
Towards an Emmaus Experience: An Indian Response to *Kairos Palestine*

On the Second Anniversary of the Kairos- Palestine Document in 2011

Introduction:

Let me place on record my sincere appreciations on behalf of the ISEN to the kairos Palestine group for having made in-roads to various contexts in promoting solidarity and friendship for the cause of justice in Palestine. The document indeed has created ripples among several contexts calling people to be inspired and challenged to accompany Palestinians in their search for liberation and justice.

In the post resurrection narrative of Jesus, the Lukan perspective records the conversation of two people on their way to Emmaus debating on the 'talk of the town', the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As they walk the talk, Jesus Christ accompanied them and helped them to realise, recognise and refresh their faith articulations and built a community of peace among those two walkers on the road to Emmaus. That experience helped those two to learn from one another, appreciate one another, correct one another, strengthen one another, and all the more build friendship of solidarity to witness the resurrection and liberative power of Jesus Christ. Such a walk is an experience worth attempting!

In concurrence with such an experience, when contextual articulations of faith narratives are at the cross-roads, when experiences of 'walk the talk' among God-human-talk are perceived as competitors rather than collaborators, when such expressive talks fail to make their relevance felt, an attempt to bring together local critical faith articulations together for a walk becomes immanent. Such an attempts motive is to build bonds of solidarity, for dialogue and mutual understanding. In response to your invitation of 'Come and See', my coming to Palestine makes me realise that I am on an Emmaus journey here, allow me brothers and sisters in Palestine to be your co-pilgrim in the journey towards justice. As co-pilgrims we have a common destiny, as co-pilgrims we share our struggles by listening and sharing, as co-pilgrims we have embarked on a journey of hope, for we affirm in a God of hope, who is willing to journey along with us and as co-pilgrims we strengthen our commitment and resolve when hope seems blurred. Building friendships of solidarity is a step forward in realising our dream of liberation and justice. Here I have attempted to highlight contextual realities bring out the resonances from our ground zero's, and thereby attempted to work out the theological response as kairos now from an Indian young Dalit ecumenical learner.

Our Common Milieu: Resonances from ground zero:

Israel happens to be the cradle to three world's major religions, the Judaism, the Christianity and the Islam, and thereby receives the attribute 'holy' to their land. India like Israel also happens to be the cradle for four other world's major religions, the Hinduism, the Buddhism, the Jainism and the Sikhism, and thereby receives the holiness to her land. In both these holy sites, unholy sights have been practiced and perpetuated.

1. The unholy sights in the holy sites: Walls & Gates

Journeying into the streets of Palestine led me to anger, distress, disappointment and frustration, for visualising the segregations and separations made by the Israel by their cruel occupations, confiscating the Palestine lands, by building walls, fences and gates and thereby dividing and dispersing towns and villages of Palestinians, which is beyond one's imagination in this so called 'holy land.' We have the foreign 'settlers' on mountain tops guarded by the security forces and the native inhabitants of the land of Palestine in

gated communities. Their humiliations, discriminations and the human right violations done against Palestinians knew no bounds.

These sites are not very new for a country like India. Our Indian societies are divided in the name of caste from ages, and we have the dominant caste groups living around the temple inside the village, where as those that are born outside the caste, the Dalits live segregated outside the villages as communities. We have the invisible gates around these Dalits communities, which are very strong and deep, for they are built on the grounds of purity and pollution. There are several examples to illustrate how Dalits were denied entry to the dominant caste localities, denied giving rents of their houses and adding on to it, Dalits are humiliated and ostracised when attempted to walk through their paths. Oppressions to Dalits have become subtle and aggressive these days, for there has been an increasing violence against Dalits with several killings, rapes and arrests, for many go unreported, while the others go unattended. Dalits are forced to work as manual scavengers to clean the human excreta with their bare hands, which again is an occupational based and caste based discrimination that goes unabated. The cries of Dalits women are beyond description, for they have been oppressed in the name of gender, class and caste. Walls of divisions in the cemeteries, walls in the Churches, walls among different communities etc. are all a reality today done in the name of caste.

2. The Hydra of Zionism and Hindutva: Hatred & Violence

Like Zionism in Israel which calls on for one nation and one religion, a Hindu cultural fundamental group in India which subscribes to the ideology of Hindutva calls on India for one Hindu rashtra (state) with one Hindu religion, for Hindus are a major religion. Both these trends are dangerous and venomous, for they have been attacking and persecuting the religious minorities in both our countries, particularly the Muslims and the Christians. For the onset of globalisation has come hand in glove to these ideologies, for it promotes homogenisation and counters all forms of diversities. It tries to bring in uniformity and not unity. These ideologies promulgate violence, for by any means they want to achieve their goal of one-ness, breeding exclusivism and absolutism in their perceptions. Once again it is the Palestinians and the Dalits they have been the worst victims of these ideologies. These ideologues perpetuate violence, encourage hatred and the make inflammatory speeches and hate campaigns against the minorities. The state governments are softer towards them. Saffronisation of education, extra-judicial killings, state sponsored violence, unjust trials in the courts of law, extra-constitutional authorities to the rabbis and swamijis etc. are all part of the package of these ideologies. Demolitions of places of worship (6th December 1992 Babri Masjid was demolished in Ayodhya by these forces), destructions of sites of spiritual importance, attacks on the properties and places of minorities etc. all happen due to these. Both these ideologies are like hydra, a multi-faced serpent from the Greek mythology, which has several faces and they prop up according to the need of the uncertainty that exists.

3. The plundering of lands & natural resources: groaning & pain

The Israeli settlements and the dominant caste/class groups plunder the lands of Palestinians and that of Dalits and Adivasis. In Israel, in the name of God, in the name of force and for the cause of security they plunder the land. In India, in the name of development, in the name of bonded labour and for the cause of prosperity they plunder the land. Such plundering makes communities landless and powerless, for in their land their spiritualities and their sentiments are inter-twined. These people have

been the original inhabitants of their land, and the out-siders take away their lands and control their resources. This has been creating displacement among these communities, many turn up refugees and strangers in their own land. Not only the communities are affected by these plundering, but also the mother earth groans in pain and suffering due to the insensitivity of those in power towards her. The rich green lands are turned into deserts and thereby create ecological imbalances. The unholy alliances of patriarchy, capitalism, casteism, etc. make a vicious circle of oppression. Among various vertices of injustices around us, injustices done to mother earth and injustices done to those living in the margins of the society, the Palestinians, the Dalits, the Tribals, the Women, the migrants etc. particularly call for our attention as those interested in peace and justice issues. Both the creation and the people in the margins mutually share their pain and have been yearning for justice and peace now and only now!

From the above contextual realities, deciphering the signs of our times, one can draw parallels between Palestinians and Dalits, one can observe several similarities and commonalities among our struggles. Here are a few of them for our understanding.

- a. Both happen to be the indigenous, local, inhabitants of their own lands, yet who do not have their lands with them. In both cases lands and natural resources are owned and controlled by those in the power.
- b. Both have been segregated and are oppressed either in the name of nationality and religious identity or in the name of caste and ethnicity.
- c. Both the oppressions have religious sanctions and have used religious Scriptures in justifying the oppressions.
- d. Both these communities do not enjoy the religious liberty, for they are denied access to the holy places, Palestinians on the pretext of security, and Dalits on the pretext of pollution. (in most Hindu temples, at the holy of holies a sign board reads, "non-Hindus are not allowed into this holy place")
- e. Both these communities are humiliated and subjected to various kinds of torture, creating a fear psychosis among them.
- f. Both these communities have been as refugees in several quarters, for emigration and migration among these people have been on the rise.
- g. Both these communities have been the victims of unjust laws and policies, for international human rights laws are not applied and implemented by their respective governments.
- h. Both these communities have been victims of historical injustices, victims of ongoing violence, and human rights violations.
- i. Both these communities have been viewed by the international communities as matters of humanitarian aid or objects of charity and have never been analysed as matters of justice and peace.
- j. Both the Palestinian Christians and Dalits Christians have been denied their constitutional rights, for in the case of Palestinian Christians in Jerusalem are slowly confiscated to deny their right to living and the Dalits Christians are denied affirmative actions like Scheduled Caste status from the government on becoming Christians. Many schemes and policies for Dalits empowerment are not being channelized and utilised.

Justice & Peace: *Kairos* Now!

The given theme carries an exclamatory mark, and this is only to reveal that justice and peace surprises several power structures, by pulling them down. The exclamatory mark on the other hand is a challenge to the young people in adding surprise of bringing in a change in our society. Justice and peace are they a possibility now, may be is a pessimistic voice and for sure is an optimistic voice, and bridging these two is a surprise, for it needs to be established now and only now.

a. Why now!

Allow me to contradict with the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, when he says that God has a little defect that God acts slowly, for I think such a defective God's slowness only adds salt to our existing wounds and only makes us to live in an unrealistic hope. The moment of truth and justice 'now' is the need of the hour. These days, delay and denial of justice and peace have been modern techniques employed by those in powers, and making 'now-ness' redundant and forgotten. Delay and denial are the deadliest forms of injustices happening around, and those that are struggling for justice go from pillar to post in search of it, and often times are frustrated and become prey as victims of injustice. 'Now' is not just a matter of time period sandwiched between hours and seconds or expressed in those values, but 'now' is an invitational situation calling on for action towards justice and peace. We believe in a 'God of now!', for God has always been acting in the given now-ness, and God can't afford to lose that particular now-ness, as God accompanies every 'now' and every now and then. Jesus Christ, has been always God conscious and carries forward those characteristics, for him, 'now' is all that matters. When Jesus called Zaccheaus, he said, 'today I bring salvation to you and your household' (Luke 19:10) and when he was hanging on a Cross, Jesus replied to the one hanging next to him, that 'today you will be with me in paradise' (Lk 23:43). Jesus never postponed or dragged in exercising justice, for Jesus was against denial and delay of justice, for 'now' is an important premise on which he was preaching and practising. Therefore, without 'now' justice and peace loses its savour and severity, for they shall be only meaningful in that given 'now'. Justice, peace and now are all inter-woven and are part of the package.

God as a creator intervened in that 'now' when there was darkness, void and emptiness and created order and light in that chaos to express God's ways of justice and peace. God in Jesus Christ came into that 'now' to deliver justice and peace through Jesus' death and resurrection experiences. God in Holy Spirit acts in our 'nows' in accompanying us in our struggles for justice and peace. Therefore, every 'nows' together constitute life to every creature, and God journeys in those 'nows' of every one. $L = N1 + N2 + N3 + \dots + \infty$, life is a sum total of every now till eternity. And in lieu of that justice and peace are matters of now and now alone, for today and now is the day of salvation.

b. Justice & Peace

In light of the elaborating 'now', an attempt to define justice is that, 'the activity in 'now', where systems of asymmetries which groom life-denial forces of past and present are addressed so that there is affirmation and celebration of life till eternity.' This definition of justice is though tentative, it draws out the parameters for young people in becoming channels of justice in our localities where injustice perpetuates.

Peace, today has been yet another beaten word used in every context. Those that are waging wars says, to establish peace they engage in war, those that are in power say to establish peace and harmony force is the only option left. Peace again is also not absence of war or peace in the

grave yards enjoyed by the dead. Peace is also not mere non-violence, for peace if at all has to be defined has to be coupled with justice, for when justice is achieved, peace is realised. A further probe into justice shall help us to understand peace for now and for our times. Allow me to present three characters of just-peace, though they are not exhaustive, but shall initiate discussion to the understanding of justice and peace.

i. Spiralling Justice achieves sustainable peace

“For judgement I have come into the world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.” John 9: 39

Christ’s way of missioning is not always soothing and to sit in an armchair comfortably. Jesus Christ time and again confronted the oppressive forces of his day, and was bold in calling a ‘spade a spade’. He did not mince words, rather was prolific and prophetic in his missional approaches. There was aggression in Christ’s words and actions, aggression for the sake of giving life to all. The present saying of Christ reveals a profound mission motive of Jesus Christ coming into this world. All along the mission history, Christians and missions were content with the preaching of good news and translated it to the extent of giving charity to the poor and weak. Christian missions did not boldly preach and practice the virtues of justice, a transformative justice. This saying of Jesus Christ is a reminder to the missions today to be bold in preaching the judgement so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind. The context in which Jesus uses these mission words is in the healing of a blind man, where the religious leaders condemn Jesus and his healing and the blind man too. Jesus who came to give life in all abundance makes sure that life is given at any cost, no matter what religious sanctions; texts and leaders try to limit it. Besides giving sight to the blind, Jesus also blinds the short sighted, selfish, nominal religious people, for they try to obstruct healing to the oppressed. When Jesus said he has come to give ‘good news to the poor’, have we ever translated that as ‘bad news to the rich?’ I believe that is the strength of the good news, to convince the poor and to make confessions by the rich for their greed and selfish motives. Theory of retribution will have its due place in the justice and peace discourses. ‘You will be paid for what you have done’, ‘you will reap the consequences right here in this world for what you have sown’ will provide an ample space for missioning in the context of Dalits. Over the years, the preaching from the pulpit has been that one will be rewarded or accounted in the life after death and have side tracked the ontological relevance of Christ’s mission. Therefore, this saying of Christ, provides a clue into address the needs of the oppressed and the need for the oppressor to repent and pass through a tough judgement. The calling for us is to develop a theology of liberation for the oppressor that would seek their repentance, reconciliation and removal of systemic and structural practices of caste. Therefore mission according to Christ’s way is to give sight to the blind and to call for reconciliation and repentance from the people who have been oppressing, for they will be judged accordingly.

ii. Swordish Justice ensures peace on earth

“...I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Matt 10:34

Jesus has always been conceived and perceived as a meek Jesus, but here we see Jesus with aggression in addressing the now-ness of injustice of his times. Jesus, who took a whip in cleansing the temple challenges us to address our contexts of injustices creatively.

Resistance to the violence done to those in the margins, takes the other option of violence as the answer to violence, and this not a new phenomenon for Dalits. Is violence answer to violence? Can this be part of the mission of God in overcoming violence? In such a discussion on violence Sathianathan Clarke's observations comes handy to our contexts. He suggests, "that victimised collectives such as Dalit communities can creatively work on means to use symbolic violence in proactive ways. This may be an acceptable method of preventive violence, one which can safeguard Dalits against the well oiled wheels of fierce and vicious caste machine." He further proposes "'rebounding violence' which does not instrumentalise violence, but adroitly deflects violence back to the originator."¹ Does these symbolic violence and rebounding violence suit the ambience of justice and peace discussions and as an expression of mission of God? Felix Wilfred in addressing evil proposes 'prophetic anger', by which he explains "that it is first and foremost the anger of the victims. The anger of the victims has something visceral about it. The whole being of the victim reacts to the injustice and oppression suffered – be it women, the discriminated ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or any victim of human rights violation. There is ample room to speak about "black rage" and similarly gender rage etc., which express the anguish of the victims pushed to the wall through long-standing oppression, and yet having the strength to imagine something different. Prophetic anger is a healing anger. It opens the wounds of the society, and has ultimately the goal of healing them."² These understandings provide us the space to understand the swordfish aspect of just-peace.

Jesus Christ's mission comes in rescue of our situation in overcoming violence. Jesus cleansing the temple, Jesus taking the whip, Jesus pronouncing that he has not come to give peace but a sword, provides enough basis for addressing violence through symbolic violence and rebounding violence. Jesus Christ may not approve passive non-violence, for he never accepted the unjust status quo of his times. When Palestinians, Dalits, Tribals, migrants etc. are attacked, what legal safeguards are maintained? What justice do they receive? Mission of God is not static, blind and lethargic one, rather is pro-active and dynamic one, which addresses according to the local requirements and situations. Therefore mission of God tries to see that violence in all forms is overcome, and is taken to the right platforms for justice to the victimised people.

iii. Signature of Justice is truth

*"In fact, for this reason, I was born, and for this I came into this world, to testify to the truth."
John 18: 37*

Jesus Christ's another reason for coming to this world; the reason for his mission was to testify to the truth in this world. Jesus Christ provides the clue to the Truth, for on knowing truth one is set at liberty. Truth is not ones exclusive property, and therefore Jesus' way of mission is to testify to the truth, the truth of liberation and the truth of equality. Since God is truth, as the mission agent sent from God, Jesus Christ testifies truth and provides way towards truth, for he leads everyone to truth from all falsehood. Situating this missiological approach of testifying truth within the parameters of justice and peace, the lessons to be drawn from this way of Christ's mission is to testify and witness to the truth of equality, freedom, justice and peace. Testifying to the truth is condemning the falsehood and the inequality it promotes and to live by

¹ Sathianathan Clarke, "Dalits Overcoming Violation and Violence, A Contest between Overpowering and Empowering Identities in Changing India" Pp. 296-98

² Felix Wilfred, "Prophetic Anger and Sapiential Compassion" in *Asian Public Theology* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2010) P. 173

truth, for truth is liberating. Witnessing (*marturia*) to truth is to become martyr for the cause and sake of truth, which is all liberating. Therefore this characteristic of justice calls for a mission paradigm that calls people to live in all truth and to testify to the truth of liberation and life. Mission as witnessing, mission as leading to all truth and mission as confronting all falsehood provide the basis for an emerging new young missiological paradigm. Truth is always triumphant, and one who testifies to truth is also triumphant, and will emerge victorious from all pangs of bondage and oppressions. So, justice needs to be blended in truth then it shall lead all people into all truth and make them to live in hope for truth is always victorious, and liberation is not far, when everyone live in truth. Because of growing falsehood, there is more oppression and discrimination, for caste creates false apprehensions of inequality and unjust practices. Therefore Christ's way of mission is to testify to the truth, to live in truth and make all live in truth. When truth overarches the society in which we live, transformation is at hand.

Sign-Posts for Moving Forward:

- Time has come to recover Bible: A joint Dalit- Palestinian readings of the Bible needs to worked out and projected, in order to provide a perspective to our struggles. Eg. Books like Nehemiah needs to be re-read, for most times we read it as 'come lets build the walls' not knowing the adverse impact it has for the Palestinians. We need to deconstruct such readings and add new meanings like building bridges among people today.
- Situate and locate our struggles in our Asian setting, for our struggles are Asian struggles striving for Asian solutions and therefore we need to expand our networks among Asian countries for a profound and solid solidarity for our struggles.
- Inculcate 'earth-centered spiritualities.' Let issues of land be the common denominator for our struggles, for an inter-facing of Dalit liberation theology and Palestine liberation theology is the need of the day to work out common strategies and methodologies for liberation. Encourage Dalits- Palestine theological dialogue. Eg. Chengara land struggle in Kerala and how 5000 Dalits have taken land by making their tents over there.
- Develop exchanges between our communities. Eg. Student social forum by SCMI and we want to invite young people from Palestine to speak and to learn from our contexts.
- Expose our local tour operators of pilgrimage to the realities of Palestine and encourage the alternative tourism.
- May the International day in solidarity with Palestine on Nov 29th be popularised, calling on the attention of the local congregations with necessary homilies and liturgies. Assigning one Sunday as Palestine Sunday and calling on to observe it globally shall strengthen our resolve, by making some activity on that day.
- At the ensuing WCC Assembly in Busan, Korea, we need to organise a joint *madang*, an open market place to display our struggle for justice, for no other issues than Dalit and Palestine journey for justice can add meaning to the theme, 'God of life, lead us into justice and peace.'
- Let the Dalit & Palestine issues be projected as justice issues, faith issues and not as mere diakonial issues.

Conclusion:

Let me conclude by echoing the clarion call that was made by the National Council of Churches in India as an attempt in articulating Kairos- India, at its National Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits in October 2010, "As Christians we claim to reflect the mind of Christ but we are vested in the logic of caste. Jesus says "no one can serve two masters, for a slave will either love the one and hate the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other" (Matthew 6: 24). In

a context of caste division, caste discrimination and caste violence we announce from the rooftop: "No one can serve Christ and caste!" We also confess that in our caste-infested world "we have decided to follow Christ." Empowered by a deep faith in God, who binds us into communion, who frees us for justice and who heals us towards wholeness, we join together to live faithfully as disciples of Christ in India today. This involves public confession of our complicity in the sin of casteism, reaffirmation of our faith in a God of justice and a radical commitment to solidarity with those crushed under the weight of the caste system." In line with that tone, if caste is pronounced as sin, occupation in Palestinian context needs to be pronounced boldly as sin, for we are all called like prophet Jeremiah, "See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant." (Jeremiah 1:10). May the walls of division in this land be tore down and destroyed so that peace and justice shall flow like an ever flowing streams. Today we need prophets like Jonah, who after an fish experience proclaimed a fast that challenges the polis of his day, the polity of his day and the prophecy of his day, thereby saving the territory and city of Ninevah. Jonah truly is a first prophet of his kind who has blend of Dalit- Palestine ethos in achieving justice. We as SCM India pledged our support to the Palestinian struggles for justice, when we recently met as our General Committee meetings when we wrestled on the theme, "Blessed are those in the margins, for they shall inherit the land", drawing parallels from our Dalits/Adivasi experiences.

May this season inspire us to discover Jesus ,
among the weak, the poor, the powerless, the landless, and the occupied
May this season invite us to recover Jesus,
from the glamour of prosperities and from the armour of pseudo-spiritualities,
May this season initiate us to uncover Jesus,
from the wrappings of exclusivism and from the claims of absolutism.

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