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The Situation of Women



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Editorial

There is a growing awareness in the world today that the liberation and empowerment of women are necessary if humankind is to have a bright future on this earth. But the reality is that in a variety of ways women are discriminated against and oppressed. This is why we have chosen to deal with women's concerns in this issue of *Jnanadeepa*.

Three articles in this issue discuss the actual situation of women. One deals with the place and role of women in Hinduism. Because of the prevalence of patriarchal society in India a woman's role is relegated to that of a child-bearer, a child-minder and a homemaker. But there are liberative elements in Hinduism which can help empower women. There is another article which discusses the place and role of women in the Catholic Church. Through their total commitment to the Church and its activities, women have been its pillars. And yet, they have little influence on the thinking, planning and decision-making in the Church. They have been excluded from any participation in shaping the Church's internal and external policy. (An article on the place and role of women in Islam was originally planned for this issue but could not be included because of a technical problem). A third article deals with the place and role of women in the tribal societies of the Northeast. In many ways these women enjoy a high status. These tribal societies are egalitarian and place hardly any restriction on the life and activities of women. All the same, participation of women in politics is minimal, though some changes in this area are noticeable now.

There is an article, which examines the role of women in Hindutva. The advocates of Hindutva are against the liberation and empowerment of women. They would like women to be content with the traditional role of being faithful wives and devoted mothers. They are against all movements for gender equality.

Two articles deal with the Christian Scriptures. One of them attempts a re-reading of the Bible from a feminist perspective. After describing the feminist approach to the Bible, it seeks to re-image Mary of Nazareth through a feminist reconstruction of the gospel accounts. The other article is a feminist re-reading of Luke 8: 24-48. This dramatic narra-

tion of the healing of a woman with a flow of blood shows how this woman moves from the shadows into the bright light and how her encounter with Jesus empowers her.

One of the articles included in this issue seeks to develop a spirituality of loss. After carefully studying the experiences of three Indian Catholic women, it points out that loss when faced with courage can be transformed into moments of self-revelation and spiritual energizing.

There is finally a search for a meaningful future. An article depicts a feminist vision of a participatory Church. It begins with an analysis of women's experience of the Church, which is often an experience of 'darkness'. Women are mostly relegated to the shadows. It goes on to project the vision of a church in which women and men collaborate as equal partners. A discipleship of equals describes an ecclesiological model which expresses a feminist vision of a participatory Church. And we need to realise that the boldness of the feminist vision is a transforming grace for the Church.

It is undeniable that the full flowering of the human on this planet is not possible without the active collaboration of women and men. But as long as men tend to look down upon women, to despise them and regard them as second-class citizens or inferior human beings, such collaboration will not materialise. Hence, the liberation and empowerment of women should be a high priority for all of us. In this common task women have a key role to play. They have to realise that they are equal members of the human family with their own dignity, and that precisely because of their experience of oppression, they have a unique contribution to make to the creation of a new humanity. Besides, they will have to learn to be more assertive and more expressive without losing their femininity.

It is our fond hope this issue of *Jnanadeepa* which discusses women's concerns will be a small contribution towards their liberation and empowerment.

Kurien Kunnumpuram SJ

Editor