

## **FOREWORD**

**by Tissa Balasuriya, O.M.I.**

### **(1) Bernadeen and CSR**

The booklet you have in hand is with friendship and love made by the CSR in honour of Bernadeen Silva, who since the very beginning of the Centre for Society and Religion (CSR) in 1971 worked there during thirty years of her life, till 2002.

In this booklet we publish several of her many writings. CSR has already published a booklet on *In Search of Justice, Essays by Bernadeen Silva* as Quest 97 in September 1988. In this booklet, we publish her writings on Feminism written over three decades. These writings have a special character for three reasons.

1. Feminism was the item in which most of the thinking and passion of Bernadeen was chrystalised.

2. These writings show the way Bernadeen worked during her life: biographical stories, attention for the concrete situation of persons was always combined with her broader reflections and actions.

3. Publishing texts by Bernadeen is honouring in a more specific way what she did for several decades at CSR: careful editing work of many publications at CSR, supporting those workers at CSR who were the beating heart of the CSR: the secretariat, the library and the publishing office, which kept over the decades track of the important social events and activism that happened at CSR.

Writing, reading, cataloging books and articles, supporting other writers, was one of the passions of Bernadeen from the very beginning of her adult life. In the 50's already she worked as a librarian and student counselor at Aquinas University College. Her passion for books she inherited partly from her mother, Rosalind Mendis, one of the first women in Sri Lanka who published stories in English.

To honor Bernadeen as a writer we have to also remember her in the richness of her life. Only in this dialectic process, she can stay fully present in our midst.

### **A life long commitment to integral human and social fulfillment**

Bernadeen Silva was one of the Catholic university students of Peradeniya who responded to the invitation of Fr. Peter Pillai in the mid 1950s, to help in the beginnings of the Undergraduate Department of St. Joseph's College that was to become the future Aquinas University College. When the idea was announced in the newspapers in 1953 there was strong public disapproval of it. Dr. Ivor Jennings, the Vice Chancellor of the only university in Ceylon begun in 1942 wanted all university education to be residential. For this he was building the University of Ceylon at Peradeniya.

There was also opposition from other quarters such as the Buddhist revival movement that disapproved of further development of Catholic educational institutions. Undaunted by such opposition Fr. Peter Pillai went ahead with beginning the classes of the Undergraduate Department on the 15th January 1954, at the building near the College gate, that was then the Old Joe's sports club.

Fr. Peter was then a chaplain of the Catholic university students. He invited some of the students completing their studies at Peradeniya to help him in this new venture. Bernadeen was one of the young students who volunteered to help organize

the Undergraduate Department. It was for her a mission that led to a life long commitment to work for the integral development of persons and for justice in society.

She was not looking for a regular job as such and was not discouraged by the uncertainty of the success of the project. She was interested in the welfare of the students. From the beginning she was interested in the library and used it as an opportunity to come to know the students. In January 1956 she moved with Aquinas University College to its new site at Archbishop's House, Borella, from where the St. Bernard's Seminary had moved to Ampitiya. In his handwritten Convocation address of 1962, Fr. Peter Pillai says "The library has more space, but we need many more books. The Librarian Ms. Bernadeen Silva wishes me to mention the following among other needs for the library: fans for the reading room, a film projector, documentary reproduction unit and past numbers of periodicals (p 9). Bernadeen was the initiator of the library at Aquinas University College till she left Aquinas in 1971 to join the Centre for Society and Religion.

For about 15 years she used to meet students at the Aquinas Library, where she counseled students not only on books to read but also informally on their life orientation. Thus it happened that she advised the students union members on non-violent action rather than join the first JVP insurrection that broke out in violence on 5th April 1971. This was the beginning of youth violence that lasted till mid 2009.

She was for justice through peaceful action and transformation of minds and hearts in favor of equality and fair play. When the revolting students were arrested, she visited them and sympathized with their cause. She thought something must be done to assist them and helped form the **Civil Rights Movement (CRM)** by inviting concerned leading citizens to meet in her flat at Barnes place, under the guidance of Mrs. Suriya Wickremasinghe. They campaigned publicly for understanding the young students and releasing them from prison. They appealed to the Prime Minister Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike to be sympathetic as a mother.

Likewise when there was (youth) violence during the past three to four decades of Sri Lanka's troubled post Independence history Bernadeen came forward to campaign for peace with justice to all. She did so in times of ethnic violence as in 1956, 1958, 1977 and 1983 – at all times in defense of the rights of the minority Tamil community. She joined in forming the **Citizens' Committee for National Harmony (CCNH)**. As she writes in her articles she went round the country to listen to the peoples' grievances and propose remedies to the Government. She opposed the Referendum of 1982 that postponed general elections for a decade or so and disempowered the youth especially of the minorities.

She was an apostle of human rights of all persons and all groups. One of the first activities of the Centre for Society and Religion at its foundation in 1971 was to take up the cause of the **plantation workers of Indian origin in the tea and rubber estates**. She worked for due wages to them, for their housing, and education of the children.

### **Research and Action, Action and Reflection, Justice and Religion/s**

According to the circumstances of the times and her own personal development she worked with different civil society groups as;

- Centre for Society and Religion
- CCNH Citizens Committee for National Harmony
- Civil Rights Movement, CRM
- PAFFREL Peoples Alliance for Free and Fair Elections
- Nadesan Centre

- Social Scientists Association
- MIRJE, Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality
- Women's movements, Kantha Handa, Voice of Women
- WERC (Women's Education and Research Centre)
- Women's Committee for International Cooperation
- Half Way House, Richmond foundation for the Disabled
- Christian Peace Movement, Dialogue with Marxism
- Left Movements,
- Catholic Students Federation
- Publications: Social Justice, Logos, Quest, Dossiers, Outlook Group
- National Peace Council
- EATWOT (Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians)
- Mozambique Day Committee
- South Africa – against Apartheid

### **Bernadeen Silva – A Pioneer in Civil Society**

When one reflects on the life of Bernadeen Silva (1929- 2007) and asks how her life long contribution to Sri Lankan society can be described or summarised, one begins to realise that she responded to a call or vocation that was experienced in the mid 1950s by the first generation of university youth after the Independence of Sri Lanka in 1948.

At the general elections of 1956, a new Ceylonese (mainly Sinhalese) power group emerged under the leadership of S.W.R.D. Banadaranaik and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP ). They carried through a “social revolution” of the day, symbolised by the “Sinhala Only” Act making Sinhala Only, the national language “in 24 hours”. It dethroned the dominant English and marginalized the Tamil language, alienating the minority Tamil population who had had Tamil as their language of administration in their homelands during many centuries. This led to ethnic discontent and sporadic civil conflict lasting three decades from July 1983 to mid 2009.

### **Bernadeen's Role in the Centre for Society and Religion from its inception in 1971**

The Catholic Church went through a universal Council convened in 1962 by Pope John XXIII. From 1962 to 1965 the Church was in Council as Vatican II. The Council gave the Church new orientations in 16 decrees in many directions, based on the teaching of Jesus. One of the critical lines of change was in favor of the Church as a community of the disciples of Jesus. The Bishops were to decide issues as a College, the Council gave directions on openness to other religions, on religious freedom, on dialogue with other Churches, on the training of the future priests and religious, on the lay apostolate, on the use of the vernacular in the liturgy.

The local Churches were to reform themselves according to these insights. In Sri Lanka the Bishops began a National Synod in 1968. Bishop Leo Nanayakkara OSB, Bishop of Kandy was enthusiastic on the reforms, but he found little support in the hierarchical leadership of the Church. Due to this lethargy several personnel of the Church including priests and religious were disappointed with the failure to carry out the reforms in Sri Lanka.

Several priests and religious began initiatives to implement the Vatican II directives on their own. Some left their calling and even left the country. We, at Aquinas University College, were conducting seminars on public issues such as inter-religious relations, social justice and ethnic harmony. We began the "Quest" as a forum for dialogue on such issues. One issue of Quest was on the "Ebb and Flow of our new Pentecost".

At this stage, in 1968-69 Bishop Leo Nanayakkara and I were discussing a decision to resign from our official positions in the Church to be free to develop our thinking and express it in public. Accordingly he resigned as Bishop of Kandy and I as Rector of Aquinas University College. We announced our intention to set up a Centre for Society and Religion in August 1971. We were to move to a rented house in Talahena, Malabe, a Buddhist village where we were strangers. We were going into the unknown future, to be open to all religions, and to work for human liberation of the poor and needy, without allegiance to any political party.

When we moved out to our new house a few persons from Aquinas University College decided to join our endeavour. Among these were Bernadeen Silva, G.S.B. Senanayake, Douglas Silva, the Librarian and some others to visit us occasionally. Bernadeen was making an option for life, for she was convinced of the need of reforms in society for justice and equality, and in Catholicism towards openness to other religions and secular ideologies such as humanism and Socialism.

Bernadeen began to work from 281 Deans Road, and the Provincial of the Oblates Fr. Lucien Schmitt gave her three rooms for her work at our present site. The others also came to work here. We had to determine our work and invite other participants. We were to continue the publications which we brought over from Aquinas : Quest, Voices of Third World Theology, Logos, and later Sadharanaya.

We began to organize public seminars which also we had done at Aquinas, some under the auspices of the Peter Pillai Social Institute, also begun by me along with many former students of Fr. Peter. We developed the work among the poor people of the slums and shanties, continuing the services of the Social Justice Movement, begun in 1936 by Fr. Peter Pillai and his coworkers as J.P. de Fonseka, Anthony Jayamane, Eric Mendis, Pat Cooray and others. One of the first areas of concern was the plantations of Tea and Rubber. We had a series of research studies and public meetings followed by publications as the Logos issue "Liberation of Tea", Vol 14, No 1 February 1978.

Bernadeen began as the Secretary of the Centre for Society and Religion. As Sydney Knight wrote in an obituary

"She had the God-given capacity to attract us younger persons to her way of thinking and taking us on board her dreamboat of working for people...Many were her concerns. In her work with the Richmond Foundation she brought in a personal dimension for she was interested in the welfare of each person. Bernadeen was a simple and humble person. But her work was giant-like.

It was her inner life, the spirituality that was hers, which motivated her to move from the Blessed Sacrament to work with and for people of all sorts, seeking the welfare of all people".

At this stage in the history of Sri Lanka we were still young as an independent nation from Feb 4<sup>th</sup> 1948. Most of the activity on public issues was limited to competitive political parties, that sought political power through general elections. Even the four religions opted to support one or other of the political parties. The Catholic Church openly supported the UNP, to safeguard the private schools which the other parties wanted to nationalize.

There were few civil society organizations that were independent of the political parties. Sarvodaya led by Tudor Ariyaratne was one of them. Our decision as CSR was to be independent of the political parties, as well as not attached to or mandated by any religion. The Archbishop of Colombo hesitated to approve our Centre for Society and Religion, The OMI Provincial Fr. Lucien Schmitt however blessed the enterprise, leaving the responsibility to us (on the Gamaliel principle: if we survive or if we fail it is our look out).

CSR had to work out a way of creating public opinion in favor of justice in society, and in conformity with the core values of our religions and the secular humanism. Bernadeen had to help organize activities for “Society and Religion”, to reform society in terms of justice, and to interpret the religions in relation to needs of the social common good. In doing so CSR became a principle forum where such issues were publicly discussed. Thus our research and public seminars of issues such as

- The plantations
- The Multinationals
- Ethnic harmony and peace
- Feminism and women’s rights
- Inter-religious dialogue
- Dialogue with Marxism
- Free Trade Zone
- Tourism
- Migration of housemaids to the Middle East
- Workers rights of July 1980 strikers
- Justice in Colombo city
- Media freedom
- International justice
- Capitalism
- Neo liberalism
- Ecology
- Climate change

We had to evolve the required strategies for research on such issues, reflection and evaluation on data collected, organization of weeks long public seminars, media coverage and relevant publications in Social Justice, Logos, Voices of Third World Theology, Dossiers, printing, distribution of publications, exchanges, sales. Bernadeen, as Assistant Director of CSR, had responsibility for all these activities during three decades, with the help of Richard Dias from the mid 1970 onwards.

She had also responsibilities for staff coordination and management, which increased as our activities and sites expanded. Her understanding of persons and issues helped in relation to orientation of our seminars and also staff management. Over the period of three decades from 1971 to 2002 many young staff gained experience of this type of work and eventually set up new services or joined other related enterprises.

We are very grateful to Bernadeen for having worked together with us during 15 years at Aquinas University College and three decades at the Centre for Society and Religion.

We are grateful to WERC Women’s Education and Research Centre for publishing “Remembering Bernadeen”.

We would like to present this book on Feminism for study groups as a help in understanding the plight of women in a male dominated society and religions. It can be also a message and challenge to boys and men on how to improve relations with girls and women inter-personally and in socio-religious structures. The case studies which Bernadeen presents here can be subject matter for our reflection and meditation, especially inspired by the teaching of Jesus on love of God and love of neighbor – the main commandment of Christianity as well as of all the world religions and the principle value of humanism.

Alongside Bishop Leo Nanayakaka OSB, Bernadeen may be regarded as a co-founder of the Centre for Society and Religion. She was the assistant Director of CSR and contributed immensely to every aspect of CSR, and being acting Director whenever the Director was out of the country.

Bernadeen was kind and compassionate towards all in need, irrespective of ethnic community, social class, religion, gender, paying more attention to the poor as the people she visited in the slums and shanties of the City and the disabled. She was an active member of many civil society groups, that responded to oppression such as the July 1980 strikers who were dismissed and came to CSR as did many such groups.

CSR is very thankful to her for these services.

May she have her eternal reward for a life lived in dedication to all persons whom she came across in her life of service to others.

## **(2) Bernadeen on Feminism**

### **Writing is making life present**

When we present here some of the feminist writings of Bernadeen we are confronted with a variety of styles and themes: stories, poetry, reflections.

Her methodology is mainly a biographical case study of persons and situations she encountered.

In her Ballad on **Woman Vulnerable** she reflects on inadequacy of every religion when it comes to women.

We have placed these essays according to the life of the female characters or personalities she has studied. Most of the essays show that “To live in fear: is the fate of a woman”. She begins with “**Baby Farms**” in which babies, especially girls are sold. Mothers do so due to poverty, and shame of being born out of wedlock.

She has an article on **child exploitation** with information from the Police Officer in charge of women and children in the City Police ... from two shanty community workers and ten others as sources. They speak of child abuse, prostitution, ...heart rending stories.

Next she writes on “**A day in the life of Basis Menike**”, wife of rural farmer Ukku Banda with five children. Basis Menike gets up at 4 am, cleans the house, waters the vegetable plants, feeds two chicken, prepares breakfast by 6 am for children to go to school by 7 am... She woke up at 3 a.m. to feed the 6 month baby, and once earlier for the other baby go to the toilet. Work during the day gathering firewood, cooking, washing the children’s clothes, evening meal for all, prepare for the following day. Ukku Banda says she does not work, and brings no income!

Story of Bisio Menike is the same in every village. She brings up her elder daughter to continue her role. The rural woman is the bearer of the traditions of the family and the community. She cares for all, is very hard working, patient, and sacrificing herself for the whole family, more exploited than the urban woman. She is confined to the home and is not free to take interest in public life. In her youth her education was neglected. She is more exploited than the urban woman.

Bernadeen stresses the equality of the husband and wife in the family for a better society. The rural woman is the forgotten statistic in social analysis. She recommends social insurance for the rural women and men.

**Laila**, a 16 year old Muslim girl was forced to marry 27 year old Ahmed, who said he did not want dowry and wedding trousseau or the traditional bedroom suite. Laila tells her story of harassment by Ahmed for the dowry, who wants her to abort the child she conceived. When she refused this, she found Ahmed was actually attempting to poison her.

The whole social system subordinates the young woman to the desires of the husband. She needs to be liberated to live a full life in freedom with justice.

Next Bernadeen has three short articles on **women in coconut and rubber estates**, paid Rs. 26/76 if she collects 1000 coconuts in an eight hour working day. Their living conditions are worse than on the tea estates. They are not organized, and do not have trade unions.

Women, suffer the most in situations of conflict, ethnic or social. She describes conditions of family in the refugee camps of displaced persons in North and East as: **“Walking through a nightmare”**. Mothers who await the return of a son or husband from the war zone, but have no news of them. It was utter desolation, most painful to see what had happened ... torture, abuse,... disappearances. In 1990 she calls for a **National Commission on Women in Conflict**. How should we rehabilitate these women so that they can be “whole” again to give birth to a free Sri Lanka.

### **Capitalism and Women**

This article includes three sections from two other articles. Capitalism has been the main policy since Independence in 1948. It has given more employment to women. There are three types of employment: in the **Free Trade Zone**, working mainly in textile export section doing monotonous work; these young women have to work long hours on tedious jobs, without learning any new technologies, and suffer in their eyesight after some years of doing this work.

In **Tourism** working in the service sector of the industry in hotels.

**Migration of labor to the Middle East** mainly females as housemaids. They earn about Rs. 2,500 a month and send money home to the family. But the family misses the love and care of the mother. This has an undesirable effect on the family life and upbringing of the children.

Bernadeen reflects on how the challenges of these situations can be met, inspired by the gospel values of the Magnificat, and “the transformation of women’s consciousness from domestication to assertion of their rights...beginning on the long road to freedom and their human liberation” .

### **Women in China...**

Traditionally females have been brought up as second class citizens in China. Historically the most radical change was brought about by the revolution led by Mao

Tse Tung in the mid 20th century. Bernadeen writes of her observations on a visit to China in 1975, International Women's Year declared by the United Nations. The marriage law of 1950 stipulated free choice of partner, full consent of both parties..."duty bound to love, respect, assist and look after each other, to live in harmony, engage in productive work, to care for the children and to strive jointly for the welfare of the family and the building of the new society".

She mentions how the equal rights of women and men is being fostered at all levels of society, in the new China, women undertaking jobs such as engineering, driving trains, operating huge cranes... Equal pay for equal work became a right. Much remains to be done, but the process has begun, and the liberation of women is part of the social revolution, affecting one sixth of humanity.

**Kusala Abhayawardhana** was a dedicated woman activist Member of Parliament who got together a group of progressive women to usher in the 1975 International Year of the Women.

Bernadeen relates next the story of how 15 Sri Lankan young women aged 16 to 20 years are taken to Japan to be married to Japanese farmers as Japanese women did not want to marry farmers. These women do not know any Japanese and only one knew English. This is a process of **trafficking in women** where the Japanese farmer pays Rs 18,000 to the agent bringing a woman from Sri Lanka.

Next is an article that summarizes the discrimination against women in society, in politics, in economic life and in religion. The liberation of women must be part of human liberation at all levels.

The next article shows the theological presentation of God as a male and the discrimination against women in the Catholic Church, headed by the male clergy. How Mary is honored as the mother of Jesus but not regarded as a mature adult woman. Accepting the Genesis story, the Catholic Church regards women as "Eve", the seductress.

**What then is feminist theology?** Feminist theology is born of the dissent from the traditional theology that neglects the role of women in the life and teaching of Jesus. Jesus respected the poor and marginalized in society. It is women who accompanied him in his way of the cross, (while the apostles disappeared). Mary his mother followed her son to the supreme sacrifice of his life. Women watched over his tomb after his burial and it is to women that he appeared after his resurrection. Yet the Catholic Church regards women as not worthy to preside at the Eucharistic liturgy of the Jesus community.

Feminist theology notes that the Catholic Church theology was written by males in a patriarchal Church in which authority is exercised by the male disciples and community leaders. At the present time, with secularization of society, the male clergy is reducing in numbers and ageing, especially in the West. Feminist theology stresses the equality of women and men in society and in religion. Presently there is a world wide movement of feminist theology affirming the rights of women to a full life in the Church, though it will take more time and effort to bear fruit in the Catholic Church.

In June 1995 Prof. Lieve Troch was awarded the **Prestigious ARTEMIS Award**, at which simple ceremony Bernadeen was present and wrote the article about it in the Social Justice of October 1995.

Of feminine concerns are issues mentioned under modern neo-capitalism – in the free trade zone, in tourism and in the Middle East countries as house maids.

**Bernadeen suggests theological reflections in respect of women:**

In dogma how the doctrine of God the Father has reinforced patriarchal values.

How clericalism and hierarchical structures subordinate women in the Church and society.

Pastoral theology to address openly and boldly issues of sexuality:

Rethinking 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> commandments from women's point of view

To review Church teaching on Christian marriage, contraceptives.

In missiology critique the physical and sexual violence to indigenous women in the colonies

Use of language that is not sexist, but inclusive.

A positive approach to sexuality as God's gift to humanity for mutual fulfillment.

**Made in God's image**, to enable the churches to free themselves from racism, sexism, and classism, from teachings that discriminate against women.

In the last article Bernadeen writes of **the true revolution** "that is to be a radical transformation of society, it must come from within the people conscientized by those who as leaders and intellectuals profess to know.

We should build a non-violent power from among the people. It will be TRUE SOCIALISM, for all would be involved in the preparation, overthrow and in the final realization of the People's Glorious Kingdom – The Kingdom for which Jesus Christ suffered and died for."

## *Feminism by Bernadeen Silva*

This book is a collection of articles, stories, poems, reflections by Bernadeen, written over a life time of five decades. As the first article mentions the book can make us conscious of the condition of women in a male dominated society, family and culture, religion, and society. Radical changes are required for both women and men to be able to live more humane lives.

May this life-time work of Bernadeen contribute to the transformation of minds and hearts as she advocates. Please write to us if you have similar experiences of women at any stage in life, anywhere, in Society or Religion, which CSR is committed to reform. We may be able to give publicity to your experiences, perhaps in a follow-up website.

Woman vulnerable  
Lies on her bed  
The glass ceiling above  
Through it she sees  
A beautiful little girl  
Dancing, Dancing – three year old  
Enter the Black Beast, the White tourist  
'Aids my friends, I do not want'  
Innocence destroyed, the little girl coils

Were you there, were you there !

From the side dances in  
The young woman draped in saree  
Is she Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim  
Who knows, who cares – BUT she is a Body  
That is the problem, that is the solution  
How asks, the woman lying on the bed  
The problem how to protect her virginity  
There's a war, soldiers need recreation  
There's globalisation, the more you give  
The more your profits.  
We need foreign exchange,  
Beautiful figure, the nimble fingers  
The smart Secretary.

Were you there, were you there !

What is the solution? Asks the woman lying on the bed  
She is an asset, makes a good mother, a faithful wife  
Continues the line, conditioned to be fooled.  
The Muslim Father finds her man  
The Tamil Father's son gives the dowry  
The Sinhala Father sells the land  
The girl no choice, invisible, only body

Very much for public sale.

Were you there, were you there !

The scene changes  
 The girl still young, haggard over the kitchen fire  
 Little ones dancing around happy and full of fun  
 No space to call her own.  
 The night creeps in, the children sleep around  
 The woman at the table, with head down, half sleep  
 Covered food for two

She waits, she waits.

Strides in the chief, full of life and cheer  
 The woman sits up, fear in her eyes  
 The kids wake up sleepy and afraid  
 Knows the routine, creeps under the table  
 Thunder, hell has broken loose  
 'Woman, my food, damn it  
 This meat is cold, flung at her  
 Followed by shots - the woman screams  
 The kids scream, the shutters  
 Of Neighbouring houses goes up  
 It's family, what can we do !

'This is life' says the man  
 'This is our lot' says the woman

Were you there, were you there !

'You carry the sins of your previous life' it's karma  
 'Preserve the sanctity of the family', says the Poosari  
 'Submit to the will of Allah' says the Mullar  
 'Jesus suffered, bear up, my child' says the priest.  
 The woman on the bed asks  
 Who's sanctity, my sanctity !  
 What sacrifice, my life is a sacrifice  
 Who's will Allah's or your man ?  
 Karma, whose karma, his or mine.  
 Too many religions, too many cultures

Were you there, were you there !

The woman on the bed ponders  
 I, know not, I, know not, !  
 In anguish she cries out  
 No love, no compassion.

We are here, we are here

Woman, be not afraid  
 Break, break through the ceiling  
 To Freedom, to freedom

We are here, we are here

## ***Biographical Case Studies***

### **A Methodology of an Approach to Feminization**

Today we find that case studies are taken as a tool for surfacing problems in society. It is interesting that social analysts have realised that it is through the experience of those who suffer that we can not only understand the human condition within which people live, but from this also draw inferences towards changing the society that affects both the human body and soul. Traditionally, the indicators of social justice have been income, housing, land, health, transport, education. These indicators while they have their usefulness, often fail to bring out the human dimension of such essential aspects as protection, self-esteem, compassion, sharing, tenderness, identity, right of recognition and other values which though unquantifiable are understandable and acceptable requirements in terms of human relationships. They are, therefore, essential for building structurally the material reality which makes possible a full life for all.

What progressive, radical groups and development-oriented NGOs work towards is for a full life for all. Nevertheless, in those groups the female is neglected within the 'all', if not deliberately avoided, as being a non-entity. For this, we have to blame the patriarchal culture and the ideologies which are based on patriarchal values, which are incapable of fostering a just world where women can fully participate in all dimensions of life. The subordination/discrimination of women achieve perspectives only when seen in relation to the mechanism of domination apparent in the existing system which we term as 'patriarchy'. Another significant departure in approaching women's liberation is the use of the word 'gender'. Today we speak of 'gender and development' and not 'women and development' and this I believe should be extended to all issues relating to women such as 'gender and domestic violence' and 'gender balance in institutions' etc. The bottom line is the need to recognize that all human issues are "shared" issues – relationship between women and men.

### **A Communication Strategy**

Within this syndrome the living experiences of women through the methodology of using biographical material found in case studies, have become a communication strategy for revealing the reality of life. It can be stated that related experiences appeal to the heart and not to the mind and therefore judgment can mislead liberative trends for change. It is so if these case studies remain as a good and 'sad' story and not creatively reflected upon. The stories should lead to the sources of the injustices committed and become a tool for change. It is said that the beginning of liberation lies in the capacity to suffer, and one suffers if one is oppressed, physically and spiritually, and these experiences just reveal this.

Violence against women – in all its forms physical, sexual, emotional, financial and spiritual is endemic, cutting across race, ethnicity, class, income and is a constant element in the lives of millions of women all over the world. No doubt, cultural manifestations may vary – from female genital mutilation in certain areas of Africa and Asia, to dowry death and female foeticide in Asia, and incest and sexual assault in the West. But the causes to this state of 'being' are not different in different parts of the world. It is the differential access to power, resources and information prevalent in this global dominating/dominated system that has etherized society into accepting that this is how it should be, and this incapacitates women for action.

Today fortunately we have many NGOs committed to women's issues, to the gender bias in work, against all forms of discrimination and violence against women. And there is evidence that an awareness has been created in the consciousness of society that women have something to say based on reality and experience. Women speak of their experiences of being alienated, isolated, abused, humiliated and screamed at. What is most depressing, which makes one helpless and paralysed, is the disregard and disbelief shown in women's experiences as an authority, particularly when these experiences are used as indicators to measure heinous forms of domination of the weak. The experience often accepted is only biological or cultural – as a mother, wife etc. – what you hear is 'she is just a woman', and the experience is dismissed.

This dismissal and disregard is due to the misunderstanding of the feminist movement. The feminist movement is integral and identifies itself at every level where women are treated as a 'non-being'. Feminism is the political theory and practice that aims to free all women, not only the poor and the disadvantaged but any oppressed woman even in any privileged class or group. The rapist does not enquire whether you are rich or poor before he rapes! The feminist struggle should not be seen as women attempting to topple patriarchy, but the seeking of women to regain their human dignity as persons, equal to all and not subordinate to anyone man or woman. Fortunately today critical consciousness has moved from the assumption that women's experience was irrelevant to the conviction that it is normative. I would say that the goal of women's discourse is the search for justice upon the belief that it is a shared value.

Thus the methodology of using case studies is oriented towards the valuing of the feminist dimension which is denied or undervalued and discriminated against in our patriarchal culture. These experiences when reflected upon critically will help to create mechanisms structurally in the legal and administrative system, the media, work places, and power-sharing to promote gender equity at all levels. We must understand that 'the feminine and masculine' are not only biological properties and physiological characteristic of the two sexes, but manifest themselves in the psychological and spiritual dimensions present in each human being regardless of sex. And therefore gender equity is a possible reality even in patriarchy if it is enlightened. The acceptance of feminization in the sense of values will not only give a different world view but will effect a humane civilization.

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*Celebrate the fight for our rights!*

## **To Live in Fear – A Woman’s Fate?**

Once again we are invited to celebrate 8th March International Women’s Day and some of us invited to contribute articles. So here it goes some random thoughts by me on 50% of humanity.

Gender oppression continues to be universal and pervasive at all levels of humankind. In Sri Lanka, in the social field there is plenty of evidence to indicate that women are capable of adjusting to new situations - victimized and traumatized by the conflict In Sri Lanka, running homes single handed because of the war and the 1989 Southern Insurrection. Yet, SON preference continues to be the normal and accepted idea in families.

Degrading remarks against the barren woman, the divorcee and the widow and a demand that a girl must be chaste and be a virgin to be accepted as a bride and definitely so by the bridegroom’s family, also continue.

In the **economic** field particularly in today’s development process, woman is a “labour product”. She is exploited as cheap labour in the country and encouraged to go to other countries to earn foreign exchange. “Women in development”, considered a recent concept and very popular too, does not take into account that women have always contributed to development. It is an age old practice particularly in agriculture (80% rural) for women to be gatherers of food and fuel, work in paddy fields at harvest time. They have also always done ‘housework’ (the latter is considered by many to be non-work). If this is not women in development – what is?

These forms of control and attitudes are not only culturally, socially and legally accepted but are also accepted by the religions and further given a stamp of spirituality. It is the same as what happens in secular societies or in secular courts. It is sympathetically accepted that religious men are sacrosanct and women are at fault for it is they who seduce and tempt them. In spite of their spiritual strength, they are human. Only men are human!

In spite of the many conferences - national and international – and women’s charter, on the whole, women are seen entirely in terms of delivery capacity and ability to extend the working day and bear all types of insults, humiliation and pain, for they are often regarded as less than human. Even the UN has taken seriously the issue of violence against women and in this late 20th century (20 years after 1975) has appointed a Rapporteur for Women against Violence. How does one account for this type of snail’s pace progress!

Males on the other hand continue to hold the same position and power in society, in religion, in development, in politics, in the economy. The two highest posts In Sri Lanka are held by women – but, then two swallows do not make a summer for us women. Males are pardoned and accepted as if it is the ‘done thing’ for ‘wrongs’, which women are condemned for.

Such double standards in judgment, I call ‘structural dualism’. This discrimination on gender at all levels is well structured and accepted even by women due to the patriarchal system that prevails in the world. We have basically a patriarchal society where power rests squarely on men, and men have through the ages illustrated their power chiefly through the control they exercise over women. Violence has always

been accepted as a form of assertion of authority and power in hierarchical stratified societies, including that of religious institutions. Individuals have different degrees of power over others, based on factors such as class, caste, age and gender.

It is not just andocentric but intrinsically built into a system over the years and accepted as being the traditional way of life, stamped with religious and moral patronage. If opposed it is regarded as upsetting cultural and religious values. It is believed that for harmonious living, it is the women, that should cooperate to live by the accepted values. Why is it news for a woman in a high position to dance in public, while a man in a high position could do so without been made the subject of public comment?

Women participate today more than ever before in changing structures which produce injustice, violence and worldwide economic and ecological disaster, yet they live in fear of being attacked physically and abused mentally.

Hence, to us women, to live without fear is –

- to walk the streets alone
- to be able to sit by the sea or in a restaurant alone, enjoying the environment and the solitude
- to be able to go out for a meal, for a walk with a member of the opposite sex
- to be taken seriously when a woman speaks of her pain, her fears
- not to be dismissed or given scant attention when speaking on profound intellectual or spiritual questions
- to repeat when one has not been heard without it being called ‘nagging’
- to travel in public transport without molestation
- to be accepted that women may respond emotionally to situations
- not to be dismissed as mere imagination when fears and anxieties are expressed
- that women have a strong sense of ‘angry Justice’ and this should not be regarded as vengeance
- not to be classed along with children in action programs as if women are also of the same mental level
- to be equipped to meet a drunken male of the family in the home
- not to be exposed to humiliating situations
- to be able to enter a Police Station to be courageous in breaking gender discriminative taboos
- not to be treated just another but be accepted as **the ‘other’**

It is only then, daughters and sons, you will truly be free and we will have society in equity.

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## **Baby Farms Show up a Society Plunging to Its Lowest Depths**

Of late, newspapers have highlighted Baby Farms where self-styled agents have been found to be selling infants illegally to foster parents, particularly to foreigners at a bargain price, the latest discoveries have been in Wadduwa and Negombo.

Such stories were unveiled a few years ago too, but evidently nothing seems to have been done. Every time such stories appear, the public are indignant, rightly so, and many ask, how can these local agents have the heart to sell innocent babies who may grow up to be prostitutes or may be sold for experimental medical purposes. The public are equally horrified that mothers can so heartlessly give away their children for a pittance. Such sanctimonious comments are natural but no one seriously tries to analyse why such incidents occur.

### **Babies are sold due to poverty and shame, not due to lack of a mother's love**

I can see two reasons why a baby is given away 1) poverty, 2) shame. Poverty is one of the chief reasons for giving away one's baby and not the lack of a mother's love. A baby is not only the responsibility of a mother alone, but of the whole community. Each and every child born, under whatever circumstance is entitled to human rights. Society and the State must see that each and everyone gets all the facilities and the amenities necessary for that child to grow. This covers provision of nutritious food, health, and education leading to employment. If a mother is guaranteed that all this is possible, the child will get what she or he needs most of all – love, warmth and the security of a family, for in these circumstances a mother will not give up her child. Most often a child is given away not because the mother loves the child less than other mothers but simply because she cannot afford to look after the child.

Even if the mother wants to go to work and thereby earn a living to keep herself and the baby, she has no place to keep the baby while she is away at work. How many creches are there in our country for working mothers to keep their infants? Does our health system provide for postnatal care once the mother leaves the maternity hospital? These are not luxuries but essentials needed for a healthy nation. All socialist countries have these facilities and many Western capitalist countries too. A friend of mine living in an orphanage told me that she often comes across mothers weeping, sometimes right through the night, before the infant is taken away by its foster parents. Is this heartlessness on the part of the mother or of society!

### **Women's burden**

Another reason often given is, "she has fallen into trouble so what can she do except give away the child". Having the child out of wedlock is a shame for the woman. The burden of carrying this shame most often throughout life, is also that of the woman. Caring for the child is also that of the woman. Where is the absconding father; where is his shame; and why is it that he bears no responsibility, for his offspring?

Are our laws adequate to make the man responsible for his child, if born out of wedlock? Even if the laws are adequate, often the social stigma on the woman is so severe that she does not like to go to Court. If she is a young woman it is almost impossible for her to live in her neighbourhood or village; it is difficult for her to get

married. And once a mistake is made by the woman, it is near impossible for her to regain this so called 'responsibility' – she is the centre of gossip and is always a ready target for men for she is considered an “easy” woman. Why does the man always go scot free?

### **While women bear the burden, men go scot free**

The label “Baby Farm” also indicates that women are kept there for the purpose of producing infants for sale. Thus some of these women are there for baby production, besides the women who have come there to give away their unwanted infants. Hence the label “Baby Farm” stinks of the fact that human persons are being treated as a commodity – infants and women alike. Thirty nine years of Independence has not broken the shackles of human bondage and the price of our kind of progress seems to be in the direction of lowering the dignity of the human being. Another heinous crime is the labelling of a person as ‘illegitimate’. The poor child grows up with this on her/his birth certificate.

### **Subordinate beings**

We have had an International Year of the Women (1975) and International Year of the Child (1979). These years have come and gone. These years have been marked with celebrations, seminars, discussions, workshops and programmes for future both at local and international level. Many of us have attended these Meetings and have spoken so eloquently and so movingly that one could have expected the quality of life to be improved both for the child and for the woman. But, on the contrary, the child is still burdened with indignities and suffering and the women though perhaps enjoying a higher quality of life are yet treated by men and women as subordinate beings.

Unless and until we agitate for radical changes in society to bring about eradication of poverty children will continue to be sold for a mess of potage. Unless and until we truly understand that women continue to be regarded inferior beings, in spite of the equal opportunities there are in the economic and political field, society will continue to heap social sanctions on women.

While it is absolutely necessary that there be a strict enforcement of laws and supervision regarding the sale of infants and laws against the discrimination of women, concurrently we must agitate against oppressive and exploitative structures, that create problems of poverty, hunger, unemployment and discrimination. Stringent laws alone will not prevent baby farms. One headline says “Stringent laws needed to prevent illegal baby sale”. The emphasis is on “illegal” and the need seems to be to make the sale legal. As long as it is legally done the sale of human beings seems to be acceptable. Has not our society been reduced to its lowest depths?

## **Child Exploitation**

At the outset I would wish to preface my talk with the following facts –

1. It was extremely difficult to get first hand information on the question of child prostitution in Sri Lanka because firstly, my time was short and secondly, because of the attitudes and customs of our people, they are very reticent to speak on moral behaviour, and as such you need time and patience to get to know them before you can get any information.
2. The major part of my paper is based on interviews with
  - a) The Police Officer in charge of the Women and Children's Bureau of the City Police
  - b) Two shanty community workers
  - c) The Director of the Children's Secretariat
  - d) The Secretary, Ministry of Social Services
  - e) The Secretary of the Dept. of Child Care & Probation Services
  - f) Doctors of the Anti-V.D. Clinic, Colombo
  - g) Social Worker from a Tourist Resort
  - h) Newspaper articles
 and i) A woman living on the street

Therefore, most of my paper will be from secondary sources except for (i), the woman from the street. Thus my paper is a more impressionist account of the situation of Child Prostitution in Sri Lanka. I was not able to speak to anyone under 14 years, long enough to get the truth from them. There is so much reticence on this subject. Let me now give some definitions – A child is defined as being below 14 years and a prostitute as someone who offers her or his sexual services to another person in return for an agreed and usually immediate payments in cash or kind. It is within this framework that I base my paper on Child Prostitution.

Prostitution, considered one of the oldest professions in the world, was traditionally confined to adult females only. It is only in recent times that social researchers have begun to speak of men and children selling their sexual services. At this point, I wish to categorically and emphatically object to the term "Child Prostitute". If one were to study the broader socio-economic and particularly the cultural aspects of societies, one would see them as victims of an antagonistic and hostile social environment, and they are in real terms victims of unscrupulous adults some of whom may be parents. This kind of activity is for the gain of adults and not for children – since the greater proportion of the money and benefits earned are for the use of the adults. Thus I would refer to them as "Child Sexual Victims" (CSV). There is "child prostitution" no doubt where elders have organised a system to sell their and other people's children to men. This term "child prostitute" is as heinous as labeling a child as "illegitimate" burdening the child for life with discrimination and abuse because of elders who have contracted non-legal relationships. I am not trying to pass a value judgment on this kind of female/male relationship but merely to condemn society for labeling a child "illegitimate".

When I relate further my gatherings from my interviews and study, you will be able to understand why I call these children “victims of sexual abuse” (CSV). In my paper I will use the term child prostitution but not child prostitute.

Robert Knox a 17<sup>th</sup> Century authority on Sri Lanka found that while pre-marital and extra marital sex (specially the latter) was rather common and more or less tolerated in indigenous society, prostitution per se was socially condemned and severely punished. To quote from Knox:

‘Indeed here are no Public Whores allowed by Authority. In the city some that have followed that Trade, have often times by the King’s order been severely punished by Whipping, and having the Ears and Hair cut off. But in private few or none can exempt themselves.’

‘In some cases the Men will permit their wives and Daughters to live with other men.’

‘Both women and men do commonly wed four or five times before they can settle themselves to their contention.’

Dr. Tudor Silva, a sociology Professor of the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka says,

“Even though Knox may have somewhat exaggerated the situation, the authorities generally agree that sexual norms in pre-colonial Kandyan society (1550-1815) were considerably lax, though by no means promiscuous. This implied that while it was quite possible for a woman to offer her sexual services in return for economic gain as long as the client was of acceptable caste and status, the structural need for having a special category of women serving an impersonal client did not exist in so far as there were ample opportunities for adult men and women to satisfy their sexual desires through pre-marital, marital and extra-marital contacts based on mutual attachment and consent. However, prostitution of some sort seems to have always existed in Sri Lanka. Literary sources of the medieval period refer to *abisarwan*, courtesans serving an exclusive clientele of the city and *vesya* women who were low-status prostitutes notorious for cheating.”

From these records one could infer that there was possibly an inclusion of girls under the age of 14 years, because girls in Sri Lanka at that time and sometimes even now marry before the age 14. Hence it could be said that culturally it was not considered wrong to have sexual relations outside marriage even if it was for favours in kind and cash. When I posed the question “Have you come across CSV’s in your work with the urban poor, from the 2 community workers they both gave more or less the same reply. “You know these people do not consider this a problem or something to feel ashamed of. They are for one thing so poor and they live in such small houses that if some man plays around with the small girls and they get in return some trinket or a few rupees, no one bothers and if by chance the child conceives they will try to get her married if that is not possible they will accept that child into the family.” They further said that it was a shameful problem for the middle income class and above – it was they who went for abortion and ostracized the girls. This was also substantiated by the Director of the Children’s Secretariat who said that child prostitution was not the problem, it was malnutrition and that this was what we should pressurize the government to look into. The Director of Child Probation and the Police Officer in charge of the Women and Children’s unit also said that they have not come across a single CSV. Of little boys however, who hang around the tourist resorts and roam the streets, the Police Officer had this to say of them “Parents do not object to boys even small ones roaming around (no consequences) and it is they who try to make a few rupees or get a ball point pen selling their sexual services.

However, there is definite evidence to indicate that homosexuality has emerged as a social problem particularly with the growth of tourism. Together with the magnificent beaches and the eternal summer is advertised the pleasant and consenting young boys as a tourist attraction. This is being advertised in a magazine called "Spartacus" (Gay Guide) an international guide for homosexuals. A very unfortunate aspect of this trend, in the growth of homosexuality, is the prevalence of "Paedophilia" or child prostitution where boys between the ages of 9-18 years are said to be lured into homosexual relations with tourists. According to a newspaper report (weekend of 27<sup>th</sup> Nov. '83) it is estimated that there are about 2000 such small boys. The social worker from a tourist resort in the Negombo area who has done extensive work on this subject related some hair-raising stories of how boys from the ages of 7 to 19 years were lured by tourists for homosexual purposes and they have more often than not ended up as nervous wrecks, of no use to society or to themselves. He maintains that this is a well organized 'racket' on an international scale linked to drug trafficking, terrorism, general prostitution, foreign exchange frauds, gem smuggling etc. In fact Paedophilia is just one "company" in the giant Multinational Corporation of the underworld. It is big business and big people, he said. A resident of another coastline town - Moratuwa relates how an organization was exposed when it was found that 2 Germans were helping schoolboys with bursaries for periods of 3 to 4 years. The modus operandi was that Germans, through their local contacts, approach unsuspecting parents and teachers and offer to help boys through college. In some cases it was not merely poverty that drove these boys to accept help but for the extra 'goodies' for some are from rich families. They do not realize that this could be harmful and that they could get infected with some incurable disease. The recent publicity given to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) may have some deterrent influence.

The media highlighted this problem of homosexuality quoting from foreign tourists' reviews and from pornography magazines so prominently that the Ceylon Tourist Board took some remedial steps. A Committee was set up to go into this and in January 1985 was passed the Restriction of Entry to Hotels bill of prohibiting persons between the ages of 5 to 18 years to enter hotels unless accompanied by a parent or guardian. The fact that they have done so from the age of 5 upwards, is indicative that there must be little children involved in spite of the denials to me by some of those whom I interviewed. Perhaps it does not occur in the same magnitude as in some of the neighbouring Asian countries.

Homosexuality however is not unknown in Sri Lanka. Some researchers maintain that it is something of a tradition among Sri Lankans. The reason they argue being that a number of social and moral taboos actually encourage homosexuality; it is absolutely indispensable for a girl to remain a virgin until she marries, divorce is taboo and extra marital heterosexual relationships are met with disapproval. Hence homosexual relations. Even in the underworld and on the streets little boys need a "protector" with whom they have both paternal and sexual relations.

Newspaper articles particularly in the Sinhala papers speak of incidents where infant children have been sexually abused by adults, quite often by their own fathers. One could see here that fathers use their power and take mean advantage of an infant's need for personal security. Fathers have easy access to their kids and particularly infants need body warmth and therefore respond to the caresses of anyone. To take such advantage of a helpless infant is most degrading not merely to that individual alone, but to society itself for throwing up such persons. If such cases are isolated ones, one could feel sorry for such persons, regard them as psychopaths needing treatment. But from some of the news one hears and from my readings of other countries one cannot but conclude that this kind of behaviour is an outcome of a 'sick' society. A social worker from the United States whom I met just a few days ago told me that such cases are very difficult to detect at the early stages because it is too late, not for the

adult but for the child. She works in a clinic where female infants are being brought in because of sexual assault and quite often it is by their fathers. She related such revolting stories that listening makes you want to scream for vengeance. How can the law be made effective and public opinion more alert to be able to enter the sanctuary of the family to detect what a father does to his daughter in the name of love.

All those whom I interviewed stressed that teenage prostitution has increased tremendously and that this is a problem. The Police, Prisons and Social Services Departments have some statistics concerning prostitution, but there are many deficiencies and gaps in their statistics, as confessed by them. Nevertheless they could say through the carrying out of their normal law enforcement and welfare functions that teenage prostitution both female and male has increased. It is also evident that there is a problem of 'paedophilia' or child prostitution in spite of what is said, for social workers and government to get alarmed and take precautions such as the entry to hotels and definitely there is sufficient evidence to indicate child sexual abuse. Please note it is the male who is the culprit whether, it is an old lady, teenager, infant, boy or girl.

I would like to situate this question of child abuse in the context of the economic situation in the country. From the time of independence (1948) the pattern of development that Sri Lanka has adopted is one of capitalistic development. Capitalistic development is founded on the race for profit and output. Since the present government came into power in 1977 these processes have been accelerated mostly by an open liberal economy.

Economic experts speak of a recent widening of the gap between the haves and have nots, growth in malnutrition, in unemployment and a deterioration in public life. This situation has been further complicated by the ethnic conflict which has brought into our society violence, hatred and bitterness among most people of the two major communities.

In the background of this worsening economic situation, the rising costs and inflation, and breakdown of values it is but inevitable that people are driven to unethical modes of trying to earn a living.

This is not a situation peculiar to Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan policies of the free and liberal economy, the dependency syndrome of 3rd world countries and the global scenario of terrorism, violence, drug trafficking and addiction and vulgar consumerism have contributed in driving many, particularly the poor to selling their children and labour for a mess of potage. This situation has also resulted in the breakdown of values and has led to a spiritual impotency.

My conversation with the 'woman from the street' will bear out the significant role that poverty plays in Prostitution. Thangamma, who did not know her age (looked about 30 to 35 years) nursing her last born 2 year old, says she was married to a Tamil of Indian origin who left her with 2 children, to return to India. She strung along with another, a Sinhalese by whom she now has 5 children – later in the conversation she admitted that though the Sinhala man was a steady companion, 3 of the 5 were from other men. The whole family lives on the street, just outside a shop, the owner of which she says helps them with money and food. She related how the 4th child a daughter was raped at the early age of 1-1/2 years, 7 years ago and last year another daughter 11 years was found to be having relations with the master of the house in which she worked. The master was the owner of the shop outside of which the family lives. He took the little girl home as a domestic and when the wife found out, the child was returned to the family. One comes across such incidents and this is also an aspect that has to be reckoned with when dealing with child domestics.

Thangamma gave me some good insights into the life on the streets. At first she was reluctant to talk – it was only when we were joined by the social worker, a religious nun who introduced me to her, that she came out with the story and the truth. She spoke of how even little girls and boys were exposed to sexual harassment and abuse because of poverty. Living under such subhuman conditions what could you expect! Small boys were being introduced to Japanese and Korean business expatriates (we have a good share of them) by ‘brokers’ as she calls them. Brokers are often taxi drivers and street thugs. It is these brokers that pay the fines if the boys and girls are picked up by the vice-squad. Thangamma says that the fine is something between 100 to 200 rupees – but this is nothing compared to what they earn which could be anything up to about Rs. 500/- in a few hours. They earn so much that they could put in some savings in the Post Office book, unlike me who earns little and has a large family to feed, she regretfully said.

These poor people, regarded by society as the scum of the earth have multiplied over the last few years. One can see quite a few families living on the streets when you walk around in the city in late evenings.

In conclusion we could say that though child prostitution is not a problem of such magnitude as in some other countries, it has definitely increased in recent times due to economic conditions. Nothing but poverty has driven these parents to overlook their kids being offered for sexual services. One gets so many little boys and girls walking the streets and the beaches, selling little trinkets and offering their bodies to tourists. A foreign friend of mine told me that when he was walking on the beach at Mt. Lavinia, a little boy approached him and said, “Sir, girl no cheap, I cheap.” Quaint, but sad and tragic.

### **Some Suggestions Towards Solutions**

Thus we see that it is the economic and social upliftment of the less privileged sections of society that needs to be done. Second, we need a complete overhaul of values of all sections of society – a spiritual rejuvenation of what we need and want from life. We do have legislation such as Children’s & Young Persons Ordinance of 1939; the Orphanages Ordinance of 1941; Adoption of Young Persons and Children Act of 1956; Domestic Servants Ordinance and the Brothels Ordinance (1889) – all these provide protection for children but in practice these are violated and the machinery is inadequate to enforce them. Even this inadequate machinery is subverted by the overwhelming power of money.

Therefore, one of our tasks could be to urge NGOs to bring pressure on government to enforce the law here. The Women’s Lawyers Association could help. We must also press that the ‘Children’s Charter’ (it is still in the making since 1979) be soon formulated. However, my main belief is that the chief thrust and action should be to work for a more just and equitable society where families could provide their children with conditions and opportunities for developing as integrated human beings without having to resort to these shameful actions. Children’s problems cannot be solved in isolation. They are not only an integral part of society but are the future of humanity. It is by whole communities being raised to decent human living that children can be assured of not only a happy childhood but of growing up into integrated human beings. What is needed is drastic structural changes in the social and economic spheres which will bring into being enduring social justice and fair play.

Social work though necessary and essential and helps ease the burden, is not sufficient, for it does not fundamentally remedy the evil situation of chronic deprivation. We must help to remove the causes of injustice that inevitably lead to child exploitation. In attempting to do this, we must examine and analyse the roots of injustice and

selfishness. The roots of injustice are discrimination of all types based on race, caste, class, sex and religion where values have been forsaken for money and pleasure. The roots of selfishness lie in the fact that, most of us, most of humanity today seems to have passed into a state of spiritual inertia. Profit-making and self-centredness dominate and we are not concerned with the “other”, but only in our own loss and privations.

Today’s emphasis seems to be the ‘commoditization’ of everything, culture, love, relationships and the sacrifice of honour and justice for a few rupees. Progress we seem to have but is it real progress? It is more correct to describe it as retardation.

I would like to conclude with some thoughts I read somewhere. For those in pursuit of the truth; it is a confusing journey today littered with false trails. When confronted with any one signpost, the best thing that should be done is to ask who put it there, and for whom before we place too much faith in its message.

(Paper presented at the Lawasia Conference on “Child Labour & Child Prostitution” – Feb. 1986)

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## **A Day in the Life of Basis Menike**

On a visit to the home of Ukku Banda, we were able to get a little insight into the life of the farmer and his wife.

Ukku Banda lives with his wife and five children ranging from the ages of 7 years to 6 months, in a small colony three miles from Norton Bridge. We met him at about 5.30 p.m. returning from his fields. He spoke of the difficulties of protecting his crops from the wild boar and deer, and complained that he had to return again to the fields after dinner to keep watch for about an hour. We told him that we would like to have some idea of his day's programme.

He said that a farmer's life is very very difficult – he gets up in the morning at about 5.30 a.m. has his tea and breakfast and sets out to the field by 6.00 a.m. About 10.30 a.m. he has a chew of betel and tea (given by his wife) and a chat at the little boutique close by. By 11 a.m. he is back in the fields and returns home for his mid-day meal by 1 p.m. He has his lunch and an after-noon nap and returns to the field at about 3 p.m. after an evening cup of tea prepared by his wife. He is back at home again at 5.30 p.m. having had a bath at the well on his way home.

About 6 p.m. – he visits the local boutique for his glass of toddy and a chat with friends on national and local politics. The boutique is the farmer's 'club' he said. We asked him our last question, "How much income do you get on the average each month and does your wife contribute to the income?" His reply was, "about Rs. 100/- each month. We farmers have a hard life and we are eternally in debt to the Kade Mudalali. My wife she *does not work* she *brings in no income!*"

### **Basis Menike**

Basis Menike, his wife was seated close by on the doorstep nursing her six month old child. We thought of interviewing her – after all it was 1975, International Women's Year – so why not find out how her day is spent. This is what she said.

I get up at about 4 a.m. when everyone is asleep and it is easy to get the work done. I clean up the house and the little garden where we have a few Chillies and vegetable plants, that must be watered and a couple of chicken to be fed. The tea and breakfast are prepared for the family. I have already woken twice in the night, once to nurse the baby and again when the 3 and 4 year olds woke up to go to the toilet. I nurse the child again at 6 a.m. and then my Husband and children must be fed, and the school going children dressed and sent to school. The eldest 7 years, a girl and the boy 6 years attend the local school 2 miles away. They have to walk far and when they return home it is about 1 p.m. So I must also prepare some tea and if possible a little something for them to eat at school. My husband leaves for his fields by 6 a.m. and soon after the 2 younger children too leave for school.

After they have left, this is what I do from 6.30 to 11.30 a.m. I gather firewood, some green vegetable for the days meal, bring water from the well and work for two hours 9.30 to 11.30 a.m. doing some weeding on a neighbouring estate for which I am paid Re. 1/- each day. This when I do not have any work in my husband's fields, of course. While I am away from home, the small ones are looked after by the 4 year old daughter. I am lucky the 4 year old is a girl for she can help me with the looking after of the children and the house-work.

I return home to nurse the child and to prepare the afternoon meal, by 1 p.m. for my husband and children who will be back by then, tired and hungry.

All the children and my husband have to be fed and I leave at about 3.30 p.m., after preparing the tea for my husband who leaves for his fields again at 3 p.m., to the well to wash the clothes and the children. I have to wash the clothes daily – they are so dirty and we do not have extra clothes for them. I must be back at home at 5 p.m. otherwise my husband gets very angry if I am not there to receive him with his tea and listen to his woes of the field.

I am happy when he leaves again to meet his friends at the boutique at 6 pm, for then I am free to prepare a quick evening meal, feed the children, nurse the baby, clean up the house, attend to the garden and my chicken and get Ukku Banda's meal ready nice & hot when he returns at 7.30 pm. for his dinner. By about 8 p.m. everyone is asleep except Ukku Banda who chews a betel on the doorstep, while I eat, wash up, and clean the house and get the things ready, for the children & my husband for the next morning. While I am working Ukku Banda chats with me. This is the only time we are able to chat with each other. At about 10 p.m. after nursing the baby I lie down on my mat, tired but happy that everything has gone off well. "Everyday is more or less the same" she said, smiling.

### **The Story of Biso Menike Same in Every Village**

This story of Biso Menike is true of almost every rural woman. The rural woman from time immemorial has been working not only in the home which is "expected" of her but in the fields too. She has always supplemented the family income, by way of collecting each day, firewood, vegetables and greens. Since her contribution is not a monetary one, neither her husband nor society regards her as an income earner.

### **The Rural Woman an Etherised Patient**

The tragedy is that the rural woman herself accepts this role of being a non-worker, a non-contributor to the family income and the protector of the well being of her family and through this the community. All pervasive are the socio-cultural structures that condition her role as being a virtuous girl, a good mother, an obedient wife, so compelling are the myths that propagate this so called "ideal" role and so unanimous the public opinion, the voice of society supporting this myth that woman herself guards this traditional role as being sacred and one that should be emulated by all women. This system is often maintained and generated by its very victims and each generation of women prepares the next generation to fit into this and to be imprisoned within this system. These concepts, virtuous, good, obedient etc. are utilized in order to deny the woman's opportunity of personal development and fulfillment and her access to employment and education. This is evident in the manner and attitude of Biso Menike when she says "thank god my 4 year old is a girl and can help me with the children and the home".

She grooms her daughter to continue her role, she conditions her to accept the present system of inequality of the sexes, and again ... "happy that every thing has gone of well!" She does not even realise that she has been exploited, taken for granted. She is etherised like a patient, merely fulfilling the role that is expected of her.

### **The Protector**

Traditions die hard in the village and it is the woman who is expected more than the man to preserve the family's traditions and through them the community's traditions. The wife-mother was the one who is answerable for any breach of morality (including crime) or convention. Such breeches were most serious, most unbecoming and offensive and completely unforgiveable if a woman committed them. If a man went against the accepted code or broke a convention it was understandable, even expected

of him. The tone of the family, the community, the village depended on the example and the discipline of its women. To expect only the woman to be the protector of the well-being of the community and be the one who should maintain the moral standards, is not only lopsided but grossly unjust.

### **The Worst Exploited**

In the village, more than even in a town, the woman is the most isolated and exploited human being. The good woman, the accepted woman is the virtuous woman, patient, suffering, hardworking, conventional and venerating the traditions of the past and sacrificing her entire being for her husband, her children, her grand children, her entire family. These are indeed positive values – the fault in this system lies in that these positive values are only meant for the woman. Why this double standards? The existing type of system do not promote the well-being of the community, though it is believed it would do so. On the contrary it is detrimental. If a family is to contribute to a community and the community to the nation, it is imperative that both the woman and the man are jointly responsible. The man too should be answerable for any breach of morality or convention. He should *share* with his wife the bringing up of the children and the drudgery and difficulties of running the home, often on a shoe string budget. It is in sharing of love and justice between husband and wife and between children and parents that makes for a happy and good family which in turn flows into the relationships within the community.

The Rural woman however is happy and content, like Biso Menike, unaware that she is not only exploited by the entire community, but that she is in reality less than a person, devoid of any individuality. This is so because she has been so conditioned over the years to accept this role. To break through the fabric built of the status and position of woman in the family is *very* difficult. In fact the chief obstacle to bringing about any radical change in the woman's role has been this identifying of the woman's role with that of the family role. The family is sacred yet in Sri Lanka society and more so in the village. There is an unconscious fear that if woman is liberated the family would be destroyed. This is an unwarranted fear born and nurtured by society to keep the woman oppressed. The family is truly sacred if both man and woman take joint responsibility in all the affairs of the family.

Being a virtuous woman a good mother and wife is not *per se* directly detrimental to any society, neither should the concept of the family unit be broken up. On the contrary there are values in these relationships of the traditional family that should be utilised in the building up of a socialist society. The family is the fundamental matrix of group life and personal development carrying with it mutual obligations and duties-all these are vital factors that are indispensable to socialism.

But unfortunately these concepts though wholesome in themselves have been selfishly maintained in the traditional family to apply to only the relationships within the family itself. They have also been used by society to condition not only the woman but society itself into a belief that if women are to be involved in the radicalising of society for the building up of a Socialist System, woman will cease to be virtuous, a good mother and a good wife thereby disrupting the family unit. The permissive society of the West which has resulted in an exorbitant increase in divorces and juvenile delinquency has often been cited as a factor against the liberation of the woman.

Here it should also be stated that the very benefits which socialist societies give to women, such as economic independence, equality and maintenance by the father for unmarried mothers, have also resulted in increasing the incidence of broken homes. I was told that in Czechoslovakia, in the city of Prague, everyone out of 4 persons are divorced and a high percentage of them are in the first year of married life. This however

is not so in the rest of the country particularly in the rural areas. This is an indication that social opinion is a constraint on society and therefore community sanctions should be maintained in a socialist society. All this indicates a radical change in the concept of the family from an individualistic selfish concern to a concern for a person because he is a person in his own rights capable of contributing to the well-being of the whole community and not because he belongs to your family.

### **Re-orienting of Family Values**

I have dealt in somewhat length on this traditional family role of the woman because it is the fabric built by this role that is difficult to break through in the total liberation of the woman.

This traditional socio-cultural conditioning of the woman has also repercussions in the economic and political spheres. She is bound to the home and hearth so intimately as if she *alone* is responsible and it leaves her hardly any time to think on matters political or economic, leave aside actively participating in them. Merely to release her into the economic and political field without at the same time changing the attitude of society towards the woman, without re-orienting the family values and without providing the necessary conditions to enable her to be involved in the affairs of the nation, is detrimental to the well-being of the country. It is absolutely necessary that society accepts her as all equal to that of man, accepts her as a person in her own right and as a co-partner of man in every field of activity. Also it is imperative that the community provides crèches, nurseries for children, maternity benefits, revolutionize the cooking and eating habits and re-orient the family values from one of family selfishness to community selflessness. If these are not attended to women wanting to develop their personalities and wanting to participate in the affairs of the community and the nation will only develop a guilt complex in this bourgeois oriented traditional society.

Fortunately with education, the young rural women of Sri Lanka have gradually awoken into a consciousness of wanting to gain their rights as equal partners with that of men. This group is small and the struggle for the liberation of the rural woman is one that needs building up of awareness and organisation on the line mentioned earlier not only among rural women, but among all women and men of Sri Lanka.

### **Liberation of the Village must Contain the Liberation of the Rural Woman**

Generally one considers the "Liberation of the Village" from my point of view the farmer, the peasant cultivator and solutions are chiefly from a male context. The total liberation of the village can never take place unless and until every organisation, government or otherwise is liberated enough to take into account the contribution that the village woman makes to the family income and to the development of the village as a whole.

From time immemorial the woman has been the gatherer of vegetable foods and it is largely through this occupation that agriculture has developed. In Sri Lanka the rural woman has kept this role for years as she has always worked alongside the man in the field and in developing cottage industries. In the Coconut areas it is the women who make the fibre and the coir, in the rubber areas, women are the tappers, in tea they are the pluckers and in the fishing areas, it is they who clean, cure and sell fish, and in the rice growing areas they take part in the pre and post harvest work. 77% of the country's population is rural and 50% of the rural population are women and nearly all of these women take part in agricultural activities as listed above, *yet they are not regarded as part of the labour force.*

### **The Forgotten Statistic**

The rural woman does not also enter the wage earning list. It is she who collects the firewood, the vegetables, the greens and picks fruits daily and yet she is not regarded as contributing to the family income. There are quite a number of families in the village, where the husbands go to the cities for work, and they do not return home for months except send a few rupees on and off to the family and the burden of keeping the home fires burning is on the shoulders of the wife/mother.

The rural woman as contributor to the labour force, does not enter the surveys, the studies and the statistical books. She is the "forgotten Statistic".

### **Solutions**

May I suggest a few recommendations to improve the status of the rural woman.

1. Pre-School institutions and crèches for children under the age of six, like the schools to be free.
2. All development schemes to include the following.
  - (a) Banks and Credit Councils to entertain applications of women for credit facilities etc. to enable them to set up cottage industries, agriculture and livestock development.
  - (b) Workshops to teach modern techniques on farming, agriculture, light and cottage industries to women as well as to men.
  - (c) Social insurance for women and men peasants.
3. Functional literacy classes where women can be taught the rudiments of economics and arithmetic.
4. Social education with a view to building up a sense of dignity in the woman and her potentialities for the full and equal participation in the establishment of a better society.

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## **Laila**

Laila, from a Muslim community, married Ahmed at the age of 16, giving up reluctantly her studies. She comes from a middle class family, the youngest of seven children, 2 boys and 5 girls. All the members of the family were married at the time except for Laila, with 3 of the married girls and their families living in the parental home with the mother and Laila. The father had died a few years previously.

The mother and the sisters considered Laila a burden and when the sister of Ahmed suggested a marriage they were eager to settle Laila, against her will, to this young man of 27 years whom they thought was a very eligible man and most desirable because he said he did not want a dowry, a trousseau or the traditional bedroom suite.

Laila at 23 years old (1993) shared with a progressive Muslim women's organization, the pain of her relationship with her husband. Laila confessed that she consented to marry because the family including her mother brought pressure on her, saying that she was a burden on the family and traditionally girls marry at 13 and 14, so 16 was not at all so young and above all here was a man from a 'good' family who was willing to marry without a dowry. To avoid conflict and nagging, much against her will the marriage was rushed through in 2 weeks.

The story Laila unfolded was unbelievable and could be interpreted as a case of violence due to oppressive traditional, social and cultural values such as that a woman must marry or perish, and the need of a dowry by the bridegroom. All this put pressure on the family and this in turn puts a great deal of strain on young women.

The normal custom in a Muslim wedding is that the first night is spent either in the house of the bride or bridegroom, in whichever house the ceremony had taken place. Laila says that Ahmed on the first night, breaking tradition, took her to a hotel, saying that he needed to come to know Laila better. The night was spent by Ahmed questioning her as to why dowry was not given and where the jewelry and the trousseau were kept and what about the gift of the bedroom suite. "You must get these from your family," he kept on repeating and insisted that she speak to the mother.

Immediately after marriage, Laila lived with her husband in his mother's home where his divorced sister with her two children also lived. From now onwards it was a continued harassment – assaults and requests for the dowry. Laila's mother then transferred the house to the 5 daughters. However, harassment of Laila by Ahmed continued even after this. Laila conceived and when Ahmed heard of this he wanted Laila to abort the child, Laila refused and this too added to the conflict and to the situation of violence between the two.

Soon Laila began to suspect that her husband was poisoning her. Ahmed gives her a drink everyday saying that he has put in some glucose which is good for her pregnancy. Laila observed that some substance was found in the bottom of the glass and wondered why, since glucose dissolves easily. When she next went to the Asiri nursing home for her monthly check up she took this substance and requested the nurse to test it. She says that the nurse took it in and came back and said that they do not do such testing in this nursing home. Laila then threw it away and was very cautious after that about drinking what Ahmed gave her.

Ahmed, stating that he needed money for the confinement, forced Laila to sell her portion of the house (one of the sisters bought it) and the Rs. 250,000 realized was taken by him and banked in his account.

The very first time that Laila tried to argue a point on some issue (Ahmed coming home late every night), he beat her and “banished” her for one month to his sister’s house while he continued to stay in his mother’s house. The reason according to him was to make her “reform” her ways.

When the confinement was getting close, one of the kids in the house contracted an illness and Ahmed, stating that this was not good for Laila, sent her to stay with her brother. Ahmed visited Laila every day and he brought with him each day 2 Oberon capsules saying it was good for her. On one of the visits when he was in her bedroom, he requested her to bring him a drink and said that they must share this drink together. When she brought him the drink, he sent her out on some errand and when she returned he was coming out of the bedroom. He told her that the drink was not good and that he had thrown it away, and wanted her to bring a cup of black coffee instead. He also mentioned that there was a foul smell in the bathroom.

A little later having made the cup of coffee Laila brought it in and he then requested her to go out again to bring the newspapers. When she brought the newspapers, he said that he remembered that he had an appointment and had to leave and will come the next day to see her. He had drunk part of the coffee, leaving the rest for her to drink, as agreed.

Laila took the cup to her lips and felt some burning sensation and remembering what had happened earlier, she became afraid and called her brother to whom she unfolded the miserable existence with her husband – how Ahmed harassed her, wanted her to abort, had beaten her and her suspicions of him wanting to poison her, and now this cup of coffee. This was the first time that she had told anyone of her life with her husband. Her brother told her not to say anything about this to anyone and that they would see what Ahmed would do the next day when he came to see her. He took the half cup of coffee away to be kept for testing.

The next day Ahmed came and was much agitated, and said that after he had drunk that coffee in her brother’s house, he had vomited and was feeling very ill and wanted to know how she felt having drunk the coffee. And he soon left.

After he had left she went with her brother to the police station. The brother made an entry to the effect that Ahmed wanted to poison his wife and to place the blame on him (the brother) since the coffee was given in his home. The coffee was tested at the MRI and was found to contain pesticide. The police requested that she be admitted to the Castle Maternity home for a check up and two days later she delivered a baby boy.

The police took up the case and Ahmed was charged with attempted murder and was arrested and later his lawyer brother-in-Law bailed him out and the case is now in courts. Ahmed has made a counter charge of poisoning by Laila’s brother.

Laila and her son are now back home with her mother. Her mother and her sisters ask her why she did not tell them of her miserable life with Ahmed. Laila’s answer to this is that she did not want to be a burden on her family as she well remembered how they pushed her into marriage against her will. She told them she had wanted to somehow make the marriage work – even if she suffered in the process, and it was only this poisoning that made her talk to her brother.

### **Comment**

- (1) The story of Laila shows how culturally and traditionally the girl is considered to be a burden to the family and parents hurry to marry her off. Society has put many constraints on the woman such as dowry, submission to husband, the need to bear up all suffering for the sake of the family.

Besides, to be single is a taboo for a woman. Even educated, professional women are expected to marry and even provide dowry.

- (2) The role of Ahmed shows clearly the dominating nature of man in considering his wife as his property being able to control the situation. He is not capable of accepting that his marriage could be a failure. Otherwise how could one interpret the fact that divorce being easy according to Muslim law, he did not go through this but planned an elaborate process to eliminate her. There is a strong evidence of the power of patriarchy, here.

We should not only blame the cultural patterns in society but also the fact that most of the religions make use of these double standard values to further give a spiritual stamp on relationships that are unjust particularly to the woman. Religions, too, are very patriarchal in structure and therefore can easily go alongside that of society.

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## **These Women Work for a Mere Pittance**

*Trade Union action called for to relieve pitiable conditions of coconut and rubber women workers*

We were appalled to hear from the women's organisation 'Kantha Handa' research team that did a study on 'Women Coconut & Rubber workers' that the conditions of the women coconut and rubber workers appear to be as bad or far worse than the poor unfortunate women workers of the tea estate.

A woman rubber worker is daily paid and collects only Rs.26/76 for an eight hour day. The coconut worker gets Rs.18/- for picking 1000 coconuts. It is difficult to collect 1000 coconuts in a day, so she gets a member of her family to help or has to work the next day to make up the 1000 coconuts. If there are no coconuts to pick through no fault of her own, she gets payment according to the number picked.

As these workers are daily paid and as the crops are seasonal, living is very difficult. As there is not much of weeding on these plantations, out of season means out of pocket which means little or hardly any food for the family. Most of those interviewed were the sole breadwinners of the family. If the husband was there more often than not he too was a seasonal labourer.

The living conditions are that of line rooms. Line rooms are single rooms in a row – each about 10' by 10' and about 2 to 3 families live in the same house which means about 10 to 15 persons. Water and toilet facilities are very bad – there is only one well for about 10 houses i.e. about 100 persons and toilet for about 6 families (60 persons). The million house programme of the Prime Minister does not seem to touch these workers who contribute so much to the Gross Domestic Product and to the export earnings of our country.

The Research team also informed us that about 80% of those who were interviewed had hardly any education at all. As for their food, at this level of wages, one could hardly expect a member of the family to have a proper meal. The normal daily food is a plain cup of tea for Breakfast, rotti, pittu or bread for Lunch, since it has to be more or less a hurried meal as the women have to go back to work in the afternoon. Most often dinner is rice with one curry.

These women workers of the Coconut and Rubber plantations unlike the Tea estate women workers are hardly organised as workers to present their problems. They do not have strong unions and since they live a more independent and isolated sort of life than the tea workers, they are more unorganised as labour. Most of these women do not live as a unit on the estates - they go back to their homes in the village at the end of the day. Even the status of these workers in the village is very low. The villagers look down on them, they say, for they are called 'Estate boys' or Estate girls' which was regarded as derogatory as they were paid labour and not cultivators.

According to the department of Census & Statistics (1985) 227,875 hectares are under Tea cultivation, 205,589 under Rubber and 419,201 under Coconut (1 hectare 2.471 acres). This includes both private and state plantations. You will see that though coconut ranks the highest, the coconut worker is the least paid worker today. It is imperative that Trade Unions, wages Boards and the State Plantation sector not only be concerned with the physical output of the produce, but also of the wages and the living

conditions of the worker particularly the women workers who constitute about 60% of this labour force.

Why is it that owners of capital whether private or state do not realise that if they do not give a living and decent wage to the worker, they will never get good returns. Only organised trade union action will compel owners to give a better deal to the worker. It is necessary therefore that Trade Unions move to the Rubber and Coconut Worker Sectors. No amount of fertilisers, or pesticides can help increase the production of the estates and bring in the necessary foreign exchange through exports, unless and until the worker is given a decent wage to maintain herself/himself and the family with dignity.

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## **Walking Through a Nightmare**

Being a member of the Citizens Committee for National Harmony in Colombo, I have been fairly regularly in contact with events in the North and East of Sri Lanka where most of the ethnic conflict was played out. Citizen Committees from these areas not only kept us informed of what was happening but they also did come, whenever they could, down to Colombo to meet us and give us a vivid account of what was happening particularly to the innocent citizens of these areas.

Thus, informed we had a fair picture of what was happening and this helped us in drafting our statements on the situation, assisting some of the political prisoners in jail and organising our Peace demonstrations in Colombo.

This I thought was good and even sufficient. But then! ... I joined a small group from the Colombo Citizens Committee about 7 persons to visit the North and East from 29th August to 7th September.

A visit that I will never forget.

### **Desolation**

It was utter desolation, most painful to see what had happened and hear citizens particularly the mothers relate their story of the torture and sufferings their children underwent. The disappearances were many and yet like any other mother they wait in hope for the return of their children and women of their husbands. But they wait in vain and as one member of the Citizens Committee told me, they do not want to accept that their children are no more.

Everywhere we went particularly in Vadamarachchi, buildings houses were all broken and destroyed. Vadamarachchi operation was called "Operation Liberation" – one wonders when passing through this area, what were these people liberated from. – Liberated yes from their stone houses but crippled in their minds and bodies with pain and agony as one old lady said, sitting aside alone among the rubble, in utter desolation, "The Lord has forgotten us". Is this Liberation!

We will be able to put these buildings back again but can we ever restore their minds, repair the harm, the damage we have done to their souls, our forgetfulness of an entire group. These are not strangers, not foreigners but our own people, our people of our own country uncared for, destroyed because they belong to another ethnic group.

We the people of the South, particularly the majority Sinhalese (who can because they are the majority be magnanimous) should have cried out louder. Never, never let this happen again and, let us not make the same mistake in the South.

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## Women in Conflict

March 8<sup>th</sup> was International Women's Day. Many have been celebrated and organised, yet :-

Women are in conflict situations  
Economic, social, political

- Economic** - cheap labour; Migrant Housemaids; exploitable in work places; low wages
- Social** - culturally oppressed by traditionally accepted values; exploited by media; unmarried mothers fodder for anyone; no dowry – no husband; sexually oppressed and abused; unpaid Family Household Worker
- Political** - problems in refugee camps; recreation for military personnel; widowhood; single headed household difficulties

Why is it that women are in such difficult conflict situations – Are these not a reflection of the type of society we are in? Are these are not various manifestations of a patriarchal society?

In the economic field, with today's emphasis on profit, woman is in a more vulnerable situation than even in a feudal society.

In the social field woman conditioned by society, legitimized often by culture and religion, continues to be treated as a 2nd class citizen in society.

In the political field, any kind of conflict – ethnic – in elections – in war, woman suffers more indignities and is exposed more to rape, insecurity and fear.

### Solution

Solution to this subordination of woman in society lies in the recognition of a simple principle of recognising the dignity of another human being and the need for providing every individual person irrespective of gender, class, caste, race or creed with the basic necessities for living and with opportunities for developing into a full human being.

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## **The Position of Women in Sri Lanka Since the 1979 Asian Theological Conference (ATC I)**

### ***A Viewpoint***

#### **A Brief History on Sri Lankan Policy**

The policies of the various Sri Lankan Governments since Independence (1948) have been more or less similar regarding the economy and politics of the country. We have, since Independence alternated between two political parties the UNP and the SLFP, the former a more rightist in orientation and the latter more a Centre Party. The only break in this monotonous rhythm was in 1970 when the SLFP formed a United Front Coalition with two other Marxist parties the Lanka Samasamaja Party and the Communist Party. However the trends during the tenure of this Government 1970 to 1977 were not fundamentally different in spite of the few Socialistic measures such as the Land Reform, Import Substitution and Nationalisation of the Plantations.

Thus, it is possible to show a continuous evolution of the same type of development with a few changes from time to time. This continuous policy that we see is one of capitalistic development. Capitalistic development is founded on the primacy of profit and output; on competition between firms which consider their own particular interests at the expense of labour and where the product and not the person is important.

The foremost factor in a Capitalist economy is production for profit in the market, not primarily to satisfy human need. Such commodity production practically subordinates not only the economy of the country but also many aspects of the human being to a small group of powerful and wealthy persons who exploit the others in the name of development. In Sri Lanka today, under the leadership of the Government that was elected to power in July 1977, this kind of system has been given a faster and deeper thrust with its liberal open economy and invitation to foreign investments. This has resulted in bringing about changes in the political structure detrimental to democracy. In order to maintain an apparent "stability" in the country for the free development of capital various measures have been introduced to curtail people's rights and crush opposition whether it be from political parties, students, workers or minorities.

This dichotomy of the exploiter and exploited which exists in this kind of capitalistic development has affected more the woman who is already in the exploited category. It is true that women belonging to the exploiting class benefit more from this system than women of the poorer classes. Yet even these women who benefit from the system suffer in the wider oppression of women by what is called "middle class morality". This middle class morality is a great upholder of the capitalistic system as this morality is based on patriarchy, favouring men in every aspect whether it be in the home or society. This idea of the subservience of women cuts across class, ethnic and caste divisions. Capitalism creates unequal relations in all areas and in this woman is made more unequal irrespective of the class, caste or race she belongs to.

It is true that capitalist expansion has changed the position of the woman somewhat by drawing more women into the working class, pushing her out of the home more into society and increasing her earning capabilities. This assumes a facade of emancipation but in reality as studies have revealed the nature of this change has not

loosened the bonds of oppression but rather worsened the situation of the already exploited woman.

Further the contradictions of the expropriation of economic surplus from the many and its appropriation by the few as found in a capitalist system is often been given more strength by offering “apparent” liberal measures of relief for the exploited sector. It is in this background that we must understand the reliefs meted out to women by the present government in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka the government has established a Women’s Bureau, a Ministry of Women’s Affairs and is spending large sums of money on self-help projects for women. Further the Public Service Commission has opened all avenues of employment to women and they could now be on par with the men not only in wages but also in promotions. Recently the disparity in wages in the Plantation Sector (a struggle that has been going on for years) has been done away with and women get wages the same as the men. A woman Inspector General of Police was not an impossibility, so said the Head of the state at a meeting of Police Personnel, and now legislation is passed to include employed women in the Widows and Orphans Fund, a provision which hitherto was only available to the government employed males.

While we do appreciate and welcome these progressive measures we see that in practice the attitude towards the woman as being a subordinate person has not changed very much and also new forms of exploitation have risen. These progressive measures give a sense of progress, freedom, more employment – in short an euphoria that everything is O.K However, if we take the areas in Sri Lanka in which women have moved to in large numbers due to capitalist expansion, we find a new pattern in the subordination of women. The important factor to note is whether these measures have improved or retarded the dignity of the woman as a person or not. The various studies that have been made indicate that it has had a more dehumanizing effect.

Let me illustrate by taking a few areas where it has affected women most i.e. in Tourism; the Free Trade Zone; Migration of Labour to the Middle East countries; in the Family and in the influence of consumerism.

### **Capitalism and Women**

From the time of independence (1948) the pattern of development that Sri Lanka has adopted is one of capitalistic development. Capitalistic development is founded on the race for profit and output; on competition between firms which consider nothing but their own particular interests; on the need to produce more every year ensuring that products wear out more quickly every year so that people will keep buying more of them. The result inevitably is a frightening waste of natural resources essential for the preservation of life and also the increasing use of human labour for the accumulation of wealth by a few.

This type of development practically subordinates the whole economy of the country to a small group of powerful and wealthy persons and leads to profound changes not only in the economic field but also in the social and cultural fields and to the curtailing of human rights that obstruct the free development of capital growth. The theory of the polarization of the capitalist system into the metropolitan centre (developed countries) and peripheral satellites (most third world countries) is applicable within a country too. This same metropolis satellite contradiction extends still deeper and characterizes all levels and parts of the capitalist system.

The dichotomy of exploiter and exploited existing in the capitalist system has only further exploited the woman who is already in the exploited category. It is true women belonging to the exploiting class benefits more from this system than women of the poorer classes. Yet these women benefitting from the system share in the wider oppression of women by what is called “middle class morality”. This middle class

morality is a great upholder of the capitalistic system as this morality is based on patriarchy, favouring men in every aspect whether in the home or society.

The whole idea of subservience of women cuts across all classes, ethnic and caste groups. The fact of trying to divide the struggle of women into categories is to my mind a ruse to weaken the struggle and the “divide and rule” theory of the oppressor becomes applicable here too. Capitalism in all areas creates unequal relations and in this woman is further made more unequal irrespective of the class, caste or race she belongs to.

It is true that with capitalist expansion the position of the woman changed drastically assuming a facade of emancipation but in reality as studies have revealed the nature of this change indicates that it has not loosened the bonds of oppression but rather worsened the situation of the already exploited woman.

Further the contradictions of the expropriation of economic surplus from the many and its appropriation by the few as found in a capitalist system is given more strength by offering apparent liberal measures of relief for the exploited sector. It is in this background that we must understand the reliefs meted out to women by the government in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka the government has established a Women’s Bureau, is spending large sums of money on self help projects for women. Further it has specifically stated that the public service commission would open all avenues of employment to women and they would be on par with the men not only in wages but also in promotions. A woman Inspector of General was not an impossibility, so said the head of the state at a recent meeting of Police personnel and now legislation is to be prepared to include government employed women in the Widows and Orphans Fund, a provision which hitherto was only available to the government employed males.

This type of progressive measures gives a sense of progress, freedom, more employment -in short an euphoria that everything is O.K., good for all, and therefore for women too. However, if we take the areas in Sri Lanka in which women have moved to in, large numbers due to capitalist expansion we find a new pattern in the subordination of women. Let me illustrate this by taking a few areas where it has affected women i.e. the Free Trade Zone, Tourism, the Migration of labour to the Middle East countries and the influence of consumerism.

### **Free Trade Zone**

It is true that the Free Trade Zone (FTZ) draws a large number of women into the work force of the country (86.3% of the total labour are women of this 70.8% in the garment industries) but the studies and the surveys and interviews indicate that the wages though higher than found outside the FTZ is low compared to the profits made by the companies and is inadequate when one sees the long hours of work they have to put in with their “compulsory” overtime and conditions of work. Most of the jobs are monotonous and many women end up with bad eyesight and poor general health due to the precision of work that the jobs entail.

The FTZ also indicates that they want young women (72% are below 25 years of age) and single women (88%). This indicates that they are in good health and in the prime of their working life. But unfortunately within a few years due to the conditions of work that prevail in most of the factories and the pressure under which they work, their health deteriorates. (Refer “Women Workers in the Free Trade Zone”. A survey by “Voice of Women”, Colombo.)

One of the basic principles for locating an industry in the Free Trade Zone of a developing country is the advantage of obtaining relatively cheap but skilled and semi-skilled labour. And our women finding it difficult to obtain employment elsewhere are

drawn in large numbers to the FTZ to be exploited, as cheap labour. Most of the factories in which these women work are what are known as runaway industries and footloose factories that could shift at short notice if faced by rising wages. Hardly any technology is given to these women, most of the work involves sewing a button, ironing a shirt collar, straightening stockings or putting together 2 bits of wire.

It is difficult for the recognised and established trade unions to work in the FTZ and therefore the women have no-one to look after their interests. There are Worker Councils and though some of the members are elected by the workers themselves, these councils in fact act only as advisory boards. (Refer also Logos Vol. 20, No. 4. Free Trade Zone)

### **Tourism**

Tourism is a part of a package of a number of factors that promote the type of development we have spoken of. Though it is claimed that Tourism has benefited the country, providing foreign exchange and employment, we see that where women are concerned they have got only the crumbs.

Here the majority of women have entered the “service” sector of the tourist industry. You find many women involved in the travel trade as tour guides, as room maids in the hotels, working at reception desks and there is the inevitable increase in prostitution. Women entrepreneurs as guest house owners or senior managerial executives of big hotels are few chiefly because of the traditional social constraints imposed on women. They often lack the necessary capital (credit is often unavailable to them) and confidence to make decisions and take responsibility for investing in a venture in comparison to men for whom traditionally such access to enterprises is less difficult. Most that they do is rent a room in their home to a tourist and this most often is done only by middle and upper class women. The poorer women run the risk of ruining their reputation by letting out a mat or room since they are unable to obtain the ‘respectability’ image by registering with the Tourist Board (they are not up to standard) and necessarily therefore cater to the poorer tourist. Because of the social constraints the avenues of making money open to women are batik and handicraft selling, and the ‘service sector’ of the industry and of course resorting to prostitution.

Women are also employed to greet tourists at the airport when they arrive, as receptionists at travel agencies, hotels and guest houses – all indicative of the fact that the traditional attitude still prevails that a woman is merely a sex symbol. Tourism in keeping with the policy of the ‘open market’ sells anything from necessities to pervasions in order to make some money.

It should be noted here that the ethnic and other types of violence that erupt from time to time in the country has greatly affected the tourist industry – hardly any tourists arrive today. This is also an indication that to adopt tourism as a development strategy is dangerous since its success is based not only on the affluence of the Western countries but also needs a stable situation in the country. Stability in the country is often obtained at the cost of the loss of rights of the citizens.

(For further information see: “Who needs Tourism” by Shireen Samarasuriya. A Research project Leiden University. March 1981)

### **Migration of Labour to the Middle East**

Unable to find employment to meet the high cost of living due to inflation, many have been forced to leave the shores of Sri Lanka to find employment elsewhere. A large majority of those who obtain employment in the Middle East are females and chiefly in the capacity of housemaids. The recruits are within the age group of 18 to 45 and come

from a working class or lower middle class background. While it is true that these women earn a very high income relatively – about Rs.2,500/- per month as a housemaid and that they do send money to their homes, the effect in the long run on their children and families have been found to be wanting. Reports appearing in the local press from time to time relate harrowing stories about “long hours of work, lack of leave facilities, inadequate pay, harassment by the members of the household, improper advances by male employers, even torture, cases of attempted suicide and death in mysterious circumstances”. (See Logos, Vol. 20, No. 4 “Woman’s Subordination”)

Here there is double exploitation – exploited because of their class (housemaids come from the lower rungs of society) and exploited because of their sex too. How else can one understand the seeming indifference on the part of government and most non-governmental institutions in these migrant working women in spite of they being one of the largest foreign exchange earners of the country.

### **The Family**

This study should also take into account the influence that this type of development has had over the years on the value pattern of the family. This particularly affects the woman since claims are made that the woman is the Queen of the home and the well-being of the family is considered her responsibility. The values associated with the open economy – those of cut throat competition, power hunger, various forms of violence in addition to inflation have greatly influenced the family unit. Today we have more the nuclear family unit and not the traditional extended family system which made the burdens of the woman in the home easier with the sharing of responsibilities with the mother and the grandmother.

In addition, with the cost of living going up daily, more and more mothers and wives go out to work and single parent households have increased with divorce, widowhood, unmarried mothers and with women going abroad for work. Needless to say, this has affected the home with children being neglected and the woman returning home tired and having to do the housework under strain and stress. The consequence of this is that the relationships between the wife and husband and the parents and children are disrupted to the detriment of a peaceful home.

This no doubt has some bearing on the increase of violence in the home. It is today an urgent social problem particularly affecting the woman. This is nothing new except that it has increased and is now being more frequently reported in the newspapers and discussed among women’s groups. Violence has always been an accepted form of assertion of authority and power in hierarchical stratified societies and has today been intensified by the present system of the open economy. It has taken many forms, state violence against workers, students, clergy, judges, academics and women while acts of thuggery and intimidation have become features of our daily life.

Society’s violence has permeated into the sanctuary of the home. Surveys made not only in cities but also in the rural areas and substantiated by reports in the newspapers indicate that daughters are violated by their fathers and brothers, wives battered by drunken husbands, female domestics being a prey to the males in the house and the abuse of the traditional recognition of the right of the husband over the bodies of their wives.

### **Consumerism**

The liberal economy which goes with capitalist development has brought into the country various kinds of consumer items most of which are far beyond the purchasing power of the citizens. The majority of what is being imported – baby foods, domestic

appliances, cosmetics, drugs, pep-up tonics and drinks, variety of easy prepared foods are items that women are attracted to, for by nature and tradition women need these. To give an example the working mother and housewife wants the domestic appliances and easy prepared foods, the nursing working mother welcomes the availability of baby foods and the woman brought up in the tradition that they, the young must marry and a woman's role is to please the man is happy to purchase the new 'keep young & fresh' cosmetics.

### **Change not Qualitative**

Whilst its true that today's development has brought in many women into the working class and there is a greater mobility of women and a sense of freedom and independence among them, a closer and intense look into the nature of this change shows that the change is not a qualitative one. The basic question we must ask ourselves is, has this changed and to what extent has it changed qualitatively the status of women? The problem that we must look into regarding this new influx of women into the working class is whether this, though it has no doubt given an economic boost to them, has changed the traditional role of woman as being subordinate to man. Always her activities of wanting to participate in society as an equal is restricted by an ideology imposed by the society which defines in a narrow sense what is 'acceptable' for a woman.

Third World women because of their traditional social and cultural background are more susceptible to exploitation. In Sri Lanka women constitute a high proportion of the population and because of this traditional background is more influenced by the lack of money, being made to accept that it is their responsibility to see somehow that the children and husbands are provided for; keep a clean and beautiful house; get married and therefore need to have a dowry and a trousseau and it is used to, accepting a man to rule over them. All this type of conditioning makes it possible for a government to offer TNCs cheap labour in the form of women. The stereotype woman accepted by the traditional societies and legitimised by culture and religion is well equipped to serve the interests of capital.

International capital makes use of the traditional social, cultural and religious values to further their accumulation of capital in the 3rd world countries by recruiting high cadres of women. Therefore women continue to be the most exploited group driven out of necessity into accepting socially inferior and demeaning jobs at low wages. Also the nature and type of jobs given are merely an extension of what are known as women's jobs. Women have been drawn into wage labour in manufacturing mainly in what is termed 'subsistence production'. Subsistence production as described in Veronika Bennholdt Thomsen's paper ("Of Marriage and the Market" Edited by Kate Young and others. CSF Books London) means what is necessary by nature for consumption e.g. the work of women as wives, housewives and mothers. – here the work is continuously produced and reproduced. To quote from the book. "Subsistence production includes work related to pregnancy, childbirth, nursing and education of children, as well as that required in the production and transformation of food, clothing, housing, and the physical and psychological demands associated with sexuality. In short, subsistence production is largely women's work (wives, housewives and mothers) in the metropolitan countries. However, it is also necessary to include the subsistence production of peasants (men and women) in the so-called Third World because by means of such production, nature is directly appropriated for consumption." (Page No. 17)

Thomsen further argues that the basic contradiction within the capitalist mode of production is the separation of subsistence production from social production and this

separation is fundamentally necessary for the accumulation process. Thus women are inevitably easily subjected to exploitation in a capitalist society.

Thus we are not far wrong when we say that the type of development model that Sri Lanka has embarked upon from the time of Independence, though at various stages has given concessions to women is predominantly one of helping to further the exploitation of women and relegating her to a more degrading position in society than ever before.

### **What Can be Done?**

We must not despair. There is much that women can do to liberate themselves. The important point is not to be fooled by apparent liberal measures. Once you understand how and to what extent capitalism uses traditional and religious values that are adverse to women, to further the oppression of women, it will be easier to organise women in their struggle for liberation.

The important question that arises out of this analysis is that the women should become aware of the personal and social reality of a capitalistic system as well as the contradictions in it and how it makes use of traditional customs and religious mores for its own benefit and profit, and becoming conscious of this, be galvanized into action for liberation. We must be alert, we must not allow capitalism to programme us into conformity to the logic of its own system and thereby, because of the apparent liberal gestures, become submerged into thinking that “things are not so bad for us now” or give up the struggle. This on the assumption that it is a historical process and wait till history corrects and ushers in an egalitarian society.

Capitalism has thrown up challenging situations for the organizing of women. It has given no doubt certain amount of economic independence to women and brought them out of their traditional roles. To cite just one example – the Free Trade Zone has brought a vast number of women together. However difficult it may be because of the legal framework of the FTZ to organize the women within it, to an understanding of their needs, it is yet an opportunity not to be missed. A women’s organization or for that matter a Trade Union could move in and help in the organization of these women for their liberation struggle.

To have so many hundreds of working women together should be a challenge to any radical movement. This is part of the challenge and the struggle. Here it must be mentioned that the women’s struggle is not an isolated one, it is and should be part and within the general struggle of all humanity for a free and egalitarian society.

How does humanity propose to achieve this liberation within capitalism? There will always be some persons who are more aware and more committed than others to bring about a radical change. Persons who have the ability to organise, to suffer and to sacrifice, can through a process of conscientization bring the people to an awareness of the various contradictions in the political, socio-cultural and economic society, so that all together they could think and take action against the oppressive elements in the society. Conscientization can take all forms – publications, talks, public discussions, fact finding surveys and seminars. However, they should be so designed, that they do not be, just mere words but a meaningful, sincere communication based on fact and reflection which must necessarily lead to action.

### **What Can Christians Do?**

What Christians could do is to be faithful to Jesus Christ and the Gospel. Keeping in mind the Lord’s saying “by this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35), Christians should positively take up the

challenge to fight the injustices that dehumanize the human person. But unfortunately many of us do not do this – we pray, we go to Church, receive the Sacraments and accept the status quo” – often saying that to be actively involved in the struggle against injustice is to politicize Christianity.

We know from history that faith and theology often served the political and economic interests of the powers that be. Slavery for example was justified on the basis of faith in a God who ordained slavery and in a similar way, capitalism was undertaken as if it was divinely sanctioned and colonial expansion was undertaken with a sense of divine mission. Thus, we see that when it suited those in power, the Faith was used to legitimise the system and to condition the people to accept such a system.

This we see is a misinterpretation of the true Biblical message. It is good to remember that not everyone who cries “Lord, Lord” will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but those who do the Father’s will by a deep and conscious reflection on the faith as lived in a given context. For a Christian, Christ is the centre and meaning of human history. In Him and through Him “all things are to be restored”. He came to build the Kingdom, His Kingdom on earth – a Kingdom of love, a love that will transform and unite all men in one community – a community of those who love God. This God of love unites humanity in one body through the communication of the spirit of Christ.

This communication of the spirit of Christ is through the realisation of the values of the “Whole Christ” i.e. values of love, truth and justice in this world through the operation of the political, social and economic processes. Therefore to participate and be actively involved in the processes is not only inevitable but necessary for a Christian for the values of the Kingdom of God cannot be realised objectively without a relationship to the reality of the processes. To quote from Pope Pius XII’s address to the 2nd World Congress for the Lay Apostolate (Oct. 1957) “All members of the Church are called upon to cooperate in building up and perfecting the Mystical Body of Christ. They are all (clergy, religious and laity) free persons and should therefore be active.”

### **How Can Women Participate in Promoting the Kingdom of God**

The foregoing pages have shown us some of the evils of the present system and how it affects the woman in particular. It must be categorically stated here that the liberation of the woman is not an isolated or a separate struggle. It is part of the total liberation struggle of all people. I believe that it is only in a non-exploitative, egalitarian society, that woman can develop as an integral human being equal to others. Thus, unless the liberation struggle of women is linked to the liberation struggle of all mankind, achievement will be limited. Therefore women must take part in fighting all forms of oppression and positively work for human rights, freedom, justice and peace for it is in this that their own liberation lies.

An objection often made by the Church is that even if men take part in politics, women must not, on the grounds that a woman’s predominant role is to be a mother and wife and it is not proper for her to participate in the affairs of state and society. If it is accepted that to be a true Christian is to work for the values of the Kingdom, then according to this argument, a woman is no Christian.

Also the woman is considered to be inferior to man and therefore not capable of active participation in development.

Religion and Culture attempts to legitimize the subordinate role of the woman. In Christianity names as Mary, Elizabeth, Anna, Mary Magdalene are some of the women given an important place in the gospels and to quote St. Paul “All baptised in Christ, you have clothed yourselves in Christ, and there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

(Galatians 3:28) .And what more powerful liberation song is there, than Mary's "Magnificat", Nael Cortez writes in "Women and Men in Asia" (page 22) "Women around the world, especially in Asia, ought to find identification with Mary and her Magnificat. We say it is a manifesto because in it we find a charter, an anticipation of full humanisation, where the lowly, the humble and the poor are delivered from their hopeless situation. The transformation of women's consciousness from domestication to assertion of their rights, alongside the oppressed in Asia and all over the world, marks the beginning of the long road to freedom and human liberation.

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## ***A Call for a National Commission on***

### **Women Victims of Conflict – Rehabilitation**

Let us situate the woman and the man in this phenomenon of violence that is prevailing in our country. For the last six years or so violence of many kinds and by various groups has been accelerated, affecting in most cases more the woman than the man. When young men join militant movements and the armed forces and are killed, captured or disappear without any trace, who suffers the most? It is most often the mother and or the wife who have to carry on the burden of looking after the bereaved families. There are villages where over 50% are widows and other villages where mothers and wives have virtually spent fortunes trying to trace their sons or their husbands who have disappeared.

Let me relate a story of a woman whom I met recently – she said with sadness in her voice “Lady, I have walked from police station to police station, to army camps and refugee centres asking whether my son is there. They pretend to look up a list and say No – often they chase me away, even use abusive language and at one station, this is what they said – Don’t come here and waste our time. Your son, if he was taken in, must be a subversive and deserves to be killed. You must be a worthless woman to have given birth to such a son – is this the way you have brought him up?” “I told him”, she continued “I brought up my son with great difficulty and with love and whether he be bad or good he is my son and please Sir tell me whether he is here?”

Some women have spent much money also seeing soothsayers and consulting horoscopes and often they hear that the child is alive. This gives them some joy and hope but it is a tragic joy that only a mother knows. Such stories are countless that sometimes one becomes almost immune to suffering.

Another story, one of hundreds. One house in a shanty area, Summitpura, Colombo, the father the sole breadwinner died (natural causes) leaving behind the mother and the two daughters. The husbands of the two daughters are in detention and these women have no jobs and have to fend for themselves somehow and for their four children.

When I related some of these stories to my friends their answer was “we know many such cases and some of them are much more horrendous” they said. A Tamil friend of mine very sadly and bitterly said, “we mothers went through this type of suffering for many years and we are yet going through it.”

It is believed that if one is a widow of a police or armed force personnel, compensation is given and therefore such widows are O.K. This I think is a callous way of thinking – whether one gets compensation or not, being a widow as a result of the prevailing violence does not make the burden less heavy. Also there are widows in this category who have not got any compensation. I know of a young woman who lost her husband in a land mine and got no compensation because she could not produce the marriage certificate. Compensation is paid according to years of service and quite a few get only a few thousand rupees and even if a couple of lakhs how far does it go today?

When families are chased away and are forced to go to Refugee camps, one can well imagine the humiliation and suffering women have to undergo. Changing, nursing a child, toilet habits are all difficult exercises for the woman. A woman in a refugee camp told me that she hardly slept at night as she had to watch over her two young daughters. Sexual abuse was not ruled out even in a refugee camp.

The sufferings of these women are unimaginable. To think one of your loved ones may be that mutilated body, the headless corpse on the street, floating down the river

or maybe some of the bits and pieces in a polythene bag – what more pain can one have? Compensation is only an immediate though necessary relief and therefore the whole question of such killings and disappearances need a more far reaching analysis and solution.

There are hundreds of women throughout the island who are the sole breadwinners because their sons or husbands have been killed, taken in, or disappeared. Janasaviya programmes do not help them, the Youth Commission recommendations do not affect them, the promotion of small and medium scale enterprises do not touch them – no national programme has yet being devised to meet this phenomenon of women who are forced into being breadwinners because of a violence unleashed in this country – a violence begun and perpetuated by the men.

I say begun and perpetuated by men because whether we like it or not, whether we want to believe it or not, wars, conflicts, subversive movements are created by men. Even the armed forces and police which are said to be for the protection of citizens and of the country are known to abuse women – stories of rape and plunder by soldiers and by police are widely known. “Sixty eight security forces and police personnel including officers have been remanded during the past year on a number of charges including rape, murder and connivance ....” (Sun newspaper 16.2.90).

This year we celebrate 42 years of independence, but what does the nineties hold for us in this country – this country so cruelly brutalised by violence. Are we truly free today particularly us women? Are we free when mothers prostitute themselves to feed their kids; are we free when our women are afraid of walking the streets for fear of assault; are we free when our young girls live in fear of rape; are we free when we are afraid when a member of the armed forces or police enters our house; are we free when mothers and wives are abused and chased away when they search for their missing menfolk? What does independence signify when there is so little protection for about a 100,000 house maids in foreign countries mainly in the Middle East; when 50,000 or so young women in the Free Trade Zone have no effective defence of their rights as workers?

All these women are victims of different types of conflict due to either the unjust structures in society itself or due to the ongoing political conflict raging all over the island.

What we need today is a National Commission on Women Victims of Conflict. This is a national problem because it affects the whole nation. How should we rehabilitate these women so that they can be “whole” again to give birth to a free Sri Lanka?

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## **Women in China – Perspectives for Asia**

*(This year, 1975 is international Women's Year, declared by the United Nations. Many countries have responded to this call and are involved in working out methods of raising the consciousness of people in areas where women are oppressed and discriminated against. The writer gives a note on an experience in CHINA)*

A third century poet, Fu-Hsien says of Chinese women,

“Most bitter thing it is to be born a woman,  
 pushed so low we cannot speak;  
 a child who is a boy commands all  
     from the time he is born,  
 but should the baby be just a daughter,  
 no notice is taken of her.”

This third century view is very much applicable not only to Chinese women but to women in almost in all Asian countries. Today however the position of woman has changed to a great degree in China. China now places no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in any field of activity. Chairman Mao teaches “Times have changed, today men and women are equal. Whatever men comrades can accomplish, women comrades can too.”

The first attempt to change the status of women came with the Taiping Rebellion of 1850 (an unsuccessful peasant effort to destroy Confucianism), where one of the demands was equality between the sexes by advocating against concubinage, bound feet and arranged marriages. Then with the establishment of the Christian mission schools for girls, women began to be more conscious of the subordinate role and in the early years of the 20th century, a small but significant women's press developed promoting sisterhood. The 1911 Republican revolution also promoted women's rights. Demands focussed on the right to marry freely, vote, be elected to office, own property and be educated. In the years that followed there were many publications dealing with women's issues – traditional forms of marriage and family were attacked, culminating with a series of articles written by Mao Tse-Tung on women.

What contributed most to the liberation of women in China was that this struggle was linked with nationalism – the fight for women's rights was seen as a cause subordinate to and defined by the interests of the nation. It was this belief that true equality could be achieved through a revolutionary re-organisation of society – that made the women's revolution meaningful to all and made it a reality with the inauguration of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Mao's greatest efforts were towards transforming-the patterns of thought and behaviour of the Chinese people towards a non-selfish communitarian mentality – in this the family system and the relations between the sexes was naturally given priority. After the revolution, bigamy, concubinage, child betrothal and the extraction of gifts – all part of the feudal marriage system – were prohibited. The marriage law of 1950 stipulated free choice of partner, full consent of both parties and husband and wife were seen as equal partners in the home, “duty bound to love, respect, assist and look after each other, to live in harmony, engage in productive work, to care for the children and to strive *jointly* for the welfare of the family and for the building of the new society.” Divorce was granted upon the mutual consent of husband and wife (Delia Davin – “Women in the liberated areas”).

The main obstacle in most countries to bringing about a change in the woman's role has been in the identifying of the woman's role with that of her family role. There is an unconscious fear that if women are liberated and given the freedom to love, to

choose, the family would be destroyed, as sexual freedom would result in promiscuity and in the increase of divorce. That this is a myth and unfounded is illustrated by the experience of China – a change in the marriage laws in no way increased the break up of homes. On the contrary, there is evidence, when reading the documents of China and speaking to those who have visited China, to show that the emancipation of women has brought in a more stable society, for now all, both men and women contribute jointly to the building of the nation. In fact visitors to China have said that it is more a puritanical society. Mao's attitude towards the freedom to love, to choose one's marriage partner and his detestation of the restraints placed on the individual by the social system is poignantly and well explained in his writing, "Miss Chao's suicide". (The suicide of a young girl who had been compelled by her parents to marry against her will.)

Land reform was another factor that brought about economic equality between men and women. Each got a share of the land, irrespective of sex or age and for the first time in the history of China's village, women had their own names on land title deeds. Women were told "Build Socialism" and "to gain emancipation you must do productive work just like men". In every major political movement – from the days of Land Reform through the Great Leap, the Cultural Revolution and the Anti-Lin, Anti-Confucius campaign, women have been urged to "revolutionise their ideology ... to give prominence to politics, take part in the class struggle and world events." (China notes, Hongkong, 1968.) Equal pay for equal work became a right. So with child care facilities, abortion, contraception and 56 days paid maternity leave. They were no longer bound by artificial society limitations. They were given more freedom not only within their chosen life patterns but also freedom in choosing alternative life patterns. Above all, they were now regarded as persons capable of contributing fruitfully to society and their contribution was recognised. Women were not regarded merely as sex objects and capable of only snake dancing.

Today in China women have entered into areas of work previously and often traditionally associated with men. The publication "New Women in New China" (Peking Foreign Language Press 1972) relates to women involved in bridge building, operating huge cranes, making electronic equipment, driving trains, welding steel in ship building establishments, being machine tool operators, engineers and holding responsible posts in medicine, education and government. By 1970, 90% of the women were working and at a wide variety of jobs. Women also began to take a direct part in managing state affairs, but it must be stated that women have not as yet achieved *equal* representation at the highest level of government, though they have acquired considerable power at the local level. According to the Hsinha News Agency Peking 1973 in the 10th Party Congress organs percentages of women in Politburo, Presidium, Central Committee and the total congress were 8%, 2.1%, 13% and 21% respectively. At local regional level they have better representation. The most senior women have been Madame Soong Ching Ling, a Vice-Chairman of the Chinese Peoples Republic and Madame Chiang Ching (Mao's wife) who played a dominant role in cultural affairs – 'her political status was enhanced by the publicity given to her struggle to revolutionise theatrical works.' (Far Eastern Asian Review 1974.)

Chinese themselves admit there remains much to be done and the Chinese women must continue their struggle to attain full emancipation. However there is much evidence to indicate that women in China, have made significant progress in achieving personhood and dignity. Unlike most other women's liberation movements, where the primary goal seems to be personal freedom, and has sometimes resulted in being a battle of sexes, in China the women consider their movement as part of the class struggle and therefore embodied in Marxism-Leninism-Mao ideology. Thus any remaining discrimination against women is the result of continuing feudal influence and thus women will always benefit economically, culturally and politically

from any advances made in the development of the socialist system which will ultimately eliminate the feudal organisation and the superstitious ridden social system and help consolidate a society based on sharing, love, justice and human dignity.

Hence anyone or any organisation seriously committed to working for a just and equalitarian society, must in its programme of action include the liberation of women, for women do constitute a fairly wide area or the oppressed section of humanity, otherwise achievement will be limited. The emancipation of women should be treated not in isolation but as part of the total liberation struggle of mankind and thus one necessarily linked with the economic liberation. Women's liberation movements need to reflect on two objectives. First, that their struggle be a part of the struggle towards the establishing of a just society based on the dignity of women, men and children, and therefore they should be as persons committed also to the general struggle for liberating all human beings from any type of oppression. Second, that in order to achieve their own liberation it is essential that they get the cooperation of all people. It is necessary that an identification of the areas of discrimination against women be made before a concerted attempt is made towards integrating women into society as equal human beings. Legislation though it does effect the "rights of women by eradicating sex discrimination by law, does not as practice has shown, change the nature and extent of women's subservient role in society. Legal changes to be woven into the social fabric of society are very difficult and takes time for the question of women's liberation is so linked with the culture of the society and charged with emotion (What will happen to our homes and our children!) The woman's position in society is part of the social inequalities, it is often the hidden and unarticulated assumptions that affect girls and women not only in employment but in whatsoever life pattern they choose. We are in a changing world and therefore reflection and action have to be also in the field of changing community attitudes (this includes women too) and uprooting prejudices and debunking of myths.

This experiment of China will, I hope serve as a useful directive to those interested and involved in the need to liberate humankind.

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Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo



## **Kusala Abhayawardhana**

### ***An Appreciation***

Those of us who are involved and committed to the rights of women have much to be grateful to the late Mrs Kusala Abhayawardhana. How many I wonder would know that Kusala was the person who in 1974 (then she was a Member of Parliament) got together a few of us women to form a Progressive Women's group to prepare and usher in 1975, International Year of the Woman. From then on progressive and radical thinking women began to be active and many organisations were formed thereafter.

Kusala had her own inimitable way of working for justice. She believed in taking quick action on matters, even going to the extent of dismissing, formal getting together of a committee, to get comment and approval. If you are serving with her on a committee where she is Secretary or President, you will get an early morning call – as early as 6.30 a.m. – and she will tell you or read out to you a statement prepared by her on an important current situation and stress the importance of the text, get your comment and approval and ring off.

Woe unto any other who takes the call from your household for Kusala will explain to that person the gravity of the incident and the need to take prompt action. She believes in conscientising everyone she comes in contact with on issues of justice particularly when they refer to women.

It is difficult to believe that Kusala is no more, since she was so very active right up to her death on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 1988. For the last few years she has been ailing with a terminal disease but this together with other complications, did not deter her from not only talking on justice but taking an active role, attending meetings – taking an active part in the meetings – even having day long meetings in her own home.

Many of us marvelled at her acceptance of her fatal illness and her strength and courage to continue to be involved in issues of justice in spite of her physical pain, right up to her death.

This is because Kusala was a woman not only of indomitable courage but a sincere human being committed to truth and justice for all and at all levels.

We shall always remember you, Kusala!

*Social Justice* 18 (September 1988) : 1-5  
Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo



## **What are Your Comments?**

A Japanese religious Sister who visited Sri Lanka recently told me of a story of how our young girls from rural background are taken by an agency to Japan to marry farmers.

Educated Japanese girls do not fancy marrying farmers, so the farmers look elsewhere for brides. Most of these are over 40 years old. One place they look for brides is Sri Lanka. The advertisement goes as "Sri Lankan women have a similar religious (chiefly Buddhist) and cultural (Asian) background and therefore could suit Japanese men." An additional advantage is that Sri Lankan women are considered to be of high fertility as compared with Japanese women. All this makes the young Sri Lankan girl an attractive bargain.

Not that we have anything against Sri Lankan women marrying Japanese men or for that matter any foreigner. This is their choice.

But their story is indeed a sad one. The Rev. Sister had visited a farming village in Japan called Aoki in the Nagano prefecture (about 100 kms. from Tokyo), where she met a group of 15 girls in a room waiting till the bridegroom farmer comes along and picks one of them. They knew no Japanese or English either except for one. Thirteen were Roman Catholics. All of them had 8 years of education looked shy and bewildered and did not know where in Japan they were. The only knowledge they had was that they had been brought to Japan to be married to a Japanese whom they believed would give them all the comforts.

### **Appalling Conditions**

The farmer pays Rs. 18,000 to the Agency concerned for a bride. How much of this goes to the bride's family, one does not know. These girls are between the ages of 16 and 20 years and they come on a 3 month tourist visa. If they are not chosen by any Japanese farmer within the 3 months, the Agency arranges a trainee visa and they are made to work in a factory on a very low wage. The whole transaction seems a commercial venture and the poor girls who are mere commodities, really have no say in the choosing of their husbands or their work ... they are just bought and sold.

### **Philippine Women**

Marriage to a Japanese farmer is a different arrangement where Philippine girls are concerned. It is a local government to local government arrangement. A local government in a village in Japan twins with a local government of a village in the Philippines. The farmers go to the Philippines and within a day or two chose their brides, marry them in the Philippines, and bring them back to Japan. This is unlike the Sri Lankans who are taken to Japan in the hope of marriage.

Which is better, I really cannot say. I only see the situation that Asian women are placed in because of their poverty, and the fact that, being a woman in an Asian society which emphasises that a woman needs to marry if she is to be of some value to society, she is subjected to indignities. When a woman is placed under the hammer is she going ... going or ... or has she already gone under.

## **Discrimination Against Women<sup>1</sup>**

I wish to reflect here on the participation and response of CSR in the general struggle for the oppressed sections of humanity, of which women constitute an important and high percentage.

Readers will appreciate that this subject is both vast and global and therefore this issue has necessarily narrowed the area covered. Most of the articles deal with Asian countries and the attitude of Christian churches.

Readers will find it useful if a few lines are written on the UNO's declaration of 1975 – as International Women's Year. The Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was adopted by the General Assembly on 7th November 1967. The Declaration sets forth the principles of rights for women on equal terms with men and calls for measures to guarantee their implementation.

The work on the Declaration began in 1963 when the General Assembly noted in a resolution that there still remained considerable discrimination against women, in fact, if not in law, and asked the Commission on the Status of Women to prepare a draft Declaration aimed at eliminating such discrimination. After a series of discussions and amendments the Commission adopted the revised text in 1967, to which the Assembly gave high priority at its twenty-second session.

The Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women represents a milestone in the work of the United Nations to promote equal rights for men and women in accordance with the provisions of the Charter and the principles set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights.

Now the UN has declared 1975 as International Women's Year with a view to spreading knowledge of the provisions of the Declaration and a full understanding of their meaning among men and women throughout the world.

... “the principle which regulates the existing relations between the two sexes ... is wrong in itself and (is) now the chief hindrance to human improvement and ... it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other.”

“The Subjection of Women” – John Stuart Mill, 1869

The principle of perfect equality between the sexes as advocated by J.S. Mill in 1869 has yet not seen the full light in –1974 in spite of the immense changes that have taken place over the last 100 years, in all fields of activity. In the traditional society, the woman's role was limited to the family, and though traditional society itself has undergone tremendous change, the attitudes towards the role of men and women have evolved very little. The woman is still regarded as the cornerstone of the household and as a sex symbol while the man's role is still: to master and conquer the world.

### **Mass Media**

Mass-media yet portrays woman exclusively as either a house-wife, mother or a sex-kitten. Advertisers use female bodies, draped and undraped to sell everything from shaving cream to air-line tickets. The media-created woman is (1) wife, mother and housekeeper for man (seldom is a woman portrayed as one who has work outside the home – she is either washing clothes or preparing a dish) (2) a sex-object used to sell products to men (smo-oo-th “old spice” after shave!) (3) a person trying to be more

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction for 1974 Logos (Vol. 13, No. 2) Issue

attractive for men (if you do not use this deodorant or hair conditioner no man will want you.) Mass-media portrays woman thus, because the attitude and opinion of society towards the female is, that a woman's entire role and interests are confined to recipes, hemlines, child-care and being attractive to man. This diehard attitude enunciated chiefly by a man-opinionated society is not easy to break. In spite of all the changes, women still continue to have primary responsibility for child rearing, so unless ways are devised to ease this responsibility it will be difficult for her to participate fully in all activities. Another factor to reckon with is that unlike other unequal groups – employer-employee; white-black; low caste, high caste etc., sex is the only instance in which representatives of the unequal groups live in more intimate association with each other than with members of their own group.

### **Legal changes alone not sufficient**

The early leaders of the feminist movement were more concerned with securing the vote for women and to change the law affecting marriage so that women will have equal rights to property and to their own children. This has been achieved in almost all countries, but does not seem to have effected a radical change in the attitudes of society towards women. A change in the legal code does affect the rights of women in the legislative, economic and educational sphere; by eradicating sex discrimination by law, has not, as practice as shown, changed the nature and extent of women's subservient role in society. Changes required to translate the law into the social fabric of a society are quite different! It is one thing to declare legally racial equality but quite a different matter to effect racial integration in society by persons. Legal changes may have reduced the inequality between men and women, yet though society expresses belief in sex equality, manifestations in personal life have being resisted. Therefore if a social movement is to be effective, it should not rest content with only bringing about legal changes but must make every effort to change the social institutions through which they are given expression and also work to effect change in the mentality of society. The need for this seems to have been realized, for today we find that women's liberation movements are more concerned with analysing the origins, nature and extent of women's subservient role in society with an emphasis on "psychology of oppression".

### **Social Field**

It is in the social field that the struggle for the liberty of woman is most difficult, for here, one comes up against custom, mores and values. The chief obstacle to bringing about a change in the woman's role is the identifying of the woman's role with that of her family role. There is the unconscious fear that if a woman is liberated, the family would be destroyed. A woman is thought of as a wife and especially a mother; the unmarried state is regarded as a temporary one since in everyone's eyes she is the future wife and mother. Hence any discussion or debate on the role of the woman is invariably centered round the role of the married woman, particularly the working mother. Society seems to feel that women's liberation will sooner or later lead to the break-up of the family.

To change *this* attitude of society is no doubt an uphill task, The question that should be asked here, is whether the husband, the father is not *as necessary*, not *as important* as the wife and the mother for the happiness and completion of married life. Further, placing the burden of the home, of the family on the woman alone is not only erroneous in a context where "a man and his wife are one" but also degrades the position of man into one of being a mere agent for producing children and food for the woman and the family. It is most surprising that man has not yet thought of uplifting his position in the eyes of the family and society by seeking to share responsibilities with his wife in raising the family and keeping the home-fires burning.

The next question that will be asked is – what is the position of the widow, the divorcee and the unmarried woman. These persons are considered as “marginal” and in any case constitute only about 10% of the total number in each cohort of women and therefore considered not of any consequence in a discussion on women! Particularly in the traditional society of Asia and Africa, unmarried daughters cause great anxiety to parents – to settle them is one of the major problems. In these societies there is no such thing as a “bachelor” girl – there is simply the girl who has been looked over and rejected by prospective husbands and prospective families-in-law. For woman, spinsterhood is intolerable, widowhood a tragedy and divorce, a disgrace – these are the marginalised categories of the female world. This attitude does not seem to have changed very much in the 20th century – still a woman needs to marry (keep her husband, and you cannot permit him to die or leave you!) to achieve ‘freedom’ and recognition.

### **Economic Field**

One of the chief aims in an expanding economy is the having of an active manpower policy i.e. the utilisation of the country’s human resources. Therefore it becomes necessary for measures to be introduced to make possible for certain ‘special’ groups that have difficulties in becoming members of the labour force, such as older persons, women and rural workers who need training, and marginal groups due to caste and creed. Of these ‘special’ groups women constitute a large majority where numbers are concerned – in Sri Lanka for example, the census of 1971 indicates that 48.7 % are females. Women workers also encounter many and special difficulties in obtaining or holding, a job, owing to the lack of laws and regulations which enable them to combine their jobs and family responsibilities and owing to customs and prejudices of society.

An argument often put forward in favour of the non-working woman is that women are physically weaker than men and therefore equality in employment particularly in factories is not possible. History however has shown that, though traditionally women were regarded as weaker, in times of crisis and need they have shown that they are capable of physical work. An outstanding example is found in Vietnam. In Vietnam today, transformed by war, women, are manning anti-aircraft batteries, driving ploughs and operating complex agricultural machines – worked hitherto, and believed to be the preserve of man. “It was through their massive, participation in the national struggle, first against colonialism and later against aggression that the Vietnamese women won a position of equality with men.” (“New position of women” Harish Chandrola) Many such instances can be cited to support the fact that women *are* capable of ‘heavy’ work.

In Asia, the rural woman has been man’s co-worker for ages – cottage industries; working in the field has long been a part of the rural woman’s life. Thus one finds it difficult to understand this prejudice today against the working woman. Perhaps the reason may be twofold – men do not want their women to have freedom and to develop their personalities in competition with them; working the whole day in an office or factory gives them this opportunity. Secondly, employers though they generally welcome the employment of women when they are single (chiefly because women are given lower wages) discourage further employment the moment they marry in order to evade the fringe benefits due to married women when they approach maternity. These I contend are the true reasons, though what is often put forward is that the “working woman” is detrimental to family life. There is no scientific basis to show that employment has given rise to increase in divorce, broken homes etc. – on the other hand it is certain that if a woman has a job, she not only contributes to the family income, but also need not find herself without resources if her home breaks up. The problem of women-workers should be seen not as a special problem but as one coming within the general context of

manpower and therefore the aim of any nation should be to provide equality of opportunity to all women who want to be employed. Particularly in Asia, a developing continent where population figures are very high, proper and complete manpower utilization is necessary to solve most of its economic ills. Further, poverty as seen in Asia, should revolutionize this concept of the “woman in the home” for today the need to contribute to the family income has become more important than the domestic seclusion of women.

Another aspect that should be taken into account is that in Asia more and more girls are going into higher education and the development of technology has also introduced new methods of production techniques which no longer call for physical strength. Further mortality rates show that women live longer and population control propaganda has slowed the birth rate – all these will, no doubt, have – influenced the traditional role of woman in society. Women are playing an increasingly important and a changing role in Asian development, evidenced by the three Prime Ministers, the women diplomatic personnel and by the thousands entering each year into the professions. On the other hand though it is true that women are equal at professional and political level, in the lower ranks or labour they are discriminated against. Factory, shop and domestic women helpers get lower wages than their male counterparts and in most cases as in Sri Lanka, the conditions of work, leave etc. are almost non-existent.

### **Religious Field**

The emancipation of women is necessary also in the religious field. Religious life cannot be divorced from the political, economic and social events and changes that take place in a society and therefore serious attempts should be made to eliminate sex-discrimination in religion. In Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism the woman is considered somewhat “inferior” and is refused equal participation in some religious rites. In the Christian church, there are many movements afloat – seeking equal participation in religious ritual. There seems to be some breakthrough in this field for a certain amount of consciousness has been awakened in society and thinking has been directed towards questions such as – what is the contribution of women in disseminating religious values? What are the causes of discrimination, the deep, psychological roots and religious values which maintain the concept of woman’s inferiority and the role of woman in the Church., The validity and the justness of women’s demands in this field are difficult to dispute for religions in their pristine form do maintain equality at all levels.

### **Women’s Struggle as part of the general struggle**

Finally, the emancipation of women should be treated not in isolation, but as part of the total liberation struggle of mankind and one linked with the economic revolution. I believe that it is only in a non-exploitative, egalitarian society, that a woman can develop as an integral human being equal to others. Thus unless we link the liberation struggle of women with the liberation struggle of all mankind, achievement will be limited. The time has come when all societies and governments will have to endeavour at all levels and in all domains to enhance the status of women in all fields of activity and to provide them with full human rights and with opportunities to enjoy these rights effectively as persons, citizens and workers, for the consciousness of people has been awakened in almost all countries for the need to liberate humankind at all levels.

## **On Feminine Concerns**

Today women's concerns have become a central issue, a concern for everyone. Women have realized that 'double standards' are applied whenever a critique is made of them and governments and society have recognized that the female component is an essential part of integral human development. Basically the bottom line of the women's struggle is the acceptance, by society, religions and governments, of the inequality of the sexes.

Two clauses from the UN Declaration on Discrimination against women (7th.Nov.1967) can be the basis for consideration by the NPC -

- (a) *In the Preamble it is stated "that despite the Charter of" the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights and other instruments of the United Nations and of the specialized agencies, and despite the progress made in the matter of equality of rights, there continues to exist considerable discrimination against women ... discrimination against women is incompatible with human dignity and with the welfare of the family and of society, prevents their participation, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries and is an obstacle to the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity".*

and Article 4 which says,

*"states should not invoke any customs, tradition or religious considerations to avoid the obligations in respect to its elimination".*

In the Christian context, theology is an elaboration of a faith concerning God, human life and the universe. Put into theological praxis it is to a very great extent determined and influenced by customs, attitude and power relations in society. Often societal attitudes, beliefs and practices particularly those in favour of the dominant and powerful are given recognition by theological practioners. Therefore one could conclude that the gender relations found in society, where the male is dominant and powerful will be reflected in Christian religious education and in Christian practice.

In the Church, it was an acceptable theology when God was presented as only a male and that the priesthood and the hierarchy had to be male and they were regarded as the interpreters and custodians of the truth, preservers and the presenters of the truth. Also the images of women promoted in religious education is in contrast to the teachings of Jesus and His own attitude as manifested in the gospels toward and treatment of the women of His times.

Society revolves round power/prestige/knowledge and wealth and so it is in the institutionalized Church, particularly the Catholic Church (C.C.) The C.C. with the Pope at its head and with its wealth is as powerful as any Transnational Corporation. The laity are regarded as the "ordinary" Church members as opposed to the experts, the ordained theologians and in this hierarchical structure the Bishops are the custodians of theological thought by their belief that they have direct communication with the Holy Spirit. The arrogance of possessing theological knowledge is far worse than the arrogance of a powerful state because religious power is stamped with being "sacred", and more acceptable, through fear by the people.

Let us examine the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church. The Pope is at the pinnacle, then Bishops, Priests, Religious Brothers, (all celibate males) Laymen, Religious Sisters and last the Lay women. In such a hierarchical stratified society, it is

inevitable that there are different degrees of power and control, over the others depending at what level of the system you belong to. Male domination in the Church is not just some individual man, Pope, priest or male religious exercising power and authority. It is a systematic set of structures within the C.C. where women are kept subordinate, silent and discriminated against.

The relevant question here to be asked is, what are the values, the spirituality the Catholic Church promotes? For me 'spirituality' is the maintaining and fostering of right and just relationships with ourselves, other human beings, community, society, nature, the earth and the cosmos. Where this right and just relationships are maintained, there is less opportunity for oppressive and dominating elements to exist. We see that various historical factors have corrupted this harmonious way of life through various forms of domination, subordination, slavery, invasion, conflicts which, when analyzed, are manifestations of patriarchy enslaving, in particular, women and nature.

Another question we should ask is, whether the Church is committed to creating a society based on just, right and harmonious relationship of humans and ecological wholeness?

To reflect on this with reference to women – it is necessary to refer to some theological issues, particularly the images of God and christological teachings that are detrimental to women. The personification of God as male and especially as the “father up in heaven” reinforces the patriarchal system of father-rule. A male God is presented, God as a warrior who produces floods and fires and asks that Abraham sacrifices his son – in a way, this image separates God from humanity.

In Christianity, patriarchy has extended to include the after-life. The Old Testament God, jealous, just and mighty who was not to be visualized or portrayed as a corporeal being nevertheless emerged as a magnified and deified father figure. “Our Father who art in Heaven”. Worse is the image of God who demanded the sacrifice of his only son to atone for our sins is perhaps one of the most detrimental to women. It has fostered a “victim attitude” among women and glorifies the acceptance of their own victimization – “Women are born to suffer”. In Christology too Jesus is presented as a victim, suffering and a product of Virgin birth – this in way disparages marriage – and yet the Church has elevated marriage to a sacrament.

Although women were credited with a soul equal to men in the eyes of God, made in his image, women were regarded as temptresses, responsible for the fall of Adam and as 2nd class human beings, for, as St. Paul wrote, “a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image of the glory of God, but woman is the glory of man” (1 Cor. 11: 7). Such similar references are adhered to more in theological teachings rather than the incidents where Jesus placed women to be equal and on par with men. It is extremely surprising that the C.C. which has such a devotion to the Blessed Mother should treat women as being inferior for the performing of spiritual functions. The Church allows Mary to be revered (Mariology) but resists all efforts to present her as a mature liberated human being.

There is a connection between these interpretations and the traditional religious education that is taught in our schools, in the Sunday sermons and in the general attitude of the Catholic Church towards women. An accepted and taught image is that women are submissive, docile, patient, long suffering, self sacrificing. These are characteristics of a victim consciousness and our religious education on the model of a woman is a conditioning of women to become victims of violence, for the glory of God and to gain heaven in the after-life.

Basically the reason why the Catholic Church upholds these views, I believe can be found in the attitude the church has (and of course society too) towards sexuality.

How does the Catholic Church view sexuality and what is its perception of sexuality? The Church is a patriarchal institution and the bottom line in patriarchal societies is that women are perceived as purveyors of sexual satisfaction and as inferior beings. It is good to review what is being taught in the seminaries, to the prospective priests, regarding the female gender. The emphasis is on controlling of emotions and not on the handling and coping with emotions. So the “Eve” aspect is the perception that is given – woman is a seducer, a temptress and thus an unnatural approach to gender relations is created. A religion that emphasizes chastity and virginity as being pure, good and of a higher order, will naturally teach its torch bearers that anyone capable of violating his state, threatening their celibacy is bad and dangerous.

The question of women is very much tied up with the position of the laity in the Church. The laity are not only the largest of the Church’s constituency but perhaps also the most important. Ordinarily the term laity is used to denote ‘non-experts’ or/and ‘non-clergy’, implying that laity are those who have less information as a result of less formal training and discipline. But the word ‘laity’ derives from the term ‘Laos’ meaning the whole people of God. As such the term ‘laity’ must necessarily include clergy and non-clergy. Neither of their respective roles is more or less central to the process of achieving a holistic civilization. “Both groups must work together – learning from and with each other as we seek to discern God’s will and as we act to restore God’s creation to its original design” (Konrad Raiser, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches)

Another point is that we need to look at the Western countries. Not only churches are been shut down but very few are joining the seminaries and laity will soon be given more functions; even women will be called – some sort of new Ministry will soon be inaugurated. It is wise that the NPC addresses its mind to this emerging phenomenon – the possibility of a Churchless Church and a priest-less seminary.

### **The Temporal World**

From the time of Independence, (1948) the pattern, of development that Sri Lanka has adopted is one of capitalistic development. Capitalism in all areas creates unequal relations, emphasizes the selfishness of the individual and profit is the motive and not the well being of persons. It is true certain measures taken have been progressive for women – more avenues of employment, in some cases more time and space for women; but due to this very capitalist expansion a new pattern in the subordination of women bearing on violence has emerged.

The current development models and theories based on modernization, human capital, stabilization, need for national security, structural adjustment programs enunciated by international financial institutes (WB, GATT, IMF) and the recently concluded Uruguay Round at Morocco, designed mistakenly to achieve economic growth and to a great extent introduced changes affecting the lives’ of the people, particularly the poor and this has undoubtedly impinged on the life of the woman, who has today become the most wanted and exploited economic commodity in development. This is mostly apparent in the Free Trade Zones, in Tourism and the migration of women workers.

### **Free Trade Zone**

FTZs draw a large number of women into the work force of the country (86.3% of the total labour are women. Of this 70.8% are in the garment industries). But the studies and the surveys and the interviews indicate that the wages, though higher than found outside the FTZ, are low compared to the profits made by the companies and are inadequate when one sees the long hours of work they have to put in with their

'compulsory' overtime and conditions of work. Most of the jobs are monotonous and many women end up with bad eyesight and poor general health due to the precision of work that the jobs entail. Some of the violent conditions under which these 'cheap hands' work are inadequate housing, sometimes 7 or 8 girls to a 8' by 8' feet room in shifts-paying a high rent, harassment by boarding masters and the other males in the house, resulting in high rate of abortion and prostitution to find the means of subsidising their income.

In addition, the women are not permitted to join any recognized trade unions and there are instances when the women workers have struck work, they have been fired upon by police and thugs have attacked them. In recent months there were strikes at the garment factories – Star Garments; and at the strike at Atlas factory, a number of women while on a peaceful demonstration were fired upon by the police.

### **Tourism**

Here the majority of women have entered the "service" sector of the tourist industry. You find many women involved in the travel trade as tour guides, as room maids in the hotels, working at reception desks and there is the inevitable increase in prostitution and the possibility' of AIDS. Women entrepreneurs as guest house owners or senior managerial executives of big hotels are few, chiefly, because of the traditional social constraints imposed on women. They often lack the necessary capital (credit is often unavailable to them) and confidence to make decisions and take responsibility for investing in a venture in comparison to men for whom traditionally such access to enterprises is less difficult. Most that they do is rent a room in their home to a tourist and this most often done only by middle and upper class women. The poorer women run the risk of ruining their reputation by letting out a mat or room since they are unable to obtain the 'responsibility' image by registering with the Tourist Board (they are not up to standard) and necessarily therefore cater to the poorer tourist. Because of the social constraints the avenues of making money to women are batik, handicraft selling, the 'service sector' of the industry and of course resorting to prostitution.

### **Migration of Labour**

Unable to find employment to meet the high cost of living due to inflation, many have been forced to leave the shores of Sri Lanka to find employment elsewhere. A large majority of those who obtain employment in the Middle East, Italy and Singapore are females and are chiefly in the capacity of housemaids. The recruits are within the age group of 18 to 45 and come from a working class or lower middle class background. While it is true that these women earn a very high income relatively – about Rs.2,500/- per month as a housemaid and that they do send money to their homes, the effect in the long run on their homes, on their children and families have been found to be wanting. Reports appearing in the local press from time to time relate harrowing stories about "long hours of work, lack of leave facilities, inadequate pay, harassment by the members of the household, improper advances by male employers, even torture, cases of attempted suicide and death in mysterious circumstances".

### **Suggested Reforms**

What we hope and look forward to is a positive statement of policy and action by the NPC regarding the restoration of the dignity of women in the Catholic Church.

What basically we women call for, is a recognition of human dignity in relationships and this, in no way could be achieved in an hierarchal organisation where position, power and wealth play an important role.

Moreover, the Church being patriarchal it will be necessary to dismantle clericalism to construct a Church of equality in gender. A correct understanding of ministry is incompatible with clericalism which separates the ministry from mutual interaction with the community and promotes a hierarchically structured institution with the clergy being the favored caste.

Therefore for a valid ministry truly relevant to Jesus Christ and His teachings, revolutionary changes must be made in the Church's education system. Religious teaching institutions, the seminaries, minor seminaries, religious novitiates and the teaching in catechetical institutes should include subjects such as social analysis, social responsibility, human rights and feminist theology.

In addition, there should be a restructuring of the syllabuses and teaching methods of the different branches of theology from the perspective of society and the different religions.

### **In respect of women we suggest the following -**

**Dogmatic and Fundamental theology** should see how the doctrine of God-Father has reinforced patriarchal values.

**Ecclesiology**, to rethink how clericalism and the hierarchical structures of the Church concentrate power in the hands of men which leads to various forms of control and subordination of women bordering on acts of violence against women.

**Moral theology** to consider all acts of violence against women and children as terrible sins. Re-thinking of the 5th, 6th, and 9th commandments from a women's perspective.

**Sacramental theology**, to review its teaching on Christian marriage – many aspects discriminate women, making them objects and not subjects within the family. Insistence of obedience and subservience to the husband in all things should be done away with; recognize the possibility of rape in marriage – insisting that it is 'spiritual' that women forgive endlessly and unconditionally to make peace in the home and in relationships.

**Missiology** should not only mention the glorious achievements of the missionaries but also include a critique of the violence, physical and sexual to indigenous women in the colonies by the conquering armies and even by missionary personnel.

Regarding **Pastoral theology**, there are many cases of harmful pastoral approaches to violence against women. One of the chief drawbacks is the non-recognition and the imperviousness to many acts of violence that takes place in homes, in work places and religious institutions against women. Religious counsellors (this includes priests and nuns) are so concerned about the preservation of the marriage, the reputation of the aggressor (the man) and the observing of social norms and customs in relationships that they hardly consider the tremendous pain, suffering, trauma and danger to the victim (the women). So Pastoral theology should address boldly and openly issues of sexuality, abortion, a realistic approach to birth control, family planning, drugs, AIDS, roots of poverty, violation of human rights within the context of today's technology and social change. The social, the personal and psychological implications in relationships should be an intrinsic part of pastoral theology.

A comment must be made also on 'LANGUAGE' in the Church's teachings and documents. A non-discriminative, a non-sexist use of language is called for. Words both express and reinforce our attitudes and action. But it is unlikely that attitudes and actions will be altered significantly without an accompanying change of word patterns, –

'men', 'brethren' 'sons' had their day as generic terms. These same words are used for males alone; so, they are ambiguous.

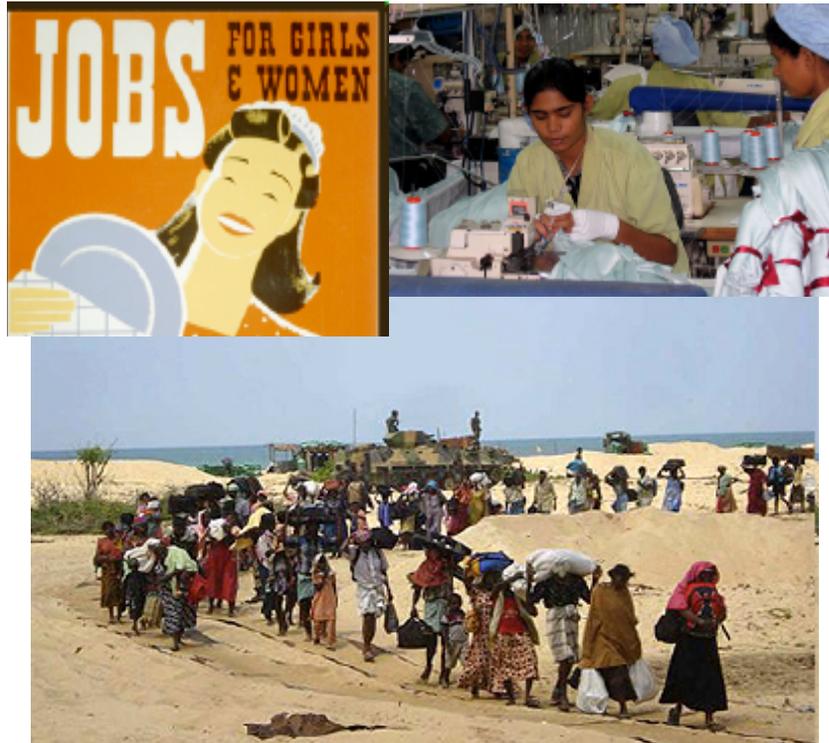
Using them to refer to people in general affirms that maleness is more representative of humanity and because femaleness is inferior, it need not be mentioned. Objection to using clear or specific language often indicate a person's psychological need to think male. This is sexism. Even discourses on Human Rights often means 'men's rights' and therefore in any struggle women become invisible and alienated because of their gender.

In conclusion we wish to suggest if we are to take the NPC theme seriously 'For a Sharing and Renewed Church' that -

- (a) In order that a women's perspective be observed, a definite quota be laid aside for women representation on all commissions, committees, even deaneries, presbyteries and all other decision making bodies of the Church.
- (c) That the NPC comes out with a positive statement of policy and action on the restoration of the dignity of women in the Catholic Church.

25th March 1994

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## **Feminist Theologian, Prof. Lieve Troch & the Prestigious ARTEMIS Award**

### **Who is Professor Troch?**

A regular subscriber of *Social Justice* and a friend of CSR (who worked on common projects with CSR in Sri Lanka), Prof. Lieve Troch of the University of Nymegem and Heerlen, received the prestigious Award given by the Artemis Centre, Middelburg, Holland.

The Artemis Centre is one of a group of a few Centres in Holland which call themselves 'Women's Therapeutic Centre'. Lieve received this award for her work as a theologian in civil society specially related to women. Lieve through courses and talks has provided the spiritual basis that is necessary to those women needing therapeutic counselling.

I was privileged to be present at this Award Ceremony (20th. June 1995) – simple with a touch of 'true' feminist qualities – no show, no marathon speeches with the whole ceremony at 'ground level'!

We of the Centre are happy by the recognition given by women to a woman who courageously but painfully is on a journey in the upstream of ecclesiastical assault on a woman's dignity. In this connection Lieve faces an inquiry initiated by the Cardinal (Bishop of Utrecht) for being a qualified feminist theologian who does not accept the official line that women with a feminist perspective are not theologians.

Congratulations Lieve and carry on this courageous struggle!

The work of the Artemis Centre is covered in this issue of *Social Justice* elsewhere. It is an interesting project, similar somewhat to Sri Lanka's 'Women in Need' (WIN).

### **What is the ARTEMIS Centre?**

The Artemis Centre is a women's own therapeutic Centre – an inter-disciplinary working Centre. From a feminist perspective it is seen that many of the depressions and illnesses that women have, has much to do with society. Being a patriarchal society certain roles and expectations are attributed to women and men. Mental illness is also culture-bound as seen in society's attitude towards the widow, the barren woman, the battered, the single woman, the lesbian, those raped and those who abort outside marriage. So looking at depression and illnesses of men, those of women will naturally be different.

At the Artemis Centre, clients who call upon the Centre are grouped around specific interests and self-help, inter-supportive exercises around these interests take place. An example – battered women meet together to exchange feelings, attitudes and to analyze why they are battered. This helps to understand that being battered is not only a personal problem within their own relationship but is a structural situation namely that both men and women take it for granted that women must conform to a particular type, and if they do not, they could be battered.

Over-60s meet to discover the level of wisdom they have reached in order to move on. Here questions of loneliness, generation differences, companionship are some of the subjects looked into.

There is also a group called the 'Spiritual Group' to help discern the leading threats to women in society and how to deal with them holistically in an active way.

Similar such groups are formed around rape, drugs etc. This type of group therapy avoids one-to-one relationship with a therapist or psychiatrist, though a therapist or psychiatrist is always present in the group. Always available at the Centre are therapists, psychiatrists and educationists who support the groups in their self-help analysis. Personal one-to-one therapy is also provided, if needed.

The Centre thus does not adopt a clinical approach in looking at tensions and situations but promotes a spiritual healing and helps to develop one's own capacity – a therapeutic process, and community-based on mutual relationships and not relationships of dependence. The Centre is for women and run by women for they believe that the system of patriarchy is based on structural subordination and therefore can be detrimental to the therapeutic healing of women. Having branches all over Holland, it has shown a higher rate of healing than the normal one-to-one psychiatric healing.

The Centre also conducts courses on economic, social and political analysis of society, specially directed to women on welfare, homeless, drug-addiction etc. Feminist theologians are engaged to train therapists and educationalists on how religion and religious values can have a positive or negative influence on women's attitudes and behavior. In the same way, the Centre engages the skills of feminist social scientists.

### **... And Who is ARTEMIS?**

Artemis is a Greek Goddess, also called the virgin of the silver bow/arch. As Goddess of hunting she represents the archetype virgin and is patron of roads and harbours.

Her ideal was to be an eternal virgin. The archetype of virginity is not a biological virginity, but has to do with integrity. When a person loses her integrity, when she is no longer recognizable in what she is doing, when she is no longer faithful to her own deep self and her deepest commitment, only then she loses her virginity. The Goddess Artemis is the symbol of every woman who dares to live out from her own truth, untouched, straightforward and with a great freedom of spirit. She has a radiance due to enthusiasm and desire for life. She embraces life.

Living creatively in the woods, Artemis knows how to live in the dark and to see clearly because the light of the moon accompanies her with her silver bow/arch. She embraces life, does not allow anybody to take her away from this vitality of life. With respect for mutual relationships, Artemis women encourage each other to rely upon their own capacities.

Artemis has to do with inspiration, vision and goal-orientedness – an interesting concept valuable to women.

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## **What Then is Feminist Theology?**

In spite of Women's Liberation Movement being several decades old, people yet keep asking what is feminism and what is this need for a women's liberation movement. A good starting point would be to see why women are being continually considered as second class citizens, in spite of statistics and research indicating that women are in no way inferior to men. The feminist role is arbitrarily based on custom and tradition rather than on differences between men and women in terms of physical or mental capacities. We also see that though on the whole women are slighter in build and have lesser strength it has not prevented them from being carriers of burden in agricultural work or from doing other strenuous and protracted physical labour.

In Sri Lanka the physical quality of life (PQLI) of women is high, literacy 83%, life expectancy 67 years and a maternal mortality of 1.2 per thousand births which is comparatively good for a 3<sup>rd</sup> World Country, but yet in society, in religious institutes, at work, in the family, women have a subordinate position. Society expects a woman to be virtuous, servile, self-sacrificing, a chaste young girl, grow up and be an obedient wife and a good mother. Her position and status in life is in reference to men, she is either the daughter or the wife of some male or the mother of some child. She never appears to have an identity of her own.

This subordinate position of the woman is also reflected in religion. In spite of what the leaders of the great religions have said, in practice all the religions place the woman low in the religious hierarchy of persons. Let me take the Catholic Church. In the hierarchical structure the Pope is at the pinnacle and right at the bottom is the lay woman. This is in direct opposition to the teachings of Jesus Christ who in his sex or for that matter on any arbitrary division recognizes only the man made division into the privileged and underprivileged based on who is the oppressor and who are the oppressed.

Theologians, including male theologians, have cited many instances from Jesus' life, for example, Mary and Martha's story, his attitude to Mary Magdalene, announcing of the resurrection etc., to show that Jesus does not discriminate on gender. I think these incidents indicate much more than mere discriminating on gender. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus has shown a definite partiality towards the marginalized in society – the poor, the workers, the disabled, the sick, those considered to be of low morals and women. This partiality shown by Jesus is what liberates the oppressed for it is a recognition that they, the oppressed in society, can participate in equality and with dignity as full human beings. This stance taken by Jesus could also help in the redemption of the oppressor too, for he too is part of divinity, however distorted his life style and perspectives would be. Thus the gospels are a powerful message because of the acceptance of the truth which runs throughout, that every human being made in the image of God is divine and it is this divinity that is common, binding and unites in humanity.

The divisions and discriminations we see around us are based not on any rational thinking but are the result of social conventions, "man" made interpretations that serve the function of underlining and promoting relationships and divisions resulting in sexism, racism and classism, rather than on their common humanity. Similarly it is so in Christian Theology to quote Tissa Balasuriya (Planetary Theology):

"There is a generally accepted opinion that the sources of Christian theology are revelation and tradition. Revelation is thought to have ended with the written Scriptures. Tradition is taken to be the theology that has prevailed in the churches. The problem with this is that the Scriptures were written by males in

male-dominated societies, and the same is true of traditional theology.” Can these be adequate sources for a theology of men and women?” (Underlining is mine)  
(pp. 222-223)

Although women were credited with a soul equal to men in the eyes of God, made in His image, women were regarded as temptresses, responsible for the fall of Adam and as 2<sup>nd</sup> class human beings for as St. Paul wrote “a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image of glory of God, but woman is the glory of man” (1 Cor 11:7). These type of references are adhered to more by the Christian institutions rather than the incidents where Jesus Christ placed women to be equal and in par with men. It is extremely surprising that the Catholic Church which has such a devotion to the blessed Mother should treat women as being inferior for the performing of spiritual functions; and capable only of making tea and coffee and typing and posting of letters.

Further Christian theology interpreted by males has manifested and maintained in praxis, differences and divisions at all levels. In this historical process woman has been isolated and to a woman, Christianity has become a means of enslaving rather than redemptive. As Rosemary Reuther, a well known feminist theologian says, “A Christology that identified the maleness of the historical Jesus with the maleness of the divine Logos excludes woman as representative of Christ and makes her a second-class citizen in both creation and redemption.” Deprived of her part in the creation and redemption process woman is being deprived of her full humanity. Theologically therefore if one is deprived of one’s humanity then one does not reflect the divine. It is this marginalization of woman’s humanity that the Feminist theologian challenges.

The rationale then for Feminist theology is found in the Christian experience of the need for the Truth of humanity. No longer can women be “used” (cheap labour) and “misused” (sexual abuse) regarded as “inferior” (weaker sex) either in society or in religions institutions.

Credibility to Christ’s mission and message lies not in divisions and distinction but in unity, in distinctiveness which helps both women and men to advance to full humanity. It is this, that Feminist Theology is concerned with, the struggle for equality in humanity in order that both women and men could reach full humanity. The theology that women enunciate is not abstract theories but is a theology that springs from experience, from gut level of oppression of being from the marginalized section of society and therefore is more a theology of the people, having its own roots and its own aspirations and message for all humanity.

Feminism cuts across all barriers, all divisions for women are subject to double marginalization at every level for e.g. if of a lower class, she suffers both because of her class and because she is a woman; if a black, she is oppressed both because she is black and also a woman. In socialist societies, economically and in law women are equal, but at the social and cultural level, women are treated very much the same as in other societies, and in the capitalist societies, women are subject to many indignities etc) and are considered low in status because of gender. Thus at any level and in all societies since they are patriarchal, women are relegated to a lower status.

Finally I would say that the struggle of woman within the secular society and within the religious institutions will be a long and strenuous one but with Faith and courage together with other women struggling all over the world and with the men who work for a more human society, we (both women & men) can help build a New Faith and a New Heaven, “where there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male or female, for ye are all in ONE in Christ Jesus”. (Gal. 4:28)

## A Spirituality of Sexuality

Sex, sexuality and reproduction are all closely interwoven into the fabric of living things both animal and plant. All relate to the propagation of the race and the survival of the species. In the animal world there are two sexes, the female and the male.

Both man and woman are made in the same image and in the image of God, so says the Bible. In the **same** image in the sense of the form e.g. head, legs, etc. and **in** the image of God means having the attributes of a God thus both female and male – the divine spark in them. Yes in the same form except a difference in sexuality i.e. there are physical, biological differences between the two sexes and this makes a significant difference. So the female and the male are equal in divinity and in humanity i.e. in dignity, freedom, intelligence, will, but different in sexuality – bi-polarity manifests certain traits and behaviour. Are these manifestations arising out of this biological difference purely psychological, conditioned and influenced by culture, attitudes and mentalities of societies or are some, at least intrinsic to being a woman, a man? This is an important question for us in order to understand not only sexuality but the whole question of feminity. What makes us women different from men, is it only that our reproductive systems are different?

Let me elaborate with some examples – let me take first what most of us know as “double standards” i.e. applying of different judgments on the same type of behaviour. In most societies, extra marital relations are expected of husbands not of wives. Wives do not approve of this, yet they believe this is to be a **masculine propensity**. Then often parents want their daughter to be popular which is sexually attractive, but abstain from sexual activity – because of pregnancy, social diseases, morality and most important social disgrace. And if you are a Christian it is a very grievous sin. Sons on the other hand are told “don’t do it, but we accept that you will” and most often are forgiven and accepted by the family and even by society.

In these examples you can see a definite discrimination – different censure exercised on the same act depending on the sex you belong to. I would say – “Does this not nurture a conditioning by society of expected norms of behaviour – a society i.e. patriarchal and therefore more moralistic with women’s behaviour, for the purpose of giving women a subordinate position. Let me take the words “masculine propensity”. Can you honestly say that women have less inclination for sex. Is it a myth that men need more sex, women less, etc. – medical evidence and research has shown that inclination is the same – the degree differs not on your sex but on the type of individual you are.

In fact the prestigious “Encyclopedia Britannica” basing itself on research done, says the majority of women enjoy sex more than men and do so even later in life thus exploding a belief that women fade out after 50, while men are eternally virile. The next example is based on the theory that women must get married to be fulfilled and that sexual relationship is tabooed for unmarried women. The first point that a woman must marry – so somehow be attractive, be provocative but under no circumstances should you give into your feelings – “excite but don’t get excited yourself”. These reasons are societal and chiefly advocated because of the fear of pregnancy and social disgrace. In this we must go into the whole question of what is “social disgrace” and why is it different for men. Also the question of pregnancy of the unmarried mother and the attitude of society, particularly the family towards a woman who is considered “fallen” needs discussion. You will see that in many instances it is the reaction of parents and society that determines a person’s interpretation of an event. What could have been a trivial and soon forgotten act becomes traumatic. Unfortunately parents and society refuse to recognize that single women (and this applies to children too) have sexual

responses and capabilities. Such responses are so suppressed and considered wrong that in most societies particularly the Asian, the unmarried females become alienated and are then considered to be frustrated and even 'queer'.

Let me take the qualities that are attributed to a woman, to a man. Woman is considered to be kind, gentle, mild and man more prone to fight physically and take more easily the gun and the knife when angry while woman take more easily to shouting and crying when angry. Then a woman feels more for a child. This is often challenged even by feminists that men too love children and are capable of looking after children – changing nappies, etc. I would say yes but ... from my own reactions and what I have observed and heard from women friends. I would say that the majority of women as a rule do feel more responsible for children than men. There may be many who disagree with me but we must look into this question closely. See, the mother hen's concern for the chicks, but the cock does not bother – then again the cow and the calf. Is it reason, the rational element that has changed this element in the human race. Then again I have observed – I have seen women responding more to a cry of a child than a man. Why? I also ask this question, should women curtail this feeling – should we kill this response in us. What is wrong in publicly showing your love to a child – in being demonstrative of one's feeling – I do not say that men do not respond in the same manner – I only say that on the whole women behave like this than men.

Women also take a definite stand when it concerns violence, and the killing of human beings. They are more moved to sorrow than men. And you get movements such as "Women for Peace" and "Mothers' Front" in times of strife. One does not hear of "Men for Peace" or "Father's Front" – though it is known that sometimes men even divorce their wives for not bearing sons.

It is not merely out of sorrow that women face a violent situation. It is out of strength and courage – strength in the knowledge that they can save life and courage for they are not daunted by fear when it comes to saving lives or standing up for what they believe. They have tremendous moral strength. To quote Mahatma Gandhi:

"To call women the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then indeed is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior."

I also say that there is no harm if a man shows these same tendencies – but if he does society often labels him a "sissy" "soft", etc. My contention is that if a behaviour gives you fulfillment, why then is it considered contrary to one's nature. We must try to understand how and why the biological differences affect the behaviour role.

Let us take a common occurrence in life – the attitude of a woman towards the person she loves. You will find that she desires to please him, like doing personal things for him like making a dish, etc. and showing signs of jealousy if he shows partiality for another. Is this because she has been conditioned to believe that this is what is expected of her or is it that by nature a woman is more demonstrative in her relations and more possessive. I think it is important to understand this type of woman's motivation in relationships in order to understand Feminism and also liberation. I say this because if a woman displays these tendencies she is often considered an unliberated woman. We must not identify personal prejudiced views with Women's liberation – if we do so we discredit Feminism and liberation – we must be above such prejudices and not make judgments or wrong assumptions and we must be more discerning in our understanding of what is pure Feminism. We must not allow our personal views and prejudices to colour our attitudes and responses and thereby jeopardize the cause of women. The need to understand the ideology "What is Feminism" is thus important and is the task of all those who claim that they are fighting for the liberation of women.

The understanding of sexuality is very necessary since it seems to underlie all discussions relating to women – violence, sexual exploitation and harassment at home and at work-places, prostitution, rape in the family and outside. It is also sexuality that makes possible subordination and the myth of weakness of women. This should also be viewed in the context of Capitalism where woman is most exploited, made use of her qualities of femininity being exploited for gain and profit. This does not necessarily mean that Socialism has taken away the exploitation of women. Socialism as practiced has minimized the visible condition of inequality – but the psychological discrimination continues.

### **A Christian Perspective**

Sexuality is a gift from God. God created man and woman and pronounced that they “go forth and multiply”. This sexuality is good in itself and ennobling. There is a universal human need for intimacy in wanting to participate in the act of God’s creation. Intimacy between a woman and a man involves a loving sharing of one’s being with another and openness to similar sharing by the other in the act of creation.

Every human being is capable of sharing in the process of birth, but to be involved in the act of creation which is life-giving in the highest possible measure, the bringing into being of a new human life, the relational element in the intimacy must be based on mutual love, respect and equality. The mingling of the bodies is not a matter of giving and receiving physically, but a marvelous creative force in which a woman and a man wish to belong to each other wholly. Here lies the reason for the Church to raise marriage to a sacrament.

The Church’s moral teaching on sexuality is valid and acceptable. What is needed is to give a positive perspective instead of emphasizing only its negative aspect as is often done. Unfortunately the Church’s emphasis has been on the prohibitions, pre and extra marital relations, divorce, adultery and contraception.

Human love, the need to give and receive are positive values not merely individualistic, but communitarian and embraces the whole human race. The giving of oneself to another fully is not a matter of giving and receiving physically and then going away as with lower animals but rather the giving of oneself to another fully in a context of love in a desire to participate in God’s act of creation and salvation which is liberation.

Enriching sexuality and intimacy are not confined only to a relationship between husband and wife. We must also take into account the interpersonal relationship of others including the single, the lesbian, homosexual and the celibate. Also intimacy may not be an enriching experience within marriage because the relationship may be frustrating and disappointing. Legality does not necessarily entail enrichment and fulfillment. Though it helps to take away the fear of pregnancy and social disgrace.

The Scripture is very strong on homosexual practices (Gen. 19; Rom. 1) and on adultery and chastity and the presenting of the woman as temptress. The Church’s teaching on celibacy and on pre and extra marital relations are also very strong, many arguments are put forward to say that the celibate state is not a state without love and that the religious chooses to love many and the need for sublimation in order to love and serve God. Divorce is not encouraged, the Catholic Church prohibits it and divorcees are not permitted to re-marry.

Each of these areas need special coverage and will no doubt be taken up in the course of the programme. I only wish to say that socio-sexual behaviour not only plays a vital role but that an understanding of sexuality is necessary for the understanding of human life and living. It must also be stated that moral judgment must not be exercised

regarding persons with reference to so-called deviant behaviour or practices for what may be moral in one era of society may not be so in another.

An important question arises on this issue. Is the relationship spiritual “per se” if based on giving and receiving or does it become spiritual only within accepted norms and practices. In other words spirituality in intimacy is possible only in marriage and if not it is the work of the devil. This is not only a difficult question but an involved one and needs more elaboration, discussion and understanding of family law and the sociological roots of human behaviour. Some of these questions will be taken up later in the programme when we take up family and problem areas.

It is sufficient then here, to say that history has shown that relationships differ from society to society and what is considered abnormal and evil in one may not be so in another. In the Old Testament there is no evidence of inequality in the relationships, even incest appears to be sometimes accepted. It was inevitable for the children of Adam and Eve. What is important has been fulfillment in relationships. It is mainly in the New Testament that marriage takes so legal a form and condemnation of relationships from the point of view of sexuality is mentioned.

What is needed is, I think an integral wholistic understanding of human bi-sexuality for genuine fulfillment of each one. There must not be suppression, rejection or sublimation, but an affirmation and a fulfillment. But unfortunately society has applied different standards, resulting in inequalities and unjust relationships in the human race most of which are particularly disparaging to women.

To have a proper perspective of sexuality it is necessary also to understand society. This society is patriarchal – it is a mono-sexist view of person, life and the world for that matter – “His story” – it is a patriarchal, a masculine world. This is also so in the Church. The Church is a patriarchal society, where the woman takes a very low position. To change this is not to have another mono-sexist view of that of a woman, but rather the fulfillment of bi-sexuality which is being oneself as a sexual human i.e. of woman being human as a woman and a man being human as a man. Each one being oneself and not by being another i.e. a woman cannot be fulfilled by being a man. Also being oneself cannot be human if in being oneself one diminishes the humanity of the other. The sexes must be complement to each other without being subordinate one to the other.

This brings us to Just Relationships. In any relationship, in this case between a woman and a man, if an event, a situation takes place that makes one or the other humiliated, feel less a human being, that relationship is a dehumanizing one and therefore goes against human nature and is most un-Christian. There should not be any superiority of one over the other not adequacy of one without the other. This is clearly seen in God’s creation of woman. “Here at last is bone that comes from mine, flesh that comes from mine ... so that the 2 become one flesh” (Gen. 2:23-25) indicating the oneness of man and woman.

Thus it is important to recognize each other as human though different in sexuality to form together a human community based on respect for each other. What is needed in the Church today is to work out a positive theology of sexuality where not harsh God gives way to a more understanding and merciful God of human behaviour and living. What is needed is a positive spirituality of accepting relationships based on mutual love and respect at and in all levels of society – the giving and receiving in terms of a just equality of the sexes.

(A talk given at a “Feminist Theology” Workshop, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1985)

## **In God's Image**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) decided in January 1987 to initiate an Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women. The decade (1988-1998) is a sign of the growing awareness and responsibility of the ecumenical movement towards the position of the woman in the Churches and in Society.

### **Aims of the Decade**

The aims are laid down by the WCC.

The Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998) aims at:

- \* Empowering women to challenge oppression in the global community, their country, church.
- \* Affirming – through shared leadership and decision-making theology and spirituality the decisive contributions of women in churches and communities.
- \* Giving visibility to women's perspectives and actions in the work and struggle for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.
- \* Enabling the churches to free themselves from racism, sexism and classism; from teachings and practices that discriminate against women.
- \* Encouraging the churches to take actions in solidarity with women.

These aims have a framework for the different Churches and the different countries to work out their own local programmes according to their own milieu for actions in solidarity with women.

In response to this the Women's Commission of the National Christian Council (NCC) of Sri Lanka invited women representatives from the various Christian denominations to meet (4th April) together "for sharing of faith experiences, ideas, resources and skills" with a view to forming a National Committee for the working out of the decade.

It was decided at this meeting that the Sri Lankan Churches initiate the decade during the season of Pentecost, symbolic of the empowering of people (both women and men) by the Holy Spirit to Truth and Justice.

The Catholic women, religious and lay, who participated met subsequently and decided to launch their campaign on the 28th of May to which women of other denominations and other faiths will be invited to participate.

### **A Viewpoint on the Need for Churches Solidarity with Women**

I believe it will be useful if I give my viewpoint as to why the Catholic Church should cooperate in the WCC's call for 'Solidarity with Women'. This should not be viewed as just another programme or just another theme for us to meet and discuss but be seen as part of a process of an entire ecumenical movement, central to the well being of the whole of Creation. I would like to take just one text from the Bible and comment from this perspective.

## **Hosea 2: 18 & 19 & 4: 1 & 2**

We could say how true these words are from Hosea “The Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land”. We keep on hearing of the many tragedies occurring in almost all the countries of the world particularly the Third World ones – be it Palestine, South Africa, Nicaragua and in our own country Sri Lanka. Violence seems to be the theme. The covenant between God and the World has been broken. We humans have forsaken the Lord. The covenant which binds God to humanity can only be realised if there exists as Hosea says, “righteousness”, “justice”, “steadfast Love” and “mercy”.

Do these virtues steadfastness, love, justice, mercy exist in most countries? Is there justice when so many go hungry; when so many young have no jobs; what mercy is shown when those who are taken by the Police and Army are tortured, kept in detention for days without trial. If there is to be a true covenant it must be based ultimately on the values of Jesus Christ. God born as man Jesus showed us how we should live and act. Like Jesus we Christians must take the option to fight to struggle for the poor and oppressed even if we have to suffer and be killed like Jesus. Solidarity is not enough – framing and signing statements of solidarity etc., but commitment to action, to the truth is what is needed. This is very difficult for it calls for tremendous courage, change of life style and selfless love of humanity.

Our faithfulness to God is to make the covenant dynamic – a dynamic relationship between God and Humanity. For this it is imperative that no one or no group be it women, minorities of race, caste, class or ethnicity or youth be excluded from this covenant – no one should be isolated or alienated to the extent that she or he is forced to take to violent methods to destroy creation – ‘they break all bounds and murder follows murder’ as it is being done in our country and as we have heard of in most countries.

Though I do not approve of violence I cannot help but think that it is not those who dissent, even take up to armed struggle that have displeased the Lord, but rather those who are responsible for having driven them to violence. It is they who “have no knowledge of God” – it is those forces of evil, those structures that promote sin – the sin of poverty, unemployment, oppression, alienation, isolation of groups, indignity of the human person; these have gone against the integrity of Creation and have broken the Covenant. But yet we cannot justify counter violence and can counter violence really achieve anything other than dehumanise the very person that fights the dehumanised society?

How then should we act as Christians? Here I would like to situate the woman and the man in today’s phenomenon of greed, poverty and violence that has gripped many nations.

It is true that every country needs the services of the security to maintain law and order within its country and even against another if threatened by intervention. But does not all this have in a way an element of violence in it – the need of those maintaining law and order (chiefly a male sphere) to be strong and tough, almost the necessity of brutality and aggressiveness for maintaining peace. Perhaps this is because of the ethos prevailing in our society where boys are brought up to be tough and strong and success means power.

Then again is not institutionalised violent societies male dominated – who holds the power in such societies? Most of the political leaders, leaders of militant and terrorist groups are males. 98% of the armed forces are men, they train the personnel for war and it is they who go to war.

Restoration will be as in Hosea 'I will betroth you to me in righteousness' and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy and in faithfulness". These are transcendental values, values that will help save humanity. It is good to bear in mind that these values are identified in society as being feminine and therefore weak and yet it is these very values that can help resolve conflict and avoid violence. It is good also to remember that it is the woman who has the capacity to empty herself so that another lives. She does not destroy so that she can live.

This is why the Ecumenical Decade of 'Churches in solidarity with Women' becomes relevant, becomes important for all of us. It is necessary that both Christian men and women re-read the Bible bearing in mind that it has been written by men and therefore the stories of women have been underplayed for instance it is a woman who annointed Jesus – it is women who are at the foot of the cross; it is women who found the tomb empty – no names of these women are given though they have played significant roles – women have been de-personalised and even when their names were mentioned, what they said was regarded as 'idle talk'.

What I am trying to say is that if we are serious as Christians in wanting to maintain the integrity of Creation we must read the word of God from the perspective of truth and the truth as I see it is in the values of righteousness, love, compassion, truth, mercy, justice, identified through the women and by feminine categories as in Luke "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings".

I believe that the values that need to be promoted "to guide our feet into the way of peace" are these values, values considered to be feminine and therefore supposed to be weak. But are they not positive values and are absolutely necessary in the restructuring of our societies of which we all speak of, if we want to prevent the outbreak of violence and maintain a just society for all. These values need to be nurtured in all humanity in order to bring pence and reconciliation among persons and all nations.

This is the new thinking that should be in our Churches for effecting the integrity of Creation in right relationships among people in equality and in dignity and right relationships between humanity and its environment and resources. There is no hope for our societies unless it is accepted and recognised that both the woman and the man must contribute to that covenant between Cod and the world as it is said 'if anyone is in Christ it is a new Creation'.

*"Catholic Messenger" (22nd May 1988)*

## ***On the matter of –***

### **The True Revolution**

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he has anointed me and sent me out to preach the gospel to the poor; restore the broken-hearted: to bid the prisoners go free and the blind have sight; to set the oppressed at Liberty...” Luke 4:17-19

This and many other biblical passages can be cited to show that the true follower of Jesus Christ has no alternative but to be with the poor, the down-trodden, the broken-hearted. In short, to be a liberator. The coming of Christ itself was a liberation from sin and from the slavery of law. Here, sin does not refer only to sin against the flesh as Christians were often taught to believe, but transgressions against the whole moral law. The existence and the permitting of injustices, oppression and alienation of persons, despair, indifference, treachery, hatred in society is sin.

Today, whether one belongs to the rich, middle or poor class or comes from developed or developing countries, one must realize that society is filled with exploitation, corruption, poverty, injustice, oppression, inequality of persons based on such factors as caste, class, creed, race and colour. It is, in short, a dehumanised society that one lives in; those who oppress are inhuman and those oppressed have become sub-human. One has to search, hard and long to find the human in the human world! Much injustice is done in the name of religion, love, democracy and even justice itself.

#### **Divine Spark**

However, even in spite of this almost depressing state of affairs, there is a **divine spark** in every person, whether he be from the oppressing or oppressed class, that **needs to be ignited to bring in the revolution of the New Society.**

This revolution to bring about a humanised society cannot be achieved by a group of leaders alone, however committed, whether they be from the working, middle, educated, urban or rural class but by all people acting together in belief and action. History has shown that revolution, be it right or left-oriented, has been promoted by a group of persons who have thought and planned and then imposed it on the people. They first usher in the revolution and then try to attract the masses to themselves. Such revolutions are short-lived.

Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, the left-wing German radical, has this to say of revolutionary activity. There is no need for a party. His main contention is that any organized leadership or party (whether it be communist, Trotskyist, Maoist or capitalist) “certain of its infallibility appoints itself spokesman and defender of the people and as such wields power on their behalf i.e. acts as a bureaucracy”.

And as Mao Tse-tung says, “the road to the abolition of classes, to the abolition of state power and to the abolition of parties is the road all mankind must take; it is only a question of time and conditions”.

What is then needed are merely “agents” who will educate the conscience of the people and encourage them to struggle and show how their struggle could contribute to the overthrow of a unjust society and the eventual establishment of a socialist state, based on freedom and equality.

## **Ends and Means**

The objectives people want to achieve always remain the same. Almost all want a classless society which would provide opportunities for all, the elimination of racialism, war, poverty and man's alienation from man. Whether one be a socialist, communist, Christian or humanist, this is the end. It is in the means of achieving this end that a choice arises, and on the type of structure that is to be set up once the revolution has taken place opinions differ; otherwise all speak as with one voice.

In the Soviet Union although the revolution brought about a change for the better in terms of economic justice, there is today a certain dissatisfaction creeping in. Pakistan and Ghana had leaders who through revolution brought about far-reaching changes in their respective countries. Yet the regimes of Ayub Khan and Nkrumah were overthrown. Such revolutions, since they have been initiated by a few, will always beget counter-revolutions. This is not only because power centralised in one or a few corrupts but also chiefly for two other reasons.

First, the people had no part in the organization and implementation of the actual physical overthrow itself. They were merely led by the leaders to action. Second, once the revolution had taken place, the structure of government that followed did not allow for the total participation of the people in the running of the country. The Government still continued to be in the hands of a few. This also seems to be one of the causes of dissatisfaction in Marxist Allende's Chile.

## **Alienation**

Today's unrest whether among working class, peasants, elite or youth is often due to the fact that they are not allowed to participate in running the institutions to which they belong. Even this concept of "alienation" in the analysis of modern society is, fundamentally, a "feeling" generated by the fact that the group that considers itself alienated has no part to play in the decision-making process. Everyone wants to know the facts and everyone wants to have his say.

The basic demand today is for permanent participation in running the affairs of the nation through permanent dialogue. This can be achieved at two levels. Firstly, people today want to know all the facts, so that they can decide on issues that concern the community. Thus it is necessary that there be free mass media and not a government-controlled system. Mass media must be completely democratized. Secondly, once the people have this information, there should be the structure through which they can participate in all decisions affecting their life. Power must be democratized. If we are to have effective change of a permanent nature, the people must understand issues involved. Correct information would lead to development of understanding; this is most important, and it would automatically result in action to change the existing oppressive society and bring about the new and just society.

## **With the People**

If we want a permanent, true revolution – though always there will be need for change – the leaders of liberation must think with the people. Not merely think about them. It is true that leaders of revolution have thought about the people and it is around them that the leaders have worked for liberation. However, they often forget the essential factor, which is to realize the revolution with the people. The revolutionary must not lead or teach the people but try to understand and express their common aspirations.

It is through dialogue together with the people that they must transform society. **One cannot carry out a successful revolution for the people without the people.** Such revolutions have been achieved through methods such as manipulation, regimentation, sloganising, by giving power to the police and the army. All these methods have oppressed the people and it is from that the people are trying to liberate themselves. So how can a revolution that adopts the same methods bring about the true revolution?

People want socialism, but not the kind of socialism they see today. They want socialism with freedom. Let us thus not have a revolution for the people and impose it on the people but a revolution of the people with the people through dialogue, awareness and action. This is “true” socialism. **The very substance of socialism is freedom.** The type of revolution we refer to gives all society the freedom to think and act before, during and after the revolution.

How can this “true socialism” be achieved through revolution? There will always be persons who though serious thinking are more committed than others to bring about the transformation of society. Persons who share an ideology, who have the ability to organize, who can suffer and sacrifice, and are pledged to struggle against oppression, must go among the people to understand the problems at grass roots level and then through a process of conscientization bring the people to an awareness of the various contradictions in their political, social and economic society, so that together they could think and take action against whatever is oppressive in society.

No doubt, each group (working class, intellectuals peasants etc.) will have its own struggle and its own methods of defending its interests, but in the total confrontation their efforts will all converge.

## Dialogue

Conscientization through free discussion and dialogue aims at a meaningful, keen and sincere communication based on reflection which would necessarily lead to action. As Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* says, the revolutionary’s role is to liberate and be liberated with the people and not merely to win the people to his side or way of thinking. He awakens them.

What Lenin says of the proletariat in “What is to be done” applies to all oppressed people - i.e. they are unable by themselves to reach a scientific understanding of society for they tend to adopt the prevailing i.e. the bourgeois ideology. Thus the creation of the “New Man” becomes necessary. The “New Man” is one who has undergone a change of mentality to receive the new society which will be based on public ownership, free from class exploitation and oppression and devoid of political parties and leaders, and where land and work will be given to all. For this, the instrument is not the machine gun but a qualitative change of heart on true socialist lines through dialogue and discussion. Charles Reich, calls this “Revolution by consciousness” in his well-known book *Greening of America*.

The power of new and true values will help them to accept the new way of life. The leadership should not be in the hands of a few, as stated earlier, but in the hands of the leaders and the people i.e. in all persons. This is imperative if there is to be a permanent revolution. The basis for this unity in leadership is true communication based on humility and a capacity for love and a renunciation of power. These are no easy virtues, for they call for great effort, particularly from the leaders. Humility calls for great sacrifice, love, renunciation of power and tremendous courage. Above all, for this common leadership there should be a tremendous feeling of love for the people. As Che Guevara says, “it is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking in this quality.”

## Libraries

Another effective method of bringing about the true revolution, which even the most progressive intellectuals have failed to see is the tremendous importance of the need for the printed word. Every local government area, however small, should be persuaded to have a library which will be the centre for information for the community. It is through a library that information can be received and disseminated effectively to the people. It is, in short the peoples' educational system. Also those who pledge themselves to radical social changes, should publish newspapers, reviews and pamphlets which aim at dialectical analysis of the existing society and the creation of the "new consciousness".

In summary, if there is to be a radical transformation of society, it must come from within the people – a people conscientized by those who as leaders and intellectuals profess to know. We should build a Non-Violent Power from among the people. No doubt, this would seem particularly to the youth, a long process. But it will be TRUE SOCIALISM, for all would be involved in the preparation, overthrow and in the final realization of the People's Glorious Kingdom – The Kingdom for which Jesus Christ suffered and died for.

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## Can We Dare to Hope

In this age of the 21<sup>st</sup> century  
 UN Rapporteur for Violence against Women  
 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of  
 Discrimination against Women and the  
 Global statistics say –  
 67% of work by women  
 1.5% of property owned by women  
 75% who starve are women

In our country of Sri Lanka  
 Education, Literacy 50-50  
 but statistics of 2000 say  
 10% in decision making  
 28.8 % in policy making  
 Five in Parliament  
 But who runs the country?  
 Sustains economy and governance?

And why, Oh why do  
 Media say  
 Women raped daily either by  
 Father, brother, grandfather, uncle,  
 Gang rape, girl child molested,  
 Single mothers, widows aplenty  
 Villages of them, North, South, East and West  
 All races, victims of war and insurrection

Fear at checkpoints  
 Fear of Police  
 the army and the so-called  
 security forces.  
 Battered women driven to suicide

Who cares! Who cares!

Woman the home maker  
 Rearing, caring, mother  
 Obedient to husband and son  
 The tradition, the stereotype

This 'wonderful' woman  
 Today she works this out  
 In the refugee camp  
 So easy to do  
 For there is nothing to do  
 No where to go and  
 No husband to please  
 Crushed, bruised  
 Dignity trampled, dishonoured  
 The victims of our society.

Can we hope?  
 Can we dare to hope?  
 The HOPE within us is  
 To break the structures of domination

Together with the oppressor  
Oppressed by HIS own inhumanity  
To ENGENDER total transformation  
For Equity – for Freedom

*Social Justice*  
Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo