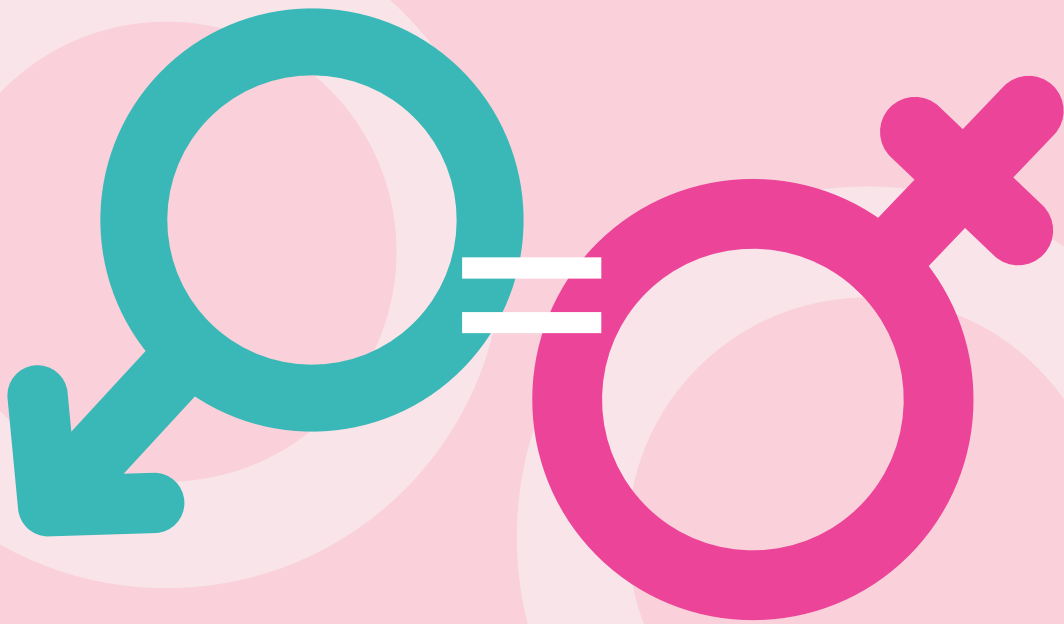


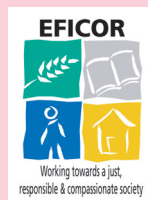
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Issue 1, 2022

Evangelical Perspectives on Mission and Ethics



Gender Justice



**“For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh
the dividing wall of hostility.”**
Ephesians 2:14 (New International Version)

Drishtikone means perspective or viewpoint in Hindi. The magazine seeks to provide a space in which Christians can share their perspectives and points of view on wholistic mission in India.

Our Vision is that **Drishtikone** will motivate change in readers. The experiences of development practitioners, theologians, grassroot workers and others demonstrating God’s love in a practical way, will influence and encourage Christians to join the struggle for peace and justice in this country.

Drishtikone seeks to present a Biblical perspective on social issues and provide readers with information and models of engagement in wholistic concerns. It is a forum for evangelical reflection and dialogue on development issues in India.

Drishtikone is published three times a year by EFICOR to mobilise Christian reflection and action. Financial contributions from readers are welcome to support EFICOR in its efforts to influence the mind towards action.

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Letters to the Editor



Dear Editor,

Thank you for sending Drishtikone magazine on Digital Technology. It is a very informative and useful resource.

Sincerely,

Rev. G. Edward Rajan

Banswara Post & District

Rajasthan

Dear Editor,

It is always a blessing to read Drishtikone. The articles in the 'Digital Technology' issue are quite interesting and insightful. Thank you for sharing the magazine.

Mr. Ungshungmi

New Delhi

Dear Editor,

I really appreciate the publication of EFICOR and the team who put in their efforts.

Thank you.

Ms. Shushobita Singh

Odisha

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Editorial...

Gender justice and equality are crucial issues which are a sub-set of discussions on inequality. We have highlighted the various dimensions and challenges of inequality in the previous issue of Drishtikone on Inequality, Issue 1, 2021. Inequality is recognised as one of the most challenging issues and within that lies the issue of gender inequality. Gender roles and expectations are learned. Systems of social differentiation such as political status, class, caste, ethnicity, physical and mental disability, age, etc modify gender roles.

Gender norms are insidious because this injustice is borne out through socially constructed norms that are handed down and are accepted from generation to generation without questioning. Gender is a justice issue because it robs women and girls of opportunities and outcomes that men in those same circumstances take for granted. Harmful traditional and cultural practices within the family and society gets manifested and are felt not just by women and girls, but also by men and boys in a different way. In this issue, we have therefore covered the transgender perspective of gender in one of the articles. Gender is a justice issue which the church and all of us must be engaged in not merely as an act of sympathy or kindness but because we as Christians and as Church are being called to play our part in bringing gender justice and equality to our own context.

The articles have highlighted gender justice from a Biblical perspective and we hope that it will prompt us all to reflect from these pertinent questions - What does gender justice look like in the family, community, church and nation? What are some lessons from the Biblical narrative about gender justice? Who are the Biblical heroes that challenge our thinking about gender norms? What implications does this have for Christian leadership? What are some practical steps that Christians and churches can take on understanding gender dynamics and bringing about gender justice? What are the concepts of masculinity and femininity in the Bible? This publication rightly seeks to address these issues and we hope that it will motivate you to take sustained efforts in bringing gender justice.

How can this be? (there is no man)¹

Sushila and Sanjiv Ailawadi

Something went terribly wrong right there at that beginning of human history. That beautiful partnership created to be of mutuality and oneness, chose together to distrust God. Divine order was thrown into disarray by human disobedience. Sin and terrible suffering entered the world. Blame and accusation took over, “*The woman you gave to be with me*” (Gen 3:12). Hierarchy and a power struggle ensued, “*Your desire shall be for your husband, and he will rule over you*” (Gen 3:16). Manipulation and control led to oppression, exploitation, abuse and suffering for

all generations
to this day.

As a woman growing up in a world deeply rooted in a male dominated worldview, I have often felt at complete odds with myself. Much the same as a modern India co-existing with its colonial past; fast paced urban centres surrounded by a rural, ancient mindset. Simultaneously new and old, future and past in what seems to be an incompatible, incongruous partnership.

The church steeped in similar gender contradictions creates the impossibility for us as women to be equally yoked with our brothers in ministry. For that matter, as women generally to engage in any kind of public or private discourse and be received as having credible, valid opinions is an insurmountable task. Try getting a word in if you’re the only woman in a group of even two or three others.

At the core is a species divided within itself. There seems to be no difference whether we are in the church looking out, or outside the church looking in. In the face of the ‘Me too’, or the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movements, where is the church and its stance on these issues? Is it our own guilt that keeps us silent? Or do we defensively speak against the practices of such people to cover up who we really are?

Jesus challenges to the very core our pursuit of God. He threatened the powers of His day simply because He did not play by their rules. He did not cater to their power and

denounced unequivocally what they stood for. He had not come to lord it over the earth. His ways were to wrap a towel around His waist and wash the feet of those who followed Him.

Heaven’s answer to the craving for position and power is the slain Lamb.² Born in poverty and vulnerability, far from the courts of kings of His time. *He became a servant and made Himself of no repute.*³

Our greed for power is what corrupts us. Jesus came to remind us how we are to treat each other. Where the walls of inequality that exist in the world are brought down in the Kingdom. Walls of race and ethnicity, caste and class, rich and poor, male and female.⁴

Something needs to be recovered in the way we follow God. We have forgotten how to be faithful stewards of position and authority, forgotten about the priesthood of believers. This article explores patriarchy, its effect on the believing community, and concludes with suggestions of how we could move forward.

*Social wealth*⁵ is a commodity that depends largely upon social connectivity and social status. Both are measures of power: the greater the connections, the greater the status, the greater the power, and social wealth of an individual in any community. Various intersectional factors contribute to social wealth. Our colour, our looks, our nationality, our ethnicity, our education, our bank balance, our skills, amongst other things. The ability to capitalise on these enables ascendancy over others.

In a traditional patriarchal society,⁶ maleness is the single most defining factor of social wealth. The man has an indelible

¹*Lk 1.34*
²*Rev 5.6*
³*Phil 2.7*
⁴*Eph 2.14-16; Gal 3.28-29*
⁵*Social wealth must be distinguished from social capital. Social capital is good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit (Putman, 2000). Since wealth is associated with power, social wealth of an individual or community is the dominance an individual or community has over others by virtue of possessions that are perceived as socially valuable. This could take several forms including colour, nationality, ethnicity, caste, and class, normally a multiplicity of two or more of these.*

⁶*It can be argued that it’s not just in traditional patriarchal societies, it’s in any society, anywhere.*

⁷*Not only is domination internalised, so is subordination.*

status by virtue of being male; the man has greater physical, economic, and social mobility; he has the connections, he is confident, he represents the family, he controls the finances. He has exposure to the workings of the outside world where the woman may not. Such an imbalance creates the potential for a high degree of gender power abuse.

The male generally in such families is socially conditioned to believe that his maleness makes him superior. He *internalises domination*.⁷ Woman is subordinate and must serve the man. Women and children are owned by the men in the family. He is indulged and pampered, he is as a god to his wife. A family that has only girls keeps on trying for a boy. A wife redeems her status by having a son. In such a context, to be born a female is a crime.

Part of this *narcissistic heritage* is that *a person's self-worth is almost exclusively determined by the rank he occupies in the profoundly hierarchical nature of society. If the perception of another person has first to do with gender ('Is this individual male or female?'), followed by age ('Is he/she young or old?') and by other such markers of identity, then in India the determination of relative rank ('Is this person superior or inferior to me?') remains very near the top of subconscious questions evoked in an interpersonal encounter.*⁸ Such a culture does not understand the notion of rights when applied to women and children.

One of the first girls who came to our home for those rescued from abuse and exploitation, was seventeen-year-old Seema.⁹ She was pregnant with the child of her grandfather. There was also some confusion about which one of the other men in her family was the father. She had to flee the family just to stay alive.

Basanthi,¹⁰ another girl, was not as fortunate. Someone in the village called us to take a burn victim to the hospital. She was already dead by the time we reached her house. Her weeping, grief-stricken family had seen this as their only recourse, rather than face the shame. Femicide - the killing of women and girls because of their gender - is the most extreme form of gender-based violence.¹¹

What of the church in India? Do we subscribe to this treatment of women or is there some difference in the worshipping community as against the attitudes found in the dominant culture? Is the church also oppressive, or is the church free of the shackles of such practices?

There are six beliefs present within traditional Christian thinking that have aided perpetrators in rationalising their behaviour when it comes to abuse:

- *The belief that God intends for men to dominate and for women and children to submit.*

⁷From *'The Indians, Portrait of a People'*; pg 8, Chapter 1, *The Hierarchal Man (The Web of Family Life)*; Sudhir and Katharina Kakar; Penguin Books, India; 2007.

⁹Name changed

¹⁰Name changed

¹¹<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60653099>

¹²Carolyn Heggen (*Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches*); as quoted in the Paper *'Power, Patriarchy and Sexual Abuse in Churches of Christian Denomination'*; Thaeda Franz; Liberty University Traumatology, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 2002).

- *The belief that because of her role in the Fall, woman is morally inferior to man.*
- *The belief that children are inherently evil and must have their wills broken.*
- *The belief that marriage however dysfunctional is to be preserved at all costs.*
- *The belief that suffering is a Christian virtue.*
- *The belief that Christians must promptly forgive those who sin against them.*¹²

I would add a few more:

- A woman is created solely to serve men.
- Good wives look after their husbands, never complain about their behaviour, they just modify their own.
- A girl born into a family is the property of a future husband and his family, who are to be paid to take her away. She therefore is a liability.
- Women are objects owned by men, the symbol of honour in a family. One way to assert ascendancy over, and humiliate a man, is to publicly rape the women in his household.
- Domestic abuse is the norm, to be expected in any family. Where not present, the man is weak, has no control over his woman, to be scorned by others.
- It is the woman's fault when men pass lewd comments or molest her, because she must have spurred him on in some way.
- The highest call for a woman is to nurture her family.
- Single women are therefore inferior to married women for they have no man or children to serve.
- The lighter your skin the more beautiful you are, the more superior to a darker skinned girl.

All the above beliefs find place in most circles, including Christian.

The deep-seated conviction in parts of the church that it was the woman who led the man astray in that primordial past has also led many churches to view the woman as weaker, not just physically, but morally and emotionally as well.

This belief goes on to suggest that since God cursed Eve, all women therefore must suffer the pain of childbirth. I have spoken to an indignant pastor who was filled with wrath at the thought of any escape from such pain. He was convinced that a caesarean operation was disobeying God's intentions for a woman to go through painful labour. Any epidural process to make it easier for the woman is a flagrant disobedience. When I spoke to him about Jesus becoming the curse so that we would all no longer be under the curse he spluttered in speechless wrath.

Pastors are revered in traditional societies, especially in congregations of simple-minded folk. They exercise immense power in a society where godmen are widely worshipped, followed blindly, by those searching for the face of God and hope and security in the face of a meaningless world that offers

¹³Nancy Myer Hopkins M.S. (1994) *Power Abuse and Theologies of Sexuality in the Church, Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 1:4, 357-361, DOI: 10.1080/10720169408400058

¹⁴*Ibid*, pg. 357, ¹⁵*Ibid*, pg. 358

none. This unfortunately extends to the church as well: in her article on ‘Power Abuse and Theologies of Sexuality in the Church,’¹³ Nancy Hopkins says that *an imbalance of power and unequal relationships will lead to an abuse of power.*¹⁴ It is inevitable that it should.

From our own experience we found just how easy it is for a leader to believe in his ‘inalienable rights’ by virtue of just being a leader. The right to be heard and listened to and in some cases obeyed without question. According to Hopkins, *‘Women and children are socialised to be victims and men to be offenders.’*¹⁵

In a workshop with twenty pastors, my husband was speaking on the issue of church engaged with social evils in the city. My husband asked the question, “*How many of you think it is right to discipline your wives?*” All agreed. The answer to the next question was chilling, “*How many of you have beaten your wives, in order to discipline them?*” Nineteen of twenty raised their hands.

David Bosch says, “*As Samuel Rayan puts it: In our methodology, practice and theory, action and reflection, discussion and prayer, movement and silence, social analysis and religious hermeneutics, involvement and contemplation, constitute a single.*”¹⁶ In other words, what David Bosch attempts to express is that neither is our practice born from our theology, nor is our theology derived from our practice. Instead, ***our practice is our theology.***

Consequently, if our practice flows from our culture, then our culture cannot be divorced from our theology, nor our theology from our culture. Our culture not only then influences our theology, but our culture is also our theology. Taking this logically further, we come to a disturbing conclusion: ***If patriarchy is our culture, then is patriarchy our theology?!***

It would seem so from the way the Bible is interpreted to the way dowry and dominance are practiced in the church. When the church is not at odds with the dominant culture, we end up deeply influenced by it. *To be friends with the world is enmity with God.*¹⁷ Such a body would have parted company with the paths of life that the church is meant to live by and ceased to be the salt and light, we are meant to be.

History is usually written from the perspective of those in power, for the dominant force presents a dominant narrative. Such a narrative influences our attitudes and legitimises our actions. Patriarchal constructs used to exert power and have dominance over women need to be deconstructed to affirm and recover a narrative on women’s contributions to both our past

and our present.

To interrupt this discourse, there is an urgent need to see and analyse our lives, our histories, and daily behaviour not only through the lens of men but also through the eyes of women.

Can we call for an analysis of our marriages from the perspectives of our wives? Can we call for an analysis of our parenting from the perspective of our daughters? Can we call for an analysis of our workplaces from the perspective of women, especially those in blue collar jobs? For our histories, too long have been written and evaluated and analysed by men, the dominant discourse has been penned by them, not by women.

If we do call for such an analysis, we will first have to provide the tools for such an analysis, or male voices will once again drown women out.

So, if you are a parent, teach your daughters

self-confidence, affirm their womanhood, equip them with skills that others give their sons. Teach them to be proud to be women, teach them to walk with their heads held high, show them how to ask questions with courage, to answer with strength, without violence.¹⁸

Teach this to your wives, if you are a married man, learn to take the back seat, give her the place and the voice she deserves in your marriage together.

In the workplace, provide these tools and spaces to other women, so that they too have a voice. Let us imagine a world that is not only *post-patriarchal* but also *post-feminist*, as a feminist who fights for the equality of women will no longer need to speak up in a world where women and men are already equal.

Somebody has said, “*Privilege is invisible to those who have it.*”¹⁹ In our patriarchal world, men are privileged. But if you were to tell a man he is privileged, many may be surprised. Further, if you were to tell him that his wife was feeling lesser than him, feeling like he never considered her feelings, he may also be equally surprised.

My wife and I were counselling a couple. We met them separately. Describing his marriage, the husband said that his wife and he were fulfilled in their marriage, they made all decisions together, and he considered her thoughts and feelings before they did anything.

In the next room, his wife was in tears. She felt very alone in their marriage. Her husband and her mother-in-law made all the decisions together. He never considered her feelings. Since they were married, he had not even once celebrated her birthday.

So, to take off on the statement *privilege is invisible to those who*

¹⁶Bosch, David Jacobus; *Transforming Mission : Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission; (American Society of Missiology series ; no. 16)*

¹⁷James 4.4

¹⁸Quote on Instagram by Lila, 9th March 2022, d/o Ruby Von Drews, Australia.

¹²<https://www.lehman.cuny.edu/academics/inter/women-studies/documents/why-men.pdf>

have it, we note that the *underprivileged are invisible to those who are privileged*. A woman's feelings and her oppression are invisible to her husband, for he is the privileged one.

To take it further, *the underprivileged, brainwashed by centuries of oppression, believe the privileged are entitled to their privileges* on account of their higher location on the social ladder. The lower castes revere the higher; the poor serve the rich; women are slaves to men. Each catering to the dominant group as if that group was entitled to it.

So, we come to the fourth outcome of a patriarchal world: *Privilege is also invisible to those who have never had it*.

To change begins with the voluntary relinquishment of privileges by those who *have*; the refusal to offer it to the privileged by those who have none. Those who *have*, never notice that they *have*. If informed that they do, they are not likely to be convicted by the sheer injustice of imbalance, but most often feel threatened and angry, or

refuse to do

anything about it because they do not want to lose their privileges. Men react with aggression and domestic violence, if not given what they think they deserve. *Refuse privileges to the privileged but be prepared to face violent repercussions in the use of brutal means to be forced to provide these.*

History is the story of the dominant, it is the story of the privileged, who are so stuffed with privileges, that they no longer regard these as such, but instead believe it to be their God bestowed birth right. *Those born into privileges believe that it is their birth right to be privileged*. For those not born into privilege, it is in effect their death sentence, unless they do something about it. We cannot change without surrendering all privileges to voluntarily share these with those who do not have.

How do we change? By recognising the privileges that have been accorded to us and refusing these when these are not given equally to all. Protest must begin from both sides.

We have heard about *glass ceilings*.²⁰ But the ceiling above our heads, is someone else's floor. While I look to break through this ceiling, can the person above break through his floor? The work will be done twice as fast, if done collaboratively. This invisible glass ceiling and *glass floor* is found at home, between a husband and wife, it is found in a joint family between the men

²⁰The concept of the glass ceiling originated during the middle 1980s to describe the invisible and artificial barriers that have kept women from promotion to upper management and other higher leadership positions in the business world. (https://edge.sagepub.com/system/files/15_GlassCeiling.pdf)

and the women, it is found between a brother and his sister. Can we, starting with our families, accord all equal privileges? We must break the myth of patriarchy that informs us that men are better than women. They are not. We need one another.

Patriarchy carries its own symbols. The most common symbols of patriarchy both in the family and in the workplace are gendered roles. By gendering roles, we make a claim, that men are better suited to some tasks and women to others. These definitions and symbols are created by men, because they are in power, and these keep women disempowered. It's couched and hidden in very positive statements. For example, the very positive statement: A woman is better than a man to nurture and care, she is more empathetic and compassionate, she is better organised.

These are all positives, but by saying that these are a woman's characteristics we also emphasise that she will be a good worker with children, she is better at taking care of people.

This then creates the following professions for her: homemaker (care of children), schoolteacher, nursing, hospitality, public relations, secretarial, beautician, etc. And so on. Women are consigned to these professions; men then take their place in the rest. Managers, researchers, scientists, engineers, leaders, women have been relegated²¹ to tasks that essentially serve the

men.

Such symbols of power must be broken or relinquished. Are we prepared to give up the belief system that declare men better? To work towards a post patriarchal world, we will voluntarily relinquish all those symbols presently found in us. We are liberated by not *naming and labelling others*.²²

The next step in creating an equal world is to create socialisation spaces where we engage with those not as advantaged, not merely just to visit with, but to share our lives with, our friendships genuinely.

In the family, this results in men empowering women, not just their daughters but also their wives, their mothers if possible. It results in boys and girls being given the same jobs and responsibilities. At the workplace it means breaking *glass walls* and permitting women to flow horizontally across roles, for it is in acquiring skills horizontally that she will be able to rise

²¹Downgraded!

²²This thought from <https://www.lehman.cuny.edu/academics/inter/women-studies/documents/why-men.pdf> quoted earlier.



vertically. It requires that men ally with women, become mentors to help them get ahead. Without condescension but in genuine friendship.

Living in a post-patriarchal world demands that we not only walk across self-created virtual borders consciously but permit others to invade ours. In other words, men need to permit women to be their teachers, to learn to lay down all agendas except those rooted in humane, non-manipulative, transparent friendships. It requires us to live by a new social paradigm, a framework that trains itself to live concurrently in a variety of multiverses, discovering joy, beauty in each and valuing all simultaneously. Having a woman mentor a man will do wonders for his psyche.

Is it possible to recognise, to value, and to desire what those not as privileged have to offer which perhaps are far more valuable than what we have to offer? The ability to see and act humanely is liberating.

From the account of the good Samaritan, Biblical justice is **restorative** i.e. to right a wrongdoing, as well as to recover the dignity, health, and wellbeing of another. It is **active**, in that the initiative to restore a victim of injustice was intentionally taken by the Samaritan. It is **concerned**, a heart matter: the Samaritan did all he did out of a response to the pain and the anguish of another. It is **voluntary**, in that the Samaritan did not need any

push to propel him towards his actions. It is **sacrificial**, in that the Samaritan used his own resources, gave up his time, and made himself uncomfortable to address the issue. It is **redistributive**, in that the Samaritan used what he owned to share it with the wounded traveller.

Gender justice Biblically, is therefore **restorative, active, concerned, voluntary, sacrificial, and redistributive**. Both men and women need to actively and urgently engage in this task to restore sacrificially the humanity that has been lost to us. Our actions culminate in the person of Jesus and His liberating power.

Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.²³

(This article has been written jointly by Sushila and Sanjiv Ailawadi. They can be reached at sanjivailawadi@gmail.com)

²³2 Cor 3:17

Side by Side, As Equal Partners

Mr. Cherian Thomas

At the outset, let me commend Sushila and Sanjiv Ailawadi for an insightful article exploring a complex issue like patriarchy, with its various subtle and unsubtle nuances, its impact on attitudes and practices in men-women relationships and suggesting how we may deal with it as disciples of Jesus. As an unapologetic egalitarian, I endorse the views set out by the authors and see little need for any addition; nevertheless, I've restated and elaborated a few issues that I consider critical.

First, we need to call out all forms of patriarchal practice and behaviour in society and the church. At one end, harsh, rigid and authoritative attitudes of men, often resulting in physical, emotional and sexual abuse of women are easy to condemn. But equally, the subtler, far more prevalent practices - gendered roles, deeply embedded cultural mores, the invisibility and entitlement of privilege, which result in the exclusion of women, need to be brought to the forefront in our discussions. At its softest, even the suggestion that men are to be servant-leaders to their wives is patriarchal to the core, and comes from an inability to give up privilege and authority. We need to be servants to each other, without the tag of "leader"! Period!

Secondly, since much of what is practiced by the church is with scriptural "sanction," we need to challenge the theology behind these practices. As the authors rightly point out, theology and practice are so closely intertwined that patriarchy has become theology for many in the church! In doing so, we should not be drawn into arguments using proof-texts for either position, but should primarily keep examining the issue through the lenses of God's moral character, justice and His original intention for men-women relationships as set out in the creation narratives. We have good precedent for this - Jesus looked at a contemporary theological dispute over divorce by going back to God's original intent in creation. The lessons learnt from dealing with the issue of slavery, which faced similar resistance in its times, need to be taken to heart. Further, in our study of scripture, the ability to distinguish between what is an eternal principle and a cultural or contextual concession / practice needs to be consistently applied.

Thirdly, we need to teach and discuss the issue widely. All women (the victims) should be able to see patriarchy as unjust, not in keeping with God's character and intention, and discard deeply embedded attitudes instilled in them all their lives by teaching and demonstration. This education needs to begin very early and reinforced by examples of women who broke patriarchal barriers in their lives and service to God and society. Equally important, as the authors have pointed out, is to provide equal opportunities for

women through affirmative action. We need to show older women who become flagbearers for patriarchy, the absurdity of their position. We need to teach young boys and men so that many glass ceilings may be removed by their breaking the floors above; having become aware of their positions of privilege and opening up these for women in the pursuit of God's justice. In doing so, we would also be releasing boys and men from the unreasonable pressure of being the sole providers and leaders, something that's drilled into them early, and to see women as equal partners and sojourners, each providing mutual help and support to the other, in their life journeys.

Fourthly, while doing so, we need to be single minded and not distracted by criticism or labelling by the beneficiaries of the status quo, often in the guise of "protecting" scripture. Terms such as "liberals", "feminists" or promoters of "woke" culture as is the current fashion to do, do not diminish the worth of what is being said and done in the pursuit of justice. Equally important is to not have the discussions on patriarchy and gender justice derailed by their linkage to the conversations and controversies around LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) and abortion. This is too important a matter to hold up - it impacts half the human race, half the church!

Finally, the whole issue of gender justice has to be championed by women and men together working, learning, and debating these matters, side by side. We need more examples of couples modelling and practicing togetherness, just as the authors have done in the writing of the article and in their lives, in the manner of Priscilla and Aquila. Patriarchy is not a women's issue - even if women are the main victims - it is a human issue and so needs tackling together. May the Lord give us much wisdom as we tackle patriarchy and other barriers to living God's kingdom values within the community of the church.

(Views are personal)

Mr. Cherian Thomas is Regional Leader: South Asia & Pacific, World Vision International. He can be reached at cherianthomas1962@gmail.com.

Gender Justice and Covert Patriarchy

Dr. Senganglu Thaimai

How can this be? by Sushila and Sanjiv Ailawadi is a compelling article which traces the fundamental principles of patriarchy. It elaborates on how the manipulation and control that patriarchy allows the dominant gender have led to oppression, exploitation, abuse and suffering. Beginning at the Fall of mankind, the disarray of the divine order permeates through all societies and cultures, and the Christian church is no exception. The writers very ably elucidates the complexities and nuances of how patriarchy is executed and naturalised in church as it has in the world at large. As somebody who teaches courses on Women Empowerment and Feminism in the university, I admire and commend the effort of writing such a convincing piece on the complicated subject from an informed Christian perspective, given the long conflicted history the religion has with advocacy for women's rights.

The writers take us through a diagnostic journey by setting the symptoms of patriarchy in church as the premise. They deconstruct cultural practices and its correlation with theology, gender-based privileges and roles, and the historical narratives written by the privileged group that have disadvantaged/silenced women's positions/contributions. They urge to break the symbols of power stemming from patriarchy, and create a new social paradigm where gender equality is the norm. Their arguments are augmented by evidences from their interactions with people they minister to. These examples are analysed in the light of Scriptural truth. The foundational worldview on which patriarchy is constructed is then juxtaposed with the world order that Christ brings to mankind. The character of the slain Lamb is contrasted with man's hunger for power. As opposed to and to restore what had been destroyed in the patriarchal system, the writers present the essence of gender justice based on Biblical principles.

Needless to say, there is little I could add to such a compact and incredibly clear exposition on the subject of gender justice. Nevertheless, a few subtle areas where covert patriarchal attitudes are still at work could be considered. I propose to examine a very limited circle of those who are assumed to have relatively better exposure to the questions of patriarchy and gender justice - through their education or social pressure to be politically correct. One could attempt to put them out in the form of questions one often asks as positive structural changes

are being made to empower women. Do some men discontinue harassing women more from the fear of getting slapped with a sexual harassment case rather than a genuine concern and respect for their women colleagues? Do the modern empowered women still require to prove themselves as super multitasker wonderfully juggling between house work and office? Is her success primarily gauged by her performance as a mother and a wife? Does the Committee set up for the protection of women and children in churches tend to gravitate towards protecting the leadership/reputation of the church in case some rogue members are found guilty?

Beneath the thin veneer of political correctness, could the untransformed church stare back at us with the old arrogance preaching milder subservience of women by coining new terms? Under the pretence of restoration from the evils of inequality, does the modern Church often go only as far as to hold up the bare minimum? Roping in a woman or two to be part of the Board of Trustees is commonly seen in contemporary Christian organisations. Is it possible that the exercise is more out of the need to have the right image of representation rather than seriously incorporating their perspectives or giving them the power of decision making? Do talented and abled women still decline to take up top position because they foresee the toxicity they would "call down upon themselves" working among men? If the answer to these questions are 'yeses', we still need to go deeper and question the superficiality of our denial of patriarchy in our enlightened groups, including the current normalisation of tokenism in the decision making bodies. Moreover, it is definitive that a woman leader is recognised for her own abilities, rather than merely given the position of leadership to fulfil the formalities of their organisation's affirmative action policy.

In total agreement with the need for a new paradigm proposed by the writers, we could achieve gender just homes, organisations, and churches by the transformative power of radically following the principles of Jesus Christ. Amen.

(Dr. Senganglu Thaimai is an Associate Professor of English in Miranda House College, University of Delhi. She has been awarded Fulbright Fellowship recently. She can be reached at sengmei64@gmail.com)

Dismantling Gender Injustice: A Biblical Perspective

Mr. Raaj Mondol

Christians engaged in the field of development and social justice often have to face the charge which is voiced by people advocating for equal rights and empowerment of women that the Bible like all other religious texts reflects and promotes a patriarchal view of the relations between men and women. They also argue that the language used in the Scripture is sexist and largely ignores the stories or concerns of women. Even when women are addressed, they are asked to remain silent, be submissive and accept their subordinate status as being ordained by God.

The real-life experiences of women in the church seem to substantiate this charge. The denial of leadership positions for women in the church to serve as Priests/Pastors/Elders or Worship leaders is one of the most glaring examples. Even in denominations where they are appointed to leadership positions, they are often entrusted with secondary roles. The Pastorate Committees, or other decision-making bodies of the church are also largely filled by men. Due to their absence in such decision-making bodies, the issues and concerns of women such as domestic abuse, sexual abuse and exploitation do not get discussed or addressed in the Church. Despite the fact that majority of the congregation in most Churches are women, their participation in the life and ministry of the Church remains confined to women's ministry, Sunday School or children ministry. They are mostly entrusted with the responsibility to arrange flowers, Pot-luck meals, Annual Fetes to raise funds etc.

During one of the meetings organised in Delhi by our team to discuss gender concerns in the context of Church, the following views and experiences were shared by the participants which seem to confirm the above observations.

- Theological understanding of gender affects personal attitude and behavior.
- Christian ministry experience also reflects patriarchal mindsets. Role of women is not recognised in Christian ministry. Discrimination against women is more visible in the Church than in the society. They shared about experiences of mistreatment by older men and discriminatory behaviour

at home while growing up.

- They shared difficult experiences of domestic violence.
- It is not a standalone issue but is interlinked with various other issues.
- Men have often not seen a good model of marriage in which a wife is treated with respect.
- Girls experience huge pressure to have a fair complexion.
- Girls have to fight at every stage of life. They also face rejection in the family as parents expect a boy. They often cannot pursue the educational course of their choice.
- There is immense pressure on girls to get married.
- If the mother is a strong person, then girls have a different experience. Some women reported receiving equal treatment growing up as girls in their homes.
- In cases of crimes against women, offenders easily get acquitted.
- Makes one feel that somehow you are lesser than men. Struggle to find one's identity.
- In Churches, women were often relegated to roles which are supposed to be specifically done by women.

How does one respond to this charge and the reality experienced by a vast majority of church going women? Does the Bible support a Patriarchal worldview? Is it God's intention for women to remain in a subordinate status to be ruled by men? If that is true, then what about the notion of a just and righteous God? Are equality and freedom only referring to a spiritual status and not in our social and material existence as human beings? These and many such questions are perplexing.

One would need to go deeper through the Biblical narrative in order to grapple with these questions. One of the helpful frameworks is to look at the entire story of the Bible in terms of a progressive revelation of God, His nature and purpose behind the creation of the universe and human beings. The Bible Scholars of the Reformed tradition call this the framework of Creation-Fall-Redemption-New Creation.

Creation: The Bible teaches that both men and women were created in God's image, are equal in being and of the same essence. Being image-bearers of God, both have inherent

value and dignity and together they represent the character of God. God blessed them together to be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth, subdue it and to have dominion over the created order (Gen1:26-28). The act of procreation requires participation of both and so does the act of ruling over the rest of creation. The Cultural mandate given by God in the Genesis account allocates no different tasks or distinct roles to male and female. Both enjoy God's blessings and are given responsibilities with identical instructions. In establishing the marriage union between the first man and woman, God made his intentions amply clear - "man will be united to his wife and they will become one flesh." (Gen2:24). Primary purpose of marriage is to "become one." There is no hint of a hierarchy. There is no suggestion of patriarchy too. That they will become one flesh even precludes any hint of subordination in the relationship. The fact that the man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame (Genesis 2:25) reflects the intimacy that they shared in their relationship. So, in the Creation, we see the principles of equality, mutuality, unity and intimacy defining the relationship between man and woman.

Fall: The Bible teaches that both man and woman were co-participants in the Fall and therefore both were held responsible. Both face negative consequences – hard work for man and painful labour for bearing children for woman. Both are banished from God's glorious presence and bountifulness of the Creation that they had so far enjoyed in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:6,16-19). Fall in sin brings a rupture in their unity and the consequent break down in all relationships marking the beginning of a power struggle between them. The statements in Gen 3:16 concerning the woman having desire towards her husband and he ruling over her are not curses, but rather a description of what lay ahead of them in the future. It was a predictive statement not prescriptive.

Redemption: In the plan of redemption both men and women have equal access and rights to become the children of God through their faith in Jesus Christ.

"Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God..." John 1:12.

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ came to redeem and reconcile all things back to God through His blood shed on the cross (Col 1:20). All relationships which were broken as a result of the Fall have been reconciled by the sacrificial death

of Christ which includes the distorted order of relationship between man and woman. By putting our faith in Jesus Christ, we become children of God, have one identity in Christ as new creation and become heirs to the blessing of salvation without reference to racial, social or gender distinction (John 1:12-13, Romans 8:14-17, 2 Cor. 5:17, Gal.3:26-28). On the day of Pentecost, the gifts of the Holy Spirit were poured out upon both men and women fulfilling the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 enabling both men and women together to exercise the gifts for the building up of His church. The Holy Spirit indwells in both men and women and sovereignly distributes gifts without preference for a particular gender. (Acts 2:1-21, 1 Cor.12:7-11, 14:31). Both men and women are called to develop their spiritual gifts and to use them. (1Pet.4:10-11, Rom 12:5-8). The New Covenant priesthood is for all believers (1 Pet 2:5-10, Rev 1:6, 5:10). Symbolising this truth, the rite of circumcision prescribed for Jewish males, which denoted God's covenant relationship with them gave way to Baptism in the New Covenant of Christ where both men and women have equal access to express their new relationship with Christ.

New Creation: The vision of the New Creation given to us in the book of Revelation again re-emphasises that the great multitude of people who stand before the throne are from every nation, tribe, people and language together in front of the lamb without any distinction (Rev.7:9-17, Rev21:1-4). There will be no longer any curse and God will dwell with His people. His servants will serve Him and He will reign forever (Rev.22:1-5). We are called to demonstrate this new order of equality, justice and mutual submission to one another based on the foundation of love which is the royal law of the Kingdom.

Old Testament: Work in Progress

The Bible has given this framework to guide us and help us understand that a large portion of the Biblical narrative in the Old Testament reflects the reality of the Fall and its consequence upon human beings. These are to be looked at as descriptive and not prescriptive. So, when we read genealogies after genealogies mostly recording male heirs, we understand it as representative of the Patriarchal family set up. The practice of polygamy, discriminatory practice in inheritance rights between sons and daughters, forced abduction of young girls for marriage and various other incidents of rape and sexual assault as described in the Bible can be seen as the sinful practices emerging out of the Fall and not in any way being endorsed or justified as God's intentions.

At the same time, within this patriarchal narrative, we also see God's original intent for creating both males and females.

As evident in the history of Israel, the Bible also mentions strong women characters such as prophets Miriam and Huldah, Judge and warrior Deborah, Queen Esther, Ruth a Commoner, wise Abigail and the multi-tasker entrepreneurial woman described in Proverbs 31. We can see that God is still working with the broken system corrupted by sin to lead them to His plan of redemption that would be revealed in the fulfillment of time through the coming of Christ into this world when the new order of relationship, of equality, mutuality, unity and intimacy is restored in Christ.

Gospel Accounts: New Order of the Kingdom

Jesus' life and ministry brings in a radical shift in the way women are presented in the New Testament. Christ directed His ministry to both men and women. Women were included in his band of disciples (Mark 15:40-41, Luke 8:1-3). They received equal treatment from him. He showed deep respect, empathy and compassion to the women he ministered to. Jesus used both male and female characters in teaching spiritual truths. The risen Christ appeared first to women and sent them as His messengers to proclaim the great news of resurrection to his disciples. (Mathew 28:10, John 20:17-18). Jesus challenged some deeply entrenched patriarchal mindsets on divorce (Mathew 19:3-9, Mathew 6:31-32), adultery (Mathew 5:27-29, John 8:2-11) and affirmed women for their sincere display of faith in him (Luke 7:36-50, John 12:1-8)

Early Church: An inclusive Church

The New Testament history of the early church depicts women as full participants in this new community of believers as equal recipients of the gift of the Holy Spirit and ministering at all levels including prophesying, teaching, leading and hosting house churches, serving the poor and even in suffering for the gospel. This new-found freedom for the women also led to some controversies in the church which are addressed by Paul in his epistles to the Corinthians and Timothy. Some of those texts have become the ground for denying equal access and ministry opportunities to women in Churches. The space here does not allow us to attempt a discussion of those texts here. But if we follow the framework of Creation-Fall-Redemption and New Creation discussed earlier, it makes clear that we are to govern our lives in the light of the accomplished work of Redemption and Pentecost. In a world where women suffer grave injustices and oppression of various kinds on account of their gender, the practice of equality of the sexes by the

Church would indeed be the good news of the kingdom.

How can we respond to this?

History tells us that in any instance of an exploitative and unjust structure or institution whether it was Slavery, Apartheid, Civil rights or various freedom movements against Colonialism, dismantling those evil structures required the willingness on part of the oppressors to see the evil nature of the system and join in the movement against it. Dismantling gender injustice in our Churches and society also requires willingness on the part of men in power to see the evil nature of their power, control and dominance over their co-partners and co-heirs in the kingdom. They need to be ready to relinquish their attitude of entitlement as males and put on the towel of service as modelled by our Saviour. They need to raise their voice against all forms of discriminatory practices and systems in homes, Churches and public spaces that have kept one half of our population from experiencing the fullness of life that Christ came to give all. Gender justice has to begin with each one of us to throw off the mental shackles of our cultural systems of patriarchy and embrace the truth of the gospel of the Kingdom, where "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

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FACTS

24X7 GOVERNMENT HELPLINE NUMBERS AND RELATED INFORMATION TO HELP WOMEN IN INDIA

- National Commission for Women Emergency WhatsApp Number to Report Abuse: 7217735372
For filing Complaints visit the official NCW website <http://ncw.nic.in> or <http://ncwapps.nic.in> under the section 'register online complaints.' For complaint related queries to NCW, Phone nos. 011-26944880, 26944883. Email: complaintcell-ncw@nic.in
- National Human Rights Commission Helpline No. 011-23385368/9810298900

STATE WISE HELPLINE NUMBERS

Delhi		Jammu and Kashmir	: 1091, 100
Police Control Room Number	: 100, 2316100	Jharkhand	: 181, 9771432103
Delhi Women Protection Cell	: 011-24673366/4156/ 7699	Karnataka	: 1091, 0821-2418400, 100
Central Social Welfare Board	: 1091, 1291, 23317004	Bangalore Women's Police Helpline	: 08022943225
Delhi Commission for Women	: 23379181, 23370597	Mysore Women Police Station	: 0821-2418110 / 2418410
Delhi Government Women in Distress Helpline	: 181	Kerala	: 181, 1091, 9995399953
Mobile Van Helpline	: 1800-11-9292	State Vanitha Cell	: 0471-2338100
Rape Crisis Cell 24 Hrs service (run by Delhi Commission for Women)	: 23370557, 9013707460	Women's Cell, Kollam	: 0474-2742376
Helpline for Pregnant and Lactating (destitute) Women	: 9971802146, 9971802415	Women's Cell, Kochi	: 0484-239673
Child Helpline	: 1098	Madhya Pradesh	: 181, 1090
Anti-Stalking/Obscene calls	: 1096	Maharashtra	: 181, 1091, 103
Child, Student & Senior Citizen	: 1291	Mumbai Police Women	: 022-22633333/22620111
Andhra Pradesh	: 181, 040-27853508, 040-23320539	Maharashtra Women Commission	: 07477722424/022-26592707
Hyderabad Women Police Station	: 04027852400/4852	Manipur	: 100
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	: 181, 040-27853508, 040-23320539	Mizoram	: 181, 100
Arunachal Pradesh	: 181	Nagaland	: 181, 100
Assam	: 100	Odisha	: 181, 1091
Bihar	: 181, 18003456247, 0612-2320047, 2214318	Punjab	: 181, 1043, 109, 9781101091
Chattisgarh	: 181	Chandigarh Women Police Exchange	: 1722741900
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	: 100, 0260-2633001	Rajasthan	: 1800-1200020, 1091
Daman and Diu	: 181, 100	Women Police Station Jodhpur	: 0291 -2012112
Goa	: 1091	Sikkim	: 181
Gujarat	: 181, 1091	Tamil Nadu	: 1091, 044-28592750
Haryana	: 181, 1091, 0124-2335100	Women Police Station, Adayar	: 044-24415732, 044-23452586
Himachal Pradesh Women - Commission	: 9816066421, 09418636326, 09816882491 9418384215	Telangana	: 1091
		Tripura	: 1091, 0381-2323355, 03812322912
		Uttar Pradesh	: 181, 1090
		Uttarakhand	: 1091
		West Bengal	: 181, 1091

Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action (SNEHA)

Non-Government Organisation

Works with women, children and public health safety systems, and to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality and morbidity, child malnutrition and gender-based violence.

For women and children facing violence : crisis@snehamumbai.org

Phone number : +919167535765

Address : Behind Building No.11, BMC Colony, Shastri Colony, Santa Cruz West, Mumbai - 400 054

Abhay Helpline

Provide legal and moral support to victims of domestic violence and help in taking action against people who misuse the Domestic Violence Act.

Phone number : 09423827818

iCall

Helpline
Counselling, referrals

Phone number : 022-25521111/ 9152987821
Address : Pan India helpline number.

Based out of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

Maharashtra

Human Rights Law Network

Works on women's justice, HIV/AIDS etc

Phone number : 6463634,6463635

rri.fbd@hrln.org, <http://hrln.org/hrln/>

Address : Faridabad

Sakshi

Violence Intervention centre

Phone number : 95124-2352275

Address : Gurugram

Delhi & NCR

Shakti Shalini

Non-Government Organisation

They provide shelter Home for women victims of domestic violence. They motivate women and help them in coming out of the abuse by increasing their self-esteem.

Helpline No. : 09711053706, 09811390630

Phone number : 01124373736

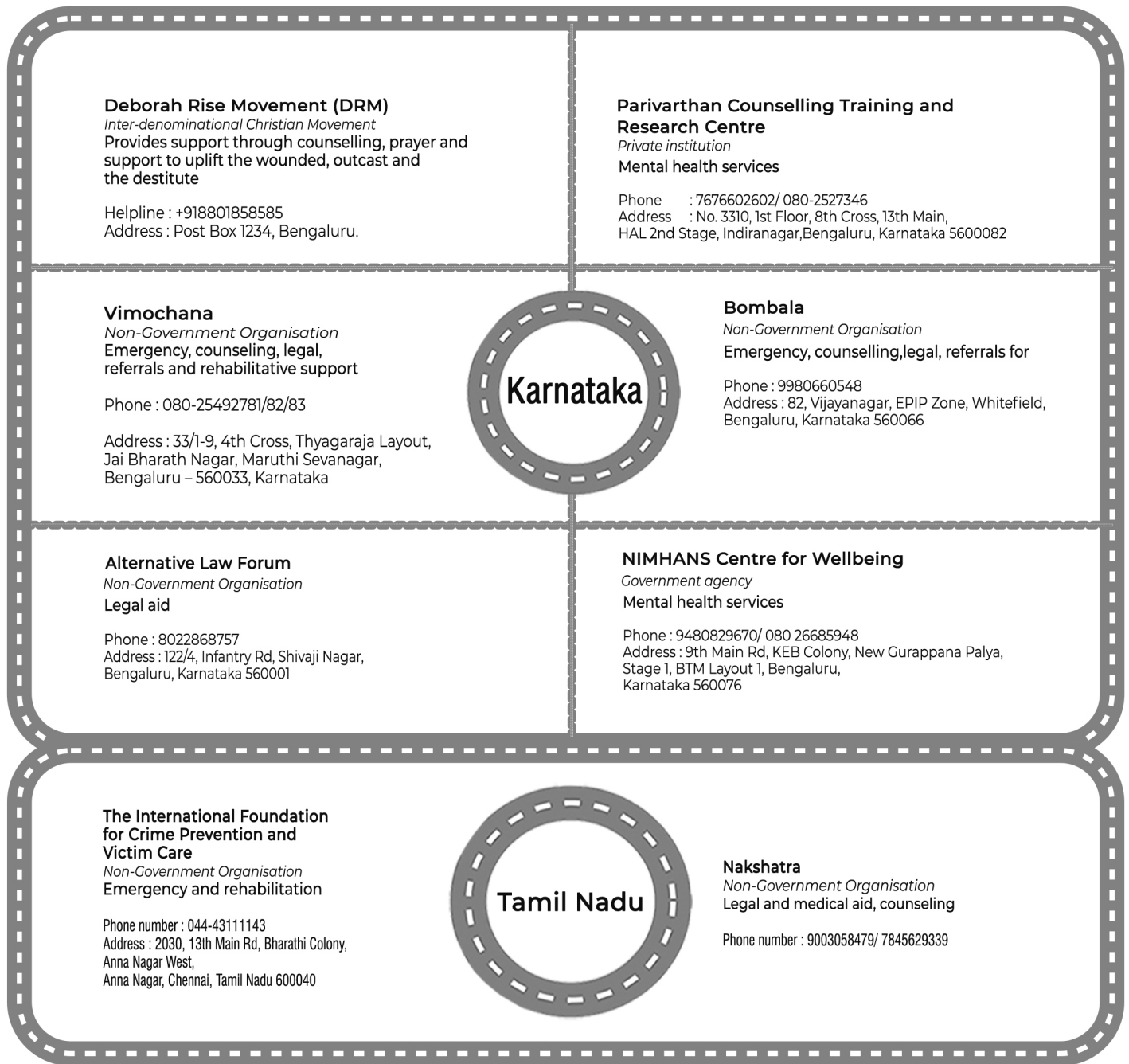
Address : Delhi

Human Rights Law Network

Legal help

Phone number : 45532183, 45524835

rri.vp@hrln.org, contact@hrln.org, <http://hrln.org/hrln/>
Address : New Delhi

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One on One Conversation



Since ancient times, transgenders were an integral part of the society. Despite this, norms of masculinity and femininity have been set in the society. Transgenders may describe themselves as a 'transwoman' or a 'transman.' There are also some who do not identify as neither male nor female, but rather identify outside a gender binary. Transgenders belong to the LGBT group (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender). Social stigma and discrimination are some of the challenges affecting the transgenders. In this article, we present a one on one interview with Ms. Inba Ignatius in order to bring out the issues of gender justice as experienced by the transgender community in India.

(DTK - Drishtikone, IG - Inba Ignatius)

DTK - Generally, people are less aware of the gender justice issues faced by people from the transgender community. Thank you for being open to share your experiences and perspective with our readers.

IG - Thank you for the opportunity. I am glad to share my life journey with the readers of Drishtikone.

DTK - Please tell us about yourself and early childhood experiences regarding schooling, family or life experiences in general. Tell us about your journey of gaining acceptance within your family and wider society.

IG - I was born as a boy to my family and they were all very happy about it. I have two brothers and a sister. I studied in a school and there I started facing various kinds of challenges. Some children would make fun of me, so from a young age, I was always cautious and lived in constant fear that people would laugh at me or bully me. In those days, there was a lot of stigma attached to transgenders. When I was in class 8, I stayed in a boarding school. After completing higher secondary school and college, I left my family and my home town and stayed with the transgender community, as I felt more comfortable and accepted.

DTK - What are the biggest justice issues faced by transgender persons? Are some more vulnerable than others? Do you feel at risk of violence because of your

gender identity?

IG - It is sad that the transgender community have been living under stigma and in some societies were even ostracised by their own community. I had experienced lots of horrifying cases of violence from the day of my transformation till today. As I was small and thin during my childhood, I grew up with the fear that people would beat me up as I have experienced lots of bullying in the school. It was during 2004-2005, as I was walking home, suddenly a group of 5-6 people circled around me. They started abusing me and hitting me. I had a terrible head injury and it was bleeding profusely. I could somehow call for help and my friends took me to a hospital. In the hospital, my experience was even worse. The doctors there were reluctant to treat me though they saw me bleeding. They ignored me as they could see that I am a transgender. After much persuasion by my friends, the doctors reluctantly attended to my wounds and treated me.

Let me also share another experience. During the Koovagam festival of the transgenders in Villipuram district, Tamil Nadu, we went to attend the festival with my friends. One day, during the programme, we went to the Ladies Rest room and there were some girls inside. They all came out of the rest rooms as soon as we entered. They waited until we all came out - these are the kinds of treatment commonly experienced by the transgenders in the society.

DTK - Can you please share how you deal with discrimination or injustice that you face because of your gender identity?

Who are some of your allies in such situations?

IG - *In my case, I would immediately react and fight back when people insult me verbally due to my transgender identity, but now I have ignored these types of attacks. Since the last couple of years, I think that there is better awareness among people due to the various awareness campaigns at the community level. From my family, when we were young, my brother was very supportive to me. My transgender friends have been my greatest support.*

DTK - What caused you to put your faith in Jesus? Does your faith have a role in dealing with difficult circumstances in your life? If so, how?

IG - *I was born and brought up in a Christian family, and my family instilled in us the importance of having faith in God. In school, the Catechism classes taught to us strengthened my understanding of Christ. I have gone through a lot of experiences due to my gender identity. Those difficult moments have caused me to have faith in God.*

DTK - Tell us about your experiences within the church. Have you faced any form of discrimination in the church as a transgender person?

IG - *Though I came from a Christian family, I did not feel comfortable being with my family as I was the odd person. That is why, I did not go back to my family and stayed with my transgender friends who have become my family. Let me share with you another experience in the church. In 2000, there was a Christmas night service, we went to the church along with my friends. The Priest was distributing Holy Communion mass to the congregation, but on seeing me and my friends, he simply refused to give the communion to me. I went to ask him the reason the next day. He said to me matter-of-factly that he did not think that transgenders could be Christians. I explained to him how God does not differentiate between people. The creation account as mentioned in Genesis 1:27 says that, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." This passage shows how God himself is inclusive of both the male and female part of a person. God must be also a transgender - without a specific male or female identity.*

DTK - In the long term, would you like to see the transgender community have its own churches or be

integrated into the wider church? Please elaborate.

IG - *I would suggest that there should be a separate church only for the transgenders due to the kind of discrimination faced by us. In my place we, the transgenders, worship separately and we have our own church. We welcome everyone even the FSWs (Female Sex Workers) to join us in our prayer services, etc. We ourselves conduct the services but we do invite Pastors or Priests to come and worship with us. Sometimes, they themselves would voluntarily come and worship with us or would come to preach whenever they could.*

DTK - What is your message to the wider church in India?

IG - *There is a need to create more awareness in the church about transgenders and their identities e.g. there is a difference between transmen and transwomen. Church leaders should have basic knowledge about the transgenders. Once a church identify a transgender child or children among its congregation, they should ensure that the child does not feel discriminated nor left out. These kind of children should be allowed to mingle freely among their peers without any fear of being physically or verbally bullied. This kind of basic awareness is needed among the churches.*

DTK - What are some specific suggestions that will help the church grow into being more accepting of persons from the transgender community? What are some ways in which individuals can be more sensitive and be an ally to make the world more just for transgender people?

IG - *Nowadays, there is a lot of talk about inclusivity in the society. In our churches, we can make the transgenders comfortable by letting them take active participation in our church services or activities. At the individual level, I urge people to be sensitive to the transgenders and ensure that everyone should take responsibility in making a better world for them. In schools, the teachers and school authorities should ensure that children who are transgenders be comfortable. Make space for them to grow as an individual in the school along with their peers. We can all be kind, sensitive and be inclusive to make the world a better place for everyone, and ensure that people do not feel marginalised due to their gender.*

(These real life experiences were shared by Ms. Inba Ignatius to Joan. We thank her for the willingness to share her story without any inhibitions. Inba can be reached at inba326@gmail.com)

Why are Women forced to be Atlas?

Ms. Brinda Adige

In Greek mythology, Atlas is condemned to hold up the heavens or the sky. I mention the title of this article in the context of women who are punished to bear the inequities of patriarchy, sexism, chauvinism, and even capitalistic competitiveness as a means of hegemony and control.

Yet, women do hold up the sky, look after the land, the community and home. They shoulder all kinds of responsibilities and even burdens; they are subjected to violence because of patriarchal norms and chauvinistic mindsets. Therefore, women's contribution and work is ignored. This discrimination occurs within our homes, communities, institutions and even places of worship.

And the women of this great nation, "WE, THE CITIZENS OF INDIA, are forced to put up with flagrant violence, inequalities (of opportunity and outcome), burdened both inside our homes and outside." These are not as instances, but systematic violations at every age, stage, professional and domestic relationships. Gender is central to most religions and religious orders. Added to this are layers of identities - religion, ethnicity, class, caste, skin colour, sexuality; all of these can serve to add multiple dimensions of injustice on the lives of women and girls, especially those of us who are a minority within the minority. Constitutional provisions, even in the face of communal riots, domestic violence and sexist attacks, are rarely realised for women.

Leadership positions prioritise male candidates. Women are being conditioned to strive for the ideal of the 'good woman', which equates to motherhood, family, following religious piety. Even when women seem to be powerful, they are positioned within professional structures created and defined by men, and are expected to adhere to patriarchal beliefs and unjust gender norms.

The power equation between the abuser and the abused is so skewed, therefore, silencing or threatening the female victims is the norm. Gender discrimination, exploitation, injustice further reiterate and force entire communities to suffer female infanticide, dowry harassment and deaths, domestic/gender-

based violence against women and girls (VAWG), trafficking of women and girls for prostitution, pornography and forced labour, no living wages paid to women in the unorganised sectors of work, nor do they enjoy any of the progressive laws enacted.

The prevailing prejudices affect structures too, to remain silent, by echoing the 'apolitical' nature of women and the tendency for the domestic sphere. Often patriarchal practices like fascism are contradictory, like denouncing capitalists, yet enriching them, preaching order, and practicing disorder; calling for return of women to the home, yet encouraging women to join political organizations, opening up spaces for women to participate, but not acknowledging the rights of women or their freedom to choose and decide.

Role of Civil Society Organisations

Various civil society organisations, several church-based and para-church groups are involved in the rescue, rehabilitation and restoration of children, women, and men trafficked for bonded-forced labour, prostitution, pornography, and child marriage. These groups do not discriminate on the basis of religion, caste, language of the victims and survivors. The primary focus and emphasis of such groups, is to work alongside the government and state agencies to make constitutional guarantees accessible to the downtrodden.

Freedom is the greatest gift God has given to human beings. Human freedom is a necessary condition to achieve our wholeness for which we are created. By denying freedom to women, patriarchal religious interpretations deny women, the means to achieve wholeness and live lives to its fullness. Justice is the harmony between individual interests and that of the state. Justice is the rule of law. The Indian Constitution's Preamble guarantees social, economic and political justice for all people; yet these are a constant challenge for the majority of people in Indian society.

The pandemic revealed the extent of domestic and sexual violence on children and women, child marriage, deepening

factors stimulating human trafficking, bonded labour, the miserable state of migrant labourers, including the lacunae, apathy, and the many fissures in the society. Civil society organisations, churches, temples, mosques left no stone unturned to share food, shelter, clothes, counselling support, rescuing women and children caught in the throes of domestic violence.

It is important to understand that in the name of religion, culture, tradition and rituals, women are being subjected to discrimination, exploitation, domestic and sexual violence, while societal norms reinforce patriarchy in different forms. This undermines the personhood of women and girls and forces them to be satisfied by cosmetic changes that appear to bring about gender parity.

Christian women across denominations, are amplifying their voices, *to identify and challenge wrong theologies that indirectly legitimise gender violence and sexual abuse of women and gender non-conforming persons*¹.

What is needed today?

The need of the hour is to make each woman aware of her right to live, to be free, to lead, demand justice in every sphere of life. Religions need to adapt to changes and Christian women demand that women should not be forced to conform to feudal laws and patriarchal interpretations, in the name of attaining heaven.

Education, both scholastic and lifelong learning prospects are the primary gateway, yet we lack making quality, open education free and accessible to all. Of course, we must shun bigotry, violence, caste subordination, intersectional gender discrimination, and question the complicity and apathy of state duty bearers and functionaries, and development that reduces the celebration of life of human beings and the environment. Our aim to become inclusive, also bears upon us the ethos of honouring the traditions of love, diversity, ethical practices, sharing resources and re-distribution of power to amplify goodness.

Giving space for women in our society

The vision for a renewed India is to deliberate newer spaces engaging with issues revolving around gender justice, sustainable development, and reconciliation at various

levels, with all people - children, senior citizens, women, trans-persons and men. We must not be shy to delve into the real and root causes of gender-based violence, human trafficking and the mindless destruction of our environment. Women's nurturing and compassionate leadership is central to creating inclusive and peaceful societies, rebuilding peaceful coexistence, respecting all people, upholding the dignity of all.

Beginning with our homes, churches, institutions, judiciary and all arms of the government, there is an urgent need to change mindsets, to consciously become responsible for actions that promote respect and dignity of girls and women, to make health care and legal aid accessible and affordable, to make provisions for more women to occupy positions and spaces of decision-making, including Parliament and to stop judging and blaming women for everything that may not be right with our communities and the nation.

In conclusion, upholding the dignity of women in our homes, institutions, communities through spirituality of our religions, will be one of the sure ways to help us open our minds, hearts and heads to comprehend the complexities around gender, equity, equality and justice; this necessitates collaboration and convergence action with various stakeholders, for creating opportunities that ensure gender justice becomes a way of life, promoting transformative leadership, so that, "all may have life, life in all abundance".

Quote from *George Orwell*,

"In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act."

(Brinda Adige is a Pioneer of India's first Child Protection Helpline in India, called Makakla Sahaya Vani. She spearheaded the UNICEF sponsored, People Friendly Gender-Sensitive Police Training & Manual in Karnataka, works on people's participation in local self-governance, lifelong education with vulnerable slum communities, against human trafficking and Human Rights of Women, Children, and Dalits in India.

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¹Kochurani Abraham, *The Challenge before Clergy Sexual Abuse*

Well-Organised Community Help Fight Hazards

A unique experiment reclaims land lost to flood and erosion in Assam. At the same time it has organised the community that is effectively fighting the hazard of flood.



“One morning I got up to find my cowshed washed away by the river. We started to shift our belongings to a safer place. But within an hour, my house became a part of Brahmaputra,” said Hareswar Koch, a local resident of Bhuragaon village in Morigaon district of Assam whose house was about 15 meters away from the river bank. “The main problem is erosion. The river is devouring our fields. The place where I sowed paddy last year is now in the river. I have lost all my fields and I am now landless,” adds Khatun. Another villager Abdul Hussain narrates a similar story. His father, late Nahsur Ali, owned more than 20 hectares of land. Erosion took away all the land and he has since then been working as a daily wage labourer. Bhuragaon villagers are no strangers to floods. But what they really dread is erosion that is threatening their existence. For most of the community members, like the few mentioned above, it is a tale of riches to rags. Flood and inundation posed great plight for them.

The Bhuragaon Circle land records show that about 5,349 hectares of land have been eroded. The phenomena is not confined to Bhuragaon alone. According to experts, 3.15 million hectares of land along Brahmaputra and Barak rivers are prone to heavy floods and erosion. Due to large scale deforestation in the mountains, large stones are carried as runoff along with water, which gets deposited on Brahmaputra’s river bed. Added to it, massive siltation makes the river bed shallow. This impacts the current flow of the river and triggers soil erosion. “Apart from loss of land and property, people have also lost their livelihood options,” says Komrul Hussain Choudhary, member of **VOICE (Voluntary Initiative for Community Empowerment)**, an organisation working for the rehabilitation of flood affected people in Morigaon. The region was once prosperous due to good yield of agriculture.

A WAY OUT

A solution to the problem came from a visit of Komrul Choudhary to Vaniyakulum Panchayat in Palakkad District of Kerala. There he saw the river Bharatpuzha being blocked by creating bunds for lift irrigation purpose which also stopped erosion substantially. He adopted the technique in Assam. He selected a few points along the Brahmaputra river where barriers made out of sand-filled jute bags were erected. The technique works like this: when the river hits the bunds, its current breaks and silt carried by the river gets deposited at its base. Over a period of time, as silt mounts up, the river changes its course. This way, an 8 km long and 4 km broad land has been created. Initially, when Choudhary began the project, no one showed much interest and few people attended the meetings. After discussing with a few organisations working in the region like the Morigaon Mahila Mehil, he shifted his mobilisation efforts to local markets where people were readily available. This worked and the process slowly began to draw people’s attention. In the meetings, Choudhary shared his plans and mobilised the community’s support. Finally, local residents agreed for labour participation in the project and made available provisions like puffed rice and jaggery at the work site. Women contributed by sewing jute bags for the bunds. It became a completely community supported project. Later, the Government gave 20,000 jute bags. People from the villages have realised the benefit of the project and are ready to extend support for the project. Choudhary set up the Rajjyor Shram Daner Brahmaputra Garakahania Protirodh Samiti at Bhuragaon, comprising 10,000 people from 80 villages. The villages were spread over an area of 35 sq kms. The organisation also set up a 31-member Executive Committee that takes stock of the land reclamation project. The district administration has accredited Mr. Choudhary’s work and awarded him a citation for his achievement. Bhuragaon village model has shown that if communities are well-organised, they themselves will work for their own development despite the hazards they face.

(Adapted from the book ‘Turning the Tide: Good Practices in Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction,’ published by EFICOR and Sphere India, 2010, pp. 90-92)

Serving the Needy

The CGM Prarthana Bhawan was set up by Pastor Suvendu Parida in 2004 at Panki Block, Palamu District, Jharkhand. The vision and mission of the church is to serve those in need by providing both their physical and spiritual needs through the love of Christ. A thorough understanding and conviction of integral mission which is grounded in Scripture motivated the Church to put its belief into practice through many avenues of work that bring wholistic transformation to the communities in Palamu District. A clear calling received by the Pastor that one must serve the needy has motivated him in doing development work.

With this passion, the Pastor along with the Church members, serve the needy communities in the Palamu area where the community has limited access to development.

Education

The Church believes that education of children is important. Some of the Church youth volunteered themselves to provide tuition for the children of poor parents and they do it all for free. Tuition centre was set up and there are about 30-40 children who come to the centre for learning. The Pastor and some of the Church members would sometimes visit schools and the Government's Anganwadi centers. They would motivate the workers to ensure that school children are given nutritious food which is part of the Government mid-day meal programme.

Hand Pump Installation

Public hand pumps were earlier installed in 3 districts - Palamu, Garhwa and Latehar villages. It was recently installed in Tal village in Palamu district, Jharkhand. This has enabled the community to have access to water.

Self Help Groups

Since 2017, the Church has been helping the communities to form Self Help Groups in different blocks of Palamu, Jharkhand. They have been functioning actively and are working successfully. As a result, many women were able to get loans with a low rate of interest.

Access to Government schemes

Due to extreme poverty, many of the poor did not have a home of their own. Through the initiative of the Church, many needy families were able to construct a home of their



Photo: Pastor Suvendu along with the community in Palamu

own by availing the Government's Indira Awas Yojana Housing scheme.

The church also helped the community to avail various schemes provided by the Government such as widow pension, old age pension, disability certificates, etc. and helped them in obtaining Aadhar cards, opening of bank accounts, etc. Most of the families in Palamu rely on agriculture for their sustenance. This year, the church supported the farmers by distributing seeds to 80 families.

Providing food and other essential items to the poor during the COVID-19 Pandemic

During the first and second wave of the COVID-19, the communities were severely affected and there was grave shortage of food. The church helped by distributing food, clothes and other hygiene items to the poor in different parts of Palamu District.

Despite various hindrances and with limited resources, the Pastor and the Church have been able to put their Christian faith into action by helping poor communities in the villages around Palamu district in Jharkhand. The Church continues doing the good work over the years. The CGM Prarthana Bhawan members have truly lived out their faith by serving God, through serving the needy.

(Pastor Suvendu Parida is the Pastor of the CGM Prarthana Bhawan, Panki, Jharkhand.

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Books on our Desk

Scars Across Humanity: Understanding And Overcoming Violence Against Women

By Elaine Storkey, SPCK, First published in 2015, Great Britain (276 Pages)

Mrs. Joan Lalromawi

The book by Dr. Elaine Storkey on Scars across Humanity: Understanding and Overcoming Violence against Women is a well-researched book covering stories of women in vulnerable situations across the countries and how there has been historical discrimination of women and girl child.

The author has documented various cases of violence against women across different cultures. The book offers a heavy reading as one goes through gruesome stories of violence against women occurring from female infanticide, female genital mutilation, child marriage, domestic abuse, trafficking and prostitution, rape and honour killings. Dr. Elaine has presented the 13 chapters in simple and easy reading format. The Introductory chapter starts off on the global issue of violence against women, defining it as a global pandemic. It examines the denial of violence against women occurring in some countries and she presented this with the brutal murder of the three Mirabal sisters in the Dominican Republic in 1960 and how there is absolute denial of the crime. The sisters were defiantly speaking out and helping the victims from a brute regime.

Dr. Elaine mentions that in some countries women are vulnerable to violence as there is no proper legislation to protect them. And even when there are laws, many women do not have knowledge of their rights and even if there are, they may not know how to lay claim to them. This is largely due to patriarchal attitudes and culture. She gives an elaborate description of crime against women being perpetuated in the name of 'Honour killings' and how this crime exist sthroughout the UK, Europe, South Asia and the Middle East countries. Most domestic violence cases are under reported as mentioned by Dr. Elaine, "There is little doubt that the tally of abuse, assault and murder of girls by certain family members is much higher in every country than the cases recorded in police statistics." She commented that wherever gender inequality is rarely challenged, it can be part of the cultural norm for women to be admonished in the home. So violence can be used as a way of bringing women back in line and reasserting where the 'power' really lies.

In Chapter 4, Dr. Elaine describes horrendous real life stories of child marriages of young girls. However, she says that

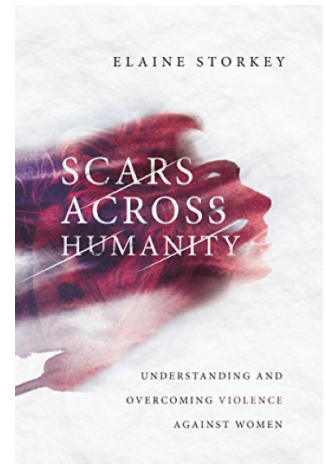
poverty is not the only driving factor for this. In almost every country where it is prevalent, child marriage is also linked to systems of ownership and control, and to a low view of childhood. It is a disturbing consequence of gender inequality and oppression. A girl's status is transferred from being under the control of her parents to the ownership of her husband.

Dr. Elaine also mentions how rape culture is widely prevalent in different societies. She comments that until power and patriarchy are kept in check by external accountability structures, impunity stays in place (p.150). She, therefore, stresses the need to combat rape on all fronts. School curricula, police training programmes, public awareness literature, legislation, poetry, art, counselling and sentencing can all contribute to changing the culture.

Dr. Elaine delves further into the question of why there is gender based violence through the biological/evolutionary view of gender relations. Throughout the book, she deftly puts forth her argument in line with power dynamics/relations narrative of gender. Dr. Elaine points out that traditions of patriarchy is dominant in Christianity but reminds that scripture emphasises on giving dignity and equality to women, and not validating gender violence. She writes, "A united commitment for gender justice can only be born from spiritual conviction, and experience of God's love." However, she also says that far from underwriting violence and abuse, the Christian faith offers a Biblical framework for understanding it and the power of God's love to combat it. In the concluding chapter, she has presented a framework for action and calls out to join the healing and the work of restorative justice as the scars across humanity have become too deep-rooted.

Dr. Elaine's book is definitely an essential reading for everyone as it has highlighted the important issue of gender inequality and gender justice.

(Mrs. Joan Lalromawi works with EFICOR. She can be reached at joan@eficor.org)



Review of Dr. Alice Evans Blogpost

Why are North and South India so Different on Gender?

(<https://www.draliceevans.com/post/why-are-southern-north-eastern-indian-states-more-gender-equal>)

Mr. George L. Samte

In this blog article, Dr. Alice Evans has shared her insights on an important issue of gender equality within the context of India. The diversity within India is indisputable, and there have been innumerable studies on this aspect of the country. One might wonder whether it is worthwhile to look for new avenues of discussion on this facet of India, which has ostensibly been discussed threadbare. That being said, if India is divided broadly in terms of cultural and linguistic differences, one can see a palpable distinction between North, South and North Eastern India. Dr. Evans embarks on an interesting study, unravelling how this difference among regions extend to gender relations, possibly bringing new perspectives to the discussion.

At the outset, she presents a group of indicators - infant mortality, literacy, employment, social freedom, choice of spouse, marriage age, sex ratio etc. - in which South (and North Eastern) India fares better than the North. She then explores how these regional predictors work by reviewing the history of poverty, colonialism, matriliney, cousin marriage, conquests (purdah), cultivation and crop yields in India.

Dr. Evans proceeds to analyse each of the above mentioned indicators and discovers that the Northern region still fares poorly in female literacy and status/involvement in society, even though factors like poverty and colonialism were endemic across the nation. Furthermore, factors like the existence of matrilineal communities and communities which practise cross-cousin marriage in North East and Southern India are insufficient to explain the improved gender equations in these areas, since these communities are a minority even within their respective regions. Islamic conquests have been argued to have introduced Purdah and exacerbated women's subjugation in the Northern regions; but Dr. Evans finds that practices of sati, child marriage and restrictions on widow remarriage predated the Mughal invasions.

She finds that geography and methods of cultivation are surprisingly very important indicators of women's social status. In South and North Eastern India, the major crops (like rice) require labour-intensive cultivation involving both sexes. Consequently, female labour participation (and social standing) are found to be higher. In the relatively fertile Northern Gangetic region, women were less needed in cultivation, which possibly led to male preference in Northern India. However, in contrast to North America,¹ Latin America

or even East Asia, Dr. Evans explains that women in India could not leave family farms in search of alternate economic opportunities (manufacturing or factory labour) in the light of social constraints like caste-based policing and Purdah. Reading further, it is fascinating to discover how factors like traditional pastoralism might have led to higher preference for sons, and areas with arid soils with historically low yields (like Rajasthan) might have engendered low sex-ratios.

Dr. Evans effectively leverages resources from non-conventional sources (social media) and draws on her wide range of scholarship on subjects which she feels are pertinent to her topic of interest; including geography, anthropology, economics, and even art. This is amply reflected in the mountain of references provided at the end of the blog, and the thematic maps (from various census and surveys) that provide a helpful visual overview to support her research. The blog concludes by acknowledging the differences in female emancipation between North and South (including North Eastern) India, stemming not only from social and cultural influences but, equally importantly, from geographical and occupational agencies.

Like a data scientist, Dr. Evans has a talent to co-relate seemingly unrelated pieces of information to extract and construct unique insights into the root cause of various issues while providing convincing rationale for the same. Some of the conclusions drawn possibly need to be carefully re-examined. She writes, "Dowries were always common in Rajasthan, Bihar, and Punjab but rare in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and West Bengal." Dowry has always been practised across India and it is increasing, both in value and rate of adoption. Thus, the relation between collection of dowry and gender disparity in North and South India might be tenuous. For India, the role of religion in exacerbating gender differences may also need to be examined.

Dr. Alice Evans' academic background is diverse - ranging from a graduate degree in Philosophy, M.Sc. in International Development to a Doctorate in Geography. Fittingly, she has written this article from a perspective that spans across various disciplines, making it an interesting, informative and important read.

Mr. George L. Samte is a Computer Scientist, currently working with the Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO), Ministry of Defence, Delhi. He can be reached at bygeorge.gls@gmail.com

Women Leaders of the Early Church

Dr. Atola Longkumer

In 2019, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) Women's Commission and the Lausanne Movement's Women in Evangelism partnered to host 'Rise in Strength,' a global consultation held in the Netherlands. This global consultation brought women from different parts of the world to deliberate on the experiences of women's participation in the church and the larger society, including leadership. The consultation reiterated, "Gender inequality continues to be a barrier that diminishes the effective witness of the church to the transforming power of the Gospel."

Indeed, equal participation of women, the recognition of women's gifts and the freedom of women from socio-cultural constraints continues to challenge the church and the wider society. Gender justice is a crucial area of witness of the church to the liberation in Jesus Christ. Yet, the Bible has often been appropriated to justify the discrimination and exclusion of women. Such a usage of the Bible limits the meaning behind Biblical texts' - texts that have specific historical and literary backgrounds. For instance, the story of the woman at the well can be understood as Jesus breaking boundaries of religio-cultural barriers. A careful study of Romans 16 illustrates a fuller picture of women in the early church.

Letter to the Romans

The Letter of Paul to the Romans is one of the seven letters that is undisputed about Pauline's authorship. Probably written in 57 AD, Paul presents a careful exposition of the Christian faith as salvation given by God through grace in Jesus Christ for all humanity. Written to encourage and guide Christians to live faithfully as transformed by the good news in Jesus Christ, the letter of Paul to the Romans remains a valuable scripture that both reflects the ordinary lives of the early Christian communities as well as provides theological articulation of the transformation brought by the Spirit in Jesus Christ. That women played a key role within the early church is also evident from this letter of Paul to the Romans.

Ten women named by Paul in Romans 16

In Romans 16, which forms the concluding greeting of the letter, Paul names ten women who were active partners and coworkers in the early Christian mission. The ten women are: Phoebe, Prisca, Mary, Junia, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus' mother, Julia and Nereus' sister.

Deacon Phoebe

Phoebe is the first woman among the ten that Paul mentions in the chapter. Paul commends her to the church in Rome (Romans 16:1-2) as a sister and benefactor (patron) of many, including Paul himself. Described in Greek as a "diakonos" (deacon) and a "prostatis" (benefactor/patron), Biblical scholarship agrees that Phoebe had a significant role in the ministry of Paul as an emissary and a wealthy supporter. Paul's usage of the term "diakonos" suggests that Phoebe had a leadership role in the church. Earlier inaccurate translation of the word "diakonos" as "deaconess" has influenced the church in ways that limited women's participation to subordinate roles.

Apostle Junia

In Romans 16:7, Paul mentions Junia and identifies her as a relative, who was imprisoned, who came to know Christ before Paul, and who was a prominent apostle. While ancient manuscripts and church fathers like Origen have identified Junia as a woman, some later translations have erroneously assumed the Greek name 'Junia' to be a male. However, careful Biblical scholarship in the recent times has concluded that Junia is indeed a female apostle. As an apostle, Junia was chosen and sent to preach the good news and she distinguished herself in that calling to serve the church.

Actions for gender justice in our times

The 2019 global consultation "Rise in Strength" encouraged the church to commit to "Equip women and girls to take up leadership positions in the Church and wider society, including training and development, making the most of innovative resources," among others.

Conclusion

Apostle Paul lists ten women in his letter to the Romans, who worked together with him as apostles, deacons, missionaries, and patrons. This indicates that women played a central role in the early church and its mission of witnessing to Christ. Both men and women are created in God's image and both are called to participate in the work of God. As written in Romans 16, the fundamental tenet of faith in God's love for all humanity is to put into practice and ensure gender justice in every aspect of the church and the larger society.

(Dr. Atola Longkumer is a Baptist and theological educator, currently residing in Imphal, Manipur, where her husband pastors a church. She can be reached at - atolalongkumer3@gmail.com)

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