# The *Kairos* for the *Galilaioi*

## (A Study of John 1-7)

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The disciples of Jesus need to decipher the *kairos* graphics on the walls of history and distinguish and discern it from the *chronos* of history. Jesus lived in the *chronos* of history but he was diligent enough to discern the *kairos* in the *chronos*. The arrest of John, the Dipper was a decisive moment in Jesus' life and he affirmed this as the *kairos* in order to preach the *evangelion* of the Kingdom of God (basileia tou theou) (Mark. 1:15). The death of John, the Dipper passed off in the *chronos* as an usual event for ordinary people, but Jesus deciphered this event as the decisive moment, the *kairos* to raise the trumpet call to the *Meen Galilee* (Galilean heretics) and to the *Bahujan* of Galilee in order to rally around him for the kingdom of God. The first seven chapters of John's Gospel show the conflict of two traditions and this is plotted out in geographical categories: Galilee and Jerusalem. The "Galilaioi" represents a 'little tradition' and "the Jews" represents a dominant 'higher tradition'.

### A Historical Sketch

The Galileans were predominantly gentiles in the pre-exilic times.[1] Even in the whole of Galilee the actual Jewish population was only a slender minority.[2] However during the post-Maccabean period intensive Judaizing was initi ted in Galilee, but those who turned to the Jewish cult remained scarce (cf. I Macc. 5:14-17, 20-22). During the time of Aristobulus I (104-103) a few were forcefully converted.[3]

According to Martin Hengel, Galilee was the center of resistance movement and there were groups of 'robbers' who were known for their bravery and love of freedom.[4] Due to the absence of good leadership they lacked unity of action against the enemies and this paved the way for their scattering and defeat. Also because of their independent and recalcitrant attitude in religious matters, the Pharisees of the higher Jerusalem tradition had a poor opinion about the Galileans.[5] They regarded them as ignorant country boors careless of the law. Many are stigmatized by rabbis as *amme-ha-aretz* (Jn. 7:49).

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The Herodian reign (37 B.C. - A.D. 70) brought significant shift in the economic life of the Galileans. Many were deprived of their basic means of production. There was a systematic and accelerated dispossessing of the local peasantry.[6] Most of the best land belonged to large land owners, while the small property holders seem to have concentrated in the hill country. Burden of taxation was heavy especially on lower classes. This led to frequent revolts which were repressed with an iron hand. Around the lake, a goodly number of Galileans made a living by fishing.

Jesus movement began in an atmosphere of fear and resentment, of crushing poverty and messianic expectations. Preaching of the Kingdom of God was a sign of dissent, and claiming to be the Son of David or Messiah was viewed in the light of apocalyptic revolts and suspected by the imperial authorities and their Jewish collaborators.

In John's gospel, the narrator talks about Jesus' to and fro movement from Galilee to Jerusalem. There was a time in Jesus' ministry that he resorted to be with the Galileans especially in the face of opposition (Jn. 1:1-3). His relation with "the Jews" and their higher tradition was one of confrontation and challenge. He comforted (2:11), corrected (6:32) and led the Galileans to confession (6:34). Even though Jesus had a preferential option for the Galileans, he was not devoid of that option towards the victims of the Jerusalem higher tradition (see chs. 5,9,11). Nevertheless he spent his time with the Galilean little tradition and established a strong relation with them.

## Jerusalem Higher Tradition and "the Jews" as Its Patrons

A cursory survey of the first seven chapters of John's Gospel reveal certain features of the higher tradition. First of all, even though this tradition claims to be the patron saint of true religious tradition and worship, there was an absolute abuse of the worship of God (Jn. 2:13ff). The place that was allotted in the temple for the gentiles, women and proselytes to come and honour YHWH was used for accumulating wealth. Money making took precedence and became the objective of worship and religion in the high tradition.

Secondly, those who claim to be the teachers and the rulers of the people in this higher tradition lack understanding and knowledge (Jn. 3:1,10). Claiming to be the protagonists of the Kingdom of God they exhibit total ignorance of the basics of the kingdom.

Thirdly, this tradition totally ignored and isolated the victims and the marginalised among them to their fate (Jn. 5:2ff). In ch. 5:5 the paralyzed victim was lying in the Bethztha for thirty eight years in

Jerusalem which has a pool and five porticos. There also lay a collection (plethos) of invalids, blind, lame and paralysed. They lay in wait that something good may come from this tradition, a tradition in to which perhaps they were baptized with false hopes. The gravity of indifference towards them is shown by the comment of one of the victims — there have been no men to put him to this pool in order to get delivered (v. 7).

Fourthly, inspite of their ignorance and victimization of others, they glory in their religion and tradition (Jn. 5:10). Sabbat, the 'holy day' need to be observed at all cost, of course not as a day of release and rest. The delight of deliverance of a victim in the higher tradition is scolded off as a grave sin and violation of the values ceaselessly observed in the higher tradition.

Fifthly, in such a tradition with oppressive and exploitative value systems, the movement of Jesus was viewed with grave suspicion. The supporters of the higher tradition did not like Jesus, as liberator, to isolate the Galilean multitude from their sphere of influence and lead them to liberative and redemptive truth (Jn. 6:41). They found Jesus as the one who stirs the status quo (2:16; 5:12) and attracts the *ochlos*, the Bahujan towards him. The Jews who murmured against Jesus in ch. 6 in Galilee can be considered as the patrons of the higher tradition who have settled down in the Galilean territories. This could be viewed as the result of centuries of Judaizing process which the higher tradition attempted in order to establish control over the little Galilean tradition in the north.

Sixthly, the higher tradition resorted to personal accusation in order to demoralize and discourage the attempts of Jesus. They began to speak ill of Jesus (6:42), a direct attack on his pedigree and possibly his progene. This proved to be a strong weapon in the hands of the protagonists of the higher tradition to put down and destroy the integrity and credibility of those in the little tradition who opt to join in the liberative tradition.

Seventhly, the Jerusalem higher and exploitative tradition refused to listen to what Jesus says (6:52). This shows, first of all, their unwillingness to accept the work of any redeemer among the Galileans and secondly their unwillingness to part with the Galilean Bahujans. Since a large number of Galileans were baptized in to the higher tradition, the latter valued them to be a source of income for the higher tradition particularly in times of feasts and festivals when they pour down all what they have earned to appease the higher tradition and systems. The structures of the higher tradition was flourishing due to its exploitation of the little tradition, so any voice of dissent will be deposed with full force (Jn. 19:6).

Lastly, in all practical purposes, the higher tradition looked down upon the little tradition. The Jews of the Jerusalem tradition looked down upon the Galileans and the place they lived — Galilee (7:41,52). For them the deliverer can only be from their tradition and there cannot be one from the little tradition. They employ all means to thwart the changed perspectives of those of the little tradition (6:41,52; 7:1).

## Jesus and the Galilean Little Tradition

The Synoptic Gospels give a clear picture of the conditions of the Galilee and the Bahujan Galileans. Matthew describes this as the 'land of Zebulun' and the 'land of Naphtali' 'towards the sea', and 'across the Jordan'. All these areas come under the boundary of Galilee and its inhabitants are generally known as Gentiles (Mt. 4:15ff). Recently scholarly investigations also approve of this fact.[7] The inhabitants were living in darkness and in the shadow of death (cf. Is. 9:1-2). The people were poor, captives, blind, oppressed and economically deprived of their God given due share (the jubilee blessing) (Lk. 4:16-19).

In the Gospel of John they are seen scattered over Cana, Capernaum, Samaria and Galilee. The marriage narration in Jn. 2:1-11 tells us that even at the time of a marriage, a time when generally people store and share all they could with the guests; in this particular family in Cana, "the wine gave out", "They have no wine" (2:3). This shows that, inspite of their every efforts, they could store only that quantity of wine which was inadequate for the wedding guests. They were poor and those who gathered also would not be a different lot.

John notes one important aspect of the corporate and social life of the people who were living in these regions. They loved family atmosphere and Jesus too was not an exception (Jn. 2:12). They loved to live together. Perhaps their economic deprivity, social alienation, political oppression, and cultural and religious humiliation made them to cement their own corporate togetherness.

Side by side with this, John present to us the life situation of the Samaritan half Jews (Jn. 4). Jesus passes through this region on his way again to Galilee (4:3). The Samaritans are poor, scheduled as low caste untouchables who are known for their loose living. Nevertheless, they long for establishing their identity within the dominant tradition. The Samaritan woman, who is an untouchable, with whom the 'Jews have no dealing', boast on 'our father Jacob who gave us this well' (v. 12). This is the vain hope and longing of a shattered and battered people, who have nothing to resort in order

to build their identity. They, therefore, turn to the available identity — the dominant but dehumanising Jewish Jerusalem higher tradition.

All the above narratives tell us that when Jesus revealed himself as the helper, as one among them and as the real living water; the wedding guest opened their mouth to drink the 'new wine', they stayed with him and received the living water, for these events were redeeming and liberative.

When Jesus turned to the Galilean Bahujan, John writes that the Galileans welcomed him (4:45). This verse tells us that they received Jesus because they have "seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast". Interestingly John narrates only two incidents prior to 4:45 which Jesus had done at Jerusalem — confronting the religious minded, money making temple authorities and challenging one of the ruler cum teacher of the Jews who lacks understanding of the kingdom of God (2:13ff and 3:1ff). These deeds appealed to the Galileans. Jesus concretely revealed the exploitation, futility and the vanity of the higher tradition and its false religious claims — a thing that the *Galilaioi* longed to see someone doing. John 4:45 again reveals one more important aspect about the sociological life of the Galileans. It says that 'they too had gone to the feast' in Jerusalem. This means that until the coming of this deliverer, the *Galilaioi* go all the way to Jerusalem, to the higher tradition, somehow to relate their identity to the Jerusalem dominant tradition (cf. 4:12). Until now the Galileans had no other place to go for establishing their identity. So they used to go to Jerusalem and spent all what they had at the feast, claiming Jewish heritage which the dominant tradition never accepted (7:41, 52; 4:9). They were branded as *ochloi, the amme-ha aretz* who do not know the law and are accursed (7:49).

The Galileans are simple and innocent people who believed in Jesus by seeing the signs (4:48) of deliverance. The deliverance which Jesus brought by confronting the dominant tradition at every opportune time and by being identified with the Galileans. Jesus loved to be with them (1:43; 2:1; 4:3,45; 6:1,2, 7:1-9). He provided to their needs, he found comfort in the midst of them and he loved to move about in all Galilee and remained there (7:9).

John tells us that the Galileans are the 'Bahujan' (ochlos), which means that they are not merely a crowd, a gathering of people. Bahujan has a particular caste, geographic, ethnic identity. A tradition is implied, perhaps an ignored little tradition. They are ignorant of the law and are accursed by gods (7:49). They followed Jesus (6:2) due to the signs which Jesus performed. Exhibition of signs is inevitable to draw the people of the little tradition, for now

they want concrete evidence and when the signs are performed the Bahujan followed in multitude.

Interestingly in John we could notice that in the first Passover feast these Bahujan resorted to their higher tradition and participated in its festivities (4:45) in order to establish their identity. But in the second feast (6:4) they came to Jesus for a feast and that too on a mountain (6:3-5). This means that they have seen and tasted the long awaited identity in Jesus' movement. They have seen what Jesus did with the dominant tradition with their eyes (4;45) and the desire of Jesus to identify with their little tradition. Jesus movement made the difference in between these two Jewish feasts and now for the Galilean Bahujan, the feast of the higher tradition does not count much and they learned to survive without the participation in the dominant tradition and its festivities. This switching over of affinity was so drastic, sudden and radical.

An important feature of the Galilean Bahujan is that once they realize the redeeming signs in confronting the higher exploitative tradition and identifying with their little tradition, they start coming towards the redeeming signs, the liberative tradition; they come in large numbers and that will surprise or even embarrass even the accomplice of the redeeming signs (6:5,7). Once they come and get their identity, they are willing to feast with the liberating tradition in whatever it gives even in a deserted place (6:12).

The Galilean Bahujan were longing for their political and economic deliverance for a long time and therefore when the redeeming signs were revealed in the midst of them via Jesus, they have resorted to make Jesus the symbol of their political and economic deliverance (6:5). Their desire to have a politico-economic deliverance is natural. But the liberative tradition (Jesus) is devoid of any selfish politico-economic ambition as such, for his longing is the kingdom of God and this demands a step ahead.

Similarly, their following of Jesus as their liberator was for meeting their physical needs (6:26-29). No wonder that those who are in the little tradition have no other desire, for they are forced in to such a situation due to the structural exploitative methods of the dominant tradition. The liberative tradition need not look down upon those of the little tradition, if at all they come to them in order to meet their immediate physical needs.

It is important to note that Jesus after meeting their physical needs did not leave them to their destiny. He leads them to deeper and transcendent truth and belief where their identity will be secure (6:27-29). Perhaps this is the vital clue in securing a permanent and secure identity for the Galilean Bahujan.[8] Of course when the question of accepting this permanent identity is put forward(6:29)

these innocent Galileans begin to withdraw and try to take refuge again in their ignorantly inherited dehumanizing higher tradition (6:31). For this, we cannot find fault with them for this is the way they have been trained and brain washed for generations.

Jesus did not try to cut them off from their little traditions, for he believed that the liberative tradition coupled with the little tradition of the Galileans will be a formidable force in building a secure and sufficient identity for the Galilean Bahujan. Jesus spends more time to build up this integrated tradition (6:32-33). This is very vital. It was after much effort of perseverance and perhaps also persuasion that these Galilean Bahujan were brought to a confession. When they realized the mystery of the integrated approach towards their identity, they in all one voice cried out "Lord, give us this bread always." (6:34).

When such a state is achieved, opposition is sure to occur against the approach. The patrons of the higher tradition living among the Galilean Bahujan will come to know about this and they will use all the powers that are at their disposal to thwart this integrated identity of the Bahujan (6:41,66) and they may try to snatch out some from this newly emerged tradition. But those who are genuine, and realized the mystery and power of this identity will stay even in the face of opposition (6:68,69). Attempts will be there to annihilate the agents of the liberative integrated tradition (7:1). However for Jesus the *kairos* is to remain in Galilee (7:9) in order to accomplish his purpose, for Jesus believed that the *kairos* has come for the *Galilaioi Bahujan.*

## A Contextual Theological Reflection

Geographically the peripheral part of India which are predominantly jungles, mountains and backward are inhabited by the Bahujan, original inhabitants of the land. They have settled here not by their own choice, but they were forced to scatter in to these areas by their invaders who forcefully occupied their earlier possessions and land.[9] Even in these peripheral areas the conquerors did not leave them to their fate.[10] There is a systematic and recurring economic, religious and cultural conquest, both directly and indirectly. Exclusive pockets of people of high and dominant tradition are visible in areas of people belonging to the little traditions. This resembles to what is called the process of Judaization of Galilee. In India we have her sister—Sanskritization and Hinduization of Dalits, Bahujan and the original inhabitants. They are the *amme-ha-aretz* of India, the accursed ones, the ones who do not know or even permitted to know the Vedas (the law).

The people of the little tradition are scheduled as low castes, untouchables, unapproachables, and harijans which has a subtle connotation towards their indecent origin in the eyes of those of the higher tradition. They are branded as illiterates, who deserve no mercy or reservation, instead they are divinely destined to sustain and serve those of the higher tradition as part of their *karma* in order to attain a blissful rebirth in the higher tradition. This has been the deceitful hope that made those of the little tradition to undergo all agonies of life.

Attempts were made via political means, for centuries, in order to baptize those of the little traditions in to the dominant tradition as it was done by the Maccabean descendants and the Roman imperial powers via the Herodian 'proselytes' in Galilee. If at all the Bahujan had resorted to the higher tradition, it is merely their attempt to establish their identity. This writer while on a visit to some villages in Orissa has noticed that the so called 'harijans' from a village had gone to Puri, the brahmin 'holy' place and performed a certain costly ceremony and came back claiming themselves to be the brahmins. But the tragic fact is that neither the people of their immediate neighbourhood accept them as brahmins nor the brahmins who made them so, treat them as equals. We are yet to see a 'Dalit Brahmin' to be the Sankaracharya of Sringeri, or Kasi, or even Puri.

The Dalits, the Dravidians, the Adi Dravidas, the tribals and all the Scheduled castes of India are increasingly aware in recent years about their pre-Hindu roots. This made the protagonists of the higher Hindu tradition to call these segments of Indian society as heretics, just as 'the Jews' called the Galileans as the *'meen Galilee'*( Galilean heretics).

The people of various little traditions in India are eagerly awaiting to see the signs of liberative and delivering traditions from any quarters so that they may join in it en masse. This had happened in the past, it is happening in the present, at various levels. The followers of the Real Liberator may catch the *kairos* and act. They may show signs of deliverance that the Bahujan of the little tradition may see and believe. The *kairos* has come to concentrate fully on the Bahujan, those of the little traditions, that it may stir a jealousy in the higher tradition, that they may in turn accept the real liberative tradition (cf. Rom. 11:13f).

The signs of the liberative tradition need to be concrete and visible, that the Bahujan may flow towards it and seek their integrated identity in it. A politically and economically motivated move from those of the little tradition may be viewed in the *kairos* perspective. They have seen in the *chronos* that only such a move could deliver them from the clutches of the dominant exploitative tradition.

Political polarization is natural and economic ambitions are inevitable. The liberative tradition should not be satisfied with these happenings, for such efforts alone have not settled all human problems thus far in human history. The goal ought to be the kingdom of God, the entry into which is preconditioned also with the imperatives— *metanoeite* and *pisteuete* (repent and believe, Mk. 1:15) in the Gospel. This calls for an individual as well as corporate transformation of the people who are coming to the kingdom. Leading the Bahujan to transcendent truth along with meeting their physical needs is vital to assure a credible and lasting identity for them in the future.

Often those who turned to be the followers of Jesus and the liberating tradition are ridiculed as 'rice Christians' by those of the dominant tradition. This, to some extent, is true. Meeting the needs of their stomach was their priority, and so in the past those of the little tradition looked up on the followers of Jesus for their food. Jesus fed such Galileans with what he could (Jn. 6:9,12), and made them to follow him.

The liberating tradition must have the *dunamis* (power) to reveal the futility and vanity of the higher exploitative Hindu tradition and religious culture. It is at this point that the Dalits are going to join the liberative tradition en masse.

A warning to the liberative tradition: Do not try to destroy the little tradition and their style of corporate, sharing life and togetherness. A corporate, collective and caring life of the tribals and those of the little tradition is unique in India; and it is this pattern of life that the higher tradition attempted to torpedo by their individual, self centered religious values and culture. They tried to amalgamate and fuse the little traditions into their higher tradition for their advantage. This was aimed to extinguish the little tradition and subjugate them to generations of slavery and economic deprivity. The liberative tradition need to work for a creative integration of its values with the values of the little tradition and make the little traditions credible. Such an 'integrated tradition of traditions' can function as a bulwork to thwart all attempts of the exploitative, dehumanizing higher tradition (cf. Jn. 6:34,68f).

Attempts to destroy the integrated tradition is sure to occur. Viewing the Gospel tradition and liberators with suspicion is not uncommon in India. The patrons of the higher tradition wield power in politics, in bureaucracy, in business and in media. But this cannot stand against an integrated liberative tradition if this is put in proper perspectives. The Bahujan's reluctance to accept the liberative tradition need not upset us. When they see the 'signs', they are sure to follow.

The *kairos* has come for the *Galilaioi* in India. A definite and decisive move from the liberative tradition towards achieving an integrated tradition, for a viable and credible identity for the people of the land is the need of the hour.

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