

FRATELLI TUTTI – AN INDIAN RESPONSE

A Review: At the heart of Fratelli Tutti is a concern for human dignity. Fratelli Tutti means Christian humanism at its core. Some of the common and repeated expressions in this encyclical are dignity, equality, fraternity, justice, rights, respect and peace. Pope Francis gives a universal call to recognize and affirm the dignity of every human being and respect, accept and love all as “Brothers and Sisters”. Loving every person with a love without borders is by acknowledging the worth of every person. Unless this fundamental right to live with dignity is upheld, “there will be no future either for fraternity or for the survival of humanism.”

These thoughts mirror the Pope in person for the values he stands for. What he has been practicing in his personal life, is put into words in this encyclical. His life has been an open book from the time of his election to the Pontificate. Ever since we know him, we know him as a person who concretized servant leadership.

This paper will approach Fratelli Tutti from four perspectives:

1. **As an Indian:** India is known for its unity in diversity. India took pride in making it loud and clear that despite the individuality of religion, language, culture, caste and social status, the identity has always been INDIAN. India looked beautiful because of its diversity. Already the 12th Stone Edict of emperor Ashoka stated that King values the growth in the essentials of all religions... Whoever praises his own religion and condemns others harms his own religion. One should listen to and respect doctrines professed by others. All should be well-learned in the good doctrines of other religions.” However, it appears that this statement and related

slogans have become a myth of the golden age. In the wake of the call given in Fratelli Tutti to be brothers and sisters, our evaluation of the present situation reveals that the very values that we upheld and took pride in, have become the cause of division. Today, we are divided based on ethnicity, language, religion, culture, caste and social status. Hence the reflections on the present encyclical come as a needed guide to introspect our contribution either for unity or for disunity.

- 2. From Indian Feminist Perspective:** Fratelli Tutti's invitation to be brothers and sisters draws our attention to the question of what are the things that show that we in India treat women as sisters? The moral and spiritual standards in society can often be perceived by the respect and regard it gives for its women. A society that allows women to live in honor with respect and protection and allows reaching their real potential in life, is egalitarian. Among the many societies that can be found in the world, we have seen that some of the most venerating regards for women have been found in Vedic Culture. The Vedic tradition has held high regard for the qualities of women and has retained the greatest respect within its tradition as seen in the honor it gives for the goddesses. These forms include those of Lakshmi, Saraswathi, Subhadra, Durga, Kali, Shakthi and exemplify inner strength and divine attributes. There is a Vedic saying: 'where women are worshipped, there, gods dwell' or where the women are happy, there will be prosperity. Manusmriti says: "women must be honored and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands, and brothers-in-law, who desire their own welfare. Where women are not honored, no sacred rite yields rewards. Hence men who seek welfare should always honor women on holidays and festivals with ornaments, clothes and food. (Manu Smriti III: 55-59). In the earlier days, the

external role of women in Indian society was minimum, but it regarded women with respect and dignity.

In the present times, there is an improvement in the way women have emerged with leadership qualities in various sectors, like Corporate members, Pilots, Scientists, Doctors and Political leaders. According to the study report published by the centre for economic policy research and world economic Forum, countries with women leaders at the helm seem to have handled the pandemic significantly better than their male counterparts. Some of them are: Angela Merkel of Germany, Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand, Mette Fredericksen of Denmark and Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh. Women as caregivers are in general better disposed to create a culture of care. Thus, encouraging more and more women to take up the leadership of nations can contribute to the enhancement of world peace.

However, all these contribute only to 20% of the opportunity given to women to function in leadership roles. Pope Francis rightly points to the fact that the organizations of societies worldwide are still far from reflecting clearly that women possess the same dignity and identical rights as men. We say one thing with words, but our decisions and reality tell another story. Indeed “doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights.” (no. 23)

Matthew Henry in *An Exposition of the Old and the New Testament* says: “the woman was made of the rib of man to be beside him, not from his head to top him, nor from his feet to be trampled by him, but from under his arm to be protected by him, near to his heart to be loved by him.” Yet the situation of women is not encouraging in India... In this regard, we need also to ask,

what are things that show that we men and women in India do not treat women as sisters?

Instead of a culture of care, we witness a culture of rape. The immediate victims of power dynamics are the Dalits and Adivasis...Every other day we have the news of women, girls and girl children being raped.... Within the year 2020 itself, the number of women raped is alarming. On 14th September, 4 upper caste men allegedly gang-raped and murdered a 19-year-old Dalit girl in Hathras dist of UP. Grave negligence of the UP police led to her death and the police cremated the body allegedly without the family's consent. In Jharkhand, a 35-year-old woman was allegedly gang-raped by 17 men in Dumka while her husband was held, hostage. In another case in Premnagar in UP, a Dalit teenager was stalked and molested by three young men. When this 11th-grade student stood up for herself, she was shot 5 times in the head and killed. Again in Sonbhadra in UP, a Dalit was raped and murdered and her body was found with mud in the mouth. In Pilibhit, a minor girl was confined and raped by a 20-year-old. In Budaun district of UP, a 50-year-old woman was brutally gang-raped and murdered by three people including a priest; in Bareilly, a Dalit girl was raped by a neighbor of 40. Besides these, women are also victims of honor killing and love Jihad. These are just a few of the horrible things happening in our country every day and every hour. Unfortunately, these victims did not and do not get justice. Persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled, no longer needed. Pope rightly said, democratic values have been bent and shaped to serve as tools for domination, as meaningless tags that can be used to justify any action. Addressing

someone as a brother or sister is different from feeling or experiencing them as brothers and sisters.

In the light of these, how can we come to say that women are treated with dignity and respect? Is India becoming a sex-starved country? What do certain words like democracy, freedom, justice or unity mean?

- ❖ **Scripture condemned violence against women**
 - Deut 22:25-29, Psalm 56, Proverbs 14:31
 - Matthew 9:13, Luke 4:18-21 Mark 3:4-5
 - Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21

3. **From Indian Religious Perspective:** amid all the unjust treatment of the less privileged, where are the religious? What is the role played by them? The religious could be the catalyst in the act of enlightening the people to build up an egalitarian community. If this is not done the reasons must be unearthed. Some of the reasons for the failure in this responsibility are:

- a. Only an empowered person can empower the other. Unfortunately, to some extent, religious communities themselves have become the centers of inequality, politically motivated and divided based on factors such as cast, culture, rite, language and social status.
- b. The luxury of materialism has invaded the religious sector and blinded the eyes preventing them from seeking out the people in misery. Therefore, instead of a culture of encounter, there is the temptation to build a culture of walls, i.e., to raise walls, walls in the heart, walls on the land, and walls on the culture. And those who raise walls will end up as slaves within the very walls they have built. (no. 27) To a certain extent, religious

- communities instead of becoming a culture of encounter are becoming a culture of isolation. The gap between concern for one's personal well-being and the prosperity of the larger human family seems to be stretching to the point of complete division between individuals and the human community.
- c. Another cause of failure of our responsibility comes from digital communication. In the words of Pope, "digital media can also expose people to the risk of addiction, isolation and a gradual loss of contact with concrete reality, blocking the development of authentic interpersonal relationships." Digital connectivity is not enough to build bridges. It is not capable of uniting humanity (no. 43). Have the religious become prisoners of the gadgets? These gadgets may help us to become neighbors but not brothers and sisters. We are more alone than ever in this world as it weakens the communitarian dimension of life.
 - d. Yet another reason for failure is the fear of being targeted. This fear has paralyzed our role as catalysts to transform the church. When we need to discern, we concentrate first on our self; hardly we come to favor the poor and needy. Hats off to the group of Holy Family sisters who dared to visit the protesting farmers and express their solidarity with them.
4. **Fratelli Tutti and the Bible:** The Holy Father uses the Parable of the Good Samaritan to drive home the message of universal love without boundaries. Are there other texts in the BIBLE which portray a similar theme and which could enrich the text of Fratelli Tutti? Yes, there are: From the first book to the last book, the bible gives us the vision of fraternal society.
- First,** Adam and Eve are not Hebrews or Egyptians or Canaanites. Their ethnicity is not identified. They became father and mother of all. The story is not about white or black or

brown people. The only identity is they are created in the image and likeness of God. It insists that people of all races and ethnicities are created in the image of God.

Second, the story in the OT frequently includes individuals and groups from a wide spectrum of ethnicity. Abraham a Mesopotamian and ethnically an Aramean migrated to Canaan. Judah and Simeon, the sons of Jacob married Canaanite women and Joseph married an Egyptian.

Third, When Israelites left Egypt, a “mixed multitude” went with them (Ex 12:38). In the OT, there is a frequent influx of people from their ethnicities into the people of God (Moses married a Cushite woman; Rahab a Canaanite; Ruth a Moabite etc).

Fourth, In the NT, at Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit brings in such universalism that gender, age and class distinctions are leveled. Men and women, young and old, men and maid slaves, all will prophesy (Acts 2). The first non-Jew to become a believer is an Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8). And Peter is instructed, “What God has cleaned you shall call not unclean.” (Acts 10) Paul proclaimed that in Christ, believers form a brand new humanity (Rom 4; Gal: 3-4; Eph 2).

Finally, the book of revelation describes the consummation of history, describing people from every tribe and language and people and nation (Rev 2:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:5).” This fourfold formula of tribe, language, people and nation stresses the ethnic diversity of the people of God who will worship around the throne. St. John clearly sees the kingdom of Christ as a multi-ethnic congregation.

- **Conclusion:** In reading this encyclical, it seems that the document is written keeping the Indian situation in view. The document is so close to the Indian situation that an Indian reader does not feel alienated. The encyclical mirrors the Indian Scenario. As usual, we hold in high regard the Papal encyclicals, but in practice, we fail almost miserably. If Pope Francis is walking his talk by imitating his patron saint St. Francis Assisi, we have the responsibility to walk our talk when we admire Pope Francis through his writings. Let us make India a truly a fraternal country where people live as brothers and sisters.