

Moral Formation for a Gender-Just Church and Society

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Shaji George KOCHUTHARA

[ABSTRACT] Recent decades have witnessed Indian women becoming more empowered. However, Indian society continues to be predominantly patriarchal. Violence against women is on the increase. Hence, education for gender-justice is of vital importance. At least to a certain extent discrimination against women continues in the Church. This contradicts the Church's teaching on justice.

After critically evaluating the present structures of gender-discrimination, this article proposes to discuss gender-justice education as an integral dimension of Catholic social teaching. As a specific example, theological and moral formation for gender-justice at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram (DVK), a Catholic theological institution in Bangalore, India, is presented. Majority of the students are seminarians, priests and nuns. There are also a few lay students. Formation for gender-justice is very important, since they will be leaders of the Christian community. To form moral and theological perspectives the following are adopted: 1. Re-reading of the biblical

stories which were traditionally used to support gender-discrimination; 2. Equality of husband and wife as basic to family ethics; 3. Importance of gender-justice in the official documents of the Church; 4. Discrimination against women as violation of justice; 5. Violence against women as violence against humanity, and violation of basic human rights.

Besides courses on these topics, in recent years various seminars and conferences have been organised on Gender, to communicate its importance. Moreover, it is ensured that equal opportunities are provided for women and men students. DVK is one of the first institutions in India which welcomed women for theological education, and a good number of women continue to study here. Thus the very ambience of the institution provides the possibility of a gender-just formation. Through theoretical input and practical steps, moral formation for a gender-just Church and society is offered.

Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed Indian women becoming more empowered. However, Indian society continues to be predominantly patriarchal. Although in principle women are considered equal, in practice they continue to be discriminated against.

Moreover, violence against women continues. In spite of the attempts to empower women, and greater involvement of women in public life, violence against them is on the increase. In recent years, a number of cases of violence, especially of sexual violence on women have been reported. Some of these cases immediately get public

attention, but studies show that unreported cases are even more. All these point to the need of education for gender-justice.

Although the Church stands for justice and equality of both men and women, even within the Church discrimination against women exists in various forms. From a Christian perspective, gender-justice and women's equality is not merely a need of women alone, but it is a matter of basic Christian justice. Discrimination against any human person is an injustice. Hence, recognition of the equal dignity and rights of women is basically a matter of justice and human rights. As Mee-Yin Mary Yuen points out, although the Church has become more alert to the issue of gender equality since the 1960's, many in the Church still have reservations about feminism and feminist theology. It is important to fight various forms of violence and discrimination against women, "with the goal of bringing justice and humanity on earth."¹

Besides explicating these issues, the final section of this paper also explains how an education for gender-justice is imparted at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram (DVK), a Pontifical Athenaeum in Bangalore in India.

Gender Justice: Indian Context

Indian women have become more empowered. There are millions of women who are highly qualified and who work in various professions. Women are also active in politics and social life. We get an image of liberated Indian women who contribute not only to their families but also to the society as a whole. In spite of this, patriarchal

¹ Mee-Yin Mary Yuen, "Promoting Women's Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong: Inspirations from Church Leaders and Women Christians as Leaders," in *Feminist Catholic Theological Ethics: Conversations in the World Church*, ed. Linda Hogan and A.E. Orobator (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2014), 123.

structures continue to dominate the Indian society. Moreover, even within their homes, women face discrimination, exploitation and violence.

Violence against Women

It will not be justified if I say that sexual violence or violence against women is a problem of India alone. For example, a report of the World Health Organisation points out that one in every three women in the world is a victim of violence [35%]. 13.5% of all the homicides happen within the house, by the partner.² A recent study says that one in ten men in Asia Pacific has raped an unknown woman.³ However, here I am trying to highlight the situation in India so as to point out the continuing structures of patriarchy which are the root causes of violence against women and discrimination against them, and to approach the issue of gender equality as a basic issue of justice.

According to National Crime Records Bureau, 132,939 sexual offences against women were committed in the year 2014.⁴ The total number of crimes against women in 2013 is 309,546.⁵ In 2013, gender specific crimes that had been reported totals 16% of the total crimes. In the last 10 years, there is a sharp increase in the crime against women. It may be because more women have become courageous to report crimes against them. But, on the other hand, we cannot ignore that despite social changes, crimes against women do

² "Violenza sessuale, un'epidemia mondiale: Una donna su tre ne e' vittima," *Corriere della Sera*, June 20, 2013.

³ "1 in 10 Men in Asia Pacific Has Raped an Unknown Woman, Finds Study," *The Times of India*, Sept 10, 2013.

⁴ National Crime Records Bureau, <http://nrb.nic.in/>

⁵ National Crime Records Bureau, <http://nrb.nic.in/StatPublications/CII/CII2013/Chapters/5-Crime%20against%20Women.pdf>

not decrease. Moreover, even today, only 20% of crimes against women are reported. A study by NGO ‘Breakthrough’ among girls in 6 Indian states, the findings of which were published a few months back, says that 50% of school girls are subjected to various forms of sexual harassment while travelling to and from school, while 32% are stalked.⁶

Gender Based Violence and Law

Gender based violence is not something peculiar to the society today. Almost from the beginning of human history various kinds of violence against women have been perpetrated — female infanticide, sexual abuse, rape, domestic violence, kidnapping, sexual harassment, trafficking, etc. These were treated as normal and often would be justified using religious and legal texts. In the late nineteenth century, with the emergence of Women’s movements and the discourse on human rights, attempts to curb violence against women and to empower them through legislation were initiated. The twentieth century saw many dramatic changes as women began to ask for the right to vote and for changes in the law, in the hope that law reform would change lives of women. Thus, a number of laws were enacted at the national and international levels. In India also many such laws were enacted in the post-Independence period, especially following the struggle of women’s movements in 1970s. Many amendments were made later, for example, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), Criminalisation of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace (1997 and 2013).

⁶ Himanshi Dhavan, “50% of Girls Sexually Harassed on Way to School, 32% Stalked: Study,” *Times of India*, Feb 25, 2016, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/50-of-girls-sexually-harassed-on-way-to-school-32-stalked-Study/articleshow/51130446.cms>

Today many start doubting the efficacy of laws in protecting women from violence. Many reasons are pointed out for this inefficacy of the law: 1. Low conviction rate; 2. Most of the crimes against women are committed in the private space, and hence difficult to prove; 3. Even when committed in public places, the perpetrators make it sure that there is no witness, or evidence; 4. Most of the judges are men, and often prejudiced; 5. It is not rare that the judge feels sympathy for the perpetrator on the basis of his age or social status, and gives a less severe punishment; 6. Even when the perpetrators are convicted, the process is too long; 7. The victims have to face embarrassing questions, and may give up the case; 8. And, most importantly, because of all these, the victim is reasonably afraid and often does not dare to file the case.⁷

I am not arguing that laws to protect women are not needed. Rather, laws alone cannot ensure the safety of women and justice to them, mainly due to the continuing patriarchal views held by the police, administrators, legislators and judges. Recently a tennis player was raped by two security guards at a sports complex in Bangalore. This happened late in the evening on 12 November 2015.⁸ Replying to questions, the Minister for the Home of Karnataka state asked, "Why she had to go there alone at that time?" This is a repeated response by those in power or the police. Even if the woman, the victim, goes to the police to file the case, they may

⁷ V. S. Elizabeth, "Gender, Violence and the Law in Indian Society," in *Gender Justice in the Church and Society*, ed. Shaji George Kochuthara, CMI (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2016), 251-263; Julie George, SSpS, "Domestic Violence and Patriarchal Bargains," in *Gender Justice in the Church and Society*, 284-297; George Kodithottam, SJ, "The New Rape Law: Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 — An Overview and Some Ethical Reflections," in *Gender Justice in the Church and Society*, 264-272; Lavanya Devdas, "Drawing the Line: Arresting Sexual Violence at Workplace," in *Gender Justice in the Church and Society*, 273-283.

⁸ "Bengaluru Shamed again: 3rd Gang-Rape in a Month," *The New Indian Express*, November 13, 2015, <http://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/bengaluru/Bengaluru-Shamed-Again-3rd-Gang-Rape-in-a-Month/2015/11/13/article3125810.ece>

refuse to do that, saying that the woman was responsible as she went out alone, or as she was out late in the evening or night. A prominent politician in the state of Uttar Pradesh told, “Boys will be Boys, They Make Mistakes... Will you hang them for Rapes?”⁹ This is not merely about the police or the administrators, but this only reflects the views held by a good number of people in the country. In short, unless the patriarchal structures and views change through moral formation, the laws may continue to be ineffective to a great extent.

Patriarchy and Violence against Women in India

Patriarchy literally means rule of the father in a male-dominated family. It is a social and ideological construct which considers men (the patriarchs) as superior to women. Typically, it refers to the family, but it extends to the whole society. Patriarchy is based on power relations that are hierarchical and unequal where men control women’s production, reproduction and sexuality. In general, women are considered to be the property of men, and the meaning of women’s existence is understood in terms of their usefulness for men. Most of the societies in the world were patriarchal, and many continue to be so. The nature of patriarchy and subsequent control differ based on the caste, class, religion, socio-cultural and economic practices. A study undertaken by International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) found that about 40% of Indian men had ‘rigid and discriminatory’ gender views. They believe women to be inferior.¹⁰ Let me present some of the features of patriarchy in India.

⁹ “Mulayam’s Shocker: Boys will be Boys, They Make Mistakes... Will you Hang them for Rape?” *The Indian Express*, April 11, 2014, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/politics/mulayam-singh-yadav-questions-death-penalty-for-rape-says-boys-make-mistakes/>

¹⁰ “40% of Indian Men are Hardcore Sexists: Study,” *The Times of India*, Dec 4, 2013.

1. Patriarchy in India: Religious and Cultural Practices

Like many other religions, Hinduism, the major religion of India, is also patriarchal. Scholars have pointed out that in ancient times, Hindu women enjoyed greater freedom and equality. Hindu women enjoyed some rights of property from the Vedic Age, took a share in social and religious rites, and were distinguished by their learning. There were many women philosophers and teachers.¹¹ But, by the close of the sixth century BCE, the choice of pursuits open to women in the Vedic society was diminished. In subsequent centuries, the position of women was drastically degraded and they were regarded as unfit for exposure to the sacred texts and were excluded from most religious responsibilities. The *Manusmriti*, the most important moral code in Hinduism, is unequivocal on the inferior status of women. "Girls are supposed to be in the custody of their father when they are children, women must be under the custody of their husbands when married and under the custody of their sons as widows. In no circumstances is a woman allowed to assert herself independently!" (5:151; see also 5:150, 2:213-215). The woman's role is confined to the family. Patriarchal imposition of Hindu women's identity such as *pativrata* — which means devoted, virtuous, faithful, uncomplaining wifehood — come mainly from *Manusmriti*. "The *pativrata* image led to the strict management of sexuality, and restricted women's social interaction and mobility but has also ensured that women remain in an inferior, subordinate and distinctly dependent position in the marital equation."¹² These concepts later led to atrocious practices like *sati*. *Sati* is the practice

¹¹ Ellison Banks Findly, "Gargi at the King's Court: Women and Philosophic Innovation in Ancient India," in *Women, Religion and Social Change*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1985), 40.

¹² Prathibha Jain and R. Muhan, ed., *Women Images* (Jaipur: Rawat, 1996), 15.

which demands the wife to jump into the funeral pyre of her husband and thus die with him. This was prohibited by law in modern times, but there were even attempts to re-introduce the practice of *sati*. For example, on 4 September 1987, Roop Kanwar, aged 18, was immolated in the funeral pyre of her husband Maal Singh Shekhawat, who was 24 years old. Besides, many Right wing outfits try to control the freedom of women in the name of the Indian tradition. They try to dictate what women should wear and how they should behave in public places. Though the law grants equality to women, many laws are not enacted – due to political pressure, corruption, religious, cultural and caste factors.

There are also other practices which make the life of a woman dependent upon the man. For example, *mangalsutra* or *Thali*, is a locket that the husband ties around the neck of the wife at the time of marriage.¹³ The woman is expected to wear that all the time. Practically it becomes a symbol of her dependence on the husband. The *mangalsutra* is a very powerful symbol: Whatever be the suffering she endures in her marital home, a Hindu woman must succumb to the power of the *mangalsutra* which is binding and this makes her subservient to the man.

The image of a virtuous woman is also relevant to be considered. The woman is supposed to have self-control, to wait upon and serve her husband with devotion and a cheerful heart, to be willing to suffer anything for the good of her husband, and to possess humility and modesty. Such images of a virtuous woman are still very prominent in the Indian culture, facilitating ill-treatment of women.

¹³ This is basically a Hindu practice, but some Christian groups also have adopted this.

The traditional village system that exists in some regions also tries to impose patriarchal norms even at the cost of violence. A number of cases of "honour killing" were reported in recent years.

I do not mean that Hinduism is the only patriarchal religion. Other important religions in India, namely, Islam and Christianity are also basically patriarchal. Man/Husband is taken for granted the head of the family, and women are supposed to obey men in the family. Women are excluded from important roles and administrative positions in these religions as well. Attempts are there to question whether such practices are really religious practices or patriarchal practices justified by misinterpretation of religious texts, but they are often suppressed as heretical.

2. Active-Passive Sexual Roles as Facilitating Sexual Violence

One of the most long-standing and deep-rooted gender polarisations is the concept that in sexual relations men are supposed to take active role while women are to take passive and submissive role. Assigning passive role to women and active role to men encourages different forms of degradation and exploitation of women.

In general, cultures have considered women as sexually passive. That women engage in sex only to please men and that "normal women" do not enjoy sex as much as men are some of the gender prejudices coming from this negative socialisation.¹⁴ The active-passive paradigm considers the woman as unequal, weaker and inferior, facilitating exploitation and violence. Men who adhere to the active-passive model may find it as a justification for coercive

¹⁴ Robert Crooks and Karla Baur, *Our Sexuality*, 8th edition (Pacific Grove, CA: Wadsworth, 2002), 74.

sex. Indifference and even resistance from the part of women may be seen by such men as natural. Sometimes, resistance from the part of the woman may be interpreted as techniques of a ‘good’ woman to invite the ‘active’ role from the man. Thus, men may consider even the disapproval and resistance by women as legitimising their violence. Moreover, women who differ from the traditional model of passivity by the way they mingle with men, or the way they dress, may be viewed as ‘loose’ women or as ‘easily accessible’. In such cases men may justify sexual violence arguing that they were provoked by the woman or that it was not an act of sexual violence since the woman was of ‘loose’ morality, or that they were encouraged by the indirect invitation of the woman.

3. Dowry System and Violence against Women

In India, the dowry system, the practice of paying money to the bridegroom’s family by the bride’s family, has been one of the major causes of the continuing degradation of women. Dowry is prevalent in most of the social groups in India. In practice, dowry is not merely a one-time payment. In the traditional dowry system, dowry was said to connote female property, or female right to property, transferred at a woman’s marriage as a sort of pre-mortem inheritance.¹⁵ But, it has deteriorated into a bargaining system.¹⁶ Dowry can take different forms: money, jewellery, property and so on. But, in most cases, it is a demand from the bridegroom’s family and this demand may continue for years. If the demands are not met, the wife will have to

¹⁵ Neena Joseph, “Stridhanavum Charitra Paschathalavum” [in Malayalam; English translation: “The Dowry and the Historical Background,” *Stridhanathinethre Streesakthi* (Neyyattinkara: Neyyattinkara Integral Development Society, 2002), 4-6.

¹⁶ Jane Rudd, “Dowry-murder: An Example of Violence against Women,” in *Women’s Lives and Public Policy: The International Experience*, ed. Meredith Turshen and Briavel Holcomb (CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 92-94.

face humiliation, mental and physical harassment, and torture. These demands are considered as legitimate 'right' of the husband/his family.

A rather new development associated with the dowry system is the widespread and extreme forms of violence associated with it. There are thousands of women "tortured, killed and driven to suicide by the menace of dowry and other demands associated with marriage..."¹⁷ For example, in a study it was found that in Bangalore 1,133 cases of unnatural deaths of women were reported in 1997. From one woman dying in every three days in the 80's and mid 90's, today unnatural deaths of at least three women due to violence related to dowry are reported in a single day just in the city of Bangalore.¹⁸ According to the Crime Clock 2005 of the National Crime Records Bureau, India reported one dowry death every 77 minutes.

Dowry is the leading cause of the continuing belief that woman is inferior and a burden to the family. This belief influences the treatment that a woman receives at every phase of her life. Since girls are considered burden, millions of female foetuses are aborted. According to some studies, 12 million female foeticides have happened in India over the last three decades. Other studies say that it is up to 35/40 million.¹⁹ Parents naturally prefer to feed better the boys who will be 'assets,' ignoring the girls, resulting in the malnutrition and denial of education for the girls. Dowry system

¹⁷ Rita Noronha, "Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 72.6 (2008) 410.

¹⁸ Vimochana Editorial Collective, "A Web of Violence," in *Daughters of Fire*, 3; "IT City Plagued by Dowry Deaths," http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2007-07-16/bangalore/27993561_1_dowry-deaths-harassment-cases-dubious-distinction.

¹⁹ Shaji George Kochuthara, "Millions of Missing Girls! Female Foeticide and Ethical Concerns," *Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church Newsletter Forum* (2012) <http://www.catholicethics.com/july2012>.

encourages domestic violence, deepening further the idea that violence against women is something normal. It denies the woman the possibility of becoming independent. Whatever she brings or earns is considered the property of the husband/his family, a 'payment' due for taking care of her.²⁰

4. Domestic Violence

A report by the United Nations World Population Fund (UNFPA) says that six out of 10 Indian men admit to having perpetrated violence against their wives or partners.²¹ The prevalence of domestic violence throughout the country calls in to question the notion of family as a safe place for women. The economic dependency of women on her husband compels her to silently suffer violence. However, it is not the only reason. Some recent studies show that more number of working women face domestic violence. Going to the Police and Court is often discouraged for protecting the family honour. Thus, violence against women is almost built in to the culture of everyday life in different ways. Cruelty by husband and relatives continue to have the highest share — 38% of crimes against women in India.²² There was a strong demand to include marital rape as a criminal offence, supported by the Justice Verma Committee Report,²³ which

²⁰ Kurian, "Feminism and the Developing World," 74; Veena Oldenburg, "Dowry Murders in India: A Preliminary Examination of the Historical Evidence," in *Women's Lives and Public Policy: The International Experience*, ed. Meredith Turshen and Briavel Holcomb (CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 145-157.

²¹ "Six out of 10 Indian Men Admit Violence against Wives: UN Study," *The Times of India*, Nov 10, 2014.

²² Times of India, 3 November, 2014. A publication by the Central statistics Office – women and Men in India, chapter on social obstacles in women empowerment

²³ On December 23, 2012 a three member Committee headed by Justice J.S. Verma, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, was constituted to recommend amendments to the Criminal Law so as to provide for quicker trial and enhanced punishment for criminals accused of committing sexual assault against women.

recommended that the exception to marital rape should be removed. But, it was rejected under the pretext of protecting the integrity of the Indian family.

Women in the Indian Church

Is the Indian Church a model for gender justice? On the one hand, women are active in the parishes and in various ministries. Tens of thousands of women religious serve the Church and society – in educational institutions, hospitals, social service agencies, missions, parish ministry and so on. There are hundreds of thousands of lay women who are actively involved in the parish ministry and other Church programmes. In spite of all these, at least to a certain extent discrimination against women continues in the Church. Often they are assigned a subordinate role. There are functions and roles reserved for men (This may be the case everywhere as far as the Catholic Church is concerned). Opportunities women get to serve in various offices of the Church and ministries are practically limited. They are often at the mercy of men leaders to make use of their charisms and gifts. Discrimination against women contradicts the Church's teaching on justice.

Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India

In spite of various forms of discrimination that continue, the Indian Church has made a unique contribution towards gender justice, namely, the *Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India* (GP). It is the policy officially accepted and published by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI). Released on 24

February 2010, it is an instrument for the empowerment of women especially in the Church.²⁴ It is the first time that a Catholic Bishops' Conference officially adopts a gender policy.

Although a detailed presentation of GP is beyond the scope of this article, I would like to indicate its content. GP has three parts: Part I deals with the need of gender equality, the situation of women in India, biblical and theological foundation of gender equality and the teaching of the Catholic Church on gender equality. Part II explains the vision, mission, objectives and guiding principles. Part III elaborates upon the policy and its implementation on various levels. Part III, section XI [first section of Part III] is the most detailed one, which deals with areas of implementation. Policies and strategies for a more just role of women in the family, society and Church are outlined. The difficulties women face in different areas like education, healthcare, social life and so on are explained and strategies to overcome these problems are indicated. Part III also includes a section on "Special Areas of Concern," such as rights of the girl child, tribal and dalit women, violence against women, and women in difficult circumstances. As a background, I shall begin with Appendix II of the GP, which outlines the evolution of the GP.

Appendix II of the GP summarises the process of its evolution in four phases (GP 50-56). This helps to understand the long process undertaken through serious study, discussions and deliberations. This will also help us to understand that the GP is the fruit of the work not merely of some particular offices of the CBCI, but of various offices, the hierarchy and many people who collaborated in the process.

²⁴ Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India*, (New Delhi: CBCI Commission for Women, 2009) <http://cbci.in/DownloadMat/Gender_Policy.pdf> Hereafter *GP* in the text. Though released on 24 February 2010, the official date of publication is 8 December 2009, the feast of Immaculate Conception.

In the "Foreword" Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil says: "The *Gender Policy* underlines that equality and dignity of all human persons form the basis of a just and humane society. The Policy maintains that women's empowerment is central to achieving gender equality" (GP ix). "The Policy promotes the egalitarian message of Jesus, with the vision of a collaborative Church with Gender Justice. It envisages a world where both women and men can enjoy total freedom and equality to grow in the image and likeness of God" (GP x). Thus, Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil emphasises not only that gender equality is in agreement with the Christian vision, but also that it is demanded by Christian faith. Denial of gender equality is the denial of the possibility of growing in the image and likeness of God, a call fundamental to the Christian vision.

What Bishop Thakur says in the "Introduction" also deserves special attention: "Equality between women and men is seen both as human rights issue and as pre-condition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development" (GP xiv). "Gender equality is a burning issue of all times. It affects not only the fifty percent of women but all of humankind" (GP xv).

In short, gender equality is basically an issue of justice; it is a human rights issue. Without ensuring gender equality, it cannot be claimed that we are a just society. Moreover, ensuring gender equality is vital for development. When justice and development are denied to about 50% of the population, how can we claim that there is real development? Equality of women is to be understood as integral to a just society. Justice to women is not an issue of women only; it is an issue that concerns both men and women, the whole humanity.

Gender Justice as Integral to the Church's Commitment to Justice

The basis for a Christian vision of gender equality and gender justice is the biblical vision that God created human beings as male and female, as equals in dignity, in his own image. As the introduction to the *Gender Policy of the CBCI* says, “The Christian understanding of gender equality is based on the biblical account of creation. Man and woman are both created in the image and likeness of God, expressing a “unity of the two” in a common humanity” (GP, Introduction). This is further developed in the New Testament “in Jesus’ invitation to women’s discipleship and St. Paul’s exhortation that “there is no male and female, for all are one in Jesus Christ” (Gal 3:28)” (GP, Introduction).

In the recent centuries, especially from the mid-nineteenth century, in the Catholic circles there has been a greater awareness that justice is central to the Christian message. *Rerum Novarum* marks a definite beginning of this new phase in the Catholic theological thinking. The Church’s uncompromising demand for justice, especially for the poor, the marginalised and the discriminated, can be said to be unparalleled and it is much appreciated even by its critics. It seems that the Church took more time to speak clearly about the rights of women, and to consider it as an issue of basic human rights and justice. Before Vatican II, the popes explicitly taught women’s inequality and subordination to men. The Second World War was perhaps the transition point. Women held jobs while the men were at war, and this led to an acceptance of women’s need to enter the public realm through employment. Pius XII recognised this change and the fact that their entry into public realm made it necessary for them to acquire rights

there. John XXIII and the subsequent Popes have said that women are equal and should be granted equal rights.²⁵

The Pastoral Constitution of Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 60 acknowledges that, "Women now work in almost all spheres. It is fitting that they are able to assume their proper role in accordance with their own nature. It will belong to all to acknowledge and favor the proper and necessary participation of women in the cultural life."

Paul VI, in his Closing Address acknowledges more explicitly the role of women: "And now it is to you that we address ourselves, women of all states — girls, wives, mothers and widows, to you also, consecrated virgins and women living alone — you constitute half of the immense human family. As you know, the Church is proud to have glorified and liberated woman, and in the course of the centuries, in diversity of characters, to have brought into relief her basic equality with man. But the hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of woman is being achieved in its fullness, the hour in which woman acquires in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is under-going so deep a transformation, women impregnated with the spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid mankind in not falling."²⁶

In the official documents of the Church, the first systematic and methodical discussion on women can be found in the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem: On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman* (1988). John Paul II affirms that there is a fundamental equality and

²⁵ Christine E. Gudorf, "Encountering the Other: The Modern Papacy on Women," *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition – Readings in Moral Theology*, no. 9, ed. Charles E. Curran, Margaret E. Farley and Richard McCormick, SJ (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 67-68.

²⁶ Paul VI, "Second Vatican Council II Closing Speech," *Papal Encyclicals Online*, Dec 8, 1985, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6closin.htm>.

at the same time a basic difference. Women and men are equal partners and oriented towards each other. He rejects any form of male domination. He affirms that the statuses of life in which women experience their dignity and vocation are motherhood and virginity.

The *Catechism* also affirms the equality of man and woman: “In creating men ‘male and female,’ God gives man and woman an equal personal dignity.” Man is a person, man and woman equally so, since both were created in the image and likeness of the personal God” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], 2334). “Each of the two sexes is an image of the power and tenderness of God, with equal dignity though in a different way” (CCC, 2335).

Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) accords a greater recognition to women: “The Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skill sets which they, more than men, tend to possess. I think, for example, of the special concern which women show to others, which finds a particular, even if not exclusive, expression in motherhood. I readily acknowledge that many women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection. But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church. Because ‘the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society, the presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace’ and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures” (EG, 103). However, as it may be clear, he says that the reservation of the priesthood to males is not a question open to discussion (EG, 104).

A few paragraphs from the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* also may help us obtain a clearer idea of the Church’s

commitment for gender justice. The Church is unambiguous in asserting the equal dignity of all human beings: "The Incarnation of the Son of God shows the equality of all people with regard to dignity: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28)."²⁷

"'Male' and 'female' differentiate two individuals of equal dignity, which does not however reflect a static equality, because the specificity of the female is different from the specificity of the male, and this difference in equality is enriching and indispensable for the harmony of life in society." Referring to *Christifideles Laici*, the *Compendium* continues: "The condition that will assure the rightful presence of woman in the Church and in society is a more penetrating and accurate consideration of the anthropological foundation for masculinity and femininity with the intent of clarifying woman's personal identity in relation to man, that is, a diversity yet mutual complementarity, not only as it concerns roles to be held and functions to be performed, but also, and more deeply, as it concerns her make-up and meaning as a person" (*Compendium*, 146).²⁸

"Woman is the complement of man, as man is the complement of woman: man and woman complete each other mutually, not only from a physical and psychological point of view, but also ontologically... The woman is 'a helper' for the man, just as the man is 'a helper' for the woman!" (*Compendium*, 147).

At the same time, it may be difficult to say that the Church's stance on gender equality and gender justice is as emphatic as it

²⁷ Pontifical Council for Peace and Justice, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), 144.

²⁸ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 50.

should be. One of the reasons for this is that a lot of injustice towards women takes place in intimate relationship and within the realm of the family. Hence, gender justice becomes a subject matter mainly of sexual ethics and family ethics. Perhaps because there are other issues which are much more debated and controversial in these areas, the issue of gender justice does not get adequate attention even there. Another reason might be the reservation of certain religious roles and functions exclusively to men. There seems to be a concern that the call for gender equality and gender justice may question this tradition of the Church. Moreover, many of the papal statements on the dignity of women are in addresses to particular groups, or in messages given on Bl. Virgin Mary or saints. Often, the silent and obedient role of the women saints is highlighted in such messages. Such messages may not get a public attention as in the case of many other documents. Another criticism against many of the official teachings is the continuing emphasis on complementarity. As many have pointed out, complementarity model facilitates gender discrimination in a subtle manner by attributing certain qualities as more feminine, and as integral to women and hence as belonging to “feminine genius.” In the Catholic context, the usage of “feminine genius” is attributed to the writings of John Paul II, especially to *Mulieris Dignitatem*. Though it is considered to be a recognition of women, there are many who criticise that the concept of “feminine genius,” like the complementarity model, may not ensure gender equality. For example, motherhood is often presented as a special gift and quality of the woman. This may also imply that the woman is supposed to be primarily concerned about the duties at home. Why fatherhood is not equally presented as the quality of a man or as “masculine genius”? Similarly, docility, humility and patience are sometimes presented as feminine qualities, which may indirectly confine women to the traditional roles.

It is high time that violence and injustice even in the realm of intimate relationships and privacy of the family are addressed basically as issues of justice, since these attitudes and behavioural patterns are carried over to the social and public level. As the *Gender Policy* say, "The equality and differentiation of women and men is based on their God given, natural, biological and specific personal constitution. Gender inequality is not a 'women's issue' but should concern and engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as human rights issue and as pre-condition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development" (GP, Introduction).

Education for Gender Justice at DVK

After critically evaluating the present structures of gender-discrimination, and after considering gender-justice education as an integral dimension of Catholic social teaching, let us consider a specific example for theological and moral formation for gender-justice, namely, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram (DVK), a Catholic theological institution in Bangalore, India, where I am teaching at present. At the very outset I would like to say that I am not presenting it as a perfect model of education for gender-justice. Moreover, I am not trying to say that this is the only Church institution where attempts at gender-just education are made. I would rather mention some of the steps taken to ensure gender-justice, though limitations still remain.

The very setting of the institution is rather patriarchal. DVK is a pontifical athenaeum offering degrees and diplomas which have ecclesiastical approval. DVK is owned and managed by a men religious congregation, namely, Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI). Thus, the administration of DVK is basically in the hands of

men. The majority of the students are seminarians studying philosophy and theology in preparation for their ordination. In the post-graduate and doctoral courses the majority are priests. At the same time, about 15-20% of the students are nuns, who are undergoing various undergraduate, post-graduate and doctoral courses. There are also a few lay —men and women—students. As a whole, we can say that the administrative set up and the setting of the institution are male-dominated. In this context also, education for a gender-just Church and society is imparted. Formation for gender-justice is of vital importance, since these students will be leaders of the Christian community after the completion of their studies. What GP says about the formation of priests is relevant in this regard: “Educate clergy against the imposition of gender biased practices (i.e. covering the head with veil by women, while receiving Holy Communion, reading the gospel and at the time of adoration) (GP, 11). This is of vital importance since there are priests who insist on such practices even today.

Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram was one of the pioneering Catholic theological institutions in India, which welcomed women for theological studies. Since then, a number of women, mainly women religious, have undergone theological and philosophical training at DVK. There are many women students studying at the doctoral, post-graduate, undergraduate and diploma levels. In every batch/class there are women students. This gives the possibility to seminarians and priests to interact with women (most of them religious) as equals. It will have a direct influence on their attitude towards women when they engage in various ministries. To encourage more women to take up theological studies, as far as possible, scholarships are made available for them. There are a few women who are full time faculty, and many other women are visiting faculty. Men and women students study in the same class and work

together for various academic and co-curricular activities, giving them the opportunity to know each other better, to learn to respect each other and to collaborate with each other. Men and women are given equal opportunities for various programmes organised here. Thus, not only through intellectual studies, but also through daily interactions, they learn the importance of gender-justice and gender-equality.

To form moral and theological perspectives on gender-justice, the following ways are adopted:

1. Re-reading of the biblical stories which were traditionally used to support gender-discrimination: It is not rare that (mis)interpretations given to scriptural passages in the Christian tradition are used to argue that men enjoy a natural superiority in the creative plan of God. Such passages and stories are interpreted in light of modern biblical scholarship, so that patriarchal bias may be questioned and corrected. I shall give only a few examples:

In the past the Yahwist creation story was sometimes interpreted in the following way: since Eve was created as a solution to the loneliness of Adam, her creation was only an afterthought; that since Eve was created after Adam from his rib, as a 'helper' (Gen 2:18-22), she was to be considered inferior to Adam; that since it was Eve who fell into the Serpent's temptation first (Gen 3:1-6), she was to be considered responsible for all the sin in the world. Although such (mis)interpretations have been rejected by modern biblical scholarship, such ideas find supporters even today. Biblical scholars today underscore that Yahwist narrative is an aetiological narrative, explaining the rationale behind the intimate relationship between man and woman using mythological elements. What is important is not the order of creation; the story presents God as the creator and life-giver of both man and woman. Similarly, 'helper' does not

denote any inferiority, since the same word is used for the Holy Spirit, and for God. Besides, both man and woman are equally responsible for the sin, for falling into temptation to challenge the sovereignty of God the creator.

Though in the Priestly narrative in which we find the creation of man and woman simultaneously, this aspect was almost ignored by the tradition. Often, the interpretations of the priestly narrative of creation focused on the procreative purpose, as far as man-woman relationship or marriage was concerned. While interpreting this story, it is pointed out that man and woman were created simultaneously, and that both of them are created in the image of God.

Similarly, although the Prophetic symbol of marriage has many positive elements, it is possible that this symbol is misused to show that the woman (Israel) errs frequently and easily, that the man (God) is always right and faithful; it may be used to authorise male violence on women, and to claim that she deserves to be treated in that way. While pointing out the positive values in this symbol, care is taken to correct such misinterpretations and to show the negative aspects involved in this symbol.

The way Jesus treated women, even the so called sinners, is shown as a model of the respect, acceptance and equality that women should receive in the Church and society. The Church is to follow the example of Jesus who accepted women as ‘equal disciples.’

2. Equality of husband and wife as basic to family ethics: Marriage is a relationship of equals, based on mutuality and reciprocity. Even today, the preferred imagery in the Christian circles to speak about husband-wife relationship is that of Christ-Church relationship used by St Paul (Eph 5:22-24). Though this is a very rich image beautifully showing the love of Christ as the model of marital love, this imagery has been used also to argue that the husband is the

head of the family to whom the wife owes obedience. While interpreting this passage, we try to emphasise that the basic norm of the relationship is given in verse 5:21: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ."²⁹

Based on various biblical stories and passages, mutuality and reciprocity are presented as the norms for marital sexual relationship. The lover and beloved in the Song of Songs are presented as a model of erotic love in conjugal relations. In the Christian tradition, this concept goes back to 1 Cor 7:3-4, which says, "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does." In fact, St Paul is very much gender-sensitive when he speaks specifically of the right and duty of the husband and wife. However, in the patriarchal context, the possibility of using this norm to demand an unconditional sexual availability from the part of the wife existed, whereas the wife would not have the freedom and spontaneity to express her sexual desires and needs since such expressions would be judged by patriarchy as 'abnormal' or 'perverse.' That is, in practice this norm had become a patriarchal norm to control further the woman and her sexuality. What GP says is important in this regard: "Promote a spirituality of sexual relationship perceived as an expression of mutual love and self-gift rather than an exercise of conjugal right (of the man) and duty (of the wife)" (GP, 15).

3. Importance of gender-justice in the official documents of the Church: Besides explaining the teaching of the Church on gender equality and gender justice in the above mentioned documents, a

²⁹ In fact this is the norm given for the three sets of relationship in the household, namely, husband and wife, parents and children, and masters and servants (Eph 5:21-6:1-9).

particular focus is given on GP, so that the students may become aware of the teaching of the Indian bishops on gender justice.

4. Discrimination against women as violation of justice: Through an analysis of the relevant biblical passages and stories, the tradition of the Church, the official teaching of the Church, especially the social doctrine of the Church, and through the writings of various theologians, we attempt to inculcate in the students the conviction that discrimination against women is a violation of justice.

5. Violence against women as violence against humanity, and violation of basic human rights: We try to communicate the idea that violence against women is a human rights issue. It is not something that affects women alone; rather, it is violence against humanity.

6. Conferences, Seminars and Publications: At Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, we have organised a few conferences and seminars on Gender Justice and Feminist Theology. For example, in 2014 July under the auspices of the Department of moral theology, DVK organised a conference on “Gender Justice in the Church and Society.”³⁰ Another important conference, “Feminine Genius: Women Leadership for a Just and Compassionate Society” was organised by *Journal of Dharma* in July 2016.³¹ In the conferences or seminars we organise there will be usually a few papers from the Gender Justice and Feminist perspectives. We also try to have women scholars speaking in the conferences, writing in our journals and other publications. During the academic year 2016-2017, the annual lectures for the Faculty theology was on “Women Empowerment,” and the lectures were delivered by Prof. Lisa Sowle

³⁰ The papers of this seminar have been already published: See footnote 7.

³¹ The papers were published in the four issues of vol. 41 (2016) of *Journal of Dharma*, and in *Feminine Genius: Perspectives and Projects*, ed. Jose Nandhikkara, CMI (Bengaluru: Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, 2016).

Cahill, a world renowned moral theologian and feminist theologian teaching at Boston College, USA.

In the last couple of decades many books on gender justice, feminist theology, etc. have been published from DVK. *Journal of Dharma* and *Asian Horizons*, two journals published from DVK, have dedicated a few issues to themes on gender justice.

Conclusion

Ensuring gender justice is not an option or generosity for a Christian, but an obligation, because ensuring justice to everyone is integral to the Christian vision and mission. Continuing patriarchal structures which discriminate against women, and various forms of exploitation and violence against women demand a more committed action from the part of the Church to create a gender-just society. The Church cannot be said to be free from gender discrimination. This calls for a critical self-appraisal from the part of the Church. Although in recent decades the Church has been asserting more emphatically the need of gender-justice, it has to be strengthened further. Gender-justice should be understood basically as an issue of justice and human rights. Above all, education for gender-justice is of utmost importance. Although I have briefly presented education for gender justice in the context of a theological institution, in fact, this education should begin at the school level itself. To fight gender violence and to ensure gender equality, laws may be helpful, but more important is the change in the mind-set and attitudes.

[摘要] 近數十年，印度女性的權利和地位得以提升是有目共睹的。然而，印度社會仍然是父權主導，針對女性的暴力持續上升。因此，性別公義教育顯得格外重要。某程度上，教會中歧視女性的情況仍然存在，這有違教會在公義方面的教導。批判性地檢視現時的性別歧視結構後，本文建議將性別公義教育視為天主教社會訓導不能或缺的一部分。作為具體例子，本文介紹了位於印度班加羅的一所天主教神學院(DVK)的神學和倫理培育情況。該神學院的大部分學生為修生、神父和修女，亦有少數平信徒。由於他們將成為基督徒團體的領袖，他們的性別公義培育尤其重要。培育倫理道德和神學角度，會採用以下的步驟：1.重讀那些傳統上被用作歧視女性的聖經故事；2.夫妻之間的平等是家庭倫理的基礎；3. 教會文件中有關性別公義的重要；4.歧視女性是違反公義；5.對女性施加暴力違反人性，亦違反人權。除了這些主題的課程，近年來，為了表達對性別議程的重視，神學院舉辦了相關的研討會和會議。此外，DVK 神學院確保男女學生都得到平等機會學習，它是全印度其中一所最早歡迎女性接受神學教育的學院，一直以來都有不少女性學生在此學習。因此，學院本身提供了性別公義培育的環境和氛圍，透過理論學習和具體實踐，神學院為建立性別公義的教會和社會提供了倫理培育。