

Social Trends: The River or the Rain?

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I must congratulate the organizers of this workshop for the decision to celebrate the coming of the Jesuits of the German Province to the Bombay-Poona missions. The pioneers of Gujarat Province too were from the then Upper German Province. It gives us an opportunity to see where we stand and also where we want to go? I am assigned the task of raising a few issues in the domain of social trends that can become mandates for further exploration by each province in the Western region.

It is said that ships are safe in the harbour but that is not for what the ships are built for.

But let me state that all our ministries and apostolates must fight injustice not just the social apostolate. But do all our apostolates deliver justice properly? What is the dominant model under which our apostolates function? Christ's vision of God as Father and all of us as BRETHREN. If we ignore our brethren we ignore Christ. *The relevance of our ministries springs not from what we do but from the how we do it: the specificity of our apostolate: "an understanding of man that springs from an inner experience of God's love that moves us to love our neighbours.* Are we paternalistic or participatory?

I

Shrinking Space for Jesuits in Traditional Apostolates

Any apostolate is an entry point for delivering justice. But do we go beyond the entry point? The space is increasingly shrinking for Jesuits in traditional works like education. The State is the prime cause of this shrinking. The market has brought out better packages in education and schools than what we offer. There are complaints from our Jesuit principals of elite schools that students are leaving our schools to join others. In our rural or non-elite schools we reach out to the poor. However, literacy and schooling was a source of upward mobility two decades ago but it no longer helps the poor as economic opportunities to improve their condition are not available. What do we do with our educational enterprise?

In the developmental sector the secular NGOs are better equipped professionally than our Jesuits who have at best liberation theology rhetoric and little professional training in delivering development. What we have in our social action apostolate are a few individuals who do excellent work independently but hardly network as a team. This has been noticed whether in Gujarat, Mumbai or Pune provinces. Each one doing his own thing. There is hardly any sharing. Does deprivation of sex aggravate our hunger for power? Resources are wasted in duplication. It is reported that there is little enthusiasm from young Jesuits to get into social action. Professional training in teamwork is necessary if a participatory paradigm shift is to be made.

A few Jesuits have broken a path in the rights mode at the grass roots level. In Gujarat I can think of Joseph Idiakunnel, Mathew Kalathil and J.M. Heredero who have worked at the grass roots and community levels. I am sure there are similar figures in Mumbai and Pune provinces. There are also well-known human rights activists in these provinces.

These are meteors that appear and disappear in the Jesuit firmament. Their experience or for that matter experience in most apostolates is not institutionalized. Think of the collective hours of experience we Jesuits could have had in our own respective provinces. But no, each Jesuit has to reinvent the wheel, to learn afresh, make the same mistakes, victimize the people in the process and hardly take forward the trajectory begun by those individuals who are after a time considered atypical Jesuits.

When I was a scholastic there was a vehement debate on poverty and the fight against poverty. Today one hardly gets to hear about agricultural labourers, the unorganized sector in urban centres, labour unions etc. in Jesuit circles. Perhaps today one gets to hear more about computers, mobiles, and vehicles!

Gujarat has been somewhat in the forefront in social action and inculturation. Yet when a new regional theologate and seminary had to be built all the rhetoric of liberation theology and inculturation was given a backseat and structures involving crores of rupees were erected. And yet the discussion centred on small, narrow living rooms and the lack of conveniences rather than on the software of theological formation. So formation in comfort without any struggle which an ordinary lay person goes through and that too a formation of transmitting given knowledge may not prepare Jesuits for the participatory or rights mode. Does our formation trigger off in our students a thirst for equality, justice or does it make them individualistic, scared and diffident? Has any major intellectual, theological or missiological output resulted from the regional theologates? When end product is pre-determined in the theologate (requirements and credits) there is little room for participatory model. The report of the commission for formation emphasizing FORMATION IN MISSION is little realized. Are we ready to leave our middle class existence which is ensured by the institutions we run? Are we not insulated from the masses and the mainstream?

On his return from a visit to Spain a well known Jesuit confided how irrelevant Jesuits have become in a traditionally Catholic country like Spain? They are trying to upkeep an official church system which is nearly dead. Only 80 people for Easter celebration in a parish of 8,000? To keep the remnant church going cultic issues are highlighted with reference to Eucharist! Are we far too behind in India?

While the spaces for many traditional ministries are shrinking there are ministries which we may emphasize for the future: the intellectual apostolate, mainstream media, and activism in issues like state terrorism, gender justice, environment and ecological degradation. Above all the nation is looking for a value system when secularism and democracy are threatened in this country and corruption is rising. Minorities and weaker sections are getting marginalized and are feeling unsafe.

II

Human Development and Empowerment

The basic purpose of development is to enlarge people's choices: greater access to knowledge, better nutrition and health services, more secure livelihoods, security against crime and physical violence, satisfying leisure hours, political and cultural freedoms and a sense of participation in community activities. These can be realized best in a secular and democratic society with least corruption. The object of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives (Huq 1999:14). Development is providing equal opportunities irrespective of gender, race, creed, or caste, for all people to empower themselves and opt for choices according to their own preferences not merely at individual level but at the community level.

Most often empowerment is defined as producing human beings who are physical fit, morally upright, intellectually competent, and socially adjusted and emotionally stable. But this definition is so well suited for individual empowerment as suitable to middle classes than to communitarian empowerment of the masses. Individual empowerment functions very well under paternalistic model while communitarian empowerment can only function under participatory model.

Three key players in human development are the State, Market and Civil Society. The state and market have been known to project that they are for development while actually they curb and suppress the development of the masses. Most often the state is hand in glove with the market. In the age of globalization open markets are considered the best engine to raise living standards. How far is this true in India and western India? Finally what roles do civil society or NGOs play, especially Church related ones, is what we need to discuss when we talk of social trends for the future of our mission. GC 32 has been a watershed in our social action as it leads us to the option for the poor and we need to have a look back on the character of the performance of this option.

III

Fonts of Injustice: Globalization and Hindu nationalism

Here is a parable. A man walking down the river bank saw a dead body floating. He jumped into the river, fished it out and tried to resuscitate it. Getting worried he took it to a hospital and entrusted it to the doctor saying he would be willing to pay all the bills incurred in the process of restoring the person to life. He then went back to the same river bank and continued his walk. He saw another dead body floating. He did exactly the same as in the first instance. He then returned to the river to continue his walk. Again he saw another body floating! He was puzzled and began to think, "Who is pushing these bodies down the river?" He went upstream and saw for himself who it was pushing the bodies down the river. He ceased to be a Good Samaritan and began to fight the cause than the effect. Here is paternalism, charity or Good Samaritan model operating and then getting puzzled and looking for more effective model to counter the structural causes.

Understanding inequality in all its dimensions and battling it is the primary requirement in the calling of a Jesuit. The two dominant processes operating in India are globalization and Hindu nationalism. While globalization has a positive dimension it marginalizes the masses. Globalisation and Hindu nationalism are in some ways two sides of the same coin contributing to inequality and injustice. Religious fundamentalism is raising its head all over the world. Bush won on “Christian” vote, Sharon on “Zionistic” vote, and Advani/Bajpeyi on “Hindu” vote. None of them treat people as equals. Globalisation looks only at profit motive, creating markets. Globalisation and fundamentalism go hand in hand and feed on each other. These processes are redefining not only what is negotiable but also non-negotiable within Indian society and culture. Both are homogenizing tendencies, both marginalize the masses, and give rise to conflicts and violence.

Hindu nationalism is but a ploy of upper castes to safeguard their position and privileges by bringing together the vote bank in the name of religion when caste is no longer yielding the desired results. The upper castes universalize their own interests as if they are of all Hindus. They Hinduise the tribals and Scheduled castes but will they treat them as equals when it comes to sharing benefits? Globalisation is marginalizing the masses and the upper castes stand to benefit. The resentment of the masses is directed to the minorities as if they are the cause of their marginalization. Unemployed people, retrenched people, underemployed people are ready material for any riot situation.

Inequalities and Injustices

Despite five decades of development basic necessities are still not available to a large number of our people. Only 40 % of the population enjoys all the basic amenities. By the recommended standard of 2400 calories per capita per day in rural and 2100 in urban areas we still have 25% below the poverty line. Poverty has declined but not for the socially disadvantaged viz., the STs and SCs. Potable water is not available for 25% of the villages after the three months when tanks and wells dry up. Where drinking water is available the ground water is contaminated with traces of cadmium, fluorides, arsenic, nitrates and lead. In Goa five star hotels store water for customers which in turn deprive the nearby villagers of their share. The Coca cola plant in Kerala guzzles 2.5 million liters of water every day. This factor has led to depleting sources of water in the surrounding area.

In the health care sector an overall low level of satisfaction in the public sector health is noted while phenomenal growth of private sector hospitals is observed two thirds of whose customers are rich. The poor who on account of waterborne diseases fall sick cannot avail the services of these hospitals. The poor also receive abusive treatment in these units.

Though enrolment in education has increased in the 6-11 years age group, the drop out rates from 1-5 standards has not declined. One fourth of the teachers in primary schools do not regularly attend those schools. The gap in quality of education has widened

between the disadvantaged and well to do sections in the last four decades. The system of education ironically perpetuates the system of inequality.

Despite a surplus of 65 million tons of food grains, some 320 million people go to bed hungry every night. Starvation deaths have been reported from Orissa, MP and Rajasthan. Domestic violence on women shows no sign of decline. The practice of dowry has increased where it did not exist before. Atrocities against dalits, tribals and minorities too have also increased.

Economic growth is not geared to generate employment. According to 2001 census, of the 406 million workforce only 6 per cent are in the organized sector and the remaining 94 are in the unorganized sector. The organized sector uses capital intensive labour saving technology. Mahindras, Bajaj Auto and Associated Cement companies have reduced their labour force by 30 per cent. On the other hand their productivity margins have increased. Textile mills have been closed in Mumbai, Ahmedabad and other parts of Gujarat leading to laying off of workers (25 thousand in Mumbai and 13 thousand in Ahmedabad).

Regular employees with a regular salary have become problematic. Duration of employment is not fixed. The monthly fixed wage for watchmen is from 800 to 1500. Subcontracting and delayed wages have become the rule of the day. The right to strike by labour has been taken away. Self employed workers such as hawkers, plumbers; cycle repairers, rag-pickers, shoeblacks, carpenters, and bidi makers are living from hand to mouth. Neither self-employed nor casual labourers get employment throughout the year. The living conditions of workers in small units of the unorganized sector are pathetic. Low level hygiene and safety measures prevail. 80% of the victims of the plague in Surat were labourers of the unorganized sector. Participation in recent riots in Gujarat by the poor has been very high. They are material always ready for hire.

It is clear that the high growth rate has not benefited the poor. If an executive earns 600,000 a year, a labourer earns only 6000 per year. Social Darwinism has come to stay. In this situation not only companies, but also individuals, each social group, each community, must be the fittest, the strongest and the best. Those who are not competitive are eliminated from the economic arena regardless of social, moral or environmental implications (Oswald De Rivero 2001:80). Markets can be engines of growth but they can be enormously destructive of the environment and social and cultural goods. Civil society and the state have to play an active role in taming the market.

Western India has two of the most developed states (agriculturally and industrially) and what Gujarat and Maharashtra are today will be the India of tomorrow. There is uneven development even within these states. Resource transfer from socially weaker sections like the tribals is taking place to benefit the better off sections. Laying off of labour, casualisation and feminization of labour is on the rise. Whatever is happening in these states must be of great significance to our Jesuit interventions unless of course we want to work in isolation from the changing socio-economic context. Both globalization and

Hindu nationalism are leaving significant marks therein. Do these affect our traditional works at all?

IV

Implications of Fighting Injustice

1. The metaphor to fight injustice

I would use the metaphor of the river and the rain indicating to perhaps what has been and what could be the Jesuit Mission for the future: River or Rain? The river gives greenery and growth on either side of its banks and as one goes further the growth and greenery thins out. While the rain gives widespread growth wherever it falls in a uniform manner. I like to compare the river to Jesuit missions of the past and present. Wherever they have worked they have created pockets of growth or oasis in the desert. But doesn't our future lie in being like the rain giving widespread growth? What do I mean by this?

Fr. Michael van den Boagaert S.J. in an article in JIVAN a few years ago compared the Jesuit and Ramakrishna mission villages of Ranchi area. He found two contrasting models. In Jesuit villages there were many illiterates and some very highly literate persons, while in Ramakrishna villages there was hardly any illiteracy and most were fifth standard. From Jesuit villages the highly literate had migrated to the cities and found jobs. From the Ramakrishna villages there was hardly any migration. Most of them being fifth standard literate were charging the local ecology and were making a livelihood and did not migrate. In Jesuit villages minimum get maximum while in Ramakrishna villages maximum get minimum. Jesuit villages brought about economic and social differentiation and stratification while Ramakrishna villages brought community up gradation however slowly at one pace. Jesuit villages lifted a few individuals while Ramakrishna villages lifted the entire community. Jesuit villages as a by product instilled hierarchy and class while Ramakrishna villages some kind of solidarity and homogeneity. Bogaert is advocating communitarian as opposed to individual mobility model. Perhaps that is the only model of development.

2. The Rights Mode

Where are we Jesuits in the development discourse? There have been three identifiable modes in the development discourse: i) relief/charity/Good Samaritan mode ii) service/skills delivery mode and iii) rights mode. The relief mode has been easily explained as giving fish to a starving man. The service mode is teaching a man to fish or giving him skills to earning his livelihood. The rights mode is going beyond the second viz., making a person aware that he has rights to fish in the pond or imparting awareness of human rights, rights of a citizen and how to claim them.

Where are we positioned in this continuum of three modes? How would we quantitatively distribute ourselves? Can we say most of us and our manner of working are in the rights mode? Or are we just a handful? Can we say we loathe giving up the relief, charity or Good Samaritan model because it makes us feel good and paternalistic?

Can we say some of us have transited to the service model, teaching people income generating skills? But how confident can we be about how many of us have latched on to the rights mode in our activities? The Rights mode is not just reserved for social activists but characterizes any kind of apostolate: education, health or rural development.

In Gujarat we have just completed a major study of the Impact assessment of Missionary interventions in six districts of tribal south Gujarat. We find that most of the missionaries are comfortable with the paternalistic relief mode, many are transiting to the service mode and a few are venturing into the rights mode with a participatory model of development.

It is not that these three models are unrelated. These can possibly exist given a situation...some component of relief, some component of imparting skills and then knowledge of rights. Bombay Jesuits gave up the relief mode twenty years ago. I am not saying that we Jesuits need to give up relief and service modes and all plunge into the rights mode. But the future of the Jesuits in western India to my mind lies in the rights mode in the participatory model. The Arole couple both medical doctors at Jamkhed has demonstrated that development in the participatory mode is the best medicine!

3. A fundamental change of attitude and approach

Paradigm shift from paternalism to participatory mode (Lobo 2002:155)

<i>Paternalistic Model</i>	<i>Participatory Model</i>
Organization: hierarchical, top down, One person centred, feudal type.	Egalitarian, bottom-up, multi-nodal equal.
Approach: giver, donor, doer, Problem-solver.	Partners, participants, mutual Recipients, all share responsibility.
Orientation: condescending, pity talking at people.	Respect, talk to people.
Treatment: people as objects, focus on a few individuals.	People as subjects, focus on community
Employ: material resources, quantity.	Ideational awareness, not material resources.
Projects: role of contractor, landlord, executive, trader	Critical of exploitative roles in society.
Gives: maximum to the minimum.	Minimum to the maximum.
Seeks: patronage of police, bureaucracy.	Critique the state if it is blind to the needs of the people.
Leads to: dependency and uneven development.	Even and sustainable development in a community.
Results in: fragmentation. Stratification and cultural alienation.	Holism and cultural identity.

Conclusion

Participatory model is in fact the only model of growth and development. The Samaritan and service models in fact do harm in the long run. Samaritans create dependencies and imbeciles. Service models may leave half baked technicians without proper and satisfying employment and create a situation where the technicians are pushed to abandon their social world and become meaningless clogs in a wheel only for the sake of a pittance to continue their existence in a solitary manner.

Labour must participate in the process of enjoying or coming to enjoy their rights. Take the question of Minimum wages. Both in agriculture and factories minimum wages are given a go bye. This affects a large number of workers. Do the unions deliver the goods is not the question. Do the unions give an opportunity to the workers to participate is the real question. The answer is an emphatic 'no'. The unions are themselves are captives of various political parties and are slaves of their political masters. Certain figures in the Union are undesirable. Where participation of workers is the hall mark of the Union those on the top can be dislodged the moment they cease to account to the workers. Which Unions permit the workers to ask questions about union activities to implement the minimum wage act? Which unions permit workers to seek accountability from their leaders? Non participatory unions have failed to inspire the workers to struggle for their rights. Can the Jesuits do any thing to create unions which allow participation of workers? What role can Jesuits play in the creation of participatory unions? Would Jesuits be compatible with participatory trade unions? Take for example the Jesuit schools, how many principals have fostered a teachers union which can be compared to a participatory union. How many Jesuit parishes have where Parish Councils are running the Parishes? Take the Jesuit communities? Have you seen a community in which the members have an important role in thinking about the future role of the community? Have you come across communities in which members have sought a critical evaluation of their community achievement and its worth?

Like the Minimum Wages Act, there is the Panchayati Raj Act to ensure participation of citizens in their march to progress. The Act provides for Gram Sabhas with wide powers. What has derailed the Gram Sabhas from playing their roles? What prevents the Gram Sabhas from assembling? What prevents the members from expressing their views? What obstacles are there in villagers demanding their rights? What alternatives to Gram Sabhas can you suggest? Sitting in Gram Sabha of the organized masters and unorganized SCs and STs; would it have the desired effect sought to be achieved by the Act? The question is: Under these peculiar circumstances where do we begin? How do we get the S.C., S.T. groups to raise questions? Where is the first step in a confrontational situation? The Jesuits would play a relief role, mother Teresa's role, the Good Samaritan's role. In practice what else could the poor Jesuit could do?

With Jesuits own helplessness, dependencies, non participatory form of collective life with submissiveness as the hall mark, would it be possible for such a Jesuit making an

entry into SCs and STs and create participatory model of development of which the poor Jesuit has had little or no experience?

Are we Jesuits qualified for functioning in the participatory model? I suspect not. The needs to grab power, failure to share power are somewhat paramount at behavioural level. To empower others we have to give up our power. We need to exercise power in the familial ambience. The father yields power so that the son may grow in power.

From the by ways of paternalism a paradigm shift to the highways of participatory model is essential for Jesuits to be relevant in the future. The other shift necessary is to integrate the relief, service and rights mode in the participatory model for whole communities rather than a few individuals. And finally to achieve all this scaling down of our middle class lifestyle and culture to a lower middle or lower class culture is essential.

We Jesuits are like a powerful warship, comfortably and safely anchored in a harbour, when the action is out in the open sea. It is not enough to send out emergency commanders. We should be out there, where the people are, not to bring them to safety, but to be with them. Privilege is the sin of the Jesuits today. Even our service is from a position of privilege. Do we treat the poor as our equals?

Fighting injustice cannot be assigned only to social apostolate alone. Every apostolate needs to get into the participatory mode. In this presentation I have dwelt more on how social apostolate can be made participatory. It is for each apostolate to enquire the implications of getting down to participatory mode.

The future of Jesuit contribution not just to Christians but also to the wider society lies in more contextual training of younger Jesuits (formation in mission), giving them more professional skills in development rather than only in theology and philosophy. Understanding of the nature of the State, caste, the social, economic, cultural and religious history of the region and a deep knowledge of the processes operating therein. Institutionalizing collective experience is highly desirable. The intellectual apostolate has a great future.

Note:

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