

DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY: SOUTH ASIA AND GC 35

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It is typical of Asia to begin with a story. The narrative form of the story gives us matter to relish and reflect on; it leaves many things unsaid so that the listener can complete the story; it has porous edges for the mystery to unfold itself; it is fascinating so that it can be told and retold many times to diverse audience.

I. The Narrative

A blind boy sat on the steps of a building with a hat by his feet. He held up a sign which said to help him. A man walked by and took a few coins from his pocket and dropped them into the hat with only a few coins in it. He then took the sign, turned it around and wrote some words. He put the sign back so that everyone who walked by could see the new words. Soon the hat began to fill up.

Next time the man passed by, the boy recognized his footsteps and asked: "Were you the one who changed my sign this morning? What did you write?" The man said: "I only wrote the truth". I said what you said but in a different way: "Today is a beautiful day and I can not see it". Both signs told the people that boy was blind. But the first sign asked people to help by putting some money into that hat. The second sign suggested to people that they were able to enjoy the beauty of the day, but the boy could not. The story

depicts an attitude of thankfulness to what there is and a call to positive attitude to make a difference in life.

At GC we are invited to tell our story in such a way that we see the 'blindness' around us. The story contains an element of 'upside downing' wherein the listener is pulled into the story; GC could do that to the larger Society and to the Church. A good story is transforming, helping us see and act differently and refreshingly. The Jesuit story needs to be 'different and refreshing to our times.' S. Asia expects this to happen in GC.

II. The Context of the Narrative: 'See, Hear and Look at the World' (SpEx 106-8)

Stories are told in a context; often at the time of harvest, festivals, gatherings, at the celebrations of life cycles; they are retold at any time, at any place. They have resilience beyond time and space. What is the context in which GC 35 is invited to retell the story? I pick up three contextual features that influence our story telling today: i) *Globalization*, ii) *the Church among Religions* and iii) *Questions of Identity and Violence*. Though these contextual features are in a sense universal, I look at them more particularly from S.Asian angle. Let me highlight them briefly.

2.1 Globalization and S. Asia

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The complexity of globalization is perceivable in three aspects. There is *technological globalization* where the arms and eyes of technology are capable of reaching any part of the world, bringing about a communication revolution for our times. At the same time a particular type of technological perception has almost pulverized the debate on alternate sciences and technologies. (*Visvanathan, Shiv, 2001. p.13*). At the *economic level*, the financial institutions are rewriting the global landscape. Production has increased in quantity and quality, and there is

greater access to commodities at an international level. At the same time, the dynamics of the market forces makes the individual institutions and nation-states helpless and volatile under the 'invisible hand' of market economy. *At the political level*, nation-states are forming trans-national alliances and global institutions are coming into place. However, nation-states are also getting powerless. Vital decisions are made at the terms of dreary network of agencies like the GAAT, WTO, and IMF (Visvanathan, Shiv, p.13). In the corporate world, democracy is redefined to suit the economic agenda. As the Jesuit study on globalization shows one significant phenomenon of globalization is its linkage to marginalization. This is particularly true of S.Asia. *"Marginalization appears as a process of denying opportunities and outcomes to those living 'on the margins' and enhancing the opportunities and outcomes of those who are 'at the centre' (SJS, p.19).*

The complexity of globalization has produced heightened tension due to the polarities between openness and universality versus neo-colonialism, between freedom of individual and the emergence of new communitarian projects (Self-Help Groups of S.Asia particularly of women is a clear example), between 'homogenizing cultures' and the emergence of multiple identities, between consumerism versus sustainable development, between local versus global, between institutional religions and various forms of religious expressions (SJS, p.19).

There is newness in globalization. Political, religious and sporting events can reach simultaneously millions of people around the world; knowledge is diffused through access to libraries and research centers; the 'local identities' are redefining and interrogating what is termed as 'global'; the sheer speed of communication and relationships baffles analysis; ecological concerns are demanding greater space, etc (SJS, pp.20). There is the emergence of a 'border space' that is fluid and porous and has vital linkages with a 'centre space' often inter-changing its space. Even the geographical 'border spaces' like the airports seem to control the center space. The emergence of new processes of relationships, communication and institutions has created, according to SJS a new systemic character called 'web' accessed through 'channels' and determined by the new 'hub's (SJS pp.20-21).

Poverty is a major issue today even if it does not find mention in the global agenda. The more the poor are marginalized, (poor here would mean the powerless of all variety), the more we create new classes of 'underdogs'

and thus breed violence. Today 'the world is both spectacularly rich and distressingly impoverished' (Sen, Amartya, p.120).

2.2 The Church Among Religions in S.Asia

Colonialism among others, produced wounded memories' of colonized minds in Asian psyche. From the South Asian perspective, the presence of the Church is connected with colonial memories and hence it carries a baggage of wounded memories. The process of healing of wounded memory is not linear, nor circular, but spiral. There are forward looking steps taken in the past to shed the colonial traits (Vat II paved the way), but there are backward steps that refuse

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to let the simplicity of the Gospels reach the Asian people. Even the Asian Synod, meant to put a healing finger on the wounds of Asian Church, occasioned the revival of memories and the restating of entrenched formulations and institutions.

Globalization has brought about new relationships among religions.

i) The web brought religions into focus and the dominance of western religions as world religions received a beating at the hands of major religious traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. ii) Religious practices and belief systems became more and more visible and accessible to the whole planet. Believers do not depend exclusively on the 'official versions' about other religions. They have direct access. iii) Religions are now the new global partners; no more the 'mission territories' to be evangelized in the traditional sense. iv) This level playing field among religions interrogates many of the narratives and claims of Christianity as a religion. Its theological and philosophical thought-pattern seems to be unable to address the questions raised in the democracy of religions. v) The incident of Ignatius taking a decision to kill or not to kill the Moor if the mule turned left, raises questions of democratic values and the issue of religious fundamentalism. It challenges one to respect the other even when he/she holds a contrary view to one's sacred beliefs. A mule saved Ignatius; we may have to create more mules of

sort to deal with religious fundamentalism. vi) The challenge is to articulate the 'logic of the Gospel' respecting the salvific will of God in other religions. vii) The criticality of the issues invites us to relate the Gospel culture as a powerful counter-culture against 'consumerism'. Other major religious traditions seem to be in the forefront in this counter-cultural stand. viii) Our desire to form communities of solidarity with others gets weakened when we hold on to religious and cultural claims of 'superiority' and 'absolute truth'. ix) Our mission of faith and justice needs to be sharpened and articulated with greater theological responsibility.

In S.Asia one feels the strength and weakness of the Church among other religions. The Asian Church is a significant experiment for the universal church. It is less a problematic to be resolved and more an experiment to learn from. The trajectory of Jesuit mission in S.Asia shows both the incoming and the out-going wave-lengths of the mission pedagogy. S. Asia continues to welcome Jesus and enacts the Good News in many ways, yet persists in countering the church and refuting its religious claims.

2.3 Questions of Identity and Violence

The above two features of globalization and the role of the church bring us to the third feature of identity. Identity is a multiple and open-ended construction and not a watertight, compartmentalized, single, closed entity. In the S.Asian context identities refer to a variety of social phenomena, such as caste system, strong cultural values, ethnicity, nation, religion, descent group, class, occupation, lifestyle, gender, sexual orientation, and so on. They are often interconnected. One dimension influences the other. Despite the multiplicity of identities each one of us has a dominant identity enabling us to read the world from a particular perspective. Globalization sharpens the question of identity and interrogates the status of religions in forming identities.

Identities refer to the way one defines oneself in relation to the other, and in the process one constructs 'boundaries'. Consequently we get constructed and dichotomized notions of "insider-outsider", "same-different", "me and the other", etc. While a sense of belonging to one's community can be seen as a resource, it can also firmly exclude other people.

This is particularly true when a singular identity is taken to override the rest. *'The Clash of Civilization'* projects a singular identity on people and presumes that humanity can be easily classified into civilizations based on a singular identity of religion or culture. This ignores the fact that there are multiple diverse identities that a people possesses. A person's religion needs not be his or her all encompassing and exclusive identity (Sen, p.14). The notion of a singular dominant identity is very divisive. Plural affiliations are more realistic. "Civilizational partitioning is a pervasively intrusive phenomenon in social analysis, stifling other – rich - ways of seeing people. It lays foundation for misunderstanding nearly everyone in the world, even before going on to the drumbeats of civilizational clash'. (Sen, p.42). The advocates of singular identity skillfully cultivates it in order to foment hostilities. In making a Hindu a Hindu, a Hutu a Hutu, a Tamil Tiger a Tamil Tiger, a Serbian a Serbian, 'a Born again Christian a Born again Christian' a specific identity is separated in one's self-understanding and the relevance of other affiliations are ignored. The 'sole' identity is instrumentalized; human being is miniaturized (Sen, p.185). Asian can be seen only as Asian, not in any of her other affiliations; hence at best, is capable of talking about Asia and nothing more and beyond. The surprising phenomenon in a globalizing world is that there are many who would define themselves primarily in terms of their religious identity. The religious identity becomes the dominant identity among the multiple identities. Imposing a singular identity on a gullible people is the best guarantee of championing terrorism. Whereas "the recognition of multiple identities and of the world beyond religious affiliations, even for very religious people, can possibly make some difference in the troubled world in which we live" (Sen Amartya, p.79).

Two challenges emerge from this: i) enable people to see differently, in their diverse affiliations, rather than in singular identity; ii) inculcate that another world is possible and that one can have global identity without losing other loyalties and identities. Will it be too much of reductionism to claim that Spiritual Exercises begin on a universal identity of 'Creator and creature' and ends with another universal identity of 'finding all in Him and in Him all'. Other loyalties and identities are preserved and fostered within the universal one. An important challenge for GC 35 will be to define our identity in a globalizing world of economies, cultures and religions.

III. Expectations from GC 35

3.1 South Asian Jesuits expect a lot from GC 35. As globalization brings in a confluence of events, generates meeting points of civilizations and creates more 'border spaces', Jesuit spirituality and Ignatian pedagogy can be very relevant and contributive. We expect GC to set sign-posts in this direction and lead the Society in an emboldened way. The principle and foundation of a Good God creating a sustainable world, the Trinitarian gaze upon the world taking upon the globalizing world and embracing it in the continued unfolding of the pedagogy (and as yet unknown ways) of the paschal mystery, discerning the 'web and hub' of the world in and through the Two Standards and loving it beyond the violence of economic fundamentalism and religious terrorism. Instead of resignation at the dwindling numbers in the Society, we engage the world through confidence in discerning the movements of the Spirit.

The Jesuit spirit is never afraid of the world in all its complexity and novelty. In all things loving God and finding all things in God give us a mission that is most needed. From a S.Asian perspective, one might say that our globality can include religions, cultures, neo-religions and ideologies that have a minimum common ground - the human and the secular - 'to see, look, taste and hear' the human and in it encounter the divine decisively, and embrace the secular and the sacred in a non-dualistic (*advaita*) perspective. We expect GC to help identify Jesuit spirituality for and in a globalizing world.

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3.2 Even as Ignatius chose a path apart and away from the monastic world but taking with him a monasticism of heart, we are invited to be pilgrims of the globalizing world; to be present at the web and hub of post-modernity; to be an inter-religious, inter-cultural 'apostolic subject'; to become an eco-friendly cosmic presence; to be a pilgrim of the 'border spaces'. The Society from its inception, through the founding fathers began, grew and developed in S.Asia. Its features now form part of the very identity of a Jesuit. It would be the task of GC to access these global messages and features and weave them into the story of a Jesuit today.

3.3 In a world where the church is one among the religions, our theological formulations and interpretations have to be academically competent to inter-disciplinary interpretations, and experientially open to the deep experience and expressions of the Mystery in other traditions. This is not a methodological device; the Lord of the Exercises is God who is infinitely rich and finely surpassing our calculations. We have to think out of our boxes. We are invited to discover a God labouring in the cyber net and global markets, in the worshipping centers of neo-religions and in the god-less 'border spaces' and in the 'anawim'. *"Jesus' kingdom ministry dissolves alienation and breaks down walls of hostility and exclusion, laying the foundation for a universal mission. He tends to rupture the wall between the sacred and the secular; the chosen and the common as he forces his followers to see God's presence in a Roman Centurion, a Samaritan Woman, a Syro-Phoenecian Mother, an Ethiopian Eunuch, etc. That the human person is created in God's image is the most validating factor about him/her with the inevitable consequence that our relating capacity becomes the measure and testing ground of our God –experience."*(George Soares-Prabhu, Vol.IV. P.67) We expect GC to reaffirm our commitment to theological search into the border spaces of 'the human and the divine' 'the secular and the sacred.'

3.4 As Asian Jesuits we share the strongly communitarian nature of our peoples, the emphasis on fidelity and respect for the community's elders as cherished values. We perceive that this community bonding is under threat from the pressures of modern living, individualism and caste and ethnic ideologies. We expect a renewed emphasis on 'community living' in GC35. Fr.General's letter on Eucharist insist on the community dimension of the Eucharist. *"It is the Church that celebrates the Eucharist: it is so to speak our breath of life as a community. ... Community life needs to be sustained by this food It is only in this way that our communities, often stamped with a disturbing diversity of personalities and backgrounds, will give witness, in a world torn by hatred and divisions ..."* (Kolvenbach, The Eucharist, 2006/5). The Eucharist is also the continuation of the memory of Jesus' table-fellowship. (Moloney, p.189.) Through the Eucharistic table Jesus is present to the failing, the broken and the outcast disciples of all places and times. It is in our broken-ness as 'friends in the Lord' that we recognize the Lord of the Eucharist and we build our 'union of minds and hearts'. *"The radicalism of Jesus (...) invites us to an inter-human concern*

that sets no limits but reaches out to the undeserving and the unrewarding (Lk 6:32-34) – to the collaborators with the Romans (the ‘tax collectors’) so hated by the Zealots; the ‘am ha’ares ‘sinners, (‘little ones’) despised by the Pharisees; the ‘children of darkness’ (the ‘lost sheep of the house of Israel’) written off by the sectarians of Qumran. The good news is truly for the ‘poor’ for the destitute, the outcast, the sick, the crippled, the illiterate, the exploited, the oppressed (Lk 4:16-21).” (Soares-Prabhu, Vol. IV, p.142). The richness and contributions of Basic Christian/Human Communities could hearten our Jesuit Community living.

3.5 GC35 should take globalization head on, in a mystical and a prophetic spirit. We search for God who labours in the globalized villages and localized super-markets. We rediscover the power of the word of God in challenging the de-humanizing consumerism and the denuding vandalism of the earth. We struggle together to be with the marginalized of all variations. We expect GC 35 not to resign itself to *‘there is no alternative’* cliché, but to create alternate ways of understanding, thinking, being and acting on behalf of the ‘crucified’ of this world, under the banner of the cross. As in our story, we can rewrite our script in such a way that the blind (including ourselves) are enabled and empowered and transformed.

3.6 We have in S.Asia experiences of different forms of monastic, religious, committed life. They differ from the classical *asrams* (Hindu monastic place) and *viharas* (Buddhist monastic dwelling) to Dalit communes, and tribal community life. The classical Indian models of four *ashramas* (stages) of *Brabmacharya* (chaste and studious life), *grihastashram*, (family life) *Vanaprasta* (forest-pilgrim) and *sannyasa* (total renouncing) offer one model. Could Asian Jesuits be encouraged to experiment a Jesuit religious model where people of different faiths, of no faiths, of different castes, language groups live together with a few Jesuits in the Ignatian Charism and may be following these different stages in diverse ways? Can we birth another mode of religious life in the church today?

3.7 The Society has the expertise of international governance for five centuries. Ignatius envisaged a style of functioning where the ‘man on the spot’ was taken into the decision making process. How can we further globalize the ‘local’ so that our style of governance becomes visibly an ever-widening circle rather than a pyramidal one? As the borders are becoming

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increasingly 'porous' and 'fluid' the structures could be more interrelated and dependent.

3.8 Shouldn't GC35 ask for an account of the reception, growth and development of decree 14 of GC 34 *concerning Jesuits and the situation of women*? Globalization has brought about revolutions in interconnectedness and communication. Has it further masculinized the world with a one-sided rationality? Are women 'apostolic subjects' in our missions? The abuse of the environment, terrorism and violence destroy life, and women and children are the first victims. Bearing, nurturing and growing life, women carry forward the cycle of life. The unprecedented signs of solidarity that is visible across the globe could promote a culture of life in which women and the earth are partners. Could Jesuits be agents of an 'alternate path' that is ecologically sound?

IV. Contributions to GC 35

4.1 We take with us from S.Asia our lived experience of a vibrant culture and civilization that survived for thousands of years to this day. We are a culture of many cultures, we are a religion of many religions and we are a people of many peoples. It is a lived experience that is a unique experiment in a globalizing world. S.Asia is ready to take on globalization and at the same time seems to have resilience to maintain its rootedness.

*S.Asia feels the restlessness
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4.2 We bring ourselves as Asian Jesuits. We belong to many language groups, cultural zones, tribal communities, dalit groups and castes affiliations and we live these multiple identities as Jesuits. We are different in many diverse ways. Living the identity of the universal Society through the multiple identities of S.Asia, we help moulding an Asian Jesuitness and we carry that to the GC.

4.3 This multiple identity gives us a facility to look for multiple and diverse modes of expressions in philosophy, art, architecture, music,

dance and the folk, classical and subaltern traditions. Our articulation attempts to listen to the argumentative Asian mind (rational) as well as the symbolic and the cosmic Asian dimensions (experiential). Perhaps Catholic theology has been unduly and far too long married to one particular rational philosophical tradition (or perceived to be so), and has not always let the dynamism and the richness of the Gospels emerge fully. S.Asia feels the restlessness of the Asian face of Jesus, in spite of the fact *Asia was chosen to be His earthly dwelling place. (Ecclesia in Asia)*. We carry that creative restlessness to GC.

4.4 We bring with us theological hermeneutics of suspicion of a certain type of philosophical theology and introduce a hermeneutics of appreciation of contextual theology, discerning the labouring God of the Asian soil. The realm of the Mystery is fascinating for the Asians. There is a personal engagement with the Mystery, manifested in the appeals to spirituality, even when organized religions are declining. As in our initial story, the edges are significant locations of the Mystery. Let us welcome the modern quest for spiritualities as part of the modern context in which the Spirit is working. We discern the active presence of the Spirit at work in the great movements active in the world: ecology, feminism, basic human communities, the neo-religious spiritualities. Are they the modern prophetic voices?

4.5 By participating in peoples' movements, writing in secular journals, dialoguing with secular thinkers, working in government projects, engaging in educational network (formal and informal), net-working with NGOs, responding to national issues etc., the S.Asian Jesuits have developed a certain 'secular culture' and credibility in a multi-religious, pluri-cultural and democratic society of S.Asia. In that sense too, we come to GC as '*Secular Asian Jesuits*'.

4.6. We come to GC with our sin and shame. The abject poverty, the rampant corruption in governance, caste discriminations and inter-religious conflicts stare us. We struggle against them with full trust in the renewing power of the Spirit.

4.7. We have not succeeded in creating an Asian Jesuit (Christian) Identity that truly responds to the genius of India/Asia and the wisdom and

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needs of its people. To that extent we also failed in our responsibility towards the larger Society. GC might as well be an occasion for self-critique in order to launch ahead.

4.8. We bring with us our weaknesses. We have not succeeded in imbibing the Ignatian spirit in its depth and dynamism so as to create a vibrant apostolic body with a specific Asian pedagogy. GC 35 could challenge and interrogate us on our formation structures and ways of proceeding.

V. Conclusion

We return to our story. Jesuit life and mission has been always a story-telling, with nuances for reinterpretation, with porous edges always itching to be reinvented, with horizons wide open for turning us upside down. 'The blind boy' could sense the sound of the steps of the man who re-wrote the lines. When we re-write our stories in a refreshing way, even the blind can see us; even we begin to see. Mary of Magdala could not see the Lord, but she recognized Him, in the familiar voice of the stranger. Mary said: Another World is Possible.

¹ Moloney, J.Francis. A Body Broken for a Broken People, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Pub; 1997.

² Sen, Amartya. Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny, London: Penguin Books, 2006.

³ SJS. Globalization and Marginalization: Our Global Apostolic Response, Rome: 2006.

⁴ Soares-Prabhu, George, The Collected Works, Vols.1.2.4. Pune: JDV, 1999; 2001

⁵ Visvanathan, Shiv. "The Problem", in Seminar, 503. 2001