

CURRENT TRENDS IN INDIAN BIBLICAL STUDIES¹

In an editorial to the special number of *Indian Theological Studies* on "*Indian Lines of Approach to the Bible*" writes Fr. L. Legrand, "Some twenty years ago, at one of the first meetings of the *Indian Society for Biblical Studies*, a participant raised the question: 'Is there an Indian exegesis?' The quasi unanimous answer, at that time, was that there is no more Indian exegesis than Indian physics or chemistry. Biblical exegesis was thought to be a solid, monolithic and immutable discipline. The question of an Indian exegesis was dropped as irrelevant. This was twenty years ago. Presently, the quasi unanimity would go the opposite way"². Evidently, Western exegesis itself has realised that it is loaded with its own presuppositions and has opened up to a variety of methods such as New Hermeneutics, Structuralism, Rhetorical criticism, Psychological method, Sociological method, Narrative criticism, Bible as Literature etc. It has given up the monopolistic claim of the standard historico-critical approach and looks for new approaches. It is in the context of universal questioning and exploring in which Western exegesis itself has gone out of its secure academic positions, we need to situate the quest for an Indian reading of the Bible. Already in 1984 Soares-Prabhu asked this pertinent question: "How is one to read the Bible in India to-day, in this India of ours with its vigorous and pluriform religiosity, its grinding poverty and its dehumanising caste? Is an Indian reading at all possible?"³ The amount of literature which has been produced on this subject only shows how much the question is alive among the Indian exegetes.

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1. Paper presented at the 19th Convention of the Society for Biblical Studies at Union Biblical Seminary, Pune, 24th April, 1998.
 2. IndTS 21 (1984) 199.
 3. Cf. George Soares Prabhu, "Towards An Indian Interpretation of the Bible", *Biblehashyam* 6 (1980) 151.

I. Quest for an Indian Reading of the Bible

In fact the quest for an Indian reading of the Bible is not a recent phenomenon. Attempts have been made already from the beginnings of great missionary activities in India. Notably we can mention the works of great missionaries like Robert de Nobili (1577-1656)⁴ and Constantine Beschi in the southern part of India. Both of them heavily depended upon the Indian tradition of "story telling". This method has been used by Hindu religious teachers from ages to instruct their followers. Hermeneutics for them is not the re-reading of the old texts but re-telling of old stories for a new context. Inspired by this and particularly following the epic principles of Tamil literature, Beschi wrote the first Indian Christian epic *Thembavani* (in Tamil) having St. Joseph as the hero. Soon others followed suit. A few can be named: Vedanayagam Pillai, H.A. Krishna Pillai, A.J. Appasamy⁵, Mungamuri Devadass, Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya⁶, Sadhu Sunder Singh⁷, Vaman Tilak⁸ etc. They borrowed largely from the Sanskrit and Tamil mode of story - telling.

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4. For a list of De Nobili's works, see S. Rajamanickam, *The First Oriental Scholar, Tirunelveli : De Nobili Research Institute, 1972*; also see R.V. De Smet, "Robert de Nobili and Vedanata", *Vidyajyoti*, 40 (1976) 363-371.
 5. For example see some of his works : *Christianity as Bhakti Marga*, Madras : CLS, 1928; *What is Moksa? A Study in the Johannine Doctrine of Life*, Madras: CLS, 1931.
 6. Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1861-1907), whose original name was Bhavani Charan Banerji, was a friend of Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore. It was with him that Rabindranath Tagore founded Shantiniketan. In 1891 he received baptism from an Anglican priest, but in the same year, he became a Roman Catholic. In 1894 he became a *Sannyasi* and adopted the name *Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya*. He wrote on theological issues in his two journals : *Sophia* and *The Twentieth Century*. Due to lack of understanding of his ideas by the Church authorities, he was forced to stop writing on theological issues in 1901. He later joined the freedom movement in Bengal and brought out a Bengali Daily called *Sandhya* (1904-1907) and in March 1907 a Bengali Weekly called *Swaraj*. In September 1907 he was imprisoned by the British and in October 1907 he died after a hernia operation. For a summary of his theological interpretations see F. Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations*, Madras: Department of Christian Studies, 1993, p. 19-36; K.P. Aleaz, *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedanta*, Delhi : ISPCK, 1996, p. 10-38.
 7. *The Real Pearl*, 1921; and *At the Master's Feet*, 1922; *The Real Life*, 1927; all recently republished by CLS, Madras.
 8. P.S. Jacob (ed.). *The Experiential Response of N.V. Tilak*, Madras: CLS, 1979.

They did their retelling in their own mother tongue, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, Punjabi and Marathi. Most of them were converts from Hinduism and were familiar with the digressive narrative mode of the Hindu epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha*. For example Krishna Pillai, a convert from *Vaishnavism*, leaned towards *Vaishnavite* tradition in telling the story of Jesus⁹, while Appasamy made use of both *Vaishnavite* and *Saivaite* traditions¹⁰. Others like Dayananda Francis, who drew upon the literary tradition, applied devices of Tamil *aham* poetry (the love poems of Tamil Literature) to re-narrate the Song of Songs¹¹.

However their re-telling of Christian stories was not systematic but cyclical, episodic, digressive and fully asides and parentheses. Their hermeneutical attempts do not conform to the ground rules set by academies and, therefore, set aside as lacking in methodological rigour¹².

But in the post-independent India, particularly after Vat II, their attempts were revived. More systematic studies began to appear. We can group them into *three categories*:

i) Looking Back to India's Past :

It is an attempt to reclaim ancient reading theories and methods of story telling. Krishna Mohan Banerjea, a Bengali convert to Christianity, saw interconnection between Vedic texts and biblical narratives. He held that the Vedas came closer to the spirit of Christianity than do the Hebrew scriptures and that the pure form of Hinduism found in Vedas is identical with the Christian scriptures, thus identifying contemporary Indian Christian as the spiritual heir of Aryan Hindus.

9. For a discussion see D. Hudson, "The Conversion Account of H.A. Krishna Pillai", *Indian Church History Review*, 1 (1968) 15-43.

10. For example see his study, *The Gospel and India's Heritage*, London: SPCK, 1942.

11. For details see Kaj Baago, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity*, Madras: CLS, 1969.

12. Cf. R.S. Sugirtharajah, "Introduction, and Some Thoughts on Asian Biblical Hermeneutics", *Biblical Interpretation* (1994) 254.

Others like, Swami Abhishiktananda¹³, H. Sharma and Hemraj¹⁴, T. Manikkam¹⁵, Sr. Vandana¹⁶ and R.H.S Boyd¹⁷ tried to interpret the Bible from the Sanskrit literary tradition. While P. Gregorios¹⁸ urged the Indian exegetes to recover the distinctive interpretative principles laid down by three Indian philosophical schools - *the Nyaya, the Vaisesika and the Sankhya*, T. Manikkam saw a cross cultural hermeneutics based on three classical schools - *Mimamsa, Vyankarana and the Vedantic School of Sankara* - as useful for Indian reading of the Bible¹⁹. Sr. Corona mary proposed to study the Bible with the help of Tamil Saiva-Siddhanta tradition²⁰. However these methods do not have many takers.

Others have suggested the use of dhvani method²¹. The word dhvani literally means sound, tone, echo etc. but in aesthetics it means

13. *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point : Within the Cave of the Heart*, Bombay: The Institute of Indian Cultures, 1965. The Swami labelled St. John's Gospel as Christian Upanishad.
14. *The First Letter of John in Sanskrit*, Ranchi: Satya-Bharati, 1987. This is a unique and authentic *bashhya* (commentary in the classical Indian style) in English with a translation of 1 Jn in Sanskrit.
15. *Dharma According to Manu and Moses*, Bangalore : Dharmaram, 1977.
16. *Waters of Fire*, Bangalore: ATC, 1989. It is a remarkable study of the water symbolism in the Gospel of John in the light of Hindu scriptures.
17. *Kristadvaita : A Theology for India*, Madras: CLS. 1977.
18. "Hermeneutics in India Today in the Light of the World Debate", *Indian Journal of Theology*, 28 (1979) 1-14.
19. "Cross Cultural Hermeneutics : The Patterns of Jaimini, Bhartrahari and Sankaracharya", *IndTS* 21 (1984) 259-267.
20. "Divinisation Through Grace: Understanding a Johannine Theme in the Light of Saiva-Siddhanta", *Jeevadhara* 25 (1995) 161-172.
21. For a detailed study see Anand Amaladoss, "Dhvani" Method of Interpretation and Biblical Hermeneutics", *IndTS* 31 (1994) 198-217. The *dhvani* method comes quite close to semiotic analysis.

evocation or a poem that evokes. However as a method of interpretation this method stresses the suggestive possibility of the text, its evocative nature and its emotional grip on the reader/ hearer / spectator. A number of scholars have attempted to interpret the Bible in following this method²².

ii) *Looking at India's Social Problems (Indian Social Reading)* :

Taking into consideration the desperate economic poverty of India's masses and its social situation, a number of scholars began to read the Bible in the light of a liberating praxis among the socially oppressed. This Indian social reading shared similar features with South American Liberation Theology in terms of socio-economic concerns. However it kept up its own Indian specificity, such as stress on personal (not just structural) liberation from aggression, fantasy and greed (*dvesa, moha, lobah*), as well as the recognition of the prophetic elements found in the Indian religious traditions. In this context of reading arose a number of socio-political and cultural studies²³. The *dalit reading of the Bible* is another offshoot of this attempt²⁴.

iii) *The Integrated Indian Christian Reading:*

This method, recent in its origin, takes into consideration both the aspects of the above mentioned two types of readings. Above all

22. For example see Soares-Prabhu, "And There was a Great Calm: A *Dhvani* Reading of the Stilling of the Storm (Mk 4:35-41)", *Biblebhasyam* 5 (1979) 295-308; R.J. Raja, "Seeking God, Sought by God: A *Dhvani*-Reading of the episode of Zacchaeus (Lk 19:10)", *Jeevadhara* 25 (1995) 139-148.

23. Just to name a few : G. Soares-Prabhu, "Good News to the Poor: The Social Implications of the Message of Jesus", *Biblebhasyam* 4 (1978) 193-212; "The Liberative Pedagogy of Jesus. Lessons for an Indian Theology of Liberation", in Felix Wilfred (ed.), *Leave the Temple, Indian Paths to Human Liberation*, New York, Orbis, 1992, p. 100-115; L. Legrand, "There is neither Slave nor Free, neither Male nor Female': St. Paul and Social Emancipation", *IndTS* 18 (1980) 135-163; P.A. Sampathkumar, "The Rich and the Poor in Luke-Acts", *Biblebhasyam* 22 (1996) 175-189.

24. For details see A. P. Nirmal (ed), *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, Madras: Gurukul (no date).

it considers the Indian temperament that is, among other things, cosmocentric, inclusive and pluralist attitude. As Soares Prabhu points out, the Indian mind "perceives reality as an interconnected, interrelated and therefore an interdependent whole. A human being is perceived not in isolation, but always as situated in the social context of his or her family and caste; humankind does not stand alone, but must always be understood as part of the totality of the cosmos"²⁵. Therefore the Indian mind prefers an inclusive (both/and), rather than an exclusive (either/or) logic because it thinks dialectically. It is tolerant of ambiguity, and is able to hold together seemingly contradictory aspects of reality as complementary parts of a never fully to be apprehended whole. This perception stands as basis for this type of reading.

However, in order to do this reading in a very effective manner, one must also have a prophetic temperament. This, in fact, is the biblical *modus operandi* of theologising. This prophetic temperament calls for context-sensitiveness rather than the text-sensitiveness. In India, this means coming to grips with poverty-religiosity-caste situation. Then only the language of theology will become the language of authentic, contextualised metaphor.

II. Examples

Having enumerated the main attempts on Indian reading of the Bible, let me now illustrate these three types of readings with examples:

1. Reading with the help of India's Past :

This reading basically consists in the application of the traditional methods of Indian exegesis to the biblical text. In this process it transposes its Greek and Hebrew symbols into Indian ones. As an example for this reading we can cite the work of Sr. Vandana. In 1979 she published an article entitled, "*The 'Johannine-Upanishadic'*"

25. "Interpreting the Bible in India Today," *The Way* 72 (1991) 76.

*Experience : An Indian Meditation on St. John's Prologue*²⁶. In this study she makes a link between the Prologue and the experience of the Upanishad. She points out that John gathers up the dual concepts of the world seen by the Jews (the divine revelation created and kept in being by the Word) together with that of the Greeks (a view of the world in the light of reason, existing and developing in the mystery of *Logos*). This, according to her, comes close to the Upanishadic concept of "aum". She describes "aum" to be *Brahman* as sound, the word spoken by the Absolute, by and through which men and women reach the soundless silent *Brahman* which is its crown and apex. To consolidate her point of view she cites a text from the *Kathopanishad*

"I will tell you the word that all the Vedas glorify, all self sacrifice expresses, all sacred studies and holy life seeks. That word is *aum*; everlasting *Brahman*. That word is the highest end. When that sacred word is known, all longings are fulfilled. It is the supreme means of salvation; it is the help of supreme. When that great word is known, one is great in the heaven of *Brahman*" (*Kathop II: 15-17*).

This naturally reminds one of Jn 1:1. For the Hindus this "word" is "aum", and the word though one is yet three - A-U-M. This makes one think of the Trinity, the mystery of fullness. She then goes on to say that the *Isha Upanishad Shantipath* chanted daily by thousands of Hindus becomes meaningful for Christians who believe that the second Person of the Trinity, the Word, became flesh :

"Aum fullness here, fullness there.

From fullness, fullness proceeds.

Take fullness from fullness

Fullness yet remains".

The Word in becoming man is no less "full" when he proceeds from the Father and is enfleshed. He is fully divine when he takes the human form. The Trinity in its own being becomes no less full when the Word enters human history. "Fullness ever remains".

26. *IndTS* 16 (1979) 153-168.

The Word in Jn is also "Son". Hence the Gospel of John is not merely an account of the sayings and doings of Jesus. At the bottom of Jesus' words and teachings, there is Jesus himself. He, as a totality, is *Son*, *Word*, and *Mission*. His activity reaches right down to the ground of being and is one with it. And it is precisely in this unity of being and doing that his special character lies. This Son in whom God and the world have become one is *aum* which resounds continually in our hearts, calling us to union. "Come to the Father".

Thus we notice Sr. Vandana's study is an attempt to go back to India's past, particularly to the Upanishadic experience of God, and try to understand Jesus from the religiosity of Indian mind. This reading involves a good understanding of Hindu scriptures. However, one encounters a certain number of difficulties in reading the Bible in this manner. One has to keep in mind that the genre of Christian scriptures is quite different from that of the Hindu scriptures. Besides, Hindu scriptures exhibit an element of mysticism and contemplation, which is not always the case in the Bible. We need to be selective in taking up this type of reading.

Seeing the difficulties involved in this type of reading, others have proposed to make use of traditional Indian methods of interpretation like *dhvani*. This does not require a mastery in Hindu scriptures. It needs only an understanding how this method functions. The basis of this approach lies in the perception that the Indian thinking sees things a part of a whole and part cannot be understood without reference to the whole. However much one might claim to be "objective", human being is not perceived in isolation but situated in the concrete world which is part of the whole. Therefore one looks at the text from one's own specific background and cultural milieu in which one has grown.

The *dhvani* method of interpretation takes this perception into consideration. When a reader reads a text, it evokes in him a certain experience as well as knowledge. For example, the phrase, "the sun has set" might evoke differently to different hearers. For a religious person it would mean that it is time to begin one's evening prayer; for a soldier it might indicate that it is time to attack the enemy under the

cover of darkness; for a lover it is a call to meet his beloved at the appointed place and so on. All these different evocations are due to the background of the reader or the hearer and they need not be the very intention of the author. The *dhvani* method works on this perception. As the Indian mind looks a part in the whole, the reader is not content with what appears but looks for a depth dimension in reality. This process is a delight, a thrill of discovery of something previously concealed. It is this aesthetic delight that is highlighted as training or forming the taste. This discovery is also a process of self-discovery. It brings in self-refinement and sensitivity in perceiving and interpreting finer aspects of reality. It gives a new perspective and gains a new way of looking at reality.

A fine example for this study is that of Anand Amaladoss' interpretation of Jn 21:1-19 in his article, "Dhvani method of interpretation and biblical hermeneutics"²⁷. After studying the structure and context of the pericope he focuses on the three elements of the narrative: *the great catch; Jesus as host; the mission*.

Each element evokes an inner dimension for the reader. The miraculous catch evokes that without the Lord nothing could be made even of the best opportunities. Similarly, the sensitivity of the host in keeping ready a breakfast for the tired disciples and his friendly presence without any fuss or embarrassing questions evoke an atmosphere of love. This means that Jesus makes others feel important. That is the type of love that is evoked. A genuine concern for others, accepting them as they are with all their failures and still enthusiastically approaching them in their hour of needs - all this instils confidence in the disciples. What is important here is that what is non-verbally evoked, particularly in the hearts of the disciples who experienced that warmth of Jesus' love. This evocation can be felt by the reader of today. Likewise the mission given to Peter brings out the nature of discipleship. After a friendly meal expressing his love and concern, his sensitivity and vibrancy with which he has built up a fellowship and communion, Jesus began a probing test for Peter.

²⁷ *IndTS* 31 (1994) 199-217.

The reader is aware of what Peter had done on the night of Jesus' trial. Peter's response to the question shows that he has realised this for himself. Jesus as host gives a mission. It is a mission to be hosts to others in their turn, to express the type of love and concern they had experienced. Coming at the end of the Gospel of John, the narrative sums up its message as a metaphor, evoking the same process of experience to the sensitive readers as that the first disciples underwent. Jesus began his public ministry with an opening invitation to his first disciples: "Come and see" (Jn 1:39). It is an invitation to be with him and experience for themselves what Jesus is and how he lives. It is significant that the concluding chapter of John has this invitation again to come and have breakfast. The first moment was coloured by initial shyness and that was formulated in a question: "Where do you live?" Now this time the context is different, since they have already seen and experienced the concern and love of Jesus.

Thus we notice that the *dhvani* way of interpreting a text supposes the use of the normal exegetical methods of interpreting a text. But it draws special attention to the evocative process that is at work through all the factors of language phenomenon. And it emphasises the special role of the sensitive reader whose cultural background, personal maturity and aesthetic sensibility, enable him or her to gain newer insights into textual context. In this sense, it comes closer to the semiotic analysis practised in the West. However it does not reduce the biblical narrative to lifeless codes, but looks at the inner dimension of the text.

2. Reading : Looking at India's Social Problems :

In this reading the Bible is seen in the light of Indian social concerns such as exploitation, caste discrimination, the gap between rich and the poor etc. As an example for this type of reading we can cite the study of M.A. Raja : "*The Authority of Jesus : A Dalit Reading of Mk 11:27-33*".²⁸

Raja begins his study by analysing the problem that arose concerning Jesus' authority. We come across many Gospel passages

²⁸ Jeevadhara 25 (1995) 123-138.

in which the official Jewish authorities, representing institutional authority, confront the charismatic Jesus with questions about his identity and mission. As a result of such conflicts Jesus is crucified and killed. Raja sees a similar situation of conflict that exists between the dalit Christians and the institutional authority whether civil or religious. He, then, shows by a detailed analysis that the conflict between God-given authority of Jesus and the institutional authority of the Jewish leaders is a paradigm of the conflict going on between Dalit movements fighting for justice and the institutional leaders who oppose them. Properly understood, Mk 11:27-33 is a challenge for all to evolve a proper spirituality of dalit liberation, which, in fact, is a spirituality of confrontation. This involves, of course, down-to-earth solidarity with the dalit masses suffering under the oppression of the evil forces and confrontation against the hardened institutional structures which do not promote the Reign of God. He concludes that the Jesus-event continually reminds the dalits that rootedness in God and in the authority which God gives is ultimate. This rootedness through faith in God impels the leaders and the collaborators of dalits to find inner strength to lead the dalit Exodus towards an integral liberation.

Thus we notice that the Indian reading of the Bible takes into consideration the real problems of Indian society and people. Those who follow this reading do not imagine the problems to interpret the scriptures but rather experience the real problems and then read the scriptures in the light of their experience. Raja rightly stresses on structural as well as personal liberation which in fact is the Indian specificity of social reading. In this respect it is also a prophetic call for a complete transformation.

3. Integrated Christian Reading :

This approach reads the Bible both in the light of India's poverty and of religious traditions. Biblical reflection on India's socio-political problems cannot be isolated from the religiosity of the people. In fact both are interconnected. When we talk about the religiosity of the people, we do not, however, mean the religious texts only. We do consider also the unwritten traditions of the people expressed in the

form of folk songs, street plays, dramas, stories as well as customs and popular devotions. For these too express India's struggle against evil forces as well as India's religious quest.

Thus reflecting on the strategies for an Asian interpretation of the Bible, Soares-Prabhu clearly points out that the reading of the Bible in its post-modern Asian context must always be liberative²⁹. He sees this in three different ways : (1) attempt to liberate Asian religions (including Christianity) from the pre-critical dogmatism which still plagues them and is a source of the malevolent fundamentalism. Critical exegesis achieved this in modern Europe and its "enlightenment" needs to be extended to traditional Asia too; (2) critique of Asian reality be encouraged. This will eventually lead to the social liberation of the marginalised and the oppressed; (3) highlight the necessity of the spiritual liberation of the individual from the bondage of inordinate attachments, which is the primary goal of non-Semitic religions of Asia. The principles such as "disinterested action" (*niskama karma*) of the *Bhagavadgita* (2:47;4:18-20) and the unshakeable "calm" (*shantam*) like that of a deep lake clear and still, of Dhammapada (6:7;7:7) be analysed in the biblical way.

Soares-Prabhu further points out that without such spiritual freedom, attempt at other kinds of liberation will inevitably end in further bondage. The "enlightenment" of Kant must be completed by the enlightenment of the Buddha, the liberation of Marx with the liberation (*moksha*) of the Gita. An interplay of these three freedoms form the basis for this integrated Christian reading of the Bible.

A fine example for this type of reading is Soares-Prabhu's own analysis of "Two commands". One is from Jesus narrated by Matthew (28:16-20) and the other is from Buddha narrated in Mahavagya of Pali Buddhist Canon. Both are remarkably similar. Let us look at these texts:

29. "Two Commands : An Interpretation of Matthew 28:16-20 in the Light of a Buddhist Text", *Biblical Interpretation* 2 (1994) 265-282, esp. 273-274

Matthew 28:16-20	Mahavagya 1.10-11.1
v. 16: Now the <i>eleven disciples</i> went to Galilee.....	1.10: At that time there were <i>sixty one Arahats</i> in the world
v. 18: Jesus said, " <i>All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me</i> ".	11.1: The Lord said to the <i>Bhikkus</i> (Buddhist monks), <i>I am delivered, O Bhikkus from all fetters, human and divine.</i>
v. 19: <i>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.</i>	<i>Go now, O Bhikkus, and wander for the profit of many, for the happiness of many, and out of compassion for the world..</i>
v.20: <i>teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...</i>	<i>Preach, O Bhikkus, the dhamma, which is good in the beginning, good in the middle and good in the end...</i>

Soares - Prabhu points out that the two texts belong to very different literary contexts. The mission command in Matthew concludes a coherent, carefully constructed narrative about Jesus. It concludes Matthew's story of Jesus, but at the same time opens out its significance to a future: "the end of age". They also give us a compact summary of the gospel from christological, ecclesiological and eschatological perspectives.

By contrast, the mission command of the Mahavagya is part of a loose collection of traditions, put together to serve as "rules of discipline" for the Buddhist monastic community. Further, like in Matthew, this command does not form the conclusion of Buddha's presence on earth. Rather it is one of several incidents in a crucial period of life of the Enlightened One. But however different their literary contexts, the two mission commands have the same life-context. Both define the missionary task of the respective communities to which they are addressed. Both focus on preaching the *gospel / dhamma* to all.

Although both aim at the ultimate liberation of humankind, they express this aim in very different ways. In the Buddhist command this aim is quite explicit. The monks are sent out "*for the profit of many, for the happiness of many and out of compassion for the world*". The aim of mission is, expressly, the welfare of all, indeed not only of all humankind, but of all other beings in the world as well. Mission for the Buddhist is an expression of that "passionate desire for the welfare of all beings", which the Bhagavadgita (5:25) posits as a significant attribute of the liberated human being.

This is much less clear in Matthew. Here there is no mention of the welfare of the "nations" to whom the disciples are being sent. They are referred to merely as objects of mission, those who are to be made disciples of Jesus. That is why the mission command contains an injunction (not found in the corresponding Buddhist text) "to baptise" them. Such "baptism" implies, of course, the welfare of the people baptised. But this is not explicit in the text and can easily be forgotten. Selfish mission, political and economic interests can become more important than the welfare of the evangelised people. In this context the Buddhist inter-text draws our attention to a dimension of the Christian text: all mission must be for the good, the profit, the happiness of the world and of the human beings. While the mission in Matthew is universal which includes "all nations", the Buddhist mission is more conscious of the unity of humankind than of national differences within it. It does not distinguish between "nations", but between "gods and human beings". In this aspect also the Buddhist inter-text enriches our understanding of mission.

The integrated reading of the Bible thus focuses upon in bringing into light the impact of the various Indian insights drawn from its rich traditions as well as stressing on the need of understanding India's present social, religious and political problems. In this respect this reading stands out as an important mile-stone in Indian hermeneutics.

III. Conclusion

Indian reading of the Bible and particularly the Gospels, as found elsewhere, shifts from the author to the text, and from the text to the

reader. Thus the Indian reader is invited to read the Bible with an Indian pre-understanding, inspired by Indian concerns and drawing on an Indian life-experience enriched by its rich religious traditions. It is by reading the Bible in this way that the Indian reader will enter into hermeneutical dialogue with the text. This enables the reader to discover the specificity of Indian meaning to the biblical passages.

Dr. P.A. Sampathkumar