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Emerging Holistic Child Development Programme: Innovation in Theological Education

Jesudason Baskar Jeyaraj

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Theological education in India is a big enterprise with the mushrooming of Bible colleges in some cities training pastors, evangelists and missionaries. One can notice six major streams of theological education in India viz. seminaries affiliated to the Senate of Serampore College, institutions accredited by the Asia Theological Association, independent Bible colleges not part of SSC or ATA, Christian Studies Department in the secular Universities in Madras, Mysore and Madurai, private Christian Universities such as Allahabad Agricultural University, Martin Luther University and William Carey University in Meghalaya and Distance Education by TAFTEE, AIT, CFCC and IIM-RC. A number of students are studying in these streams to work as fulltime or part-time ministers and secular witnesses.

¹ A lengthy version of this paper was presented in OCI Consultation at UBS, Pune held from 3-7th November, 2008.

turns becomes the concern of the church and the community. If this has to actualize then the key constituent i.e. the child caregivers have to be equally encouraged and given opportunity to be equipped. So, to have authentic holistic child development, we must have effective and efficient child caregivers. For which we need to care and train the child caregivers too. In the end, let me complete the incident that I mentioned at the beginning of the paper. The cry and plight of child caregiver did not really change the patron. Their salary was not given for three months and people with personal interest made use of this opportunity, sadly some of the older children were misguided making this and other two child caregivers to quit the job from the institution. Only to be replaced by another couple who had no idea of HCD and child care, but have a great passion to work among them and have taken it up as a challenge.

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Theological education in India is a big enterprise with the mushrooming of Bible colleges in some cities training pastors, evangelists and missionaries. One can notice six major streams of theological education in India viz. seminaries affiliated to the Senate of Serampore College, institutions accredited by the Asia Theological Association, independent Bible colleges not part of SSC or ATA, Christian Studies Department in the secular Universities in Madras, Mysore and Madurai, private Christian Universities such as Allahabad Agricultural University, Martin Luther University and William Carey University in Meghalaya and Distance Education by TAFTEE, AIT, CFCC and IIM-RC. A number of students are studying in these streams to work as fulltime or part-time ministers and secular witnesses.

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Indian theological education is also unique since we have promoted indigenization of theological education as soon as we got independence from the British colonial rule and created Indian Christian theologies. Indigenization in the early period (appx. 1947-1975) was in terms of developing Indian forms of worship, liturgy, using bhakti traditions, national leadership for churches, missions and seminaries, teaching courses in seminaries in regional languages and producing literature and text books focusing on Indian context. Indian theological education moved from indigenization to contextualization after 1970s by formulating theologies such as liberation, humanization, dalit, tribal, environment and feminist emerging from our own context. While the process of indigenization and contextualization goes on and significant achievements can be reported, Indian theological education still depends on the West for new ideas and funds. Theological discussions going on in the West (e.g ordination of women as priests or consecrating women as bishops and arch-bishops, homo-sexuality, combating racism, inter-faith dialogue, church growth, power evangelism and prosperity theology) set the theological discussions in India in similar fashion. Of course, it is not possible to come out of the global network and influence. Nevertheless, it is important to discuss common issues, concerns and trends in the light of Indian context. Innovative programmes and approaches can be encouraged to make theological education relevant for the changing scenario in churches and communities.

I. INNOVATIONS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Theological education in many parts of Asia is still traditional following the western pattern of departments, subjects, classroom teaching methods, assignments and evaluations lacking interdisciplinary approach, practical involvement in society and learning through experience. Some churches have not yet revised their curriculum and training method for their seminaries for more than 30-50 years. Some seminaries have emphasized evangelism and not the holistic dimension of training. Some are donor-driven to offer only those subjects and programmes dictated by their donors. Either due to these constraints or out of ignorance, innovations are not happening in the educational process of most

of the seminaries. Let me mention briefly three major areas for innovations.

New Programmes

There are some seminaries particularly regional medium seminaries established decades ago with the B.Th programme, have not introduced any new programme. Upgrading their existing B.Th programmes as well as introducing new programmes such as BD or M.Div and M.Th is not happening as expected. Even if the leadership proposes to upgrade and introduce new programmes of higher level, the proposal is not accepted either by the faculty members or the Board. Most of the ATA colleges are still having B. Th. as their main programmes. B.Th programmes of colleges in SSC still go on but a development has been made to face out B.Th gradually by integrating it with B.D. Since B.Th and BD/M.Div are regarded as basic training for ministry with a number of courses drawn from different departments and practical work, many seminaries are not interested in introducing new programmes like MA, M.Min. or M.Th or D.Min. Other constraints of having qualified faculty to teach at post-graduate level, constantly building resources in the library, infra-structure facilities of classrooms, raising funds and getting accreditation or approval for the new programmes from the ATA or SSC restrict the institutions not to introduce new programmes either at certificate or diploma or degree or doctoral level. In addition to these constraints, there is some sort of restriction on those colleges affiliated to SSC that they cannot offer new programmes (e.g. MA or M.Th in HCD or Worship, Liturgy and Music or Urban Transformation or Organizational Administration or Handling Natural Calamities, Conflicts and Resolution) which are not available in SSC, in co-operation with ATA or NGOs. This affects the freedom of the colleges to offer new programmes and serve the churches or NGOs who demand such specialization for their pastors, evangelists or social workers. Similarly, ATA should not restrict itself with accrediting only traditional programmes like B.Th, M.Div. and M.Th, in line with SSC but should come forward to support innovative programmes created and proposed by some colleges to offer more specialization and train the candidates with upto-date skill for the demand in society. Nevertheless the quality of the

programmes, which will be discussed later in this paper, should not be compromised.

New Courses

The package of the subjects in the curriculum of B.Th, B.D/M.Div. include key courses from different departments. The students may learn 2 or 3 subjects only from each discipline within the 3 or 4 years of their programme. Specialization of biblical studies or theology or religion or counselling or communication or social analysis is difficult in BD or M.Div programme. Unless Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) is introduced at BD/M.Div. level helping students to select courses on the area of their interest along with certain number of core subjects, specialization in a particular area is not possible. Graduates of B.Th and B.D/M.Div come out of the seminaries studying 26-32 subjects, but without having a skill for special task in churches and society. In the case of women students and some men students who want to minister among children in churches or communities are also expected to learn like majority of the men students prepared for pastoral ministry or missionary work. Why can't they specialize in a particular field of ministry to women, children or musicology? Many women students want to learn courses on Holistic Child Development for their future ministry with families or NGOs or mission societies. But, at present such HCD programmes are not available for them to specialize during their basic degree programme or even at M.Th and Doctoral level. However, specialization built within undergraduate programmes and at post-graduate programmes are developing gradually in India and abroad. More than 20-30 subjects on HCD and 60 research topics are listed to offer fullfledged M.Min, MA, M.Th and Ph.D in HCD.²

New kind of Institutions

Innovations are not only in terms of new programmes and courses but also in terms of creating new kind of institutions and different models of training with or without big infra-structure, but with suitable pedagogy to offer some of these programmes. For example,

² Consultation held in Chiang Mai has listed 60 research topics in the field of HCD. The Curriculum Planning Committee of CECD-India has listed more than 30 subjects at present. The process of CPC to list more subjects is going on.

separate institutes offering MA or M.Th and Ph.D for Reformation or Ecumenical Studies or Counselling or Management or Leadership or Urban Studies can create more subjects on that particular field, work out different mode of learning either fully residential or fully distance mode or partly residential and partly distance mode. Special institutes focusing on one particular area of study can provide in-depth study of subjects, practical work, placement opportunities, take up focused research and attempt for more publications. Already a few institutes such as IIM-RC and CFCC offering Missiology, and Christian Institute of Management offering leadership and management. Similar institutes with distance model of education may increase in India focusing on certain area of study like HCD. This cuts down the cost of education and enables the students to continue in their job and get qualified. Demand for such special institutes offering special programmes is gradually increasing in India. Many involved in ministry may not prefer to go to the traditional seminaries which require 2-3 years of residential stay and collect high fees and yet the students may not get what they want in their field of specialization. On the other hand, special institutes may use professionals from other institutions, universities, NGOs on contract basis and On-line library and internet to make the students more professional in that field of study. Their net-working with businesses, missionary organizations, churches and NGOs provide fertile ground for carrying out the field research, thesis project and employment opportunities. In addition to offering courses on HCD in existing seminaries, special institutes are needed to offer fullfledged HCD programme of MA, M.Th and Ph.D in South Asia. Many NGOs are looking for such training institutes for their staff members get trained. Graduates of BD/M.Div. are looking for more professional training at post-graduate level. It is important to note that the traditional programmes of B.Th, B.D or M.Div. will survive in the long run because they are the basic degree to enter into ministry. However, these programmes should be made more innovative periodically by the seminaries with CBCS for specialization. Otherwise, such seminaries will be regarded outdated.

Some seminaries, as we are aware, have been closed down. We notice the signs of few others are at the verge of closing

down due to lack of vision, innovation and effective training programme, students and qualified staff members, able leadership, politics of the members of the Board, financial difficulties and severe competition. These struggling-seminaries can be turned into special institutes for special programmes focusing on one or two areas of training like Urban/Rural Ministry or Communication or Bible Translation or HCD or Gender Studies or Counselling, Peace Studies, etc.

Will the traditional seminaries draw more students for their M.Th and Ph.D or special institutes meet the demand of the market? Whose training will be more professional and effective in the field? – are yet to be seen in the future. My observation is that the post-graduate theological degree programmes will be taken up more by specialized institutes emerging in the future in South Asia. Many traditional seminaries may have a setback in offering quality programme combined with professionalism and drawing students for their PG programmes since they have to do justice to basic ministerial programmes of BD/M.Div. These traditional seminaries will have a constant struggle to do justice to all their UG, PG and Doctoral programmes demanding too much from their faculty members, building a mega infra-structure to provide facilities and resources for all their programmes and raising funds to run their programmes. As small is beautiful and effective, decentralizing some of their programmes to special institutes or limiting themselves either with basic or advanced training is the way to reduce their burden and to do justice and enhance the quality.

Quality Enhancement

'Quality' is the word today in the market economy. Parents are looking for quality education and willing to pay any amount of fees to educate their children. Educational institutions from the level of schools to colleges and professional programmes like engineering, medical and business administration are facing cut-throat competition to woo students to them by building modern buildings with all sorts of facilities, creating new courses and training programmes, net-work with overseas universities and companies for placement, appointing well qualified staff members and hiring professionals from companies and NGOs. For them,

quality in all the areas is the criteria for their survival and becoming excellent institutions in the ranking of the government, companies, media and public. Unfortunately, many churches and seminaries are far behind in quality in terms of their programmes, qualification of staff members, infrastructure and producing graduates who would prove themselves honest and effective in ministry. Some of the problems for enhancing the quality of theological education in India can be listed below.

1. Continuing the Western pattern of compartmentalized education than using inter-disciplinary and integrative approaches.
2. Not revising and updating periodically their traditional programmes like B.Th, BD, M.Th. and keeping the curriculum outdated.
3. Suspicion on the part of the Founder, Trustees, Governing Board or Faculty members for any innovative courses and programmes.
4. Lack of funds to develop infra-structure to offer new programmes.
5. Complacent attitude of colleges that they got their affiliation or accreditation.
6. Lack of demands on teachers to upgrade themselves, publish papers and books, involve with local communities and take up research projects.
7. Lack of proper evaluation of the performance of teachers and providing Refresher courses by accrediting and affiliating agencies.
8. Lack of effort on the part of the SSC or ATA or University to demand its member colleges for innovation and monitor quality enhancement of programmes, staff members, infrastructure and holistic development of students.
9. Lack of quality control mechanism in each institution to evaluate their programmes, curriculum and the performance of each office, departments, staff and student. ISO helps each institution to develop their standards and quality. Seminaries can seek the help of ISO or some other Consultancy Service to evaluate them each year.

10. Lack of accountable relationship with churches and thrust on holistic dimension of ministry.

Innovations without setting standard and monitoring the quality will certainly lead to poor performance of the programmes whether they are existing, old or the newly introduced programmes.

II. HOLISTIC CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Holistic Child Development (HCD) programme is a newly emerging discipline within the past 5-6 years to promote child theology as its theological basis and protect the children. But it is ignored unconsciously or neglected deliberately in most of the theological institutions.

Reasons hindering the promotion of HCD Programme

1. Churches are not realizing enough the importance of children in families, society and churches. Most of the Christian leaders treat children as students to learn from others rather than listening to what the children say to us about their views, socio-economic, cultural and psychological problems and expectations.
2. In theological education, study of children is either linked to the Feminist theology or incorporated within the study of women and society or assigned to the department of Christian education. What is the understanding of children by the department of biblical studies or in the history of Christianity or in the writings of great theologians namely, Augustine, Martin Luther, Calvin or Indian Christian theologians or in the scriptures of various religions is not yet fully explored in seminaries except a few thesis on the social problems of children.
3. Procedural difficulties in approving any new course or a separate discipline by the Senate of Serampore as well as by the Board of ATA are a reality. Even if courses on HCD are offered as optional ones by seminaries, getting the approval for the courses is a problem.
4. No group either a particular denomination or a seminary or para-church organization is devoting their full effort to

- develop child theology for HCD even though they are involved in taking care of children through their programs and projects such as managing orphanages, children homes and offering primary education and health schemes.
5. Creating child theology requires the involvement of children from various strata of society – rich, middle class, poor, upper caste, schedule caste/tribe and different religions and cultural traditions. Their perceptions, views, problems and expectations differ. So the question is about linking theoretical studies with practical requirement and giving credit to the involvement. This kind of HCD programmes demand the teachers and academic office to do more preparation, monitoring and evaluation.
 6. Schools and institutions of churches are satisfied with giving formal education to children. They are not influenced to promote child theology and work for the holistic development of children. Nevertheless, some state governments provide free mid-day meals to children in schools but without dealing with other socio-economic and psychological problems they face.

Children at Risk – Issues and Reasons

Many of us are not aware that millions of children are at risk (CAR) in different parts of the world. In fact, no child whether rich or poor living in cities or villages, is safe today. Any child could be kidnapped for sexual abuse or child labour or for the sake of selling kidney to hospitals. Out of 400 million children at risk, more than 200 million children are in crisis (CIC) facing one or the other problem. According to one statistics India had 298 million children below the age of 14 years out of 827 million in 1990. However, it has increased from 30 percent to 40 per cent in 2004 and estimated to be 400 million. Out of it, 100 million children between the ages of 5-14 years are not in schools. They may be at home in domestic work or employed as child labour in carpet industry, fire works, auto-mobile workshops and in some dangerous jobs. More than 10 million children die each year because of poverty, mal-nutrition, ethnic conflicts and war in different parts of the world. It is estimated that 3,00,000 children under the age of 18 years are in armed forces of the rebel groups

in different regions of the world carrying guns and bombs and getting ready for suicide attacks at the cost of their lives. Many of them have not entered into schools to gain formal education except the training to use the guns and bombs. Thousands of children become orphans and left uncared since their parents die of HIV/AIDS or commit suicide or killed in accidents or ethnic conflicts. In the year 2007, nine million children in Africa celebrated their Mother's Day without their mothers who died of AIDS. Hundreds of female fetuses are aborted in various clinics in India. Every day some child is missing when going to or coming from his or her school or during great festivals or picnics and excursions. School education is becoming so burdensome and not giving cordial atmosphere that many children dropout of schools or run away from homes and become street children. Children from *devadasi* families are forced to practice that system by some villagers. Sacrificing children for the sake of religious ritual happens even now in remote parts of India. Marrying a girl child to an elderly man goes on due to poverty or custom of the caste and village. Girls between the age of 11 to 18 years from poor families in villages are bought for Rs.3000 and sold for Rs.50,000 in sex trade going on in big cities. Sexual abuse of children by the members of families, relatives and neighbours led many children to go through psychological trauma and social alienation.

The list of these issues and the problems faced by children are unlimited. The reasons are many and also complex demanding detailed analysis by experts. They can be pointed out here without discussing them in detail.

1. *Economic* reasons such as poverty, lack of medical facility and schools, unemployment, mal-nutrition, environmental degradation, illiteracy, globalization, high taxes on agriculture and alienation of land from communities and disparity in wages and scale of pay, widening gap between the rich and poor, have contributed to the problems of children.

2. *Sociologically*, the major factor is the structure and system of our society practicing patriarchy and gender discrimination. Another reason is the caste system practiced in India. Each child is born with a caste identity which discriminates children from their birth as high caste or low caste or dalits and untouchables.

Paying dowry for the daughters to get married in the same caste and spending a huge amount for the wedding ceremony have paved way for aborting female fetuses and practicing infanticide.³ Alcoholism and drug addictions have broken families and thrown children on streets. Poor parenting, divorce and separation are affecting the social atmosphere at home that children cannot enjoy peace and progress.

3. Wrong *policies* of the government encouraging violence and conflicts between communities for cheap political gains and political movements recruiting children and training them for their ideologies (e.g. Islamic groups, RSS and VHP, Naxalites, insurgent movements in North East India) and militants have affected the population of children leaving them without much hope for their future.

4. *Religious teachings* encouraging the children to be sacrificed or married to elderly man, used as a medium for evil spirits, sorcery, thrown into the river or to be offered as a temple prostitute for the gods and goddesses have devalued the life of children. They are treated as a commodity for religious rituals and customs.

Both print and visual media have brought out these issues over the years in their programmes.⁴ Churches have been working for the children particularly taking care of orphans and giving education and medical treatment through their schools and hospitals. UNO has required its member nations to accept the Child Rights Declaration and implement it.⁵ NGOs, both Christian and secular are working for the welfare of the children. However, child theology for HCD is developing recently in North America, Europe, India and South East Asia.⁶

³ J.B. Jeyaraj, *Invisible Children-Infanticide, Feticide and Abortion* (Madurai: JIP, 2008), pp.

⁴ Refer to journals such as Economic and Political weekly (EPW), Frontline, India Today, Gender Studies, Manushi and various News Papers columns on children. Also websites and internet searches on Children.

⁵ Refer to UN Charter on Child Rights

⁶ Prof. Marcia Bunge in Valparaso University and scholars in Fuller Theological Seminary in USA, Dr. Keith White and Dr. Hadden Wilmer in UK, Dr. Dan Brewster, Dr. Menchit Wong, Dr. Sunny Tan, Dr. Rosalind Tan and Dr. Theresa Lua in South East Asia and scholars and practitioners in Christian Forum for Child Development

III. CURRICULUM OF HCD - COMPONENTS, TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS

The nature and component of HCD curriculum have been discussed in the Global Academic Consultation on HCD held in Chiang Mai, Thailand from 13th-17th May, 2007 and later in the Consultation held in Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena from 25th-28th, 2008. The following components are important and should be reflected in the curriculum in total and not necessarily in each subject :

Biblical perspectives

Theological basis

Contextual dimension

Ecclesiastical aspects

Ministerial perspectives

Missional dimension

The general objectives of the curriculum of HCD had been discussed in various consultations on CAR and HCD held in Bangalore (Sept., 2nd-3rd, 2005 and March 17th-18th, 2006), Pune (Oct. 2007), Kolkata (24th-26th Jan., 2007) and Global Alliance-South Asia Consultation on Curriculum and Resource Development (SAC-CARD) held in Bangalore from 11th-14th Feb., 2009.

1. To have the biblical perspectives on children and their development.

2. To study the status, role and problems of children in families, churches and society.

3. To identify the reasons and oppressive forces and analyze the issues and develop strategies for the empowerment of children.

4. To develop partnership and co-operation between churches - seminaries - NGOs - missionary organizations for exchanging of views, information and involvement at micro and macro-level.

(CFCF-India), Viva-India, Compassion, IMA, ATA and in the colleges of Senate of Serampore in India are developing Child Theology contextualizing it to their regional contexts. (Refer to their articles, reports, books and papers).

5. To get a verifiable result in caring, developing and empowering children as an outcome of theological education.

Already a few subjects have been created and offered in some seminaries. For example, 'Biblical Understanding of Children and Pastoral Perspectives' and 'Foundations for HCD' were offered to MA and M.Th students respectively in SAIACS. UBS has already offered a subject for the M.Th students in the Department of Christian Ministry. The syllabus of 'Introduction to Child Theology' is ready for the BD/M.Div programmes in colleges under SSC and ATA. A course on 'Family, Parenting and Child Development' is planned by another seminary for their M.Div students. TAFTEE is incorporating the HCD aspects into their curriculum of BTS and MTS. So far only one or two individual subjects are offered to students in BD/M.Div or MA or M.Th in the above seminaries. Fullfledged HCD programme is not yet developed in India but discussions to offer MA, M.Min. M.Th and Ph. D in HCD are going on to train pastors, lay leaders and staff of NGOs.

However, in the global context, Malaysian Baptist Theological Seminary is offering a fullfledged MA in HCD. Fuller Theological Seminary offers six modules for Ph.D with specialization in HCD in its School of Inter-Cultural Studies. AGST is also offering a programme in HCD.

Christian Forum for Child Development (CFCF- India) in co-operation with Global Alliance for HCD, a partner unit of Compassion is promoting HCD programmes in seminaries and for NGOs. Global Alliance for Advancing HCD -South Asia unit is promoting with the help of CFCF, MA, M.Th and Ph.D programmes and to develop courses, train faculty members and build resources. Already more than 30 subjects are identified. The quality of the HCD programme depends upon the way the components are incorporated into the Core and Optional subjects, using different methods of teaching the subjects, requiring the involvement with the children and writing the research project and proving with realizable evidences of transforming the society.

HCD in MA or M.Th or Ph.D can be offered as interdisciplinary programme with the integration of theory and practice. The Department of HCD in a seminary can co-ordinate the team teaching of faculty members from two or three

departments, monitor the practical involvement of those students with children and work out placement for their future ministry suited to the special interest of the students to work among the children of abused or HIV or prisoners or sex workers or broken homes or orphanages as pastors or social workers. Involvement as part of requirement in the curriculum of HCD strengthens the integration of learning theology and praxis. On the one side, it opens the eyes of students who come to the seminaries for theological education and touches their spirituality, perspective of humanity and enables them to move their churches and missions towards caring children at risk. On the other side, those practitioners coming from mission fields or projects of NGOs with first hand experience of working among children learn theological basis. Offering specialized courses with integration through Distance mode incorporating contact seminar classes periodically is the way forward to contextualize theological education and make the training more professional and relevant for churches and society.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Since HCD programme is new and innovative, it has a long way to become fullfledged programmes in India. Listing of courses, writing the syllabus, building the library resource and training the faculty members are tasks ahead of theological colleges that wish to offer HCD courses. All the seminaries, in a more realistic understanding, cannot offer fullfledged HCD programmes. However, all the seminaries can offer one or two Core subjects on family, parenting and child development under HCD programme to their B.Th, B.D/ M.Div. students. Some seminaries and a few special institutes for HCD in different regions of India can plan and offer fullfledged MA, M.Th and Ph.D in HCD. Any innovative programme like HCD in India cannot be well established without the support of churches, missions and NGOs such as Compassion, World Vision, KNH, Viva-net work and other para-church ministries going on among children. They provide field-opportunities for ministry as well as the feeder of personals for training and teaching. SSC, ATA, IMA, ICHE, OCI and other agencies involved in theological education should come forward to extend their expertise in developing the curriculum and recognizing the programmes. I

have presented above the need of innovative programmes without compromising quality, challenges of children at risk, problems and prospects for HCD in South Asia.

Questions for Further Exploration

1. Can we ignore the problems of children?
2. How can we have God's heart for children?
3. How can we build better future generations?
4. What is the role of theological education and Institutions?

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