

“Challenges to Democracy in a Multicultural and Globalized World: a Woman’s Perspective”

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Dr. Roy Daniyel, ladies and gentlemen, dear students, it is a privilege and an honour to be invited to CMS College Kottayam to deliver the Benjamin Bailey Memorial Lecture. This is particularly so not only because this is an occasion to remember the contributions of Benjamin Bailey to the cause of education, and promoting awareness globally of the beauty of the Malayalam language but also because it is now a little over a hundred years since the cause of women’s education was upheld by the College and indeed became Kerala’s cause itself.

Reading about the life of Benjamin Bailey, who came to India as a young Shropshire lad as it were, and made the propagation of the Malayalam language and through that language, the culture of Kerala a part of his mission, has been a revelation. The narrative of his life is intimately interwoven with the nineteenth century renaissance in art, literature and letters within Kerala. The Rev. Bailey introduced a dimension to the people of this State that also involved the study of English and thus opened the door to the literature and civilization of Western Europe. It was left to the people of course to critique the knowledge they acquired through this exposure, and discover the tensions of East versus West, but the expansion of horizons that English education provided to our nineteenth century ancestors brought fundamental change for Kerala society. In Kerala and beyond, across India, use of the English language in a country where for centuries, as S. Gopal has noted, bilingualism had been the accepted norm among the educated, the nationalist idea was fostered through the use of English. For many in the middle class, the knowledge of English became an asset for social and economic advancement. This factor was not relegated to the masculine gender alone. In the first complete Malayalam novel, *Indulekha*, the author O. Chandu Menon writes of his intent to illustrate “the position, power and influence that our Kerala women, who are noted for their natural intelligence and beauty, would attain in society, if they are given a good English education”. And, he adds that it was therefore necessary to impart good education to women as well as men. It was a clarion call that resonated in Kerala as the ruling family in Travancore led the way to actively encourage the establishment of institutions of women’s learning and to foster the education of young girls, enabling them to aspire even to careers in medicine – the first Indian woman Surgeon General, Dr. Lukose, was from Kerala - and teaching – all hitherto unheard of at that time in history. “To boldly go, where no woman has gone before” became the guiding beacon for the women of Kerala.

Since the theme of my lecture today involved democracy and globalization it is not out of place to note the unique position that Kerala occupies on the global map of connectivity through history with the rest of the world. The adjective “globalized” attached itself to Kerala naturally. Its connections through the centuries with the Levant, with Africa, and the archipelagoes of the Indo-Pacific, are well sung and well known. And, these were factors of consequence in Kerala’s history as the late Ambassador A.K. Damodaran eloquently observed. One sees them in the impact of Christianity and Islam on Kerala

society and people as also the long linkage with the Jewish people who came both to seek refuge and to trade because Kerala was so business friendly and its environment so tolerant and embracing. And there are fascinating stories that are told of all these interactions including the unique instance of the last King of united Kerala, Cheraman Perumal who it is said, left his kingdom, converting to Islam and taking off for Mecca to spend the rest of his days in Arabia.

Benjamin Bailey's pioneering work in opening up the whole new world of printed Malayalam, through the establishment of the Kottayam CMS Press unleashed great changes in Kerala society. One saw the growth of Sanskritization among Malayalees particularly in communities like the Nayars. Sanskrit poems like the Kumarasambhava of Kalidasa were translated and published in Malayalam. And, uniquely again, some of the patrons for this process were Christians, including the founder of Malayala Manorama, Kandathil Varghese Mappilai. It is what scholars call an inter-religious symbiosis which also came to represent whole-hearted identification with India as a country, and Kerala as an organic part of it. In fact this consciousness of being a part of the greater Indian nation, being "Indiakar"s was surfacing among Malayalees, even as far back as the late eighteenth century. Benjamin Bailey's contributions to Malayalam printing also saw the advent of newspapers and journals in Kerala, including the Malayala Manorama and the Mathrubhumi which came to capture wider and wider readerships as the decades went by mirroring as Robin Jeffrey says, both nationalist sentiment as well as the evolution of democratic politics in Kerala.

The theme of my talk today which is "Challenges to Democracy in a Multicultural and Globalized World: a Woman's Perspective" brings along with a number of issues. Here we are, denizens of the world's largest democracy, living in a multi-lingual, pluralistic society that is embedded in diversity and many sub-cultures. And, when it comes to globalization, that tide does not escape us either. Change is a metaphor that defines our existence today, change in lifestyles, in educational and business opportunities, the promise of diminishing poverty, the bombardment directed against old, entrenched values and the resistance this creates in an old, millennial tradition. We pride ourselves in the fact that our democracy, and our free and open society is such a welcome contrast to China's, notwithstanding the galloping economic and developmental progress in that country in the last few decades.

We live an age of Revolution as well as Democracy. One has only to witness the ferment on the Arab Street and the public squares of the Arab world to understand the depth of the desire of women and youth for the freedom of expression, the freedom from fear, for greater equity in the process of development and progress, and for the end of inequalities that have defined their existence over centuries. Has that struggle been won? The record is a blurred and distorted one. Has political Islam worked for women's rights? What is the role of traditional cultural practices in preventing change and more representation for women? Religious radicalism, and extreme voices from the edge compounded by fractious, inter-ethnic strife have spelt the near end of state structures and institutional melt down in some countries. The voices for democracy are drowned out in this mayhem where the rise of intolerance, killing, and brother against brother, herald the advent of a new world that is far removed

from the vision of the century of progress with democracy that the 21st century promised to be. The revolution is clearly unfinished, especially for the women of the Middle East.

But democracy thrives in pluralistic India – not perfectly, for we have still to do right by many millions of our compatriots, particularly our women, the poor and the traditionally marginalized. The Constitution our founding fathers gave us stands straight and tall, but the hierarchical and discriminatory nature of our social stratifications does not do it justice. Most of us stand idly by and expect our freedom to be handed down to us. That is not the approach that icons of our time like Aung San Suu Kyi adopted. They should be our role models for the 21st century.

Montaigne once said, “Nothing human is foreign to me”. The question we must ask ourselves is whether we treat the world as if we intended to stay. The world we live in, because of the air and space we share, is a borderless one, where sustainability, the economy of life and good, open governance should provide the benchmarks for gross transnational happiness on an inter-connected, integrated planet.

The effects of globalization are all around us. The media, the mall, the multiplex – these determine the wavelength of our times. If these are what shape the consciousness of our youth, how will they be sensitive to issues of concern to plural societies such as ours: the environment, gender violence, sustainable development, socially responsible entrepreneurship, food security, the value of diversity? What is needed is the inculcation of what Professor Robert Nash calls a “certain liberality of character, marked by virtues of self-discipline, obligation, civility, tolerance, fairness and generosity.” In the age of inter-dependence, which globalization entails, we also need to ensure that the ethical base does not shift from under our feet, that our youth, particularly are equipped with the knowledge, the skills, the values that enable them to deal with the complexity and change that our new century stands for. As Koichiro Matsuura, then Director General of the UNESCO said in 2003: “At the heart of globalization, there is a complex pattern of mutable relationships- between the global and the local, between the ‘included’ and the ‘excluded’, between those who benefit more and those who benefit less.” Globalization can only succeed if it has a human face and addresses the shocking scale of global inequities.

A Sri Lankan friend, Radhika Coomaraswamy rightly notes, in a post 9/11 world we see a great deal of strident masculinity in the responses to situations in need of solutions. The art of negotiation and the spirit of compromise are given much less value. We have come to celebrate violence. Increasingly, the idea of a “commons” where people of the world share and include rather than exclude or marginalize has escaped us. Professor Vinay Lal of the University of California has written in fascinating detail on this aspect. This is not the world Gandhi lived and died for. We must address this deficiency, this shortcoming with a sense of urgency and seriousness.

The world is still an inequitable place. The revolution in rising expectations we see across our planet, compels us to be even more conscious of the need for social innovation, applying technology to provide solutions for human development, whether it is water for drought prone areas, higher yielding agricultural techniques, or better management of our rapidly growing urban space. In the summer of 2010, Pepsico's Indra Nooyi addressing a conference of Indian Ambassadors noted that whether "you look through the lens of diplomacy or the lens of the corporation, the task is the same – to create a world in which we feel safe, settled and happy". In our world of today, prosperity and security reinforce each other. That safety and security comes from economic progress, from innovation and enterprise and technological invention.

Today, also as a measure of how the world has changed, borders between nations are becoming increasingly porous, and in time, they will be increasingly irrelevant, as people are allowed to move freely to transact trade and commerce, and to travel without hindrance. Protectionism in such a situation becomes a hindrance to economic growth and development because it seeks to cap the flow of people, of goods and services, of ideas and technologies. It builds walls and is thus retrogressive. We must be alert to its stifling effects.

Globalisation integrates the world today in many ways. But it has also unleashed its discontents. There are vast gulfs between those who have a wealth of opportunities and those whose lives are ridden with poverty and marginalization. We, who live in the developing world, as in India are especially conscious of this reality. We are a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious, pluralistic society. Our challenge is to deliver the benefits of globalization, and economic reform and growth to the many millions of people who must be included in and benefit from this growth process. They must have a ticket to ride and we must do right by them, to borrow what the Beatles said. And, to ensure this, we have to grow our economy at an accelerated pace. The unhindered flow of capital and technology across borders is one of the key components of this process.

And here in India's most female state, Kerala, let us turn to the daughters of Eve, that half of the world that is womankind. How have they fared in democracy? And, are they the beneficiaries of globalization? Does multiculturalism promote gender welfare and equality? The Women in Politics Map 2014 launched by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women has ranked India 73rd in participation of women in politics with just 9.9% of parliamentary or ministerial posts being occupied by women. Do our women enjoy full and equal citizenship? The hurdle of complete literacy is yet to be crossed. At 65% female literacy is 16% lower than the male literacy rate. Violence is a constant companion in most women's lives with at least 34% of Indian women having experienced violence at least once in their lives. There is the haunting and shameful statistic of how nearly 600,000 girls are missing in India each year because of sex-selective abortions. Rape, molestation and sexual harassment are other manifestations of violence against women – literally examples of war against women in peacetime. Patriarchal structures perpetuate female inequality.

More active participation of women in governance can help bring the issues that affect their wellbeing onto the highest political agenda of government. The growing presence of women in the Panchayati Raj and local government after the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution has been a positive development. More women in India are also voluntarily exercising their constitutional right of adult suffrage which is a positive and encouraging trend in Indian politics. Scholars term this phenomenon as self-empowerment.

Despite all this, our women need more visibility. Aruna Roy says, "The other side of India is still invisible". A few swallows do not make a summer. A small minority of us women who have succeeded in what they do, do not represent the vast majority of our sisters who live anonymous lives submerged by patriarchy, surfacing only as examples of victimhood as a Nirbhaya or an acid burn victim, or the object of vengeance unleashed by antediluvian custom and usage. Not one of our women, regardless of economic or social status, can walk our streets safely after sundown. They retreat silently into the shadows, the white flags of surrender over their heads, giving themselves up to the helplessness of not being able to win protection from a male-dominated environment, and the hands that grope and violate and destroy their physical and mental sanctity. This is not the democracy our founding fathers and mothers envisioned. Sexual violence against women is not of a genre different from a war crime. Is gender equality recognized in the lives of our women who turn out to vote in such large numbers in each general election?

In the wake of the gang rape of Nirbhaya in Delhi in December 2013, the Justice Verma Commission's epic work generated a veritable Magna Carta for women, a Bill of Rights many of whose provisions have now become law with the amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code passed by Parliament. Society is beginning to recognize that women are not victims, they want agency, they have chosen survival, that gender justice, realized justice or nyaya as Amartya Sen defines it, is what the women of India want. The tide is slowly turning against the "cultures of silence and impunity" (Meenakshi Gopinath) surrounding women that has pervaded our patriarchal society for centuries at the family, community and national levels.

As Madeleine Albright once said, "For democracy to thrive without women is impossible. If women are undervalued or underdeveloped then that democracy is imperfect and incomplete." The question we must ask ourselves is whether we can be founding fathers and mothers of a new tradition. Decision-making and the prioritization of issues that affect human security have to involve women and men, not just men alone. Key questions of human rights involving half of humanity are involved – whether it is a gang rape in Delhi, or the shooting of a young Malala, wherever there is a struggle by women to seek their human rights, to seek freedom from fear, and their security, physical and psychological. Women need access to information (after the passage of the Right to Information Act in India, Aruna Roy notes that the "new currency was information and it had even replaced the bribe), they need education and

vocational skill development, reductions in maternal and child mortality, and access to health care – all of which are core issues for gender rights.

I have especially referred to access to information. What is called the “chaotic pluralism” of the Internet can be mined to generate some very interesting data that can help policy makers to take policy decisions that are more inclusive and a better reflection of the state of the country. How many women have smart phones in India, how many have access to the Internet? Technology is a platform that women can scale, that enables them to transcend the limitations that surround them in their daily lives and provides them with the opportunity for economic and political advancement. Globally, men have a much easier time accessing the Internet than women, according to a new report issued by the United Nations' Broadband Commission Working Group. The report estimates that more than 200 million more men have access to the Internet than women, particularly in countries where Internet access is relatively new and still difficult to come by. Citing statistics from the ITU World Telecommunications/ICT Indicators database, the report says 41% of men worldwide are connected to the Internet, compared to 37% of women. In the developing world, the report claims that 16% fewer women use the Internet than men, whereas just 2% fewer women are online in the developed world. Several factors contribute to the online gender gap. Specifically, the report mentions the online harassment and threats frequently aimed towards women. In July, Caroline Criado-Perez, the journalist heading up the campaign to make British author Jane Austen the face of England's £10 note, was bombarded with abusive comments and rape threats via Twitter. On Facebook, sexism had become such a pervasive issue that earlier this year the company announced new efforts to crack down specifically on content that "targets women with images and content that threatens or incites gender-based violence or hate." By working through these issues and facilitating Internet access, the UN predicts that a larger presence of women online could have a drastic global economic impact. "The World Bank (2009) estimates that every 10% increase in access to broadband results in 1.38% growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for developing countries," the report says. "Bringing women online can boost GDP - Intel (2013) estimates that bringing 600 million additional women and girls online could boost global GDP by up to US\$13-18 billion." Bringing women online also enhances their scope of political participation.

For all women, influencing the political agenda at higher levels is key. According to the World Economic Forum, countries where men and women are closer to enjoying equal rights are far more economically competitive than those where the gender gap has left women and girls with limited or no access to medical care, education, elected office and the marketplace. Similarly the Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that if women farmers had the same access to seeds, fertilizer and technology as men do, they could reduce the number of undernourished people in the world by 100 million to 150 million. And here, I recall Norman Borlaug, whose pioneering work in the sixties was responsible for the Green Revolution in India, and who said: there is no more essential commodity than food. In his words, “without food, people perish, social and political organizations disintegrate, and civilizations collapse”. Women understand this because they spend their daily lives ensuring that their children and families are fed and nourished so that their future is secure and stable.

The mechanisms of decision making in the world, and democracies are no exception are essentially male dominated. Decision making is a preserve of men the world over. Democracy, human rights, development and good governance are of concern to women as much as men. Eleanor Roosevelt once said: “Too often the great decisions are originated and given form in bodies made up wholly of men, or so completely dominated by them that whatever of special value women have to offer is shunted aside

without expression". Simone de Beauvoir added, "Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth". This is especially so when questions of human security are involved. Security has to be considered multi-dimensional, it is not military security alone that defines it. Military security does not take cognizance of the ambit of female experience, it has no gendered perspective. It does not address issues of subordination and domination, of gender and sexual violence, issues of access to food, water, sustainability and health. International politics has often valorized masculine values like toughness and physical strength, violence and the use of force in the defence of one's country and has paid scant attention to issues concerning women in wartime or the peacetime violence against women that is an everyday occurrence in our lives.

Transparency and accountability in governance are critical requirements for a well-functioning democracy. It has been rightly observed that the arbitrary use of power by public officials not only gives public service a bad name, but it should be subsumed within the definition of corruption – remember the dictum that absolute power corrupts absolutely. A feudal social structure cannot exist within a political democracy as it does in some parts of India today. It is absolutely legitimate for people to question such arbitrary uses of power and also to seek accountability from public servants. We hear the people say: hamara paisa, hamara hisab. The government must answer them in this era of unique identity for every Indian living in this land.

A few words would not be out of place here on multicultural India. Our Constitution upholds the principle of unity in diversity, recognizing that we live as Indians, with the concept of diversity, diversity in ethnicity, language, religion, cultural practices. Identities also overlap in India and our structure of federalism and linguistic states has buttressed the idea of multiculturalism. It has preserved India's unity and the stability of the Indian State for six decades now. The integration of these diverse strands of belonging and identity into one unified national dimension makes India's example unique, and lends power to this example for the rest of the world. The challenge for India, is, even while all these differences exist, to promote the cartographies of connection and shared space between all the different groups that populate our territory, to turn as the educationist Meenakshi Gopinath says, "boundaries into bridges". Dr. Ambedkar spoke eloquently about India lacking a "concept of fraternity" – we must recognize this, and build that fraternity, breaking down divisions that separate us, and instead, unifying people through inter-cultural and inter-ethnic, and inter-religious dialogue, through educational syllabi that promote the idea of India, through the protection of our eco-systems, through inclusiveness in our policies and programmes so that the common man and woman, regardless of where they come from, feel proud to be first and foremost, Indian.

The phenomenon of multi-culturalism also brings attention to bear on the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples and first nations – their eco-systems, their traditional knowledge and their accessibility to the world. Globalization can be an instrument to help these peoples access the wider world, and enable improvements in their economic situation, provide educational facilities for their children, improved health care, infrastructure in terms of energy access, connectivity, just to name a few areas. The challenge is to ensure that the biosphere which is the traditional habitat of such peoples, and their body of indigenous knowledge is not infiltrated and dissipated by arbitrary and insufficiently imagined methods of administration or top-down policy applications. At the same time, however, "the

glorification of violence as a shining path” (Amartya Sen) to resist the State and its apparatus in campaigns and struggles for indigenous rights, cannot provide a legitimate solution within the parameters of constitutional justice and democratic practice.

There is also the question of applicability of IPR regimes in developing countries where a vast majority of the population does not have access to health insurance and affordable health care. In India, we have been waging a justified battle with some of the international pharma giants on the issue of renewal of patents and compulsory licensing of some life-saving drugs used in the treatment of certain cancers. East does not meet West on such issues and there is still a great gulf that separates developed and developing country positions on such issues even when, as countries like India argue, we are not in violation of international intellectual property regimes in taking decisions not to renew certain patents or compulsorily license a certain drug so that it is readily and more cheaply available to our people for life-saving treatments. The battle continues and we in the developing world must not give in because history and righteousness is on our side in this struggle.

I come from the world of foreign policy having spent four decades of my life in the practice of diplomacy. Our foreign policy is a reflection of the priorities of our life as a democracy, a large, multicultural, developing nation, and our determination to always be guided by our national priorities, by the secular values of our founding fathers, and to be ourselves. This is not a static policy but it has evolved to adjust to shifts and changes in international affairs. It is intimately concerned both with issues of security, both defence-related as well as human security, as well as the cardinal, core, principle of development, including access to technology and the flow of capital and investment to help economic growth. It has placed India in the forefront of nations assisting countries like Afghanistan while at the same time building global resistance to the forces of transnational terrorism. I believe it is a foreign policy well attuned to dealing with the challenges of a globalizing, democratic, multi-cultural India.

As a woman who is also a foreign policy practitioner, I would urge more and more young women of our country to consider careers in the foreign service. We are underrepresented in the foreign service, as in the rest of the bureaucracy. Women need to be more involved in determining the future trajectory of many issues of foreign policy concern for India, whether they are border and territorial questions, neighbourhood policy, trade and inter-connectivity, regional economic cooperation and security, energy security, politico-military issues, and public diplomacy, to name a few. This will help better mainstreaming of gender-related issues also into the working of our foreign policy and bring new perspectives to bear on policy concerning our neighbours, in particular. Women can bring courage and resilience of the feminine sort into the public sphere, a concept of sisterhood that is focused on long-term solutions to problems, the building of common ground, and the creation of cross-border synergies for peace and reconciliation. Preparing our women and skilling them in the art of negotiation and empowering them to build peace is key. I believe, like many of my sisters, that history can and must be pushed in a positive direction.

I will conclude by reverting to Kerala, land of my birth. India’s most female state has always prided itself on its spirit of engagement with the rest of the world, particularly the Indian Ocean world. While preparing this talk, I came across these words of Pepita Seth:

“In northern Malabar there is a Theyyam deity, Kshetrapalan, the guardian of temples, who once demolished a semi-ruined shrine and built a mosque to give a growing community of Muslims a place of worship. This, in essence is a sharing of cultures and spaces, even as the other is respected. This fineness shows India’s profoundly pluralistic dimension. It is beyond me to suggest what can be done, political will being what it is. The great hope is that our children can, at an early age, be shown what is common to us all, that with opened minds they come to recognise that this will give them a share of the wider whole.

As India is railed against for the dreadful things that now too often happen, it can help to recognise that the other side of the coin exists. And that I have been lucky to experience it.”

This narrative governed by mutual respect, of a sharing of cultures and spaces, this fineness that shows India’s “profoundly pluralistic dimension” is what we need to valorize, to preserve and to internalize as we chart our future course. The world waits and watches expectantly, for lest we forget, India encompasses many parables of human experience that hold lessons for men and women everywhere. That is the power of her example. And, it is for the youth of India, our demographic dividend, on whom our hopes rest for the invigoration of our democratic system, to welcome ideas, new technologies for development from the outside world, to embrace a dialogue of cultures and civilizations, to say no to ghettoization of groups like women, and to sweep clean the accumulated detritus of centuries that strangles progress, to uphold our Constitution, and to see through the glass clearly and objectively as we chart the way forward.

Thank you.