

**SENATE OF SERAMPORE COLLEGE**  
**Workshop on Religion, Culture, and Theology in Theological Education**  
**Date: 7 – 10 August 2024**  
**Venue: Senate of Serampore College**  
**Report of the Workshop**

**Rationale of the Seminar**

Religion, culture, and patriarchy interplay with theology in forming theological education in a given context. The issue of gender justice in theological education in India/South Asia has been around for almost four decades. Gender and margin perspectives are integrated to some extent into the theological curriculum of the Senate of Serampore College, making Feminist Theology a required Course in the BD syllabus. However, the impact on the Church ministry, its structures, and its theological institutions is significantly less. No doubt, women faculty recruitment in some colleges/seminaries has increased. Hence, this workshop was organized to reflect critically on religion, culture, and gender justice in theological education with the following objectives:

1. To critically reflect on how religion, patriarchal culture, and theology shape theological education;
2. To share problems and challenges in teaching feminist theology and gender studies courses’
3. To promote gender justice through theological education
4. To review the existing Course on Feminist Theology.

This workshop was supposed to be held last year, 2023, but unfortunately, we could not organize it due to the shortage of funds and time constraints. The Senate could organize it only this year from August 7-10, 2024, at Serampore. We thank the FTEAP for funding this program. The Senate of Serampore College is immensely grateful to FTEAP for its strong financial support.



## **Participants**

We have invited Feminist theology subject teachers from Senate-affiliated colleges/seminaries. Thirty-two faculty members from different colleges participated, out of which 13 were male faculty members, and 19 were women; six resource persons, officers, and staff of the Senate, and total 40 participated in the workshop. Dr. Wati Longchar, Executive Director of FTEAP led a session.

The following is a comprehensive report of the Seminar proceedings:

### **August 8, 2024 (Day 1)**

The workshop began with the morning devotion led by Dr. Limatula Longkumer, Registrar. She reflected on Luke 1:46-55, and participants were invited to meditate on the text silently.

Then, the Registrar, Limatula Longkumer, briefly introduced the workshop and its objectives, followed by introducing the resource persons and introductions of the participants.

The first session was on reading the Bible from the New Testament. Dr. Menjiwapong Jamir, Asso. Professor ETC Jorhat, led the first session. It was a participatory, interactive Bible reading based on Luke 8:40-56 with the theme "Jesus and Gender Justice." All participants were actively engaged with the story and reflected critically on gender justice in the church and society.

In the second session, three conceptual papers were presented, Rev. Dr. Mervin Sinoj Boaz (Presbyter, Diocese of Cochin, CSI) presented a paper on the topic: "The Interplay of Religion, Culture, and Theology in Theological Education," and Prof. Lalngakthuami from Aizawl Theological College moderated the session. He began with the question, "Whose problem is the problem in Theological Education." In his paper, he brought out three main aspects to understand the position of women in Theological Education: 'Feminine Body,' 'Feminine Memory,' and 'Feminine Psyche.'

Dr. Wandahilin Kharlukhi, Prof. John Robert Theological College, Shillong, presented the paper on "Ecclesia as an Inclusive Community for All." Rev. Dr. N. K. Prasad from Kerala United Theological Seminary moderated the session. She critiqued that church policy is a gendered and ecclesiology policy, so the question is, "How can we break this hegemony?" She proposed six alternative models for an inclusive Church.

Dr. Aswathy John, Dean, Research/SATHRI, spoke on the topic, "Gender Issues in Theological Education," and the session was moderated by Rev. Pervez Sethna, faculty from Allahabad Bible Seminary. She highlighted some of the pertinent issues, such as church preference for male candidates, lack of scholarship for women, lack of placement for women in the church ministry after studies, etc. She also emphasized the areas that need strengthening to encourage women in theological education.

### **August 9, 2024 (Day 2)**

Day two started with a touching and inspiring morning devotion led by Rev. Papiya Durairaj, Asso. Professor at Bishop's College, Kolkata, with the theme "From Woe to Wow: A New Horizon," based on the text John 20:11-18.

The first session was on 'Contextual reading of the Bible from Old Testament' led by Dr. Abeni Patton, Asso. Professor, Baptist Theological College, Pfutsero, based on Judges 4. She

articulated the text from two schools of thought. i.e., complementarian and egalitarian. It was an Interactive group discussion reexamining the story of Deborah, Barak, and Jael from the gender justice perspective, reflecting on traditional gender roles and underestimating female leaders.

Dr. Wati Longchar, Executive Director, FTEAP shared on the topic “Constructing Gender Justice in Theological Education .” The session was moderated by Rev. Telkalapally Raju from Kerala Theological Seminary, Kottarakara. While affirming the contribution of exclusivist methodological claims by different contextual theologies, he pointed out the danger of methodological exclusivism. It was an interactive and challenging session urging the participants to rethink critically the existing structure of theological education and develop steps to bring justice for all.

The next two sessions discussed the “problems and challenges of teaching feminist/womanist theology,” where every faculty member was given three minutes to share their teaching experiences. Dr. Anish K. Joy, a faculty member from MSOTS, Ernakulam, Kerala, led the first session. Then, it was followed by a group discussion on personal experience of the Feminist Theology Course and the group discussion was moderated by Prof. Lovely Awomi James, Prof. ETC, Jorhat. The summary of the two sessions is as follows:

1. The majority of the students have preconceived negative attitudes- the patriarchal mindset towards feminist theology; thus, they come to class for counter-arguments, not to learn.
2. What does FT class mean? Heated debates and arguments.
3. Reservation or lack of openness to the F/T subject– the preconceived notion that it is for women only. To dismantle the negative attitude that it is only for women.
4. Fear of change - Many students think F/T is a threat to the existing structure of the churches.
5. 40% of the women students want to be categorized as ideal women – passive.
6. Bullying the male students who support women’s issues.
7. Students often have complex questions, especially when they come from different cultural backgrounds and find it difficult to accept a new perspective.
8. It is a required subject, and many students simply do it; otherwise, they will not complete the BD degree.
9. Students argue that Feminist theology is an ideology, not a theology. It is a Western ideology imposed on them.
10. Lack of support from male colleagues in the colleges.
11. Lack of confident subject experts to teach F/T.
12. Need to revise the syllabus thoroughly and insert local/field exposures.
13. F/T can be offered in BD II year.
14. Need to devise a proper teaching pedagogy as it is an issue-based subject.
15. Many students change their perspectives on gender issues at the end of the course.

Rev. Dr. Limatula led the concluding session on the topic “Feminist Theological Pedagogy – Prospects and Suggestions”

- The first step in teaching feminist theology is to clarify the concepts of feminist consciousness and women’s questions because the majority of the students do not know women’s problems. It is to create feminist consciousness, deconstruct prejudices and negative attitudes, and reconstruct gender justice knowledge for all.

- The role of a teacher in feminist theology class is crucial to creating gender justice awareness.
- Proposed Engage Pedagogy as a method- where teacher-student must actively engage on the issues while doing the course.
- Epistemology – whose knowledge are we learning?
- Integrative Approach to teaching-learning.

The workshop was closed with a beautiful worship led by Dr. Baby Rani, UTC, Bangalore, and Dr. Mary Kath, GLTC, Chennai.

We thank all the resource persons and faculty from the affiliated Colleges for their active participation. We express our thankfulness to FTEAP for constant financial support and accompaniment. Special thanks to Mrs. Preeti Paluri, NTC, Dehradun, Dr. Tiameren, CTC, Mokokchung and Rev. P. Usha Priya, ACTC, Hyderabad, for recording the workshop proceedings.

Limatula Longkumer, Registrar