

8th March 2018 - International Women's Day

# mahila

A Women's Movement Rising

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## A guide for reflection and sharing on the documentary

"Mahila" tells stories of empowerment from India's rural Dalit communities. For ages, Dalit women have suffered from a triple discrimination based on their gender, their caste and their impoverished economic class. The women of "Mahila" have found a rare voice and an important standing in their communities. They've achieved this through education, through access to credit and training to form businesses, and through awareness of their rights as citizens.

"Mahila" introduces us to three generations of Dalit women who represent a movement that is changing the face of India. Young Indra gets her parents full support to fulfil her dream of becoming a teacher. Jaysree leads a women farmers' cooperative that negotiates fair prices for their dairy production. And, finally, Mary Rani is the first Dalit woman to be elected president of her village.

As we see in the film, the Good Shepherd Sisters, who have advocated for women and Dalit's rights in India

for the past 30 years along with many partners in mission, lead this movement, supporting hundreds of girls and women out of oppression through education, economic justice and human rights. Since its founding, the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd has focused for centuries on the dignity and worth of all people especially women and children beyond ethnic background, culture or religion. Every person has innate value and is precious in the eyes of God.

On 8th March we celebrate women worldwide. In 1975 the United Nations announced the first International Women's Day, beginning a global movement recognizing and affirming that women have inherent rights as human beings. Over the years, many member states of the UN signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), testifying it was finally time for women to take their equal and rightful places in society.

The film invites us to reflect on the root causes of discrimination and on the vulnerability of the girl child. Girls are threatened just because they are not boys and therefore considered inferior humans. From a biblical perspective we are reminded that since the creation of the world, God loves all humankind: both female and male.

*God created them in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female God created them. God saw all that he has made – and it was very good!*  
(Genesis 1:26-27 and 31).

Our beliefs strengthen our commitment to challenge all cultures that promote practices of subtle or overt male domination of women. In “Mahila”, Sr. Sabina and Sr. Aruna remind us that continuing discrimination is rooted in patriarchy that in many countries keep women in a condition of inferiority. Males worldwide hold primary power, predominating in roles of political leadership, religious and moral authority and social privilege expecting females to submit without any voice in decisions that affect them and their children. This is particularly true in situations of poverty and ethnic discrimination.

Growing into consciousness of equal humanity is a slow process for both women and men. This film portrays women waking up to help one another, recognizing and claiming their rights to education, to having a voice in politics, employment, moral and religious freedom and freedom from all forms of violence and discrimination.

Watching the film we can sense at times that the pace is slow, maybe too slow for these frantic times of fast communication. With its careful choice of imagery and details of women’s everyday life, the film invites us to contemplate and walk in the shoes of these women, at their own pace. Dalit women in Andhra Pradesh belong to the lowest caste of Indian society. By walking in their shoes through the markets, in the fields, in the busy roads of their cities and villages, we discover how they are making a difference and how their daughters will make family and society richer for all. In this journey they commit themselves to be a bridge across diversities of gender, caste and religion, including their husbands in this process, to make it sustainable.

The women in “Mahila” walk together leading their sisters, daughters, sons and husbands out of oppression towards a more dignified and full life.



## WATCH

To watch and project the film please go on the website [www.mahilafilm.com](http://www.mahilafilm.com)  
You will find the film with subtitles in English, French, Spanish and Italian



## REFLECT

Take a moment to reflect on the following questions and share with your group:

1. What do you think about your own rights as a woman? What has influenced your views?
2. How does your society view women’s rights?
3. What organizations are available in your local area that promote the women’s rights?
4. Do you participate in the efforts to promote the rights of women? How?
5. How has your spirituality encouraged you to promote women’s rights?



## SHARE

We invite you to share with us the comments and reflections from your group.

You may send written responses, videos, pictures, or other forms, directly by email to Sr. Monique Tarabeh at [com@gssweb.org](mailto:com@gssweb.org) or to Sara Braga at [comm.gsif@gssweb.org](mailto:comm.gsif@gssweb.org)

Or, you may tag them directly on our “Bonpasteur Rome” Facebook account using the hashtag [#mahilafilm](https://www.facebook.com/mahilafilm).

With your permission, we will publish selected contributions on the Congregational website and on the Good Shepherd International Foundation’s website and social media.