

NATIONAL INTEGRATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

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1. Introduction

Anyone having a sense of belongingness to a nation has to hold fast to the ideal of national integration. For, there will be no progress in any realm of the nation without the unity of its citizens and of all its constitutive elements and structures. Disintegration means disunity, and disunity means moving towards degeneration, decomposition, and destruction.

This article deals with a few aspects of Indian national integration in the light of the fundamental principles of liberation theology, which is synonymous with the theology of liberation.¹

2. Meaning, Implications and Nuances of Integration

2.1. Integration in General

To integrate means all the following: to make a whole out of parts; to join the separated parts into the already existing body; make the parts functional by assembling them into a unit; to restore the functional unity of the disintegrated parts; to bring together a variety of persons or groups as a viable large group; to bring the distant or separated individuals into a social group to make them part of the whole group; to enable the scattered individuals to join the life of the community; to incorporate the estranged or abandoned or neglected individuals into the mainstream of the society. Integration means, therefore, functional unity in all realms of the nation – social, political, cultural, religious, linguistic, territorial, etc. It means also gender integration – harmony between men and women – and also coordination between urban and rural citizens.

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¹It is not within the purview of this study to mention all authors and books on Liberation Theology, as our primary interest is liberation in relation to integration.

2.2. Relevance of the Biblical Model

Since this article is written from Christian theological point of view, it is not out of place to mention at the very outset the biblical model of integration.

Biblically, national integration means national communion. There was *perfect caring, sharing and mutual bearing* in the early Christian Community:

Now *the whole group* of those who believed *was of one heart and soul*, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses, sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet and it was *distributed to each as they had need* (Acts 4:32-36).

It seems appropriate to corroborate this passage with another one: "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:44-45).

What is remarkable in the quoted passages is that *the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is perfect communion of his disciples, a communion-based community wherein all members and all dimensions of the community are perfectly integrated.* In other words, *where there is integration, there lives the risen Jesus.* This implies also that the primary mission, commission, and obligation of all Jesuans (disciples of Jesus) is creation of universal communion – in our context creation of national communion. A close look at the communion of the early community will make it clear that it was based on the principles of genuine liberty, equality, and fraternity, which, centuries later, became the slogans and ideals of the French Revolution, in spite of its aberrations and inner contradictions. Genuine integration cannot be subject-object or active-passive relationship. Integration can mean only mutual integration on the basis of freedom, because the members of a nation are human persons having the same dignity and respectability as persons and citizens. It is possible that the rich integrate the poor into their economy just for utility purpose. The high caste people may accept the low caste out of necessity and solely for exploitation of their labour potential. This kind of integration does not imply mutual acceptance, respect and appreciation. Therefore, *integration should result in an 'association', which accepts*

others as socii (fellows or friends). Love-motivated association is the best form of integration.

Equality and dignity of persons does not exclude dissimilarity on the social level. The Arian division of society into four groups, on the basis of natural talents, was a practical and justifiable setup taking into account the natural or genetic dissimilarity of human persons. We could even say that it was a beautiful setup according to the Augustinian definition of beauty: “*parium dispariumque apta dispositio*” – suitable setting together of similar and dissimilar parts. A human endowed with muscle-power alone is not fit for study and teaching and one who is intelligent but physically frail and fragile cannot wield weapons. That is to say, equality does not even indicate Procrustean equality, i.e., seeking to enforce physical uniformity by forceful methods. There will always be social and economic differences in any society. The important point is that just needs of all are met, exactly as in the primitive Christian community. Their resources were not distributed equally but according to the need of each and every one.

For a Jesuan (disciple of Jesus), national integration is nothing but national fellowship, though it sounds too idealistic, or even fanciful and utopian. It is Jesus’ boundless love that enabled him to have fellowship with people of all social classes, the rich and the poor, men and women, Jews and Gentiles, the noble and the outcaste, the moral and the immoral, Pharisees, prostitutes, and tax-collectors. He criticized the Pharisees mercilessly for their legalism, formalism and ritualism; at the same time, he had no hesitation to be their guest.

2.3. National Integration and Hindutvaism

In the process of Indian national integration, one should proceed with extreme caution against the religious nationalism of Hindu fundamentalist groups, like RSS, VHP, Bajrangdal and the Ramanism of the BJP, as they create the impression that national integration is unachievable unless Hinduism is permitted to devour all other cultures and religions in India. This religio-national chauvinism should be fought against, because it overlooks or neglects or connives at the complexity of Indian culture. “Hindutva religious nationalism is not capable of responding to the quest for equality and justice on the part of the identities – the marginal and the regional.”² The mistake of Hindutvaism is that it binds the Indian nation

²Felix Wilfred, *Asian Dream and Christian Hope: At the Dawn of the Millennium*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2000, 215.

with Hindu religion. It denies the bare truth that religion by its nature is beyond all territories. “Nation is essentially bound to a particular territory, whereas a religion can be professed in different nations. Further, the state is co-related to the concept of citizenship which is different from nationality. State and nation need not be coterminous.”³ India is not a nation or state with a single religion. It is a civilization with a variety of religions. “A civilization encompasses many and divergent cultures, traditions and religions, and it goes beyond the relationship of individual citizens to the nation-state as in the case of modern state-formation in the West. The concrete reality of the Indian nation-state should reflect the reality of India as a civilisational entity.”⁴ Hinduization of India will always remain a utopia, because it is not ready to accept the complexity of Indian situation.

2.4. The Inadequacy of LPG

The capitalist agenda of liberalization, privatization, and globalization does not have much to do with genuine Indian national integration. The main reason is that there exists the danger of creating a suitable atmosphere for the big fishes to swallow the small ones. What is urgent in the present Indian context is humanization, i.e., improving the Indian situation in a way which makes it conducive to the welfare of the whole people, especially of the weaker sections: the poor, the illiterate, the oppressed, the down-trodden, the untouchables, and the marginalized or peripheralized. It means utilizing Indian legislature, executive, and judiciary for ensuring the equality and dignity of all Indians and the just distribution of Indian resources.

Felix Wilfred is quite right when he pinpoints two evil consequences of liberalization and globalization, namely ‘amnesia of the poor’ and ‘eclipse of social consequences’. What he means by the first is the forgetfulness of the poor and the oppressed and their exclusion at all levels.

In the feudal system the slaves were ill-treated, but they knew that they were wanted; in the traditional caste-organization, the outcastes were discriminated against, but they knew that they were wanted. For, without them and their toil the society could not function. But, today, the worst thing happening with globalization is that the poor

³Wilfred, *Asian Dream and Christian Hope*, 216.

⁴Wilfred, *Asian Dream and Christian Hope*, 217.

are told in many words that they are not wanted, that they are a burden, and that they are simply redundant. The whole atmosphere seems to be charged with the spirit of eugenics and philosophy of the survival of the fittest. The concrete way of expressing it is to exclude the poor from every sphere. Exclusion is writ large at the very core of globalization and economic liberalization.⁵

What is meant by “progressive eclipse of social consciousness and responsibility” is the disregard for the poor and the marginalized in the national economic planning.” This anaesthetising of social consciousness and responsibility is the worst thing that has happened. For, “it strikes at the very root of our capacity to envision a different order of things and a different kind of society.”⁶ National integration should not mean feeding the rich to make them richer and the richest as fast as possible. It has to primarily mean empowering the weaker sections of the society to stand on their heels in association with the stronger sections. According to Amartya Sen, if anybody wants to strengthen a chain, he/she should strengthen the weaker links first. If the already strong links are further strengthened the chain will break

3. India’s Disintegration in the Words of Prophet Ezekiel

Needless to say, the people of India are not so scattered or divided as the People of Israel described by Prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 37:1-14). But his description of its disintegration can be adopted and adapted to throw some light upon various aspects of disunity and lack of coordination and subordination among the Indian people.

Look at the Indian “bones”: Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jain bones; Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya, Sudra and so many such caste-bones; the tribal bones; the Dalit bones; linguistic bones like Aryan and Dravidian; territorial bones in the form of states; political bones in the form of ego-centric parties; cultural bones; economic bones in the form of the rich and the poor; gender-bones as men and women! Who “will cause” a unifying “breath to enter” them? Who will join together the “two sticks” South and North India?

⁵Wilfred, *Asian Dream and Christian Hope*, 47-48.

⁶Wilfred, *Asian Dream and Christian Hope*, 47-48.

4. Applicable Insights from the Liberation Theology

Many aspects of the theology of liberation can be made use of for the realization of India's national integration. A few important ones are mentioned below.

4.1. Comprehensive Approach

Liberation theology, which is a praxis-bound systematic reflection on the society which neglects the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized and search for possible solutions of their problems in the light of Jesuan vision, Exodus event, prophetic teaching, etc., aims at the all-round liberation of humans, liberation in all its aspects. "In its theological usage the concept of liberation has three levels: *the socio-political level*, i.e., liberation of the oppressed: "exploited classes, despised ethnic groups, and marginalized cultures"; ... *the anthropological level*: liberation for a qualitatively different society with a human dimension; ... *the theological level*: liberation from sin, the ultimate root of all injustice and oppression, for a life of community and participation. And it is the task of a responsible theology of liberation to go through these three levels and articulate them in a differentiated account."⁷ The integration of Indian nation should be as comprehensive as the liberation envisaged by liberation theology.

4.2. Socio-economic Contextualization

Special mention is to be made of liberation theology's insistence on socio-economic analysis as its very matrix.⁸ A liberation theologian is not an arm-chair academician, playing skilfully with arid and abstract concepts, fabricating syllogisms with *a priori* propositions, deducing conclusions that are irrelevant for the existing society, or doing intellectual gymnastics for enjoying rational self-complacency. On the contrary, he speaks every word in a definite socio-economic context, and puts every word into the same context. In this sense, his theology may be called situation-theology just as situation-ethics. That is why Gustavo Gutierrez defines liberation theology as "critical reflexion on praxis in the society in the light of faith."⁹ The main characteristic mark of a liberation theologian is its

⁷Rosini Gibellini, *The Liberation Theology Debate*, Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis, 1988, 8.

⁸Kuno Fuessel, "Theologie der Befreiung," in *Neues Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe IV*, Muenchen: Koesel, 1985, 202.

⁹Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis, 1973, 6.

“concrete participation in the liberation struggles of the oppressed.”¹⁰ Concrete participation means combining critical theory with sincere liberative action. One could even say that liberation theology “is biased towards praxis and calls for a consistent practical and pastoral mediation following the social analysis made and the theological reading given. The prior acceptance of socio-analytical mediation and hermeneutical mediation ensures a correct articulation of the relationship between theology and praxis.”¹¹ A liberation theologian is a dedicated politician and theologian, at the same time. He is a social worker and theoretician. In speculative theologizing, the relation between theory and practice is dealt with in purely theoretical manner. In liberation theology, however, theologizing follows active engagement for the liberation of the enslaved and the oppressed. Here discussion on reality does not mean conceptual or theoretical reality. The reality that touches a liberation theologian’s heart and head and motivates him to deal with it critically and theoretically is poverty, oppression, and other miseries of the people. “Theology of liberation ... is concerned primarily with the concrete situation and practice, which is the foundation, the object and the conditioning framework of mental reflection and intellectual cognition.”¹² Consequently, liberation theology itself has a temporal and transient character, because formulation of a theory is dependent upon the liberative practice of the theoretician. Truth cannot be devised, invented or contrived by theory. On the contrary, theory should correspond to and be truthful to the practice of liberation of the socially and economically enslaved. Similarly, Indian theologians are duty-bound to speak and write always in the concrete context of India¹³ and to practice what they communicate.¹⁴

4.3. Preferential Option for the Poor

Theology of liberation is not a theology for the sake of theology. Far from being an arm-chair theology, it insists on being practical in favour of the down-trodden and under-privileged. It “presupposes *a prior political and*

¹⁰Fuessel, “*Theologie der Befreiung*,” 202.

¹¹Gibellini, *The Liberation Theology Debate*, 11.

¹²Fuessel, “*Theologie der Befreiung*,” 207.

¹³S. Kappen, “Towards an Indian Theology of Liberation,” in Paul Puthenangady, ed., *Towards an Indian Theology of Liberation*, Bangalore: ITA and NBCLC, 1986.

¹⁴Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation*, Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis, 1989, 30-35.

ethical option in the light of the gospel, for the poor: liberation theology has chosen the option of evaluating social reality from the viewpoint of the poor, of reflecting theologically from the cause of the poor and acting for the liberation of the poor.”¹⁵ Biblical hermeneutics, according to liberation theologians, is hermeneutics of the poor and for the poor. Their theology is nothing but the voice of the voiceless and cry for justice to be done to the poor.

Unlike the traditional theologians, liberation theologians do theology with the poor. They “listen to the yearnings and laments of the poor, live with them, accompany them with advice and action on their difficult paths and begin to do theology out of this togetherness.”¹⁶ Liberation theologians are of the firm conviction, that not only professional theologians and ecclesiastical authorities, but also the ordinary faithful as a whole are entitled to evangelization and theologizing. In their view, the spirit of God and spirit of Jesus are not the monopoly of the *magisterium* of the Church. Each and every member of the people of God should make use of his/her brain to discern the will of God and express it in their own words.

Therefore, the best field for cultivating genuine theology are the basic communities, in which professional theologians and ordinary faithful have equally important roles to play. Systematic theology has no rights of its own. It is expected to represent the experience of the faithful, especially of the poor, quite faithfully, and to formulate them systematically to attain integral liberation for which they are struggling. “Theology is always the second step, and never the first. The first is engagement in the practice of liberation in the society, and the proclamation of the Word of God related to it.”¹⁷ The people of God are not mere objects of indifferent and dispassionate theological discussions to be done by professional theologians. A theologian who is not actively involved in the liberation of the people is not worthy of that name.

Theological statements are to be verified by their practice and practicability in the society of the poor and the exploited. Practice has always primacy over theory. Indeed the criterion for the veracity of theological proposition is always their applicability in the concrete

¹⁵Gibellini, *The Liberation Theology Debate*, 9.

¹⁶Fuessel, “*Theologie der Befreiung*,” 204.

¹⁷Fuessel, “*Theologie der Befreiung*,” 205.

situation of the people. This view is a resonance of Mahatma Gandhi’s famous statement that for the poor bread is the truth.

Any theologian or even any writer having a heart for poor human beings will side with the poor and fight for the solution of their problems.¹⁸ He or she will necessarily have the attitude of the famous Malayalam poet Vayalar Ramavarma who sang: “*Snehikkyayilla njaan novumaatmaavine snehichchitathoru thatvasasthratheyum*” (“I will not love any philosophy that does not love the suffering humans”). Liberation theologians all over the world – whether in Latin America, Africa or Asia – have always held to this principle of preferential option for the poor without prejudiced judgment on the rich.

Likewise, anyone who speaks about national integration in India should have a soft corner for the poor, because they constitute the majority of the Indian people. That more than 240 million Indians live below poverty line and more than 370 million are illiterate provide more than a shocking information to any sensible Indian; and this should be the primary consideration in any sort of engagement for national integration. All theologians are obliged to appropriate the words of Yahveh in the Book of Exodus: “I have observed the misery of my people... I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them...” (Ex. 3:7-8). Such liberation is the first step to national integration.

Liberation theology is undoubtedly a science; but for a liberation theologian “preferential option for the poor is the political and epistemological locus where science and partiality mediate subjectively and objectively.”¹⁹ Therefore, a sincere liberation theologian is not and cannot be ashamed of partiality for the poor and the oppressed.

4.4. Liberation of Theology

Preferential option for the poor naturally impels a liberation theologian to liberate theology itself from the clutches of ecclesiastical imperialism. Traditional theology not only dealt with dry and abstract concepts that have no relationship to the concrete situation of humans, but also aimed at perpetuating the enslaving systems and structures of the official Church in the name of faith, Jesus, and God. This slavish and sycophantic theology is

¹⁸Segundo Galilea: *The Spirituality of Evangelization*, Bangalore: Claritian, 1982, 40-45.

¹⁹Fuessel, “*Theologie der Befreiung*,” 202.

of no use to the oppressed and the marginalized. What can the poor profit from metaphysical Trinity, metaphysical Christology, highly sophisticated theology of grace and such other theological treatises, which have no concern for the suffering of the people and do not take into account the appalling horrifying and scandalous contradictions in the Church and society. If there is theology at all, it should discuss God, the giver and protector of life,²⁰ Jesus the liberator, Church as the community of the liberated, etc. That is, liberation theology should be understood also as liberation of theology that is imprisoned in bourgeois ideology.²¹ Liberation theologians are quite aware of the history of European and American colonialism. The Spaniards and North Americans had no scruples to justify slavery and subjugation with theological arguments supplied by European theologians. Right for private property meant for them right to amass wealth even at the cost of the poor. Even today European theology

does not realize the price to be paid for a theology, the insights of which are angered on the experiences of slums, prisons and torture cells of military dictators. He who stands on the threshold of violent death and reflects on the cross and resurrection of Jesus and the political resistance of an oppressed people will keep his formulations away from the criteria of speculative orthodoxy and they will obtain a new cognitive quality on the basis of their perplexity.²²

That is why theology is to be liberated from its non-liberative and anti-liberative understanding.

According to liberation theologians, the traditional separation between body and soul, nature and grace, natural and supernatural, reason and faith, science and religion, sociology and theology, secular and sacred, profane and holy, earthly and heavenly, material and spiritual, political and ecclesial, etc., is obsolete and impertinent.

Magisterium-controlled theology defines its orthodoxy without allowing it to be sufficiently qualified by the developments in the society. Hence, control of theology from above²³ should be balanced by control from below. Instead of excluding or minimizing worldly realm, theology

²⁰Gustavo Gutierrez, *The God of Life*, Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis, 1981, 3-19.

²¹Fuessel, "Theologie der Befreiung," 206.

²²Fuessel, "Theologie der Befreiung," 206.

²³Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis, 1976, 126-133.

should take into account the multidimensionality of human existence and multiple-causality of human welfare and social development.

The ideal of liberation theology is absolutely relevant in the context of national integration. Christian theologians are expected to develop a new theological hermeneutics conducive to social and economic liberation and all-round national harmony.²⁴ The need of the hour is not a missiology persuading Indian Christians to lure Non-Christians by all means into the inescapable labyrinth of structuralized Christianity, but a theology that can liberate the poor and the oppressed, and integrate them into national communion.

5. Liberative and Integrative Factors

Integral liberation of all Indians and a fully integrated Indian nation is the ultimate goal to be reached by each and every Indian citizen. There are many resources in India that can be utilized, so that this dream may come true. It should be kept in mind that here we speak of national integration in the light of liberation theology and not of politics, economics, or such other subjects.

There are two categories of resources that can be made use of: 1) Religious resources and 2) Models of liberators and integrative leaders.

5.1. Religious Resources

Though India is constitutionally a secular state, the majority of Indians are so religiously charged that purely secular ideologies like Marxism and Naxalism have only a very limited influence on them. They are not the basis of India's hope. The secular nature of the state means only that before the Constitution all religions have the same status and rights. According to statistics, 80.5% of the population are Hindus, 13.4% Muslims, 2.3 % Christians, 1.9% Sikhs, 0.97% Buddhists, and 0.47% Jains. All these religions deserve due regard in any discussion on national integration. But because of the decisive influence of Hinduism on India, its resources are given special consideration in this article. It is not within the scope of this article, to discuss the religious literature thoroughly by quoting the numerous pertinent texts. What is feasible is to depend on reliable studies of the literature, made from the viewpoint of liberation and integration.

²⁴Mathew Paikada, *Indian Theology of Liberation*, Delhi: Intercultural, 2000, 211-216.

5.1.1. Vedas and Upanishads

Vedas, which are the main normative religious books of the Hindus, do not directly deal with social and economic liberation of humans. Apparently, they are interested in the discussion of cosmic powers, sacrifices, etc. However, when they are taken as a whole, we can see in them concern for the all-round welfare of human beings. In the Vedas,

we find a very wholesome attitude to the terrestrial realities and the secular concerns of man. Human fulfilment is considered to be intimately related to the orderly and harmonious functioning of the cosmic elements – earth, water, fire, air and space together with the biological and temporal cycles. Evil, suffering and hardship were not unknown to the Vedic man, and yet he did not consider human condition as essentially fallen and suffering as quite normal.²⁵

The ultimate concern in the Vedas and Upanishads is perfect happiness of every individual and, thus, of the whole humankind.

5.1.2. Liberative View of *Bhagavatgita*

The authoritative scripture for an average Hindu is *Bhagavatgita*. Even though, primarily, it seems to deal with the three ways of *jñāna*, *bhakti*, and *karma* (knowledge, devotion, and action) to attain God, it is keen on stressing the unity of humankind and the equality of all human beings because of the indwelling Brahman in all of them. If all Hindus, who constitute the majority of Indian population, were faithful to the teaching of the *Gītā*, caste system, untouchability and such other evils would not have any place in India; and inner unity of Hinduism would pave a short and smooth path to national integration. The *Gītā* says: “A wise human sees equality in a Brahman imbued with learning and humility, in a cow, an elephant, a dog and an outcaste” (*Gītā* 5:18). No Hindu who reads this passage can have a positive attitude to casteism which, according to Mahatma Gandhi, is the foremost curse of Indian nation. The *Gītā* says also that, if one’s mind is united with God, “he sees himself in all beings and all beings in himself; he sees the same in all” (*Gītā* 6:29). The question is: Why do the upper caste Hindus neglect or forget such instructions of their highly revered religious scripture.

Unity and welfare of all is a point much emphasized by the *Gītā* but ignored or disregarded by the majority of Hindus: “Action out of a holistic

²⁵Louis Malieckal, “Liberative Vision of the Vedas,” in Puthenangady, ed., *Towards an Indian Theology of Liberation*, 46.

vision of reality is action for the integral transformation of society. The structures which break society into fragments are removed and an integration is envisaged. *Gxt* calls it ‘*lokasamgraha*’ (3:2, 25). *Samgraha* means holding together, coherence, harmonizing work. *Lokasamgraha* is therefore *Gxt*’s word for universal welfare, social justice in the full sense of the term. The fulfilment of *svadharma* gets thereby an objective motivation, the creation of a more humane and just society.”²⁶ It is paradoxical that those who uphold the *Gxt* as a God-given scripture have very little or no social consciousness and urge for creating an integrated Indian society.

5.2. Role Models for Liberative and Integrative Engagement

There are a few Indians who should be considered as sublime models in the realm of liberative and integrative action. Chronologically the first one to be mentioned is Raja Ram Mohan Roy.

Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) who was a versatile scholar and founder of Brahma Samaj fought against all kinds of superstitions and social evils within Hinduism and tried to reform it in an integral way. What he did through Brahma Samaj for the integral reform of society is enormous. Rejecting idolatry and polytheism, which were quite normal for ordinary Hindu believers, he preached monotheism and accepted the Gospel passages that have relevance for social wellbeing, insisted on the need of rational approach to scriptures and ethical purity, opposed *sati*, casteism, child marriage, etc., and pleaded for the right of widows for re-marriage and for the all-around freedom of all individuals.²⁷ All-round freedom for every individual and for the society as a whole was the goal he strived to achieve. “Ram Mohan Roy, like Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau had a passionate attachment to the concept of liberty. He urged the necessity of personal freedom and in his private conversations also referred to the ideal of national emancipation. Liberty is a priceless possession of the human being and hence Ram Mohan was a magnificent champion of personal freedom. But liberty is also needed for the nation. Ram Mohan had a keen appreciation of the uncompromising freedom, the

²⁶Sebastian Pynadath, “Bhagavata Gita’s Vision of Liberative Action,” in Puthenangady, ed., *Towards an Indian Theology of Liberation*, 60.

²⁷Antony Chirappanath, “Indian Renaissance and Liberation,” in Puthenangady, *Towards an Indian Theology of Liberation*, 168.

creative spirit.”²⁸ Unlike Mohan Roy the majority of Hindus think of freedom individualistically and in too narrow a religious sense, namely as the right to reach God in any way one likes. What India is presently in need of are reformers like Roy, who understand freedom as the ability to dedicate oneself for the total liberation of fellow-humans.

Dayananda Saraswathi (1824-1883) and the Arya Samaj he founded, took up many of the ideas and ideals of Mohan Roy, but asserted the need for returning to the Vedas. He too rejected caste system and preached equality of all human beings and the necessity of combining social activities with individual spirituality. According to him, nobody who is selfish can be spiritual, and freedom from selfishness means preferring social welfare to purely individual interests.²⁹ At least two more liberators are to be mentioned in this context: Annie Besant (1847-1933) who, with her Theosophical Society, worked untiringly for India’s national welfare³⁰ and Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) who, in accordance with the teaching of his master Sri Ramakrishna, gave a new interpretation to Vedanta and combined action with contemplation and founded Ramakrishna Movement, which gave a new dimension to Hinduism itself.³¹ Worthy of tribute are also E. V. Ramaswamy³² and Swami Agnivesh³³ and several others.

M. K. Gandhi (1869-1948): In any discussion on integral liberation and national integration the most important person to be considered as archmodel is M. K. Gandhi, who is the Mahatma par excellence for Indians.

Without abandoning his Hindu religious roots and, at the same time, drawing inspirations from the Gospels and modern thinkers like Fyodor Dostoyevski, he gave a new interpretation to the teachings of *Bhagavatgita* and the Hindu concepts of *Bhakti* (devotion), *moksha* (liberation), etc., and concretely showed the world how a really liberated human should live: self-dedication for fellow-human beings is the proof of real spirituality.

The dream, for the realization of which he spent his whole life-energy was *Rajamarjya* (Kingdom of Rama) where all are equal and have

²⁸Chirappanath, “Indian Renaissance and Liberation,” 164.

²⁹Chirappanath, “Indian Renaissance and Liberation,” 169-170.

³⁰Chirappanath, “Indian Renaissance and Liberation,” 170-174.

³¹Chirappanath, “Indian Renaissance and Liberation,” 174-176.

³²Michael Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom: Liberation Theologies from Asia*, Delhi: Vidyajyothi, 1997, 101-107.

³³Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom*, 97-101.

the same dignity, rights and obligation for common welfare. “The goal of Gandhi for India can be called integral liberation based on a perspective of spiritual humanism.”³⁴ His ideal of *satyagraha* (holding fast to truth, adherence to truth) does not mean mere loyalty to scriptural words, or abstract ethical or philosophical principles. It means truth-based love for all fellow beings. That is why he held the view that truth for the poor means food for every day.

With Gandhi, *satyagraha* is the way out of alienation, bondage or unfreedom. Our imagery of the ‘way’ out is inadequate to convey Gandhi’s truth. It is more the entry point to authenticity, integration and inner freedom extended to the social sphere as *Satyagraha* is not even the means to a freedom conceived as an end. Rather it is itself the concrete experience or realization of freedom in authenticity and integrity as an actuality for the *satyagrahi* and as a possibility or potentiality for those who aspire for freedom. *Satyagraha* is not a way in the sense of a technique of liberation. But it is the way in the sense of the style or mode of achieving liberation.³⁵

Satyam (Truth) can be interpreted as honesty, integrity, love, freedom, etc. For Gandhi, all virtues are implied in the one word ‘truth’.

Gandhi’s famous ideal of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) is closely related to liberation and integration. Non-violence “is not merely a negative state of harmlessness, but it is a positive state of love, a state of doing good, even to the evil-doer. But it does not mean helping the evil-doer to continue the wrong or tolerating it by passive acquiescence. On the contrary, love, the active state of *ahimsa*, requires you to resist the wrong-doer by dissociating yourself from him even though it may offend him or injure him physically.”³⁶ It is evident that non-aggressive fight against all those who perpetuate poverty, oppression, and discrimination is an integral part of *ahimsa*.

According to Gandhi, in a liberated society, all are equal, though each one has particular duties to fulfil. This may be the reason why he did not condemn caste system. However, the ideal of each member should be

³⁴ Amaladosss, *Life in Freedom*, 89.

³⁵ Ignatius Jesudasan, “A Gandhian Theology of Liberation,” in Puthenangady, ed., *Towards an Indian Theology of Liberation*, 224.

³⁶ *Young India*, Jan. 19, 1921, cited in Jesudasan, “A Gandhian Theology of Liberation,” 226.

the welfare of all (*sarvodaya*) and there is no question of concentration of power and authority in a small group at the top; even a small village *panchayath* will have a say on national planning and execution of projects.³⁷ An honest research into the ideas of Gandhi will convincingly make it clear that one of the main reasons for the existing social and economic inequality in India is disregard for his vision. Forgetting Gandhi means forgetting the means and ways for social and economic liberation and national integration.

6. Hindrances to Liberation and Integration

It may not be out of place to mention here a few hindrances blocking integral liberation and national integration. The main hindrance is, in my view, the religious verticalism of Hindus, who constitute the majority of Indian population. One cannot but admit that for the majority of them spirituality is individualistic and ego-centric.³⁸ Everyone seeks his/her own liberation in his/her own way, and bakes bread for himself/herself alone. A fatalistic attitude to life, owing to belief in *karma* (abiding effect of each human act in the previous life), also contributes to such a spirituality. One who walks with his/her chin pressed upon chest cannot see those standing around him/her. Without liberating oneself from individualistic and narcissistic spirituality, as Mahatma Gandhi, Ram Mohan Roy and others did, one cannot be motivated for national welfare.

As mentioned above, horizontal dimension is not unknown to Vedas, Upanishads, *Bhagavatgita*, *Puranas*, *Ithihasas*, etc. Unfortunately, this dimension seems to be eclipsed in the case of the majority; and eclipse of concern for fellow beings in one's religiosity necessarily implies retardation of social development, liberation, and national integration.

The basic difference between Hindu religion and the two main Semitic religions – Islam and Christianity – is another hindrance. Linguistic traditionalism – the opposition between Aryan and Dravidian language families – is also an obstacle, though not very huge, to national integration. Mention should be made of political parochialism too. There are only very few politicians who think of India as motherland and nation. The characteristic mark of the majority is thirst for power and parochial political manipulation.

³⁷Jesudasan, "A Gandhian Theology of Liberation," 228-229.

³⁸For details of Indian egoism, see Cedric Rebello, *The Bible: Aspirin or Dynamite*, Bombay: ATC, 1983, 111-116.

7. A Christian Solution

Since this article discusses national integration from the angle of liberation theology, which is typically Christian, I am prompted to make mention of the liberative and integrative power of Jesus' message.

Jesus dedicated his life for the liberation of the poor and the oppressed, who constituted 90% of the Jews at his time and were nicknamed by the elite as '*ham-ha-ares*' (people of the soil, uncultured people). The poor were also illiterate; they were out-castes because of their mingling with Non-Jews and eating meat forbidden to Jews.³⁹ Only those who were highly learned, i.e., well-versed in the Thora, and exceptionally holy, i.e., who blindly and meticulously kept the religious laws, customs, and traditions of the Jews were entitled to be called children of God. Jesus respected the poor as children of God and taught them to call God Abba, Father.

What impelled and enabled Jesus to do so was his spirit (Hebrew: *ruah*; Greek: *pneuma*). Spirit means power. The inner power that moved him vertically and horizontally was his Abba-Consciousness. He had a consciousness (*bodham*) about God, namely, "God is my Father and Father of all." This consciousness was also his conviction (*bodhyam*). By the communication (*bodhanam*) of this conviction he tried to liberate his people from their superstitions, laws, and traditions that were for them fetters and shackles. In other words, Jesus experienced God as Father; this experience was his faith, and he preached this faith as his good news to the people for the establishment of the Kingdom of God, i.e., universal harmony under the sway of God.⁴⁰ All Christians who are engaged in liberative and integrative activities should "look at Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). Pioneer is one who marches in front of all. Those who march behind Jesus, motivated by his Abba-Consciousness, will be empowered to empower others; they will be liberated to liberate others, especially the untouchables, the dalits, the tribals, the fishermen, women, etc. As Martin Buber says, faith of Jesus unites us, faith in Jesus divides us.

By raising the poor from their miserable situation the Jesuans will be able to give witness to the risen Jesus; "the pursuit of the same values that

³⁹Albert Nolan, *Jesus before Christianity*, London: Darton, 1977, 21-29.

⁴⁰Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, London: SPCK, 1980, 55-57.

Jesus held dear is an indispensable prerequisite for being able to ‘see’ and recognize the risen one.”⁴¹

The Hindu belief that each *jīvaātma* (individual spirit) is the manifestation of the *paramātma* (Absolute Spirit) is also quite liberative and integrative. So is the Muslim belief that all humans are Allah’s creatures. In short, in India religious means for liberation and integration will be more effective than the political ones, even though these too are essential.

8. Conclusion

The logical conclusion to be drawn from our discussion on Indian national integration, in the light of liberation theology, is the following: National integration is unattainable without the integral liberation of all, especially of the poor and the oppressed. Only the liberated can be united by communion, fellowship. The natural effect of national communion will be national integration. Therefore, a *metanoia* – change of mind – which is effected mainly by the utilization of Indian religious resources, is the first step on the road to national integration.

⁴¹Juan Luis Segundo, *The Historical Jesus of the Synoptics*, Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis, 1985, 171.