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HOSPITALITY TOWARDS MIGRANT LABOURERS: A MORAL THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF MIGRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF KERALA WITH A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE DISTRICT OF ERNAKULAM

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Introduction

Migration has been one of the most dynamic human activities since the very beginning of human history. It implies the mobility of a group or individual from one region to another, mostly in search of better living prospects. It is the reality of migration, especially the interstate migration towards Kerala, that occasioned the present doctoral research, which attempts to analyse the phenomenon of migration from the perspective of Catholic moral theology through the prism of hospitality. An act of hospitality towards migrants implies not only a

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moral responsibility but also a divine call. It has deep historical, social, ethical, and moral theological resonance in the context of migration.

Significance of the Theme

Migration, a world-wide social phenomenon, has its implications always and everywhere. It affects every aspect of life—economic, social, political, and religious. It is in this regard that we speak about migration to Kerala. It is an original contribution to moral theological study. It is a study of the complex phenomenon of migration—specifically interstate migration and the moral theological response to that, especially in the context of Kerala with special reference to the district of Ernakulam. Without doubt, the topic of the dissertation is relevant, as the whole world is undergoing a crisis due to migration. The significance of the theme and uniqueness of this study become clear from the following points:

1. The present study is the first doctoral dissertation in moral theology that analyses migration in the context of Kerala. Though sociological analysis forms an important part of the study, it is basically a moral theological study conducted on migration and hospitality.

2. Perceiving migration as a serious issue, touching different areas of life, a sociological survey has been conducted among the migrant labourers in the district of Ernakulam, one of the most attractive destinations of the migrant labourers coming to Kerala, so as to facilitate moral theological analysis.

3. Another novelty of the study is its focus on the act of hospitality, the key factor in welcoming and accompanying migrant labourers. Although several studies have been done on the topic of migration, this is the first work, to my knowledge, that specifically brings forth the act of hospitality as a moral theological response to the problems of migrant labourers, specifically in the Indian context.

4. Another important element of this research is its utilization of the Indian ethos of hospitality, as embodied in the revered saying “*Atithi Devo Bhavah*” (Guest is akin to God), which serves as a cornerstone of the rich Indian heritage. The Indian ethos of hospitality underscores the importance of practicing hospitality toward migrants.

5. Beyond the question of interstate migration in Kerala, this research also refers to, from a wider viewpoint, migration that takes

place due to the pandemic Covid-19, Russian-Ukraine war, political unrest in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and other countries.

6. Although not detailed, it also dedicates a small part to the implications of migration in a synodal Church.

Scope and Limitation of the Study

The general scope of this doctoral dissertation is to explore the significance of hospitality given to interstate migrant labourers in Kerala. The findings of the sociological survey persuade us to be more hospitable towards migrant labourers. The scope of the survey conducted in the district of Ernakulam is to help us obtain an overall idea of the situation of the migrants in Kerala and, thereby, to show the need for the act of hospitality. Based on the data received, the dissertation develops under the purview of different disciplines such as Bible, theology, ethics, pastoral care, social sciences, and so forth. The study based on interstate migration in India is, nevertheless, limited to the context of Kerala. The sample of the survey is restricted to the district of Ernakulam, particularly to certain areas in the district.

Likewise, although there are biblical interpretations of certain texts, no detailed exegetical study of any biblical text is undertaken. Even though this study is supported by patristic and magisterial teachings, a detailed study of migration and hospitality in the Fathers and Magisterium is beyond the scope of this study. In addition, the study undertaken is limited to the social and ethical aspects of the problems faced by the migrants and the responses of the natives, based on the Catholic moral tradition.

Methodology of the Study

The proposed study is inter-disciplinary and contextual, and the methodology is analytical, historical, descriptive, explorative, synthetic, and critical. While the moral theological response through hospitality finds its progress and depth from the biblical, patristic, and magisterial exploration, a direct and personal survey was conducted to obtain data on the problems faced by the migrant labourers. The methodology used in the survey is quantitative² analysis. The sample size, questionnaire for the survey, and other scientific parameters were designed under the guidance of Rev. Dr. Saju Madavanakkadu, the guide of the survey, from the Department of Social Work of Rajagiri

² Periannan, *Social Research Methodology: An Introduction*, Madras: Department of Christian Studies, 2003, 145.

College of Social Sciences, an esteemed research guide in social work under MG University, Kottayam. The migrant labourers were entered through an NGO³ called Suraksha Migrant Project, Perumbavoor. The analysis was done using SPSS⁴ software version 20.

Sources of the Study

Several books and articles based on biblical, theological, patristic, magisterial, pastoral, and social perspectives have been used in this study, to articulate the problems of migration and highlight various aspects of hospitality. Catholic Social Teaching forms an important source of this study. Moreover, the data collected from the survey is analysed in light of moral theological principles and resources. A special attention is given to Indian theological sources and sociological studies. Findings and facts given in such sources are also referred to in analysing the situation of Kerala's migrant community. For the biblical quotations, the New Revised Standard Version of The Holy Bible is used.

Structural Division of the Dissertation

This dissertation encompasses the importance of hospitality to migrant labourers. Apart from the general introduction and conclusion, it consists of four chapters. The thematic expansion of the chapters is as follows:

The first chapter, entitled "Migration: A General Understanding," attempts to explore the historical and sociological understanding of migration. While the first section of the chapter discusses different types and theories of migration, the second section highlights the reasons for migration. Among the reasons of migration, economic reasons stand prominent. The third point of the first chapter deals with the positive and negative aspects of migration. The chapter comes to an end with an overview of the challenges and consequences of migration.

After having provided a general introduction to the phenomenon of migration, the second chapter takes a closer look at the reality of migration, with a case-study of the interstate migrant labourers in Kerala, especially in the district of Ernakulam. In the first section of the chapter, an analysis of the historical, sociological, and psychological

³ NGO: Non-Governmental Organization.

⁴ SPSS is short form of 'Statistical Package for the Social Sciences,' and it is used by various kinds of researchers for complex statistical data analysis.

aspects of migrant labourers in Kerala is provided. It continues with the main reasons for the migration to Kerala. The second section deals with the psychological, social, economic, and ethical conditions, and problems of migrant labourers in Kerala. The third section analyses the survey, which forms the main basis for the moral theological appraisal of migration in Kerala through the lens of hospitality. The interview, conducted among 300 migrant workers⁵ in the district of Ernakulam, both males and females, demonstrates the nature of hospitality received by the migrant labourers from the natives. The logic behind the survey is that the more problems faced by the migrant labourers, the less hospitality is offered to the guest workers and vice versa. The chapter comes to an end with a description of the migrants in Kerala. The survey helps us to have an idea of the actual situation and thus facilitates our moral theological analysis in the context of the subsequent chapters.

The above-mentioned survey points to the fact of the lack of hospitality from the host state in several ways. Hence, the third chapter deals with the hospitality that should be offered toward migrant labourers. The act of hospitality basically entails the moral and social responses to the guest workers who need our special care, concern, and compassion. The first section of the chapter describes hospitality, together with some of its philosophical insights, as a positive response to migration. It is followed by foundations for the response of hospitality, as enveloped by the cultural mantra, *Atithi Devō Bhavah*. The second section alerts us to the socio-cultural response, which encompasses an act of hospitality to the problems of migrant labourers in Kerala. Again, in the light of the sociological survey done in the second chapter, the rest of the third chapter shares some proposals helping us to be vigilant in the protection of the rights of migrant labourers, especially women and children. The fourth section comes to an end with certain practical suggestions for the central and state governments. It sheds light on adequate measures to be taken to protect vulnerable migrant labourers and their families.

The fourth chapter is sort of a continuation of the third chapter. It establishes the scriptural, theological, and ethical basis of hospitality to migrant labourers. The first part of the chapter discusses the general scriptural understanding of migration and hospitality. The second part of the chapter describes both the Old Testament and New Testament

⁵ The decision to interview 300 migrant labourers as samples of the survey is as per the requirements of the Rajagiri college, MG university Kottayam.

understanding of migration and hospitality. Showing compassion to the other is the iconic representation of hospitality in the New Testament. The third part commences with the early Christian tradition on hospitality before exploring theological and magisterial understanding of hospitality to migrant labourers. The chapter proceeds with a theological appraisal of the phenomenon of migration through the lens of hospitality. It ends up with a magisterial understanding and teachings on migration and hospitality. The fourth section deals with ethical responses to migrant workers in Kerala. It is followed by a section entailing hospitality towards migrants as a new call and challenge for Christian ethics. The chapter continues with the question of hospitality to the migrants, especially in the light of the pandemic Covid-19, the Russian-Ukrainian war, political unrest in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, and so on. As hospitality deserves due consideration in a synodal Church, the discussion on the phenomenon of migration and synodality takes us to the final part of the thesis.

Major Findings of the Study

(1) Migrant labourers play an essential role in the economic stability and development of the state of Kerala. We cannot forget that many industries and construction centres in Kerala owe their existence and growth to the presence of these guest workers.

(2) Being away from home, migrant labourers may feel isolated and separated, and they are often unhappy and unsatisfied. Proper psychological assistance, like counselling and accompaniment, is to be given to those who are mentally distressed and disturbed.

(3) An unfailing support from the host society would help enormously in the questions of adjusting to the new environment, climate, food, and other realities of life. Thus, opening a generous heart towards everyday necessities and challenges of migrant groups remains a very necessary humanitarian act on the part of the host society.

(4) Measures are to be taken to protect migrant labourers' cultural and spiritual heritage together with their rights. In view of promoting and strengthening culture and cultural interaction, the organization of celebrations of festivals like Holi, Onam, etc. are significant.

(5) The rights to suitable housing, drinking water and sanitation, good living condition, a decent salary, and nutritious food are basic

needs of every human being. The hosting group has to look into these needs of the migrants, including the right to vote, with all priority.

(6) Migrant women are to be offered constant support, care, encouragement, and accompaniment, especially to those who are in irregular and deplorable situations. Migrant workers are suffering, at times, from sexually transmitted diseases and communicable diseases. Moreover, migrant women, who are breastfeeding should be given adequate breaks and facilities to feed their children at the work site itself.

(7) Host society has a great responsibility to be vigilant against all kinds of serious human rights violations and aberrations against the migrant population. Similarly, governmental, and humanitarian agencies have to take special care of every physically, mentally, and psychologically challenged, tortured, and abused persons among the migrants' labourers.

(8) As the number of migrant children, who are malnourished, is on the increase, host governments and other organizations have to provide special diets to ensure their growth and their physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing and uplift.

(9) Learning languages, both by hosts and guests, involves a two-way action. That means, both locals and migrant workers are involved in this. Ignorance of the language of the host state results in another major cause of social distress and agony, because of which they feel alienated and unwelcomed. Respect for all languages and cultures, and their equal treatment can play an important role in fostering social cohesion and building up peace and love in every community.

(10) Migrants must also be recognized and accepted as political, economic, and cultural actors by the host society. On the other hand, migrant labourers should cooperate with and abide by the rules and regulations of the hosting community.

Ethical Responses from the Part of the Church

(1) We cannot approach God without caring for our migrant brothers and sisters. It is because the image of God is hidden in every human being. Therefore, it is a moral imperative to safeguard the dignity of migrants.

(2) Migrants need to be welcomed and initiated in the society so that they feel 'at home' in the state to which they have migrated. It leads to mutual and reciprocal engagement between the hosts and the

migrants. It creates thus an atmosphere of mutual love, relationality, and harmony between hosts and guests, as well as a feeling of acceptance and respect for their dignity.

(3) Convene a meeting in the presence of concerned Bishops, various Church agencies, and religious congregations that are already working in migration hospitality services to facilitate a sharing of information, experience, and planning.

(4) Build up a 'Migrant Help Desk' in each city parish, and a ministry of hospitality at the parish level making the migrants feel welcome regardless of their ethnic, caste, and religions diversities.

(5) Provide individual pastoral care, ensuring social, moral, and spiritual support for migrant families. Special measures are to be taken for accompanying separated couples, broken families, and their children to empower them to overcome the difficulties in the host community.

(6) The Church has the mission to welcome migrants and share God's gifts with them, especially the gift of faith. Moreover, she needs to walk together with poor, needy, and vulnerable migrant labourers and create a culture of welcome in all Christian communities.

(7) Take a prophetic stand, from the part of Church authorities, in the face of society's unjust treatment of migrants and thereby avoid injustice and abuse against the guests.

(8) Mass media communication presents a powerful tool for fostering moral education, particularly among migrant workers. To promote moral education among migrant workers, dedicated rooms in parishes may be established. It would be helpful to equip these with media resources like updated news, value-based movies, and educational videos on drug and alcohol harm. This parish-based approach leverages accessibility, trust, and community involvement for effective learning and engagement.

(9) From a moral perspective, I would like to suggest that a committee for Justice and Peace be formed to give proper attendance to the migrant labours in each parish and diocesan levels. Thereby, they will be properly attended to whenever they are in any dangerous health conditions, if they happen to be in jail, regular visits may be made and communication with their family members may be made, etc.

(10) Organize awareness classes and seminars for migrants and hosts to persuade them to practice moral values like justice, honesty, empathy, compassion, respect for others, etc., for a fruitful involvement in the services destined for the migrants.

(11) The moral response to the problem of migration is hospitality. When natives' hospitality is reduced, issues and problems increase among the migrants as well as among natives.

Conclusion

Migration is one of the notable phenomena of the present world. Migrant labourers face a lot of problems in their hosting societies. The Church has to respond to their problems from a moral and theological perspective. By showing hospitality to the migrant labourers with care, compassion, and concern, she can and should be an unfailing source of support, agent of empowerment, and a bridge of moral and social interaction for the migrant population. She has to welcome migrants and share God's gifts with them, especially the gift of faith. She has to care for and empower every migrant labourer because he/she is an image of God. The Church, especially a synodal Church, should need to walk together with every poor and vulnerable migrant. In the context of migration, it is an important duty of a synodal church to accompany the vulnerable migrants. Therefore, the Church in India, especially that of Kerala, has to adopt an attitude of hospitality to positively respond to the problem of the migrant labourers rooted in the Christian vision, and imbibing the spirit of the Indian ethos of hospitality: *Atithi Devō Bhavah*.