Mathew, PT. (1999).Indian Christian Approaches to Theologizing:Lessons from the Seashore (Version 1.0). Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies, Jan-June 2008 (11/1), 56-73.
http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4268380

JPJRS 11/1 ISSN 0972-3331, Jan 2008 56-73

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4268380
Stable URL: http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4268380

Indian Christian Approaches to Theologizing: Lessons from the Seashore

P. T. Mathew SJ
RTC, Sameeksha, Ernakulam, Kerala

Abstract: . 'Inculturation of theology' was the key phrase for a long time since Vat.II in theological discourse. It rightly pointed to the reality of the alienation of Christianity and Christian theology in India. Later, theological discourse took up the theme of 'contextualised theology'. The key question here is not 'how to inculturate theology', but rather 'how and where do people experience the divine, and articulate that experience and use it for wholeness and wellbeing'. Authors indicate two main orientations in contemporary theological discourse in India: the socio-cultural orientation and the socio-political orientation. The present paper os an attempt to cull out some methodological directions relying on the positive cultural and religious resources that lie dormant in Christian communities. Authentic and relevant theology has to have a life context and a lived-experience as its point of reference. Doing theology in India is not simply a matter of expressing the Christian faith in culturally intelligible categories, but rather a question of understanding and articulating the living theology that sustains and supports diverse Christian communities, and responding to their concerns and challenges within a faith matrix in the direction of human liberation and wholeness. The author believes that an interpretative presentation of the religious experience and practice of the Mukkuva community could contribute in no small way to our theological enterprise in India.

Keywords: inculturation, Mukkuvar, fishing community, liberation theology, Sangam

1. The Indian scenario: shifting contours of the theological project

Christianity in India is still struggling hard to shed its alien garb and its colonial past. 'Inculturation of theology' was the key phrase for a long time since Vat.II in theological discourse. It rightly pointed to the reality of the alienation of Christianity and Christian theology in India. Later, theological discourse took up the theme of 'contextualised theology'. The key question here is not 'how to inculturate theology', but rather 'how and where do people experience the divine, and articulate that experience and use it for wholeness and wellbeing'. Authors indicate two main orientations in contemporary theological discourse in India: the socio-cultural orientation and the socio-political orientation.[1] Both these streams are built, so to say, on what Pieris describes as the constitutive dimensions of Asian reality, viz. poverty and religiosity,[2] although some add a third, viz. the all-pervasive caste. The socio-political stream has been deeply influenced by the methodology of Latin American Liberation Theology, with its accent on experience and praxis commitment directed at the transformation of the social reality. But it fails to take the cultural matrix seriously. The socio-cultural orientation, on the other hand, remains so preoccupied with personal experience and transformation that it fails to be touched by the burning socio-political issues around.

In an enlightening article some years ago S. Kappen tried to define theology as "the analytic, critical, articulate, dialogical, and committed reflection on our primordial encounter with God."[3] If theology deals with people's encounter with God (or the divine, as he prefers to use elsewhere), we need to inquire first where and how this encounter takes place. Every human encounter has to have a spatial-temporal context. The question, in this perspective, is not what the texts of the Bible say, nor how to apply biblical precepts to human situations. Amaladoss writes pointedly: "Scripture and tradition are of value only in so far as they are a living part of my contemporary faith experience. They are not data out there to be looked at from the outside."[4] The notion of 'encounter' remains the point of departure.

The questions and concerns that haunt Indian theologians are many. Since the Indian religious world is predominantly a ritual world, how

does theology deal with it adequately? How to handle a religious world that is not demarcated and contrasted with a secular world? How to interact with the secular world itself in its manifold complexity? How to develop a theological language that resonates with the everyday experience of different faith communities? ... The theological methodology that is derived from the Enlightenment rationality of the West finds itself ill-equipped to cope with these questions. Let us agree that "it is high time that we stop repeating the need for a different methodology, and enter into tentative attempts to delineate methodologies, even at the risk of being incomplete."[5]. The fact is that such attempts have been going on in different communities, though academic theologians remain largely unacquainted with these. A rich collection of theological literature is emerging on the religious experience of Dalit communities and tribal communities, exploring a methodological path yet to be charted.

This paper tries to articulate the contours of an Indian theology from the perspective of the marine fishing community, more specifically the Mukkuva community inhabiting the South-Western coast of India.[6] Lessons from their life-context and theological practice may provide possible building blocks for an Indian theology, I believe, and these may have wider significance for different faith communities and cultural groups in our country to take the ongoing search further.

3. Building-blocks from the Coastal Experience

1)The value of latent dimensions of religiosity

What usually become material for theological discourse are the rational articulations like scripture, doctrines and institutional expressions. In a global context these vary little from one place or community to another and remain the *manifest form* of religion. Manifest form refers to the socially recognized and sanctioned elements that exist within the conventional and official structures and norms. But the everyday life and practice of the same people will be far removed from what are officially presented. What a specific people or community really believe in and live by need not coincide with the official. Deep down it is the *latent* religiosity that determines what a people treasure as theirs, rooted in their context and culture, expressed in their own idiom, and giving meaning to their life and its struggles.

The *'latent mode'* refers to those elements of religion that are not recognized and approved by the community, and hence operate outside the official structures and norms. Lesser visibility would go with the latent, and hence conscious efforts are needed to acknowledge its theological value, and to evolve a methodology that would do justice to its richness.[7]

A close look at the fishing communities reveals the significance of the latent mode very powerfully. True, the liturgical year, the Sunday observance and the sacramental prescriptions are valuable to them, and they remain scrupulously faithful to them. But what would make their religiosity unique, pertains to the latent realm, which is not confined to the church and to the liturgy, but pervades their whole life. The fishing occupation remains as much a religious activity as liturgical practices. The sacred-secular polarity tends to disappear in the latent realm. It is the sphere of deep experience, that of *anubhava* which transcends verbal articulation and textual formulation. Since every experience is bound by time and space, phrases like universal religious experience, and hence universal theology, remain suspect, seen from the latent mode. No theology would make sense if taken out of the realm of experience of the people concerned.

The latent mode, as a starting-point, would also call for an approach that is more empirical than narrowly textual. The need to turn to the empirical approach has been well acknowledged by Indian theologians although progress remains negligible. Empirical theology means the theological investigation and pursuit that begins from socio-political facts and data. Every single issue treated in theological discourse, thus, will have a concrete social location.[8] This would call for doing theology with reference to particular faith communities, collecting and recording detailed data on their life using appropriate tools, and reflecting on them in the light of the Gospel. Methodologies and tools developed by the social sciences, viz. participant observation, ethnographic narratives, life histories, case studies, etc, become greatly useful in this enterprise.

2) The centrality of the worldview of a people

It is only within the specific worldview of a people that their sacred universe becomes intelligible. The religious representations that

embody the sacred universe weave together the diverse experiences and events of everyday life into a meaningful whole. Cumulatively they provide interpretative schemes and guidelines for the conduct of individuals and communities. Various expressions and articulations of a people's faith and their fundamental value conceptions can be grasped properly only within their worldviews. This explains why consideration of a worldview becomes necessary for a theological activity in the Indian context.

The *Sangam* literature[9] gives us valuable insights into the worldview of the coastal people which may be termed *neithal worldview*. The ancient *Tamiïakam* had been divided into five eco-cultural zones (*aintiòai*), each having its own cultural adaptation and worldview. *Neithaltinai* referred to the coastal zone in the five-fold categorization, and its inhabitants were *Minavar* or *Valainar* or *Valaipparadavar*. The deity of *neithal* was *Varuòan*, a pre-existing 'lord of the ocean' later transformed. However worship of the goddess had been more prominent, as evident from the veneration of *Ko^{oo}avai*, the war goddess, and of the sea itself as *Kadalamma* (mother ocean). The seashore remains the *axis mundi*. The sea and the land, the wind and the waves, and the configuration of heavenly bodies, become meaningful around this pivot. What characterizes their experience of *Kadalamma*, the mother ocean, is her inherent *ambivalence*: she appears as a nurturing mother and protector, on the one hand, while revealing her fury and wrath, on the other. This ambivalence is a recurring theme in the worldview of the Mukkuvar.

It is the life-world of a people that primarily determines their worldview. To be a Mukkuvan is to be attuned to the rhythm of the ocean, that is ever in turmoil. To live, for him, is to live amidst change every moment. The wind and the waves, the moon and the tides, the fish and the stars... all bring to him every moment the reality of change and of movement. His today is quite unlike his yesterday, and he also knows from experience, that tomorrow will again be different. It is this eternal newness that seems to make every day fascinating, and makes his life challenging and dynamic. Yet there is a pattern in this change, he knows; he knows when the next tide will occur, and when the moonlight will vanish.... This 'abnormal' time-consciousness and the feature of eternal change have far-reaching consequences not only

for his daily occupation, but also for every sphere of life including that of religion and theology.

The *neithal* man is basically a hunter-gatherer and a nomad. The hunting instinct is intrinsic to the occupation of marine fishing, and stands in clear contrast to an agrarian culture. Unpredictability and risk seem to characterize the *neithal* culture. The rough monsoon season means risk to the craft and gear, as well as to the very life of fishermen. Certain fishing operations like shark fishing in deep waters involve danger. The fact that fish is a highly perishable commodity prevents the 'harvest' from being stored up for the lean season. The state of flux characterizes not only the phenomenon of the ocean but also fishermen's very life. Fishing and associated activities of the Mukkuvar are determined mostly by the lunar calendar, the sun has only a minimal role. The incongruence between their lunar worldview and the mainstream society's solar worldview is a fact to reckon with.

Every religious tradition has evolved, and continues to operate, in the context of a specific and unique worldview. The Mukkuva worldview has been moulded by and is vitally linked with the community's association with the sea and related phenomena. Conversion into Catholicism could not erase the pervasive hold of this worldview. Similarly, the missionaries brought along not only the Iberian Catholicism, but also a worldview that is specific to the Mediterranean basin. Conversion was an encounter not merely between two divergent religious traditions, but between two divergent worldviews. Every article of faith is interwoven into the worldview of the people in question, and hence a serious consideration of the worldview becomes a precondition for inquiry into their faith journey.

The seashore remains a powerful metaphor. It is the boundary line between the land and the sea. But it is a boundary that is ever shifting – every moment, every day, every season. The boundary is ever merging, ever shifting, and never static and eternal. The 'merging of boundaries' gives us a useful clue to understand a critical issue that Indian theology faces, that of conflicting notions of boundary between religious communities. This is often behind conflicts around conversion and anti-conversion involving Hindus and Christians.[10] This metaphor may explain why people like Mukkuvar are able to live with diverse streams of religious heritage without inner conflict or contradiction.

3) Need to acknowledge the faith journey of a people

It is necessary to remember that Indian society is a conglomerate of cultural groups and communities, each one jealously guarding one's own cultural identity and heritage. Most Christian communities have a history of conversion from a pre-existing worldview – whether tribal or Dalit or maritime or any other. The history of their faith journey does not start with conversion, instead it involves layers of faith traditions accumulated by many generations. The long process of assimilation and synthesis involving various sources, often merging into one, or at times staying with apparent paradox, has been part of their faith journey. Various studies show that even after conversion elements of the previous dispensation continue or are assimilated.[11] Acknowledging this fact calls for inquiry into the layers that form part of the Christian heritage. Here we shall restrict our inquiry into the *Indic-neithal* and to the Iberian Catholic roots.

Two features stand out while considering the *neithal* roots of Mukkuva religious heritage. One refers to the tradition of goddess worship. The other pertains to the urge for warrior divinities. The close association with the ocean instils in them such an attitude of awe and reverence to the ocean that *kadalamma* gets personified and divinised.

A brief look at the *neithal* worldview reveals how various beliefs and divinities emerging from the *neithal tinai* and from various Indic traditions contributed to the shaping of a culture and a religious universe that reflected the specificity of the coastal community. The predominance of the worship of the mother goddesses and of Murugan closely links the Mukkuvar with the religion of ancient *Tamiïakam.* Deities and devotions from other Indic traditions were added on later. *Neithal* religion tries to express the composite of this total phenomenon. Buddhism and Jainism had been popular along the coastal regions and among the subaltern groups in the early centuries of the common era. These began to decline by the 8th century, and many Buddhist/Jain temples were appropriated and adapted to become Hindu temples. At the same time many elements from these traditions got absorbed into the popular form of Hinduism that flourished. Many Dravidian deities were transformed and assimilated into the Hindu pantheon. The mother goddess tradition continued through the Devi cult. It continues through many present-day Christian practices like

the veneration of *Cintathira Mata* (Our Lady of sea voyage). In brief, the religion of the Mukkuvar at the time of their conversion was externally that of popular Hinduism, but adapted through a complex process of assimilation and synthesis of various strands of Indic religiosity. So it is proper to call it an *Indic-neithal* heritage.

It was into this mould of Indic religiosity that Iberian Catholicism got implanted in the 16th century, thus initiating a new process of assimilation and synthesis. There has been a superimposition of Iberian Catholic belief system and ritual system over an Indic form of religiosity in which the community had been nurtured for ages. The transition from *neithal* religion to a creedal religion has been charted out in detail elsewhere.[12] Here I indicate the salient aspects of this transitional experience.

The Christian history of Mukkuvar starts only after the arrival of the Portuguese, and more specifically with the missionary work of Francis Xavier along the Travancore coast in the 1540s. He and his companions tried to erase elements of the pre-existing religious past of the Mukkuvar and replace them with the catechism of the Catholic faith and the Iberian liturgical practices with the help of printed prayer books translated into the vernacular. They introduced Christian feasts of Lord Jesus, veneration of Virgin Mary, and set up church structures and offices and confraternities. What was attempted was a systematic transition from a *neithal* religion to a creedal religion. But this transition was not a smooth affair either. Elements of the pre-Christian tradition lingered on and got merged with the Catholic tradition, giving birth to a unique form of Mukkuva Catholicism. *Neithal* religiosity continued to operate at the latent realm, often invisible to the church authorities, either re-interpreting the scriptures and doctrines in accordance with their worldview, or creating new forms of religiosity to meet their needs. The theological practice of Mukkuva religion remains embedded in the complexity of this latent mode, and can be unveiled only if the faith journey of this people is taken seriously and is acknowledged in its totality.

The above mechanism shows that it has been a process of *encounter and dialogue* between two divergent religious traditions and worldviews. This process has been taking place quietly for generations, and it is proof of the inner vitality of the Mukkuva religious heritage

that it was neither annihilated by the hegemony of Hinduism, nor uprooted by the incursion of Iberian Catholicism. It also shows how latent religiosity feels at home with the disparate elements of apparently incongruous religious traditions, and discovers meaning for life-support and orientation. The creative outcome of this process is both a factor of enrichment and a sphere of challenge.

4) Rituals as valid entry points to latent theology

Insights from ritual theory and ritual analysis become useful here. The notion of ritual is extremely valuable in the Indian context which gives a high premium to ritual life. Rituals, as symbolic actions, make observable the worldview of a people, and also their living theology. *"Lex orandi, lex credenti"* has ever remained an acknowledged principle in Christian tradition, and it still remains a useful tool in understanding the dormant theology anywhere. Generally a ritual is regarded as an action that is performed, and it is distinguished from the conceptual aspects of religion such as beliefs, creeds, and doctrines. However, a clear-cut demarcation of rituals from beliefs does not resonate with the experience of people not having a speculative tradition. For them rituals constitute the medium through which both conceptual and behavioural components get integrated. Thus rituals serve as a window on the inner dynamics by which people make and remake their sacred world.

The term *ritual* is widely used in disciplines like cultural anthropology, sociology or theology, but is not always uniformly understood. Some use it in a broader sense to refer to all 'culturally defined sets of behaviour' irrespective of their explicit religious or social content. All symbolical dimension of human behaviour becomes ritual here. On the other hand, traditional theologians tend to link rituals narrowly with liturgical ceremonies and religious cult. This article prefers to avoid both the extremes. Firstly, the cultural and religious horizons seem to interpenetrate in the realm of rituals, thus making it difficult to stamp certain rituals as purely religious and others non-religious. Secondly, rituals are viewed not only as means to express collective beliefs and ideals of the community, but also, simultaneously, to generate and experience the same.

Fishing, for the Mukkuvar, is more than catching fish from the sea, whether for their own consumption or for the market. For them it is the most central activity that expresses their basic beliefs and concerns, their very identity and life orientation. The series of ritual acts meticulously performed in a fishing expedition, beginning with the homage paid to mother ocean, has significance that encompasses their whole life. Fishing is a sacred activity as much as a secular activity. In and through this they make and remake their world, including what is called their religious world. Fishing, thus, is rightly termed a *ritual performance*. There are various sub-rituals within the ritual world of fishing; eg. *eilamidal (*the rhythmic singing by the crew members during fishing), *celuparachil* (ritual evaluation after every fishing expedition), *kampe°u nokkal* (checking for evil eye), *erikkila adikkal* (beating the net with twigs of *erikku* plant), etc. are examples. All these rituals have much significance, both sociological and theological, and so become valid sources in any theological project.

5) The mystery dimension of life cannot be suppressed

There is always a dimension of mystery in human affairs beyond rational explanations and traditional wisdom. The realm of mystery is deeply culture-bound, and where risk and uncertainly abound, people seek tangible means to gain mastery over the mysterious. How do people come to terms with the mystery dimension over and above the prescriptions of manifest religion with its accent on surrendering faith? What are the mechanisms that they employ, and what aspects of theology are inherent in them? These questions are crucial while exploring a theological methodology in the Indian context.

Mantric rituals that are resorted to by the Mukkuvar are valuable in answering the above questions. The power of *mantric rituals* is a generally accepted fact. At the same time there is a strong disapproval against it within the community, probably due to the official Church's strong stand against it.[13] Hence, there is an obvious guilt-feeling in those who practise it. However theological inquiry needs to take a fresh look at *mantric rituals* to do justice to latent religiosity. Every fishing expedition is a venture into the unknown. One should not go for fishing with the hope of safe return, they say. The ocean itself is a source of tremendous mystery, as *kadalamma* reveals her ambivalent features

of *shantabhava* and *rudrabhava*, her gracious and fierce natures. Protection against risk and evil thus becomes a major preoccupation; misfortune is seen as caused by evil spirits active all around. *Mantric rituals* come to their help in such situations. Mukkuvar resort to *mantric rituals* for one of three reasons: to bring good luck, whether in fishing or elsewhere; to remove or to ward off evil, and to destroy one's enemy. The plate of St. Antony, the wheel of St. Michael, and the *yantra* called Œat°u *Samhara Mala*, are clear examples of the Mukkuva attempt to synthesize the *mantric* tradition with Catholic practices in a way that becomes meaningful to them.[14]

The *mantric* tradition in India, which is closely associated with *Tantrism,* goes back to very ancient times. The deep influence of the *mantric* tradition is evident not only in the various Indian religious systems, but also in the 'imported' religions like Islam and Christianity. *Mantra* is a sacred formula or a mystical verse, addressed to a deity to acquire super-human powers. The central idea is that certain sounds uttered in the prescribed manner produce cosmic vibrations; this energy can be directed to serve specific purposes, good or evil, with the help of the designated deity. *Mantra* is closely related to, and often used together with, *yantra* (also called *cakra* or *mandala*), which is a diagram of geometrical patterns engraved or drawn on paper, metal, or other substances, and used as religious/mystical symbols. A *yantra* is considered a 'dynamic' symbol, while an anthropomorphic image remains 'static'. What *mantra* does with sound, *yantra* does with visual images. The human body itself is a *yantra* in *Tantrism*; "that which is not in the body is not in the universe" is the *Tantric* maxim. *Mantra* and *yantra*, to the Indian mind, form the effective bridge between the microcosm and the macrocosm, between individual consciousness and cosmic consciousness. Christian theology need not frown at the *mantric* tradition on the seashore. Use of sacred monograms (IHS, INRI, XC, A-O, X-P, etc.) and Palindromes[15] are indications of a similar pattern of symbolic use of words in the Western tradition. Early Christian art used many pagan motifs which were open for a Christian reinterpretation; the fish, the Greek word for which (ÉxÈÕò) formed an acrostic *Jesus Christ Son of God Saviour*, was a favourite Christian emblem, especially of the Eucharist.

The practice of *mantric rituals* is closely associated with the *profession of healing*, and practitioners are generally called *vaidyan* (doctor). Some authors indicate that *mantravâdam* and exorcism were part of the treatment of physical ailments in the ancient Tamiïakam, before and even during the *Sangam* period. Sudhir Kakar discusses Tantrism with reference to the healing traditions of India.[16] Healing profession (*Ayurveda, Siddha,* etc.) is as much a spiritual science as it is a medical science. The cosmic aspect of illness, ill fortune and ill luck is highlighted by all Indian systems of medicine including Tantrism, making medical and "priestly" functions hardly separable. *Vaidyan* (literally *doctor*) is usually both a medical man and a priestly (ritual) functionary.[17]

4. Some methodological hurdles

"Why do you use the outmoded category of caste?", I was found fault with for using the term 'Mukkuvar'. "It is outmoded, and the preferred term today is 'fishworkers' or 'fisherpeople'", some activist friends pointed out. It is generally agreed today that people define themselves in terms of multiple identities. Social activists and theologians with a socio-political orientation prefer to work with the category of class. However the inadequacy of a purely class approach becomes evident when theology tries to deal with the latent religiosity of specific peoples. Religion and theology operate basically not in the occupational or economic realm but in the cultural sphere, which alone can provide the worldview of a people coherently . The socio-political stream is too engrossed with the class approach to do justice to the cultural identities that are central in a theological project. This indicates the importance of identifying and defining the community one is working with in a theological project. It is not an easy task either. My own search led me through geographical, occupational and economic categories to arrive at the cultural category of 'Mukkuvar' where alone the worldview of the people concerned began to emerge and present itself for theological inquiry.

"It is sociology and anthropology, not theology" is a refrain one often hears while exploring theology from an empirical standpoint. This can dishearten many a student of theology, and is a stumbling block for Indian theology. Theology for long relied solely on Philosophy as its

handmaid, ignoring methodological developments in other disciplines. The fear of relativism too continues to dissuade people. More concerted efforts at incorporating methodological insights and tools from the social sciences are inevitable in strengthening the feeble attempts at Indian theology.

The fear of syncretism too looms large over genuine attempts at theologising from the Indian Christian experience. Western writings often manifest an obsession with the danger of syncretism with reference to theological attempts from other cultural contexts. This fear, however, needs clarification. Syncretism is a term usually employed officially to designate the phenomenon of indiscriminate mixing of elements from two religious systems. It is a process that takes place at the boundary zone of religious worldviews. At the root of the problem is a confusion in the understanding of the boundary as a line of separation, rather than a region of interaction. It is from the former that syncretism gets its definition as indiscriminate mixing. The distinction between *dual religious system* and syncretism that Schreiter makes of can partially help in clarifying the confusion.[18] A vision of boundary as the region of interaction alone can explain the experience of Mukkuva Catholicism where a dynamic interaction between the Catholic and the *Neithal* has been going on in a creative process of theology in life-life context. The active coexistence of beliefs and practices from both traditions side by with no radical conflict is proof enough of the creative dynamism and resilience of the Mukkuva theological mind, which gets strengthened by the long history of Christian encounter with diverse worldviews in the course of its evolution[19], as well as the insightful directives from Vatican II (GS 53, GS 58, GS 62, etc.).

Does not the accent on the cultural dimension undermine the exigency for justice and liberation in this marginal community? The answer is a definitive no. For a people on the margins, religio-cultural identity is as important as issues of justice and liberation, if not more. One is not necessarily the opposite of the other; instead, one presumes the other, or rather, both inter-penetrate each other. Besides, liberative action too becomes meaningful only when placed within the matrix of a particular culture and its history; an a-cultural approach to liberative action is self-defeating. The present methodological option before

Indian theology demands not only a commitment to justice and liberation, but also a cultural critique of it.

Conclusion

The present paper was an attempt to cull out some methodological directions relying on the positive cultural and religious resources that lie dormant in Christian communities. Authentic and relevant theology has to have a life context and a lived-experience as its point of reference. Doing theology in India is not simply a matter of expressing the Christian faith in culturally intelligible categories, but rather a question of understanding and articulating the living theology that sustains and supports diverse Christian communities, and responding to their concerns and challenges within a faith matrix in the direction of human liberation and wholeness. My belief is that an interpretative presentation of the religious experience and practice of the Mukkuva community could contribute in no small way to our theological enterprise in India.

The hesitant steps of Indian theology are likely to leave large areas unexplored, and many more areas facing incongruity with the familiar route. That is natural, and need not lead to discouragement. Areas of incongruity, in fact, create potential space for further theological engagement. Some areas yet to be explored are: the role to be assigned to the cultural and pre-Christian treasury of Christian communities, the ecclesiological implications of having an open boundary, people's inner urge for the motherliness of God, the reality of ambivalence where good and evil seem to co-exist, the significance of a militant mode of saintliness, and the relevance of a diffuse model of religious leadership in a hierarchical church. It is an uncharted and perilous path, though promising, that lies ahead.

Notes

1 Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology*. Madras: University of Madras, 1993.

2 Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, New York: Orbis, 1988.

3 S.,Kappen, "A New Approach to Theological Education", in *Theologizing in India*, eds. M. Amaladoss et al., Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1981, 57.

4 M. Amaladoss, et al., eds., *Theologizing in India*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1981, 49.

5 Felix Wilfred, "Indian Theologies: Retrospect and Prospects", in *Society and Church – Challenges to Theologizing in India Today*, ed. Victor Machado, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 153.

6 The term *Mukkuvar* is used in consonance with the local usage. It is a particular community of marine fisherpeople all of whom are Catholics by faith. *Mukkuvan* is the singular noun, *Mukkuvar*, the plural noun, and *Mukkuva*, the adjective form. This article relies heavily on my book *We Dare the Waters the world and the Worldview of Mukkuvar*, Chennai: University of Madras, 2001.

7. The concept of *manifest* and *latent* modes of religion is adapted from the formulation of Robert Merton. See Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, (1968 enlarged edition), Amerind Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi: chapter 3.

8 Wilfred 2004, 156.

9 *Sangam* refers to an association or academy of Tamil poets, established in *Tamiïakam* (which includes the present-day Kerala), probably between 500 BCE and 200 CE. '*Sangam* literature' refers to the collection of the literary works of these poets, a large number of which have come down to us intact. See N. Subramanian, *Sangam Polity - The Administration and Social Life of the Sangam Tamils*, Madurai: Ennes Publications, 1980; C. Balasubramanian, *A Study of the Literature of the Cçra Country* (upto 11th century A.D.), Madras: University of Madras, 1980; P.T.Srinivas Iyengar, *History of the Tamils: from the earliest times to 600 A.D.*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1983, etc.

10 See P.T.Mathew, "The notion of boundary: A challenge to Indian ecclesiology", in *Dreams and Visions*, ed. by R. Rocha and K.Pandikattu. Pune: Jnanadeepa Vidyapeeth, 2002.

11 Mathur, 1977, P.R.G.Mathur, *The Mappila Fisherfolk of Kerala*, Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society, 1977; Kalpana Ram, *Mukkuvar Women: Gender, Hegemony and Capitalist Transformation in a South Indian Fishing Community*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1991; Patrick A.Roche, *Fishermen of the Coromandel: The Social Study of the Paravas of the Coromandel*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1984.; P.T.Mathew, 2001, etc.

12 cf. P.T.Mathew, 2001, ch. 2.

13 Lev.19:26 b and 19:31 unambiguously prohibit 'practice of augury or witchcraft', and 'turning to mediums or wizards'. The intolerant attitude of the missionaries to similar practices of the Indian Christians is evident in the decrees of the Synod of Diamper in 1599. See *The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper, A.D. 1599*, ed. by Scaria Zacharia, Hosanna Mount: Indian Institute of Christian Studies, 1994, pp.202 ff.

14 For a detailed discussion on these see Mathew, 2001, ch. 4.

15 *Palindrome* is a mysterious construction of words that can be read forward and backward. See JCJ Metford, *Dictionary of Christian Lore and Legends*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1983.

16 Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans, Mystics and Doctors - A Psychological Inquiry into India and its Healing Traditions*, New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1982, pp.151 ff.

17 An article by Aloysius Pieris reflecting on a traditional Buddhist healing ritual is noteworthy in this context. See his "Prophetic Humour and the Exposure of Demons", *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 60/5 (May 1996), pp.311-322.

18 Schreiter, J.Robert. *Constructing Local Theologies*. New York: Orbis, 1985, 145

19 Wilfred, Felix (1999) "The art of Negotiating the Frontiers", in *Concilium*, 1999,2, ed. by F. Wilfred and O Beozzo, x-xi.

References

Amaladoss, M. et al., eds., *Theologizing in India*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1981, 57-69.

Amaladoss, M., "Towards an Indian Theology: Some Methodological Observations", in *Theologizing in India*, ed. by Amaladoss et al. Bangalore: TPI, 1981, 43-56.

John, T.K., ed., *Bread and Breath*, Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1991.

Kappen, S., "A New Approach to Theological Education", in *Theologizing in India*, eds. M. Amaladoss et al., Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1981, 57-69.

Mathew, P.T., *We Dare the Waters – the World and the Worldview of Mukkuvar,* Chennai: University of Madras, 2001.

Soares-Prabhu, George, "From Alienation to Inculturation – Some Reflections on Doing Theology in India Today", in *Bread and Breath*, ed. by T.K. John, Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1991, 55- 99.

Wilfred, Felix, "Indian Theologies: Retrospect and Prospects", in *Society and Church – Challenges to Theologizing in India Today*, ed. Victor Machado, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 137-164.

Wilfred, Felix, *Beyond Settled Foundations*, Chennai: University of Madras, 1993.

Wilfred, Felix, *From the Dusty Soil*, University of Madras, 1995.

No of Words: 5, 809
Date Received: December 1, 2007
Date Approved: December 21, 2007

Back Volumes of Jnanadeepa are Available.
Please Contact:

The Editor
Jnanadeepa
Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth
Pune 411014
Email: kuriensj@gmail.com