

INTERCASTE MARRIAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF TORAJA: Towards Contextual Theology Of Intercaste Marriage In Toraja

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Abstract

Intercaste marriage is also one of the crucial problems face by an ethnic group called Toraja, an ethnic group which belongs to the province of South Sulawesi in Indonesia. Although according to the Declaration of Human Rights Article 16.1/2 that marriage is an independent decision, but it should wait when comes to the lives of the Toraja. Although it is also specifically explained according to the 1974 Marriage Law in Indonesia that the validity of marriage can only be legally recognized when performed according to the religion of both couples, so that religion can be considered as the main issue for the Indonesian when comes to the issue of marriage, but it is clear that it is not the case for the Toraja. The main issue lies on caste, as the Toraja also consists of four castes which derived from the indigenous belief, *Aluk Todolo*, which is believed as something transcendental-ontological, therefore inviolable even through marriages. However, as Christianity has become the most dominant religion embraced by the Toraja, therefore it is worthy to ask the roles of Christian teachings in their lives. the question posed: "What is a liberative theological approach to the intercaste marriage in Toraja?" The voices from the margins, of the intercaste couples, have revealed how they have been struggling with the discriminatory acts they have received even from their fellow Church members (pastors, elders in society and lay people of the church). They have started to ask the roles of Christ's love which has set His people free from all kind of jail in this world, and that Christ Himself has demonstrated that all people are equal before Him. This article aims to show the lived experiences of the intercaste couples in Toraja, and how their voices could become the starting point for the Toraja Church to construct a liberative contextual theology of intercaste marriage, assisted by the approaches of feminist liberation theology (which always focuses on the lived experiences) and postcolonial criticism which has helped to identify the Toraja subaltern. Furthermore, the results are also helpful to contribute some concrete recommendations for the Toraja Church to be taken against their intercaste couples and commit to stand to advocate them, and especially to do some pastoral care to recover their condition both mentally and spiritually.

Keywords: intercaste marriage, contextual theology, cultural, toraja

INTRODUCTION

Intercaste marriage has been a perpetual problem faced by many, especially those who are coming from the hindus areas like India, where caste system has been part of the society. Hence, the term caste used here may not be familiar for the Toraja people, as in Toraja it is known as *Tana'*, a term that literally means stick or peg, actually

used to mark a boundary in the rice field or of a land. However, it is also used metaphorically, that is to divide layers in society according to the appropriate level.¹ According to the Encyclopedia of Anthropology, the term caste comes from the Portuguese *casta* (*bread, lineage*), and was coined by Portuguese travellers to India in reference to the social, economic and religious systems they witnessed.² Meanwhile, according to Oxford Dictionary, the term refers to any of the Hindu social classes, a social system based on differences in family origin, rank, wealth, etc., Therefore, I insist to use it here for its parity when used in Toraja context (with its differences in society).

This differentiation in society, particularly when comes to the issues of marriages has raised critiques. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 16.1/2 states that marriage is an independent decision.³ However, for the context of Indonesia, the validity of marriage is governed by the 1974 Marriage Law, which stipulates that marriage can only be legally recognized when performed according to the religion of both couples. In fact, religion is the main issue in marriage in Indonesia, as described in the recent dissertation by Ebenheser.⁴

Nonetheless, it would not be the exact case for the Indonesians who belong to the ethnic group called Toraja; the main issue lies not primarily in religion but on caste (*tana'*). In pre-colonialism, it obviously caused no restlessness, as the Toraja was truly faithful adherents of local belief called *Aluk Todolo*, a belief that teaches its adherents to believe in *tana'* as transcendental-ontological,⁵ hence inviolable even through marriages. Aware of this situation, Antonie van de Loosdrecht's⁶ changed his strategy in Christianizing the Toraja. He adapted himself with hierarchical system in society, and found it possible to rationalize their condition in biblical terms with Pauline

¹ Theodorus Kobong, *Gospel and Tongkonan: Incarnation, Contextualization and Transformation* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2008), 40; original version is in German: *Evangelium und Tongkonan. Eine Untersuchung über die Begegnung zwischen christlicher Botschaft und der Kultur der Toraja* (Ammersbek-Hamburg: Verlag an der Lottbek, 1989).

² Ramdas Lamb, *Encyclopedia of Anthropology: Caste System* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication, 2006).

³ The United Nations. *Universal Declaration Human Rights*. <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights>. Accessed on 25th January 2021.

⁴ Trimargono Ebenheser, *Interfaith Marriage: A Study of Contextual Church Polity in the Religiously Plural Context of Indonesia*. Ph.D. Disseration. (Amsterdam-Groningen: PThU, 2020).

⁵ Kobong, *Gospel and Tongkonan*, 40.

⁶ Antonie van de Loosdrecht was the first Dutch Missionary sent by Gereformeerde Zendingbond (GZB, 1913).

exhortation, that masters and slaves must each know their roles.⁷ Eventually, the steady system was threatened by the Toraja's encounter with Dutch military and missionaries, which in my observation, this is one of the reasons why the contemporary Christian Toraja have no clear understanding against caste system in society. On the one hand the Christian Toraja have put their faith in Christ as their Savior who has demonstrated love and equality, but on the other hand they are still strongly bound to the values inherited by the local belief, *Aluk Todolo*, which principally contrasting the core of Christianity's tenets.

The lived experiences of the intercaste marriage couples have shown how more evident the gaps are among the church members, that those coming from lower caste families are clearly treated discriminatively, makes it visible the presence of a "solid wall" dividing the body of Christ in the church. Similar to the condition faced by most intercaste couples in India which can be brutally crushed even before it can bloom, the intercaste marriage couples in Toraja are mostly unable to act as "normal couples" in general; their fundamental rights and needs are limited, both in church and in society, such as to be elected as presbyters, to live as husband and wife in peace and harmony (they have to choose: divorce or being driven out of the village and receive the consequences of not being considered anymore as part of the family), and even worse, threatened to be killed by the society.

A theology student of Christian University of Indonesia in Toraja talked about her experiences marrying a man of lower caste, and she finally ended up with disappointment, that she has no longer been involved in any of family's occasions.⁸ Although there has been national law on marriage, but for the Toraja, marriage is an important aspect from which man and woman can develop sustenance (*dalle'*) and obtain offspring (the continuity of their lineage, an opportunity to preserve their family heirlooms, hence demanding specific [local] criteria).⁹ In general, both men and women of lower castes experience more subtle and well-structured impacts in church and society. They are the identified "primary victims" who have undergone discriminative treatments, which in postcolonial studies identified as the 'subaltern'

⁷ Elim Wilsen Taruk, *Towards True Transformation: An Attempt to Analyze the Understanding and Practice of Rambu Solo' as An Intercultural-Theological Challenge*. Master Thesis. (Goettingen: Goettingen University, 2016), 27.

⁸ Shared by Indrawati, a theology student of Christian University of Indonesia, during discussion in our Intercultural Theology class, November 2020.

⁹ Taruk, *Towards True Transformation*, 14.

(the victims or the oppressed or the colonial subject). Nevertheless, women's position is exacerbated by the stereotype as belong to the second class. Indeed, the problem of intercaste marriage is complex; gender and class intersect in the production of inequality, which again informed by postcolonial and feminist studies as intersectionality. It is understood as the interaction between gender, race and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power.¹⁰

Given the research is done in postcolonial context, so it is here that postcolonial studies and feminist liberation theology can become the relevant approaches to be employed, given the needs of the problems for theoretical concepts and theories that challenge the oppressive and destructive spirit of both global and local colonialism are conceived in these both approaches. Therefore, based on the aforementioned background, as Christians confronted by the discriminatory facts experienced by the men and women of intercaste marriage in Toraja context, especially also in the church, and by reflecting on the broader postcolonial and feminist theology criticisms, the urgent question to be raised is: "What is a liberative theological approach to the intercaste marriage in the context of Toraja Church against the background of Toraja society and history?" In fact, the church has so far been silent on how to deal with this issue, and it can be seen by the absence of church documents or even orders concerning intercaste marriage. Although some of the church members have discreetly started to complain about the discriminative acts, in fact, there is such pressure to accept this condition as normal and unchangeable. Indeed, from the preceding explanation of the surrounding historical socio-political and religious aspects, church's stance against discussing the issue of intercaste marriage can be understood. However, to my opinion, the church should not remain silent any longer but face the challenge.

Marriages in the Context of Toraja Society

Just as birth, marriage is also an important aspect in the lives of the Toraja.¹¹ It is considered so because marriage is an opportunity to develop sustenance (*dalle'*), and

¹⁰ Eleonora Dorothea Hof, *Reimagining Mission in the Postcolonial Condition: A Theology of Vulnerability and Vocation at the Margins* (Amsterdam-Groningen: PThU, 2016), 156.

¹¹ The term Toraja I use in this writing is already referring to the plural form of the people of Toraja.

through marriage, the husband and wife can obtain offspring.¹² In the context of Toraja, marriage (*rampanan kapa'*) is part of *Aluk Rambu Tuka'* (provisions of thanksgiving). It is highly valued as it is the beginning of a husband and a wife to develop their lives by establishing *tongkonan* for their descendants.¹³ Similar to this, Roxanna Waterson has also collected significant information on marriages in Toraja society. When a couple marry, they set up their own household, and its independence marked by the establishment of their own hearth.¹⁴ To marry means *mendapo'*, 'to make a hearth', and that marriage is also referred to as the 'planting' of a hearth (*tananan dapo'*).¹⁵ The hearth as a central image of the marriage process, with its overlapping connotations of household, reproduction and nurturance, has powerful resonances in many Austronesian societies, including in Toraja, the hearth is at the heart of both the house and the marriage.

By taking the importance of marriage into consideration, in July 1981, Toraja Church mandated the Toraja Church Institute of Theology to conduct a research on marriage (*rampanan kapa'*), to prove the significance of its values in its interaction with the church and society. However important the marriage was, the rites and the ceremonies for *rampanan kapa'* were still the modest ones, and this goes hand in hand with the explication by Waterson. The marriage ceremony was traditionally very muted and small scale affair; it is even possible for a couple to commence living together with only the most minimal ritual recognition of their union, before having a marriage ceremony years later. She took example from her source person who witnessed that a marriage should be allowed to grow from small beginnings, and must not 'grow like the banana flower' (*labo' puso*) which starts out large and then shrinks as the fruits develop.¹⁶ Consequently, as there were no great exchanges of wealth involved, divorce was relatively easy and most people would marry again sooner or later.

However, this model of the modest scale of weddings has changed dramatically, as since the coming of Dutch military and missionaries, the Toraja finally encountered modernity, and that the Christian marriages became elaborate occasions for conspicuous display, especially for town dwellers.¹⁷ Furthermore, the perpetual problems inherited

¹² Taruk, *Towards True Transformation*, 14.

¹³ Kobong, *Evangelium und Tongkonan*, 62.

¹⁴ Waterson, *Paths and Rivers*, 243.

¹⁵ Waterson, *Paths and Rivers*, 243.

¹⁶ Waterson, *Paths and Rivers*, 243.

¹⁷ Waterson, *Paths and Rivers*, 243.

from generation to generation last until today's generation, including to the Christian Toraja, where conflicts can occur when marriage takes place across rank boundaries or between families of different areas,¹⁸ which can potentially raise parental opposition because of differences in rank or some other reasons. There is no objection to marriages across generation which do occur occasionally.

In the past, it was also widely claimed that marriage age was later: men often did not marry before the age of thirty, and women till they were twenty or twenty five. The reasons were that they were expected to be mature enough before they could marry. But nowadays, marriage age in the villages is often younger and a woman of twenty-five or so is considered to be 'too old' to be a desirable match. Furthermore, most of the problems faced by women were sometimes, other men tried to take advantage of such women by visiting them at night but evading marriage. But, what was the worst aspect of all? In spite of the tolerant attitude to premarital sexuality which were formerly typical, women were still the ones who received public opinion that tended to penalize the women more than the men when affairs went wrong.¹⁹ Even so, most of these women did marry eventually, although they had to experience some shame attached to the birth of a child out of wedlock. However, once married, divorce on these women could still happen, but with little difficulty in remarrying again. In fact, it is rare for any adults to stay single for very long.

On the other side, it was also uncommon in the past for aristocratic families to betroth their children in childhood. In most cases, the aim was to secure a marriage with a cousin in order to keep family property together, which was known in various terms: *dipasikampa* (made to wait for each other), *dipasitandai bitti'* (marked out for each other while small). These betrothals usually took place while the children were five years old or more, though they themselves would not be told of it until they reached puberty or began to show an interest in the opposite sex. They would then be informed in order to discourage them from forming another attachment. A feature of these betrothals was that the parents of each child would put aside some property for them, either rice field or buffaloes, so that when they marry they will already be provided for.

¹⁸ Waterson, *Paths and Rivers*, 245.

¹⁹ Waterson, *Paths and Rivers*, 248; comp. attitude intercaste marriage in India, Saroja Krishnaswamy and R. Kamath. "Measurement Of Attitude Toward Inter-Caste Marriage: Development of A Likert-Type Scale." *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* Vol.25, No.2 (1995): 125-45. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23029669>.

The betrothal was referred to as eanan dipasibali (a marrying together of property). However, when the couple at a later date divorces, the conjugal fund would be divided, and each would take back the part belonging to them.²⁰

As having been mentioned about the values and the importance of *rampanan kapa'*, therefore it should be built on honesty: *Tang dipakundunni bukunna loli, tang dipakalubambanni tangke pamuso'*. Marriage is just like cotton: beautiful, white and clean. Its holiness must be kept through harmony and peace (*karapasan*).²¹ Hence, to keep the harmony of a *rampanan kapa'*, the elders of the pertinent society (*to parengnge' or ambe' tondok*) would then decide the *kapa'*, a term used to express the possible sanctions which should be paid by the guilty side if in there is a divorce.²²

Interestingly, *kapa'* was made in accordance with customary provisions. However, it was not necessarily to be discussed (about the numbers of punishment) as it was already been decided by the social status of the pertinent couple. In Toraja society, there are (as it does still exist until today) four types of social class/*tana'*: *tana' bulaan* (highest class, those who are believed made of golden materials and are the descendants of the deity), *tana' bassi* (the free people, made of iron but still considered as the upper class, *tana' karurung* and *tana' kua-kua* (the lowest one, the level of the slaves – sudra in India). If the guilty party is from *tana' bulaan*, then the punishment would be 24 buffaloes; *tana' bassi* would be 6 buffaloes, *tana' karurung* with 3 buffaloes while the lowest one, *tana' kua-kua* or the slaves, it would be enough with only one pig.²³

Based on this explication, it is clear that for the Toraja, social status is so determinative and crucial when comes to marriage. Marriage is a high-valued thing, but *tana'* (social status) itself is the highest one, the most important aspect in the lives of the Toraja. This was the reason why S.B. Sarungallo declared that the culture of the Toraja will be totally vanished if the social status is ruined.²⁴ The Toraja believe that social status/caste/*tana'* in society is something given directly from God (*Puang Matua* – God the creator in the belief of *Aluk Todolo*). It is something transcendental-ontological, hence inviolable and unchangeable even through marriages. Meaning, an intercaste marriage or a marriage of man and woman with different castes would be a crucial

²⁰ Waterson, *Paths and Rivers*, 249.

²¹ Kobong, *Evangelium und Tongkonan*, 63.

²² Kobong, *Evangelium und Tongkonan*, 63.

²³ Kobong, *Evangelium und Tongkonan*, 64.

²⁴ Kobong, *Evangelium und Tongkonan*, 64.

problem for the Toraja; it is a difficult even not an acceptable thing. An intercaste marriage should be a threat towards the kinship, the thing that the aristocrat families have been keeping since their children were still small.

However, it is already clear that through the perspectives of Toraja society, *tana'* or caste system is the most important thing. When those all things above applied by the Toraja, especially those who are faithful adherents of ancestral belief, *Aluk Todolo*, there consequently nothing to be questioned, as they do it in accordance with their faith, in the values where their concepts and understanding are deeply rooted. All those visible things on surface are actually the expressions of their faith, including social caste/*tana'*. Hence, the further question to be raised: What would happen if the the values, rituals and all cultural aspects as production of the belief of *Aluk Todolo* are done by the outsiders, for instance, the Christians? Would it be the same when done by the original adherents of *Aluk Todolo*? What would be the impacts in Christians' life, both mentally and spiritually?

Intercaste Marriage in the Context of Toraja Church

When I mention intercaste marriage in the context of Toraja Church, that means marriages among Christian men and women of Toraja Church, and which also means, done after the encounter of Toraja society with Christianity (1913, brought by the Dutch Missionaries: GZB). During the time of GZB mission in Toraja, Loosdrecht was succeed in converting a significant number of the Toraja into Christianity, which fruit can still be seen and enjoyed until today. For the Toraja Church, Antonia van de Loosdrecht's²⁵ endeavor in spreading God's Words in the land of Toraja is a gift (as how we as Christians commonly think of the missionaries). Just as the previous apostles, van de Loosdrecht was willing to sacrifice to die bearing Christ's missions, and his death has been made a starting point for Toraja Church to proclaim: "From a small seed grows into a tree", which literally means from the struggle of a true Christian man grows so many believers in Toraja land (nowadays, Christian is the majority in both Tana Toraja and North Toraja). Indeed, with the all quality he had in him (his call and true intentions), Loosdrecht deserved to be ranked as a true *zendeling*. However, one should be able to see from other perspectives, that Loosdrecht was not fully aware of the working method he used in the field. He had a big problem, that he did not speak *bahasa*

²⁵ Antonia van de Loosdrecht was the first Dutch Missionary to come to the land of Toraja.

Toraja (local language), while the only language spoken by the locals at the time was the Toraja language. Therefore, that condition limited his communication with the locals and restricted his opportunity to understand the culture comprehensively. He was passionate to achieve quick results, that for him, the fruits (quantity) of his works were more important than the method itself.²⁶ He adapted himself with the hierarchical system in society, as he did not see it to contradict the Gospel. He found it possible to rationalize their condition in biblical terms with the Pauline exhortation, that masters and slaves must each know their own roles. Of course, from another side, Loosdrecht's position at that time can potentially raise questions, since he was a missionaries sent by the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, the Calvinist church. Just as his two other colleagues, J. Bleksma and van der Linde, they should have come with the spirit of pietism. In this case, only Bleksma and van der Linde who were so radical, that all Torajan cultures they witnessed at that time were mere paganism, hence must be abolished.

To me, this can be read as Loosdrecht's strategy to legitimate what he was doing. In fact, he was one day feeling disappointed by a nobility called Pong Maramba', from which he finally switched his attention to the oppressed society. He intensified his relation with the colonial government, to which he wished to support his efforts in transforming the culture. On the one hand he wanted to eradicate all rituals regarding death by the aid of the colonial government, but on the other, he thought it would be that easy to adapt with the social structures. Thus, it is clear that Loosdrecht did not even realize the holistic concept of Toraja belief. The Toraja began to fear that the core of their culture and values of life were about to be eradicated, so presumably, this was the reason why Loosdrecht was killed in 1917, only four years after his arrival in Toraja.²⁷

To my opinion, this is one of the reasons of the vague understanding among the contemporary Christian Toraja regarding the culture, let alone on social status or caste system in society. As Christians, we have received knowledge about Christ, our Savior, since we were little, and from there we put our faith in His kindness, generosity and loving and caring nature, that He has liberated us from all kinds of oppression, from all kinds of fear and all manifestation of jail in the world, which of course, can be

²⁶ Taruk, *Towards True Transformation*, 31.

²⁷ Taruk, *Towards True Transformation*, 32.

manifested in fellow humans' suffering due to slavery and discriminatory acts done by those who put themselves as the superior ones. In Christ, the Christians have put their faith that Jesus has proclaimed the value of all human beings, that they are all equal, and that everybody should treat others with love, compassion and most importantly, as the image of God. Therefore, equality, equity and love are all important according to Christ's teachings for His believers.

However, the discriminative acts experienced by the intercaste marriage couples in Toraja Church have caused them to ask the roles of Christ's teachings to their rights as human beings, and of course, to their Christian marriage lives. They find it difficult to comprehend the dominant theology practiced by their Toraja Church members, who are still strongly bound to the values rooted in the old belief (*Aluk Todolo*, on caste system). A woman of intercaste marriage who wished her name to be kept anonymously, told her bitter experience from 8 years ago. At first, she was reluctant to share, but having listened to the objective of the research, she finally decided to speak up and even openly continued to tell one of her desires, that is to meet good ears for her stories, her bitter experiences in the past. Her voice changed into a bit more emotionally, to which I convinced myself that her voice has somehow represented the lived experiences and feeling of her fellow intercaste marriage couples. She was lucky that her parents did not put any complains over her decision to marry a man of lower caste, that they all realized their position as Christ's children who should see others equally, regardless of their social, economic, educational background and so forth. Nevertheless, as she and her family were part of the society where they grew and located, the pressures then came from the side of the elders and some influencing figures in society. They were the ones who refused the woman to marry the man she was in love with, and discouraged her family to agree on it. Even so, the woman and her family were still determined with their decision, resulting in society's wrath that ended up with a threat of killing both woman and man if they would be brave enough to show up around the village. Meanwhile, her family was forced to leave the village as considered breaking the rules, so they moved to the neighboring district.²⁸

²⁸ This is just a similar experience of another young intercaste couple who have long decided to leave their village due to the threat and oppression they received. Comp. Rajib Lochan Dhar. "Intercaste Marriage: A Study from the Indian Context." *Marriage & Family Review* Vol.49, Iss.1 (2013): 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2012.714720>; Keera Allendorf and Arland Thornton. "Caste and Choice: The Influence of Developmental Idealism on Marriage Behavior." *American Journal of Sociology* Vol.121, No.1 (2015): 243-287. <https://doi.org/10.1086/681968>.

As clearly mentioned earlier, it was of course related to the concept of marriage the Toraja had during the pre-colonialism era, that intercaste marriage was not allowed because it was thought to be damaging the system of social order and kinship.²⁹ This means that spouses of different castes will encounter serious problems of being legally married. They will be vigorously opposed by traditional and social norms which are handled by the elders in society (*Ambe' Tondok*). Indeed, in today's reality, it remains all about superiority and inferiority, that upper caste families are not willing to share their "dignity" to those considered lower than them, or, as S.B. Sarungallo mentioned, that Toraja Culture will be totally vanished when the social system is ruined, including when it is ruined through the mixed relationship of men and women of different castes. Therefore, it is still something really taboo even to the Christian Toraja, as they still hang on to the concept according to the belief in *Aluk Todolo*, that level in society was given directly from heavenly above, transcendental-ontological, hence unchangeable even through marriages. So, when the other way around happens, that a lower caste woman marrying a man of upper class, the woman will remain in her initial status and position. During all cultural events and in society activities, she will still be dealing with all duties belong to the lower class or the slaves, with her husband sitting on particular place of the upper class (*to parengnge'/to makaka/tokapua*), watching her doing her all duties as a woman of lower caste. Meanwhile, in the church, she has no access to be elected as a presbyter due to her social status. Consequently, both men and women of intercaste marriage are experiencing the same situation, which according to postcolonial studies, they are indeed the identified primary victims, the oppressed ones, or as Spivak pointed out: "the subaltern."³⁰

Furthermore, based on the reflection, voice and the complains informed by the anonymous woman of intercaste marriage above, and from her fellow intercaste couples' experiences, of course, Toraja Church has been given alarm about the lived experiences of its members, reflecting their Christian's faith into their daily marriage lives. They would have asked how to negotiate their faith with their marriage and the behaviors of their fellow body of Christ, who still treat others brutally and

²⁹ Waterson, *Paths and Rivers*, 234-245.

³⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg's edited collection, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1988). Macmillan, 1988), 271-313.

discriminatively, but their decision to better leave the village and the society where they grew up has indicated their so-called “resistance” toward the existing embraced values and behaviors both in society and in the church, which also means, they have found something wrong in the church as the body of Christ. At the same time, this would be the starting points for the Toraja Church to figure out an alternative theological approach to the cases of intercaste marriage among its members, given the church has so far been silent on this issue, proven by the absence of church documents regarding intercaste marriage, and that there is almost no information and critiques raised by the pastors themselves when intercaste marriage happens in their congregation.

Evaluation from broader Postcolonial and Feminist Liberation Theology based on the very voices of the Toraja Subaltern

Men and women of intercaste marriage in Toraja Church have been identified as the Toraja subaltern. Usually, it is woman who we know placed as the victims pursuant to the stigma shared in society about women as the second class. But in this case of intercaste marriage, it is clear that it can be man or woman. Therefore, the issue is indeed complex, as gender and class intersect in the production of inequality. It involves not only men but also women, and at the same time still inseparable from race, class and power in society. In postcolonial and feminist studies, this theory known as intersectionality, understood as the interaction between gender, race and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these in terms of power,³¹ which of course, have been undergone by the intercaste couples.

The very voices of the Toraja subaltern have confirmed that they are not fine due to the all production of inequality in society, hence they are in need of help in terms to be advocated in their condition regarding their decision, and to have opportunity to speak up their stories. In Spivak’s seminal article, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”,³² Spivak suggested that it is impossible for us to recover the voice of the victims of the ‘subaltern’ or the oppressed ones, especially that it historically intersected with patriarchy, which

³¹ Dorothea Hof, *Reimagining Mission in the Postcolonial Condition*, 156; Pralip Kumar Narzary and Laishram Ladusingh. "Discovering the Saga of Inter-caste Marriage in India." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* Vol.54, Iss.4 (2019): 588-599. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909619829896>.

³² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg’s edited collection, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1988). Macmillan, 1988), 271-313.

in fact, make it extremely difficult for the subaltern to speak or be heard (especially for women).³³ Although the further question: "Can the voice of the subaltern be represented by the intellectual?" is not unique anymore to the study of colonialism, but it should have its powerful meaning when applied in Toraja context, especially when I think of the agenda of feminist liberation theology, that is for the ordinary church people doing theology, as the actors of theology, that they can and should become the agents of theology, too (not only the professionals).

Therefore, by opening the gate for them to speak and express their feelings, pain, hopes and theological reflection, one should be able to recommend the church for a healing methodology to be taken as part of church responsibility of pastoral care, rather than letting its member becomes the "lost sheep". The very voices of the Toraja subaltern have sounded the siren for the church to wake up and realize the needs of its flock, and interestingly, their ability to reflect on God's words in its appropriate implementations on daily basis and how they confronted the unjust behaviors of their fellow church members also speak in itself that indeed, church can also be wrong; church can make mistakes, so this should also be a chance for the church for doing self-criticism.

As in most cases of intercaste marriage in Toraja context, the couples are being driven out of the village, it is consequently time to reflect and learn from the Indian context, the country with the most well-known cases of intercaste marriage. Some activist' names like Ambedkar³⁴ and Periyar Ramaswamy³⁵ may not be as famous as Mahatma Gandhi, but these two figures were heroes to many, especially to the Dalits, the lower caste people or those who were addressed as the untouchables. Through their social and humanity works, they got succeed in inspiring their followers to continue take the mission to abolish and fight over injustice, even to eradicate caste system.

Recently in February 2019, the periyarist has made their dream come true to establish a shelter for the intercaste couple in Trichy, Tamil Nadu. It is built to offer safety for the intercaste couples, and to make sure that they receive supports they need as they have tried to escape the danger posed by their family and society. These

³³ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 2005), 192.

³⁴ Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, was an Indian politician and social reformer. He inspired the Dalit Buddhist movement and campaigned against social discrimination towards the untouchables.

³⁵ Commonly known as Periyar (his follower was then known as Periyarist), was an Indian social activist, Politian and the one who started the Self-Respect Movement.

followers of periyar are mostly the intercaste couples themselves, therefore they know exactly how it feels and they recognize the burdens and pain their fellow couples are bearing. Ergo, based on their very personal or lived experiences as intercaste couples, they themselves have to make sure that the other couples are also in serious struggles. Therefore, the shelter is not only built for the old and just-married couples, but also for the yet-to-be married couples across the state, with a board in it that proudly says '*Saadhi madham ozhiya kalappu mannamey theeryu*', which means, 'for caste and religion to be banished, intercaste marriage is the only solution.' Following Periyar political thoughts and ideologies, they have been working in hosting and helping the intercaste couples not only in the shelter but also in their own houses or offices. And in the end, when the couples are about to leave, they have to make sure first that the couples have already been equipped enough mentally to start a new life.³⁶

A possible Contextual Theology for the Intercaste Marriage in Toraja

The acts for humanity done by the periyarist in India indeed go hand in hand with Jesus' mission in His followers. Jesus' first sermon in Luke 4 is a powerful message that should be able to enliven the Christians' awareness of showing love and compassion to others, of how to spread the good news to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to bring deliverance to the captives and guarantee the liberty of the oppressed ones. I reflected on this text and found that the Toraja subaltern fulfills the criteria to be the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives who are experiencing oppression. They are captives of society values and ideology of social system which has really been torturing its own society. They are captives of their society interest and obsession of enjoying an endless superiority, but at the same time, the society and the church themselves are captives of their own obsessions and silence at once. Therefore, all parties involved in this issue of intercaste marriage in Toraja are in need of help; all are in need to be renewed, need to repent, especially for the church, in order to be able to spread the good news and continue the tasks of a shepherd through pastoral care. As known in general that pastoral care should fulfill at least four functions, such as: healing,

³⁶ A room of hope: A new shelter in Trichy is offering safety for intercaste couples, The News Minute, published on Tuesday, February 19, 2019, https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/room-hope-new-shelter-trichy-offering-safety-intercaste-couples-96978?amp=#amp_tf=From%20%251%24s&aoh=16284265647433&referrer=https%3A%2Fwww.google.com, accessed on February 2020.

sustaining, guiding and reconciling.³⁷ Healing is a pastoral care that aims in guiding a person with bad mental and spiritual health, and restore it to initial condition; sustaining is part of pastoral care that aims in giving support to the person who is experiencing a serious problem; guiding is a function in pastoral care that aims in recommending steps that can be chosen as the decision that can potentially change the life of the person; reconciling, is part of pastoral care that aims in reconciling the relationship among the all conflicted parties, including the relationship with God. In the case of intercaste marriage, of course these four functions are significantly needed, just as the Periyarist has done through the shelter: in order to make them leave with better even recovered mental and spiritual health.

However, before the pastoral care can be done, it is better for the church to start thinking of a home of hope for its intercaste couple who have tried to escape the dangers they faced in their society and family, so that they would feel safe, loved and being cared for, but most importantly, for the church to bring back its members trust about its presence to be God's representative. Furthermore, by pondering on the rampant divorce cases in Toraja society in the past, Toraja church should also intensify its guidance on its members about the importance of marriage before God. Then last but not least, to prove its support, care and manifestation of repent for being silent for quite some time. Toraja Church can now start to figure out of publishing its official document on intercaste marriage, that it is something accepted and supported by the church (supported by adequate theological explanation on marriage and equality, for instance), and that Toraja pastors are ready to take the responsibility with of course, a step by step explanation and enlightenment over its members. If necessary, citing the motto from the Periyarist' shelter: *Saadhi madham ozhiya kalappu mannamey theeryu*: for caste and religion to be banished, intercaste marriage is the only solution.' The time has come, that all captives must be set free, and say goodbye to the mentality of colonialism.

³⁷ William A. Clebesch and Charles R. Jeakle, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*, 33-36; Sarah R. Brauner-Otto and Lisa Pearce. "The Gendered Relationship between Parental Religiousness and Children's Marriage Timing." *Sociology of Religion* Vol.81, No.4 (2020): 413-438. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/sraa014>.

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