

Editorial

The editorial of this issue begins with an interpretation of the cover picture drawn by Ms. Kim, Yong-Nim of Korea. A popular and age old Korean proverb says: "if a hen crows the household will be perished." It signifies the Confusian ideology of subjugation of women to their fathers when young, to the husbands when married and to their sons when old.

The status of subjugation includes silence. One is not expected to speak out. When one keeps silence she is counted to have no mind of her own. When one has one's own thinking and feeling and verbalize them in speech or writing, the structure of domination/subjugation cannot be maintained. The oppressors know well about the influence the power of speech can brew in the social fabric and they forbid the subjugated to exercise this power.

It is the rooster who crows and the hen that lays the eggs. It is the biological phenomenon built in the order of nature. This ordinance of nature—the biological function—is extended and identified with the social order of hierarchical structure of domination and subjugation. The rooster which crows is identified with the power of speech that is concretized in the political power, and the hen who lays the eggs is expected to be confined with the boundary of a master's household with the perenial subjugation to the power of speech and politics in the home and society. It is condoned and blessed by the religio-cultural norms and expressed in a way of proverb. "If a hen crows" could be associated with many

wonderous things, because it would be an extraordinary happening. However it is given a most horrible punishment, namely, "the household will be perished!" The very task—household chores—given to women will not be kept because her interest is shifted to male domain, consequently the household will be perished.

It fundamentally lacks the recognition of basic human nature, which has regardless of sex differences need and desire for social fulfillment, and the idea of sharing and doing together the necessary work in the home between women and men. Since the whole responsibility of household chores lies on the shoulders and hands of women it connotes the tremendous power women have over the life in the home, the most basic and fundamental unit of human life. However this recognition is half-hazard and inconsistent in patriarchal family system. No matter how important women's role is in keeping the household going, the master is always a male member and the women who carry out the real power are demanded of perennial subjugation. If not the whole household will be perished.

It is manifested in Confucian culture and Hindu and Islamic cultures. Even the reformist Buddhist and Judeo-Christian cultures whose founders are understood to have proclaimed salvation of achievement of Nirvana to all, are not exempted. All the religions which are rooted and established within the patriarchal social system carry with them the sins of patriarchy. It means that the thought patterns of the majority

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of Asian peoples who are also the pious adherents of one of the above mentioned or other religions are formed with inconsistent schizophrenic notions about women and motherhood. They recognize and even praise and fear the power of women as wife and mother on one hand and on the other they make strict rules about the subjugation of women to be taken for granted. They need to have women in the household, but stripping off them any recognition of innate power that women have and exercise in the life of family. They had to invent a system of subjugation and reinforce it by all means. In this, religions play major roles.

As the control mechanisms, the major religions teach virginity of women before the marriage and chastity after the marriage as the supreme virtue, while the same expectation is not applied to male folks. These religions in their classical period (Pre-modern period) taught their scriptures to males only, with the expectation and vicious consequence of priesthood of one sex only. The scriptures are not only written by male folks, they have always been interpreted also by male folks.

The male authority in the religious life reflects male authority in the life of family and society. The patriarchal and patrilineal family system place the first born male of the clan to be the master par excellence and all the other male figures to be masters in his own nuclear family unit. The ownership of property and inheritance follow the same rule and usually women did not possess economic power no matter how hard they worked in the house and in the fields. The polygamous family system in the rural economy meant more free labour forces and producers of male heirs to the master of the household.

The male dominance in the family is also political in that all the important decisions are made by them, but not the women who obey and actualize the male decisions and orders. Since the women were confined in the household chores, all the activities in the society—whether it might be a smaller or a larger unit—were taken care by the male folks. They have held the political power and power of speech.

The women's awokenness and movement to be autonomous human beings came to the last chapter in the history book of human liberation. It came with the generalization of public education system in most nations and growing participation of women in the economic activities in modern urbanized societies. The historical tide,

once launched will not take back its stance, though the process may not seem to be fast enough for many people.

Then, even when the rooster crows in the morning women will hear the message as extraordinary in spite of the traditional teachings and indoctrinations on the sex role definition which was to be untrespassable and to be fixed in the compartments with high walls. The women will blow trumpets and beat the drums and announce the good news of freedom for all women.

This issue starts with a creative story told in the fashion of folk tale of community of sparrows—the small ordinary birds. This story represents Asian people's wish for true democracy and participatory governing bodies, denouncing dictatorial powers which destroy the genuine people's communities. The ugly big sparrow, to my mind, symbolizes patriarchy which dominates not only the other sex, but also all the other lesser power group in the hierarchical order of our societies and the world. But when the sparrows—the small folks in the community—work together for their liberation the ugly one's has to go.

Dr. Astrid Lobo's story begins with overcoming problems occurred to her inter-faith marriage, as she and her husband choose to have the wedding ceremony in Christian (Roman Catholic) way, with slight Hindu modification. She testifies to the greater power of love over against religious doctrinal restrictions. It is interesting to note that during her pregnancy and at the time of delivery, both she and her husband came out free from a male baby obsession. Many people in Asia—particularly in India—are still trapped in this male baby obsession, due to the dowry burden female children bring to their parents. The whole story is sharing her own experience in a womanly way. It makes the story interesting and brings good feelings to the readers because it makes one to journey with her in the path of freedom and genuine love.

Other articles are also chosen and they are equally important to make up the September 1990 issue.

We appreciate all the writers for their voluntary contribution of their reflection in various forms, and hope this trend will keep up.

July 4, 1990 at Kyoto, Japan
Sun Ai Lee Park

Contents

Editorial.....	2	Bride Burning—Women Burning.....	43
The Courageous Sparrows.....	4	<i>by Elizabeth Padillo Olesen,</i>	
<i>by "Cai Hong" (Rainbow), SINGAPORE</i>		<i>PHILIPPINES/NEPAL</i>	
My Marriage is Not a Sacrament.....	8	The Feast of Esther.....	44
<i>by Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, INDIA</i>		<i>by Sharon Shenav, ISRAEL</i>	
My Wedding was not Just a 'Rite'.....	11	A Meditation on the Parable.....	46
<i>by Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, INDIA</i>		of Good Samaritan	
Astrid and Kalpesh Nuptials.....	14	<i>by Catherine Ujagar, PAKISTAN</i>	
Unto Us a Child is Born (Is. 9:6).....	18	Feminist Theological Lighting on.....	48
<i>by Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, INDIA</i>		Goddess Image Imposed in Korean Folks Beliefs	
Woman-The Jewel.....	20	<i>by KAWT, KOREA</i>	
<i>by Sulochana, SHM, INDIA</i>		In the Ocean Turmoil.....	52
Future Church—The Feminist Agenda.....	21	<i>by Gabriella Dietrich, GERMANY/INDIA</i>	
<i>by Jessie B. Tellis Nayak, INDIA</i>		Bible Study—Mk. 14:1-11.....	53
Breaking Towards a Bright Future.....	25	<i>by Gabriella Dietrich, GERMANY/INDIA</i>	
<i>by Anitha John, INDIA</i>		Feminist Creed.....	54
Country Update on Korea.....	26	<i>by Gabriella Dietrich, GERMANY/INDIA</i>	
<i>by Shin Sun, KOREA</i>		Rules for Article Writers.....	55
Sighted Sights.....	30	<i>by WINA, INDIA</i>	
<i>by Jojo M. Fung, SJ</i>		Statement to the Churches in Asia.....	56
The Other Africa: Sexism in African Society.....	31	<i>Asia Church Women's Conference,</i>	
<i>by Sr. Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, LSOSF, KENYA</i>		<i>Bombay 1990</i>	
Where is the Man?.....	35	Women Renewing the Church by the.....	57
<i>by Sr. Barbara Raftery, PAKISTAN</i>		Power of the Holy Spirit	
Strangled Roots, Crushed Plants.....	36	<i>Statement of the Consultation of Asian</i>	
<i>by Rita Monteiro, INDIA</i>		<i>Associations of Women in Theology and</i>	
Sisterhood.....	39	<i>Ministry, Bangkok 13-18 March, 1990</i>	
<i>by Naseem George, OP, PAKISTAN</i>		Campaign to end Child Prostitution.....	58
Women's Status and Motherhood.....	41	Launched—Press Release	
in the Family Life of Nepal: A Reflection		<i>ECTWT, THAILAND</i>	
<i>by Elizabeth Padillo Olesen,</i>		Letters to the Editor.....	59
<i>PHILIPPINES/NEPAL</i>			

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