



A study on the role of Saints' in the fundamental battle for Justice and Human Rights

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Abstract

Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnical origin, religion, language, or any other status. There can be no universal specific set of rights, they differ from time to time and place to place, but their applicability is universal. Human rights started thousands of years ago according to the history we know. Holy Scriptures of different religion like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavathgita, Holy Bible, Holy Khuran etc. cites various occasions and incidents pertaining to human rights. India is a pluralistic and multi-cultural society where many faiths and belief systems regulate the life of individuals. Many religious gurus, law-givers, social reformers and statesmen have come to guide and influence the life and culture of Indians. The Mahabharata, the Ramayana, the Bhagvat Gita as well as the Quran, the Bible, the Guru Bani, etc., have molded the thinking pattern and consciousness of Indians.

Key words: Saints, human rights, manuscripts

Introduction

Human Rights are fundamental for living and for normal existence. They are based on the concept that every man and woman, irrespective of caste, creed, colour, race and nationality is born with certain fundamental rights such as right to live, speech, freedom, justice etc. These rights are therefore, enshrined in the constitution of the countries. In order that, these basic rights are maintained and adhered to by the nations of the world, United Nations Organisation adopted a charter of human rights soon after its formation and enumerates some of these basic rights of man which includes the right to live, liberty, security, speech, judicial remedy, movement of work, rest and leisure,

education, equal pay for equal work, equality and so on.

Human Rights comprise rights of individual or group in a society in all spheres of life since inception to the last, either, from birth to death. It is also conferred on an Individual due to the very nature of his existence. They provide suitable conditions and facilities for material and moral upliftment of the people. The concepts of human rights have set up the goals for humanity, have given the world the sense of direction and have provided a measuring scale for human progress. The concept and desirability of some of the basic rights of the citizen have been internationalized as Human Rights to be respected by all jurisdictions. The Universal Declaration



of Human Rights (UDHR) proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on 10th December 1948 was the culmination of this globalization of individual rights. The fight for human rights can be traced back even from the days of Jesus Christ.

Bible played a major role in promoting as well as protecting human rights. Any honest study of the Bible must acknowledge that man, as God's special creation, has been blessed with certain "human rights." Any true student of the Bible will be stimulated toward ideals such as equity and justice and benevolence. The Ten Commandments contain prohibitions against murder, theft, coveting, adultery, and bearing false testimony. The Bible gives strict warnings against taking advantage of the poor and down-trodden. There are certain exceptional men who practiced the above biblical wording in their real life.

Saints refers to the state of special holiness that many religions attribute to certain people, the Islamic Mu'min, the Hindu rishi or Sikh guru, and the Buddhist arhat or bodhisattva are also being referred to as "saints". From the time immemorial saints played a vital role in promoting human rights. Many of the saints we know sacrificed their lives for the attainment of human rights for the betterment of society. Their life itself is a great example of struggle for upholding human values, rights and justice.

Significance of the Study

Communal and religious wars between countries are on the rise besides atrocities against women, torture of children, injustice to poor and minorities and depriving food and shelter to the

down trodden. In order to protect human rights we have several bodies and organisations controlled by UN, Amnesty International and so on. The present study is an attempt to draw a picture about the role played by saints of the past who sacrificed their lives for upholding values of human life known as human rights. Hence the study is known as "A study on the role of saints in the Fundamental Battle for Justice and Human Rights"

Statement of the problem

We are living in an era of wars between religions, communities and nations. We are witnessing the violation of various human rights like right to life, right to peace, right of equality and so on. There are various organizations at national as well as international level to check and stop violation of human rights. But there was a time when certain people sacrificed their life for the attainment and protection of human rights. Unfortunately, the current generation is more or less unaware of the contributions of these great men. The present study is an attempt to bring into light the life history of these great men and their role in promoting human rights.

Scope of the study

The study is limited to the contributions made by saints in Christian belief towards human rights. There are saints in different religions in different names. Only the saints in Christian belief have been discussed in the study. There are several saints in Christian belief from which the researcher has selected only five saints for the particular study. The role played by other religions and their



leaders are outside the purview of the study.

Review of literature

Literature is lacking on the subject matter of role of saints in the battle for justice and human rights. Thus the entire study depends upon the literature found in various types of articles published in different newspapers and internet. There is no individual work exclusively done on the line of the present study.

Objectives of the study

1. To study the role of selected saints in the field of human rights.
2. To identify the contributions of saints towards human rights.
3. To create awareness regarding the human rights activities of selected saints.

Methodology of the study

The present study is exploratory in nature. Only secondary data has been used for the study. Five saints have been selected for the purpose of the present study. Before finalizing the topic the researcher did a pilot study among the catechism teachers and students of various churches to check the authenticity of the topic. Discussions with various priests also provided a good background for the present study.

Role of saints

There are people considered more or less holy in all religion and among Christians they are specifically known as Saints. Among Hindus they are Rishi, among Buddhists they are bodhisattva, among

Sikhs they are Guru, and among Muslims they are Mu'min. Saints refers to the state of special holiness that many religions attribute to certain people. From the time immemorial saints played a vital role in fighting for human rights. Their life itself is a great example of struggle for upholding human values, rights and justice. The saints selected for the present study is Saint John Paul-II, Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Saint Gianna Beretta Molla, Saint Anthony of Padua and Saint Padre Pio.

Saint John Paul-II

Pope John Paul II was born Karol Józef Wojtyła on May 18, 1920, in Wadowice, Poland. He was ordained in 1946, became the bishop of Ombi in 1958, and became the archbishop of Krakow in 1964. He was made a cardinal by Pope Paul VI in 1967, and in 1978 became the first non-Italian pope in more than 400 years. He was a vocal advocate for human rights and used his influence to effect political change. He died in Italy in 2005 and was announced as saint in 2013.

A vocal advocate for human rights, John Paul often spoke out about suffering in the world. He held strong positions on many topics, including his opposition to capital punishment. A charismatic figure, John Paul used his influence to bring about political change and is credited with the fall of communism in his native Poland. Pope John Paul II issued a message for the World Day of Peace on 1996-DEC-8. It was directed against religiously motivated violence. It is titled "That violence may never again be justified by appeals to religious motives."

Throughout his pontificate, Pope John Paul II promoted concern for the



environment. In his 1988 letter on the vocation of the laity, he wrote: "Today in an ever-increasingly acute way, the so-called 'ecological' question poses itself in relation to socio-economic life and work. Certainly humanity has received from God himself the task of 'dominating' the created world and 'cultivating the garden' of the world. But this is a task that humanity must carry out in respect for the divine image received, and, therefore, with intelligence and with love, assuming responsibility for the gifts that God has bestowed and continues to bestow." In his 1991 encyclical on the centenary of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical on the condition of workers, Pope John Paul wrote, "It is the task of the State to provide for the defence and preservation of common goods such as the natural and human environments, which cannot be safeguarded simply by market forces." Pope John Paul's most extensive statement on the environment came in 1990 with his World Day of Peace message entitled Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation.

In January 1998, he made a historic visit to Communist Cuba where his appeals for freedom of speech, human rights and the release of political prisoners were the first noncommunist public speeches since 1959.

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara

Chavara, who lived in the 19th century in Kerala, is reckoned as a social reformer and visionary priest whose contributions spread across education, media and social justice. Chavara is credited with introducing several reforms in Kerala and Syrian Catholic Church as well. He was born in 1805 at Kainakari in Alappuzha district. After religious

studies, he was ordained as a priest in 1829. Since then, Chavara had continuous interventions in religious and intellectual realms of life until death in 1871. As a priest, he tried to popularize the Sunday sermon in churches and retreat for laymen. One of the most significant attempts was founding of the first Indian congregation for men, which was Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI), and the women congregation Carmelites of Mother Carmel (CMC).

In 1846, he started the first printing press at his monastery at Mannanam in Kottayam. Later, the press was used for bringing out the first Malayalam daily Nasrani Deepika at the behest of Chavara. He also started the system of seminary for training priests, instead of novices attending classes under various individual teachers. His pioneering contribution to Kerala society was "school along with church". In 1864, he had issued a decree to start pallikoodam (school) along with every palli (church). This direction, later, led to the establishment of schools beside a church, a practice continued even now. Chavara started a special school for weaker sections in society and opened the first boarding school for girls at Koonammavu near Paravoor. Later, he also took steps for opening destitute home for orphans and aged people.

Saint Gianna Beretta Molla

Saint Gianna Beretta Molla is the patron of Salt and Light Catholic Media Foundation. She was selected early in the organization's history by Father Thomas Rosica, CSB, who saw in Saint Gianna a powerful role model for the Church and the world today. She clearly represents the Gospel of Life in an extraordinary



way. At the time of her beatification in 1994, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, then Archbishop of Milan described her as a "woman, doctor and lover of life." Gianna Molla was canonized on May 16, 2004 by Pope John-Paul II - the last person to be canonized by Blessed John Paul II. She nurtured a strong faith and conviction in the necessity and effectiveness of prayer. She later earned degrees in Medicine and Surgery from the University of Pavia in 1949 and would go on to open a medical clinic in Mesero, Italy in 1950.

She provides to us a strong example of the values and virtues of Christ and his ultimate sacrifice for us. Against the advice of doctors, Gianna sacrificed her life to save her child's, fully aware that she could die if she gave birth to her baby. A few days before the baby was due, she said "If you must decide between me and the child, do not hesitate: choose the child - I insist on it. Save him". She fought against abortion and her life is a typical example for the 'Right to life"

Saint Anthony of Padua

Disciple of Francis of Assisi, he wanted to live side by side with the most humble and poor class of society, taking on as his own their sufferings and the contradictions in which the populace groaned, abandoned to the arrogance of the strong, unprotected from the violent. Biographical sources and the chroniclers of the time tell us that Anthony fought courageously to restore each man with his original image and resemblance to God.

He brought brothers in discord together in peace; he gave freedom back to prisoners; he caused the restitution of that which had been robbed through

usury or violence; it got to the point that, when houses or lands had been mortgaged, the price was presented to the Saint, and based on his advice as to whether they had been taken in a good or bad manner, they were returned to those who had been robbed. He liberated prostitutes from the obscene market, and thieves famous for misdeeds held back from laying their hands on the things of others.

In this untiring work of peace, justice, reconciliation and respect for each person, in particular the weakest, the unprotected and the exploited, two episodes are emblematic of how much Anthony committed himself to the protection of human rights and the dignity of the person. Two moments of his life in which, according to ancient testimony, he found himself directly before the political powers. The first was his objection to the severity of the statutes of the City of Padua and the second, his resistance to the cruelties of Ezzelino in his treatment of the prisoners of war. In 1995, on the 800th anniversary of Saint Anthony's birth, Professor Antonio Papisca defined him as one of the greatest human rights defenders.

- protect men's lives,
- to look after the inalienable rights and the dignity of the person,
- And accompany him to his full realisation and happiness in the communion of love with God.

Saint Padre PIO

Padre Pio was born May 25, 1887 in Pietrelcina, Italy, a small country town located in southern Italy. His parents were Grazio Mario Forgione (1860-1946)



and Maria Guiseppa de Nunzio Forgione (1859-1929). In 1940, Padre Pio convinced three doctors to move to San Giovanni Rotondo and he announced plans to build a Home to Relieve Suffering. As Padre Pio expressed to Pope Pius, "a place that the patient might be led to recognize those working for his cure as God's helpers, engaged in preparing the way for the intervention of grace." The doctors were excited about the building, but were fearful that this was not the time to begin such a project with Europe being on the brink of another world war.

These fears did not stop Padre Pio and the project began. After the war, Barbara Ward, a British humanitarian, came to Italy to write an article on postwar reconstruction. She attended Padre Pio's Mass and met one of the physicians who came to San Giovanni Rotondo to work with the Home to Relieve Suffering. Upon learning of the project, she asked that the Home to Relieve Suffering receive a part of the funds designated for reconstruction. Consequently, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) gave a grant of \$325,000 for the project. The building opened its doors on May 5, 1956. A year later, Padre Pio announced plans for a medical and religious center where doctors and interns could further their medical studies and Christian formation. His life is a typical example for promoting the right to health and right to life, right to education and right of poor.

Conclusion

India is a multicultural society. Various religions respect human rights. If we check the various religious sculptures we can realize a fact that even from the time immemorial human rights had

significance in the society. There are various contributions made by various social reformers like Raja ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dhayananda Saraswathi, Rama Krishna Parama Hamsa, Guru Nanak, Sree Narayana Guru, Mahathama Gandhi and so on towards protecting the human rights. There are various exceptional personalities in Christianity who lived for and sacrificed their lives for promoting human rights. From time immemorial various religious leaders, saints of various religions and social reformers fought for the rights of common man in the society without any bias towards the latter's religion. Unfortunately, the current generation is more or less unaware of the contributions by these great personalities towards human rights. These personalities lived in this world just like us and made great contributions for the society.

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