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Emancipation for the Wretched of the Earth: The Liberative Biblical Interpretation of Soares-Prabhu

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Abstract: Postcolonialism is a philosophical discipline where everything is contested from the standpoint of the oppressed and the colonized. Gargi Mukherjee, research analyses the Biblical interpretations from postcolonial perspectives in her book *Emancipation for the Wretched of the Earth: A Postcolonial Interpretation of the Bible*. She makes a critical study of Biblical interpretations from a postcolonial perspective, from which both theologians and biblical scholars can profit. Through her philosophical acumen, she has managed to open new horizons to theological commitment, especially to the poor and the marginalised (the nativists of subalterns of postcolonialism). She projects George Soares-Prabhu, an eminent Indian Biblical hermeneut, as a valuable postcolonial Biblical scholar, drawing from his deep concerns for liberation of the poor and dialogue with the other religions.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Interpretation of Bible, Emancipation, Wretched of the Earth, Soares-Prabhu

Postcolonialism is a philosophical discipline where everything is contested from the standpoint of the oppressed and the colonized. Having begun in 1960's after the demise of formal European colonialism, it denotes a condition of no longer being what one was, in a colony, as a colonized. Post-Colonial (with hyphen) means the particular historical period after colonial period. But Postcolonial (without hyphen) does not mean historical periodisation but it refers to different forms of representation, reading practices and values that characterise the style of enquiry. This book authored by Gargi Mukherjee, research scholar from the prestigious Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan, analyses the Biblical interpretations from postcolonial perspectives. Based on her book this article highlights the main features of postcolonialism and how George Soares-Prabhu, an eminent Indian Biblical hermeneut, may be regarded as a postcolonial Biblical scholar, though he himself has never used this term in his study.

Modernity and PostColonialism

When Europe entered into modernity, Asia or Third World countries entered into the phase of European colonialism. When the Europe was enjoying the fruits of modernity with the colonial exploits, Asia and Africa were the exploited. However, during the same time, a group of philosophers emerged as critics of modernism in Europe; Nietzsche, Freud and Sartre were discussing the problem of modernity that due to high modernism all those aspects of emotions, feelings, passions and intuition have been side-lined as non-rational or irrational.

In 20th century these criticisms became stronger. Intellectuals began to promote the notion of pluralism; that there are many ways of knowing, and many truths to a fact. According to this intellectual positioning, knowledge is articulated from/with local perspectives, with all its uncertainties, complexities and paradoxes. Thus, they came to an understanding that knowledge

is relational and all realities are woven and interspersed in the localised linguistic web.

So, during the late 20th century scholars of the once-colonized countries began to trace their history of literature, culture and philosophy which went submerged under the modern colonial rubric. Due to the influence of Western rationalism, these scholars were rationalizing their culture and philosophy, using western theoretical tools. In postcolonial context we are fused with colonial ideas, so we are within that hegemony of power and domination. For example, Dr Radhakrishnan was representing the Indian nationalist elite but he had also taken the British title 'Sir'. The problem now is how to explain this fusion or hybridity. In the same way, we use the word 'Indian philosophy,' an English word presented to us by the colonizers, to denote the *darshan/smriti, thathuvam* of the Indian subcontinent. The word Hindu was not there in ancient history but when the modern colonialists came, they called the people of India as Hindus to mean non-Christians.

So, in third phase of this problem, the scholars of the Third World were confronted with the question as to how to understand Christianity in Indian context. How to decolonize the colonial continuities in native Christianity to aim for the postcolonial understanding of Christianity? What could be the differences between colonial and postcolonial biblical reading practices? Because postcolonial study tries to trace the elements of indigenous culture, which lie submerged within the colonial fabric, in order to understand the diversities within the postcolonial knowledge productions.

Highlighting the Main Findings

In this way, this book has been designed to understand the postcolonial interventions in biblical reading practices. Below we highlight some of the basic findings of our search.

The *General Introduction*, discusses the scope, methodology, objectives, research issues, sources of study, contents of the study, and the limitations of the present research work, as a general introduction to the whole work of research on postcolonial hermeneutics of the Bible.

a. Orientalism and Colonialism: Theory and Practice

The first chapter, *Orientalism and Colonialism: Theory and Practice*, discussed how Orientalism and Colonialism mutually contributed to each other. Towards this end, this chapter discusses the conceptual elaborations of the theory of Orientalism as explained by Edward Said and the conceptual understanding of colonialism as explained variously by different scholars.

Orientalism is traced back by Edward Said to the European literatures on the non-Europe even in the times of antiquity. Orientalism as an intellectual exercise starts, according to Said, from the medieval period. Especially, he traces it back to the Christian Council of Vienne in 1312 C.E. “In the Christian West, Orientalism is considered to have commenced its formal existence with the decision of the Church Council of Vienne in 1312 to establish a series of chairs in Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac at Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Avignon, and Salamanca.” In such an exercise of Orientalism, Said finds the Foucauldian notion of the relation between knowledge and power.

Drawing a parallel from Marx’s explication of Bourgeois’ representation of the proletariat in Marx’s book, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, that “They (the proletariat) cannot represent themselves; they must be represented (by the bourgeois),” Said tries to explain the representational character of European modern Orientalism. The problem of representation is not a politically naïve exercise, but to have the control over the Other, through manipulative knowledge discourse. Having a clue from Marx’s statement, Said says, “The Orient was almost a European invention.”

Using the Gramscian notion of hegemony, he explains further how Orientalism is an offshoot of power relations between the West and the East. Antonio Gramsci makes a distinction between the civil and political society. The civil society, according to him, consists of voluntary affiliations like school, family and unions, while political society consists of army, police and central bureaucracy which use the methods of direct domination and coercion. Culture operates within the civil society. In any civil society which is not totalitarian, certain cultural forms predominate over the other forms through the consent, not through domination of the predominant group over the other. This is identified by Gramsci as hegemony. According to Said, Orientalism has got its durability and strength through the cultural hegemony of the West, obtaining its validity through the consent of the masses by repeating, teaching and authorising the representations. As a cultural hegemonic discourse, "Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand."

This form of cultural hegemony was epistemologically aided with the institution of museum and archive, where the past glories of the West were put on display along with the exotic exhibitions of the Orient.

Here one gets a complex picture of the representational character of Orientalism. It is not merely the cultural hegemony alone, but shaped in exchange with different realms of power: political power, intellectual power, cultural power and moral power. These power structures were aided in reality with a whole series of dubitable interests on geopolitical awareness distributed into aesthetic, sociological, historical, philological, psychological, economic, military interests on distinctly knowable intellectual lines.

In this sense, Orientalism is a style of enquiry; it is a field of learned study, of the Biblical, Islamic and other Asian lands geographically, culturally, ethnically, linguistically and so on;

it expresses the strength of the West and the weakness of the East through the eyes of the modern scientific rationality which studies the real world as external to the observer-scholar, which does not yield to the dynamics of the subject but it objectifies the subject of study as something unchanging; it represents a 'complex series of knowledgeable manipulations' by which the Orient was identified by the West as something exotic, irrational, mysterious, subjective, religious, spiritual and so on; it helped in the rationalisation of the colonial rule of the Oriental lands; it is an 'ism' through which the West identified itself as different from the Orient, by way of defining the other, the Orient; it exhibits a system by which the knowledge and power came together to establish cultural imperialism.

Under the sub-title, ***Representation: Familiarising the Non-Familiar***, Mukherjee discusses how the model of representation is used to explain the non-familiar and unusual aspects of reality through the familiar lens. The representations of the Orient in the Western texts are part of the process of familiarisation of the non-familiar about the Orient. Both the West and the East were unfamiliar to each other. But due to the relative power over the East, the West could familiarise the Orient, by penetrating it into the Asiatic mysteries to familiarise them, opines Said. "Something patently foreign and distant acquires, for one reason or another, a status more rather than less familiar. One tends to stop judging things either as completely novel or as completely well known; a new median category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing. In essence such a category is not so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established view of things. If the mind must suddenly deal with what it takes to be a radically new form of life—as Islam appeared to Europe in the early Middle Ages—the response on the whole is conservative and defensive. Islam is judged to be a fraudulent new version of some previous experience, in this case Christianity. The threat is muted, familiar values impose themselves, and in the end the

mind reduces the pressure upon it by accommodating things to itself as either “original” or “repetitious.” Islam thereafter is “handled”: its novelty and its suggestiveness are brought under control so that relatively nuanced discriminations are now made that would have been impossible had the raw novelty of Islam been left unattended. The Orient at large, therefore, vacillates between the West’s contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in – or fear of – novelty.”¹

However, moderating the politically charged tone of this statement, still using it to explain the politics of Orientalism, Said says, “There is nothing especially controversial or reprehensible about such domestications of the exotic; they take place between all cultures, certainly, and between all men. My point, however, is to emphasize the truth that the Orientalist, as much as anyone in the European West who thought about or experienced the Orient, performed this kind of mental operation. But what is more important still is the limited vocabulary and imagery that impose themselves as a consequence.”²

Under the next sub-title, ***Orientalizing the Orient***, how the Orient was orientalised by the Orientalist, our author explores the Saidian framework. “The Orient was Orientalised not only because it was discovered to be “Oriental” in all those ways considered common-place by an average nineteenth century European, but also because it *could be*: that is, submitted to being: *made* Oriental.”³ As the relation between the Orient and the Occident is a relationship of power, domination and hegemony, the Orientalisation of the Orient became possible for the Orientalist.

Till early nineteenth century, the imaginative representations of the Orient were obtained through the Orientalist scholar’s textual relationship with the Orient. So it was a kind of second-order knowledge about the Orient. Through such textual relationship with the Orient, the Orientalist scholar created the ‘science of the concrete’, in the terminology of Levi-Strauss. While elaborating upon the origin of fictional elements in the description and the

definition of the Orient, Said says, “Yet often the sense in which someone feels himself to be not-foreign is based on a very unrigorous idea of what is “out there,” beyond one’s own territory. All kinds of suppositions, associations, and fictions appear to crowd the unfamiliar space outside one’s own.”⁴

Thus Orientalisation of the Orient is a three way process where the Orient is theatrically managed through the grid of knowledge; it is theatrically represented by the Orientalist and it is due to his representation that the Orient is understood to owe its existence: as the once-glorious civilization has been brought to life again by the Orientalist; and more importantly, it has become the consumerist product for the consumption of the European reader, close on the heels of modern capitalism.

In the next part of this chapter, under the sub-title, **Colonialism**, the different conceptual understandings of the term are explained. A simple definition of colonialism is that it is a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one group of people by that of another. The difficulty is to distinguish it from imperialism.

Colonialism is one of the practices of imperial ideologies. Imperialism is a strategic form from where it is associated with capitalism. In that sense, we may safely say that imperialism provides the conceptual basis for the exploitation of the resources of the lands other than their own, whereas colonialism is a practical aspect of it. As they are the offshoot of capitalist ideology and strategy, imperialist ventures aim for profitable trade and enrichment of one’s country by exploiting the natural resources and the low-cost labour power of a foreign land. But colonialism is one of the ways in which imperialism operates. It is about capturing the foreign land for market for Western goods.

Colonialism is classified into different ways according to its characteristics and nature. Accordingly, it is elaborated as 1) Settler Colonialism and 2) Exploitative Colonialism. In the sense of administration, it is explained as 1) Economic Company Rule 2) Settler Rule, 3) Direct Rule and 4) Indirect Rule.

Neo-colonialism is a continuity of colonialism, though in a veiled process, after World War II. According to Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, the essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. But not in fact.

For example, the colonial administration in India did not have more than 5000 British people on the soil of India at any particular point of time. By the 1930s, colonies and ex-colonies covered 84.6 percent of the land surface of the globe.⁵ In this context, how the colonial administration was able to rule over the mass of Indian population is the amazing question. The people of the colonized countries were not subjugated with the military power alone; but with the intellectual power of the colonialist, the moral power and the cultural power of the colonial missionaries, apart from the scientifically managed military power of the West over the colonized people, it is understood.

b. Postcolonialism: Some Theoretical Considerations

In the second chapter Mukherjee discusses the historical emergence of postcolonial studies. Postcolonialism refers to the forms of representations, reading practices, interventionist approaches, critical elaborations and values of the study of literatures and practices. It suggests the resistance discourses that emerge from the former colonies. In such a way, it is a method with which to analyse the diverse strategies through which the colonized was represented by the colonizers; and, the way in which the colonized inverted and/or subverted the spectrum of strategies to empower themselves and to construct their identities in a discursive practice with colonial representations.

First of all, postcolonialism is a multi-disciplinary study, following the patterns of cultural studies, in the sense that post-colonialism derives its strength from variety of resources for understanding the social, cultural, political and historical legitimisations in which colonization took place. For studying these

varying aspects, it draws upon the poststructuralism, Marxism, literary studies, linguistics, feminism, critical theories and so on.

The sub-title, *Colonial Universalism to Diverse Postcolonial Discourses*, discusses the variety of reading practices and divergent interventionist strategies of postcolonial criticism. Postcolonialism, as a critique of colonialism, is an attempt at sharing the intellectual endeavour with the political commitment. As a counter-discourse to colonization, it aims at counter-politics, contesting the politics of colonialism. Politics here needs to be understood in the Foucauldian sense of discursive practice, not in the Marxist sense of revolutionary practice.

“Readings of postcolonial literatures sometimes are resourced by concepts taken from many other critical practices, such as poststructuralism, feminism, Marxism, psychoanalysis and linguistics. Such variety creates both discord and conflict within the field, to the extent that there seems no one critical procedure that we might identify as typically ‘postcolonial.’”⁶ Hence, there are varieties of postcolonial concerns and critical practices, not only because of geographical diversity of colonized lands but also because of the varieties of resources that postcolonialism relies upon for its critical practices.

Another reason for the diversity of postcolonial discourses is attributed to the cultural specificity of the authors and readers of postcolonial discourses on colonial experiences and contingencies. The understanding of the text has undergone wide-ranging implications since the emergence of the discipline of hermeneutics, especially after Roland Barthes in literary field and Paul Ricoeur in radical hermeneutics.

Under the sub-title *Frantz Fanon: From Colonialism to Colonial Discourse*, how Frantz Fanon, an Algerian, approached colonialism as an existential phenomenological way as well as a socio-cultural aspect has been discussed. Fanon deviates slightly from the fundamental Marxist understanding of classes based on the socio-economic categories of basis and superstructure, and says that “In the colonies, the economic substructure is also a su-

perstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem.”⁷ The colonial class division of humanity is not merely on the basis of socio-economic criteria, but it is of socio-cultural at the same time.

According to Fanon, the colonial life-world is based on an unequal relation between the colonized and the colonizer, based on the Manichean neurosis. In relation to the civilising colonial mission of the West, the Blackness is imposed upon the black with no hope for ontological resistance. His/her being is sealed into objecthood. The black becomes a non-being. This non-existence is not due to his feeling inferior to the white, but the black body encounters difficulty in the development of bodily schema.

The rediscovery of the black self, in their past glory, is only a term in the dialectic which needs transcendence in the colonial life-world of the black, a driving out of my-self from myself, a flight into the colonizing self. While we discuss the self in the cultural terms, it should not be understood that culture is static and absolute in itself; with due recognition to the fact that culture is ever-changing, dynamic, fluid and plural-in-itself that Fanon writes this. It is an existential account of the encounter of the white colonizing self by the coloured and colonized self.

Fanon’s description of the colonized self in the colonial life-world basically tries to avoid, as Sartre says,⁸ the conformity of the self to the existing colonial social power and its past solidified culture-historical self as well as it resists the colonizer’s attempt to object-ify the self of the oppressed.

Further, the rise of the South Asian variety of Postcolonialism has been discussed under the subtitle, *Subaltern Studies: A South Asian Variety of Postcolonial Discourse*. In the writings of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), an Italian-Marxist, the word ‘subaltern’ acquired a different meaning; he used this word in the context of ‘class struggle’, substituting the Marxian phrase ‘Proletariat.’ He used this phrase to mean non-hegemonic

groups or classes. The change of terminology is attributed to the censorship in prison among other reasons.

The Subaltern Historiography got explained in the much-quoted article of Ranajit Guha, “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India.” In it, he describes the historiography of Indian nationalism as the one dominated by elitism of two types, namely colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism. By this, he meant to say that there is an in-built prejudice within the historiography of Indian nationalism which considers the making of the Indian nation and the consciousness of the nationalism as the exclusive and predominant achievement of the elites. By the word ‘elites’, he meant the British colonial rulers, administrators, policies, institutions and culture as the colonialist elites and the Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas as the bourgeois-nationalist elites.

Again, he questioned this sort of historiography and he opined that this kind of historical writing cannot explain Indian nationalism. Instead he tried to bring forth the submerged histories of the common people and opted to write the history of Indian nationalism from ‘the contribution made by the people *on their own*, that is, *independently of the elite* to the making and development of this nationalism’. That the elite historiography conceives mobilization of people as achieved vertically through elite politics whereas the subaltern historiography conceives the mobilization of people as achieved horizontally through subaltern politics which is independent of the domain of the elite politics. Thus, it paved the way for the paradigm shift in writing history.

c. Decolonizing Colonial Exegesis: Postcolonial Biblical Readings

The third chapter discusses about the variety of reading practices that postcolonial studies apply as an intervention in colonial practices. Decolonization here does not mean what Fanon understood in the context of Algerian freedom movement. In the words of Sugirtharajah, “Postcolonialism has

enabled those of us who were part of the former empires to see ourselves differently. It has helped us to go beyond thinking in contrastive pairs “us” and “them,” “East” and “West.” Such a duality reduces everyone to an undifferentiated entity. What postcolonialism does is to help us to free ourselves from such neatly drawn confines. At least it seems possible to throw off the victim syndrome. Positively, what postcolonial criticism does is to prevent interpretation from becoming too nativistic or nationalistic... It also enables Western countries to recognize the extent to which European culture and knowledge were involved in and contributed to older and continuing forms of deprivation, exploitation, and colonization... Its specific usefulness lies in its capacity to detect oppression, expose misrepresentation, and to promote a fairer world rather than in its sophistry, precision, and its erudite qualities as a critical tool.”⁹

But Fernando F. Segovia understands the ends of postcolonial studies as a transformative politics. He says, “the goal is not merely one of analysis and description but rather one of transformation: the struggle for “liberation” and “decolonization.”¹⁰ Whatever the differences may be, towards the goal of decolonization, postcolonialism uses different theories at its disposal for the critical intervention in colonial practices.

Within this chapter, under the subtitle *Postcolonialism as Cultural Contestation*, Mukherjee studies postcolonialism as a field of contesting cultural practice, builds its momentum on the fact that colonial residues remain even after the end of formal colonialism; so, that needs to be decolonized. Earlier postcolonialism was considered as a literary genre and as a collective name for the creative literatures emerging from the third World; but now it is understood as a method or instrument for analysing the social and cultural aspects of reality.

Under the next subtitle, *Postcolonialism as an Enabling Concept*, the author studies how Postcolonial criticism, as a style of enquiry, provides a platform for the widest possible convergence of critical forces, of multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-

cultural, in order to assert the denied rights of the colonized, has been discussed. The convergence of different theoretical tools such as the analytics of power, help it for rereading the colonial texts and strategies. Foucault's understanding of power is radically different from the previous notions of power. He refuses to offer a 'theory of power'; his alternative is to offer an 'analytics of power' which refuses the 'rhetoric of theory.' According to his understanding of power, the 'theory of power' would make the operation of power as context-free and ahistorical. Hence, he rejects the attempts at theorising power politics but analyses it as a discursive practice that is contextual.

The question regarding the use of theoretical tools for postcolonial studies is that "whether they have diagnostic capabilities to promote the cause of the marginalised."¹¹ In this sense, postcolonialism is not obsessed with theory; but they use the theoretical models which question the authority, power, dominance and hegemony. In this way, "people of color have developed their own theorizing, using their experiences of the struggle of everyday life, distinct from the abstract theoretical fashion practiced in the West," says Sugirtharajah.

Under the subtitle *Postcolonialism as Decolonization*, it is discussed that postcolonialism as a decolonizing project means 'rereading' the texts which were produced with the Orientalist gaze and during the colonialist exegesis. "The act of reading in postcolonial contexts is by no means a neutral activity. *How* we read is just as important as *what* we read... the ideas we encounter within postcolonialism and the issues they raise demand that conventional reading methods and models of interpretation need to be rethought if our reading practices are to contribute to the contestation of colonial discourses to which postcolonialism aspires. Rethinking conventional modes of reading is fundamental to postcolonialism."¹²

This rereading approach is explained by Edward Said as *contrapuntal reading*. He defines contrapuntal method of reading as a reading practice which is simultaneously aware of

“both metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts.”¹³

Postcolonial readings and textual analysis have three different forms. The first variety of the reading practice is about the rereading of the colonial texts which talks about colonial practices directly as well as latently, in order to know the colonizing strategies and representations. Influenced by the post-structuralists such as Derrida, Foucault and Lacan, the second form of analysis re-read the colonial texts that were not merely literary in nature. In the third of reading we find the application of critical theories to the situation of postcoloniality. Here we find the emergence of postcolonialists like Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, Bill Ashcraft and others.

The next part of this chapter, *Postcolonial Dialogue with Cognate Disciplines*, discusses that postcolonial criticism overlaps with many other areas, such as race, gender, language, nation, colour, caste and so on. This engagement of postcolonial criticism with other areas gives its wider scope to explore plurality, hybridity, forms of power relations, forms of knowledge discourses etc. One such engagement between postcolonial criticism and feminism has been emerging with wider ramifications in the field of postcolonial studies.

“What unites feminism and postcolonial critique is their mutual resistance to any form of oppression: be it patriarchy or colonialism.”¹⁴ Quoting Rana Kabbani, McLeod holds that there is a mutually supportive process of colonialism and patriarchy which produce Eastern women in eroticised terms.¹⁵ This is the case of the colonized women, whereas the Western women’s relationship with colonialism is different and complicated. They seem to be empowered as members of the ‘civilised’ colonizing nation, whereas they seem to be disempowered in relation to the Western patriarchal rubric.¹⁶ Quoting Hazel Carby, McLeod also argues how British colonialism interrupted native familial structures and imposed its own models to the detriment of

women. “Colonialism attempted to destroy kinship patterns that were not modelled on nuclear family structures, disrupting, in the process, female organisations that were based upon kinship systems which allowed more power and autonomy to women than those of the colonizing nation.”¹⁷

In the next part, the author studies aspects of postcolonial biblical criticism under the title *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*. In postcolonial theology, the theology is a place for contestation rather than a sphere of passive ecclesiastic orientation. As it is contestation, the contestation happens in the cultural, political, socio-economic and intellectual realms through the mediation of scriptural sources. It differs from the earlier attempts to understand the scripture as a mere scholarly attempt to understand it historically and theologically, but it attempts to understand it as a liberative paradigm for contesting the powers associated with such understandings. “What postcolonial biblical criticism does is to focus on the whole issue of expansion, domination, and imperialism as central forces in defining both the biblical narratives and biblical interpretation,” says Sugirtharajah.¹⁸

While describing the emergence of postcolonial Biblical criticism, Fernando F. Segovia identifies four paradigms: 1) the historical criticism of the early 19th century to the third quarter of 20th century, 2) the rise and development of literary criticism from the mid-1970s, 3) the volcanic eruption of cultural studies in 1980s and 1990s, and 4) the result of competing discourses within the discipline of cultural studies which defined itself as crossing the rigid boundaries of academic disciplines. Within the last paradigm, there was fundamental transformation of the reading strategies which yielded to the ‘real reader’ who is a localised, contextualised and interested reader, opposite of the ‘universal reader’ who claim to be objective, scientific, impartial and de-contextualised.

In the next section, Mukherjee analyses the empowering and liberative interpretations of the Bible as advocated by the Indian Christian thinker, Prof George Soares-Prabhu, a

revolutionary scholar who has stood by the poor for their holistic liberation. She has elaborately followed his biblical theology of liberation, Christology and the theological methodology. For Soares-Prabhu, the central experience of the Old Testament of the Bible is the liberation of the slaves from Egypt and the primary experience of the New Testament is the resurrection of Jesus after he was crucified by the colonisers of those days, the Romans. In a way the naked Jesus that hangs on the cross fits the category of the poor and the wretched of the earth. In this wretched (Jesus), the natives find hope, solace and comfort. Thus, the prophetic Biblical interpretations of Soares-Prabhu is a powerful postcolonial response (and critique) to the colonial assimilation of the Biblical message. For his interpretation he draws from the liberation theologians of South America and the Asian theologians of inter-religious dialogue.

Contribution of Soares-Prabhu

Prof Dr George Soares-Prabhu, SJ, a versatile biblical scholar, who has successfully tried to interpret the bible for the living context of India. Though he has not been using the term “postcolonial,” his emphasis and orientation has been very much close to it. When he interprets the bible for the poor and for their liberation, he has been indeed proposing a postcolonial interpretation of the sacred text of the Christians, without using the term, but from the perspectives of the poor, marginalise and subalterns.

“Concern for the poor and fascination for the person of Jesus” is the Sutra that ties together the personal as well as the scholarly threads of George Soares-Prabhu’s life.¹⁹ It is not surprising then that liberation themes constitute the bulk of his writing. Today liberation has come to be associated in (though not limited to) theological and postcolonial circles from the perspective of the theologies of liberation emanating from the Latin American sub-continent.²⁰ In Soares-Prabhu’s case, liberation had two specific characteristics: one biblical and the other Indian. His is quite

distinctly a biblical theology of liberation seen through Indian eyes. And because it is biblical and Indian it culminates in a new reading and hermeneutics of the New Testament. There is hardly any piece of writing of his that does not witness to this specific outlook, which is basically postcolonial exegesis.

Speaking generally, liberation and liberation theology have rightly come to be associated with Latin America; for it is from that continent that the light of liberation has been spreading hope to 'the poor of the earth' as also to 'the poor of theology,' remarks Francis X. D'Sa, a close colleague of Prof Soares-Prabhu.²¹ For liberation is, among other things, also liberation of theology and of the theologians of the Third World from Eurocentrism. Such were also the thoughts of Soares-Prabhu who was influenced in no small measure by the writings of the Latin American liberation theologians.²²

On the other hand, Soares-Prabhu whose resourcefulness is very much in evidence in his writings and classes was not one to reproduce someone else's ideas, as those who knew him readily acknowledge. Though open to new ways of thinking and theologizing, he was never easy to convince; in this he was a strict follower of the Scriptures in that he consistently tested the spirits as this volume will testify. In all his writings he refers to a wide variety of shades and schools of thought but what he himself proposed stands out clearly as his specific contribution. Invigorated as he was by the fresh winds of liberation theology, he was not blind to the wide differences between the Latin American situation and the Indian context. He was convinced that any theology of liberation that India produces will have to recognize the fact that there is no substitute for fidelity to the Indian context. We find repeated statements to this effect in his writings.

Conclusion

By and large this book by Mukherjee makes a critical study of Biblical interpretations from a postcolonial perspective, from

which both theologians and biblical scholars can profit. Through her philosophical acumen, she has managed to open new horizons to theological commitment, especially to the poor and the marginalised (the nativists of subalterns of postcolonialism). This has led her to draw from Soares-Prabhu's concerns for liberation of the poor and dialogue with the other.

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Notes

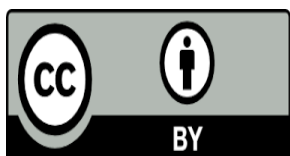
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14. R.S. Sugirtharajah (Ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 19.

15. John McLeod, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 175-176.
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17. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
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19. This article is adapted from Francis X D'Sa, "The Concerns of George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J.," in: Francis X. D'Sa, *Theology of Liberation: An Indian Biblical Perspective, Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J., Vol. IV*, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2001), xi-xxx-ix."
20. Cf. The influence of liberation theology is not limited to Indian theologians alone. See, for example, how a secular historian, Sumit Sarkar, looks at it in his, "Conversions and Politics of Hindu Right," in *Economic and Political Weekly* (June 26, 1999) 1691-1700, esp. 1698.
21. "The Concerns of George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J.," in: Francis X. D'Sa, *Theology of Liberation: An Indian Biblical Perspective, Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J., Vol. IV*, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2001), xi.
22. See his "Inculturation – Liberation – Dialogue. Challenges to Christian Theology in Asia Today," in *Biblical Themes for a Contextual Theology Today* where he speaks of Latin America's 'Liberation Theology' as a 'brilliant exception' which is not 'Western' in colour and texture (p. 53).

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