



Curriculum Theologiae

Challenges for Theological Formation in Today's India

The Level of Research and Publications

Arulsevram Rayappan

<https://doi.org/10.48604/ct.25>

Submitted on: 2013-12-18

Posted on: 2013-12-18

(YYYY-MM-DD)

This content is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License \(CC BY-SA 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

You are free to:

Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format.

Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially.

Under the following terms:

Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

ShareAlike — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original.

No additional restrictions — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

CONTEXTUALISING AND EXCELLENCY CHALLENGES FOR THEOLOGICAL FORMATION IN TODAY'S INDIA: THE LEVEL OF RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

India can be called one of the greatest 'Christian countries' in the world not merely because of the number of Christians but more especially because of the faithful who feel actively concerned with their Christian identity. Theological reflection in India has to address the deep desire of the people to belong to the soul of India while working for the liberation of India that suffers not only from the sequelae of colonisation, but also from its internal devils: social inequalities, individual selfishness of the elite and collective selfishness of the caste, indifference towards the common good, social and economic structures oppressing the poor and the weak. Indian theology has therefore to take into account, at the same time, two elements in its search: on the one hand, the concern for incarnation, which is expressed in terms of inculturation, of cultural continuity and of dialogue with the spiritual experience of India and, on the other hand, the awareness of a need for redemption, the prophetic attitude, which does not shun facing up to injustice and expressing itself in terms of rupture and liberation, sympathizing with the reactions of the marginalized and outcasts and with their rejection of an oppressive culture.

Personnel

A vast number of Indian students study different theological or philosophical disciplines in reputed universities in Europe and the United States of America. Back home with a licentiate or a Doctorate, they teach in seminaries or catechetical and pastoral centres, take care of the ongoing formation of Priests, Religious men and women, assume the charge of Biblical, Liturgical and Catechetical apostolate in their diocese. However, these specialists in ecclesiastical sciences are almost exclusively clerics. Even though India has four times more Sisters than Priests, the number of Sister Theologians is very small. Even though Religious Sisters have now access to most of the study centres in India, they have not yet flocked to them. Religious Congregations have experts at all levels, from medicine up to higher mathematics, but not in theological disciplines. The number of the laity who is qualified in the religious sciences too is quite insignificant.

Associations

Those qualified in the different theological disciplines gather in various associations. Besides the *Society for Biblical Studies*, which gathers Catholic and Protestant Biblical Scholars, there is also the *Catholic Biblical Association of India* which is in a state of revival. The *Indian Theological Association* draws together theologians from different disciplines. In their annual meetings, they try to take an inter-disciplinary approach but, in fact, it seems to concern mainly systematic theologians and philosophers. We have *Association of Moral theologians in India* and the *Canon Law Society of India*. The latter has 27 years of existence and its publication the *Canonical*

Studies contains the scholarly papers presented at its Conferences. There is also an *Association for Indian Church History*, which publishes a review and undertook the ambitious project of History of the Church in India in 5 volumes.

Faculties and Seminaries

There are different study centres that have contributed to research and publications in Indian theology.

a) While the Protestants have the university at Serampore, in the outskirts of Calcutta with the possibility to obtain an official university degree and to be integrated in the network of higher education in India, on the Catholic side, a similar integration has been attempted through the Departments/Chairs of Christianity beginning here and there to be included in the framework of state Universities. The cohabitation has not always been easy, with a rather rigid administration sometimes jolted by the winds of local politics. Moreover since it confers an “Arts” degree, place must be given to academic subjects in “arts”, and the teaching properly theological risks being diluted and at times overtly condensed.

b) The strongest infrastructure for theological research remains the growing complex of seminaries and faculties specifically Catholic, with Pontifical right. Seminaries continue to grow in number and strength. For a long time Jesuits held the monopoly of academic theological teaching with their two Faculties at Pune (heir to Kandy at Sri Lanka) and Delhi (formerly in Kurseong). Now other Catholic Faculties have been created by the seminaries of Alwaye and Kottayam in Kerala, Ranchi in Bihar. The project of a Catholic University at Bangalore having failed, it has been partly recovered by the two fraternally complementary faculties of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram (Religious of Syrian rite) and St. Peter’s Pontifical Institute (Diocesan clergy). At the request of the C.B.C.I., a faculty of Canon Law has been added to St. Peter’s from 1987.

c) An important creative role is also played by the “Centres” founded by the competent authorities in the Church or even by private initiatives whose promoters have managed to establish durable institutions. The National, Biblical and Catechetical Centre (NBCLC) of Bangalore is particularly well known. Its courses and seminars contribute powerfully to catechetical and liturgical animation at all levels. It’s interdisciplinary “research seminars,” gathering specialists from different horizons. A centre for Missiological studies has been launched at Pune by the Divine Word Fathers. The Indian Social Institute functions in Delhi and Bangalore under Jesuit direction. The Salesians of Bangalore have just opened an Institute for Catechetics. Catechetical and Pastoral centres exist too at the local level; they contribute to the animation and formulation of a catechetical, liturgical, biblical and theological reflection in local languages. It is unfortunate that the earliest catechetical institute of Tindivanam, near Pondicherry, founded by Fr. Gavan Duffy, MEP have almost given up training of Catechists.

“Non-Professionals” places

We should give due credit to the non-professionals places of theological production. Most theology Professors have a parallel activity, in the Parish ministry on week-ends, for the animation of youth or adult groups, the participation in the catechetical, liturgical, biblical activities in regional, diocesan or national Centres, involvement in teams for social conscientization or prayer groups, collaboration in works of Biblical or liturgical translation, etc. In the mystical context of India, the various Ashrams equally play an essential role of theologizing.

Publications

Besides a few publications in the local languages, we have from the important centres valuable publications: *Bangalore Theological Forum* (UTC, Bangalore), *Bible Bhashyam* (Kottayam), *Christian Orient* (Kottayam), *Indian Journal of Theology* (Calcutta), *Indian Theological Studies* (Bangalore), *Jeevadhara* (Kottayam: Indian Theological Association), *Journal of Dharma* (Bangalore), *Journal of Indian Church History* (Church History Association), *Living Word* (Alwaye), *Religion and Society* (Bangalore), *Missiological Review* (Shillong), *Sevartham* (Ranchi), *Salaam* (Delhi), *Social Action* (Delhi), *Studies in Church Law* (St. Peter's), *Vidyajyothi* (Delhi), *Word and Worship* (Bangalore). Regarding Edition Houses, besides the different “centres”, Seminaries and Faculties, one should mention *Asian Trading Corporation* (Bangalore, Bombay), *Christian Literature Society* (Madras), *Gujajrat Sahitya Prakash* (Anand, Gujarat), *ISPCK* (Delhi), *St. Paul's Publications* (Allahabad, Bombay), *Theological Publications in India* (Bangalore).

Level of Research and publications

We cannot accept any generalization with regard to the excellent or average standard of the quality of the research and publications; we can honestly say that there has been a genuine attempt to integrate a sense of Spiritual Values and openness to concrete problems.

Need of An Indian Biblical hermeneutic: As regards Scriptural roots, Indian theology has obviously to take into account the biblical data from the Old as well as from the New Testament. It is to be regretted that, apart from important exceptions, the numerous Indian Biblicists do not mingle much with the theological quest and that, on their side, theologians make sometimes a little too cursory an inventory of the Biblical message. The recourse to hermeneutics should not disguise an ignorance of the solid exegetical foundations of Christian thought. An Indian Biblical hermeneutic is an urgent need for theology.

Christian spiritual tradition: Christian roots are Scripture and tradition, including, perhaps above all, in the Indian context, spiritual mystical traditions. These latter ones are often neglected even though different religious congregations (Carmelites, Jesuits, Franciscans, Salesians, etc.) have started publishing in India, at a cheap rate, the works of their great spiritual authors or studies about them. While this is a praiseworthy enterprise, they are not supposed to ignore a

good amount of Christian spiritual tradition: (Fathers of the Desert, Patristic, Rhenan and Medieval mystics, French School, etc.).

Inter ecclesial collaboration: Much remains to be done in the area of collaboration between the different churches *Sui Iuris* in India. Numerically, it is India which has now the most important and perhaps the most vivacious branches of Syrian Christianity. This confers a special responsibility on Indian theologians, particularly on those who do research in the three theology Faculties pertaining to the Kerala Churches.

Ecumenism and Dialogue: Ecumenical meetings tend to become rare. However there exists between Seminaries through exchange of Professors, mutual hospitality in theological publications, common collaboration in Bible translations. While inter religious dialogue has received sufficient attention in some of the writings, it is often limited to the *Advaitic* aspects of Hinduism or to the currents issued from *Shivaite Bhakti*. However, Islam also should get it due since India with more than hundred millions Moslems is one of the greatest Moslem countries in the world.

Limitation of language: If an Indian theologian wants to be known, he has to publish overseas. Within India, the problem of the balance between authenticity and communion is posed very concretely with regard to the language to be used in theology. All the debates and declarations about Indian theology take place in English, a foreign language. The teaching in English in Seminaries and Faculties keeps inevitably a certain artificial character to the students' ears, except for the more gifted. A few institutions have started to teach, at least some subjects, in some of the local languages. However, there is another side to the problem. Teaching theology in local languages only would lead to the isolation not only of Indian theology but also, within that theology, of Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, Malayalee theologies etc. It is also a cause of concern that lay people and more especially women find only token presence in theological deliberations in India.

Conclusion

Indian theology exists and is alive. Like any living reality it runs its own risks, but mostly, it represents a great hope. Research and publications make the theology vibrant and active. While there have been original contributions from some faculties and centers of higher learning, one has to acknowledge that some of the publications tend to be repetitions and at times a bit superficial. Teachers and students of theology have to recognize that we belong necessarily to a certain horizon and that there is no absolute theological viewpoint that would come down ready made from heaven. More is to be done to revitalize Indian theology which while remaining true to God and to the dynamic creativity of the Spirit, must remain true to man in the on-going sharing with and discovery of the human horizons.

Fr. Arulselvam Rayappan
President,
St. Peter's Pontifical Institute
Bangalore 560055, India.