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India/Germany, 2003

Case study

visit to a Hindu widow in a German clinic

source: Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling No 11, 2003

I was visiting a young Sri Lankan who had undergone a surgery. He informed me that Mrs. Sharma, a widow 79 year old, was admitted in the Surgical Ward since she fell in the bathroom and broke her hip bone. I knew this woman through her son who runs an Asian shop. This family belongs to Brahmin caste and her husband was a Hindu Pujari in the local Temple and died few years ago. The whole family had to flee Sri Lanka since their house had been bombed by the army. As a result they lost their possession and somehow managed to land in Germany in 1984. Three years later, the eldest son committed suicide (1987) at Braunschweig (Brunswick). He has two children. Her eldest daughter has one girl (7 years) and her husband left her 7 years ago. The youngest son is unemployed and he is an alcoholic.

Mrs. Sharma is admitted in a room with 4 beds. She is the only foreigner in that room and speaks broken German and is not able to carry a conversation with other patients. Therefore, she feels lonely and isolated. I greeted her in Indian way and she greeted me back with a smiling face. Her facial appearance suggested that she was so delighted about my visit. After exchanging few words she told me that she had to undergo the surgery the next day and she felt much discomfort and severe pain in her hip. She said "It is my 'Karma' (fate). God is punishing me again and again. I have experienced so much loss in my life. I never wanted to leave my country and people. I don't like the climate here. I have no one to talk except my children or when I come to the shop a few customers from Sri Lanka. Now my mobility is gone. Moreover, I need to depend on others for everything. My hip is not going to be healed again as normal. I may not be able to walk even. My family did not do any harm to anyone. We always tried to help others as we could. My husband, being a 'Pujari' was serving our gods and the people according to Hindu dharma. We were living according to the rules of our caste and religion. We do not deserve this kind of 'Karma' in our lives. (As she said these words, tears began to roll down on her cheek). Why is god punishing us severely? Now look I become a burden to my children. I wish I could be with my husband."

As I was listening to her conversation the age old theological questions and biblical parallels became alive in my mind. I wished I could enter into a dialogue with her.

After a pause, she said, "May be God is testing my faith. I need to be there for my children. It is my 'Karma', I must accept it and live with it until I die. Everyone

has a 'Karma' in this world. We need to suffer and no one can escape from it." She added: "Next week, I will be going to the rehabilitation Clinic near Aachen. I do not know what will happen there. I hope my daughter and son could come and visit me there regularly."

She thanked me for the visit and asked for my prayer. She enquired whether I would be able to visit her before she leaves for the Rehabilitation Clinic. I could see a sense of relief and hope in her eyes.