



“When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home, when the shepherds are
back with their flocks, the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost, to heal the broken, to feed the
hungry, to release the prisoner, to rebuild
the nations, to bring peace among the
people, to make music
in the heart.”

Howard Thurman

We wish each one of you the love, peace and joy of a Christ-filled Christmas

COLOUR THE WORLD 'ORANGE' - AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The world is just recuperating from the attack of a deadly virus and is still apprehensive of the impending next wave. The Covid -19, a pandemic of inequality has aggravated issues related to violence against women and children as well as women's unpaid care work. Abusive behaviour towards women and children is a common trend in several households. The lockdown, work from home and online classes has seen millions of women and children with no option but to confine themselves with their abusers and suffer in silence.

Color The World



Every woman has a story to tell us. The stories carry clear voices of women's agonies and trauma of living in fear of violence in their homes, for themselves and for their children. The poor women – the domestic workers, the migrant women, and the Dalit women have suffered the worst. Their stories are hardly told by the mainstream media. Who wants to hear the pain of a domestic worker whose daughter was molested by her father and had to live in the same one room house with him due to pandemic? Women's realities are very painful and often they reveal women's resilience and at times their stubborn faith in God.

Violence against women and girl children bear witness to the escalating brutality on them as sites for the assertion of increasingly misogynistic and masculinised caste, class and religion-based patriarchies in India. Though there are laws with stringent provisions enacted to protect women, we lack effective implementation of them.

The colour orange, the designated colour for the 16 days of activism symbolizes a brighter future, free of violence for women. It also serves as a means of demonstrating our solidarity in eliminating all forms of violence. Therefore our actions, however diminutive, can make big impacts to end violence against women in our families, in our neighbourhood, in our communities etc., We all have a role to play. What is my role?



JULIE GEORGE

Adv. Julie George is a woman's rights lawyer and a co-opted member of the ICWM National Team

HUMAN RIGHTS, FAITH AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Joycia Thorat

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world and proclaimed in the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10th December, 1948. Eleanor Roosevelt chaired the drafting committee of UDHR along with many other women. UDHR is to be a common standard of achievement for all nations and all people. All 30 articles of UDHR uphold the rights of all and condemn discrimination, violence and mistreatment of others in any shape and form.



The three core values of Human rights are interdependent and indivisible, inalienable, unconditional and universal. Human rights and faith have a dialectical relationship. Nature is connected to human beings as we see it in the integrity of creation and sustainability of life. Human beings connect to God as a source of reason and conscience thereby becoming responsible and accountable. God created human beings to be free, equal and with self-respect which is intrinsically connected to fellowship, peace and justice of fellow-human beings and nature. This is the beautiful relationship between Human Rights and faith.



Human rights operate in a 4 fold system which are through the treaties, inherent human dignity of all beings, the right holder and the state which has the responsibility to uphold human rights. All 4 aspects have to be integrated to achieve a perfect score on human rights. In such an understanding one can see that Gender based violence undermines human rights and God given dignity, but we see it shrouded in a culture of silence. Gender based violence which occurs in every country, territory and region of the world is a violation of basic rights which also prevents women from exercising their social, economic and political rights.



Globally 35 percent of women have experienced physical /sexual violence. Under structural violence, denial of ownership of land, caste-based violence, sexual and religious minorities, violence against people with disabilities, indigenous people, violence against women, violence perpetuated by the state to uphold or honour customs and traditions all fall under systemic and structural violence. Violence manifests itself in all forms & circumstances and is present in all spheres of women's life. It's reinforced by culture, religion and government through standards and codes. In 2017, 30,000 women in the world were killed by their intimate partners, the persons whom we trust themost. 20,000 of these women were from Asia.



Violence against women is an important public health issue. Early detection and effective intervention is critical. Care work is another form of gender-based violence. Unpaid care work is the engine which keeps capitalism, economies, societies and homes running. It's run by women who have little time to get education, earn a decent living and have a say in how our societies run and they are trapped at the bottom rung of the pyramid. Women and Girls put 12.5 billion hours of paid work every day. This amounts to USD 10.8 trillion - more than 3 times of tech industry (Oxfam Care Report 2020)

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The actions for combatting gender based violence is educating boys and men on gender equality, empowering girls and women economically, enforcing law, re-reading religious texts from gender lens, challenging social norms, capacity building of multi stakeholders.

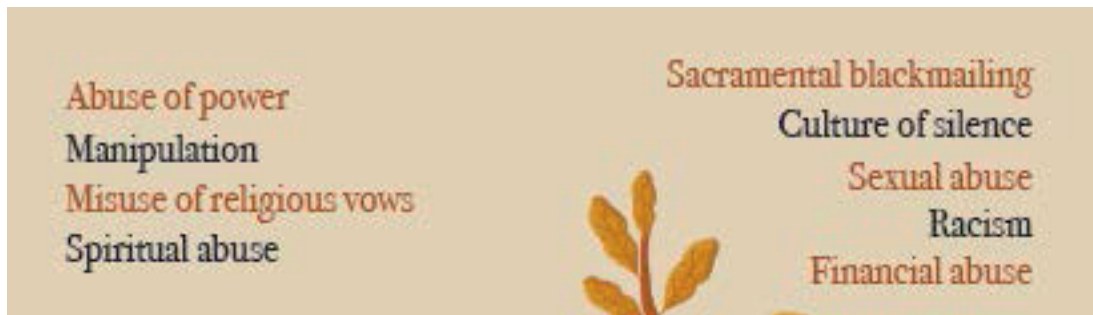
As a faith group what is the understanding of mission when we talk about gender based violence? How often do we hear about upholding human rights in our Sunday sermons, ecumenical/Christian board rooms, institutions, church committees etc. Do we discuss leaving no one behind? The violence we talked about exists in a society which has the knowledge, capacity and resources to eradicate it. Do we have the political will to make



Human rights violations a thing of the past? We need to dream and act. Standing up with people and affirming life is the most important Conversion or Born again experience or mission of God's children..

Dr. Joycia Thorat is a grass roots worker and is a member of the ICWM National Team.

ENOUGH ! WOMEN RELIGIOUS DEMAND AN END TO SERVITUDE, MISOGYNY AND RACISM... Sr. Noella Dsouza



In June of this year, the Conference of Religious of India (Women's Section), released a study mandated by them on Gender Justice in the Indian Church. It was about the Women Religious of India, speaking of the discriminations heaped on them.

121 Major superiors from around the country answered the questionnaire sent to them. Even though this was a small number of congregations that answered, it gives us a good idea of what is happening around the country. The study highlighted a number of issues. What we said was very simple....

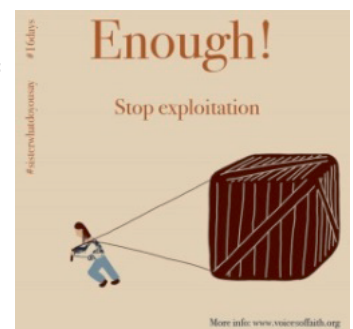
Our salaries most often are just a stipend. Sisters who work for parishes and other church related institutions, rarely get travel allowance, holiday and health allowance, pension... as in other jobs today. Why are sisters different? Why are we less deserving? Regarding property, the bishop and clergy seem to have the power to interfere, control and dispose of land in the possession of women religious even though internal agreements and official documents exist in favour of the women.

Sacramental Blackmail is another area of concern. There are priests who misuse their power, and use the sacraments to get even with the sisters should they not be heeded and given the prestige and power they desire. Verbal Abuse and abusive language from the pulpit falls in this category. Should the parish priest have some grievance about the sisters working in his parish the easiest way to demean them is to do so from where he is not questioned. These are our so called 'men of God'.

But why are we treated in this manner?

Well, for one we are cheap or even free labour. Oftentimes sisters are told, that they have vowed to work for Christ, and as they have given their lives to work for Him, so they cannot ask for salaries.

Another major factor, is that seminarians who get used to sisters serving them do not grow up respecting sisters as consecrated persons like them. Instead they look at them as mere servants. Unfortunately this mentality is carried on when they become parish priests. Thus our sisters, cheap or free labourers, decorate altars, wash church linen, organize the flowers on the altar, decorate floats on feast days and are expected to sponsor them financially too.



Enough is enough, is what sisters from around the country are saying today. Our time for Justice is now!

What do you think about this? As women who are active in church matters, how are you treated by the clergymen there? Time to think about it, don't you think so?

Noella De Souza MCJ is part of the team that took the study IT'S HIGH TIME from inception to completion.



Extracts from
SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER: THE BHIMA KOREGAON ARRESTS
Susan Abraham

To see your family under attack by the state—what could be more frightening, more demotivating, more spirit-crushing? But the resolve to bear the attack chin up comes from seeing the way the person most affected by it, the person incarcerated, is able to withstand and not get crushed under it.



Jesuit priest Stan Swamy had to die before the world woke up to the scale of the injustice in the Bhima Koregaon (BK) case fabricated by investigating agencies against activists, three of whom are women: Shoma Sen, Sudha Bhardwaj and Jyoti Jagtap. The brunt of their incarceration is being borne by their family members. I say this as the wife of Vernon Gonsalves, one of those arrested. Vernon's 99-year-old mother passed away on 2 May 2021 without Vernon being able to meet her or attend her funeral.

On 15 August last year, Surendra Gadling lost his mother. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) court rejected his application for interim bail, to attend her final funeral rites.

Our son Sagar has had a tough time. Ten years ago, as a twelve-year-old child, he witnessed his father being arrested on false charges. After spending five years and a half in jail, my husband was acquitted in all but one case, where an appeal is pending in the High Court. In 2018, when he was arrested again, Sagar was older and better able to understand how the charges had been manipulated.

The Bhima Koregaon Case

The BK case dates back to 1 January 2018, when violence broke out during an annual celebratory gathering at Bhima Koregaon to mark the 200th year of the historic Battle of Bhima Koregaon, in which a regiment of Dalits defeated a Peshwa army. The Dalits consider this a victory of the Mahars over the injustices perpetuated by the Brahmanical Peshwa rule. One person died, and several others were injured in the 2018 violence.





An FIR was lodged by Anita Sawle, a Pune resident, alleging that the violence was instigated by right-wing leaders Milind Ekbote and Sambhaji Bhide. These leaders were let off scot-free. Instead, random unconnected persons with the common thread of being dissenters were jailed and trapped in a web of conspiracy theories and a draconian law, the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) 1967, from which the road to freedom seems like a tunnel with no light at the end.

Template for Incarceration

The BK case has become a template for the incarceration of those who speak truth to power. The template is as follows: 1) persons totally unconnected with a crime are arraigned as accused; 2) The victims are made out to be the perpetrators; 3) The real perpetrators of the violence are allowed to go scot-free. 4) A conspiracy story is woven; 5) Draconian laws like the UAPA are used to keep innocent citizens incarcerated for long periods.

The same template has been used to frame the victims of the Delhi riots and is now being tried on the agitating farmers. Peace-loving citizens can no longer remain silent. We have to raise our voices against the fascist onslaught by holding the Constitution of India aloft.

Adv. Susan Abraham is the wife of Vernon Gonsalves. The above are extracts from "If Not Now, When? Disquieting Feminist Questions," Edited by Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, Kochurani Abraham, Prashant Olalekar, Published by Gujarat Sahitya Prakash.

7 FEMINIST HUMAN RIGHTS TRENDSETTER ACTIVISTS WE SADLY BID THEM A FOND FAREWELL FLAVIA AGNES

Within a short span of three months - mid-July to mid-October, seven stalwarts passed away from the feminist movement in India. While we mourn their death, we must also celebrate their life and pay tribute to the rich legacy they have left behind.



Shashi Sail (November, 1946 – July, 2021) Raipur, Madhya Pradesh

Shashi and her husband, Rajendra Sail, were Christian human rights defenders who worked in Raipur, Chhattisgarh. Their work with bonded labour is well known. It is mainly due to the efforts of human rights defenders like them that the Supreme Court (1984) ordered the release of around 25000 bonded labourers. They also worked for the release of adivasis, arrested for their struggle for land rights which led to the state labelling these adivasis as 'Maoist' and were strong supporters of the Chattisgarh Mine Workers Association.

Later, Shashi formed the Chattisgarh Mahila Jagruti Sangathan and organised regular trainings on socioeconomic and cultural issues concerning Adivasi women. She also organised domestic workers and unorganised sector workers in the industrial clusters in Raipur and the surrounding semi-urban areas. In mid-nineties, she became a founding member of NAWO (National Alliance of Women's Organizations). She was an inspiring presence and played a key role in the founding of the World March of Women as part of the international feminist movement. She worked for transnational solidarity and built bridges among feminist activists in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The passing away of Rajendra Sail in January, 2020 affected Shashi deeply. She became frail and withdrawn, and passed away on 18th July, 2021, at the age of 75.

Gail Omvedt (August, 1941 - August, 2021) Sangli, Maharashtra

Gail Omvedt, an American born Indian sociologist, passed away on 25th August, 2021 at the age of 80. Gail came to India in 1971 for her doctoral research on 'non-Brahmin social movements in Western India' and focussed on the work of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule, who led the anti-caste struggle in Maharashtra.

She was influenced by the work of Indumati Patankar, a great freedom fighter and women's rights activist, married Dr. Bharat Patankar, Indutai's son, and settled in Kasegaon, Sangli District, Maharashtra, where she lived for the next 50 years. She learnt to speak (her own brand of) Marathi and immersed in local political struggles.



Hers was one of the intellectual voices of the Bahujan movement. Along with Bharat, she co-founded Shramik Mukti Dal, a mass social movement, to highlight the cause of farmers, drought-hit villages and dam-displaced adivasis. Gail and Indutai shared a very close bond and participated together in various campaigns around social issues. She published

around 25 books and several articles.

Sonal Shukla (July, 1941 – September, 2021) Mumbai

Sonal Shukla, the Mumbai based feminist had just turned 80 when the end came without a warning. Sonal was one of the founders of Forum Against Oppression of Women, as a response to the infamous Mathura judgement where the Supreme Court had acquitted two police men, who had raped a 16 year-old tribal girl (Mathura) in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra.

In 1981, when some of us ventured to start a drop-in centre for battered women, Women's Centre, Sonal offered a room in her home. The Centre functioned from her place for two years until it could gather resources to buy a place of its own.

In 1987, she started Vacha (a charitable trust), as a library and women's resource centre. Later Vacha started work with adolescent girls from marginalised communities. She flagged the unique problems faced by them and provided the space for them to escape from family and community strangleholds and branch out on their own.

Personally, I owe Sonal a huge debt. She hand held me while I transitioned from a middle class Christian battered housewife to a feminist lawyer. She was the driving force for me to resume my education and complete my graduation.

Striking about Sonal was her razor sharp wit, sense of aesthetics, ear for classical music, her generosity and most of all, her zest for life, which she maintained till the very end. As per her wishes, her funeral pyre was lit by an adolescent girl from Vacha..



Rati Bartholomew (January, 1927 - Sept. 23, 2021) New

Theatre activist and mother of the renowned photographer Pablo Bartholomew, passed away on 23rd September, 2021 at the ripe old age of 94. Partition uprooted the family and they came to Delhi as refugees.

She inspired generations of students to transit from university theatre to amateur theatre. She looked keenly at their work and opened up opportunities when they stepped out of their studentship. She was one of the earliest members of Yatrik and the vice president of Dishantar – the two most active theatre groups in Delhi in the 1960s.

From the late 1970 onwards, Rati was active in street theatre. She helped shape Theatre Union's production, Toba Tek Singh (a poignant play by Saadat Hasan Monto, set in the background of Partition) which was performed across many cities.

Her sphere of influence was not limited to India but extended across South Asia. She worked with theatre groups in Bangladesh and Pakistan, organising workshops and collaborative productions. During one of her many trips to Pakistan, Rati was able to go to Sargodha and visit the house that she and her family had left behind during Partition.

Kamla Bhasin (April, 1946 – September, 2021) New Delhi

Two days later, on 25th September, 2021 Kamla Bhasin passed away. Her death plunged feminists across South Asia into deep grief.

Kamla, was a social scientist and started work as a developmental activist with Seva Mandir, a rural based NGO in Rajasthan and later worked with the UN. In 1979, when she moved to Delhi, she started participating in street plays around the issue of dowry and violence against women. This was the moment of transformation. Poetry, songs with catchy tunes and rhymes, prose explaining complex feminist concepts in a simple language, poured out in a never ending stream. Some of her songs became feminist anthems. Through dozens of simple booklets, she explained gender, feminism, patriarchy, etc. which could be understood by non-English speaking students and older housewives. These have been translated into several South Asian languages.



In 1984, she co-founded Jagori, a feminist group in Delhi, engaged with training and cultural activities. In 1998 she started Sangat, a South Asian feminist network to campaign for gender justice in the region. She helped build bridges between feminists and secular activists from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, striving to dissolve artificial barriers.

She had the ability to laugh at herself and could also lay bare her life and its challenges such as the suicide by her only daughter Meeto when she was around 26 years, due to clinical depression. In one of her talks she shared, 'she was not only my future, but also of my son, severely challenged because of a vaccination when he was barely seven months old, which damaged his brain'. Despite this she kept the inner fire burning.

After she became ill, she would say to her friends, "the 'bulawa' (summons) has come". When they assured her that she will overcome this, she would respond, "No, not this time. I will not take it as my defeat. I will just transcend to the other world." Her life and death teaches us not only to keep the inner flame burning despite adversaries but also to deal with the contradictory pulls, when it's time to go.



Thanksy Francis Thekkekara

(November 1953 - 1st October 2021) Mumbai Born in November 1953 in a Syrian Christian Family, was a much admired IAS officer of the 1978 batch who retired in 2013. She had completed her BSc, LLB, MBA and Doctorate in micro financing. She brought pluralistic values, sound knowledge and idealism to all her postings including that of Additional Chief Secretary, Minority Development Department, Government of Maharashtra and State Information Commissioner, Maharashtra.

She worked for the overall empowerment of women. Her work at MAVIM (Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandal) was extremely close to her heart. While she was VC&MD of MAVIM (2001 – 2007) she helped to transform it into the Women Development Corporation, committed to bringing change in the life of poor rural women. This helped to expand the work of MAVIM exponentially.

From 2008–2013 she was the additional Chief Secretary, Minority Development Department. her undersecretary Ms. Shaheen Kadri, describes her as a soft spoken person but with strong convictions who never succumbed to political pressure.

Concerned about Muslim women who faced several obstacles - both internal and external, she was particularly disturbed about the lack of reservation for them in educational institutes and employment, which they needed the most. She was far ahead of the Muslim leadership in her zeal for bringing in a transformative society.

Thekkekara co-authored the book, Women's Self Help Groups Restructuring Socio-economic Development (2011) with Professor Parthasarathy, IIT Mumbai and Dr. Veena Poonacha, Director, Women's Studies Dept, SNDT University. She also dabbled in fiction. Her book, Mehbub Gulley : Short Stories from India which was published by Notion Press (November 2019) has received very good reviews..



Jessie Tellis-Nayak (March 1925 – October, 2021) Mangaluru, Karnataka

Born on 21st March 1925 Jessie passed away on 15th October, 2021. She was the first in her family to add Nayak to her Portuguese surname, Tellis, to stress her rootedness.

During her time, the usual choice for girls was marriage or nunnery. She defied the norm, and secured a Masters and a Doctorate in social work from the Catholic University of America, Washington DC. and worked among the marginalised people in shanties and participated in protest marches for basic human dignity of the poor black people. On 28th August, 1963, Jessie was at the Lincoln Memorial Hall, where she heard Martin Luther King Jr.'s iconic speech. This strengthened her resolve to return to India, despite the lucrative positions she was being offered in the US.

She joined the Indian Social Institute (ISI), New Delhi in 1965, and started work among tribal communities in various states. Her leadership skills led her to form 'Vikas Maitri', an organization deeply involved in various types of developmental programmes by an all-tribal team of professionals. In 1975, she became the first director of Women's Development Unit at ISI. The Grihini Training Programme initiated by her became known throughout India. Her work in the area of community organization and women's welfare was accompanied by the publication of 16 books and several research articles.

In 1982 she formed a group of committed Catholic women with the aim of creating awareness about women's situation, named WINA (Women's Institute for New Awakening). It promoted Feminist Theology, networked with women's groups, established libraries for women and brought out WINA Vani, a newsletter to disseminate information. In her articles on the role of women in the Church and society, she questioned the very structure and teachings of the patriarchal, hierarchical Church and demanded justice for women – a revolutionary concept for her time. Some of the books co-authored by her are: The Emerging Christian Woman, On Legal Bondage, Women in Church and in Society and Indian Women Forge Ahead.

Adv. Flavia Agnes is a Mumbai based feminist, activist and legal scholar. She is the co-founder of Majlis, which provides legal services to women.



MY DREAM ... THE IMPACT OF INDIAN CHRISTIAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Raynah Marise 2014 saw the birth of a new ecumenical movement of women in India.... 2021 and we are evolving while trying to define ourselves, our purpose among Women, and our possible impact in Church and Society.

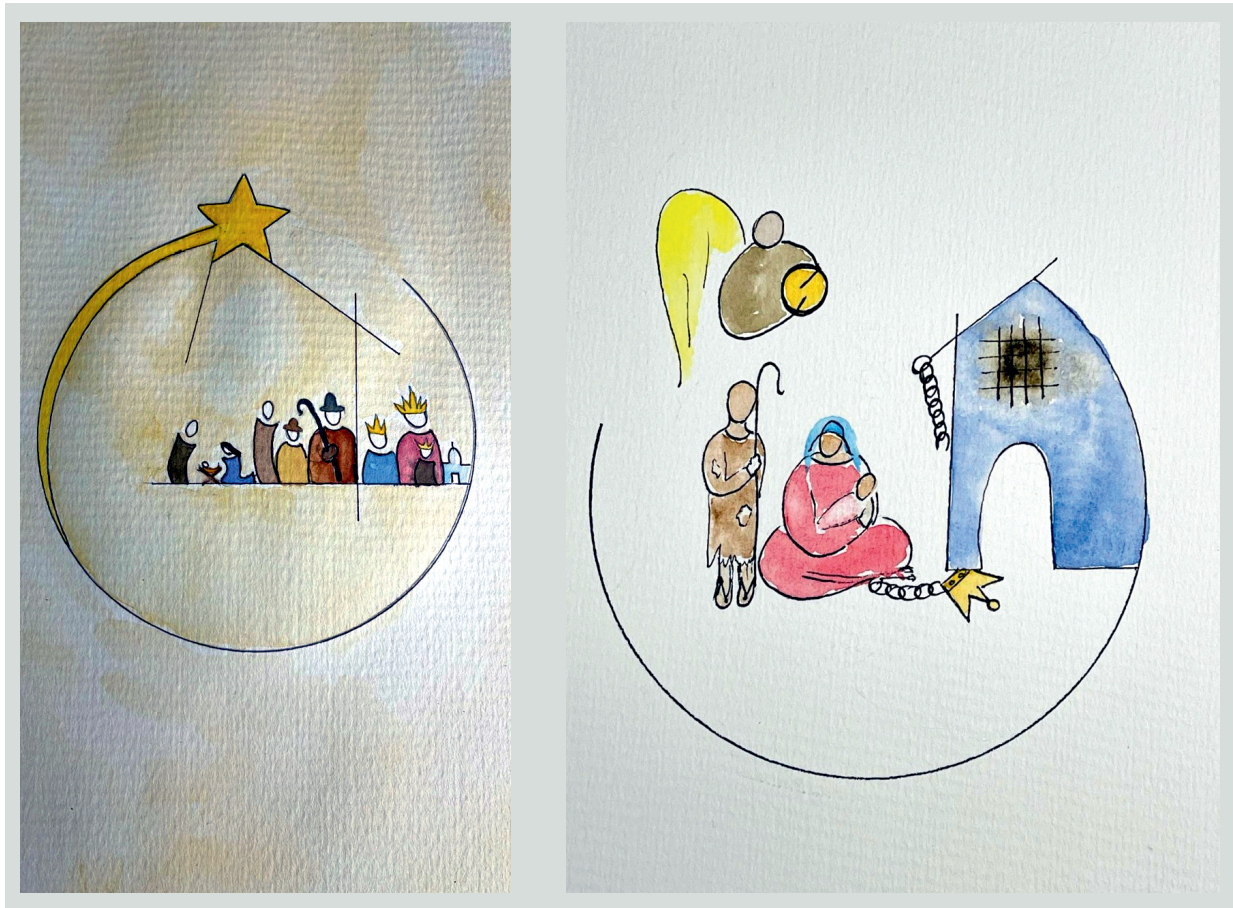
Women over time and place have learnt to stifle or shelve their own dreams, believing they have to be sacrificed at the altars of religion, culture, family and community. They are singlehandedly held accountable for the dreams of all around them, in particular, the male members of their families. In the process of encouraging, supporting, affirming, pushing others they forget to dream a dream for themselves. I too have been one among these women and even now I struggle between guilt and determination to dare to dream of women, men and everyone along the gender spectrum, being able to enjoy their right to live fullness of life, undeterred in reaching their potential, using their special charisms to make the world a better place thereby spreading the reign of God.

Within this dream of mine I see the important role a movement like the ICWM can play in EMPOWERING women.... Helping them to discover, acknowledge and affirm the power within them... the power of each one to be "ME" – themselves with no curbs, guilt, restrictions or directives! I see ICWM reaching out to women, in particular Christian women and people in the LGBTQI minority groups that have no place to belong to, helping them seek out their divinely given purpose and charisms, providing safe spaces where they can come and share their joys, pains, confusions, struggles and find mutual support and solidarity and when needed assistance to address their particular needs. These spaces can also be spaces for learning and reflection, critiquing structures in the Church and society that deny them their dignity and rights. Christian women and other minorities rarely see themselves as imaging the divine. ICWM needs to have more feminist reflection of scripture so that in seeing the myriad faces of God, and numerous women and others displaying the divine feminine, they too will find themselves and their possibilities... see opportunities to build each other, the Church and the world. They need to be led to realise that if they don't live this calling of theirs and instead choose to hide themselves and remain satisfied in religious pious practices and rituals, they fail to enjoy the larger dimension of the faith they profess that needs involvement in building God's Kingdom, protecting all of creation, reaching out in compassion and ensuring justice for the least among God's people and a voice for the voiceless.... those on the margins and those denied of their rights and dignity. My dream sees ICWM members with theological and leadership experience, those with experience of social activism, and spirituality, generously sharing their knowledge and time to spread this among women and others thirsting for this knowledge.)



I dream that their knowledge and experience will help build bridges of support among women rather than form barriers of superiority or competition amongst each other where individual achievements, triumphs, accolades, acknowledgements and progress take priority over being there for building up our sisters... I dream that Christian women see each other and the world with the heart and mind of Christ, for then there will be no way we will not reach out to heal pain, spread love, cast out demons of erroneous mindsets, challenge unjust structures, share power and support each other to be the best image of the divine we can be.

Raynah Marise was the 1st Convener of the ICWM



Painting by **Rev . Joy Devakani Hoppe**, Ecumenical Pastor. Dept.of Church Development and Training, Hamburg-West/Südholstein Region, North Church of Germany. Highlighting the human rights message in the Birth of Christ

ICWM NATIONAL NEWS ROUND-UP



The National Team have been meeting regularly, whether to plan for an upcoming webinar or to discuss the way forward. Thanks to Zoom, Team members across the length and breadth of India have been able to communicate, at no extra expense to ICWM. Here are Aruna Gnanadason (Chennai, Top row right) Kochurani Abraham (Kerala), Jayachitra Lalitha (Bangalore), Thuamteii Aizawl (Mizoram), Sushma Ramswami (Delhi), Sr Julie George (Andheri, Maharashtra), Joycia Thorat (Bombay Central, Maharashtra) and Marcia D'Cunha (Thane, Maharashtra) at a recent Zoom meeting... discussing Re-imagining India, among other things.

REIMAGINING INDIA: THE CHALLENGE OF INTEGRATION TODAY

Report of an ICWM Webinar held on 21 November 2021

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Aruna Gnanadason with notes from Kochurani, November 2021

The ICWM uses Christian values to interrogate events in the secular world. In the light of the disintegration of the country due to political, economic, religious and social forces at work, it was decided to organise a National Webinar around 19 November - National Integration Day.

Increasing divisive politics in the country is destroying the spirit of unity in diversity and threatening the integration among the diverse peoples and cultures of our society. Minorities are victims of the new surge of majoritarianism. Muslims, as the largest minority community, are the target of heinous hate crimes and violence – they have been lynched, ghettoized, and criminalized. Christian institutions are vandalized by emboldened hate-mongering fringe groups. Anti-Dalit violence is also on the rise. Political will to keep fringe groups of the majority religion under check is non-existent despite their getting more brazen and the police more complicit in the coverup.

Recent years reveal that policies and programmes as well as laws have rendered the poor poorer and the rich richer.. India has some of the richest people in world, but more and more Indians are slipping into poverty - below Bangladesh and Pakistan on simple indices. India is today back in a situation to be called a “country of mass poverty” after 45 years.



Aruna Roy, former IAS Officer and now activist and social thinker, our main speaker at the webinar organised on 21 November 2021 highlighted the above. She also stressed the importance of the Constitution in the context of the myths surrounding the rights and duties it contains. She regretted the “uninformed contentious debate” that surrounds what the Constitution promises, much of which is because of basic political illiteracy, she said.

The Farmer’s Movement in the way their leadership planned, persevered and persisted to reach their goals for justice, set the nation a precedent in how we need to act to safeguard parliamentary democracy. India is today witnessing a perversion of democracy an example of which is that those who protest are labelled anti-national. The fact that two people took the decision on the Demonetisation Bill; the labour laws subverted; and unjust laws related to Muslims introduced – all without parliamentary and other legal processes highlights the deterioration in political life.



In a context where religion is being weaponised; Aruna Roy called on women to propagate the humane values embedded in all religions and boldly promote a multi-religious culture in the public space without shying away from public discussions on our religious beliefs or public displays of our religions. We should celebrate together each other’s festivals to challenge the viciousness of the present public debate on religion.

The unity displayed by women coming together to forge a unified voice in the country over the past few years by lobbying for the Women’s Reservation Bill, protesting against the CAA and NRC among other issues in different parts of the country must be nurtured, our diversity must be celebrated openly even while we contest divisional politics. Stressing the urgency for all of us to work for an integrated Indi, a by bringing together the values in all our faiths, she urged us to take love to the places where there is conflict.

Speaking of how her education in Christian institutions, revealed the extraordinary life of compassion of Jesus Christ the man, she encouraged us to celebrate Christmas as a day of compassion with people of all religions.

In her response, Anita Cheria, human rights activist and writer and member of the ICWM focused on what is expected of us as Christian women and the ICWM. She spoke of the challenges of integration as opposed to assimilation, which seems to be the demand on us just now. We called on women to recognise and address the discrimination faced by them within their own faiths and religious institutions.

Acknowledging that many minorities (Muslims and Christians) are living in an atmosphere of fear, that many have paid a heavy price for the assertion of their identity she drew attention to how what started as hate crimes and individual attacks were now entering our education systems, text-books and even laws. All these unconstitutional acts happen with no approbation from the Central Government, which in fact prefers to turn a blind eye to the direct attacks on the minorities. She emphasised that we need to be watchful about being pitted against other minorities by the myths being spread – “there is not an iota of truth in many claims and statistics that are put out” Anita Cheria said, stating the examples of the so called “growth of the Christian population in the country” or on “forced conversion” and Muslims who force women to convert in what has been derisively named “love jihad”.

Covid drew to the fore the many forms of discrimination that exist in India and exaggerated the tensions within our own communities. We see “fundamentalism” and exclusion in all our religions and as women we should counter all this and contribute to integration.

A lively discussion ensued to consider how we ought to “rewire” ourselves and our work to affirm our Constitutional values and the secular spirit of India. ICWM ought to display prophetic courage bringing together its feminist and liberationist vision; ensuring that its Dalit membership and that members of the LGBTQIA+ community feel welcome to belong to the group

Aruna Gnanadason is the National Convenor of the ICWM



ICWM REGIONAL NEWS ROUND-UP MIZORAM REPORTS...

MIZORAM REPORTS...

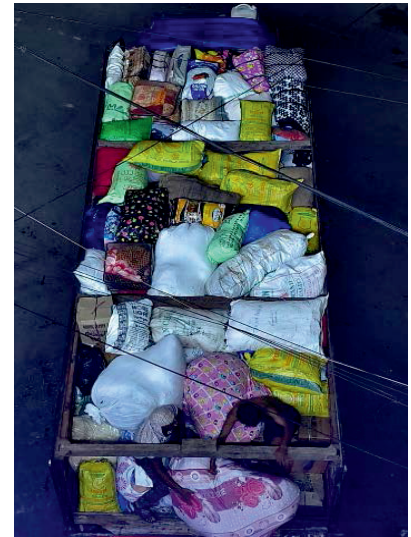
Leaders of ICWM Mizoram: New office bearers were elected.

President - Lalpianthangi. H, **Vice Presidents** - Maria Hmangaihzuali, K.R. Chhingpuii, Col. Zonunsangi. **Secretary** - Lalremruati Rokhum, **Treasurer** - Mary Lalparliani.

These elected leaders will hold office during the term of 2021 – 2023.



As resolved by the meeting of ICWM, refugees from Myanmar were given items required for daily living like, Kitchen accessories, Clothes, Blankets etc. Contributed by members of ICWM within Aizawl City



breathe

she sat at the back
and they said she was shy
she led from the front
and they hated her pride

they asked her advice
and then questioned her guidance
they branded her loud
then were shocked by her silence

when she shared no ambition
they said it was sad
so she told them her dreams
and they said she was mad

they told her they'd listen
then covered their ears
and gave her a hug
whilst they laughed at her fears

and she listened to all of it
thinking she should
be the girl they told her to be
best as she could

but one day she asked
what was best for herself
instead of trying
to please everyone else

so she walked to the forest
and stood with the trees
she heard the wind whisper
and dance with the leaves

and she spoke to the willow,
the elm and the pine
and she told them what she'd been told
time after time

she told them she never
felt nearly enough
she was either too little
or far, far too much

too loud or too quiet
too fierce or too weak
too wise or too foolish
too bold or too meek

then she found a small clearing
surrounded by firs
and she stopped and she heard
what the trees said to her

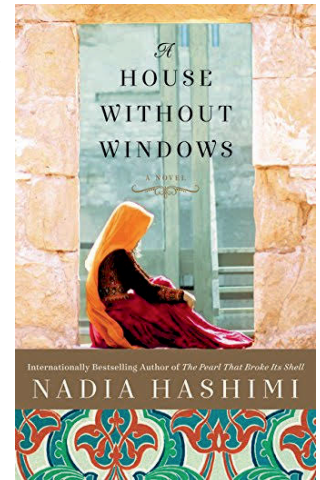
and she sat there for hours
not wanting to leave
for the forest said nothing...
it just let her breathe

Becky Hemsley

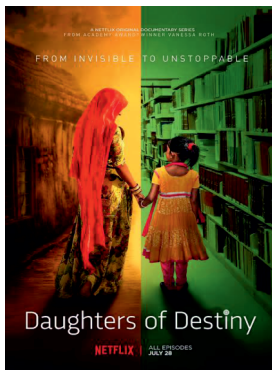
ICWM RECOMMENDS

Book: **A House without windows** by Nadia Hashmi

A vivid, unforgettable story of an unlikely sisterhood—an emotionally powerful and haunting tale of friendship that illuminates the plight of women in a traditional culture. To many oppressed women, the prison is both a haven and a punishment. Removed from the harsh and unforgiving world outside, women form a lively and indelible sisterhood. Into this closed world comes Yusuf, Zeba's Afghan-born, American-raised lawyer, whose commitment to human rights and desire to help his motherland have brought him back. With the fate of this seemingly ordinary housewife in his hands, Yusuf discovers that, like Afghanistan itself, his client may not be at all what he imagines. If you get a chance, also read *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* and *When the Moon Is Low* by Nadia Hashmi. Available: at all leading book stores and Amazon



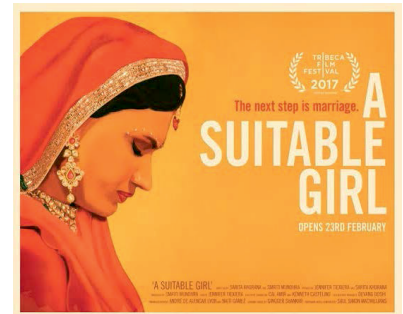
Documentaries:



Documentaries showcase the real world. **Daughters of Destiny** and **A Suitable Girl** are must watch documentaries. While *Daughters of Destiny* by Vanessa Roth surrounds the life of five girls from impoverished backgrounds who are denied education based on their caste. Do not forget to visit the Shanti Bhavan Children site to know the destiny of our daughters.

A Suitable Girl documents the lives of three young Indian women who struggle to maintain their identities and pursue their dreams in the midst of the immense pressure to get married.

Streaming on: Netflix



"INJUSTICE ANYWHERE IS A THREAT TO JUSTICE EVERYWHERE."

Martin Luther King, African-American civil rights activist



"A political struggle that does not have women at the heart of it, above it, below it, and within it is no struggle at all."

Arundhati Roy, Indian author

"Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world."

Malala Yousafzai, Pakistani education activist

Human Rights Day is observed by the international community every year on 10 December. It commemorates the day in 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

ICWM

Email: icwmjan14@gmail.com | Website: www.icwmindia.org | Twitter: [@icwm_india](https://twitter.com/icwm_india)

Masthead:

Anil Kulkarni

Editorial Team:

Amelia Andrews

Jerin Jacob

Joycia Thorat

Marcia D'Cunha

Raynah Marise

Seena Abraham

Shefalle Karanjikar

Virginia Saldanha

Website:

Amelia Andrews

Rachael Alphonso

Seena Abraham

Virginia Saldanha

Newsletter Design: Seena Abraham & Team Green I Solutions