



# BIRTHING A NEW VISION

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Vol. 21



*Indian Feminist Theology and Women's Concerns  
Reviews, Resources and Remembrance*

*Pearl Drego*

# **Birthing A New Vision**

## **The Empowerment of Women Religious in India**

**Vol. 21**

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*"Last century the church lost the workers. This century it is going to lose women, unless something is done soon. It was in this context I first started some sort of an Institute, from where I hoped a movement for women could originate. After a long period of trial, error and failure ultimately were able to establish what is today called Streevani in Pune"*

*Late Rev. Fr. Engelbert Zeitler SVD  
Co-Founder of Streevani  
10th February 1984*

# STREEVANI

The birth of **STREEVANI** goes back to the deep conviction of two great visionaries, late Fr. Engelbert Zeitler SVD and late Dr. Frances Maria Yasas, committed to the cause of women's empowerment. As an organization, it came into being at Ishvani Kendra, Pune in 1982, as a research wing to explore feminist visions through participative research about how women view themselves; and their multiple roles in the Church and in Society.

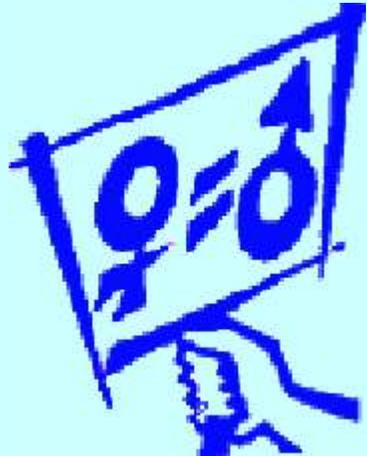
## VISION

The integral liberation of women in view of restoring her dignity as a person and as an equal partner with man within the framework of the Indian society.

Formation of a world wide community awakening to the possibilities of women's contribution to all aspects of development and liberation.

## OBJECTIVES

- Exploring women's experiences particularly in the context of their struggle for humanhood.
- Awakening Women Religious towards the path of empowerment.
- Networking and collaborating with like-minded organizations.
- Empowering and organizing women domestic workers.
- Legal assistance and intervention in the court of law for women in crisis, through Legal Cell.



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**Indian Feminist Theology and  
Women's Concerns  
Reviews, Resources and Remembrance**

Pearl Drego



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Pearl Drego



## Foreword

The world of woman is full of stories that need telling. It is full of mysteries that need revealing. This time of rapid change we need its chroniclers, tellers and witnesses. The current volume of our Streevani bulletin *Birthing a New Vision* titled “*Indian Feminist Theology and Women's Concerns: Reviews, Resources and Remembrance*” traces the genesis of women's writings in the church and in the Society in India and how it has found its voice from the top ranking down to the grass roots. On the process we too have discovered that while traditional theology follows rational thought, feminist theology is experiential. Thus, Indian feminist theologians are giving creative manifestations to their faith in the Indian context.

Pope Francis advocates working harder, "to develop a profound theology of women." I am not sure what he meant when he said this, but I do know that we already have a formidable body of writing by women about their experience of God; from the early Christian martyrs, women mystics and great doctors of the church, to the famous contemporary feminist theologians of our day. There are volumes of feminist theology just waiting for us to plunge into. The fact is that women live the Gospel in their lives and not within the formalized power structure. It is an overwhelming experience to view how the very concept of theology has been deepened by these examples of women's writing and lived experiences over the years. Theology has been stretched to include different literary genres and different forms of life expression.

Theology has authorized women to bring in their feminine genius and allowed women to share their poignant experiences and present a comprehensive picture of women's rights in the church. This volume demonstrates how women found ways to write theology, as books and articles, hymns and poems, all testimonies of their refusal to surrender the Word in their endeavour to transform traditions of exclusion. Angela Nijssen s.c.m.m. in her article “*Participation of Women in the Life of*

*Christian Communities and Towards a Feminine Theology*” fittingly advocates a “different theology of woman”, one which needs to correct the distortions of women's image of previous theologies which underlined the discriminating cultural attitudes towards women. For her, it was not just a question of re-examining the position of woman in the Gospel but of “seeing woman in a totally different light, as a person first, for whom God has a plan.”

We sincerely thank Dr. Pearl Drego, the author, who has amazingly gathered the voices of women's movements, as well as those of women theologians, academicians, women with special charisms and women from the margins. She says that, “If we see feminist theology as not only theologising on woman's dignity, identity, status, from biblical, spiritual, and ecclesial perspectives but as rooted in lived contextual realities, and viewed from sociological, anthropological, political, linguistic, and other interpretations; as emerging from the struggles of women for justice on the ground and the struggles of women as part of larger movements for political, social, marital and personal independence, then its canvas expands in manifold ways, keeping it both soul-filled and pragmatic. Indeed, feminist theologising in India emerged through women's resistance against oppression and deprivation, through reflection in faith on these struggles and through women's responses and critique of Church documents and statements on women. By studying scripture passages related to women and critiquing Papal pronouncements as well as declarations of bishops, Indian, Asian and Western, women's local study groups and national conferences produced documents on women's condition in Church and society.”

In recording, reminiscing and reviewing, Pearl Drego has given space to writings from the 1950s till date, giving us a random cross-section of published works by women. Still there are many more voices to be read, re-read and celebrated and we look forward to continuing this process. Though we have titled this book as *Indian Feminist Theology and Women's Concerns: Reviews, Resources and Remembrance*, this volume is restricted only to the Feminist Theology and Concerns of Catholic women.

We affirm the truth that, “The experience and wisdom of women are conducive for the growth and transformation of the Church and society” (Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India, 2010).

Julie George SSpS  
Director  
Streevani, Pune

## Part - I

### **1. Indian Feminist Theology and Women's Concerns: Reviews, Resources and Remembrance: Introduction**

*Holiness is the responsibility of everyone, because, the “Lord Jesus, the divine teacher and model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and everyone of his disciples regardless of their situation.”*  
Lumen Gentium 40.

Theology is derived from the word *theos* in Greek which means God. Theology is therefore the science of God, the perception of life, cosmos, events, history, relationships, indeed all of the universe, its creatures and peoples, as sourced in God and being in circulation with divine energies and purposes. Feminist theology critiques the findings and deliberations of theology from the point of view of women's rights and hopes, gender-bias and discrimination, her emotions and desires, her humanity and holiness, responsibilities and talents, her communion with God and God-centered activities, etc. Because of the incarnation of Jesus in human history, humanity's connection to God is relocated in the message brought by Jesus and in his passage through death and resurrection. Women are also immersed in this relocation, and so is women's theologising. Women theologising, theology as articulated by women, is also much wider than feminist theology. Women have often been relegated only to writing on women's issues in theology and often they are not quoted by mainstream theologians in India, even when writing about women and Church.

If we see feminist theology as not only theologising on woman's dignity, identity, status, from biblical, spiritual, and ecclesial perspectives but as rooted in lived contextual realities, and viewed from sociological, anthropological, political, linguistic, and other interpretations; as emerging from the struggles of women for justice on the ground and the struggles of women as part of larger movements for political, social, marital and personal independence, then its canvas expands in manifold ways, keeping it both soul-filled and pragmatic. Indeed, feminist theologising in India emerged through women's

resistance against oppression and deprivation, through reflection in faith on these struggles and through women's responses and critique of Church documents and statements on women. By studying scripture passages related to women and critiquing Papal pronouncements as well as declarations of bishops, Indian, Asian and Western, women's local study groups and national conferences produced documents on women's condition in Church and society. Such statements and discussions continued to grow in response to national events that included women, as well as to reactions against atrocities on women. The contributions of women leaders and thinkers, and a host of seminars of theologians, both men and women, added to the array of ideas, visions and prescriptions for saving women from oppression and for their advancement at all levels. The landmark meetings where women's voices were raised and a document emerged out of collective reflection, debate and discussion, analysis of scripture, church documents, Christian media, women's writings and speeches, legal and canon law issues, new claims, analysis of violence and structural subjugation are included in this enterprise.

From the records available, it is clear that one cannot speak of a history of feminist theology in the sense of a linear development of feminist thought on the Indian Catholic scene, and even less so in the Indian ecumenical scene. There is, and has been, a spectrum of women theological writers and speakers, with different perspectives, frameworks, attitudes and ideologies; women theologians from the north and south, from the tribal belt, dalit communities and mountain heights, from groups that have lived decades of Christianity and from groups whose grandparents or parents were recently baptised. A variety of contexts have shaped the many genres of feminist approaches prevalent in India today. While there are several groups of Catholic women with feminist agendas and actions, they have their specific regional, language, congregational, academic and other identities. Catholic feminists are still in the process of forming a visible sisterhood. We women cannot be armchair theologians, nor arm-twisting theologians. We need to be arm-in-arm theologians. However, while it may take some more time to bring feminist unity amidst the diversity, the lack of consensus has not stopped scores of feminist groups and thousands of women the world over from taking decisive action in Church structures and activities.

One important reason for which I was commissioned to write this document was the fact that even though our Catholic feminist theologians use their own experience and research as starting points for reflection, all too often in presentations and publications they refer mainly to renowned international feminists rather than to their Indian, Asian or Third World foremothers and colleagues. In the several meetings of Catholic women I attended this year, convened in the aftermath of the 16<sup>th</sup> December horrific gangrape of a young paramedic in Delhi, we realised that there was much to be done to compile and make known to each other what our own friends, colleagues and companions have written and spoken on the subject. This would be needed to advance our sense of sisterhood and create a “paradigm” in the sense of Thomas Kuhn's idea of intellectual community.<sup>[1]</sup> While it is true that we belong today to a global intellectual and academic network, and that for a topic like feminist theology we are bound to be conditioned by the immensely popular literature published abroad, there is a value in reading, respecting and remembering the women, especially the Catholic women who have overcome patriarchy, worked incessantly for women, conceptualised their feminist theology within their studies or struggles, and published works on the same.

The historicising consciousness can be faithful and meticulous about sources, connections and interconnections, or it can be partial and selective, sidelining original thinkers and pathfinders, suppressing smaller activists in the fray and highlighting those who were more vocal and media-savvy. The decisive thumb-rule reality-based appraisal would be, “From whose point of view?” Therefore from the start I admit that my attempt to place on record some of the people and events in our country that shaped feminist theology down the decades is destined to be incomplete and selective, based on my own limitations and the difficulties in accessing information within a time-bound assignment.

In this study, I shall keep these various factors as the background of my reviews and remembrances, concentrating on keeping alive the memories of women who took courageous initiatives in the past, and also expressed their views on feminism in books, journals and newsletters. The flavours and fragrance of their writings still have a message to bring to Church and civil society today.

There was a time when being “feminist” was seen by some (both women and men) as implying a stance of being aggressive, egoistic and anti-men with images of “domineering” wives isolating themselves from the community and excluding men from their deliberations. In fact the patriarchal mindset would perceive women claiming their rights with vigour as being “dominating” while women who accept the status quo and keep everyone happy they would perceive as “sweet and feminine”. This power play of perceptions also creates further divisions between women themselves and obstructs unity between diverse groups. Women are sometimes faced with the choice of being either subversive or subjugated! In these scenarios, promoting women's liberation may be viewed as an act of sabotage of Catholic tradition. Indeed, there was a time when such activities were couched in more acceptable language. For example, some ecclesial authorities found that it was OK to promote the “role and dignity” of women rather than women's “liberation”.

The terminology of women's empowerment and independence came later when papal documents and church meetings fell in line with the national and international language of feminist uprisings; as the awakening of Christian women's consciousness of themselves as individuals and as sisterhoods grew stronger and expressed itself both academically and pastorally, socially and politically in terms of personal and structural change. The oft-quoted para No. 41 of Pope John XXIII's 1965 “Pacem in Terris” is still true today: “Women are gaining an increasing awareness of their natural dignity... they are demanding both in domestic and public life the rights and duties which belong to them as human persons.”

Women's movements around the globe have been active for centuries. The Muslim world in West Asia saw women struggling against the veil and uniting with political struggles from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I have heard visiting lecturers from countries such as Pakistan, Iran and Singapore present on women and Islamic values with great fervour. In Africa, the women were an integral part of the resistance to colonialism. This is especially true of South Africa. It was on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1956, that the Federation of South African Women, Fedsaw, organized the great march of over 20,000 women to the Union buildings in Pretoria in protest against new laws which required that

they carry humiliating identity passes like the men were forced to do. Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa, Sophy Williams and Lilian Ngoyi led the protest. Petitions signed by the women of South Africa were delivered to the then Prime Minister. Their daring joint action in challenging justice and courting arrest gave rise to the famous slogan, 'Strike a woman, strike a rock'. This resounding 'No' of the women to state-imposed victimization and oppressive laws, was decisive in changing the apartheid systems. The women combined their ancestral ethnic resistance with universal values of self-preservation and solidarity. The South African woman of the march embodies several dimensions that are important to feminist action and theologising the world over: namely being a herald of justice, an axis of resistance, a model of courage, an icon of freedom and a creator of community all at the same time! It was not merely a matter of struggling as women, but struggling as women together with other oppressed groups, poor and rich, rural and urban, men and children, brown and black.

## **2. From Survival Needs to Campaigns**

Our sub-continent has been witness to women standing up for their rights and privileges from before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, joining larger protest movements and imbibing concepts of independence, self-empowerment and political strategies, as found in recorded history and documents emerging from national and international conferences, gatherings and campaigns.

However, in the beginnings, women's programmes and projects were mainly focussed on basic education, literacy, ability to sign one's name, learning facts of nutrition and how to cook nutritious foods with safe cooking methods, health education, pregnancy information and care, infant handling, baby care, economic independence, etc., while in the rural areas, importance was given to training in agriculture, farming technology, kitchen gardens, waste management, hygiene and toilet construction, well-digging, etc.

The 1975 United Nations International Women's Year while promoting the cause of women the world over, emphasised the importance of housing, networking and livelihoods for women's lives to improve. Then followed the United National Decade for Women (1976-1985) which saw a steamrolling of women's programmes in India and Asia. Among the many conferences held, worthy of mention

is that organised jointly in New Delhi by the Pacific Centre for Women and Development (APCWD) Bangkok, and National Buildings Organisation (NBO) in April and June 1980.

From the 1970s through the 80s, housing and environmental issues gained in importance and check lists of women's needs began to take into account problems from essential services such as drainage, electricity, collection and disposal of human waste, etc. to public utilities such as vocational centres, childcare facilities, working women's hostels, etc. The smokeless fireplace, village well, the sewing machine, the biogas plant, cemented grain storage tanks, tiled roofs, etc., were the focus in that era.

Recognition of the problems of migrant women, women in rural and slum settlements and tribal habitats led to a plethora of projects, often funded by international agencies. Religious congregations and Church projects included charity programmes, food distribution, founding orphanages, balwadis and women's groups. Many convents cared for children born out of wedlock or children whose parents gave them over because of extreme poverty.

The theology of human dignity and gender equality, concern for the poor and abandoned, love of neighbour and the beatitudes inspired this kind of work. The Church's heavy emphasis on self-sacrifice in the foot-steps of a suffering Jesus and the attitudes of direct and indirect evangelisation gave women an impetus to launch big education, medical and social projects. Later, the works of welfare and charity evolved into the work of social transformation and social justice. This was understood as the struggle against all forms of discrimination, combined with equal access to resources, a just distribution of wealth and resistance to unfair take-over of land and resources by governments, corporate, estate agents, and various predators. Women's issues began to include the analysis of sex roles, of images, tasks and restrictions, marriage and family life. The focus was on the need to recognise the contribution of women, to lift their oppression, to fight for rights and change laws both in church and society. Mobilisation and campaigning became vital to women's development.

Though women's movements in our country have flourished from the previous century, they have now evolved to include a whole gamut of areas, from support for household and home-making skills which

women are saddled with no matter what be the injustice of this burden, to rehabilitation of sex-workers, reservation for seats in Parliament, girl child advocacy, campaigns on issues of wife-beating, abortion, female foeticide, women trafficking, genital mutilation, rape and all forms of sexual violence, projects for family planning and use of contraceptives, importance of legal training and redress, political and land rights, de-humanising dress codes and access to resources.

Yet, the struggles, the projects and programmes, have not been able to surmount the the suffering on the ground, and they have not been vibrant and widespread enough to make a difference in the lives of millions of women who still live without food, shelter, housing and basic dignity. To the “kapda, roti aur makan”, and the “Bijli, sadak, paani” has been added “shauchalya” or “toilet”, and rightly so. Oxfam India is doing a sensible task of building toilets in Assam.<sup>[2]</sup> Our feminist theology cannot rise to heights of gender equality and mystic ecology, genderised hermeneutics and liturgy, to spiritual leadership and parish participation, when millions of women cannot use a toilet during the daytime and are forced to squat in dire exposure early mornings on the banks of the river or the slopes of a hillside! *Therefore, in India, feminist theology and spirituality arise from the awareness that women's survival needs and personal rights are enshrined in a Gospel that makes their struggles against starvation, poverty, homelessness and injustice central to its message of resistance, hope, re-imagining and reconstruction.* We need to know what has been done by women on the ground, by women in high places, by women in the grassfields and women in the hills, to lessen their own burdens, feed their families and bring solace to a broken world.

### **3. Background Trends Worldwide**

Fortunately today, democratic movements, enlightened nationalism and the recognition of the rights of local peoples to the resources of the earth, have propelled the women's movements to take a more rights-based stance and understand what came to be termed the “feminisation of poverty”. Feminist campaigns for change and modification of constitutional laws focussed on rights of inheritance, land ownership and its inheritance, grounds for divorce, rights of divorced women, water and housing rights, etc. Organising and mobilising women at the grass-roots and across class and caste divides, across regional

differences became important, and women from all strata united to make common cause for structural change, legal redress, political power, sexual dignity, etc. renewing the struggle for constitutional and parliamentary rights. Maternal health, child nutrition, child mortality rates are still high-priority issues, however ecological restoration has also become practically and theologically integrated within the struggle for women's and justice, survival and development. Both Church and civil society have realised the significance of these wider visions.

The “Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women” was adopted on 18 December 1979 in the United Nations General Assembly. It is interesting that the declaration included the statement, “States parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation to suppress all forms of traffic in women and the exploitation of prostitution of women.” The 28<sup>th</sup> session of the commission on the status of Women was held in Vienna that same year from 25 Feb to 5 March where a special report was made on the “Influence of the mass communication media on attitudes towards the roles of women and men in present-day society”. This report made by the Special Rapporteur showed how media perpetuates the image of women's subordination. “The frequent projected images are the home-loving housewife ... the efficient secretary, the femme fatale, the devoted mother, the tramp or sex object, and above all “the perfect consumer’.” It made reference to an important abuse by the media when it equates liberation with sexual liberation and replaced social with sexual emancipation. In doing this, the media “have reversed the sense and substance of women's movements.” This critique of the media was in line with the comments of the World Conference of the International Women's Year held in Mexico in 1975. The thrust was for equal partnership. In the field of Mariology there was a critique of the image of fostering the passive and receptive, as these were “identified with powerlessness and dependence and self-negation ...”<sup>[3]</sup>

Therefore today, feminist theology has recognised that women's campaigns are not focussed only on women, but on larger movements; the feminist movement is focussed on changing cultural attitudes and practices; it is integrated with the resistance to oppressive structures from multinationals, exploitation of workers, destruction of natural resources, struggles for land rights of farmers, a just international

order, democratic and political rights, the struggles against nuclear warfare, economic inequalities, militarization, pollution, media stereotyping, social and cultural conditioning, halting of all forms of violence, etc. Today, eco-theology, the reign of God's justice and peace, equality in the community of believers and humanity, participation of women in Church administration and liturgy have taken on new dimensions of urgency in feminist theory and praxis, upholding the struggles for justice by all peoples on all continents, at all stages of history. In the words of our Pope Francis, we “Say 'No' to the inequality that spawns violence”.

*Feminist theology has therefore taken a position that is both critical and reformist, aiming at changes in the way women are perceived, in the way women perceive themselves, and changes in the cultural and religious slogans and attitudes that keep women confined, inarticulate and unseen.*

Protestant women have often been ahead of Catholic feminists. While participating in the anti-slavery movement and later in the movement for equal rights, Protestant women from various evangelical Protestant Churches in the U.S. began to see their subordinate position in the Church and society. While participating in the anti-Vietnam agitation they realised that they were the ones making the coffee and tea rather than shaping the ideology! The black women's movement also gave energy and shape to the wider women's movements and to their challenge to ecclesial patriarchy. A host of women from all the Churches the world over made a diligent study of scripture and Church history and soon began a courageous critique of religious texts, beliefs and practices so as to expose their male-oriented bias. By the mid-nineteenth century, Protestant women had trained in theology, achieved the status of full-fledged women missionaries and had access to ordination. They were determined to uncover the spiritual stereotypes and ideology that had kept them subjugated in Church affairs, in the home and in society. These critiques ultimately led to a variety of positions on women and Church. Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote *The Woman's Bible* as early as 1895.<sup>[4]</sup> Closer to home, in 1888 the convert to Christianity, Pandita Ramabai's *Women in India* sold hundreds of copies in the U.S. during her scintillating lecture tours there.

In the United Kingdom, the Society for Ministry of Women in the Church was founded in 1930, a fact which can be concluded from its Golden Jubilee Conference in 1980, reported by the English Edition of the *The Catholic Citizen*, Journal of St. Joan's Alliance (op. cit). Those were the years when several Catholic movements had begun to spread around the world, such as the Young Christian Workers. In 1941 E. Hirsch wrote, *Tatsächlich werden so in gewisser Weise die Frauen in Galilaa zum Selbstzweck*” in *Fruehgeschichts des Evangeliums*, Tübingen, which has been referenced by Angela Nijssen s.c.m.m. in her article, *The Participation of Women in the Life of the Christian Communities* in “Women in India and in the Church”.<sup>[5]</sup>

In the secular world, Virginia Woolf who had been writing from a feminist perspective in the early parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had her famous published in 1929,<sup>[6]</sup> containing her 1927 ruminations on patriarchy. Mary Beard's *Woman as Force in History* published in 1946,<sup>[7]</sup> gave feminism a boost while Simone de Beauvoir's still celebrated *Le Deuxieme Sexe* 1949,<sup>[8]</sup> gave a scathing philosophical and historical analysis of the many ways by which Christianity had oppressed women, and Betty Friedan's 1963 *The Feminine Mystique*<sup>[9]</sup> created a stir worldwide.

Simultaneously in Europe, the issues of ordination raised a furore in Protestant circles in the middle of the twentieth century, leading to serious splits, as for example in the Church in Sweden. Ordination of women was an established part of Swedish Lutheran practise only from 1960, though the first commission on the topic had been appointed in 1919! By the end of the 1960s more than seventy churches in the world were ordaining women! Krister Stendahl, a clergyman of Harvard Divinity School traces this history in a powerful booklet, *The Bible and the Role of Women* which was translated into English from the 1958 Swedish edition by Emilie T. Sander in 1966, and reprinted again in 1970.<sup>[10]</sup> Stendahl showed in no uncertain terms how important women's ordination is for the Churches, taking the position that it is a matter of hermeneutics rather than tradition, and exposing the flaws in the slogan, “Separate but equal”.

While seventeenth century women such as Mary Ward and other international founders had paved the way for nuns to work outside the cloister, it was many decades later that proper theology courses were available to women. In the early 1960s, Mary Daly followed what she

called her “passion to study philosophy and theology” (p.8), and described her quaint experiences while sitting in classrooms in the University of Fribourg filled with priests and male seminarians. Yet she went through it all to get a canonical degree in theology and then, inspired by her interactions with the sea of international communication that was Vatican II, and its “ebullient sense of hope” she began writing her *The Church and the Second Sex* in 1965, based on Simone de Beauvoir's title and arguments. Her work was published in 1968, after which she went through many public trials, yet gained renown as a celebrity in the media.<sup>[11]</sup> She had been fired from her teaching job at the Jesuit-run Boston college, but having been “hurled into instant fame” as she herself reports, she was also ecstatic to see “a community of sisterhood coming into being, into be-ing” (p. 14). By the time her book was republished in 1975 her thesis had settled into people's consciousness as something positive for a new future, and her *Beyond God the Father* had also become famous.<sup>[12]</sup>

Women philosophers and theologians have flourished since ancient times, and publications of women philosophers have come to the fore in academic and literary spheres since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Mother abbesses were erudite and foundresses kept records of their charisms. However, women acquiring canonical degrees in theology began only from the mid-twentieth century onwards. By the late 1960s nuns in the United States had degrees in theology, many from St. Mary's in Indiana, where Mary Daly got her first theological training. Sally Cunneen's book, *Sex: Female – Religion: Catholic, - Hopes: Few*,<sup>[13]</sup> castigated male-dominated Church practice and showed that the woman in the pew was beginning to understand her highly suppressed condition. I attended an education conference in India in 1975 where it was reported that a statement on sex roles and conditioning, on dependencies of Church women and the need for liberation of women had already emerged from a conference on “Sexism in the 1970's: Discrimination against Women” held in West Berlin in June 1974.

The scene in India was different as regards critiques and challenges. Few Catholic women took theological training seriously in the 1960s, and though the same was not true of the Protestant Churches, the situation was still bleak as regards women theologising. According to a survey done by the Council of Christian Education of the Methodist

Church in Southern Asia, United Theological College, Bangalore reported 11 women in the academic year 1974-75 registered, while Bishops College Calcutta and Serampore College had no women students. The Leonard Theological College had seven women in the Seminary and 12 in the Women's School, while North India Theological College had two women for the Bachelor of Theology degree and 12 for other studies, all the women being wives of those studying in the School of Theology.

Internationally, the late 1960s and 70s saw the women's question further expanded in western academic and religious circles by many articles and books. To mention a few: Kate Millet's, *Sexual Politics* of 1970,<sup>[14]</sup> Eva Figes, *Patriarchal Attitudes* of 1970,<sup>[15]</sup> and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* of 1971.<sup>[16]</sup> In 1979, Adrienne Rich exposed more horrors about women's oppression in her book, *On Lies, Secret, and Silence – Selected Prose 1966-1978*.<sup>[17]</sup>

In this decade of the 1970s, Church women were not far behind. *Woman Liberated* appeared in 1971, in which the author Lois Gunden Clemens presented the Mennonite view.<sup>[18]</sup> Sarah Bentley Doely edited *Women's Liberation and the Church* in 1970,<sup>[19]</sup> and the same year, the Reverend Elsie Gibson of the United Church of Christ published a controversial book, *When the Minister is a Woman* in which she reported how a woman pastor in California dissuaded women from ministry as they would then lose friends and influence! In 1973 Mary Daly's, *Beyond God the Father – Toward a philosophy of women's liberation*, carried the campaign to further heights.<sup>[20]</sup> In 1974 Letty Russell wrote her *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective – A theology*,<sup>[21]</sup> and in 1975 Rachel Conrad Wahlberg's *Jesus According to a Woman* hit the stands.<sup>[22]</sup> That same year Una Kroll published another famous work, *Flesh of my Flesh*.<sup>[23]</sup> while in 1978 Mary Daly's *Gyn/ecology-The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*<sup>[24]</sup> shocked the Christian world with facts about obliteration of woman, witch-burning, etc. Phyllis Tribble wrote, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* that same year,<sup>[25]</sup> and Maria Riley OP in the “Centre for Concern” in Washington had begun focussing on feminist issues and challenged bishops meetings to be inclusive. Books and articles on feminism and religion appeared in several European countries in different languages and became more acceptable in Church circles. The stage was set indeed for an avalanche of thought and action on women in Church and society!

## 4. Other Feminist Voices

Catherine J.M. Halkes, a Dutch feminist theologian who wrote many books and worked actively for women in the Church on the European scene, wrote a public letter to John Paul II in which she said, “But if you want to listen to the signs of this time, then you must also see a sign in the protests of countless women against your statements to them and about them. This protest is directed against the one sided anthropology you use when you speak about women. Out of your limited view of women, of our “bodiliness”, you make numerous other statements about human sexuality which make people of good will, both men and women, unhappy, and which discredit the church....Of course parenthood remains an important task, one of the ways of cooperating in the governing of creation. But this holds true for men as it does for women. Mutual negotiation between the parents can create the possibility that both will be available for their family and both will be available for society.

Catherine continues in the same vein, respectful yet critical: “Believe me, Brother John Paul, if you do not wish to enter into discussion with us and do not even deem us worthy of an answer, you make yourself increasingly aloof from us. Thereby you alienate growing number of women from the Church. This cannot be your intention. Place your trust now in what the Teresas, the Catherines, the Marys and the Hildegardes of this age are bringing to the awareness of the church and the world, and let us seek together better paths of understanding.”<sup>[26]</sup>

A friend of mine, Marita Estor, writing from Bonn on her experience in the Germany Synod expresses similar feelings when she states: “Not until I started work in the Department of Labor and Social Affairs (1968), did I become more aware of myself living in a man's world. I began to see the manifold problems women were facing, particularly in the labor market. As a member of the German Synod (1971-75), I also discovered the relevance of women's issues for the Church. A big step forward in my growing consciousness was my participation in a seminar organised by Mary Buckley in 1979 on “A feminist approach to work, sexuality and religion.”

Marita continues: “This past summer, I gave several lectures on “Women Moving the Church” in Salzburg. For the first time, I realized

the deep relevance for the Church of the changed situation of many women and their search for a new self-understanding. The Church is concerned not only because women are leaving the Church and are deciding moral issues according to their own consciences. More important, it seems to me, is that a new understanding of women's personhood, dignity and freedom has repercussions for the Church's own self understanding, since she speaks of herself in the image of woman.<sup>27]</sup>

The academic scene in universities around the world also shaped the direction and language of feminist movements. In the 1980s “Women's Studies” programmes and Women's departments with special bibliographies and syllabi became popular. They avidly promoted seminars and research projects applying feminist methods and critiques in the fields of anthropology and sociology, primatology and archaeology, linguistics and history, biology, psychology, psychiatry, etc. New terminology such as “feminist empiricism”, “post-modern feminism in sub-Saharan Africa”, “black post-colonial non-western methodology” came into use and gradually feminist theology also began to fine-tune concepts of sex versus gender, gendering, gender justice and gender sensitive analysis. More Catholic feminists began taking the theological road more seriously and consistently. Ann Carr's *Theological Anthropology and the Experience of Women* was put out by Chicago Studies in the summer issue of 1980<sup>[28]</sup> and in 1983, Rosemary Radford Ruether published her 1980 lectures given at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and her 1982 Caldwell Lectures given at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary,<sup>[29]</sup> under the title, *Sexism and God-Talk – Towards a Feminist Theology*. Feminism had truly come of age in the Church internationally. Issues of sexual abuse of women and children began to be addressed in public with sexuality, intimacy and friendship becoming centre stage in human development studies. Child sexual abuse, physical addictions and recovery groups, debates on lesbian relationships were written about openly. One example from the literature is *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Sexual Abuse* by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis published in 1988.<sup>[30]</sup>

At the same time, the discipline of psychology made big strides in deconstructing the gender myths and freeing women to be themselves.

For example, Carol Gilligan, a Jewish psychologist studied girl's development and is famous for her book, *In a Different Voice* published in 1982,<sup>[31]</sup> in which she shows in concrete ways how girls and boys are psychologically conditioned into traditional stereotypes. Psychology and psychotherapy made enormous contributions to gender freedom from the 1970s and 1980s, and in 1986 Gerda Lerner's, oft-quoted *The Creation of Patriarchy*, brought several disciplines together to present an accomplished reference point for future studies on women.<sup>[32]</sup>

By the mid-1980s, western Catholic women had acquired degrees in Theology, including specialisations in Biblical Studies, Canon Law, Church History, Liturgy, etc. International theological journals had special issues on women. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Mary Collins edited an issue of *Consilium* on *Women – Invisible in the Church and Theology* in 1985. The other women contributors to the issue all had their degrees from Europe or the US. Fiorenza had already been professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame since 1970 and was Talbot Professor of New Testament Studies at the Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts. She had received worldwide recognition through the publication of her books, *In Memory of Her – Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Early Christian Origins*; *The Book of Revelation: Judgement and Justice*; *Bread Not Stone – The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation*.<sup>[33]</sup>

Another renowned leader of Catholic feminist theology from the west is Sandra Schneiders, whose famous work, *The Revelatory Text – Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*,<sup>[34]</sup> justified hermeneutics as transformation, using inter-disciplinary theoretical tools. She was then professor of New Testament studies and Christian spirituality at the Jesuit school of Theology and the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. Women in theology had come to stay and were accepted in high places and contributing to method, context, content and direction for the future!

Feminist theology emerged as Christian women began affirming their action plans and academic research through the reinterpretation of scripture including reviews of Paul's injunctions to women, study of women in the Old and New Testament, Biblical views of male and female, the issues of equality in the Church, male imagery of God, ordination and ministries, marriage and canon law became hot topics

not only for women theologians but also for Church leaders and scholars in general. Christian women gradually made these issues their own and *began contributing to mainstream theology*. Some argued for “women's space” to claim their identity, some stayed within the Christian arena of discourse with their vision of new ecclesial communities, others used Mary Daly's “post Christian” scenario.

In India, while great women foundresses of Catholic religious orders showed both character and charism in their starting of a host of institutions to educate and elevate, it was only in the late 1980s that sisters were sent to study theology, liturgy, sacraments, scripture, Christology, ecclesiology, etc. Women also became even more active on the liturgical and catechetical front. However, in Protestant Churches women's education in theology had begun and several went abroad to train. The United Theological College in Bangalore was where many were trained. One of the first women to be ordained deacon was Rev. Elizabeth Paul who was born in Tamil Nadu in 1927. She was well educated in Chennai and held the position of Dorothy Cadbury fellow at Selly Oak College, Birmingham. On her return to India she studied theology as an external student of Serampore University. In 1987, the first women of the Church of South India to be ordained were Rev. Nirmala Vasanthakumar, Rev. Florence Deenadayalan and Rev. Elizabeth Paul.

## **5. Other International Locations**

In Asia, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, (EATWOT) has given importance to women's issues. The Pro Mundi Vita: Dossiers 4/1986 gives a report of a women's consultation held in Manila, titled, *Feminine voices in Asian Theology: Selected Papers from the Asian Women's Consultation, Manila, 21-30 November 1985*. The papers are very moving, such as *The Death of Christ in the Filipino Woman* by Lydia Lascano, who describes the woman martyrs of freedom in a way that justifies her slogan, “Greater love has no woman than this, that she lay down her life for her friends” p. 20. Annamma K.K. George in the same newsletter says that, “It was by the guidance of the Holy Spirit that the Association of Theologically Trained Women of India took up the study of feminist theology in the period 1985-1987,” p. 23.

EATWOT women, Rosario Battung, Virginia Fabella, Margaret Lacson, Elizabeth Tapia are some of the women named by Pintig Diwa who supported her writing of *In Search of a Filipino Women's Hermeneutical Principle* which was presented at the Asia Women's Theology Meeting, Seoul, Korea which was held from 29 June to 1 July 1989. A significant element in Asian women's analyses is the impact of colonialism on women. Diwa points out that EATWOT member and chairperson of the women's organisation called Gabriel, Mary John Mananzan shows how "the root causes of women's oppression as well as a tool for perpetuating their subordination, is religion, specifically Spanish Catholic Christianity." Before colonisation the girl was free to education, transaction business, carry financial responsibility and even become a religious leader of her tribe. All this changed and "under the Spanish influence she became a sheltered, over-protected, timid maiden who received a truncated education confined to church, kitchen, and children."<sup>351</sup> The paper contributed by the Philippine delegation at the EATWOT Asian Feminist Theology Meeting in Madras (Chennai) from 15-20 December 1990 is evidence of the sisterhood of collective research and expression. The group titled their paper, *Toward and Asian Principle of Interpretation: A Filipino Women's Experience*. Starting with stories of Filipino women, it moves to women's situation in the Philippines, to analysis of the causes of oppression, reclaiming the dual heritage of local myths of woman power and the Christian faith. It concludes with a tentative hermeneutical principle and a programme of tasks for the future, giving an example of women's collective authorship.

So too, in Latin America and Africa women theologians began writing articles and books not only on women in society but also on women in the Church. Orthodox Women's Consultations had begun holding international meetings in West Asia and Southern Europe by the end of the 1980s. In Australia, the network called Women and the Australian Church (WATAC) had regular meetings and sharing of feminist resources from abroad through newsletters and by the 1980s began producing their own theological feminist frames based on local intercultural experience. In 1989 for example, the Catholic Education Commission in Perth held a weekend conference on "Women's Spirituality and Creativity". Australian Church women formed their larger networks including all denominations and began their own

newsletter *Voices from the Silence* in 1990. The February 1990 issue of the same reports that at the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Seoul “women spoke and women were heard”, women gave presentations, acted as moderators, chaired committees, and had a women's desk established, among other triumphs.<sup>[36]</sup>

Meanwhile black women in the US were finding that feminist theology was more a white women's preserve and they felt the need to make black women's experience the basis for their own theological creations, calling it womanist theology. For example, Jacquelyn Grant wrote *White women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology – A Womanist Response*, in 1989<sup>[37]</sup> at a time when several black women were rewriting feminist theology within the challenges of race and class.

## **6. Experience - Theory - Action**

Even though the emergence of Catholic Indian feminist theology showed and still shows evidence of a strong impress from feminist trends around the world, it is basically steeped in local traditions and in Indian women's movements, while at the same time absorbing trends from Protestant Churches within the country. Catholic feminist theology in India accompanies the journey of Indian women, (not just of Indian Christian women) in their struggle for identity, dignity, respect, partnership, freedom of opportunity, redressal of grievances, preservation of basic human rights, etc. Feminist sociology and anthropology, feminist literature, feminist counselling, feminist liturgies, feminist architecture, are important feeders for the material of Indian feminist theologies. Even now as I write I have received invitations to three conferences on Women Trafficking, having already attended two which dealt with this issue especially child trafficking. We have still a lot to do to campaign against trafficking, abortion, and IVF.

Combing the secular field of women's studies, doing feminist research in informal and academic ways, understanding women's problems face to face, promoting women's rights and opportunities, are all important ingredients for our feminist theologies. Women's lives are the 'text' for interpretation and elucidation, compassion or celebration. The importance of protecting women's bodies, women's participation and prosperity in agriculture and land reform, in entrepreneurship and in the arts, in health and reproductive rights, in the family and in the

community, in politics, the media, governance and in economic decisions at all levels is vital to the Indian feminist cause. From the *legacies of Indian women down the ages*, especially those involved in the movements against colonial rule, the fight against culture of dowry and rape, the rejection of the girl child and subjugation in marriage, Indian feminist theology has integrated the liberating message of Jesus through lived experience, through prayer, spiritual reflection, study of scripture and critique of tradition, through women's colloquiums and celebrations, so as to bring about new social and ecclesial realities.

## **7. Indian Women in Previous Decades**

The context of twentieth century feminist theology in India is the redoubtable courage and determination shown by Indian women in previous decades, whose lives were poured out in political action and service to the women's cause with immeasurable strength in the face of stiff opposition and even rejection. Their life stories and speeches, successes and sufferings, their agonies and labours provide us even today with energy to formulate the foundational sweep of the Spirit in women's cries and creations. Many Indian women of the nineteenth and twentieth century showed sterling natural leadership skills which they utilised fearlessly. I have therefore taken a random selection of a few leaders: Sarojini Naidu, Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kripalani, **Vijaya Lakshmi Nehru Pandit**, Savitribai Phule, Bhikaji Cama and Vasumati Dharker. Two Christians women I also include here are Pandita Ramabai and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur.

Sarojini Naidu, born in 1879 was jailed with Gandhiji and other freedom fighters and later became President of the Congress party in 1925. In the 1940s Aruna Asaf Ali (born 1909) played an important role in the Quit India movement and was part of the Congress Socialist Party for a while. Sucheta Kripalani, who was born a year before her in 1908 and also came to the forefront of the Quit India movement in daring ways, worked closely with Gandhiji during the Partition riots. She was elected twice to the Lok Sabha, in 1952 and again in 1957. In 1963 she became Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, the first woman to hold such a post.

**Vijaya Lakshmi Nehru Pandit**, was another of India's famous women diplomats, whose brother was Jawaharlal Nehru. Born in August 1900 she married in 1921 and lost her lawyer husband in the Freedom movement in 1944. Undeterred, she pursued her political

career, becoming ambassador of India to many countries as well as India's High Commissioner to the UK and Spain. She headed the Indian UN delegation for 22 years and became the first woman President of the United Nations General Assembly, besides being governor of Maharashtra for three years.<sup>[38]</sup>

Savitribai Phule, born in 1831 was the first female teacher of the first women's Marathi school. In 1852 she opened a school for “untouchable” girls and in spite of stones thrown at her and abuses she still carried on. Savitribai Phule also promoted widow remarriage and is considered a pioneer of modern Marathi. Ammu Swaminathan, who was born in 1894 became disciple of Gandhiji and a member of Rajya Sabha in 1952.

Bhikaji Cama, a Parsee woman born into a rich family in 1861 is known for her dedicated work to save the victims of the Bombay plague at the end of the nineteenth century, herself succumbing to the disease. She recovered in the UK and had an illustrious career in Europe working for India's independence, though often faced with arrest and extradition by distributing revolutionary literature, and hoisting an Indian national flag in Germany, one which she co-designed. Bhikhaiji Cama was a true feminist and in a public speech in Cairo in 1910, she is reported to have declaimed: “I see here the representatives of only half the population of Egypt. May I ask where is the other half? Sons of Egypt, where are the daughters of Egypt? Where are your mothers and sisters? Your wives and daughters?”<sup>[39]</sup>

The Maharashtrian woman Vasumati Dharker was another feminist who as a teenager defied the ban on girls wielding lathis, training herself and others to demonstrate dagger fights for foreign dignitaries. She wrote “feminist” stories in the 1930s with themes and attitudes that still find expression in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Tara Ali Baig wrote *Women in India* in 1958, published by Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, the same year that Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's *The Evolution of India* was published.

Pandita Ramabai, 1858-1922, is a famous Christian figure from Karnataka. Her father was thrown out of the village for beginning to educate his child bride. Travelling through different states Ramabai learnt four languages. Her father taught her Sanskrit and the need to

educate women. After her parents died in the 1877 famine, she and her brother continued her public lectures and Calcutta University conferred on her the title of Pandita, and the highest title of Saraswati for her interpretations of Sanskrit works. After her brother died she married a Shudra, but after two years of marriage he too died. So Ramabai moved to Pune. Her evidence before Lord Rippon's Education Commission made her very famous. She showed how men were opposed to women's education and stated that, "If they observe the slightest fault, they magnify the grain of mustard-seed into a mountain, and try to ruin the character of a woman." After her conversion to Christianity she conducted lecture tours abroad, especially in the US. She was a prolific writer and poet. She established educational institutions in the poorest districts of Karnataka and was passionate about women's freedom. The historian Uma Chakravarti, in her booklet on Pandita Ramabai describes her daring nature which helped her withstand the outcry in India against her conversion, the betrayals she experienced when exposing corruption, the alienation from those who could not take a stand for truth. "Unable to fit into anyone's agenda, she was often castigated but sometimes grudgingly admired" p. 33.<sup>[40]</sup>

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, 1889-1964, was daughter of Raja Sir Harman Singh Ahluwalia of the Kapurtala ruling family. Her father had converted to Christianity, encouraged her in the Christian path as well as in the struggle for India's freedom. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, a freedom fighter and social activist, was Gandhi's secretary for 16 years. She participated in the Dandi March, faced a lathi charge and was imprisoned at Kalka during the Quit India movement. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur co-founded the All India Women's Conference in 1927. She held the position of Health minister of the Indian cabinet for 10 years and was President of the All India Women's Association.<sup>[41]</sup> She promoted women's education and housing for the poor. Two quotations from her speeches give an indication of her feminist orientation, "Child marriage is eating as a cancer into the vitality of our national life. Girls become mothers while they are children themselves, and bring into the world offspring who are, in the very nature of things, the victims of disease and ill health." "The abolition of early marriage and purdah...will remove two of the main obstacles in the way of the spread of female education. Needless to say that the position of the widows in

Hindu homes, marriage laws and the laws relating to the inheritance of property by women need radical alteration.”<sup>[42]</sup>

## 8. A Pioneer Publication

The earliest Indian book connecting women to theology that I can trace in my library is one sent to me in 1978 by Fr. Engelbert Zeitler, a German-born priest of the Society of the Divine Word. The work had been co-edited, and the other editors were Lucy Misquita RSCJ, and Jessie Tellis Nayak, a famous Catholic feminist. They titled their book, *Women in India and in the Church*. It has two parts, Part I on *Women in India* and Part II on *Women in the Church*. The book fittingly places the articles on women in the Church within the context of women in India. It was published in collaboration with the Indian Social Institute (ISI), Delhi, at a time in the late 1970s when women's concerns were getting more attention in the country. Ishvani Kendra, begun by Fr. Zeitler and later its sister organisation Streevani, started in 1982 have been centres for women's studies and action from those decades.<sup>[43]</sup>

## 9. Women in India

The first article in the Part I, *The Women in India* section is written by Louella Lobo Prabhu on *Women in Ancient, Medieval and Modern India* who gives us a historical sweep of women in India down the ages, archiving the legacies that we have inherited. During the British period she tells us of the feisty, sword-wielding Laxmi Bai, Rani of Jhansi and also of Ahilya Bai Holkar who successfully defended her territory against a male rival claimant. In the Post-Independence period she details the legal disabilities of women before the Hindu code and the various Acts that came into force to protect women, critiques the novel *Debi Chaudhurani* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, urges women to make their own films and analyse existing films for their gender bias. She makes honourable mention of the daring novelists Kamala Das and Nayantara Sehgal. She quotes the Punjabi writer Amrita Pritam as stating in her autobiography that, “A woman *belongs* to no one but herself; that Love has many aspects, not merely the sexual one, ...” and makes a lengthy plea for a change in attitudes, parenting, emphasising the rejection of dowry, a woman's right to her property and possessions and need for domestic chores to be shared by both husband and wife.

Next follow articles by M.N. Srinivas on the *Status of Women in*

*India*, Mehra Masani on *Indian Women: Second Class Citizens*, Margaret Kalakdine, on *The Upbringing of a Girl* and a detailed description of women's Literacy and Education, Employment opportunities and economic contribution as well as public and Political fields by Kamala Mankekar. Then Monica David gives us *The Legal Status of Women in India*, Kamlesh Nischol analyses the *Image of Women and Girls in School Text Books* and Jean Paranjoti Augustine writes, *In Defence of the Indian Woman and her Birthright*. Geetha Mullyl's article on *Women's Liberation: A Purely Human Problem* closes Part I. It is fascinating to read these various pronouncements on and visions of women by women writing in the 1970s. They provide the background for the articles in the second section, viz., "Women in the Church".

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## Part II

### 10. Women in the Church

The first contributor to Part II, who has the unique name of Lucia of the Incarnation, restates the traditional stereotype of woman without critiquing it, (p. 110) in her article titled, “The Western Spiritual Tradition”. She states, “Woman's nature is profoundly ordered to motherhood, to the reception, transmission and nurturing of life on all levels. This is her primary field of creativity ... Man's nature is ordered to action and achievement. Fatherhood is never more than one part of his life....” However, Lucia of the Incarnation then goes on to give a spirited account of famous women saints of the west who exemplified the true prowess of women, highlighting the depth of their intellectual and spiritual contributions.

Angela Nijssen s.c.m.m. has two avant garde articles in Part II, *Participation of Women in the Life of Christian Communities* and *Towards a Feminine Theology*.<sup>[1]</sup> In her first article she tells of a survey she conducted of communities of religious sisters in Andhra Pradesh at the behest of the CRI. She then deals with questions arising from Jesus' parables and his dealings with women. Though these are constant themes among feminists in the Church, Nijssen approaches the subject with a refreshing attitude. She uses the technical language of “pericopes”, “Sitz im Leben”, “redaction” in advance of her sisters to divines special inspiration for the reader. In her second article, she uses the word “feminine theology”. One can understand that though the word “feminist” was in vogue she did not use it as a safeguard against being misunderstood as too forward or assertive. Yet her contributions certainly strike a harmonious chord with feminist writings of that era and thereafter. She advocates a “different theology of woman” which needs to correct the distortions of women's image of previous theologies which underlined the discriminating cultural attitudes towards women. For her, it was not just a question of re-examining the position of woman in the Gospel but of seeing woman in a totally different light, as a person first, for whom God has a plan. She

acknowledges the western women-feminists but deplors the fact that while on the one hand modern women in India were emerging, “the silent victims of misunderstanding and misinterpretations (servant-woman, outcasts, prostitutes) have still to become the objects of change” on the other. (p. 165)

In outlining the scope of a “feminine theology” Angela Nijssen sees women's needs and anxieties at the heart of the reflection, moving away from the mere intellectual research of male theologians to the intuitive, deeper levels of human experience. She openly states that, “There are terrains of criminality in the very midst of the Christian community” (p. 167). She views a female approach to pastoral work as “going beyond the existing boundaries of Church-service, and will change bringing out the maternal aspects of God... Woman's task is to redraw in her own lines the demands of Christian life in the struggle of everyday... and be rooted in the encounter with the Risen Lord.” In the last paragraph she also has a question in brackets: (women priests?)! “More than ever before, the Church needs the theological ministry of women in order that the Gospel-message may come through again as it came through afresh on that early Easter-day.” (p. 169)

The next article is a reprint from *In Christo* of October 1976 and gives the views of Sigrid Voggel of the Holy Cross Institute who worked long in the establishment of her congregations work in Hazaribagh. In her article she bemoans the way certain Church customs have followed negative secular patterns. “For example: the way a bishop was received at an official visit was exactly the way a roman senator entered a public place... In recent centuries, when absolute monarchs ruled the western world, the Church authorities, including the heads of religious societies were invested with near absolute power.” (p. 171). She records how male-dominated the Church is. “Do you remember that strange practice at the time of benediction, when no altar boy was present and an iron stand was considered better than a woman to hold the censor?” (p. 172)

Sister Sigrid also talks about sisters being on the frontline of womanhood as a whole and experience the “the cracking up of structure, the evolution of a new responsible obedience, the inner freedom and the warm human climate in many of our communities...” (p. 172). From her experience in the rural belt she gives some stark

anecdotes of how proposals for TB prevention were refused by Church authorities, and even screening of the children disallowed, until several felt fatally. Only then everyone woke up and gave the go ahead for her projects. “The care for orphans and unwanted children falls quite naturally into the undisputed sphere of women . . . But when it comes to the distribution of funds then all is male managed” (p. 173). Sister Sigrid's article is replete with positive real life stories of women's leadership, from Grihini schools in Mahuadanr, to civil rights movements in the U.S., to women running parishes in Brazil, or making a breakthrough with “red workers” in Austria where they men could not, Baptist churches where people are more involved thanks to the role essayed by women, etc. She then goes on to outline difficulties in pastoral and missionary involvement showing how nuns in India “are hampered by their education from childhood. While girls are supposed to be beautiful with a fair skin, boys; are expected to be sturdy, courageous, intelligent and self reliant. But these are exactly the qualities we expect also of sisters. . . Maturity in sisters is often delayed. Often the priest is the first man they encounter, unaware that he too is not the incarnation of an angel, quite unhealthy relationships develop” (p. 176). She describes how in some places sisters can't form a community because of the inquisitiveness of the parish priest. Others can turn the priest into a chaprasi and want to be looked after by women with no hardships and risks, while still others are in a state of slavery due to economic dependence. Then follows some wonderfully elevating passages in which she describes how best to build the Church as communities of love and fearless witnessing. “A man without love, mercy and compassion, a woman without courage and strength are not fully developed in the likeness of our Creator. . . As far as I know there is no special baptismal rite for boys different from that of girls” (p. 183).

Part II of the book showcases two articles by priests, one by Fr. Zeitler, the co-editor, known for his ardent support of women's conferences and for finding the funds for several Indian women to study theology in international university departments. The other priest contributor is the Fr. Amaladoss SJ, a pioneer in Indian theological studies and a prolific writer. In addition, Part II reprints *Men and Women in Partnership in the Church and in Society* from *Pro Mundi Vita* – an unusually radical document for that era.

Fr. Engelbert Zeitler SVD writes about *The Dawn of a New age for Women in the Indian Church*. After an introductory survey of women throughout the ages he shows how even in the reign of female deities, public or social authority was always with man. “Women's role was dubious and often ambivalent; sometimes she was queen in certain periods and culture; some women were at the helm of a tribal government and still are. Sometimes woman is a magician, a sorcerer, sometimes a priestess; always woman is the anonymous mother of countless generations but only too often just a slave of man who has surrounded her with taboos” (pp.185-186). Yet in the world to come Fr. Zeitler outlines the hopes for equal partnership and the new vision for women in the Church in India, emerging in spite of the decades of derogatory images and statements about females. Citing Church research and the development of Secular Institutes he shows how there is need both for subjective changes with individual perceptions and for objective realignments through new religious forces. Fr. Zeitler condenses the findings from a survey of Sisters into ten points such as:

1. Our Sisters (Women in the Indian Church) are de-personalised and institutionalised.
2. Their life and vocation is work-centred, not person-centred.
3. Sisters are treated as cog-wheels in a big machine with disregard to their own personality.
4. Most of our Sisters' congregations are infected by partiality and favouritism ...
5. The religious life of Sisters is superior-centred and not Christ-centred ...
6. The religious life of Sisters is often lived in isolation and not integrated into their actual environment...

The article ends with a “Magna Charta” of women in the Indian Church which is poignant, poetic and praiseworthy:

The "Magna Carta" of the women in the Indian Church  
"As women (religious) in India today  
we are called to make visible and intelligible  
the essential nature of the Church  
as an open community of love

totally dedicated to the Lord,  
and testifying by a life of radical evangelical simplicity  
joyful renunciation  
and shared dependence on the guidance of the Spirit  
to the possibility of possessing  
here and now in faith  
a certain beginning of that eternal life  
for which all men  
of whatever religious background  
were created,  
and for which they long  
even without realising  
what it is that they desire.  
Our chief problems spring  
from our lack of a clear sense of our identity  
as intelligible sacramental signs  
in contemporary India  
of the Paschal Mystery  
of life through death  
resulting in  
a deep uncertainty and insecurity  
in superiors,  
formation personnel  
and individual religious of all age-groups,  
and, as a consequence,  
in a fundamental lack of freedom  
and courage  
to be ourselves  
in our personal lives,  
our community relations,  
our contacts with priests and seculars,  
our apostolic decisions,  
and above all  
in our personal relationship with God.  
These problems are made more acute  
because we have to live our response of faith to God  
as mature women -  
i.e. as women who are called

to respond intelligently and freely  
with the whole of our being  
to God's continuing initiative  
by a life of loving service of our fellow-men  
wisely adapted to the needs of the country  
in the context of an Indian Church  
which has not yet discovered its own identity  
and which exists in a society  
where women on the whole  
have not yet won recognition  
as equal partners with men  
in that transformation of society  
which is the continuation of Christ's redeeming presence  
in the world of today."

The final article in Part II is *Christian Women in India* by Jessie Tellis Nayak. Today Dr. Nayak is well known in India and internationally for having launched and coordinated many programmes for women's empowerment and women theologising. She was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity (Honoris Causa) in recognition of her services to the Church in India and abroad by the Academy of Ecumenical Indian Theology and Church Administration, Madras. She worked as Assistant Director of the Indian Social Institute's (ISI) Chhotanagpur Project in Ranchi, and spearheaded the ISI Programme for Women's Development.

In her article *Christian Women in India* she celebrates the immense contribution women make to the home, to child-rearing, house-keeping, caring for everyone including in-laws for the best part of their lives, as well as working as farmers side by side with men. Yet women remain unsung and unheard of, with exceptions such as Cardinal Gracias who always praised his mother. Jessie Tellis Nayak upholds the vocation of the single woman who does not join an order or secular institute, nor does she get married and gives the example of a single woman who was constantly told by a priest, "Jasmine, you must get married" till one day, "in exasperation the woman shot back, 'Father you respect my vocation and I will respect yours'. He never pestered her again." (p. 201). Many single women take the complete responsibility of the family. The charismatic movement in her opinion has emboldened women who are leaders in it. Secular Institutes, about 20

of them with a total of 300 women also give dignity and freedom.

Tellis Nayak lists successful, well-known Catholic women of India, such as Violet Alva Deputy Speaker of the Rajya Sabha, Eva Vaz minister in Karnataka, and other lesser known women such as the Sorabji sisters Cornelia, a lawyer, and Susan, a social worker, Kamala Ratnam Sattihiadahan a journalist, Dr. Mary Punnen the first woman Surgeon General of India, K. R. Gouri Thomas, the first woman state Minister in a cabinet, Anna Chandy, P. K. Theresia, and Dr. Mary Verghese, the only paraplegic woman surgeon in the world, (p. 210). She describes how while women were making history internationally and nationally women religious in the Catholic Church were founding education institutions, orphanages, homes for lepers and abandoned babies, hospitals for the sick and dying. The theology of the cross and of evangelising the world through charity led to a vast array of institutions in which women played a leading though often invisible and less advertised part.

Tellis Nayak reports how in the 1970s Chhotanagpur tribal women's Mahila Sangh was already in full swing, holding annual meetings of over 2000 women. Christian women had also started an Asian Women's Institute with centres in Christian colleges from Beirut to Tokyo and an international office at Lucknow headed by Dr. Eva Shipstone, and sent around their magazine *Asian Women*. In India in the 1970s much was published by the Women's Department of the Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, e.g. on Grihini Training in India.

Indeed the 1970s was a time of great energy when many institutions were founded for men and women, yet institutions that gave importance to women's problems and leadership. The Voluntary Health Association had been founded by Fr. James Tong SJ and promoted women's health, the Catholic Nurses Guild had begun uniting the Catholic nurses, the AICUF students movement was fostering women's leadership on an equal footing to that of men, YWCAs were flourishing, Christian NGOs such as Action for Food Production started by Elizabeth Reid were sending specialists around the country to promote women in agriculture, the Indian Social Institute ran training programmes that included women at all levels, congregations such as the Loretos, the Presentations, the Holy Cross and others had numerous educational and training centres for women in India. In that

era, very few nuns were sent for formal training in social work, yet they used their common sense to be effective and productive. Only one sister in the country, was sent to learn finance and auditing.

Some of Jessie Tellis Nayaks's references at the end of her article give us a sense of the issues taken up in those years.

“5. *Domestic Help in Mangalore Town*, unpublished report of a study of 200 employees made in the summer of 1976 by the ISI-DWD in collaboration with Roshni Nilaya School of Social work, Mangalore.

A more comprehensive study has been done in 1977. 6. YWCA, *The Educated Women in the Indian Society Today*, Tata McGraw Hill Publishing Company, Bombay 1971.

7. Padmini Sengupta, *The Story of Women in India*, India Book Company, New Delhi, 1974.

8. J. Muricham, *Women in Kerala: Changing socio- economic status and self image in Women in Contemporary India*. Editor: Alfred DeSouza, Manohar Book Service, New Delhi, 1975.”

The bibliography lists at the end of the book by Zeitler, Misquita and Tellis Nayak give a comprehensive list of books, magazines and articles written by Indian women and men concerning the plight of women, especially women in India. However, the list shows that those writing about women in India mostly belong to faiths other than Christian. The only Christian woman in the Bibliography list on “Women in India” is Louella Lobo Prabhu whose piece “I have a dream” was published by the National Council of Catholic Women, Bangalore in 1976. Alfred de Souza is the other Catholic (a Jesuit of the Indian Social Institute in New Delhi) mentioned. Moreover, the books listed in the section “Women in the Church” all from the 1970s, has no Indian woman author featuring in it; the books are written by international authors and published abroad.<sup>[2]</sup>

## 11. Women in the 1970s

Publications in the 1970s include Devaki Jain's 1970 editing of *Indian Women*; <sup>[3]</sup> Pratima Asthana's *Women's Movement in India* published in 1974; <sup>[4]</sup> Ela Bhatt's 1975 *Profiles of Self-employed women*, <sup>[5]</sup> in which she describes her pioneer activities for self-employment of women and self-help groups; Kamala Bhasin's *Position of Women in India*, of 1976; <sup>[6]</sup> and *Women in Contemporary India: Traditional*

*images and Changing Roles*, edited by Alfred de Souza SJ, in 1975.<sup>[7]</sup>

In 1976 the Christian Institute for Religion and Society in Bangalore put out a special issue on *Women in the struggle for a new Humanism*.<sup>[8]</sup> Jessie Tellis-Nayak, Selena Costa-Pinto, edited *Towards Self Reliance - Income Generation For Women*, which was published in 1979.<sup>[9]</sup>

## **12. The 1984 Historic Publication on Women**

In 1984, the institution in Pune then known as Ishvani supported Jessie Tellis-Nayak and her two companions editors Stella Faria, Anna Vareed-Alexander, to undertake the task of contacting women known for their commitment to women's issues and publishing a book on their testimonies and views.<sup>[10]</sup> Even though the title of the book, *The Emerging Christian Woman – Church and Society Perspectives* seemed rather conservative, many of the contributors freely used the word “feminist” and “feminism”. Satprakashan Sanchar Kendra/Ishvani were the joint publishers, and the forward was written by Eva Shipstone, Co-ordinator of the Women's Institute, Lucknow. It was a revolutionary step to publish the book and it was well done, with photographs and profiles of authors. Contributors included Asian women, Sun Ai Park, Chitra Fernando and Marianne Katoppo, US women Regina Coll and Rosemary Reuter, priests Gerwin van Leewen OFM, RH Lesser SJ, Joseph Velamkunnel SJ, a married couple John and Ellen Webster from the US who were Presbyterian missionaries in Lucknow and Batalia, had taught a course on “Church and Women” at the United Theological College in Bangalore and had co-edited their book, *The Church and Women in the Third World*. An Indian couple, Helen and Josantony contributed an article on *Moral Theology from a Feminist Perspective*. Josantony already had an M/Div from Loyola, Chicago, and was on the faculty of the St. Pius X Seminary in Bombay. Co-Founder of the Secular Institute of the Khristsevikas, Crescy John, had studied theology at Regina Mundi in Rome, but the only woman contributor reported holding a formal degree in theology is Regina Coll, a sister of St. Joseph, who had received her doctorate in theology from Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary in the U.S. and was then professor of theology at Catholic University D.C.

The first contribution in the book was by Rita Monterio, focussing on the roles and stereotypes of male and female, as well as behaviour traits and attributes. Rita shows how anatomy is not destiny and Freud's

negative approach to women was countered by new research which appropriately puts high emphasis on learning experiences and cultural forces as indicators of gender difference. She details the typical stereotypes of the male and female roles demonstrating how sexual identity and physical intimacy between the sexes is caused by cultural factors rather than biological. She hails the concept of Shakti and deconstructs myths of sexuality, presenting new goals and attitudes for men and women, because, “One sex is neither inferior nor superior to the other. They both must collide, integrate and coalesce in their biological and personal roles.

Sun Ai Park, editor of the Asian Journal *In God's Image* who had moved from Korea to Singapore in 1982, wrote the next article titled, *Women and Menstruation* using Biblical and other faith perspectives. She shows how cultic pollution issues worked against the ordination of women. Regina Coll wrote on *Feminist Liberation Theology: Its Past and Future* detailing the two-nature and one-nature anthropologies as well as Mary Buckley's third transformational model of humanity which aims at transformation of gender and of the structures of society which are responsible for the stereotyping.<sup>[11]</sup> With scriptural references she shows how from the undifferentiated 'ha'adam' or earth creature, the two (ish and ishah) emerge, and how the “one flesh” was perceived patriarchally as woman being absorbed into the man. She further analyses the theology of power, and the theology of peace, and reminds us how Virginia Wolf's *Three Guineas* equated chastity with the refusal to sell one's brain for money, namely, refusal to prostitute one's knowledge and talent.<sup>[12]</sup>

Pearl Drego in *The Feminist Viewpoint* sees women's subordination as structural sin. She states that “feminist theology brings a radical refocusing of the whole Christian theology, catechesis, ministry, both in theory and application. ... It is an end of oppression and the dawn of liberation in the happiness of peace and communion of God's own people.” Her article covers attitudes to women in Jewish times, in early Christian communities and the early Church fathers, illustrating through Gospel passages the attention Jesus gave to women, e.g. “My little one stand up”, “Take heart daughter”. She shows how he impacted women and called them to freedom and dignity, and holds out the promise that with a feminist perspective will visualise scripture

differently, seeing the little child in Matt. 18: 2, Mark 9: 36 and Luke 9: 47 as a little girl child, “and we shall see women too, not just the twelve apostles seated together with Jesus for the eucharistic passover ... we will “see” the women at the cross, the women who were the first to announce the resurrection and the women present at Pentecost.”

Marianne Katoppo highlights the feminine qualities of God, analysing attributive terms of “Father”, “Ruah”, Hokmah”, “Shekinah”, the “dove” of the Holy Spirit, as feminine. She reinterprets Mary as a fully liberated human being and shows the motherliness of God and Jesus. Anna Vareed Alexander details the many negative images of woman in Indian society and then, quoting from Phyllis Trible, she gives the positive forceful images of women in the Old Testament and the men in the Old Testament who stood by women's rights of inheritance; then she goes on to women in the New Testament to build the liberating images of womankind.

Gloria Durka's article is titled *Is Partnership Possible? Ordained Men and Unordained Women* in which she shows the effects that clericalism and sexism have on women's minds and behaviours, and how stereotyping polarises the sexes. She states, “Women expect negative, not positive consequences from high achievement and thus avoid success in order to escape social rejection.” (p.138). Modifying material from *How Sex Role Stereotypes Keep Women Down in Nonprofit Management Skills for Women Managers* she describes stereotypical characteristics of male and female, the games women and men play, and the behaviours men express when they perceive women as mothers, wives, daughters, etc. She ends with a note of hope for partnership quoting Letty Russel, on God having chosen partnership with us, and chosen to be present in our lives through Jesus Christ as a happening of co-humanity.” Madhu Kishwar's article *Bondage: Denial of Fundamental Rights to Women* is reprinted from “Manushi”.<sup>[13]</sup> She shows how the fundamental rights and civil liberties enshrined in the Indian Constitution are denied in reality to many, thus making women the most oppressed among the oppressed. She shows how the right to property, the right to freedom of movement, the right to freedom of Speech and Expression, and other rights are denied to women in India.

Bernie Tellis calls her piece, *Sex Roles Defined: As Others See Us* and gives us an imagined interview of a woman by a young male

reporter, which is both gripping and hilarious. At one point the woman says, “It’s the vows of permanent mental celibacy the clergy appear to have taken that’s really bothering women – an unwillingness to be open to alternate practical solutions to lasting problems.” Her ideal is a relationship in which there are “vanishing stereotypes and stigmas. Separate lives with many meeting points. A blend of dependent and independent, areas of aloneness and togetherness. A fair share of the rights, responsibilities, powers and fruits of labour...”

Aruna Gnanadason who worked with the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches, actively promoting women's concerns, called her piece, *Women ... Where are you? Women in the Protestant Churches*. She contrasts the simple village Churches with the gothic-like city Churches, and gives a history of women's leadership in the early Syrian Church communities in India from 52 AD onwards. She gives examples of how the phase of Protestant Christianity in India which began in 1906 “played a crucial role in improving the status of women”, though in later decades, the work of education and health was unfortunately focussed on the elite. Quoting Mary Daly and the Orthodox Sister Elizabeth Behr Sigel, she argues for the inclusion of women and derides “tokenism” by which “women are often co-opted into male dominated committees, and councils to project an image of openness. Aruna shows that while there are powerful women's organisations in the CNI and CSI, in the Mar Thoma Church and the Methodist Church, women are not concerned about taking part in decision-making, even when it comes to ordination – a matter which “is discussed and voted on in a 96 per cent male dominated Synod!” (p. 174). She addressed the language of worship, theological education for women, and the denial of ordination to women. She sees the latter as “a denial of a right to respond to a call from God.” She concludes that, “The prophetic voice given to women by Christ on various occasions and finally on that Easter Sunday morning has been reduced to an inaudible whisper by magnifying St. Paul's local disciplinary instructions into timeless norms” (p. 179).

Crescy John in *New Wine in New Skins: Secular Institutes* exposes the alienations, subjugation, westernisation, elitization and contradictions of women's lives and apostolates in religious orders. She presents the life of secular institutes as inculturated, localised, relevant and autonomous, bringing a new springtime for the Church in

India. M. Carol of the Apostolic Carmel congregation, writes on *Women Religious in the New Society* caricaturing the images of women in convents in which institutional values such as polished behaviour, discipline, proficiency in English, spotless cleanliness promote capitalist class values instead of Christian ones. "...our insistence on bristling uniforms and excessive smartness, our reluctance to learn the Indian languages, the western atmosphere in our institutions, in a word elitism, class us with the haves against the have-nots" (p. 206).

M. Carol pleads for genuine renewal, and self-evaluation through tools such as that used in a NBCLC (National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre) conference chart separating capitalist values from evangelical values. She works to help women in India to struggle for a new society through a new personal consciousness and an education for independence:

"Awake, my sister, awake,  
You are great,  
You are power ...  
Be like Mary, an open door,  
Through which I, your Redeemer, pass again ...  
To save my people."<sup>[14]</sup>

Jessie Tellis Nayak in her piece on *Women Development Workers* details methods and techniques, namely fourteen practical ways for consciousness-raising for women and gives examples of new organisational approaches and new types of programmes. The non-formal approach such as the Grihini Training Programmes for girls who have not been to school, can help embolden them in matters related to family, community, agriculture, leadership, etc. She describes the activist approach which is needed to campaign for rights and redress grievances and goes on to describes a survey made by Caritas India in 1982 in order to clarify what is genuine development and the importance of women's participation in Church development projects. In presenting guidelines related to women she quotes one of her respondents as saying,

"Bishops don't seem to understand the work done on the village level. The Sisters are overloaded with teach work, social work, and work in he parish church. Sisters are few in number but the work assigned is too much... Sisters have to get organised to speak up...

Serving the poor needs humility and self-cleansing of a male-dominated Church.”

Sara Grant RSCJ gives us a truly spiritual contemplative outlook in her enlightening piece called *A Sammelan of the Spirit* which balances the activism in the rest of the volume. Finally, Section III of the Book is composed by the Webster team who give us *A Teaching Model for Teaching Seminarians about the Church and Women*. Their contribution is presented in impressive detail within 26 pages, containing an Introduction to the Course and 16 Section Topics, each with a detailed Syllabus, Background Reading, and Bibliographies.

### **13. Landmark Events and Publications**

In 1985, Build Documentation Centre in Bombay brought out a set of Background Papers on *Beauty Contests: The Myth, the Mystique and the Cult* exposing the corruption and competition behind the Miss World and Miss Universe contests as well as the hold that beauty and cosmetics have on the lives of women, who do not realise that their preoccupation with external glamour is part of their negation of the female body and its innate dignity. A theology of the body has always been part of feminist thinking, though the actual impact on Catholic women seems to be negligible these days when we see the kind of glorification of beauty that the Catholic community indulges in at the time of First Communion and Weddings, as well as at Christmas, Easter and birthdays. In 1986 Samuel Rayan SJ wrote *In Christ: Power of Women*, published by the All India Council of Christian Women, a sub-unit of the National Council of Churches in India.<sup>[15]</sup>

#### **● Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection April 1987 issue on Women**

In his editorial for this issue on women, S. Arokiasamy SJ states, “Without any pre-planned agreement, three national Christian journals have devoted their early 1987 issues to problems concerning women in the country and the Church. Jeevadhara and The National Christian Council Review devoted their January numbers to this topic. VIDYAJYOTI present this month a collection of reflections dedicated specially to the problems of Asian and Indian women with a plea for profound changes both in law and in practice. In the same editorial he noted that the FABC Fourth Plenary Assembly in Tokyo in 1986 had in its

statement six paragraphs on the condition of women, recognising that women “cry out to the Lord for liberation” and stated that “It is, therefore, not just a human necessity but a Gospel imperative that the feminine half of the world's population be recognised and their dignity be restored, and that they be allowed to play their rightful role in the world and in the Church.” He then summarises the four contributions made by Pearl Drego, Astrid Ann Lobo, Jean D'Cunha and Sun Ai Park.<sup>[16]</sup>

*Values, Human Development and Women's Oppression* is the title of Pearl Drego's article which shows how values such as that of sacrifice, co-operation, faithfulness to charism, obedience, keeping out of conflict, keeping your cool, etc. are used to bind women and stop them not only from functioning as fully human persons, from being truly religious. She presents a new paradigm for personal growth and community, presenting the contradictory pulls women often feel regarding independence and being cared for. “I also believe that while independence was once a core value for spiritual maturity, this has been imposed on cultures where independence leads to ostracism and alienation. I could well imagine human and spiritual values of certain decade influencing the most good-natured souls in such a way that the Lord could say to them, “I was thirsty and you asked how come I did not know where to get water. I was hungry and you gave me the address of the bakery in the city telling me to make my own decisions. I was sick and you told me that the power to heal was within me and that I should not trust allopathic doctors. I was in prison and you gave me Das Kapital to read. I was lonely and you told me to take a course in counselling.” On the one hand religious women are surreptitiously trained for adaption to tradition and obedience, on the other they are told that they need to be mature and take their own decisions, be responsible for themselves. They feel guilty when they need support and help, saying to themselves, “I should be able to mangle on my own and not need anyone else.” When they have to take a stand on their own, they also feel guilty that they are not fitting into the expectations of others and are being a source of pain to those who think differently. It is curious that religious men rarely have such inner contradictions to sort out because they are not plastered with the same personal and spiritual values as women are.” (p. 158)

Astrid Ann Lobo writes on *Women and Canon Law* in which she discusses the 1983 Code of Canon Law in contrast to the one of 1917. She shows us how the major distinctions in the revised Code with regards to obligations and rights are between the clergy and the laity. “When seen from a woman's point of view, however, even this becomes an issue of sexual discrimination, for women are excluded from all ordained ministry (c. 1024). This means that women are excluded from all the offices, functions and ministries that are ordinarily the sole prerogative of male clerics. This includes the power of governance in the Church (c. 129:1) and offices that entail the exercise of that power (c. 274:1). When one realises that, for the Christian, Church law pervades every aspect of human life, one has to admit that as things stand, women are in the position of children with little or no say in the orders that govern their lives.” On the other hand Astrid points out the positive elements, saying, “Despite the exclusion of women from the power of orders, however, the Code has attempted to put women on an equal footing with men. To appreciate this, it is necessary to view the role of women within the broader context of the role of the laity. Thus, along with men, women can exercise the ministry of the Word and preside at liturgical prayer (c. 230:3).” She indicates that, “Women are allowed to preach in Church or Oratory (cc. 758, 759, 766) even if there is a priest. Even the homily, which is ordinarily reserved to a priest or deacon (c. 767:1), may be preached by women if “in certain circumstances it is necessary, or in particular cases it would be advantageous” (c. 766). This could apply for instance to a Children's Mass, or to days dedicated to particular causes such as Social Justice, Peace, Fight against Euthanasia, etc.”

In terms of Church structures, Astrid says, “The Diocesan Pastoral Council deserves special mention, as it is the body that has the biggest reach. Women are conspicuous by their absence. At the last count (October 1986), out of 68 elected parish representatives only 4 were women.” She strikes a note of hope in reporting that, “The situation in Bombay is a little encouraging. We have a religious sister with a Doctorate in Canon Law who is an associate Judge of the diocesan court. She is also involved in teaching Canon Law and Theology of Religious Life. We also have two women who function as notaries.”

*Christian Personal Law* written by Jean D'Cunha gives us a comprehensive view of the subject and brings feminism down to practical levels. She gives us the shattering experiences with the process of divorce and annulment that Catholic women go through. She underlines the loopholes in the Christian Marriage Act 1872 and the Indian Divorce act 1869 and exposes their “monumental antiquities”. According to the latter, a husband could petition for divorce on the grounds that his wife had committed adultery but the wife could do the same to him on six grounds. Jean outlines the paradoxes in alimony, custody of children, grounds for nullity, etc., and the dire straits that women are subjected to in the face of humiliating court and Church procedures. She points out the many efforts made by members of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal of the Archdiocese of Bombay and by the All India Christian Forum in pursuit of a Uniform Civil Code.

*Women, Justice and Peace* by Sun Ai Park is an uplifting article bringing a note of serenity and reconciliation to the feminist calls, since peace-making is truly Christian ministry that requires the best of our human and faith faculties. Sun Ai Park points out the realities of sexism and the divergence of views even among women as to how to overcome it. The socialist view differs from the culturalist view while others link it with total human liberation. She sees the need for political action in a clean new style of operation. For men, it goes against the psychology of “include-me-out-in-the-guilt-trip. She sees the women's movement as “counter-cultural”, uniting with the struggles against multi-nationals and colonial rule to bring wholeness of life in all spheres. Sun Ai Park, a Korean poet based in Singapore is the founder editor of “In God's Image” an Asian magazine on feminist theology.

### ● **The Brussels Colloquium 1987 – A foundational experience**

A baseline document of the 1980s decade, which emerged from an experience that surely remains at the foundation of many Catholic women and Catholic organisations across the globe, was that produced by forty women from each of the continents who were shared and discussed together for six days from 9 to 14 June 1987 in Brussels. It was convened by the Conference of International Catholic Organizations on theme of “Women in the Church and in Society”. *Wina India* published the document in booklet form in September the same year, and circulated it widely. The methodology of the

colloquium included individual presentations, group discussions, plenary sessions that deliberated the final wording and recommendations, opportunities for personal sharing and mutual confrontation, space for disagreements, and ways of reaching consensus. I was privileged to be part of the colloquium and give below some quotations of the document as many of the statements are well-designed and have stood the test of time.

Article No. 12, p. 6 critiques the maleness of the Church: “The mentalities which we find in society we find also in the Church. In its own practice the Church helps to perpetuate sexual discrimination, for all decision-making and leadership structures are controlled exclusively by the male clergy. Even when women are involved in advisory capacity on commissions, and so forth, they do not participate fully in the proceedings and final decisions. A small group of male clergy regard it as their task to define what it means to be virtuous Christian women for all socio-cultural contexts. In this mentality women are perceived primarily in terms of their sexual role as mother, spouse, virgin.”

Grievances about alienation and disconnection, even false accusations were openly shared and Article No.25, p. 9 states,

“Unfortunately those who work for justice under the inspiration of the Gospel, both women and men, do not enjoy that measure of support and protection that they would expect from the hierarchy (though there are some notable exceptions). They even experience opposition, as they are accused of being communists. This persecution is not found only in Latin America, but is a tendency throughout the world. Recently, the entire Justice and Peace Commission of Singapore was arrested. In some dioceses of the rich world, Justice and Peace Commissions have been dissolved by the Bishops, and replaced by bodies seen as less subversive.”

It was a spiritual awakening within our group that clarified the relationship of womanhood to the Godhead as in the following excerpts:

“Being created in God's image, dynamic Being and Becoming, means that we are called to transcend fixed boundaries, such as gender.” *Article No. 33, p. 11.*

“In Scripture, God reveals God's Self repeatedly in a feminine dimension: as Shekinah (Presence), Hokmah (Wisdom), Torah (Guidance), Ruah (Spirit) and more explicitly as women (Ps. 123, 2).” *Article No. 34, p. 11.*

“Some of the most poignant and forceful expressions of God's Love for humankind are to be found in the descriptions of God as Mother. (Isaiah 49, 15; Hosea 11, 3-4; Exodus 34, 6; Isaiah 66, 13; Ps. 131; Matt. 23, 37)...

The quality of motherhood should not be limited to a physical event, but as a quality of God, which can be perceived as an important model of relating to living with creation, to which all human persons, be they male or female, ought to aspire: taking charge, teaching, nurturing, sheltering, healing etc. The whole Church, not just women, is called to express this maternal face of God in her practice.” *Article No. 35, p. 11.*

Paul's statement about unity and divisions were highlighted and much was said about Gal. 6; 2 Cor., Gal. 2, 28 and other texts. Article No. 56, p. 16 made an important declaration as follows: “The Church as People of God is not superior to the people that God gathers in liberating love. Neither is it a communion of persons closed upon themselves. The Church exists at the heart of humanity and of cosmos so that death be destroyed by the creative energy of the Spirit wherever it appears. As such, through its members, the Church witnesses and acts as instrument of liberation for justice, peace, human and cosmic growth in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.”

Article No. 60, p. 17 further elucidates the fact that “... If the Church is there involved as a community of women and men witnessing to liberation in Jesus Christ, it will contribute to the growth of humanity and of the cosmos.”

Among the several recommendations that were passed by the Colloquium, two are significant,

Recommendation No. 6, p. 19: “That the Canon Law be revised wherever it legislates discrimination against women, including No. 1024, concerning ordination,” and

Recommendation No. 7 p. 19: “That the notion and practise of authority, which is still linked to priesthood, be revised in the light of tradition, notably that which concerns the rights conferred by baptism.

This will lead to a declericalization of the institution and allow the laity to participate in the bodies of power. This power we understand as related to capacity, recognition, sharing.”

The overall experience for the members of the assembly was one of deep solidarity and an outpouring of the Spirit. The forward of the document states: “The Colloquium did not merely produce a document, however valuable it might be. It was a living experience of community of the Church, an experience of unity, which did not prevent plurality and also an experience of very free discussions. The participants have returned to their countries enriched by their experience and strengthened in their commitment by having met other women from different parts of the world, with the same vision: that of a Church which is a true community of men and women, in true solidarity, in search of the justice and development which Paul VI described as, “... of every human being and of the whole human being” (Foreword p. 1)

### ● **Workshop organised by WINA**

WINA, Women's Institute for New Awakening, founded by Jessie Tellis-Nayak and her team held a ten-day intensive study workshop on “Human Liberation of Women” from May 7-16, 1988. The materials prepared for this workshop were comprehensive and meticulously prepared. Fourteen sessions were outlined with printed papers plus pages of exercises and discussion questions for each session. From “Structural Analysis of Society” by Francois Houtart to “Feminist Uses of Biblical Materials by Katherine Doob Sakenfeld the workshop was a veritable landmark in the history of feminism for Catholic women in India. A selection of papers by the feminist theologian Bernadeen Silva printed and published by the Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo, Sri Lanka, was a special highlight of workshop. Bernadeen, an illustrious organiser and writer and the eight papers chosen included, *A Spirituality of Sexuality, Capitalism and Women, What then is Feminist Theology, and Baby Farms show up a society plunging into its lowest depths.* During the Wina workshop, sharing of personal experiences went hand in hand with erudite presentations, skits and dialogues, analysis of patriarchy, Mariology, alternative social scenarios and the precise agenda of feminist theologies.

### ● **Misereor Lenten Veil 1990**

The German funding agency Misereor, that has donated money to a stupendous number of rural projects in India for decades, collects its funds through an annual Lenten campaign in West Germany using folk art banners. In 1990 the theme of the campaign was “The role of the women in the process of development” and the artist commissioned to paint the Veil, which came in small sizes and very large sizes, was Lucy d'Souza of Bangalore. She created seven sections with seven different biblical scenes depicting women, symbolic representations of the gospel of God in feminist art language. Images of Miriam's triumphant song, Shiprah and Puah the midwives of the Old Testament who are icons of effective non-violent resistance, Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi, Mary of Magdala in saree announcing the resurrection to the disciples in lungi-kurta attire, Mary and Elizabeth in the Visitation scene, and the woman mixing leaven into the dough, all make Lucy's Lenten Veil an epoch-making art work, colourfully Indian, powerfully feminist and spiritually vibrant.

### ● The Magnificat through Sujita

Feminist art work was matched by feminist poetry and a fine example of the latter is the re-imagining of Mary's Magnificat by Sr. S.M. Sujita, SND, also in 1990. She titles her piece, *Mary's Song of the Kingdom* contextualising its themes as follows:

“...The off-beat melody of your song haunts me, Mary,  
For you sang of an “Upside- Down Kingdom”  
Where the mighty would fall helpless  
And the helpless rise with dignity;  
A kingdom where the pleasure-hunters  
Will disappear to make room  
For a loving, caring human family,  
Where kingship is shared with  
Those born slaves- the insignificant little ones  
Whose life is drenched in their own tears,  
But whose empty, wide hearts remain  
Open to the king- open to all.  
Teach me the *why* of your revolutionary rhythm,  
Oh, powerfully, humble One!  
Why did your God-Son search out  
The rejected stones, the dejected outcasts?  
Why did His heart bleed

And his gaze fell on the lame, the sick, the hungry?  
 Did He not know what kingdoms are made of?  
 Whence such courage, Mary,  
 To sing in total disharmony with the song of the world?  
 Ah, yes, I know your song is in perfect harmony  
 With the compassionate love song of the King  
 A song that topples thrones  
 To find a dwelling for those  
 Who have nowhere to lay their heads. . . .  
 And food for them whose starved eyes  
 Will fill with satisfaction and meaning,  
 For they have been touched  
 By the life and love of the kingdom.  
 Your melodious strains continue to echo;  
 “All you who are buried. . . lowered,  
 In the despicable filth of oppression and degradation,  
 Look up and smile  
 For yours is the kingdom, here and now.....”  
 Yes, your revolutionary song  
 Echoes a call. . . a Mission in my heart  
 To create . . . a world of Communion,  
 Of live –giving compassion and Love-  
 Your song challenges the woman in me, Mary,  
 To create to reshape  
 A better human family,  
 A better “woman race”!  
 We women are indeed blessed in you and through you, Mary,  
 Oh, fullness of womanhood. . .fullness of motherhood!  
 Sing with us your Song of the kingdom—  
 Today. . . Tomorrow. . . Everyday.”

Sr. S.M. Sujita, SND, *Mary's Song of the Kingdom*<sup>[17]</sup>

### ● JDV Vatican II Seminar

In 1990, the Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth in Pune organised a seminar from 5-10 November, on the occasion of the Jubilee year of Vatican II, and invited a woman to give opening address on “*The Place and Role of women*” - a somewhat traditional phrase. Pearl Drego in delivering the address critiqued these terms and said, “As regards her role, she has the same role as that of the baptized, she has the same capacities as men to

exercise the leadership of a priestly people. She has the same role as any member of the People of God, the role of a sacred citizen of a sacred nation. She is shedding her stereotype roles of helper, handmaid, as well as the stereotype virgin, stereotype spouse and stereotype mother. Woman is becoming herself, a true creation of God, a true revelation of the divine at work in the world, capable of being a Sign of God, a Sacrament of saving Grace capable of being the medium for God's revealing Spirit.” (p. 165).<sup>[18]</sup>

### ● Pre-Beijing articulations

In advance of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing of September 1995, the Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection had another issues, that of August 1995 on women's concerns in which the Document on Women passed by the General Congregation of the Jesuits was included. The opening article, *Changing Figure of the Indian Young Woman* by Philomena D'Souza FMA, traces the stages of the western feminist movement and its implications as well as the phases of development of the Indian feminist movement.<sup>[19]</sup>

She calls the first phase of the 60s, the Liberation-Separation which was marked by radical protests for rights to divorce, abort, etc. and in which the fashion and beauty industry came under heavy attack in the struggle to stop male control of the female body. The second phase of the 70s she calls the Promotion-Equality phase when equal rights, the unique contribution of women, “the natural difference between man and women”, the self-challenge as to why women had to prove themselves as equal, the danger of imitating male models, came into focus. In the third phase of the 80s which she calls the Difference-Mutuality phase, we have the appearance of the new woman as *different* from man, and the nature versus culture discussions predominated. Women began to recognise their caring and compassionate nature, to be in solidarity with the marginalised, and work for all of humanity by contributing to world peace, ecology, education, health care, etc. green movement, nuclear movement, etc.

She indicates certain starting points of the Indian feminist movement such as the social reforms of 19<sup>th</sup> century of Hindu men, for example, the pioneering role played by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The Preamble of the Constitution of India enshrined equality of the sexes

and by 1955 laws related to marriage, divorce, inheritance, economic equality, abortion, etc. were enacted. By the 1970s, a strong and vibrant women's movement had emerged. Then in the 1980s, the Indian woman becomes vociferous about dowry deaths, rape, and all forms of violence. The Shah Bano case of 1986, the Roop Kanwar Sati case of 1987, infanticide, domestic violence, etc. Muslim Women's Bill of 1986, indecent representation of women bill 1986, Sati Prevention bill 1987, the Maharashtra Regulation of Parental Diagnostic Technique Act 1988, family courts, etc. She shows how the 1990s had more widespread agitations, more issues were taken up by NGOs, and the decade saw more mobilising of women at the grass-roots, with tribals, dalits, peasants, rural women, becoming aware of their condition and working for consciousness raising and empowerment. She states, "Thus Indian feminism is a positive movement of women educating women rather than a reactionary movement of protest" (p. 507). The Panchayati Raj Bill 1992, reserving 30% seats for women in local governments, and lobbying have put in place many policies for the women's cause, and protest marches are on the rise on issues of national importance, environmental, globalisation, family planning, etc.

In assessing the present cultural climate for women she analysed the perceptions of sex before marriage and the negative views that girls had about their sexuality, the extended news on crimes against women and the low key presentation of real life contributions that women make to society. Therefore she focuses on the need for assertiveness training for women, for acceptance in the home, for healthy education systems for women, emphasising the need for co-responsibility, justice, solidarity and mutual co-operation. "effectively *influencing the macro-sphere through organised action at the micro level.*" In conclusion she presents many useful suggestions for the positive education of girls so that they do not grow up with negative self-images due to media, culture and social expectations.<sup>[20]</sup>

The same issue of the Vidyaajyoti Journal has a stirring article by Janet Chawla, *A Woman Activist Theologian* in which she describes realities on the ground connected to traditional beliefs about women. She narrates her experiences with Kali, the ways in which basti health workers speak theologically, and anecdotes with her male classmates of theology. Janet gives an interesting sketch of goddesses, of women's

nature as seen in Hindu philosophy, explores the contradictions in the image of midwife, and the importance of claiming her freedom as a thinker, writer, researcher, rather than fall prey to academic meanderings. *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol. 59, No. 8, August 1995, pp. 528-539. The same issue of the *Vidyajyoti Journal* contains a book review on *God as Feminine* by Joseph Sebastian, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995 in which the author covers several faith traditions to elucidate his theme. The issue also contains the Document on Jesuits and the Situation of Women.

### ● Jesuits and Women

The document *Jesuits and the Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society* was approved on 15 March 1995 by the 34<sup>th</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus. It is a special statement of the Jesuits, presenting a straight and honest-to-God declaration of their personal responsibility for being party to the gender scenario. Declarations from men about their need to change are very rare, so this was a welcome breakthrough from the side of a group of men that are held in high esteem in the world.<sup>[21]</sup>

“In response, we Jesuits first ask God for the grace of conversion. We have been part of a civil and ecclesial tradition that has offended against women. And, like many men, we had a tendency to convince ourselves that there is no problem. However unwittingly, we have often been complicit in a form of clericalism which has reinforced male domination with an ostensibly divine sanction. By making this declaration we wish to react personally and collectively, and do what we can to change this regrettable situation.” (No. 9).

In citing the “Ways Forward” the document states, “In the first instance, we invite all Jesuits *to listen* carefully and courageously to the experience of women.... Listening, in a spirit of partnership and equality, is the most practical response we can make, and is the foundation for our mutual partnership to reform unjust structures.” (No. 12). The next article goes further and invites all Jesuits, “as individuals and through their institutions, *to align themselves in solidarity* with women.” It recommends,

“-explicit teaching of the essential equality of women and men in Jesuit ministries, especially in schools and universities

-support for liberation movements for women which oppose their exploitation and encourage their entry into political and social life.

-specific attention to the phenomenon of violence against women,

-appropriate presence of women in Jesuit ministries and institutions, not excluding the ministry of formation...

-respectful collaboration with our female colleagues in shared projects..."

The laudable conclusion states, "We thank women for the lead they have given, and continue to give ... We are grateful, too, for what the society and individual Jesuits have contributed to this new relationship, which is a source of great enrichment for both men and women." (No. 15). "Above all we want to commit the Society in more formal and explicit way to regard this solidarity with women as integral to our mission..." (No. 16).

#### **14. Streevani: Publications and Programs - 1980s onwards**

Streevani was begun by Fr. Engelbert Zeitler and Dr. Frances Maria Yasas as a research wing for issues related to women and their empowerment. In contrast to those researchers who mostly cite enlightened women of national and international renown, Dr. Frances Yasas and her Streevani associates wrote case histories of women at the grass roots whose stories are no less inspiring and sensational, who have shown intelligence and courage in difficult circumstances. During the 1992 CBCI meeting on the theme of Dalits, Unorganized Labor and Women which was held at Ishwani Kendra, Francis Maria Yasas with her vision and mission saw an opportunity to create a base for the empowerment of women in a concrete way in the church. She managed to have a special session with several Bishops to apprise them of the actual stories of women and their struggles with the Church. "This meeting was the seed for the formation of a women's Desk in 1992", says Sr. Shanti Fernandes RSCJ who worked closely with Frances Yasas for many years. Dr. Usha Bambawale, who was one of the Directors of Streevani, kept the inculturated focus.

From the start of Streevani in 1982, Frances Yasas and Dr. Peter Fernando, Assistant Director of Ishvani Kendra, began a special

mission to edit a book on images of woman. It was ready in 1985 and contains important methodology and material that is relevant to this day. They published it through Ishvani Kendra, Pune, under the title, *Woman's Image Making And Shaping*,

Fr. Zeitler in the Preface of the book welcomed it as a “contribution to the new philosophy of women and religion for women ... a new epoch of humankind” (p. 6). Part I has three articles on the conceptual framework and how images are made and broken, by Maurice Friedman, Regina Holloman and Peter Fernando. Part II has an article on the images of woman in Hinduism by Laxmanshashtri Joshi and M.P. Rege, one on images in Islam by Shamoan Lokhandwalla, and a third on feminist theology by Gabrielle Dietrich. Part III has a design for the sociological study of women by Suma Chitnis, and insights into work with working women by Leela Gulati. Part IV has the analysis of woman's image making in Literature by Sarojini Vaidya and an analysis of the role of the mass media by Asha Bhende. Part V has an article on how human communications support the environment by Vera Mehta. Then comes the Discussion Notes by Olinda Pereira, profiles of the contributors and a bibliography.

The article of Gabriella Dietrich, a feminist Christian theologian of Madurai Theological Seminary, titled, *Perspectives of a Feminist Theology: Towards the Full Humanity of Women and Men* is a scholarly treatment of the legal and social position of women in the Old Testament, an analysis of the creation narratives, the maleness of God, the maleness of Jesus, (in which she presents the views of Una Kroll and Mary Daly and Hannah Wolff), a detailed comparison of Paul's Galatian text, “In Christ there is no male nor female” with other Pauline texts, and perspectives of liberation and integration. In the latter part Gabriella she highlights stories of women's leadership in the Bible, the need to rediscover the traditionally “feminine” qualities as general human qualities, a rethinking of sexuality and the need to find images in theological language which transcend gendered stereotypes.

A very special book orchestrated by Streevani in 1990 was in collaboration with the International Association of Schools of Social Work. It gives both heartrending stories of oppression and abuse as well as enduring memories of resistance and overthrow of patriarchal obstacles. Suma Chitnis, new to her post as Vice-Chancellor of SNDT

Women's University, Bombay states in her contribution *Women's Studies in Social Work Education – A New Challenge* that both profession and voluntary social workers have aimed at the suffering of women and for their welfare before feminism brought gender discrimination into focus and awakened public conscience to eliminate it. (p. 9). Eds. Frances Maria Yasas, Vera Mehta *Exploring Feminist Visions- Case Studies on Social Justice Issues* Streevani and International Association of Schools of Social Work. Streevani/Ishvani Kendra, Pune, 1990.

The other books put out by Streevani are very significant contributions to feminism and to the Church. Some of them provide grass-roots material for Indian feminist theologians. I list them below:

1. Ed. Frances Maria Yasas, **Single, Celibate, Dedicated Women Tell Their Stories – Images of Women in Secular Institutes in India**, Satprakashan, Indore/Ishvani Kendra Pune, 1990.
2. Celine Aranha, Peter Fernando, Prabha Mahale, **Beyond the Fire Line - Perceptions of Eight Tribal Women Indian Social Institute, 1991**.
3. Ed. Dr. Usha Bambawale, **Mythakvani** L.V. Tawre, Pune, 1996. The book is about women mythological figures.
4. Sumitra Bhawe, **Stree Shakti - Interpretation of Gandhian Sadhana** ed. Dr. Usha Bambawale, Streevani/ Ishvani Publications, Pune, 1997.
5. Prof. Grace Mathew, Sr. Latika Pazhunkaran, Sr. Mary George, Sr. Shanti Fernandes, **A Study of Innovative Development Projects by Religious Sisters**, Streevani/Ishvani Kendra, Pune, 1997.
6. Dr. Usha Bambawale, **Women in Court** Streevani/ Ishavani Kendra and Snehavardhan Publishing House, Pune, 1997.
7. **Struggling to be myself** Sujata Gothoskar, ed. Dr. Frances Maria Yasas, Streevani “Voice of Women” Series. Undated.
8. "Bai" 16mn colour documentary film in Marathi Sumitra Bhawe (Produced jointly by Streevani and Ishvani Kendra).
9. Eds. Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, Varghese Theckanath S.G., and Raynah Braganza Passanha. **'Gender Relations in the Church – a call to wholeness and equal discipleship'**: Published by

Streevani and Montfort Social Institute, 2012.

10. Eds. Julie George SSpS and Varghese Theckanath S.G .*Woman Man and God-Talk* Published by Streevani and Montfort Social Institute, 2013.

### ● Empowerment of Women Religious in India

Under the leadership of Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS) Streevani initiated the program “Empowerment of Women Religious in India” to facilitate **capacity building among Women Religious, to Promote participatory leadership and decision-making processes in various church related institutions and organizations and to deepen of one's understanding on feminism, patriarchy, feminist spirituality and theology.**

### ● Birthing a New Vision

The launch of Streevani Bulletin *Birthing a New Vision* was a result of the felt need to have a document to record various happenings of empowerment experienced by Religious Women in India at different levels, and to discuss the challenges, concerns and the way forward. Till date Streevani has published 20 issues of *Birthing a New Vision* which many have found to be a source of information and inspiration. The bulletin has been a good means of consciousness raising. Many have responded by being part of it through writing their reflections and articles on relevant subjects in the Church and society. It has shared the profiles of a few women religious who have become instruments of change, paving the way for a new awakening.

Sr. Helen Saldanha, one of Directors of Streevani was part of the formulation committee of the gender policy document and also prior to that, she was also part of the reflections at the national level.

Sr. Julie George SSpS who joined Streevani from the year 2006 took the organization to further heights through coordinating National Consultations and conferences and being a locus of information sharing. Sr. Julie, a Women's Rights Lawyer founded the Legal Cell in Streevani in 2006. She says “My involvement in the justice ministry made me to reflect deeply on how I can make a difference to awaken feminist consciousness that is required in today's situation of violence against women”. She along with Sr. Helen Saldanha SSpS, the then Director, launched the “**Women Religious Lawyers Forum**” in 2008,

under the banner of **“Pursuit of Justice: A Prophetic Response of Women Religious in India”** which meets every year.

**Some of the recent National Consultations spearheaded by Streevani**

1. Gender Relations in the Church: A Call to Integrity and Justice, 2010.
2. Gender Relations in the Church: A Call to Wholeness and Equal Discipleship, 2011 (Streevani, Montfort Social Institute, Satyashodhak, and IWTF).
3. Building Integral Partnership for Prophetic Mission, 2011 (Streevani/ Ishvani Kendra).
4. Gender Relations in the Church: A Call to Wholeness and Equal Discipleship: Living Nirbhaya: Towards a Violence Free Society, 2013 (Streevani, IWTF, Satyashodhak and Montfort Social Institute).

These consultations were prompted by two important contemporary events in the Church: The publication of The Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India, by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India (2010) and the unprecedented crisis in the universal Church triggered by revelations in the public sphere of cases of sex abuse and violence against women.

**● Norms for dealing with cases involving sexual abuse by church personnel**

At the end of the deliberations of the second Consultation it was unanimously decided to draft a policy and evolve a code of ethics to curb sexual violence of women within the Church by both preventive and punitive measures. Accordingly a group was chosen to draft the policy. The Members of the Task Force were: Dr. M.T. Joseph SVD, Bro.Varghese Theckanath S.G., Sr. Noella D'Souza MCJ, Dr. Shaji George CMI, Adv. Julie George SSpS and Reena D'Souza SSpS. The draft was finalized with the help of Dr. Astrid Lobo Gajjiwala, Ms. Virginia Saldanha, and Adv. Flavia Agnes. The draft Norms for dealing with cases involving sexual abuse by church personnel is submitted to the CBCI for consideration.

## ● National Survey

Streevani has recently undertaken a national study on Women's Role in the Catholic Church of India based on the Gender Policy of the Catholic Bishops conference of India, 2010.. The respondents of this study were Parish Council members who are best equipped to provide us with direct perceptions and informed opinions about the matter under study.

Mary George, Ida Lobo SSpS, Helen Saldanha SSpS, Dr. Kochurani Abraham and many other women who collaborate with Streevani have played a vital role in carrying out the legacy of Streevani in the field of empowerment of women in the Church in India.

## ● A personal testimony from Judy Siqueira

Below is a sharing from Judy Siqueira, a lay woman who got her MA in theology in 1999 from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. She has given courses in theology and spirituality in diocesan seminaries, in the Mater Dei School of Theology, Goa, to clergy and religious in Baroda, and other places. Judy lives in Pune and is the Editor cum producer of the newsletter *Ashram Aikya*, of the Union of Ashrams of Catholic Initiative. Many of the art works in the newsletter are expressions of feminist theology through art. Judy gives us a poignant personal testimony of her spiritual journey which throws light on the dedication of those who founded Streevani, and supported it.

“My journey into the women's movement began in the early 80s. I had no awareness of women's subjugation then. After a 30 day retreat with the Medical Mission Sisters in Bibwewadi (Pune), in the summer of 1982. I was directed to meet Frances Yaras. I was feeling lost and searching. She was the director of Streevani (Voice of Women) which she had recently started with Fr. Engelbert Zeitler SVD.

Frances was a US citizen who had worked for the UN in South and South-East Asia and had opted for early retirement, in order to work for the cause of women. She had chosen to stay single in a commitment inspired by her Christian faith. Supporting her was Jessie Tellis Nayak who had worked retired from the Indian Social Institute in New Delhi. Jessie and Frances were close friends though they clashed on a number of issues and had temperaments that were very different. They had been contemporaries during their doctoral studies in the US and had

shared an accommodation together. P. D. Kulkarni having worked with Frances in the UN was a close friend and was invited by her to be on the governing body of Streevani and later to do an evaluation of WINA.

Streevani at its inception was housed in Ishvani Kendra as Fr. Engelbert Zeitler SVD inspired by Vatican II was its founder-director and co founder of Streevani with Frances. He had fought in World War II in the German army and the tragedies of war had always stayed with him. He was also deeply influenced by two women and treasured his friendships with women. He accomplished so much, as one of the prime founders of the SVD order in India, that on the exterior he seemed like a bull dozer, but the truth was that interiorly he was gentle and deeply sensitive.

Contemporary with Streevani was WINA (Women's Institute for New Awakening) started by Jessie Tellis Nayak, Anna Alexander, Stella Faria who had co-authored the first book on Women in the Church in India. Frances, Crescy John and a few others were with them in WINA. Both were faith-based Christian women's groups from which my interest in theology arose.

My relationship with Frances soon deepened. She was the mentor and friend, a multi faceted personality, with whom I went a long way in realising mine. It was through Streevani and WINA sessions that I became aware of women's issues and that these issues were also mine as a woman. Working as a research assistant on her book *Single Dedicated Christian Women Tell Their Stories*, my awareness of women's issues, both, personal and social grew in leaps and bounds.

I entered the women's movement in a search for myself with no consciousness of women's subjugation, yet, over the years I have come to see that my search for self is spiritual and human, that as we grow as persons and in our awareness of women's issues, ready to commit ourselves in service, we need not confine ourselves to what is strictly and formally considered feminist issues. I have also learnt that commitment to women's issues or even human issues does not necessarily lead to personal liberation at the deeper level, nor to women's liberation or social change. I have learnt, and am still learning, that the first commitment has to be to a dissolution of one's personal ego. Otherwise one is likely to perpetuate the cycle of subjugation in other forms, though there may be some superficial, short term, quick

benefits at first. A genuine spirituality has to be taken seriously personal and social change, even though it means apparently achieving less in the public eye.

Another thing I have learnt in life is that sisters are preferred to lay people in most church services, especially in higher positions that are formal and therefore controllable. It is easier to control sisters than to control laywomen. It would be a big help if sisters themselves put their foot down on this. However, this requires a lot of dissolution of ego.

I also realized that just becoming a member of Christian feminist organizations does not necessarily help in the dissolution of a woman's ego. Like a feminist issue, the issue of being ego-centered also requires to be made a “category” of special focus, both personal and communitarian. Sadly today the focus in feminism is too much on activity and not enough on a genuine spirituality that can cut the roots off our malaise.”

### **Endnotes:**

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11. CTSA Proceedings 1979, pp.48-63.

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15. Rayan Samuel SJ, *In Christ: Power of Women*, All India Council of Christian Women, 1986.
16. Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection, April 1987, Vol. LI, No. 4, p.153.
17. Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection, April 1990, Volume 54, No. 4.
18. *The Place and Role of Women in Church and Society in the light of Vatican II in Quest for an Indian Church – An Exploration of the Possibilities Opened up by Vatican II*, Eds. Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ and Lorenzo Fernando, SJ., Anand: Gujerat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, 1993, pp. 159-212.
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## 15. CBCI Women's Desk

Sr. Cleopatra CMC took charge of the CBCI Women's Desk in June 1992. The CBCI began the desk through its Commission for Laity and Family. Sr. Cleopatra started diocesan Women's Desks managed by local Secretaries and initiated the Newsletter *Magnificat* in March 1993. In the early issues Sr. Cleopatra made a plea for women to fight communalism and uphold secularism. Through intense networking she organised the National Consultation of Christian Women Leaders. It was jointly sponsored by her CBCI Women's Desk and AIACHE (All India Association for Christian Higher Education) and held from May 11-14, 1993 at Kristu Jyoti College, Bangalore with 49 participants and 6 observers. It was a unique ecumenical venture. I can still recall the deep sense of solidarity across denominational boundaries, the intellectual debate and the coalescing intimacy that grew among the participants. Women's issues were discussed into the night and even the need for Catholic women to be ordained was affirmed. Sr. Cleopatra from the CBCI, Jyotsna Chatterjee of the Joint Women's Programme, Premila Balasundaram of the YWCA, Sr. Shalini D'Souza from the Indian Social Institute and Hazel Samuel from AIACHE, together with representatives of the Church of North India, Church of South India, Methodist Church, Salvation Army and G.E. Evangelical Lutheran Church supplied the data and analyses for the meeting through. Topics ranged from domestic workers, tribal and dalit issues, to work with mentally retarded children, health work, fish workers' struggle, the need to change laws governing marriage, divorce, etc. Virginia Saldanha took over as CBCI Women's Desk Secretary in 1998.

Eunice Britto, National Vice-President of Catholic Council of Women India became the First woman Mayor of Mangalore in 1993, and it was the decade in which Mother Teresa continued to rise to fame worldwide and plunge deeper into her work for the poorest, the outcast and the rejected, Sathyashodak in Mumbai continued to spread its base among Catholic women and to pursue intensive study of women's

issues, as did Vimochana women's action group in Bangalore, Streevani in Pune and WINA in Mangalore. Udaya Kiran, an NGO in Bangalore, was also founded in 1992 to advance Indian women theologising. AIACHE continued its centre for Women's Development bringing together 260 colleges, each with a Women's cell promoting study, action and research on women's concerns, and continuing its newsletter *Vikasini* from Janakpuri, New Delhi. Soon individual colleges would be putting out their journals on women's studies and related issues, as for example the journal *Urdhva Mula* published by the Sophia Centre for Women's Development and Empowerment. Women's study and action was now a byword in all areas and feminist theology was born and reborn through these studies and actions.

## **16. CBCI Commission for Women - Gender Policy**

*Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society – Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India*, the Statement of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) in its 28<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly in Jamshedpur, from 13-20<sup>th</sup> February 2008, was the culmination of intense discussions and reflections by bishops, feminist theologians and activists.<sup>[1]</sup> Approved by the CBCI in 2009 and published in 2010 as *Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society – Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India*, the booklet has a foreword by Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil C.Ss.R, President of the CBCI; an introduction from the Chairperson of the CBCI Commission for Women Bishop John Baptist Thakur, SJ and a list of acknowledgements from the Bishops of the Commission and the Executive Secretary of the Commission Sr. Lilly Francis. The members of the Drafting Team were Dr. Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, Dr. Rita Noronha, Ms. Lida Jacob IAS, Dr. Neena Joseph, Ms. Loy Maria George and Sr. Lilly Francis. They were supported by six women of the Advisory Committee, the Bishops who chaired the regional commissions and the regional co-ordinators. The document had a vast array of meetings and contributions.

In 1984 and 1992 the CBCI had already held deliberations on women and so the 2008 Plenary was able to take a clearer stand on the empowerment of women. The bishops arrived at the finalised text through intense discussions and processes. The Plenary began with four presenters, Rita Noronha, Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, Sr Inigo, Dilith Castleton and B.M. Leela Kumari covering the historical, scriptural,

ecclesial, ethnic, civil and other matters concerning women. The document acknowledges that the causes of women's oppression lie in the culture of patriarchy, market-centered and profit-driven globalization and the feminisation of poverty. It underlines women's interiority and capacity to endure suffering, the uniqueness of motherhood and the complementarity and reciprocity between men and women. The statement covers gender justice in Christian family education, equality of husband and wife, and removal of prejudice against the girl-child; the need to train women in theology and scripture and give them opportunities for leadership; the need to create audio-visuals for gender sensitization; the need to recognize women's Church-related services as ministries; the need for prioritising needed to be given for dalit, tribal and disadvantaged women, migrants and domestic workers, the importance of their education, employment, rights and redressals; the need to fight trafficking in women; to provide emotional and legal help in marriage cases; the importance of health factors and the need to support women to rise in political leadership for Panchayat, Legislative Assembly and Parliament.

### ● **The CBCI 28<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly**

The 28<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly of the CBCI, which was the space in which the *Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India* took form, consisted of 161 bishops, 40 women, 7 laymen and several other Church dignitaries. *The Empowerment of Women in The Church and Society*, published by Commission for Women, Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, 2008, and dedicated to Sr. Alphonsa (1910-1946) the first woman saint of India, describes what led up to this Assembly and what was achieved there. <sup>[2]</sup> The book contains 37 articles and 13 reports. The keynote address, *Empowerment of Women in Church and Society* (pp. 1-51), was given by Professor Rita Noronha, professor of the Roshini Nilaya School of Social Work, Mangalore. She gave a scintillating presentation of 51 pages, with a wide sweep of Church history, Church social teaching, action programmes, the global picture, statistics of atrocities on women in India, the manifest and hidden face of multiple discriminations, etc. She added a section which is often omitted, namely the impact of patriarchy on boys and men who have to pay a heavy price too. In her section on the forces behind gender inequality she presents her thesis with an impressive diagram and lists

the systemic roots of patriarchy, the ways in which families reproduce the polarisations of the macro society, the internalisation of gender, the impact of communalism on gender and a vast array of analyses of the situation of women in the Church followed by concrete proposals for modelling gender-just structures in schools, families, centres of healing, political structures, economic structures and in general social settings. She concludes, “The march towards dignity and equality (women as well as men) is an unstoppable march in the civilizing process of humankind...”

Dr. Astrid Lobo Gajiwala in her response to the keynote reminded the bishops that she had addressed them in 1992: “I chose at that time to break the silence surrounding violence against women. At the close of that meeting the bishops instituted a Women's Desk with Sr. Cleopatra appointed as the first woman secretary in the office of the CBCI.” Dr. Astrid proceeded to outline the problems of women - the disappearing girl child, the child sex ratio, trafficking in brides, the female literacy rate, problems of tribal women, the hidden faces of gender discrimination, strategies for empowerment such as the CINIs (Child in Need Institutes), practical changes needed in Church affairs and the need for a gender policy in the Church.

#### ♦ **Sr. Inigo SSA**

In her piece on *Scriptural and Theological Foundation for Women's Empowerment*, Sr. Inigo SSA, (pp. 71-82) places herself in the context of “94,000 women religious in India who belong to 244 Congregations, living in 12,870 communities ... a big force in India and especially in the Church” (p. 71). She combs the Old Testament and New Testament, philosophical concepts of dualism, social teachings of the Church, a list of positive signs and finally proposals. Here are points 6 and 7 from her list of 12 proposals:

6) “Gender sensitivity is not a woman question; it is human question and a spiritual question. Therefore Church authorities should *invest on women's formation* at various levels. Dioceses should train and *empower women for canonical and judiciary undertakings*, marriage and family counselling, priestly formation and lay- leadership training.

7) *Appointing women formators*, women spiritual directors and consultants along with men in seminaries and houses of formation to give a human, both feminine and masculine, expression to

priestly/religious formation for the mission is the need of the hour” (p. 81).

Adv. B.M. Leela Kumari from Acharya Nagarjuna University, in her presentation on *The Question of Dalit Women Today and Church's Response*, gives a succinct summary of the emergence of untouchability and separates it from the impure. She details the problems faced by Dalit women in their search for political power, identity, land rights, etc. and gives a ground plan for the Church's response. She reminds us that out of 18 million Catholics in India, 10 million are Dalit, 3 million are tribal. Leela Kumari gives us 10 vital points for a gender policy that will support Dalit women.

Ms. Dilith Castleton, Manager, Family Initiatives, Tata Steel, began her presentation on *Contemporary Tribal Women's Reality and the Prophetic Involvement* with Genesis 1: 27 and followed this with her statement, “The partnership of men and women would be the most credible and potent mystical reality as it would point to the fullness of the divine presence in humanity, made in God's image and likeness” (p. 105). She outlined the five territories in which tribals are located in India presenting a poignant picture of their pauperization and marginalisation, as well as the positive aspects of women's lives in tribal society. Today the scene has worsened due to globalisation, and the economic cum sexual exploitation of tribal women, plus their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. She compares their nutritional status to the rest of India and the gives us a picture of the horrors of women trafficking and statistics of witch killing in Jharkhand. Dilith calls for prophetic involvement to bring help to women: just as Jesus healed, so too the paralysed women of the tribal belts need the healing touch of God.

Sr. Helen Saldana SSpS, the current CBCI Women's Desk Secretary who travels the length and breadth of India, encouraging and empowering women's groups at the parish, diocesan and regional levels, has an article on *Gender Mainstreaming and Empowerment of Women*, (pp. 330-336), in which she gives very useful and innovative suggestions for strategies and policy level decisions for gender mainstreaming, an overwhelming yet vital enterprise for women. Among the numerous points she makes, Sr. Helen mentions the need for grievance redressal systems and vigilant cells for gender justice, gender budgeting and audits, resource allocation, documentation, as

well as concentrating on finding and countering resistance rather than emphasising the opportunities for change.

Dr. Sr. Pushpa Joseph FMM, from the Department of Christian studies, University of Madras, presented *Scriptural and Theological Foundations for Women's Empowerment*, (pp. 169-170) as part of the National Consultation process that led up to the CBCI meeting. She describes various types of empowerment based on the concepts of Joan Chittister OSB and Paulo Freire. Detailed lists of Psychological empowerment, intellectual empowerment, socio-political empowerment and religious/spiritual empowerment provide a wide spectrum of resources that women need to acquire to be truly autonomous beings. Dr. Pushpa then relates these empowerments to the time of Jesus and also to the early Christian movement. She gives us the theological foundations of women's empowerment, a Christian anthropology, understanding God and Jesus beyond male identities, explores female images of the divine and an ecclesiological understanding from women's perspective.

Fr. John Desrochers, CSC from the Centre for Social Action, Bangalore is one of the few men who are often invited to women's conferences to deliver important segments of social analysis and theology. In his piece on "The Church's Social Teaching on Women" given at the National Consultation, he covers Church documents in an easy-to-read fashion. Ms. Mungreiphy Shimray of the Gender Department of Caritas India made a presentation on *Church's Place and Role in Women's Empowerment*, emphasising the importance of conscientization, access, participation and collective ownership for women.

There were numerous presentations from the regional consultations all of which are worth reading. I select a few at random: *Scriptural and Theological Foundations*, by Sr. Bhavya CHF (pp. 213-229), *Church's Social Teachings on Women*, by Sr. Alice Lukose (pp. 230-236), *Scriptural and Theological Foundations*, by Sr. Gabriel Mary (pp. 236-265), *Responsibility of the Church in Women's Empowerment*, by Poojya Guruji Joe Mary M. Lobo (pp. 271-276), *Women in God's Plan*, by Sr. Ananda Amritmahal, RSCJ (pp. 311-315), and *Status of women in Church and Society*, by Virginia Saldanha (pp. 316-329). In the Western region Dr. Astrid Lobo Gajiwala made a presentation titled, *Genius of Women*, in which she gives an excellent coverage of Church

documents and pronouncements relating to women, from Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum of 1891, to Pius XII's Quadragesimo Anno of 1931, Vatican II, to present day Papal letters and encyclicals, calling for a true change of scene when the message of Jesus will bring about equality.

#### ♦ **Sr. Lilly Francis**

Sr. Lilly Francis as Executive Secretary of the CBCI Commission on Women kept up the steady pace of writing, convening meetings, and empowering women at the grassroots. She conducted several surveys on women, published them and ensured that they were circulated widely. Her publications include:

1. Commission for Women, Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *In Search of Space*, 2008.
2. Commission for Women, Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *The Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society*, 2008.
3. Adv. Lilly Francis, SMMI, Loy George, *Empowerment of Women and Church in India*, Commission for Women, Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, New Delhi, 2009.
4. Adv. Lilly Francis SMMI, *Wife Battering*, Commission for Women, Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, 2010.
5. Adv. Lilly Francis SMMI, *Women for Peace*, Commission for Women, Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, 2010.

#### ♦ **Virginia Saldanha**

When Virginia Saldanha took over as CBCI Women's Desk Secretary in 1998, she continued building up and strengthening the regional structure of the Women's Desks and made the newsletter *Magnificat* not only a news giving publication but also one that provided resources for meetings and training in feminism. Virginia Saldanha was Executive Secretary of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences, Office of the Laity from 1998 to 2010. She continued in the CBCI Commission for Women till 2004, from which position she began the Women's Theology Group 2001 in Pune; (later named the Indian Women's Theological Forum) and supported WORTH, (Women Religious Theologising). She obtained funds from Missio for the Women's Desk and organised them in such a way that these funds continue to finance women's meetings till today. Virginia worked with

the Diocesan Pastoral Centre on the new syllabus for teaching Catechism. She was on the Executive Council of Pax Christi International from 1997 – 2004 and currently works to provide Gender Education in cyberspace to students from around the world through the Catherine of Siena Virtual College.

Virginia has convened numerous meetings and conferences for Catholic women and contributed consistently to feminist theology developments. She wrote a beautiful letter to her house worker in 1991, which was published in the *Examiner* that same year. Her letter expresses a solidarity and equality that is often written about but not always practiced. Virginia has indeed put into action what she proclaims. Here is the letter:

Dear Savitribai,

We have just gone through a forty day period of reflection and introspection so that we can celebrate New Life at Easter... this year I have realised that this New Life will not be complete in me if I do not share this Good News of God's love and concern with you. So now, I will try my best to do this. But I must first reconcile with you and ask you to forgive me ...

At the outset, forgive me for calling you Ayah, Naukar, and many other derivatives of a menial worker, instead of calling you by your name. You are as dear to God as I am and God calls each of us by our name. Perhaps I wanted to remind you of your position of subservience so I felt comfortable calling you by other names...

Forgive me for thinking of myself as your mistress and you as my paid slave to do my every beckoning. I have now realised that I too am a worker like you, except that I have had the opportunities to come to the position I am now in. I have inherited this idea that my intellectual work is superior to your manual work because of the amount I've invested in terms of time and money in my education. Today I've come to recognise that every person is a worker and that we express ourselves through our work which helps us to grow in the process. Forgive me for not allowing you the opportunity to express yourself through your work, because I've always made you do things my way...

Soon I will be planning a holiday because I feel the need of a break from the monotony and drudgery of my work. I've never ever thought

of giving you the same privilege... Yes, every year I've celebrated Easter and joyously sung: "The New Life of Christ is mine ...". Now my reflection reminds me of how empty these words have been when I have not shared this Good News with you. I have kept you shackled to your poverty and consoled myself with periodic doling out of old clothes and things, and an occasional baksheesh.

So I condemned you to your lot. I now realise that I need your help if I have to continue doing my own work and that I have to allow you to live your life as humanly as I would like to live mine, if I profess to be a follower of Christ. For Christ came to set us all free from every kind of oppression and sin. Forgive me, for I have oppressed you due to my sin of inhumanity without thinking ever, that my own needs and aspirations as a human being could as well be yours. Christ through his death and resurrection has set both of us free. I have no right to shackle you down just because economically and intellectually I am better off.

Come my sister, forgive me... I am going to try and give you the opportunity to live your life to its full potential as a human being, so that you understand that; you are a child of God with your own dignity and worth.

I greet you on the occasion of the feast of all workers under the patronage of St. Joseph the worker. From now on, I will respect your dignity as a worker. I greet all others like you who belong to the unorganized working class employed in my home, society and work place and promise to make efforts to treat you in a manner that is truly humane and just.

Your sister,  
Virginia Saldanha.

Virginia's 2005 article, *Understanding Discipleship – A Woman's Perspective*, in the NBCLC publication *The Church in India in the Emerging 3rd Millenium*,<sup>[3]</sup> shows her deep concern for the problems women face, especially that of domestic violence and sexual abuse which she states is very much prevalent in the Christian community where women are kept in bondage. She puts the blame squarely on Catholic morality and spirituality in which Mary is used to make women docile and scripture is falsely used to give women the image of taking the wife/mother or virgin/temptress roles. On the other hand men are conditioned to be macho wage earners, with unbridled sexual

freedom. The image of the Church therefore becomes one of male domination, position and power. In this scenario she calls for embracing the spirituality of Jesus which is integral, holistic and inclusive by which we can overcome the duality of spirit and matter and make women comfortable with their bodily processes and their spiritual experiences.

At the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the FABC, January 2000, Paper No. 103, Virginia presented a Discussion Guide for the Workshop on “Women” in which she continued to plead for a spirituality that is reconciliatory, life-giving and liberating, breaking free from the patterns that bind Christians to greed, self-indulgence, racism and authoritarianism. She calls for a repentance that repudiates these addictions and opens up to the grace for conversion from sinful attitudes that oppress others. She calls for a grace that empowers us to love. Women are at the service of life and are pro-life. Christian marriage and family life is therefore hallowed by women's presence. She refers to No. 371 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, reminding us that “God willed that there should be a relationship of profound communion between man and woman, in a perfect reciprocity of knowledge and of the giving of self”. However, woman should not be limited to this relationship but move to wider areas of political, economic, social, and religious life.

Virginia concluded her presentation with an impassioned plea: “In the spirit of reconciliation I hope the Church will LISTEN and respond to the voices of women hitherto spoken of as 'rebels', by genuinely understanding the true message of their cries... Through the true spirit of reconciliation, all women hope that they will be recognized as equal partners in the mission and ministry of the Church. Through the spirit of reconciliation, I hope that no woman will feel devalued, not taken seriously, or uncomfortable as a woman in the Catholic Church who walks in the footsteps of Jesus who showed us the Way, the Light and the Truth to true Human Liberation. May Mary our model of discipleship, woman of courage and woman of action, inspire and be with the Church of Asia in her journey towards fullness of life for all the peoples of Asia.”

In 2001, together with the Catholic woman activist Flavia Agnes, Virginia Saldanha made a special journey from Bombay to Delhi to

meet Arun Jaitly, the then Law Minister. Their aim was to amend the Indian Christian Marriage Act with regard to the clauses on grounds for divorce for Catholic women. Through their persistent efforts they succeeded in getting the amendment passed in Parliament on December 2001, by which women could be granted divorce on the same grounds as men.

#### ● **The Indian Theological Association - 2004**

The Indian Theological Association (ITA) at its meeting held at Dharmaram College in Bangalore from 25-29 April, 2004, had *Concerns of Women: An Indian Theological Response*, as its theme. This is the title of the book that collated the papers of the ITA meeting.<sup>[4]</sup>

The first presentation *Oppression of Women: A Psycho-Social Analysis*, is by M. C. Abraham, CSC, who gives a philosophical and epistemological arguments for re-instating the mythic consciousness and cross-categorical knowing to arrive at a trans-system mode of knowing in which love and compassion are states of being rather than volitional acts of virtue. Such radical paradigm shift in modes of knowing would help dissolve those social systems that maintain rigid and destructive autocracies. “I would like you to keep generating a theology or theologies that would be at the service of truth and not merely of context-dependent incarnations, expressions and manifestations of truth... release our exaggerated hold on historicity, tradition and superior 'uniqueness claims' and embrace the trans-historical, universal-spiritual and contemplative perspectives” (p. 26).

Sr. Pushpa Joseph, FMM in her *Giving Voice to Scriptural Silences through Feminist Reconstructions*, begins with analysing what she calls the exegetical-topical cut-and-paste method of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and moves on to other methods of interpretation, the remedial approach that recovers neglected history, the text cum translation method which explores androcentric language and its silencing mechanisms, and other approaches such as the socio-cultural, the socio-political, the liberationist. Then she points out some of the hazards of the symbolic representative and gender contextualisation forms of interpretation using the Samaritan woman text to demonstrate her argument. Pushpa then uses the feminist hermeneutical technique of experience based interconnections to imaginatively reconstruct the text and give voice to the voiceless Indian women. Sr. Shalini's

presentation, “Pen Theology from the Margins gives a broad spectrum view of the women's oppression in India, mother goddesses and one-dimensional theologies, the cry and invocation of the Asian feminist theology, she comes to the Pen theology from the margins, or feminist theologising from the grassroots, because, (quoting Nestor O. Miguez), “The narratives of the eventless events that fill the lies of the humble, the excluded, the denied persons of today's world must be collected and incorporated as basic data of theological discourse” (p. 85). Shalini gives a real life demonstration of her method through the story of Mallika in the sub-sections, “Meeting God in the Ambiguities and the Folded Spaces of Life”, “Experience of the Paschal Mystery”, “Transcendence in/through the Pain-filled Fragments of Everydayness”, “Caring: Female Mode of Empowering and Re-deeming” and “Feminist Theology as Affirmation of the Agency of the Margins”.

Evelyn Monteiro's presentation is titled *Towards Partnership in a Participatory Church – A Feminist Dream and Vision*” which indeed gives practical ways that an alternative model of an egalitarian Church can be achieved. She suggests in the second half of her presentation that models from the early Christian communities such a leaders of House-Churches, Paul's missionary co-workers, new modes of authority that are life-giving, reciprocal and dialogical, can help us reach the dream of a community of equals. In the first half of her article she covers the exploitation and oppression due to institutionalisation using Ian Ramsey's “disclosure models” to unveil the factors that have, in his words, “depositioned women and blocked true ministerial partnership” (p. 108). She shows how the culture of horror and shame, purity regulations and the politics of domination and submission destroy the true “communion of God's people”.

Asrid Lobo Gajiwala's *Mothering God* is a moving piece connecting the bodily functions of woman to the divine. “Menstruation”, “Mothering”, “Goddesses”, “Sexuality”, “Menopause” and “Mother Church” are her sub-sections intimately woven into a tapestry of down-to-earth experiences that evolve into divine revelation. She bemoans the way women's bodies are made into objects of lust and rather than transformational mediums of grace and sites of mystical visions. She ends with an emotion-filled poem of Kate Compston, “I dream of a Church” (p. 147).

In inimitable style, Philomena D'Souza FMA titles her presentation *Birthing of a Spirituality from Women's Perspective* and names her first Part, “Unmasking Patriarchy in Spirituality” in which she analyses the masculinisation of religious experience, naming the spirituality of Christian warfare, pilgrimage to the next world, mountain climbing, sportsmanship, sinner/slave before the judge/king and the spirituality of 'carrying one's own cross'. She innovatively details the debilitating effects these spiritualities have on women's lives and the “Patriarchal Internalization of Female Sexuality by Women”. Philomena then shows how patriarchy obstructs social transformation while feminism promotes it. Part II is titled, “Weaving a Holistic Spirituality from Women's Perspective”. Under the sub-headings of Integral, Circular, Inclusive, Relational, Empowering, Contemplative, Life-affirming, Creation-centred, Embodied, Promoting Non-violence and Peace, Born of Suffering and Struggle for Justice, and Revision of Traditional Symbols and Teachings, Philomena D'Souza gives us a panoramic view of new images of God, fresh hope for women's liberation and salvation, alternative ways of social cohesion and thirst for the dawn of a new day for everyone.

The conclusion of the book contains interesting workshop reports and recommendations of the ITA conference 2004.

## **17. Women with Special Charisms**

### **♦ Shalini Mulackal PBVM**

Dr. Shalini Mulakal of the Presentation sisters teaches systematic theology at Vidyayoti College of Theology, Delhi. She is visiting professor to many Seminaries and Theological Institutes in India, having completed her Doctoral studies from Madras University where she researched the religio-cultural practises of Dalit women. Amidst other affiliations, she is a Board member of the Centre for Dalit Studies and of the Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA). She has been active in many organisations of women theologians in India and Asia. A prolific writer and researcher, her most popular book is, *Ruth, Esther & Judith*. The book has a most inspiring introduction by the famed theologian Fr. T. K. John SJ and a foreword by the Rev. James Massey, the chief editor of the series. As Rev. Massey points out in his foreword, “the experience gained from Dalit Bible Commentary ... will not confine Dalits to their lives alone but shall expand them by becoming a spring

board for integral liberation.” Indeed this is the stupendous task that Sr. Shalini undertakes and superbly accomplishes in 141 pages. The structure of her book is reader-friendly and distils the essence of each of the stories that she analyses through short pithy explanations, making her work scholarly and sublime, spiritual and inspiring.

The pattern for interpreting the Word of God for Dalits from the actions and experiences of the three Biblical women presented is effective. Sr. Shalini begins each piece with an introductory essay giving the historico-social setting of the biblical texts and follows this with by a series of commentaries in which the biblical passages are sorted into small sections with each section elucidated by its related commentary. This structure highlights the development of the dramatic storyline and deepens the application of each scene to the cause of Dalit rescue, empowerment and prosperity. The commentaries are captioned with slogans that bind feminist thought to the scriptural scenario and to the hope for deliverance, solace and salvation, e.g. “Womanly Genius Claiming its Space”, “Assertive Alliance of Dominant and non-Dominant Women”, “Claim Your Legitimate Rights”, “Generations of Hope-Filled Future” “The Forgotten One Honoured”, “My Life is My Community”, “Terrorising the Powerless”, “A Cry from the Dust”, “Resilience despite Desolation”, “Celebrating the Womanly Heroism”. Sr Shalini has prised three women from the Old Testament so that become icons of the Sacred Word of God, exuding sustenance, strategy, consolation and hope for women, Dalits and other disempowered peoples. This booklet should be translated into regional languages so that instead of standing on a shelf in a library it functions as a source of reflection and study for parish groups.

In her commentary on Ruth 4: 1-12, Sr. Shalini states, “But from a feminist perspective one cannot overlook the patriarchal bias of this text. Boaz *acquires* Ruth. Woman is seen as property which a man can own. She has no right of inheritance. The overwhelming concern is on the dead man and the need to keep his name among his kindred (v. 10). Woman is seen only as an instrument in raising children for men so that their name can live on (v. 11). On the other hand this same text also critiques certain patriarchal strategies used to keep women as inferior beings by ignoring their contribution to the society at large. By referring to the house of Perez, they recognise and acknowledge the initiative taken by Tamar to secure her rights as a widow (v. 12). They

also recognise the role played by women like Rachel and Leah in building up the house of Israel (v. 11). It is seldom that we hear of these women in other biblical books and narratives.” (p. 38)

On Esther, chapter 6, under the heading “The Forgotten One Honoured” Sr. Shalini makes this important comment: “Often the book of records, the annals (v. 1) or the history is written for the benefit of the dominant. Mordecai's name was recorded not because he belonged to the dominant group but because of his immediate association with the King and his life. What is expressed in and through these events is the faith of the unknown author” according to whom “there is a hidden divine hand operative in all that is happening” (p. 71). In her commentary on Esther, chapter 7, Sr. Shalini makes the following relevant observation: “Esther poses a challenge to all those dalits who have climbed the socio-economic ladder, but do not want to reveal their true identity for fear of rejection and loss of power and thus prefer to remain unconcerned about the struggles of their brothers and sisters” (p. 73).<sup>[5]</sup>

**Some of Sr. Shalini's articles on Theology and Scripture are listed below, out of more than forty articles:**

1. *Liberation of Women: Some Indian Issues*, in *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 61 (1997): 809-815.
2. *The Feminine Face of the Father*, in *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 63 (1999): 781- 784.
3. *Christologie feministe Asiatique*, in *Sedos Bulletin* 33: 1 (January, 2001): 22-25.
4. *Feminist Christology in Asia*, in *Theology Digest*, Volume 48, Number 2, (2001): 107-110.
5. *Towards Building Communities of Resistance and Hope: Theological Perspectives*, in *RIPPLES A Journey of CNI-SBSS* - Compiled by Probal K. Dutta & Nalini Nupur John, Delhi: ISPCK, 2001, pp. 5-23.
6. *Towards an Egalitarian and Inclusive Ekklesia*, in *Bend without Fear: Hopes and possibilities for an Indian Church*, Kuruvilla Pandikattu & Rosario Rocha (Eds.), Delhi: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth/ISPCK, 2003, pp. 127-144.

7. *Political Economy of Participation: Women in the Life and Mission of the Church*, in Evelyn Monterio, SC & Antoinette Gutzler, MM (Eds.), *Ecclesia of Women in Asia: Gathering the voices of the Silenced*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2005, pp. 184-198.
8. *Women's God-experience rooted in Life: A Theological Framework*, in Virginia Saldanha (Ed.), *Discipleship of Asian Women at the Service of Life*, Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2007, pp. 225- 248.
9. *Margin as a Site of Sacred Encounter: A Hermeneutic of Transcendence from the Subaltern Perspective*, in James Massey & Indukur John Mohan Razu (Eds.), *Revisiting and Resignifying Methodology for Dalit Theology*, CDS, Delhi and UTC, Bangalore, 2008, pp. 227-237.
10. *Set Apart to Nurture and Care for: Christian Mission in the Context of Ecological Crisis*, in *Asian Journal for Priests & Religious*, Vol. 55 No. 3, May 2010, pp. 16-26.
11. *Gender Sensitivity in Theologizing*, in Tomy Palely and Thomas Manjaly (Eds.), *Theological Education for Transformative Ministry*, Shillong: Oriens Publications, 2011), pp. 167-187.
12. *Christian Discipleship in Contemporary India*, in V.D. John & Viju Wilson (Eds.), *Among the People: Essays in Honour of Rev. Dr. P.G. Vargis*, Delhi: ISPCK/SALTDC, 2012, pp. 227-244.

♦ **Stella Balthazar**

Stella Balthazar FMM has been a staunch support of women in the Church for many decades and has written much on feminist theology and spirituality in several professional and Church publications. Her paper on *Women and the Church: A Search for an Identity*, presented at the 19<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Indian Theological Association, held from 4-8 May 1996 at NBCLC Bangalore, gives us a flavour of her charism.<sup>[6]</sup>

She begins with the following Invocation:

Feminine Wisdom and prudence

Spread your spark around and inspire me

Silent sage of history, open thy reservoir of graceful speech

and help me utter the unutterable

Women saints of our Culture ...

Kannagi, you are the woman of endurance and fiery protester of

injustice  
Women who won Kongar Padai,  
you were courageous enough to face the battle front  
Mira, you defied the plots of lust and witnessed to Divine  
commiment  
as the Supreme Reality  
Pandita Rama Bai, you are the patron of the untouchable  
uneducated woman on whose behalf you were ostracized from  
Brahminism  
Mother Mary, you had the courage to stand by the cross of your  
son and become the source of support  
to those who take a stand for the cause of the poor.  
Jesus, you were born as man to bring fullness of life to man and  
woman. Give us the wisdom to transcend gender difference and look  
at women equally as persons and take up their cause for freedom as a  
human cause.  
Amen.

Stella Baltazar's paper tracks the sacredness of woman and explores metaphorically how women are still silent and why they still keep their head's covered. She quotes the opinion of Corona Mary that “the inability of men to acknowledge their own weakness impels them to project their feeling of insecurity and passion onto women and exert control over them”.<sup>[7]</sup> After analysing Patristic and modern views on women she goes on to see the impact of Church and civil laws on women's lives, probing the roots of violence and outlining ways for empowering women through social transformation, especially through grassroots activism. We need community (come-unity) and responsibility (response-ability). “Women are slowly emerging to prove wrong the aphorism of Chesterton, “Million of women came across and shouted 'no one will even dictate to us again' – and they became typists!” Stella develops her feminist theology by plunging into dalit issues, developing eco-feminism and hoping for “sustaining life” strategies that “claim our links with the cosmos”, “bonding sisterhood in togetherness” and so finally “humanizing the structures of Church and society”.

#### ♦ Astrid Lobo Gajiwala

Astrid Lobo Gajiwala holds a doctorate in Medicine and a Diploma in Theology. She is Head of Department of the Tissue Bank, Tata Memorial Hospital, Mumbai. She was part of the group that founded

Satyashodhak in 1984 and of the Indian women's Theological Forum (IWTF). She has been Assistant co-ordinator of the Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA) and a member of the Indian Theological Association. She has written for national and international theological journals and has received the Best Christian Journalist Award of the *New Leader* and the Golden Pen Award from *The Examiner*. Astrid's contributions to feminist theology have been recorded in previous sections of this manuscript and below I present one of her most recent creations, *Negotiating Partnership in the Church*, from a book of which she is a co-editor, *Gender Relations in the Church – a call to wholeness and equal discipleship*, Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, Varghese Theckanath SG & Raynah Braganza Passanha Eds. Published by Streevani and Montfort social Institute through Media House, 2012. The book was the result of the second National Consultation on the same topic spearheaded by Streevani.

In this article she begins with the hierarchical structure of the Church as envisioned by Pope Pius X in 1906, by which, "... the one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led and, like a docile flock, to follow the Pastors". She quotes the canon lawyer Thomas p. Doyle who says that, "the world's sole surviving absolute monarchy (with) its ruling elite, the cardinals and bishops, (constituting) an aristocracy." Hence the need for negotiation, even though Jesus intended a discipleship of equals. She shows how Pope John Paul II in his 1995 *Letter to Women* emphasizes "an urgent need to achieve real equality in every area". Astrid tells of her painful experience of being rejected by Church bodies and her own parish after she published an article on the feminine face of God. One of the results of the policies of women's exclusion is the complacent attitude to sexual abuse, which is basically about power and not sex. She gives a compassionate rendering of the confusion, shame and guilt felt by women victims of clerical abuse. She gives concrete examples of Systemic Gender Inequality, such as those of women in high places in Pontifical societies who do not really have decision-making power, and two women in the US who have the position of Vicar General but not the title.

#### ♦ **Noella de Souza**

Noella de Souza of the Missionaries of Christ Jesus is an educationist, psychotherapist and counsellor who has worked for the

past twenty years on creating a gender-sensitive supplementary curriculum together with women from Avehi Abacus, an NGO in Mumbai. She gives women's retreats and runs workshops on women's spirituality for sisters and lay groups in various parts of the country, besides being available to local parish communities and women of all faiths. The recent gender-sensitization kit worked on has been accepted so well that it is on the syllabus of the Archdiocesan Schools of Mumbai Archdiocese and is also being used by all the Presentation schools in Chennai, besides individual progressive schools around the country. The kit is a vital form of theology in action, as it puts into practice the analysis and recommendations of the theologians by changing images, mindsets, behaviours of teachers and children, inserting them into the salvific journey.

In the book *Gender Relations in the Church – a call to wholeness and equal discipleship*, Noella's presentation at the consultation is included, *Gender Relations: Insights from the Field*. Her sharing was the result of her involvement in ecclesial processes of justice and healing connected with two priest abusers who both had multiple sexual episodes with women. Noella gives a scathing, horrifying profile of the two priests, their talent at helping, their self-indulgence and arrogance, their air of trustworthiness, and methods of seduction, indicating that they did not so much have a sickness as an irresponsible, predatory attitude that made them plan the abuse consciously and carefully. She then gives a profile of the victims, highlighting the tragedy of their lives, their vulnerability, the misconceptions and at times their conscious co-operation with the abuse. Then follows a detailing of the investigation procedures, the denial of abuse, the loopholes for scuttling justice and the need for proper, transparent methods to get at the truth that can lead to decisions to prevent repeats by the abusers and hasten healing and justice to the victim.<sup>[8]</sup>

### ● Men Join the Chorus

This book also contains significant articles by priests who are “women-identified men” whole-heartedly supporting the women's cause. Varghese Theckanath SG is specially dedicated to organising conferences and workshops for women and is eloquent on the subject of women and Church, M.T. Joseph SVD and M.C. Abraham CSC are regular faculty on women's situation integrating with the women's

movement, Anthony Da Silva SJ, a psychologist is known for his gender-sensitive programmes, Jacob Parappally MSFS never misses a women's consultation, is an enthusiastic presenter on the topic and encourages women to write in the Journal of Indian Theology of which he is chief-editor and Shaji George Kochuthara CMI is also very well known in the women's forum for his staunch adherence to gender freedom in various fields of study.

#### ♦ **Kochurani Abraham**

Kochurani Abraham has an MA in Child Development and a Licentiate in Systematic Theology from Comillas University, Madrid. A seasoned activist on women's issues, she has worked with Streevani and conducts workshops for women's empowerment and spirituality. She is skilled in the use of poetry, liturgy, music and dance to promote women's spirituality. Apart from editing books on the topic, she has authored more than thirty theological articles in English. I have selected eight of them. In her writings she focuses on deconstructing gender, building eco-feminism, and creating a new ethic of partnership based on gospel imperatives. Kochurani has numerous articles in Malayalam. In *Women and the Politics of Language* she gives graphic examples on how local language perpetuates women's subjugation. Malayalam slogans translated as, "Women should forgive as much as the earth", "Women's intelligence is backward intelligence", "Those who listen to women will be on the streets", "If the hen crows, the country is destroyed" are used as hegemonic tools to create a patriarchal mindset within women. Kochurani rightly calls for a feminist depoliticization of language.

1. *And She Was Made Straight: A Feminist Theological Engagement with the Bent Lives of Indian Women*, in Joseph Prabhakar Dayam and Mohan P. Larbeer, Eds. *Margins in Conversation: Methodological Discourses in Theological Disciplines*, Bangalore: BTESSC, 2012, pp.120-133.
2. *A New Relationality with the Earth: Redefining the Gender-Ecology Dialectic*, in *Bangalore Theological Forum*, Vol.XLII, No.1, June 2010, pp. 193-203.
3. *Deconstructing Gender for Rediscovering the 'Home'*, in Felix Wilfred, Ed. *'Eco-Justice' Jeevadhara: A Journal for Socio-Religious Research*, Vol XL 2010, N0.235, pp47-57.

4. *Feminist Theological Methodology: An Indian Inquiry*, in “Gurukul Journal of Theological Studies”, Vol. XX, No.2, June 2009, pp.49-54.
5. *Women Encounters with Religion: Gendered Landscape of Violence, Ambiguity and Emancipation*, in Felix Wilfred, Ed., *Transforming Religion: Prospects for a New Society*, New Delhi: ISPCK 2009, pp. 67-82.
6. ***The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenge to Marriage and Family Life: Redefining Gender Relations and Power Equations*** in Sharon A. Bong and Pushpa Joseph, Eds., *Reimagining Marriage and Family in Asia*, Malasia: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (SIRD) 2008, pp.133-154.
7. *The Place and Role of Women in the Church*, “*Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies*”, 7 (2004) 69-91.
8. *Women and the Politics of Language*, in *Woman, Man and God-Talk – Gender Inclusive Language*, Julie George SSpS, Varghese Theckanath SG Eds., Pune/Hyderabad: Streevani, Monfort Social Institute, 2013.

#### ● **The Council of Catholic Women**

In the context of bringing women's spirituality and wisdom to the grass-roots we need to get a glimpse of some sections of the Catholic women's organisations which flourish both in the urban and rural sectors, uniting women of different classes and cultures. Dr. Olinda Pereira, Phyllis Ignatius, Violet Scolt, Tessie Anthony, Chinnamma Jacob, and Anita Lukose are some of the women who have sent in histories and lists of workshops and conferences conducted by the Council on theology, women's concerns and other topics of national and international importance.

The Council of Catholic Women of India (CCWI) is a national organization of lay women, run independently by women and for the welfare of the women in India. Its Administrative Office, which is referred to as the National Secretariat, is located at 21, Museum Road, Bangalore 560025. Excerpts from Dr. Olinda Pereira's records in *Neythri* are given below:

“The National Council of Catholic Women was founded in Nagpur in September 1956 with Dr. Mary Agnes Saldanha as its first President, and Muriel D'Souza as Secretary, though its history can be traced back to 1939 when Mrs. Lizzie Colaco made a presentation in Rome at an International Conference on Women, where she met Countess Christine de Hemptinne whose visit to India later in 1958 also helped unify the organization. In 1964, the Eucharistic Congress was the occasion for initiating the formation of National Organization of Catholic Women. A temporary contact centre functioned at 'Roshini Nilaya' in Mangalore, from where too a quarterly newsletter, later entitled *Neythri* was launched. The then Secretary, Muriel D' Souza was also from Nagpur. The Mahila Sangh in the North East from the Chotanagpur belt to the Himalayas continues to spread and holds annual regional assemblies, and the strength of their presence in the CCWI is very much felt. At the International level, CCWI has been an associate member of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organization (WUCWO). Dr Dulcinea Rodrigues was a member of the WUCWO Board for two terms. Averil Stone has been the most recent CCWI member to be elected a Board member of WUCWO. By 2010, CCWI has 55 affiliated diocesan units in India. Phyllis Ignatius, Chinnamma Jacob, Lorna Barrett have been active in promoting the CCWI.”

Violet Scolt and her companions emailed this report about the Delhi units of the Council:

“The formation of the Council of Catholic Women Delhi (CCWD) dates back to 1967. This came about under the able stewardship of Dr Olinda Pereira. Our founder members are Dr D Kulandy, Margaret Alva, Yolanda Mathias, Joan Dias, Late Phelia Rebello, Stephanie Lobo, Claire Tauro, Mary Naidu and Joyce Pinto. In 1972 these founder members along with new members organized the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual National Conference in Delhi with the theme *Social & Moral Rehabilitation of Women*.

Today there are 16 formal units in the Delhi Archdiocese and many informal units where women are working in groups for CCWD. The CCWI national organizational structure is followed in all units. The strength of the Unit is solely dependant on the leadership of the women leaders.

As we write this report we specially remember with gratitude the following women leaders of our Archdiocese who contributed to the growth and empowerment. Dr Olinda Pereira, Frances Lyn, Late Irene

Pinto, Margaret Alva, Late Birdy D'Souza, Phyllis Ignasius, Norawallah, Angela Ekka, Janet Morrison, Violet Xavier, Elmy Andrews, Chinnamma Jacob, Helen Augustine, Teresa Justine, Lilly Bosco, Tessy Anthony and many other unsung women who have done work incognito.”

In 2006 *Woman Leader* was the new name given to the Monthly Newsletter of the Council of Catholic Women, India.

### ♦**Rekha M. Chennattu**

Rekha Chennattu RA is a Biblical scholar, with a licentiate from the Biblicum in Rome where the intense study of Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic and other languages equips the scholars to do original work in scripture, theology and Church studies. She completed her doctorate in Rome and has held the position of professor and head of department of Scripture at JDV Pune. She is the Provincial of her congregations and when I contacted her recently she had just returned from Jharkhand and was leaving in a few hours for Vietnam. In spite of her rushed schedule she sent me her list of publications in English and in other European languages, including Italian, Hungarian, German, French, Dutch, and Spanish. Her forthcoming book, *Biblical Women as Agents of Social Change* will soon be available. Below are selections from her impressive list of more than 50 articles.

1. *Women in the Mission of the Church: An Interpretation of John 4*, *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 65 (2001): 760-73; reprinted in *Sedos Bulletin* 34:2 (2002): 39-45.
2. *When the Name of Mission is Woman: A Woman from Samaria*, *World Mission Magazine: The Asian Catholic Monthly* 15:11 (2003) 22-25.
3. *Asian Feminist Christology*, pp. 183-202 in *Asian Faces of Christ: OTC Theological Colloquium*, Vimal Tirimanna, Ed., Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2005.
4. *Biblical women as Agents of Justice and Peace*, pp. 124-58 in *Word of God: Source of Justice and Peace*, A Peter Abir, (Ed.) Tindivanam: CBF, 2008.
5. *Reciprocal Partnership and Inclusive Leadership: Exploring Paul's Attitudes to Women*, pp. 139-57, in *Learning from St. Paul:*

*Reflections for the Pauline Year*. Shaji J. Puykunnel and Jose Varickasseril, Eds., Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 2008.

6. *Biblical Women as Models of Theologizing*, *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 73 (2009): 670-84.
7. *Partnership of Equals: Paul's Vision of Women in the Church*, pp. 274-90, in *The Relevance of Saint Paul: An Indian Reading of His Letters*, Kurien Kunnumpuram & Rekha Chennattu, Eds. Mumbai: St Paul's, 2009.
8. *Revisualizing Women in the Story of Jesus*, *Word & Worship*, pp. 270-280, 41:4 2008.
9. *Paul's Understanding of Women's Place in the Church*, *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies*, 12, 2009: 261-79.
10. *The Dignity of Women: Christian Perspectives*, *Journal of Dharma*, pp. 435-450, 37:1, 2012.

Rekha Chennattu's article *The Good Shepherd (Jn 10) – A Political Perspective*, in *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies*,<sup>[9]</sup> moves the text away from its mystical aura of the usual image of Jesus with a sheep around his neck, to its political and transformational meanings based on Johannine studies which see a historical tradition underlying the Fourth Gospel in terms of response to Roman imperialism and persecution. Citing conclusions from R. Bultmann in his *The Gospel of John*, from F.J. Moloney's three works a) *Belief in the Word*, b) *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5-12*, and c) *Reading John: Introducing the Johannine Gospel and Letters*, as well as from J. H. Neyrey's *An Ideology of Revolt: John's Christology in Social-Science Perspective*, R. J. Cassidy's *John's Gospel in New Perspective*, R.E. Brown's *The Gospel according to John*" and other studies and commentaries, Rekha distills the meaning of this pericope in terms of the radical message of Jesus as a personal, socio-political declaration and call. Locating the date and place of composition of John's Gospel as being within the geographical and political context of Roman colonialism, and written sometime after 70 CE and before 110 CE, probably in the time of Roman emperors Domitian and Trajan, the passage can be appropriately read in the context of Roman economic exploitation and political oppression. The Second Book of Baruch

enunciates the problems arising from the perishing of the shepherds of Israel: the lamps are out, the fountains dried and the people are stranded in darkness and aridity. Baruch responds with the promise that shepherds, lanterns and fountains come from the Law and all will be replenished by following the Law. Rekha shows us how, in similar vein, the community of John looked upon Jesus as living water (7:37), as the light of the world (8:12; 9:5) and as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (10:14-15). Furthermore, as John 5:1 leads to the theme of “the feasts of the Jews”, in chapters 5-10, within the setting of the feasts, John reveals that the presence of the living God, once celebrated in these feasts, is now in its fullness in Jesus.

Going into the details of how the week-long feast of the Tabernacles was celebrated by the Jews, namely, 1) by a water libation ceremony, 2) by mounting of the light, and 3) by confession of faith in Yahweh the true God, Rekha expertly describes how these three aspects are reflected in the words of Jesus. The first, in Jn. 7:37, “If any one thirst, . . . come to me and drink”, the second, in Jn. 8:12, “I am the light of the world; the one who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life,” and the third, in Jn. 10:14-15 as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. The recognition of Yahweh as the true God is now the proclamation of Jesus as the one true God, the messianic Good Shepherd. Rekha Chennattu then goes on to show how this announcement of the reality of Jesus is not only made through the symbols and rituals of Jewish tradition but also through confrontation with the policies and practices of the Romans.

Following J. H. Neyrey and other scholars, Rekha shows that the Jews understand what Jesus is saying and therefore challenge his claim of equality with God. Jesus' use of Pslam 82 to defend himself against the accusation of blasphemy, has deep significance. The “gods” as in Exodus 21:6; 22:8, and in the traditions of West Asia, are the national guardians some of whom God chastises for their unjust behaviours; “gods” also refers to those who receive the Word of God. The defense of Jesus is: If those “to whom the Word of God came” are called “gods” then how can one “whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world” be accused of blaspheming! Rekha unfolds the Johannine irony, referring to P. Duke's *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, and explains the two layers of meaning in Jesus' use of the term “gods”. One level is that he is “son of God” like other leaders of the Jews, but another level is that he

claims a unique intimate union with the Father: “The Father is in me, and I am in the Father”. He is therefore the special revelation of the pre-existent Logos.

Psalm 82 also has important reference to the judgement of God on the leaders who oppress the weak and the orphans, and who are indifferent to human suffering. So Jesus represents the justice of God, doing the will of the Father as the true Son of God. The Good Shepherd passage is preceded by chapter 9 in which a blind man is healed, Lazarus is raised from the dead and people begin to have faith in Jesus, thus creating “political anxiety” among the Jews who rightly perceive the claims that Jesus makes, fear the challenge that Jesus poses to Roman authority and therefore decide to kill him.

Rekha further shows how the image of “shepherd” was a figure of speech in West Asia to refer to both civil and spiritual leaders, and was a common epithet for royalty and divinity. Roman emperors considered themselves as “lord”, as for example Domitian who gave himself the title of *Dominus et Deus*, “lord and god”. Jesus as the Good Shepherd is the true Lord and God who has the true authority to include or exclude a person from the society of God's chosen people - not the Roman emperor. The text presents four tests of authenticity, namely, a) entrance, b) orientation, c) action, d) relationship. This has implications for Indian society and for women oppressed by patriarchy. For while the Romans a) enter by force, climbing over the gate, b) are oriented to plunder and enrich themselves with the resources of others, c) engage in political action that deprives and destroys, d) are strangers to the people and do not know them, Jesus the Good Shepherd is radically the opposite. He enters by the gate; his orientation is to give life, d) his actions are to save, he truly known his own and is known by them. We can apply Rekha's interpretation to feminist theology for Jesus as the Good Shepherd is the saviour of the downtrodden, the one who challenges corruption and unjust social structures, who names the “thieves and robbers”. “The discourse on the Good Shepherd inspires us to ... “defend the earth from destruction; protect children and the unborn; respect women as life-giving partners; and to empower the poor and the downtrodden to shape their lives freely...” p. 102.

## ♦Evelyn Monteiro, SCC

Evelyn Monteiro belongs to the congregation of the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod. She holds a doctorate in Theology from Centre Sevres, Facultes Jesuites de Paris and is on the Faculty of Theology at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Religion, Pune and was head of the Department of Systematic Theology as well. She is currently at her congregation's headquarters in Geneva. She has made numerous presentations and contributions to theology and to feminist theology, both nationally and internationally. A summary of three of her articles is given below, the first being from a speech on the *Role of Women in the Church* given in 2003. <sup>[10]</sup>

In her speech on the *Role of Women in the Church* with reference to the Asian Synodal document *Ecclesia in Asia (EA)*, Evelyn Monteiro states that she will place the topic within the framework of the value of COMMUNION that EA advocates, and present woman through a re-reading and re-articulation of EA. While praising the document for opening up avenues of dialogue, collaboration and partnership within the Church, she expresses her pain at observing the absence of the female heart, head and hand in its planning and formulation, and its overtones of androcentric language.

She appreciates the Synod's proposal that where possible the local Churches in Asia should promote human rights activities on behalf of women (EA 34), that there be a change of attitudes, more involvement of women especially as evangelizers, co-workers, community builders and peace-makers. Sr. Evelyn notes that theme of 'communion,' occurs 75 times in *Ecclesia in Asia*, a theme which “opens a wide range of possibilities to foster fellowship, partnership and collaboration and to re-found the Church as People of God (cf. LG 9-18) which is in conformity with the founding intentions of Christ.” Communion “promotes a dialogical relationship to bridge the divides between different groups of people within the Church and counters the excesses of the hierarchical-juridical structures. After elaborating on the equalising dimension of communion Evelyn moves on to describing how communion is for mission by which the Church needs to have a preferential love of the poor and the voiceless, because the Lord has identified himself with them in a special way (Mt. 25: 40). The Church should therefore be on the frontiers and for women who have for too long been silenced.

“We have several examples of women who empowered by Jesus dared to break the gender taboos of uncleanness, and overcome gender stereotypes of temptress, prostitutes, home-makers that had confined them to hidden and silenced roles: the Samaritan woman who left her water jar at the well and went into the city to witness to the people the Good News of her encounter with the Messiah (Jn 4: 28), the polluted woman who declared in the presence of all her experience of being restored to wholeness (Lk. 8: 47), Mary “who had chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her” (Lk 10: 42), and Mary Magdalene who shared her God experience with the disciples “I have seen the Lord” (Jn 20: 18). These women were empowered to discover their inner power and to cross boundaries that had earlier forced them to be powerless, hidden and silenced.”

Through constant reference to the gospels, and to the women included in the Pauline Churches Evelyn describes what a true spirit of community and partnership of love entails, praying that the seed of World Church sown at Vatican II now sprouts in Asia's pluri-cultural and pluri-religious soil as 'Church of Communion'.

In her article, *The Silenced Speak*, in *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies* in 2001, <sup>[11]</sup> Evelyn Monteiro, after presenting the scenario of poverty, neo-colonialism and the silent exodus from the Churches, bemoans the conflicting tension between those who promote greater personal freedom and those who advocate greater authoritarian control. She quotes J.B. Metz, who highlights the need for the Church to move from being the 'Church for the people' to the 'Church of the people'. Along with Fiorenza she agrees that the Roman imperial authority influenced the Church's style of 'father power over' and restricted women's leadership which was scripturally legitimised (cf. Tit. 2:3-5; 1Tim. 2:11) by the Fathers of the Church. She traces how the ecclesiastical offices of the ordained hierarchy which were intended to be offices of service (diakonia) became offices of authority, power and glory and how the patrimony of authority came to stay. She advocates a re-styling of authority in the Church by re-imagining hierarchical authority as service (*LG* 24), recognizing the principles of collegiality (*LG* 22, 23) and legitimate diversity (*LG* 23), and re-covering the spiritual, charismatic character of authority. She points out how the same document unfortunately re-affirms patriarchal hierarchy (*LG* 18-

29), indicating that the Vatican II Council did not wholeheartedly endorse the equality of women in the Church.

Evelyn Monteiro then presents the Maternal Model as an alternative model, in which authority is life-giving unconditionally, without expecting or calculating a return. “It wills life, nurtures it and desires it to grow and be fulfilled.” She urges the need to demythologise the patriarchal understanding of the 'male sky God' of the Hebrew and Greco-Roman traditions and promote the 'female-earth God' of Eastern traditions, exemplified in the quote of Ursula King, in her article on *The Divine as Mother* (Consilium 206, 1989, p. 128) from the 18<sup>th</sup> century Hindu saint, Ramprasad:

“O Mother! Thou art present in every form;  
thou art in the entire universe  
and in its tiniest and most trifling things.  
Wherever I go and wherever I look,  
I see Thee, Mother, present in thy cosmic form.  
The whole world – earth, water, fire and air –  
All are thy forms, O Mother,  
the whole world of Birth and death.”

Evelyn speaks of the cosmic God who supports an egalitarian system of love and compassion, life and harmony, as expressed in the Hindu *Magna Mater, Shakti*, an endearing mother, who gives us an assuring presence and supportive care. Such maternal authority is impartial and inclusive, desiring the well-being and fulfillment of all; it is stewardship authority that is power sharing, prophetic charismatic, integrative, challenging and enabling. Empowering authority is transformative, founded on trust, mutuality and openness, fostering collaboration, participation and creative action as well as encouraging a goal-oriented atmosphere, and communication at all levels.

Maternal authority fosters a spirit of mutuality, interdependence and respect, gives a sense of purpose, meaning and vision and is modeled on Jesus, the empowered Son of God who heard, “this is my beloved Son, listen to Him” and said, “I have come to give life in all its fullness” (Jn 10:10). “He is Saviour, yes, but not an autocratic one who imposes his power on people. His empowering strategy is 'Ask ... knock...seek...' (Lk. 11:10).” Jesus respects human consent, “do you want to be healed?” (Jn 5:6) or human initiative, “come and lay your hands on her”.

Evelyn gives the re-interpretation “helper” to support the theme of partnership. She states, “With the fall of humans who fell a prey to the subtlety of the greed to have dominion over (Gen.3:7), the 'nakedness' (transparency) of authority is clothed with garments of control and domination setting limits to our life and power (Gen. 3:21). With the fall, patriarchy is given its first spiritual coating of divine sanction. In the fall, man and women lose their equal dignity (cf. MD 10). In this partnership model, the biblical reference to the woman as 'helper' (*ezer-neged*) gives a particularly different insight into the customary patriarchal understanding of authority as superiority, strength, dominion or power. In several passages, *ezer* also characterizes Yahweh as helper who creates and saves (1Chr. 4:4; 12:9; Nehemiah 3:19).”

In order to fulfill the dream of a new earth and a new heaven the silenced call for a metanoia of the whole Church “in order to build a civilization of love, equality, inter-dependency and inter-relatedness.

Evelyn Monteiro gave an uplifting presentation on *Mary Lives the Eucharist -Spirituality of the other and of otherness*, at a conference on “Living the Eucharist in South Asia”. The first part of the presentation deals with the “Eucharist as sacrament of the body: The womb of life and relationships”, describing how Mary, by becoming mother of Jesus, the Son of God, had the intimate task of transforming him into the voice of the oppressed in Israel. Quoting from Samuel Rayan's, reflections on the Eucharistic mother-child bonding, we are led to see the connections between the experiences Jesus had as Mary's baby with his words, at the Last Supper: “Take, eat, this is my Body; and drink, this is my Blood poured out for you” (Mk 14:22-4). Evelyn says, “As he did so, Jesus must have nostalgically recalled in spirit his boyhood days when his Mother placed before him his meals, and heard her say through that silent loving gesture: 'Son, take, eat, drink, and grow up: this is my body, my energy, transformed through love's labour'. Jesus would have had similar experiences when in the womb Mary surely communicated to him, 'Take, my Love, here is my blood coursing for you; take it, make it your own, unfold and blossom.' All these experiences may have flashed back as he shared his Body-Bread and Blood-Cup with his table-friends.”

Evelyn further extols the intimate spiritual bonding between Mary and Jesus: “As Jesus grew both in knowledge and wisdom gaining favour with God and humans (Lk 2: 40, 52), the mother-child relationship matured too. Mary accompanied and stood by Jesus through thick and thin – from the manger at Bethlehem (Mt 2:1) through the flight into Egypt (Mt 2:13-18) to Calvary (Jn 19:26-27), protecting her infant from the unfriendly world – the unaccommodating businessmen (inn keepers), the brutal political leaders, and silently shielding her young son from public ridicule and insults, and the piercing pain at Calvary. Mary herself and her relationship with her son matured, as Jesus went about decoding the Kingdom of God.”

Evelyn shows us how the Bread of Life breaks boundaries and creates a table fellowship with all kinds of people, in a spirit of mutuality, solidarity and total self-giving. Mary exemplifies the spirituality of discipleship and has the priestly power to console the other believers, nurture the community and bring them out of despair. The symbol of blood, so important to women and birth is a symbol of the total self-gift of Jesus, (Lev. 17:11) and is a sign of the new covenant that Mary is a model of, because “the new covenant that pledged God's love and faithfulness to the whole human race was sealed by the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God.”

The final part explains to us how the *Magnificat* is a Song of Revolution, indeed a triple revolution: cultural, political, economic, bringing a radical message of the type, which one can read in the writings of the revolutionary prophets of different ages, bringing to fruition Jesus' Eucharistic offering “This is my blood poured out for you.”

Evelyn describes how Mary appears as a bridge between the life of Jesus and salvation history, being a point of convergence for the great moments in his life. Mary demonstrates the total essence of “Do this in memory of me” the command to imitate Jesus' life and teachings and cross apparently impenetrable boundaries for the sake of solidarity and harmony.

“In this context, Jesus asks his followers: Who is my mother, my brothers and my sisters? (Mark 3:33). Mary's profound Eucharistic spirituality inspires us women to continue sprouting and blossoming

from South Asian soil as we build bodies in hope, break bread with joy and shed our blood in loving service.”

The bibliography Evelyn cited for this presentation is an important resource for feminist theology:

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R. K. Samy (Edit), *Mary in our Search for Fullness of Life*, Bangalore: N.B.C.L.C., 2006.

Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary, A Mature Committed Woman*, Colombo.

*This paper was transcribed from a recorded presentation of the paper and emailed to me by Virginia Saldanha.*

Out of more than thirty articles written by Evelyn Monteiro, the following are selected:

1. *Church and Culture: Communion in Pluralism, Delhi: ISPCK, 2004.*
2. *The Silenced Speak, Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies* 4:2 July 2001, pp. 83-94.
3. *Let A Woman's Longing and Fulfillment Be Hers, in Human Longing and Fulfillment: East Encounters West*, Kuruvilla Pandikattu & Josef Quitterer, Eds., Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2002, pp. 271-284.
4. *Who Will Break Down the Wall? in Dreams and Vision: New Horizons for an Indian Church: Essays in Honor of Professor Kurien Kunnumpuram SJ*, Rosario Rocha & Kuruvilla Pandikattu, Eds., Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2002, pp. 233-254.

5. *The Role of Women in Asian Churches*, in *Church in the Service of Asia's Peoples*, ed. by Jacob Kavunkal, Errol D'Lima and Mathew Jayanth, Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2003, pp. 359-375.
6. The Touch of the Untouchable: A Re-reading of LK 8: 42b-48, *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies*, January 2004, pp. 131-152.
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8. *Women in a Participatory Church* in *Church in the Evolving Society of Goa*, Delio de Mendonca SJ, Ed. Goa: New Age, 2005, pp. 47-55.
9. *Re-imagining Woman and Re- shaping Her Destiny: An Indian Feminist Reading of the Bent Body, Lk. 13: 10 -17*, in *Body and Sexuality: Theological – Pastoral Perspectives of Women in Asia*, Agnes M. Brazil & Andrea Lizares Si, Eds., Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2007, pp. 139-152.
10. *Asian Churches and Public Theology, Jeevadhara*, *Doing Public Theology in Asia*, Vol. XLIII, No. 253, 2013, pp. 49-63
11. ***One Indian Church – Many Churches of India: An Emerging Vibrant Church of Adivasis in Chotanagpur***, in ***Many Tongues, One Spirit: Local Ecclesiologies in Dialogue***, Thomas Cattoi, Ed., **Jesuit School of Theology, Santa Clara University, Berkeley, California, 2013, pp. 75-95.**

Books edited.

1. *Hope at the Dawn of a New Century*, Jacob Parappally MSFS & Evelyn Monteiro SCC, Eds., Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2000.
2. *Towards the Full Flowering of the Human: Interdisciplinary Studies on the Empowerment of Women*, Kurien Kunnumpuram SJ & Evelyn Monteiro SCC, Eds. Mumbai: St Pauls, 2011.

## ♦Sr. Pauline Chakkalalal

Sr. Pauline Chakkalalal, of the Daughters of St. Paul, holds a Doctorate in Biblical Theology. She has diplomas in Library Science from Delhi Library Association, Journalism and Public Relations, from Media Centre, Bangalore. Sr. Pauline is a member of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), Indian Theological Association (ITA), Catholic Biblical Association of India (CBAI), Society for Biblical Studies, India (SBSI), Indian Women Theologians' Forum (IWTF) & Satyashodhak, a Mumbai-based Feminist collective. She is associated with several NGOs and has served a two-year term as President of SBSI, an Ecumenical Bible Scholars' Forum. Pauline is actively engaged in women's empowerment programmes and Inter-religious and Ecumenical activities. She teaches Pauline Letters & Theology, Biblical Women, Biblical Spirituality, Mariology, Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics and Feminist Theology with special reference to India/Asia. Her favourite topics are Feminist/Prophetic Spirituality and Women in Church and Society. She conducts Bible Classes for laity in parishes, and retreat sessions for Sisters and Pastors. She has conducted numerous seminars and workshops for bishops, provincials, women and men religious. Recently she gave a course to religious of Patna region on *Partnership in the Mission of the Church: Sociological, Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiological Perspectives*.

Sr. Pauline's most recent paper was presented last month, October 2013, at the meeting of *Ecclesia of Women in Asia VI*, held at Bangalore from 14-17 November 2013, and is titled *Power of Paul's Liberative Vision: A Feminist Reading of Galatians 3:28*. She begins by warning us that though the Bible is God's Word it comes to us through human authors and is culturally conditioned and we need to sift out the androcentric and sexist elements in biblical texts. Though Pauline is an expert in various branches of theology and scripture studies, she is in her element when expounding on the meaning of the legacies of St. Paul of Tarsus. She reminds us that he is indeed a controversial figure in feminist circles because of his alleged denigration of the role and status of women (1Cor 11:2-16; 14:26-40). Her goal is to use contemporary feminist awareness together with the precision of hermeneutical method to respond to the hidden silences in the text and unearth the meanings it enshrines in order to “recapture

the original dignity and equality of woman and man (Gen 1: 26-27; Gal 3:26-28)”.

After analysing the different kinds of power and the gendered forms of hierarchy that exist in the world, and need to be deconstructed by the feminist enterprise, especially the ways in which women tend to submit to a “benevolent patriarchy”, Pauline gives a ray of hope by citing the organizations and collectives of women in India that aim at creating a society of equals, and applauds the efforts of **feminist scholars whose innovative strategies for transformative power and leadership through liberative hermeneutics and historical criticism brings other avenues for change. For example**, “inspired by Schussler Fiorenza's 'spiraling circle dance' of feminist biblical hermeneutics, feminist historian Jen-Wen Wang of Taiwan has worked out eight steps for this hermeneutical dance to help us read the historical texts critically.”

Part 1 examines the context, structure and exegesis of Gal 3:28. The context is the social character of the Galatians to whom Paul was writing, probably Jewish Christians who Paul calls 'troublers' (*oitarasontes*; Gal 1:7; 5:10), who had persuaded the Galatians to accept another gospel (1:6) with its emphasis on 'the works of the law' as indispensable for Christian living, rather than rely on faith. “The clause *hina ek piste s dikai th men*, “that we might be justified by faith,” expresses the ultimate purpose of the law in its function as *paidag gos* (attendant; Gal 3:24). With the coming of faith (v. 25), the Christian has access to sonship/daughterhood through faith in Christ. She/he is now justified by the faith *of* and faith *in* Jesus Christ (v.22; cf. Rom 3:21-4:25; Gal 2:20; Phil 3:9).” Pauline goes into great details to show the connection between the law and faith that St. Paul wants to emphasise: “They have become one in Christ; they have “put on Christ,” the underlying reality of Christian existence (3:26-27). “Justification” (*dikaio synê*) comes through faith *in* and *of* Christ, not through circumcision or the observance of the Law.”

By examining the structure of the text, and the opinions of several scripture scholars, including Fr. Joseph Patrapankal's *Women in Pauline Theology: A Realistic Appraisal*, in *Asian Horizons*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (June 2009), Pauline shows with painstaking detail, that in v.26 Paul makes a fundamental statement regarding the status of “all” (*pantes*)

believers as being “sons of God” and that Paul envisages social and cultural transformation, resulting from faith and baptism (v.28) which removes the partition between Jews and Gentiles asserting the *oneness* and *equality* of the baptised when he states, “I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Here too she explains how “sons” includes daughters because of the denotation residing in the text.

After a further lengthy microanalysis of Paul's words and their translation/implication we are led to understand the full import of “Gal. 3:28, *pantes gar hymeis heis este en Christo Iesou* (All of you are one in Christ Jesus)” which has to be understood in such a way as to denote that the new community constituted through baptism is a “*corporate personality*, a concept derived from the covenant theology of the Old Testament. “It is a dynamic reality of relationships rising above narrow domestic walls of caste, class, creed and gender-sex discrimination. It corresponds to the notion of *kainos anthr pos* in Eph 2:15 and Col 3:10.”

Now the stage is ripe for us to understand Pauline's analysis of the celebrated phrase, “ouk eni arsen kai thelu”, “there is no longer male and female”. After a meticulous study of the text, the words, the relationship to texts in Genesis, etc., Pauline convinces us that, the phrase “no male and female” in Gal 3:28c points to the quality of the “new creation in Christ” (Gal 5:6; Col 3:10). In her words, “It does not deny biological or physical differences between man and woman. Paul is referring to re-creation by baptism, whereby having put off (*apekdusameno*) the old *adam*, the Christian enters into union with the new *adam*, Christ (Col 3:9-10). This new creation in Christ (cf. Col 1:15) brings about the “oneness” of all believers in Christ (Gal 3:28d). The male-female relationship which had become one of subordination and domination can no longer be maintained in Christ Jesus.” At this juncture we are able to grasp the multi-faceted dimensions of sonship/daughterhood through faith in Christ, and to apply them to the Indian context in order to put into practice Paul's egalitarian vision of a society built on equality and freedom.

In Part II of her scholarly presentation, Pauline translates Paul's vision of transcending “divisions based on ethnic (3:28a), legal (3:28b) and gender (3:28c), into concrete concepts and strategies for creating a

discipleship of equals in the Indian Church and Indian society. After pointing the road from *women's ambiguity* to *women's commitment*, and the need for egalitarian structures in the Church, Pauline ends with the edifying conclusion: “Today when women have proven their effective leadership in many parts of the secular sphere, church authorities are admonished to initiate structural changes in the existing systems by encouraging women to participate in all ministries and at all levels of decision-making. Church's organizational structure and institutional power must undergo a process of conversion. Similarly, women should reclaim their rightful space in the church and allow feminine energies to reinvigorate its existence. This will eventually lead to the realization of Paul's liberative vision in Gal. 3:28 and empower the whole church to become a community of discipleship of equals.”

Pauline has authored three books:

1. *Paul, a Challenge to Christians Today*, 1992.
2. *No Longer Male & Female: Paul's Liberative and Unitive Vision in Gal. 3:28/ (M.Th. Thesis, 1993).*
3. *Discipleship – A Space for Women's Leadership? A Feminist Theological Critique* (originally a Doctoral Thesis, published in 2004; reprinted in 2007).

In 1994 she compiled and edited, *Gifts of Education: Gandhi's Visions and Realities*.

Some of her many articles are listed below:

1. *Paul – A Challenge to Christians Today*, Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1992.
2. *No Longer Male and Female: Paul's Liberative Vision in Gal 3:28*”, *Voices from the Third World*, Vol. 17, No. 2, December 1994, pp. 36-53.
3. *Must Women Cover their Heads? (1 Cor 11:2-16)*, in *Envisioning A New Heaven and A New Earth*, Ed. Lalrinawmi Ralte et al. (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), pp. 183-191.

4. *Women's Ordination and Priesthood - a Case Study*, in *Lived Realities: Faith Reflections on Gender Justice*, Elisabeth Joy, Ed., Bangalore: CISRS Publications Trust, 1999, pp. 134-144.
5. *Gender Justice: A Utopian Ideal? A Feminist Perspective*, *Journal of Dharma* Vol. 29, No. 2, April-June 2004, pp. 163-181.
6. *Re-Reading the Bible from a Feminist Perspective*, in *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (January 2004), pp. 109-129.
7. *Women Disciples of Jesus: A Feminist Reading of Luke*, in *Joskiran*, Vol. 1, No. 2, August 2004, pp. 139-157.
8. *Law and Religion: A Feminist Biblical-Theological Critique*, in *In God's Image*, Vol. 27, No. 2, June 2008, pp. 3-11. The same article was published also in *Journal of Dharma* Vol. 32, No. 3, July-September 2007, pp. 241-255.
9. *Women Religious and Today's Challenges*, *In Christo*, Vol. 45, No. 4 October 2007, pp. 227-231.
10. "Go and Tell" and "Women Should Be Silent: A Feminist Reading of Jesus' Commission and Paul's Injunction", in *Jeevadhara*, Vol. XL, No.236, March 2010, pp.148 – 168.
11. Inclusive Language: "A Biblical – Theological Perspective," in *Woman Man and God – Talk*, Julie George & V. Theckanath, Eds. Pune/Hyderabad: Streevani/Monfort Social Institute, 2013, pp.75 – 88.

### **Endnotes:**

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3. Saldanha Virginia, *Understanding Discipleship – A Woman's Perspective*, in *The Church in India in the Emerging 3rd Millenium*, (Ed.) Thomas D'Sa, Bangalore: NBCLC, 2005.
4. Monteiro Evelyn & Kochurani Abraham, (Eds.), *Concerns of Women: An Indian Theological Response – Proceedings of the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Indian Theological Association*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2005.

5. Mulackal Shalini, *Ruth, Esther & Judith*, Old Testament Volume - 6, Dalit Bible Commentary, New Delhi: Centre for Dalit/Subaltern Studies, 2011.
6. Kunnumpuram Kurien SJ, Errol D'Lima SJ Jacob Parappally MSFS, (Eds.) *The Church in India in Search of a New Identity*, Bangalore: NBCLC, 1997.
7. Shanti Margaret and Corona Mary (Eds.), *We Dare To Speak*, Worth Study Series, No. 1, pp. 7.
8. Gajiwala Astrid Lobo, Varghese Theckanath SG & Raynah Braganza Passanha, (Eds.), *Gender Relations in the Church – a call to wholeness and equal discipleship*, Streevani & Montfort Social Institute through MediaHouse, 2012.
9. Chennattu Rekha, *The Good Shepherd (Jn 10) – A Political Perspective*, in *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1998.
10. Monteiro Evelyn, *The Role of Women in Asian Churches*, in Jacob Kavunkal, SVD, Errol D'Lima, SJ, Mathew Jayanth, SJ, (Eds.) *Church in the Service of Asian's Peoples*, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Publications, Pune, 2003, pp. 359-375, pp. 361.
11. Monteiro Evelyn, *The Silenced Speak*, *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies* 4:2, July 2001, pp. 83-84.

## 18. Voices from the Margins

Not enough feminist theological writing has emerged from the rural and tribal belts, indigenous peoples and special ethnic groups. Therefore we are glad of the efforts made in the North East to bring local and feminist issues to wider attention. One impressive book that is a must read is, *Theologizing Tribal Heritage: A Critical Re-Look*, edited by Hrangthan Chhungi who is Dean of the Indian School of Ecumenical Theology.<sup>[1]</sup> The book emerged as the result of a National Workshop at Aizwal Theological College, Mizoram from January 15-19, 2008, which she organized. It contains three articles from a feminist viewpoint:

1. *A Critical Re-look at the Tribal Heritage from a Feminist Perspective*, Lalnghakthuami, the HOD of the Department of Theology at Aizwal Theological College.
2. *A Feminist Critique of Landing Patterns in Mizoram*, Lalrinawmi Ralte, who is Chair of the Department of Women's Studies, UTC, Bangalore.
3. *Theologizing Tribal Heritage: A Critique of Mizo Customary Laws from a Feminist Perspective*, R. L. Hnuni.

Another series on tribal feminism is that by Marije Sres who has authored a number of articles and books. One which won a Gujarat Sahitya Parishad award is her fascinating collection of essays on how a young woman deals with the issues of love, sex, relationships, work and marriage, dramatised in a series of conversations between an older woman Mira and her young friend Kavita. The title of the book is *Kavita sathe Samvaad*, Ahmedabad: Navbharat Sahitya Mandir, 1998 and the English translation is, *Talking to Young Women*, published by St Paul Publications in 1999. An earlier work is called *Girasma ek Dugri* Gujarati, 1994, translated as *To Survive and to Prevail*, 1996 both self-published. Gujarat Sahitya Parishad, Ahmedabad published a special edition in 2005. The book won a Gujarat Sahita Akademi award. It is a collection of short stories on the lives and experiences of the adivasi women of Sabarkantha. The intensity of Marija's writing attracted the praises of several Gujarati writers, and in 2005, on the occasion of its centenary, the Gujarat Sahitya Parishad declared it "one of the hundred most significant books in Gujarati literature." Eminent

writer Manubhai Pancholi 'Darshak' praised her saying, "This foreign *ben* brought the tribal woman into our literary awareness, something which we native Gujarati writers had not deigned to do." Another publication of Marija Sres is *Walking with Them: A Missionary's Experiences*, which was reprinted in *Sampark*, New Delhi in 2008.<sup>[2]</sup> She also wrote *First there was Woman*, Zubaan Publications, 2007 which is the English translation of an earlier work, namely, a collection of Dungri Garasiya Bhil folktales, collated and re-told.

In this bracket I also place the work of Bernadette Pimenta with prisoners and with another much neglected group, namely, women mental patients. She founded an NGO Sevadhan in 1991 to work with prisoners in Maharashtra, Mental Hospitals and Children's Homes. Her mission is to work with marginalized women and children. A home she visits frequently to provide care, compassion and much needed services is Snehalaya, a day care centre where she looks after 28 mentally challenged inmates. She runs Christian meditation centres, Benedictine style, in parishes in Mumbai, a garden school on her premises for disadvantaged children. Bernadette is Vice-President of the Indo-Global Social Service Society and Office bearer of the national Rugna Kalyan Samiti which oversees the work of Mental Hospitals in India. Similarly, the work of Sr. Prabha Varghese came to my notice these weeks. As Executive Secretary of the CBCI Health Desk she works indefatigably for health care of the poor in 19 states of India. In collaboration with the Catholic Hospital Association of India she does TB prevention and HIV/AIDS education outreach. Numerous women such as those mentioned above work, write, theologise, but not always in the public arena.

An artist, who has to be put on record for her feminist theology through art, is Françoise Bosteels who gives silent yet eloquent expression to her vision by placing her black dolls in different scenes, on tables, desks, cupboard tops and parapets. Her dolls are made of cloth and through their stance and position we get messages about woman's power and dignity. Her work is unique and dramatic scenarios are creative and full of meaning. Three of her books which have sold thousands of copies each are: 1. *The Dolls Speak*, Bangalore: Better World Publications, 2000, in association with Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). 2. *Through the Needle's Eye*, by Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2006. 3.

*Human Icons, Sacred Stories*, Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2010.

**Basically, theology is a reflection of faith in the context of one's daily life and anyone who contributes to the development of theology is a theologian in the broad sense of the word. Our personal experiences of faith, life – situation, talents and competence in various disciplines have a place in the process of theologizing.**

♦**Khristsevikas - Involved in Empowering**

Here is a touching testimony of Joyce Almeida, of the Kristsevikas:

It was in early 1965, that the group of young women, a lay consecrated group landed in Raipur to begin something unique, namely, involvement in agriculture, dairy farming and caring for children brought from broken homes. Their experience was limited though they had been theologically trained in Regina Mundi in Rome and had undergone spiritual training in Germany through the Pallottine Family of priests, sisters and lay people. At Raipur they were called The Khristsevikas. In those days Raipur was part of Madhya Pradesh, today it is in Chhattisgarh.

A few days after they landed in Raipur, while they were still searching for a place to establish their Centre, children of different ages were brought to them mostly given away by the parents and abandoned. There was Latha newly born and abandoned by the father as the young mother died at childbirth. Mother's death was seen as bad luck brought about by the child. Premsingh, a boy of 7 years with his two sisters 5 years and 2 years, were left with us by their father who never came back. Then there was Shakuntala, 9 years old, picked up from the railway station where she lived with 4 boys of her age. Shakun never remembered anything about her parents or home. Besides taking care of them, we educated them to high school, helped them with careers and got them settled in life. What gave me the greatest surprise in life was that in October 2013 one of the boys Hemlal, now settled in Raipur, organized a get together. They called me to Raipur to attend a “milan” in the village from which he hailed. He called together other of our students because he wanted me to see the process of empowerment that had taken place in each one of them.

Today Shakun is the Head Mistress of a government school. She is married and has a son and a daughter, owning her own house, and had recently become grandmother. Preamsingh, with the steady job of a driver has a family of five children and a grand child. His sisters are doing very well too. Prema is today a police officer and her sister Shama a staff nurse in a famous hospital. Latha went ahead with her studies, acquired a Masters degree in Hindi and teaches in a school in Bangalore. It was beautiful to meet them after so many years as well as to see the values they have lived and pursued and handed over to their children. It brought tears to all at the big gathering, when on the last day of the three-day Milan they came up to the stage to say to express their gratitude. These words I shall always remember. They said, "When our own parents gave us away it is the DEEDIS (Khristsevikas) who gave us everything and that is what we have become today." It was heartening to see them present with their families, all well employed in government or private jobs. As a policy we never let them become dependent on us. We told them after the basic education or skill training 'to stand on their feet'. As they shared and shared their experiences my heart was filled with the memories of the little girls and boys we had brought up years ago. Each of them had faced life and struggled through hardships and disasters holding on the faith that we instilled. It is the love of God that binds us together even to this day, wherever they are in the country. We were their mothers and we followed our theology of giving, nurturing, supporting, guiding, as God would want us to.

### ♦**Sr. Karuna Mary Braganza**

She is the recipient of numerous national and international awards, the culmination of which is the Padmashri, awarded to her on 26 January 2008 in recognition of her undying commitment to the people living on the margins of society, especially those in the remote locations of Torpa, Jharkand. After completing her Master's degree in St. Xaviour's college she taught at Sophia College Mumbai. During those days she heard God's call to Religious life and joined Sacred Heart Novitiate then in England. In the field of education, as Principal for over 20 years she built up Sophia College into a premier educational institution in Mumbai and eventually made it an inclusive educational hub by making a technical school and a school for the different abled children as part of the complex. In 1965, she was appointed to All India Association for Christian Higher Education (AIACHE). From her

college days she has had a special concern for the tribal poor in the district of Talasari and their education. This abiding interest in the poor, especially women, bore abundant fruit as she spends twelve years of her more active life in Thorpa, in Jharkhand, where she built up a hostel for girl students besides launching many Self Help Groups for Women. The name 'Karuna' (compassion) was given to her by her tribal admirers. She promoted ecology and research into herbs of Jharkhand. Her vision and commitment, her capacity to inspire others and secure their collaboration, her eagerness to reach out to all, lay and religious, the poor and the rich, people of all religions and cultures are truly amazing. She received the Padmashri award in recognition for her work in Torpa and for empowering education.

#### ♦**Sr. Jeanne Devos ICM**

She dedicated her life for the cause of Domestic workers in India. It was in 1985 Sr. Jeanne got fully engaged with the domestic workers. The first step she took was just listening, loving and responding to the women and forming Solidarity Groups which gradually multiplied, crossed borders and spread to 24 States, Sr. Jeanne spearheaded a new perspective in the mission for Domestic Workers, by revisioning the movement and giving it a specific identity, and building intense solidarity among them. Today, domestic workers have become an integral part of her life and she continues to walk this unbeaten path full of meaning by simply allowing herself to be an instrument of God. Many women religious from other congregations have come forward in support of the domestic workers and now thanks to Sr. Jeanne and her co-workers, it became a national movement. “The way was carved out to me by God and domestic workers helped me find it and gradually they became part of my life, my spirituality and mission”, says Sr. Jeanne.

#### ♦**Sr. Lissy Joseph**

The Founder of the Domestic Workers Movement in Andhra Pradesh has now extended her service to advocacy for migrant domestic workers, in the Gulf States. Her Organization is a member of the 'Migrant Forum Asia' and the 'Women & Global Migration Working Group'. Sr. Lissy being one of the pioneers to create trade union for the domestic workers, coordinated the national level preparation and training for a national federation of domestic workers in the country.

Sr. Lissy pioneered the work on children in domestic work in Andhra Pradesh and was the first one to start the bridge school for the children in domestic work which has now become a common phenomenon for all the children out of school in the state under Sarva Shiksha Abiyan.

♦**Sr. Sudha Varghese**

She received the Padamshree in 2006 for her service to Musahars, the Dalits of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. She is member of the Congregation of Notre Dame Sisters. She has been living and working at a village named Jamsaut in Patna district. For the past 22 years, Sr. Sudha untiringly devoted herself to the service of Musahars, the Dalits of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh who are considered as the most backward, lowest and poorest Dalits in Society. At 50 she secured LLB to fight for them in the court of Law. Her dedication is such that she cycles approximately 12 hours a day or about 30kms a day to visit the various centres and groups of Nari Gunjan and is fondly known as the 'cycle sister'.

♦**Sr. Noelline Pinto**

She dared to move away from the Institutional community living and lived in a simple life close to the people in a semi rural area. Her doors were open to all who came to her. Her project H.O.P.E started under a tree, since she had no resources. Sr. Noelline gathered women together with the intention to learn from each other. As she asked the women about their interests they said that they would like to learn something by which they could earn their own money. Because some of them had a natural talent for handicrafts they started to teach each other in various skills and to produce different kinds of handicrafts. On her travels in Europe, Sr. Noelline had contacted some boutiques which were willing to sell some of the articles they received from the women. Later on, after earning the first money and with the kind support of others the project got some land and a tinshed. Soon Sr. Noelline could amplify her program and offer projects for development of women, women empowerment and organize social actions on different themes.

♦**Sr. Lucy Kurien**

As a young girl while working in Mumbai she felt called to the Religious life and joined Congregation of the Sisters of the Cross. As a junior sister she was working with Sr. Noelline and rediscovered the

call to be with poor and destitute women who were coming for help. An experience of a pregnant women being burned to death by her husband in the vicinity shook her and prompted her to commit her life for the cause of women - victims of domestic violence and shelter them in homes. She has 40 shelter homes across the Country for the destitute.

### ◆**Philomine Marie MMS**

Philomine Marie MMS is a legendary figure in the history of the Church's Socio-political involvement in India. In 1984 it was Sr. Philemon Mary who went on fast, for the cause of the fisher folks, which lasted for twenty two days. When finally she had to give in, she was left as an emaciated lump of skin and bones. She has become a 'totem pole' of the clan of the vibrant, commented social activist of the Church today.

The time changes began to take place in the Church and in the Congregations, preferential option for the poor and serving at the grass-roots began to be the watch words of the time. A trained pharmacist and an MBA holder in hospital administration decided to step out of the hospital into the midst of the marginalized. It was a time of freedom and enlightenment, commitment and activism, contentment and zeal. Her being present to the fisher peoples and the most disadvantaged still continues. At the age of 82 she says that she is prone to reflection, mysticism and action and struggle. Fr. Thomas Kocherry, Srs. Alice Lukose, Threamma Praikkalam MMS, Patricia Kurivinakunnel, Regina Neriamparambil were all committed to the cause of the fish workers and were in the forefront along with Sr. Philomine.

### ◆**Manju Kulapuram**

Manju Kulapuram, a Holy Cross sister gives her personal testimony of nine years of work among Muslims, after which in 2008 she left to become National Secretary of the *FORUM of Religious for Justice and Peace*, and editor of the forum newsletter. The newsletter covers the life and ministries of many religious women who are living icons of feminist theology. Manju shares her life and ministry among rural Muslim families.

“I was closely connected with Muslim families in six villages, which come under three Gram Panchayats of Nawabganj Block, Bareilly District, U.P. For the first three years I stayed with one of the Muslim families in Sattuiya village. Then I shifted to a family in

Gargaia village. During my time here, I ran twenty-two non-formal literacy centres of one month to three years duration, and formed twenty Self Help Groups. **Due to ignorance and illiteracy there are lots of superstitions and sadly, there are many untimely deaths since the people depend on 'quacks' for medicines.** They believe that people get sick due to evil spirits, so they go to 'Miyas' and bring 'Tabeez' to hang on the neck of the sick person, plus blessed water to drink. Fear of God is the basis for their religion. But they don't follow the teachings of Koran with regard to social life. Some grab money and others starve.

Women are mostly confined to their houses. They live in fear of being dismissed from the home at any time. Men, women and children use bad words, referring to the private parts of the women in all their conversations without any inhibition. Wife beating is very common. Husbands consider their wives as their private property to be used and fired, as they want. Soon after marriage they become victims of various kinds of violence. Women following the 'culture of silence' keep quiet for fear of becoming victim of more violence and also for the sake of safeguarding the family prestige. The girl child is considered a liability and 'Paraya ghar ka dhan' (wealth of somebody else's home). Women are not allowed to enter the mosque. During menstruation they are considered impure and are not allowed to read the Koran nor pray namaz.

“My work with these communities has been to set them on the path of liberative transformation using literacy and liberative education as the means to help them be conscious of their oppressions, analyse them and overcome them by making personal choices and decisions. I taught them that property rights and economic security are a must for women so that they are not thrown out on the road at any time at the whims and fancies of their husbands. I have helped them to become free of superstitions and a false fear of God. I use the images of a Creator God as a loving Mother and Father, and the teaching that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God without any discrimination. I supported them to consider each other as brothers and sisters and to imbibe Jesus' saying, “I have come so that you may have life, life in its abundance”. I helped them realize that God's will is that all live in human dignity and respect; that each woman, man, child bloom to the fullness of life to fulfill our mission on earth. I worked to

create awareness and empowerment programmes that helped the women become self-confident and acquire mobility.”

♦**Sr. Daphne Furtado RSCJ**

Finished her B.Sc. in Newcastle, Ph.D. from London University in 1981 and courses in bio-ethics from Georgetown University. The paper she gave at a UNESCO in Bangkok was such a success that she received the Erasmus Mundus scholarship to study bio-ethics in Nymegen, Louvain and Padua. She designed courses that became the basis for the Mumbai University course on Analytic Chemistry. She is currently Vice-President of the Asian Board of Bio-ethics.

♦**Sr. Livi Rodrigues RSCJ**

Political scientist and historian, got her doctorate from the London School of Economics and her thesis *Rural Protest and Politics – A Study of Peasant Movements in Western Maharashtra, 1850-1950*, was published by Oxford University Press in 1998. Her work is relevant to feminist resistance and the need to integrate gender issues with larger protest campaigns, e.g. anti-colonial, dalit, tribal, movements. She covered historical uprisings such as the 1875 Deccan riots against British rule, non-Brahmin movements, agitation of the Warli tribes 1946-1948, etc. Sr. Livi also began the Centre for Women's Studies and Development in Sophia College during her 15-year tenure as Principal.

♦**Sr. Muddita Sodder RSCJ**

Who is based in the tribal belt near Patna runs an eco-friendly campus where students and people of all ages can experiment with an organic, nature-oriented life-style. Her ashram is called Tanumitra. Her stubborn feminist dynamism she has expressed through a unique “donkey spirituality. She says:

“The donkey symbolised for me stubbornness, stupidity, foolishness, one that needed to be led. Hailing from a Goan *Chardo* family, with an independent mind and a liberal upbringing, I was proud and stubborn, but the donkey was never something I wanted to be. The Holy Spirit was active and for the first time in my life, I identified myself with the donkey in the Nativity scene. It slowly dawned on me that the donkey had a very special role in the whole Incarnation Story. The Lord had precise need of the donkey all through his life. It was the means of transport and communication for the Holy Family and a living

example for his teaching and preaching... During Mary's pregnancy, in all the sojourns from Nazareth to Bethlehem, then to Egypt and from there to Israel and back to Nazareth, the Lord had need of the donkey. The donkey was privileged to live in the house of the Lord and listen to all the intimate conversations, witness His birth and be of help all through his early childhood and in the family carpentry profession carrying wood and finished goods between the market and the workshop... Despite being very difficult at times, my Donkey Spirituality has worked for me and continues to bring me special graces and blessings. Grace alone prodded me to give up worldly values and offer to fill in needs in my Congregation-Sophia College, Mumbai, as Mistress of Discipline, in Jaiharikhal, Garhwal District, to start a new mission and Ashram with Vandana Mataji, in Kazli near Talasari, Maharashtra to work with the Adivasis and now in the Patna Mission, North India!

♦**Sr. Angela Rodrigues, FC**, is head of St. Elizabeth's Nursing Home, Mumbai. She is one of India's first sister doctors.

♦**Sr. Joel Urumpil/Jyoti Behn**

In one of the women's meetings this year, Sr. Joel Urumpil told us that after ten years of work in Nepal and one year in Patna with an NGO dealing with Dalit issues she did a socio-political analysis course which gave her a radical perspective. She had been part of the famed movement in Bihar that had been spearheaded by Rob Currie SJ, Sr. Pilar MCJ and others. Later she joined Sr. Marie Tobin MMS in 1988 working with social activists in Bihar. She was grateful that her religious superiors supported her to be part of a secular group whose leader was a fiery upper caste Rajput male! She learnt to trek more than 30 kilometres to her convent until she decided to stay in a mud hut and experience daily life in the village. This was a desert, mystical experience which emerged from her daily contextual reflections with her group correlated with readings of strong women in the Bible. She felt that she saw true Christianity, Hinduism and Islam in action-for-changing-the-world. Sr. Joel was appalled at the harassment women underwent in the home, in the community, in the political sphere and even from the police. With creativity and courage she protected the leader from 20 policemen who had come to arrest him. Campaigns for land ownership, protests against government corruption, child

marriage and child labour, were on her agenda. She studied the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA), the Right to Information Act (RTI), and the Forest Rights Act (FRA) in order to save women from oppression. She worked for 25 years in Chatra District and can celebrate the changes she has facilitated among the women as well as the learnings she gleaned from them. The women were at one time able to release 2500 acres of land and have formed an organisation of 1200 women to bring about changes in systems and structures at all levels. Sr. Joel is known as Jyoti Behn and she sees herself as a religious social activist bringing the freedom of God's Word to the oppressed women so that they together can rise successfully in solidarity and love. Her story is written up in one of the issues of the *Forum of Religious for Justice and Peace*.

#### ♦Sr. Rose Paul FMM

Some of the contributions of Sr. Rose Paul are:

1. A 1989 audiocassette of songs called *Vivahamanjari* which has been created to conscientize women on their dignity and equality as well as on the need for abolishing dowry.
2. Three articles in *We Dare to Speak* edited by Sr. Shanti and Sr. Corona Mary, viz.,
  - a) *Influence of Existentialist Thought on Theology and Women's Liberation.*
  - b) *Process Philosophy - Its Influence on Theology.*
  - c) *Myth of Goddess Gauri.*
3. *Women And Sacraments of Life: Weaving New Counter Rituals*  
Eds. Rose Paul & Shanti ICM.
4. *Recreating Psalms: Worth Study Series – IV*, composed and edited by Shanti, Pushpa Jyothi & Rose Paul.

Few of the Women Religious who require mention are:

**Vandana Mataji** who wrote on theological method in the book *“Theologizing in India.”* She opposed the Western cerebral, conceptualistic theologies which produce more God- talkers than God-realizers. According to her, theology is faith seeking religious experience. She made a paradigm shift in the matter of inter-religious dialogue.

**Sr. Margaret Shanti ICM**, a Theologian who was the Director of Women's Studies Centre at Dindigul has written extensively on women and the Church.

**Sr. Jyoti BS**, was the Vice President of National CRI and one of the four founder members of Mater Dei Institute for Women's Theology. Currently she is the South Asia Coordinator of AMRAT (Asian Movement of Women Religious Against Human Trafficking).

**Sr. Mary Lobo MCJ**, promoted theological education of women religious. **Dorothy Fernandes PBVM** and **Shanti Fernandes RSCJ** are two religious who have translated Theology in to grassroots activism.

The remarkable journey of some of the Women Religious Lawyers who brought remarkable changes in the lives of women are : **Sr. Avila Hsp** who was a Special Public Prosecutor, **Sr. Merlin Hsp**, **Sr. Mary Nalpathamkalam MMS**, **Sr. Gracy Thomas**, **Sr. Reetha Susai FMM**, **Sr. Mary Scaria** and few more.

#### ♦**Sr. Cyrilla Chakalakal FSMA**

Sr. Cyrilla, the sister of Sr. Pauline presented this paper titled *My Experience of Women Living Eucharist in Asia*, for the South Asian meeting of women held in Bangladesh. She has just been elected General of her congregation. She belongs to the Congregation of the Franciscans of St. Mary of the Angels and has worked for years with the homeless, street children of Mumbai. She says, “My experience with the street kids with their bulging bellies, sunken eyes, open wounds, and with a body covered with dirt and sores, gave me many new insights into human poverty and human nature. Much more, it took me to greater depths in my life as a Christian. It is here that I found my life as a religious worthwhile, my Eucharist really meaningful.”

Cyrrilla begins her thirteen page presentation with a scene that is now commonplace for her. “I saw a very fascinating scene which opened my eyes to many realities. I caught sight of a group of street children gathered together in a secluded corner of the railway platform; each with his own little packet either picked up from the dustbins or collected from food thrown out from the nearby restaurants. All laid out their food and ate to their heart's content. The joy on their faces at the sight of the bread and the swiftness with which each shared their food

was immense... The meal united them, the bread brought them together, no one was in want. That scene reminded me of the agape that Jesus spoke about. At the scene of the multiplication of the loaves and fish Jesus said “I am the Bread of life come down from heaven” (John 6:35) Gandhiji said “If God were to come today, he would come in the form of bread.” Cyrilla then extols the value of bread as symbol of life, community, eternity, embracing all ages and bringing together the three worlds of the cosmic, the human and the divine. She then connects this scene to Jesus for feeding was very much a part of his life. “The parable of the Good Shepherd is an expression of the great risk taken by the Good Shepherd in protecting and leading the sheep to greener pastures so that they may all have abundant food (Jn.6:1-18). It manifests the compassion of the Good Shepherd towards the hungry sheep (Mt.14:12-23). In the Eucharist Jesus gives himself as bread (Jn.6:33), feeding us with his own body and blood.”

She describes in detail how the Eucharist is a gift of life, love and sacrifice, how she had to do a real kenosis in order to be part of the lives of beaten up, hungry, broken-hearted street children, understand how they took part in petty crime and listen to their agonising histories. Her theology led her to become bread for others, like Jesus. She worked for them, making them her central concern, trying to provide a sense of home and chances for a better life. “They were convinced that they were 'nobody, they had no place, no voice, no chance, no one to call their own. They required food, nourishment, love, acceptance, security and we did all we could to give them an experience of their lost childhood, to meet their unending demands, to heal their brokenness, to build them up. We adjusted our time-table to be available to them. Certainly now I know that being a mother is a full time service... Jesus is the gift of the Father with a mission to give life. A love made perfect in self-sacrifice by Jesus and renewed in the Eucharist requires from us nothing less than a life-style of sacrificial love, *nishkamakarma*, for the salvation of the world.

Cyrrilla continues her beautiful rendition of the Eucharist as givenness for others by telling a number of real life stories of women, give us word pictures of women's daily toil and sufferings. She tells of the tragic murder in November 1990 of two of her sisters Sylvia (45 yrs) and Priya (35 yrs) who were in charge of a home for street children. The aftermath was as painful as the initial shock because of the attempted defamation of

the sisters and the defensive attitude of the official Church. “I became more acutely aware how vulnerable are poor and women, and how they too live the passion death and resurrection of Jesus”.

After long and emotion-filled sharings, Cyrilla concludes reminding us that the Eucharist is an act of thanksgiving, it is a sacrament of love, it helps us to bring forgiveness into lives to bring unity, charity grace and future glory, taking the commonplace experiences of life and transmuting them into sacredness. “It is obvious that we have a long way to go, but together we keep moving as sisters and brothers, supporting, encouraging, challenging, by being mystics and prophets with a firm hope that a different world is possible.”

#### ♦**Metti Amirtham SCC**

Sr. Metti Amritham of the Holy Cross congregation and head of the Holy Cross Centre in Chennai is a feminist theologian who has been honoured with an award for her creative work *Thagaval*, (Vaiharai Publications: Dindigul, 2006). *Thagaval* which means “message”, was one of the books selected in the year 2008 by the Tamil Nadu Library Association to be placed in all the Government libraries of Tamil Nadu. Metti did her M.Th. from Vidyajyoti, Delhi from 1996-1999, and her Ph.D from the Department of Christian Studies, University of Madras, in 2008. From August 2009 to March 2010 Metti was International Visiting Fellow at Woodstock Theological centre, Georgetown University, Washington DC to undertake post-doctoral research on *Women in the Sacred Space: Evolving a Theology of Spatiality in its relation to the Female Body*. She has been a guest lecturer of Systematic Theology since June 2000 and has taught over fifteen subjects in various theologates, seminaries and universities. Metti has also written two lessons in the text-books for the Institute of Correspondence Education, Christian Studies, University of Madras, Chennai, under the title “*Contextual Theologies*” in *Leading Thinkers, Movements and Issues* for the MA degree course, 2nd year, paper VII. She has given presentations and workshops in India, Italy, Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, and the US. She has several forthcoming publications two of which are:

1. *Hinduism, Gender and Sexuality* in Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender & Sexuality Studies, ed. Nancy Naples, University Of Connecticut, USA, 2013.

2. *Shakti Shanti* in Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender & Sexuality Studies, ed. Nancy Naples, University Of Connecticut, USA, 2013.

Besides her book *Women in India: Negotiating Body, Reclaiming Agency*,<sup>[3]</sup> and her regular features in magazines, Metti has written many articles in Tamil and more than thirty in English some of which are selected below:

1. *We shall burn the oppressive myths*, in *Marai Aruvi*, 17/4, Oct-Dec. 1993, pp. 33-43.
2. *Spirituality of Women*, in *Paaraiyai Pilakkum Vergal* ed. X. D. Selva Raj, St. Paul's Seminary, Trichy: St. Paul's Publications, 1994, pp. 226-239.
3. *Introducing the Gospel of Mark*, (Tamil) *Vivilia Virunthu*, 2/2 April 1995, pp. 2-9.
4. *Reading the Bible from the Street Corners*, (Tamil) *Vivilia Virunthu*, 3/3, June 1996, pp. 21-23.
5. *Jesus the Feminist*, in *Parimaanangal*, Cyril SJ, Ed., Beschi College, Dindigul: Vaiharai Publications, 1996, pp. 125-142.
6. *Dignity of Rahaab*, (Tamil) *Vivilia Virunthu*, 1/9 (Sep 2000): 14-17.
7. *Emerging Women in the Church of Tamil Nadu*, *Marai Aruvi* (A Tamil Theological Quarterly), Vol. 25, Nos. 3 & 4, July-Dec. 2001, pp. 130-142.
8. *Lamentations of Job – A Feminist Reading*, (Tamil) *Vivilia Virunthu* 2/2, April 2002, pp. 7-10.
9. *Indian Feminist Hermeneutics*, *Vaiharai*, Vol.8, No.4, Dec. 2003, pp. 54-69.
10. *Dalit Women's Education and Empowerment*, in S. Lourdasamy Ed., *Education For Empowerment of Dalits: Perspective and Priorities*, New Delhi: Centre For Dalit / Subaltern Studies, 2004.
11. *Bodily Representations of Hindu Goddesses: A Feminist Perspective*, in Agnes M. Brazil, Eds., *Body and Sexuality: Theological – Pastoral Perspectives of Women in Asia*, Manila: Ateneo De Manila University Press, 2007, pp. 252-272.

12. *Women Confronting Stigma in Tamil Nadu*, in Mary Jo Iozzio, Eds., *Calling for Justice throughout the World: Catholic Women Theologians on the HIV/AIDS Pandemic*, New York: Continuum, 2008, pp. 174-182.
13. *Retrieving Motherhood as an Agent of Peace*, in Judette A. Gallares, and Astrid Lobo, Eds., *Feminist Theology of Liberation Asian Perspectives – Practicing Peace*, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2011, pp. 221-240.

#### ♦ Pearl Drego

Pearl Drego is a certified psychotherapist and spiritual director who focuses on family unity, gender equity and ecological restoration. She has been Visiting Faculty at colleges in India and universities abroad, e.g. for ten years at the Rajkumari Amrit Kaur College of Nursing, New Delhi, three years at the Natesan Cooperative Training College, Madras, ten years at the National Council for Education, Research and Training, (NCERT), New Delhi, for its International Diploma Course in Counselling. She was also Visiting Faculty at the University of San Francisco, University of Utrecht, De La Salle University, Manila, etc. Pearl has given workshops, retreats and presentations in more than twenty-three countries, training professionals, in skills of group psychotherapy and family counselling with special reference to victims of gender violence, child abuse, psycho-social deprivation, addiction systems and dysfunctional parenting. She has paid nine visits to Japan to work for the CRI there. She conducted several workshops over a period of ten years for the Religious of the Sacred Heart, Japan, and the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, Australia. Pearl has given keynote addresses at conferences in Canada, USA, Holland, Zurich, Switzerland and South Africa. She is a group process facilitator and a chapter facilitator, e.g. she facilitated the Loreto provincial chapters in Kolkatta and the Presentation chapter in Liverpool. She has made presentations at conferences of Indian bishops and Asian bishops.

Since 1980 Pearl is one of the founding members of the TACET Academy of Social Transformation and Mental Health, New Delhi, where she is currently located as Director and psychotherapist, organising/conducting a weekly schedule of training/treatment in psychotherapy, counselling, spiritual direction, gender equity, eco-community strategies, etc. An example of TACET's projects is that of

building a market place in Raghbir Nagar for 2000 women pavement vendors of old cloth belonging to the Gujarati Wagri community, by coordinating with the Delhi Slum Wing to organise and mobilise the women over a period of four years from 1998 to 2001. Pearl has led TACET volunteer teams in workshops for tribal domestic workers, abandoned or disadvantaged children of places such as Loreto School, Entally, Missionaries of Charity in Delhi, Kolkatta, St. Mary's Orphanage, Kolkatta, Merici Convent, New Delhi, etc. She currently does the self-development courses for primary school teachers of Delhi University, who are training for the Bachelor of Elementary Education, many of whom are first generation learners besides coming from low income rural and urban settings. Pearl has more than forty articles and presentations on theology of which a selection follows:

1. *Women in the Church*, Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection, September 1981, pp. 382-388. (Address delivered at the Second Bishop's Institute for Missionary Apostolate, held in Ponmudi, Trivandrum, Nov. 20-30, 1980).
2. *The Mission of the Local Church and the Inculturation of the Gospel*, Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection, June-July issue Part I, October 1981, pp. 423-435, Part II.
3. *The Annuciation - Advent Meditation*, Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection, Nov. 1991, Vol. 55, No.11, pp. 653-661.
4. *Searching for a Place - Joseph with Mary*, Word and Worship, Vol. XXVI, October-November 1993, Nos. 8 & 9 pp. 282-294.
5. *Celibacy and Sexuality*, opening address at first conference of Catholic Indian Psychologists titled *Sexuality, Celibacy and the Religious Quest: Psychological and Clinical Issues from a Psycho-Anthropological Viewpoint*, 2001, in Conference Papers 2001.
6. *Patriarchal Attitudes in the Church and Gender Sensitivity*, Resource Text for 19<sup>th</sup> National Conference, "Redefining Our mission in Family and Church" of Council of Catholic Women, Archdiocese of Delhi, 1-4 November 2002, pp. 22-31.
7. *To Be Life Giving Like Mary*, Women Leader, Monthly Newsletter of the Council of Catholic Women, Vol. 39, No. 8, August 2004, pp. 1-3. Excerpts from an address given on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2004 in New Delhi.

8. *From Gender Violence to Gender Freedom – An essay in psychosocial transformation*, Word and Worship, Vol.1, No. 1, Oct – Dec 2010, pp. 170-188.
9. *Contextual Theologies - An Overview* in Journal of Indian Theology Vol. III, No. 1, Jan- April 2010, pp. 42-61; Presentation given to Bishop's Colloquium, 9-11 July, 2009.

Below are three selections from Pearl's articles in secular journals:

1. *Marriage and Family Therapy* in *Conference Notes*, Christian Counselling Conference in Asia, 23-26 August 1995, Wesley Methodist Church, Singapore, pp. 86-94.
2. *Freedom and Responsibility: Social empowerment and the altruistic model of ego states*, in *Transactional Analysis Journal*, vol. 36. No. 2, April 2006, pp. 90-104. (Keynote in Scotland 2005).
3. *Bonding the Ethic Child with the Universal Parent: Strategies and Ethos of a Transactional Analysis Eco-community Activist*, *Transactional Analysis Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 3 July 2009, pp. 193-206. (Keynote in South Africa), 2008.

## **19. Other Voices to be Read and Celebrated**

The book *Ecclesia of Women in Asia: Gathering the Voices of the Silenced*, edited by Evelyn Monteiro and Antonette Gutzler, which has been mentioned above, has fascinating articles by several Indian women. *An Indian Critique of the Cult of Ideal Womanhood* is written by Pushpa Joseph FMM, who is teaching theology and is a Post-doctoral Fellow of the Department of Christian Studies, University of Madras; *Religious Traditions and Attitudes Towards Women in Ecclesia of Women in Asia*, by Lilitta Lewis, member of the Congregation of Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany, who has a Masters in Christianity and is doing research on Feminist Theology at the Bangalore University; *Church in Asia: Following the 'Mystery Model or Imitating the 'Mastery' Model* by Clemens Mendonca, who is Executive Director of the Institute for the Study of Religion, Pune, and has a degree in Theology from Tübingen University. I tracked two more articles by Clemens Mendonca, *The Eucharist and Daily life* in *The Eucharist and Life*, edited by Kurien Kunnumpurum SJ and another on *The Role of Women in Hindutva*, in the book *Towards the Full*

*Flowering of the Human: Interdisciplinary Studies on the Empowerment of Women*, edited by Kurien Kunnumparam and Evelyn Monteiro.<sup>[4]</sup> Sr. Philomena D'Souza FMA has written many interesting articles, a recent one being, *The Bible on Consensual Abuse of Women*. This article which was emailed to me by Virginia Saldanha, and is not yet published.

I also put on record the works of Valerie M. D'Souza, who was the only woman presenter at the 29<sup>th</sup> annual ITA Seminar held in Bangalore in 2006. Her paper on *Spirituality of the Laity – A Woman's Perspective* in the Indian Theological Association publication *Laity in the Church – Identity and Mission in India Today*, in which she uses the “Alabaster Jar” as symbol of women's spirituality, is unique in its method and conclusions.<sup>[5]</sup>

In recording, reminiscing and reviewing, I have given space to writings from the 1970s and 1980s because these are not so easily available in bookshops or as soft copies. They were written in the days when computers were rare and Church personnel used typed and even handwritten manuscripts. Indian clergy authored books and leaflets using their own genius, though the theological community stretched beyond national boundaries. International faculties, seminary professors and international library collections were always part of the Indian Church's inheritance, even as foreign missionaries and scholars began to indigenise theology. Many of our first generation male theologians were sent abroad for their foundational training. Later internet facilities created a boom in communication, downloads from the net propelled Indian theologians into cyberspace and more international travel, conferences, study tours further increased the interface contacts with scholars of other nationalities. At various times, quotations from international journals and books were understandingly hyped up, and original work starting from an Indian base took a down slide, until the demands of Indian identity and contextualising in the mid twentieth century made local creativity a necessity. These factors and trends are reflected in the journey of Indian Catholic feminist theologians, of whom 95% belong to religious congregations. There are only a handful of lay women theologians in the Catholic Church in India who have formal degrees in theology, even while scores of lay people who have diplomas in scripture or theology are actively

teaching, preaching, creating communities of love, by putting their learning into action - often supported by Catholic charismatic groups.

## **20. Conclusion**

The grace of feminist theology is that it shows women the pathway that leads from darkness and shadow to the radiance of peace, out of the throes of violence and humiliation to the dignity of safety and security. Feminist theology is not only for the classrooms of theologates and novitiates, but for the field, the home, the street, the kitchen, the library, the podium, the pew, the courtroom, the conference, the liturgical lectern, the stage, the factory, the railway station, the crèche, the government office, the grocery shop and the banner billowing street march. It is about the mobility and mobilisation, the re-education and resistance, leadership and liveliness, the dynamism and declarations of women being who they are, creating a new world of equality and saving all who suffer from their slaveries. Out of God's deepest mercy, a dawn will come for women, a light will come for those women shadowed by death and the power of the most high will guide their feet into the way of peace, where they will be safe and secure

Today feminist theology in the Catholic Church in India has come of age. It is holistic, scripture-based and connected to woman's daily life, to changing attitudes and creating vibrant communities involved in larger issues of humankind. It is focussed on individual transformation, as well as on ushering in new economic values and structures, on resistance to the domestication and marginalisation of womankind and the resurgence of joint woman-man, girl-boy action groups who create new family cum neighbourhood life-styles within which each woman can make her own free choice to be herself, choose her education, career path, occupation and political stance, as well as to be aware of her personal, cultural, political, marital, sexual, reproductive and other rights; pray, dance, speak out, travel, possess goods, use resources, love, feel, say 'yes' or 'no', eat, play, study, write books and articles, preach, compose liturgies, and above all, feel her holiness and her communion with God deepened by a freedom to participate at the highest levels of ministry and mission.

## Endnotes:

1. Chhungi Hrangthan Ed., *Theologizing Tribal Heritage: A Critical Re-Look*, Delhi: CWM/ISET-ECC/PCI/ISPCK, 2008.
2. Sres Marije, *Walking with Them: A Missionary's Experiences*. Poligrafi, 47/48 (vol. 12, 2007) Ljubljana, and re-printed in *Sampark*, New Delhi, 2008; Indian Studies, Slovenian Contributions”, (Ed.) Lenart Skof
3. *Women in India: Negotiating Body, Reclaiming Agency* USA: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011; Delhi: ISPCK, 2011
4. Mendonca Clemens, *The Role of Women in Hindutva*, in Kurien Kunnumpuram & Evelyn Monteiro, Eds., *Towards the Full Flowering of the Human: Interdisciplinary Studies on the Empowerment of Women*, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2011.
5. *Spirituality of the Laity – A Woman's Perspective in Laity in the Church – Identity and Mission in India Today*, A. Pushparajan & X. D. Selvaraj, (Eds.) ITA Publications 2010.

## Salutation to Mary

O Mary, Grace-filled and Gracious Woman  
River of Life, Woman of Holiness, Daring and Love  
Beloved of God and all humanity  
Rekindle and rejuvenate our Life  
Nourish our spirits, replenish our strength

To you do we cry as we struggle with  
Rejection, banishment and fear  
As we recover, and help others recover from  
Deprivation, despair, and brutality

O Mary, O Woman of Mercy,  
To you do we lift up our agonies  
As we change structures of subjugation and humiliation

O Mary, Foundation of Compassion and Courage  
To you do we turn for guidance as we claim our woman rights,  
Our space and our freedom;  
Affirm and accenuate our leadership and holiness  
Our wisdom and vocabulary

To you do we send up our yearnings for  
Belonging, validation and justice;  
Revitalise our power in the midst of powerlessness.

O Mary, turn upon us your fountain of divine radicality  
You for whom the mighty were thrown down from their thrones  
The lowly raised up

And after this our journey from exile to homecoming  
Celebrate with us our shared victory over oppression and death  
Rejoice with us in our fruitfulness and harmony

Reveal to us the face of Jesus  
As we birth a new world of lovingness  
In the partnership of sharing communities.

Oh warm-hearted, firm-footed, valiant,  
Truth-seeking, dynamic Woman  
MARY.

*Pearl Drego*  
*10 March 2013, Meeting of Women for Change.*