

JESUIT SOCIAL ACTION IN THE WEST ZONE --- GC 32 TO 2004

I. INTRODUCTION: Scope of the presentation

- A. I have taken the concept of Social Action to include all action for human welfare carried out in the West Zone Jesuit Provinces of Bombay, Goa, Gujarat and Pune during the last 40 years that is from 1964 to the present.
- B. It does not include Action for Direct Evangelization, Pastoral Work and Formal Education which are areas covered by the other two presentations.
- C. The geographical areas covered are those that fall in the present provinces of Bombay, Goa, Gujarat and Pune though the original area of action of the German Jesuits covered the vast area in pre-independent India and Pakistan from Quetta in the North to Belgaum in the South.
- D. Due to limitations of time and space and sufficient information it has not been possible to include statistical data to assess the impact of the work of Social Action in all the provinces of the West Zone.

II. CONCEPT OF SOCIAL ACTION:

A. Pre-Vatican II:

- 1. Social Action as defined by the social teachings of the Church through the Social Encyclicals of the Popes right from *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII to *Mater et Magistra* of John XXIII took a reformist view of Social Action.
- 2. It did not ask for a radical change of structures but a social concern for the poor especially the workers. The charity of the gospels demanded just wages and just treatment of the peasants and workers.
- 3. It demanded a just share of natural resources and wages to the peasants and workers not as a right but as a matter of charity.
- 4. Thus private property and private ownership of natural resources and the means of production remained untouched.
- 5. While trade unionism was permitted, the use of pressure and violent means to obtain these by the peasants and working class were to be eschewed.
- 6. In keeping with this understanding of Social Concern, Social Action came to mean charity for the alleviation of poverty. In the colonial countries it went hand in hand with evangelization.

B. Pre-Vatican II Jesuit Social Action in the West Zone:

- 1. In keeping with this understanding the Social Action work of the Jesuits in the West Zone as elsewhere took the form of charity in different forms as a means to alleviate the poverty of the poor and down-trodden.
- 2. Thus the work of evangelization and education of the Jesuits in the West Zone went hand in hand with charity in cash and kind for the alleviation of poverty, hunger and disease.
- 3. Formal Education besides being an instrument of catechesis would also provide gainful employment to those who availed of it.

4. The positive results of this was easy to see with the large number of people educated by Jesuits getting employment in the government, armed forces, railways and other business establishments.
5. However, while this was so in the urban centers, the rural poor particularly the dalits and adivasis did not gain much. The social structures of caste and class in the rural areas were too strong and entrenched for them to break out of.
6. Many of them inspite of getting educated remained dependent on missionary charity to eke out their living and carry on their agricultural occupations. They remained in a vicious circle of poverty, discrimination and bondage.

III. VATICAN II:

A. In Vatican II the emphasis shifted from Social Concern and Social Action as mere Charity to Social Justice.

1. Human Welfare and well-being were no longer a matter of charity and largesse on the part of the well-to-do, but a matter of right of the poor and downtrodden.
2. Poverty, Hunger, Disease, Want, Discrimination, domination and subjugation were no longer a just condition of the poor to be borne up with, but a situation to be liberated from.
3. This Human Liberation is an essential dimension of the Prophetic Mission of Jesus in the Gospel as enunciated in Lk 4/18-20.
4. The Church inherits this Mission from Jesus and seeks to live it out for today as delineated in *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican II.
5. It is a part of building of God's Kingdom among the oppressed peoples of all nations.

B. GC 32 Decree 4 took its Mission for today from Vatican II and the Gospel and enunciated it as the "Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice".

1. This meant that the Society could not carry on with its work of evangelization without addressing the problems of injustice that plagued the peoples of the world particularly the third world.
2. Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* considered Social Justice as intrinsic to the Mission of Evangelization and building of God's Kingdom of Peace, Justice and Harmony.
3. Jesuits all over the world and particularly in the third world took up the clarion call of GC 32 under the leadership and guidance of Pedro Arrupe.

IV. SOCIAL ACTION IN THE WEST ZONE:

A. In India too Jesuits were not far behind in responding to the call of GC 32. Jesuits in the West Zone too attempted to answer this call in as faithful and radical a manner as possible.

1. Up to Vatican II Jesuit Social Action in the West Zone as elsewhere was guided by a similar understanding of Social Action as the rest of the Church.
2. Social action was practiced as Charity to the poor dalits, adivasis and other marginalized in order to alleviate poverty, hunger and disease.
3. It was considered an essential dimension of the work of direct evangelization and education.

4. Missionaries tended to mobilize funds particularly from their mother provinces and provide it as charity in cash and kind to converts, catechumens and others with the primary aim of bringing them to the Church.
5. However, while many became Christian, this did not solve their problems of poverty. They tended to depend on aid from the missionaries to solve their economic problems.
6. Massive and repeated droughts and famines accentuated the problem of poverty of the rural masses which touched all irrespective of their religion.
7. The Jesuits realized that mere charity in the form of cash and kind would not solve problems of drought and famine or poverty of the rural masses.
8. Besides how could people think of religion or a change of religion while they suffered hunger, malnutrition and disease. "*Adhi potoba mug Vithoba*" – "*First the belly then God*"-- became the adage for many missionaries carrying out programmes of economic development.
9. If malnutrition and hunger could be eliminated on a mass scale the proper grounds for evangelization would be created. But mere charity would not solve this perennial problem.
10. Agriculture being the main occupation and source of income needed to be tackled. If the income of the poor could be raised, they would become self-reliant with regard to their own development.
11. Thus economic aid for development of agriculture and its infrastructural requirements was seen as the primary solution to the perennial problems of poverty.
12. It was with this in mind that major economic development programmes were resorted to by many Jesuits of the W. Zone in the late sixties.
13. Pioneering work was carried out in this regard by both German and Spanish Jesuits in the rural areas of Gujarat, Goa-Pune and Bombay Provinces.
14. Under USAID and the PL 480 programmes, CRS provided food-aid to stem the effects of drought and famine of those years.
15. In order that this might prove long lasting from the perspective of economic development of the rural poor they were disbursed through food-for-work programmes.
16. Food-for-work would not only help solve the problems of hunger and malnutrition but also go into developing the infrastructures for agricultural development like land-levelling, well-digging, percolation tanks and roads so essential for agricultural development.
17. In all the three provinces Jesuits also set up organizations that would help the farmers to make their farming more effective and productive.
18. These organizations mobilized the funds required for such agricultural development from Germany, Switzerland, Spain and other countries.
19. Funds were provided in the forms of loans and grants for improved inputs of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides and for agricultural equipment like bulls, implements, pumps, etc.
20. Since water seemed to be the basic need for agriculture and one could not depend on the vagaries of nature, funds were also invested in the setting up various sources of water like bore wells, percolation tanks and small dams in Ahmednagar, Nashik and in Gujarat.
21. Some Jesuits also embarked on the task of setting up co-operatives for savings and investment in productive enterprises.

22. A large number of medical facilities like hospitals, dispensaries and mobile clinics were also set up with the help of sisters in order to tackle the problems of disease that went with poverty and malnutrition.
23. A large amount of financial aid mobilized from funding agencies abroad was poured into various rural development programmes in all the provinces during the sixties and seventies.
24. However, while many benefited from these agricultural development programmes they didn't appear to be self-sustaining and self-reliant.
25. Poverty seemed to have become endemic to the dalits and adivasis. The root causes of their poverty lay elsewhere and all the economic efforts at rooting out poverty itself seemed to have little effect.
26. In spite of all efforts made by the missionaries, the majority of the dalits and adivasis remained poor, discriminated, oppressed and downtrodden.

V. GC 32 AND AFTER:

A. An assessment and analysis of the efforts at Agricultural Development in the rural areas of the three provinces revealed that the root causes of poverty remained untouched:

1. The insights of Social Analysis revealed that the root causes of poverty did not lie in the backwardness of the dalits and adivasis or poor infrastructural facilities, but in the unjust socio-politico-economic-cultural structures that dominated rural society.
2. The dalits and adivasis in the rural areas of the three provinces remained backward and marginalized, because their problems were not purely economic but social, cultural and political too.
3. They still occupied the lowest rung of social life. Cultural domination of the higher castes and classes still prevailed. Politically they had little say in the processes of development affecting them.

B. Shift from development to justice model:

1. The years 1975-76 and onwards saw a shift in the paradigm of work particularly in the rural areas of the three provinces. Social Justice as an essential part of our Mission began to assume importance for many Jesuits in the rural areas.
2. Many Jesuits realized that development had to be an integrated process that embraced the economic, social, cultural and economic dimensions of their life at the same time. Justice needed to be achieved in all four areas.
3. However the shift from the purely economic development model to an integrated model that included Social Justice was not easy for all Jesuits.
4. There were those who felt that the Jesuits must opt for the radical approach of direct social action in terms of awareness, motivation, mobilization, organization and action for Social Justice to the rural poor and marginalized.
5. This direct action included mobilization and organization of the rural poor and marginalized through processes of agitation, confrontation and conflict for a radical transformation of social structures

C. Period of polarization and crisis:

1. While a few Jesuits in each of the three provinces opted for this radical approach, not all were able to adopt it. At stake was much of the existing evangelization, pastoral, educational and development works that many Jesuits were already carrying on.
2. While all seemed to accept the Mission of GC 32 as the service of the faith and the promotion of justice with a preferential option for the poor and marginalized including women, not all agreed as to the radicality of the means.
3. Many felt that the mission could be realized by integrating into their existing work the dimensions of economic, social, cultural and economic justice.
4. Thus the existing works of formal education, economic development and social justice were allowed to carry on side by side.
5. However this began to give rise to polarizations among the Jesuits themselves. This polarization was seen most acutely with the work of Peter D'Mello through Shantivan Shetkari Seva Mandal in the Thane District.
6. Radical action for social justice among the adivasis led to confrontation and conflict with powerful vested interests and the CPM.
7. The activities of other Jesuits in the field of evangelization, pastoral work and formal education became the targets for the wrath of the CPM cadres.

D. Period of co-existence and mellowing:

1. This ended with the expulsion and leaving of these Jesuits in Thane District. For the sake of peaceful co-existence it was decided that Talasari would carry on with formal education as its main thrust.
2. Nashik District would seek to realize social justice through economic development programmes and Dhule district through programmes of empowerment and non-formal education.
3. In the Goa-Pune Province it was the Social Centre first at Ahmednagar that spearheaded the movement for poverty alleviation through agricultural development programmes.
4. Through the period of the mid-seventies and mid-eighties Social Centre Ahmednagar, MPSM Nashik and similar organizations in Gujarat continued with massive programmes of agricultural development. The work of MSSM Manmad had come to a premature halt in 1969 with the departure of Fr Ferrer.
5. Programmes of empowerment and non-formal education had a more modest beginning through Janseva Mandal in Nandurbar, Navsarjan in Surat, and Jan Jagran in Belgaum.

E. Period of synthesis:

1. By 1986 the period of radical Social Action of the previous decade and Social Justice through pure economic development had given way to a more sober understanding of the potential of both approaches to achieve a certain amount of Social Justice.
2. Both approaches began to integrate in their methodology something of the positive aspects of each approach. An arbitrary uni-dimensional approach was not realizing the objectives of Social Justice.
3. Those conducting purely economic development programmes began to realize that real community development was not being achieved simply by economic betterment of the poor and marginalized adivasis and dalits.

4. While economic development was being achieved to some extent the social, cultural and political development of the adivasis and dalits, women and other marginalized lagged far behind.
5. Those in pure social action work for Social Justice began to realize that pure issue-based social action had limited success and was short-lived. Unless some amount of economic, cultural and political empowerment also took place the structures of injustice would still remain.
6. Hence there was need of a synthesis of both approaches to really bring about the transformation of structures that GC 32 and then GC 33 and GC 34 envisaged.
7. Both approaches now appeared prepared to integrate within their respective areas integrated programmes of empowerment as well as non-formal processes of education to achieve these.
8. They also realized the need of networking with like-minded organizations and movements to achieve their objectives of Social Justice.

F. New comprehensive programmes for social justice:

1. From 1996 onwards Jesuits in all the four western provinces (the Goa-Pune Province was now constituted into the two new provinces of Pune and Goa) began to evolve programmes of Development and Social Action that took an integrated approach.
2. Their approaches comprised programmes for economic development as well as social, cultural and political empowerment with greater or lesser stress on one or the other.
3. Jesuit organizations like Social Centre, Ahmednagar and MPSM Nashik together with others in Gujarat went in for Integrated Agricultural and Watershed Development that included the other dimensions of Community Development that would bring about Social Justice.
4. Savings and Income generating Self-Help Groups particularly of women became an essential part of Community Development Programmes.
5. The socio-cultural empowerment of women through Mahila mandals became also an important instrument for their emancipation and participation in the political decision-making processes at the village community level.
6. Non-formal literacy and legal education programmes provided both men and women with means to understand and struggle for their rights to justice and development.
7. Health Education and the promotion of herbal and natural medicines and training of village health workers helped people become self-reliant in the area of health.
8. The non-formal and functional literacy programmes were supposed to help people understand their rights and duties and how to participate in Panchayati Raj and Adivasi Self-rule as part of their political education and empowerment.
9. Non-formal programmes to train people in obtaining their land and forest rights and the economic schemes of the government for the development of their lands and to train themselves in agriculture and other gainful employment became also an important aspect of the programmes to achieve economic justice.
10. Legal education and legal aid became an important weapon to help the adivasis fight for their rights and obtain legal redress for violation of their human rights.
11. The mobilization of people to join in major movements related to their lands, forest, water and other natural resources like the Narmada Bachao Andolan and Fisher folks struggle in Goa became also an empowerment activity of the Jesuits through networking.

12. The struggle for the rights of children to education and dignity also kept a lot of Jesuits in the three provinces very involved through Reap and Snehsadan in Bombay, SADDAC in Pune, Jan Jagran in Belgaum, and other organizations in Gujarat.
13. In all these efforts, several Sisters' congregations collaborated with the Jesuits in order to realize the objectives of Social Justice, which were concerned particular with regard to girls, women and health.

G. Organizations in development for social justice:

It must be said that today there are very few Jesuit Organizations that are involved purely in Economic Development or Radical Social Action. Almost all the organizations in the West Zone present themselves as working for Social Justice with a preferential option for the poor.

Some lay a greater stress on Non-formal Education and involvement in the peoples struggles for justice, while the others lay greater stress on building up economic self-reliance in order to struggle for justice.

Some of the Jesuit Organizations which lay stress on Economic Development for Social Justice are the following:

1. In the Bombay Province, Maharashtra Prabodan Seva Mandal in Nashik District lays stress on various agro-economic development programmes and integrated Watershed Development Programmes as a basis for Social Justice.
2. In the Pune Province Social Centre at Ahmednagar has been the hub for similar activities of Integrated Watershed Development and Community Building in Ahmednagar and Beed Districts with Social Justice as part of their goal.
3. The Pune Province has been instrumental in providing economic help for higher education of dalit youth as well as support for training of marginalized women in income generation at Ashankur, Bhokar, Shrirampur.
4. The Integrated Tribal Watershed Development Programme at Sangamner is an initiative also of the Pune Province at building the tribal community around Watershed Development.
5. In Gujarat many of the major mission stations have also had major economic development programmes in agriculture, co-operative farming and technical training with similar objectives.
6. Since the Goa Province was only recently separated from the Pune Province we are unaware of any major Jesuit Organization involved in Economic Development Programmes with similar objectives.

Some of the Jesuit Organizations which lay stress on Non-formal Education and involvement in Peoples Struggles for Justice are the following:

1. Janseva Mandal Nandurbar in the Bombay Province which also has Watershed Development Programmes and Self-Help Groups.
2. Shirpur Vishwa Mandal Sevashram which has also SHGs and Watershed Programmes.
3. Janhit Vikas Trust in Raigad District, which has Self-Help Groups and Income Generation Programmes together with other Non-formal Education Programmes.
4. Shanti Seva Sadan, Manor which concentrates on legal education for the rights of Adivasis to their lands together with SHGS and other Non-Formal Education Programmes.

5. Gnanmata Sadan, Talasari which has activities fostering Adivasi Art and Culture together with Co-operative Savings and Formal Education.
6. In Bombay Reap and Snehsadan focused on providing street children their right to living stability and education through homes and non-formal street classes.
7. Jan Jagran in Belgaum of Goa which runs a comprehensive set of programmes in Non-formal Education, Income Generation, SHGs and Legal Education for the uplift of shepherds, women and other marginalized groups.
8. Navsarjan in Surat with stress on legal education and legal aid to the Adivasis for their rights, women's rights and other non-formal education programmes.
9. Sangath at Modasa in Gujarat takes up the cause of empowerment and holistic health of marginalized women and their rights to legal aid, redress and participation in Panchayati Raj.
10. The Rajpipla Social Service Society in Gujarat concentrates on Cultural Awareness, Community Organization, Legal Education and Leadership Training for Community Development.
11. St Xavier's Social Service Society, Ahmedabad takes up the cause slum children's education, slum community organization, women's empowerment programmes, village health workers training and advocacy at different levels.
12. Ashadeep at Vidyanagar in Gujarat provides legal education, community organization and training for dalits and training for participation in public services to dalit students.
13. At Chotaudaipur innovative and non-formal education is provided to tribals together with legal education and legal aid.
14. The Behavioural Science Centre, Ahmedabad conducts a host of programmes for organization of marginalized groups, socio-economic development, research networking and advocacy for human rights.
15. Fr Cedric Prakash has played a major role in the struggle for justice and human rights particularly of the minorities and marginalized groups including advocacy for justice to the victims of communal riots.
16. In Pune, TDSS has been instrumental in providing support for many groups involved in the struggle for justice to the marginalized women and children over the years.
17. SADDAC at Daund has been organization started recently with the collaboration of sisters for shelter and education to street children.

H. Communalism -- the new threat:

1. After 1996 while the efforts of the Jesuits to synthesize their approach to Social Justice was beginning to take shape, their appeared a new threat to Social Justice on the horizon.
2. This was the religious fundamentalism of the BJP, RSS, VHP. In 1998 a concerted was launched against all the activities of the Jesuits and sisters with the adivasis of South Gujarat.
3. These also had their repercussions in certain areas of the Bombay Province like Nashik and Raigad.
4. While an uneasy peace prevails at the moment the virulent communalism of these religious fundamentalists still continues.
5. Gujarat has suffered the brunt of this attack with the BJP in power. A similar situation cannot be ruled out if the BJP comes to power in Maharashtra.

6. However even in Maharashtra the atmosphere in many adivasi areas where we work has been vitiated with anti-Christian emotions which make much of our work for Social Justice suspect.
7. What is at the root of this antagonism? Is it purely religious fundamentalism or something else under the garb of religious fundamentalism.
8. Maybe it is time we took a fresh look at our work and its impact on adivasis and dalits and the dominant castes and classes to understand the root causes of this antagonism.

VI. Conclusion-a critique of the work for social justice:

A. As one peruses through the years of Social Action Work since GC 32, one sees a mellowing down of the radicality of Social Justice through direct action to a more sobering posture of Economic Development and Education and Formation for Social Justice!

1. While the option for the poor remained still a radical option, direct action for Social Justice came to be substituted by Non-Formal Education and modified forms of Economic Development for Community Development, whose content and methodology was directed to educating and conscientizing the poor to struggle for justice for themselves through adapted forms of Paulo Freire's Methodology, where Jesuits played the role of formators of lay rural animators, who themselves would play a more direct role in the struggle for Justice!

2. Did this point to an inadequacy of Jesuits to play an active role in the struggle for Justice? Was it a result of burning their fingers too much and getting burnt out themselves? Were the institutional blocks that came in the way of direct Social Action something too difficult to handle by individual Jesuits? Did the conflict with Official Church Structures and Church Orthodoxy become something too difficult to confront?

3. Were the unjust social and political structures out their too gigantic and vicious to handle by Jesuits? Or was Direct Social Action just a popular wave of the 70s and 80s that had to die a natural death with the ebb of the tide?

4. Or is Social Action passé in a post communist and socialist world with no role to play in a unipolar globalized capitalist world of the 3rd Millenium?

5. In short is GC 32 or Vatican II for that matter relevant to a world that is more materialistic, secular and fundamentalist at the same time? Or is the Church and The Society itself a victim of these three trends in the present context of the West Zone!

6. Perhaps the dilemma in which the Jesuits of the West Zone find themselves at present is visible in the lack of interest and participation in the zonal JESA meetings on the one hand and helplessness of participants at JEPASA meetings to handle the impact of fundamentalist communalism that keeps rearing its head in the West Zone!

7. To be precise, is the issue of fundamentalist communalism simply a religious issue or is it fundamentally an issue of Social Justice which we are at a loss to handle? The communalist atrocities perpetrated on the minorities in Gujarat seems to bring this matter to the fore! A deeper reading of the study and analysis carried out by the Jesuits and their collaborators in South Gujarat would seem to point in this direction!

8. Perhaps they have been compelled to make this study by the horrendous events that overran and still harangue Gujarat! Maybe a similar study and analysis of the impact of our contemporary work in Bombay, Pune and Goa provinces might bring to light similar

conclusions! Or are we waiting for similar events to overrun us which might force us to open our eyes?

B. For the present I would like to conclude that GC 32, 33 and 34 did provide a critique as well as a sense of direction to our work for Development as well as Social Justice! However at present we seem to be in some sort of limbo:

There seems to be some sort of drift and stagnation! What at one time would have been considered common policy thrusts whether in the field of Development or Social Justice is now left to the best judgement of individuals in the field! As such there seems to be a dispersion of energies in these to fields with no common thread connecting and holding them together! Is this a strength or a weakness is left to each one of us to decide!

Whether in the field of Development or Social Justice our Jesuits have done glorious things that have benefited thousands over the last 30 to 40 years! But then hasn't the time come to ponder and regroup ourselves, search for a New Vision and a New Paradigm of the Kingdom, that will help us face the challenges of the Third Millennium in this West Zone?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Has our work for Social Justice achieved the desired results of GC 32 Decree 4?
2. What are the lacunae or obstacles in our programmes for Social Justice which need remedy?
3. Are the programmes directed specially to economic development realizing their objective of integrated community development?
4. To what extent has culture been taken into account in our struggles for Social Justice?
5. What measures do we need to take to deal with the problems of religious fundamentalism and communalism?
6. Do we have any concrete proposals to make for our work for Social Justice to be more effective in the future?

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