

Dissent and Healing: Reflections on Freedom and Equality on the Way to the Defeat of Global Capitalism

*Gabriele Dietrich*¹

When I was first asked to give a lecture on the occasion of Dhyanchand Carr's 70th birthday I was wondering what it was that I wanted to speak about. Dr. Carr is a much revered and much resented personality. This is why there were stiff rules during his birthday celebrations on 10th of March, 08. Nobody was allowed to say anything bad about him. Nobody was also allowed to repeat anything good, which others had already pointed out. It struck me that one of the reasons why Dr. Carr was feared as well as loved by many is the fact that he loves to challenge authority and attack his adversaries without mincing words. Many Bishops and Church leaders have received letters from him, which have not endeared him to them. I have witnessed his wife reproaching him for his constant rebellions, because it deprives her of the pleasure of going to church peacefully on Sunday morning. Preferably at his side, that is. Upon which he may reply: 'What's the fun of that?'

It struck me that perhaps the most enduring inheritance he is leaving to us is his untiring capacity to dissent and to pursue his point with great tenacity. However, he does not do this out of self-righteousness or for the fun of having a quarrel. He pursues an issue for the sake of social justice and much of the time he argues on behalf of the underdog. It is normally not his own concern or freedom of speech which moves him, but the violation of another's freedom and equality. It is this identification with the underdog, which gives him the freedom to persevere. His aim is to heal the rift of inequality.

When I asked him the other day what has shaped this innate rebelliousness in him, he told the story how as a young boy he was driven in a bullock cart belonging to his family which owned land in the fertile countryside of Thanjore. The driver of the bullock cart allowed the boy to take over the reins and to drive the *vandi*. He sat behind the boy, giving him instructions. For this, the servant was severely reprimanded and punished not because of safety reasons, but because his deed was seen as a violation of the caste dharma. He was accused of having degraded the young master and having put himself into a superior position. I am sure there must be many more such stories, but it certainly

¹ **Gabriele Dietrich** is Senior Professor at the Centre for Social Analysis, Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary, Madurai, India. This is a lecture originally given in Tamil on the occasion of the 70th birthday of Dr. Dhyanchand Carr at Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary, on March 27, 2008.

explains the pleasure derived from challenging rules of hierarchy. Having explained this background, I would now like to stop speaking about Dr. Carr and to take up the topic of Dissent and Healing, which in my understanding is crucial to reflect on in the present situation of our institution, of our State, our Nation and the world situation of a neo-imperialist global capitalism, which is totally unsustainable and destructive of the environment. I also want to reiterate that dissent and healing are intrinsically linked with the dialectics of freedom and equality, which is a crucial organizational principle in the struggle for transformation. Let me now go into some examples of dissent and healing, which are drawn from the experiences of individuals and movements involved in struggles for transformation, in order to draw lessons for our own lives.

1. Some Lessons from Dalit Feminisms

I first of all would like to draw some lessons from Dalit feminism, because it is an exemplary site of dissent and rebellion, which is condemned to a lot of invisibility. This invisibility stems most of all from the patriarchal structures of Dalit movements, but it also stems from the attempts of some liberal, often upper caste feminists to play down or deny the reality of caste as a social structure. Both factors lead to underestimating the toil of Dalit women in the struggle for social transformation. Sharmila Rege has recently published the testimonies of Dalit women in Maharashtra, who participated in the Ambedkarite movement. She has also given a very thorough introduction in which she examines the duality of internal and external patriarchies, which these women face and tries to come to grips with lacunae in a caste blind feminist position. She tries to work out the possibilities of a Dalit feminist position which has fresh relevance for the women's movement as a whole².

I find this attempt considerably more inspiring than the attempts of some voices in Dalit theology, which confine themselves to pointing out that Dalit women are "Triple oppressed": being poor (economically exploited), untouchable (polluting as well as sexually exploitable) and vulnerable as women (subjected to internal and external patriarchy, especially rape). While these kinds of definitions are not wrong, they mostly focus on victimhood and do not account for the resilience and militancy of Dalit women and leave the sources of rebellion untapped, which make the experiences of Dalit women relevant for the overall transformative struggle. I myself have recently published an article on emerging Dalit Feminisms in Tamilnadu³. I would like to summarize some of the aspects discussed in this article and reflect on them in the light of some of Dr. Carr's theological positions.

² Sharmila Rege, *Writing Caste, Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2006). It is not possible in this limited essay to do justice to this comprehensive introduction.

³ Gabriele Dietrich, *Emerging Dalit Feminisms: In God's Image* (Sept. 2007).

One of the primeval examples of a rebellious Dalit woman is Krishnammal Jaganathan, hailing from a village near Bathlagundu, who ran away from home as a young girl in order to be able to avail education and got inspired by Gandhi's Freedom Struggle at a young age. She married S. Jaganathan, who hails from the Mukkulatur community and who built up the Worker's Centre in Gandhigram together with the American Missionary Dick Kaithan⁴. Krishnammal and Jaganathan took part in the bhoodan movement under the leadership of Vinoba Bhave. They started to work in East Thanjore in the early sixties and moved in permanently after the Kizhvenmani incident of 25th Dec. 1968, when 44 Dalits, mostly women and children, were burned alive in retaliation for a wage struggle. Krishnammal and S. Jaganathan identified clearly that the problem of the Dalits in this area was not just wages, but land, both for house sites as well as for agriculture. They went beyond the wage struggles of the communist parties and involved in a thorough battle for land distribution. There was also a long-standing struggle for total prohibition and against the brewing of liquor going on, in order to reduce violence and to improve the quality of life in the family. During the emergency, they got involved in Jaya Prakash Narayan's struggle for total revolution. They went to Bihar and got involved in a major way in the struggle for land distribution at the Budhgaya Mutt. This struggle became famous all over the country for the attempt to give land rights to women. Krishnammal has been at the forefront with this demand and till today, she is actively constructing house sites in women's names. She is in a permanent struggle with landowners, liquor brewers, banks and donors to bring healing to the devastated lives of landless Dalits.

Another example of Dalit feminist rebellion is Bama, who has found her voice in writing novels and short stories. Having grown up in Puthupatti near Viruthunagar District, she encountered untouchability, women's oppression and poverty in great measure. She tried to find a way out by studying B.Sc. and B.Ed. with the help of religious sisters and entering a convent. However, she experienced the religious life as another kind of jail and settled down in Uttaramerur in Kancheepuram District where she teaches in a village school.

Having found her voice in the colloquial Tamil of Dalit village culture, she has discovered her writing as a source of rebirth and affirmation. Not only that, with translation of her novels and short stories into English and publication by the prestigious feminist publishing house *Kali for Women*, she has found recognition and acclaim at the national level and internationally. At the same time, she has not been swallowed up by the laws of the market. Asked in a public discussion, what audience she is thinking of when she writes, she frankly says: I am writing to heal myself. Ironically, her first two books: *Karrukku*

⁴ Laura Coppo, *The Colour of Freedom: The Gandhian Foundation* (Monroe: Common Courage Press, 2005). See Solai, *Puratchiyil Poottha Gandhiya Malarkal, Sarvodaya Seyalpattu Aaraychi Mayam* (Madurai, 2006).

and *Sangathy* (News)⁵ have been republished under the title: *Thalumbukal Kayangal Aki*⁶ – Scars turned into wounds. Beyond this, her short stories have been republished under the title *Thathavum Erumaiyum*⁷ – A Grand Father and a Water Buffalo.

Her writings are full of bitterness, sarcasm, dirty words and crude humour. The narrative style is acquired from relatives like her elder aunt, who told stories while delousing the head of her niece. This aunt later died due to wife beating, and no case was ever filed. Male child preference is described in great detail, starting from discrimination in breastfeeding and medical attention. But the outcome is not just disempowerment, but an enhanced toughness and will to survive, a cleverness to prevail and greater practicality in handling survival issues. The sexual and physical restrictions laid on girl children are led at absurdum by a culture in which privacy is not a concept and a language in which dirty words for women's private parts are abundant. This is all part of a spirit of rebellion, which ultimately defeats the oppressive culture.

The short stories are taken from the village milieu of agricultural work and grazing of cattle. A culture under severe assault of globalisation today is shown in its harshness, perseverance and resilience. The first story in the collection, titled *Pannakkari* (Rich woman) deals with a woman who gets Rs. 100/- [about 2 US\$] in compensation when her husband dies in a village tank, trying to retrieve the water buffalo of an upper caste man. Her children then discuss whether the mother is now a rich woman, having received Rs. 100/-. Another story deals with a young man who has called an upper caste man as *Annan* (elder brother). He defends himself as only having given respect. After all, he did not use a term like "*machan*," which would indicate a marital relationship with upper caste. He affirms his right to give respect to another human being.

One of the problems about this type of literature is that today the world from which it emerged is literally threatened by extinction, because of the destruction of agriculture under globalisation. The question is whether the resilience, the rebellion, the connection with soil and water, the humour, the survival skills, can be retrieved and rescued for transformation of society at large. If so far, Dalit culture was characterized by subversion, transgression and transcendence, as I pointed out in an earlier paper⁸, today the question is whether this fighting spirit can contribute towards transformation into a more humanist society centered around basic needs, food security, preservation of nature and human dignity. It is true that even Dalit communities are fragmented among each other due to different origin. Even if they do not have a "common

⁵ *Karukku* is the sharp edge of an agricultural instrument.

⁶ *Thalumbukal Kayangal Aki, Vidiyal Pathipagam, Coimbatore, Oct. 2001.*

⁷ *Thattavum Erumayum, Vidiyal Pathipagam, Coimbatore, Dec. 2003*

⁸ "Subversion, Transgression, Transcendence: 'Asian Spirituality' in the Light of Dalit and Adivasi Struggles" in *Concilium* 2000/4 (London / SCM)

culture”, the question is whether they can help to build “a culture in common”, according to Raymond Williams⁹, where people can affirm solidarity, dignity, humour, non-violence and the value of life for humans and nature.

The third example I want to give has to do with a controversy which may appear trivial and to some even frivolous, but which shows clearly that young Dalit women activists need to free themselves from the male dominated grip of Dalit movements. I happened to be present at the occasion of a young Dalit poet Sugirtharani presenting her views at the workshop of Dalit Intellectual Collective in Dec. 2006 in Vagamon. She had been interviewed by the magazine India Today way back in October 2005 regarding her views on sexual controls over women. In the same magazine, a Tamil film actress, Kushbu, had expressed the view that chastity was an outdated concept, which had created a big outcry. It turned out that underneath the campaign against Kushbu, there was a conflict with a film director Thangarbachan, whom Kushbu was said to have humiliated earlier. This man was close to the Vanniyar Party PMK, which is since some time allied with the Dalit Panther Movement led by Thol. Thirumavalavan. Thangarbachan made denigrating remarks against Kushbu, suggesting all women in the film industry were available to men, overlooking the powerful element of violence and coercion in the production relations of the film industry.

Kushbu’s remarks on free sex were construed as an offence to Tamil Culture and the concept of *karpu* (chastity) was upheld by the Dalit Panthers movement and her effigy was burned in order “to uphold women’s honour in Tamil Culture.” Some women’s movements saw Kushbu as an icon of feminist free speech, unfortunately losing sight of the fact that indeed a major part of political life in the State of Tamil Nadu is run by the film industry and sexual exploitation of women in this context is rampant. To make things more complicated, tennis star Sania Mirza had chipped in, pointing out that she did not wish to speak on pre-marital sex, but Muslim fundamentalists had no right to pull her up on the length of her skirt. All this inspired Pennurimai Iyakkam, a women’s movement of workers in the unorganized sector, to make a statement on the market fundamentalism of the film industry, which instrumentalises women, the Tamil cultural fundamentalism of the Dalit Panthers and the religious fundamentalism of the Muslim forces, who were policing Sania Mirza’s skirts.

It is important to see this Dalit feminist critique of Dalit patriarchy not as an individualistic venture by a young woman who gets media attention. The political alliances of Dalit parties have at certain times completely sidelined the concerns of Dalit women. It is important in this context to keep in mind the incidents which happened during the Assembly elections in 2001 in 55 villages of Cuddalore District, where the Vanniyars, affiliated with the PMK, went on rampage against Dalits affiliated with DPI [Dalit Panthers of India] and raped

⁹ Raymond Williams, *Culture* (Lakeside: Fontana Press. 1981).

Dalit women in large numbers. In that situation, the Dalit Panther Movement leadership was banned from entering the District, but women's organisations like Pennurimai Iyakkam, and Women's Struggle Committee, together with Construction Workers union and other unorganized sector workers, conducted hunger strikes and other struggles in solidarity.¹⁰ It required class organisations of slum dwellers and unorganized sector workers to uphold the struggles. The enormous sufferings of the Dalit women were brought to light by a public hearing in front of the National Commission for Women. The DPI found it opportune to ally with the PMK in the meantime. While this alliance has no doubt reduced the incidence of violence on Dalits in Cuddalore area, one also has to keep in mind that the positions on *Karpu* and the honour of Tamil women were ventilated in public, after the alliance with the PMK had made the violence inflicted on Dalit women in 2001 henceforth unmentionable.

1.1 A Theological Excursion

I would like to end this part of my reflection with a brief excursion into theological implications of these examples. Dalit theology has tried to relate to the situation of ostracism, untouchability and pain, which becomes visible in the life sketches outlined at the beginning of this paper¹¹. It is evident from the writings of Dalit feminist/womanist theologians that they are in a certain balancing act of critiquing middle class, "upper caste" feminism, styling itself as "casteless" while at the same time undermining the patriarchal tendencies in Dalit communities and movements. There is also evidence of a new breed of male Dalit theologians who have a more sensitive assessment of the predicament which the new generation of Dalit Feminists find themselves in¹². Philip Peacock's interpretation of the bleeding woman achieved an integration of caste, class and patriarchy, which was not present in older male Dalit theological writings. At the same time it needs to be said that the extremes of untouchability also roughen the edges of the experience of purity and pollution which is imposed on women in general and which creates the commonality assumed between women, Dalits, dogs and donkeys in Manu Smrthi. This has a radicalizing effect on any middle class position which may try to lay claim to being "beyond caste". Castelessness cannot be achieved without going through the trauma of untouchability and pollution.

One of the texts, which appears to be of relevance in the context of Emerging Dalit Feminisms is the text of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk. 7, 24-30), who in the Mathew version (Mth. 15, 21-28) is characterized as a Canaanite woman.

¹⁰ See "Violence, Dalit Feminism and the Healing of Fragmentation" in *Vikalp Alternatives* IX/3, 2001.

¹¹ See e.g. The issue on Dalit Women, "The Haunts of Pain: Theologizing Dalits", guest edited by Monica Melanchton, *In God's Image*, Vol. 26, No. 3, Sept. 2007.

¹² See e.g. the interpretation of the bleeding woman of Mk. 5, 21-43 by Philip Peacock, "Untouchability is the Key," in *In God's Image*, Vol. 26, No.3, Sept. 2007, pp. 56-58.

Clearly, she is a woman who does not belong to the Jewish people. However, she determinedly goes after Jesus and claims his attention for her daughter, who is possessed by an evil spirit. The text is an embarrassing one as far as Jesus's response goes. He rebukes the woman as not belonging to the "lost sheep" of Israel. However, she perseveres and insists that even the dogs under the table have a claim on the crumbs of the children. He heeds to her plea and heals the daughter. It is interesting to investigate how different authors have interpreted this text. Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza in her book *But She Said*¹³ has put the main emphasis on the persistence of the woman. She goes more by Mark's version, where the resistance is most clearly expressed: "But she said ...". The woman is willing to accept the metaphor of the dog under the table. Her single-minded aim is to free her daughter from possession.

In the interpretation of Dhyanchand Carr¹⁴, the Canaanite woman is subsumed under the "Galilean option", - Galilee here is seen as a place where Jews and gentiles have mixed, but the focus of Jesus is on the "lost sheep", i.e. the poor and the socially ostracized. Within this framework, Carr sees the woman as a privileged, upper class woman, on the ground that she is called a Canaanite. This is a rather forced interpretation based on the assumption that Canaanites generally represented the oppressors in the Galilean setting. This neglects the fact that women were not rooted in their class in the same way as men. In the patriarchal setting of the time, the woman appears vulnerable, running after Jesus and his disciples, so much so that the disciples advise Jesus to send her away. First of all, Jesus does not answer her at all and thus the disciples are hopeful to get rid of her (Mth. 15, 23). As if to justify himself in front of her he refers to the fact that he was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (V. 24). She humiliates herself, kneels and says: Lord, help me (V. 25). Then he gives his explanation that it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs (V.26). In Matthew's version, she agrees with his position, but turns it against him in the same breath. "Yes Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table" (V. 27). She clearly figures him as the master who has likened her to a dog. Upon this Jesus answers her: Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done as you desire (V.28). It is not clear whether her faith is in her own persistence or in him. It is clearly based in the conviction that she will finally be able to make him change his position and get what she needs: The healing of her child.

In Dhyanchand Carr's interpretation, Jesus' rebuke is made to appear as a demand to a privileged woman to declass herself and to accept the hegemony of the "Galilee of the Lost Sheep". This interpretation is rather questionable.

¹³ Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

¹⁴ Dhyanchand Carr, "Dalit Theology is Biblical and it Makes the Gospel Relevant" in Arvind P. Nirmal, *A Reader in Dalit Theology* (Gurukul: Madras 1990), pp. 71-84.

If the woman was so privileged, why did she have to run after Jesus and shout? She could have afforded expensive treatment for her child. No need to scandalize the disciples. It is also rather unlikely that she should have so readily accepted the comparison with the dogs under the table, if she was so privileged. Carr uses this argument of subordinating the Canaanite woman to Jesus's option for the poor of Galilee, following the caste and class reductionist logic which is prevalent in Dalit movements and which is today relativised by Dalit feminists. Jesus uses an ethnic argument, but gets rebuked by the woman persistently in his own terms. The woman experiences him as a Jewish male, however committed to the poor, who keeps her out with an argument, which appears as authoritarian, ethnic and gender-insensitive. She uses his own logic in most embarrassing ways and astonishingly wins him over for the healing of her child. It is only in this act of heeding to her logic, that Jesus fully transcends the ethnic confines, with which he kept her at bay.

Dr. Carr does not seem prepared to recognize the exceptional stamina of the woman and Jesus' change of heart. In this, he seems to take a line, which has been used against the women's movement and against women in the Dalit movement. Subsumption under Dalit politics appears as the most important imperative. It is this caste reductionist line, which has been used to prevent 33% reservation for women in parliament for years on and the same line has also been used to prevent Dalit women from raising their voice independently and from dismantling the patriarchy in the Dalit movements. While de-classing and de-casting are important objectives of any one holding power positions while trying to be in empathy with poor, Dalits, Adivasis, workers, it is important to understand the protest potential of this woman and the depth of her predicament. This is the only text, where a dependent person contradicts Jesus and gets what she wants.

I feel that Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza's interpretation, which raises doubts about Jesus's own limitations and creates solidarity with the woman and the child, who have come to the limits of their constrained existence, helps us to see how persistent questioning and request combined with dialectically turning around the cultural logic, leads to a new identity, not just for the woman and child, but for Jesus himself. The woman provokes Jesus with her persistence and her appeal to have compassion. At the same time, she turns Jesus's own logic against him. This is actually the same method which Dhyanchand Carr himself has consistently used in his polemics with church authorities and which has brought him into lots of difficulty, because the church authorities are not normally as enlightened as Jesus, who accepts the argument of the woman gracefully.

Dhyanchand Carr, eager to de-class and de-caste himself in solidarity with the Dalit movement, succumbs to the patriarchal logic and fails to recognize his own mentality in the provocative argument of the woman. This may have

to do with the fact that he does not argue with authorities from a position of vulnerability. He de-recognises the woman's vulnerability and co-opts her, with patriarchal blinkers, into his own act of de-classing and de-casting. He will be welcome to learn solidarity with her in the act of rebellion by taking on her vulnerability.

Another author who has written on this text is Kwok Pui Lan, who reads the text in a post-colonial perspective¹⁵. Her interest is to read the gospel in the non-Christian environment of Asia. She therefore critiques that in missionary interpretations, the assumption has often been that the woman was converted by her encounter with Jesus. She protests against this assumption and lays emphasis on the need to respect the religious background of this non-Jewish woman. This emphasis is therefore more on assertion of her ethnicity vis-à-vis the exclusivist position which Jesus seems to express. She also mentions Gerd Theissen's suggestion that the woman might have been "privileged"¹⁶. She uses this to reflect on her own relative privilegedness while being "the other" and the marginalized in a situation which she sees as "post-colonial", being settled in an affluent country. Yet, she ends this chapter with a poem, which makes the woman a symbol in which she makes "visible the concrete intersection of sexism, economic injustice, political oppression, and militarism in Asian Women's lives:

"Yes, who is this Cannanite Woman?

She is the woman down on the dirty road of Calcutta

She is the mother of a political prisoner of Seoul

She is the old garment factory worker in Hong Kong.

She is the mother whose daughter is a prostitute in

Jakarta, Taipei or Chiang Mai.

She is also the survivor from Hiroshima

The woman is the poorest among the poor,

the oppressed among the oppressed,

she is at every corner of Asia

and she fills the 'The Third World!'"¹⁷.

The controversy between Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician woman has brought up the issue of inclusiveness and equality, including ethnic equality, which is actually at the heart of Dr. Carr's theology. Galilee is not only the place of the working classes, fishermen, other artisans and small peasants, it is also the Galilee of the gentiles. Inclusiveness is one of the characteristics of wisdom

¹⁵ Kwok Pui Lan, "Woman, Dogs and Crumbs" in *Reading the Bible in a Non-Biblical World* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), pp. 71-83.

¹⁶ Gerd Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 68-75.

¹⁷ "Women, Dogs and Crumbs"; op.cit., p. 83.

theology¹⁸. It is also one of the most central themes in the gospel of Mary of Magdala, which shows in detail the relationship between Jesus and Mary his closest disciple, who was seen as an apostle to the apostles¹⁹. The controversy with Peter, who stands for a much more exclusive hierarchical approach, is a significant characteristic of this gospel, which was kept out of the canon for fairly obvious reasons.

2. Freedom and Equality under Conditions of Ethnic Strife

It is not possible in a brief lecture to go into the history of the ethnic conflict in Srilanka, which since the severe attacks on Tamils in 1983 has taken on the shape of quarter of a century of civil war. Suffice to say that Dr. Carr has had a consuming passion for upholding human rights in our neighbouring country. He also always felt that the Churches, which cut across the ethnic divide, had a special responsibility to overcome polarization. He very movingly described at many occasions his visit to the Methodist Headquarter in Colombo, after the pogroms in 1983. Shoman Pereira, the Sinhala head of the Methodist Church, had thrown the premises open for the Tamils and was literally running a crowded refugee camp there. It was a signal of compassion and solidarity in times of utmost strife. In the eighties, Dr. Carr was deeply involved in showing the commonalities between the martyrs on both sides of the ethnic divide.

I remember most vividly the assassination of Rajani Rajasingham Thiranyagama on Sept. 21, 1989. She had been one of the moving spirits of the University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR) in Jaffna. She was teaching anatomy at the Jaffna University and had gone to England for her higher studies. Both she and her elder sister Nirmala had originally been supporters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), but had been disillusioned by the fragmentation of the Tamil liberation struggle, by the fratricidal tendencies and the power struggles which were open to external manipulations and which led to severe human rights violations and numerous murders within the fragmented movement. One of the chief reasons for Rajani's assassination by the LTTE was the fact that she was the driving spirit behind the investigations which went into her book *the Broken Palmyra*²⁰. Her crime had been to expose not only the Sinhala army and the Indian Peace Keeping Force but also the machinations of RAW [Research and Analysis Wing, an Indian agency for external intelligence] and the violations of different Tamil groups. She took

¹⁸ See Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza, *Jesus, Mary's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum Publishers, 1995).

¹⁹ Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 2003).

²⁰ Rajan Hoole, Daya Somasundaram, K. Sritharan, Rajani Thirangama, *The Broken Palmyra: The Tamil Crisis in Sri Lanka – An Inside Account*. (Claremont: The Sri Lanka Studies Institute, 1990). See also Gabriele Dietrich, "In Memoriam Rajani Rajasingham Thirangama (1954-1989)" in *The People's Reporter*, August 1-15, 1990.

great care to document the experiences of women (Chapter 5: No more tears, Sister, the Experiences of Women). It is not wrong to say that she was killed for standing up as a feminist. She was also killed because as a doctor, she saved lives irrespective of ethnicity or nationality, knowing all the way that her own life was in severe danger. Her faith in human rights had deep respect for life. I remember a Human Rights Meeting in Chennai, only ten days after the LTTE had killed 19 EPRLF [Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front] cadres in Chennai, in which different speakers honoured the martyrs. I myself had to speak on Rajani in the meeting. Such events are hardly imaginable in the present situation, where the fronts have been hardened enormously. The remaining cadres of UTHR are still on the move documenting human rights violations, but cannot function above ground. The political prospects for a resolution of the conflict are extremely dim in the present situation, where the peace negotiations have completely collapsed.

In the light of this desperate situation, the struggle of the pastors of the Jaffna Diocese to uphold their sovereignty and not to be bullied by the dominant political forces is of great significance. Dr. Carr, who had been a visiting professor at the Jaffna Theological Seminary 2004-05, has taken a strong position against the manipulative intervention of the Church of South India (CSI) synod in secretly consecrating as Bishop on 21st August 2006, a person who has fraudulently worked towards conquering such a position since 2002 and who does not enjoy the support of the vast majority of the pastors of his diocese²¹. While it seems to be extremely difficult to undo this ordination, as the Moderator was induced to invoke rule 37 Chapter VI of the CSI constitution, Dr. Carr's fervour in exposing the fraudulent process, has certainly helped to encourage the pastors of Jaffna to sustain their independent position under the banner of the Church of the American Ceylon Mission (CACM), distancing themselves clearly from the corrupted machinations of the CSI's interventions in Jaffna Diocese. Dr. Carr's clear stand has helped to expose corruption in the CSI leadership. The recent synod elections were certainly influenced by Dr. Carr's stand.

If the murder of Rajani Rajasingham and of numerous other martyrs was a symbol of the defeat of the spirit of dissent and healing, today the work of women's groups and peace groups against recruitment of child soldiers in places like Batticaloa is a sign of resurrection and uprising, vindicating the slogan under Rajani's photo: You have not been buried, you have been sown. In the light of these memories, the rebellion of the vast majority of the pastors in Jaffna diocese is a sign of resurrection and uprising which affirms dissent and

²¹ See Dr. Carr's letter to the Leaders of CSI Synod on the Recent Consecration of the Bishop of Jaffna, dated 29th August 2006 in Rev. Dhyanchand Carr, "What the Church is For and What the Church is," published by Rev. Dr. Gnana Robinson for the Prophetic Forum for Life and Witness of the Churches in India. (Kanyakumari: Peace Trust, Dec. 2006).

thus creates spaces of democracy and freedom from fear, which may contribute to the healing of the wounded Tamil psyche.

Dr. Carr in a recent article has spoken extensively of the need to heal memory wounds²². Such healing is needed to gain freedom from the enmity of majority - minority constellations, which can be turned into their opposites, as has happened with Sinhalese in Sri Lanka and even with Hindus in India. Healing is also needed where the freedom to dissent and to participate democratically within a community has been done away with by intimidation and violence. This can happen in religious and ethnic conflicts as well as in political and institutional rivalries.

3. Workers and Peasants Fighting for Life and Livelihood

Let me come back to the Indian situation, where globalization in a monopolar world has led to unprecedented political absurdities. While the Congress party tries to push for the 123 agreement on supply of nuclear fuel with the US, the Left, more precisely the CPI-M [Communist Party of India (Marxist)], who opposes this agreement, has trained its guns on the land struggles of peasants and adivasis in West Bengal and Kerala. In this struggle against the self assertion of people's control over their land and the agriculture which sustains them, unprecedented violence has been used in Singur and Nandigram²³ and more violence can be expected in Chengara in Pattanamtitta, North Kerala. The events in West Bengal are not significantly different from what happens in neighbouring Orissa under a rightist government²⁴. Companies like POSCO, TATA, Jindal, Mittal and Vedanta have usurped the resource rights of the people. In neighbouring Chhattisgarh, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has unleashed a civil war on the Adivasis of Dantewada District, which has lost numerous lives and has led to large scale rape of Adivasi women²⁵. The common denominator in all these situations is that people's resistance is blamed on Naxalites and Naxalism is equated with terrorism and understood as "the greatest danger facing the nation".

While the governor of West Bengal, Gopal Krishna Gandhi has made it publicly clear that the people's struggle against SEZ's [Special Economic Zone] in Singur and Nandigram needs to be respected, and has wondered loudly how come no Naxals have been arrested in any of these places, the Naxalite presence in forests of Orissa and in Dantewada District of Chhattisgarh has to be acknowledged. It has been pointed out that the success of their operations rests on the fact that they are the only forces, who seriously address the dire

²² Dhyanchand Carr, "Conflict Resolution – the Need for Healing Memory Wounds": in *Religion and Society*, Vol. 53, No. 1, March 2008, pp. 48-62.

²³ See Cover Story in *Tehelka: Why Nandigram*, 24 Nov. 2007, Vol. 4, Issue 45.

²⁴ See e.g. G.N. Saibaba, *Representing Nayagarh*, New Indian Express, 29.02.08, Madurai Edition.

²⁵ *Death, Displacement and Deprivation. The War in Dantewada: A Report*, Human Rights Forum, Hyderabad, Dec. 2006.

circumstances of survival of the local Adivasi population.

Today, dissent against the dominant development model, which rampantly promotes mining projects and SEZ's, can easily be construed to constitute sedition. This leads to severe violations of human rights by the State. The freedom of the human rights activists to document and raise the violations is severely curtailed.

One of the most blatant cases of this kind is that of Dr. Binayak Sen in Chhattisgarh, a highly respected medical doctor and human rights activist, who is the General Secretary of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) in Chhattisgarh and the Vice-President of PUCL at the national level²⁶. Having documented the Salwar Judum operations in great detail and having visited Naxalite prisoners in his capacity of PUCL State Secretary with permission of police and jail atrocities, he was finally accused to be a Naxalite and was arrested on 14th May 2007. The Supreme Court refused him bail with a sentence of five words: "The leave cannot be granted" – ironically on Human Rights Day, Dec. 10, 2007.

These are not events that are far away. Binayak is an alumnus of Vellore hospital and has received its prestigious Paul Harrison Award in 2004. He was one of the co-founders of the Shaheed Hospital in Dalli Rajhara, which many of us visited at least once in a year during the eighties, while the struggle of Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha was in full swing under Shankar Guha Niyogi's leadership and even after Niyogi was murdered in 1991. Dr. Ilina Sen, who is the head of the Women's Studies Department of Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University in Wardha, was part of the celebrations of twenty years of Centre for Social Analysis in 2006. Agitations by human rights groups have been going on untiringly. Amnesty International has given Red Alert. Prominent personalities from Noam Chomsky to Arundhati Roy have signed petitions. The State is determined not to budge. Not only the BJP, also at the Centre.

The onslaught on agriculture, the peasantry, landless labour and food security, which is carried out in the name of "development" is anticipating to lead to massive land-flight, entailing migrations from country side to cities in the order of 400 millions, i.e. double the populations of Britain, France, Germany taken together. This is facilitated by the SEZ Act of 2005, by the amendments of R&R Bill of 2007 and the aggravation of the Land Acquisition Bill 2007.

At the same time, the working classes are facing tremendous roll-back of their hard-won rights. In Tamilnadu, the unorganized sector workers, encouraged largely by the determined fight of the construction workers, had gained the Manual Labourers Act in 1982. After protracted struggle of

²⁶ See the Cover story by Shoma Chaudhury, "No Country for Good Men" in *Tehelka* Vol.V, Issue 7, 23rd Feb. 2008. See also my article: "Why Does the Prime Minister Not Lose Sleep Over Binayak Sen?", in *Mainstream* Vol. XLV, No. 49, Nov. 24, 2007.

thirteen years, the T.N. Construction Workers Welfare Board was formed in 1995. From the beginning of the Millennium, schemes were passed for different sub-sectors and fourteen boards started functioning for construction workers, manual workers, autorickshaws and rental vehicles, handicrafts, palm workers, Handloom and silk weavers, leather workers, artists, goldsmiths, potters and domestic workers. The National Campaign Committee for unorganized sector workers had given a Bill worked out by Unorganised Workers Federation to the Petitions' Committee of Parliament in Delhi on May 5th 2005 supported by over ten lakhs of signatures. This bill had been endorsed by the Petitions Committee of Parliament in August 2006 and the Standing Committee on Labour also consistently rejected the extremely inadequate legislation by the Labour Ministry proposed in 2007, slipped into the Rajya Sabha during a debate on the 123 agreement on nuclear energy. Despite this heroic struggle of the unorganized sector workers at the national level, the State Government of TN [Tamil Nadu] has now passed a Government Order No. 23 in March 2008, to undo the Welfare Boards, to refuse the regularization of the workers and to hand over their concerns to the Revenue Department, which is already overburdened with other works and is known for its rampant corruption.

Numerous Dharnas²⁷ have taken place from March 3, 2008 onwards in about sixteen districts and a big struggle took place in front of Memorial Hall in Chennai on 26th March 08 with massive participation. The TN government is planning to implement this G.O. from April 1st, 2008. This would have disastrous impact not only on the 2.5 crores [25 million] unorganized sector workers in TN but on nearly 40 crores of unorganized workers in the whole country, who are producing 65% of the G.D.P. The movement also demands a separate comprehensive legislation for agricultural labourers. The present move is to crush the working class movement and to undermine the Trade Union Act of 1926. The demand is to implement the working of the welfare boards, to staff them adequately, to collect 1% levy on all production and to allocate 3% of the budget for workers welfare and regularization of work, and to enable the boards to function at Taluk and District levels. Regulation of wages and work and implementation of E.S.I [Employees' State Insurance] is essential. More sectoral boards are needed for embroidery workers, meat workers, childcare workers. Workers rights over natural resources, right to reside near the place of work, complaints committees against sexual harassment are other important features. The G.O. No. 23 must be withdrawn. The attempt to categorize workers into BPL and APL [Below and Above Poverty Line] must be dropped. Fish Workers Welfare Board and Sanitary Workers Welfare Board must be implemented through the labour department.

It is obvious that this is a struggle of epic dimensions, which goes completely

²⁷ [Editor's note]: a dharna is a sit-in fast most typically practiced at the door of a debtor as a protest.

against the entrenched development policies of the Central Government and the State Government. The question is how to withstand the concerted attempt to destroy agriculture and to crush the working classes. Dissent has become risky and tedious and healing is not in sight. It is only through tenacious organizational processes on massive scale that transformation can be envisaged. It is obvious that the middle classes and most of the churches spend their life in their own enchanted circles and are oblivious of the onslaught on agriculture and workers and ignorant regarding the effect of their own consumer habits on global warming, coastal erosion and the vanishing of water resources. The ruling classes are whistling in the dark and are boasting of growth rates, of which nothing percolates to the poor.

4. Towards Transformation

Let me end with some reflections regarding the difficulty to envisage a social and economic transformation, which can break the rule of money over all living beings on earth and over land, water, sky and in the times of the electronic church, even Heaven. Jesus for one was very clear that nobody can serve God and Mammon. This clarity is today not shared by the Churches.

When I visited Dr. Carr shortly before his birthday, we were digging up memories of a trip to the World Conference of the Christians for Socialism held in Barcelona in Jan. 1984. This was a time when Christians from all over the world were eager to come together to exchange their experiences in their struggles against the capitalist system. We also remembered a film show on Fidel Castro and Cuba, which was attended by enthusiastic crowds. Today, Cuba stands out as an extraordinary country, which has withstood the capitalist onslaught tenaciously, but the fact that Fidel Castro recently had to handover his political responsibilities, does not augur well for the future of this brave nation²⁸. However, Castro has trained up leaders like Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia, and a good number of other Latin American countries is today willing to challenge US imperialism. This happens at a time, when India has abandoned non-alignment and is willing to gamble away her sovereignty in the nuclear power game. It also coincides with the moment in history in which the UN declares its inability to feed the poor, especially the massively newly created urban poor, which it calls the “The New Hungry”²⁹. Climate change and global warming, tenaciously denied for several decades, have now been accepted as a grim reality³⁰. One fifth of the world’s people may be homeless and supplies of freshwater are likely to fall by 30%.

²⁸ See Frontline March 14, 2008 with the Cover Story: *Living Legend: Tribute to Fidel Castro, an Icon of Socialism*.

²⁹ Front Page Article by Julian Borger, “UN Declares it Cannot Afford to Feed the World” in *The Guardian Weekly*, Feb. 29- March 6, 2008.

³⁰ Front Page Article by Iyan Traynor, “Europe Expects a Flood of Climate Refugees” in *The Guardian Weekly*, March 14-20, 2008.

It is Samir Amin the radical Leftist thinker from Senegal, who has consistently developed the thinking process after the collapse of actually existing socialism in Eastern Europe. He explores ways and means to break free from US hegemony and to advance transition towards socialism by creating what he calls a “multipolar world”³¹. He points out that there are substantial differences between Europe and the US regarding the values of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, which arose as foundation for human rights out of the French Revolution. In the US system, the emphasis is on Liberty and the most important liberty is that of free enterprise and private property. It is this which stands in the way of seriously envisaging equality, which was a more prominent value in the European political system. He points out that the European history could help to foster more egalitarian relations with developing nations and thinks of a possible axis Paris, Berlin, Moscow, upto Delhi and Beijing. He also hopes that new forms of solidarity can be developed among the peoples of the South and that socialist reconstruction can take place in the radical countries of the periphery. He is highly critical of India’s market-centred, populist national project and of what he calls “the liberal and culturalist drift” which leads into foreign dependency and communalist and fundamentalist tendencies and identity politics which lead to fragmentation. He points out clearly that within the Indian Left, spaces for democratic participation have not been available. He points out the need to recognize the peasants right to land and to agriculture and the need to unite the working classes of the unorganized sector. He also sees the need to maintain the unity of the Indian subcontinent, as fragmentation would strengthen the imperialist design. He hopes for a serious rapprochement between India, China and Russia in order to challenge US hegemony. He sees it as a challenge for peoples movements to project developmental alternatives which can benefit the over 800 million marginalized in our country in order to offset the self-interest of the 200 million people, who benefit from the present neo-imperialist trend.

I think having recognized the need for dissent and for a healing process, which is willing to confront and overcome the chaotic rule of Mammon in this world, we are challenged to renew our faith in resurrection and uprising. Perhaps this sounds like old wine in new bottles. But it is the only thing open to us if we want to sustain God’s good creation and to prevent a nuclear holocaust. I trust Dr. Carr will find ways to awaken the churches to this challenge, side by side with his work on organic agriculture for small peasants. May his spirit keep soaring!

³¹ Samir Amin, *Beyond US Hegemony? Assessing the Prospects for a Multipolar World* (New Delhi: Daanish Books, 2006).