forced to flee and take refuge in other

countries, separated from their loved ones, denied of human rights and justice - all in the name of power inspired by an ideology (Zionism) that justifies the existence of one race (Jewish) at the expense of another (Palestinians).

The present situation of Palestine has not changed rather it has intensified with increased occupation of Palestinian land, continued exploitation of resources, and rampant human rights violations. Recent acts of the U.S. administration - movement of its embassy to Jerusalem and the "Peace to prosperity" plan that supported Israel's annexation plan of the West Bank settlements and parts of Jordan valley - further strengthened Israel's ongoing project of occupation of Palestinian land. "Israel's extraction of natural and mineral wealth from the Dead Sea, which is partly within the occupied West Bank, while the Palestinians were denied any access to those resources", [1] goes to prove the brutality of Israeli oppression. The presence of numerous checkpoints and the manner with which the Palestinians were made to pass through to get from one place to another, the thousands of Palestinians who have been held under "administrative detention" without being told what crimes they have committed, and the

PALESTINE'S CRY FOR HOPE: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

appalling conditions they live in while in prisons are but few instances where human rights violations take place in the name of security for the Israeli occupier.

Reading and learning about the situation of Palestine makes me question a lot of things – the role and agency of the United Nations, human rights organizations, churches and other faith bodies. While there have been efforts in different parts of the world including India to support and be in solidarity with the Palestinian people, they all seem insignificant and powerless to make an impact in overturning the oppressive conditions for the Palestinians. And at such moments when efforts do not yield anything substantial, it seems easy on our part to give up. But for the Palestinians, giving up is not an option. Theirs is a fight until freedom is achieved. They have been fighting for freedom and self-determination and still continue to do so despite the unfavorable conditions now exacerbated by the pandemic.

As a student community with faith in the values of justice, love, peace, and equality what is our response to the Palestinian situation? Do we still think that we have nothing to do with Palestine? Think again. Their situation of oppression is not different from ours.

Haven't we raised our voices against injustices and discriminations that Dalits and Adivasis face in our own country? Haven't we retaliated against the armed forces in the North east region when the army could rape, threaten and kill anyone? Haven't we empathized with the people of Kashmir when they have been under lockdown even before the Covid-19 pandemic, denied of basic human rights? Haven't we fought against the recent Citizenship Law that threatens to take away the citizenship of religious minorities?

Standing with Palestinians (oppressed) does not mean condemning Jewish people but condemning acts of injustice perpetrated by the state (Israel) against Palestinian people. There are some groups even among Jews such as the Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) that support the Palestinian cause and are against Israeli oppression. The words of Martin Luther King Jr. "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" are a reminder of our collective fight against any injustice, anywhere. Injustice is a faith and human rights concern. We cannot call ourselves Christians or people of faith if we choose to remain passive to issues of human rights and justice because faith demands that we love our neighbor (1 John 4:20) irrespective of their

PALESTINE'S CRY FOR HOPE: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

community, religion, nationality, etc. And Jesus has exemplified in one of his parables (Luke 10:25-37) that loving our neighbors implies doing whatever it takes to restore them back to life. Jesus' own ministry, as articulated in Luke 4:16-18, was about doing justice by liberating all who are bonded and oppressed, and condemning acts of injustice practiced either by individuals, groups, religious, or state leaders. His life reflected what God requires of us - to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8).

[1] "Israel's exploitation of Palestinian resources is human rights violation, says UN expert".

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24349&LangID=E>

Dakerlin Mukhim

*Executive Secretary,
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THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY DURING COVID-19

At least from a past few months we all are used to some unusual words like lockdown, wearing masks, sanitizer, social distancing, washing hands, quarantine, vaccine, PPE, isolation etc. Pandemics have been threatening the entire creation time and again. We are learning new ways of fighting and managing such unexpected diseases that can potentially kill millions of people around the world. Technology cannot prevent the onset of the pandemics; however, it can help prevent the spread, educate, warn, and empower the race. Today, with converging technologies like mobile, cloud, analytics, robotics, Artificial intelligence/ Machine learning (AI/ML), 4G/5G networks, and high-speed internet, it has become possible to test several innovative approaches to pandemic response.

Technology will not be able to avoid the onset of a pandemic. Still, it can assist in managing a crisis more effectively. We all know how badly COVID-19 has impacted our lives, both personal and professional. During this time of utter uncertainty and constant fear, our willingness to adopt technology has been our lifeline.

Here, are few such areas where technology plays a vital role. Let's take a look at how technology has impacted our lives in the current COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Distance Learning

According to a recent survey, around 191 countries have either implemented or announced the closure of schools and universities, which has directly impacted close to 1.57 billion students. Most of the educational institutions have started to offer their courses online to make sure education is not disrupted due to the pandemic. Technologies used in distant learning include applications like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google meet, Skype, etc.

2. Online Entertainment

COVID-19 has completely transitioned how content is being generated, distributed, and streamed. Several film production companies have also been releasing their movies via Over The Top (OTT) platforms such as Amazon Prime Video, Hotstar, Netflix, Zee5, Voot Select, etc. The lockdown has helped people in realizing the ease of viewing content on OTT platforms. Many gaming platforms have seen substantial growth in their user base. There has been a significant spike in the gaming sector's sales and the duration for which the games are being played. Youngsters are using gaming as an option to deal with COVID-19 stress.

3. Contact Tracing Applications

Technology has helped in educating

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people about the entire situation and reminding us to take the necessary precautions. Telecom operators such as BSNL, Jio, Airtel, Vodafone, Idea etc. have used caller tunes for spreading awareness about the pandemic. The facial recognition technology has helped in identifying people accurately even when they are wearing a mask. Technology has also helped in monitoring the movement of quarantined people. CCTV cameras which are enabled with facial recognition feature have helped in identifying infected individuals who do not follow the rules and step out of their homes despite being quarantined.

Contact tracing apps like Aarogya-Setu have assisted in tracking the COVID-19 spread. Contact tracing apps which use GPS and Bluetooth are surely helping the authorities in tracking the COVID-19 spread; however, are they as effective as they claim? This is something that we need to think about. According to experts, a contact tracing app could help in stopping the spread of the corona virus only if 80% of the Smartphone users download the app. Therefore, it is not guaranteed that a contact tracing app will function as intended to help in reducing the spread of COVID-19.

4. Stock Market

The adoption of technology in the stock market industry has been quite good for brokerage firms. Several brokerage companies have seen a spike in the number of clients since more investors have decided to tap the stock market. Due to the pandemic, clients are mostly staying indoors and are getting more free time to access the market situation, thereby also leading to an increase in trading volumes.

5. Contactless Online Deliveries

The online grocery market witnessed tremendous growth during the pandemic due to the high demand amongst consumers. Families, particularly with children and older people, preferred to place their grocery orders online. This, in turn, resulted in a significant increase of new users who are resorting to online apps for grocery deliveries. The provision given to choose a preferred time slot for delivery plus a reduced delivery fee for orders above a specified amount is attracting more and more customers towards online delivery business models.

6. Robotics

COVID-19 has made us realize how meaningful human interactions are for making things work. The pandemic has severely impacted labor-intensive

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sectors such as food, retail, logistics, and manufacturing businesses. COVID-19 has resulted in a strong push to implement the usage of robots and also to speed up the robotics research. Robots are now being used to clean infected areas and for delivering food to quarantined individuals in few countries.

The count of COVID-19 cases is increasing rapidly, and the number of patients who need medical attention is putting extraordinary pressure on healthcare professionals across the world. Drones are being used for food deliveries, tracking population, transporting test kits, spraying disinfectant, and for delivering medicines to quarantine areas, etc.

7. Dissemination of Information

Companies such as Google, Facebook, are striving hard to ensure people get only accurate and verified information. Their objective is to make accurate information accessible to everyone so that there is complete transparency of the entire scenario, and people can be educated about the required steps to undertake well in advance. False information around the number of COVID-19 cases, vaccines, diagnosis and treatment options, medicines, government measures, etc., can create more panic among the

population. The anxiety of people could result in widespread chaos, hoarding of essential items, panic buying, increased rates, conspiracy theories, etc.

8. Fitness & Health Apps

New alternatives are being introduced by health and fitness apps to help people remain fit at the comfort of staying indoors due to the pandemic situation. Several fitness and health brands have started conducting live workout sessions on their apps and social media platforms. These initiatives have also seen decent traction.

9. Technology-Based Temperature Monitoring

Infrared and wireless thermometers have now become the most commonly used medical equipment at toll gates, entry and exit gates of offices, airports, shopping malls, hotels, railway stations, shops, hospitals, worship places and other public places. These temperature monitoring technologies have assisted in measuring the body temperature of individuals from a distance; these temperature measuring devices have also been useful in identifying the individuals who might need further investigation.

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10. Work from Home (WFH)

Even though many companies have shut down and many youngsters have lost their jobs in corporate companies, the work from home option has ensured business continuity for various companies and businesses. Internet, data privacy security, virtual meetings, cloud conferencing, etc. have assisted professionals in adapting themselves to work from the home scenario with ease. WFH has also ensured that the deliverables are not delayed. Remote working has been a blessing in disguise, which has helped us to a great extent to maintain and follow social distancing protocols.

Conclusion

Today the greatest risk of worldwide catastrophe is pandemic, an enormously infectious virus that's more devastating and may kill many people. The transparency that we have gained through this current COVID-19 situation, we now understand that we were not geared up for this pandemic situation.

The next pandemic is not a matter of “if it happens”, but “when it happens”, would we be prepared well in advance against any crisis at both an individual and collective level. After the COVID-19 outbreak, it is evident that, from AI to robotics, the technology innovations are helping to manage the pandemic and better equip to fight future public health emergency in a timely, systematic, and calm manner. All we need to fight a pandemic like COVID-19 is preparedness. Advancement in technology is steadily progressing; it will undoubtedly continue to grow exponentially. It's we humans who have to adapt to changes in technology faster and continue to invest in building the technology systems for better preparedness.

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JOB CRISIS AND ECONOMIC SHIFTS DURING COVID-19

Covid-19 virus has turned the world upside down. The deadly virus has infected millions of people, wiped out human beings from the face of earth by causing death. In this pandemic situation the question of survival for the middle-class people and poor is in danger. Due to continuous lock down for a period of 5 month or above in various states of India, the job crisis made many labours to leave their work place and return back to their native villages. The return of migrants by every possible way and means have caused death of several labours who died on road accident, on railway track and some due to hunger. Many have walked, taken their rickshaw, bi-cycle, motorbike whereas the poor daily wage earners had no means than to return home by walking night and day on the National Highways.

The decline in economic activities consequent to the lockdown have severely impacted the workforce and their dependents. It is presumed that almost the entire 93 per cent informally employed workforces of India are now unemployed. These informally workers constitute those people who have no written work contract from their employers and hence are not liable to get any social security benefits from their employers (and also from the union and the state governments). Indian economy

made a tremendous shift during this pandemic. Due to close down of industries, manufacturing units, small cottage industries, hospitality, entertainment industries, fashion industry, construction companies, IT sector, Telecom industry, travel agencies etc. a huge amount of people have lost their job unexpectedly. As many as 41 lakh youth in the country lost jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic while construction and farm sector workers account for the majority of job losses, according to a joints report by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). "For India, the report estimates job loss for 4.1 million youth. Daily wage labours, construction and agriculture have witnessed the major job losses among seven key sectors,"[1] These informally employed workers work in both the organised and the unorganised sectors, from producing simple pins to assembling highly technological products in the global value chains. The government has requested the employers not to retrench the informally employed workers and also to provide full wages during the period of lockdown. In a country like India where a large chunk of workers gets wages below the minimum fixed by the government it is utopian to believe that these workers have not been retrenched and are also

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being provided wages after the lockdown. Among the informally employed workers, the migrant workers are the worst sufferers during this period. Millions of them are stranded in makeshift homes by the highways, slums and even under the open sky. Let alone the informally employed workers, many formally employed workers are also facing the impact of the lockdown as many of them have lined up to withdraw money from their employee's provident fund accounts. By April 15, 2020, the Employees Provident Fund Organisation has received 3.31 lakh provident fund withdrawal claims. [2]

The Covid-19 brings many new issues, challenges, and also prospects to re-examine our journey of faith? How do we discern God's love and God's liberating presence during pandemic? All these questions relate to justice concerns in the realm of economic shift during COVID-19. How do we address the humanitarian crisis brought to the marginalized communities by this pandemic crisis? What kind of long-term strategies are required to help the marginalized communities? How do we respond job crisis and food crisis? How do we respond to the new normal situation and how to face these new normal

challenges? Online education has created a digital divide between the rich-poor and rural-urban people – How do we help those who are digitally marginalized? What is the role of government, NGO's and church leaders during this pandemic? The COVID-19 virus is going to be endemic; it will stay with us. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, concerning the discovery of a vaccine, said "It won't end the Covid-19 pandemic on its own and there's no guarantee that scientists will find one". Many experts have expressed similar opinions that "No guarantee for permanent eradication!" WHO Director-General further said, "We will not, we cannot go back to the way things were." We just have to adopt a new normal way of life. [3]

For the people young and old who have returned to their native places to different states/provinces and villages, there is a big question and challenge how can they rebuild a new life. Covid-19 gives challenges and also opens up the opportunity to re-start a new beginning in new normal way. They need food, home, and a job to earn their living. Unemployment is breeding day by day, because of the crisis of this covid-19 pandemic. Job opportunities are very less and the salary provided are even lesser

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then they should actually get. Even the highly educated people are unemployed because the wages paid to them are less in amount. The farmers are in a state of confusion about how much crops to produce. As many of the crops are getting wasted because there are less consumers to consume. And as the price rates are getting higher, hardly do we see some consumers to buy them. Because of this new drawback's, farmers are suffering. If they don't get enough money by selling their crops they would be indebted or starving in hunger. India is an agrarian country were farmers play a vital role in the society.

People who have lost their jobs and are looking for jobs desperately are being driven by poverty and frustration, they will indulge in substance abuse, robbery, and will engender social unrest and commercial sex works. Resettlement requires long term intervention – what steps should we take to address the issue? Is charity work enough? We need a theology of justice, equality, and solidarity. Covid-19 evokes us for the need of theology that affirms the centrality of land/creation; community

transformation over individual freedom; relationality or interconnection over disconnectedness of all living beings; simple functionality over luxury; respectful and reciprocal attitude overexploitation of natural resources; sharing over-accumulation of wealth; and promotion of people's-oriented development and management of resources over corporate controls of resources.

The government should also use fiscal measures to rev up the economic activities. The multiplier effect of monetary and fiscal measure augur very well for any economy witnessing slowdown. Last but not the least, the government should implement some 'rights based' policies and programmes that provide adequate social security benefits to all the people of India so that they could enjoy a decent standard of living and tide over any crisis that may occur in the future.[4]

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BIBLICAL REFLECTION

ON HOPE AMIDST HOPELESSNESS - CHRISTMAS 2020

Introduction:

Christmas is the occasion where families and friends would love to spend time together to celebrate the birth of Jesus. It is a time of joy, sharing and giving. Jesus came to be the Immanuel in the form of human who dwells amongst us and to share the pain, joys and suffering, even to the point of death. Every year we are eagerly waiting for this time to be together; children will be waiting for Santa Claus who will visit their homes and neighborhood with the carol group. As we prepare ourselves to remember the birth of Jesus even at this time of COVID-19 pandemic, the message of Christ's incarnation is hope, love, joy, and peace to the whole world. Let us receive Christ who is born amidst hopelessness. Let us draw a similarity between the times of Jesus and this year's situation when we have been going through, and try to experience a part of the story of Christmas from the Bible.

The flight to Egypt and COVID-19 pandemic:

In Mathew 2: 13-15 God appeared to Joseph in his dream to take the child and the mother and escape to Egypt from the hand of Herod who at that time killed all the boys who were two years and under. Without any delay Joseph took them in the middle of the night to a very far place.

Egypt was believed to be a logical place to find refuge, as it was outside the territories of King Herod, yet, both Egypt and Judea were part of the Roman Empire, linked by a coastal road known as "the way of the sea"[1] making their travel easy and somewhat safe. In this age of technology and science we cannot imagine that an infant and the parents have to travel miles after miles on a donkey not even a horse. Imagine the needs like food, water, clothes for the infant and other things during the journey and while staying in a new place. The details of their journey to Egypt were not mentioned in the scripture. Joseph might have experienced fear, uncertainty, and worry to take his young wife and his infant son in a long and unknown journey. Mary as a young mother might have also faced many challenges to take care of her infant son and herself. In Catholic tradition, there are seven sorrows of Mary. The flight to Egypt is her second sorrow.[2] This might be the unspoken and unwritten details which Mary as a woman and a new mom was going through. Joseph took his family to Egypt not knowing when he will return back to his hometown where he earned his living and raised his family. They had to leave behind whatever they had as the donkey would not be able to carry more.

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When COVID-19 pandemic entered to into our states and towns, the Government announced nationwide lockdown on 23rd March leaving many people without food, jobs, shelter and transport. Some of us managed few days and weeks but later we realized that we cannot go on like this. The future was uncertain and bleak. Many migrant workers, workers in unorganized sectors, daily laborers lost their jobs and income. There was a saying during the lockdown mentioning that the rich didn't know where to spend their money and the poor didn't know how to earn money. Just like in the flight of Joseph and his family to Egypt, when they did not know what the future would be, many migrants, students and others across our country travelled more than a thousand kilometers to get back to their homeland with nothing but a hope to do something back home for survival. We have seen in news channels and newspapers how men, women and children walked on foot or took risk, with any transport available to reach their places as there was no source of public transport. A 15-year old Jyothi Kumari from Bihar cycled a distance of 1200 kms in seven days to reach her native place carrying her ailing father.[3] The painful images we saw of their journey on foot showed that their feet were full of blisters and wounds; the same might

have happened even to Joseph and Mary on their way to Egypt.

Christmas brings Hope:

Christmas 2020 will be celebrated in a different way when compared to the traditional way in which we have been celebrating all these years. Family get together and vacations might not be as exciting as before, our churches will be sans senior citizens above 65 years and children below 10 years; no carol rounds or visiting. We are still not sure how our Christmas celebration this year will be. Thinking of the past months, we were all in a very difficult period of life. We are panicky, fearful, worried, and our hope for the future is dwindling. In a short span of time, many precious lives were lost, some of us have lost our loved ones, some others have suffered through the unbearable pain of this illness, many faced stigmatization within our neighborhood and society, many lost their jobs, the regular income was cut down and the normal flow of our daily lives was disrupted leading to a new way of everyday life.

The message of Christmas conveys the message of hope to the hopelessness. Immanuel God with us reassures us that He will not leave us in whatever situation we are going through.

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Joseph did not lose hope when God told him in his dream to go to Egypt and wait to return back after God told him when the right time came, to return. Joseph did not argue with God and did not ask time to prepare for the long journey and for the new place. During the months of May and June, at the peak of the pandemic, we all had fears, worries and challenges but as the year 2020 moved along, situations have changed us to adjusting ourselves to new things, new lifestyle and we felt that those fears, worries and challenges are lesser even though the virus has spread to every corner of the globe. We are all with hope waiting for the New Year trusting that the situation will be better, brighter and that we will be in good health. Children and students are longing to get back to schools, to meet their peer group. The COVID-19 pandemic which has severely affected human life everywhere in the globe will not stop us from celebrating this important season in a different or low-key method.

Joseph and his family returned back from Egypt to Nazareth after everything settled down as promised by God. Let us wait for the future with hope where our

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace will dispel the darkness. Let us entrust the entire humanity into the hands of the Lord despite the uncertainties of life, so that all may find peace, joy, and hope amidst COVID-19 to celebrate a meaningful Christmas 2020.

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