

WHO IS THE NUMBER ONE ENEMY OF WOMEN?

Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ

I have no doubt about who is the number one enemy of women. I have known it from my childhood. I remember an incident when I must have been just eight years old. Then about one thousand meters away from my grandfather's house, my father, mother and five children staying in a newly constructed house in the midst of our farm land. It was the season of heavy monsoon.

One day late in the evening after finishing the works in the field my father went to meet his friend staying less than a kilometer from our house. Some times his friend came to our house and sometimes my father went to his house. That was the custom. That day it began to rain cats and dogs. Heavy rain is in order during the monsoon season in Kerala. But that day the rain was exceptionally heavy with thundering and lightening with no end.

Usually my father comes back after spending an hour or so in his friend's house. When his friend comes home they speak about their works in the field and about the market as well as about their workers in the field. But my father always returned home in time for the family rosary and supper. But that day the rain continued to pour. Thunder and lightening made the atmosphere very frightful. To make the matters worse our dog tied in the varanda was barking non-stop.

After waiting for sometime my mother and we children said the family prayers including the rosary. The thundering and lightening seemed to become more terrifying. My mother went and checked and made double sure that all doors and windows are locked from inside. When mother got tired of waiting she served us supper. My three young brothers were put to sleep after the meal. But my mother did not allow my elder sister of 11 years and me to go to sleep, as she was afraid to be left alone.

Why is that Appachan has not come? He never comes so late! What must have happened to him? My mother's worry and fear seemed to increase by every passing minutes. Did some tall trees get fire by lightening? Why is that the dog is barking so fiercely? Are there some thieves outside the house? My mother was at the end of her wits with fear and worry.

The night was very dark. Mother lit lamps in all the rooms of the house. All the doors and windows of the house were closed tightly. Yet the light of lightening flashed inside the house through grill of the wintilators. After about three hours the rain subsided and my father returned to the house. Only then my mother was at peace and mother allowed my sister and me to go bed and prepared out bed spreading the mat on the floor.

That day I experienced how frightened my mother was. If one thinks intellectually there was absolutely no reason to be afraid. The house was new and strongly builded that no thief could enter it easily. And if any stranger dares to come close to the house there was a tamed but ferocious dog to attack. If anyone tries to enter through the window or door there were big kitchen knives to attack the intruder in self-defense.

If fact, mother told us the incident when a thief came close to the house looking for a way to get into a house, where a mother and her daughter were alone, the mother through the window threw

a heavy sharp knife and wounded the thief. He pleaded with the woman for some clothes to bandage the wounds and stop the flow of blood. The woman pointed a gun at him and shouted that she would kill him if he does not run away from there. The thief had to go away from there for his life.

That night I could not but feel sleepy. But mother managed me some how to keep awake with her. That day I understood that the biggest enemy of a woman is her fear. I also learnt recently the same thing of women's fear from a high official of the Indian Public Service.

Addressing the first national meeting of young women of All India Catholic University Federation (AICUF) at St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad Miss Radhika Duraiswami, IPS said, "The life-journey for women is specially painful. I speak specially about women, because we women have to face many obstacles and difficulties from our birth. If those obstructive difficulties are not taken away from childhood, they make us handicapped.

"What are those obstructive difficulties? It is fear. The fear to be alone is slowly put into our minds. Fear is shown to us in living alone or without any life-partner. To hide this fear we begin to think and act in a certain way.

"We prefer to live under someone. We become humble and submissive. We become obedient. We try to make others happy. We smile in our effort to be pleasant. In other words we put on a mask. As time passes, the mask becomes part and parcel of our being. Not only that, we are afraid that if we try to put aside our masks, we will suffer its consequences. We will be thrown out of the door of Paradise of happiness and peace.

"But the truth is, we will be living incomplete lives as long as we do not become true to ourselves. And as long as we lead an incomplete life we never enter the Paradise. On the other hand, it is also frightening to speak with courage, without fear and live true to ourselves on the path of morality and justice. There is pain also in a life free from fear. The journey is difficult. The consciousness of the difficulties creates conflict situation."

After speaking about such painful and fearful mentality of women in Indian Society Radhika Duraiswami continued, "The wonderful freedom and the very different ways of thinking and acting make the human beings distinguish from the animals. But most women throw away their gift of freedom and under pressure from the society live an ordinary rut of lives."

Ms Radhika Duraiswami at the end of her short but thought-provoking and enlightening speech said that many women approve and accept this situation and give up the opportunity to develop themselves. Instead of this traditional life, if a woman wishes, she can make a life worthy of her dignity.

In practical terms Ms Duraiswami has given three advices to women. First, study well and find a job that you become financial independent and become free from the fear of lack of economic support; second, cultivate a relationship of equality in thought and actions with others; and third, through on-going formation develop yourself continuously.

These three advices given by Ms Radhika Duraiswami in the AICUF meeting on December 29, 2004, at St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad apply to all people but specially to young men and women. If a person can study well and earn enough to be financially independent, then such a person need neither be dependent for his/her survival on someone else nor be a slave under someone's care.

Similarly, the human dignity is cultivated by accepting and treating all people as equals. Human dignity is the source of peace and equality. Finally, the whole world would become a better place to live when everyone takes the path of on-going formation and continually develop oneself leading to the welfare of all people.

Every year on March 8 we celebrate the women's day with the whole world. In this context the three point of Ms Radhika Duraiswami can help us and especially the women to become free from fear and from the sources of fear. Finally all women need to remind themselves that nobody would give them their just rights but they have to take the initiative to get their rights and rightful place in the society. If there is need, the women should use just force to get their due rights.

The empowerment of women is in women's own hands. The women should continually fight for the rights and equality in their families, societies and religions. In this fight they need to recognize the demon of fear and conquer it. Conquering the fear will lead a woman to her rightful place of equality and dignity. (Contact: ciss@satyam.net.in)