

## Human Rights Concerns in the Lukan Infancy Narratives (Luke 1: 5-2: 52)

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### INTRODUCTION

The recent demonstration against the G8 summit at Edinburgh and the slogans like, "Some people eat nothing, because G8 everything," "Drop the debt," and "We're making poverty history"<sup>1</sup> affirms the increasing awareness among international communities to protect the inalienable rights and inviolable dignity of human beings. Ever since the adoption of Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations in 1948, a growing body of works on human rights have come from different quarters. But only at the dawn of twentieth century a few articles on human rights from the New Testament perspective have been published.<sup>2</sup> This plausibly the human right concerns became the key topic in the international forums only during the close of the 20th century.

Luke, among all other New Testament writers, seems to pay more attention to social problems. Until recently, the Gospel of Luke has been studied from the historical, theological, and literary perspectives. Most of the major commentaries on Luke have taken such perspectives. The social-sciences critical approach on Luke has paved a paradigm shift in the Lukan studies. The social scientists began to ask more concrete social questions and started studying the Biblical text through the pre-industrial Mediterranean lens. The social-scientific criticism exposes the oppressive structures and the dehumanised condition of the poor and powerless in Luke's Palestine.

Luke's concern for the poor, the marginalized, the social outcasts, and women are interpreted in terms of liberation but not in terms of human rights. This paper proposes to analyse and assess the human rights concerns in Lukan infancy narratives (Lk. 1: 5-2: 52).

### 1. The Social Background and Unity of Luke 1: 5-2: 52

The social world of Luke's Palestine was made up of two social classes; viz. "the

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elite" (5-10%) and "the non-elite" (90-95%).<sup>3</sup> Politically Luke's Palestine was under the Roman colonial power (Lk. 3: 1).<sup>4</sup> Hence, the Roman governors intervened in the local administration any time they deemed fit.<sup>5</sup> E. Lohse maintains that the Roman officials had used their position to enrich themselves.<sup>6</sup> As Oakman observes, the land of the first century Palestine was directly or indirectly under the control of Caesar or the people of the Rome.<sup>7</sup> The Roman taxation on the colonies plundered the economy of the native population.<sup>8</sup> The Magnificat (Lk. 1: 46-55) and the Lukan account of the census of Quirinius (Lk. 2: 2), plausibly show the economic exploitation of the Roman Empire. Under the colonial powers the privileges and the rights of the native population were negated, however, the elite groups who supported the colonial powers enjoyed certain amount of rights.

In that society, the social status of a person was not only based on one's economic condition but also based on one's power in the society.<sup>9</sup> The elites, the tiny minority, controlled the agricultural lands and its productions and governed the political, social and religious systems.<sup>10</sup> The human rights in Luke's Palestine were determined on the basis of economic and religious traditions, gender, and racial purity. As Moxnes observes, in Luke's Palestine, "One's position was not based on universal human rights but on one's place in a personal hierarchy."<sup>11</sup>

Most of the studies on Lukan infancy narratives have not taken the social milieu of Luke 1: 5-2: 52 seriously. The commentators such as Plummer,<sup>12</sup> Marshall,<sup>13</sup> Fitzmyer,<sup>14</sup> Tannehill,<sup>15</sup> Nolland<sup>16</sup> and Johnson<sup>17</sup> have applied historical, redactional and literary criticism to study Lukan infancy narratives. They have shown the social milieu of Luke whenever they found it useful to highlight the theological significance. Thus, the dehumanising social structure was not seen as violation of human rights. Scholars like J.B. Green have emphasized the dehumanising social structure.<sup>18</sup> He has interpreted Luke's concern for the downtrodden and deprived in terms of liberation.<sup>19</sup> Green, however, has overlooked the deprivation and the dehumanisation in Luke 1: 5-2: 52 as human rights violation.

The social-scientific critical studies on Luke's infancy narratives show that the first century Mediterranean society was characterized by social values ("honour and shame") and social relations ("patron and client"). Honour and shame exhibited one's station in the society. As Malina and Neyrey observe, in the first century Mediterranean world one's honour was determined by one's power, gender, and position on the social scale.<sup>20</sup> Shame, on the other hand, is loss of honour, reputation and respect.<sup>21</sup> The patron and client displayed one's economical and political privileges in the society. Moxnes maintains, "Patron-client relation is based on a very strong element of inequality and difference in power. A patron has a monopoly on certain positions and resources that are of vital importance for his client."<sup>22</sup>

In such a society only a few enjoyed the privileges and rights and a vast majority of people lived without them. Luke's concern for the poor, the marginalized, the social outcasts, and for women betrays his interest in the restoration of human dignity and he thereby upholds human rights. The social, economic and political conditions of Luke's Palestine and his concern for the oppressed and the marginalized make the present study worth investigating.

The atmosphere of Luke 1: 5-2: 52 shows Lukan Palestine was under the Roman colonial power. The narrative starts in the days of Herod the Great, who was a vassal of Roman colonial power (Lk. 1: 5). The fundamental rights like freedom of speech, movement were denied in his reign.<sup>23</sup> The songs of Mary (Lk. 1: 46-55) and Zechariah (Lk.1: 68-79) reflect the political atrocity of Herod's reign. The song of Mary is a revolutionary song against Roman colonialism.<sup>24</sup> The census was conducted in the Roman colonies for taxation purposes.<sup>25</sup> The Lukan account of census during the governorship of Quirinius infers the burden of heavy Roman taxation on colonies (Lk. 2: 1-3).

Luke 1: 5-2: 52 is treated by most of the Lukan scholars as the first major section of Gospel of Luke. H. Conzelmann, on the other hand, excludes the infancy narratives in his *The Theology of St. Luke*. As for him, some passages in Lk. 1-2 are in direct contradiction with the rest of the Gospel.<sup>26</sup> However, scholars like R.E. Brown, Marshall, Green, and others strongly disagree with Conzelmann's thesis.<sup>27</sup> Brown maintains that the infancy narratives function as a transitional narrative from the story of Israel to the story of Jesus.<sup>28</sup> Green maintains that even though Luke 1: 5-2: 52 is a self-contained unit it is incomplete in itself and completely dependent on the narrative that follows.<sup>29</sup> Fearghail observes, that Luke 1: 5-2: 52 and 3: 1-4: 44 form a literary unity and the themes that are introduced in Luke 1: 5-4: 44 run throughout Luke-Acts.<sup>30</sup> All these scholars convincingly argue for the literary unity of Luke. Thus, Conzelmann's thesis is not convincing.

As Tannehill observers, the infancy narratives give a preview of God's purpose, which is unfolded in the rest of the Gospel.<sup>31</sup> Marshall maintains that Luke in the infancy narratives shows how Jesus was born as Son of God and destined to bring salvation.<sup>32</sup>

Here in the first major section (Lk. 1: 5-2: 52) Luke introduces the purpose of the Gospel, salvation to all. God and Jesus are called "Saviour" (Lk. 1: 47; 2: 11) and the mission of Jesus is to bring salvation to both Jews and non-Jews (Lk. 1: 69; 2: 30-32; cf. 1: 76-77). It is important to see while introducing the purpose, whether Luke highlights the social, economic and political oppression of the people and thereby underlines his concern for human rights.

## 2. Salvation as Human Rights

The Septuagint translators translated term  $\gamma\acute{\sigma} \text{ } (\rho\psi\theta)$  as *sōtēria* ( $\sigma\omega\tau\eta\rho\iota\alpha$ ).<sup>33</sup>  $\gamma\acute{\sigma} \text{ } (\rho\psi\theta)$  is used in the sense of deliverance that comes through an intervention of a third person who rescues the oppressed from the oppressor.<sup>34</sup> According to R.L. Hubbard, the root  $\gamma\acute{\sigma} \text{ } (\rho\psi\theta)$  means brings help to people in the midst of their trouble.<sup>35</sup> The concept of salvation in the Old Testament is understood in terms of physical than spiritual.<sup>36</sup> In the New Testament, salvation is understood more of spiritual that is deliverance from sin and entering into the kingdom of God.<sup>37</sup> How does Luke use the term salvation in the infancy narratives? In Lukan infancy narratives the term salvation is used in the sense of both political deliverance (Lk. 1:71) and forgiveness of sin (Lk. 1: 77).

As Marshall rightly observes, the political and spiritual dimensions of salvation are intertwined in the Lukan concept of salvation.<sup>38</sup> Green convincingly argues that Luke does not dichotomise salvation as spiritual and physical but it embraces the totality of life.<sup>39</sup> It is the post-enlightenment Western culture that separated religion from social, economic and political life of people and interpreted the salvation as spiritual. The ancient societies never separated religion from social, cultural, economic and political life.<sup>40</sup> This can be evidently displayed in the great Indian epics *the Mahabharata* of Vyasa and *the Ramayana* of Valmiki. As Horsley puts it, either the Old Testament or the Gospel tradition did not show the separation of religion from social, cultural, economic and political life.<sup>41</sup>

The Lukan audience did not escape from the political oppression of the Roman colonialism but suffered with the rest of the subjects of the Roman Empire. When human beings are chained physically they cannot just enjoy the spiritual freedom in its fullness. Thus the spiritual freedom calls for a holistic deliverance from all oppressive forces both spiritual and physical. Thus, it means restoration of human rights. This restored life comes from God. Mary recognizes God as Saviour (Lk. 1: 47). The promise of the birth of the Son of God shows God now intervenes in human history to accomplish his ancient purpose, salvation to all.<sup>42</sup> According to Luke, God prepared this salvation before all the peoples (Lk. 2: 31). Nolland maintains that the verb "to prepare" (Lk. 2: 31) is used here in the Semitic manner, meaning "God has set up" or "establish it on the public stage."<sup>43</sup> Whom does Luke refer as "all the peoples" in Lk. 2:31?

Basing on Acts 4: 25, 27, Kilpatrick argues that "peoples" (*λαοι*) in Lk. 2: 31 refer to the tribes of Israel.<sup>44</sup> As Farris rightly argues the language in Acts 4: 25, 27 is influenced by Psalm 2.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Luke used the term "people" in Acts 15: 14 to denote the new people of God that includes both Jews and non-Jews. Thus, Kilpatrick's argument is not convincing. Most likely, Luke here had Isaiah 52:10 in his mind. Luke seemingly modified "all the nations" (*πάντων τῶν ἔθνων*) of Isaiah into "all [the] peoples" (*πάντων τῶν λαῶν*). In that case, "people" denotes non-Jews. Marshall observes that Luke probably had changed "Gentile" (*ἔθνη*) to "people" (*λαος*) to avoid the repetition of "Gentile" (*ἔθνη*) in Lk. 2: 32. Luke uses both *ethnē* and *laos* to denote the Gentiles and the Jews together. This interpretation perhaps suggests *ethnē* as Gentiles. However, the juxtaposition of "of all people" and "people of Israel" in Luke 2: 32 probably the exposition of the term "peoples" in Luke 2: 31, thus "all the peoples" denotes both Jews and non-Jews.<sup>46</sup>

The historical intervention of God to bring salvation to all (both Jews and non-Jews) causes a reversal of human values.<sup>47</sup> Those who are designated as outcasts and lived in the margin, now by the birth of Christ the Saviour (Lk. 2: 11) are brought in the centre. It is not just the superiority of race or blood that makes a person "insider" or "outsider" but it is purely based on the economic and political factors. The present evil social system has designated people, those who are economically disadvantaged and politically powerless, as outcasts and pushed them into the margins and looted their fundamental rights.

Thus, Luke in the infancy narratives shows God's salvation restores human beings from their fallen and dehumanised conditions and grants them a dignified life here and now. The Lukan concept of salvation conveys the very meaning of the modern concept of human rights. How do people experience this salvation? In what sense does Luke interpret salvation?

### 3. The Political and Religious Rights

The pious and radical groups in Palestine revolted against the Roman colonialism. One such group was the Zealots. They were zealous for the Law and advocated a violent revolt - perhaps "the messianic holy war," against the Romans.<sup>48</sup> According to Ford, the infancy narratives present a Zealot flavour.<sup>49</sup> He argues that all the four hymns in the infancy narratives are militant hymns (Lk 1: 46-55, 68-79; 2: 14, 29-32).<sup>50</sup> However, labelling Zechariah, Simeon, and Anna as Zealots is not convincing because historically the Zealots movement started only in 6 C.E.<sup>51</sup>

Tannehill maintains that the themes that are introduced in the song of Mary (Lk. 1: 46-55) are later developed in the song of Zechariah (Lk. 1: 67-79).<sup>52</sup> Both the songs of Mary and Zechariah, perhaps reveal the deep-seated longing for the political freedom and rights of the common people. The song of Zechariah looks forward for the political freedom and rights (Lk. 1: 71, 73-74).<sup>53</sup> The song of Mary exhibits a reversal motif. This reversal is a reversal of political power (Lk. 1: 51-53). Stanley Jones calls the song of Mary a revolutionary document in the world (Lk. 1: 46-55).<sup>54</sup>

Marshall observes a shift of thought from Luke 1:46-49 to Luke 1: 51-54.<sup>55</sup> The use of aorist in Luke 1: 51-4 refers not to the past events in history but what is going to happen in consequence of what God had done to Mary.<sup>56</sup> The aorist should be understood as Hebrew prophetic perfect that is speaking the future as something that has already happened in the past.<sup>57</sup> The powerful (*δυναστος*) is removed, and the powerless and the lowly (*ταπεινος*) are lifted up; the rich is sent empty and the hungry is filled with good things (Lk.1: 52-53). God's gracious dealing with Mary's humble state (*ταπεινωσις*, Lk. 1: 48) is now compared with God's dealing with the low status of his people (*ταπεινος*, Lk. 1: 52).

The term "lowly" (*ταπεινος*) not only refers to the emotional state of a person but also refers to one's position and power.<sup>58</sup> *Tapeinos* (*ταπεινος*) is used in Hellenistic literatures as "cast down" or "oppressed."<sup>59</sup> Luke most likely uses the term to show the political oppression of the Jews. The term *dunastēs* (*δυναστος*) literally means "ruler." In Acts 8: 27, *dunastēs* is used to refer to court official. Here, it most likely refers to the oppressive Roman rulers. God will bring them down (*καθαίρειν*) from their thrones (*ἀπό θρόνων*, Lk. 1: 52). the verb *kathairein* (*καθαίρειν*) literally means "tear down," "overpower," and "conquer" thus it suggests a vigorous action.<sup>60</sup> The Roman colonialism had made a few rich and had sent many hungry (cf. Lk. 1: 53). Thus, Luke 1: 51-53 discloses an anti-colonial atmosphere and looks forward for a reversal of political order.<sup>61</sup>

The anti-colonial sentiment is very strongly expressed in the song of Zechariah (Lk. 1: 68-79). According to Green, Luke 1: 68, 71, 74 presents an Exodus typology.<sup>62</sup> This suggests a socio-political deliverance of God's people.<sup>63</sup> Farris argues that salvation in v. 71 embodies the national redemption.<sup>64</sup> What does it mean by national redemption? Who are these "enemies" and "[those] who hate" (οἱ μισουντες) in Luke 1: 71, 74? The Exodus motif in this passage looks forward to a new Exodus, the political deliverance from the Roman colonialism. The "enemies" are not identified but the context suggests that the Romans are in focus.<sup>65</sup> The phrase "from [the] hand" (vv. 71, 74) refers to the power of the oppressors.<sup>66</sup> The present participle "those who hate" (των μισουντες v.71) function as subject, thus makes a parallel with "enemies" (vv. 71, 74). Both the terms "enemies" and "[those] who hate" most likely refer to one group, likely the Romans.

The popular expectation of political freedom is to serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness (Lk. 1: 74). The verb "to serve" (λατρευειν, Lk. 1: 74) is used in the LXX in cultic sense.<sup>67</sup> In Luke, "to serve" is used in religious sense (Lk. 2: 37; 4: 8). Thus, "to serve" gives a religious significance that is the priestly service.<sup>68</sup> During this period, the priestly office was monitored and appointed by the Romans. It is a strong note for the religious rights. The Roman interference in the religious rights of the Jews often ends in conflict.<sup>69</sup> The songs of Mary and Zechariah unfold the popular notion of political and religious rights.

#### 4. The Economic Rights

The Roman censuses were conducted for taxation and control of the social groups.<sup>70</sup> It also symbolizes the Roman over-lordship.<sup>71</sup> The Jewish rulers paid tribute to the Roman emperor; Archelaus paid 600 talents, Antipas 200 talents and Philip 100 talents.<sup>72</sup> Rome had imposed two kinds of direct taxes on the colonies; they are, (1) a tax on agricultural production (*tributum soli*) and (2) a poll tax (*tributum capitis*).<sup>73</sup> Except children and the aged everyone - men, women and slaves - were to pay the poll tax. In Syria, men paid poll tax from the age of fourteen to sixty-five and women from twelve to sixty-five. In Egypt, it was from the age of fourteen to sixty or sixty-one for both sexes.<sup>74</sup> There is no record how the poll tax was collected from Palestine. Plausibly poll taxes were collected according to the manner of Syria.

The Lukan account of the census during the governorship of Quirinius has created a historical problem of the text (Lk. 2: 2). According to Josephus, Quirinius conducted the census in Judea in 6 C.E.<sup>75</sup> Has Luke mistakenly recorded the census of 6 C.E. as taken place during the time of Herod the Great? Pearson shows that Herod the client king of the Romans conducted census in Judea for the purpose of collecting taxes.<sup>76</sup> Heichelheim maintains that few years before the birth of Jesus Herod took a thorough survey of his kingdom.<sup>77</sup> As Pearson observes, Josephus in his works gives the indirect evidence of census and taxation that existed during the period of Herod.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, without a detailed and careful census taxation was not possible. However, the interpretation of Luke 2: 2 that Luke had mistakenly recorded the census of 6 C.E. does not fit into the historical context of chapter 2.

The adjective *prōtos* (πρωτος), in Lk. 2: 2 is translated in the English translations as “first” and the genitive absolute *hegemoneuontos tēs Syrias Kurēniou* (ἡγεμονευοντος τῆς Συριας Κυρηνιου, v.2) is translated in a temporal clause, “when Quirinius was governor of Syria.” Thus it seems there was no census conducted in Judea before Quirinius governorship in 6 C.E. According to Pearson, the genitive absolute does not express time rather it takes its sense from the preceding construction.<sup>79</sup> Pearson argues that the term *prōtos* functions in Luke 2: 2 as it does in John 1: 15, 30.<sup>80</sup> In John 1: 15, 30, *prōtos* means “before” or “earlier.” In Luke 2: 2, *prōtos* is used with comparative force, meaning “before.”<sup>81</sup> The lack of article before “registration/census” (ἀπογραφή) may refer to a local census conducted by Herod the Great on the direction of Caesar. As Nolland puts it, Luke probably distinguishes the census with the better known census conducted during the governorship of Quirinius.<sup>82</sup> Thus, Luke 2: 2 can be translated as “this registration was taken place before Quirinius was governor of Syria.” This translation gives more sense to the historical taxations during the time of Herod the Great.

Taxation had created outrage in Judea. Josephus mentions about Judas of Gamala<sup>83</sup> who rebelled against the census (cf. Acts 5: 37).<sup>84</sup> According to Judas, the census leads to complete slavery (ἀντικρυς δουλείαν).<sup>85</sup> F. Belo observes that the rich national wealth of Palestine made Palestine an economic self-sufficient state but the heavy taxation ruined the economy of the people.<sup>86</sup> The heavy taxation uprooted people, many lost their land and were forced into debt and slavery.<sup>87</sup> The agricultural land in the first century Palestine was controlled by Caesar or Romans. Oakman points out that the estates from the Hasmoneans in the Esdraelon plain and the Jericho area came under the direct ownership of Caesar, rest of the land came under the ownership of Romans but in practice the ruling elites who controlled the land acted as Roman agents.<sup>88</sup> The Roman colonialism had widened the gap between the “haves” and “have-nots.” In short, the Roman colonialism oppressed the colonies and ruined the economy of the locals. The setting on fire of the archives in Jerusalem, where the records of the debtors were kept, in 66 C.E. by the insurgents shows the seriousness of taxation.<sup>89</sup> Luke mentions the term “register” four times and its cognate in the infancy narratives (Lk. 2: 1-3, 5), this shows Luke’s concern for the economic rights.

## 5. The Rights of Equality

The infancy narratives begin with a godly family (Lk 1: 5-25). Luke puts Elizabeth equally with her husband. She is termed a daughter of Aaron, righteous and blameless (vv. 5-6). By giving such an additional note, Luke places her in a high status but she bore a stigma. Elizabeth was barren and aged (v.7). The word “order” in Greek is worth notable. Luke first records that “they had no child” (οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τέκνον, v.7), then he explains the reason for childlessness as “because Elizabeth was barren (καθοτι ἦν ἡ Ελισάβετ στέραια, v.7). It is not the advance age that is the reason for childlessness but the barrenness of Elizabeth.

Barrenness was considered as a punishment of God (Gen. 20: 17-18; cf. Gen. 29: 31; 30; 22; 1 Sam. 1: 6; Ps. 127: 3) and a symbol of shame and disgrace (v. 25). Nevertheless, Luke shows how God intervenes in one’s dishonourable status and

restores human dignity and rights. The promise of the child had removed her stigma and gave her an honourable place in the society. She said, "The Lord... took away the disgrace I have endured among my people" (v. 25). She had obtained the right of equality among other women.

The distinctive feature in Luke is that he always presents his material in pairs.<sup>90</sup> Apart from the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth he puts the song of Mary alongside the song of Zechariah (Lk. 1: 46-56, 68-79), and Simeon and Anna (Lk. 2: 25-38). Simeon and Anna had the gift of prophecy, Zechariah and Elizabeth come from the prestigious tribe, and the song of Mary and Zechariah are revolutionary songs. These are not merely pairs of stories but Luke's distinctive way of expressing the equality of men and women.

## 6. The Challenges and Christian Response

The economic policy of independent India is built upon three fundamental guidelines, they are: (1) protecting the Indian industry from foreign capital; (2) delivering the millions of poor from poverty and starvation; and (3) self-reliant development.<sup>91</sup> The structural adjustment that the central government introduced in 1990s has shaken the Indian economic policy. The Economic Survey 2002, claims that the percentage of people living below the poverty line had fallen from 36% in 1993-94 to 26% in 1999-2000.<sup>92</sup> A recent study, however, says that every fourth person in India lives below the poverty line.<sup>93</sup> According to the Second National Family Health Survey, 47% of children below the age of 5 years and 30% of population do not get nourishment as recommended by Indian Council of Medical Research.<sup>94</sup> While a huge number of people live in poverty, 65 million tonnes of food grains are stockpiled in the godowns of the Food Corporation of India.<sup>95</sup>

Poverty forces children to take up jobs in unorganised sectors. Although the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act 1976 bans child labour, yet there are about 20 million child workers in India, in which 87% children are from rural areas.<sup>96</sup> Child labour has created two major problems, first illiteracy and second low-income that perpetuates poverty.<sup>97</sup> Due to poverty children are forced into flesh trade. Result, there are 4 lakhs child sex workers in India today.<sup>98</sup> Privatisation and mechanization have made thousands jobless. Moreover, the loans that the government took from World Bank, International Monetary Fund and rich countries for development enslaved every Indian. Every Indian family has to pay Rs. 1, 400/- per annum as interest to the rich countries,<sup>99</sup> an economic colonialism. Poverty and debts have created inequality. Thus, globalisation deprives human dignity and rights.

Article 15 of the Constitution of India prohibits discrimination of any citizen on the ground of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth.<sup>100</sup> Article 16, promises equality of opportunity in public employment.<sup>101</sup> The gender discrimination, dowry deaths, sexual abuse, unmatched marriages, glorification of sati and female foeticide disclose that the constitutionally guaranteed privileges and rights have not fully materialized.

The literacy rate shows the unequal distribution of knowledge. A report shows that in 2001, the literacy rate of men was 75.85% but the women literacy rate was



54.16%.<sup>102</sup> Illiteracy and economic dependency force them to depend on men. Hence, they have no opinion of their own. For instance, without her will, she is forced to agree to abort female foetus. Result, the sex ratio is declining drastically. In 2001, the sex ratio was for every 1000 male there were 933-927 females.<sup>103</sup> Mohan Das and Debotosh Sinha observe that for every 100 men, 105 women should be born, that means there should be 512 million women in India, but there are only 489 million women. This shows that we are short of 23 million women.<sup>104</sup> Every year about 2 million female foetuses are being aborted in India.<sup>105</sup> Various reasons are suggested for the abortion of female foeticide. One of the primary reasons is that the family lineage only continues through a son.<sup>106</sup> This means the protection of ancestral property. A girl, on the other hand, is an economic burden. She is treated as a sex object.

In Rajasthan, 8-16 years old girls are given in marriage to men 50-60 years of age.<sup>107</sup> This causes early widowhood and they suffer life-long hardship and stigma. The religiously sanctioned temple prostitution, the Devadasi system, is a conspiracy against Dalit women by the caste Hindus.<sup>108</sup> Every year about 5,000 Dalit girls from Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra are dedicated as Devadasis.<sup>109</sup> A report on national crime shows that every 26 minutes one woman is molested, every 34 minutes one woman is raped, every 42 minutes one sexual harassment takes place, every 93 minutes one woman is killed and every 42 minutes one dowry death takes place.<sup>110</sup> Apart from social discrimination and gender injustice, rural women become victims of the deadly epidemic HIV/AIDS. This shows that even after enacting various laws, gender discrimination and injustice continues in India.

What I have pointed out are just a few burning Human Rights issues of the post-Independent India. How do we respond to such a situation? What is the role of the church? The Lukan infancy narratives inspire us to stand on the side of the oppressed, the poor, and the marginalized. They encourage us to voice for the voiceless. The church should take concrete steps to improve quality of human life. It is her duty to show the world that human beings are created in the "image of God," and being delivered from human depravity by the atonement of Jesus, thus they are free and equal in dignity and rights.

## Conclusion

Luke in the infancy narratives shows salvation as deliverance from all kinds of oppressive systems including political and economic. This salvation belongs to all. Thus, no one should be discriminated on the basis of gender or one's place of birth. Hence, the concept of human rights is explicitly expressed in this section (Lk. 1: 5-2: 52).

Luke 1: 5-2: 52 is very much relevant to the social, economic, political and religious context of the post-independent India. Luke shows that in the midst of violence, exploitation and deprivation the disciples of Jesus can bring hope. The liberating God in the person of Jesus Christ had intervened in that hopeless situation and restored human rights and dignity. God's mighty acts in Luke's Palestine give us hope and enable us to work for a just world – a world of equality, liberation, justice and peace.

## NOTES

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