

Dalit Tribal Interface

*A Ray of Hope
for Healing and Restoration*



Editors
Elizabeth Joy & Hrangthan Chhungi

This book owes its genesis to a meeting held in January 2011 in Bhubaneswar. This meeting was one of the solidarity activities for the victims of Kandhamal violence, which erupted against Dalit Christians in 2008. The Kandhamal incident has heightened the need for a Dalit-Tribal interface. This book is a must-have for those who want to understand the intensity and complexity of the issues faced by the Dalits and Tribals of India. It gives valuable insights into how the Dalit-Tribal communities in India are struggling to reclaim their identities and dignity as human beings.



Mrs. Elizabeth Joy currently serves as Director, Jyoti Enterprises Limited. She has also served as Executive Secretary, Mission Education, Council for World Mission, and as General Secretary, Student Christian Movement, India. Also, she is currently pursuing her PhD in Theology at King's College, London.



Dr. Hrangthan Chhungi holds a doctorate degree in the Old Testament. She currently serves as Executive Secretary, Commission on Tribals and Adivasis, National Council of Churches in India. She has also served as Dean, North East Region, TAFTEE, Bangalore, and Dean, Indian School of Ecumenical Theology, Ecumenical Christian Centre, Bangalore. She has written many articles.

978-81-8465-236-9



₹275.00; \$15; £10; €12

A Socio-Psychological Issue before Jesus

BISHOP YUHANON MOR MELETIUS

Bible Study: Matthew 15: 21-28

An Indian author and diplomat Vikas Swarup wrote a novel in 2005 called Q and A. Hollywood director Simon Beaufoy and writer Danny Boyle made a movie out of it. The hero in the novel/ movie Jamal Malik lived in a slum in Juhu, Mumbai. For the Hollywood film makers he was a dog of the slum, so also every one in that situation. Jamal participated in a TV game show and became a millionaire. Still, for the Hollywood film makers he continued to be a slum dog, of course a millionaire slum dog or a slum dog millionaire (I, for now, forget all the humiliating events that happened in the movie for short of relevance. It remains a question whether all Indians are dogs or only those living in slums alone are? Of course it is a movie and it does not take our questions. It gives only the statements of its makers). This is how the rich and the powerful, those who control the world affairs, those who make others slaves for the sake of their own agenda call those who are not equally powerful. Some dogs wag their tail and some others resist. However, many go passive while those who cannot do any of these, but feel the heat go crazy and hysteric. I did not hear many voices objecting the change in the title of the movie.

Matthew 15:21-28. ²¹ And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²² And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and cried, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon."
²³ But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged

him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying after us." ²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵ But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." ²⁶ And he answered, "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷ She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Let me start with a question. Jesus was in the region of Tyre and Sidon, in the land of the Canaanites or Syro-Phoenicians. What business did he have there?

Geographically the western region between Mediterranean and river Jordan where the people of Israel settled is called Canaan (Nb. 35:10-14; Jos. 22: 10-11). This region was populated as early as 3000 B.C. According to Nuzi inscriptions from 15th to 14th C. B.C, Canaan was famous for purple wool from which it got its name. Canaan also may mean 'merchant' (Isa. 23:8). The people of the region were Semitics like the Hebrews. They had independent cities and rulers for each of them. Israelites settled first in hilly areas and then slowly came down to Canaanite cities. From 1992 to 1779 B.C, and again from 1550 till 1225 B.C. the region was under Egyptian rule. Later various groups like Barbarians (from North west), Philistines (from Southwest), Hebrews (from South East) and Arameans (from North East) came and pushed the people of the land to Labanese mountains and Canaanites had to confine themselves to the costal region of Tyre and Sidon which was also called Phoenicia. The Canaanites who were thus pushed to a corner survived by treaty or in subordination (Gen. 9:26; Josh. 17:13; Jg. 1:27-33. There was also social integration and assimilation. Judg.3:1-6).

The Canaanites were engaged in ship building and trade. King Solomon and king Hiram of Tyre (BC 969-936) were friends and cooperated in constructing the temple in Jerusalem and in trade (1 Kgs 5; 9:26-28; 10:11-12). Later Ahab entered in to marriage alliance with them (1 Kgs 16:29-33). Hebrew alphabets and language were influenced by Canaanite language. Hebrew religion also borrowed much from Canaanite religion. But eventually they lost their glory. The attitude

of the Jews towards them changed considerably particularly after the exile and return. Jews considered themselves as an exclusive community and everyone else as subordinate and alien. Non-Jews wanted to protest, but were unable due to demographic, economic and political reasons. During Jesus' time Jews enjoyed considerable amount of freedom both religious and social in the region even though Romans were ruling the country. So they were able to continue the dominating and oppressive attitude towards people of the land. They called the Canaanites 'dogs' and accounted them to be much lower in social status.

To sum up, the Canaanites were people of the land and were subjected to invasion, enslavement, oppression and humiliation. Thus, we have in Matthew 15:21 ff., a story of a Dalit woman of Indian sub-continent. I do not want to go to the geographical and historical details in parallel.

I take the story of Matthew than of Mark (7:24-30) which is probably the first and shorter, because Matthew has a longer passage with extended dialogue of Jesus with the woman. The message of the event is given to the Jewish audience of Matthew and hence would speak to our situation as well.

The humiliating tone in the words of Jesus certainly reflects the attitude of the Jewish Christians of the early times and the response of the Church (refer to the situation expressed in the Jerusalem council reported in Acts 15). The primary purpose of the story may not be to present Jesus as a miracle worker since there are several other better stories that will serve the purpose. The whole setting of the story, to me, talks about the social status to which Jesus elevated the woman and her daughter and consequently the whole community of Canaanites. (This can be compared with the story of the Samaritan who helped the traveler on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. There is a tendency to single out the person who helped the traveler and call him 'the good Samaritan'. I think Jesus was referring to Samaritans as a community, not just one person).

Canaanites or Syro-Phoenicians were a community who faced humiliating treatment and unjust dealing from the Jews who invaded their land centuries back.

I consulted few practicing clinical psychologists to learn a bit about the condition of the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman. What is said in the Bible as 'possession' in modern terminology can be called hysteria, the cause of which can be socio-psychological frustration. I think this works very well with the stratified and unjust social order that existed during the time of Jesus.

Since the Canaanites were not in a position to rebel, they took it on themselves. In the illness of the girl, I see an expression of the rebelliousness on her part in response to this unjust social order. The mother is the representative of the older generation of the community that accepted the situation as normal. Her mind was already conditioned and had no problem in being called 'dog' (I have seen this happening in my own backyard in the so called 'god's own country', Kerala). But for the younger generation, it was not at all acceptable. They wanted to change it. But opposition may have come even from their older generation. This would have caused an internal struggle in the mind of the girl which may have affected the person resulting in the form of hysteria. When the woman was taken to the status equal to that of Jesus' own people, the dominant community, the Jews, the girl was 'healed instantly'. Re-establishment of social status provides the girl wholeness.

To achieve this goal, Jesus had to work slowly pushing the woman herself to that end. It was not a one sided act of charity on the part of Jesus. The goal was achieved by the woman herself with the environment and challenge created by Jesus. The woman's urgent need and her love toward her daughter helped her fight for the cause all the way and reach the target.

There is a slow, but steady progress towards the goal. The role of the community around specially that of the disciples is crucial. First, Jesus keeps silence (v. 22). But the woman did not get discouraged and leave. Rather continued to plead and the disciples had to intervene. Then Jesus gets a chance to respond. It is hard to believe that Jesus meant what he said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel". The immediate question would be, if that was the case, why was he there in the territory of non-Israelites? (Of course scattered Jewish presence was in that region. But was he there just for those

few? He had been to gentile territory earlier and had worked miracles there too as according to Mt 8:28 ff). The woman was not ready to accept that reason either; rather she continued to press her case. Jesus' second statement was more humiliating than the first. Jesus further tries to hurt her feelings and calls her indirectly 'dog'. It was not only an insult for her, but also for her own community. With this, while for Jews, she becomes a representative of the community of dogs, but for Jesus of a community that can rise to the status of the Jews or even above them by faith. She challenges Jesus with a valid argument. She does not show any offence for being called a dog. This is a positive attitude on her part. She can not change the way others think of or talk about her. She is concerned of her rights and will go however far to get it protected or granted. Through her valid argument she claims her rights since dogs are part of the family and they too have rights. It is not a question whether she accepts the word others use to call her or not. What matters is what she thinks of herself and her rights. She claims that she too has rights in the family. Those who call her dogs are trapped in their own argument. May be this was an answer of the early Church before the Jews who were so proud and counted everyone else inferior.

Jesus had no other go, but to grant her demand. He gives up and makes a comment on her faith and grants her wish. Jesus in fact was slowly liberating her of her mindset and putting her in the right position. Her urgent need also helped in the process. So far Jesus has been complaining about lack of faith of 'his own' people, the children. Now he was able to appreciate the faith of a person (of the community too), a woman first and on the top of it a Canaanite woman. With this appreciation of Jesus she is placed on the top of his own community. The Canaanite woman from under the table is elevated to the top of it and to the position of the children themselves, if not over them. Jesus had already thrown the children out from the table several times (Mt. 15:14. Take special note of Mt 21:31b. "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you").

What happens further is in response to the change of status of the woman and her child. Matthew states, "and her daughter was healed instantly" (15:28). The social upliftment, self-respect reestablished/

restored removes the reason for being angry, rebellious and hysteric too. The girl is thus cured and becomes whole. The new humanity Jesus creates does not validate the claims of children's status or otherwise (gentiles). It only looks for faith that fights all the way up, to be considered equal and established in wholeness (see Peter's address in the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:6-11. "Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.⁷ And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.⁸ So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *he did* to us,⁹ and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.¹⁰ Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?¹¹ But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they".

We need to put this in perspective!

Let me bring in few questions!!

Why is the Church placed in this world of plurality and where people are hierarchically structured? Is it to protect the interests of the rich and powerful honoring their claims or to plan and workout ways and means of making the weak, the oppressed and marginalized whole? Is it not to recognize, protect, and further help them fight for their rights? Just look at what happened in the territory of Tyre and Sidon and also see Jesus' comment in Mt 11:28 ff (Come to **me**, all **you** who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.²⁹ Take **my** yoke upon you and learn from **me**, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.³⁰ For **My** yoke is easy and **my** burden is light").

Why do people call others dogs? People call others dogs not because they are dogs, but because it will help those who call, to work out their agenda easily. First, it will create a subordinate mindset in them and they will always be obedient. They will not demand their rights, rather be content with charity. Second, this will give the oppressors a free ride and will help them continue their oppressive attitude.

The oppressors on the one hand are limiting themselves to a corner and on the other becoming a helpless people. When they realize that they are alienated from others and are a helpless lot, they would try to get help through 'force'. They can do that only until others are submissive to them. Once the enslaved people regain their self respect, the dominant community will become even more worried. So they try all that they can to keep others from claiming their rights. One way of doing it is by demoralizing them through derogative names and titles. This is a universal phenomenon. For example, follow the recent events in the international arena. George Bush complained that Indians started eating more and that is why food price is going up in the US. He complained that more Indians are using vehicles and that is why fuel price is going up. Then comes the movie, 'slum dog millionaire'. Later Barak Obama asks Indians to invest in US. Few days earlier Manmohan Singh asked Indian to eat cheap food items to bring down the food price. Do you get the picture? You save money by buying cheap food and invest that in US so that companies like AIG and others can eat that money up. Our Prime Minister is all for it!

Again political and religious fundamentalists will try to divide people and call one higher and the other lower not because they are so, or because god made them so; but because it will keep them divided and will never be united against the oppressors.

Jesus did not categorize people. He only wanted all to be united in faith. He criticized Jews for not having faith. He hailed the Canaanite woman for having faith. This is an indirect call for Jews to have faith and be hailed by Jesus and the oppressed to gain self respect to consider themselves equal to the oppressor in status or even excel them through faith but never sell them away to the oppressor.

So what shall the Church in this part of the world do? Be present just like Jesus was present in the region of Tyre and Sidon. Work with people to help them slowly move upward and gain confidence in themselves. Adopt a social reformist methodology to emotionally and psychologically liberate them from being oppressed and marginalized. Help them to be aware of their rights and privileges and gather strength to fight for it.

The story of the Canaanite woman with Jesus is a story from our motherland, India (the incredible India, the shining India, the land of the slum dogs). Jesus is here in our midst. An unjust social situation created by humans is prevailing in our country and in our society. Dalits and Tribals, the people of the land are being pushed away from the main stream to the side walk and to gutters to be enslaved and oppressed. Their rights are denied by political, social and religious leadership. People respond to this in multiple ways - some quietly surrender, some rebel violently and some go hysteric. Rather they should see the existential challenge before them just like the Canaanite woman did, and stand together against any kind of denial of their rights and violation of their human self. They have to claim their rights as humans just like any other human being in this world.

Christ should be the source of liberation in all matters with creation and particularly humans. Church representing Christ in this world today needs to act on his behalf. It has two responsibilities - first, to interact with the oppressed to support the correct perspective in the struggle for justice, second, to address the oppressive forces with the power of the word to be transformed. Let us be present and be liberative as our Saviour was.

Church's Response to Kandhamal and Similar Situations

- BISHOP YUHANON MOR MELETIUS

Friends,

We are now concerned of Church's response to Kandhamal and similar situations. My opinion on this has already been expressed in my Bible study earlier. The primary question with which I would like to begin in this context is, 'what does 'the Church' mean? To me, Church is 'an agency that tries to work out the liberation that Jesus inaugurated in this world'. This agency, therefore, has no fixed or permanent structure or shape. It is ever dynamic and vibrant and at the same time local. The best and most effective model for the Church to adopt to be an agency of Christ's liberation is 'the incarnation model'. John 3:16 portrays this model very well. It says, "God so loved the world that He gave (away) his Son ..." (the emphasis and bracket are provided and they talk about the methodology of the model).

The Church today has become an institution with its riches in many areas and the structures that keep and multiply these riches. Unless following the classic model the Church is ready to give away and shed these engulfing structures and come out into the midst of the people like Jesus did, it can not address the question raised here.

Jesus was called Son of God (by Peter), son of David (by the blind man on the road side), good teacher (by a ruler) etc. These were titles that would have put Jesus up on high pedestal. Indeed he was on the pedestal. However, taking up the mission of his Father, he came down into the midst of the people. During his time, anyone who was called

a teacher stayed in the temple or in the synagogue. But as Jesus himself put it, such teachers 'put so much burden on the shoulders of the people and never cared to lift it even with their small finger'. Son of David to them was one on the throne with political power. Yes, he was Son of God, Son of God with us (the people); he was son of David as a 'good shepherd', he was a master who taught in the streets with words and deeds.

The Church has not learned much from the incarnation model. Rather, it copied the old model of the Jewish leadership, which was irrationally proud of its Mosaic authority and Abrahamic heritage. They forgot the fact that these two leaders were called by God to be 'with the people and be leaders in God's liberating act and be a blessing to generations'; not oppressors and enslavers. They were called for a mission with the people. They had no right to make their calling a proud claim of exclusivism and authoritarianism and to distance themselves from God's creation. The Church today has become highly institutionalized and structured. It is primarily concerned of maintaining status quo and keeping the structures and protects its interests. This is what the Church need to shed to come down in to the midst of the people.

The early fathers of the Church said, 'Jesus went through all the stages and situations of humans to liberate those stages and situations from bondage'. He participated in the life of humans with its most crude and concrete situations. He shared human's times of joy, sorrow, suffering, hopes and every other mood in this world. This is what the Church is called for. The incarnate Word asks his disciples to 'go out in to the world and be his witness'.

The response of the Church to situations like that of Kandhamal is 'incarnation'; to be present in body and spirit in every situation humans are placed in. This presence is fundamentally and essentially liberative in goal and purpose. Only that which is being incarnationally present can be liberative. The Church will 'walk with those humans who 'walk through the valley of the shadow of death' and will help them to resurrect. It is a participatory role. It will help people to face dangerous situations with determination and courage and to come out victorious and be resurrected. No one shall ever ask the Church 'Were

you there when I was persecuted or when I was in jail or when I was hungry or when I was naked?' Church's presence and participation will help people take up the cross and to transform it to a sign of victory over every thing deadly. A Church that is tied up by institutional interests cannot engage in such a mission. Hence, the Church has to first come out from its castle, and then has to be present in the midst of the people. Situations like that of Kandhamal is a frequent possibility in today's world that is under the powerful influence of evil forces. Only the way of the cross can win over such situation and for that the Church, the steward of Jesus in this world, has to be present to bear that cross on behalf of the people.

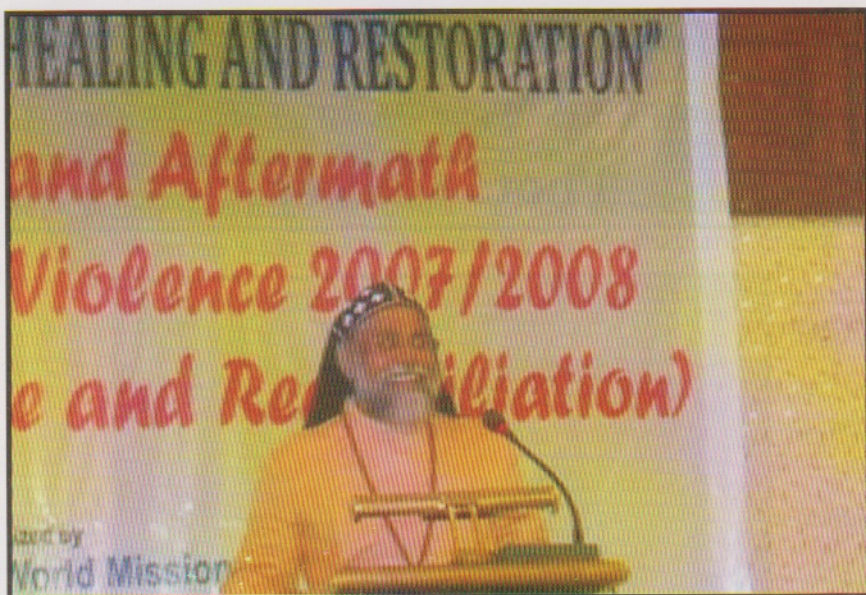
Photo Gallery



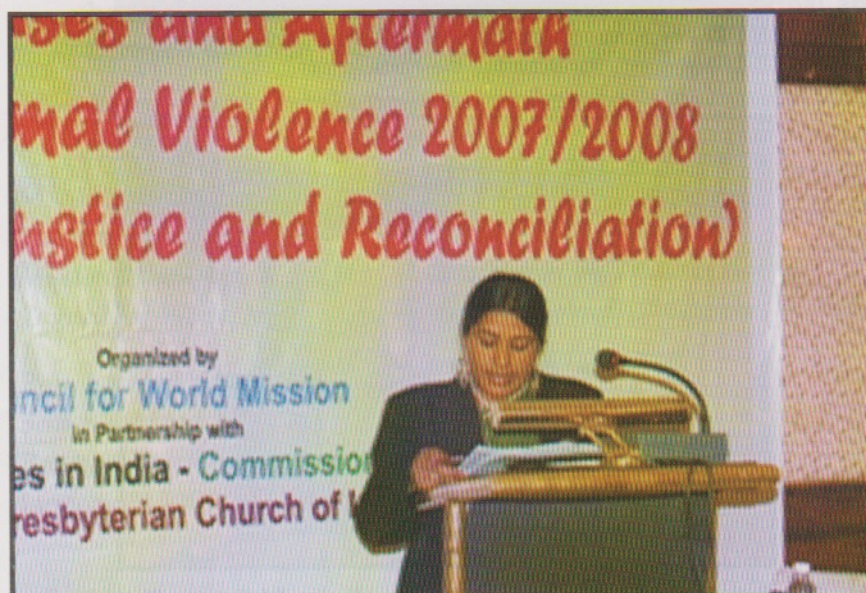
Rt Rev Samson Das, Bishop of Cuttack Diocese, CNI, welcoming the Participants



Elizabeth Joy, the Executive Secretary for Mission Education, CWM leading the lighting of lamp during inaugural Worship. Others from left to right – Dr Roger Gaiwad, Mrs Enna Nsofu, Bishop Subas Chandra Gouda, Bishop Samson Das, Rev S S Majaw, Bishop Yuhanon Mor Meletius



Bible Study led by Bishop Yuhanon Mor Meletius, Metropolitan of Trissur Diocese, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church



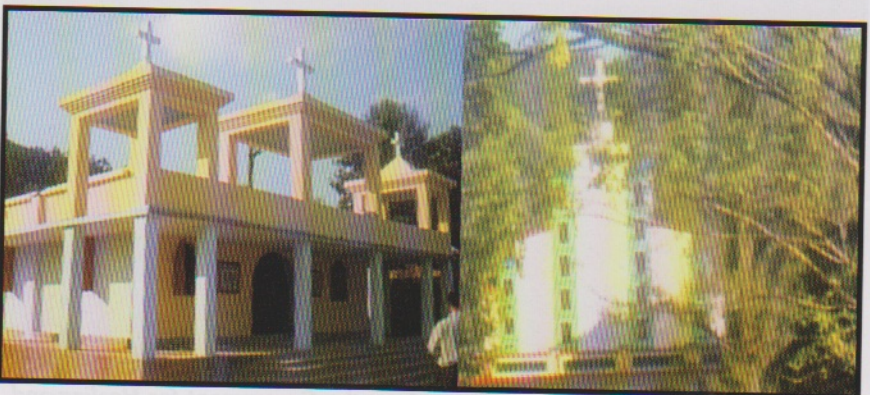
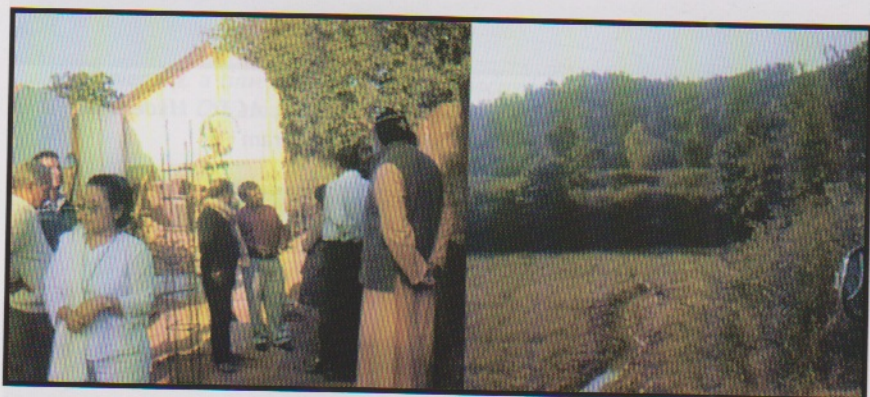
Dr Kaushal Panwar, Assistant Professor of Sanskrit, Delhi University, delivering the Keynote Address

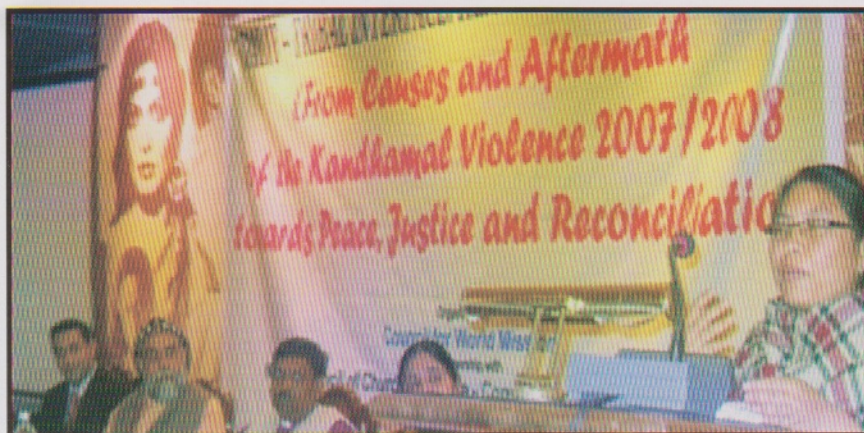


The Participants with rapt attention to the keynote address



After 3 years of destruction and violence, its hard to get back to normalcy as the stint of the violence remains with unrepaired houses and church buildings still lying in many places even as a few houses and church b uildings are under repair.





Church's Response on "Healing and Restoration Towards, Peace, Justice and Reconciliation for Dalit and Tribal Communities". Panellists from left to right: Rev Nathaniel B M., Bishop Yuhanon Mor Meletius, Bishop Bijaya Naik Kumar and Rev Nancy Singaram. Session moderated by Ms Ibatista Shylla



An Exposure Trip and solidarity visit to Kandhamal on 20th January 2011. Mr Kasta Dip gives an orientation to the georgaphycal locations of Kandhamal, places of destruction and the victims of violence.



A time of interaction. Listening the testimonies of the victims of perpetual violence against Christians of both the Dalits & Tribal Communities in Kandhamal area.



Bishop Yuhanon Mor Meletius is the Metropolitan of Thrissur Diocese of Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. He is a very dynamic person and a Bishop with a 'Difference'. He believes in dialogue, change and liberation with respect to both himself as well as others from bondage (mental, physical and spiritual) within the varied structures that distort

God ordained identities with freedom to lead a meaningful life. He was born in a small village in central Kerala district of Ernakulam in 1954. He is a graduate in Malayalam language and literature. He did his B.D. and M.Th (in Old Testament) at the United Theological College, Bangalore. He was Ordained as a priest in May 1986 and consecrated as Bishop in December 1990. He served as Vicar in a small congregation in the home diocese for 3 years. He taught at Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary, Udayagiri, Ernakulam (MSOTS) for 9 years. Currently, he is a guest lecturer at St. Thomas Orthodox Theological Seminary (STOTS), Nagpur, Maharashtra. He is a social democrat and activist. He is one who is always proud to identify himself as a Student in Old Testament despite the credit he has to both his Scholarship as well as teaching experiences!



Rt. Rev. Subas Chandra Goudo is the Bishop of Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church and the President of Utkal Christian Council, Orissa. He is also the President of the Governing Body of Orissa Christian Theological College and the Executive Committee Member of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India. He is a man of Prayer and great commitment for the cause of people's liberation from bondage.



Bro. K. J. Markose is a member of Brothers of St Gabriel (Montfort Brothers). He is a lawyer and also has a postgraduate in history. He has been at the service of the poorest for about 30 years. He is an