

Discrimination Against Women in Japan

In Japan there are two centers for Women's studies: one is Kobe College Center and another is Tokyo Women's Christian University. Both were represented at the AWI Indonesia Conference. The speeches given by the Japanese participants were brief but they contained interesting points regarding the problems of Japanese women.

From a paper presented by Kobe Jogakuin (Kobe College Inst. for Women's Studies), the following points are worthy of consideration:

1. Although Japanese culture is oriented towards Europe and the U.S.A., Japanese women realize that what they can do for the solidarity of the Asian Women is to think deeply of the problems involving Asian countries such as the increase of the Japanese defense budgets, multinational corporations, sex tours and dumping the nuclear waste into the Pacific ocean.

2. In Japan, wife and husband are more likely to be secluded, each one of them has a separate role. We should work for a change in the paradigm of the male-dominated society and try to create a new proper discourse for women.

3. The reforms recently initiated in Japan promote the new sexual division of labor and strengthen wives prerogatives. As an example, the Pension Law provides pensions automatically to the wives who are dependent on husbands. Other women are granted benefits under specific conditions.

Lawyer Tetsuko Kawai presents in her lecture the following complaints:

1. Sex discrimination in work. One example is the field of law where it is harder for women than for men to find a job, even though they passed the state examinations and got well trained in law.

2. At the institution for the mentally handicapped, boys and girls are trained to work at the factory in town, but women get only half the men's earnings.

3. The wife's house labor is not considered equivalent to a full time job, therefore the indemnification claim for the death of a full-time house-wife in a traffic accident could not be accepted. After 1974 the claim was legally recognized but it was only half of the sum paid to indemnify a full-time worker. Discrimination in this case is unacceptable because a housewife's work is very valuable since it insures the reproduction of life; it is at least equal to a man's job in value and quantity.

Dr. Fumika Takase, director of Kobe College Institute for Women's Studies, gives the following statistics quoted from a report published in the Christian Science Monitor, Jan., 1985.

Although the number of professional women increased from 760,000 in 1965 to 1.87 million in 1981, most women workers are teachers or clerical assistants. Women constitute only 6.4% of Japan's scientists, 2.4% of its engineers, 9% of its lawyers, despite the fact that 33% of them go to college, as opposed to 40% of men. Women form only 5.5% of the total number of those in charge of executive posts.

In 1985, women's salaries averaged 51.8% of men's salaries.

It remains to be seen whether the newly passed law of "Equal Opportunity for Employment" will succeed in eliminating all discrimination against women with regard to employment, promotion, retirement and dismissal.

Legal and Political Justice

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In order to achieve legal and political rights for women, I would like to highlight four basic guidelines for the women's rights movement. **Firstly**, women's rights movement has to walk hand in hand with the civil rights and human rights movements. Women's rights cannot exist in isolation and can only be obtained and preserved in a genuinely free society. The debacle of women's rights in the Soviet Union is ample evidence of the above. This applies specially to Third World countries where many women activists think that they can achieve rights for themselves when these rights are denied to all others.

The **next** and foremost objective has to be equality in the fountain head of all power, i.e. in the **pinnacle of power**. There are always plenty of women engaged in the drudgery of menial work, there are few in the upper echelons of power structure. The penetration of women into the power structure has to be on a wide scale, so that genuine equality may be achieved. Today, those few women who sit at the top are exceptions to the rule. Their position is precarious because of their sex and their **insignificant number**.

The **third** bastion to be attacked is the disparity within the family. Even where societies have allowed equal civic and political rights for women, personal status laws remain discriminatory. This disparity has remained a millstone around our necks. Even as we struggle up the surface of equal opportunity, this **deadweight** drags us down again and again. Unless women are given equal status in this nucleus of all societies, the foundation of women's equality will remain shaky.

Fourthly, religious interference in temporal matters must be dismissed. Religion as practiced today has bred intolerance for many of the basic human rights. It is important for us not only to diffuse and minimise religion in affairs temporal, but also clearly demonstrate the dichotomies of current religious thought.