

# *Come Come Come to the Manger*



*Let's Re-image Christmas this year!*

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## EDITORIAL

Shefalle Karanjikar



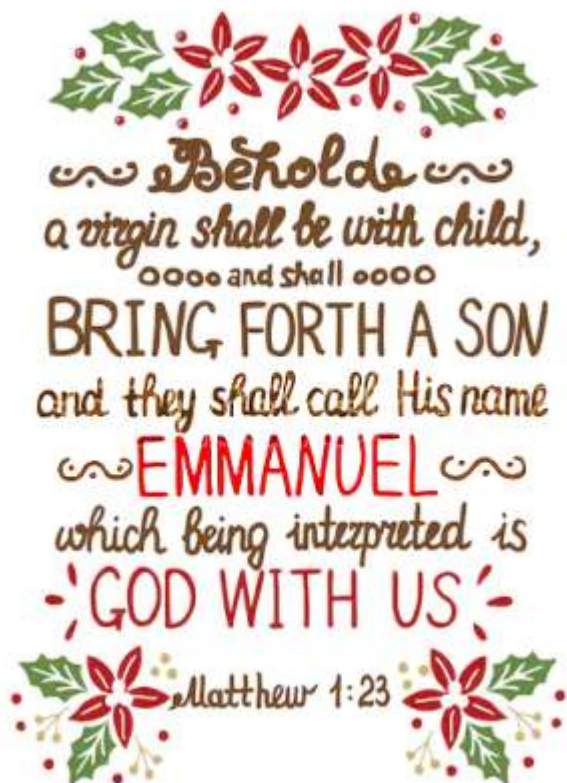
With the Season of Lent being spent in a lockdown, to Easter and Pentecost celebrated in fear of a ravaging pandemic, we are now in the season of Advent preparing for Christmas. The lockdown was a great opportunity to rethink our ingrained ideologies and think beyond the scope of fed-in inculcated values that we never gave a thought to previously.

The Church too was reformed with thoughts anew - minds were catechized in bold ways and new insights continue to pour in almost daily. We saw women playing a pivotal role in the scriptures as we meditated on the Word to prepare for Easter and Pentecost.

This now leads us to rethink the Nativity story. Did Mary have a mid-wife - a kind woman or two in the form of shepherds, wise women, inn keepers? Did Mary feel the exhaustion of labour and how did Joseph handle it all?

The birth of Jesus initiated inclusiveness. God becomes human, power and strength goes helpless and dependant, rich meets the poor and God to whom no gender, no caste bounds - encompasses all the world and all the people including those we would call pagans. Gradually all rejected by society found a home in Jesus.

ICWM wishes you the joy that comes from inclusiveness, peace that comes when you care without borders and hope for a rejuvenated world that is comfortable to discard the old and embrace the new.



## EMMANUEL – GOD WITH US... A CALL TO CONNECTIONS & CONSCIOUS LOVE

Raynah Marise

Raynah Marise is Chairperson of the Poona Diocesan Women's Commission, member of ICWM and IWTF.

Have you ever wondered about the incongruity of the way we celebrate Christmas? The tinsel and Christmas tree, Santa and presents, food, clothes and parties... and maybe a crib or an Advent retreat besides the midnight mass where the liturgy is not the central focus – all squeezed into the entire 'celebration saga'? It always strikes me as a celebration to escape – escape the realities of life, the real message of the Christmas story - escape into this wonderland of treats and tinsel because both, reality and the challenge of the Christmas story are too tough to face. It is easier to celebrate the birth of a baby than focus on the

'incarnation' of that moment when God became Flesh to be 'Emmanuel – God with us'. We avoid acknowledging the challenging possibility of 'incarnation' in us so that the resurrected Jesus can continue to be 'with us' and 'amongst us', continuing the mission of 'conscious love' by bringing joy, peace and hope through us in this wounded hurting world of ours.

How can we prepare for Christmas differently - for this miraculous moment that marks the birthing of God into each member of the human race?

The first thing we need to do is acknowledge and accept that we are part of this incredible love story of God's intervention into the lives of God's people. God chose to involve us and entrust us with the plan of loving and caring and healing the world we live in, thereby enabling the spread of God's reign and the defeating of the powers of doubt and fear, insecurity and hopelessness. And we can do it. For as the angel said to Mary, "Do not be afraid for nothing is impossible for God!"

The next thing to do is to see the world through the eyes of Christ - put on your compassionate, merciful, forgiving lenses and look at the people and realities around. See the pain and fear behind the anger, the insecurity and lack of self-worth behind the bravado and bluster, the distress, dread and anxiety behind the withdrawn external mask, the ignorance and feeling of being out of one's depth behind the apathy, the loneliness and aloneness behind the constant calls and long conversations of

the elderly, the cry for attention, love and understanding behind the rebelliousness of the young. Look behind the obvious, the surface and when you see with the eyes of Jesus you will see God before you in the other as one who suffers and struggles with them, seeking desperately for you to reach out to the divine with 'conscious love'.

Conscious love is nothing more than what Jesus modeled for us while walking the earth. Jesus was conscious of every life touched – the sick, the outcasts, the bereaved, those dealing with the demons in their lives, the hungry – both for food and the bread of life – the good news. Jesus was conscious of their needs – whether they verbalised it or not. The Lord responded in love, bringing healing and wholeness – Joy, Hope and Peace!

That for me is Christmas...celebrating this person called Jesus who grew to be someone who revealed the face of God in words and works, who witnessed what it meant to live as 'children of God', who loved humanity so much that he took on their weaknesses, and sent the spirit to guide us into living in the world as incarnations – “God with us” Emmanuel.

Jesus showed us that 'Conscious Love' is about connections with everyone, especially the last and least.

Can we this Christmas see how we can incarnate this spirit? Despite the social distancing and fear and lack of clarity because of Covid-19, can we reach out to the wounded, the vulnerable and abused sections of our society – women, children, those with different sexual orientation, those who are victims of caste and creed and other forms of discrimination? Let us seek creative ways to reach out to the lonely and share a divine great love. Let us join networks of support to raise issues of injustice.

Let us enhance our connections with our neighbourhoods, and pray for our neighbours, families, friends, health care workers, scientists and emergency responders as we see Jesus in them – both in the hurting and those healing.

Jesus, the light of the world was born into a time of uncertainty, of the crumbling of empire, of paranoid kings, disease and fear. This light to remind us, now more than ever, through you and me and the choices we make to witness that God is With Us (Emmanuel). We Are Not Alone.

Let's move beyond the tinsel and the trees when we celebrate a divine birth. Let's see Jesus in our homes, our neighbourhoods, our streets, our world and reach out to them with 'conscious love' as we are enveloped with the loving grace and strength of Jesus. Keep praying. Keep caring. Keep connected. Keep hope alive.



## JESUS BORN INTO THE MARGINS OF SOCIETY

Virginia Saldanha

Virginia Saldanha is a founder member of ICWM, theologian, writer and activist.



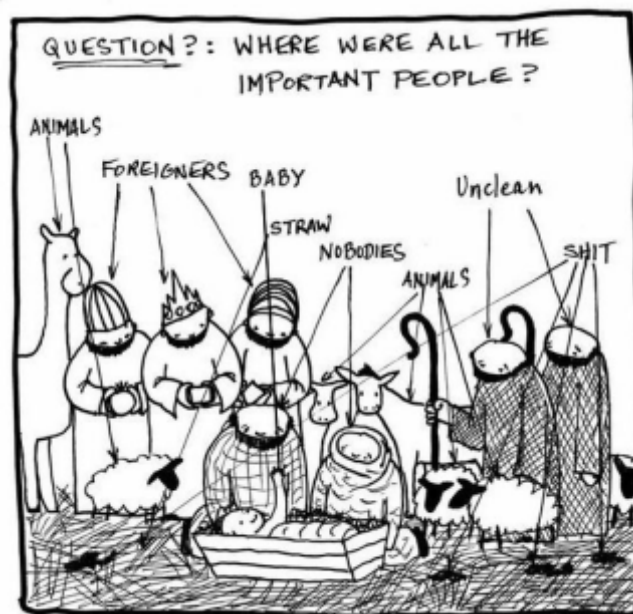
Scripture tells us that Mary and Joseph were people of very moderate means or lower middle class as we would describe them today. They had to travel to Bethlehem to register themselves according to the Roman ruling for recording a census. This happened just as Mary came to full term in her pregnancy, but being under foreign rule, they had to follow the law without question. This is so similar to the experience of people all over the world who live under foreign rule and are forced to follow unjust laws. The people of Palestine have suffered the oppression of foreign rule for centuries. Today, the people of Kashmir face a similar situation where their independent status was changed in August 2019.

Slowed down by Mary's condition, they arrived in Bethlehem when all the inns were full. However, some kind inn-keeper offered them the room in the house where the animals were kept and Joseph and Mary accepted as she was tired from their journey and perhaps already in labour. Their social status would not afford them anything else. Mary probably had to depend on handouts to clothe Jesus. They settled down in this humble place and God chose to allow our Saviour to be born in these humble circumstances, so that everyone could identify with him especially the poor and migrants who have to depend on the kindness and hospitality of people in the new place.

Our cities in India are filled with impoverished persons from the interiors of India who migrate to the cities for earning a living where they are forced to live in humiliating and often sub-human conditions. What is the hospitality of our cities to these people? What happened to these poor people when they were far from home in alien States of India and were forced to trudge home under gruelling circumstances when the government declared a lockdown? The insensitivity of the government towards these "little" people was so clear. Where is our hospitality towards these poor persons?

Another group of human beings who are pushed to the margins of society because we refuse to extend to them our "hospitality" of acceptance is the LGBTQI+ persons. We refuse to accept their humanity, their rights and deny them basic dignity as human beings. Sadly, even the Catholic Church which is inherently patriarchal is also homophobic and refers to them as "disordered". This discriminatory attitude has made families ashamed of their LGBTQI+ children often forcing them to be someone they were not created to be. This negative attitude has forced many LGBTI persons to leave their homes or be someone they are not, thus living their lives in confusion and personal suffering, pushing many even to suicide. What would Jesus say to the Church and each one of us today?

Through his infancy, Jesus lived as a migrant.



David Hayward





## MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Marcia D'Cunha

Marcia D'Cunha, National Secretary of ICWM is actively engaged in church ministry, liturgy and women's issues.

"Good morning boys!" As a teacher, if I welcomed my class with this greeting, the girls would feel totally left out. If I continued the practice every morning, a delegation of parents might call for action against me. So why does our church use archaic words like 'brethren' 'mankind' 'for us men and our salvation' as part of texts in the new revised versions of the Missal (3rd Edition, New English Translation, 2010). For example, Eucharistic Prayer No 4 reads, "You formed man in your own likeness and set him over the whole world to serve you, his creator, and to rule over all creatures." When assisting women in distress, I listen, as church-goers explain to me, that they beat their wives, to "correct" them. With lines like these in the Eucharistic Prayers, it's not surprising, some men think like this.

On the 1st of November, the psalmist in my church and at the Archdiocesan celebration at Holy Name Cathedral both sang the Antiphon thus, "Such are the men who seek your face O Lord." The feast being celebrated was All Saints Day. I unconsciously visualized the saints, all men, seeking the face of God. The subtle message was so powerful that I had to remind myself that all Saints are not men. Now that line could so easily have read, "Such are the ones/people who seek your face O Lord."

Why should the Church use Inclusive Language?

English has changed since Shakespeare. Most readers no longer understand the word "man" to be synonymous with "person," so clear communication requires writers and speakers to be more precise. It is unacceptable in a school, office or even a party, to speak to only a section of the crowd and ignore the rest. So why does this happen in church? In fact, such language cannot be justified in a celebration of the death-resurrection of Christ, in whom there is neither male nor female (Gal 3:28).

*With apologies to Bob Dylan*

How many years will a woman look on while  
sermons address her as man?

How many years will it take till we learn that  
there's more than one gender in our land?

How many years till our church understands that  
all don't fit in their plan?

The answer my friend is blowing in the wind, the  
answer is blowing in the wind.

The church may say many things in its defence but have they considered what younger generations understand? To pray these words in the Eucharist with sincerity, some (young and not so young like me) will need a sex change! Gen. George S Patton's advice rings out loud and clear, "Say what you mean and mean what you say."

Inclusive language comes from within. Language is one of the most powerful tools we have as



Church patriarchs insist it is understood that the words 'men' and 'mankind' refer to everyone. But when it comes to ordination of priests or the appointment of married deacons, the reference is only to men?

humans. It unites and instructs us. When used well, it creates a common understanding. And it's essential for creating an environment where everyone feels welcome and included. Using inclusive language is a conscious effort to communicate in a way which is fitting to the values we stand for - such as respect for, acceptance and inclusion of different people in our community. Christ reached out to everyone and restored dignity to the last and the least. Christ's words and gestures spoke up for

the values of inclusion. Pope Francis himself affirmed recently God's love for everyone, no matter their sexual orientation. If we then wish to speak to all persons (men, women, LGBTQ+) we must address them as 'people of God' and not as 'men' 'mankind' or 'sons of God'.

Our words reflect our thoughts: In our staff room full of teachers who technically affirm Gender Sensitization, a teacher addressed her daughter as 'beta'. Why 'beta' I asked? The teacher explained that in Hindi, the most beautiful word, from a mother to her daughter is 'beta'! I asked her what that said unconsciously about those mothers' opinions of their sons vis a vis their daughters. I wondered on the other hand how her son would react to being called 'beti'?

Is the church revealing unconsciously its refusal to accept women as equals, by refusing to give up archaic translations of Roman and Greek texts that have little to do with the message of Christ? Four women church leaders approached Oswald Cardinal Gracias on the 7th of January 2012, with their concerns about both the New Missal and with suggestions for a new Lectionary edition. They have yet to receive a reply. As long as women and their opinions are taken for granted or just simply ignored, there is little we can do. "Women need not be priests to lead church," says Pope Francis in his book *Let us dream: The path to a better future*. Unfortunately, until women are involved in writing the Missal and the Lectionary, and in other key areas of decision making, his words will remain just that, a pipe dream.

"You will hear now and again people saying, 'well, if it was good enough for the Apostle Paul, it's good enough for me.' Which is humorous, except it's actually quite serious, because people do say that. And helping people understand that Paul didn't have access to an English Bible, is a bit of a shock." Stephen Cave

So what can we as women do? We can change the way we speak. Communication is not just what you say, but also how it's heard. Many people use exclusive language purely out of habit, without reflecting and meaning what they say. Instead, the use of inclusive language calls for focus and discipline. Our prayers become more personal and meaningful. Of course we need to work our brains to be innovative in finding appropriate substitutes. Making a deliberate effort to use more inclusive language offers us a chance to grow and become better communicators, while also caring

for those we're communicating with. Here are a few tips to make the task easier:

1. When we address people, let us address the maximum number: people/people of God rather than women and men; Hi friends instead of Hi Guys! Chairperson rather than Chairman.
2. Use names when addressing persons - not 'baby' 'darling', 'sweetheart' when there is no special bond of love you share.
3. Let us use words that are inclusive: humanity or humankind rather than mankind; parenting rather than mothering;
4. Use gender sensitive translations of Biblical texts (wherever possible especially in our own liturgies). Thankfully many such texts are available E.g. New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Bible.
5. Sometimes we fall back on old habits. Here are a few tips to rely on when stuck for words:
  - ♦ Use plurals: Children of Abraham and Sarah (don't forget her) rather than Sons of Abraham;
  - ♦ Substitute articles ('the', 'a', 'an') for 'his' and 'who' for 'he'. Substitute 'one', 'we/they', or 'you'.
  - ♦ Use new terms, especially with professions, that are clearer: Security rather than watchman; Courier instead of postman; Flight Attendant not Air Hostess; Human Resources is better than Man Power.
6. Edit hymns in your hymnals that reflect a male bias. E.g. The hymn 'Make me a Channel of your peace' has a line in Vs 2 that says 'It's in giving to all men that we receive.' Use instead 'It's in giving to all people we receive.' "I'll say 'Yes Yes Yes...' has verses as follows: 'Where he leads me I will follow'; easily replaced by 'Where you lead me I will follow.'



We can spend a long time on this journey to a more inclusive way of communicating and still make mistakes. But why not try? Nothing is lost in the process, yet so much is gained. In this season of Advent, the season of hope, I'd like to re-imagine the Christmas liturgy as one that speaks to all God's people, irrespective of culture, creed, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, socio-economic status, appearance and more.

Come O come Emmanuel - God with us - and usher in a happy Christmas for everyone!





## A CHRISTMAS POESY

Jerin Jacob

Jerin Jacob is a feminist  
researcher, educator,  
social entrepreneur and writer.

Two women  
sharing womb camaraderie  
put their heads together  
to map out, design, lay foundation  
to the stories their chosen sons would live,  
later only to be stolen, replaced  
by the histories of  
a dominant Christmas poesy.

'Lady, peace! You're chosen, be pleased!  
You'll mother a lineage,  
a generation's worth of sorrows,  
punctured by sufferings galore,  
a consignment worth 'morrow.'

'I consent.'

She walked towards the celebrated birth  
across towns and cities  
brimming within her being  
tended to by the women  
who were sent for by her womb sister,  
women conveniently erased in later lores;  
labouring, her determination bore him  
into the mortal world  
a son who wasn't to be  
hers lone.

Overlooked by the comforting moos  
of bovine solidarity,  
two wise men and a wise woman  
led by a star  
came a-visiting, just as  
two shepherd women and a shepherd man  
followed a multi-sided story  
towards the manger  
hitherto untold.

## I'M DREAMING OF A QUIET CHRISTMAS

Adele Pereira

I'm dreaming of a quiet Christmas  
Just like Jo-seph's and Mary's, you know  
To see a coalition  
Of children who listen  
To their Fathers heart  
And want to grow

I'm dreaming of a quiet Christmas  
Please close your eyes and you can try it  
All this noise is so anti-light  
so may all your Christmases be quiet

Have yourself a very Mary Christmas  
Sit with her awhile  
Gaze with her upon the very holy child

Have yourself a very Joseph Christmas  
Hold Jesus in your heart  
May you never ever ever grow apart

Here we are  
In the Covid year  
What a year it's been so far  
So many souls who are dear to Him  
Have suffered so and are scarred

You and I  
Have so much to do this year  
Let's stop it all to seek  
More of Christ whose celebration it's indeed

So have yourself a very Jesus Christmas  
Ask Him what He wants  
Do what He says coz after all  
It's HIS birthday

So have yourself a very Mary Christmas  
Have yourself a very Joseph Christmas  
And have yourself a very Jesus Christmas time!



## RECOMMENDED READING

### PERSISTING PATRIARCHY

Intersectionalities, Negotiations, Subversions

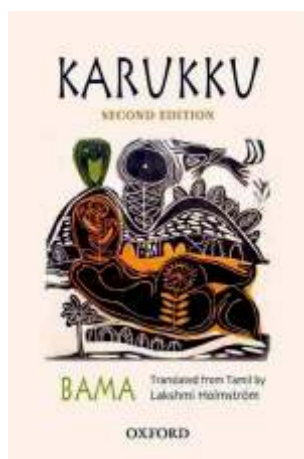
Author : Kochurani Abraham

Publisher : Palgrave Macmillan

Genre : Non-fiction



This book examines the operational dynamics of patriarchy that is deeply woven into the Indian cultural fabric and its persistence in spite of women advancing in Human Development Indices. In studying the situation of women of the Catholic Syrian Christian community of Kerala, South India, as a case of analysis, Kochurani Abraham identifies caste consciousness and religious prescriptions of this community as the main factors that intersect with gendered identity construction and succeed in keeping women within its patriarchal confines. While women do engage in negotiating patriarchy through what can be termed simulative, tactical, and 'agentic' bargains, this remains a 'politics of survival' as it does not challenge the established gender order. In this context, making a shift from 'politics of survival' to a 'politics of subversion' is imperative for challenging persisting patriarchies.



### KARUKKU

Author : Bama

Translator : Lakshmi Holmstrom

Publisher : Oxford University Press; 2012

Genre : Non-fiction

Karukku is an autobiography that chronicles Bama's life, from her childhood to her early adult life as a nun, and beyond. It is one of the first autobiographies of a Dalit woman written in Tamil. It was in 1992 that Bama left the convent that she had been a member of for seven years. The book is her attempt to make sense of her many identities; as a Dalit, as a Christian, as a woman.

She writes of life in her community with its vibrancy and colour, never making it seem like a place defined by a singular caste identity, yet a place that never forgets, and is never allowed to forget its caste identity. She writes simultaneously of humorous incidents she remembers from her childhood, the games she used to play with her friends, good meals with her family and the oppression of her community by the police, upper-castes, and the convent. In this manner, she presents the pervasiveness of caste oppression – how it not only punctuates everyday life, but is an integral part of it, even in the memory of a community.

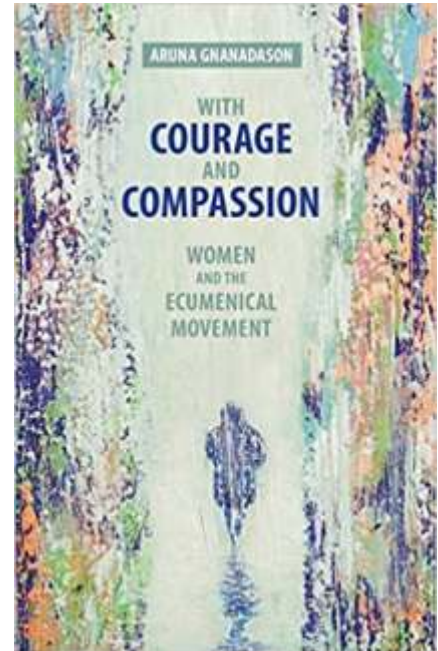
## WITH COURAGE AND COMPASSION

Author : Aruna Gnanadason

Publisher : Fortress Press Minneapolis, 2020

Genre : Non Fiction

This book celebrates the lives and contributions of women regionally and globally; as well as the initiatives with and by women in the World Council of Churches, (a movement of over 340 denominations - Protestant and Orthodox), born in 1948. The two major issues addressed in the book are – the issue of violence against women and the ordination of women to priesthood - issues that call for urgent attention as they could hamper the full and creative participation of women in the church and society. The book addresses women's pioneering and brave work in confronting violence in several conflict points in the world; and in the domestic sphere. The book addresses ecclesiological questions as women confront them related to ministries of the church, including ordained ministry. The book suggests ways forward for the global movement of women.



**Four Grace Club:** This painting by Tricia Robinson depicts the women in the genealogy of Jesus - Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba.

The family Tree of Christ startlingly notes not one woman but four. Four broken women – women who felt like outsiders, like has-beens, like never-beens.

Women who were weary of being taken advantage of, of being unnoticed and uncherished and unappreciated; women who didn't fit in, who didn't know how to keep going, what to believe, where to go – women who had thought about giving up. And Jesus claims exactly these who are

Wandering and wondering  
And wounded and worn out  
As his.

He grafts you into his line and his story and his heart and gives you his name, his lineage, his righteousness.



## ICWM PUNE REPORT

Nirmala Bhukre



**Socially Sanctioned Abuse / Violence Against Women & Girls - Does it happen in "our communities"?**

SHATTER THE SILENCE  
STOP DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- Streevani,
- Women's Commission, Poona
- Indian Christian Women's Movt.
- Invites One & All To an evening of reflection with
- **Flavia Agnes**
- [women's rights advocate & activist]
- DAY & DATE :
- SUNDAY 11<sup>th</sup> October
- TIME: 5 TO 6 PM
- ON ZOOM

OCTOBER is Domestic Violence AWARENESS MONTH

ZOOM ID : 854 1408 8471. PASSWORD : 273536

The lockdown saw ICWM Pune collaborating with Streevani and the Poona Diocesan Women's Commission to conduct several webinars: 'The Real Mary Magdalene' in July, 'Mary - Model Of Freedom, Proclaimer Of Justice And Liberation' in

August. Two sessions were held [in August and October] with the resource person renowned lawyer, writer and social activist Flavia Agnes on the topics 'Being Church - Reaching out to the vulnerable' and 'Socially Sanctioned Abuse / Violence against Women and Girls - Does it happen in "our communities"?' The latter was to commemorate October which is Domestic Violence awareness month. A follow-up was held in the light of Hathras and other rapes on the Role of Culture in Socially Sanctioned Abuse / Violence against women and girls. The resource person was social activist Manisha Gupte. These sessions not only created an awareness but several women approached us for support and help. The sessions build a community of women interested in growing in awareness about women's issues. They were also encouraged to participate in other programmes / webinars conducted by other groups in Church and society.



NIRBHAYA HATHRAS ETC  
CHALLENGE US TO EXAMINE

There has to be a shift in culture. We have to have conversations about systems that are in place that allow sexual violence to flourish.

**The Role of Culture in Socially Sanctioned Abuse / Violence Against Women & Girls**

BREAKING THE CULTURE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT  
EDUCATION COMMUNITY PREVENTION RESPECT CONVERSATIONS MEDIA SYSTEMS AFFIRMATIVE INTERVENTION CONSENT SOLUTIONS

- Streevani,
- Women's Commission, Poona
- Indian Christian Women's Movt.
- Invites One & All To an evening of reflection with
- **Manisha Gupte**
- [women's rights activist]
- DAY & DATE :
- SATURDAY 24<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER
- TIME: 3.30 TO 5.00 PM
- ON ZOOM

ZOOM ID : 824 3561 2094 PASSWORD : 979040

## NEWS FROM ICWM

### National Team

In spite of the Covid pandemic and the lock down, the National Team had a hectic schedule. Letters of solidarity or protest were sent to the Prime Minister regarding the migrant workers crisis; statements were made on several national concerns - including on custodial deaths in Tamil Nadu and the increasing violence against women. A strong protest was registered against the Citizen Amendment Act 2019.

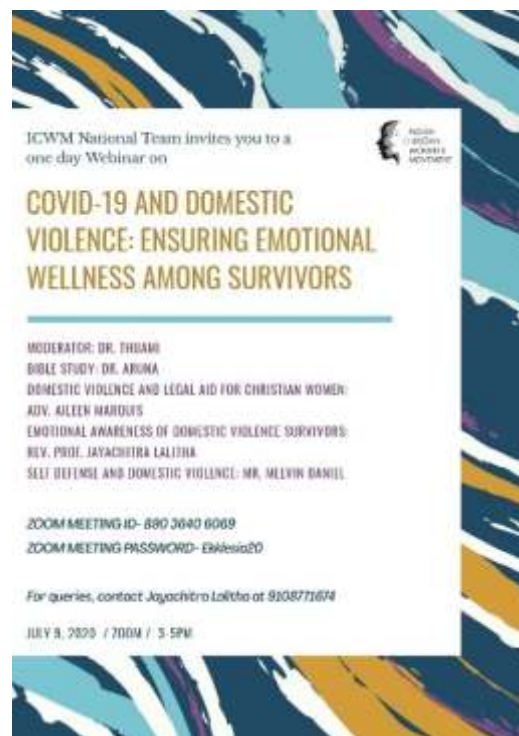
With the first initiative taken by Rev. Dr Jayachitra Lalitha and Dr Joycia Thorat to put together the 1st National Webinar on the Issue of Domestic Violence and Emotional Wellness; three more Webinars were organized on The Price of Freedom, The Dalit Dream and with the IWTF, a webinar on Clergy Sexual Abuse. Here's a brief report on the 4 Webinars organised between July and December 2020:

## COVID -19 AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: ENSURING EMOTIONAL WELLNESS AMONG SURVIVORS

Dr Joycia Thorat

It was amidst the peak of the pandemic Covid-19, that the Indian Christian Women's Movement organized its first ever online Webinar: "Covid-19 and Domestic Violence: Ensuring Emotional Wellness among Survivors" on 9th July 2020. The sudden lock-down and the crisis of the migrants left well-meaning citizens, including ICWM members wondering on responses. Millions of refugees were left to fend for themselves as they walked 100s of miles to reach their destination with all their belongings tied up into bundles. Images of children being dragged along, many dying on the way; pictures of the struggling elderly; visuals of pregnant, lactating mothers, all added to the agony among ICWM members.

Another shadow pandemic thrived amidst this chaos – Domestic Violence – where victims were locked in with their abusers within the four walls which they called 'home.' Ironically this was a time when slogans like 'Stay Home, Stay Safe' were heard everywhere. Members of the ICWM, Lawyers, Activists and Counsellors were getting calls among others from distressed women and children. Recognising that Christian women were no





exception to domestic violence, ICWM decided to come up with a Christian Response to the problem. The webinar was organized with the dual purpose of helping women tackle domestic violence and providing tools to help others.

Marcia D'Cunha welcomed the gathering briefly introducing ICWM to the group. Dr. Aruna Gnanadason set the tone with a Biblical reflection on Christian women who use the Bible to endure and accept abuse. It was important to counter this myth of non-confrontational Christians, submissive wives and help women restore their God given dignity and image. All humans are created in the image of God, and hence the image of God needs to be respected.

The Key Speaker was Adv. Aileen Marques, an active member of ICWM Mumbai and a practicing lawyer with specialized skills and expertise in the area of Domestic Violence. She spoke about the legal provisions of the DV Act, with practical solutions for those who find themselves or know persons in an abusive situation. Vivid case stories drove home the point of how deep rooted the violence is and how critical is the need to engage in addressing this, especially as Christian women.

Dr. Rev. Jayachitra brought in the aspect of emotional wellness and shared the ABC of REBT (Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy) to protect women from the insanity unleashed by the pandemic. This was followed by a practical demonstration by Melvin Daniel on self-defense mechanisms - basically the know-how of protecting oneself if one is in a violent environment. Self-protection is a priority before calling for help. It was very touching to see a young man sharing about transformative masculinity and self-defense for women.

Dr. Kochurani delivered the vote of thanks. The first webinar also helped ICWM get familiar with the new tool of Virtual Meets – Zoom and its cutting edge technology. The zoom platform helped us in organizing other important webinars during the lock down, to be engaged in the activism around us on the other pandemic issues.

## THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

Dr Thuamteii Aizwal

This Webinar organized successfully by the ICWM was held on 22nd August, 2020 on the theme, "The Price of Freedom." It was attended by 100 women from all over India on Zoom and another 30 on Facebook. We had two key speakers Dr. Teesta Setalvad - an award-winning Civil Rights Activist & Journalist and Dr. Monica Melanchthon - a Feminist Theologian and Biblical Scholar.

Sushma Ramaswami, Member of the National Team led the group in prayer.

Dr Joycia Thorat moderated the first session introducing Dr Teesta Setalvad and coordinating audience responses. The focus of the Webinar was on encouraging women and marginalized groups

to raise their voices against the atrocities and violence imposed upon them under the present government. Even though the Constitution has guaranteed every citizen freedom of expression, there are people who are paying a high price for exercising their fundamental right to speech and expression. Dr Teesta Setalvad passionately advocated speaking out and collectivizing our action, for none of us can afford to be silent. To be silent is to be complicit in a subversive agenda. Policies like CAA in combination with the NPR and NRC; EIA and the NEP can change the diverse and secular fabric of India, de-franchise thousands and divide India and Indians, leading to a sectarian crisis.

Dr Jayachitra Lalitha introduced Dr Monica Melanchthon and summed up the discussion at the end.

Dr Melanchthon discussed the ambiguity in the term freedom particularly in the context of women violated, abused and driven to violence, women bound within the clutches of patriarchy. Looking to the scriptures our very conception of God - I am who I am – articulates freedom that resides in and characterizes this God. If we are created therefore in the image of God we are free and holy. We need to resist all attempts that tarnish that image of God that resides within us. She shared Biblical stories of women heroes like Tamar, Vashti and so many more who resist patriarchal subjugation, navigate life for themselves and affirm this image of God for themselves and others. Above all else Mary in her song of Liberation identifies with the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed and sees God's choice of her as being always with them all.

Dr Kochurani Abraham thanked the speakers and participants.

The price of freedom is incalculable so is the cost of exploitation of men and women. However, the principle of freedom is our chief commitment, for without this we are handicapped, the door of capability is slammed shut and the progress of women and minorities in all walks of life slows down. Let us create a space for all citizens to exercise a responsible freedom as it is a gift of God. We remember those men and women who paid the price of freedom. As Herbert Douglass asserts, "It is up to us to stand at our gates, adding to "that thin red line of heroes(heroines)" and boldly say "No more" to coercion and control of any kind that would limit the ability of another to breathe free".



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**Dr. Monica Melanchthon**  
 A Feminist Theologian and Biblical Scholar,  
 Associate Professor, University of Divinity, Victoria, Australia

**22ND AUGUST, SATURDAY | 6-8PM**

**Contact:**  
 Marnia D'Cunha +919620448542 or Dr. Jayachitra Lalitha +919108771674

**Zoom Meeting ID:** 830 8928 1542  
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## WHO IS KILLING THE DALIT DREAM?

Marcia D'Cunha

"The India of our dreams lives in the Constitution," wrote Babasaheb Ambedkar, but the ghastly Hathras case demonstrated exactly now far away from the Dalit dream India has moved. Against this backdrop, the ICWM hosted a National webinar to address the intersectionality between caste, class, gender and religion so as to highlight the urgent need to address questions of justice and human rights assured by the Indian Constitution to Dalit women, who form 16% of the female population of the country.

Dr. Aruna Gnanadason introduced the ICWM and the dream and vision that inspired the movement with its foremost objectives - to uphold women's place in the church and also to stand firmly for justice and democratic values in India.

A brief moment of prayer was ably led by ICWM member Asren Guria from Patna.



Dr Astrid Lobo Gajiwala situated the Webinar in the backdrop of the recent incidents of caste-based violence that seem to be on the rise. She knit the webinar together with her usual finesse, analyzing the speakers and recapping the crux of their communication.

The three powerful speakers had grassroots experience and a huge body of work that spoke out loud and clear even before a word was spoken. They complemented each other to make for a spell-binding evening.

Dr Ruth Manorama spoke passionately about the Dalit dream - simply the right to Life - free from untouchability - something everyone else takes for granted. For her personally the church has been liberative and what was touching was her sharing that most Dalit churches are different from regular churches since their women are always weeping, as they share stories of deep loss and grave injustice. She explained how the state plays a very important role in not being present when needed and so despite all the laws that exist, little changes on the ground. She described how caste hierarchies are intrinsically linked with patriarchy since controlling women perpetuates caste.

Beena Pallical started powerfully quoting Martin Luther's famous 'I have a dream.' She showed us how we are all collaborators in the caste system and equally responsible in killing the Dalit dream.



Despite the right to Education enshrined in the Constitution, children of manual scavengers (people who worked all through the Lockdown) are not admitted into government schools. Shakespeare is read in our elitist schools, while the vast body of the most beautiful Dalit literature is unheard of by our students. Her real-life experiences exposed the pain, the disadvantage and humiliation that Dalits feel as their dreams and aspirations are ruthlessly crushed.

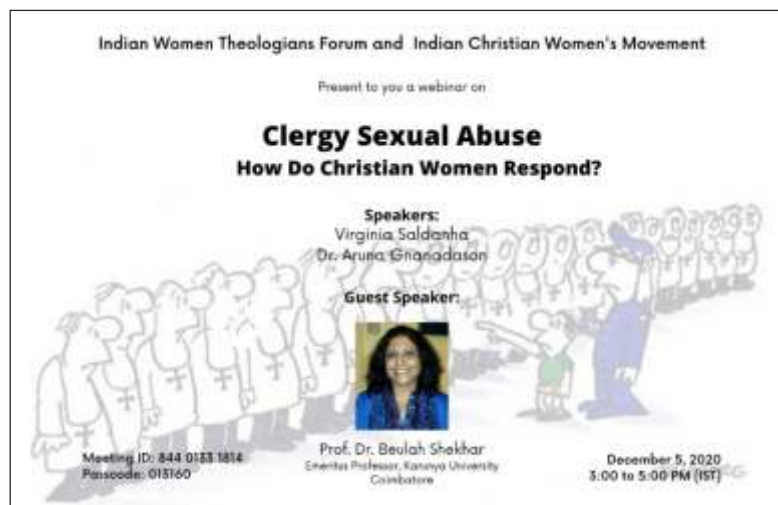
Christina Dhanraj with her global experience added new dimensions to the discussion. She pointed out that in the Hathras case where the focus of media should have been on the brutality, legal aid, the inhumanity of the responses by the police and administration, questions were raised about whether Caste does play a role? The culture of impunity that surrounds these crimes calls for a build-up of solidarity with support from Anti-Caste allies, since most Dalits are just engaged in the game of survival. She drew attention to micro-aggressions, small acts that add up to keep Dalits in their place can be traumatic. She called for a fundamental shift in the way we see Dalits - not just as either survivor or victim but also as people striving and thriving, dreaming and living their dreams.

Dr Joycia Thorat thanked the Speakers, the participants and the persons responsible for putting the program together.

## CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE How do Christian women respond?

Rev Dr Jayachitra Lalitha

The webinar organized by Indian Christian Women's Movement and Indian Women Theologians Forum (IWTF) on the topic, "Christian Women addressing clergy sexual abuse" was held on 5th December from 3-5 pm. Approximately 130 women attended the webinar. The webinar was intended to give greater clarity on the critical issues underlying the problem of clergy sexual abuse so women of the different Christian churches can wake up to the gravity of this concern and explore ways of addressing it as committed members of ICWM.



This Webinar was intended to explore our own unintentional complicity in the abuse by our silence when we should speak as Christian women. We tend to take sides with the abuser and question

the motives of the abused woman in speaking up about the abuse and challenge her 'defiance' of the Church. We question her integrity, and put her in the dock. This has allowed this cancer of abuse to grow, emboldening the abusers and silencing victims of abuse."

Dr. Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, a member of both ICWM and IWTF ably moderated the webinar.

Virginia Saldanha began by pointing out that Clergy Sexual Abuse is a global problem propped up by the patriarchal and hierarchical structures of churches that utilize scriptures and culture to perpetuate the sexual violence and gender discrimination as well as ensure silence of those abused. Viewing sexual abuse as sin and not crime prevented proper redressal. She went on to show how the learned image of the priest helps predators access victims.

Those abused as children were only able to articulate their abuse at the age of forty and above and willing to confront their abusers. From her experience she shared the modus operandi of predators.

Saldanha suggested the following action plans:

- Break silence
- Establish the mechanisms to address sexual abuse
- Have awareness programs
- Break the myth of the aura surrounding priest as man of God
- Following the POSH (Prevention, protection and redressal of Sexual Harassment in the workplace.) Act, we should campaign for churches to make their policy on Sex abuse and publish it. Use the press to publicise and break the myth that abuse is western phenomenon.

The second speaker, Dr. Aruna Gnanadason stated that there are no statistics available of clergy sexual abuse in Protestant churches, which is very unfortunate. Women are trapped into a system of patriarchal abuse, rather than pin pointing case by case. Women clergy in protestant churches alone cannot abolish the power system of male dominance in church. As Mary Daly comments, Sin of self-complicity causes self-destruction. Women's psychological and social conditioning need to be re-challenged. Women need to network too.

Dr. Beulah Shekhar highlighted how CPSA (Clergy Perpetrated Sexual Abuse) reveals the huge disconnect between teaching of scriptures and the control of clergy over vulnerable women. She pointed out to a three-pronged approach taking into account we are dealing with: a motivated perpetrator, vulnerable parishioners who are easy targets and the absence of capable guardians. The vulnerable need to understand how they are made targets and can come out of it. Women need to realize that it is they who give power to clergy and they need to take it back. She also insisted on implementation of the restorative justice system as very crucial.

Dr. Shekhar showed us the way forward: The clergy need to take responsibility to set the power equations right in church systems. 2-6 per cent of clergy from Catholic and Protestant churches are abusive. We need to take into account the structural context in which abuse takes place. The secrecy of such abuses is kept intact by power and trust and needs to be exposed publicly. There are plenty of laws but what is lacking is the awareness of these laws. The frontline professionals of NGOs and BBOs need to be accountable for monitoring the enforcement of laws in respective and local locations. We need to explore political will to implement and enforce legislations. Finally, to end the impunity for breach of laws, they need to increase reporting. Only certainty and severity of punishment can deter clergy perpetrating sexual abuse.

Raynah Marise warmly thanked the NCCI, all the participants, Speakers and Moderator.



*Here's wishing the invisible, unnamed, and unnoticed, more surprises this Christmas!  
& a Year of greater Gender Inclusion in 2021,  
unveiling our loving God, in whom there is neither male nor female.*



This year on the feast of the Nativity  
Let us look at Christmas anew  
Mary takes a little nap,  
perhaps nine months overdue.

Joseph holds the little babe,  
wonder in his eyes.  
Just another proud dad,  
mothering his child?



*May all of our Christmas reflections  
fill our new year with hope*



## ICWM

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The 4<sup>th</sup> Edition of WWW (When Women Wake) is led by the Western Region