

## EDITORIAL

“Women: Perspectives from World Religions” is the general theme of this issue of *Journal of Dharma*. Much has been written on this subject. In the past Journal has brought out some issues on topics related to women. This theme definitely needs further discussion, deliberation, conscientization and mobilization of resources for the actualization of positive programmes for the betterment of the lot of women. ‘It is a matter of fact, a truth of history and a phenomenon of our daily experience that women are eminently tuned to a more intense form religious worship and spiritual life than men. They involve themselves with ease and enthusiasm in all internal and external acts of religiosity. It is mainly women who keep alive the faith in the family. They inculcate the faith, religious practices and traditions, customs and religious culture to the succeeding generation. The religious ethos and character of the family and of the society are generated, maintained and guaranteed mainly because of the uncompromising religiosity of women. Thus, their contribution to spirituality, collective religiosity and religious culture of their religion is immense. They maintain close relationship with the church, temple or shrine and actively participate in the rituals, worship, feasts and celebrations. Therefore, it is also a matter of fact that without the active help, participation and involvement of women in religious matters, no religion can effectively bear witness to its values and worth, carry out its mission and message and maintain its vigour and vitality.’

However, in almost all religions of the world today women cannot take up active role in the ministry of ritual worship. It is, however, to be noted that ‘in many cases the founder of the religion and the basic scriptures of many religions were not antagonistic to women. In the course of time priests and priestly craft became all powerful, and they legislated rules and regulations of priesthood and ritual worship. ... This type of historical development is very clear in Hinduism and some other Indian religions. Internal evidences of the scriptures and other historical facts testify that women in the *Sruti* period, the first and most important phase of religious history of India, were regarded and respected as equal to men. There were eminent women philosophers who fearlessly debated

and discussed important issues of philosophy and religion with great men philosophers of the day. It is even believed that some of the *mantras* of the Vedas, the most sacred, the most ancient and the most important and normative part of the sacred scriptures of India, were realized by women sages. But the situation drastically changed in the second phase of the history of Hindu religion, namely, in the *Smṛti* period. Rules and regulations were created to keep away women from the official religious matters. Reasons and devices were concocted to declare women impure and incapable for carrying out priestly functions’.

In social, cultural and political realms too the status of women is to be enhanced, elevated and fortified.

*Journal of Dharma* celebrated the twenty-fifth year, the silver jubilee, of its service to humanity in 2000. As part of the celebrations we brought out four books on relevant themes. One book was on “Women and Worship”. Some of the articles of this issue are taken from this book. Parts of this editorial are also from the Preface I wrote for the above-mentioned book. (For more articles of Women and Worship”, please see the book published by *Journal of Dharma* and *Dharmaram Publications: Augustine Thottakara (ed.), Women and Worship: Perspectives from World Religions*, Bangalore: Journal of Dharma and Dharmaram Publications, 2000, pp.296. ISBN: 81-86861-22-X).

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