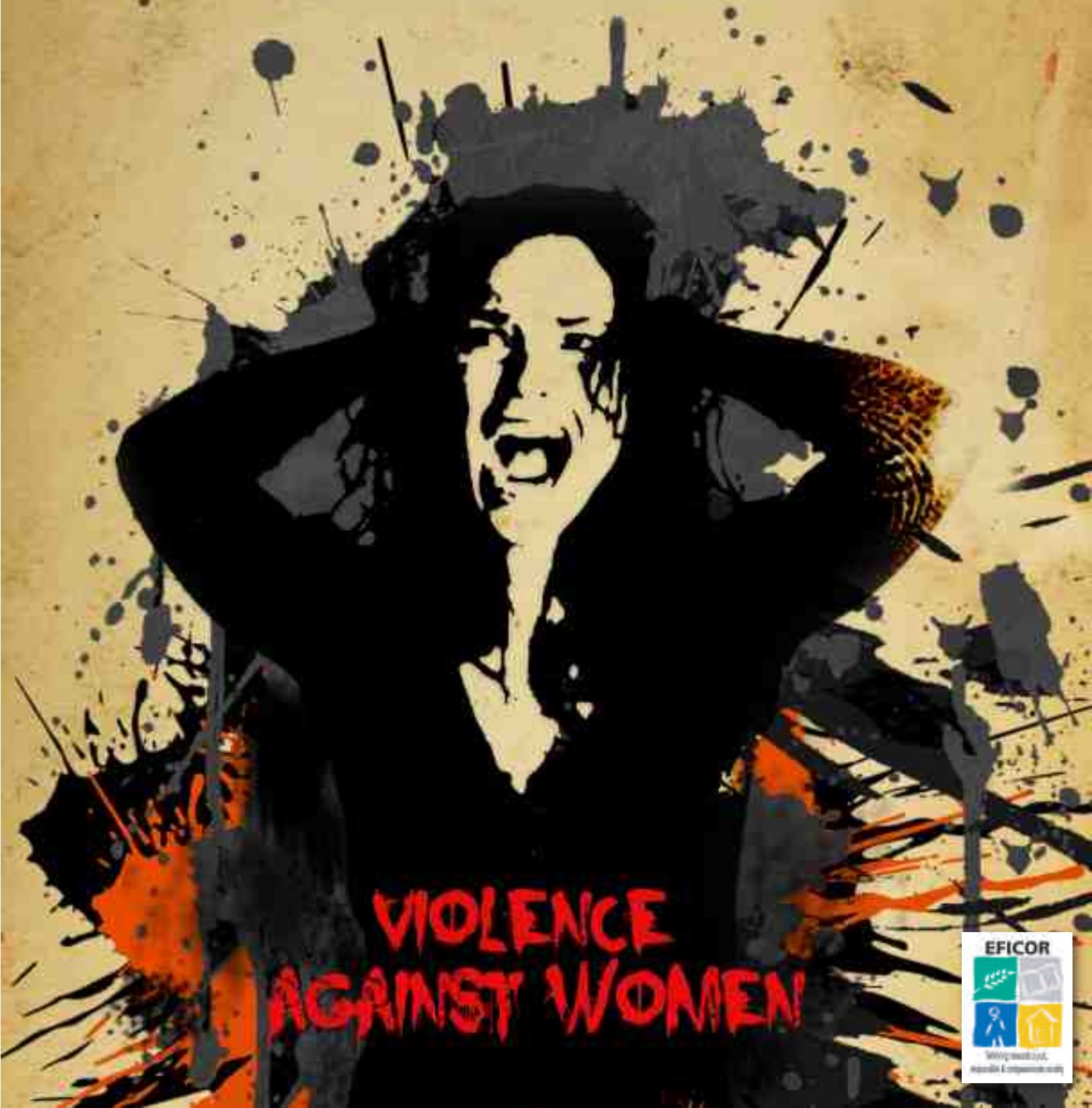


dṛīḍhlikone

Evangelical Perspectives on Mission and Ethics



**VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN**



**“The Lord tests the righteous,
But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates.”
Psalm 11:5 New King James Version (NKJV).**

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...



Greetings from ISARA!

I am a regular reader of “DRISHTIKONE”. I appreciate Drishtikone as it is an informative tool focussing on issues of the societies, people and the environment i.e. Land, Water, Forest, Disasters, Drought and Justice to all etc. The contents of each article are informative, useful and serve as a guide to the readers who are committed to social change and want to do something about it. It is one of the resourceful magazines for a number of readers, scholars and researchers in our free public Library.

Thanking you with regards.

Sincerely,

Mr. Rabindra Nath Patra
Secretary
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Dear Editor,

Thank you very much for sending me a copy of Drishtikone Issue on Forest Rights. It was very informative, encouraging and enlightening.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mr. Thanseia
Pangdailo House B-33
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Contents

2 Editorial

3 Cover Story

Violence Against Women

Ms. Bindulata Barik

7 Response to the Cover Story - 1

The Rights of Women in our Context

Mrs. Anuvinda Varkey

1

8 Response to the Cover Story - 2

Church's Response to Gender-based Violence Against Women

Dr. Ms. Elizabeth Leelavathi Manasseh

9 Christian Perspective on the Cover Story

Ending Violence Against Women: What can the Church do?

Mr. Raaj Mondol

12 Facts

Facts

Contd...

Contents

14 Voices from the Grassroots

Staying Strong Amidst the Odds

Mrs. Joan Lalromawi

15 My India

Grace and Healing

Ms. Lalbiakhlui (Kuki) Rokhum

18 Seeds of Transformation

New Age Entrepreneur

20 Book Review

Books on Our Desk

22 Faith In Action

From a Local to a Global Church in Action

23 Bible Study

A Study of Genesis 38

Dr. Jamila Koshy

24 Ideas for Action



Editorial...

Everyday we see the newspapers report of physical and emotional harassment to women. Dreadful news items are seen and read daily by most of us. We are aware of the fateful incident of rape and sexual assault which had happened to a para-medical student in December 2012, in New Delhi. The intensity of the rape which the woman (Nirbhaya) went through is horrendous, and we know that she died eventually as she could not cope with the cruelty caused to her. Such is the kind of incident that has been happening even in our metro cities, like Delhi. We cannot deny the fact that these kinds of incidents or even worse happened in our other cities and in the small towns and villages. Four years have passed since this particular incident happened in Delhi. But can we say that the situation has improved for the women? What have we done about it, say, as an individual or as a church? Reports and statistics of the National Crime Records Bureau show a very grim situation. Similar incidents related to violence against women keep recurring in our society.

The underlying causes of these kinds of violence towards women could be traced to the cultural and social status that women occupy in our society. Women in India have always occupied low social status. They are vulnerable and bound to be abused by the family members and the society. While men dominate and wield power both in homes, workplace and society, women have always been placed in subordinate roles. Their roles are often limited to child rearing and domestic responsibilities. These social roles and responsibilities lead to discriminative behaviour towards girls and women. It further creates inequality between men and women leading to various forms of violence and injustice against women.

The experience of violence undermines the dignity and empowerment of women. It is a great barrier to the overall socio-economic development of the country. Since the issue is deep rooted in our socio-cultural life, it is necessary to address the social norms and values present in our society. It is at this juncture that the church in India also needs to come out and address the issue head on. We may not have solution to these problems overnight. However, we as a Church can stand up, raise our voice, and act on the injustice meted out to our sisters, mothers, grandmothers, aunties, daughters, or daughters-in-law in the country.

Violence Against Women

Ms. Bindulata Barik

“A Thomson Reuters Foundation global poll of experts”¹ places India as the fourth most dangerous place for women to live after Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Pakistan. In India women face different kinds of abuses throughout their life time, from womb to tomb. India is placed in the second position with regard to sexual violence and tops the list in human trafficking. Violence against women (VAW) is a term used to describe a range of abuses that primarily affect women². The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against

Women (1993) defines this as: “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”³

Gender discrimination “is a reality that denies women and girls’ equality, security, dignity, self-worth and their right to enjoy fundamental freedom.”⁴ VAW is a behaviour and it exists irrespective of the literate-illiterate divide and transcends the barriers of culture, class, caste, creed, race, age, time, income, ethnicity and countries and places women on a secondary status. According to Shalini Karbak gender based discrimination “limits women’s choices directly by



instilling fear in them, destroying their health, limiting mobility, controlling their sexuality, limiting access to resources and services. Indirectly, it impacts on a woman’s self-confidence, self-esteem and self-identity.”⁵

Constitutional efforts to uplift the inferior status of women

The constitutional and legal provisions for women in India show government’s efforts to value women equally and uplift their status. Such efforts affirm the existence and possibilities of VAW in India. Articles 14, 15, 16, 39 (a) 39 (b), 39 (c), 39 (d) of the Indian constitution have granted women equal fundamental rights and granted socio-economic, educational and political status

to every citizen of India. Every citizen of India irrespective of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth is equal before law. Special provisions are made in favour of women to uplift their unequal status so that they can get equal opportunity relating to employment, appointment and equal pay for equal work. Different Indian Penal Codes (IPC) are amended for crime against women such as rape (Sec 376), attempt to rape (Sec 276/511), Kidnapping & abduction of women (Sec 363,

364, 364A, 366), Dowry death (Sec 304B), Assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty (Sec 354), Sexual harassment (Sec 354A), Insult of the

modesty of women (Sec 509), Cruelty by husband or in-laws (498A), importation of girls up to 21 years (Sec 366B) and abetment of suicide of women (Sec 306).

Also some Special & Local Laws (SLL) have been amended for women such as the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, The Indecent Representation of Women Prohibition Act 1986, the Commission of Sati Prevention Act 1987, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and the Immoral Traffick Prevention Act 1956.

¹ A Thomson Reuters Foundation Global Poll of Experts, <http://www.trust.org/documents/2011-women-poll-results.pdf> accessed by Bindulata Barik on 08 June 2015 at 16:52 pm.

² Domestic abuse/violence, rape and sexual violence, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation, trafficking and sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and crimes in the name of honour. The majority of these abuses are committed by men towards women they know or are in a close relationship with.

³ <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/gender/vaw/about.html>

⁴ Shalini Karbak, Gender Violence in India, (Independent Commission on Development and Health in India: New Delhi, 2004), 1.

⁵ Karbak, Gender Violence in India, 1

⁶ Crime in India 2014, Chapter – 5, <http://ncrb.nic.in/StatPublications/CII/CII2014/chapters/Chapter%205.pdf> access by Bindulata Barik on 15th November, 2016.

Crime Against Women

Even though the Indian Constitution has made the provision of different laws to safeguard the rights of women, it has not secured women from the vulnerability of violence and the rates of crimes against women have been on the increase. The following table⁶ of head-wise incidents of crime against women during 2010 & 2014 and percentage variation in 2014 over 2010 shows that, total rate of crimes against women under IPC has increased 58.7% in 2014 over 2010 and rate of crimes under SLL against women is increased 46.8% in 2014 over 2010.

Sl. No.	Crime Head	2010	2014	Percentage Variation in 2014 over 2010
1	Rape	22172	36735	65.7
2	Kidnapping & Abduction of women	29795	58311	95.7
3	Dowry deaths	8391	8455	0.8
4	Assault on women with intent to outrage her/their modesty	40613	82235	102.5
5	Insult to the modesty of women	9961	9735	-2.3
6	Cruelty by husband or his relatives	94041	122877	30.7
7	Importation of girl from foreign country	36	13	-63.9
8	Abetment of suicide of women		3734	
	Total IPC	205009	325329	58.7
9	Commission of Sati Prevention Act			
10	Indecent Representation of Women (P) Act	895	47	-94.7
11	The dowry Prohibition Act	5182	10050	93.9
12	Immoral Traffick	2499	2070	-17.2
	Total SLL Crime Against Women	8576	12593	46.8

According to the above table, even though some of the crimes against women seem to have reduced like insult to the modesty of women, importation of girls from foreign country, Indecent representation of women and Immoral trafficking, however, the incidents of Rape 65.7%, Kidnapping & abduction of women 95.7%, Assault on women with intent to outrage her/their modesty 102.5% and crimes under Dowry Prohibition Act have remarkably increased to 93.9% from 2010 to 2014.

Cultural Perceptions on the inferior status of Women

Though legally women should be viewed equal with men, in practice they are treated as objects. There are many popular sayings about women in India, which devalue women.

Aurat ki akal aidee mein hoti hai or ghutne mein hoti hai - A woman's intelligence is in her heels or in her knees;

Zaydad, jameen aur joru, sab ladaiyon ke karan - Wealth, land and women, all three lead to fight;

Billi ke pet me ghi khate to, lugai ke pet mei bat khate - Like the cat cannot digest clarified butter, women cannot keep secrets;

Beti ko palna aur padosi ke paudhon ko pani dena saman hai - Bringing up a daughter is like watering your neighbours' plants.

dhor ganwar shudra pashu nari, ye sab tadan ke adhikari - Drums, rustics/uncouth people, the untouchables, animals & women all of them deserve to be beaten.⁷

These common sayings which find expressions in the different languages of our country are indicative of the low value that society places on women. VAW is not limited to physical acts of violence alone, but it is a global epidemic that kills, tortures and injures women psychologically, sexually, economically and emotionally. Women leaders in the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing claimed "women rights as human rights". People partake in spreading VAW when they deny women and girls' their basic rights as equal human beings or deny them security, dignity, self-worth, and their right to enjoy fundamental freedom.

4

Perceptions of the secondary status of girl children

Women don't have the liberty in making any decision for their own life or family. In today's India they are even not allowed to be born. The girl child sex ratio is 914 against 1000 boys in India. State like Haryana has gone down to 834 girls against 1000 boys. The preference for sons has resulted in 12 million girls being aborted over the past three decades. Though sex selective abortion is illegal in India, still million girls are missing day by day. Mothers are forced to abort their unborn; else their life is at risk. Those

⁶ Crime in India 2014, Chapter – 5, <http://ncrb.nic.in/StatPublications/CII/CII2014/chapters/Chapter%205.pdf> access by Bindulata Barik on 15th November, 2016.

⁷ Binoy Acharya, Gender Awareness and Sensitivity Application, Unnati Organization for Development and Education (India:Ahmedabad), 2009. 74.

mothers, who cannot afford prenatal diagnostic tests, abandon their baby girls by smothering, strangling or simply leaving them to starve to death.

Girls are considered as burden in India as they have to be given in marriage to a different family. Even if they are educated, it gains nothing to their family, rather it is a loss as parents have to spend huge amount on dowry for their marriage. More she studies, more money is required for dowry as parents struggle to find a matching groom for her. Her sexual security is another threat to the family. If before her marriage anything happens to her sexually then she can't be married and becomes a lifelong liability to the family.

So, even though the Indian Constitution sets 18 as minimum age for marriage for a woman, India scores the largest number of child brides in the world by 47% brides below the wedding age. Early marriage causes early pregnancy and early death. 22% of the child brides give birth before they are 18. Women under 15 years are likely to die 5 times more than adult women.

Girl children are considered as helpmates for their mothers in taking care of younger siblings and household works. So, they lack basic education. Such girl children are more vulnerable to be kidnapped. A kidnapping or abduction occurs every 43 minutes, a dowry death every 75 minutes, a rape every 34 minutes, an act of cruelty every 33 minutes and a criminal offence against women every seven minutes in India. Out of 15 million girls born each year, only 25% will get to reach their fifteenth birthday.



Sexual abuse against women

Women are mostly believed as a sexual object. Irrespective of age, they are being assaulted sexually. According to the reported rape cases in 2014, 86% offenders were known to the victims. 16 out of 26 states/UTs have reported more than 90% of rape cases. In 2014, 3.2% victims were girls below 6 years, 11.8% girls between 6 to 12 years, 29.6% teenaged girls between 12 to 16 years, 16.1% girls between 16 to 18 years, 28.5% women between 18-30 years, 9% women between 30 to 45 years, 1% women between 45 to 60 years and 0.8% women in age group of above 60 years were victims of incest rape. These statistics

show that a total of 60.7% victims are children below 18 years and including above 18 to 30 years 89.2% women and girls are raped in their early age by their own family members or known persons.

These statistics shows that every year the incidents of rapes are increasing. However, in reality, sexual abuse is a form of abuse which is always hidden in the culture of shame and fame. If a girl or a woman is abused sexually, always the victim is blamed for her different etiquettes of lifestyle. Such blame forces the victims to be suppressed, isolated and dump their testimonials. However, today's women are educated and empowered to realize the culture behind the silence and open up to witness and complain the abuses they undergo. Crime is not increasing but complaints are, which indicates that sexual VAW is always there, but now women have learnt that it can be told, and start reporting about these incidents.

The culture of silence

The above statistics is only of the reported cases. In reality, these facts and figures are only on the basis of incidents that are reported to government, uncounted incidents of VAW remain unreported. The culture of silence on these issues has made women handicapped to raise their voice against such violence. Study shows that 66% of women in abusive relationships remain silent about their sufferings. 55-95% of women never approached for formal help. 70% of women face some form of violence. 75% of women who report have attempted to commit suicide. In India, 50% of all reported crimes are against women. A woman in abusive relationship is 12 times more likely to be suicidal than a woman who is not.

Vulnerability of Minorities

No society can claim to be free of such violence, only forms of abuse may vary.

However, specific groups of women and girl children are more vulnerable such as minority groups, indigenous people groups, migrant women, refugees, disabled, children, elderly women and women in conflict situations.

Domestic Violence

The most hidden and ignored form of VAW is domestic violence. 58% of family members are aware of the abuse that women or girl children suffer in the family, but do nothing to stop it. Among the forms of domestic violence, dowry torture is the most violent among all. Though dowry death crime reports seem to be less than before, cases of dowry related harassments have increased to 93.9%. Cases of cruelty by husband or his relatives, dowry harassments show that, violence against women and girl children take place more in the home.

Perceptions of Women's status among Christians in India

The dehumanization of women is deeply rooted in the cultural and religious worldview of people. Christians are no exception. According to Thomas Varghese's study⁸,

Christian women are equally victims of gender based violence. Many may spiritualize and deny the existence of abuse against women in Christian families. Varghese's study shows that church is often blind about the sufferings of women. Church leaders think that the abuse against women and girl children "in Christian families is negligible, insignificant or unimportant, some of the churches and clergymen deny the fact". In his study he interviewed 100 Christian married women from 9 leading denominational backgrounds⁹, who were abused by their husbands psychologically, verbally, physically, sexually, financially and socially. Such violence leaves women to live helplessly, develop anger, and become more suicidal. Most of the victims do not know where to seek help. Women have adopted a culture of silent suffering mostly because of shame, fear, threats by husband, financial insecurity and on account of their children. Even if they shout or cry for help from friends or relatives, clergies or pastors, they are asked to tolerate or keep quiet. This is the sad reality of Christian women in India.

Conclusion

The above study shows the depth of wound that women are bearing and living with.

Government organizations and Non-Government Organizations are engaged in addressing

this issue, but under the garb of cultural and social norms, service providers are unable to reach the victims on time and fail to provide help. To address such a crucial issue the support of all civil society members are greatly required. It is important to know the identity of woman, who she is. Churches can play an important part in changing this scenario. It is because the Bible identifies woman as the equal image bearer of God. Together they were designed in the image and likeness of God; together they received the blessings to rule over the earth and to live life together. If the community of believers can understand this fact and equal status of women in their community are given, the status of women will definitely be improved.

⁹ Church of South India, Church of North India, Evangelical Church, Catholic Church, Syrian Marthoma Church, Bretheren Church, Pentecostal Church, Syrian Orthodox Church and Methodist Church. Varghese, Abuse of Women, 107.

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The Rights of Women in our Context

Mrs. Anuvinda Varkey

India has laws that protect the rights of women and the statute books are replete with laws that ostensibly protect women from crimes that may be perpetuated against them. India is also the signatory to various international conventions that promise to protect women from violence of any form. However the statistics available on violence against women, demonstrate that crimes against women in our country are on the rise. This phenomenon is not only witnessed in India but seems to be on the rise the world over. Violence against women in our country vary from dowry deaths, honour killings, female infanticide and foeticide, rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment at the workplace, human trafficking, forced prostitution, stalking both physically and in cyberspace have seen a rise.

Violence against women and girls are perpetuated against them at various stages of their lives. In the mother's womb the crime of female foeticide, and then female infanticide, is borne out by the skewed sex ratio of girls to boys, the 2011

census puts the ratio of females to males as 940 females to 1000 males. As the female child grows, the withdrawal or the denial of basic nutrition for the female child is prevalent in the country sometimes leading to death of the female child. It is a known fact that medical care will be less for a female child. Then the perpetual fear of rape and assault of a girl child or woman at any age most of the time from persons known to the woman or girl, quite often from a family member, is a known fact. Women, as they grow up and get married, face the possibility of dowry harassment and then in the workplace, women are faced with discrimination and sexual harassment. Violence against older women has also come to light; with a horrific report presented in the Kerala assembly, of sexual assault of women by family members and strangers against women over 75 years of age. Though these cases of extreme violence are not committed against every woman in the country, even one woman experiencing any violence against her is one case of violence too many.

Violence against women is used in times of war and conflict, by state forces. A recent story which was broken by the media

reports a number of rapes in Chhattisgarh by state forces against tribal women. We have also heard of the horrific violence against women refugees fleeing from their homes in Iraq, Syria and other parts of the world.

One of the dominant reasons for crimes against women is the strong dominant patriarchal system that seems to dominate most societies in India and around the globe. The status of women in these societies is considered less than that of a man's. We see this in the inequality of inheritance and property rights and the spaces for economic and social development being dominated by men. In these changing times and when more and more women are asserting their

rights to compete in the workplace, socially as well as politically, we find that men are finding it hard to deal with women being empowered. The only way that some of them feel they can dominate and control this phenomenon is by perpetuating varying

degrees of violence against women.

It is important to assert that violence against women is an assault on their human rights. Violence against women should not be seen as a violation of their modesty, in the case of rape or sexual harassment. Nor should violence against women be seen as a violation of the honour of a community. Women's movements across India and the world have for years been advocating for the acts of violence against women to be seen as a violation of their human rights.

It is time for us to recognise that violence against women needs to be spoken against in our churches and by our pastors from the pulpit. We need to engage with men in our churches and societies to be part of the movement to eradicate violence against women. It is also important for women to be seen and take up leadership positions in the church and society.

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Church's Response to Gender-based Violence Against Women

Dr. Ms. Elizabeth Leelavathi Manasseh

Violence against women and girls includes physical, sexual, psychological, mental, social, spiritual, economic abuse, etc. It is often known as 'gender-based violence' because it evolves in part from women's subordinate status in society (World Health Organisation) and the term show who the victims are. Gender-based Violence or violence against women may be understood using terms such as physical abuse - wife battering or spouse abuse, verbal abuse, psychological abuse, spiritual abuse, etc. It is a reflection of unequal gender relations in the patriarchal society.

While violence against women as well as other forms of family violence is universal, it is very much present in the Indian family and society. Although the nature and forms of violence that women faced are entwined within physical, mental and psychological levels, the prevailing forms of violence in the Indian family and society include wife beating, rape, sexual harassment, discrimination, deprivation of positions and privileges, eve teasing, etc.

As Ms. Bindulata Barik rightly argues and based on the findings of the study done by Thomas Varghese, Christian women are equally victims of gender-based violence. As Varghese's study shows, the Church seems to be blind about the sufferings of women. There are some who argued that Christianity has contributed significantly to the restructuring of man-woman relationship in the West as well as in India/Asia. On the other hand, women in the non-Western countries make conscious efforts to arrive at a new understanding of Biblical texts as well as to see clearly with a new vision that God has included women, and not excluded women. Genesis 1 suggests nothing else other than an equality of male and female human persons, created together in the image of God. This understanding, Jesus' vision for man-woman relationship and various Biblical texts continue to enhance Christian women to work towards eradicating or eliminating violence against women with the support of the Church.

72 Christian professional women across the nation, who faced gender-based violence articulated during 2013-2014 that as women of faith engaged themselves with the Word of God and prayer, they understood that faith without action is empty and therefore, they try to live what they believe. They are no longer angry about patriarchal authority. They stayed with their abusive husbands and through Church-based Bible Engagement programmes have been able to eradicate violence in their own families and even saw how God's word could transform their husbands/spouses for the better. Their testimony is that the way of love, grace and cross has been powerful in their lives and therefore, they are now able to help the abused and the abusers to overcome and eliminate violence against women.

Furthermore, the global Church bodies, namely, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the World Council of Churches (2001-2010), the World Evangelical Alliance (1997-2008) and the Lutheran World Federation (1999-2001) have given the impetus to the Church for a new awakening among the people of God, affirming the fundamental biblical understanding that every human being is equal before God in general and there is equality between man and woman, in particular. Though conscious efforts have been made by the Church at large, still the gift of leadership of women seems to be taking time to be affirmed, recognised and allowed to be exercised in many Church denominations as well as Christian Organisations. Still male speakers and leaders are preferred. How many more decades will it take to fully integrate the gifts and talents of women in the life, witness and ministry of the Church? A beautiful example of gender equality in the body of Christ perhaps is the best way forward to give agenda to the society to overcome gender-based violence and even eradicate or eliminate it! The clarion call for men and women in the Church is to labour hard in love, side by side, with the mind of Christ to make this happen.

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Ending Violence Against Women: What can the Church do?

Mr. Raaj Mondol

Violence against Women exists across every country of the globe and abuse takes place within every faith community. It knows no socio-economic, cultural or national boundaries. ‘According to the UN, as many as 7 in 10 women in the world report having experienced physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lifetime.¹

Christian women are equally victims of this practice. In the mid 1980s Clinical Psychologist Jim M. Alsdurf had done a comprehensive survey through a questionnaire sent out to 5700 Protestant Pastors in USA and Canada to find their response to the issue of domestic violence in the church. Some of the findings of the study were as follows:

- 26% of the pastors polled said they normally tell a woman who is abused by her husband that she should continue to submit to him and “to trust that God would honor her action by either stopping the abuse or giving her the strength to endure it.”
- About 25% of the respondents said a lack of submissiveness in the wife is what triggered the violence in the first place. In other words these pastors believe that the abuse is actually the woman’s fault. The women are told that if they would “learn to submit” the violence will stop.
- A majority of the pastors said it is better for a woman to tolerate some level of violence in the home even though it is “not God’s perfect will” than to seek separation that might end in divorce.
- 71% of the ministers said that they would never advise a battered wife to leave her husband or separate because of abuse, and 92% said that they would never counsel her to seek divorce.²

In a more recent survey conducted by Sojourners magazine and IMA World Health (On behalf of We will speak out, US) through telephonic interviews of 1000 Protestant

Pastors between May 7-31, 2014 it was found that: “Ending sexual and domestic violence is not yet a core message of the Church. An overwhelming majority of the faith leaders surveyed (74%) underestimate the level of sexual and domestic violence experienced within their congregations leading to infrequent discussions of the issue from the pulpit as well as lack of appropriate support for victims. Additionally only 56% of the pastors are adequately familiar with local resources that specifically address sexual and domestic violence, creating missed opportunities for victims to access services. The survey also found that even pastors who have handled incidents of violence may not be offering appropriate advice to those who are suffering, potentially doing more harm than good.”³

In India we are not aware of an extensive research done to assess the situation in churches however some small studies have been done and published. In one such publication ‘Abuse of Women in Indian Christian Families’ by Thomas Varghese, ISPCK, Delhi 2013, interviews were conducted of 100 Christian women from different denominations who had suffered domestic abuse. 100 pastors and priests from different denominations were also interviewed to find out their views and experiences in handling instances of domestic violence in their own congregations.

The above mentioned studies suggest that there is an attitude of denial or incorrect understanding in dealing with the issue of violence against women among churches.

Following steps will help in changing this scenario.

1. Let’s admit the problem and name the sin -

Burying our heads in the sand won’t help. We need to admit that the problem exists and name it as sin. Any change begins with the confession of guilt. We need to seek God’s forgiveness for our sin of mistreating and abusing women. The Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity with

¹ Report of the Secretary General Commission on the Status of Women, Fifty-seventh session, 4-15 March 2013.

² James M. Alsdurf and Phyllis Alsdurf, “A Pastoral Response,” as quoted in J. Lee Grady, 10 Lies the Church tells Women, Charisma House, 2006, p184.

³ Broken Silence: A call for Churches to speak Out, Protestant Pastors Survey on Sexual and Domestic Violence June 2014.

Women, 1988-98 took a step in this direction by firmly emphasizing the elimination of all violence in various forms (sexual, religious, psychological, structural, physical, spiritual), and the culture of violence, especially as they affect the life and dignity of women. And we declare our readiness to confront any attempts to excuse, cover up or justify violence. We declare that its presence in the church is an offence against God, humanity and the earth.”⁴ We must recognize all forms of violence against women as violence whether it is verbal, physical, emotional, sexual or spiritual and name them as sin.

2. Lift the veil of secrecy and shame surrounding the subject

- Any sin prospers in the climate of secrecy and silence. To expose the sin we must bring it to light and speak up. The fear of social stigma dissuades people from reporting and the perpetrator is emboldened to continue

the crime. This happens even in cases of abuse and violence committed within the walls of a home. We need to break the culture of silence surrounding the issue and begin to talk and discuss those matters in our families, in schools and Sunday schools, preach sermons and lead Bible studies. This will help in prevention of many crimes. There is a need to create a safe environment in our churches to talk about those issues so that the women can feel safe to share. In fact the Bible discusses those issues with quite frankness. Accounts of incest in the family of Lot (Genesis 19:30-38), rape of Dinah (Genesis 34), gang rape of a Levite’s concubine (Judges 19), rape of Tamar (II Samuel 13) and other instances of sexual violence are recorded there for us to recognize that all of us are both capable and vulnerable to crimes of passion or evil intent. Even a man like King David committed adultery with another man’s wife and got him killed in a war (II Samuel 11). He also failed in his responsibility by not taking any action against the guilty for the rape of his daughter. God sent the prophet Nathan to rebuke the king for his sinful act (II Samuel 12) which led to his consequent confession and admission of guilt (Psalms 51). The Church has a similar prophetic role to play when her members fall in such sins.

3. Recognize and teach that God hates violence - The Bible makes it very clear that God hates violence. In fact

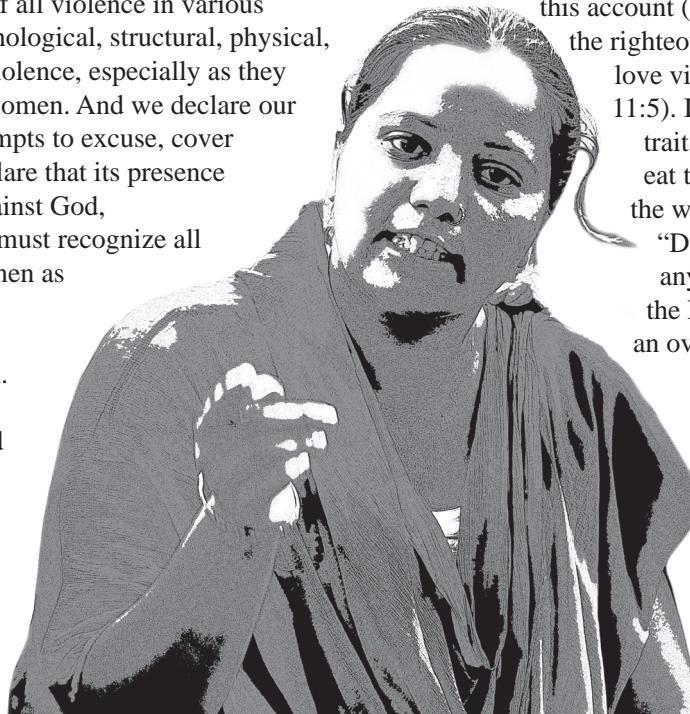


Photo: Stanly Thomas

He destroyed the world through the great flood on this account (Gen. 6:11-13). “The Lord examines the righteous but the wicked and those who love violence, his soul hates” (Psalms 11:5). In the Bible, violent behavior is a trait associated with the wicked. “They eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence” (Proverbs 4:17).

“Do not envy a violent man or choose any of his ways” (Proverbs 3:31). In the New Testament the qualification for an overseer in the Church was to be a person who is not violent but gentle (1 Tim 3:3, Titus 1:7). Therefore violent behavior by any Church member should not be condoned but confronted. The perpetrator of violence should be warned of the serious consequences and punishment for his behaviour both from the Lord as well as from civic authorities. (For they are God’s servants and agents of wrath to bring

punishment on the wrongdoer - Romans 13:1-7). The Government has made various legislations to prevent crimes against women. Any contravention of such laws need to be brought to the notice of relevant authorities and reported to the Police as per the nature of the crime committed.

4. Zero tolerance towards violence against women – We

must develop a zero tolerance attitude towards any act of violence in our homes, churches and institutions. It is very sad to hear reports of sexual and other forms of abuse and violence being reported from Children Homes and orphanages run by Christians or to come across instances of sexual harassment from our institutions. Boards and Management bodies need to take a serious view of any such incident. Inquiry committee should be set up to investigate a reported incident and appropriate action be taken against the person who is guilty. We as Christians need to set a high standard in this regard to maintain our Christian testimony.

5. Let God be God, Husband is not God - In India there is a strong cultural tradition sanctioned by some religious texts to the idea of “Pati-Parmeshwar”, treating husband as god. This view seems to have influenced many Christians as well. Biblical texts from Ephesians 5:22-24, I Timothy 2:13-15, I Peter 3:1-6 etc are often used to convey the argument that wives should submit to her husband in all things, at all times and should never question or argue back with her husband. A great deal of domestic abuse and violence takes place in Christian homes and even the homes of many pastors

⁴ “From Solidarity to Accountability” Letter from the Decade Festival—Churches in Solidarity with Women” in Together on the Way, Official Report of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, edited by Diane Kessler. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1999,p. 243. (As quoted in “Churches say No to Violence against Women”, Lutheran World Federation, Geneva, 2002.

and church leaders under the backdrop of those verses. This is an example of a wrong interpretation of God's word. One of the basic rules of Biblical hermeneutics is that we look at all of Scripture to clarify the meaning of a particular text. Therefore we must look at what the Bible teaches on submission and authority in general before we arrive at the intended meaning of those verses in the marriage context. Jesus made it very clear to his disciples in Mark 10:42-45, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." This teaching completely turns the traditional notion of patriarchal authority on its head and conveys a transformational paradigm of leadership as service with Jesus as the primary model. The Bible's teaching on marriage is that, "They are no longer two but one"(Mark 10:7). God's desire for married couples is that they will become one flesh (Genesis 2:24). Paul also asks husbands to love their wives as their own bodies (Ephesians 5:29) and instructs a person to love his wife as he loves himself (Ephesians 5:33). So in such a relationship of unity and love, how could we justify domination or violence? Doing violence to one's wife is to do violence to one's own body. In Malachi 2:16, God speaks strongly against this practice. "I hate a man covering himself (his wife) with violence as well as with his garment," says the Lord Almighty.

6. Accept the reality that marriages can sometimes break

- Churches normally emphasize on keeping the marriage union intact despite serious challenges. In many instances, pastors are hesitant to the idea of separation and send back the woman to a dangerous situation prevailing in her home, even when her life is in serious threat. It is true that God desires permanence and life-long commitment by the spouses in marriage but knowing the fallen condition of humankind, He made a provision of divorce in certain cases when the marriage covenant breaks down, like in the case of marital unfaithfulness (Matthew 19:8-9). Many women have lost their lives at the hands of their husbands or have suffered serious mental and physical injuries due to this approach of trying to save a marriage at any cost. We need to remember that a person's life is more important than the institution of marriage. In such cases the violent spouse has first broken the covenant of marriage by abusing and injuring his wife whom he promised to love and cherish. The victim leaving such a relationship is only making the dissolution of the covenant public. God's word envisages situations in which marriages can break down but is emphatically firm on the sanctity of human life. Therefore it is the bonded duty of the Church to first ensure the safety and wellbeing of the victim from the lurking threat upon her life.

7. Let's not justify or glorify abuse as suffering for Christ

- Many times the victim of violence is told to accept her suffering as part of God's will for her life and various verses in the Scripture are used to communicate this to her such as "To be patient in suffering or sharing in the sufferings of Christ" and so on (1 Peter 1:6, 4:12-16, James 5:10-11). By doing this, we are justifying the sinful actions and behavior of the perpetrator and putting the victim's life at risk. God wants a relationship of love, mutual respect and unity in marriage. He abhors violence and therefore we cannot condone the violent behavior of a man against his spouse. God has a special concern for the vulnerable and the weak which is expressed in his commands to care for the widows, orphans, poor and aliens. He expects his children to protect the weak from the hands of the wicked men. Jesus himself saved the life of a woman who was facing the murderous assault of a violent mob (John 8:1-11). Therefore it is the responsibility of believers to protect women facing abuse and violence.

Church has a special role to play in ending violence against women. We have a responsibility to impart and train our members to view and treat women with respect as image bearers of God and as co-heirs in the Kingdom. The Church is meant to be a community of healing and restoration. It also has a prophetic role in naming the sin of abuse and violence and to hold the perpetrators accountable for their actions. Church can work in collaboration with other agencies, government bodies and civil society members in creating safe homes and safe cities for women and girls.

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:23-37) if narrated in our contemporary context would perhaps have as the victim, a young girl or a woman who has been stripped, robbed, physically and sexually assaulted while travelling on the unsafe roads of our cities and villages. Tragically she gets assaulted even in the safe confines of her home. She fell as a victim often at the hands of known men, who could be her trusted family members, relatives or friends and men who wear the uniforms meant for her protection. The religious leaders (Priest and Levite in the Good Samaritan story) usually pass to the other side when seeing the victim. Some, in fact, blame the victim for her condition as to why she was out on the road at this hour, or find fault with her dress or provocative behavior. Sometimes, her manner of speech is held responsible for provoking the men to anger and assault. The Good Samaritan usually does not turn up in most of the stories which we regularly read in our newspapers. Will the Church in India arise to act the Good Samaritan in helping the women facing abuse and violence in our country?

*(Mr. Raaj Mondol is the Team Leader of Salt Initiatives, an organization working on Gender justice issues.
He can be reached at raajmondol@gmail.com)*

FACTS

World

An estimated 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives. In some nations, the percentage is up to 70.

Worldwide, more than 700 million women alive today were married as children (below 18 years of age).

Up to 50 percent of sexual assaults are committed against girls under 16.

An estimated 150 million girls under the age of 18 suffered some form of sexual violence in 2002 alone.

The first sexual experience of some 30 percent of women was forced.

Sexual harassment at work or school (by women):

European Union countries - Between 40 and 50 percent

Across Asia (Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines and South Korea) - 30 to 40 percent

Nairobi - 20 percent of women have been sexually harassed at work or school.

United States, 83 percent of girls aged 12 to 16 experienced some form of sexual harassment in public schools.

Source: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>
<http://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/299-fast-facts-statistics-on-violence-against-women-and-girls-.html>

Violence against women

Proportion of women reporting intimate partner violence and/or non-partner sexual violence, low- and middle-income regions of:

Africa	45.6%
South-East Asia	40.2%
Eastern Mediterranean	36.4%
Americas	36.1%
Western Pacific	27.9%
Europe	27.2%
High income countries	32.7%

SOURCE: WHO

12

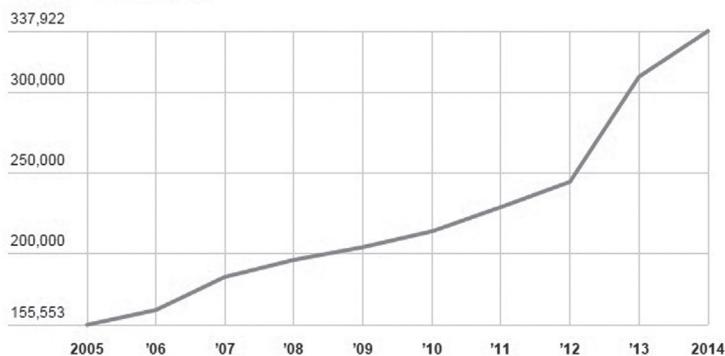
In 1993, the UN General Assembly **Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women** provided a framework for action on the pandemic.



India

Crimes Against Women, 2005-2014

*Figures represent cases reported.



Source: National Crime Records Bureau

Over the last decade...

Crimes against women have more than doubled!

As many as **2.24 million** cases were reported,
26 cases reported every hour, or
1 case every **2** minutes (IndiaSpend analysis).

Cruelty by husbands and relatives is the major crime committed against women across the country, with **909,713** cases reported - **10** cases every hour!

Assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty - **470,556**!

Kidnapping and abduction of women - **315,074**!

Rape cases - **243,051**!

Insult to modesty of women - **104,151**!

Dowry deaths - **80,833**! more than **66,000** cases have been reported.

Source: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>
<http://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/299-fast-facts-statistics-on-violence-against-women-and-girls-.html>

CRIME CHECK

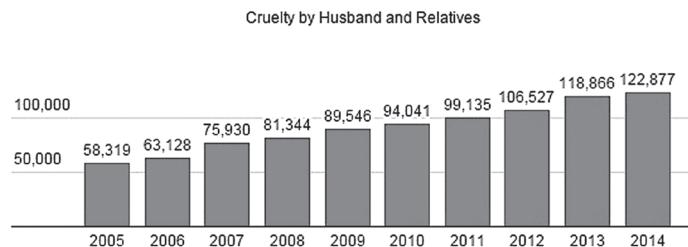
Top 10 states ranked according to the increase in crimes against women over the past decade.

	Number of crimes against women (2011)	Annual growth rate of crimes against women (2001-2011)	Rate of crime against women (2011)	Sex ratio in 2011 (females per 1,000 males)	Decadal change in sex ratio	Female literacy in 2011	Overall crime rate (IPO) in 2011
West Bengal	29,133	16.06%	31.9	947	13	71.16	156.8
Meghalaya	269	15.09%	9.1	986	14	73.78	92.9
Tripura	1,358	11.98%	37	961	13	83.15	158.1
Assam	11,503	10.49%	36.9	954	19	67.27	214
Sikkim	55	8.65%	9	889	14	76.43	98
Delhi	5,234	8.61%	31.2	866	45	80.93	318.5
Manipur	247	8.23%	2.1	987	13	73.17	118.2
Kerala	11,288	7.55%	33.8	1,084	26	91.98	515.6
Bihar	10,231	6.69%	9.9	916	-3	53.33	130.9
Jammu and Kashmir	3,146	6.63%	25.1	883	-9	58.01	195.3
ALL INDIA	228,650	4.7%	18.9	940	7	65.46	192.2

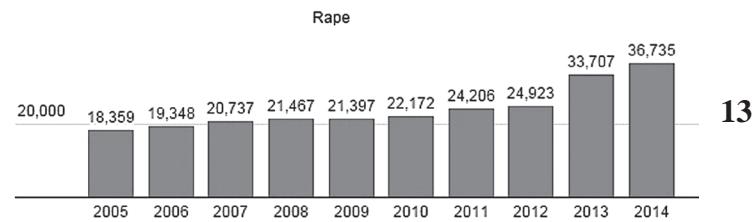
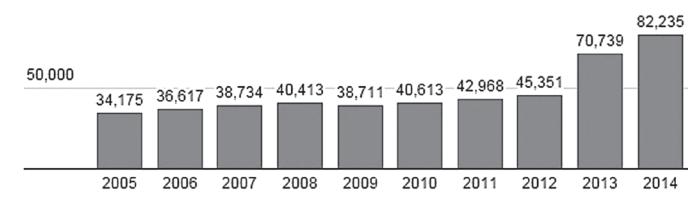
Note: 1) Annual growth refers to the compounded annual growth rate between 2001 and 2011.
2) NCRB computes crime rate as the number of registered crimes per lakh population.

Source: NCRB, Census

Major Crimes Against Women * Figures represent cases reported.



Source: National Crime Records Bureau



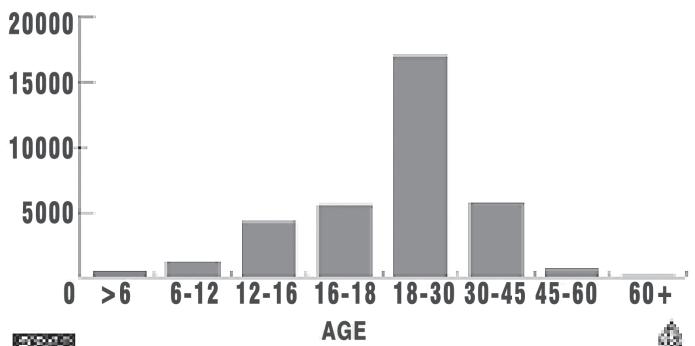
Source: National Crime Records Bureau

India: Female victims of rape

Graph shows total cases of reported rape in 2015, divided along age groups.

Total cases of reported rape **34,651**

VICTIMS



Source: National Crime Records Bureau

Source: National Crime Records Bureau

Staying Strong Amidst the Odds

Mrs. Joan Lalromawi

It was one wet monsoon day for the community of Krishna Nagar, in Vikaspuri, West Delhi. As I was entering the colony, I could see that rain water kept pouring inside some of the houses, from the nearby drain. In most of the households, the children were playing outside enjoying the rain, but their mothers are busy cleaning the drain water which seeps into the house. Due to the water logging and blocked drainage, the dirty water overflows and enters the houses. This gets worse in monsoon, as I was told, with various diseases spreading in the area. Every year, the community has been facing this water logging problem as there was no proper drainage system in the area.

Education of children is not a priority for the parents in the clusters of Krishna Nagar slum. One thing I have noticed is that all the child rearing and upbringing seems to be left in the domain of the women only. As I talked to some of the women, their husbands stay out of home for months, to work as drivers, engage in small business, etc. So they would not be involved in the upbringing of their children. Despite their situation, I could observe that women of this community are very motivated and strong. By forming Self Help Groups (SHGs), they could gain some financial benefit through their savings, adding on to the family income or start small business, which gave them some source of income. I met Shilpa,* who is a member of the women's Self Help Group. She said that she took a loan of Rs. 2000 to start a small shop for selling spices. With this loan, she managed to run the business of selling masalas, toffees, snacks, etc. She had taken the loan in February 2014 and she has repaid all her loan. She has even earned some profit to supplement her husband's salary -which was not sufficient to manage her household and to raise her three children.

As I walked a few yards down Shilpa's, I was welcomed by Deepa,* who is another member of the SHG. She welcomed me warmly to her home and offered tea which was very appropriate for the chilly monsoon season. As we were discussing, she said that she had learned tailoring from the training provided by EFICOR. With this skill she was able to stitch kurtas, blouses, skirts, etc not only for her family but for others as well. Her husband is a driver and stays out of home for several days leaving Deepa to manage the household, on her own. Besides taking care of her children, Deepa has to look after her aged in-laws. The lives of these poor women are really challenging. Through the odds, they have learned how to survive on their own.



Photo: Joan

Living in this kind of context, it is unimaginable for the children, especially the girls, to think of going to school. EFICOR has set up a remedial education for the children in the Kids Club for these kinds of children, and I saw some of the older girls who enthusiastically come to this club to learn value education, basic reading and writing skills. Some of them bring along the younger siblings. It is very inspiring to see the children who are so excited and eager to learn despite the many challenges they face at home or are deprived of the basic facilities which many of us take for granted.

The school going children of this community were also provided tuition support in the centre set up by EFICOR. They come to this centre in different batches for tuition. There is the tutor, Priya* who is a very committed teacher. She does not live in the colony but comes all the way from a far off location to teach these children. She looked extremely happy in her work as I could see the smile radiant on her face as she patiently taught each and every child asking them their doubts and explaining to them.

With the little surpluses they received, the women of this community have become more self-confident, earned more respect and authority in their home, and lead better standard of living. The persistent attitude of the women themselves - ready to fight the odds of life - is commendable. This is very much evident in the lives of the women whom I met that day like Shilpa, Deepa and Priya. As I walked back home, I pondered with the thought that India needs more of these brave women - to bring empowerment and transformation in the nation.

*Names are changed

(Mrs. Joan Lalromawi works with EFICOR as Programme Coordinator – Academics and Publications.
She can be reached at joan@eficor.org)

Grace and Healing: The Ongoing Journey From A Victim, Survivor To A Fighter

In November 2010, ‘Grace’ went to work as she had done for the past several years. Just another normal day. The company cab dropped her and her room mate at around 1 am, in a place which was just about 5 minutes walk away from her rented flat in South Delhi. A few minutes after getting down from that cab, ‘Grace’s’ life changed forever. She was grabbed and thrown into a vehicle where she was repeatedly raped by a group of men. After her case was fast-tracked, all 5 men were convicted and sentenced to life in prison in September 2014. This is her story – the first time she has ever spoken about it.

I used to be an independent, joyful, confident and loving person. And in one night, my worth, my energy, my safety, my confidence and the steady lifestyle I had been enjoying was destroyed. All I was doing was going home from work on a cold winter night waiting to get back to my flat and rest. My room mate got off first and I walked a few steps behind her. In an instant, everything changed. I could not believe what was happening to me, I thought I was in a wild crazy dream. At gun point, I was repeatedly violated by these men. In the beginning I fought them trying to protect myself and escape from this crazy nightmare. I then realised that I need to stay calm and obey them to stay alive. If I were lucky they would leave me alive.

‘Grace’ was thrown off the vehicle after the men had ‘finished’ with her. Her room mate had alerted the police and ‘Grace’ was picked up from where she was dumped. Initially, the police, her family, the local community leaders (she is from North East India) and her employers rallied around and provided her various forms of help. Her family flew in and in fact her mother was working in their field in her village and flew straight to Delhi from the field with the support of friends and family.

When I look back I realise what a blessing it was to be able to have my friends and family around me. They were with me all the time in the beginning. Even when I cried feeling hopeless, they assured me and helped me to calm down. I thought I had no future and I had no desire to live any longer. If my friends and family were not with me I don’t think I would still be alive. I also appreciated the help I received from others. Arrangements were made for me to stay in another place, a psychologist came to meet me from time to

time, I was taken to the hospital for check-up and medication was given to me to prevent any sexually transmitted disease including HIV. Several people came to see me and comfort me. Our church leaders and the women’s fellowship came and prayed for me. Local government officials from my home state, the local leaders from my community including the student leaders helped me in various ways. The practical help I received from everyone really helped me in the beginning. These were all very important to start the process of healing.

The hardest part in my whole ordeal was going to court and having to defend myself for something wrong that was done to me. The trial started almost one year after the incident and I was asked to talk about it in detail in the courtroom. I was examined and asked several questions, trying to find loopholes and contradictions in my statements. The way they talked to me was aggressive, they tried to steer me off course, tried to rephrase my statements in ways to manipulate my answers. I was asked pointed questions about my personal life, love life, family life, my past life. Me, my family, and my friends had to go through all these again and again.

At first I thought that I would be able to work again, then after going to work for some days, I realized that I could not cope with it. The emotional trauma was worse than the physical injuries. My nightmares wouldn’t stop. Sometimes I dreamed that I was infected with diseases I can’t even describe.

Becoming a survivor and a fighter

After completing all the police formalities, ‘Grace’ decided to go back to her home state to ‘rebuild’ her life.

When all the noise and the initial frenzy ended, my friends, family and everyone else went back to their normal life. This is when I ‘became’ alone and I began to think and ponder over what had happened. I was then faced with different situations – I could wallow in self-pity and quickly slip into depression. To avoid getting into this I could also ‘make’ myself happy in order to ‘forget’ my problems. And I also had the choice to have a positive outlook and to fall

into the embrace of God. I realised that I didn't want to choose the first two options. So I started going to church gatherings and participated in church activities. There I met many new friends. While in church, I can actually forget that I am a victim. I feel 'safe' as people in my church do not know the ordeal that I had been through and I can just be another 'normal' church member. I also began to realise that I am actually doing something meaningful in my life. I began to feel reassured and felt that I 'belonged' somewhere. I felt that I was in a place where I am loved and not judged. I increasingly felt the comfort of God and did not feel the fear that gripped me.

In spite of all that had happened to me I realised that I can find contentment in God and in His people. The Bible teaches us many things, that God loves all of us whoever we are and that He disciplines those he loves and that He works everything for the good of those who love Him (Hebrews 11). Even those who follow God diligently face troubles and pain. God allowed me to go through pain and because of that I am able to bring comfort to those who also go through a hard time. Complete peace comes only from God. My family and friends comforted and loved me but perfect love comes only from God. Whatever pain we face God teaches us to heal and how to deal with it.

Of course the doubt and the pain and the painful moments don't just disappear. Even though I am actively involved in church and in society, the memory of what happened to me constantly comes back. I often feel insecure and wonder how people will perceive me. Till today, I cannot go alone anywhere without wondering if someone behind me will attack me. If I have to pass a standing car, I am scared that someone will jump out of that car and push me inside it. I often become closed and find it difficult to open up to others. Now I am afraid to go for walks in the evening, passing strangers, and passing by parked vehicles. I have become suspicious of people and trusting people has become very difficult. Whenever I meet people the first thought that comes to mind is whether they know about the incident and what would they be thinking. I have found it difficult to make new friends and even when I do I create boundaries because of my insecurity.

Before I was a victim, I used to think that rape is the worst thing that a woman can endure in her life and that



very incident happened to me. I wonder how people will judge and perceive me being a rape victim and being so actively involved in church. But whatever the struggle, it is this family of church and my involvement that has brought back joy in my life and I continue to do it whatever negative thoughts come to my mind. I feel useful and know that I can be a blessing to others.

16

My message - to women who are victims- never stop fighting. Even though you are on trial defending your credibility, know that if you don't give up, justice will be served just like it was for me. When people doubt you or dismiss you, God is with you and He loves you unconditionally. Say it to yourself, "You are worthy and you are to be respected."

'Grace' is not her real name but it is something that she has been experiencing as she continues to heal. Life continues to be a battle for her but she has many more positive moments now due to the strength she receives from her involvement in church ministering to others. She is still not ready to share her story with her church members and has chosen to live in a town in her home state where only a couple of her close friends know what she went through. She has been contacted directly and indirectly by different media to share her story. This is the first time she has put her thoughts down. We hope that this article will encourage readers to realise that healing is possible. We pray for 'Grace' and many like her that their journey will not end at being victims and survivors but they will become fighters who also bless others.

More information on her story can be found on the internet (Dhaua Kuan Gang Rape Case of 2010).

(As told to Ms. Lalbiakhlui (Kuki) Rokhum who works with EFICOR as Director – Training and Mobilization)

SOS HELPLINE NUMBERS

All India	
Women's Helpline (All India)	1091 / 1090
National Commission for Women (NCW)	0111-23219750
Delhi	
Delhi Commission for Women (DCW)	011 23378044/ 23378317/ 23370597
Outer Delhi Helpline	011-27034873, 27034874
Women in Distress	1091
Police Control Room	100
Child Helpline	1098
Anti Stalking/Obscene calls	1096
Child, Student & Senior Citizen	1291
DCP SN Mosobi, North East Special Unit	9818099070
IGP - Robin Hibu, Nodal Officer for Northeasterners	(Whatsapp no) - 9810083486
Andhra Pradesh	
Hyderabad/Secunderabad - Women Police Station	040-27853508
Hyderabad Women Police Station	04027852400 / 4852
Bangalore	
Women's Police Helpline Bangalore (Vanitha Sahayavani)	08022943225
Bangalore Traffic Police	080-22868444/22868550
Chandigarh	
Women Police Exchange	1722741900
Haryana	
Women and Child Helpline	0124-2335100
Himachal Pradesh	
Women Commission	9816066421, 09418636326, 09816882491, 9418384215
Mumbai	
Railway Police	9833331111
Mumbai Police Helpline	100, 103
Navi Mumbai Police Station	0222758 0255
Punjab	
Women's Helpline	9781101091
Tamil Nadu	
Women's Helpline	044-28592750
Women Police Station, Adayar	044-24415732, 044-23452586
Tripura	
Women's Helpline Numbers	0381-2323355, 03812322912
Rajasthan	
Nirbhaya Sambhali Helpline	1800-1200020
Women Police Station Jodhpur	0291 -2012112
Karnataka	
Women Police Helpline	0821-2418400
Mysore Women Police Station	0821-2418110 / 2418410
Kerala	
Vanitha Helpline Number of Kerala Police, Trivandrum	9995399953
State Vanitha Cell	0471-2338100
Women's Cell, Kollam	0474-2742376
Women's Cell, Kochi	0484-2396730

New Age Entrepreneur

Women in flood affected Assam take over local flea market and use that to sell local products and secure livelihoods.

Why is Matu Gogoi, a resident of Silapathar of Dhemaji District of Assam so worried about fashion trends in Guwahati? In fact she is so worried that she has gone to the extent of studying the weather of Guwahati to ascertain whether silk or cotton would be more suitable for the area. As a victim of flood who struggles every year to recover from its devastating effects, one cannot imagine that she would be able to think about fashion. It is strange but true: Matu is the new age women entrepreneur emerging from Assam's flood affected areas. A unique livelihood programme for flood-affected female victims initiated by Rural Volunteer Centre (RVC) has targeted the business instincts of women to compensate losses from regular floods. This in turn, has brought back women into social mainstream. Matu is the president of Matri Amar Bazaar Kendriya Samiti, a local market association floated by the women self-help groups.

The Matri Amar Bazaar Kendriya Samiti runs a handloom garments production cum training center in Silapathar. Matu felt that while there was high demand for their products in the local market, the markets in Guwahati and in West Bengal did not prefer their products. It was affecting the association's business and thus the profits of its members. "I found that our clothes were not suitable for the warm weather in Guwahati and West Bengal. So we shifted to cotton," she says. This decision opened up the market. They are now planning to have a yarn bank in which all varieties of threads would be stored and given to the people for producing cloth. To understand the design requirements of consumers in urban areas like Guwahati, they have sent their members for training to Sualkuchi Institute of Fashion Technology in Guwahati. Two trained members, now in turn trained girls from different villages. Not limiting their search just for a better market share, the Samiti is exploring market linkages and building its understanding of demand and product pricing. Matu is planning for a full fledged institute and has already met the Deputy Commissioner for land in Jonai Block.

A LOSING PROPOSITION

Since mid-1980s it has been observed that sand



Photo: EFICOR

18

deposition, river bank erosion, shifting of river course and other adverse effects of chronic floods on fertile agricultural land, have permanently affected the agro-based traditional livelihood practices. Total breakdown of the surface communication system affected the animal husbandry sector as well as traditional handloom and handicrafts sector, by creating hindrances in access to markets and in turn making the producers dependent on exploitative middlemen. This crippled the village economy triggering displacement, seasonal and permanent migration both within the district and state. Women suffered the most in this melt down in local economy. Alienation from traditional practices has reduced women's control over household and community resources. Since mid-1990s in most of the riverine villages in upper Brahmaputra river basin, women have become daily wage laborers. The same women used to command respect and take pride in their contribution to the village economy. This resulted in decline in children's access to education, especially girl child, poor health of women, increase in girl child labour, child trafficking and domestic violence against women. This period also coincided with the advent of women empowerment as the core of both national and international development programmes. The flood plains of upper Brahmaputra river basin witnessed the formation of women SHGs for income generation activities under various programmes of development agencies. This led every development player to target women as primary beneficiaries under various socio-economic development schemes. But critical observation reflects that little or no practical knowledge and understanding of the market-dynamics has either left the women debt-ridden or victimized in the hands of middle men.

To overcome this, RVC came up with the Amar Bazaar concept.

A NEW DEAL

In 2004, RVC started this programme called Amar Bazaars. The primary objective of the programme is to enable women entrepreneurs to take charge of their livelihood and create cadre of women entrepreneurs. Amar Bazaar is a community based programme that enables women living in flood plains to learn, choose and take up income generation activities from a wide range of choices. This contributes towards supplementing the losses in traditional livelihoods that they suffer due to recurring floods. The programme is unique as it is based on the ethical belief that if women have access and control over resources, they can plan better and implement effectively disaster relief and rehabilitation activities both at household and community levels. Intervention started with setting up of Amar Bazaars by rural women SHGs in flood plains of Brahmaputra river basin through retaining the existing village weekly markets or opening new markets for a cluster of villages. Earlier, in such weekly markets the market avenues were run by influential individuals to whom the revenue collection authority was given by the government. RVC facilitated the shift of control of these markets to the women SHGs by mobilizing support from community and government. Each Amar Bazaar differs in size according to local market size: the number of shops varies from a minimum of 20 to a maximum of 100. Women groups have created the market infrastructures like sheds using their own savings. They charge a rent of Rs. 5 to Rs. 10 per market day (weekly) to vendors depending on the kind of products they sell. In Amar Bazaars, vendors sell daily household requirements like fruits and vegetables mostly grown in local farms, food items and traditional cloth from local weavers. Now there is a separate market for selling pigs, goats and chicken. Livestock rearing is very common in the region and women members realized that they had a good potential to be sold in their market. Thus emerged the concept of Janwar Bazaar (animal market) for which they set up Janwar Bazaar Samiti in every village where there is an Amar Bazaar to look into sale and purchase of animals. The idea behind setting up Janwar Bazaar Samiti was also to reduce dependence on middlemen. Running Amar Bazaars does not mean only renting out shops to vendors, but also understanding market, products in demand and securing rent from vendors. Thus for setting up Amar Bazaars, women members were trained in organizing and educating the women members of SHGs on market mechanism (demand and supply, quality of products, market linkages etc). It also involves mapping out the choices for selection of income generation activities and the required

skill/quality upgradation among them. A major part of this training activity is to understand and manage the market. In setting up market linkages, RVC encouraged the market to production route i.e. to map the requirement and then produce accordingly. This ensures the right kind of products for marketing. Engagement with the market enables women groups to understand the market mechanism. Understanding the market has encouraged the groups to go for selected products and set their own vendors in their market.

TEETHING PROBLEMS

Setting up Amar Bazaars was not without hurdles. The biggest challenge was to bring together the women groups who could run the market. Constant engagement with the women groups in villages of Sissiborgaon Block of Dhemaji district and constant negotiation at community and government level resulted in formation of 21 Amar Bazaars in 2004. The next hurdle came from the Panchayat. When the Amar Bazaar picked up business, the middlemen who lost business connived with the Panchayat members to forcefully capture the markets. To overcome this, women representatives from the 21 Amar Bazaars decided to establish the Kendriya Amar Bazaar Parichalana Samiti in 2004. This became the common front for the women groups that took up the matter with the District Commissioner. They explained the importance of Amar Bazaar to ensure their livelihood and how an attempt to capture the market would lead to loss of their livelihood. The Commissioner debarred the Amar Bazaars from being auctioned by Panchayat. It was a major victory that also helped the programme to spread further. In 2006, the Kendriya Amar Bazaar Parichalana Samiti was rechristened as Matri Amar Bazaar Kendriya Samiti, which covers 50 Amar Bazaars in 2009. This apex body of the Amar Bazaars works for coordination and management of the programme.

Amongst other benefits, the Amar Bazaar has proved to be a boon for local unemployed youth. They set up shops on rent for selling their products. The rent is levied based on day to day earnings. If the earning has been good the tenants have to pay the full rent and if the earning is poor, they are charged less. Women members keep a track of the earnings of vendors. In case of default in payment, the shopkeepers are not given a shop on rent next week or until the payment has been cleared. The bottom line is women have started finding out ways by themselves to ensure smooth functioning of Amar Bazaars.

Books on our Desk

Behind Closed Doors: Domestic Violence in India

Edited by Rinki Bhattacharya, Sage publication 2013
 (Available on www.amazon.in for Rs. 295)

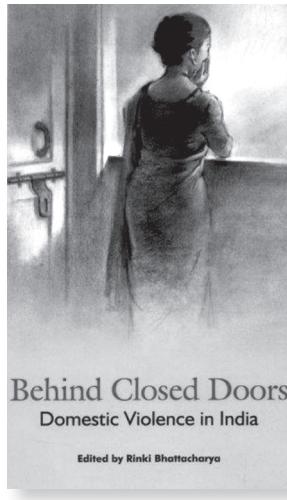
Ms. Kimneijou Lotjem

The book is a compilation of essays and stories which delves upon gender inequality and the miserable status of women in India. It tries to understand the issue in the face of consistent resistance from family, community and the state to bring about equality and social justice in the system. All these narratives have depicted a common mindless abuse by husbands or lovers and being used as a means to fulfil sexual or material need with any resistance resulting in abuse and homelessness.

The essays unwrap the meaning of domestic violence, both physical and psychological, and its effect on women globally notwithstanding economic status, class, education or background. It is ironic that women are victims of abuse at the hand of their closest and most intimate male partners, who are not mentally ill or psychopathic yet resort to violence to prove their manhood. Some of the main causes highlighted are the role of family and community in dictating gendered roles in society, which often victimises women. At the root of it, this brings to focus the deeply seated patriarchal nature of the Indian society that not only controls, dictates but also demeans the status of women by drawing its legitimacy from religious and cultural beliefs and practices.

The authors locate the problem in the larger socio-cultural milieu in which these gender relations exist in the Indian context. A society that values and prefers a son to a daughter at birth and allocates customary or ritualistic function to the son while seeing the daughter as a burden increases the vulnerability of women. In addition, the essays highlight the fact that women from the so-called upper caste are subjected to even more harsh familial constraints as compared to women from the lower caste as they are confined to the home. They are denied the freedom to pursue a career while women from lower caste seem to enjoy more freedom and fairer power-relation with their male counterparts.

Another problem highlighted is the representation of women in the Hindu religious tradition where women are worshipped as the ultimate creative principle but in



reality there is a dichotomy in the representation of women as a goddess, because the religious tradition of a glorified goddess does not necessarily translate into equal status. A woman becomes a goddess disrobed of powers. Within this religious context, a woman's position is determined by becoming a wife who has to submit her life in service to her husband.

Further, the essays address the flaws existing within legal provisions, which do not fairly address the issue of domestic violence and are in many cases counterproductive. Despite the presence of legal provisions, custodial rapes, dowry murder and sati are every day forms of abuse women face today.

Even the police do not want to intervene in cases of domestic violence and dismissing it as a matter between husband and wife. The authors assign this failure to the patriarchal character of the state. The intrinsic link between the family, community and the state outplays in the subdued treatment of its women, as its systematic control their freedom and movement. In addition, since the law favours the father for custody of the children, a woman loses not only her status and her family but is eventually robbed of her identity. The State lacks political will to amend the laws because at the core of it, the representation of a wife as a Devi does not resonate with her having an independent status as she embodies the larger role of being a wife, a submissive wife. Hence, without proper legal support, women continue to suffer due to social injustice and cultural malpractices.

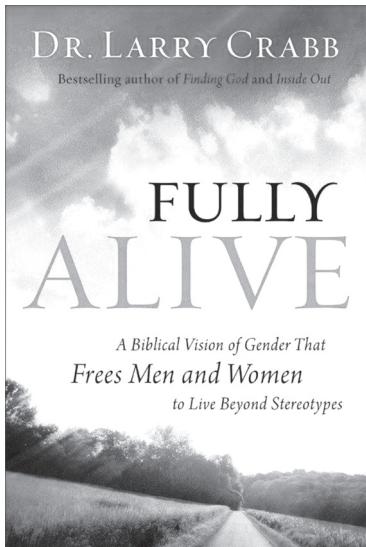
This book is educational and helps to understand the perception of how and why women are treated in a certain manner in the Indian society, and is a must read for those involved in the social development sector and advocates for gender equality and women empowerment. However, in trying to explain the contemporary social context, the authors' usage of 'class' for 'caste' does not suffice to say that caste system no longer exists in India, as caste identity is still integral in the Indian psyche even if the law does not legally recognise it. At the core of it, it is not only gender relations but all other social relations which are an outcome of the larger issue of caste and its stigma attached to it. Hence, only when this evil social practice is properly addressed, one can hope for fairer treatment of women in the Indian society.

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Fully Alive: A Biblical Vision of Gender that Frees Men and Women to Live Beyond Stereotypes

by Dr. Larry Crabb, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 2013. 222 pages.
(Available on www.amazon.in for Rs. 745)

Ms. Nancy Geertsma



In this book, best-selling author and psychologist Dr. Larry Crabb explores the reason why God made people of different genders. Why was gender important for his image bearing creatures? Crabb's answer is that the relational God (Trinity), created relational people – but what Crabb argues is that femininity and masculinity are two essential means of relationality.

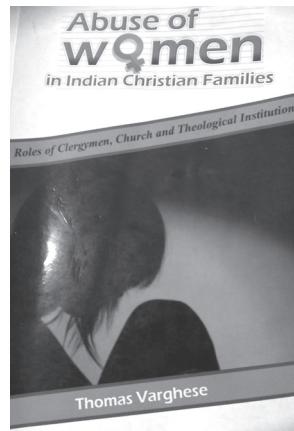
The author wants us to move away from entrenched positions that are too liberal or too traditional toward a viewpoint that reflects God's intent and design in creating human beings male and female. This book does not intend to debate on the topic of men's and women's roles. Instead, the author explores godly masculinity and godly femininity, showing how a biblical understanding of gender frees us to fully experience God, ourselves, and each other. A woman is designed by God to open herself and invite others in. A man is created to move into the lives of others, and then enter those lives. He suggests that our physiology reflects a deeply spiritual reality. Crabb asserts that living out our created gender identity is an essential component of the narrow road to which Jesus calls us. The book helps us to discover that God created male and female to relate to each other in gender-specific ways, and to make a difference in the world by displaying God's relational character. Crabb clearly shows men and women what it means to live 'fully alive' as feminine women and masculine men.

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Abuse of Women in Indian Christian Families: Role of Clergymen, Church and Theological Institutions

by Thomas Varghese ISPCK, 2013, ISBN: 978-81-8465-297-0. 195 pages.
(Available on www.flipkart.in for Rs. 250)

Mrs. Abhishikta Kwankin



The book under review is the author's D.Min. dissertation for a research on "Abuse of Women in Christian Families: Role of Clergymen, Church and Theological Institutions" undertaken in SAIACS (South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies), Bangalore. The author has presented his findings in this book explaining the contributing reasons on the issue of domestic violence and abuse faced by women.

There are many women in Christian families who have faced abuse from their husbands in one or another form. In most of the cases, women hesitate to respond to the abuse due to fear and shame. According to the author, the basic rights of women and fundamental freedom of women must be secured by the Church.

There rests a tendency to keep women from the decisions that affect their own destiny, leaving them vulnerable to neglect and abuse in many areas of life - above all in the family. Further, the author says that submission of women and headship of men, are misinterpreted in Christian marriages or in Christian families. Sometimes it leads to inequality between men and women which encourages the abuse against women. The author analyzed the Biblical view on abuse and believes that the Bible strongly condemns abuse and abusive behavior of men towards their wife as marriage is a beautiful, loving and long lasting relationship.

The author emphasizes on the roles of clergymen, church and theological institutions. The book concludes with the recommendation that the Clergy should give full attention to the spiritual aspects of the church community through educating the men's group with correct Biblical doctrine regarding equality and mutuality. Overall, the book gives a good insight on how the Church can intervene and eradicate marital abuse in Christian families.

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From a Local to a Global Church in Action

Mrs. Amenla Cunningham

The First Assembly of God Church in Bangalore was founded by Miss Constance Swinfen Eady in 1935. Since July 2004, Senior Pastor, Rev. Gavin Cunningham has been leading the church with much enthusiasm that the church should not be squeezed to a particular category of society but rather represent the full face of humanity where people from all walks of life find a home. The embracing of the full gospel of Christ has motivated the church to be a community actively involved in the lives of the people around them. We seek to build a church that would impact locally, influence regionally, and reach globally.

Vision: The First Assembly of God church exists to be God's instrument of transformation, bringing healing and deliverance to our community and world, through knowing HIM and making HIM known.

To understand this church, it is best to see it through the 5 fold vision statement that drives it. The church puts its belief into practice through various ministries that bring wholistic transformation.

1. Mission of Discipleship & Spiritual Development: The foundational focus is to fulfil the mandate of Jesus (Luke 14:26-27) in training every member to be a fruitful disciple of Jesus. Discipleship programs, Care Cells, Covenant Couples, Kingdom Men, Women of Destiny, Young Adults, Youth Ablaze, Happy Hearts and Teens 4 Christ ministers meet this need. It is through these ministries members are prepared to encounter the presence of God in personal ways and undergo radical transformation to realise their destiny as World Changers.

2. Mission of Compassion: This mission is about communicating the love of Christ in wholistic manner by showing His love and care to the communities. The church is engaged in various manners of demonstrating the love of God through Elizabeth Fellowship (Slum women's club), Little Lambs Club (Slum children's club), Slum Kindergarten School, Medical Camps, Helping Hand (Providing the needy women in the slums with provisions), Mission sale (to make available clothing, utensils, etc, in almost new condition at very cheap rates), Vocational Training (60 people have graduated from the tailoring program and have all got good jobs), Special programs, Barnabas (Visiting the sick and those in loss and crisis), and

Compassion ministries by sending relief materials during disasters in Tamil Nadu and Nepal.

3. Mission of Justice: Fulfilling our role in the Messianic purposes of God from generation to generation (Isa 61:1, John 20:21 ESV). The church raise prayer against social issues such as suicide, destitute, alcoholism, addiction, divorce, poverty, etc., the crown of which was anti human trafficking. This led to the formation of the Anti-Human Trafficking Network in Bangalore - by networking with NGOs, civil society organisations, churches, institutions, colleges etc. The network raised awareness in schools, colleges, conducted seminars, held rallies on the streets and submitted a 10000 signature memorandum to the Governor. The vision then was consolidated in the establishment and operation of Jubilee Home for the daughters of women stuck in sex trafficking.

22

5. Mission of Prayer: Realising that prayer the centre and key to all that the Church does, the members continually pray for the nations. The prayer movement called Father's Heart is made of, Hannah's Prayer (Church Women's prayer), Women of Destiny Interdenominational Prayer Movement (City wide prayer movement consisting of 36 groups and nearly 200 churches), Prayer Shield (Praying for the leadership), 24X7 chain of Prayer (Praying for all the needs), Prayer Tower, Prayer walk/drive, War Room (Half Night Prayer for nation & Church), Touching Heaven Changing earth (Prayer for the Church).

In conclusion: This fivefold thrust has birthed a movement that the senior Pastor states must have a full human face without marginalising any person from any background. Social, communal, financial, religious divides are scaled over to embrace the unfettered Gospel of Christ. Commitment to Christ must be defined in terms of commitment to the truth of the Gospel, love for the nation, to rise up against injustice and break its chains, to stand with the oppressed and marginalised, to see transformation operating in all strata of society. The Church has a global mandate of transformation in all spheres of life for we are the Salt of the Earth and Light of the World (Mat.5:13).

(Mrs. Amenla Cunningham serves as Women's Pastor at First AG Church, and Convenor, Anti-Human Trafficking Network Bangalore.)

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A Study of Genesis 38

Dr. Jamila Koshy

This sad and sordid story, set in patriarchal times in Canaan, raises many issues relevant to the topic.

Diving straight in, verses 1-6: Judah, son of faithful Israel, fails to value faith when he marries. His Canaanite wife is unnamed unlike her father and sons, setting the patriarchal context.

Verses 6-7: Judah's failure extends to his parenthood. Er is so evil the Lord 'puts him to death'.

Verses 8-10: Onan is commanded to wed Tamar, to 'raise offspring for his brother', another practice of patriarchal succession. Onan doesn't want to, but rather than confront his powerful father, he sleeps with Tamar, craftily ensuring there would be no progeny. Sleeping with someone under false pretenses is tantamount to rape in some countries. In this case, the overt reason for the marriage was progeny, so even if not rape, Onan is certainly taking sexual advantage of a vulnerable woman. In doing so, he is reflecting the attitude of society, and as we see later, of his father. Tamar, the woman brought in from outside, is there to bear Er and later Onan a male heir. Beyond that, she has no rights, no choices, and no voice.

Verse 10: God intervenes, for the voiceless. What Onan has done to Tamar cannot be borne by the righteous God. He has no right to live.

Verse 11-14: Judah, seemingly blind to his sons' faults, unjustly blames Tamar. He gets rid of her, lying that she would soon wed his youngest son.

Verses 14-23: Realizing her exploitation, Tamar takes matters into her own hands. Her course of action – disguising herself as a prostitute and putting herself in Judah's way, shows her correct summing up of his character. As she anticipates, he succumbs to lust, sleeps with her, leaving behind a pledge. Tamar has found a way to defeat society's curse on childless women.

Verse 24: Judah's reaction to Tamar's pregnancy is astounding in its hypocrisy and double standards. In a male-dominated world, her sexual activity is death-worthy, while his promiscuity is permitted. The woman caught in adultery in John 8 would agree – her partner is let off, while she is shamed and condemned to stoning.

Verses 25, 26: When Tamar reveals that he is the father, Judah's confession is partial. He doesn't own up to his and his sons' patriarchy or violence or his own failures as man,

father. Yet his acknowledgement of the righteousness of her action is Judah's single redeeming feature in this sordid saga.

Was Tamar wrong in what she did? Without doubt. Yet, she lived in a world in which she faced marriage with two wicked men, one of whom exploited her sexually. She was then blamed for their early deaths, as young widows still are. She was given no voice, condemned to perpetual widowhood and childlessness for no fault of hers. There are thousands of women like Tamar. Tamar was different in that she fought back, for her rights to conceive a child. Yet she did not force the issue. Judah did not have to sleep with her. He still had more choice than she ever had. God did not seem to condemn her, even as Judah finally did not.

The story brings up various aspects of violence against women:

Overt is the rape / sexual abuse by Onan, often underemphasized since it occurs in a marital context. Yet it is no less, and must be recognized and rejected as such. Tamar was not a toy or plaything to be used. Other passages of Scripture notably Genesis 1, emphasizing both sexes made gloriously in God's image, and 1 Corinthians 7:1-7, stressing mutuality in sexual consent and power make clear that God dislikes skewed sexual relationships.

Also overt is Judah's readiness to burn Tamar to death for sexual promiscuity. An extreme solution for the woman, while he himself is unapologetically promiscuous – as shown by his casual and open attitude to visiting a prostitute. The underlying double standards and male power being exercised over women are chilling and saddening – and still common. We only need to look around.

The covert and underlying attitudes pre-disposing to violence against women are brought out too. Primary in Genesis 38 is a lack of faith, and societal and personal exercise of hierarchy and power. This same power carries over into male-female dynamics, with over-emphasis on female purity and restrictions, and unquestioned and deeply rooted idea of male rights and privilege. These attitudes should be identified, understood and challenged today, if we want a world where men and women would walk side-by-side in faith and friendship, rather than hierarchy and violence.

*(Dr. Jamila Koshy is a Christian psychiatrist currently living and working in Chennai.
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IDEAS FOR ACTION

Ring your local helpline or the police if you witness any incidents or hear of anything that concerns you.

We all have a responsibility in this area.
Domestic abuse/
Violence against women is everyone's business.



24

When a woman discloses abuse: Respect and listen

1. Believe a victim
2. Do not ask for proof of violence
3. Assure the victim that it is not her fault
4. Reassure her that confidentiality will be maintained but explain its boundaries
5. Assure the victim of your concern and interest
6. Be honest and upfront about your ability to help.

If there are children involved

1. Follow child protection procedures
2. Emphasize the effects of domestic violence on children e.g. physical danger, emotional damage.

Ensuring the safety of the woman first

1. Be aware that any intervention will heighten the victim's risk level and that of any children involved. It may also put you and your colleague in danger
2. Be guided by what the victim wants and not by what you think they need. Consider the immediate venue/time constraints.

Action Steps

1. Outline available realistic options available, e.g. Shelter at a Church member's home, Church facility if any, Women's help services, Police, Local refuge or civil court proceedings etc.
2. Supply appropriate information, leaflets and contact numbers.
3. Ask for permission to record what you have been told using the victim's own words where possible, your actions, if any, and note your concerns.
4. Encourage the victim to do a referral/report the incident to the police or Women's Help line or do it on her behalf with her permission.

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