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The Concept of Human Liberation in Gandhi's Social Philosophy and Balasuriya's Social Theology

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One reality that the world has battled with since ancient times is the reality of oppression and degradation of the human person. Oppression of one person by another or a group of persons by another group is a stack reality of life. People or persons who have been oppressed have often cried out for freedom or liberation from whatever oppresses them. The term “liberation” is a very common term that is heralded here and there. What is the real meaning of the term “liberation” or “human liberation?” It is not possible to examine all the shades of meanings and understanding that this term carries. The objective of this paper is to hermeneutically and analytically decipher and break open the meaning of the concept of human liberation as presented in some of the works of Mahatma Gandhi and Tissa Balaruisya. The paper will equally make a comparative appraisal of their understanding of human liberation in their teachings, advocacy, and practices. The paper finds and concludes that both of them were deeply involved in advocating and working for the liberation of human beings from social, political, economic, and other forms of oppression on earth, while they were open to the full liberation that can only be obtained in the hereafter.

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INTRODUCTION

The word "liberation" is a popular concept that pervades the humanities and social sciences. The term is a popular one among people who have lived under some form of oppression, under colonialism, or even those facing the challenges of life. People speak of being liberated from sickness and diseases, being free from colonial oppression, being liberated from all dehumanising forces, being freed from sin and bad habits, being free from hunger and starvation, and so forth. Ecclestone (1979) writes: "The word liberation will be in our ears whether we like it or not for a long time to come. It is attached to many movements, activities, and studies, notably theology, and especially too much theological writing that is being done in the erstwhile colonial and politically oppressive regimes in Asia, Africa, and South America" (p. 469). The fact is that the word is not limited to theology. Mendieta (2020) avers that it is also used in the Philosophy of Liberation, which has its origin in Latin America (p. 1). The important point to be noted is that liberation or human liberation is an important issue that is still relevant and should not be ignored for situations that warrant liberation still prevail in the world. Liberation can apply to all dimensions of life such as social, political, spiritual, cultural, etc. They all have to do with the human person or human society. In this paper, the terms "liberation" or "human liberation" shall be used interchangeably. When liberation is written about in this paper, it implies human liberation and is inclusive of all that affects human beings.

Among the two key thinkers for whom the concept of liberation is at the core of their works are the great Social Philosopher Mahatma Gandhi and the Liberation Theologian Tissa Balasuriya. Fazing (2008) has shown that in India, philosophy is a very practical exercise and connected to the life of the people, concerned with realising the truth in real

life, related to the realisation of the self, rooted in the spiritual aspects of human life, equally focused on the good life on earth, and philosophic-religious life is tied together (pp. 10-11). Rightly, the thoughts of Gandhi cut across philosophical and religious truths. This study delves into how these two thinkers from the Asia continent understood the concept of liberation. It should be stated right from the onset that not everything that they wrote or practised about human liberation can be presented here. The idea is to highlight some of the key issues and points that are helpful in the comparative appraisal that this paper is about to undertake. While Mahatma Gandhi is from India, Tissa Balasuriya is from Sri Lanka. To uncover their understanding of this concept, the paper will use a critical hermeneutic method to break open and dissect their understanding of the concept. To foreground the discussion, this paper will do a literature review. After the literature review has been done, the paper will present the results and findings before concluding.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order not to be too verbose, this literature review shall be restricted to key works of those who have treated the concept of human liberation in Gandhi's work(s) on human liberation. In a similar vein, it will review works limited to Balasuriya's notion of human liberation. Works that deal with the issue of human liberation are so many within the scope of this paper it is imperative to limit to works that treat the issue of human liberation in these two thinkers. This is also done because under the section on results and findings, the section will begin with an analysis of the concept of human liberation. Under this section, works will be studied to decipher the meaning of human liberation.

Kurian Kachappilly devotes his work to examining the holistic vision of human liberation found in

Gandhi. For him, his concept of *Sarvadaya* (welfare of all) “envisages a total liberation, comprising of social, political, economic and religious spheres of life, leading to self-realisation or God-realisation” (Kachappily, n. d: 1). This author notes that in Gandhi’s thoughts *Satyagraha* (soul force), selfless love, and nonviolence (*Ahimsa*) are meant to achieve liberation towards God-realisation. Mehta (1999) examines integrative humanism in Gandhi’s thought in which Gandhi speaks of the need for the human being to live a moral life for the development of society, and morality is not simply adherence to outward rules but inward fulfilment. Palakkappillil (2014) examines Gandhi’s notion of social justice. Though Gandhi never wrote any treatise or book on social justice yet the ideas of social justice flow through his writings and practices. He advocated for an egalitarian society built on nonviolence in which there is equal distribution, self-rule, trusteeship, self-sufficient local communities, the dignity of labour, protection of animals, and uplift of the oppressed, among many other things. Biwas (2015) looks at Gandhi’s teachings on peace and how he emphasised truth and nonviolence as the means to attain a peaceful society and just living.

Fernando (2018) reviewing the life and writings of Balasuriya, shows that he was concerned that the church should not be separated from society and social realities. She has to be engrossed and engaged in social realities and the struggles of the people. The titles of some of his important books reveal his concern for liberation-*Jesus and Human Liberation*, *Mary and Human Liberation*, and *Eucharist and Human Liberation*. He was concerned about contextualising theology and a theology that is concerned with the earth. Ecclestone (1979) discusses Balasuriya’s book, *Eucharist and Human Liberation*. He reveals the serious concerns of Balasuriya for contemporary Asia, the special problems that the youths are facing and the challenge of socialism. He calls on the church to be engaged in liberation.

As noted previously, it will be quite impracticable to review all the works that deal with Gandhi and his social thoughts, philosophies, or theologies. The concern is with his notion of human liberation. Direct works on his notion of human liberation are quite a few as seen above. This equally applies to Balasuriya’s thoughts. The review reveals that though various works deal with the works of the above two thinkers, very few deal with their notion of human liberation. None of the work makes a comparison of the thoughts of these two thinkers on human liberation. This is what grounds the relevance of this work.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative and is based on secondary sources. Through qualitative and based on secondary sources, it will look at the primary works of these two thinkers, books, and papers written by them. The research will survey the literature on the issue of human liberation to understand what human liberation is. It will also gather information from books and papers written by both thinkers in hard copies or from online sources. It will also examine the information from those who have written about these two thinkers. The idea is to appraise, analyse and do a hermeneutics of their thought on human liberation. Their concepts of human liberation will be appraised comparatively as similarities and dissimilarities are presented.

RESULT AND FINDINGS

Conceptual Analysis of the Concept of Human Liberation

One of the fundamental meanings of human liberation can be found in what has come to be named liberation theologies. From the vantage point of liberation theologies, it is freedom from all forms of oppression whether these oppressions are social, cultural, religious, political, economic, gender, racial, etc. This is why as Nickoloff (2007) has noted various brands of liberation theologies

include “Latin American liberation theology, African American or Black theology, feminist theology, womanist theology, gay and lesbian liberation theology, and many Third World theologies. (Theologies of liberation have also been developed in religious traditions beyond Christianity, for example, by Jews and Muslims” (p. 769). Gutierrez (1988) who is widely acclaimed to be the father of liberation theology opines that the term liberation refers to freedom from sin and all the social structures that oppress and obstructs the destinies of individuals and peoples. By this token, he notes that it “expresses the aspirations of oppressed peoples and social classes, emphasising the conflictual aspect of the economic, social, and political process which puts them at odds with wealthy nations and oppressive classes” (p. 24). Liberation aims at authentic freedom to create a new humanity in a new world. Sedgwick (200) writes that liberation from the vantage point of liberation theology aims for actions against poverty, solidarity with the poor, fighting against social injustice, and promoting the wellbeing of the marginalised.

Floyd -Thomas (2014) states that in African American theology, “liberation is the positive transformation of unequal personal and societal power relations in the merger of divine and social justice in the world” (p. 200). It is to be technically distinguished from freedom which refers to situations in which humans choose their destinies without external coercion (Floyd-Thomas, 2014). In this paper, the Hindu notion of liberation, the tradition from which Gandhi emerged should not be left out. Moniz (1988) notes that in Hinduism, the English word liberation could be equivalent to many Sanskrit terms such as: “Mukti, Moksha, Kaivalya, Apavarga, Aikantya, Nirvana, Nirvrti, and Samadhi” (p. 40). Moniz (1988) says that the most used word, “Moksha”, implies ‘to liberate’, ‘to be free’, and “to deliver”, and all of these imply salvation (p. 40). In Hinduism, as Moniz (1988) notes, it implies being liberated from the cycle of rebirth or karma, from evil and the three paths of

liberation are “Karma-marga” (the path of action), “Bhakti-marga” (the path of love of God), and “Jnana-marga” (the path of knowledge). Moniz (1988) notes that the path of liberation that one seeks depends on what one needs to be liberated from. According to the teachings of Hinduism, if it is an evil action, you seek the path of action; if it is an evil intention, you seek the path of love, and if it is ignorance, you seek the path of knowledge.

It is with the above understanding of human liberation in mind that the teachings and practices of Gandhi and Balasuriya are examined.

Human Liberation in Gandhi’s Social Philosophy

A brief word on his life and times is necessary here before presenting his concept and practices regarding human liberation. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (famously known as Mahatma Gandhi) was born on October 2 1869, in Porbandar (now in Gujarat) in the Western part of India. He was born into the Vaisya caste, which was the 3rd of the four castes in India at that time. He got married at the tender age of thirteen years to Kasturba. In the year 1888, he was in London to study law, coming back home to India after three years. He arrived in South Africa in 1893 to practice law. The human oppression meted out against the Indians there in South Africa surprised him. It was his first-hand experience of oppression and racial discrimination that inspired him to begin the non-violent struggle; he called this *Satyagraha* (soul force). By the fact of the oppression that he suffered his vision and mission as a human liberator springing forth and developing, Gandhi returned to his native India in 1915 travelling and observing the poor and harsh living situations of his people suffering under British colonial oppression. He worked and struggled through writing, education, and non-violent campaign activities and eventually led his people to independence from British rule on August 15, 1947. Gandhi was an advocate of total liberation whether it is religious, social, political, economic, or

cultural. He is revered as the father of the Indian nation, a great spiritual leader, and a political emancipator (Fazing, 2008). Fazing (2008) shows that Gandhi was influenced by the followings: his mother's ascetic practices, Jainism and Buddhism, the message of the Isavasya Upanishad, the Bhagavad Gita, his compatriots Naoroji and Raychandabhai, Leo Tolstoy and John Ruskin, and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. He lived a life of renunciation and was detached from material things. Gandhi died on January 30, 1948. Agarwal (1976) writes: "He dedicated his entire life to the service of his country and brought his country out of the darkness of slavery and brought light into it. There is no such sphere of life in the twentieth century as is free from the impact of Gandhi's philosophy and teachings. His influence is seen the entire world over. Thus, it is essential to study his views on various aspects concerning human life and activity" (p. 517). Odey (1996) says that Gandhi is hailed as a liberator worldwide, a restorer of hope, and an eradicator of exploitation.

Gandhi is rightly notable for his struggle to ensure the British yoke of colonialism and oppression over India is broken. He led India to independence in 1947. First and foremost, then, the idea of struggling to ensure that Indians are free from colonial rule is important in his notion of human liberation. Under British rule, India was not free and needed to be free. He also laboured and worked to end the Hindu caste system. The caste system deprives human beings of their rights. He equally struggled for the well-being and rights of women (Moniz, 1998). These cannot be separated from his concept of human liberation. Gandhi is thoroughly a champion of total human liberation. His entire life and works are aimed at this. If someone refuses to classify Gandhi as a liberationist and some of his teachings and his works as aimed at human liberation, one would wonder what human liberation is. From the analysis of the concept of liberation given at the beginning of this section, it becomes clear that man and his works can be classified under the umbrella

of human liberation. Birch and Cobb (1981) describe his vision of human liberation as: "the liberation of social structures and human behaviour such as will involve a shift from manipulation and management of living creatures ... to respect for life in its fullness" (p. 1).

Gandhi lived in an Indian society that suffered from a lot of social conflicts, social alienation, oppression, and lack of development. Hill (2013) writes that Indian society was grounded in a caste system and hierarchy of class, and there were many subdivisions in the caste system rooted in religious myths and practices. Hill (2013) states further that whom you marry and the party you join are all informed by the caste system. Apart from the caste system, he notes that there was a large group of people in the population who belonged to no caste and are seen as outcasts and untouchables. As Hill (2013) notes further, the origin of the group of outcasts arises from the fact that a caste rule was broken and the person or family was thrown out and all persons born to that person or family became outcasts, and outcasts were excluded from the temple and can only be allowed to do menial jobs. They were strictly discriminated against. Gandhi saw outcasts not as outcasts but as *harijan* (children of God). Gandhi spent time-fighting for the rights of those who were considered untouchables.

To be untouchable in Indian society is to have no life. Moniz (1997) writes that you are not allowed to enter public places, deprived of taking water from public wells, can only take leftovers, and indeed you were seen as a "non-person" (p. 72). Gandhi determined that segregation and discrimination against untouchables were eradicated.

In his social teaching, Gandhi was clear that the Hindu scripture did not support discrimination against fellow human beings. He taught that all human beings are equal and have the same basic human dignity. Moniz (1997) quotes Gandhi saying in *Quest for Gandhi*: "I believe in the doctrine of equality as taught by Lord Krishna in the Gita. The

Gita teaches that the members of all the four castes should be treated on an equal basis” (p. 76). All people are equal no matter their conditions of birth. Moniz (1997) cites him again saying: “There can be no greater ignorance than this. Birth and observance of forms cannot determine one’s superiority or inferiority and no scripture that labels a human being as inferior or untouchable because of his or her birth can command our allegiance. It is a denial of God and Truth” (p. 77). He believed human beings should be treated as human beings and with love. They are all entitled to equal opportunities.

It can be said that Gandhi’s understanding of human liberation is fully holistic. It is not just from physical or material debilitating conditions but for people to realise their identity as children of God knowing the kingdom of God is within them. Human liberation in terms of freedom for Gandhi has two dimensions, political and *moksha*. Political freedom concerns moral, social, economic, and material liberations from things that oppress human persons. Outside this, there is also a need for *moksha*, salvation. His understanding of liberation is not limited to the social or political realms. Gandhi (1927) says that it includes self-purification by cultivating a pure heart of becoming “absolutely passion-free in thought, speech, and action; to rise above the opposing currents of love and hatred, attachment and repulsion” (p. 464). Humans must continue to cultivate this path as they quest for God-realization and obtain ultimate salvation. Gandhi et al. (1966) write: “I have no desire for the perishable kingdom of earth. I am striving for the Kingdom of Heaven, which is *Moksha*. To attain my end, I do not need to seek the shelter of a cave. I carry one about me if I would but know it”. (p. 18). Gandhi et al. (1966) also say: “For me, the road to salvation lies through incessant toil in the service of my country and there through of humanity. I want to identify myself with everything that lives”. (p. 18).

Gandhi experienced racial segregation and oppression. On an occasion in South Africa when he was riding on the train to Pretoria, he was thrown

out of the first-class compartment (Gandhi, 1927). It is instructive to note that great leaders, liberators, freedom fighters, etc., are always inspired or provoked into action by something that happens in their life. Martin Luther King Jr was pushed into the limelight by the action of Rosa Park (History dot com, 2023). Gandhi’s maltreatment on the train and his being left to sleep on the platform at nightfall pushed him to struggle against segregation. He began to struggle against injustice in South Africa; he could not see why one human being should be treated differently from another person. He could organise, lead demonstrations, and give speeches and conferences to campaign against the injustice meted out to Indian and other people in South Africa. Moniz (1997) states that the efforts of Gandhi bore fruits as “the three pounds tax on Indian labourers was dropped; the Black Act and other bills were withdrawn; Indian marriages were recognised; the Emigration Act was mitigated and the system of importing labourers from Indian was put an end to in 1918” (p. 70). Moniz (1997) notes that: “Two decades of intense work in South Africa had made Gandhi a ‘liberator of the oppressed poor’.” (p. 70).

Another issue that featured prominently in Gandhi’s life and practice is working for liberation and freedom for women. Women suffered from many forms of oppression in Indian society. Girls were dedicated to the temples, they were married out early in life, and they underwent painfully and forced widowhood, self-immolation, the *pardah* system, and heavy dowry. The society was a patriarchal society and granted a lot of privileges to men. Women were seen simply as sexual objects for the reproduction of children and the pleasure of men (Kripalani and Radhakrishnan, 1960). In many societies, women are treated in an ambivalent manner. They could be given respect, but in actuality, they suffered a lot of oppression. Kripalani and Radhakrishnan (1960) writing magnificently about the status and gifts of women and how their oppression is unjustified, write thus:

“Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity—to me, the female sex, not the weaker sex. It is the nobler of the two, for it is even today the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith, and knowledge”. Gandhi was a strong voice which spoke for social justice for women. He was not afraid of being critical and rejecting sacred texts that supported the oppression of women. This is a mark of a true and strong liberator. They do not justify injustice or social discrimination with sacred scripture.

He fought for the rights and dignity of women as he saw it as necessary for the full liberation of society. He spoke against laws and systems that treated women as slaves or kept them as slaves such as the *pardah* system that put restrictions and fears over women’s purity, whereas at the same time, there were no fears on the part of women over men’s purity. Kripalani and Radhakrishnan (1960) say:

Chastity is not a hot-house growth. It cannot be protected by the surrounding wall of the purdah. It must grow from within, and to be worth anything it must be capable of withstanding every unsought temptation. (SB, 248) And why is there all this morbid anxiety about female purity? Have women any say in the matter of male purity? We hear nothing of women’s anxiety about men’s chastity. Why should men arrogate to themselves the right to regulate female purity? It cannot be superimposed from without. It is a matter of evolution from within and therefore of individual self-effort.

The dowry system was also problematic and he insisted that marriage should be based on love and founded on consent not dowry. The birth of a girl child was seen as a curse and that of a male child was seen as a blessing (Gandhi, 1927). Gandhi encouraged all children no matter their sexes were equal in dignity and should be treated as such. He

encouraged women to be bold, strong, and fearless and live noble lives and act for their freedom and not allow themselves to be in bondage. The role of women as mothers is sacrosanct and should be honoured and respected. Equality with men does not mean they should neglect this noble role. For Gandhi as cited by Khoshoo and Moolakkattu (2009), “Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate...and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him” (p. 33-34). Khoshoo and Moolakkattu (2009) write that Gandhi “...helped women find a new dignity in public life, a new place in the national mainstream, a new confidence, a new self-view, and a consciousness that they could themselves act against oppression” (P. 36). These two authors just mentioned notes that today he is accused of “maintaining a predilection for gender-specific roles and education” (p. 36) and not allowing women into congress. These two authors note that perhaps Gandhi did not want to square women against men or obstruct the structure of the family, but his views were certainly radical for his days.

Human Liberation in Tissa Balasuriya’s Theology

Tissa Balasuriya was a Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate Catholic priest from Sri Lanka. He was a notable radical liberation theologian, human rights crusader, and economist. He died at the ripe old age of 89 years on January 17 2013. In 1971 he founded the Centre for Society and Religion in Colombo. The goal was to promote interreligious dialogue and promote peace and justice. He also played a key role in the coming existence of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. On January 2, 1997, he was excommunicated from the Catholic Church for his radical views on Mary, no original sin, papal authority, divine revelation, etc. It was his 1990 book, *Mary and Human Liberation* that brought him into trouble with the congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of the Vatican. After a year, he was reconciled back to the Catholic Church

on January 15 1998. Among the books that he has written are *Eucharist and Human Liberation*, *Mary and Human Liberation*, and *Jesus and Human Liberation* (Fernando, 2013).

Human liberation and planetary liberations are strong themes and issues in Balasuriya's theology. When he has reconciled back with the church the beginning of his statement reveals what burns in the heart of this theologian and lover of human liberation. Balasuriya (1998) states: "I, Fr Tissa Balasuriya, O. M.I., declare that my life commitment has always been to endeavour to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, to serve the Church, and to work for integral human liberation, including a more just society. In terms of that aim, I have striven to promote theology given an inculturation of the faith in Asia". As cited by Fernando (1997), a coalition of women groups petitions Rome saying:

As women who have struggled for women's equality and empowerment in Sri Lanka, we are deeply distressed that Father Balasuriya, a champion of social justice and a pioneer in the fight for human rights and ethnic harmony, has been excommunicated ... We are particularly concerned because one of the issues over which such drastic action has been taken concerns his attitude toward gender equality.

Menzies (1997) does a review of Balasuriya's controversial book, *Mary and Human Liberation* which brought him into a confrontation with the Vatican. Menzies notes that he devotes his book to redefining the role of Mary in today's church and society, claiming that Mary has been traditionally seen as a passive woman. Balasuriya and Menzies (1997) say, argue that this was defined by a male-dominated church to tranquilise Christians in a society rooted in oppression and exploitation. In his strong advocacy for liberation and justice, Publishers Weekly (1997) asserts correctly in reading Balasuriya that he radically opposes "traditional Western images of Mary as submissive, virginal, and obedient Mother of God as he tries to

draw an image of Mary that can be used and understood in Third World cultures to bring justice, especially to women and the impoverished". Publishers Weekly (1997) opines that drawing from the Magnificat, Mary's song, he shows that Mary is not a passive but strong woman, who sacrificed her son for the world and from her, all can learn a radical message for social liberation and work against injustices. Writing of the Magnificat, Balasuriya (1997) says:

"The Church's love of preference for the poor is wonderfully inscribed in Mary's Magnificat. God 'has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly, ...filled the hungry with good things, sent the rich away empty, ... scattered the proud-hearted ... and his mercy is from age to age on those who fear him'" (p. 10).

Mary declares: "He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away" (Luke 1: 51-53, revised standard version). God is not neutral. He sides with the poor, oppressed, and victims of social injustice. Mary also is not neutral.

In furtherance of the point just mentioned, Balasuriya is critical of the oppression and suppression of women in the church and society. Unfortunately, Christian worship for him has contributed to this. He argues that women have been denied responsible action in Eucharistic celebrations. Though they have advanced in all spheres of life they still suffer from much suppression in the church. For instance, until recently, a female could not even be an altar server in Eucharistic worship. Women should be seen as equal to men and not discriminated against. In all, Balasuriya argues that the Eucharist should be a source of unity, end social discrimination, and serve the liberation of all people. He is critical of the

oppression and maltreatment of women in indigenous Asian religions and Christianity. For him, religion has a duty to uplift women and support their struggles for equal rights and human dignity. Pradeep (n.d) cites Balasuriya in *Towards the Liberation of Theology in Asia* saying God is seen as being on the side of the dominating male in both, especially in the church where they are seen as unequal to men. This is not acceptable to Balasuriya. Pradeep (n.d) notes that:

In his controversial book 'Mary and Human Liberation', Rev. Balasuriya presents a dynamic Mariology that helps to strengthen feminist theology, in this book he states Marian spirituality is traditionally preached and presented but there is more than that it downplays the humanity and the maturity of a woman who participated in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. 'It is this type of women that needs to be central to Christian Spirituality'.

Balasuriya (2000) is a strong advocate of human rights. He is equally a strong critique of globalisation. While globalisation has many benefits, it has also brought a lot of harm impeding the freedom and peace of people. Among the negative effects that Balasuriya enumerates are transnational corporations dominating trade to the detriment of poorer nations, acceleration of poverty, increase in inequality of income, creating wants through advertisements, the control of the mass media by a few, reduction of the power of states in poor nations, environmental destructions, exacerbation of violence and conflicts, violations of the rights of indigenous cultures, etc. Balasuriya (2000) writes:

Christian liberation theologians have been clear in their emphasis on human rights of the peoples oppressed due to racism, colonialism, or gender. Their argument for human rights was biblical and theological based on the view that God has opted in favour of the liberation of the oppressed as the path towards the

realisation of the kingdom of God on earth. Human rights were to be realised by a struggle against the values and structures of oppression that dominate most of the world. More than right as such, the Bible from Genesis onwards emphasises the obligations of humans, as responsible persons, to care for one's neighbour as a child of God, and also for nature.

People need to be freed from the negative side effects of globalisation.

Balasuriya (1977) argues that the Christian Eucharist has been socially conditioned. He wonders with the millions of Eucharistic celebrations in history, Christian people continue to be selfish and individualistic, and the cruellest colonisers of history have been Christians. Balasuriya (1977) argues thus: "The traditional Eucharistic devotion was cut off from the life of the people and from their day-to-day problems. The numbers present at the Eucharist and the utterly heterogeneous character of the congregation in the Church did not permit any common reflection for action. Thus, it had little or no positive impact on the Christians regarding their social obligations" (p. 35).

From the Old Testament, using the story of the Exodus, he argues that "the liberation which God wrought for his people was a political liberation. God bears witness here to the need of a political action, as liberation was impossible otherwise" (p. 11). Balasuriya (1977) also writes that God's action was also violent. God used force to bring the people of Israel from Egypt. The Christian Eucharist was instituted within the Passover of the Jewish people and so it "is thus closely connected to the struggle of the Jewish people for their liberation" (p. 12). The following biblical verses such as Isaiah 1:1-17, Isaiah 58:4-8, Amos 5:21-24, Micah 3:1-3, Micah 6:9-15, Micah 6:66-7 all link worship to struggle for justice and liberation, to struggle to end oppression and suffering. Re-reading the incident of Jesus'

cleansing of the temple, Balasuriya (1977) argues thus:

This action of Jesus was against the economic exploitation of the Jewish society and the Roman occupation; but it was also a clear condemnation of the corruption to which the priesthood of the day had been reduced. The priests did recite long prayers. They celebrated the temple feasts. But they participated in a system in which the temple itself had become a kin-pin of business and exploitation. Jesus could not stand this mockery of worship. The priests had collaborated in this distortion of religion and of prayer. The temple was guarded by the Roman soldiers as a central institution of the whole socio-political edifice of their colonial exploitation. (p. 18)

He has argued that the early Christians were socialistic in their lifestyles, lived and shared goods in common and they lived an egalitarian lifestyle in which they shunned oppression and marginalisation of anyone. He argues that the Eucharist has been monopolised and clericalised by the clergy and monks. In the light of contemporary challenges, Balasuriya (1977) proposes some of the key things that need to be done for the real liberation and social justice dimension of the Eucharist to be revealed: reflection should not be separated from radical social commitment, inner spiritual life and struggle for socio-economic liberation should be seen as mutually inclusive not exclusive; and there should be rigorous social analysis during of worship.

One clear fact is that those who advocate for human liberation must always advocate for social justice. It is social injustices and oppressive practices that hold people in bondage. This is why the theme of social justice is very prominent in the writings and practice of Balasuriya. He critiqued the social injustices that existed in the Asian continent. He opined that Asia was the poorest region of the world. Balasuriya (1994) writes: “Asians are the poor of the world. They have been exploited for

thousands of years- five hundred of those years by Europeans. Asia is the continent of the hungry masses of humanity” (p. 259). Critiquing Rich North America, he writes: “Our people have no food no land. You are the World’s landlords. You control the resources that can make human life possible for our people. But do you even consider sharing them”. (p. 216).

Another aspect where the liberation thoughts of Balasuriya come to play is in his relations and actions towards other religions. He did not discriminate against any religion and he had a deep respect for Buddhism. He laboured and worked for authentic religious harmony. Pradeep (n.d) writes that on May 11, 1969, Balasuriya penned an article titled “Buddhism and Christianity” for the *Ceylon Daily News* in which he critiques the dark side of Christianity through history, her maltreatment of Buddhists in Sri Lanka and called for repentance and reconciliation. Pradeep (n.d) cites the book *Vision for the Future: Essays in Honour of Tissa Balasuriya* in which he says: “He urged Catholics to live in a spirit of appreciation towards the Lord Buddha and Buddhism and presented the Buddha as a man of Spirituality”. Balasuriya (1997) writes profoundly about the significance and values of other religions apart from Christianity. For him, other religions have to be respected and the profound spiritual treasures that they carry are recognised. These values should not be despised. Balasuriya (1997) cites the Catholic Vatican II *Declaration on Relation of the Catholic Church to Non-Christian Religions* (nos 2-3) arguing that the Catholic Church has a profound respect for Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, etc. In the same place, he mentions number 9 of the *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church* which states: “whatever good is found to be sown in the hearts and minds of men, or the rites and cultures peculiar to various peoples, not only is not lost, but is healed, uplifted, and perfected for the glory of God, the shame of the demon, and the bliss of men”. Balasuriya (1997) championed the acceptance of the

sacred writings of other religions and even opined they should be read in catholic liturgical gatherings; and also opined that the spiritual leaders of Asia should be respected.

In bringing the section on Tissa Balasuriya to an end, it is important to remark that his understanding of human life is not simply limited to this earthly plane. He lived out his life as a Catholic priest in the hope of the heavenly kingdom. Ultimate freedom and liberation for people then do not just end in this life but the blessed life hereafter. Balasuriya (1997) writes: “*The Constitution on the Liturgy* reminds us of the eschatological dimension of our liturgy, which seeks to build up the full realisation of the kingdom of God” (p. 164). Writing from his religious background, he notes that there are no distinctions in heaven, which will be filled with all people of goodwill, and because of this it is important even in the right here and now for all to strive for “universal harmony and justice on earth” (p. 164).

A Comparative Appraisal

Gandhi essentially stepped into his Hindu tradition but was open to other religions and had a deep respect and reverence for them. He saw all men and women as brothers and sisters and children of God. Nobody should be discriminated against. This is equally the similar attitude of Balasuriya who was influenced by the works of Gandhi. Balasuriya was steeped in his Christian tradition, but he had a deep reverence for other religions. He spoke of Christ as the “cosmic Christ” and saw all human beings as brothers and sisters. Inter-religious peace and harmony were at the centre of their life pursuits. Balasuriya was primarily a theologian of the Liberation Theology persuasion. Gandhi was both a social philosopher and a religious thinker. Gandhi’s work draws from Hindu philosophy and religion and other ecumenical writings. Burns (2006) notes that though he was not an original thinker, his remarkable achievements as one of the most outstanding figures of the twentieth century cannot

be denied as he inspired figures like Martin Luther King, Jnr, Nelson Mandela, etc. Adams and Dyson (2007) hint at this when they aver that Gandhi is not a political thinker in the technical sense of that word but a moralist and a man of action. Mukhi (2008) will certainly differ from Adams and Dyson, as he avers that Gandhi has made an outstanding contribution to modern political philosophy and Indian political thoughts. He is a synthesiser who weaved from the writings and teachings of others.

Both Gandhi and Balasuriya were not dogmatic in their teachings. They were critical even of their religious traditions. They were not afraid of questioning what they considered to be oppressive and “unfreezing” in their religious traditions. They re-read sacred texts to promote human rights, freedom for women, and the promotion of human wellbeing and welfare. Their attitude is akin to Ruether (1983), who wrote that a critical lens for judging what is revelatory, divine, and authentic in sacred writings is what promotes the full humanity of women, not what distorts their personhood and full humanity. As noted, both Gandhi and Balasuriya questioned and rejected sacred texts that distorted and supported the oppression and dehumanisation of women. They strove for and worked for the promotion of the rights of women both in religion and society. They spoke of the fact that religion has a great role to play in the upliftment of women. Both of them were broadminded. Gandhi called his autobiography an experiment with truth and he did not claim infallibility. They both have a vision for an afterlife rooted in their different faith perspectives.

Both of them spoke of life as one holistic reality. Life is not to be compartmentalised into different and exclusive segments. They believed that religion and politics intermingled with one another. Both of them were respecters and lovers of all religions. They did not see any need for religious disunity. Gandhi in his life worked for Hindu-Muslim unity, while Balasuriya worked for peaceful interaction between Christians and Buddhists. Burns (2006)

writes that Gandhi was deeply influenced by the “universal compassion of Buddhism” (p. 73). Gandhi and Balasuriya had a deep respect for Islam. Gandhi saw all religions as true though imperfect. They affirmed human dignity and equality. All human beings are equal. They worked hard to eliminate all forms of discrimination and oppression in their respective societies. Both of them were advocates of universal love. They saw the presence of divinity or God in all human beings. This is a profound area in which these two great minds meet. People’s attitudes and beliefs about their different religions have in most of history often been the source of conflicts, wars, violence, and oppression. Some persons have persecuted and oppressed persons from other religions and deprived them of their human rights. A great proportion of the wars fought in history have been religious wars. In many countries where there are Christians and Muslims, there have often been tensions and conflicts. You think of places like Nigeria, Indonesia, Pakistan, etc. In history, wars have been fought between Christians and Muslims over the holy land. Their beliefs and attitudes to religions are important to highlight here for as noted much oppression that people have suffered comes from religious adherents. Their visions, missions, philosophies, and theologies speak to a world in which people more than ever need to collaborate despite having different religions. Their spirit of tolerance and universal love should not be forgotten in a world troubled by religious terrorism, persecution, and ethno-religious conflicts.

Because of their different religious persuasions and philosophical leaning, each person’s thought is informed by concepts from his persuasion. Concepts from Hinduism predominate in Gandhi’s thoughts. For Balasuriya, concepts from Christianity predominate in his writings. While Balasuriya may dwell on concepts like Mary, Original Sin, Christology, etc. Gandhi will be concerning himself with concepts like *Moksha*, *Satyagraha*, *Ahimsa*, etc. Each person is coloured

by his tradition, though they are open to pluralism and universality.

CONCLUSION

The paper has examined the concept of human liberation in Mahatma Gandhi and Tissa Balasuriya. It was shown from the above that the concept of human liberation is manifest in the writings of the above two thinkers. Gandhi wrote and worked seriously to ensure that oppressed people and people who were discriminated against were liberated. He worked and brought India to national independence from British colonial rule. He worked to ensure that women, outcasts, girls, prostitutes, and others were free from discrimination. He affirmed the brotherhood/sisterhood of all men and women. He affirmed the equality of all people. He had a profound plural mind in respecting other religions and their adherents. Qualities that we find in Gandhi can also be seen in Balasuriya, who read some of Gandhi’s works. Balasuriya also had a profound love for the human person. He saw all as children of God and from the Judeo-Christian tradition, saw no basis for the oppression of any human being or group. He advanced from his Judeo-Christian tradition liberation motif to work for the freedom of people. Through his writings and advocacy and activism, he campaigned and worked to ensure that women are free and attacked colonialism and globalisation for their evils. He had a profound reverence for other religions and argued for their acceptance. The similarities between Gandhi and Balasuriya are profound. One would never have fully appreciated these similarities unless by a comparative appraisal such as this. In all, their profound love for the human person, promotion of the freedom of the human person, advocacy for the welfare and wellbeing of women, and reverence for religious values and adherents of other religions are not to be forgotten. They can help in the liberation of a world that is still crying for full liberation and fullness of life.

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