

GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM AND REPRESENTATIONAL POLITICS AS INTEGRAL TO EVANGELIZATION A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

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Abstract

The 2014 electoral verdict, a significant turning point in India's political landscape, marked a decline in authoritarian dominance. However, it did not conclusively signify the resolution of the rising authoritarianism in India. The article argues that fostering grassroots political activism and representational politics is not just a political mission but also a constitutive part of the mission of evangelization. Drawing on the insights of Amartya Sen and Catholic social tradition, the article presents a compelling argument for such a political engagement of the Christians in India. Emphasizing Sen's conceptualization of democracy as public reasoning, wherein citizens engage in rational dialogue and subject their beliefs to critical scrutiny, the article underscores the imperative of informed engagement with critical socio-political issues. Subsequently, it delves into the principle of participation within Catholic social tradition, which advocates for active involvement in socio-political and cultural processes to further the common good. Synthesizing these perspectives, the discourse proffers practical strategies through which the Catholic Church, as a key societal institution, can play a crucial role in cultivating social trust and fortifying the secular fabric of Indian society by fostering grassroots political activism and aiming at representational politics.

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Such a political engagement is construed as an intrinsic facet of the mission of evangelization.

Keywords: participation, Catholic social tradition, grassroots political activism, Amartya Sen, public reasoning, democracy, justice

Introduction

On June 4, 2024, India experienced a momentous shift in its political landscape, marking the end of a decade-long trend towards authoritarianism and a significant return to coalition politics. The election results, a key turning point, revealed a substantial reduction in the parliamentary seats held by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party, *Bhartiya Janata Party* (The Indian Volks Party), which ended up winning just 240 of 543 seats in the Lower House (Lok Sabha) 63 seats less from 2019 general elections. This outcome, which deprived the party of the majority it had sought, was a clear message from the electorate. The Hindu newspaper's editor wrote: "People are, and should be, at the centre of a democracy. The outcome of the 18th general election is an unambiguous reiteration by the people of that tenet."¹ The election results of 2024 signal that political parties in India must adopt a more "conciliatory and less confrontational approach"² when addressing the diverse aspirations of its various communities, groups, and regions. The electoral verdict is also a clear indication that the strategy of communal polarization has proven ineffective, necessitating a profound reorientation by the erstwhile authoritarian party towards the re-emergence of coalition politics. The diversity and plurality intrinsic to Indian democracy are its lifeblood. Hence, this electoral outcome underscores the resilience of India's democratic fabric and the electorate's preference for inclusive governance. The electoral verdict towards coalition politics demands a renewed commitment to accommodating the multifaceted nature of Indian society within the political arena.

Looking at the electoral verdict, many civic activists, political pundits, and minority leaders have understandably breathed a sigh of

¹ The Hindu Editorial, "People at the centre: On the Election results 2024," <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/people-at-the-centre-on-the-2024-verdict/article68251276.ece>, accessed on 06.06.2024.

² The Hindu Editorial, "People at the centre: On the Election results 2024," <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/people-at-the-centre-on-the-2024-verdict/article68251276.ece>, accessed on 06.06.2024.

relief.³ Nevertheless, it would be premature to consider the danger of authoritarianism threatening the secular fabric of Indian society entirely resolved. Despite the return of coalition politics, Prof. Mujibur Rehman, the author of a recently published book *Shikwa-e-Hind: The Political Future of Indian Muslims*, is unsure that the political landscape for the minority would drastically change.⁴ It is imperative to recognize that the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) operates as the political wing of a larger organization, the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS),⁵ established in 1925. The RSS is rooted in *Hindutva*⁶ ideology, advocating for India to be a *Hindu Rashtra*, a state where Hinduism is the official religion, thereby relegating minority communities to a subordinate status. Under the BJP's administration, the RSS has significantly deepened its influence within Indian society, embedding its ideological tenets more profoundly. Despite the BJP's recent electoral setbacks, which have diminished its dominance, the pervasive threat posed by the divisive *Hindutva* ideology persists, posing a substantial risk to the secular fabric of Indian society. Therefore, continuous vigilance and sustained efforts are imperative to address the deep-seated inequities and to foster an inclusive political landscape. At this critical juncture of history, the Indian Church must

³ Surinder Kaur, "Indian Christians Relieved as Election Results Limit Hindu Nationalists," <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2024/june/india-election-results-2024-christians-modi-bjp-prayer.html>, accessed on 08.06.2024.

⁴ Mujibur Rehman, *Shikwa-E Hind: The Political Future of Indian Muslims* (India: Simon & Schuster Press, 2024).

⁵ The *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) is a right-wing, Hindu nationalist organization in India. Founded in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, the RSS promotes the ideology of *Hindutva*, emphasizing Hindu cultural and spiritual unity and Hindu cultural and religious supremacy. Critics argue this ideology marginalizes non-Hindu communities, particularly Muslims and Christians, fostering a divisive and exclusionary environment.

⁶ Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva* (Pune: Swatantryaveer Savarkar Rashtriya Smarak Trust, 1923): The term "*Hindutva*" derives from the Sanskrit word "*Hindu*," and it broadly translates to "*Hinduness*" or the essence of being Hindu. The concept was articulated and popularized by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in his 1923 pamphlet titled "*Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*" Savarkar's formulation of *Hindutva* was not merely religious but cultural and nationalistic. He envisioned it as an ideology to unify and strengthen the Hindu community, distinguishing between cultural Hindus and followers of other religions in India. This notion emphasized the idea of India as a historical and cultural entity primarily shaped by Hindu civilization, advocating for the assertion of Hindu identity and values in the public and political spheres. *Hindutva* ideology has since been adopted and propagated by various organizations, most notably the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS). It has significantly influenced the political landscape in India, particularly through the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP).

reflect on its mission and role in reinforcing the Constitution's values and vision among the citizenry. What is the role of the Church in reaffirming and strengthening the commitment to a democratic and inclusive society where the rights and dignity of all citizens are respected and upheld? Fr. Cedrick Prakash, S.J., Mr. John Dayal, Dr. Sebastian Michael, and Dr. Kham Khan Suan Hausing, prominent Christian thinkers and activists in India, have asserted that the official Church in India, along with the broader Christian community, has predominantly maintained an apolitical stance.⁷ The Indian Church has often been a passive observer, primarily concentrating on self-preservation and protecting its institutions rather than engaging proactively in the socio-political sphere.⁸ In this volatile political context, the article reexamines the role and mission of the Church, presenting compelling arguments for collaboration with the people of goodwill in fostering grassroots political activism and civic participation. Such an engagement, the article argues, is constitutive of the mission of Evangelization. In doing so, the article presents a model drawing upon the principles of Catholic social tradition⁹ and the insights of Amartya Sen.¹⁰

⁷ ISAC Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics, <https://www.isac-research.org/roundtable>, accessed on 06.06.2024.

⁸ ISAC Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics, <https://www.isac-research.org/roundtable>, accessed on 06.06.2024.

⁹ Drawing on Winfried Löffler's distinctions, I define Catholic social tradition as a process of critical reflection by individuals, theologians, and institutions of the Catholic Church on contemporary sociopolitical, economic, and cultural issues from a theological perspective. Often, Catholic social tradition is employed to indicate the well-known social principles of the Catholic Church culled out from the social encyclicals of popes and the Bishop Conferences around the world in the last century; Winfried Löffler, "Soziale Gerechtigkeit Wurzeln und Gegenwart eines Konzepts in der Christlichen Soziallehre," in *Gerechtigkeit im politischen Diskurs der Gegenwart*, ed. Peter Koller (Wien: Passagen Verlag, 2001): 28-65.

¹⁰ Amartya Sen is an Indian economist and moral philosopher who has worked and taught in many major universities across the globe. His contributions to welfare economics, social choice theory, and research on poverty, famine, and developmental economics have been significant. He was awarded the 1998 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences for contributing to welfare economics. He was awarded *Bharat Ratna*, the highest civilian award in India. In 2020, the German Publishers and Booksellers Association awarded him the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade for contributing to global justice issues. Sen is keenly interested in practical issues like famine, poverty, development, equality, and justice. By combining philosophy and economics, he has strived hard to restore the ethical dimension of discussing contemporary economic, social, and political problems. Moreover, he has played a central role in creating the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI).

The article proceeds in the following steps. It examines political participation as a Christian response to the rise of authoritarianism, drawing on the insights of Amartya Sen and Catholic social tradition. Firstly, it explores the concept of democracy as public reasoning within Amartya Sen's theoretical framework, which advocates for citizens to engage in rational dialogue on critical issues affecting them and to inform themselves by subjecting their beliefs to critical scrutiny. Secondly, the article delves into the principle of participation in Catholic social tradition, which emphasizes active engagement in socio-political and cultural processes to contribute to the common good. Thirdly, synthesizing these insights, the article proposes concrete ways the Catholic Church can build social trust and strengthen the secular fabric of Indian society. Such political participation is posited as an integral mission of evangelization. By engaging in public reasoning and fostering participatory democracy, Christians can help ensure that the values of plurality, diversity, and tolerance are upheld, thereby reinforcing the democratic and secular principles that underpin Indian society. The article argues that such engagement is a critical contribution of the Church in countering the rise of authoritarianism and aggressive nationalism, thereby safeguarding the secular fabric of Indian society. This engagement is integral to the mission of evangelization in India.

Democracy as Public Reasoning

In his seminal work, *The Idea of Justice*, Amartya Sen elucidates the intricate relationship between justice and democracy, positing democracy as a form of "public reasoning" and "government by discussion."¹¹ To fully grasp Sen's conception of democracy, one must first comprehend his nuanced account of justice, distinguishing between two enlightenment traditions in Western thought: the

Alongside Mahbub ul Haq, Sen played a vital role in founding the United Nations Development Report (UNDP).

¹¹ Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, M.A.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 354. Three meta-principles lie at the foundation of Sen's normative framework of justice: integrating informational diversity in the structure of normal evaluation, belief that no single moral system is capable of yielding a complete evaluation of a world that has an irreducible plurality of values and attributes of both individual and of the social state they inhabit, and thirdly the deep commitment to democratic value; S. R Osmani, "The Sen System of Social Evaluation," in *Arguments for a Better World; Essays in Honor of Amartya Sen*, Vol. I: Ethics, Welfare, and Measurement, ed. Kaushik Basu, and Ravi Kanbur (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2009), 31; Lawrence Hamilton, *Amartya Sen* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 122.

transcendental-institutional and realization-focused approaches.¹² The transcendental-institutional approach seeks to identify an ideal theory of justice, subsequently defining the nature of just institutions based on this theoretical framework. Sen contends that this approach currently predominates within political philosophy. In contrast, the realization-focused approach eschews the quest for an ideal theory of justice or the examination of foundational institutions. Instead, it provides practical tools to discern and address actual situations of injustice, emphasizing the outcomes realized by existing social institutions. The primary aim of the realization-focused approach is to mitigate the injustices present in the real world. As Sen articulates, “We need to seek institutions that promote justice, rather than treating the institutions as themselves manifestations of justice.”¹³

Sen critiques the transcendental-institutional approach, rooted in social contract theory, for its failure to achieve the fundamental objective of any ideal theory of justice: the creation of tools to facilitate greater social justice in practical terms. His critique implies that having an overarching conception of justice is neither necessary nor sufficient for formulating comparative judgments regarding social justice. This argument is often referred to as the redundancy claim.¹⁴ Consequently, Sen advocates for a paradigm shift in the theorization of justice, favoring the comparative tradition based on social choice theory. This tradition is concerned with ranking social states and selecting a more effective framework for reflecting on social justice issues. Sen promotes a more pragmatic and outcome-oriented approach to justice through this lens, aligning with his broader vision of democracy as an ongoing process of public reasoning and deliberative discussion.

Justice and Democracy

This raises the issue of the relationship between democracy and the two Enlightenment theories of justice: the transcendental-institutional and realization-focused approaches. According to Amartya Sen, there

¹² Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 82; Sen characterizes the mainstream theories of justice as transcendent institutionalism, which suggests two salient features of such a way of theorizing: transcendence and institutions. According to Sen, transcendentalism entails searching for a unique set of characteristics of a perfectly just society that would be universally acceptable. The Institutional dimension refers to defining a perfect society in terms of a group of just institutions; S. R Osmani, “Theory of Justice for an Imperfect World: Exploring Amartya Sen’s Idea of Justice,” *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 11, no. 4 (November 2010): 599-607.

¹³ Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 82.

¹⁴ Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 15.

are at least two distinct conceptions of democracy: institutional and procedural.¹⁵ The institutional view of democracy is primarily characterized by the mechanisms of elections and ballots.¹⁶ In contrast, the procedural view perceives democracy as grounded in decisions based on public reasoning, integrating participatory discussions with public decision-making.¹⁷ For Sen, democracy transcends the mere existence of representative governmental institutions, ballots, elections, and the rule of law within states, as well as global institutions (*Niti*).¹⁸ Instead, democracy fundamentally involves the active participation of citizens in public reasoning, discussions, and deliberations aimed at determining the common good (*Nyaya*).¹⁹ This emphasis on participatory processes underscores a more dynamic and inclusive understanding of democracy, aligning with Sen's broader critique of the transcendental-institutional approach and his advocacy for a realization-focused perspective on justice.

Advocating for democracy as public reasoning, Amartya Sen draws significantly from John Rawls's concept of public reason and Jürgen Habermas's notion of the public sphere. Sen frequently references Rawls's assertion that "the definitive idea of deliberative democracy is the idea of deliberation itself. When citizens deliberate, they exchange views and debate their supporting reasons concerning public political questions."²⁰ He also highlights Habermas's extensive scope of reasoning, particularly the coexistence in political discourse of both moral questions of justice and instrumental questions of power and coercion.²¹ Understanding democracy as public reasoning carries important implications for political participation, dialogue, and public interactions. For Sen, the central role of public reasoning in democratic practice closely aligns democracy with the pursuit of justice. In Sen's view, justice is evaluated through the lens of public reasoning, establishing an intrinsic link between democracy and justice. Thus,

¹⁵ Amartya Sen, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare* (UK: Penguin Books, 2017), 395.

¹⁶ Sen, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*, 395.

¹⁷ Sen, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*, 396.

¹⁸ The duality between the transcendental-institutional and realization-focused approaches is also present in the Indian tradition of jurisprudence. Sen's unmatched manoeuvrability in shuttling between civilizations makes the argument all the more delightful. Both *Niti* and *Nyaya*, as Sen says, mean justice in Sanskrit. But there is a difference: *Niti* stands for institutional propriety and behavioral correction, and *Nyaya* signifies realized justice.

¹⁹ Lawrence Hamilton, *Amartya Sen* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 122.

²⁰ Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 324.

²¹ Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 325.

public reasoning is not only a fundamental component of democracy but also essential to assessing and realizing justice. This underscores the intimate relationship between democratic processes and the principles of justice.

In contrast to this nuanced understanding of democracy, Sen critiques the political institutionalists' perspective, which confines democracy to the mechanics of ballots and elections.²² He labels this as the public ballot perspective. Such a viewpoint reduces democracy to the act of voting and the rule of the majority. Such an interpretation has been compellingly articulated by organizational theorists like Samuel Huntington. In *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Huntington asserts that "elections, open, free, and fair, are the essence of democracy, the inescapable sine qua non."²³ However, this interpretation is far from a comprehensive understanding of democracy. It places undue emphasis on electoral outcomes, disregarding the quality of public discourse that precedes the ballots and the nature of political engagement that follows. This limited view overlooks the importance of informed and deliberative public reasoning as fundamental to the democratic process.²⁴

As an alternative, Amartya Sen forwards a procedural view of democracy, which conceives democracy as predicated on public reasoning and governance through deliberation. The term government by discussion originates in Walter Bagehot's work and gained prominence through the writings of Adam Smith. Sen underscores the significance of dialogue and deliberation, anchoring his conception of democracy on two foundational postulates: Firstly, Sen posits that human beings possess the capacity for communication, wherein deliberative processes, dialogue, and reasoned discourse serve as the collective means of inquiry leading to decisions made in earnest pursuit of the common good within a community. Secondly, he contends that it is feasible to discern the requisites of rational decision-making for a society provided all members enjoy the liberty to participate, directly or indirectly, in the decision-making process, thereby safeguarding their entitlement to voice, influence, and rights. Sen asserts that without this apparatus of public reasoning, reliance solely on public ballots, voting procedures, and the institution of

²² Sen, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*, 395.

²³ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 9.

²⁴ Sen, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*, 396.

representative government proves inadequate. He says, "Indeed, the efficacy of balloting procedures hinges critically upon the accompanying factors, such as free expression, access to information, and the freedom to dissent. Balloting, in isolation, is inherently insufficient..."²⁵ This underscores Sen's conviction regarding the indispensable role of reasoned discourse and participatory engagement in sustaining the democratic process.

The Concrete Realization of Democracy

The realization of democracy as public reasoning in society manifests concretely through various mechanisms, with one central feature being preserving freedom of the press and the right to freedom of speech. These freedoms are pivotal in promoting democracy as public reasoning and governance by discussion, facilitating unimpeded communication, critical inquiry, ensuring human security, and fostering value formation.²⁶ Moreover, a free and robust press is a crucial conduit for enabling public reasoning in general. As Sen contends, "Evaluation needed for the assessment of justice is not just a solitary exercise but one that is inescapably discursive."²⁷ Hence, Sen's conception of justice and democracy is inherently intersubjective and interrelated. Unrestricted communication among individuals within a democratic society is an indispensable component of democracy and justice. The unfettered media assumes a central role in actualizing choices and processes, thus illustrating the inseparable link between democracy and justice in Sen's framework. Sen underscores the profound interconnection between the pursuit of democracy and justice, positing democracy, conceived as public reasoning, as an essential prerequisite for justice. Absent such discourse, as Sen suggests, the notion of "discussionless justice"²⁸ risks confining and stifling societal progress.

Amartya Sen's perspective on democracy carries profound implications across social, economic, and political realms within democratic societies. Sen has persuasively argued that in democracies characterized by regular elections, opposition parties, and free media, significant famines have been notably absent. This assertion underscores the pivotal role of periodic elections and a free press in

²⁵ Sen, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*, 327.

²⁶ Hamilton, *Amartya Sen*, 128.

²⁷ Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 337.

²⁸ Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 337.

mitigating the risk of famine within democratic contexts.²⁹ Open parliamentary discourse, critical dissent, opposition parties, and a free press are instrumental factors in averting major famines in numerous functioning democracies. A free and independent press, in particular, serves as a vital conduit for accurately disseminating information, shaping public opinion, and informing the decision-making process.

Amartya Sen's conceptualization of democracy as public reasoning is intricately linked to three pivotal imperatives: development, human security, and minority rights. Throughout his work, development emerges as a central concern intimately intertwined with the democratic ethos. Sen vehemently rebuffs the notion that remarkable economic progress can be achieved divorced from the foundational requisites of democratic governance. He emphasizes that "the assessment of development cannot be divorced from the lives that people can lead and the real freedoms that people enjoy."³⁰ Sen advocates for the capability approach as a viable framework to operationalize this holistic vision of development. Within this paradigm, traditional economic metrics such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP), along with industrialization, are not viewed as ultimate ends but rather as means to enhance the substantive freedoms of all members of society to lead lives they value. Consequently, when understood through this lens, development entails a constitutive relationship between democracy and development, necessitating the recognition of political liberty and democratic rights as integral components of development.³¹ Furthermore, Sen underscores the significance of economic growth in buttressing democracy, as it furnishes opportunities to foster a more equitable distribution of economic progress. In essence, Sen's scholarship delineates how democracy, conceived as public reasoning, engenders a symbiotic relationship with development, wherein the realization of democratic principles augments the pursuit of comprehensive human flourishing and social equity.

Democracy is intrinsically intertwined with human security, serving as a vehicle for amplifying the voices of society's marginalized and vulnerable segments. Drawing upon examples from India, Indonesia, and South Korea, Sen elucidates this nexus by stating, "Democracy allows the opposition to press for policy change even

²⁹ Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 342.

³⁰ Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 346.

³¹ Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 346.

when the problem is chronic and has had a long history, rather than being acute and sudden, as in the case of famines.”³² Moreover, Sen contends that democracy, conceived as public reasoning, offers a solution to the persistent challenge of balancing majority rule with minority rights. He posits that democracy as public reasoning fosters the cultivation of tolerant values vital for the effective functioning of democracy at large, thereby mitigating the risk of majority tyranny and safeguarding minority interests. In essence, Sen’s scholarship underscores how democracy, with its emphasis on public reasoning, not only enhances human security by providing avenues for addressing chronic issues but also serves as a bulwark against the erosion of minority rights within democratic frameworks.

The Principle of Participation in Catholic Social Teaching

Democratic participation is a fundamental principle in the Catholic Social Tradition. *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* articulates participation as “a series of activities using which the citizens, either as an individual or in association with others, whether directly or through representation, contribute to the cultural, economic, political and social life of the civil community to which he [she] belongs. Participation is a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility and with a view to the common good.”³³ According to Catholic social tradition, participation fosters integral human development, particularly in social and political spheres. By this implication, it becomes the cornerstone of democratic order. Pope John Paul II emphasized this aspect by asserting democracy as participative, which involves the free and responsible exercise of one’s civic role in collaboration with others.³⁴ Pope Francis, in *Fratelli tutti*, insisted that the Church, while respecting political autonomy, participates in public life to build a better world and reawaken spiritual energy for societal improvement. Religious ministers should avoid party politics but must engage with the political dimension of life, focusing on the common good and human development. Beyond charitable and educational

³² Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 349.

³³ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of The Social Doctrine of The Church* (London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2005), 96.

³⁴ John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, § 46. Encyclical. May 1, 1991. Vatican Website. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html, accessed on 09.03.2024.

roles, the Church seeks to advance humanity and universal fraternity.³⁵ Jürgen Motlmann argued that liberation is a constitutive dimension of evangelization. “The Church is an evangelizing and a liberating community. If it’s not, it is not Christ’s Church- nor indeed a Church at all.”³⁶ The call to discipleship as a person and a community inherently implies a “responsibility for reality.”³⁷ Drawing on these insights, the Indian Theologian Felix Wilfred draws direct political implications of faith. “The Church is challenged to give a political expression to its faith. Politics and faith are not opposed to each other.”³⁸ Pope Francis and the aforementioned theologians conceptualize political participation as extending beyond party politics. It implies that the Indian Church, as a civil community, is responsible for informing its members about pressing issues and actively listening to their aspirations. Within this framework, democratic and political participation is not merely a right but a duty that must be conscientiously and responsibly exercised by citizens. This duty is always directed towards the pursuit of the common good, emphasizing the Church’s role in fostering an informed and engaged populace.

The active engagement is essential for the flourishing of a truly democratic society, ensuring that the voices of all members are heard and considered in the decision-making processes. The imperative for the Church and its adherents to foster democratic and political engagement transcends mere advocacy for rights and secular values. Rather, it derives from a profound theological underpinning rooted in the concept of the Trinity. Central to this understanding is the theological notion of God’s active participation in human existence, notably through the doctrine of the Incarnation.

The Theological and Philosophical Foundation of Participation

The principle of participation in the Catholic social tradition is deeply rooted in New Testament theology, particularly through the

³⁵ Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, § 276. Encyclical. October 3, 2020. Vatican Website. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html, accessed on 07.06.2024.

³⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today’s World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 28.

³⁷ Jon Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (New York: Orbis Book, 2008), 2.

³⁸ Felix Wilfred, “Liberation in India and the Church’s Participation” in *Leave the Temple: Indian Paths to Human Liberation*, edited by Felix Wilfred (WIPF & STOCK, 2009): 175-197, here 189.

concept of *koinonia*, or communion. This term, fundamental to ecclesiology, reflects the essence of the Holy Trinity—an eternal exchange of divine life among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Through the Incarnation, Jesus invites humanity into this divine *koinonia*, allowing us to share in the divine life. The Eucharist symbolizes this participation, emphasizing our transformation into the body of Christ as outlined in 1 Corinthians 10:17-21. Roland Minnerath has explored the participation and Eucharist. Drawing on the insights of Roland Minnerath, participation can be viewed as a divine commission for humans to engage in salvific history alongside God, marking the fulfillment of our existence and ultimate purpose.³⁹ It begins with the reception of sacraments and a life dedicated to charity and justice, highlighting our spiritual nature. This participation is a gracious gift open to all, contingent on individual freedom to accept or reject it. Understanding participation through the lens of *koinonia* means recognizing it as accepting a vital gift essential for being part of a community.⁴⁰ It underscores the role of personal commitment and communal integration, reflecting the communal nature of divine life and our part within it.

Philosophically, participation embodies the essence of human existence within a community. A person flourishes by engaging in communal life, exercising human freedom towards moral and higher spiritual law. A human being is not merely an individual of rational nature but a free agent, simultaneously the subject and object of deliberate action. Pope John Paul II, adapting Kant's categorical imperative to the Gospel, asserts, "Whenever a person is the object of your activity, remember that you may not treat that person as only the means to an end, as an instrument, but also allow for the fact that he or she too has or at least should have distinct personal ends. This principle, thus formulated, lies at the basis of all the human freedoms."⁴¹ This underscores that human freedom encompasses self-determination, self-possession, self-consciousness, and self-actualization, which are intrinsically linked to human dignity. Human

³⁹ Roland Minnerath, "The Human Right to Full Participation in Society," in *Towards a Participatory Society: New Roads to Social and Cultural Integration* ed. P. Donati (Vatican City: The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2017): 49-59.

⁴⁰ Roland Minnerath, "The Human Right to Full Participation in Society," in *Towards a Participatory Society: New Roads to Social and Cultural Integration*, 49-59.

⁴¹ Meghan, Clark, "Integrating Human Rights: Participation in John Paul II, Catholic Social Thought and Amartya Sen," In *Political Theology* 8, no. 3 (2007): 299.

freedom allows individuals to coexist and act within a community, engaging in collective activities while maintaining independence. The capacities for self-determination, self-actualization, and self-consciousness highlight the dual role of the human person as both subject and object, affirming the reality of the “self.”⁴² Thus, participation transcends mere public discussion and deliberation. Human beings are interrelated, and engaging in public discourse represents just one dimension of this interrelatedness.

Democracy as Public Reasoning and the Principle of Participation

The insights of Amartya Sen and Catholic social tradition present compelling arguments for fostering political participation, i.e., representational politics and grassroots political activism. Within the framework of Catholic social tradition, such an engagement is the integral mission of evangelization. In addition, both theoretical frameworks assign human agency a central role and present a positive anthropology that considers human beings rational and endowed with substantive freedom and inherent dignity capable of influencing the world by bringing about transformative changes. In his writings, Sen often stressed that people should not be seen as passive beneficiaries of social welfare institutions but “seen as being actively involved in shaping their destiny.”⁴³ In a similar line of thinking, Paul VI, in *Populorum progressio* writes: “Man is truly human only if he is the master of his own action and the judge of theirs, only if he is the architect of his own progress. He must act according to his God-given nature, freely accepting its potential and claims upon him.”⁴⁴ In both theoretical frameworks, persons are not just interested in maximizing their self-interests. In rational choices, a human does not always consider maximizing one’s utility. In other words, people are not only interested in maximizing their self-interests and utility. They are capable of caring and acting for other-regarding goals. They can take responsibility for their actions and lives. They can also live good lives cooperating with others and caring for nature, i.e., well-being and agency freedom.

⁴² Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H.T. Willets (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981), 22.

⁴³ Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 18.

⁴⁴ Paul VI, *Populorum progressio*, § 34. Encyclical. March 26, 1967. Vatican Website. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html, accessed on 14.05.2024.

Moreover, empowering the agency of the poor, the marginalized, and the weak is a special concern of Catholic social tradition. *Sollicitudo rei socialis* expressed “the option or love of preference for the poor.”⁴⁵ The poor are not considered objects of charity but the subjects of their destiny. According to the principle of subsidiarity, the responsibility for one’s development lies at many different levels, but it certainly lies with the individuals, families, and other subsidiary groups. For Sen, a person must be seen as a doer and a judge, not a mere beneficiary of some welfare schemes. An agent is “someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms one’s own values and objectives.”⁴⁶

In addition to recognizing individual moral agency, both theoretical frameworks emphasize the social collectives⁴⁷ in realizing certain social conditions that enable human flourishing. In Catholic social tradition, the principle of subsidiarity demands that the large institutions don’t overwhelm and interfere with the functioning of smaller and local collectives such as families, local schools, parishes, cultural clubs, and church communities. For Sen, Justice is advanced when diverse individuals and groups can contribute their views and arguments to reach a consensus. It is “not just the government but also the public itself in all its manifold economic, social and political activities” that are involved in public reasoning.⁴⁸ Sen writes: “When we try to determine how justice can be advanced, there is a basic need for public reasoning, involving arguments coming from different quarters and divergent perspectives.”⁴⁹ Of course, such openness to diverse views, opinions, and arguments is hard to achieve in a pluralistic context. However, this should not lead to skepticism about the effectiveness and validity of grassroots political activism and participation.

Political Participation and the Indian Church

The Indian Church in post-independent India has faced significant challenges in successfully promoting political participation. Several

⁴⁵ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, § 42. Encyclical. December 30, 1987. Vatican Website. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html, accessed on 13.04.2024.

⁴⁶ Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 18.

⁴⁷ James F. Keenan SJ, “Recognizing Collectives as Moral Agents,” *Theological Studies* 85, no.1 (2024): 96-123.

⁴⁸ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen. *An Uncertain Glory India and Its Contradictions* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), 356.

⁴⁹ Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 392.

factors have contributed to this lack of success. Professor Rowena Robinson provides a meticulous historical account detailing the Christian community's deliberate abstention from representation in the legislature.⁵⁰ This stance is corroborated by Gnana Patrick, who illustrates how Indian Christians, post-independence, prioritized minority rights over direct representation in the parliament. Their emphasis lay on securing religio-cultural freedoms rather than pursuing legislative representation.⁵¹ Moreover, Christians and Muslims, as minorities, rely on the goodwill of regional and national parties to voice their concerns in parliament. Professor Mujibur Rehman critiques this arrangement as a form of minority colonization, likening it to taxation without representation.

Lack of Political Representation and Grassroot Political Activism

Christian leaders and analysts⁵² highlight the community's political invisibility despite numbering over 22 million. The Muslim minority has a representation of 4.24% in the Indian parliament. But 2.5% Indian Christian population often remains unheard of and unaddressed, primarily due to their representation falling below 1%.⁵³ Historically, the political parties have provided only minimal representation to Muslims and Christians. In the previous Lok Sabha, the BJP party had a single Christian Member of Parliament, John Barla from Bengal, who was appointed as a deputy minister for minority affairs. Throughout the five-year term of the last parliament, the Modi government did not include any Christian or Muslim cabinet ministers. This is an evident political marginalization of minorities and a systemic exclusion. The Christian community in India is responsible, to some extent, for contributing to such political marginalization. In John Dayal's view,

⁵⁰ Rowina Robinson, "Minority Rights Versus Caste Claims: Indian Christians and Predicaments of Law," *Economic & Political Weekly*, 49, 14 (2014): 82-91; Dhinakaran, Savariyar, "Hindu Nationalism and Indian Christian Response!" *The Journal of Social Encounters* Vol. 6 no. 1, (2022): 17-31 here 24.

⁵¹ Gnana Patrick, *Public Theology: Indian Concerns, Perspectives, and Themes* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020), 48; Dhinakaran, Savariyar, "Hindu Nationalism and Indian Christian Response!" 24.

⁵² John Dayal, "Despite Rising Persecution, Indian Christians Remain Invisible in Electoral Landscape," https://thewire.in/rights/despite-rising-persecution-indian-christians-remain-invisible-in-electoral-landscape/?mid_related_new, accessed on 08.06.2024.

⁵³ Sheikh Saaliq and Krutika Pathi, "India's parliament has fewer Muslims as strength of Modi's party grows," <https://apnews.com/article/india-general-elections-muslims-modi-c01281195f71a4c8b4bd53146695a0e5>, accessed on 08.06.2024; Dhinakaran, Savariyar, "Hindu Nationalism and Indian Christian Response!" 24.

over the decades, the youth in both rural and urban areas and universities have shown less enthusiasm for grassroots politics, trade unions, and advocacy groups compared to other communities.⁵⁴ Many have prioritized early employment, with nursing being a popular career choice due to its promise of immediate jobs and opportunities abroad.

Among the West Coast Christians in Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Bombay, and Gujarat, many middle-class and working-class youth have migrated to the Middle East and Western countries for employment, ranging from engineering to construction labor. This exodus has diminished their political influence, though their remittances support their families and the state economy. The Church, despite possessing influential premier education institutions and hospitals, has not fostered broad grassroots political engagement. Nationally, the Christian population is dispersed across former mission stations, railway, and military hubs in the Indo-Gangetic plains, the Deccan plateau, and old port cities. Despite pockets of Christian influence in places like Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, this does not translate into significant parliamentary representation.⁵⁵ The community's lack of grassroots political activism and training has hindered young people from attaining higher political positions. Historically, the Church hierarchy has focused on securing political seats through relationships with the Congress and other regional parties rather than fostering grassroots political involvement. Recently, there have been efforts to help youth pass government exams for civil and police services, but these initiatives have been sporadic and not particularly successful. The Church leadership has also sent mixed signals, with some segments, especially in Kerala, showing a tendency to align with the BJP, similar to their historical alignment with the Congress. A few leaders, such as Archbishop Peter Machado of Bangalore and Filipe Neri Cardinal Ferrao of Goa, have stood against the BJP's policies. Cardinal Ferrao, for instance, has publicly

⁵⁴ John Dayal, "Despite Rising Persecution, Indian Christians Remain Invisible in Electoral Landscape," https://thewire.in/rights/despite-rising-persecution-indian-christians-remain-invisible-in-electoral-landscape/?mid_related_new, accessed on 08.06.2024.

⁵⁵ John Dayal, "Despite Rising Persecution, Indian Christians Remain Invisible in Electoral Landscape," https://thewire.in/rights/despite-rising-persecution-indian-christians-remain-invisible-in-electoral-landscape/?mid_related_new, accessed on 08.06.2024.

opposed government policies.⁵⁶ These efforts remain insignificant and insufficient.

Recent years have seen increased stress on religious minorities due to changes in the political and demographic landscape. Anti-conversion laws in twelve states are frequently used to harass Christians, and there is a fear of these laws being adopted nationwide. Christians, particularly tribal groups, face violence and threats from BJP-affiliated groups. In Manipur, the Kuki-Zo ethnic group has experienced severe violence, including the destruction of over 320 churches. Christian NGOs are often labeled as agents of religious conversion and have faced license cancellations. The BJP's electoral strategy emphasizes religious themes over development achievements, demonstrating a majoritarian bias. In this context, fostering political activism and securing political representation is integral to the Church's mission and evangelization. The Church needs to regain its voice in the nation. The custodial death of 83-year-old Jesuit tribal activist Fr. Stan Swamy presents a compelling argument for such a need. Despite appeals to authorities, Christians were unable to ensure his humane treatment in prison or secure his release, even though his needs were minimal, such as a sipper for drinking.⁵⁷ His death highlights the significant lack of political agency among Indian Christians, reminding them that achieving effective political influence remains a distant aspiration.

Concrete Steps for Grassroots Political and Civic Participation

In pursuit of its mission, the Church must collaborate with people of goodwill within the nation, leveraging existing initiatives led by civil society leaders to address socio-political challenges. By networking with civic organizations, the Church can significantly amplify its impact and influence. A strategic step for the Church would be to establish a think tank. Such an institution would consolidate the Church's intellectual resources and promote a coherent and proactive engagement with the broader socio-political landscape. This collaboration would enable the Church to articulate its positions more effectively and contribute meaningfully to the common good. A pertinent model for this collaborative effort can be observed in the civic

⁵⁶ John Dayal, "Despite Rising Persecution, Indian Christians Remain Invisible in Electoral Landscape," https://thewire.in/rights/despite-rising-persecution-indian-christians-remain-invisible-in-electoral-landscape/?mid_related_new, accessed on 08.06.2024.

⁵⁷ Dhinakaran Savariyar, "Hindu Nationalism and Indian Christian Response!," 26.

movement in Karnataka. This movement exemplifies how the Church can work synergistically with other entities to foster grassroots political activism and engagement among its members. By emulating this model, the Church can enhance its role in shaping socio-political discourse and advancing collective well-being.

In the 2018 Karnataka elections, the BJP did not achieve the required majority to form the government. However, through “Operation Kamala,” the party used financial incentives to poach Members of the Legislative Assembly from other parties. Once in power, the BJP focused on communal polarization, promoting aggressive nationalism, and tolerating corruption. The party passed controversial bills, such as the anti-cow slaughter and anti-conversion bills, which harassed minorities, especially Muslims and Christians. Incidents of vandalism against Muslim and Christian places of worship increased, and Muslim girls faced restrictions on wearing hijabs in schools, leading many to stop attending classes. Hindu fringe groups called for boycotts of Muslim traders. Media reports uncovered scams involving government officials receiving 40 percent commissions as bribes for developmental project approvals. The BJP used hate speeches to distract from pressing issues like healthcare, education, employment, good governance, ecological concerns, farmer issues, poverty reduction, inflation, and privatization.

In response, public intellectuals, activists, and progressive organizations, including the Christian organizations and the Jesuits of the Society of Jesus, initiated the *Eddelu Karnataka* (Wake-up Karnataka) movement. This coalition of approximately one hundred organizations mobilized volunteers to address key issues and registered 160,000 new voters. They focused on 70 constituencies where the nationalist party had previously won by narrow margins. Volunteers organized workshops and conducted outreach, engaging 200,000 people, including farmers, laborers, Dalits, women, students, tribal communities, and minority groups. The movement avoided divisive language, emphasizing the dangers of ultra-religious nationalism and advocating for pluralism and democracy.

Eddelu Karnataka exemplifies how civil society can resist manipulative and divisive political ideologies, fostering grassroots political and civic participation. As traditional pillars of democracy and the media succumb to fascist forces, civil society, often called the Fifth Estate, empowers individuals to reclaim control of the constitutional system and safeguard democratic principles. This

movement inspired citizens nationwide to engage in the democratic process, oppose political misconduct, and uphold constitutional values, representing a crucial symbol of defiance against the rise of Hindutva nationalism.

Further, Dhinakaran Savariyar examines a noteworthy political experiment in Kerala, India, where nominees supported by the Church succeeded in local body elections in 2015.⁵⁸ Specifically, candidates backed by the Church-affiliated High Range Protection Council secured a significant portion of seats in the Kattapana Municipality of Idukki district, with the Communist Party of Kerala endorsing these candidates. This unanticipated collaboration between the Church and the Communist Party, without explicit solicitation from the former, underscores the potential for broader political engagement and cooperation among diverse groups in Indian society. The experience in Kattapana offers valuable insights for political mobilization across India, particularly among the Christian community. While acknowledging the limitations of extrapolating local successes to national contexts, we could emulate this model within Indian Christianity to advance its political objectives effectively. Moreover, there is a need for concerted efforts by the Church to empower Christian youth in bureaucratic roles, which have been marginalized amid nationalist sentiments. Despite existing challenges in implementation and coordination, the text emphasizes the imperative of collective action to counteract nationalist influences on Christian life and mission in India. By leveraging successful precedents and consolidating efforts, the Church can fulfill its political mission within the broader landscape of Indian democracy.

Conclusion

The 2014 electoral verdict represented a pivotal moment in India's political evolution, marking a decline in authoritarian dominance. However, it did not conclusively address the burgeoning authoritarianism within the nation. This article contended that promoting grassroots political activism and representational politics is not merely a political endeavor but is also integral to the mission of evangelization. Drawing on the insights of Amartya Sen and Catholic social tradition, the article constructs a compelling case for the political engagement of Christians in India. Amartya Sen's conceptualization of

⁵⁸ Dhinakaran Savariyar, "Hindu Nationalism and Indian Christian Response!" *The Journal of Social Encounters* Vol. 6 no. 1, (2022): 17-31, here 24.

democracy as public reasoning emphasizes the importance of citizens engaging in rational dialogue and subjecting their beliefs to critical scrutiny. This article highlights the necessity of informed engagement with socio-political issues. Moreover, the principle of participation within Catholic social tradition advocates for active involvement in socio-political and cultural processes to further the common good. By synthesizing these perspectives, the discourse proposes practical strategies through which the Catholic Church, as a significant societal institution, can play a crucial role in cultivating social trust and strengthening the secular fabric of Indian society by promoting grassroots political activism and representational politics. Ultimately, such political engagement is framed as an intrinsic component of the mission of evangelization, underscoring the broader significance of integrating socio-political participation with the Church's evangelical objectives.