

Dalit Liberation Sunday

11th November 2018

Theme

As for Me and My Household, We will Serve the Lord

(Joshua 24:15)



**NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
CHURCHES IN INDIA**



**CATHOLIC BISHOPS'
CONFERENCE OF INDIA**

10th Anniversary of Witness to Faith in Kandhamal

Respected Ecumenical Leaders,

Warm greetings from NCCI - Dalit and Tribal/ Adivasi Concerns

Dalit Liberation Sunday has become an important feature in the calendar of Indian Churches and Ecumenical movements. Over the years, there has been a positive response in sensitizing the local congregations towards concerns of Dalits, for no longer caste issue is visualized as a sociological issue or an issue outside the purview of church but more seen as an issue challenging the core of our faith and gospel. Dalit Liberation Sunday is a joint programme of National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) and Catholic Bishop's Conference of India (CBCI), aiming at the empowerment of the local congregations for Dalit liberation. Thanks to the enormous support received from across the churches, dioceses, parishes and theological institutions in celebrating this special Sunday.

The theme for this year's Dalit Liberation Sunday is "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). We take this opportunity to invite you to observe Dalit Liberation Sunday on 11th November 2018 in your church/local parish/institution in a creative way and rededicate our commitment to the Gospel by accompanying the unaccompanied. However, if you already have some programme on 11th November 2018, you may think of celebrating this Special day on later Sundays. Herewith we are sending you hard copies of posters and a special order of worship for the day. You may take the freedom to use the entire worship order and translate it in your vernacular language or adapt parts of it. We would appreciate if you send a brief report along with a few photographs of the observance to the undersigned. Let us join to observe Dalit Liberation Sunday on 11th November 2018.

Thanking you in anticipation.

In Christ,



Pradip Bansrior

Executive Secretary,

Dalit and Tribal/Adivasi Concerns, NCCI

Foreword

In the last few days, we have seen a spate of Supreme Court decisions relating to several justice issues. There is however one justice issue that has not been addressed by the Indian society at large: the injustice of the caste system, and the innumerable expressions of this injustice inflicted on dalits. Their birth itself becomes a curse for them in the casteist society. They are looked down upon as persons who are unclean, and of not any worth, except to serve the caste-groups above them in the social hierarchy, and to suffer discrimination and oppression of all kinds. They are loaded with many prohibitions and burdens, and can hardly claim any freedoms and privileges.

One keeps hearing stories of dalits being denied access to well-water, being denied entry in many temples, being deprived of quality education, not being given access to basic health care, being deprived of employment opportunities (even though the law stipulates certain reservations), of dalit women being raped and dalit men being murdered. The situation of Dalit Muslims and Dalits Christians is worse; they are deprived of government affirmative action programmes just because they happen to be either Muslims or Christians. In the background of the ghar wapsi (home return) campaign of Hindu fundamentalists, Christian and Muslim Dalits are told "If you want to enjoy such rights, you have to give up 'foreign' religious faiths and turn to Hinduism, which is the original religious home of Dalits."

Thus one observes that Dalits are bound by several chains – biological, social, economic, political, cultural, and religious. Therefore the observance of Dalit Liberation Sunday every year is a strong reminder to the church and society, that since all human beings are reflections of the image of God, it is indeed a grievous sin to look down upon dalits as untouchables, unclean, and unworthy. The observance of this Sunday gives us a mission mandate to liberate ourselves from our exclusivist mind-set, and to include all in the 'kin'dom of God. The church needs to be reminded again and again, "You cannot serve Christ and Caste". All unjust divisions have to be broken down!

However, we also need to move on from the bondage-liberation perspective to the identity-wholeness perspective. As we look around us, dalits along with tribals/adivasis and other marginalized communities are rising up. Instead of being overwhelmed with their tears of pathos, they are now being refreshed by the fountains of identity and new life. Within the Dalit category there are people of different communities, cultures, geographies, stories, creative skills and vocations. Within the Dalit category there are different movements for affirming identities, expressing self-dignity as children/people of God, thereby making their unique contribution to the church and society. Persons like B.R. Ambedkar, Jurist, economist, political leader, writer; K.R. Narayanan, Tenth President of India; Babu Jagjivan Ram, Former Deputy Prime Minister of India; K.G. Balakrishnan, Former Chief Justice of India; Naveen Andrews, Television and Film Actor in Hollywood; Kailash Kher, Bollywood Singer; Lal Chand Yamla Jatt - Punjabi Singer; PT Usha-Former Sprint Queen of India; Dalit writers like Bama Faustina Soosairaj, Namdeo Dhasal, and Meena Kandasamy; and dalit activists like Ruth Manorama and Kancha Ilaiah - all belong to a long list of dalits leaders who have initiated movements affirming dalit identity and dignity.

Therefore we need to move from observing Dalit Liberation Sunday to celebrating Dalit Affirmation Sunday.

Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad

General Secretary

National Council of Churches in India

Introduction

As we mark the 10th anniversary of witness to faith in Kandhamal, it seems more important than ever to revisit the time Christians especially Dalits and Adivasis were attacked in this landlocked, forested district in the heart of Odisha. More than 600 villages were ransacked, 5,600 houses were looted and burnt and 54,000 people were left homeless, according to the National People's Tribunal headed by retired Delhi High Court Judge A P Shah. At least 39 Christians were killed and 232 churches destroyed, though human rights groups quote higher numbers. It all started when Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Swami Lakshmanananda Saraswati, a saffron-clad preacher known for his inflammatory speeches and who had worked for four decades to reconvert Christian Dalits and Adivasis in the state, was murdered with four of his associates on August 23, 2008, in what was widely reported as a Maoist attack. The Sangh Parivar, however, blamed Christian missionaries and retaliated by attacking Christians. There is no evidence to suggest that Christians killed him. Seven Christians were convicted and are serving life sentences for the Lakshmanananda Saraswati's murder.

In 2016, the Supreme Court had asked the Odisha government to re-investigate 315 out of the total 827 cases, which were closed by police claiming the offenders could not be traced or no offence was made out. The Bench observed "... In 315 cases, either no offence was found to have been made out or the offenders could not be detected. Such large proportion is quite disturbing. The State could do well in looking into all these 315 cases and see that the offenders are brought to book..." The Bench had also added that "Out of 362 trials which stand completed, only 78 have resulted in conviction, which again is a matter of concern," observed Justice Uday Lalit from a division bench of the apex court.

Oppression can be carried out in various and diverse ways, oppressive structures can be numerous and communities affected by oppression can be many. This is true for Indian social order where many oppressed communities are the victims of divergent oppressive

systems. For the last 10 years, it is only the Christians who remember this atrocity. The majority community does not seem to feel the need to share the suffering, pain, humiliation and sense of injustice of their Christian compatriots. We are turning into a nation of fractured sensibilities with little sense of justice. Ten years later, we need not recall the details of the violence.

But we need to record the valiant battle that the victims and survivors have been engaged in to secure justice. This is despite the indifference, and stonewalling, of the state organs. These 10 years have seen hate and violence against Christians being routinised. Beating up of priests, breaking up of prayer meetings and carols, desecration of churches and arrests of priests, enactment of anti-conversion laws, as in Jharkhand or villages being made out of bounds for Christians as in Chhattisgarh, lack the spectacle of Kandhamal. Our indifference to all these only indicates the normalisation of what Kandhamal saw. The mission of Churches is not only limited to exploring and exposing discriminative tendencies, but also finding ways through which discriminated communities are built up and transformed.

Pradip Bansrior

Executive Secretary

Dalit and Tribal/ Adivasi Concerns, NCCI

ORDER OF WORSHIP

Theme: As for Me and My Household, We will Serve the Lord
(Joshua 24:15)

10th Anniversary of Witness to Faith in Kandhamal

Call to Worship

Gather O people of God from all walks of life!
Gather O seekers of justice for the crushed and the oppressed!
Let all creation join in a peace seeking movement, affirming to be united in a praxis oriented approach.

Invocation

Leader: God of Peace, let your comforting peace roll down among your people who lament in the times of afflictions and tribulations.

All: Faithful God give us a peace loving heart.

Leader: God our Healer, heal the abraded wounds of the areas where they still lie raw in the bodies and minds of the ones who are not yet healed by the mere words of comfort.

All: Merciful God give us the tranquility of hope.

Leader: God our Provider, let the constant supply of blessings in different forms be efficient and competent to many who require a helping hand in their needs.

All: Generous God bless us through your outstretched hands.

Leader: God of Justice, we invoke that justice, so that no one faces discrimination on any grounds for their identity.

All: Righteous God be our witness in the times of distress.

Hymn: *(The following hymn or any other suitable one may be sung)*

Healer of Every Ill

Healer of our every ill,
Light of each tomorrow,
give us peace beyond our fear,
and hope beyond our sorrow.

1. You who know our fears and sadness,
grace us with your peace and gladness.
Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts. *(Refrain)*

2. In the pain and joy beholding
how your grace is still unfolding,
give us all your vision, God of love. *(Refrain)*

3. Give us strength to love each other,
every sister, every brother.
Spirit of all kindness, be our guide. *(Refrain)*

4. You who know each thought and feeling,
teach us all your way of healing.
Spirit of compassion, fill each heart. *(Refrain)*

Affirmation of Faith *(In Unison)*

We do not believe in a God whose thirst for worship is quenched by the blood of innocents.

We do not believe in a Saviour whose preaching and praxis are sectarian

We do not believe in a Spirit who instigates people to kill their fellow beings on the grounds of faith.

We do not believe in an ideologically immutable and institutionally sheltered church, which refuses to side with the victims of hegemony on the pretext of glorifying self-imposed suffering as redemptive.

In negating all these

We do believe in the One, true, mutually indwelling, ever-renewing God, for whom worship is an essential communitarian experience, manifesting the celebration of diversities in Godself.

We do believe in Jesus the Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, who breaches history by taking flesh from the womb of an impoverished woman; whose life, death, resurrection and Parousia comforts the discomfited and discomfords the complacent.

We do believe in the Holy Spirit, whose holiness transcends the regressive human constructs of purity and pollution and inspires us to embrace all alike with their differences.

We do believe in the church that emerges from the cry of the destitute, the agony of the impoverished, the voice of the subalterns, the groaning of the women and the wounds of the tortured and the scars of the victimized. We do believe in the communion of martyrs and saints, the resurrection of the dead and life anew on its way. **Amen**

Scripture : Joshua 24:15

Reflection : Identifying the Identity of Victims

It has been 10 years since the cruel violence against innocent people took place in Kandhamal. Painfully the younger generations are not much aware of what actually happened in Kandhamal and many have already forgotten that cruel violence. But after 10 years especially after High Court's order to reinvestigate some of the cases which were dismissed by the state, has again brought Kandhamal violence to the forefront. Interestingly many news and articles that speak about Kandhamal violence are titled as violence against Christians but we need to ask an important question; Is it only violence against Christians? There was actually something more than religion in the Kandhamal violence that is the answer to the question; Are those victims just Christians?

In Indian context religious identity is not a primary identity rather it is the social identity of a particular person deciding his/her social life. Reading Acts 16: 25-40 brings to us a peculiar incident which took place in Paul's missionary journey. Verse 37 reads, But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly?" Paul who was vulnerable and had gone through violence suddenly became a threat to the authorities. What made Paul look different? Was it his Christian identity? Or was it his identity as a Roman citizen? Anyone, who can understand the scenario from a political and social perspective, will say it was his identity as a Roman citizen. Though Paul was vulnerable as a Christian he was powerful as a Roman citizen. So we can understand that political and social identity mattered even in the life of the early Church. I don't think Paul could have escaped prison if he was just a Christian and a Jew.

For Paul his social identity was his respite but it is the other way round in the matter of Kandhamal violence. The social and actually the primary identity of those people made them more vulnerable. Indian social life is primarily built upon the unique social stratification called caste system. The victims of Kandhamal violence are just not Christians rather they are Dalits and Adivasis. Painfully only few articles and news emphasize the social identity of the victims. Neglecting the social aspect of this violence has hidden the original agenda of the dominant power behind the violence. A Dalit and Adivasi is nowhere safe in India, whatever the religion he/she belongs to and whatever is his/her education and position. The Kandhamal violence was not just violence against minorities but was the deeply rooted hatred against the so called untouchables of this country. The primary intention of the violence was to make sure that the oppressed remains oppressed and politically weak for the political survival of the hegemonic powers.

From another perspective it is also the failure of religion such as Christianity that continues to practice casteism and hinders the social upliftment of the oppressed. Dalits and Adivasis remain vulnerable in spite of their religious identities. So the issue should not be seen only from the religious perspective but from the social perspective as well. By portraying the victims just as Christians will not bring justice to the double oppression that Dalit and Adivasi Christians face in this country. From the Church perspective we should make sure that Christianity brings social and economic upliftment in the lives of oppressed people. If we do not view this issue critically and understand the real agenda of the hegemonic powers we will not be successful in providing proper response. And if the Christianity doesn't bring change in the lives of Dalit and Adivasi Christians Indian 'Pauls' will never be freed from the prisons.

Confession

With contrite hearts we as a church confess that we have failed to ensure justice to the victims of violence of Kandhamal even after a decade of the horrendous cataclysm. We have remained in the cellar of our comfort zones when we should have been with the people of Kandhamal wiping the tears of the bereaved, sheltering the homeless, feeding the hungry, embracing the orphaned, emancipating the widows and safeguarding the girls and women. We were reluctant in standing with the victims in their pursuit of justice by protesting for their losses, demanding credible compensations, transparency in investigations, acquitting the innocents languishing in prisons, unravelling the kingpin of this heinous conspiracy and imprisoning the real culprits of this gruesome violence in the name of community and faith. We are also guilty of romanticizing suffering and persecution as redemptive thereby vitiating the Divine indignation exemplified by Christ against the propaganda of the Empires. We repent our sins and beseech your forgiveness while we promise you our transformation.

Absolution

May God graciously forgive our sins and increase our faith so that we may bear witness to the reign of God in the midst of unjust prevailing order. **Amen**

Prayer of Resilience

In deep distress with the agony of Kandhamal reverberating in the hearts of the citizens of the nation for a decade, we pray that may the spirit of resilience permeate our being. May our expressions of solidarity with the victims of the Kandhamal violence be powerful enough so that justice be meted out at the earliest especially to the innocents languishing in prisons. We implore that our voices of dissent breach the systemic evils prevailing in the society so that never again the topography of India is drenched with the blood of its citizens for whatsoever reason.

In our pursuit of dignity of life may nothing deter us. Grant us the courage to protest with implicit hope and fervour for the rights denied to the margins. Ignite our hearts with the indignation of Christ so that we never choose to remain silent, oblivion and complacent. Help us realize that the veracity of our faith is tested by the way it leads to the emancipation of the victims of violence.

Grant us the audacity to resist when finite realities are conferred transcendental value and thereby divinity. We earnestly request that the Divine grace imbue us so that our spirit of resilience which we Christians have inherited from our Saviour Jesus the Christ, may never dwindle or deteriorate. We pray this prayer in the name of the one who chose to be resilient even after his death, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Hymn: *(The following hymn or any other suitable one may be sung)*

1. When the storms of life are raging,
Stand by me (stand by me);
When the storms of life are raging,
Stand by me (*stand by me*);
When the world is tossing me
Like a ship upon the sea,
Thou Who rulest wind and water,
Stand by me (*stand by me*).

2. In the midst of tribulation,
Stand by me (*stand by me*);
In the midst of tribulation,
Stand by me (*stand by me*);
When the hosts of hell assail,
And my strength begins to fail,
Thou Who never lost a battle,
Stand by me (*stand by me*).

3. In the midst of persecution,
Stand by me (*stand by me*);
In the midst of persecution,
Stand by me (*stand by me*);
When my foes in battle array
Undertake to stop my way,
Thou Who saved Paul and Silas,
Stand by me (*stand by me*).

Intercessory Prayer

Leader: As we seek God in our midst, let us intercede with an unceasing heart with God remembering specially the affected people of Kandhamal who await the pronouncement of justice for a decade now.

Voices: We pray for all the affected innocent communities of Kandhamal, Odisha, who were attacked, ransacked and murdered with unprecedented motives and relentlessly await for justice to be pronounced in fairness after going through a decade full of unfair and ruelfulness shown in the verdicts and judgment by the evaluators.

All: God our protector, hear our prayers.

Voices: We pray for all the people who were purged and persecuted and suffered greatly for their faith in the past and in present times. We remember all the families of all the near and dear ones who were threatened of their lives and enforced to give away their faith by force and life threatening approaches.

All: God our protector, hear our prayers.

Voices: We pray for all the people who have lost their lives in brutal mob lynching and riots in the hands of religious fanatics. We remember the families of all those who have been martyred for their faith in the name of false accusations and allegations. We ask to heal the abraded wounds of all families and people who have undergone such heinous experiences in their lives.

All: God our protector, hear our prayers.

Voices: We pray for the vandalized spaces of worship and destroyed spaces of residences which resemble the fierce outrageous faces of evil and barbarity to a great extent. We pray that every community may partake in rebuilding the demolished spaces to recreate and restart a new chapter by overcoming the violent past.

All: God our healer, hear our prayers.

Voices: We pray for all those who were displaced from their dwelling places and were forced to live in fear and traumatic situations

throughout their life. We pray that they find solace in the situation of intense grief and bereavement which they have undergone.

All: God our protector, hear our prayers.

Voices: We pray for all fanatic groups and those who encourage violence and communal unrest in the lives of the people from different faith and community groups, and who hamper the lives of the innocent ones. We ask that they may respect their neighbours in the likeness of God and respect the dignity and virtue of every created being.

All: God our healer, hear our prayers.

Closing Prayer

Eternal God, the ground of our being, we thank you for sojourning with us throughout this worship. We praise you for challenging the mediocre version of our faith through the reflection. As we disperse may we embark upon a renewed journey of faith which transcends impediments like caste, creed, religion, ethnicities etc. so as to realize the varied forms of divinity we are engulfed with. We beseech that may the embers of challenging the status quo, which have been lit in our hearts through this worship, propel us to resist and protest whenever we encounter injustice and violence. For Christ's sake we pray. **Amen**

Lord's Prayer (Adapted)

Our God in Heaven and Earth; hallowed be your name through us; your reign of love and your will of communal harmony be established all over the earth; may none be impoverished of their daily bread of sustenance and forgive our oppressors as we forgive them for their vision is obscured by the illusion of power; lead us not into the enticements of hegemony but deliver us from the viciousness of evil conspiracies. For yours is the kingdom, the power of powerlessness and the shame of victimhood forever and ever. **Amen**

Benediction

Go out into the world being true channels of justice and love. Raise your voices against injustice meted out against the weak and vulnerable. In the midst of comfort, choose to be uncomfortable for the sake of the reign of God and be ever willing to strive towards the establishment of an egalitarian society. May the grace of our Saviour Jesus the Christ who confronted and rattled the power structures, love of God the creator who manifests in and through creation, and the communion of the Holy Spirit who propels us to live in fellowship, rest and abide with us now and forever more. **Amen.**

Order of Worship Prepared by

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Cover Poster Designed by

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