

Christian Women Reformers in India: Strategies of Transformation

印度基督教女性改革者： 轉型策略

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Introduction

There is a long tradition of Reformation in the history of Christianity in India where different social and religious reformation movements took place responding to contextual realities. At different junctures of history many Indian Christian women played crucial role to transform society to build just inclusive communities. In fact the ever changing topography of social and geopolitical realities, reformation movement whether social or religious takes place in contextual grounding. In this article an attempt is made to share stories and strategies of transformation by three Indian Christian women reformers at different junctures of history. Despite their vulnerabilities these three women exhibited prophetic courage and wisdom to reform society. Through different strategies of transformation they made efforts to purge society of complex

religious rituals, norms, cultural practices, superstitious beliefs, patriarchal ideologies, inhuman practice, religious sanctions and laws that oppress girls, women and widows in order to build just inclusive communities. The three Indian women are:

- **Pandita Ramabai**, who pioneered female education in India, paving way for women, girls and widows' emancipation from social and religious oppression in the 19th century.

- **Shanti Solomon**, who gave expression to women's spirituality reflected in action to promote justice, peace, healing and reconciliation in the world ripped apart by hatred, violence and vengeance in the 20th century. The ripple effects of her work continues till today.

- **Mary Roy**, who challenged her own family members, church, community and discriminatory 'Personal Laws' prevalent in India depriving Christian women equality in matters of inheritance and paved ways for new laws.

【摘要】 在印度的基督教歷史中有一個悠久的宗教改革傳統，當中不同的社會和宗教改革運動都是對社會現實的回應。在歷史的不同時期，許多印度基督徒女性在改造社會以建立包容性的社區方面發揮了至關重要的作用。本文從不同的歷史時期闡述三位印度基督徒女性改革者的轉變故事和策略。儘管她們處於弱勢，但她們表現出改革社會的先知勇氣和智慧。通過不同的轉型戰略，努力清除社會中複雜的宗教儀式、規範、文化習俗、迷信信仰、父權意識形態、不人道行為、宗教制裁以及壓迫女孩、婦女和寡婦的法律，以建立公正的包容性社區。這三名印度婦女是：

- **Pandita Ramabai**，印度女性教育的先驅，在 19 世紀為女孩、婦女和寡婦從社會和宗教壓迫中解放鋪路。

• **Shanti Solomon**，表達了女性的靈性，在 20 世紀充滿仇恨、暴力和復仇的世界中，提倡正義、和平、治愈與和解。她工作的漣漪效應一直持續到今天。

• **Mary Roy** 挑戰她自己的家庭成員、教會、社區和歧視性的「個人法」，這些都在印度流行，剝奪了基督徒女性在繼承問題上的平等，Mary 的行動為新法律鋪平了道路。

The contributions of Shanti Solomon is widely acknowledged by Asian and global ecumenical movement as she worked within the church, with Christian women and was involved with prayer movement. Pandita Ramabai is recognized as Christian social reformer. Mary Roy is globally recognized as a woman activist and reformer in the history of feminist movement in India. However she does not adequately find space in Indian Church history. This is because many Indian churches still think that women's activism and feminism is part of secular movement and not agenda of the church or ecumenical movement. However her struggle for justice was an eye opener for Indian churches to rethink of its mission strategies and introspect how to be a true 'ekklesia' or body of Christ that does not exclude women but promotes equality and gender justice.

Historically and traditionally ecumenism is understood as 'unity' among the churches and 'Christian unity'. But in order to understand Indian ecumenism especially from Asian feminist perspective, ecumenism needs to be re-thought and placed within the wider search for the unity of humankind. In fact the word 'ecumenical' comes from the Greek word '*oikumene*', which meant, '*the whole*

inhabited earth'.¹ Therefore ecumenism or modern ecumenical movement is not merely confined to internal developments and relationship within the on-going church.

Ecumenism calls for healing schisms, divisions and the brokenness of the world or society, pursuing justice and peace in midst of violence to weave culture of peace and standing in solidarity with those who are poor, oppressed, marginalized made vulnerable by the powerful economic, social, and political forces of our day for the welfare of the 'whole inhabited earth'. Renowned South Asian ecumenist Dr S. Wesley Ariarajah states that our affirmation that God creates all life, preserves it, and seeks to bring it to its fulfilment demands that we collaborate with God and with all who are seeking to build up the values of God's Rule in a fragmented world. Wider ecumenism is part of this process.²

Mary Tanner, former President for Europe of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and moderator of 'Faith and Order' Commission of WCC states that in today's context the ecumenical community is focused on an ecumenism of action, on travelling together on a pilgrimage of justice and peace. Violence women faced are exposed in starkest ways.³ Feminist perspective of Asian ecumenism today calls for ecumenism of action, a pilgrimage of justice, peace, healing and reconciliation. Christian women's voices, stories of challenges and their efforts of reforming and transforming society to build just inclusive community are new opportunities to Asian ecumenical movement and through the ecumenical movement to the churches.

¹ S. Wesley Ariarajah, "Wider Ecumenism", *Current Dialogue*, Issue 47. (June 2006), accessed November 28, 2018.

<http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/cd47-15.html>.

² Ibid.

³ Mary Tanner, "Opportunities and Challenges Women Offered and Still offer to the Churches and the Ecumenical Movement". *Monastero di Bose*, accessed on November 28 2018, <https://www.monasterodibose.it>.

According to Mary Tanner, churches need to listen attentively to the challenges women raise and the opportunities for renewal, for wholeness and holiness to which they point.⁴ This notion of wider ecumenism and nexus between women's activism and Indian ecumenism is still evolving.

Centuries after centuries the culture of violence on women, girls and children exists in India and is increasing at alarming rate. In the present context gender based violence has become pandemic in India. The culture of violence on women and girls in India is not merely a national crisis but also poses challenges to Indian Churches and the Asian ecumenical movement that reflect ecumenism in action to promote gender justice. According to Swami Vivekananda, "*It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing.*"⁵

This article provides scope to draw insights from strategies of the three women reformers and contextualize it in promoting gender justice and building just inclusive communities of peace. However it is important to briefly highlight the status of women in India in different centuries to understand the strategies of transformation used by women to respond to needs of their time.

Status of Women in India

According to R. Kalaiyarasi the status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Lata Singh, "Reflection of Swami Vivekananda's Views on Women Education in Current Scenario." IOSR Journal of Economics and Finance, Volume 5, Issue 5. (Sep.-Oct. 2014), 40.

From a largely unknown status in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of women's rights by reformers in the modern time, the history of women in India has been eventful. The status of women in India has been traced by dividing into historical phases 'Ancient society,' 'Medieval society,' and 'Modern society'.⁶

Ancient Society

The status of women in ancient society can be divided in two periods (a) 'Early Vedic' and (b) 'Later Vedic' period.

Early Vedic Period: Historical studies and the scriptures indicate that Indian woman enjoyed a comparatively high status during the early Vedic period (2000 B.C. to 1000 B.C). According to Puja Mondol, the status of women was fairly high and they enjoyed equal status with men. They were not secluded from men and freely participated in public life. They attended great assemblies and state occasions.⁷ Women in the early Vedic era excelled in the sphere of education and allowed to enter into the *Gurukulas* along with boys. There are also instances of female Rishis, such as Ghosa, Kakhivati, Surya Poulomi, Urvashi etc. During the *Rig Vedic* period women studied the Vedas and composed hymns. The *Rig Veda* contains about one thousand hymns, of which about ten are accredited to Maitreyi, the woman seer. Other women who composed Vedic hymns were Ghosha, Lopamudra, and Gargi who were regarded as the prophetess of the Vedic period. Child marriage and polygamy was unknown. *Gandharva 'Vivaha'* or love marriage and remarriage of widows were allowed. There are a number of references to the

⁶ R. Kalaiyarasi, "Status of Women in India." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Volume 20, Issue 2, Ver. III (Feb. 2015): 51-55, <http://www.iosjournals.org>.

⁷ Puja Mondol, "Women: Essay on Position of Women in India," *Your Article Library*, accessed February 24, 2018. <http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com>.

custom of 'Niyoga' where a brother of the deceased husband could remarry the widow.⁸

Later Vedic Period : The position enjoyed by women in early Vedic period deteriorated in later Vedic period (Puranic or Smriti periods). Puja Mondol opines that the imposition of Brahmanical rules and code of conduct, rigid restrictions imposed by caste system and joint family system were the main reasons for lowering of status in this period.⁹ Nitisha opines that most probably, the woman's status deteriorated due to the introduction of non-Aryan wife. The non-Aryan wives did not have any knowledge of Vedic rituals they lost many privileges which they enjoyed in the earlier period¹⁰. Child marriages and polygamy came into existence. Some of the 'Dharamsastras' mentioned about the prohibition of 'Niyoga' and widow remarriage. Widows were required to spend a life of penance and austerity as their life was regarded as a curse. 'Sati'¹¹ was being practised. In this period, women were regarded just as a means of satisfying the physical desires of men.

Indian scriptures during this period were filled with paradoxical statements about women. In many places women were regarded as Goddesses and other places through religious sanctions they were undermined and their status was no better than slaves and chattels. The *Smriti* writers preached that the wife should look upon her

⁸ "Status of Women in Vedic Period." *Women in India*, March 13, 2014. <http://studyofindianwomen.blogspot.in/2014/03/status-of-widow-in-vedic-period.html>.

⁹ Mondol, "Women: Essay on Position of Women in India." *Your Article Library*.

¹⁰ Nitisha, "Status of Women in Vedic Period." *Your Article Library*.

¹¹ Sati is an obsolete funeral custom where a widow immolates herself on her husband's pyre or takes her own life in another fashion shortly after her husband's death. In fact most of the times women and child widows were forced to sacrifice their life on husband's pyre. Mention of the practice can be dated back to the 3rd century BC, while evidence of practice by widows of kings only appears beginning between the 5th and 9th centuries CE. The practice is considered to have originated within the warrior aristocracy in India, gradually gaining in popularity from the 10th century AD and spreading to other groups from the 12th through 18th century CE. The practice was particularly prevalent among some Hindu communities.

husband as God. Mondol reveals to us that in the '*Mahabharata*' epic it was also mentioned that there was no creature more sinful than man, and woman is the root of all ills.¹²

Status of Indian Women in Medieval Society

The medieval period was known as dark ages for women in India as their position totally deteriorated. Practise of *sati* among some communities, child marriages were common during this period. In some parts of India, the '*Devadasi*'¹³ system or temple prostitution was introduced where women are sexually exploited as temple slaves. Medieval India saw many foreign conquests, which resulted in the decline in women's status.¹⁴ It is during this period the system of '*Purdah*' was introduced by Muslim communities later rigidly followed by Hindus to protect their women as invasion increased. Under the '*Purdah*' system, not only were women required to live in a secluded apartment in the house but also they had to dress in apparel which completely covered their body excepting the eyes. The practice of '*purdah*' became so rigid that women were forbidden even to visit the holy shrines and had no opportunity for education.¹⁵ '*Jauhar*'¹⁶ was also introduced by Rajput Hindu community. In both the systems, liberty of woman was curtailed and restrictions were imposed by community. Life for women became burdensome and they lived in fear. The women lost their entity in the 18th century and till the beginning of the 19th

¹² Mondol, "Women: Essay on Position of Women in India." *Your Article Library*.

¹³ 'Devdasi system' or 'Temple Prostitution' still continues today in India and has religious sanction.

¹⁴ Asmita Singh, "Medieval India: Women's Dark Age." *We Women*, accessed February 25, 2018. <https://wewomen.wordpress.com>.

¹⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁶ 'Jauhar' was the Hindu custom of mass self-immolation by women in parts of the Indian subcontinent, to avoid capture, enslavement and rape by any foreign invaders, when facing certain defeat during a war.

century women were totally and forcefully made to yield to male superiority, physically and intellectually.

Status of Women in Modern India

Status of Indian Women began to change radically during the modern period. Historically the period after 1750 A.D is known as the modern period. The status of Indian women during this period can be divided into two stages:

Status of women during the British rule in India

After the fall of the Mughal Empire at the decisive Battle of Plassey (1757 A.D) the British people established their complete political supremacy over the Indian people. During the British rule, a number of changes were made in the economic and social structures of Indian society. Though the quality of life of women during this period remained more or less the same, some substantial progress was achieved in eliminating inequalities between men and women in education, employment, social right. In the 19th century and early period of 20th century, during the Indian renaissance, social reformers became aware of the social, political and religious cultural degradation of Indian society and became conscious of individual freedom. The social reformers struggled for the improvement of status of woman in Indian society. Peary Charan Sarkar first started girl's school in 1847 at Calcutta. Under this period only with the help of Governor Bentinck, Raja Ram Mohan Roy had succeeded to abolish *sati* system from India. This period witnessed many legislative enactments being enforced by legislation for protection and promotion of woman like Act of Sati (abolish) 1829, The Hindu Widow Remarriage Act, 1856, The Child Marriage Restrain Act of 1929 etc.

In 1880s, the 'Zenana Missions' of the Baptist Missionary and the Church of England *Zenana* Missionary society in India played a

crucial role in not only engaging in medical mission for women but had expanded their ministry, opening schools to provide education for girls, including the principles of the Christian faith. The 'Zenana' Bible and Medical Mission, was involved in recruiting female doctors, both by persuading female doctors in Europe to come to India and by encouraging Indian women to study medicine in their pursuit of conversion. 'Zenana' mission helped break down the male bias against colonial medicine in India to some extent. Women's participation in the workforce as well as in other activities increased during this period but majority of women still grappled under scourges of patriarchal violence.

The status of women in post independent India

The status of Indian women has radically changed since independence. Both the structural and cultural changes provided equality of opportunities to women in education, employment and political participation. With the help of these changes, exploitation of women, to a great extent was reduced. The constitution of India has greatly enhanced the status of Indian women. The Government of Independent India undertook a number of legislative measures to safeguard the interests of women. For example The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, The Equal Remuneration Act 1976, The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012, Domestic Violence Act 2005, etc. However despite of the benevolent laws, India still is the fourth dangerous country in the world for women to live in and girl child to survive. Various forms of violence are still perpetuated on women and girls. The culture of rape and sexual violence has increased in India. The 'Times of India' reports that, there is one rape in every 20 minutes in India.¹⁷ In the

¹⁷"One Rape in every 20 Minutes." *Times of India*, accessed August 25, 2013. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/One-rape-every-20-minutes-in-22040599>.

post-modern era of neocolonization women faces other forms of violence, continue to face harassment, discrimination and abuse within home and workplace. Girl child is still regarded as burden and female infanticide and foeticide is common practice despite the fact government of India prevents sex determination before birth. The greatest problem is the mindset of people has not changed much and there is a culture of silence on gender-based violence.

Pandita Ramabai: The Pioneer of Female Education in India

In an era where Indian women were considered 'lower than pigs' and 'thought to have no mind of their own',¹⁸ a Christian woman Reformer and activist named Pandita Ramabai ushered a new chapter in history of women's education in India and Indian church history. Ramabai was one of the early pioneers in the field of woman's education and rebelliously championed women, widows and girl child rights in the 19th century. She was regarded as the forerunner of modern Indian feminism.

Background and Experiences that Moulded Ramabai to Social Reformer

Ramabai's family background, experiences as a woman and her losses and pain moulded her to be a woman reformer. She was born in an Asharam in Gangamal forest run by her father Anant Shastri Dongre, a Chitpavan Brahmin on 23rd April 1858. Her father, though member of Hindu orthodoxy was a reformist in his own household. Breaking the tradition he taught his child bride Laxmi 'Slokas' in

¹⁸ Yoel Charan, "Pandita Ramabai is the Indian Woman of the Millennium", All About God Net, accessed November 29, 2018. <http://www.allaboutgod.net/profiles/blogs/pandita-ramabai-is-the-indian>.

Sanskrit. This enraged the Brahmins in his community and being ostracised he was forced to move in forest where he opened his ashram. Struck by poverty Anant Shastri Dongre travelled with his family in different parts of the subcontinent as pilgrims and teacher-studying and reciting sacred texts in public and talking about female education. Hence, by the age of fifteen Ramabai was well travelled and fluent in various languages like Marathi, Hindi, Kanarese, and Bengali and was also a learned Sanskrit scholar.¹⁹ In a time where child marriages especially of daughters was common practice defying the social norm her father left her unmarried till age of sixteen years. At age of sixteen years she became an orphan when her parents and sister were killed during famine in 1877. After her parents death she and her brother travelled throughout India lecturing on female education and social reform. When she arrived to Calcutta seeking job in Calcutta University by that time she was already a famed lecturer. Because of her high academic stature she was awarded the title 'Pandita' and 'Sarasvati'.²⁰ Unfortunately her brother died and Ramabai married his brother's friend Bipen Behan Das Medhavi, a Shudra by caste. During her time marriage of Brahmin woman to low caste man was totally forbidden and was regarded as crime. In Manusmriti it is mentioned in "*Utman sevmansto.....*" – 8/365. "*In case a man from a lower caste enjoys sex with a woman from a higher caste, the person in question is to be awarded the death sentence.*"²¹

¹⁹“Ramabai:India’s First Feminist”, *Madras Courier*, accessed February 28, 2018. <http://madrascourier.com/biography/pandita-ramabai-indias-first-feminist>.

²⁰ Aisha Khan, "Overlooked No More: Pandita Ramabai, Indian Scholar, Feminist and Educator", *The New York Times*, (14 November 2018), accessed November 28, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/14/obituaries>.

²¹ Hirday N. Patwari, "The Status of Women as Depicted by M8anu in the Manusmriti." *Nirmukta*, accessed February 28, 2018. <http://nirmukta.com/2011/08/27/the-status-of-women>.

Along with her husband she studied western ideas and philosophy. Ramabai was also influenced by the reformist group 'Brahmo Samaj', which sought to integrate the teachings and insights of different religions. Ramabai began to read a Bengali Gospel of Luke given to her husband by a Baptist missionary while they were living in Assam. Unfortunately her husband died a year after her marriage and she was left alone with an infant baby girl Monorama whom she gave birth. As written in 'Madras Courier' the collection of all these losses and pain seemed to have shaken her faith but her experience of widow gave her a purpose of life. She became a wounded healer. Ramabai dedicated her life for emancipation of widows, child brides, high caste Hindu women and vulnerable women.

In 1883 she converted to Christianity during her visit to England for higher studies and was severely criticised by the Hindus. It was seen as an act of betrayal to her religion. However, she was very critical about colonial patriarchal Christianity and she chose to be non-denominational Christian.²² Her encounter with Christianity and the Anglican Church, within the imperial, Orientalist and patriarchal framework, was problematic. But Ramabai found her new religion to be a source of spiritual sustenance.²³ Ramabai realized the importance of international church networking to promote women's education in India. Ramabai was deeply influenced by the work of the Anglican nuns or sisters who dedicated their lives serving the marginalized. She worked closely and had the support of an Anglican Order of Sisters who worked in Poona, the Community of St Mary the Virgin. The High Anglican sisters' support realized Ramabai's

²² Madras Courier.

²³ Meera Kosambi, "Multiple Contestations: Pandita Ramabai's educational and missionary activities in late nineteenth-century India and abroad", *Women's History Review*, Volume 7, No. 2 (1998): 193, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf>.

independence, refusing to accept anything on the authority of the Anglican Church which is patriarchal.²⁴

Plight of Widows During Ramabai's Time

Meera Kosambi reveals to us during Ramabai's time, widowhood was constructed as punishment for sins in previous lives and bore stigma of inauspiciousness and a widow became as household drudge, expected to live with meagre food and subjected to various forms of exploitation and even sexual abuse.²⁵ Ramabai realized that western education and laws passed during the British Empire to prevent violence on women alone cannot emancipate Indian women and widows. She realized there is need for change in mindset and women themselves and they should learn to break barriers for their own emancipation. Ramabai realized emancipated women and widows in India need protection of women and an egalitarian system of education which is free from patriarchy. In order to achieve her mission to promote female education, on the invitation of Bombay Presidency, she travelled to Poona and took up the cause of women's education.²⁶

Arya Mahila Samaj

The '*Arya Mahila Samaj*' was started on November 30, 1882 by Pandita Ramabai with the aim of empowering and educating each woman to live a life of dignity. '*Arya Mahila Samaj*' aimed to improve women's literacy and health by abolishing child marriage, enforced widowhood and '*purdah*' system. According to Geraldine Hancock Forbes, Ramabai wanted the *Arya Mahila Samaj* network to provide support to newly

²⁴ Ronald S. Ward, "The Story of Ramabai- Founder of Mukti Mission", *Knox Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia*, accessed on November 29, 2018. <http://www.knoxpcea.org.au/index.php>.

²⁵ Meera Kosambi. *Pandita Ramabai: Life and Landmark Writings* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 5.

²⁶ Ibid.

educated women through weekly lectures at home where women could meet as friends. She predicted, they would begin to define the role of educated women and gain self-confidence. And even as women and housewives, they can influence in public sphere taking responsibilities to help during emergencies like flood, famine, plagues etc.²⁷ Ramabai's '*Arya Mahila Samaj*' had rippling effects and influence on women throughout India. Similarly, in 1886, Swarnakumari Debi (1856–1932), Rabindranath Tagore's sister, started '*Sakhi Samiti*' (Women's Friendship League) to spread knowledge among women and widows. In 1900 in Bombay, Parsi women founded the '*Stri Zarothoshti Mandal*' (Parsi Women's Organization).²⁸

Medical Education for Women

Ramabai also emphasized and engaged in advocacy for the need for women to be educated as doctors to cater to Indian women. Those days there was strict restriction on women due to '*Purdah system*'. Society would not allow women to be treated by male doctors. The British Commission on Education sought her opinion regarding the need of female doctors and teachers. Ramabai responded that the country needed more female doctors and teachers to remove the stigma women face daily in terms of health care and education.²⁹

Sharada Sadan

On 11 March 1889 Ramabai established '*Sharada Sadan*' also popularly known as 'House of Wisdom,' a home for learning, a residential school for upper caste widows. The objective of empowering women and girls in this school was along with education, there was vocational training

²⁷ Geraldine Hancock Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1999), 66.

²⁸"History Feminist Association in India." *All India Deprived Community Support Centre*, accessed March 1, 2018.

<http://www.indiancommunities.org/2016/11/09/history-feminist-associations-of-india>.

²⁹ Kosambi, 183.

and providing alternative shelter. According to Kosambi, through this venture Ramabai sought to liberate women and ‘despised widows’ from narrow domesticity and oppressive homes to the public sphere as educated, useful and income earning members of society. This was a paradigm shift in history of reformation in India. The principle of religious freedom and neutrality was strictly followed in the Sadan. Though Ramabai herself converted into Christianity but her agenda was not religious conversion. However, when she prayed with her daughter she left her doors open and slowly other girls started joining her.³⁰ According to Ramabai:

“People must not only hear about the kingdom of God, but must see it in actual operation, on a small scale perhaps and in imperfect form, but a real demonstration nevertheless.”³¹

Mukti Mission

Another ground breaking contribution of Ramabai was establishment of ‘*Mukti Mission*’ (Mission of Liberation). During the closing of 19th century India was grappling with two natural disasters, famine and plague. Girls, women and widows being most vulnerable in India society were most affected.³² This led to the establishment and phenomenal growth of ‘*Mukti Mission*’ in Kedgaon in an hundred acre plot. By mid-1900, there were 2500 residents housed in the ‘*Mukti Sadan*’, ‘*Krupa Sadan*’ (home of grace for the disgraced women), ‘*Priti Sadan*’ (home of love for the aged and infirm), ‘*Sadanand Sadan*’ (home for boys) and ‘*Bartimi Sadan*’ (home for the blind). Her ministry in ‘*Mukti mission*’ also catered to the differently abled. Her own daughter Monorama studied Braille in England and was teaching Braille to the blind.

³⁰ Kosambi, 180.

³¹“Pandita Ramabai Founder of Mukti Mission.” *Jeevan Marg*, accessed March 1, 2018. <http://www.jeevanmarg.com/testimonies/pandita-ramabai-founder-of-mukti-mission>.

³² Kosambi, 185.

Minnie Abraham, an American missionary with the Woman's 'Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church' was greatly influenced by Ramabai's passionate work in the emancipation of women.³³ In 1898 Abraham left the Methodist post to work with Ramabai at the (non-denominational) Mukti mission in Kedgaon. Abrams was an advocate of Wesleyan holiness theology, viewed baptism in the 'Holy Spirit' as a separate work of grace occurring after conversion and designed to sanctify and empower believers for evangelism. Ramabai also heard of the Welsh revival which began in late 1904. Revival encompassed a wide spectrum of Christians, from Anglicans, Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, and Presbyterians, to members of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, London Missionary Society, and the Young Men's and Women's Christian Associations.³⁴ Ramabai and Minnie Abraham joined with others in praying for the restoration of apostolic power. Ramabai longed to see revival among the helpless women in India. So she started prayer circles. Shortly after revival began at 'Mukti Mission' in 1905, Abraham began taking "praying bands" of young women with her to hold services at mission stations. Village evangelism spreading the gospel and 'Good News' became a part of ministry also of 'Mukti' but Ramabai retained Mukti Mission as non-denominational.

Ramabai died in 1923 suffering from bronchitis.³⁵ The Missionary Alliance took charge of Mukti Mission after her death in 1923 till 1970. After 1970 Mukti Mission came under Inter-Denominational Board of

³³ Minnie Abrahams, *School of Theology - History of Missiology*, accessed November 27, 2018. <http://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/a-c/abrams-minnie>.

³⁴ Gary B. McGee, "Baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire! The Revival Legacy of Minnie F. Abrams", *Assemblies of God Enrichment Journal*, accessed November 28, 2018. http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/199803/080_baptism_fire.cfm.

³⁵ "Mukti Mission," accessed March 1, 2018. http://www.mukti-mission.org/mukti/About_Mukti.htm.

Management.³⁶ The ‘Pandita Ramabai ‘Mukti Mission’ in Kedgaon is still very active today, providing housing, education, vocational training, and medical services, for many needy groups including widows, orphans, and the blind. ‘Mukti Mission’ has spread different parts of country and even in Australia.

Shanti Solomon: The Midwife of Peace, Healing and Reconciliation

Shanti Solomon from Church of North India was a renowned women ecumenist of the 20th century who initiated women’s global ecumenical prayer movement - ‘Fellowship of Least Coin Movement’. Mrs Solomon’s vision of ‘transforming practices’ and ‘collective transformation’ united Christian women from the Protestant and Orthodox traditions in Asia and different countries in world to reflect their prayer in action to weave peace, justice, healing and reconciliation. FLC movement altered the ecumenical history in understanding women’s contributions of promoting peace and justice in the world. Even today FLC creates ripples to bring about transformation in the world. This movement was born out of midwifery of Shanti Solomon during a time when the world was still grappling due to the aftermath of violence caused by World War II especially to women and children.

Family Background of Shanti Solomon

Shanti’s father hailed from an ordinary Hindu *Baniya* (business) caste family in Uttarpradesh state in Northern part of India. She was born on 10 June 1920 in Baduan, Uttarpradesh.³⁷ As a child Shanti witnessed

³⁶ Gary B. McGee, “Baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire! The Revival Legacy of Minnie F. Abrams”.

³⁷ Isaac John Newton, “Shanti Solomon Memorabilia.” *Voice of Christian Ministries India*, accessed March 1, 2018. <http://www.voiceofchristiansministries.org/fnote.html>.

the murder of her own father at the age of six by his relatives as they were angered due to his conversion to Christianity. This escalated the family dispute over property. Despite their poverty and various adversities Shanti's widowed mother though did not have opportunity of education was able to provide Shanti a secured and happy childhood and never neglected the education of her daughters. Shanti was educated in Christian schools and colleges run by Christian missionaries. As a young adult before her marriage she pursued the career as teacher in A.P Mission School in Dehradun. Her marriage was fixed to Ruben Solomon who was fifteen years older than her and got married in 1950 and became a widow in 1960.³⁸

Birth of Fellowship of Least Coin Movement

A life transforming experience happened in Shanti's life in 1956 that resulted birth of the FLC movement. Being actively involved in women's ministry in her own church she was invited by Ms Margaret Shannon of the Presbyterian Church USA in 1956 to be a member of ecumenical women's team comprising of seven women leaders who were visiting from various parts of the world for women to women pilgrimage of peace. The main purpose of this visit as an act of solidarity was to spread the message of love, peace, healing, reconciliation and hope in midst of violence experienced by some Asian countries like Japan, the Philippines and Korea affected and devastated by the World War II. This ecumenical team of women through this pilgrimage of peace visit was also seeking methodologies of promoting advocacy and creating global awareness regarding the need to heal pain, bitterness, hatred and importance of reconciliation to build a culture of peace. Women, girls and children are the worst victims of any war. Women and girls from Asian countries like Korea, Philippines were forced

³⁸ Shanti Solomon, *A Legend and A Legacy: An Autobiography* (New Delhi: ISPCCK, 1997), 11.

into sexual slavery. Korean women were taken by the Imperial Japanese Army as sex-slaves and ‘comfort women’ in occupied territories before and during World War II. According to Erin Blakemore the end of World War II did not end military brothels in Japan. In 2007, *Associated Press* reporters discovered that the United States authorities allowed ‘comfort stations’ to operate well past the end of the war and that tens of thousands of women in the brothels had sex with American men³⁹.

When Shanti applied for a visa in Korean embassy in Manila to visit Korea she was denied visa. This was due to strained diplomatic relationship between South Korea and India. As her friends left for Korea, Shanti was introspecting in the context of pain, hatred, misery how Christian women could heal wounded relationships, individuals, communities and nation. She shared in her autobiography that,

*“War, bombing and violence were far too big matters for individuals to deal with and yet I had to admit that it was from individuals that war started (James 4:1-2). Greed in the human heart led to human selfishnessIn a way greed led to violence...if people want to live in peace they would learn to live without greed and selfishness.”*⁴⁰

She realized that peace in the interpersonal level will surely help to promote peace and justice in the international level. She believed that forgiveness was essential ingredient for making peace. However, in the context of violence, hurt and resentment it is not easy to pray or forgive, hence divine grace is needed to gather strength to forgive. According to her resentment causes hatred and hatred causes violence. In her autobiography she cites a quote;

³⁹Erlin Blakemore, “The Brutal History of Japan’s Comfort Women.” *History Stories*, assessed February 18, 2018.

<https://www.history.com/news/comfort-women-japan-military-brothels-korea>.

⁴⁰ Solomon, *A Legend and A Legacy: An Autobiography*, 32.

*"Forgiveness is not the case of 'Holy Amnesia' that wipes away the past. Instead it is an experience of healing that drains out the poison from the wound."*⁴¹

Mrs Solomon realized healing and reconciliation will facilitate the process of forgiving and prayer is important ingredient to achieve that. She believed that a global praxis oriented prayer movement of peace, healing can create a culture of forgiving one another in midst of violence, animosity and culture of hatred created by war. Such movement of prayer can start ripples of reconciliation that spreads out in the world in widening circles and can bring peace and justice in the world.⁴²

The issue that irked Shanti's mind was: How can women play crucial role in peace building and their contributions can impact global peace movements? She realized that Asian and rural women weave peace through their daily dialogue of life but their contributions are confined within the periphery of home, community and at the most local. Her concern was how Christian women's spirituality of justice and peace can be implemented into action to heal brokenness where all women from different denominations can contribute irrespective of their caste, creed, nationality and economic status. She felt asking women to pray for peace, justice, healing, reconciliation is not enough and there is need for practical action of peace.⁴³

Mrs Solomon realized the importance of 'praxis dimension' of prayer and the necessity to build up a peace fund where women can contribute to support peace, healing reconciliation initiatives in the world. Mrs Solomon was inspired by the Biblical story of the power of 'widow's mite' and its value in God's eyes. She thought every

⁴¹ Ibid., 32.

⁴² Ibid., 31- 32.

⁴³ Ibid., 32.

time a woman prays, whether rich or poor, she can set aside the least coin of her currency to support peace, justice, healing, reconciliation initiatives. Her vision was connectedness and ‘collective transformation’ arise from women praying for peace and reconciliation and setting aside the least coin of their country as a symbol of that prayer. She believed as prayers and coins gathered from around the world, they become a sign of oneness in a common quest for peace, justice and reconciliation. It would be a spiritual practice which unites one another in fellowship of love and peace.⁴⁴ However, according to her this act of putting the least coin every time a woman prays was not merely a fund raising event which may lead to competition later.

When the team returned from Korea, Mrs Solomon suggested that prayer could transcend every national boundaries. She inspired the Christian women of Asia and Presbyterian women leaders in this team the necessity to combine their efforts and resources and launch a project of justice, peace and reconciliation on an international basis. Her friends encouraged her to start the ‘Fellowship of the Least Coin Movement.’

FLC became a world-wide ecumenical movement of prayer for peace, justice and reconciliation. Through this movement Christian women around the world seek fellowship with each other and are reminded to live a reconciled and forgiving life with others. In 1958, at the first Assembly of the Asian Church Women’s Conference (ACWC) held in Hong Kong, the ACWC agreed to launch the Fellowship of the Least Coin. At the second Assembly in Thailand in 1962, the Assembly voted to make the promotion of the FLC a basic outreach programme of the ACWC. The East Asia Christian Conference (EACC), now known as the Christian Conference of

⁴⁴“Fellowship of Least Coin,” *Presbyterian Women*. Accessed March 1, 2018. https://www.presbyterianwomen.org/what_we_do/nurture-faith/fellowship-least-coin.

Asia (CCA) administered the FLC fund from 1958-1970 and now administered by World Council of Churches.⁴⁵ Women's national groups collect the coins and send them to the central FLC Fund. FLC's international committee awards grants from these 'least coins', funding special projects of evangelism, service, ecumenical solidarity, awareness-building among women, and relief throughout the world.

All India Council of Christian Women (AICCW)

Mrs Solomon also played a crucial role ushering women's ecumenical movement in India by uniting Indian Christian women from different Protestant and Orthodox traditions through her efforts in establishing 'All India Council of Christian Women'- the women's wing of National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). AICCW was established in 1974. The reason why Mrs Solomon felt the necessity to form AICCW was not merely to unite church women but also to promote them in decision making process of the church. She felt that though women are the backbone of Indian churches and actively involved in lay and women's ministry in the 1970's, however their leadership roles, capabilities or contributions are not adequately recognized by churches. She felt women from the member churches of NCCI should have a forum where they can decide and actively contribute in various ministries of the church. AICCW also aimed in strengthening networking among women of different denominations to promote women's ordination, theological studies, justice - peace ministries and not merely confined to women's and children's ministry. AICCW had representatives from different women fellowship who were elected as the Executive Committee members in the Quadrennial Assembly of AICCW which was held every five years. In the course of time AICCW also had

⁴⁵“What is Fellowship of Least Coin.” *Australian Church Inc*, accessed March 1, 2018. <https://www.acw.org.au>.

close networking relationship with women of the Catholic Church: the 'Commission on Women' of the 'Catholic Bishops Conference in India' (Though Catholic women are not part of AICCW) and there were many issue based cooperation with the Catholic women.

Asian Church Women's Conference:

Mrs Solomon also played crucial role in strengthening Asian church women's networking while serving as the Executive Secretary of Asian Church Women's Conference. Shirin Samuel in her tribute to Shanti Solomon wrote;

*"Most of her life she lived as a widow that too in a culture of India where widows are despised and considered ill fated. She faces the life of her challenge as fortitude. She provides us with an example to live with faith living God and not to accept defeat but cling to God to overcome all difficulties. She is like a wide ocean with treasures but she lets the treasures to be used for survival of others"*⁴⁶

Mary Roy: The Rebel and the Prophetess of Courageous Resistance

The Decade 1975-1985 witnessed Indian women's groups as well as individual women reformers challenging unjust laws and obscurantist forces. Mary Roy, a Syrian Christian, renowned educationist and activist was one of them. Mary Roy began a tireless crusade for Christian women so that they enjoy equal property rights. According to Indira Nair discrimination against women in the matter of inheritance has been an issue because of the continuance of the religion based personal laws in

⁴⁶ Solomon, *Legend of Legacy: An Autobiography*, 58-59.

India despite the guarantee of equal status under Article 14 of the India Constitution. She states that the Indian Constitution while guaranteeing 'Right to Equality' deliberately ignored and safely pushed it to the Directive Principles under Art 44.⁴⁷ Vinay Reddy points out that, there are different personal laws for different religious communities in India. There is one inheritance rule for Hindus, another for Christians and yet another for Muslims. This results in depriving Indian women Constitutional protection of 'Equality of Status.'⁴⁸ It is during this decade two Muslim women Shenaz Sheik and Mrs A.M Syed filed petitions in Supreme Court demanding reforms in Muslim Personal laws. Similarly Syrian Orthodox woman Mary Roy demanded amendments in Syrian Christian Personal Law that was blatantly discriminatory in matters of inheritance. Through her struggle for justice she not only challenged Christian Personal law, but also the Indian Church. Not only did she create ripples in Nation regarding Christian women's legal rights but her struggle created awareness among Christians women and Christian communities in India regarding 'right based approach' as an integral part of Christian Mission.

Context for Mary Roy's Struggle

Mary Roy's struggle goes back to 1965 when as a single mother along with her two small children, returned to her father's home after a divorce with her Bengali alcoholic husband. She was asked to leave her Ooty home by her brother shortly after their father's death. Mary Roy had broken the cardinal rule by marrying outside of her religion and, after divorcing her husband and returning to her home village with two young children, it became clear they were not wanted there. Her daughter Arundhati Roy shared about her mother's plight, "She

⁴⁷ Indira Nair, "Discrimination against women." *Central Law Quarterly*, Vol. IX: 11, 208, (1996): 50.

⁴⁸ Vinay Reddy, "Women and Succession Laws in India: A Critical Analysis." *Indian Socio Legal Journal* Vol. 26, issue No.192, (2000):19-28.

was very ill all the time, she had asthma, she didn't have anywhere to go so she was living in my grandmother's house and everybody used to tell us you have no right to be here."⁴⁹

Discriminatory Laws

The brothers' action was rooted in two laws (a) the Travancore Christian Succession Act 1916 and (b) Cochin Succession Act 1921 - which restricted a Keralite Syrian Christian daughter's property rights. The Syrian Christian Community followed the provision of the Travancore Succession Act of 1916 and Cochin Succession Act of 1921. As per the 'Travancore Act' and 'Cochin Act' daughters were eligible for one quarter of son's share of Rs 5000, which ever was less if the father died intestate.

Prophetic Resistance

The young mother went to court and, after a 21-year battle, got the Supreme Court to strike down the two laws in 1986 in what has come to be known as the "Mary Roy case" in Indian legal history. The conservative and powerful sections, including the Church, came out vociferously against the verdict, saying that it would wreak havoc in the community by splitting families over property as daughters would drag their brothers to court. A legislation passed in the state Assembly to circumvent the Supreme Court judgment failed to receive President's assent. The Opponents' argument was that all the women in Christian families used to receive a handsome amount as dowry which was equal to the sons' share. But the total prohibition of dowry in the 1980s had weakened the women's position.⁵⁰ K.T.

⁴⁹ Arundahti Roy, "My Mother Broke Me and Made Me." *Style Celebrity News*, Sunday 11 March 2018. <https://www.independent.ie/style/celebrity/celebrity-news>.

⁵⁰ M.G Radhakrishnan, "Kerala: Sister Mary Gets her Land." *India Today*, assessed October 30, 2010. <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/nation/story/20101108>.

Thomas, a former Supreme Court judge and one of the few to have stood by Mary Roy throughout said that;

"It was sad that the religion which swore by Jesus, the greatest upholder of gender equality and even the rights of a prostitute, openly came against its women's rights to equality" ⁵¹

The lower court at first rejected her plea. However the Supreme Court verdict brought all Christians in the country under Indian Succession Act which gives equal property rights to sons and daughters enabling thousands of Keralite Christian women to regain their share of property denied to them.⁵² Roy won a historic struggle which ensured the 'Right to Equality' enshrined in the Indian Constitution. After winning the case, Roy donated the property for charity. According to Mary Roy:

*"My battle was not for a piece of property alone but to ensure that women in this country enjoy the rights guaranteed by the Constitution."*⁵³

Journey of Promoting Gender Justice Continues

Roy has not really given up hope for a more gender-equal future and she feels education is the way forward. As an educationist she established the Pallikoodam School (formerly Corpus Christi High School) in the suburb of Kottayam town in the state of Kerala. According to her: "My girl students will not take their families to court. They won't have to. Nor will they need their dowries. Because they have been made to realise that education will set them free," she says with confidence. "Boys will not be the alcoholic, wife-beating,

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² John Mary, "Mother of big case to donate hard-won inheritance." *The Telegraph*, October 6, 2010. <https://www.telegraphindia.com/1101026/jsp/frontpage/story>.

⁵³ Ibid.

dowry-expecting men that we hear of. But they have to gear up and find their footing fast.”⁵⁴

Even at the age of 80, Roy joined the ‘Aam Aadmi Party’ (AAP). Roy claims that she wants to see the alternative in politics bringing changes.⁵⁵ According to Shwetha E. George, Roy's zeal to bring in change has not ebbed. She is going to the Supreme Court again to file the ‘Justice’ and ‘Human Rights’ for citizens living in the Periphery of Garbage Dumps’ petition which has taken precedence over everything else in her life for the last few years.⁵⁶

Space in Indian Church History

Mary Roy’s prophetic resistance and success can be regarded as a landmark not only in Indian history but also in the history of feminist movement in Asia. Though her contributions are recognized by the secular world, but her contributions could not find space in Indian Church history. This is mainly because even today traditional Indian patriarchal church does not have much space for women’s activism. According to Fr Jerry Kurian from Jacobite Syrian Church:

“The church still has a chance to redeem itself by first of all accepting what Mary Roy, a Syrian Christian herself has done for the emancipation and equal rights of women. She should be honored for this fight and struggle that she has undertaken. Her fight and case should not be seen as anti-church but as a struggle for the church and its constituency of women... It’s time the church should

⁵⁴ Shwetha. E. George, “Revisiting the Rebel: Her Name is Mary Roy.” *Boloji*, assessed November 8, 2010.

<http://www.boloji.com/articles/10146/revisiting-the-rebel-her-name-is-mary-roy>.

⁵⁵Shahina K.K, “Mary Roy Style of Activism.” *Open Magazine*. February 1, 2014. <http://www.openthemagazine.com/shorts/smallworld/the-mary-roy-style-of-activism>.

⁵⁶ Shwetha. E. George, “Revisiting the Rebel: Her Name is Mary Roy,” *Boloji*.

find itself at the cross roads looking at itself on what it means by equality, justice and peace."⁵⁷

Today women's ecumenical movement in India and Asia draws insights from Mary Roy's struggle for justice in their quest to promote gender justice and build culture of peace. Women are part of 'ecclesia' which is 'Body of Christ'. Causing wound to any part of the 'Body of Christ' in the form of any sort of violence on women or their exclusion needs to be addressed by churches and ecumenical movement to build culture of peace so that all can have 'life in its fullness'. The World Council of Churches 'Decade to Overcome Violence'⁵⁸ emphasized the need of churches and ecumenical movement to the focus, respond and work towards prevention and overcoming any forms of violence including violence within the home and the family, violence within the church, violence within legal systems. Today women's ecumenical movement in India and Asia through ecumenical bodies like National Council of Churches, Christian Conference of Asia in partnership with member churches are promoting in different forms of advocacy to end any forms of violence and even discrimination of women within home, church, society and challenging any forms of discriminatory laws that violates women's rights. Mary Roy's prophetic resistance is a sign of hope and inspiration to many.

Mary Roy's prophetic struggle reminds us of the daughters of Zelophehad, Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milkah and Tirzah in Numbers 27 who had the courage to stand before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders and the whole assembly at the entrance to the tent and claim for their rights to their father's property. The daughters of

⁵⁷Jerry Kurian, *The Priest and the World as He Sees It* (Blog), accessed February 20, 2018. <http://jerryachensworld.blogspot.in>.

⁵⁸ 'The Basic Framework For the Decade to Overcome Violence', World Council of Churches, assessed November 21, 2018. <https://www.oikoumene.org/basic-framework-for-the-decade-to-overcome-violence>.

Zelophehad had dauntless courage to claim their rights to inheritance during a time when women had no rights to inherit property. Similar courage was shown by Mary Roy.

Strategies of Transformation

The three Indian women Pandita Ramabai, Shanti Solomon and Mary Roy made unique contributions in transforming or reforming society. They had unique strategies to overcome their own vulnerability and transform or reform society. All of them experienced different scourges of gender based violence - yet they were not passive recipients. They used their painful experiences as a catharsis for social change. They could transcend beyond the Indian traditional understanding of pain and suffering as punishment due to '*karma*' or traditional Christian understanding suffering as God's training to be faithful inevitable for salvation. Nor did they accept it as their fate despite their vulnerabilities. Such power has its roots in their resilience and praxis oriented spirituality of justice. The three women reformers used the strategy of transforming pain into power through power of resilience. In their attempts to build a just, inclusive society, their strategies of transformation are very relevant for the Asian global ecumenical movement even today if moulded and contextualized to end the culture of gender based violence and to heal brokenness and schism.

Ramabai's Strategy of Empowerment and Transformation through Female Education:

In order to reform society and emancipate widows, girls and high caste Hindu women from oppression, Ramabai used the strategy of empowerment and awareness through female education. Ramabai is recognized as one woman wave of Indian feminism.

- **Education based on Gender Parity :** Ramabai realized in a context of violence women during her times could transform pain into power by retaliating against the male hegemony in Hindu society. Education during her time was traditionally religious and was monopolised by men of the Brahmin community until the advent of English or western education. Though western egalitarian ideas had impact on Ramabai but she was against the cultural hegemony of the colonizers. Ramabai realized that western education system in India was not secular but caste and gender neutral and was egalitarian but such western education was entirely a male project. Meera Kosambi mentions that in its patriarchal parameters, reforms were strictly circumscribed by the existing normative boundaries and geared towards making wives better for English educated men demanding companionate marriages and more enlightened mothers for the future generation which would restore India to its former glory and political autonomy. Ramabai realized during her time emancipation of women was essentially investment in the society – that is male progress rather than a step towards gender equality.⁵⁹ Hence Ramabai's strategy was to educate Hindu women, widows and girls to read, write and interpret Hindu scripture stripping it from its Brahmanical patriarchal tarnish. Ramabai attempted to combine her new Christian ideals with her old Indian culture and used this mix to promote change in India.

- **Strategy of Empowering Women to be Self Reliant :** Women's self-reliance was a part of her educational agenda. She trained women with skills of entrepreneurship through vocational trainings along with academic studies. She believed self-reliance will not only give them self-confidence and self-esteem but remove fear, equipping them to resist oppression.

⁵⁹ Meera Kosambi. *Pandita Ramabai: Life and Landmark Writings* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 155.

- **Strategy of Mentoring and Accompaniment :** Ramabai realized the importance of mentorship and nurturing women to be leaders and self-confident people to be liberated from oppression. ‘*Arya Mahila Samaj*’ founded by her, aimed in mentoring women.

- **Right Based Approach:** Ramabai’s mission endeavours to emancipate women through education was based on ‘Right Based Approach’. She championed the rights to life and dignity of women, girls and exploited widows during an era where promoting such rights were revolutionary.

- **Non-Denominational Approach of Mission:** Though Ramabai used the strategy to networking with missionaries from different denominations to empower and emancipate women through education but she maintained a non-denominational approach. This approach enabled her not to be dictated by mission strategies and ideologies of a particular denomination. It was very relevant in a multi pluralistic and Hindu dominated Indian context as her mission was also to liberate High caste Hindu women and widows.

Shanti Solomon’s Strategy of ‘Transforming Practices’ of Justice Peace, Healing and Reconciliation

Shanti Solomon used the strategy of ‘Transforming Practices’ and ‘Collective Transformation’ to promote justice, peace, healing and reconciliation to build culture of peace. Shanti initiated the Fellowship of the Least Coin Movement which is based on the principle of ‘transforming practices’ and each time woman prays for justice, peace and reconciliation, she sets aside one “least coin” of her currency as a tangible token toward her prayer being answered. Kristen Zimmerman and Julie Quiroz states that:

“Transformative practice includes the intention-full ways we cultivate and shape a way of life and live our

values; ways that are connected to the past and looking forward to where we need to go." ⁶⁰

Zimmerman and Quiroz further mentions such transforming practise is rooted in power of love and focuses on practice, the day-by-day, step-by-step action, that individuals or groups take on to intentionally learn and shift. In transformative movement building, practice helps people to change themselves in order to change groups, systems and culture. 'Transforming Practice' enables people to make personal, collective, and structural changes simultaneously. It is a crucial part of an overall commitment and approach to social transformation.⁶¹ Such transforming practices also pave way for 'collective action' and 'collective transformation' helps in the process of healing and reconciliation.

FLC the ecumenical prayer movement has united women from than 100 countries in world. The fund raised through this prayer movement is managed by International Committee of Fellowship of Least Coin (ICFLC) through the help of World Council of Churches. Through the funds raised ICFLC has been able to wipe tears and support justice and peace initiatives of women in many parts of the world. In India FLC is promoted by 'All India Council of Christian Women' – Women's wing of 'National Council of Churches in India' in partnership with women's fellowship of member churches within the Protestant and Orthodox tradition. The women's fellowship have their own FLC convener who promotes this prayer movement. In 2016 FLC initiated by Shanti celebrated 60th anniversary. Rev Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary of World Council of Churches in his statement on 60th anniversary of FLC mentions that that FLC have paved the way where

⁶⁰ Kristen Zimmerman and Julie Quiroz, *Love with Power: Practising Transformation for Social Justice, Movement* (USA: Strategy Center, 2016), 52.

⁶¹ Ibid.

“We can celebrate the gifts, visit the wounds and commit responsibly to transformation toward a world-wide culture of gender justice and peace with no sexual and gender-based violence.”⁶²

Mary Roy’s Strategy of ‘Hopeful Resilience’ and ‘Prophetic Resistance’

Mary Roy used the strategy of ‘Hopeful Resilience’ and ‘Prophetic Resistance’ to challenge unjust practices and unjust laws to transform society in midst of acute adversity. Roy was extremely vulnerable being a single mother with two small children after her divorce. She was threatened to be ousted by her own brother from her father’s home. In such a hostile situation ‘Hopeful Resilience’ was Roy’s ‘safety valve’ which enabled her to resist violence. According to Johan Degennar,

“Hope is a creative expectation of a future in which justice prevails and which precisely through the disposition of hope, one commits oneself to bringing about.”⁶³

Hope is deeply connected with one’s ability to cope with difficulties and love within - and into - communities of faith in ways that are life giving and resilient. According to Froma Walsh, resilience involves the whole person, including emotional and relational well-being. It involves struggling, experiencing both suffering and courage and effectively working through difficulties both internally and interpersonally.⁶⁴ ‘Prophetic Resistance’ is

⁶² Olav Fykse Tveit, “WCC shares Greetings on 60th Anniversary of Fellowship of Least Coin.” *World Council of Churches*, accessed on February 28, 2018. <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/wcc-shares-greetings-to-fellowship-of-the-least-coin-on-60th-anniversary>.

⁶³ Johan Degennar, “Creative Expectation,” *Book of Hope* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1991), 4.

⁶⁴ Froma Walsh, *Strengthening Family Resilience* (New York: Guilford Press, 2006), 4.

Biblical and the first step towards subverting and transforming oppressive systems and affirming dignity and right to life in its fullness. Prophetic resistance leads to conflict which is inevitable. In order to seek justice and peace when Roy challenged unjust laws this not only aggravated the conflict with her brother but also with the church and Syrian Christian Community in Kerala. However as Martin Luther King Junior rightly points out, "*True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice.*"⁶⁵

This strategy of 'Hopeful Resilience' and 'Prophetic Resistance' and activism mode to seek justice was an eye opener for Indian churches. The 'Right Based' approach of mission has been adopted by some mainline protestant churches in India like Church of North India (CNI) and Church of South India (CSI). The Social wing Church of North India, 'Synodical Board of Social Service' (CNISBSS) has been using this strategy to empower communities especially grassroots communities to voice the injustices done towards them and change existing scenarios of inequality. The mission theme of CNISBSS from 2005 to 2015 was '*Building Communities of Hope and Resistance*' and strategic action plan and mission focus was based on the theme. CNISBSS working through Diocesan Board of Social Service (DBSS) in grassroots communities.⁶⁶ The CSI is working through the Social wing 'SEVA' and has been empowering communities to promote gender justice even of their legal rights in context violation of human rights and Women's Rights.

⁶⁵ Martin Luther Junior Quotes." Good Reads, accessed March 2, 2018. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/202045>.

⁶⁶ Annual Report (April 2008- March 2009), *Church of North India Synodical Board of Social Service*, accessed on November 28, 2018. http://cnisbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Annual_Rport_2008_09.compressed.pdf.

Conclusion

When society plagued with darkness, corruption and unjust practises, reformation takes place to bring about transformation. Reformers make unique contributions to transform society, church, communities or nation. In midst of adversities and challenges through their contributions and prophetic acts they sow seeds of justice and peace. The three Indian women reformers Pandita Ramabai, Shanti Solomon and Mary Roy made unique contributions at different juncture of history to end gender based violence and transform society despite their vulnerabilities of being a woman in Indian society. Ramabai aimed to emancipate women, widows, and girls through her strategy of pioneering female education during a time where India women were grappling for survival and exclusion. Shanti the midwife of justice, peace, healing and reconciliation changed the course of Indian and global church history and ecumenical movement by ushering an ecumenical prayer movement and founding All India Council of Christian Women. Mary Roy challenged unjust laws that discriminated women and used the strategy of 'Hopeful Resilience' and 'Prophetic Resistance' to promote Christian women's human rights to inherit property which resulted in change of 'Personal Laws' in India. All of them made impact of Asian ecumenical movement in their attempt to remove darkness of patriarchal culture which has tarnished society. It is their spirituality of justice which helped them remove darkness in search of light, truth and peace.

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