

EDITORIAL

Religions claim to stand for upholding human dignity. Christians so proudly quote St Paul to show that it is a crime for Christians to discriminate between the members of the human race. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). This oneness of all in Christ is compared to the unity of the body with diversities of operations. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ" (1Cor 12:12). The Hindu culture also recognized the basic equality of men and women. "Where females are honoured there deities are pleased" (*Manu Smrti* III, 56). But in agreement with another instruction of Manu, subjugation of women to men became the normal style of life in Indian society. "Her father protects her in childhood; her husband protects her in youth; her sons protect her in old age; a woman is never fit for independence" (IX 3). The enlightened women in India today revolt against this tradition and they think that they are bound in slavery by the chains forged by men and is caught in the deathtrap of religion, thanks to lack of education and opportunities for public life.

In the West women began to be considered equal to men after the declaration of rights of human beings in the American, French and Russian Revolutions. The truth is that these declarations have not yet become part of our social living. Even religion, which has the professed aim of raising human beings to their true dignity, makes women play a secondary role in the human living. The present number of **Journal of Dharma** takes up this issue for a more detailed study. The essays in this number are mostly factual statements about the status of women in the sacred scriptures and socio-cultural and religious situations. Though desirable, the accent is not on giving an account of women's movements and struggles in various countries to develop a new perspective about human dignity.

The efforts of the international bodies like the United Nations to achieve women's development through the observance of International Women's Year (1975) have made their impact on our Indian scene also. In 1981 the Indian Social Institute organized a series of workshops on the programme for women's development. These workshops have identified a number of obstacles that come in the way of women's development in the Indian society. Most of them are sanctioned by religious traditions among the people.

At the birth itself, in many Indian communities, a girl's arrival is resented. Consequently she begins to feel helpless and weak, a burden, in spite of her endless toil. With regard to education girls are admitted to inferior schools. Several laws meant for the protection of women employed in the industry make employers reluctant to employ them. Most religions have considered women unclean during menstruation and after childbirth. Rituals are prescribed for the purification of women during these stages. During this period, in some communities, they are segregated from the family. Dowry system brings the feeling to the girls that they are commodities rather than human beings. She is accepted in her bridegroom's house not for what she is but for what she brings. These and similar other practices leave the impression that although all religious preachers rush to declare that a woman is to be respected and that there is no scope for inequality between man and woman in the eyes of God and law, it has not become the guiding light of mankind.

In the Christian circles, writings of St Paul are also accused of anti-woman tendency. Some of his teachings seem to confirm this impression. He requires woman to cover her head while praying (1 Cor 11:5); "Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man" (1 Cor 11:8). He forbids woman from speaking in the assembly. "Let your women keep silence in the Churches; . . . they are commanded to be under obedience. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the Church" (1 Cor 14:34, 35). Women activists complain that women as a whole are made to feel inferior both by religions and cultures which are the story of men alone (his-story)! This sorry plight of women has to be rectified.

The whole humanity stands to gain when both men and women consciously involve in the process of removing all the obstacles in the way of women's development. Development means to help develop "adult women". By way of definition an adult woman is meant to be a person who could look at a situation, weigh the pros and cons, and arrive at decisions that affect her life and then bear the consequences of these decisions with courage and without feelings of guilt. Most of our world religions and cultural traditions seem to need a thorough self-examination to eliminate those elements which are anti-female in their teaching and practices so that the one half of humanity receives its dues from the other half in a fair way.

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