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THE CANONIZATION OF MOTHER TERESA AND ITS RELEVANCE

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ABSTRACT: *mother teresa has been one of the most well-known personalities in India and also across the world. Amongst her numerous accolades, the most note-worthy are the noble prize, the beatification and the canonization. in spite of such recognitions, she has also been criticized for her stand against divorce, abortion, remarriage or her perception about transgenders. it is necessary to see not the individual making such statements or holding such views, but to understand that she is speaking on behalf of the church and has no option to defy it. this paper also goes on to explain the necessity of miracles as a prerequisite for canonization and shows how it is relevant for religion per se.*

Keywords: *Mother Teresa, canonization, beatification, miracle, Catholic, abortion.*

INTRODUCTION

Mother Teresa has been one of the most well-known personalities in India and also across the world. Amongst her numerous accolades, the most note-worthy are the noble prize, the beatification and the canonization. In spite of such recognitions, she has also been criticized for her stand against divorce, abortion, remarriage or her perception about transgenders. This research article focuses on the beatification and canonization of Mother Teresa and reconstructs it in connection to the Roman Catholic Church. It tackles both the praises showered on her and also the criticisms levelled against her and deconstructs it in the context of individual freedom. This paper focuses on how a statement or an ideology issued by a representative of the Roman Catholic Church might not be her own. It also takes into account that it might also be an internalization of her own belief system which is totally influenced by the Church. It is needless to say that a wide-spread popularity of such ideology only helps to propagate the dogmas of the Catholic faith and attract more followers to it. At the end it is just religious domination which seeks to increase its numbers and income.

Mother Teresa was born as AnjezeGonxheBojaxhiu in Skopje on 26th of August 1910. After completing 18 years of her life there, she moved to Ireland and then to India where she spent the rest of her life. She settled in Calcutta where she opened numerous orphanages under the patronage of the ‘Missionaries of Charity’. She was known to embrace all

kinds of ailing people, even those suffering from diseases like AIDS and leprosy (Greene, 2004). In spite of that, she has had her fair share of criticisms as well and in the event of her canonization last year in 2016, it perhaps becomes more relevant to dig them up in the context of this article.

Notable amongst her critics have been Christopher Hitchens, the American- British journalist, who attacked her views on abortion in her Noble prize acceptance speech where she said that it was “The greatest destroyer of peace” (Parker, 2006). He was also outspoken about her opposition to the abolition of Ireland’s ban on divorce and remarriage. According to Hitchens, Mother Teresa was “fundamentalist even in orthodox Catholic terms”. Another of her critics was Aroup Chatterjee (2016) who wrote the book *Mother Teresa: The Untold Story*. In this book he spoke about forced conversions, pathetic hygienic conditions of the homes run by her and the vast amount of financial donations not being spent of ‘NirmalHriday’. Apart from these there have been many conspiracy theories too about her, the most interesting of which put her down as a CIA agent working to prevent the bonding of India with Russia.

Notwithstanding her applauses and criticisms, one should look beyond these narratives and arrive at a critical understanding of them. It becomes more important in the context of her canonization as already mentioned before. The problem with over celebration of a ‘mother’ is that she is made an exception. It undertakes to proclaim that it is not the

norm to be kind or caring to so many people who are not your blood relations and thereby defeats the purpose of the appreciation. There has been a culture of sadhus and sanyasis in India and they have practiced exactly that; the relationship with human beings, irrespective of their class, creed, gender or race. It is an important part of the Upanishads too. It teaches to bond with the soul of the individual and not the decomposable body.

The difference that is evident in the case of Mother Teresa is evidently her huge network of organizations and that is the major point of contention. Unlike other well-meaning individuals who might have the same bend of mind, Mother Teresa had a religious system backing her. She was part of an organization and not a free individual and that is where the criticisms leveled against her have to be evaluated. When she takes a stand against abortion, transgenders or divorce, one has to understand that it is not the stand taken by a free individual but a person bound by religious rules and regulations (Gupta & Negi, 2016). Mother Teresa was anything but free. She had as much liberty to go against Catholicism as a party cadre has to go against the ideology of his own party. Mother Teresa was the mouth piece of the Catholic Church and her fame and popularity only helped to portray the benevolent side of Catholicism to the entire world. It is unfortunate that when she opposed the freedom of women, people put the responsibility of those views squarely on her instead of questioning the dogmas of the Catholic Church (Chatterjee, 2016). It would be pertinent to refer to the case of Savita Halappanavar who in October 2012 was not allowed to abort her 17 week fetus, though it led to the development of sepsis and ultimately her death. This was because, in Catholic Ireland where she was residing it was a criminal offense to abort a fetus (BBC, 2013). Following the huge controversy it aroused, the government was forced to pass the 'Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013', where it stated that it was permissible to abort a fetus if it posed any threat to the life of the mother.

It is not surprising then that such a rigid system of religion would be anxious to present itself in a good light to the rest of the world. This brings us to the beatification of Mother Teresa and her subsequent Sainthood in 2016. The need for declaring Mother Teresa as a saint was to portray her as the epitome of Catholic compassion where only the kindness is exaggerated and the rest is swept under the carpet. The process of declaration of sainthood itself is controversial as it requires the person to perform some miracles in his or her life time. This then transforms the individual to a god-like figure. The rationale behind an ordinary person having unconditional love for all of humanity is thereby lost and it reiterates that only a godly person is capable of such care and kindness. In other words, it alienates the mother figure and

puts her on a pedestal, thereby distancing her from the rest of humanity.

The requirement of miracles for qualifying as a saint is not new. Most religions have had this requirement where the proof of being a God is given by performing miracles. There is reference in the New Testament of Jesus walking on the water, or of Lord Krishna holding up a mountain on his little finger or in the Quran where muslims were assisted by angels in the battle of Badr. Miracles are a necessity because through it one gets unquestioned allegiance and devotion. Miracles forbid questioning and rational explanations. It urges one to blindly obey and meekly follow. It is this very quality which is utilized by many god-like figures who can be found across all religious denominations. These self-proclaimed gods try to entice and captivate their followers with miracles. If performing miracles was the benchmark for being a god then magicians producing subtle and elaborate tricks would have been in the fore front of this (BBC, 2014). It is worth mentioning here that a nun cured by a late Pope, as part of demonstration of miracles, reportedly fell ill again (Hooper, 2010).

Mother Teresa may have been a kind and caring person but she was also an agent of the Catholic Church and as such she was never free to express her own opinion because she was just a mouthpiece of the Pope. It is necessary to strip all the adjectives that are attributed to her and see her as a real person. There will emerge few possibilities here. One is that the views shared by her were not her own, but were spoken at the behest of her superiors. Another hypothesis is that she herself was totally brainwashed with the ideologies of the Catholic Church and as such had turned into a fanatic herself (Loudon, 1996).

Hinduism is notorious for its discriminating system of casteism but where it differs from other religions like Islam and Christianity is the freedom that it enjoys from the influence of the Temple or temple authorities. A Hindu individual does not have to seek permission for marriage from the religious heads for choosing a non-Hindu partner. The same however cannot be said of the other systems of faith. Muslims and Christians have to obtain permission from their religious leaders for getting married. In some instances going against the law might result in excommunication of the individual from the rest of the community or even a refusal of burial space (Devasia, 2016).

CONCLUSION:

Mother Teresa is just one of many people who have been canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. In a religious establishment where the Pope is always a man, it is no wonder that Mother Teresa's views would be regressive. Her canonization brings to surface the problems inherent in

Roman Catholicism. Most people who equate Christianity to the west are always under the impression that it is a bolder and liberal religion which gives the individual greater amount of freedom and liberty. The reality however is totally different. It is interesting that even after renaissance this religious cult has still retained its stifling dogmas and dictates. It is time we reconstructed Mother Teresa in that light.

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