

Marxist Jesuits are not for tribal welfare. India and Indian Catholics both must realise that

By JAITHIRTH RAO

The author is an entrepreneur and writer. Views are personal.



Representational image | A church in Tamenglong, Manipur | Simrin Sirur | ThePrint

Marxist Catholic priests in India are no longer happy focusing on old-fashioned parish work. Instead, they want to guide tribals towards ‘revolutionary Marxism’.

The purpose of this article is not to go into the tragic circumstances around the recent death of Father Stan Swamy. While many columns have been written about the tribal rights activist, including one by retired IPS officer [Julio Ribeiro](#) in ThePrint, I believe an attempt should be made to look at the larger issues surrounding the Roman Catholic Church and the Jesuit order in the context of their extensive and intensive engagement with Adivasi communities in India.

Christian missionaries and schools are generally viewed positively by Indian society. In most Bollywood movies, the Christian (usually Catholic) padre is portrayed as a benign, helpful and healing figure. I certainly hope the image stays that way, and is not altered or tarnished. For that, it is important to examine the political ideology of Christian/Catholic Marxism.

It is a common belief in India that the Roman Catholic Church in general and the Jesuit order in particular is anti-Marxist. This belief is quite wrong. The so-called ‘liberation theology’ is very much a Roman Catholic product, absent from most Protestant Christian theological outpourings.

Liberation theology is profoundly anti-capitalist, anti-markets and justifies **violence**, using selective quotations from the gospels. They like to talk about the reference in the gospels to Jesus throwing out money-changers from the temple; there is little if any reference to the parable of talents. The leading lights of liberation theology have been Latin American Jesuits who are completely opposed to a conservative strain in philosophical, theological and political matters. The influence of the Marxist Latin American liberation theologians has deeply permeated the Roman Church in India and has impacted the Jesuit order quite profoundly over the last few decades.

It is this ideological orientation among Jesuits that leads to many of them being well-disposed to Maoist insurgents, while publicly donning the robes of supporters, helpers and padrones of the supposedly helpless tribal people. This is pretty much what Catholic Marxists have endorsed in Central and South America also and is a classic “practice” of liberation theology.

In contrast with peaceful theology

My father and I both have been products of a leading Jesuit college in south India. I am personally a significant supporter of my alma mater. Every time I interact with older, kinder, more sober, more sensible Jesuits, they find it difficult to let their guard down. But directly or indirectly, they admit to me their frustration with the fact that the loudest and most active elements in their order today are Marxists. These Marxist Jesuits reject the earlier accommodative position of the Church and the order. They have also enthusiastically embraced ‘cultural Marxism,’ which in the West attacks white male dominance and in India has chosen to attack Hindu male dominance.

It is a part of liberation theology that such dominance cannot be addressed within peaceful, constitutional, parliamentary channels. A violent, revolutionary change is, therefore, considered necessary and desirable. They want to overthrow Indian society and specifically Hindu society, which, in the vocabulary of cultural Marxism, is seen as hegemonic, patriarchal, misogynistic, and casteist — a society that the Marxist Jesuits cannot and will not come to a peaceful engagement with. This is in complete contrast with the Jesuits of my college days who respected Hindu traditions and were votaries of an empathetic society.

Unfortunately, too many of today’s Roman Catholic and Jesuit priests take their inspiration not from Roberto de Nobili (a Sanskrit and Tamil scholar), Thomas Stephens (a Marathi scholar), Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi (a Tamil scholar) and Anthony de Mello (a scholar of Vedanta, Buddhism and Sufism) but from Gustavo Gutierrez and Jon Sobrino (radical, even revolutionary Latin American Catholic scholars).

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who served as Pope Benedict XVI, was usually stuck between a rock and a hard place while heading the Vatican’s doctrinal office. He had to **condemn** de Mello’s fondness for Vedanta, Buddhism and Sufism as theologically not quite proper. At the same time, he had to emphatically oppose Gutierrez’ attempt to plant revolutionary Marxism into Catholic dogma. As early as 1984, Ratzinger’s office published a critical analysis where it was specifically mentioned that “Marxism and Catholic Theology are incompatible.” From my perspective, Ratzinger would have been better off supporting de Mello, who, after all, was engaging with traditions infused with the sacred and the spiritual, something that the founder of Christianity would have approved of.

Non-Christian double-talk

Only the most convoluted arguments can stretch the message of the Christian gospels to support violent materialism. Theologians like Gutierrez and Sobrino are looking for an alternative to market capitalism and reject the position that this economic system has in fact done the best job with respect to poverty reduction. They call for a dismantling of the “bourgeois State,” an old Marxist demand. Their influence extends well beyond Latin America and has found fertile soil in India.

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Why is the “predator of press freedom gallery” by RSF fallacious?

By Dhananjay Shinde

Author is a student of computer applications. He writes on geopolitics, international affairs and issues pertinent to national interest.

Recently a France based NGO RSF, which publishes reports on press freedom, published a “Predator of Press Freedom” gallery. A gallery that calls out on the leaders that suppress and crackdown freedom of the press.

The RSF is well known for its Press Freedom Index. The Predator of press freedom gallery that has been published by RSF has included 37 leaders from various countries, out of which stands India. As claimed by the report, the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi uses “National-populism and Disinformation” as a method to crack down on the press.

Let’s assess the report and see if it holds any ground. The report claims that the journalist “risks dismissal if they criticize the government”. If I had a penny every time Narendra Modi was subjected to hate and vicious vitriol, I would have been a millionaire by now. I know people who are some of the harshest critics of the establishment, but the criticism is policy-based and not hatred against any individual or a community.

The report further goes on to declare that Gauri Lankesh was gunned down by the “Hindutva” elements, which is a fallacious argument per se. The case is still pending in the courts, you can’t be the judge-jury-executioner.

The most ridiculous argument was that the government relies on a troll army online known as “Yodha” (I’m hearing the name for the first time) who wage an appalling hate campaign against the journalist.

They are putting hate and criticism in the same basket, the second thing is you can’t stop people from criticizing or talking, else you are trampling down on the freedom of speech of the citizens.

Media from both sides of the political spectrum get their fair share of hate and criticism, it is not something peculiar to a particular spectrum only, as claimed by the reports.

The absurdity of the report can be sensed when the report goes on to say that only Modi “bhakts” target and defame journalists for their anti-Modi stance on any issue. No, it happens vice-versa as well. The leftist in India targets and denigrates independent journalists. They are not all sober, and these things happen in every country. Trump supporters sling mud at Biden supporters and vice versa, this is not peculiar to India only. This point alone is sufficient to sense the biases of the report.

So the fundamental question is - do journalists in India enjoy freedom?

There are some instances of strife between politicians and journalists in various states of India. That we can’t deny. However media outlets in India are free to report whatever they want, take the case of Barkha Dutt reporting from an intensive care unit (ICU), full of covid patients, when loved ones of the patients aren’t permitted to even watch, she was able to get inside the ICU flouting all the protocols. Was she penalised for that? NO.

Journalists reported the customary Hindu funeral pyres of the covid patients from the cremation ground, images were widely circulated. A person will be jailed for this offence in the west. Were these journalists jailed in India? No.

So the one thing worth noticing is that the government isn’t even applying the laws when there's a clear case of violation.

The report also mentions Rana Ayyub, as we all know FIRs are filed against few journalists including Rana Ayyub in the Loni case of UP, where they are being prosecuted for peddling fake news. A certain video was disseminated on social media which was used to create social strife by claiming it was antithetical to what happened. An attempt was made to create social strife between two communities.

As the erstwhile IT minister of India Ravi Shankar Prasad said “even a small spark can cause a fire, especially with the menace of social media”, it’s becoming important for the government to curb the dissemination to avoid uncalled-for incidents. Having said that freedom of speech comes with reasonable restrictions, which if violated are destined to get rebuked.

Lastly, the moment journalists politicise any issue or take potshots at someone for political reasons or because of prejudices, the credibility and sanctity of the movement or reporters will diminish. It has a detrimental effect on the reputation. It will jeopardise the cause as an instrument of propaganda void of any journalistic objectivity.

So should we be concerned about the gallery or the fact that India has ranked 142nd out of 180 in the press freedom index? Not really, because the reasons given to classify PM Modi as a “predator” are not coherent and lack journalistic integrity. It lacks the careful research of hard data and relies on the responses of select individuals. Furthermore, 47% of its funding (RSF annual report) comes from government entities such as European Union, French Development Agency, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the French Foreign Ministry, the French Defence Ministry and US State Department

There are several assertions about preconceived notions and biases about RSF and their opaqueness in surveys, as one report termed it as an instrument of racism and white supremacy.

Beijing too is worried over how to deal with Taliban

By Prof Srikanth Kondapalli

Author is Professor in Chinese Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), & Distinguished Fellow, IPCS.

The jolt from the blast at the Dasu hydroelectricity dam in north-western Pakistan, in which nine Chinese were killed, has sent Beijing into a tizzy to protect its interests and further its regional ambitions. However, the going is set to get tough. The blast comes amidst the heightened violence in Afghanistan-Pakistan as the Taliban steps up its campaign to take all of Afghanistan under its control following the sudden flight of the last of the American troops from Bagram airbase on July 4.

China’s interests are related to protecting its citizens in Afghanistan, stabilising its border areas in the Wakhan corridor in Badakhshan province, which witnessed a resurgence of the Taliban there earlier this month, curbing the drugs and small arms trade from Afghanistan, containing the spill-over of Uighurs trained by the Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State-Khorasan and its effect on stability in Xinjiang province. Of course, there is also the matter of protecting its investments in Afghanistan -- the Aynak copper mine, energy interests in the Amu Darya basin, resources at Bamiyan and ongoing infrastructure projects. China’s ambitions include pursuing the “five connectivities” of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects.

China had tied down the Kabul government in the last decade with “comprehensive cooperative relationship” in 2006 that was elevated to “strategic partnership” in 2013. The first memorandum with Afghanistan on China’s BRI was signed in 2016. Two years later, it was decided that a cross-border railway would be built -- from Peshawar to Kabul and Quetta to Kandahar. Beijing had also organised trilaterals with Afghanistan and Pakistan. All of these are now to be passed on to the Taliban for approval and support, if it marches on into Kabul.

Although China claims a policy of “non-interference”, it has propped up political groups in other troubled places — Libya, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, etc. China is no stranger to the Taliban, either, having provided military training to the Mujahideen in the 1980s against the Soviets, and international protection to the Taliban prior to 9/11. More recently, Beijing supported and hosted the ‘Istanbul Process’ in 2014, invited Taliban officials at Doha to Beijing and Urumqi. The Taliban, too, sent friendly gestures to Beijing, but it has to factor in local commanders’ will, too.

China’s immediate response has been to send advisories to its citizens to leave Afghanistan following news of violence spiralling out of control in various parts of the country. It had earlier evacuated its citizens from Kabul.

China is also striving for a political solution with “united front” tactics to address the Afghan situation and minimise the damage to its national interests. In May, China brought together the five Central Asian foreign ministers in Xian to strategize on the Afghan situation. Under the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Beijing is pushing its version of “three evils” (separatism, extremism and splittism) and the Regional Anti-Terror Structure on counter-terror exercises and intelligence sharing.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited three countries in Central Asia, besides attending the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group foreign ministers’ meeting at Dushanbe last week. The Dushanbe meeting on July 15 advocated for an “independent, neutral, united, peaceful, democratic and prosperous state” of Afghanistan and condemned the ongoing terror attacks.

However, Wang Yi’s comments that the Taliban should “make a clean break with all terrorist forces and return to the mainstream of Afghan politics with a responsible attitude toward the country and people” appears to be wishful thinking, given what’s unfolding in Afghanistan. On May 17, Wang even suggested external effort to “facilitate internal negotiations among various parties in Afghanistan,” but found few takers for the idea.

The crux of the problem for Beijing is the possible spread of political violence into Xinjiang, which it claimed had not witnessed a single terror incident since 2016. While the Taliban made certain comments disassociating from the Turkistan Islamic Party (East Turkestan Islamic Movement) and others trained in Afghanistan, Beijing knows that the ground reality is complex.

China even tried to infiltrate the Uighur militant groups but its spy ring was busted by Kabul and 10 Chinese were briefly arrested and had to leave Afghanistan in December last.

More significantly, if the Islamic State-Khorasan Province provides concrete assistance to the Uighur militants and connects them to the training bases in north-eastern Syria, that would be beyond Beijing’s control as its counter-terrorism cooperation with the Syrian government has not yielded results.

China’s Afghanistan policy is then faced with a conundrum, caught as it is between protecting its interests, promoting its regional ambitions and the resurgence of the Taliban. The “united front” with the SCO or those bordering Afghanistan provides only temporary relief for Beijing as Xinjiang could become restive in the coming days and months.

This article was first published in Deccan Herald

India-China Relations and Future of Quad

By Dr Antonina Luszczykiewicz

Dr Antonina Luszczykiewicz is a specialist in the political and cultural history of India, China and India-China relations. She published several books and articles focusing on India-China relations and the United States. She has collaborated with experts on public and international policy issues in journals and magazines, including The Harvard International Review, Review of International Affairs, The National Interest, South China Morning Post, and The Diplomat.

India-China relations is what I focus on in my academic research career. However, today I would like to talk about that from a broader perspective.

I have to stress and it is not a secret that I am neither Chinese nor Indian. I am looking at India-China relations from a certain distance, from a European perspective; which sometimes is a challenge but sometimes I feel it can be advantageous. This distance gives you a broader perspective and you can avoid emotional bias because this is not your motherland.

My talk is divided into two parts. In the first part, I would like to focus on the original implications of the India-China dispute and within this part, I would like to briefly refer to three select issues – border issue, water issue and Tibetan issue in political perspective. Afterwards, I would like to proceed to the global implications of the India-China border dispute in light of the China-US rivalry. So in the light of this very hot topic, which certainly has an impact on all of us.

It is becoming more and more significant to India itself too; as the relationship between India and the US is getting closer as well. But I will talk about it a little bit later.

To start with the border issue, we know that it hasn't been resolved for over seven decades. Actually, it is rooted much further back into the past. It stems from the old colonial era, the time in history when it was born. It wasn't resolved as a result.

We still have a border issue today and it seems to be escalating because border tension is flaring up recently. We have to remember that China does not want to solve this dispute. There were some proposals from the Chinese in the past, which India refused to accept when it came to the division of disputed territories. However, right now, it seems that even though China declares that the India-China border dispute should be kind of set aside so that India-China relations in different spheres could flourish. In fact, it seems that Beijing is not interested in solving this dispute because it can always be used for the so-called 'blackmailing' practice. China can use border issues to increase tensions and heat the atmosphere if it wants to pressurise India to do something in different spheres when it comes to economic relations, or maybe some other political issues.

In 1988, we had a consensus between China and India, and between two prime ministers of those countries. India-China relations shouldn't be developed despite ongoing border disputes. So we should put the border dispute aside and develop bilateral relations. However, in reality, we know that everything is tightly connected and that the India-China border dispute cannot be separated from economic relations, social relations and so on and so forth. Unfortunately, China can pressurise India in that regard by using the border issue card.

An example was given to us in 2017 by the **Doklam Standoff**, which was resolved surprisingly one week before the BRICS Summit, which was organized at the time in China.

But what was kind of not seen by the international community is that India was in a way punished by China. At least this is how many experts and think tank analysts perceives it. Because these two matters do not seem to be there if they're connected. Yet they are, or at least, this is what many experts claim. I'm talking about the water issue, and in this regard, I'm talking about the Brahmaputra flood which followed the Doklam crisis. China should warn India about the upcoming flood, according to the agreement between the two governments, it did not warn India about the upcoming flood on the river.

India, of course, accused China also of doing that on purpose. China defended itself by saying that; some Hydrological stations were being upgraded at that time, which means China could not simply share any data with India. Of course, one might say that this is possible. This might be a coincidence. If you look at China towards the river sharing, you will see that there is a pattern. China is slowly starting to use the river issue or the water issue as another card that It can play against various countries, including India.

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Nation is Indebted to: Prof Thirumallini Selvaraj



Charminar to Thanjavur Palace: Civil Engineer Brings Back Ancient Science to Preserve Heritage

A civil engineer and a professor at Vellore Institute of Technology, Thirumallini Selvaraj has been using ancient and sustainable methods to restore heritage structures such as Padmanabhapuram Palace, Charminar, Vadakkunnathan Temple, and many more.

Among the many things fast disappearing amid rapid urbanisation in India is the ancient belief of harmonious coexistence with nature. Centuries before words like “sustainable” and “eco-friendly” became part of our vocabulary; Indian architects were miles ahead in terms of using environment-friendly techniques and designs with whatever material was available locally.

Professor Thirumallini Selvaraj (47), a civil engineer and teacher at the Vellore Institute of Technology, says this practice has now slowly faded.

“In ancient times, architects used whatever material was locally available. Stone or lime mortar were the most used materials in ancient construction. Others included granite. Plant extracts were also used, including jaggery and kadukkai, which are a type of seed rich in carbohydrates. These projects involved a lot of fermentation. But very few records of these methods exist now,” she notes.

For over a decade, Professor Selvaraj has been working as a consultant to restore heritage sites and structures using ancient techniques. These buildings include the **Charminar**, Padmanabhapuram Palace and the Vadakkunnathan Temple. She holds a BE degree in Civil Engineering and has done her PhD in Heritage Lime Mortar Characterisation and Simulation.

Professor Selvaraj works for scientific restoration of heritage structures in India using ancient techniques.

“I started with scientific restoration, wherein I studied existing ancient structures to gain a better understanding of how to restore them. India is one of the few places in the world that has used plant extracts in the construction of these structures, based on regional availability. So that’s something I wanted to work with as well,” she says.

Professor Selvaraj has studied and **written extensively** on the restoration of heritage sites and the challenges posed in a country like India. “I studied projects across the world and collaborated with people working on these in parts of Europe, including Italy. But our structures are different, and we need to employ specific methodologies that involve these plant extracts, which is something these countries don’t use”

Any time Professor Selvaraj is approached for a restoration project, she collects these samples and does extensive research to scientifically understand how to work on the process. Apart from this, she has also conducted studies on excavation sites and the ancient material found there, to understand how people of ancient civilisations were using different materials and how good they were. “The idea is to understand the level of technology”

Professor Selvaraj has also worked on the Naganathaswamy Temple in Kumbakonam, and the Thanjavur Maratha Palace. She is also studying how we can employ these ancient methods in modern architecture.

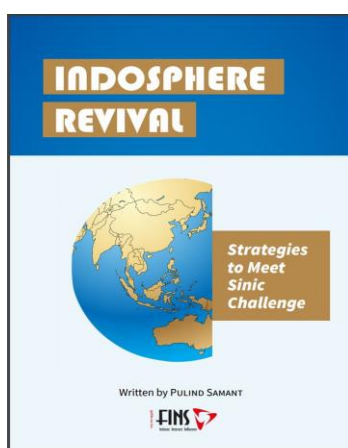
Speaking about the challenges that scientific restoration faces in India, she says, “We have modern methods now, including using material such as cement. But cement is highly incompatible with old structures, and if you use it, the entire structure will fail. These mistakes have been made before. People think cement is a strong material, but the results are the opposite. The structure becomes very weak and cracks develop. Also, these materials are highly polluting. But in ancient times, people used eco-friendly materials. Lime is an extremely green material and stone is a naturally occurring rock. As you know, these structures then survive for 1,000-2,000 years. New buildings can’t do that — they’ll stand for 70-80 years, but no longer than that. So that’s what we work with. There’s a lot to learn from ancient architecture.”

“There’s increased discourse on climate change now. In such times, the inputs and knowledge we can gain from ancient techniques become that much more substantial. Ancient structures are a window into the past. It’s the need of the hour for future generations to know the methods deployed to construct civilisations, and how **sustainable** these have been. All of these will disappear one day and they’re already doing so at a much faster rate here in India than in other places. This is because we’re unable to protect our heritage.”

She adds, “When you visit a foreign country, say Italy, your first thought is that you want to visit Roman settlements. There, they try to link the economy with culture and heritage. This is something we can work on here as well.”

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