



**MOTTUKAL – EMPOWERMENT OF
SINGLE WOMEN IN URBAN SLUMS**

International Women's Day – 2026

GOOD SHEPHERD CONVENT – CHENNAI, INDIA 🟡🟡

Prepared by: Sr. Hemalatha, RGS



No. 32, College Road, Nungambakkam,
Chennai – 600006, Tamil Nadu, India.

**08
March**

Gathering Women Together

On 7th March 2026, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Chennai, together with their committed Partners-in-Mission, collaborators, and staff of various social initiatives, organised a vibrant celebration of International Women's Day 2026 at Fathima Hall in the historic Good Shepherd Campus, Nungambakkam, Chennai. The event brought together women from diverse backgrounds and created a welcoming space where they could gather as a community of courage and hope. The initiative reflected the Sisters of the Good Shepherd's long-standing mission to accompany women, particularly those living in vulnerable circumstances, and to affirm their dignity and potential. International Women's Day provided a meaningful opportunity to highlight the struggles and strengths of women who are often unseen in society.



The celebration was designed as a day of encouragement, fellowship, and reflection, where women could express their voices and celebrate their contributions. Opportunities for interaction, sharing, and joyful participation fostered a sense of belonging and solidarity among participants. The programme also demonstrated strong collaboration between the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and their partners, who continue to work to empower women in urban poor communities. More than a commemorative event, the gathering became a moment of unity and affirmation for women who carry heavy responsibilities in their families and communities.

Voices of Strength

More than 300 women and around 50 girl children participated in the celebration, making the gathering lively and inspiring. Most of the participants were Single Women, those who are unmarried, widowed, separated, or deserted. Many came from six slum communities in and around Nungambakkam of Chennai Metropolitan City, the capital of Tamil Nadu state in India, where daily life is often marked by economic hardship, social insecurity, and limited opportunities. Despite these challenges, the women along with some of the girl children arrived with enthusiasm and openness, ready to celebrate their day and share their experiences.



For many participants, such gatherings are rare opportunities to step away from daily challenges and experience a supportive community. The celebration provided a platform for women to speak freely, listen to one another, and reflect on their strengths and aspirations. It reminded them that they are not alone in their struggles but part of a wider network of women who share similar journeys and hopes. Laughter, conversations, and creative expressions filled the Good Shepherd Campus and the Fathima Hall, reflecting the participants' resilience and spirit. The gathering encouraged the women to recognise their dignity, support one another, and look toward the future with renewed confidence and determination.

Global Theme Reflection

The celebration was inspired by the International Women’s Day 2026 global theme: “Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls.” This global call urges the world to move beyond words and promises and to actively ensure that every woman and girl enjoys her rights, experiences justice, and is empowered to act for change.

For women living in vulnerable urban communities, this message carries deep meaning. It reminds society that women’s rights are human rights, and that justice must reach even the most marginalised women. The event, therefore, encouraged participants to recognise their dignity, understand their rights, and build the confidence to claim a rightful place in society.



Joyful Community Spirit

The day was filled with lively activities designed to bring joy and encourage participation among the women. Several traditional competitions and games were organised, including Rangoli competitions and interactive group games such as “Hold Your Staff,” which brought laughter and enthusiasm to the gathering.

These activities were not merely entertainment; they served a deeper purpose. They created a space of freedom and happiness where women who often carry heavy burdens could relax, celebrate their creativity, and experience the joy of community. The colourful rangoli designs created by the participants symbolised the beauty, resilience, and creativity of women’s lives.

Empowering Women to Overcome Challenges

Entrepreneurship trainer, writer, and social activist Shalin Maria Lawrence addressed the gathering at the beginning of the programme with an inspiring message for the women participants. In her address, she spoke about the many challenges that women often face in their everyday lives, particularly those living in economically and socially marginalized communities. She encouraged women not to lose confidence in themselves, but instead to recognize their own strength, dignity, and potential to bring change in their families and communities. Emphasizing the importance of awareness and self-reliance, she explained how women can overcome difficulties through education, skill development, and collective support.



She also highlighted the various welfare schemes and support systems provided by the government for women, including programmes related to livelihood development, financial assistance, health care, and education. She urged the participants to actively seek information about these schemes and make full use of the opportunities available to improve their economic stability and quality of life. Her motivating message inspired the women to believe in their abilities, pursue opportunities for growth, and work towards building a more secure and dignified future for themselves and their families.

Releasing the Message of International Women's Day 2026

On the occasion of International Women's Day, a special handbill highlighting the theme of International Women's Day 2026 – "Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls" was released and read aloud to the participants. The handbill carried a powerful and reflective message that helped the women understand the broader realities of women's lives across the world. It offered a brief glimpse into the global situation of women, pointing out that although much progress has been made, many women continue to struggle for equal rights, dignity, safety, and opportunities. The message also reflected on the status of women in India, where several legal protections and development programmes exist, yet many women still face challenges related to poverty, discrimination, and lack of access to resources.



The handbill further focused on the situation of women in Tamil Nadu, especially those living in urban slums and marginalized communities. Particular attention was given to the lives of single women and their children, who often struggle with economic hardship, social stigma, and limited support systems. The message emphasized that empowering these women through education, skill development, and livelihood opportunities is essential for ensuring a better future for their families. It concluded with a strong call to action, reminding everyone that transforming the lives of single women in urban slums is the need of the hour and requires collective efforts to build a society rooted in rights, justice, and dignity for all women and girls.

Introducing the Mottukal Single Women Project

Mrs. Amala Mary, Community Mobiliser for the MOTTUKAL – Empowerment of Urban Poor Single Women Project 2026, introduced the project and its key strategies to the participants and guests. She clearly explained the vision and objectives of the initiative, highlighting how the project seeks to support and strengthen single women living in vulnerable urban communities. She emphasized that the project focuses on building self-confidence, promoting livelihood opportunities, and enabling women to access their legal and social entitlements. She also noted that the initiative encourages collective leadership among single women so that they can become active voices within their communities. Through awareness, capacity building, and solidarity, the project hopes to create a supportive environment where single women can live with dignity, security, and empowerment.



She further explained that the project focuses on organising single women into supportive, creditworthy groups, enabling them to build solidarity, develop leadership, and access opportunities for economic activities. Through training, awareness programmes, and collective initiatives, the project aims to promote social empowerment and economic independence among the participants. Her presentation motivated and inspired the gathering, encouraging the women to actively participate in the project and work together toward a more secure and hopeful future.

Issuing of Certificates to Tailoring Course Participants

A special highlight of the programme was the distribution of certificates to the women who successfully completed the second batch of the St. Mary Euphrasia Tailoring Course, supported by the Catholic Women's Fellowship, Chennai. All the women who completed the training were honoured with certificates on this occasion, which were distributed by the distinguished guests of the day. The moment was filled with pride and joy as the participants received recognition for their dedication, perseverance, and hard work throughout the training period.

The training programme aims to equip women with practical livelihood skills that enable them to contribute to their family income and move toward greater economic independence. It also seeks to build self-confidence and encourage women to recognize their own strengths and potential. Many of the participants expressed hope that the skills gained through the course would open new opportunities for home-based enterprises and sustainable livelihoods. The initiative thus stands as a meaningful step toward empowering women to live with dignity and self-reliance within their communities.



Inspiring Women Leaders

The International Women's Day celebration was graced by eminent women leaders who served as chief guest and resource persons. The Presidential Address was delivered by Saraswathi Govindaraj, retired Head of the Department of Social Sciences at Queen Mary's College Chennai and State President of People's Union for Civil Liberties (Tamil Nadu & Puducherry). A noted human rights advocate and writer, she has long worked for women's rights and social justice and was nominated for the Right Livelihood Award in 2000.



In her address, she highlighted key constitutional and legal safeguards that protect women's dignity and rights across the life cycle, including the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act. She explained that these laws together create a protective framework for women, while stressing the need for stronger implementation at the grassroots level and encouraging women to be aware of and confidently claim their rights. She further emphasised that true empowerment begins with awareness, courage, and collective action among women. She urged the participants to stand together in solidarity, uphold constitutional values, and work actively for justice, equality, and dignity in their families and communities.

Rights Awareness and Empowerment

While addressing the gathering, Sr. Aruna George, Correspondent of Good Shepherd Matriculation Higher Secondary School and Good Shepherd Centenary School, Nungambakkam, presided over the programme, adding great significance to the event. She warmly welcomed the participants and appreciated the women for their courage, resilience, and active role in community life. In her inaugural address, she highlighted the long-standing development initiatives of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in the slums of Chennai and announced new initiatives for single women before more than 300 participants, explaining their importance and vision. She encouraged the women to recognise their dignity and rights and to stand together in solidarity to bring lasting change in their communities.



Along with her, several distinguished women leaders shared their insights and experiences with the participants, including Yamuna, Project Coordinator of the Tamil Nadu Corporation for Women Development; Nandhini, researcher and social activist for women and children; Veda, Inspector of Police at F3 Nungambakkam Police Station, Chennai; and Latha, President of the Catholic Women Fellowship (CWF). Their reflections on women's struggles, resilience, and achievements inspired the participants to believe in their own strength and work together for personal growth and community transformation.

Appreciation and Prizes for the Women

Celebrations are not only about rituals, but also about creating moments of joy and togetherness. In Tamil culture, community gatherings often highlight the creativity and spirit of women, who play a central role in nurturing families and traditions.

The day-long programme began with lively games and competitions such as drawing Kolam (கோலம்)—the traditional decorative art made by women in front of their courtyards—along with fun activities like ‘walk and hold on sticks’ and other engaging contests. Kolam, with its graceful patterns, is more than just art; it is a daily practice that brings happiness, harmony, and a sense of pride to women and their families. By participating in such competitions, women not only showcase their talent but also experience joy, laughter, and community bonding.

The winners were honoured with prizes presented by the day's distinguished guests. This gesture of appreciation lifted spirits, inspired creativity, and strengthened a sense of belonging among all participants, making the event a memorable celebration of women's contributions and family happiness.



Women's Dance as a Space for Expression and Joy

The women participants joyfully presented traditional dance performances as a form of expression and celebration during the programme. For many of them, the dance became a meaningful space to relax, share their talents, and express their emotions freely. The performances reflected their enthusiasm, unity, and cultural pride.

Through these dances, the women experienced a moment of freedom and release from the pressures of their daily responsibilities. The stage became a space where they could celebrate their identity, build confidence, and strengthen their bonds with one another in a supportive environment.

The lively performances added colour and energy to the celebration and reminded everyone that empowerment also includes moments of joy, creativity, and collective participation. Such cultural expressions helped the women feel valued, visible, and connected to the larger spirit of the International Women's Day gathering.

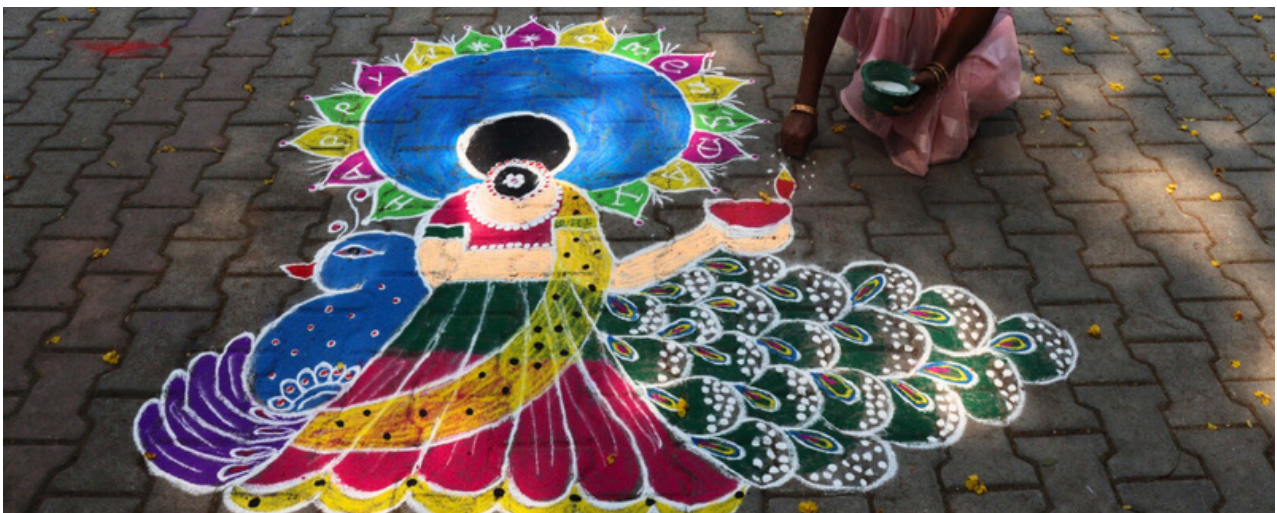


Kolam as a Symbol of Women's Rights and Cultural Expression

Women participants also created beautiful kolams as part of the celebration, using this traditional Tamil art form to express messages of awareness and empowerment. The kolams symbolised the cultural strength of women and their role in shaping homes and communities. Through these artistic patterns, the women reflected on the importance of dignity, equality, and harmony in society.

The kolam designs creatively interpreted the theme “Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls.” Each pattern carried symbolic meanings—representing women's rights, unity, protection, and hope for a more just and inclusive society. By combining tradition with social awareness, the participants transformed a familiar cultural practice into a powerful medium for reflection and dialogue.

This activity not only honoured Tamil cultural heritage but also strengthened the women's understanding of their rights and responsibilities. It encouraged them to stand together, promote justice and equality, and take collective action for the well-being and dignity of all women and girls in their communities.



Conclusion and Reflection

Strength Through Celebration: The day's events blossomed into more than just entertainment, they became a profound journey of empowerment. Women who often remain unseen in society were given space to shine, to laugh, and to rediscover their dignity. Through games, competitions, and shared joy, they experienced affirmation of their individual strength and their importance within the community. This collective recognition nurtured courage and determination, reminding them that their voices matter and their contributions enrich family and society alike.

Guiding Vision Endures: The programme concluded with a reflection on the inspiring mission of St. Mary Euphrasia, whose life continues to illuminate the Sisters of the Good Shepherd's path. Her conviction that every woman possesses immense dignity and potential, regardless of her past, remains a timeless call to action. By ensuring that marginalised women experience love, respect, and opportunity, her vision becomes a living reality. Her words - "A person is of more value than the whole world" - echoed as a reminder that true empowerment begins with recognising human worth beyond circumstance.

Hope Renewed Together: The International Women's Day celebration became a powerful reminder that empowerment flourishes when women stand united. For those who gathered, the event was not merely a programme but a moment of renewal of confidence, solidarity, and awareness of their rights. Carrying forward the message of "Rights, Justice, and Action for All Women and Girls," participants left with a strengthened resolve to shape their own futures. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd, together with their partners, remain steadfast in walking alongside these women, ensuring that dignity, freedom, and courage continue to guide their journey toward transformation.

