



Celebrating Girl Children is Building Peace

Sisters of the Good Shepherd, wherever they are, affiliate themselves with the empowerment of children, especially girl children. As followers of the charism of St. Mary Euphrasia, their Foundress, who had stern affection for the suffering children and women, the Sisters strive to uphold the rights of children and women in all their shepherding mission – a mission which aims at creating an inclusive society which upholds the rights of women and children.

Since 2011, October 11th has been observed as the International Day of Girl Children. Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd is one of 4,186 NGOs endowed with Consultative Status with the UN's Economic and Social Council. Sisters have contributed towards establishment of the International Day of the Girl Child status. The aims of the day are to promote girls' empowerment and fulfilment of their human rights while also highlighting the challenges that girls all over the world face. It is a day for introspection and retrospection; while introspecting as human beings we all understand that the conditions of children, especially girls children continue to be low and some of the global statistics reveal the discrimination inflicted on the girl children – to mention a few, as per the figures of 2011 census, there are just 918 girls in India for 1000 boys; according to World Bank estimates, as on 2020, in India, the male literacy rate is 75.3% and that of female is 53.7%, showing a gap of 21.6 percentage. Female labour participation rate in India had fallen to 20.3% in 2019 from more than 26% in 2005. In retrospect, we are forced to ask ourselves if the situation needs to be changed for the good of the girl children and if so, what are the areas of concern and what is our action plan for the same.

Campaign for Girl Child: The International Day of Girl Child was introduced in 2012 by the United Nations General Assembly to urge the global community to embolden gender equality impacts. This year, the United Nations urges the world community to bridge the gender digital divide that exists in diverse skills and jobs – a challenge that society is increasingly facing due to the prevailing coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Celebrating Girl Children Matters: Celebrations are platforms to create a positive climate and exchange positive and promotive energies with one another for building peace and tranquility. To honour the girl children, Sisters of the Good Shepherd and their Mission Partners working in Andhra Pradesh State in India planned Girl Child Day Celebrations on 9th and 11th October 2021 in Amaravathi and Krosuru Mandal Headquarters respectively. Children in the age group of 14 to 18 years, women and men leaders - all of them put together 527 of them participated and benefitted. Community leaders, Teachers, and Government Officials concerned with children were invited to address the participants. Mrs. Padmaja, Principal of Gurukul Padasala (Amaravathi), Mrs. R. Indira, District Child Protection Officer (DCPO), Mr. Babu, Sub-Inspector of Police (SI), Amaravathi, Mr. Sameer, Project Coordinator, Good Shepherd-CHILDLINE 1098, Mrs. Yasodha, Counselor of Good Shepherd-CHILDLINE 1098, Mr. Gnanababu, Principal of Jai Bharat School (Krosuru) Mr. John Aruldass, Founder of Servites of the Poor, Sr. Madhalai Vinnarasi, Director of Community Development Programmes, Good Shepherd Convent (Amaravathi) were some of the key speakers. Mr. Laxman, the Project Coordinator moderated the programme at Amaravathi and Mr. Ravi, English Tutor in Adolescent Girls Empowerment Programme coordinated the public meeting at Krosuru.

The theme of the day “Digital Generation: Our Generation” was at length discussed and explained to the participants as to how digital technology can be a boon as well as a bane to humanity, if not used properly. Girl children cheered the participants with dances between the speeches to keep the learning spirit going.

Take-home Messages

Key messages shared by the main speakers of the International Day of the Girl Child include the following:

Collective Efforts Needed to Create Safe Space: To end child marriage, individuals, lawmakers, and world leaders need to challenge the norms which reinforce the idea that girls are inferior to boys. Instead, we need to empower girls to be their own agents of change. Providing girls with equal access to quality education will enable them to support themselves and lead fulfilled cum independent lives. Creating safe space and channels for them to speak up and speak out will allow their voices to be heard.

Responsible Use of Digital Technology: With reference to the use of digital technology, two different types of experiences were shared by the resource persons; number one is that COVID-19 lockdown forced the children for the first time to utilize the digital technology for online classes. However, the girl children in many families were deprived of using technology for want of money to buy gadgets. Secondly, with regard to the unpreparedness on the part of the parents to allow the girls to make use of them for fear of possible misuse. In both cases, it is the girl children who are the deprived ones who need to be attended to, by the parents. The need to educate the correct use of technology also was emphatically expressed.

Beware of Traffickers: Girl children need to beware of fake news being spread through social media which is used for trafficking. Traffickers use social media to develop a relationship with their intended victims through false promises and coercion. Children, especially girl children need to be taught to make good use of social media. It is the duty of the parents to restrict screen watching by their children. Children also must be taught when it is appropriate to talk to strangers.

Restrict Access to Personal Profile: Social media should be a place where you safely interact with friends and family. Children must be encouraged only to accept communication from friends and close relatives whom they know and are familiar with.

Practice Child Protection Laws: One of the best ways and means of protecting girl children is to create stringent laws in view of removing all forms of gender discrimination and ensure that girls and women are equally valued as people and protected from child marriage and other types of gender-based violence and harmful practices. In India, there are laws to protect children but they are not being implemented in letter and spirit due to political unwillingness.

Change of Mindset: Child marriages are conducted not with the aim of offending children but as a matter of practice and in some cases to protect the child from abuse. In few others, it is to protect the family wealth. There is a strong need to propagate the ill-effects of child marriage among all sections of people, especially the parents. Traditional harmful practices must be replaced with scientific approaches.

Change Must Happen in the Family: Promoting children’s rights is the key to future development and prosperity. Though Government has a role to promote the educational rights of girl children, basically it must start from the family.

Awareness on Rights of Children: Adults need to be aware of the four rights of children – right to life, protection, development and participation. Children too must be made aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Higher Education for Girls: Since it is learnt that 75 per cent of girl children become dropouts during their school education, both parents and Government must take interest in continuing their school education and ensure that they send them for higher education. If girls are given good education and vocational training, then, they will become financially independent and shall be spared from family violence. When one knows that girls are not enrolled in school, they are more likely to become child brides. In other words, girls who have no education are three times likely to be married off before 18 compared to girls with secondary or higher education.

Earn Your Rights: One of the resource persons shared a different kind of story to tell children that rights can be earned only through knowledge and income-earning skills. The story goes like this . . .

Rebuilding the Lost Paradise: After creating heaven and earth, Our Father created all living and non-living creatures, an atmosphere of plentifulness. He created all kinds of trees grow; trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. God had planted a garden called Eden in the east. It all took Him 4 days to complete these tasks. On the 5th day, as expression of himself with His likeness, He put ADAM he had formed in the Eden, the Paradise. On the 6th day when he visited ADAM, He found him unhappy and in a melancholic mood. After deep reflection, GOD made him sleep. In his sleep, taking out one of his ribs, He created a beautiful woman called Eve for him to feel happy, smiling and joyful. When ADAM got up, he saw the beautiful EVE, an attractiveness for him to make life happy. Thus, through EVE, ADAM was happy and running around Eden and eating fruits and nuts without any cost. After billions of years, life got changed. The Eden, which GOD created freely for ADAM & EVE was sold to Landlords and Corporate Companies. The managers are people who had studied in international standard universities. They, with the help of the Leaders of different countries, developed laws suitable to them and prepared land documents and Eden was thus broken into small plots called countries which are now fenced with barbed wire. A large section of the decedents of Eden are unaware of the development and the ownership transferred to the Landlords and Corporate Companies. Now they are starving. In addition, they have to have a thing called ‘money’, to buy anything for their families. Whatever were given freely by GOD are now sold for high price. The earth, water, fire, air, and space are priced. Now, the only option is to buy them for a priced fixed by Landlords and the Corporate Companies, if you want them. The solution offered to majority of the poor is to work in the lands of the Landlords and Corporate Companies for the wages fixed by them. One of the conditions for employment is that one must be knowledgeable with skills required for the Landlords and Corporate Companies. This is not a story to be ignored but to be understood and to decide a way forward. If you have knowledge and skills, you can survive.

Hence, the speaker said that it is vital that girls become knowledgeable to learn the social situations and thereby become conscious citizens to face the challenges in life; in the case of girls, they must be doubly prepared as the situation of the women and girl children has not changed much. Together let us strive to create a world where the rights of every individual are taken care of. It is possible, if worked collectively.



Photographs Taken on 9th and 11th October 2021



Welcome Song by the Adolescent Girls of Amaravathi Region





Mr. Laxman explains the Life Skills to become masters in facing challenges





"Education to Girl Children is the best tool to prevent abuse or violence of any kind", says Mr. John Aruldass, Mission Partner of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd





"Girl Children, when in trouble, need not have to hesitate to seek the help of Police Department" says Mr. Babu, Sub-Inspector of Police, Amaravathi





Mrs. Padmaja, Principal of Gurukul Padasala (Amaravathi) through case studies explains the mis-use of internet and the social media - a caution to all the girls using social media.





Mrs. R. Indira, District Child Protection Officer (DCPO), Guntur District explains the ways and means of protecting and promoting children's rights and also lists the Govt. Efforts too.



Sr. Vinnarasi, Local Community Leader of Good Shepherd Convent (Amaravathi, Andhra Pradesh) and Sr. Reema, Sub-site Coordinator of CHALICE Educational and Community Sponsorship Programme pose with some of the children participated in the International Day of the Girl Child Day celebrations



"Only when we become open-minded persons, the possibility of learning will take place", says, Sr. Reema, Sub-site Director of CHALICE Educational and Community Sponsorship Programme (Amaravathi)





Mr. Ravi, English Tutor of 'Adolescent Girls Project' explained in detail the opportunities made available to Adolescent Girls for developing life-oriented social skills and job-oriented vocational skills and thus become assertive.



Mrs. Yasodha, Counselor of Good Shepherd CHILDLINE 1098 (Guntur) briefed the round the clock helplines for the rescue and rehabilitation of women and children in 'At Risk' circumstances living in the vicinity of Guntur District





Ms. Anusha, one of the girls who volunteered to address on the rights of children was facilitated by the Sisters and Mission Partners of the Good Shepherd, Amaravathi



"Let Us Break the Chain of Abuse" - a dance by the Adolescent Girls in Krosuru on the International Day of the Girl Child at Jai Bharath School Campus, Krosuru Town

