

New Marriage in Hosea : An Indian Look

(Hos 2:18-25 ; Heb; 2:16-23 ; Eng.)

Introduction :

Among the classical prophets, Hosea is the only one, who was born and brought up and preached in the Northern kingdom. Hence it is really difficult to distinguish, in his book, between the message which is proper to him and that which is drawn from the Northern traditions. There are scholars who have seen an inter-relationship between the book of Hosea and the so called proto-deuteronomium. However this suggestion is being contested among the exegetes. There are scholars who recognize the influence of Hosea's preaching on Jeremiah. But there are others who try to demonstrate that the book of Hosea contains redactional additions coming from Jeremiah, Ezekiel and from the books of the priestly tradition such as P of Genesis and Leviticus. Some have even gone to the extreme to say that the book of Hosea contains very little of the message of Hosea.

The importance of Hos 2:18-25 (The Hebrew numbering of verses) :

One cannot but notice that in the book of Hosea there are only three oracles of Salvation (2:1-3; 18-25; 14:2-9 MT).¹ It is strange to see that among those oracles of salvation, Hos 2:18-25 is the only text, where the basic metaphor of covenant is used positively to express the new relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Otherwise this metaphor appears in the book of Hosea always in the context

1. C. Westermann considers that the book of Hosea has three oracles of promise: 2:1-3; 16-25; 14:2-9 (Prophetische Heilsworte im Alten Testament, Gottingen, 1987, pp. 87-90). But we think that 2:16-17 does not strictly belong to the unit 2:18-25.

of polemics. Besides, the partners of the "*Berit*" (covenant) are not very clear in this text. There is also a certain similarity of ideas between this text and certain exilic and post-exilic texts. Hence it has been discussed without a definite conclusion, for the past two centuries, whether this unit is totally the words of Hosea or it contains the words of Hosea mixed with ideas of the exilic or post-exilic period or completely additions of the post-exilic redactor. In our opinion the questions are posed wrongly with regard to this unit (2:18-25).

The marriage metaphor in Hosea :

Though the metaphor of marriage is so predominantly used in the book of Hosea for the purpose of rebuking Israel for her infidelity, it is used positively to express Yahweh's initiative to redeem Israel ("I will marry you", "I will remove the names of Baals from your mouth") and Israel's fidelity to the marital life with Yahweh ("You will know me", "My husband", "My God") only in 2:18-25. Since this metaphor is used predominantly in the polemic context, the positive use of it here probably comes from the disciples in a particular context to convey a certain message which is implicit in Hosea's preaching. As this positive use of the metaphor of marriage clearly brings out the central message of Hosea, the unconditional love of God for Israel, it can be considered as the prolongation of the message of Hosea. One cannot but notice the presence of certain elements in this unit, which are not really akin to the major currents of this book. Hence this unit must have been composed by a later redactor or redactors (disciples?) after the fall of Samaria, in the Southern kingdom, basing on the message of Hosea.

There must have been certain reasons for the disciples to compose this oracle of salvation basing on the message of Hosea and placing it in this particular context. We propose that there must have been a certain historical necessity for it. Perhaps the fateful events during the time of Heze-

kiah must have necessitated the disciples to compose this and place it here to induce hope and courage to the people to trust in *the unfailing love of Yahweh*, who will bring a new age, new relationship, new gifts, new order, peace and harmony.

The central focus of Hos 2:18-25 is *new marriage* between Yahweh and Israel rather than a religious covenant. The term "*Berit*" is used very cautiously in this book and it has different meanings: political treaty, obligation, pact and covenant. In Hos 2:20, it has the meaning of Yahweh's "*pact*" with the animals in favour of Israel. In other words, Yahweh, by his dominion over the animals and birds, will control them so that they may not destroy the vegetation and as a consequence, the people will enjoy the prosperity of the land. Such an idea is also found in the Ancient Near Eastern seals.² Here, the author, perhaps having this idea in mind, tries to explain the new condition of life of peace and prosperity as a result of the new marriage between Yahweh and Israel. Hence the view that all the oracles of Salvation belong to the exilic or post-exilic period is unacceptable.

It is in Hosea that the marriage metaphor has been used for the first time in the whole of the Old Testament.³ It is indeed Hosea's unique contribution to express the relationship between Yahweh and Israel through this metaphor.⁴

2. P. Amiet, *Corpus des cylindres de Ras Shamra-Ougarit II, Sceaux-Cylindres en hematite et pierres diverses Ras Shamra-Ougarit IX*, Paris, p. 148.
3. W. J. Dumbrell, *The faith of Israel*, Leicester, 1988, p. 144.
4. In fact W. Eichrodt summarizes very well the symbolic value of the marriage of Hosea in following terms: "Only from this point can we properly appreciate the radically new insight which was attained under such pain. In that his marriage with all its momentous consequences was revealed to the prophet to be a symbolic action for Israel willed by Yahweh, not only is the breaking of the divine covenant by the people of God and the consequent release of ruin for Israel characterized in all its impiety with unheard-of sharpness, but also the mystery of the divine person who stands behind God's covenant activity is opened up in new dimensions" (*The Holy One in Your Midst*, Interpretation 15 1961; p. 203).

Hosea is the first who boldly revolutionized the whole understanding of Yahweh, who was venerated with awe and reverence and spoken with reticence, with an affective language. It is a bold step on his part on two accounts. First in the context, where Yahweh was presented in terms of "warrior" (Ex 15:3) and "king" (Is 6:5), to whom devotion, and obedience are to be rendered, Hosea by this metaphor explains the personal and intimate relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Secondly, in the context of prevalent Syro-Phoenician Baal-cult in Israel and the consequent cultic prostitution, he has used this metaphor to explain the gratuitous and free love of Yahweh for Israel. The partner in the marriage with Yahweh is not another goddess but Israel.

Though Hosea uses also the symbolism of paternity to explain Yahweh's prevenient love for Israel and Israel's infidelity, it is the marriage symbolism which dominates. Though he has used the word "Berit" in 8:1 to explain clearly the mutual relationship between Yahweh and Israel, it is the marriage symbolism which appears in Hosea prominently to explain the deep personal love and total self-surrender offered in freedom in that mutual relationship. Hence Hosea is the first prophet who has used the spousal metaphor to explain the relation between Yahweh and Israel, which is taken over later by the other prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

The marriage of Hosea with Gomer, an adulterous woman (Hos 1-3) was contested till recent years. The Fathers of the Church, Jewish scholars of the Middle Ages and some modern exegetes have considered that this marriage is only an allegory. But, the use of marriage metaphor in Hosea is something special. It is not one among the many metaphors, as it is for Jeremiah and Ezekiel. It is very basic to Hosea's preaching. It appears so many times in the warp and the woof of the book, combined with an emotional language. The realism of the narrative on the fateful marriage of Hosea, the mention of the name of his wife, and God's

command to marry Gomer, go against the opinion that the marriage of Hosea with the unfaithful Gomer was not a reality. Therefore the opinion that the marriage of Hosea with Gomer, an adulterous woman is only an allegory, is at present abandoned in the scholarly circles. His very personal life, in fact, has influenced his message. The lifetime experience of the prophet has served as a source and model for his message; and his marriage and family were analogy to the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Hence his marital experience was the key both to his ministry and to his theology.⁵

The metaphor of marriage makes an allusion that Yahweh is the exclusive Provider of all the gifts. Hosea's adoption of the divine husband concept into Yahwism presents Yahweh as the only God. Therefore, it demands exclusive relationship with Yahweh and so any form of syncretism is something incompatible to Israel's status. Though Hosea has used mythical elements, he has broken the myth in two levels. First of all, it is Yahweh, who provides the gifts of the land and who is free to take them back again (2:10, 11, 17). Here the metaphor of the conjugal union completely recedes and Yahweh is presented as the Lord also over devastation and wilderness. In spite of using the mythological elements, Hosea holds firmly that Yahweh alone is God and thereby he negates the plurality of divinities. Secondly, Yahweh's partner in the marriage metaphor is not some goddess, but historical Israel. The reciprocal concepts of duty and obligation replace the mythical and cultic concepts that are rooted in the sacral marriage (1:9; 2:4, 21f).

The relevance of Hos 2:18-25 in the Indian context :

1. Basis for dialogue :

Hosea 2:18-25 has used the symbolic language of marriage positively to explain the personal and intimate love

5. W. C. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, Michigan, 1978, p. 63.

of Yahweh for Israel. Such symbolic language of marriage can also be seen in the Tamil literature of India,⁶ being used to express the intimate relationship between God and the devotee.

Among the earliest Tamil literature, it is *Pari Patel* (around 350-500 A.D.)⁷ for the first time uses words which express sentiments of marital love to describe the love of God. Later it is the *Bhakti Literature* belonging to the Saivite school, such as *Thevaram of Thirunavukkarsar*⁸ and *Thiruvagasam* and *Thirukkovaiyar of Manikkavasakar* (around 9th Century A. D.) and those of Vaishnavite school (around

6. Among the Dravidian languages, Tamil occupies a privileged place. Though the Tamils are a minority in India, their literature goes back to very ancient times. They have become recently conscious and proud of it. Tamil is the official language of the state of Tamil Nadu, whose population surpasses about forty millions. In Sri Lanka, a sizeable ethnic minority speaks Tamil as their mother tongue. In Malaysia and in Mauritius, communities of Tamils exist. Tamil is the only Indian language, which offers a body of profane poems, to which there is no equivalent literature in India, even in Sanscrit. Tamil language had its grammar and religious poetry which were used in the liturgy and mystical communion even before the end of first century A. D. (Cfr. F. Gros, "Tamiloules (Langue et Littérature)", Encyclopaedia Universalis, Vol. 22, Paris, 1992, p. 25).
7. K V. Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1974, p. 89.
8. "Once she heard His name pronounced,
Then His fame described
Later, she enquired about Aroor, His dwelling place
And ever since, she fell madly in love with Him.
Loring to Him, her consciousness,
She renounced her name (the prime Ego)
And surrendered herself at the feet of her Lord "
(Thirunavukkarasar, *Thevara Pathigangal*, Trinaveli: Saiva Siddhanta Publications, 1973, p. 363).

7th to 12th Century)⁹, such as *Nammalvar*¹⁰ and *Andal* who use very profusedly the symbolical language of marital love to explain the relation between God and humankind.¹¹ A similar idea is also seen in *Thirumarittalpa* of *Ramalingasamy Addigal* (1823-1874)¹².

Bharathiar (1882-1921), a Tamil poet and activist of liberation movement in the pre-independent India, has composed a collection of poems which calls the Indians to live with self-dignity and courage. He has dreamt of a new society, which respects women and which is classless. He has composed also an epic called "Kannan Padalgal", in which he uses in a revolutionary way the symbolic language of husband and wife to express the love between God and humankind. Following the earlier Bhakti literatures he considers the Lord "Kannan" as husband and himself (soul) as his wife. But at the same time, for the first time in Tamil literature,

9. K. V. Zveelbil, Op. Cit, p. 91.

10. "What she said to her girl friend :

Dear Friend,

Dear as the Dark one's paradise, night grows long, many lives long when we part; or goes fast, a split, when we are together.

So I suffer even when my lover joins me many nights in a row, and suffer again when he goes away.

Blessed night, ever flowing, is full of tricks, plays fast and loose" (Thiruvirtham. 16) Transl. by A. K. Ramanujam: Hymns for the Drowning, Princeton University Press : Princeton, 1981, p. 64.

11. The devotional songs of the Tamils are different from the moralistic preoccupations of the Buddhists and Jains and the dogmatism of the philosophers and the pure theological speculators. They were in fact hostile to the Brahminic ritualism. The devotional songs are indeed a poetical celebration..... Basing on the love language of Sangam literature around Ninth Century Manikkavasakar wrote Thiruvasagam and Thirukkovaigar (Cfr. F. Gros, Art. Cit, pp. 25f).

12. Tamil Lexicon, Vol 1, Madras: University of Madras, 1982, p. 324.

he uses the symbolism of husband and wife in a novel way¹³. He considers the Lord "Kannamma" as wife and he (soul) as her husband¹⁴. Using a religious language, he tried to oppose and correct the social evil of male chauvinism of his time. It could probably be considered that he sought a religious sanction for a social reform, that he envisioned.

Hosea has used the symbolism of marriage to express the relation between Yahweh and Israel in the context of Baal cult and its aberrations. He has rejected the way, the symbolism of marriage had been used with regard to God in the Ancient Near East (i.e) the union of male and female gods. In this context, he has proposed a counter-idea and a counter-culture. The marriage partner of Yahweh is not another goddess but Israel herself. By the use of marriage symbolism, he has evoked the mutual response of the partners in love. Describing Yahweh's love towards Israel, he brings out clearly Israel's infidelity. The purpose of making known the guilt of Israel and announcing punishment for the sins, is to call Israel to conversion and fidelity. Hence the

13. Joseph Sebastian clearly brings out in his doctoral thesis the novelty of Bharathiar in the following manner: "Bharathi is a revolutionary poet-mystic in his love relationship with Lord Kannan. He not only experienced God as mother, female child and as feminine deity but also as "Kathali" (Beloved). He radically reversed the 'nayaka-nayaki bhava' into "nayaki-na aka bhava" by attributing the role of "katali" to God and "katalan" to the soul in all his six songs entitled "Kannamma-En-Kathali" (Kannamma-My Beloved). Though he reversed the order, passionate love flows always from the soul to God as in the normal "Bhava" (God as Feminine, Tiruchirapalli: St. Paul's Publication, 1995, p. 131).

14. "Thro the sonic, wavy ocean, It's Your face I perceived!
In the blue wel in, It's Your face I perceived!
Among the spreading foam; It's Your face I perceived!
Throughout the tiny bubbles; It's Your face I perceived!
Every cloud measured in detail; Showed me nothing but Your face!
Ringing with the sound of laughter; Distending Your hands,
But embracing again, I perceived only Your face!"
(Bharathiar "Kannan Pattu", Bharathiar Kavithaikal, Madras: Poonjapur Press, 1978, p. 303, No. 17:1).

basic motive for the use of marriage symbolism in the book of Hosea in the context of polemics is a call for a *Moral Life*.

At the same time, we see that there is an allusion to the *mystical* together with the *moral*. The moral aspect is expressed in the following way: "I will remove the names of Baals from your mouth and they shall no more be invoked by name," (V. 19) and the *mystical* is expressed in the following terms: "You will call me 'My husband' and no longer you will call me, 'My Baal'" and (V. 18) "You shall know me", (V. 22). We find these two perspectives in the use of marriage symbolism in Hos 2:18-25. This unit shows that the *moral life* will be the outflow of the *mystical union*. Though in this pericope (Hos. 2:18-25) both the aspects are given equal importance, the emphasis is on the moral aspect in the use of the symbolism of marriage in the entire book of Hosea.

As in Hos 2:18-25, *moral and mystical* elements are united in the use of the symbolism of marriage in the New Testament. St. Paul in his letter to the church of Ephesus, after making a distinction between Christian conduct and Non-Christian conduct (4:17-5:20), gives the Code of conduct for the Household of God (5:21-6:9). In the latter section, responding to the accusations that Christianity undermined the social fabric by advocating equality among its adherents, he presents the union between Christ and the Church as the model for the Christian spouses.¹⁵ In this context, he presents the Church as the bride of Christ. Here the symbolism of marriage is used both in *mystical* and *moral* perspectives. But the emphasis is on the moral aspect.

The devotional poems of Tamil literature also offer a counter-idea and a counter-culture in the context of moralistic Buddhists and Jains and the philosophic speculations

15. P. J. Kobelski, "The letter to the Ephesians," The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, pp. 889 f.

and Brahminic ritualism of the Hindus. Being inspired by the late "Sangam" literatures, such as *Paripatel*, these writers use the marriage symbolism to express the relationship between God and the devotee. In these literatures the emphasis is very much on the mystical aspect. They invite the devotees of God to engage themselves in love-relationship with Him. The use of the marriage symbolism in Tamil literatures is not like that of the Ancient Near East. It is indeed different from it. The basic motive for the use of the marriage symbolism in Tamil literatures of the "Age of devotion" is one of intimate union with the Lord and so it is *mystic*.

One thing is clear that the symbolism of marriage is used in these devotional literatures to express the relationship between God and an individual soul and never between God and a nation as in the Biblical literatures. It is God, who addresses the nation using the marriage symbolism in Biblical literatures and humankind never uses this symbolism to address God. On the other hand, it is the devotee who uses this marital symbolism to address God in Tamil literatures. Though we find that God is addressed as woman and mother, he is never considered as "wife" or "bride". In Biblical literatures, God is the one who rebukes the nation of Israel for her infidelity. But in Tamil literatures, we find both God and the devotee mutually rebuke each other for their infidelity. Can the infidelity attributed to God in Tamil literature, be considered as the devotee's eager longing for the "Beloved"? Whatever may be the differences between these two groups of literatures, they both use the marriage symbolism to express the relationship between God and humankind, which is intimate and personal, which calls for total commitment in love and fidelity.

2. *Basis for the renewal of the Sacrament of marriage :*

The marriages in India are generally stable and lasting. This stability of marriage cannot necessarily be attributed to the personal and intimate relationship between the

spouses. Social and economic factors play an important role in the marriages in India. Family pressures, caste and dowry considerations quite often influence couples entering into marriage and at times even their subsequent marital life.

The coming of the Gospel has already emphasized in the Indian Society the importance of free choice of the partners in marriage. It has, to a certain extent, liberated them from the above mentioned pressures. But still, the Indian Society has to go a long way in this process of liberation. The Biblical idea of unconditional love introduced already with the Hosean metaphor of marriage between Yahweh and Israel, has particular relevance for the Indian Church. This should influence the theological reflection on the sacramentality of Christian marriage in India and the pastoral applications of it. The Christian partners in liberty should reflect in their conjugal union the unconditional love of Christ to the Church.¹⁶ The unconditional love of Christ for the Church is already prefigured in the unconditional love of Yahweh for the faithless Israel. Hence a reflection and a marriage catechesis based on Hos 2:18-25 will help Christian couples to understand the depth of the mystery of the unconditional love of God which is manifested in the history of salvation, and which came to a climax in Jesus Christ.

3. *Basis for the liberation of the Dalits :*

The Indian Christians numbering around 18 million live in the midst of around 600 million Hindus. Hence they are in a way influenced by certain ideas and practices of these latter. One of the basic beliefs of Hinduism is

16. J. B. Sequeira clearly explains in his doctoral dissertation how relationship between the spouses becomes a sacrament of God's love to each of the spouses in marriage (Cfr. *Tout mariage entre baptisés est-il nécessairement sacramentel?* Paris, 1985, p. 633; G. Martelli, "Seize Thèse de Christologie sur le sacrement de mariage", DC 76 (1978) p. 574).

Varnashrama dharma or caste system, which maintains that the "casteless" people don't form the part of the body of *Hari* (God). Hence they have no right to associate with the caste people and they have no right to enter into the temple. They were considered as impure and they lived outside the village. They were usually landless people and daily wage workers.

In the history of India, one can very well observe that there were constantly movements¹⁷ against the caste system and social discrimination. None of these movements was able to eradicate this caste system in India. When Islam entered India it has tried to abolish the caste system and considered that all the muslims are Allah's children and they are brothers to one another. But Christianity, when it entered into India, has not tried to achieve this goal, though there were sporadic infusion of egalitarian ideals. Probably egalitarian ideals and endeavours were eroded to accommodate both caste and "casteless" people in the Church. Hence it has indirectly perpetuated the caste system of the Hindu society. There were missionaries for the "caste people" and there were also missionaries for the "untouchables"¹⁸. So much so, there were partitions in some churches to separate the "caste people" from the "casteless people". There are still areas in India, where there are walls in Christian cemeteries which separate the section of

17. Already Buddha questioned the Brahmanical philosophy of hierarchy and status by birth :

"Not by birth does one become an outcaste
Not by birth does one become a Brahmana;
By deeds one becomes an outcaste,
By deeds one becomes a Brahmana" (Vasalasutta, 21)

Tirumular, a siddhar (7th Century A.D) wrote:

"There is but one community and one God" (Tirumantiram.17)

18. In Tamilnadu, Robert De Nobili, S.J. was considered as the "missionary" for the caste people, especially for the Brahmins and John de Britto, S. J. was considered as the missionary especially for the "casteless" people.

the "caste people" from the section for the "casteless people"¹⁹.

Hos 2:25 speaks of the promise of Yahweh that he will accept unconditionally the sinful Israel as "his people" and will enter into communion with them in love. This offer of Yahweh for a new relationship to Israel is not based on any merit on the part of Israel. It is a pure gracious condescension of Yahweh to Israel. St. Paul quotes this text in a different context (i.e.) the pure grace of God leads to the acceptance of the gentiles as "God's people", just as it leads to the acceptance of the Jews. Hence all are "children of God", not because of human merits but because of divine grace. St. Paul has already spoken that distinctions on the basis of race, sex, social status have no value and all are one in the new economy of salvation: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one-body-Jews and Greeks, slaves or free-and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13).

The study of Hos 2:18-25, which speaks of God's unconditional love to human beings, and the fact that they are accepted as partners in relationship is very relevant in the present context of India. The "casteless" people were usually voiceless people in the Hindu society and so they were conveniently ignored at all levels from the main stream of national life. One of the reasons why they embraced Christianity is that they expected that Christianity would make them, who were "No people" as "People of God", giving them "human dignity" and an "identity."²⁰ But they were

19. Today these "casteless" people are called as "Dalits", which in Sanskrit means 'oppressed', "broken" and "down-trodden". In fact, the Hebrew word dal (dalim) means the "poor" or the 'oppressed'.

20. J. W. Gladstone, "Christian missionaries and caste in Kerala", Towards a Dalit Theology, Delhi, 1989, p. 109.

disillusioned.²¹ Today, they have become conscious of their status in the society and in the Church and so they claim equality, and in certain cases, they have become violent. In this context there is also the emergence of "Dalit Theology" in India.²²

There are two options before the Church and the emerging "Dalit Theology" to achieve the goal of integrating the Dalits into the main stream of Indian society and thereby giving them "human dignity" and "identity" as people of God. The first option is the way of the Naxalites,²³ which induces hatred and violence against the oppressive structures and exploiters. There is another way, which M. K. Gandhi, the "father of the nation" has used i.e. one of love, which is manifested in *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and *Satyagraha* (protest for truth and justice). He was indeed, being inspired by the message of the Gospel. In the process of social reformation of the Indian Society he gave a name 'Harijan' to the "casteless people". It means "people of,

21. A. M. A. Ayrookuzhiel presents the reasons for the disillusionment:
 1. Caste people dominated the Church institutions. 2. The Dalits, who were members of these institutions or educated by the Church ignored the poor dalits and worked for their own power and position.
 3. The Dalits themselves were divided on account of conflicting interests and objectives "Dalit Theology: A Movement of Counter-Culture", Towards a Dalit Theology, pp. 83-103.

22. M. E. Prabhakar speaking of 'Dalit theolog' says, "The point of departure for 'Dalit theology' is the liberation of the dalits from their Socio-economic and political bondage. It is not only a prophetic theology for identification with the oppression of dalits and their struggles for equality and justice, but also it is a political theology for social action towards the transformation of unjust, undemocratic and oppressive structures. It is doing theology in community within the context of the sufferings and struggles of dalits through dialogue, critical reflection and committed action for building a new life-order" "The search for a 'Dalit' theology", Towards a Dalit Theology, p. 44.

23. "Naxalites" is a movement, which organizes the people to take up violent means to rectify the socio-economic inequality in India.

God".²⁴ By this name, he wanted to give an identity to the people (i.e) they too form the body of Hari (God).

Opposing the *Varna* theology, which provided the doctrinal basis for discrimination and hierarchy in the society,²⁵ Gandhi, provided a religious justification for equality and human dignity for the "castless people".²⁶ It is, in fact, a religious and a social revolution. He translated his conviction into action. He, being a "caste" man established his "ashram" in a "Harijan" village. However, it is contested now whether Gandhi, being a staunch Hindu believer, really fought against caste system itself or the discrimination brought about by the caste system. I believe that though he accepted the caste system as a staunch Hindu, for the sake of division of labour, he fought against the social and religious discrimination which was the result of the caste system. He was in a certain way conditioned by his education and social milieu.

The path of love which Gandhi proposed is not merely a naive solution of the pietistic people to the problem of "Dalits" in India. Indeed, there can be no real love without justice. The demand for justice by violence is not a lasting solution to the problem.²⁷ It leads only to anarchy and breeds hatred and revenge. In this context, the study of the marriage metaphor in Hos 2:18-25 gives a new vision and direction to the Church of India.

24. J. Kermarec, "Gandhi," Encyclopaedia Universalis, Vol. 10, Paris, 1990, pp. 75ff.

25. Gandhi speaking about sacred texts of Hindu religion concerning the Varnashrama Dharma (caste system) says that all that are printed texts may not be authentic, as some parts of them may be rejected "as unauthorized interpolations" (M. K. Gandhi, Harijan, 11, 18 July, 1936 quoted in Annihilation of Caste, 1987)

26. M. K. Gandhi, (Tr) Tous les homes sont freres, Paris, 1969.

27. There are cases of violence committed against the "casteless" people by the caste people in India. But this violence cannot be overcome by another violence.

God has loved Israel inspite of her infidelities. Hence everyone, the oppressor and the oppressed, the sinner and the just, the good and the bad, has a right to love and to be loved as God's partner in love. This does not mean that God approves their actions. Here Gandhi's Gospel of non-violence to change the unjust structures, his commitment to justice and truth and love for all makes us see Hos 2:18-25 in a new light.

Jesus does not speak merely of "justice" but he went beyond it. St. Paul speaking of the charisms says that they are given for the edification and building up of the Church (1 Cor 14:12). The prophetic activity in the Church should not create anarchy and disunity, "for God is a God not of disorder but of peace" (1 Cor. 14:33). The Indian Church, the hierarchical leadership and the charismatic leadership should see the signs of the times and translate into action the "Good News" that "ALL ARE GOD'S PEOPLE" and "ALL ARE HIS PARTNERS IN LOVE", not because of their merits but because of his merciful love. It is not merely human action but is essentially a divine action. When this is realized in history, it is the Kingdom of God on earth, the realization of the oracle-dream of Hosea.

M. Devadass Ambrose