



SOCIAL STIGMA TO CAVE EXPERIENCE

"A soul without prayer is dead" Mother Eliswa.

Leprosy is one of the earliest diseases known to history and its causes and treatment have been associated with supernatural forces in all religions. There is a historical basis for leprosy stigma in the scriptures of all religions in India.

In the Bible, leprosy was seen as a symbol of sin and uncleanness, often viewed as divine punishment, leading to severe social stigma and isolation. However, the New Testament's portrayal of Jesus compassionately and miraculously healing lepers transformed this view, inspiring a legacy of Christian care, forgiveness, and attempts to eradicate the disease.



Widowhood is a major social stigma in India, leading to discrimination, marginalization, and significant hardship for many women. The stigma is a result of traditional beliefs that view widows as inauspicious, which results in them being ostracized, isolated, and restricted from social life, education, and economic opportunities.

Pope Francis has frequently used the image of the biblical widow to highlight those who are marginalized and in need of the Church's special protection.

In a 2018 speech to a conference for consecrated widows, he noted that widowhood is a "particularly difficult experience". He encouraged these women to use their life experiences to help the young and poor, showing "the tenderness of God".

Mother Eliswa was only 20 years old when she lost her husband. The sudden departure of her husband was a great shock to Eliswa. The stigma of being a widow remains as an unbearable suffering for those who survive their husband.

She says "*Prepare yourself to wage war with courage and determination, for only the courageous soldiers, will be crowned*".

Instead of being affected by this social stigma of widowhood she chose to turn to God and learned the art of mental prayer by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. She used to visit the Blessed Sacrament in the parish church. As days passed by her daughter Anna who was always with her, witnessed the long hours of Eliswa's prayer and meditation and imitated it in her own prayer life. Mother Eliswa's focus was not the social stigma but the spiritual warfare as she says, "**Spiritual warfare is much more difficult than all the other wars**".

As a preparation to enter into interior silence and solitude Eliswa felt the great need of detachment from comfort and conveniences of ancestral house. It was a deliberate action of entering into the cave of silence and solitude to experience prayer. Reaching this juncture of her life, Eliswa had already established a solid foundation of contemplative prayer through the practice of fraternal charity, humility and detachment as prescribed by our holy mother St. Teresa of Avila.

Let us coagulate the foundation of our contemplative life through the regular practice of mental prayer as we eagerly wait for the beatification of our Foundress Mother Eliswa.

