

Critical Thinking on Contemporary India
An Evaluation Report
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The course on 'Critical Thinking on Contemporary India' was organized in Centre for Culture and Development (CCD) Vadodara, Gujarat from 17 April to 24 April 2018. We 12 Scholastics from 5 provinces participated in it. It was an innovative, inspiring, eye opening and insightful experience. The inaugural address gave us the foundation for this course stressing on Jesuits who are called to take a learned approach to ministry. We together reflected the socio-political realities of our country. The different resource persons broadened our horizon to see and think critically on the present day happenings in our country.

To have the first-hand experience of rural and urban life, we visited a daily Labour Market where workers come in search of work by hawking their labour. We also visited few slums and a village. The visits and interactions with the people not only opened our eyes but our mind, intellect and heart. The interaction with slum dwellers forced us to think that cement and painted buildings do not necessary build a city. By demolishing the slums government is bulldozing their rights, human dignity, their relationships, security, culture, livelihood etc. The city planning is a systematic hidden conspiracy for the benefit of a few rich. In the name of smart city, people are displaced and uprooted from their habitats. The government is depriving them of their basic needs and snatching away their happiness to fulfil its own interests. The field visits helped us to understand the conditions of the people. The course helped us to see the social realities from different perspectives of politics, economics, social, culture, religion, psychology etc.

The course also made us aware of the political situation of our country, where democracy is at stake. The definition of democracy by Lincoln is ‘... government of the people, by the people and for the people...’ However, today we have a government which is off the people, buys the people and is far away from the people. Today we are becoming slaves of Hindutva ideology and religion fundamentalism. People live in constant fear, uncertainties and threats. The government is playing with the sentiments of people and neglecting their authentic interests. Our leaders who are representative of people do not really represent people.

The course helped us to remove our own prejudices and biases and provoked to see reality from the eyes of those at the bottom of the society. It opened our minds to see the life and situation of the people in larger society. It helped us to see the root cause of the problems. It provided broader perspective for our future ministries.

The course gave us new lenses to see the realities of India. It enlightened us how we can become incarnate among the people by being part of their lives and bring slowly and surely change in their lives. To bring about social change we need to pitch our tents among the people, to be one with them. For me it was an incarnational experience where I become not just an observer but an insider and ready to dirty my hands and feet to work for the poor and down trodden.

It is a challenge for us to bring change in the society where there is authoritarianism, riots, where people are brain washed with different ideas and lies, where religion is used for political gain, and where diversity is not respected. Today people are forced to live in virtual realities of government’s promise. It is a challenge for us to bring change in the county and we need to work at the grass root level where social sciences can play a great role by diagnosing social pathologies eventually leading to social transformation.

Thus the work of Jesuit intellectuals is to diagnose social pathologies and become a voice for the voiceless, fight against injustice, inequality, exploitation and corruption. We learnt how to engage in the wider society and not be insulated in the cocoon of the four walls of our institutions. All the participants felt that we need to change our perspectives, ways of thinking, behaviour and attitudes before we change our society. This course motivated us to generate new knowledge about society.

We are grateful to our resource persons: Fr. Franco Fernando, Professors Biswaroop Das, Priyavadan Patel, J.S. Bandukwala, A.M. Shah, Lancy Lobo and Drs. Kanchan Bharati, and Dhananjay Kumar.

We thank Fr. Lancy Lobo, SJ, and CCD staff for meticulously planning and executing the course. I am sure course like this will make our Jesuit ministry more effective, affective, relevant and fruitful.