

Study Group: Gender and Mission

Te Riu Whakaoreore: A deep feminine heritage affirmed by indigenous wisdom births renewed and innovating missional commitment

When two young Anglo-Indian women in Calcutta in 1819 witnessed sati, a vision was conceived that, from their vulnerability as liminal people, sought to empower vulnerable women toward their emancipation. In 1852 women in England birthed an organisation to support this vision: the Zenana Bible Mission. Interdenominational in a time of denominationalism, all-female on the ground in a time when men dominated the 'mission field', wholistic professionals when the focus was evangelism, a cooperative venture of foreigners, liminals and locals serving alongside each other, its seeming vulnerabilities were its strength. Fast forward 168 years and that organisation is now an international fellowship of women and men serving across Asia and the Middle East. In a new century, at least for that part of Interserve located in Aotearoa New Zealand, contemporary vulnerabilities could become liabilities. Like other organisations in our secular nation, we could be struggling to continue the dreams of our forebears, except that strength is being offered us from a rich external source. A nine-year journey with Māori, the indigenous people of our land, is prophetically recalling us to our heritage and offering us new perspective and deepening vision. Our Māori brothers and sisters have gifted us with taonga (treasures) that celebrate the feminine shoulders upon which we stand and, reaffirmed by this, we are innovating and thriving.

This paper explores this landscape shaped by the feminine and the indigenous – two 'vulnerabilities' speaking power to missional commitment.

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