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SOCIETY OF THE SACRED
HEART
PROVINCE OF INDIA



NEWS FROM THE COLLEGE
COMMUNITY

Beyond the Spectrum: Celebrating Neurodiversity

"Neurodiversity is not just a matter of social justice; it is a matter of human rights."

– Judy Singer, author, and activist

The Department of Psychology of Sophia College hosted a RUSA-supported National-Level Intercollegiate Conference titled "Beyond the Spectrum: Celebrating Neurodiversity" on 27th September 2024 in the Sophia Bhabha Hall.

Inclusion is a buzzword at various levels and is the need of the hour. This conference was an attempt to learn more about neurodiversity and explore ways to promote inclusion and acceptance. Neurodiversity refers to the natural variation in human brains and cognitive abilities. It encompasses a wide range of strengths and challenges and is present in all populations.

Essentially, neurodiversity posits that there is no one "normal" way for our brains to function. Instead, each individual has a unique neurological makeup, which can manifest in various ways. The focus of this conference was on autism spectrum disorders, ADHD, and learning disabilities.

The keynote address was delivered by Ms. Soumini Menon, a developmental and counselling psychologist from Gurgaon with over 15 years of experience. She connected via the Zoom platform. Her insights into developmental psychopathology and narrative work resonated with the audience and set the tone for the conference.

This was followed by a panel discussion featuring insights from three panelists: Ms. Shoba Srivastava, an Assistant Professor at Suvidya College of Special Education; Ms. Niyati Sanghavi, a counselling psychologist; and Dr. Hozefa Bhinderwala, a consulting psychiatrist at Saifee Hospital with extensive experience spanning 28 years.



The Department of Psychology with Ms Niyati and Dr. Hozefa

The first panelist, Ms. Shoba Srivastava, shared her journey as a parent of a child with autism and her work with children facing similar challenges. Her perspective emphasized the importance of personal experience in shaping professional practice. Ms Niyati Sanghavi shared her expertise in counselling and remedial education, focusing on the significance of supporting diverse populations, particularly children with learning difficulties. She provided attendees with practical insights into effective strategies for counselling and education.

Dr. Hozefa Bhinderwala, a consultant psychiatrist, energized the session with his interactive style. He candidly shared his personal journey with ADHD, discussing the challenges he faced and the strategies he developed. He also addressed the stigma surrounding mental health, reinforcing the conference's theme of fostering understanding and acceptance.

The event concluded with an engaging question-and-answer session. The conference was instrumental in facilitating deeper insights into neurodiversity among the student population and served as an impetus to work towards a more compassionate and understanding society.

Patricia D'Souza rscj

Guardian Angels Do Exist

Violence against women is on the increase; even little girls are not spared. Not a day passes without the TV channels airing news of another rape and murder. Our Newspapers are painful to read as they are full of these heinous crimes. My focus in this article is to look back at my own life as a young Religious when I was exposed to situations that could have spelt danger for me.

Technology has its plus points; but with the access to mobiles, some men, even young boys with decent upbringing, have gone wild and uncontrolled.

Listed below are some of my personal experiences where I was vulnerable:

- In 1973 during my Noviceship, we went to Lonavala for a month's Retreat. After a week in silence, 6 of us Novices went on a picnic. We were accompanied by our Help, a woman who seemed strong and who we felt safe with. We decided to climb up to the top of a hill with our food baskets. Although young, it took us half an hour to climb to the top. Suddenly, a man approached us from around the hill with knives raised in both hands. With fright we all rolled down the hill in 10 minutes falling into every thorny bush, crying and bruised. Although the man took our food and money, we felt blessed we were all safe. The lady who was there to protect us rolled down first! We decided not to talk about this incident to anyone, but it did have its negative repercussions in my life. I still find myself calculating when I choose a quiet place for prayer, always checking to see that there are other people around at a safe distance.
- In 1973 as a Junior sister, 33 yrs of age, we all set out to visit Ashrams as part of our exposure to other religions. I had read Vinobha Bhave's book on the Bhagwat Gita and was impressed by his sense of humour that came through and so I was keen to meet him in person. I chose to visit the Pounar Ashram in Wardha Dist. My partner, a Religious Sister from another congregation, dropped out last minute. It was a 24 hour journey by train. I then boarded a bus that would drop me near the Ashram. When I got off the bus it was 7 pm and quite dark, there was no one in sight. Actually what I did not realise was that the Ashram was right in front of me, but the darkness and trees hid its view. Three boys walking with their cycles came along, so I asked them where the Ashram was, they pointed towards a light in the distance and offered to take me. Actually it was the Light House in the midst of a river. Frightened by then realizing the boys were up to no good, I kept praying. In a nearby ditch were 2 construction workers, a man and a woman, whom I had not seen earlier. They offered to take me to the Ashram, saying it was just 2 minutes away. Vinobha Bhave, even though he admired my pluck for coming to the Ashram, was not happy I had come alone. The twinkle in his eye reminded me of my grandfather. He was 83 yrs of age and full of life.
- In 1980 I was sent to England for my International Experience for 4 months. I was keen to visit the Home for the Mentally Challenged run by Jean Vanier. I had to travel alone to Manchester by the 7 pm train and then change for another local train to Liverpool. I reached at 9 o'clock at night. The Irish gentleman sitting next to me in the train was very kind and talkative. He told me he liked Indian women. Although he seemed a nice man. I was aware that 'Jack the Ripper' was on the loose killing young women. He was last sighted near Leeds not far from where I was going. I wondered if he was 'Jack the Ripper'! To my surprise, he turned out to be a decent sort only interested in helping me. He called the Home and told them to pick me up and that he would take down their names and vehicle number, otherwise he would have to inform the Police. When they arrived he went away, assured I was in safe hands as one of the young men was a Seminarian.

- In 1991, as part of my Sabbatical, I decided to visit the famous Rishi Valley School in Andhra Pradesh. When I arrived there, I had to take an auto to the school. Expecting to see many houses and people on the way, I did not expect a long never ending lonely road with only the hills in the distance. Not even a hut or a few people were in sight. After a while, realizing I was alone with the driver and not sure where I was heading to, I felt a chill down my spine. I knew I could go no further. Pretending to be sick, I requested him to take me back to the bus station to see a doctor. When we reached, I ran into the main office in the Bus Depot and asked if he could take down the auto man's name and number. I was totally embarrassed to find the man was behind me explaining to the officer that he realized I was really frightened and not sick and to please assure me that he would take me safely to the school.

In today's scenario venturing into unknown places unaccompanied would be risky. I really do believe God has given each human being a Caretaker in the form of Guardian Angels, so we can call out to them in times of distress. Circled by God's love nothing thing can break through and harm us. We need only to BELIEVE!

Charlotte Bastion rscj

Relationships

'Relationships' is a very precious topic. Initially we begin with our relationships in the family. Our family relationship is warm, sincere, loving, caring and we can go on. As we move on in life our relationships develop, we start going to school and meet other children, teachers, parents etc. we realise that life gets enriched as we look beyond ourselves.

Much depends on the kind of study or work we do. If we are involved in something administrative/technical our contacts will grow accordingly.

Looking back at my childhood days the relationships were very simple. We moved around with children of our age in school and also our neighborhood. Life became great fun as we played and shared much with our companions. Our parents had several contacts because of the type of work they did. This brought us in touch with their families. Very often we had parties together or met on some important occasions.

In my work situation it is important that I have to maintain understanding, acceptance and readiness to adjust to situations.

In conclusion I would like to say that if relationships are strong and loving, life will also be very interesting.

Teresa Pereira rscj

Walking with God

"We are called to a fuller, richer, higher life within... called to work with God, to walk with God, to have influence with GOD." - JANET STUART

As I work in Sophia College I realize that students and staff feel these sisters are intelligent, wise and hard-working, and they are in great admiration of us. But, often, they don't see us as spiritual persons, people who walk with GOD. It seems as though God in us is seen less and work is seen more. Very few feel we are nuns, women of prayer. It hurt me when I heard this from one person.

When I hear about our first sisters here, the ones who began the work on Sophia Campus, I know that people saw God in them. I feel, where am I? and I feel I need to have richer interior life, a higher standard of life within, not just outside. For that, I need to learn from the Heart of Jesus, I need to walk with God.

How do I come across to people? As an intelligent person? Or as a person of God? Or both? Every day when I sit for my personal prayer, this thought arises before me. So I decided I will ask myself, at the end of every day, did I walk with God today? For me, to walk with God means to seek His will and learn from Him in all things.

How many times do I come across to people as a person of God? Do people feel happy being with me or do they keep away from me? These days I have been challenged by my work, handling different ministries with people of different temperaments, different moods and emotions. At times, I feel irritated and upset over many things, but at the core, it is only the one question that keeps returning to haunt me: am I walking with GOD in this situation? More consciously, I try to be gentle, kind, and simple before all the people I meet. I feel the need to be more human in my interactions, rather than be preoccupied in doing great work. I don't need important positions or high degrees to be a person of God. I hear again and again our two Saints say this to me....

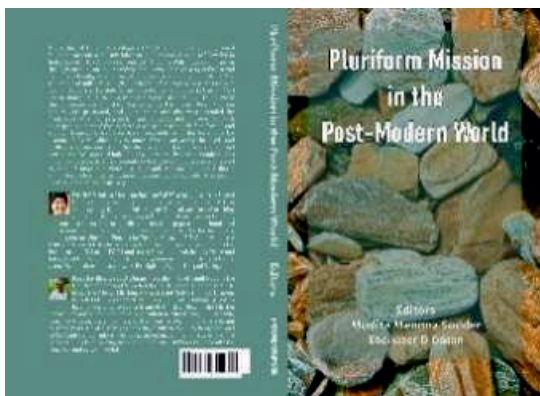
“God alone and desire of his glory – nothing else matters” - PHILIPPINE DUCHESNE

“Our one passion should be the love of Christ and the desire to make Him loved” - MADELENE SOPHIE

I don't want to write this with a judgmental attitude, I just wanted to share what I feel as a nun, how people look at me. In the end, what matters is how we live as people of God, walking with God.

Josephine Pereira rscj

A Bird Sings Because It Has Song



I write because I have something to share. It helps me to celebrate myself, connect with others and express myself. I was not born a writer. Even today, at times I struggle to put my thoughts to paper. As a young religious, I was invited to meetings, seminars etc. and often requested to be the scribe. As one who stands for the rights of women, I would often say, “Why are we women only asked to do the donkey work as secretaries? Are we not capable of being the Chairperson or present a paper?” I openly challenged the church hierarchy. Slowly, they began asking me to chair a meeting or present a paper. But every time I was asked, I chickened out, giving

some excuse.

I am academically brilliant, but English was not my forte. In fact, I had a huge complex about my English. Even though my siblings and I went to the same school, my elder sister and brother had a good command of the language. As fate would have it, when I reached the secondary section, many of these good, experienced English teachers retired, and I was taught by teachers who did not know how to teach the language. I was thus confident in speaking English, but very diffident to write, due to my limited vocabulary and poor style. In college, I was chosen and sent for a Public Speaking Course at the University Club House, and I did participate in some Paper Reading and Elocution competitions, which my elder brother wrote and prepared me for; and for which, I even won prizes, and received certificates.

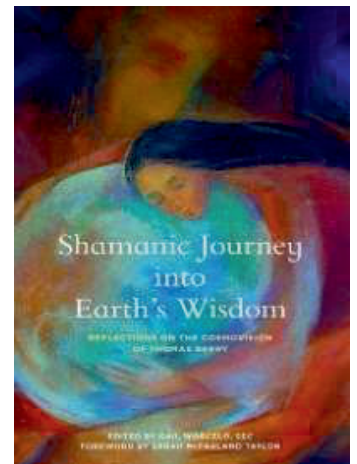
In the congregation, Sr. Daphne Furtado and Vandana Mataji often coaxed me to write for 'Ekta' – the Province Newsletter, and a little later I was on the 'Ekta' team. In 1999, Sr. Marie sent me for a three-month course in Communications to Bangalore, which turned out to be a super farce! We were only two in the group, when we started and ended with six in the group! I learnt very little of communications, not even how to use the computer properly. The only silver lining in the dark cloud was a small thesis I wrote and submitted to St Peter's Seminary entitled, "Environment as a means of Communicating with God". Back in the province, I was in charge of 'Ekta', a very trying task with no computer and no willing contributors! I had to literally cajole RSCJ to write, and go to the cybercafe in the evening, after my ministry to use a computer!

Getting a big scholarship for my PhD empowered me with a computer, printer, camera and the basic wherewithal for communications. The first book I published was, "The Mahim Story" in 2009. Public demand saw its second edition "Our Lady of Perpetual Help" in 2010. In 2015, I published my doctoral thesis, "Reliving Christian Life in the Globalized World Today".

The credit for my writing really goes to the late Fr. Verghese Alengaden. He always encouraged me saying, "Mudita, start writing, it is a great ministry. One never knows where one's thoughts will reach and inspire someone". That set the ball rolling and I began writing, especially for the cause of religious women. Difficult as it may be, since then, I have been writing a little and even presenting scientific papers at International and National Seminars and Conferences which subsequently get published.

In 2022, I was chosen for "The Life" Panel for 2022-23, Global Sisters Report: A Project of National Catholic Reporter – thanks to the late Sr. Helen Rosenthal RSCJ of the USC Province, who literally coerced me to apply, as she wanted to see an RSCJ on this panel, and I am even paid in dollars for my writings even today!

The year 2024 brought me good luck. I have three publications to my credit. My paper, "Earth Democracy and Eco-Spirituality: Two Responses to the Eco-Ethical Crises today", presented at the International Conference on 'Ethical Issues in Life and Ministry' at Jnana Deepa Institute of Philosophy and Theology, Pune, Sept. 2023, was published in 2024. I got a scholarship to attend a virtual conference in NY in 2022, after which I was asked to write a chapter for the book, "Shamanic Journey into Earth's Wisdom" – Reflections on the Cosmovision of Thomas Berry. This book was released on 25th Aug 2024, at the 30th Anniversary of Sisters of Earth. This is my first publication in book form in the US. Sr. Mary Frohlich RSCJ of the USC Province has also contributed a chapter to this book.



On 22nd Oct 2024, the FOIM book, "Pluriform Mission in the Post-Modern World" that I have edited together with Dr. Ebenezer Dasan will be released at the FOIM Research Seminar and Conference at 'The Caleb Institute', Gurugram, Haryana. Archbishop Anil Couto of Delhi and Bishop Paul Swaroop of the CSI church will do the honours. I feel humbled. All praise and honour to God alone, for without God, I can do nothing. I also know that with God, I can do everything.

Mudita Sodder rscj

P.S. I received my hard copy of the book, "Shamanic Journey into Earth Wisdom" on 21st Sept.'24, which costs \$20 online. Ironically the publisher spent \$30 on postage to send it to me! I am happy to share the E-copy of the book with any interested RSCJ.