

Imperialism and Third World Countries: A Religious View

Anup Kumar Manna

Ph.D research Scholar

Department of Philosophy and Comparative Religion

Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan

anupfreaky@gmail.com

Introduction

Imperialism is the policy of extending a country's power and influence in the world through political relations or military force. This is the policy whereby powerful countries extend their powers and influence all over the world. This was done by acquiring colonies, in the past centuries. Imperialism comes from the Latin verb "impero" that means 'to rule', 'to give order to'. The two principal elements which constitute imperialism are 'domination' and 'dependency'. With these two principal the powerful countries creates the situation of dependence to the weaker countries and dominates the third world countries. In this format, during 1950s, notion of 'Development' helps to establish the 'Dependency theory'. Within the development model, the developed countries try to define the underdeveloped countries as neither belong to the developed economic situation nor influenced by the political and economic system of communism. Within the concepts of development, development and underdevelopment is considered as the two opposite poles. The development concepts aimed at to speed the process by which the underdeveloped countries could replicate the modernization pattern of the developed countries. In this process third world countries remain dependent on the powerful countries of the world. As a result, there is huge gap being created and maintained between the rich and the poor. The rich became richer by adopting the means of exploitation; on the other hand the poor people became poorer as an exploitative victim. So, within the dependence attitude the powerful countries perpetuate their domination over third world countries. In real sense it is false notion of development, as they tries to equate growth with development. Underdevelopment is a global social fact, can be seen as the historical sub-product of development of other countries. They not only hold on economic domination, but at the same time dominated in the form of political, cultural, and social as well as religion

too. Moreover, the dependency tendency placed the third world countries under the severe situation of continuous exploitation.

From ancient time onwards, the imperial elements of dependence and domination prevailed. Also in ancient period, powerful countries were conquering the weaker countries. However, during 19th century, imperialism came with the acquisition of colonies in Africa and other third world countries in the world. Though, this acquisition of colonies starts with the economic interests initially. But later on, the economic interest extended to political interest. In this tendency of extended interests also adversely affected the religion- especially Christianity, apart from other social and cultural dimensions. Moreover, religion was also used as a political tool to substantiate the imperial rule by the powerful countries. In the course of time along with imperial tendency, the religion merges together in a same platform for profit making in the favour of the powerful countries in the world. (<http://www.learner.org>)

This paper attempts to study the relation between imperialism and religion, specifically Christianity, through the theoretical explorations of liberation theology. How the religion helps to perpetuate the imperial rule for economic and political interests in the colonised as well as the post- colonial countries? The study also attempts to analyse how the economic and the political interest merge together with religion to strengthen the imperialism, through the critical interpretations of liberation theology.

Relation between Imperialism and Religion

Christianity is the religion evolves from the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the central figure in religion of Christianity. The religion of Christianity, which is said to be an egalitarian religion, in modern and post-modern context whether served equally to every human being? It is not so. Rather, religion itself becomes an instrument for the perpetuation of the imperial rule all over the world. Also the present church allows discrimination on different contextual basis in every possible way. In order to extend the imperial rule all over the third world countries, the developed countries introduce the Christianity to strengthen and continue their power from religious point of view. The church plays the crucial role in sustaining imperialism. The churches possess economic interests; it sought to protect its interests by aligning with the powerful order. The clergy and the priest also joined hand with the developed countries in profit making by placing the majority of poor people into periphery. Within the domain of dependency theory, poor people remain kept dependent by marginalizing the real values of the religion. The religion of Christianity is

more a religion meant for whole humanity (including poor and needy masses) rather it restricted to the level of rich and some powerful self-interested groups.(Wynia 1990: 10-13)

The westernised notions of Christianity were spread, delinking its origin from Palestinian sources in order to sub serve the Western imperialism. Christianity became the political tool to perpetuate the dominance and it served as the nerve motor of colonialism. In this process the church also played the vital role to substantiate the imperial interests. As a result, the third world countries were made dependent on the powerful countries because the Christianity is not merely treated as religion rather it became the political tool to extend the power to European countries. Moreover, this attitude further marginalized the values of Christianity and its doctrines in real terms.

When religion being introduced for imperial motif, it loses its values in real terms, rather it act a substantiate factor for powerful groups. The poor and needy were put into the illusionary dominant discourse of religion, which have no connection with Jesus Christ's teaching in the Gospel's history. The abstract concept of God and other doctrines in Christianity being stabilized by these powerful countries rather concentrating on the real essence of religion that meant elimination of all forms of human's suffering. In this sense, dominant discourse of religion is considered, which comes from the 'above' or from 'up there'. But in actuality, Jesus Christ's life and teaching always centred on the poor and suffering people, it may be economic inequality, political domination and socio-cultural deprivation. Liberation theology strictly condemned these abstractions rather focuses on the concrete reality of lived experience of human being- especially the poor and suffering people. The theology of liberation arises from the concrete example of Jesus Christ, who was lived in the world for the cause of justice and equality for all human being. On other hand, dominant discourse of religion of powerful countries seeks to substantiate the profit and exploitation within the abstract notions of religion. In this process, the majority of people were remain alienate from the real value of Christianity and also at the same time dependent on the dominant discourse.

The intersection of political and economic interests in religion

Liberation theologians understood the concept of development- proposed by developed countries, as the theory of dependency. Within the dependence attitude, the weak countries or third world countries remain dependent towards the powerful countries- initially in terms of economy and simultaneously in terms of politics, culture, other forms of social conditions and religion too. Imperialism helps to produce wealth to fewer and grater to poverty for more. The poor, the dominated countries keep getting further and further behind. Development is meant for social, political, economic and cultural dependence of weak countries over the powerful countries. Through developmental model the powerful nations try to create the supremacy of power and subjugate the weak countries. To gain more profit and supremacy over other weak or third world countries, dominant and powerful countries continuously exploit them. The situation leads to the formation of two groups of people- the rich and the extreme poor. Furthermore, the Westernized notion of religion is considered as the political tool to fulfil the requirement for profit making- requirement to serve as political as well as economic interests. (Bell, 2001: 45-46)

Liberation theology analysed the cause of poverty in Latin American and other third world countries as the rapid foreign-oriented growth, meaning export of natural resources and import of manufactured goods that gained momentum in the 1950s. This economic development benefitted already- industrialized countries greatly through their acquisition of cheap natural resources from impoverished places, but made the poor providers of these natural resources dependent on industrialized countries for consumer goods. The development policy for Latin America and other third world countries admitted that the developed countries have increased their wealth by 50 per cent and the developing countries, two-thirds of the world's population, continue to struggle in poverty and frustration.

Conclusion

Though the Latin America and other third world countries became victimized as a result of imperialism, Liberation theology other hand evolves out to counter the prevailing situation of dependency and dominance which extensively maintaining injustice in its process. Also, we witness the emergence of religion- especially Christianity in a form of dominant Western discourse to substantiate religion as political tool for developed or western countries to carry forward the imperial all over the world.

In order to exploit and also to carry out supremacy or domination over third world countries, powerful western countries continuously made an economic exploitation in the name of notion of development. At the same time economic exploitation extended in the form of political domination and socio-cultural hierarchy. As a result, in order to gain justice within the society from the cluster of dominant discourse and exploitation, liberation theology evolves in Latin America and other parts of the third world countries. The task of liberation theology is not only to suspend the existing situation rather also seeks for better humane society, where everyone is treated as equally without any discrimination on the basic of economic, social, cultural and religious ground.

References

Brown, Robert McAfee. *Theology in a New Key- Responding to Liberation Themes*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1978.

Daniel M. Bell(Tr.). *Liberation Theology after the End of History*, Routledge Publication, London, 2001.

Gary W.Wynia. *The politics of Latin American development*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1990.

Parratt, John(Ed.). *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2004.

Liberationtheology.org/ Accessed on 23/12/2015.