

Christian Educational Institutions and Christian Identity

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Abstract

The paper is an attempt to understand the nature of Christian Educational Institutions in the context of Indian Democracy. In its effort to know the above, the paper seeks to situate the relationship between Christian Educational Institutions and Christian Identity. One of the primary assumptions that help the paper as a guiding insight is that the postcolonial self-understanding of identity is attained through democratic affirmation, which is informed by self critique. The paper aims to achieve it by two major assumptions in theorizing the problem further, namely, the interdisciplinary self-critique of the educational policy of Christian Educational Institutions on the one hand and the critique of the formative and functional gist of Christian Identity against Indian democracy on the other. In this connection the paper analyzes the 'secularism debate' in India and the prospects of contextual democracy that it highlighted and the ideal and concept of 'public sphere'. The key idea that the paper draws attention to is that the democratic Christian identity is basically intercultural identity which is acquired through deeper level fundamental democratic intercultural, dialogical self affirmations and inter/multi/transdisciplinary educational policies.

Keywords: Christian Identity, Democratic Identity, Secularism Debate, Public Sphere, Counter Public Sphere

A search seeking correlation (given the context, more appropriately it can be called correlative justification) between Christian Educational Institutions and Indian Democracy will instantly draw our attention to two areas of intimate contact- Indian Democracy and its multi-religious context and Indian Constitution and Minority rights. Consequently the perspective that I attempt to build up to discuss Christian Educational Institutions and Democracy is set to organize it around the reflexive conglomerate namely 'religious rights - educational rights - public sphere- Identity'. In other words, the discussion that I propose searches for the broad registry of Christian identity in its effort to creatively respond to the multicultural and multi-religious background of education in the situation of Indian democratic arrangement. I have taken the Kerala context and the recent (perhaps, still ongoing) social criticism against the CEIs that they are insensitive to the democratic framework of addressing social justice as the cross section for this purpose. The discussion is not based on any empirical model or data since such data will be difficult to make and even if it is made it would be a mere construct among many such construction possibilities. My effort is to make a conceptual

and critical interpretative overview so as to highlight and incite a distinct contextual problematique.

The Agency - Identity Question

Broadly in alignment with the thematic expose of the seminar, the discussion that I intend here attempts to trace out the postcolonial self understanding as democratic affirmation, informed by self critique. Though I use democratic affirmation as equivalent to postcolonial self understanding of CEI, I don't disagree that postcolonial self critique may operate as a more inclusive and larger concept than democratic affirmation. However, as the problematique highlighted here tries to locate the postcolonial self understanding of CEIs as democratic affirmation, it attempts to establish links between Christian identity in intimate negotiation with the concept of democratic identity.

Democratic identity is used in this context to mean a counterfactual ideal (to borrow the term from critical theory) which can institute Christian identity as dialogical, distinct and discursive in the multi-religious Indian/Kerala context. As a result the second concern happens to be the position of the author of the paper or more generally, the nature of the perspectives which initiate the postcolonial reckoning of the CEIs. It can be emphatically answered that as the CEIs are seen against the Christian identity, both insider and outsider views are possible. The approach in the paper, therefore, is equally insider view aimed at self understanding as far as identity is concerned and the outsider view, informed by self critique, which will be naturally invited by the former. In view of the above, it can be understood that the CEIs in India instantly bring into play the following issues such as fundamental constitutional rights, minority rights/community rights/cultural rights, social justice, the multi-religious/multicultural and the related discourses.

Two Major Assumptions in Theorizing the Problem

The paper puts forward two broad conceptual suggestions to take the discussion further. One operates as Self Critique of the CEIs' in understanding minority educational right as intergenerational educational right and value. The second one is the critique of Indian Democracy by CEIs' from Christian Identity's point of view.

Interdisciplinarity: Self Critique of CEIs' Educational Policy

The viewpoint of the self critique of the CEIs' comes with an important purview of the inter-disciplinarity/trans-disciplinarity dimension in education. It works out the problematique from the following apparently popular view of the CEIs. The very ordinary outsider perspectives on CEIs in India in general and Kerala in particular would appear before us as Janus faced as they appreciate the CEIs on the basis of excellence in providing qualitative education on the one side and criticize them for being insensitive to social justice and in being indifferent to critical studies, humanities, literature and art etc. Stated differently, particularly in the Kerala context, the general view in the

academic circles about CEIs is that though CEIs run primary to arts and science college level educational institutions, their recent and utmost thrust is in providing professional education to cater to the need of the global human resource market alone. Shortly, the above said sort of critical perspectives can be summed up by restating that CEIs in modernizing and globalizing their well recognized heritage of educational upper-hand and advantage make it fall into the trap of a globalized and 'technologized-gadgetized' popular, profit oriented (or job oriented, from the consumer's point of view) techie education-training providers, forgetting fundamental and research oriented studies, particularly in Kerala. I would call such admittance the interdisciplinary self critique of education.

The Concept of Interdisciplinarity

The history of knowledge shows us that knowledge as its different branches interact and interpenetrate to move from paradigm to paradigm. Interdisciplinary Nature is the true nature of knowledge. As it is shown in the diagram below, it's a continuous process in the history of knowledge.

Inter and trans-disciplinary nature of knowledge can also be understood as interactively burgeoning of language as intersubjective engagement of making meaning and truth. Natural-ordinary language is being abstracted to subject-discipline specific symbolic languages in order to be advanced to a meta-language which will be forced to be amenable to a further translation to the Natural-ordinary language and the life-world. This can be called the movement of knowledge from within.

The above insight and understanding of interdisciplinary nature of knowledge is understood only at the level of theoretical-epistemological and metaphysical contexts of origination. At this level the interdisciplinary nature of knowledge is in the form of theoretical reason in response to the theories of ultimate reality. Such a state of knowledge as disciplinary dialectic keeps on generating new disciplines. However, as it has been highlighted, the current status of disciplinary knowledge does not easily allow them to be part of our higher education due to the built-in disciplinary narcissism which reduces education into techie training of different kinds.

Interdisciplinarity impregnates Interdisciplinary competence which can be understood after the concept of 'linguistic competence' and 'communicative competence'. 'Linguistic competence' according to Noam Chomsky 'is the system of linguistic knowledge possessed by native speakers of a language and the 'ideal' language system that makes it possible for speakers to produce and understand an infinite number of sentences in their language'.¹ 'Communicative competence' is the competence of a speaker to possess pragmatic or dialogue constitutive universals to 'produce grammatically well formed' sentences which are intersubjective (that which acts as a priori elements which enable the speaker in producing speech act and to produce the general structures of

¹ Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965.

the speech situation).² Hence, interdisciplinary competence can be framed as basically the competence to approach knowledge critically and dialogically. Such an ideal of interdisciplinarity, I would call a value both holistic and spiritual in nature in its import which sustains dialogicality in creating knowledge. More over, from future's point of view it becomes intergenerational educational right as well since only a constructive, border-crossing interpretative engagement of addressing knowledge beyond all disciplinary delimitation can save the earth from environmental crises and doom caused by one dimensional technological advancement (of technological environment) ignoring the natural and cultural environments. CEIs should take a leading role in creating the interdisciplinary atmosphere of knowledge which they fail to do and almost incompetent to do in the given ambience of instituting educational institutions according to the pressures of mainstream uncritical and technological concept of knowledge.

Critique of Indian Democracy and Christian Identity

As I mentioned above, the criticism against CEIs' insensitivity in restricting their educational ideals according to the narrow minority rights assured by the Constitution and in responding to the social justice³ question involved in the recent self financed professional educational institutions conceals in its core a hybrid and entangled discourse. Such a discourse is made up of uncritical liberal democratic ideals of minority-religious rights on the one side and false ideals of educational rights which are so as they are uninformed and molded by an improper culture of interdisciplinarity. In this circumstance, CEIs' critique of Indian Democracy through acts of resistance in the name of Christian identity is legitimate in view of the fact that it unknots and disentangles the above pointed out hybrid discourse of rights.

As Richard Ashcraft reminds us the modern western concept of rights is associated with the process of secularization and the language of rights establishes a case for the importance of political and legal relationship and social life which is expected to be without succumbing to the religious sphere of influence.⁴ Indian Secularism debate, both classical and contemporary, has challenged this western modernist view and some of the recent works have attempted at serious unknotting of the entangled rights discourse.⁵

² J Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of the Society*, Trans. Thomas McCarthy, Boston Beacon Press. 1979, p.1.

³ I don't undermine the true dimension of the social justice question at all. What I highlight here is that in the given context it operates in such a way so as to conceal the rights issues which are more primary in a democratic set up.

⁴ Richard Ashcraft, 'Religion and Lockean Natural Rights', in Irene Bloom et al ed., *Religious Diversity and Human Rights*, New York, Columbia University Press. 1996, pp. 196-197.

⁵ There are many such works. Some of the very significant ones are mentioned here: 1. Gurpreet Mahajan, *Identities & Rights*, Delhi, 1998., 2. Michael J Perry, *Religion in Politics*, New York, OUP,1997., 3. David J. Hawkin Ed., *The Twenty-First Century Confronts Its Gods*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2004., 4. Gerald James Larson, *India's Agony over Religion*, Delhi, OUP, 1995., 5. Rajeev Bhargava et al Eds., *Multiculturalism, Liberalism and Democracy*, Delhi, OUP, 1999. The Major work of Ashish Nandy and Partha Chatterje also move in this direction. All of them problematize in their own ways the relationship between religious identity and modern democracy, rights theories, secular ideals and statecraft.

Hence, our discussion demands us to look into how the Indian Secularism debate draws the agency-identity question alongside in order to unearth the religious minority rights/ group rights/ cultural rights more visibly so as to separate out the huddled sedimentation of meaning of social justice. It shows the route to the Problematique.

Christian identity and the Concept of Democratic Identity

The Indian Christian Identity has been categorized and recognized as minority identity on the basis of the following design of understanding: Christian identity is Christian faith with varying shades as the core, a series of loose layers of multiple identities on the basis of regions, denominations, rituals/rites, sprung up from different cultures, manifested against the mainstream/ major Hindu identity (both in the broad Indian context as well as in the specific Kerala context). In such a mapping of Christian Identity/ Difference wherein the multicultural and multi religious democratic and dialogical credentials of Christian identity is being reduced to a dependent, opposite of the majority identity and which makes the Christian identity relevant only in the context of cultural nationalism and mono-culturalism of the ideology of majoritarian identity construction. The concept of Democratic identity has been brought in to counter the above dependent status and understanding of Christian identit(y)(ties). Democratic Christian identit(y)(ties) may be Christian faith with varying shades as the core, a series of loose layers of multiple identities on the basis of regions, denominations, rituals/rites, sprung up from different cultures but negotiated by dialogical, multicultural and multireligious other identities and not determined by or fixed by monological dominant identity. CEIs are also expected to appropriate their self status and understanding in the context of situating them in the democratic self assertion by negotiating with Christian identity as democratic Christian identit(y)(ties).

I borrow the conceptual framework that makes possible the notion of Christian democratic identity from Juergen Habermas and his critical theory. For Habermas democratic identity is suggestive of discursive and deliberative process of social dialogue as discourse in creating and understanding identities. However, I don't think that Habermas's concepts can directly reflect Indian reality. When it comes to the specific details they need contextual modifications.

Let us explore with Habermas how he reaches the notion of democratic identity (I am aware of the idealistic limitations of such a notion. However, I think that the notion of democratic identity can operate as the counterfactual ideal). Habermasian trajectory to reach the above position is determined by his notions of critique and communication. For the critical theorists in general and Habermas in particular, maturing self-identity is determined by the capacity/ power to critique, to criticize conventions. The self-identity and social identity are built upon a mutually determining individuation and sociation, and are based on linguistic and communicative intersubjectivity. The communicative necessity as the telos inherent in the language and the ideal of communicative rationality (the unforced force of reason in discourse) gives shape to the notion of communicative

identity. Habermas's theory, thus, puts forward democratic identity as something inherent and simultaneously occurring along with the communicative identity. Communicative identity as democratic identity offers the effective framework for social dialogue or discourse, since the necessity of democracy is a procedurally justified one. Hence, the ideals of consensus, discourse (ideal speech situation) and deliberative democracy are argumentatively posited as counterfactual ideals.⁶

Indian Secularism Debate and Christian Democratic Identity

The Indian Secularism debate⁷ as poised between the liberal and communitarian positions could be seen as a significant context. More specifically, the arguments of Ashish Nandy can be seen as inviting a critical third Habermasian position's intervention. Nandy, who rejects secularism and its liberal agenda of all kinds as 'an unclaimed baggage' in the Indian context, advocates the pre-modern traditions of toleration as the alternative to the modernist secularism. In the language of Habermas, Nandy is the one who '... expect[s] the mutual toleration and cross fertilization of Islamic and Hindu religious cultures to develop more from a reciprocal interpenetration of the modes of religious perception of both cultures than from the neutrality of the state towards world views'.⁸ It flaws, points out Habermas, since, 'such considerations, however, combine the normative question - how one can find a shared basis for a just political life in common - with an empirical question. The differentiation of a religious sphere separate from the state may in fact weaken the influence of privatized "gods and demons". But the principle of toleration itself is not directed against the authenticity and truth claims of religious confessions and form of life; rather, its sole purpose is to enable their equally entitled co-existence within the same political community'.⁹

What Habermas makes clear in the above position is the democratic identity's engaging ideal which takes the religious identity beyond the individual or community identities rights by postulating '...meaningful "complementarity" between the structures of personality (the either /or required for post-traditional self-choice) and those of culture (group identities presupposed in post-national constitutional patriotism)' and the post-traditionally differentiated lifeworlds which admit an emergence of the post-national patriotism which finds a home in deliberative democracy.¹⁰ The 'reflective

⁶ The major query here that would distinguish the notion of democratic identity further is the decentralization of the concept of communicative action/rationality as embedded in the linguistic inter-subjectivity and the provision for universalizable validity claims for dialogue, which is further elaborated into social dialogue and democracy, into ideas like post national constitutional patriotism, post national constellation etc. Habermas's intervention to create a distinctive space of deliberative democracy and discourse theory different from the liberal and republican conceptual framework through the notion of 'institutionalization of deliberative politics', as he explains below, the notion of democratic identity is again situated as that which reflectively enlarged from critical self and social identities

⁷ Neera Chandoke, *Beyond Secularism*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 49.

⁸ Juergen Habermas, *Post-national Constellation*, London, Verso, 2002, p.127.

⁹ Ibid. p.128.

¹⁰ Martin B. Matustik, *Post-national Identity*, New York, New Guild Press, 1993, p. 23.

thrust' that Habermas is talking about is the point of meaningful confluence of the democratic identity. It reminds us to another important aspect of any religious identity and its transformative potential to be democratic and dialogical identity.

I consider the Habermasian idea of the above type of understanding of democratic identity is interesting mainly because, 1. In the global multi-religious scenario, religious identities can be seen dissipated among the poles of 'fundamentalist-status quoits-orthodox core' and 'transformative-liberative-dialogical dimensions' of them. The Habermasian treatment of the religious identity with an ethico-cognitive claim recognizes each of the above poles of religious claims as religious identities. Consequently, it affirms the minority religious identities in a dialogical way and asks us to be reflectively aware of the dialogical-democratic process of nurturing identities. In the fashion, it allows a third realm or multiple realms of applicability/negotiability towards dialogical identity from within. Communitarian positions, particularly, the Nandy's argument, operates in a limited sociological purview alone and remains insensitive to the dialogical liberal poles and fundamentalist poles of religious identities as distinct cognitive - ethical claims within the same cultural community and across religions as different cultural communities, when they treat religious identities as community or cultural identities.

At this juncture I presume that the two major theoretical assumptions which we have derived in formulating the discussion converge in a very major conceptual position, namely, public sphere and Christian identity. The notion of public sphere, I believe, gives good reason for making use of the often conceptually redundant Habermasian idea of democratic identity which has been criticized for its Eurocentric and modernist limitations.

The Notion of the Public Sphere

Under the notion of the public sphere I bring to the surface one more concept which is more intimate for our discussion: the 'counter-public'. The concept of public sphere was introduced to highlight the media's dialogical function and to associate it with an ideal project of democracy. Habermas defines the bourgeois public sphere as follows, "The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as public, they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically but publicity relevant sphere of community exchange and social labour. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason".¹¹ The public sphere, can be called, "a realm in which individuals gather to participate in open discussions... (but this is) subject to particularization based on the historical context and on the topics that are admitted for discussion".¹² So, the public sphere is conceived

¹¹ Juergen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere and Polity*, Trans: Thomas Burger, London, and Polity, 1998, p. 27.

¹² Robert C. Holub, J.H.: *Critique in the Public Sphere*, London, and Routledge, 1991, p.3.

as evolved from representative publicity in the feudal society, later in the court nobility running parallel to the renaissance period, and in the bourgeois civil society. But, later, in the welfare, organized capitalism, the public sphere declined, making the citizens consumers, 'dedicating themselves more to passive consumption and private concerns than to issues of the common good and democratic participation'.

The major question that comes up here in understanding the Christian democratic identity in constructing the public sphere is that to what extent Christian identity can be discursive in the Indian/Kerala social and political context. The European publics and their civil life on which Habermas models his concept of public sphere may not replicate a performative space in the specific example of Indian multireligious situation. As and when Christian identity tries to dialogically affirm itself or affirm its dialogicality, it would invite certain exclusion. Here I would attempt to modify the notion of the public sphere to accommodate the idea of the counterpublics.

Nancy Fraser defines counterpublic as oppositionality, constitution of a discursive arena, and the dialectic of retreat from and engagement with other public.¹³ Oppositionality refers to a stance of resistance, rejection, or dissent. As it is observed, 'It is important to recognize that oppositionality is primarily perceptual; that is counterpublics emerge when social actors perceive themselves to be excluded from or marginalized within mainstream or dominant publics and communicate about that marginality or exclusion. Communication about marginality or exclusion helps to constitute a discursive arena'.¹⁴ There it is further added that, 'It is important to clarify that discursive refers not just to speech- written or spoken language – but also to visual communication and bodily display. Further, the notion of discursive arena should be understood as a conceptual metaphor, often related to but never reducible to specific places. People who communicate oppositional stances may in fact meet together in physical spaces but they may also create imagined communities'.¹⁵

As we try to have room for the idea of the counterpublics which can represent the Christian intervention in the public sphere in a more concrete manner, the next contextual question that demands clarification is what would be the nature of such a counterpublic. Christian identity as dialogical identity and as generating counterpublic and oppositionality can be more of intercultural and cross cultural. In other words, when the concept of public sphere has been validated with a transcultural ideal of multicultural reality, the counterpublic is substantiated with dialogical, intercultural claims of identity. It can be explained further as follows: Christian or any other identit(y)(ies) cannot be grounded without a corresponding community. A community's self understanding

¹³ Nancy Fraser, *Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy*, Social Text, 25/26, 1990, pp.56-80.

¹⁴ Daniel C Brouwer, 'Communication as Counterpublic', in *Communication as... Perspectives on Theory*, Ed. Gregory J. Shepherd et al, London, Sage, 2002, p.197.

¹⁵ Anderson B., *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (Rev. Ed), London, Verso. 1991

cannot be but with establishing a dialogical and 'interstorical' recognition of otherness. It means somehow that the other should be part of (or more than that) community's collective memory. Here emerges interculturality as something negotiating a little more and demanding yet another interface and interactive space. Interculturality enlivens its major dimensions such as intercultural communication and intercultural dialogue to register a communicative and ethical commitment to interact with and understand the other cultures to dialogically modify one's own culture, it is to be primarily recognized ethical in import. The reason is dialogical/ communicative willingness. As pointed out, Intercultural communication is Interpersonal communication and there should be dialogical willingness. So, it would be appropriate to understand the counterpublic(s) of Christian dialogical identity as intercultural counterpublic(s).

The Possibility of Christian Identit(y)(ies) Operating as Counter Public in the Kerala Context

The trajectory of Christian identities and their intervention in the public sphere and the civil society in Kerala is unique in many ways. The early modern Christian educational efforts as affirming Christian identity as distinct identity has been recognized as determining in a liberative way the emergence of the Kerala enlightenment movement ('Kerala Navothana Prasthanam') and Kerala's public sphere. The pioneering Missionary educational activities as liberative/emancipatory and empowering the marginalized mould the Kerala civil spaces as public sphere. The liberative-emancipatory intent of the early public sphere interventions with significant mass media association(printing press, translation works, Dictionaries etc) later gives way to self affirmative phases. Since the 'Vimochana Samaram' -liberation movement of the late sixties to the recent times and the proposed fight against the governmental interventions against the minority rights, Christian identity affirmative negotiation with the public sphere, unfortunately remain short of an effort to promote dialogical-democratic identity as intercultural identity.

The main point that I would like to highlight here is the most often unconscious/unintentional, visible withdrawal from the public sphere intent of assuming mass media role paying of the Christian identity affirmations and CEIs which is caused by the lack of the idea of interdisciplinarity in education. As a result, the indisposed counterpublic sphere intent related with the media would directly reflect in the knowledge construction intent of self-community Christian Identity, i.e., the educational intent of CEIs. Moreover, the lack of sufficient democratic identity affirming public sphere intent may make the media, the contemporary formative force of knowledge and subjectivity, unethical and in turn make it join hands with the power politics of the majoritarian identity claims to ultimately undo the minority rights. Democratic identity affirmations set up their educational intent to demand the media to initiate a new self-reflective dialogue with itself and the civil society.

Concluding Remarks

My effort to theorize the rapport between CEIs and Indian Democracy was to open a distinct perspective to look at CEIs from the point of view Christian Identity. I admit that the problematique that I raise deals only with one phase of the problem. Besides, the discussion does not furnish an empirical survey and related factual analysis of the Kerala context which has been taken as the ground for my observation and interpretation. As I have stated in the beginning, my theorization is based on the interpretative possibility of certain counterfactual ideas/ideals, namely, 'Democratic Christian Identity as Intercultural Identity' and 'Interdisciplinarity as intergenerational educational right and value', which I think would highlight the problematique better than any empirical-factual data and analysis.

The major sympathetic observation that I put forward in the discussion was that Christian Identities' legitimate struggle to unravel the religious-minority rights as cultural and solidarity rights against the meta-narrative of social justice does not stress and bring to light its legitimacy as it fails to translate them into intercultural identities which democratically generate counterpublics. Intercultural identities are created when the 'transcultural ideal of the public sphere' (since transcultural, it remains as an ideal, unattainable, particularly in the Indian context) is transformed into counterpublics through dialogical identity affirmations in order to democratize multicultural differences. In the context of education and knowledge creation, intercultural identities are sustained (and created) when a culture of interdisciplinarity and inter-trans disciplinary knowledge is pursued and crafted. CEIs' creative and decisive relationship in building up Indian Democracy is in actively participating in the endeavours to recognize Christian Identity as intercultural identities and thus remaining dialogical counterpublic(s) by promoting and constructing a culture of inter and trans-disciplinary education and knowledge.