

Celebrating Girl Children;

Celebrating the Future of Our Society

On 19th December 2011, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution and declared 11th October as the International Day of the Girl Child, to recognize girls' rights and the unique challenges girls' face around the world. From 2012 onwards, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Amaravathi and in Mangalagiri regions of Andhra Pradesh State in India observe this day with special events with the objective of creating awareness among the general public on the issues and problems faced by the girl children and try to challenge the situation that works against the girl children by involving everyone concerned with the objective of upscaling the rights of girl children.

If the girls are provided with proper care, education and skills required of them, then, they shall turn out to be persons with potential to become empowered workers, teachers, government officials, mothers, counsellors, entrepreneurs, mentors, household heads, researchers, policy makers, and political leaders of today and tomorrow.

The International Day of the Girl Child focuses on the need to address the challenges girls face and to promote girls' empowerment and the fulfilment of their human rights. In other words, the day is an opportunity to address several challenges faced by girls like gender discrimination, inequality, deprivation of basic human rights, and many more.

The theme for this year's International Day of the Girl Child is "*Invest in Girls' Rights: Our Leadership, Our Well-being*". This is a day of acclamation and a day of reflection; acclamation because it is the day on which God created one of the finest creations, i.e., women; and it is a day of reflection because it is to this creation trouble has come in the form of structured violence. Without female species in creation, no creation is possible.

This year, the Sisters and the Partners-in-Mission of the Good Shepherd have planned 3 days of celebration to observe the International Day of Girl Child to cover a larger audience and thus take forward mission for Girl Children.

Day 1: On 11th October 2023, a district-level Public Meeting was organised involving the Chief Officials concerned with children;

Day 2: On 12th October 2023, a Public Rally was organised at the local-level involving the school-going children and college-going students and the teaching faculty; and

Day 3: On 13th October 2023, a Public Meeting was organised with the Adolescent Girls, mothers of children benefitting under the CHALICE Educational and Community Sponsorship Program. and members of Euphrasia Mutually Aided Cooperative and Thriftiness Society.

"No one should be lost in the chaos of our times"

- Saint Mary Euphrasia

DISTRIC-LEVEL CELEBRATION OF INTERNATIONAL DAY OF GIRL CHILD

Day 1 (11th October 2023)

A public meeting in connection with the observation of the 'International Day of the Girl Child 2023' on 11th October 2023 was held at the campus of HIRD Junior College for Women, Narasaraopet, Palnadu District. Girl Students from HIRD Junior College for Women, and Sri Chaitanya School, Narasaraopet, around 250 of them attended and benefitted.

Key Persons Invited to Address the Participants

- i. Mrs. Kalpashree IAS, Assistant Collector, Palnadu District;
- ii. Mrs. Ratna Kumari, Director of Women Development & Child Welfare, Palnadu District, Andhra Pradesh;
- iii. Mrs. Aruna, Project Director of ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services), Palnadu District, Andhra Pradesh;
- iv. Mr. B. Vijaykumar, DCPO, Palnadu District, Andhra Pradesh;
- v. Mrs. G. Feebi, Principal of Hird Girls Junior High School, Narasaraopet;
- vi. Sr. Madhalai Vinnarasi, Director of Women & Children Development Programme of Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Amaravathi,
- vii. Dr. Padmaja, Department of Health, Narasaraopet; and
- viii. Mrs. V. Gowthami, DISHA – Department of Police, Narasaraopet.

Key Messages Shared by the Resource Persons

- The International Day of the Girl Child is an important day, because of the intention behind the observation of the day. In the context of increasing abuse and violence being inflicted on the girl children, the day assumes importance;
- Birth of every Girl Child needs to be increasingly celebrated;
- Mindset of the parents that Girl Child is a debt in the family must be replaced as Girl Children are beautiful, amazing persons radiating from within and a person who brings tremendous joy and happiness to the family;
- The presence of a Girl Child lights up the whole family; the hopes of the Girl Children in the family and in the community are boundless; it is heartening to see more girls enrolled in the schools; it is heartening to note that women have entered into all spheres of life; women are taking leadership roles even in space research;
- One should not forget that the discrimination of girl children in the family continues in several families; sex determination tests are secretly being done and male child is preferred in the family in spite of strict laws like Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994, PCPNDT Act was enacted to stop female foeticide and take care of the declining sex ratio in India. PCPNDT Act banned prenatal sex determination;
- Gender discrimination starts from the time of conception and continues all through one's life. It is practiced in the form of sex determination for sex preference, denial of good nutrition,

healthcare, rights to play, basic education, vocational education, denial of rights to job, rights to property, rights to politics, rights to make decisions and so on.

- Girl children must be given close attention for their health and wellbeing as they are playing a major role in the upbringing of future generations;
- It is shocking that despite formal education, in our society there are still some parents who prefer male children. In our society, parents tend to prefer to have more children if the firstborn happens to be a girl due to a strong son preference. This preference for boys is motivated by economic, religious, social and emotional desires and norms that favour males and make females less desirable;
- Social media needs to be carefully and consciously used; children should not be easily carried away by the whims and fancies being depicted by the media;
- It is crucial to promote gender equality and educate people about the importance of treating all children equally regardless of their gender;
- It is the responsibility of the individuals to take care of their health; girl children must internalise this aspect and not expect others to tell them as to how they have to take care of their health needs;
- Education is one of the determining factors for girl child empowerment, hence, both the parents and the girls themselves must focus on the founding stones, that is education;
- Women in Andhra Pradesh need to learn to download and use this women safety mobile app – The 'Disha app' introduced by the Government of India which uses GPS to track the user's location and seek help from local police and authorities in case of an emergency. The app claims that police and relevant authorities can reach the scene of an emergency in just six minutes.
- In our society, we see gender inequality prevailing in homes unintentionally, because of the culture which is so ingrained in our minds, therefore, anything to be done with reference to empowerment of the girl child must begin with the mindset;
- As per the data by NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau), in 2020, a total of 28.9% of the total child population faces some kind of crime against them but only 65.6% of the total crime committed is reported; this indicates that there are problems in revealing and reporting the state of abuse which needs to be clarified and a solution sought;
- Girl children must know why they have to wait for the right age to get married; UNICEF defines child marriage as a formal marriage or informal union before 18 years of age, because it can lead to a lifetime of suffering for girls who are more likely to experience domestic violence or die due to complications in pregnancy and childbirth.
- In 1992, when India ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, it pledged to safeguard its children from all types of sexual exploitation and abuse. In India, only 3% of Child Sexual Abuse related offenses were reported to the police. It happened because of the social stigma associated with such abuse, the criminal justice system consistently fails to adequately address the needs of children who have experienced sexual assault. Given the shame and associated sociocultural stigma, particularly if the abuse occurs in the setting of the

family, it is not surprising that Child Sexual Abuse is significantly underreported. Parents, teachers and other stakeholders have the duty to educate and encourage the girl children on the subject of good touch and bad touch. Since these things are not explained at the younger age, most of the girl children get abused as they were young and bear a guilt feeling throughout their lives which affects their lives in the long run.

- Children must be educated to say “no” to circumstances in which they are not comfortable. Parents, caregivers, and teachers have to take initiative to teach children as to how to behave in certain circumstances;
- Today, the International Day of the Girl Child, is the birthday for all girls and women; it is a day of celebration and a day of reflection; celebration because we internalise that women are the best managers of the family and best in the upbringing of children; it is a reflection because it gives an opportunity to reflect on the issues and problems of the girl children and a day to draw an action plan to redress the situation for the best interests of the girl children.

Other Activities

Between thematic speeches, girl children expressed their talents and some of them performed dances, and those who have expressed their talents and dance performances were honoured by the special guests of the day. Adolescents Girls studying at Good Shepherd Computer and Spoken English Center performed a dance through which they have listed out the discrimination and the problems being inflicted on girl children in the name of tradition and cultural practices.

GIRL CHILD RIGHTS RALLY IN AMARAVATHI TOWN

Day 2 (12th October 2023)

In view of raising awareness among the public, a rally was taken out on 13th October 2023 on the streets of Amaravathi town. School children and teachers, College students and their Lecturers from St. Augustine’ Girls’ High School and Pallotti Junior College (Amaravathi) respectively, participated and benefitted from the rally. The rally was stopped for a brief time at the crossroads where a large number of people usually gather for shopping and travel purposes.

Key Persons Participated

- i. Rev. Fr. G. Bhaskar, Director, Pallotti Junior College, Amaravathi,
- ii. Sr. Jancy, Principal, St. Augustine School, Amaravathi,
- iii. Rev. Mohan, Principal of Pallotti Junior College, Amaravathi;
- iv. Mr. Allu Reddy, Sub-Inspector for Anti-human Trafficking, Narasoraopet, Palnadu District,
- v. Sr. Martina, Good Shepherd Convent, Myanmar
- vi. Mr. Mohammed Subani, Sub-Inspector, Amaravathi
- vii. Sr. Gracy, Sub-Site Director of CHALICE Child & Community Sponsorship Programme.

Slogans Raised at the Girl Child Rights Rally

International Day of the Girl Child is a day to promote the rights of a girl child and also throw light on gender inequalities that exist in the world. It is an opportunity to spread more and more awareness with the best and catchy slogans on ‘save girl child’.

Following are some of the slogans raised during the rally which conducted on the streets of Amaravathi Town, the upcoming capital of Andhra Pradesh State:

- Stop suicide of girl children and women;
- Stop practice of girl child marriage;
- Stop girl child trafficking;
- Safeguard the rights of girl children;
- Stop child labour; send children to school;
- Protect child rights; it is every citizen's duty;
- It is the pride of parents if the girl children are educated;
- Parents need to feel proud of girl children;
- Protect the Girl Child; protect nature;
- Stop all forms of abuse against girl children;
- Childhood is every child's right;
- It is a loss for the country if children are at stake; and
- The right place for children is school.

The occasion of International Girl Child Day reminds each one of us that a girl child still needs our attention and extra care. The rally was intentionally planned to instill in the minds of the adolescents, school children, students from the college, the teaching community and the general public, the issues and problems faced by the girl children and the need for immediate attention to address the same for the best interest of the girl children.

Public Meeting on International Day of Girl Child 2023

Day 3 (13th October 2023)

Adolescent girls and women from Euphrasia Mutually Aided Cooperative and Thrift Society which is initiated by the Sisters and their Partners-in-Mission in Amaravathi, numbering 300 participated in a public meeting organised in connection with the International Day of the Girl Child on the campus of Good Shepherd Convent, Amaravathi.

Special Guests and Key Persons Participated

- i. Ms. Sri Kalpashree K.R., IAS, Assistant Collector, Palnadu District;
- ii. Mr. Vijay Kumar, District Child Protection Officer, Palnadu District;
- iii. Rev. Fr. G. Bhaskar, Director, Pallotti Junior College, Amaravathi;
- iv. Mrs. Swarnakumari, Child Development Officer (DCPO), Palnadu;
- v. Mr. K.Ch. Koteswara Rao, Supervisor, CHILDLINE 1098, Guntur;
- vi. Sr. Priya, Superior, St. Augustine Convent, Amaravathi;
- vii. Mr. Ch. Ravi Shekar, Rtd. Assistant Engineer, Department of Electricity, Andhra Pradesh;
- viii. Sr. Deanna Pereira, Counsellor of Women and Children Development Programmes, Good Shepherd Convent, Amaravathi;
- ix. Sr. Madhalai Vinnarasi, Director of Women and Children Development Programmes, Good Shepherd Convent, Amaravathi; and
- x. Mrs. Swarnalakshmi, District Child Protection Officer, Palnadu District

Take Home Messages Shared by the Chief Guest and Special Invitees:

- Children are a blessing and a gift from the Lord; the parents need to acclaim the birth of girl children because through them only the future generation has to germinate; when we are basking in the joy of parenting a male child, very often we forget the fact that the person who gave you this happiness is a woman. Without the women population, the existence of human population is absolutely impossible;
- Investing in girl child refers to providing the girls children all their needs such as special care, nutrition, healthcare, education, human dignity and ensuring their right to inherit the properties of their parents and ancestors;
- The theme of this year's International Day of the Girl Child calls us to collective action to support girls to achieve their ambitions and to boost gender equality.
- Girl children's needs must be seriously taken into consideration by the parents, especially by mothers as they are the immediate ones available for the girl children to attend to their needs;
- The thought process needs to be replaced with the right ones; soon after the girl children come of age, parents generally think of getting them married. This needs to be replaced with helping the girl children to express their goals in life and help them realise the same, instead of going back and lingering on old thoughts. The science behind getting the girls married needs to be understood. Parents need to understand that in India as per the law the girls must complete 18 years to get them married while the boys must complete 21 years. 'The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006' came into force on 1 November 2007 in India. It forbids child marriages, and protects and provides assistance to the victims of child marriages.
- Parents must be motivated on their 'responsible parenting' and its significance; they have a major role in telling their girls about their 'growth and development' and its significance, else they shall fall prey to infatuation which may end up taking inappropriate decisions in life;
- Society must develop a positive culture towards girl children, as they are going to be the creators of the future generations; investing in them is product and this message must reach every human mind;
- Girl children and women are the motivating factors and the driving forces for all the human development in the world;
- Women have entered into all the disciplines and have proved to be better administrator and leaders; this spirit needs to be further accelerated for a better tomorrow for the girls and women;
- One of the new forms of discrimination against girls is the digital divide which means many girls, especially those who are living in the remote villages, are excluded from the online world. This needs to be paid attention to; Government Departments and Voluntary Organisations can think of taking initiatives on this for girl children;
- No generation or germination is possible without the female generation; hence the parents need to feel proud to have girl children instead of feeling that they are burdensome;
- Save and respect the girl child because she is the future of the family, country and world;
- Girl children need to be encouraged to go in for higher education instead of thinking of marriage for her at the early age;

- It is the responsibility of the parents to help their children to fix their goals in life and work towards the same;
- Ensuring retention and continuation of formal education of the girl children after 10th Grade is a way forward to stop the practice of girl child marriages;
- Apart from the academic skills, the parents need to equip their girl children with skills such as riding bicycles, motorbikes, four-wheeler, swimming, martial arts, arts and crafts, vocal music and musical instruments and so on. In doing so, the level of confidence will be boosted and the girls will turn out to be fit to face certain challenges without depending on others;
- Dowry torture will be less in the cases where the girl children are educated and economically independent; The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 which was legally binding on every other citizen of India irrespective of caste or religion insists on prevention of giving or receiving any form of dowry. Parents and the youth interested in marriage need to know this law;
- Future will be in the hands of girl children, if they are literate and economically independent;
- Parents need to make use of the services made available from the Educational Institutions, NGOs and Government Departments for the greater interests of girl children;
- Even in this 21st century of the computer world, the incidence of school dropouts is more as they complete 10th grade, and not all those who pass the 10th grade get into Intermediate Course. This needs to be checked and a solution needs to be sought for the good of children.
- Parents must increasingly take initiative to check the growth and development of children, special care in the case of girl children as their needs are quite different; parents must monitor the behaviour and the movement of the children, in order to ensure the safety of the girl children; and
- Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the Father of Indian Constitution who had big reverence for women said that he would measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved. He again said that the unity in society is meaningless without the accompaniment of women. Education is fruitless without educated women and agitation is incomplete without the strength of women. All these ideas reflect that in human life one cannot forego women and make social life a better one.

Certain Observations

- ‘Social development’ is a voluntary work where like-minded individuals come together to work for people’s development; this is successful wherever there is mutual relationship built;
- National and international days of importance are opportunities for organising campaigns for bringing awareness among the various sections of people. Voluntary organisations must increasingly take steps to organise national and international days of importance in order to campaign on certain issues and problems people are facing in their lives; this is mentioned here because not many organisations take interest to organise events that are beneficial to the common people;
- Apart from the Voluntary Organisations, concerned Government Department must take a leading role in utilising the national and international days of importance as opportunities to upscale the campaigns in favour of people at the margins; and

- While organising such campaigns they should be creative and attractive enough to transfer the message to other people.

Conclusion and Reflection

For the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, around the world, the wellbeing of girl children and women is close to their heart and mind. Their minds are engrossed and committed to bringing about a fairer future for the girl children and women by educating them, training them on human values, equipping them with knowledge, skills in accordance with their age, enabling them to enter every discipline so that their voices are amplified and heard by the people in power and thereby build a brighter world for every girl and woman, ultimately for the good of the entire humanity.

International Day of the Girl Child is an opportunity to create an awareness among the general public on the issues and problems faced by the girl children in today's life and alert the significant others to work towards fulfilling the rights of girl children. This year, the Sisters and their Partners-in-Mission observed the International Day of the Girl Child for three consecutive days with different groups and communities to profess the relevance and urgency to work for the rights of girl children. It is a clarion call for every person in society and also a responsibility that if the future has to be good for all, it is the responsibility of every human being in society to work for the rights of girl children, else, the future of humanity will be a shocking one for all. A happy and healthy girl child with a safe and progressive environment is what we all dream of. Wishing all a Very Happy International Girl Child Day.

Hence, let us all learn to internalise the pivotal role played by girl children and women who are trying to balance the situation both within and outside the family. Women and girls can lead us to a fairer future. On this International Day of the Girl Child, let us amplify girls' voices, and recommit to working together to build a world where every girl can lead and thrive. May this world become a safer and happier place for girl children to live happily.

Warm wishes on International Girl Child Day.

Let us start respecting the girl children and strive to create a better future for ourselves and others.

Together everything is possible.

Documented by

Mr. Ayyadurai John Aruldass

Partner-in-Mission

Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Amaravathi

Andhra Pradesh State, India



Photo-shots of the International Day of Girl Child 2023

Day 1 – 11th October 2023 – Celebrating with Girl Children

Campaign for Upscaling the Human Rights of Girl Children

Public Meeting with School-going Girl Children at Narasoraopet, Palnadu Dt. AP., India



Ms. Sri Kalpashree K.R., IAS, Assistant Collector, Palnadu District, lights the lamp as a sign of beginning and worship on the event of the observation of the International Day of Girl Child 2023



Sr. Madhalai Vinnarasi, rgs, Director of Women and Children Development Programmes, Good Shepherd Convent, Amaravathi, joins others in the lighting of lamp in the beginning of the celebration of the International Day of Girl Child 2023



Adolescent Girls of 'Good Shepherd Computer Literacy and Spoken English Course' perform a song on the issues and problems faced by girl children from womb to tomb.



The untold sufferings of girl children has been explained by Anusha, studying at HIRD High School for Girls in Narasoraopet, through a song.



"Women started to prove their potentials by occupying high positions in the Government Administration because of their perseverance and education, and for the girl children they stand as examples" says Mrs. V. Gowthami, Sub-Inspector of Police, DISHA – Department of Police, Narasaraopet



Girl children from HIRD High School for Girls, and other schools participate in the celebration of the International Day of Girl Child 2023



"It is the duty of every person to ensure girl children a safe environment in this world" says Mrs. G. Feebi, Principal of HIRD Girls Junior High School for Girls, Narasaraopet





International Day of Girl Child is an opportunity to address several challenges faced by girls like gender discrimination, inequality, deprivation of basic human rights, and many more.





"The only key for development of children from the socio-economically weaker sections is education. Children must make use of every opportunities to come up in life" says Sr. Vinnarasi, Director of Children and Women Empowerment Programmes of Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Amaravathi



"Setting goals is a vital practice that can benefit anyone with a vision for their future" says Dr. V. Padmaja, Department of Health, Narasaraopet



A set of posters were released on the event of International Day of Girl Child to create awareness on the rights of girl children.





Ms. Anaga Laksmi was honoured for her intelligence in mathematics by the chief invitees of the International Day of Girl Child 2023.



Ms. Anusha was honoured for her active participation in the International Day of Girl Child 2023



Mrs. Kalpashree IAS, Assistant Collector, Palnadu District was honoured by the other special invitees on the International Day of Girl Child 2023



Mrs. V. Gowthami, DISHA – Sub-Inspector, Department of Police, Narasoraopet, Palnadu District was honoured by the other invitees on the International Day of Girl Child 2023

Day 2 – 12th October 2023 – Public Awareness Rally

Public Rally with School Children in Amaravathi Town, Palnadu District, Andhra Pradesh, India



The theme of International Day of the Girl 2023 is
"Invest in Girls' Rights: Our Leadership, Our Well-being".
This calls action in favour of ensuring the rights of girl children.

changing the mindset of people in favour of girl children.





'Boosting fairer opportunities for girls and amplifying their voices' are the concerns of the Good Shepherd Sisters and their Partners-in-Mission.



'Achieving gender equality and girls children and women's empowerment' is one of the focus areas of the mission of the Good Shepherd Sisters and their Partners-in-Mission.

Day 3 – 13th October 2023 – Celebrating with Women

Public Meeting with Adolescent Girls and Women from Euphrasia Mutual Aided Cooperative and Thrift Society at Good Shepherd Convent, Amaravathi, Palnadu District, Andhra Pradesh, India



Lighting of Lamp by Ms. Sri Kalpashree K.R., IAS., Assistant Collector, Palnadu District, as a sign of good beginning and invoking the blessings of our Creator, to celebrate the International Day of the Girl Child 2023.



Adolescent Girls dance together for a song enumerating the roles of girls in the household, society and the economy.



"Rejoice and smile when you hear about the birth of a daughter and consider her as a towering blessing for yourself", says Mr. Ch. Ravi Shekar, Rtd. Assistant Engineer, Department of Electricity, Andhra Pradesh.





"Education empowers girl children from the marginalised communities and helps them build better futures for themselves, their families, and their communities" says Rev. Fr. G. Bhaskar, Director, Pallotti Junior College, Amaravathi





"We, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd have our mission in 74 countries around the world and our main focus is to work with and for the rights of girl children and women" says Sr. Madhalai Vinnarasi, rgs., Local Community Leader, Good Shepherd Convent, Amaravathi



"Ensuring retention and continuation of formal education of the girl children after 10th Grade and Intermediate is a way forward to stop the practice of girl child marriages" says Mrs. Swarnakumari, one of the Child Development and Protection Officers (CDPO) in Palnadu District.



"Instead of thinking marriage for the girl children soon after completing 10th Grade and Intermediate, think of higher education for the girl children" says Sr. Deanna Pereira, rgs., who is the Counselor for Women & Children Development Programmes, Amaravathi.





Adolescent Girls studying at 'Good Shepherd Computer Literacy and Spoken English Training Centre' singing an awareness song on the rights of girl children.



Ms. Sri Kalpashree K.R., IAS., Assistant Collector, Palnadu District, has been honoured by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd for her exemplary character to the girls and women.



Sr. Martina, rgs., a Lawyer herself, who is on her visit to India for an internship from Myanmar is felicitated by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Amaravathi on the International Day of Girl Child.



Mrs. Swarnakumari, one of the Child Development and Protection Officers (CDPO) in Palnadu District is felicitated for her contribution towards child development and protection.

