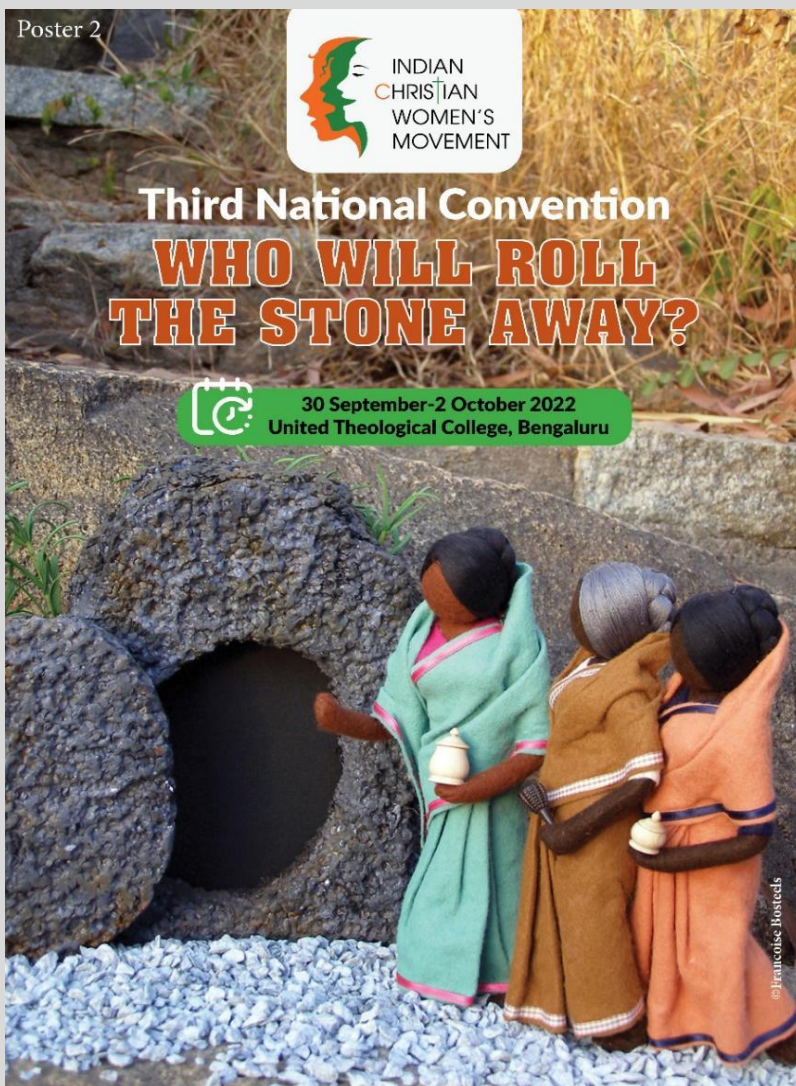


## ICWM 3<sup>rd</sup> NATIONAL CONVENTION



The Indian depiction of the three women at the tomb that forms the backdrop to the ICWM 3rd National Convention logo is the work of Sr. Françoise Bosteels, a Catholic Belgian sister who has spent close to 50 years in the villages of South India among the marginalized sections of our society. Her publication 'Dolls that Speak' brings to life the diverse realities encountered by women in society and in the Church today.

As indicated in the Gospels, Mary of Magdala and her companions arrive at the tomb fearful of how they will move the huge stone, but to their greatest surprise, they find the stone rolled away.

We too arrive at the 3rd National ICWM Convention, perhaps with apprehensions of the many obstacles on our paths, and like women who encountered the Risen Lord, may we find our stones rolled away so that we can march ahead on our paths to live our commitment with greater Faith, Hope and Passion as Indian Christian Women.



## Content

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Cover - ICWM 3rd NATIONAL CONVENTION   | 1  |
| EDITORIAL - CELEBRATING OUR CONNECTIVITY! — Marcia D'Cunha                           | 3  |
| THE THEME THAT UNITES US — Dr Aruna Gnanadasan & Dr Kochurani Abraham                | 4  |
| THE SESSIONS THAT WILL INSPIRE US  | 7  |
| My Vision for ICWM — Adv Celin Thomas  | 8  |
| NEWS & VIEWS - ICWM MUMBAI – December 2021 to June 2022                              | 9  |
| REMEMBERING ADVOCATE JAYA MENON — A Disciple Of Justice & Peace<br>Virginia Saldanha | 10 |
| ICWM RECOMMENDS — THE NARAKKAL STORY – A Book Review                                 | 11 |
| THE MONSTER IN RED   | 12 |



WOMEN TAKE WING: 1<sup>st</sup> National Convention August 2018; INTERIM NATIONAL TEAM 2018-19 with Annie Raja  
RESTLESS FOR JUSTICE: 2<sup>nd</sup> National Convention Sept-Oct 2019

## EDITORIAL - CELEBRATING OUR CONNECTIVITY! — Marcia D'Cunha

At the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Convention which concluded on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2019, an important area of concern for most delegates was communication in between Conventions. Everyone was happy to meet each other but felt that they needed to stay connected between meetings too.

The newly elected National Team swung into action and a What's App Network was formed with ICWM members across India. Regular updates on activities were posted through email. And on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2019, just in time for Christmas, the first issue of WWW (When Women Wake) was born.



Unfortunately, just after the 2<sup>nd</sup> issue was out on International Women's Day, COVID 19, brought life as we knew it, to a halt. Despite the many problems that besieged us all, the ups and downs of adjusting to the online world, we stayed connected like never before. Thanks to WhatsApp and Zoom, ICWM teams across India met online to plan or present and learn, through Meetings or Webinars.

Our WWW issues reported the activities where they happened (generally online) and everyone received their copies via email. This is the 7<sup>th</sup> issue and it will give you an Introduction to the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Convention – the inspiration behind the logo, a bird's eye view of the Speakers, the tentative program, what to look forward to and what to prepare for!

After 3 years and 7 issues of WWW, do write in with your feedback. Fill up the google form <https://forms.gle/CcxmKKezLfsBLDVy8> and tell us whether you enjoyed the Newsletters, what you didn't appreciate and whether it can be improved upon in any way. Looking forward to meeting in person at the Convention, where we can truly celebrate our togetherness.

**Marcia D'Cunha** *National Secretary ICWM*



## THE THEME THAT UNITES US — Dr Aruna Gnanadason

### WHO WILL ROLL THE STONE AWAY?

Early that first Easter morning, Mary Magdalene, with Mary the mother of James, and Salome came to the tomb, with spices, to anoint the body of Jesus that had been laid in the tomb. St Mark in 16:1-3 records that as they walked to the sealed tomb, the women were saying to one another, “Who will roll the stone away for us from the entrance of the tomb?” They perhaps, did come prepared to find the big stone that they had seen being placed, sealing the tomb in which Jesus had been laid, after his crucifixion. And yet the women came, full of faith that they will be able to anoint the body of their Saviour! To their surprise, they find the stone rolled away, and an empty tomb – Christ has risen!



This incident symbolises the faith of women; determined that they will access LIFE! Continuing in that tradition, women have been resilient in their struggle to find life even as the power of death threatens to overwhelm them, faithful in their solidarity with the struggles for justice among the least in our country. Yet, stones block their way and progress in their liberative actions. The question they continue to ask each other is, “who will roll the stone away?”. But they will not be stopped, women continue to strategize and create action plans to achieve a just and peaceful world for all.

Some of the stones women encounter.

### **The stone of violence on their bodies, their lives.**

In India, the relentless incidents of brutal violence against women, stands as a threat to our ability to claim our right to participation and justice. In the home, and in the public space women do not feel safe. The world over, a trend during the Covid related lockdown was marked by increases in domestic violence – India was not an exception. In fact, evidence points to the increase in the brutality of the violence women experience in India.



### **The stone of rigid patriarchal control**



Desire, sexuality, and sexual choices are determined and controlled by patriarchal norms within the strict parameters of marriage and family. Additionally, the offense of marital rape has not been sufficiently accounted for India. It is only in recent months that there is some discussion on it. The recent spate of what has been termed “honour killings” is another blot on our country.

### **The stones of political and economic injustice**

There has been a downward trajectory in the functioning of democracy and all its institutions in the country. At the same time the country struggles to recover from the economic and social costs of the COVID pandemic, aggravated by economic and social inequalities and injustices. We have witnessed an almost intentional decimation of the rights of minorities, particularly of the Muslim community. Any alternate analysis or counter position has been termed “anti-national” and there is a silencing of dissent.

### **The stones in the Church**

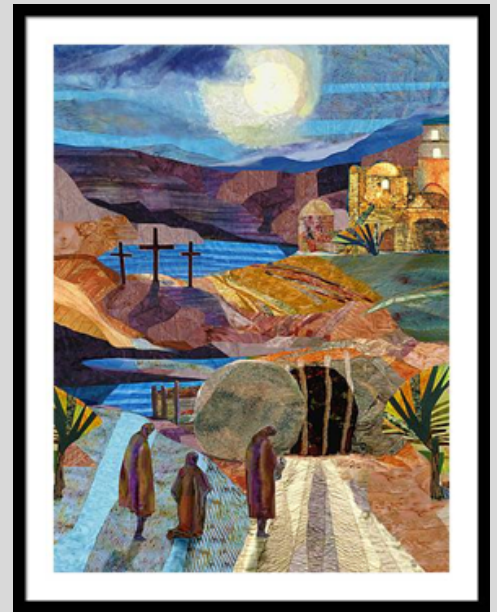
The Church too has been in the grip of a male ecclesial hierarchy that keeps control of lay people. The Bible and ordained ministry have been used to ensure obedience and even the silencing of women. Clergy sexual abuse is another stone that every now and then becomes an issue of concern. Women (even those who have dedicated themselves to the church) have been victims of sexual abuse and find little space to plead for justice.

### **Making our contribution to roll the stones away.**

The past two or three years have been disrupted by the Covid pandemic and the lockdowns that India went through. Many units of the Indian Christian Women’s Movement, stayed active in this period, engaging with movements for justice in India – women’s groups, youth movements, Dalit liberation movements,

environmental movements, human rights movements as also journalists, lawyers, LGBTQI+ communities, workers, farmers, thinkers, artists, musicians and writers – to contribute to an alternate vision for India. Creative ways to break apart the stones that hinder the journey have been explored. This convention will highlight the stories of women who have rolled the stones away by joining hands with women from other marginalised groups to offer a united voice and strategy.

Participating in the larger women's movements in India has been framed in the liberating Biblical and theological impulses that give energy to the ICWM and to the contributions of Christian women in India. This has been driven by the challenges women face in dealing with the stones of patriarchy that are strewn in every nook and cranny of the church, thwarting the progress of women, inhibiting their ministry and contributions. During this Convention representatives of some organisations working to roll away the stones will dialogue with each other to strengthen the commitment to unite in their struggles –women from the LGBTQI community, from the disability's community, minority religious groups, for example, will be featured.



#### **From here onwards....**

This is the third National Convention of the ICWM, which was birthed in 2014. It has been slowly but steadily growing as Christian women recognise the power of working together, beyond denominational divides and engaging with all women in the country to usher in justice and peace. As we plan our future course of action, we will not just identify the stones that hinder our movement, but affirm ICWM's potential to act courageously, inspired by the struggles of women and others on the margins of society. This Convention will mark our way forward.





## THE SESSIONS THAT WILL INSPIRE US

### Day 1: September 30, 2022

Our two speakers at the Convention will be **Aruna Roy** - *Pioneer of the Right to Information Act and National President, National Federation of Indian Women, Founder, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan*. And **Dr Shiluinja Jamir** - *Christian ethicist and feminist theologian*.

*Extracts from the Introduction of Aruna Roy by Flavia Agnes at the ICWM's Re-imagining India Webinar on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2021.*



**ARUNA ROY** is the recipient of numerous awards, success stories, and a lot has been written about her work. Aruna's greatness lies in the fact that she has always spoken truth to power.

She was born in 1946 as Aruna Jayaram in Madras, to very liberal, far-thinking parents. She moved when she was 4, to Delhi she studied a while in the Convent of Jesus and Mary. She moved back to Madras to get in touch with Tamil culture – arts, fine arts, music, dance at the Kalakshetra, a prestigious art school at Adayar Madras, and then to the Aurobindo ashram in Pondicherry and Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Delhi. With this rich varied background she moved back to Delhi and finished her graduation in English Literature and joined the IAS. Very few women were choosing the IAS at that time. In 6 years she was disillusioned by it and resigned and joined her husband in Tilonia at a rural educational institute he had set up. She learnt a lot of things at the ground level. She later moved to a village in Devdangri in Rajasthan. Ever since she has been involved with many others and started a huge movement for transparency. 9 states passed the RTI Act. This helped people on the ground to demand accountability. In 2006, the Community Leadership Magsaysay award for Leadership was conferred on her. In 2011 she was awarded as one of the most influential persons in the world by Time magazine.



**DR. SHILUINLA JAMIR** is a Christian ethicist and feminist theologian from the Northeast of India. In her doctoral research she did an ethnographic reading of the State through women's everyday lives in the Northeast India borderland. She writes in the area of liberation theologies and ethics, anthropology, and gender. She has also explored the importance of reading moral theology through the everyday lives of indigenous women thereby combining ethnography, ethics and decoloniality. She is well aware that she belongs to the "unlettered race" therefore much of her work privileges women's testimonia, orality and spatiality.

She is in high demand as a speaker and recognized as a prominent Indian feminist theologian. She has been actively engaged in advocating women's rights for many years. She has also provided research consultancy services to international and national ecumenical organizations on issues of mission, peace and conflict transformation, and study of Northeast India. She currently teaches Christian Social Ethics at the Masters College of Theology, Visakhapatnam, India.

**Day 2: October 1, 2022**

## **Women Changing The Narrative With Leadership**

This session anchored by Anita Cheria is divided into two segments, separated by a tea break.

**Making a better world - Women changing the narrative with leadership**

**Women lead the way – Building inclusive and equal spaces**

Both sessions will be interactive with 3-5 women, mostly from in and around Bangalore, leading the discussion. Women with leadership who have engaged with peace and justice issues, women with leadership who have made an impact on the social fabric and environment, who address serious concerns impacting life of people, communities and the nation. They will share their concerns, reflect on their efforts and impact. Lead speakers will represent diverse concerns and identities. It promises to be an inspiring morning.

**Business As Usual:** Expect the usual Interaction between Units as the Conveners share their News Reports. The National Team will also present an Account of the work it has done in the last two years. And finally if you have been with the ICWM for more than a year, you will be looking forward to the election of the new Office bearers. The Countdown has begun to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

## **My Vision for ICWM – Adv Celin Thomas**





## NEWS & VIEWS - ICWM MUMBAI – December 2021 to June 2022

*Virginia Saldanha*



In December 2021, ICWM Mumbai organized an interfaith Christmas celebration with women activists of other faiths. We had about 10 activists joining us. It was inspired by a webinar where we heard Aruna Roy say that we need to counter hate in the country by bringing together people of other faiths to celebrate each other's festivals.



At the end of April 2022, a group of ICWM Members attended an interfaith Iftar Party organized by St. Peter's Parish Bandra together with a group of activists that included iCWM member Brinelle D'Souza. It was a significant event as it exposed a Catholic Parish Community in Mumbai for the first time to an interfaith celebration with Muslims. It created bonds of fraternity, which is very much needed in our country.

On 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2022, we organized a virtual general body meeting and invited Ms. Teesta Setalvad to speak to us about the importance of joining hands with existing Mohalla committee groups or forming them where they do not exist to help bring people together towards building a peaceful and harmonious society. She offered full support from her NGO Citizens for Justice and Peace.

In between members are made aware of various issues and called upon to endorse signature campaigns demanding justice through our WhatsApp group or through the group email.

At the meeting that followed we discussed how we could put Teesta's suggestions into practice. Marcia then informed us about the National Convention to take place in Bangalore.

The Co-ordinator Virginia Saldanha tried to organize a replacement for herself and if possible a new team for ICWM Mumbai but it did not materialize.

We were sad to bid farewell to our valued member Joycia Thorat who left Mumbai for Delhi later in May 2022.

## REMEMBERING ADVOCATE JAYA MENON — A Disciple Of Justice & Peace

*Virginia Saldanha*

9<sup>th</sup> June 2022 will remain a gloomy day in our memory because on that day Adv. Jaya Menon left us for eternity. Adv. Jaya Menon was an activist, feminist, lawyer and all things to all people who needed help. She did not follow any religion but was nurtured by a mother who was familiar with the Bhagwadgita as well as the Bible. I met Jaya more than 30 years ago when she joined the office of the Justice & Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Bombay and worked very closely with me when I was Executive Secretary of the Archdiocesan Women's Desk. I found her to be a better Christian than most who are baptized. She never saw her profession as one to make money, but as an opportunity to serve people, especially those who could not access justice because of the cost. As far as possible she would avoid going to court and would strive to arbitrate to settle disputes. She lived a simple life money was not something she hankered after. In fact when people gave her money because they were satisfied with her services, she used it to have awareness programmes for women and youth living in disadvantaged communities. Her life was devoted to helping people without any consideration to herself, even her health. She was a true disciple of justice, peace and righteousness.



so

She developed arthritis at an early age but that did not deter her from helping people. When she left the Justice & Peace Commission she opened her own Legal Centre so that she could continue to help people. She was also a supporter of the ICWM and attended several of our meetings. The last being the inter-religious Christmas gathering on 26<sup>th</sup> December, 2021.

Since she wanted to be in touch with the grassroots, she started Women Networking, a network of women's organizations in Mumbai most of who worked for disadvantaged women in slum areas. She injected energy, enthusiasm and awareness in the community social workers to enhance the effectiveness of their work.

Whenever women approached me with a domestic violence problem, I knew I could always turn to Jaya for advice. Now I feel lost. She has left behind a big void which I hope some dedicated lawyer will be willing to fill. Jaya we will miss you! Rest in Peace, Rest in Power!

## ICWM RECOMMENDS — THE NARAKKAL STORY – A Book Review

**Astrid Lobo Gajiwala**

"My Prophetic Struggle: The Narakkal Story" as narrated by Annie Jaise CMC to Kochurani Abraham, is a path breaker. It speaks truth to power and exposes the hidden oppression of women religious in the church, an oppression that stems as much from clericalism as from patriarchy, which is manifested both within ecclesiastical structures and in women's congregations.

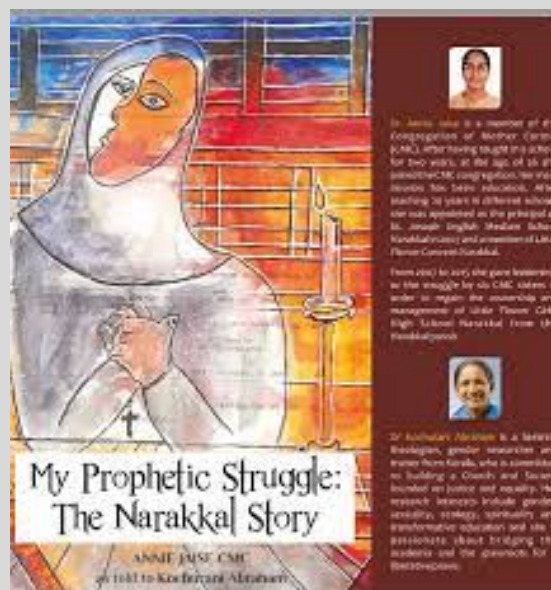
The story traces an eight-year-long struggle of six nuns belonging to a traditional Catholic congregation, one of the biggest in India, the Congregation of Mother Carmel (CMC). What makes the struggle "prophetic" is the questions it raises without apology or disguise: How do women religious understand their vow of obedience, as an informed choice or slavish submission? Are they bound by this vow when it goes against the dictates of their conscience? Why are women's congregations so dependent on clerical leadership? Why are major superiors so afraid of dissenting from their bishops, even when they know that they (the religious) are on the side of truth? Does institutionalised religious life foster structures that suppress prophetic mission? Is the hunger for wealth, power and status the ultimate reality of religious institutions? How can priests and bishops purport to be "*Alter Christus*" when they lie and cheat to "gain the whole world" (Mk 8:36)? Who are the real enemies of the Church and where are they to be found?



Treacherously abandoned by their bishops; persecuted by their own congregational leaders; subjected to hostility, character assassination and manhandling by Narakkal parishioners and church leaders; harassed by an array of false cases filed against them; through the pain of it all, these God-fearing nuns emerged victorious. Led by Sophia, they found the courage, wisdom and fortitude to fight a battle within a space they considered their home, the Church. In the end truth and justice triumphed.

There are many lessons to be learnt from this tale, but what stands out is the coupling of prayer and pragmatic action. The sisters were convinced that "God was accompanying us". As Annie Jaise says, this experience taught her the deeper meaning of Jesus' words to the Samaritan women, that true worship is "worshipping God in Spirit and in truth:" (John : 19-24).

The annexures of the book hold the other key - meticulously maintained documents. Armed with these, the sisters rose to the occasion, familiarising themselves with civil and ecclesiastical law, and engaging with the police, political leaders and lawyers. Who can withstand such a force of





Divine strength, passion for truth, and competent knowledge?

In the foreword to the book, Jacob Peenikaparambil says, "Religious life is a call to be a prophet to the nations by becoming radical disciples of Jesus, not just devotees of Jesus." The Narakkal story shows women religious one way this can be done.

## THE MONSTER IN RED

**Peggy Devaraj**

Round and round the bed  
Came The monster with a stripe of red  
Each bud he broke, was just a joke  
In his monster head.

In fear the flowers obeyed,  
Then would wilt away and fade  
For he had the power to pick any flower,  
The monster had a stripe of red

Beware the monster the whispers said  
He has a stripe of red  
No place to hide, just abide,  
The monster has a mitre on his head

But though only a simple flower,  
she'd seen greater powers  
Of sunshine and of rain,  
So she won't no more complain,  
Upright she stood and led womanhood  
Out of darkness, out of pain.

*The Kerala ICWM Unit has functioned as a Support Group to the Sister Survivor in Kuruvilangad in Kerala. The judgement in favour of Bp Mulakkal shocked most Christian women in India.*

**Peggy Devaraj** of Bangalore, like thousands of women in India, was appalled by the Verdict, yet driven to do something.

**The Monster In Red** is her response, inspired by the Women's Day song, **Hear Our Voices**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CaGndKlcsN4> put together by Mumbai Catholic Women's groups.



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