



 THIRUVANANTHAPURAM 2026  OVERVIEW



Tackling Gender Discrimination, Violence, Corporatisation and Changing Eco-Systems in Indian Media

20th National Meeting of the Network of Women in Media, India, (NWMI), Thiruvananthapuram on February 6 to 8, 2026

A gathering of over 150 women journalists from multiple corners of India turned into a festival of sisterhood in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala in February this year. In keeping with its tradition of holding a national meet almost every year, the Network of Women in Media, India (NWMI) held a three-day meet from February 6 to 8, 2026. The meet was held against the backdrop of rapid technological and financial changes and ethical challenges that have impacted the media. Artificial Intelligence in newsrooms, pervasiveness of social media, cyber abuse, 'media capture' and the shrinking space for mediapersons came up for discussion in the days that followed. This year's theme was **Media at the Crossroads: Independence vs Influence**.

The participants went home with a bag full of memories, notes, photographs, goodies, lessons, sand from the beach, and energy that will sustain them until next year.

The participants learned about the challenges faced by their colleagues and the subjects they covered, their pushback against unethical practices as well as accolades received by their peers from all over India. In closed sessions attended by NWMI members, topics ranging from artificial intelligence (AI) in newsrooms, climate news coverage and palliative care in Kerala, to gender-based violence and its news coverage were discussed. The Reporters Without Borders (RSF), through The News Minute, helped in funding the three-day conference.



Participants at the registration desk

As always, the national meeting, held at the verdant Maria Rani Center in Thiruvananthapuram, began with an introduction session wherein members, old and new, introduced themselves to each other. After a hearty Kerala lunch complete with Payasam, the panel discussions began in earnest with a discussion on 'Kerala's Gender Paradox: Progressive on Paper, Unequal in Practice?' It was followed by an intense session on palliative care and its myriad aspects. The first day ended with the 'unconference', wherein Network members themselves conducted sessions on different subjects and participants were free to choose the sessions they wanted to attend.

On the second day, after breakfast, the members again sat down for profound and experiential discussions on environmental reporting, AI in newsrooms, reporting on sexual violence and the judicial process that survivors experience in courts.

One of the most enlightening sessions of the conference was an open discussion about what survivors of sexual assault had to endure in courts. Sister Ranit, the survivor, who had filed a complaint of sexual assault against former Bishop Franco Mulakkal, spoke about her tribulations and her determination to continue the legal battle against Mulakkal.

The public meeting at the Trivandrum Club began with a chenda melam, a traditional percussion ensemble of Kerala, performed by an all-women group. The artistes came from different walks of life. Many were Kudumbasree members who doubled up as Panchayat presidents and members. The event concluded with the premiere of a documentary on the life of Ammu Joseph, journalist, author, and founding member of NWMI, which was directed by National award-winning director Shiny Benjamin.

Between these two art pieces was an intense discussion on the life of women working in the cinema industry. The panellists spoke about gender discrimination and sexual misconduct at their workplaces. Film editor Bina Paul and film actor Rima Kallingal, both founding members of the Women in Cinema Collective, and film producer Miriam Joseph weighed in with their experiences during the discussion. Participants were given the NWMI souvenir brought out in connection with the meeting.

Prior to the discussion, KR Meera, novelist and keynote speaker for the evening, spoke about the current state of the media. Addressing the issue of 'influence' in media, especially news media, Meera said, "A single person owning 800 media companies does not simply mean owning so many companies. It means that he was shaping, controlling and manipulating our conversations, thoughts and perceptions. Today, we are his products — you and me, our understanding of life, the way we relate to the world are his making. By controlling our conversations, he influenced our governments' policies, decided our destinies."

She was referring to the amassing of networks, channels, and newspapers by Rupert Murdoch. But there is hope, she said, with publications such as Khabar Lahariya, The Mooknayak, The News Minute, and other women-led news organisations that are fighting the good fight.

The members entered the conference venue with their identities as reporters, editors, freelance journalists, beat reporters, fact-checkers, video producers, editors-in-chief, copy editors, sub-editors, and multimedia journalists. But the ones who left the venue were old friends sharing pictures, contacts and information, and mentors sharing experience-based intelligence and tips.



While the members discussed traumatic experiences, they also indulged in their love for handmade jewellery, getting their pictures clicked and printed, enjoying local cuisine, catching up over dishwashing sessions, sampling spicy snacks from Nagaland, buying Kerala sarees, and sipping tea while dressed in their best.

The participants appreciated the takeaways that were given to the participants in cotton bags tailored and embroidered by the nuns engaged in a legal case against Mulakkal. Fridge magnets for the meeting were made by two youngsters on the autistic spectrum. Then there were pouches filled with spices, banana crisps and pain balms from Kotakkal.

NWMI **released a statement** at the end of the meet, sounding alarm over weakening editorial independence and calling for a gender sensitive media environment.

A group of members made their way to one of the local beaches and watched the sunset. From younger members in their 20s to the founding members of NWMI, the range of memorable experiences of those watching the sun go down was wide on the evening of February 8.

NWMI's Esther Lalchhanchhuahi captures the essence of sisterhood at the NWMI 20th National Meeting

NWMI's Rajeshwari Kalyanam created this video with highlights from the NWMI 20th National Meeting



GALLERY

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Session 1: Kerala’s Gender Paradox- Progressive on Paper, Unequal in Practice?



From left: Malavika Binny, Historian, Intersectional Feminist, Assistant Professor of History, Kannur University, Mridul Eapen, Honorary Fellow, Centre for Development Studies, Former Member of Kerala State Planning Board, Supriya Unni Nair, Independent Journalist, R Parvathy Devi, Independent Journalist, Author, Social Activist, and Sudha Nambudiri, Senior Journalist, The Times of India, Kochi

Moderator: Supriya Unni Nair, Independent Journalist

Panelists:

Malavika Binny, Historian, Intersectional Feminist, Assistant Professor of History, Kannur University

Mridul Eapen, Honorary Fellow, Centre for Development Studies, Former Member of Kerala State Planning Board

R Parvathy Devi, Independent Journalist, Author, Social Activist

Sudha Nambudiri, Senior Journalist, The Times of India, Kochi

The session examined Kerala’s gender paradox, linked to the larger Kerala model of high human development despite low per capita income. Mridul Eapen opened by noting that while Kerala has historically had lower gender gaps in education and health, and no major social opposition to girls’ schooling or women owning property, there has been growing unease since the 1990s due to very low female workforce participation, rising violence against women, and little political leadership or decision-making power for women. She stressed that averages hide inequalities, and that fishing communities, SC/ST, minorities, trans persons, and disabled women are outliers.

Conventional indicators such as education and health are inadequate to assess women’s status, and non-conventional indicators such as workforce participation and wages, occupational segregation, domestic violence and dowry, and control over income and decision-making are necessary. She questioned the assumption that education automatically leads to empowerment, arguing that autonomy and empowerment, meaning control, access, and decision-making, matter more than status. NFHS data from 1998 to 1999 showed Kerala was not on top in autonomy indicators, lagging in decision-making, mobility, and access to money. For the same education levels, women’s unemployment is far higher than men’s, reaching up to 50 to 60 percent among women graduates, and men exit unemployment faster than women over time. She identified the family as a key site of gender inequality, one that determines the type and level of education and prioritises collective interests over women’s autonomy.

Malavika Binny raised a major structural gap: the absence of caste-disaggregated labour data in Kerala, which means caste is made invisible. She presented survey findings from Kannur and Kozhikode covering 200 women, which showed that Hindu women’s workforce entry was around 79 percent, Christian women around 82 percent, and Muslim women around 52 percent even with postgraduate degrees. Within Hindu women, non-scheduled caste women entered the workforce at around 87 percent, OBC women at 70 to 75 percent, and SC women at only 42 percent. Caste and religion together strongly shape workforce entry even at higher education levels. She drew a distinction between access and retention, noting that entry may happen but staying and progressing does not. She introduced the concept of “caste-stead” occupations, citing that 88 percent of construction and manual labourers are Dalit women, while Adivasi women are concentrated in agriculture, forestry, and seasonal labour, and non-scheduled caste women dominate professional, managerial, and formal roles. She also highlighted the feminisation of higher education without a corresponding feminisation of secure employment, where the majority of students are women and contract or guest teachers are mostly women, but permanent posts are mostly held by men. Dalit women face added disadvantages including informal work, low bargaining power, and weak union representation. Policy, she noted, treats caste and gender separately with no intersectional design, and women are not a monolithic category as they face different patriarchies.

Parvati Devi, presenting her paper titled ‘Red in Politics, Saffron in Culture’, argued that education and health in Kerala do not translate into political, social, or cultural power for women. She pointed to violence as exposing women’s powerlessness, highlighting domestic violence and recent suicides linked to domestic abuse where abusers are rarely punished. While state initiatives such as Pink Police, Snehida, granting of menstrual leave, and a women’s department exist, she described them as insufficient. She identified a deepening of patriarchy driven by a middle-class cultural shift marked by growing religiosity, superstition, rituals, consumerism, and wedding extravagance, with an increase in astrology, vastu, ‘remedial’ rituals, and temple- and church-centred practices. The Sabarimala protests, she noted, showed the limits of Kerala’s progressivism, with middle and upper-middle class women mobilising against gender equality. She cited Meera Nanda on the corporate-temple-state nexus being active in Kerala, and criticised the media for largely opposing women’s entry into Sabarimala, amplifying misogyny and superstition, sidelining feminist perspectives, and giving platforms to reactionary figures while ignoring feminists. Feminist movements, she said, remain weak and consist of isolated voices, and Kerala is being pushed backwards socially.

Sudha Nambudiri focused on political representation, offering a simple test: how many women political leaders can be named. She noted that of 140 assembly seats, only 11 are held by women MLAs, and of 20 Lok Sabha Members of Parliament (MPs) from Kerala, only one is a woman. Across political parties, (Left Democratic Front (LDF), United Democratic Front (UDF), and National Democratic Alliance (NDA), women’s representation remains under 16 percent. Women candidates are rarely assessed for winnability, and parties do not allow women to build political bases. Panchayats fare better due to 50 percent reservation, with many capable women leaders emerging, but there is resistance to moving women to block, district, or assembly levels. She also pointed to how language erases women, with terms like “fishermen” used instead of fisherwomen or fisherfolk. Safety remains a major concern despite Human Development Index (HDI) rankings. The gender budget stands at around 23 percent of plan allocation, meaning the money exists, but the paradox lies in the gaps between allocations and outcomes.

Report by Lakshmi Priya M

Edited by Laxmi Murthy and Saraswathy Nagarajan

Session 2: Palliative Care in Kerala–Compassion as Policy



From left: Ashla Rani, Trustee and Volunteer, Pallium India, Dr MR Rajagopal, Founder–Chairman, Pallium India, Saima Mol, Student Palliative Care Worker, KP Rosamma, Vice–president, Kerala ASHA Health Workers’ Association and Sandhya Srinivasan, Independent Journalist

Moderator: Sandhya Srinivasan, Independent Journalist

Panelists:

Ashla Rani, Trustee and Volunteer, Pallium India

Dr MR Rajagopal, Founder–Chairman, Pallium India

Saima Mol, Student Palliative Care Worker

KP Rosamma, Vice–president, Kerala ASHA Health Workers’ Association

The session on palliative care began with the moderator Sandhya Srinivasan talking about how it is no longer considered as just treatment for the dying. She said Kerala has the oldest community–based care system for such patients, and highlighted the gender dimension of palliative care as well.

Ashla Rani, who first found Pallium India to help her overcome the terrible after effects of an accident that rendered her completely dependent on others, spoke about her experiences. “Existence was death for me. I even asked myself what I could do. And I realised I could still listen to people and work on a computer.” So she began to read out loud to the elderly and found a purpose within Pallium India. “My life changed completely with this. Palliative care can improve the quality of life,” she added.

Rosamma the AASHA worker spoke elaborately on the activities that she and her colleagues undertook during COVID. “”When everyone was confined to their homes, we AASHA workers used to go and give food and medicines to those receiving palliative care. Suddenly, we became popular after this.”

Saima Mol, a volunteer, explained why she had chosen to be a palliative care worker.

Dr MR Rajagoapl, Founder Chairman of Pallium India, a palliative care non–governmental organization based in Kerala, India, spoke next. Beginning on a philosophical note, he suggested that every healthy person can only be considered temporarily able–bodied. Further he added another fresh perspective to the deliberations: “It’s also violence if a person is confined to four walls and can step out only to go to the hospital.”

Speaking from experience, he said over 80% of care will be given by the family or a nurse. This is why Pallium India decided to go to the community in Kerala, he added as effective palliative care services should look not merely at a patient, but his or her entire family, he added. The focus of the organisation is on prevention and management of pain, and improving a person’s quality of life to enable him or her to live to full potential.

Even all this has but addressed only a small part of the actual need for palliative care services in the community. In Kerala, palliative care services ensure access, and there is a big role for the States in making palliative care available to all, Dr Rajagopal added.

Report by Ramya Kannan

Edited by Saraswathy Nagarajan

Unconference



A collage of photos from the different unconference sessions held on Day 1 of the National Meet

In its 20th edition, the NWMI meet planning committee introduced a series of interactive sessions conducted simultaneously by members themselves. The attendees could choose the session they wanted to attend. Some of those leading the sessions only steered the conversation while those with years of experience shared their knowledge. The sessions were:

- Listening Circle on SH@W by Neha Dixit
- Independent Journalism by Shweta Desai
- Reporting from Trivandrum by Gita Aravamudan
- Using Digital Platforms by Sangeetha Rajeesh
- Where is the Money? by Romita Saluja

Neha Dixit, author of the successful book ‘The Many Lives of Syeda X’, held a session on sexual harassment at the workplace. The vocalisation and sharing of such experiences were a cathartic process for some of the participants. In the conversation led by Shweta Desai, an independent journalist from Mumbai, many independent journalists with decades of experience shared the ways they survived in the industry without losing their drive for journalism.

Gita Aravamudan, who remained active as an independent journalist in Thiruvananthapuram, from 1970 and 1990, shared her observations about what has, and has not, changed since then. Sangeetha Rajeesh, a journalist-turned-science communication consultant, held a session on the different ways to create an online presence for independent journalists to build a brand for themselves. Romita Saluja, an award-winning journalist, who has found ways to fund her journalism through grants and fellowships, shared her experience of preparing a portfolio for these opportunities.

Report by Shalaka Shinde

Edited by Saraswathy Nagarajan

Session 3: Reporting Sexual Violence on Women in the Age of ‘Men’s Rights’ and Short Attention Spans



Moderator: Yamini Nair, Associate Editor, The Indian Express

Panelists:

Pushpa Rokde, Independent Journalist, Chhattisgarh

Lakshmi Priya, Senior Sub-Editor, The News Minute

Mercy Alexander, Activist, Sakhi

Sandhya Janardhanan, Lawyer and Activist, Sakhi

Arti Jaiman (Hindi-English interpretation)

The session examined how the media reports violence against women. Yamini Nair pointed out how long-drawn legal procedures affect the relevance of such cases and the consequent attention span of the media. She asked whether the follow-up of the cases (of violence against women) helps survivors or makes things worse for them.

Sandhya Janardhanan responded with examples, beginning with a 1999 case where a former minister, accused of outraging the modesty of a woman Indian Forest Service (IFS) officer, saw acquittal only in 2025. She also referred to the Suryanelli case (In 1996, a 16-year-year-old from Suryanelli in Kerala was lured into captivity and abused by several men over 40 days). She emphasized how difficult it is for women to obtain justice, noting that judicial delay leads to fading memories, the sidelining of victims, and emotional detachment. In the case of the IFS officer, the survivor learned of the acquittal through the media — not through her pleader or the court — and had no opportunity to be heard. Reporting in the media, Sandhya noted, often reduces such cases to technical terms such as “accused acquitted” or “prosecution failed” without explaining the context.

Mercy Alexander, who has been working among marginalized women, was asked how the media can play a role in helping women who have been enduring domestic or sexual violence silently due to the lack of a support system. Drawing from her experience in the 1980s, she gave the example of a case from her hometown. In 1987, a man reported that his 19-year-old wife was missing. Later, she was found dead. The woman who cleaned her body saw scars all over it and a rope around her hip, raising suspicions of murder. There was no news in the media. Overriding several objections, the government ordered that the body be exhumed, and a post-mortem conducted. Finally, the husband was found guilty. Mercy criticized how the media covered the Suryanelli case, noting that it engaged in slut-shaming of the victim. She also criticised the media for interviewing Rahul Mamkoottathil, a politician who is accused in multiple sexual assault cases in Kerala.

Lakshmi Priya addressed the threat of the manosphere, describing it as a cyberspace where people are loosely connected around dating advice, lifestyle advice, and mental health advice. While calling for more media scrutiny, she also raised concerns about the kind of scrutiny being practised. She pointed out that men’s rights activism is sometimes treated as a quirky subculture to be laughed at. She cited the example of the All Kerala Men’s Association garlanding Pulsar Pulse Suri (accused in the 2017 actor assault case) and also another man accused of public masturbation inside a bus. The Association had held a march demanding the establishment of a men’s commission in Kerala. She also discussed the activities of Save Indian Family Foundation, a large men’s rights organization that handles individual cases of men accused of various misdemeanours, and offers them legal help and counselling. Lakshmi Priya stressed that men’s rights’ ideology is now so mainstream and pervasive across social media that it often goes unrecognized, and highlighted how it overlaps with right-wing economics, religion, and Hindutva-aligned ideologies.

The session also discussed the case of Deepak. He had died by suicide following social media scrutiny. A woman had filmed him allegedly harassing her on a bus and posted the clip on social media. After his death, the woman was severely trolled. Malayalam media was criticized for shifting the focus from women’s autonomy and systemic oppression to repeatedly discussing this single case and making it look as if all women were filing trivial or false cases of harassment.

The discussion also highlighted the neglect of women’s issues, noting that from February 2025 to April 2026, 19 women and 17 children had died by suicide, yet the media failed to cover these cases or address the lack of autonomy for women in domestic spaces.

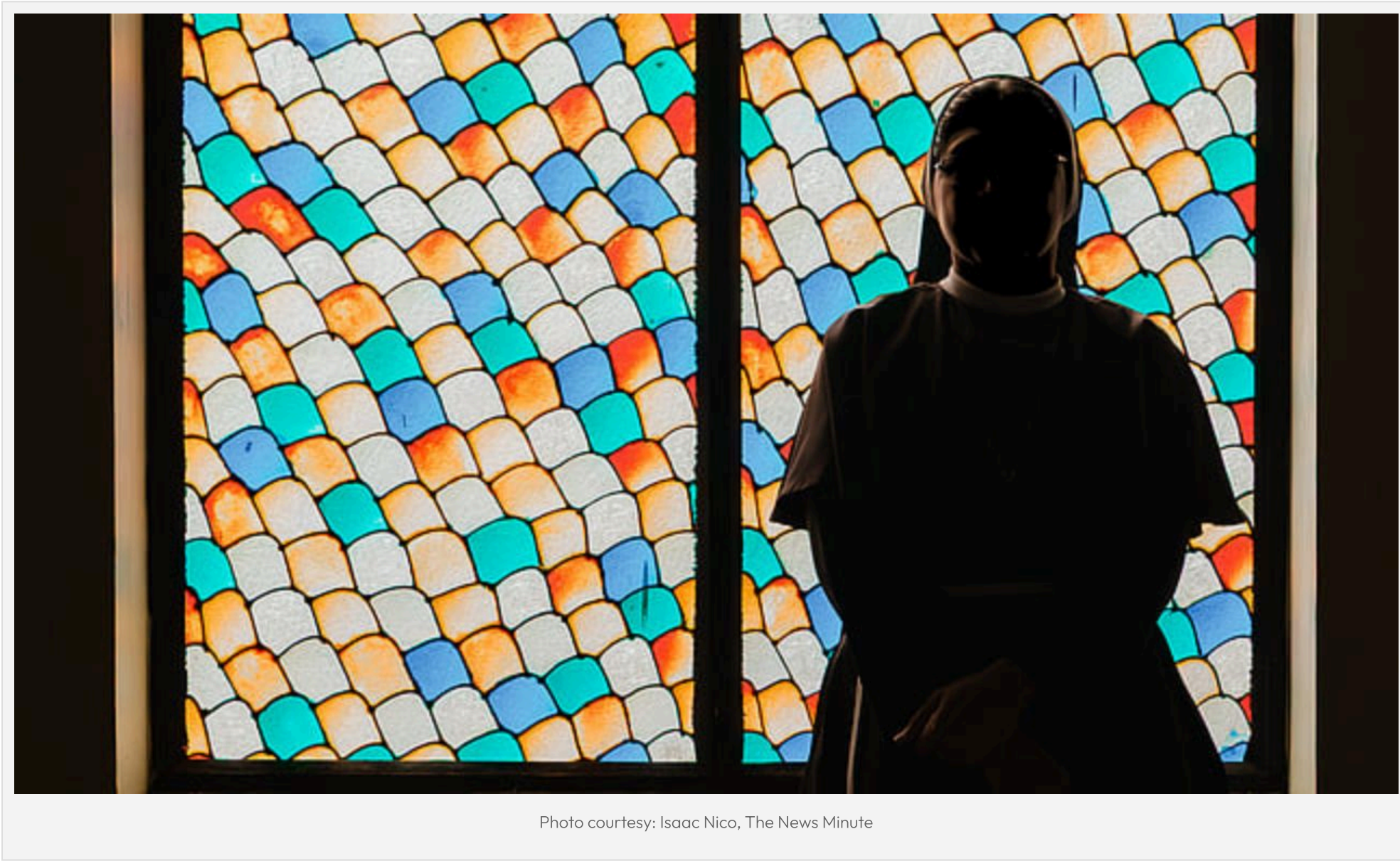
Pushpa, a journalist reporting on gender violence in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh, a predominantly Maoist-affected area, spoke about how she exposed a story of a 15-year-old orphan who was raped by her neighbour’s brother-in-law. Initially the police were uncooperative, but Pushpa intervened in the matter with the help of the local police. Her reporting prompted action from the DC, SP, and Department of Child Welfare. The Superintendent of Police wrote to the Chief Minister requesting more women officers.

Sandhya added that men’s rights activism is now influencing judgments in courts, confusing judges, and deepening the adverse impact on women.

Report by Haritha H

Edited by Laxmi Murthy and Saraswathy Nagarajan

Session 4: Sexual Violence– Trials and Justice



Panelists:

Dhanya Rajendran, Editor in Chief, The News Minute

Sister Ranit

Anita Cheria, Activist and Writer

The interaction began with an account of the abuse faced by the survivor, Sister Ranit. She is now pursuing a legal battle against Franco Mulakkal, former Bishop of Jalandhar, whom she accuses of abusing her during his visits to her convent in Kottayam, Kerala. The conversation that followed helped women journalists from outside Kerala understand the plight of the nuns, the makings of the protest that followed the case, and the current state of the case.

“I love (the Church) and live within the Church, but I am against certain things that happen within the Church. What kept me motivated was the support I got from those around me, from the sisters who were with me. I wanted to live to show my gratitude to them,” said Sister Ranit as she explained what kept her going through this very public ordeal.

Sister Ranit narrated her experience after she spoke to The News Minute. But then she had requested to remain anonymous. It was when actor Bhavana (who was sexually assaulted in 2017) spoke publicly about her plight that Sister decided to shed the cloak of anonymity as she felt that she had nothing more to lose.

Her journey as a nun had begun when she moved to Jalandhar with a cousin who was a priest there. She was drawn to the community after her mother’s demise. She was among the first batch of Missionaries of Jesus, a diocesan congregation with only 11 nuns and a few others in training. She became the first person nominated to lead the congregation.

When it came to filing a complaint, she was initially hesitant. Her complaints against Franco within the church were brought to the notice of the bishop himself. She had sent her brother to the police station with her internal complaint. As she put it, the more she wanted to keep the case under wraps, the more it became public.

Anita Cheria pointed out that there were five sisters with her, who gave her strength. Had she been alone, she could have been easily ejected from the Convent.

Sister spoke about the “”deep shame” she experienced that shaped how she approached the case, noting that she never used the word rape in the initial complaints. She, instead, used phrases like “he persuaded me to lie with him,” and this inconsistency in language across different statements later became a problem. During the protest, she described feeling numb and becoming part of it quite organically when the Joint Christian Council was protesting on her behalf. She credited people like Dhanya and Anita for keeping her alive, saying that in those days, she felt that there was no reason to wake up in the mornings. The Church kept silent while simultaneously sending transfer orders to the six sisters. Since they had police protection, the people sent to intimidate the nuns could not get into their Convent. The Church then stopped their monthly allowance and harassed them in other ways. She noted the painful irony that it was the Church that first forced them to file the case. The in-camera trial under Raman Pillai was deeply distressing. The defence lawyer’s aggressive language, expressions and body language intimidated her and wore her down emotionally. She recalled how each interaction with him left her in tears. What kept her from giving up was the support of the nuns who stood with her.

The acquittal of Franco came as a shock, said Sister Ranit. But, on the same day, the Superintendent of Police took a stand against the judgement, and in the days that followed, letters of support poured in, “giving them energy”.

Anita explained how another nun in the church had reflected on how all their adult lives as nuns they had believed it would be their own people who would stand for them, but when it came to the crunch, it was people from outside the Church who supported them.

The survivor nun concluded the session by saying that the shame now has to shift, that she loves and lives within the Church but is against certain incidents that happen within it. What kept her motivated was the support from those around her and the sisters who stood with her. She wanted to live to show her gratitude to them.

Report by Maria Teresa Raju

Edited by Saraswathy Nagarajan

Session 5: Environmental Reporting in Mainstream Media – Challenges, Ethics, and Opportunities



Moderator: Shalini Umachandran, Editor, Mint Lounge

Panelists:

Ravleen Kaur, Independent Journalist, Assam

Arjumand Shaheen, Independent Journalist, Jammu and Kashmir

Rinchen Angmo, Independent Journalist, Ladakh

Haritha John, Chief of Kerala Bureau, The News Minute

The panel brought together environmental journalists from diverse regions such as Ladakh, Kashmir, coastal India, and central India, to discuss the realities of reporting on climate and environmental issues within mainstream media.

A recurring theme was the tendency of newsrooms to prioritize dramatic, event-driven stories such as floods, landslides, and disasters, while neglecting slower, systemic processes such as climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, and livelihood impact. Panelists highlighted that environmental stories often gain visibility only when they become crises, leaving little room for reporting on the underlying causes or long-term consequences.

Speakers emphasized that environmental journalism intersects with nearly every beat, including gender, migration, public health, human rights, and livelihoods. However, mainstream media frequently overlooks these intersections. The discussions highlighted how climate impact is often experienced through water scarcity, migration, displacement, loss of livelihoods, and health challenges, particularly among women and marginalized communities, yet these dimensions rarely receive sustained attention.

The panel also examined editorial pressures and self-censorship. Journalists noted that while minor editorial changes are often acceptable, significant alterations can dilute the essence of a story. Reporters described challenges in covering issues related to caste, religion, tourism, militarization, and community conflicts, particularly in politically sensitive regions such as Kashmir. Space constraints, headline-driven journalism, and demands to shorten long-form reporting were identified as additional barriers to nuanced environmental coverage.

Another major concern was the lack of critical scrutiny around greenwashing and false climate solutions. Panelists discussed how media coverage often celebrates corporate sustainability initiatives without examining ongoing environmental damage. They also pointed to structural challenges in reporting on industries linked to major media owners and advertisers, making accountability in journalism increasingly difficult.

Journalists shared experiences of growing hostility toward environmental reporting, including threats, restricted access to sites, surveillance, and pressure from governments, industries, and local stakeholders. Several speakers noted that environmental reporting, once considered a niche beat, has become riskier as it increasingly challenges powerful interests. The discussion also explored the ethical dilemmas faced by environmental journalists. Reporting often requires balancing environmental protection with the rights and needs of vulnerable communities. Panelists stressed the importance of centering affected communities while also holding governments and institutions accountable for providing equitable and sustainable solutions. To reach wider audiences, journalists highlighted the importance of human-centered storytelling, strong visuals, social media experimentation, and locally relevant narratives.

Examples included reporting on climate-induced migration, sustainable practices in Ladakh, community adaptation efforts, and grassroots environmental innovations. The panel agreed that translating complex climate science into relatable, everyday experiences is essential for making environmental journalism more accessible and impactful.

The session concluded with a reflection that climate change is no longer a standalone issue but a lens through which many contemporary social, economic, and political challenges must be understood. The panel underscored the need for more inclusive, intersectional, and accountable environmental reporting that connects global climate conversations with the lived realities of communities on the ground.

Report by Dheeshma Puzhakkal

Edited by Saraswathy Nagarajan

Public Meeting at the Trivandrum Club



The chenda melam team with NWMI members at the public meeting.

One of the highlights from the public meeting of the 20th National Meeting of NWMI in Thiruvananthapuram was a *chenda melam* (percussion ensemble) performed by an all-women group. It created a safe and entertaining space for women journalists of all age groups to shake a leg together, inhibitions and all forgotten. The public meeting was held at the Trivandrum Club on February 7, 2026. Saraswathy Nagarajan welcomed the gathering on behalf of the Kerala Chapter which organised the meet. She spoke about how women in media needed a space of their own. Read her full speech [here](#).

The other highlight was the premiere of 'Media Woman: Ammu Joseph's Passionate Journey', a documentary film commissioned by the Kerala Media Academy. Featuring NWMI founder member Ammu Joseph, the film is directed by Shiny Benjamin, with senior journalist Saraswathy Nagarajan, co-ordinator of the Kerala chapter of the NWMI as creative consultant. Watch the film [here](#).



From left: Miriam Joseph, film producer and former journalist, Ammu Joseph, independent journalist and founding member, NWMI, Bina Paul, film editor and curator, KR Meera, author and former journalist, Rima Kallingal, actor, producer and dancer.

The keynote was delivered by award-winning writer K.R. Meera, first woman journalist to have worked at the *Malayalam Manorama* newspaper. She spoke on the meet's theme, **Media at the Crossroads: Independence vs Influence**. It created a picture of the media landscape in which every journalist in the room found their place. Read her full speech [here](#).



KR Meera

Invoking Dr B.R. Ambedkar, she said, "The more I reflect on the implications of our Fundamental Rights, the more I am awestruck by the wisdom and foresight of the architects of our Constitution. Remember, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's words that 'Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment; it has to be cultivated.' He knew that the document alone cannot save a people. He knew that it was up to us—the journalists, the citizens, the seekers of truth—to complete the task."

One of the takeaways from the public meeting of NWMI was the souvenir. Its theme was 'പെൻ പവർ/ Pen Power Pen Power: Media at the Crossroads'. The smart wordplay of 'Penn' (meaning woman in Malayalam) was only one of the many refreshing pieces of information for attendees. Read the souvenir [here](#).



Release of the souvenir at the public meet of the 20th National Meeting of NWMI.

"Not everyone in the network is aware of the tremendous amount of backend work that has gone into keeping NWMI going and growing over the past 24 years. Most members are not aware that we have no office-bearers, secretariat, staff or funds," says Ammu Joseph, in her article in the magazine.

A memorable and candid panel on the life of actors who report sexual violence, after they do so, pointed out a roadmap of how far we are from holding the men in power accountable. Titled, 'After Speaking Up: What Justice Looks Like for Women in Cinema', the panel was moderated by Shahina KK, independent journalist. Miriam Joseph, film producer and former journalist, Bina Paul, film editor and curator and Rima Kallingal, actor, producer and dancer were the panellists who are also members of the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC), an organisation of women working in Malayalam cinema.



From left: Miriam Joseph, film producer and former journalist, Bina Paul, film editor and curator, Shahina KK, independent journalist and Rima Kallingal, actor, producer and dancer.

They spoke about the rampant misogyny and patriarchal attitudes that reign over Malayalam cinema and how women who spoke up against the misogyny in the film industry were marginalised. The WCC was formed after an actor was abducted and assaulted sexually in a moving vehicle. The WCC members pointed out how the actor was still fighting for justice even nine years after the incident. Women media-persons, they said, were the ones who ensured that the news about the survivor's quest for justice and the WCC got space in news headlines. Although changes were visible in certain aspects, the WCC's demand was for a level playing ground with basic facilities available for all working in a film unit.

Report by Shalaka Shinde

Edited by Saraswathy Nagarajan

Session 6: From Byline to Bot– Ethical Challenges of AI in Journalism



Moderator: Ayswarya Murthy , Assistant Editor, 101Reporters

Panelists:

Dheeshma Puzhakkal, Editor, Fact-Check Division, NewsMeter

Divya Arya, Senior Correspondent, Collective Newsrooms for BBC

Ramya Kannan , Chief of Bureau, Tamil Nadu, The Hindu

Azeefa Fathima , Senior Reporter, The News Minute

Jayanti Buruda, Independent Journalist, Odisha

From news gathering to newsroom workflows, AI is already shaping how journalism is produced, distributed and consumed. The session explored the importance of AI in newsrooms and how AI is changing the media landscape. AI tools such as Transcriptor, Notebook LLM, Copilot, Mind Maps, and AI Flashcard Generator were highlighted for their use in research, translation, and reporting stories. The session also addressed AI and ethical challenges across the full arc of journalism, from news gathering to production and fact-checking.

The first part of the session had practical demonstrations by Dheeshma Puzhakkal, Divya Arya, Ramya Kannan, Azeefa Fathima and Ayswarya Murthy on how AI fits into their everyday work- what it helps with, where its limits lie and why human editorial judgment still matters.

Jayanti Buruda from Malkangiri, a primarily Adivasi dominated district in Odisha, presented ‘Bridging Gaps: AI Advantages and Challenges’, highlighting how AI supports her journalistic work. She spoke about how voice-based AI is helping her with answers through voice commands, which is particularly helpful since literacy is a barrier for many tribal women. AI is also helping her with writing tasks such as drafting applications, complaints, letters to officials, and reports for NGOs and media groups. AI tools, she said, are also providing better access to information, and in making videos, editing, adding subtitles, and creating images. She highlighted how AI is helping community media, citizen journalism, and social media reporting.



Jayanti went on to discuss the limitations and risks that come with AI use in Adivasi tribal contexts. Most AI tools do not support tribal languages, and many areas have poor networks and unstable internet, which limits the regular use of AI. She explained the risk of exploitation, as community knowledge, stories, and images might be collected and used without permission, meaning communities might lose ownership and credit of their own content. She spoke about algorithm bias and how AI systems trained on mainstream data can cause tribal voices to be ignored, misrepresented, or made invisible, while popular narratives get promoted over local realities.

Jayanti ended her presentation by noting that AI can support tribal women in journalism only if it respects their language and culture, protects ownership of their stories, and supports their voice rather than replacing it. The key takeaway of the session was to focus on the balance between efficiency and editorial responsibility, and on working with AI without losing the values that shape responsible journalism.

The second part of the session had the panellists discussing the ethical challenges of AI in journalism, focusing on bias, transparency, accuracy, accountability and editorial decision-making, using real examples from newsrooms.

Report by Sehar Qazi

Edited by Laxmi Murthy and Saraswathy Nagarajan

Workshops



Glimpses from the workshops held on the last day of the NWMI National Meeting in Thiruvananthapuram, 2026

The final day of the 20th National Meeting of NWMI began with three breakout workshops held simultaneously for members. The topics were:

Documentary Journalism: How To Turn Your Story into a Film

This workshop led by Milène Larsson from BBC World Service looked at how to develop ideas and access that reveal secrets, root out injustice, expose crime, corruption and abuse – into compelling storytelling and powerful films. It looked at hard-hitting documentaries and helped understand what is required to catch the attention of viewers. The workshop was for journalists across mediums, and proved useful for future pitching.

Designing Your (Sustainable) Journalism Future

This workshop introduced practical approaches for designing a journalism future amid the fast-changing media landscape. It guided independent journalists on how to become financially independent and make their work sustainable.

Decoding Kalaripayattu, Kerala's Martial Art Form

Raam Kumar, who comes from a lineage of Kalaripayattu practitioners, took the participants through the basic techniques of the martial art form and gave them a brief explanation of its practice in the modern world, and how it could mitigate occupational stress. Kalaripayattu is a martial art form and a performing art, and a dynamic way for meditation. Raam Kumar gave a physical demonstration of Kalaripayattu and participants were given a guided practice.

The National Meeting came to an end with a members-only internal session where inputs for the **statement** was put together. Members discussed the most pressing challenges facing women journalists and journalism in India. Discussions were also initiated about the venue of next NWMI national meet.

With the promise of the next annual meet, the members left with food for thought and warmth that will keep them going till the collective assemblies again.