

## Editorial

More than ever before, today, the prophetic role of subaltern movements in fashioning the destiny of humanity's future is critically recognized and appreciated in the third world countries on the onslaught of Globalisation (the most powerful process of homogenisation) which is often mistakenly regarded as the new mascot of development and progress by the common people without fathoming the anti-Gospel dynamic implied in it.

If one is perceptive and critical towards the present phenomenon of Globalisation transpiring at all levels of human life, social, cultural, political and religious, it will not be difficult to interpret it as a new form of colonisation in a non-territorial manner. Globalisation is the present eulogising cultural paradigm of Western neo-colonialism which imposes Western culture a-territorially on the Third World through its market-economy and consumerist values. This cultural process which has hidden and subtle agenda of cultural, political, economic and religious exploitation, is overtly and covertly funded and promoted by the world bodies like IMF, World Bank, GATT and WTO. It is a cultural aggression because it forces a mono-Western market oriented consumerist culture on Third World cultures through Western satellite media, net-work of TV and Internets. Again, it is an economic invasion into the age-old monetary autonomy and industrial freedom and entrepreneurship of the Third World economies through the gimmicks of patent rights, GATT and international funding agencies which hold control over the world monetary transactions through debts and speculative market. Moreover, it is political imperialism for it subtly leads to 'defranchisement' of the people of the Third World because political decisions in terms of economic priorities of the developing countries are tuned and toed in G-7 nations' political and economic interests and agenda. The mono-culture, mono-economy and mono-political vision imposed through Globalisation radically displace the root-paradigms and belief systems of the indigenous people of the Third World; it will consequently make them alienated from their heritage and archetypes creating a cultural and even ethical vacuum in their life values and visions.

Above all, in this process future is programmed and colonized because it is already an occupied territory in the purview of Globalisation. Today forecasting simply ends up by projecting the preferred past and the privileged present on to a linear future. This is being done through the western technologies and media; the advertisement on television,

newspapers, magazines for new consumer goods like cars, computers, mobile phones, digital and satellite gadgets-give the message on "how new technologies will transform not just our social and cultural environments but the very idea of what it is to be human. . . . The sub-text is that the future technologies are the resource of the West which will enable the non-West to have a future; the future will have a clone of the western future. If that seem empowering and inclusive, it is only an illusory surface seduction that obfuscates how the future is made."<sup>1</sup> Thus there is an in-built momentum in the process of homogenisation (Globalisation) towards a determined, one dimensional, linear western trajectory for the future of the whole of mankind challenging the age-old pluralistic fabric of developing countries in Asia and Africa.

At the same time it should be admitted that networking and functioning of Globalisation is intricately structural, touching subtly every aspect of our human life in a wholesome way, needs, desires, freedom, values; it seems impossible to fight against this invincible and invisible influence of Globalisation on the lives of developing countries because politics, culture, religion, economy, societal relations, all aspects of life are articulated and carried on in and through it. It is so labyrinthine and sophisticated that we cannot envisage life, whether it is cultural or economic, political or religious outside this process, for everything belongs to its dynamics in an in-built way. That is to say, the politics, economy and culture of developing countries are comprehensively controlled and constrained by the opaque power structures of Globalisation to which everyone belongs inevitably; no soft or magical solutions exist to be emancipate from this maze of exploitation. Consequently, a sense of helplessness and powerlessness or a TNA syndrome (there is no alternative) prevails over the third world polity. The stakes are fundamental especially for the Asian countries rich with their manifold cultures and religions because the political autonomy would be subverted, cultural identity diluted, and religious and social legacies forfeited in this process of homogenisation. What should then be the point of departure to challenge this oppressive and exploitative cultural process?

It is in this context that we have to find the meaning and relevance of the present counter cultural movements or the emergence of parallel systems to the existing dominant systems through subaltern movements and religions. As Amalados says, "To be counter-cultural is to be prophetic. It is to challenge the people in the name of a vision of what they ought to become, by embodying that vision. In this sense it will always be critical of the

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<sup>1</sup>Ziauddin Sardar, "The Problem [of Futures]," *Seminar* 460(Dec, 1997):12.

present."<sup>2</sup> As sociologists would say, the present monolithic, ever pervasive, powerful, oppressive economic and political systems can only be challenged by peoples' participatory role in the decision process and in the control of the system that govern their lives. This will contribute a human touch and caring approach to the present system which is purely profit and power oriented. This strategy can be pioneered by small groups of people. These are called parallel practices which intend to create a parallel social space within the domains of social life constantly contesting existing dominant oppressive values in order to finally replace or reform them with new ones. Social movements, peoples' movement, popular culture, and everyday resistance are considered as parallel practices in the social science. These movements are non-institutional collective response to an oppressed situation for establishing a new order of life through a collective mobilization based on an ideology<sup>3</sup>. But at the same time these are spontaneous movements. To be spontaneous is not necessarily to be unorganized. Spontaneous acts are cumulative expressions of accumulated experiences within the relations of dominion. A common thread of shared consciousness that runs through the spontaneous outbursts of peoples movements is a well articulated awareness that injustice is being done. This injustice is not to be taken as a *fait accompli*, but to be done away with through forms of resistance.

It is at this backdrop that, today, the role and relevance of subaltern religions and spirituality of "Little Traditions" are increasingly appreciated as counter cultural movements to the homogenisation of the ongoing Globalisation. Firstly, the mainline religions of Great Traditions are seemingly embedded in the dynamics and structures of Globalisation; hence the credibility of mainline religions to fight against the evils of this process is at stake. Secondly, for the time being, the Sub-altern religions and folk religions come outside the flux and ambit of Globalisation, and the people participatory and non-institutional nature of these religions have greater inner strength and vitality to be counter cultural to the onslaught of Globalisation.

In this connection it should be mentioned that often we reduce Indian (Asian) religiosity to great religions i.e., scriptural religions, and, by and large, Christianity has interpreted subaltern religions (of the poor and the

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<sup>2</sup>See Michael Amaladoss, S.J., "Mission in a Post -Modern World, A Call to be Counter-Cultural," *Mission Studies* XIII (1996): 68-79.

<sup>3</sup>See J. Desrochers, *Social Movements: Towards a Perspective* (Bangalore: Centre for Social Action, 1991); G.Shah, "The Human Rights Movement in Indian: A Critical Overview," *Social Action* 40(1990): 2ff.

oppressed) in the ambit of Brahmanic tradition. By doing so, we have been alienating the major chunk of Indian populace who come actually outside the realm of the high meta-cosmic religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam). For example, the "inculturation theologies" and "ashramite spirituality," which have acquired general appeal in the phenomenon of inter-religious dialogues and fellowship over the past decades in India, have forgotten the liberative potentials of subaltern religions. Instead they have prominently been preoccupied with Scriptural religions and their texts on a philosophical, theological and mystical realm. Consequently inculturation theology have addressed mostly the Brahmanic tradition and never percolated into the religiousness of subaltern religions or little traditions of the dalits and tribals who constitute the vast majority of Indians.

This issue of Dharma looks at the emerging relevance and the prophetic role of sub-altern perspectives to protect and promote the manifoldness of humanity's cultural and religious pluralism especially of developing countries against the homogenisation of present Globalisation process. All the articles in this issue attempt to unravel the import of subaltern religions from different vantage points, namely, historical, socio-cultural, biblical, anthropological and feminist perspective. Hopefully this issue would help us to rediscover the religious and cultural relevance and the role of sub-altern religions in shaping the destiny of mankind in the coming Millennium.

Fr. Antony Kalliath  
Associate Editor

**Dear subscribers and readers,**

The announced theme of the next issue (XXIII.2) of *Journal of Dharma* is *Religion and Healing*.

In the past we used to publish the papers of the annual seminar of the *Association of Christian Philosophers of India* through the Journal. We do want to continue this practice. Therefore, the theme of the next issue of the *Journal of Dharma* will be *Philosophy of Religion*, and will contain the main papers presented at the last seminar of this association. Dr. Joe Mannath, President of the *Association of Christian Philosophers of India* and Reader of the Department of Christian Studies of the University of Madras, will be the editor of this issue. The theme *Religion and Healing* will be treated in a future issue of the Journal.

Thank you very much for your understanding and collaboration.

*chief editor*