

Bringing Faiths Together for Gender Equality

**Faith-Based Advocacy & Intervention Toolkit on
Gender Inequality, Gender-Based Violence and Child Marriage**



Toolkit at a Glance

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Preface



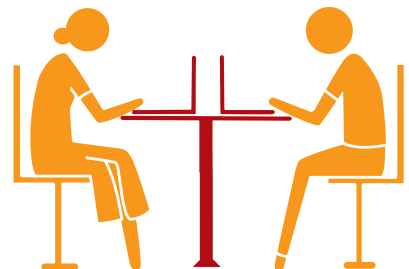
Gender Inequality, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Child Marriage are social problems that have a negative impact on society as a whole and undermine the core values of human rights, liberty and dignity for all. Whatever their origin, the reasons for their perpetuation need to be examined and understood. In order to uproot gender-based biases and disparities, we must identify them first and then strive to reverse and rectify them. The foundation of a resilient and progressive society cannot be realized if gender disparities and violence are repeated generation after generation.

This toolkit has been developed as a reference book to create a comprehensive understanding among faith leaders on these critical issues that are adversely impacting the society. By providing correct messaging that can be spread among and practiced by communities to reverse Gender Inequalities, Gender-Based Violence and Child Marriage, the toolkit will help to inform and inspire faith leaders to become agents for positive social change.

This toolkit aims to inspire change in human behaviour towards gender-based disparities, leading to an environment of harmony and inclusiveness at home, in our society, in the nation and, ultimately, in the world.

This toolkit has been designed to promote gender equality. Inspiring sustainable behaviour change is not limited to organising awareness programmes and communication campaigns but we must also challenge and change certain age-old social norms and practices.

Historically, faith has influenced – and continues to affect even today – Indian society across political, cultural, social and economic spectrums. Globally, 84% of the world subscribes to a faith tradition,



and in India, this percentage is much larger (Pew Research, 2020). Faith, religious leaders and scholars can play a vital role in addressing harmful social norms and practices.

By utilising the available information and ancient wisdom of our faith traditions, we can work to ensure that the right message at the right time can be given to reset patterns of gender disparities and discrimination.

This toolkit gives examples of mantras, teachings and stories from the ancient religious scriptures to drive and direct faith-based messaging that is truly empowering and impactful. This toolkit strives to provide a repository of faith-based tools and references to help faith leaders and representatives engage in empowering dialogue with their communities on gender equality, ending gender-based violence and child marriage.



This toolkit also provide definitions of the presenting issues – Gender Inequality, Child Marriage and Gender-Based Violence – along with their pervading status in India; possible explanations for their continued presence in the fabric of Indian society; the impact of these issues on girls and women; key messages that can be used to reverse these negative paradigms; and the appropriate religious scriptures, references and stories that can be used by faith leaders in their discourses, *satsangs* and *darshans* with their communities and congregations.

This toolkit has been compiled with the gracious contributions of various faith leaders, intellectuals and scholars researching on religious scriptures, and will prove to be highly useful for all. We humbly offer our sincere thanks for the wise contributions by these contributors.



This resource guide is not exhaustive but intends to support faith leaders to direct gender balanced messaging to bring about gender equality in our society as the foundation to a more just and peaceful world. In this first edition, it has looked at the four Dharmic traditions: Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism.

We have designed this toolkit to facilitate dialogue and to inspire action around these key themes and hence, we welcome all feedback, thoughts, suggestions and encourage you to share them with us by email at ganga@washalliance.org



Objectives of this Toolkit to Empower Faith Leaders

- To provide a comprehensive understanding of the religious and faith leaders on issues of gender inequality, GBV and child marriage.
- To provide correct messages to be disseminated in communities to alter harmful social norms and practices.
- To provide religious references from ancient scriptures which condemn these harmful social norms and practices.



Pledge

A pledge is a powerful opportunity to catalyse change and plant the seed of behaviour change in the minds and hearts of individuals. When leading a pledge, encourage and inspire your audience to raise their hands into the air in solidarity with one another, inherently allowing them to feel more expansive and empowered. Ideally, the pledge should be read out piece by piece for the audience to repeat each section together.

We recommend planting this pledge into your speech or sermon, ideally at the end, explaining and/or setting the context of the need for this pledge to promote a culture and community of gender equity and balance. We recommend utilising some of the facts and figures as well as a scriptural reference or story presented in this Toolkit below to connect your audience with this topic and issue:

“ I pledge to stop all kinds of violence and discrimination against girls and women. I pledge to raise my voice against all those practices that act as barriers in the realisation of their rights and progress. ”



When leading the pledge, please share these pledges with us as well, ideally as short videos or with some pictures and your stories of how these pledges are inspiring and motivating your communities to be the change they want to see in the world. You can email them at ganga@washalliance.org



What is Sex and Gender?



People tend to use the terms “sex” and “gender” interchangeably. But while connected, the two terms are not equivalent.

Generally, we assign a newborn’s sex as either male or female based on the baby’s genitals. Once a sex is assigned, we presume the child’s gender. For some people, this is cause for little, if any, concern or further thought because their gender aligns with gender-related ideas and assumptions associated with their sex. Nevertheless, while gender may begin with the assignment of our sex, it does not end there. A person’s gender is the complex interrelationship between three dimensions: body, identity and social gender.

Body: This refers to our body, our experience of our own body, how society genders bodies, and how others interact with us based on our body. While we are often taught that bodies have one of two forms of genitalia, which are classified as “female” or “male”, there are intersex traits that demonstrate that sex exists across a continuum of possibilities. This level of naturally occurring biological variation by itself should be enough to dispel the simplistic notion that there are just two sexes.



Identity: This refers to the name we use to convey our gender based on our deeply held, internal sense of self. Identities typically fall into binary (e.g. man, woman) non-binary (e.g. genderqueer, genderfluid, etc.) or ungendered (e.g. agender, genderless) categories. The meaning associated with a particular identity can vary among individuals using the same term. A person’s gender identity can correspond to or differ from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Social gender: This refers to how we present our gender in the world and how individuals, society, culture and community perceive, interact with, and try to shape our gender. Social gender includes gender roles and expectations, and how society uses those to try to enforce conformity to current gender norms. Each of these dimensions can vary greatly across a range of possibilities and is distinct from, but interrelated with, the others. A person’s comfort in their gender is related to the degree to which these three dimensions feel in harmony.



Gender Inequality

What is Gender Inequality?

Gender inequality is one of the oldest forms of inequality and refers to discrimination on the basis of sex or gender, causing one sex or gender to be routinely privileged or prioritized over another. Inequality results in unfair distribution of resources, power imbalance and limits opportunities to learn, earn and lead. Gender inequality is a violation of basic human rights and deprives the individual their right to live with dignity.



Article 14 of the Constitution of India guarantees equality before law and equal protection of the law to all individuals. However, gender inequalities and disparities continue to exist, both in society and at home, mostly as a result of patriarchal societal norms that are repressive and unequal in nature.

From the moment they are born, girls and boys face different treatment and unequal access to resources and opportunities, with lifelong consequences – in their homes, schools and communities. For example, often, boys are encouraged to go to school and get an education to prepare for work, while girls are more likely to carry heavy household responsibilities that often might keep them away from the school. These limiting belief systems adversely impact women and girls, and lead to gender-based violence and harmful practices.

Gender inequality and our future

Status of women and girls in India has been progressively improving, but there is still much to be done. While increasing the representation of women in the public spheres is critical, an attitudinal shift is equally essential for women to be considered as equal within their homes, in their workplaces and in broader society.

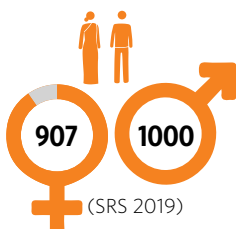
Girls and women make up almost half of the world's population, and for this reason, gender discrimination has wide-ranging and far-reaching effects on society. More importantly, ending discrimination and promoting gender equality is a matter of human rights.

As the eminent spiritual leader and national reformer Swami Vivekanandaji shared so beautifully, "The best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women". He also beautifully states, "There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved".

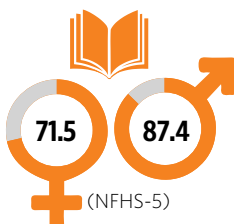
Trends and Status of Gender Inequality in India

Let us look at the trends, indicators and status of gender equality in India using the latest data:

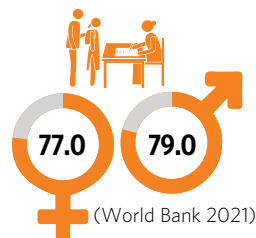
Sex ratio at birth



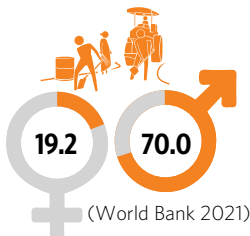
Literacy rate (%)



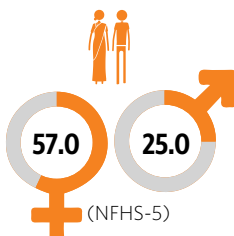
Adolescents enrolled in secondary education (%)



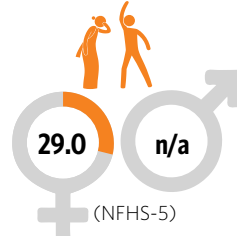
Workforce participation rate



Women aged 15-49 who are anaemic (%)

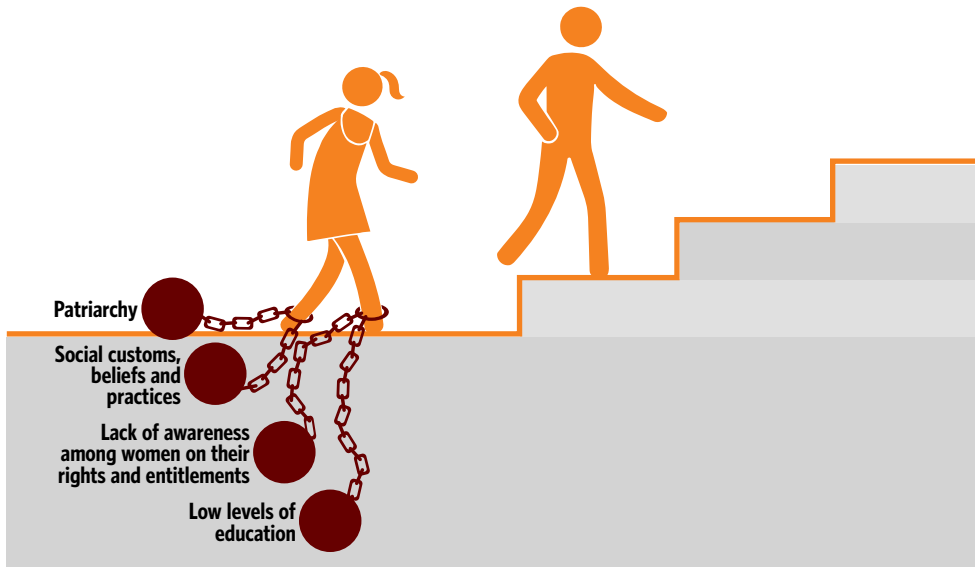


Women experiencing spousal violence in lifetime (%)



According to the **Global Gender Gap Report 2022** released by the World Economic Forum, India ranks 135 among a total of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index.

Potential factors and reasons contributing to gender inequality



Consequences of Gender Inequality

The impact of gender inequality can be seen throughout society in various negative outcomes. It is not only women who are adversely impacted by gender inequality but also families, society and people of all age groups are impacted by these effects, including:



Key Points of Reflection

We can see clearly the adverse impact of gender inequality on lives of women, family and society, and now it is time to think about what needs to be done to ensure gender equality and what roles each of us has to play and how committed we are to this cause. In our country where over 90% of people follow some religion or faith, faith-based organisations and religious leaders play a critical role in shaping or altering social norms and practices.

What action could you take in your routine activities to promote gender equality and inculcate positive masculinity among men and boys to create a gender balanced and equitable society?



What changes can you make in your faith-based organisations and communities to reflect on discriminatory gender roles and help create greater respect and understanding between all?



Key Messages

- Gender discrimination is a human rights violation.
- We must provide equal opportunities for education, healthcare, employment and freedom to all individuals.
- Both sons and daughters should equally share the responsibility, at familial, societal and/or national levels.
- Empowered women who are respected in their homes and in society result in an equal and equitable society.
- Gender equality is a precondition for advancing development and reducing poverty.



The sections below share some select scriptural verses and stories that would assist and support faith leaders in empowering and balanced messaging on Gender Inequality, Gender-Based Violence and Child Marriage.





Scriptural References on Gender Equality

Women in India have achieved greatness in various fields, including as saints and philosophers, such as Meera Bai, Gargi, Maitreyi, Sulabha, Mata Nanki, Mata Sahib Kaur, Mata Khivi, Mai Bhago, Mata Gujri Ji, Mahaprajapati Gautami, Amrapali, Chandana, Revati and warriors like Rani Jhansi and Rani Rudrama Devi. Mother Sita, Savitri and Draupadi have given a place of pride to Indian women.



Hinduism

समं सर्वेषु भूतेषु तिष्ठन्तं परमेश्वरम् ।
विनश्यत्स्वविनश्यन्तं यः पश्यति स पश्यति ॥ 28 ॥

Samam sarveṣu bhūteṣu tiṣṭhantaṁ parmeśvaram
Vinaśyatsvavinaśyantaṁ yaḥ paśyati sa paśyati

- Bhagavad Gita 13.28 II

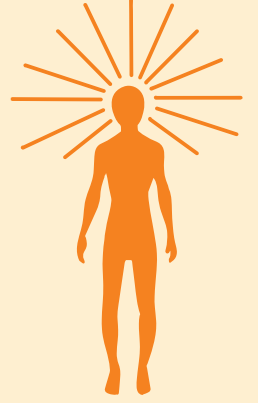
Translation: One who sees the Supreme Lord/Supreme Consciousness abiding alike in all beings, and not perishing when they perish— verily he alone sees.

Interpretation: This emphasizes that we must see all people as equal, no matter their gender, caste, colour or creed, and we must respect the presence of the Divine Consciousness in all of them. Hinduism emphasizes at the deepest level of our existence that we are Aatma (spirit) and this reality is beyond our sex or gender. Sex is of the body, not of the soul, and all of our scriptures implore us to stop identifying as the body and to realize our true nature as soul.

To explain this in another way, at the level of form or body, we identify with a specific gender (usually either based on the form of our physical body) which at a society level translates into particular roles and/or dharma to fulfill which is our social gender role.

However, at a more subtle level of existence, what is known as the “subtle body”, we consider our mind, our egos (*aham*) and intelligence (*buddhi*) which are considered tattvas (highest realities) of *Prakriti* (Nature), pervaded by three *gunas* (qualities).

On this level of the subtle body, there is far less distinction than on the level of the physical body. Then, going even deeper, one is the deepest level of our existence, the level of pure consciousness, then there is only spirit. On that level, there is nothing but God with no distinctions.



The Vedic philosophy which has been propounded through the Bhagavad Gita in this verse speaks to this ultimate truth and can be seen in other Dharmic Traditions like Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism as well. This understanding of the true nature of the soul/spirit as genderless (or genderful) is a critical understanding to have when we speak of equality. Inequality exists only when we perceive merely from the perspective of outermost form without an awareness of the deepest level of spirit but when we perceive form in the broader lens of our inherent unity, then in the duality/form exists equality, no longer an inferior or superior to one another, but as part of one divine creation with varied expressions, different roles and responsibilities that uphold and nurture the social fabric.

शिवः शक्त्या युक्तो यदि भवति शक्तः प्रभवितुं
न चेदेवं देवो न खलु कुशलः स्पन्दितुमपि ।
अतस्त्वाम् आराध्यां हरि—हर विरिन्वादिभि रपि
प्रणन्तुं स्तोतुं वा कथ—मक्रत पुण्यः प्रभवति ।।

Śivaḥ śaktyā yukto yadi bhavati śaktaḥ prabhavitum
Na cedevaṁ devo na khalu kuśalaḥ spanditumapi ।
Atastvām ārādhyām hari-hara viriñcādibhirapi
Praṇantum stotum vā katha-makṛta puṇyaḥ prabhavti ॥

- Saundarya Lahari Verse 1 (*Advaita Vedanta*)

Translation: Joined with Shakti, Lord Shiva is capable of creating the Universe. Without her, the Lord cannot even move.

Interpretation: Essentially, the duality of Shiva and Shakti in Hinduism, as exemplified by Ardhanareshwar depiction of Lord Shiva as half male and half female, is a beautiful embodiment of this teaching that both the divine masculine and divine feminine are present in all. Shiva and Shakti together give rise to creation; without any one of the two there would be no creation.



There is a common saying that without Shakti, Shiva would be Shuva (corpse) which means that creation is animate and alive only when they are together. They are complementary to one another and these energies of Shiva and Shakti of Purusha and Prakriti are embedded in all of life.

व्याकरोमि हविषाहमेतौ तौ ब्रह्मणा व्य हं कल्पयामि ।
स्वधां पितृभ्यो अजरां कृणोमि दीर्घेणायुषा समिमान्त्सृजामि ॥

Vyākāromi haviṣhāhametau tau brahmaṇā vya han kalpayāmi ।
Svadhāan piṭrubhyo ajarāan kṛṇomi dīrghēṇāyushā
samimāntsṛjāmi ॥

-Atharvaveda 12.2.32

Translation: Giving equal rights to men and women enables them to get knowledge of the Vedas and gives self-confidence to the benevolent learned people.

अवसृष्टा परा पत शरव्ये ब्रह्मसँशिते
गच्छामित्रान् पद्यस्व मामीषाङ्कं चनोच्छिषः ॥

Avasṛṣṭā parā pat sharavye brahmasamshite ।
Gachchhāmitrānpra padyasva māmīṣhāṅkan chanochchhiṣhah ॥

-Yajurveda 17.45

Translation: O brave woman, obtain training in martial arts and warfare. Unleash your potential and destroy the enemies. Capture them and do not have mercy on those who spread hatred and vices in society. Imprison them.

Interpretation: In Vedic period, women held a strong position in Indian society. No field was off limits to them – they could study, teach and even go to the battlefield. For instance, Queen Kaikeyi of Ayodhya went to war with Maharaja Dasharatha.

अहं केतुरहं मूर्धाहमुग्रा विवाचनी
ahaṃ keturaham mūrdhāhamugrā vivācanī ।

- Rigveda 5.61.2

Translation: I am a leader, a foremost scholar and excellent orator.



Interpretation: There are numerous verses in the Vedas that speak about the empowered role of women and their leadership in society and the varied means by which their contributions, whether in the battlefield, at home or in academia or elsewhere, were honoured and encouraged.

Gender Equality in Vedic Era

Some of the Hymns in Rigveda are composed by Vishavara, Apala, Lopamudra, Ghosha, Indrani and Sachi, reflect the ideals and efforts to promote equal opportunities for men and women in the Hindu religion.

Gargi the Brahnavadini

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad gives an instance of Gargi, a Brahnavadini (a person with knowledge of Brahma Vidya), one who composed several hymns in Rigveda, honoured as one of the Navaratnas (nine gems) in the court of King of Mithila, who is popularly known to have challenged Yajnavalkya in the court of Janaka. She was the only woman in the assembled gathering of the learned and one of the eight renowned sages who had the



courage to challenge Yajnavalkya for a debate. She proved herself to be amongst the most eminent scholars of her time with the courage to challenge the status quo.



Sikhism

ਨਾਰੀ ਪੁਰਖ ਸਬਾਈ ਲੋਇ ॥

ਨਾਰੀ ਪੁਰਖ ਸਬਾਈ ਲੋਇ ॥

Naaree purakh sabaee loi ॥

- Sri Guru Granth Sahib - Ang 223

Translation: Among all the women and all the men, His light is shining.

ਸਭਿ ਘਟ ਆਪੇ ਭੋਗਵੈ ਪਿਆਰਾ ਵਚਿ ਨਾਰੀ ਪੁਰਖ ਸਭੁ ਸੋਇ ॥

ਸਭਿ ਘਟ ਆਪੇ ਭੋਗਵੈ ਪਿਆਰਾ ਵਿਚਿ ਨਾਰੀ ਪੁਰਖ ਸਭੁ ਸੋਇ ॥

Sabhi ghat aape bhogavai piaaraa vichi naaree purakh sabhu soi ॥

- Sri Guru Granth Sahib - Ang 605

Translation: Guru Nanak declared that the same divine essence pervades both men and women on the basis that both are equal. God is pervading in all men and women.

ਭੰਡਿ ਜੰਮੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਨੰਮੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਮੰਗਣੁ ਵੀਆਹੁ ॥

ਭੰਡਹੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਦੇਸਤੀ ਭੰਡਹੁ ਚਲੈ ਰਾਹੁ ॥

Bhandd Janmeeai Bhandd Ninmeeai Bhandd Mangan Veeahu ॥
Bhanddahu Hovai Dhosathee Bhanddahu Chalai Raahu ॥

- Sri Guru Granth Sahib - Ang 473

Translation: In a woman, man is conceived, from a woman, he is born, with a woman he is engaged and married, with a woman, he contracts friendship. Why denounce her, the one from whom even kings are born? From a woman, a woman is born, none may exist without a woman. O Nanak, God alone is without a woman.

Interpretation: Guru Nanak is famously known to have said, "So Kiyu Manda Akhiye Jit Jamme Rajaan, Bhandho He Bhand Upjaay Bhand Baaj Na Koye", essentially translating to "So why call her bad? From her, kings are born. From women, women are born;

without women, there would be none at all". Even though this alludes to the ability of women to bear children, however, in the context of those times when women were severely oppressed and their conditions were poor, this was a bold appeal from Guru Nanak for the rights and respect of all women. In this way, Guru Nanak Dev condemned this man-made notion of the inferiority of women and appealed against their long subjugation.

The Sikh Gurus envisioned a society where all people were equal, as envisioned in the chant and symbol of "Ek Onkar". The Sikh Gurus strived to uproot discrimination based on gender, caste, religion or any other social practice that created divisions among people. In an effort to uplift the status of women in society, Guru Gobind Singh Ji called upon all Sikh women to have the surname 'Kaur' and Sikh men to have the surname 'Singh'.

Guru Nanak and his successor Sikh Gurus equally encouraged women's participation in worship, society and the battlefield. They supported freedom of expression and encouraged women to participate in all religious activities, including reading the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. They forbade the practice of female infanticide and encouraged remarriage of widows (Khalsa, 2019).

Guru Angad Dev (1504-1552), the second Guru, advocated education for all women; Guru Amar Das (1479-1574), the third Guru, prohibited sati, purdah (covering the face) and female infanticide; and by the time of the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh (1666-1708), 40 percent of Sikh missionaries were women and many held various positions of leadership and power (Kaur, 2022). Sikh Gurus were pioneers in building a progressive and egalitarian society in which men and women did not have defined gender roles but were treated equally.

Given the influence of the concept of equality espoused by the Sikh Gurus, Sikh history is rife with tales of courageous Sikh women who broke gender stereotypes and biases.



Maai Bhago (Mata Bhag Kaur): Defying Gender Norms and Courageous Example of Gender Equality

The only survivor of the Battle of Khidrana, also known as 'The Battle of Muktsar' (29 December 1705), and a source of great pride for Sikhs is Mai Bhago (Mata Bhag Kaur), the first woman to fight in the battlefield, hailing from the village of Jhabal Kalan. When the Khalsa army of 40 Sikhs was severely outnumbered and were just about to retract, she put on the battle outfit that traditionally men wore and led them back into battle. Having learned traditional Sikh martial arts from her father as a child, she fought valiantly for the Sikh Forces. The battle consisted of 250 Khalsa warriors versus 20,000 Mughal warriors. She was the only surviving Sikh in the battle and the battle left 4000 Mughals dead. Afterwards, she served as Guru Gobind Singh's bodyguard (Gill 1995).



Buddhism



Buddhism's greatest contribution to the social and political landscape of ancient India is the radical assumption that all men and women, regardless of their caste, origins or status have equal spiritual worth and access to the ultimate state of Nirvana (Halkias 2013, p. 494).

*Ye keci pana bhutatthi,
Tasava thavara va anavasesa,
Digha va ye mahanta va,
Majjhima rassakanuka thula*

- Karaniya Metta Sutta, Verse 4

Translation: Whatever beings there are, be the, weak or strong, without exceptions, long or short, big, medium-sized or small, subtle or gross, to all we must give our loving kindness.

*Dittha va yeva addittha,
ye ca dure vasanti avidure,
Bhuta va sambhavesi va,
Sabbe satta bhavantu sukhi tatta*

- Karaniya Metta Sutta, Verse 5

Translation: Those visible or invisible, residing near or far, those that have come to be or have yet to come, may all beings be joyful.

*Na paro param nikubbetha,
Nati mannetha katthaci nam kanci,
Byaro sana patigha sanna,
Nanna mannassa dukkha miccheyya*

- Karaniya Metta Sutta, Verse 6

Translation: Let one not deceive nor despise another person, anywhere at all, in anger and ill-will, let him not wish any harm to another.

*Mata yatha niyam puttam,
Ayusa ekaputta manurakkhe,
Evampi sabba bhutesu,
Manasam bhavaye aparimanam*

- Karaniya Metta Sutta, Verse 7

Translation: Just as a mother would protect her only child with her own life, even so, let them cultivate boundless thoughts of loving kindness towards all beings.

*Mettan ca sabba lokasmim,
Manasam bhavaye aparimanam,
Uddham adho ca tiriyan ca,
Asambadham averam asapattam*

- Karaniya Metta Sutta, Verse 8 (Khuddakapāṭha 9)

Translation: Let him cultivate boundless thoughts of loving kindness, towards the whole world, above, below and all around, unobstructed, free from hatred and enmity.

Interpretation: Buddhism propounds that all are equal and equally able to practice loving kindness. Buddha's teachings also expound that everyone, regardless of their gender or socio-economic background, caste, colour or creed, is able to attain enlightenment. His teachings share that one who harms others also gets harmed. So, those who look down on women as inferior or treat them unequally will also be harmed in one way or the other.

"Independent female deities are important to acknowledge and revere. There is one Buddhist deity who is not only supremely beautiful in her representations, but is believed to possess spiritual power that are equal of her male cosmic counterparts: that would be Goddess Tara (McArthur, 2019)." The Tibetan Buddhists regard Goddess Tara as the embodiment of wisdom, She is the female Buddha, who is the most compassionate mother and can be interpreted as an archetype and an inspiration to all people.

Mahapajapati Gautami or Prajāpatī - Laying the foundation of the first Bhikkhuni Sangha

She was the foster-mother, step-mother and maternal aunt (mother's sister) of the Buddha. When Mahāprajāpatī was born, an astrologer predicted her leadership qualities and she was named Prajāpatī (Pāli, Pajāpatī), "leader of a large assembly". Mahāprajāpatī is widely regarded as the first bhikṣuṇī and progenitor of the Buddhist order of Bhiksuni Sangha (Buddhist nuns).



According to tradition, she thrice requested for Buddha's permission to join the saṅgha, but was refused each time. Finally,

she cut her hair, donned renunciant garb and, accompanied by five hundred Śākyan noblewomen, walked to Vaiśālī where she once again sought admission to the order. This time, when Ānanda interceded on Mahāprajāpatī's behalf, the Buddha affirmed that women are indeed qualified to achieve the fruits of dharma (i.e. liberation) and granted her request.

Within the patriarchal social context of her time, Mahāprajāpatī became an exemplar of women's potential for leadership and spiritual attainment, and her achievements have inspired women ever since (Malhotra, 2020).





Jainism

From the time of Mahavir Swami (599 BC), the Jain tradition has included women as part of its four-fold order or the “Chaturvidh Sangh”, namely shravikas (laywomen) and sadhvis (nun) amongst their male counterparts shravaks (laymen) and sadhus (monks) (Shah & Ulrike, 2018).

The soul is neither big nor small, neither round, nor triangular, nor quadrangular, nor circular; it is neither black, nor blue, nor red, nor green, nor white, neither good nor bad, nor odorous, neither bitter, nor pungent, nor astringent, neither sweet, nor rough nor soft, neither heavy nor light, neither cold nor hot, neither hard nor smooth, it is neither feminine nor masculine nor neuter. The siddha perceives and knows all, yet is beyond comparison. Its essence is without form; there is no condition of the unconditioned. It is not sound, not colour, not smell, not taste, not touch or anything of that kind.

- Acharanga Sutra 1.197

Interpretation: The siddha, one who has become established in the Self, is beyond the form and therefore no longer defined merely as masculine or feminine.

The essence of our knowledge is non-violence and the principle of non-violence is based only on equality. It is also necessary that just as I do not like sorrow, others also do not like it because everyone likes to be treated equally.

- Mahavir (Sutrakritanga, 1.1.4.10)

Interpretation: The principle that which I do not like I should not do onto others is a fundamental teaching of Dharmic traditions and is exemplified by this verse, which sets the foundation for equality amongst all regardless of their caste, colour, creed, race, religion or gender.

Tirthankara Rishabh Dev's daughters Brahmi and Sundari

In several Jain scripts, it is mentioned that the first Tirthankara, Rishabh Dev Ji imparted 64 subjects of knowledge to women, in Jainism, especially to the right to education. Lord Rishabh Dev ji gave knowledge of language and letters to one of his daughters Brahmi and fine arts to another daughter Sundari. Thus, the famous Brahmi script was named after his daughter (Natu Bhai Shah, 2004).

"Times of Jainism were of immense inspiration for women, heralding the advent of another golden age and showing magnificently what heights women could reach. Women were given full facilities for the highest kind of education which was spiritually oriented. Many Jain nuns in those times composed or helped in the composition of Jain works. According to Jain tradition, Jayanti, the daughter of king Sahasranika of Kausambi, observed celibacy and dedicated her life to studies" (Chowdhury, 2021).



Jain Women Rising to Political and Administrative Leadership

In Jain history we find instances when women rose to the occasion and held important positions in political and administrative spheres. In ancient Jain texts, we come across women dressed in man's attire, putting on armour, equipped with weapons, arms, shields, bows and arrows, and there are examples when women actually fought battles.

In the first quarter of the 10th century AD, there was a remarkable Jain woman administrator, Jakkijabbe, and it is stated that she was skilled in her ability to govern, and skillfully protected the 'Nagarakhanda-70' region.

An inscription dated AD 918 shows that a Jaina widow was a Nadagauda (which was historically an important rural official). This noble woman was distinguished in her management and leadership skill and ability (Epigraphia Carnatica). It states that she protected her community with pride through her own heroic bravery. In 16th century AD when the Jaina queen Bhairavadevi,

while ruling over the kingdom of Gerosoppe, was attacked by the neighbouring Saiva Saradara (leader), she faced this enemy bravely and defeated him in the battle (Sangve, 2023).

Acharya Shri Chandana: The First Female Acharya of the Jain Tradition

Acharya Shri Chandana becoming the first Jain sadhvi (female renunciant) to be bestowed the title of Acharya in 1987 by Amar Muniji Maharaj was revolutionary because traditionally in the two sects of Jain Dharma, it is difficult if not impossible for women to rise up to the level of Acharya. She later to be the first Jain woman to be awarded the Padma Shri in January 26, 2022 for excellence in social service for her foundation Veeraayatan, especially dedicated to the education of young girls and women, is a matter of great pride and a step towards bridging the gender disparity in faith.





Gender-Based Violence

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is violence against a person because of their gender. Both men and women experience GBV, but the majority of victims are women and girls.



Gender-Based Violence is a phenomenon deeply linked to gender inequality and one of the most prominent human rights violations in all societies. It is manifested throughout the life cycle of women from the mother's womb to death. (Please refer to the lifecycle of GBV below to understand the different stages and forms of violence that are observed in our societies.)

The UN defines GBV in this way: "Violence against women means any act of Gender-Based Violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life." (United Nations, 1993)

Lifecycle of Gender-Based Violence at different stages of life

This table illustrates the distinct forms of violence against women and girls over their lifespan, ranging from discrimination at one end to overt sexual violence at the other. Therefore, while some forms of violence are direct and visible, many others are insidious and more hidden, thus making it difficult to make out the nature and degree of the violation.

Lifecycle of Gender-Based Violence at different stages of life

Prenatal

- Gender-biased sex selection
- Physical violence during pregnancy



Infancy

- Unequal access to care, nutrition, healthcare and education



Old Age

- Abuse of the elderly (affecting women more than men)
- Domestic violence
- Sexual violence
- Lack of access to social protection, care, nutrition and medical facilities



Childhood

- Child marriage
- Child sexual abuse
- Child trafficking and prostitution
- Unequal access to care, nutrition, healthcare and education



Youth & Adulthood

- Domestic violence
- Sexual violence
- Dowry-related abuse and murder
- Any act of coercion forcing individuals to act against their will
- Sexual harassment at workplace
- Unequal access to care, nutrition, healthcare, education, income and employment



Adolescence

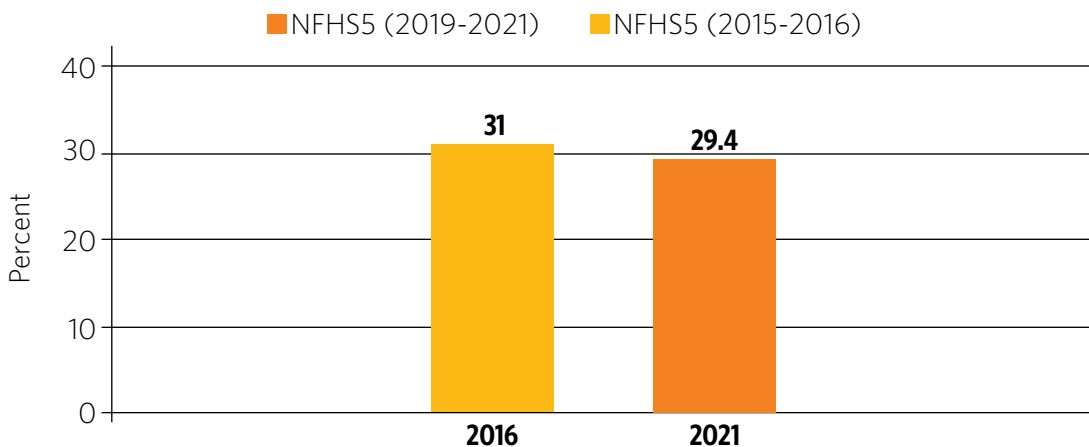
- Sexual violence
- Sexual harassment at workplace
- Forced prostitution
- Trafficking
- Any act of coercion forcing individuals to act against their will
- Unequal access to care, nutrition, healthcare and education



Gender-Based Violence in India

Nearly one in every three women in the age group of 15-49 have been a victim of Gender-Based Violence GBV from their spouse. This has remained stubbornly high in recent years.

Ever-married women aged 18-49 years who have ever experience spousal violence



Potential Factors and Reasons Contributing to Gender-Based Violence



- Patriarchy that assigns unequal power, upholding the privileges and power status of men over all others.
- Discriminatory social, cultural or religious norms and practices that marginalize women and girls, and fail to respect their rights.
- Gender stereotypes are often used to justify violence against women.
- Low levels of reporting and help-seeking due to the stigma associated with sexual violence.
- Ineffective institutions and systems (e.g. law and order), resulting in a culture of impunity for violence and abuse.
- Threat or fear of stigma, isolation and social exclusion, and exposure to further violence at the hands of the perpetrator, the community or the authorities.

Consequences of Gender-Based Violence

The violence against girls and women has a devastating impact on their own lives but also adversely affects the family and society. The effect of violence could be short term as well as long term:



Balancing myths and misconceptions with key messages on Gender-Based Violence

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a fundamental violation of human rights. All religions are committed to preventing and ending VAWG.



Myths & Misconceptions

Conflicts, discord and abuse are normal in a relationship.

Women who are attacked are to blame, for how they dressed or where they were.

Survivors are capable of preventing the attack on themselves.

“Boys will be boys”.

Most violence is perpetrated by strangers.

Women should tolerate violence to keep the family together.

How a man treats his wife is a personal matter. No one, including the state, has the right to intervene in a private family matter.

Violence is caused by substance abuse such as alcohol and/or drugs.

Countering Key Messages



Having some disagreements and conflict can be a normal part of married life but there must be space for non-violent and healthy dialogue.

Emotional abuse, demeaning and degrading statements and violence are NOT normal.

Physical, mental and sexual violence against women and girls is a silent pandemic and major public health problem.

Violence against women and girls is not their fault and they should not blame themselves or should not be blamed for it.

We need to focus on apprehending and bringing the perpetrator to justice.

We need to orient and teach boys and men to respect girls and women and take responsibility to create a violence free world for women.

Most Gender-Based Violence is committed by someone they know.

Women and girls facing violence should not be ignored or remain silent. They should reach out to trusted sources like family, friends, One Stop Centres, inform the ANM (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife), an Anganwadi worker or ASHA from their area.

VAWG is not a private issue. It concerns each one of us and everyone can play a role in promoting a culture of respect and dignity.

GBV is a human rights violation. VAWG is not a private issue. It concerns each one of us and everyone can play a role in promoting a culture of respect and dignity.

The person responsible for the violence is the perpetrator. Substance abuse does not result in men resorting to violence against people in positions of authority (e.g. their professional supervisors, senior family members).



Key Messages

- A society free from violence and fear is the first step to a prosperous nation. Violence free society means a safe, civilized and developed society.
- By developing moral qualities like equality, respect, accountability and partnership, by eliminating gender-based violence from the society, a civilized and safe society can be built.
- Every woman and all people have the right to live a life free from violence.



Key Points of Reflection

What actions could you take in your faith activities this week towards ending GBV?



How can faith communities inspire and engage men and boys to place spiritual values of ahimsa and non-violence into practice? What activities can you begin from your institution?



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Scriptural References on Gender-Based Violence



Hinduism

Whether it is the mention in all four Vedas, the first *yama* of the Patanjali Yog Sutras or regarded in Mahabharata as the highest dharma and the best *tapas* or listed as a transcendental quality in the Bhagavad Gita, ahimsa (non-violence) is a core tenet of Hinduism and finds equal importance in other Dharmic traditions (Maheshwari, 2020).

Ahimsa in the Hindu tradition is not causing pain to any living being at any time through the actions of one's mind, speech or body and in this respect, Gender-Based Violence, being an example of himsa (violence), is not encouraged in the Hindu tradition.

यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः ।

यत्रैतास्तु न पूज्यन्ते सर्वास्तत्राफलाः क्रियाः ॥

yatra nāryastu pūjyante ramante tatra devatāḥ ।

yatraitāstu na pūjyante sarvāstatrāphalāḥ kriyāḥ ॥

- Manusmriti Shloka 3.56 ॥

Translation: Where the divine feminine is honoured, divinity blossoms there, and wherever divine feminine is dishonoured and/or disrespected, all action, no matter how noble it may be, remains unfruitful.

अयं निजः परोवेति गणना लघु चेतसाम् ।

उदार चरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ॥

Ayam nijah paroveti ganana laghu chetasāma |

Udar caritanām tu vasudhaiv kuṭumbakama |

-Mahopanishad 6.71 ॥

Translation: The entire world is one family, so live together. Rising above the culture of duality, all men and women should live in harmony with each other.

शोचन्ति जामयोयत्र विनश्यत्याशु तत् कुलम् ।
न शोचन्ति तु यत्रैता वर्धते तद्धि सर्वदा ॥
śocanti jāmayoyatra vinaśyatyāśu tat kulam ।
na śocanti tu yatraitā vardhate taddhi sarvadā ॥

ManuSmriti 3.57॥

Translation: Where the female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes; but that family where they are not unhappy ever prospers (Manish, 2022).

सं गच्छध्वं सं वदध्वं सं वो मनांसि जानताम् ।
देवा भागं यथा पूर्वे संजानाना उपासते ।
saṃ gacchadhvaṃ saṃ vadadhvaṃ saṃ vo manāṃsi jānatām ।
devā bhāgaṃ yathā pūrve saṃjānānā upāsate ॥

-Rigveda 10.191.2 ॥

Translation: Human beings (woman and man) should all be bound together in one thread, stay together so that they can communicate with each other, listen to each other's happiness, sorrow, opinions, and communicate so that the mind becomes one. There should be no conflict and stay away from violence among themselves because this is true happiness.

समानो मन्त्रः समितिः समानी समानं मनः सह चित्तमेषाम् ।
समानं मन्त्रमभि मन्त्रये वः समानेन वो हविषा जुहोमि ॥
samāno mantraḥ samitiḥ samānī samānam manaḥ saha
cittameṣām ।
Samānaṃ mantramabhi mantraye vaḥ samānena vo haviṣā
juhomi ॥

-Rigveda 10.191.3 ॥

Translation: Women and men are of equal thoughts, equal attitudes, equal behaviour, equal heart & mind, knowing and doing together, play their part in life and fulfill their duty according to dharma.

समानी व आकूतिः समाना हृदयानि वः ।

समानमस्तु वो मञ्जनो यथा वः सुसहासति ॥

Samānī va ākūtiḥ Samānā hṛdayāni vaḥ | |

Samānamastu vo mano yathā vaḥ susahāsati ||

-Rigveda 10.191.4 ||

Translation: Women and men are the same in importance, their behaviours and minds are common, so there should be a sense of mutual cooperation between them, not violence, since non-violence is the hallmark of humanity.

Draupadi in Mahabharata

In the ancient Indian epic of Mahabharata, Draupadi was abducted after Yudhishtira was defeated in gambling by Duryodhana and his maternal uncle Shakuni. With the intention of disrespecting Draupadi, Duryodhana called her in the royal court of the Kauravas where Dushasan drags her in by her hair when she is defiant and attempts to disrobe her and insult her in front of the entire Royal court, but Lord Shri Krishna, whom she took to be her brother and her Lord, protected her by extending her clothes and the wise Vidura raised his voice against this violence.



Draupadi, hailing from the rich kingdom of Pancala, and then becoming the Queen of Indraprastha, is shattered, pleads and questions the entire court for watching this ordeal. She is the first ever well-known woman in history to raise her voice against violence against women and illustrates her great power and fortitude. She refuses to settle for anything less than punishment for this act that denigrates women (Mishra, 2010).

Sikhism

ਇਸਤਰੀ ਦਾ ਮੂੰਹ ਨਹੀਂ ਫਟਿਕਾਰਨਾ
ਸ਼੍ਰੀਇਸਤਰੀ ਦਾ ਮੂੰਹ ਨਹੀਂ ਫਟਿਕਾਰਨਾਸ਼

Istri da mooh nahi fitkaarnaa

- The 16th Hukam



Translation: Do not subject your wife to cursing or verbal abuse.

Interpretation: In the Hukam or “Hukamnama” or the “Divine Command” or “Divine Order”, written in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, of which there are 52, and are seen as an instruction from the Divine. Hukam 16 specifically says not to curse or abuse one’s wife, which is an even more subtle form of abuse than physical violence and Sikhism recognises that verbal, emotional and mental abuse is also a form of violence.

ਪਰ- ਇਸਤਰੀ ਮਾਂ, ਭੈਣ ਧੀ ਕਰ ਜਾਣਨੀ ।

Par istree, ma bhain, dheer bhain, kar jaananeer. Par istree da sang naheer karnaa

- The 15th Hukam

Translation: Other than your wedded wife, consider all women as your mothers and sisters. Do not indulge in carnal marital relationships with them.

Interpretation: The 15th Hukam specifically commands one to consider all other women other than one’s wife as one’s mothers or sisters, leaving no room for martial affairs, rape and non-consensual relationship with other women.

ਕਠਨ ਕਰੋਧ ਘਟ ਹੀ ਕੇ ਭੀਤਰ ਜਿਹ ਸੁਧ ਸਭ ਬਸਿਰਾਈ ॥

kaThan karodh ghaT heer ke bheetar jeh sudh sabh bisaraieer ॥

- Sri Guru Granth Sahib - Ang 219

Translation: The heart is filled with anger and violence, which causes all sense to be forgotten.



Interpretation: A warning in Guru Granth Sahib about the effects of violence and anger causing one not to think straight and make clear decisions. Hence, instructing one to stay away from the company of such people who are evil intentioned, filled with carnal desire and/or anger.

ਜੇ ਕਰੀ ਸੂਤਕੁ ਮੰਨੀਐ ਸਭ ਤੈ ਸੂਤਕੁ ਹੋਇ ॥
ਗੋਰੇ ਅਤੈ ਲਕੜੀ ਅੰਦਰੀ ਕੀੜਾ ਹੋਇ ॥
ਜੇਤੇ ਦਾਣੇ ਅੰਨ ਕੇ ਜੀਆ ਬਾਝੁ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥
ਪਹਲੀ ਪਾਣੀ ਜੀਉ ਹੈ ਜਤਿੁ ਹਰਿਆ ਸਭੁ ਕੋਇ ॥
ਸੂਤਕੁ ਕਉ ਕਰੀ ਰਖੀਐ ਸੂਤਕੁ ਪਵੈ ਰਸੋਇ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਸੂਤਕੁ ਏਵ ਨ ਉਤਰੈ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਉਤਾਰੇ ਧੋਇ ॥੧॥

Jae Kar Soothak Manneeai Sabh Thai Soothak Hoe ||

Gohae Athai Lakarree Andhar Keerraa Hoe ||

Jaethae Dhaanae Ann Kae Jeeaa Baajh N Koe ||

Pehilaa Paanee Jeeo Hai Jith Hariaa Sabh Koe ||

Soothak Kio Kar Rakheeai Soothak Pavai Rasoe ||

Naanak Soothak Eaev N Outharai Giaan Outharae Dhoe ||1||

- Sri Guru Granth Sahib - Ang 472

Translation: If one accepts the concept of impurity (Sutak), then there is impurity everywhere.

In cow-dung and wood there are worms.

As many as are the grains of corn, none is without life.

First, there is life in the water, by which everything else is made green.

How can impurity be warded off? It falls on our own kitchen.

O Nanak, impurity is not removed like this way; it is washed away by Divine Knowledge. ||1||.

Interpretation: Guru Nanak categorically criticized the social ritual of "sutak". Sutak is a period of time of ritual impurity. The following verses speak to the restrictions and superstitions

regarding women being seen as impure during the first 40 days after delivering a baby and during the menstrual period. To negate the negativity directed towards women during those times, Guru Nanak Dev Ji emphasized instead on her positive attributes and dignity, and dispelled misconceptions around purity.

ਹੋਰ ਮਨਮੁਖ ਦਾਜੁ ਜਿ ਰਖੀ ਦਿਖਾਲਹਿ ਸੁ ਕੂੜੁ ਅਹੰਕਾਰੁ ਕਚੁ ਪਾਜੇ ॥
ਹਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਮੇਰੇ ਬਾਬੁਲਾ ਹਰਿ ਦੇਵਹੁ ਦਾਨੁ ਮੈ ਦਾਜੇ ॥੪॥

Hor Manamukh Dhaaj J Rakh Dhikhaalehi S Koorr Ahankaar Kach Paajo ||

Har Prabh Maerae Baabulaa Har Dhaevahu Dhaan Mai Dhaajo ||4||

- Guru Ram Das, Guru Granth Sahib - Ang 79

Translation: Any other dowry, which is made by one who follows his or her worldly desires is for show, is only false egotism and a worthless display. O my father, please give me the Name of the Lord God as my wedding gift and dowry.

Interpretation: Practices such as dowry, parda and other disempowering practices were condemned by the Gurus of the Sikh tradition, encouraging women to come forward and make positive contributions to their faith and their society.





Buddhism

The moral code for Buddhist lay people is laid out in the Panchsheel of Buddha (Five Precepts) or Five Rules of Training. These are the fundamental code of ethics that lay Buddhists must adhere to, and are promises to refrain from killing living beings, stealing, sexual misbehaviour, lying, and intoxication.

1—पाणातिपाता वेरमणी—सिक्खापदं समादयामि ।।

Panatipata Vermani-Sikhpadam Samadyami

Translation: I undertake the precept to refrain from destroying or taking the life of any living creatures.

Interpretation: The first precept forbids taking a sentient being's life which is violated when someone intentionally kills a sentient being. Causing harm, beating and battering goes against the spirit of the precept which is to cultivate compassion and benevolence towards all.

Ahimsa in Buddhism is not merely a doctrine or a theory but a fundamental virtue (Chinchor, 2005). Ahimsa therefore is a virtue that brings a Buddhist closer to their ultimate goal of nirvana (a state of perfect happiness). The essence of this precept is also deeply rooted in the Buddhist teaching of the inherent, symbiotic and interdependent connection that we have to all living beings such that any act of violence towards another being will inevitably harm themselves (Ghosh, 1989).

3— कामेसु मिच्छाचारा वेरमणी— सिक्खापदं समादयामि ।।

Kamesu Michachara Vermani - Sikhpadam Samadayami

Translation: I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct.

Interpretation: In classical writings, this has been taken to encompass adultery with a married or engaged person, fornication, rape, incest, intercourse with a minor, and sex with a sex worker. Details such as forced intercourse in marriage and also could be extrapolated to include modern issues which are

degrading to women, such as the consumption and production of sexually explicit material. The third principle is rooted in selfishness and leads to harm to others. Contentment, especially with one's partner, and recognition and respect for loyalty in a marriage are virtues that go hand in hand with the third precept (Amruta, 2022).

5- सुरा-मेरय-मज्ज-पमादट्ठाना वेरमणी- सिक्खापदं समादयामि ।।

Suramerayamajja pamadatthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

Translation: I undertake the precept to refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness.

Interpretation: The fifth precept forbids intoxication by drink, drugs or other methods, and its virtues are mindfulness and responsibility, as they apply to food, labour, behaviour and the nature of life. The Dirgha Agama adds that alcohol contributes to quarrels, unpleasant states of mind and intelligence deterioration. The Mahayana Brahmajala Sutra uses strong language to describe the perils of drinking, particularly the sale of alcohol (Amruta, 2022).

Alcohol plays a role in perpetuation of gender violence (Shiva, 2021). Hence by eliminating the use of intoxication, one is able to remove one factor which contributes to (but is not the root cause of) Gender-Based Violence.

Furthermore, in addition to the five precepts, the six directions, as spoken by the Buddha in the Sigalovada Sutta and in Digha Nikaya, are given to facilitate interpersonal relationships between householders and their family/society. Both the five precepts and six directions as well as a striving towards the ten perfections of character are crucial to the wellbeing, prosperity and violence free family and society (Edirisinghe).

Similarly, in the Dhammapada, a collection of sayings of Lord Buddha in the form of verses and one of the most widely read and best-known Buddhist scriptures here are some verses that help us get at the root cause of GBV and VAWG:

सबूे तसंती दशहरा, सबूे भायंती मैकुनू
अतानां उपमं कटवा, न हन, या न घटये:

Sabbe tasanti daṇḍassa, sabbe bhāyanti maccuno
Attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā, na haneyya na ghātaye

-Dhammapada Verse 129 & 130

Translation: All tremble at violence; all fear death. Seeing others as being like yourself, Do not kill or cause others to kill.

मावूका फारुशं कांची, वुट्टा पाशिवाडेयु ताशी
दुखा ही सरम्भकथा, पंडिता फुसेयु ताः
सचे नेरेसी अतानां, कंसू उपहातू यथाः
एसा पत्तू की निब्बानं, सरंभू ते न विज्जतिः

Mavoca pharusam kanci
vutta pativadeyyu tam
dukkha hi sarambkakatha¹
patidanda phuseyyu tam.

-Dhammapada Verse 133-134

Translation: Do not speak harshly to anyone; those who are thus spoken to will retort. Malicious talk is indeed the cause of trouble (*dukkha*) and retribution will come to you. If you can keep yourself calm and quiet like a broken gong which is no longer resonant, you are sure to realize Nibbana; there will be no harshness in you.

Interpretation: The overall core principle of do unto others as you would like to be done unto yourself is exemplified in Dhammapada Verses 129, 130, 133, 134.

From physical violence and actual attempt to kill another to even harsh words and causing trouble to another are deemed as actions that will eventually come back to one's self, and therefore it is encouraged to keep a state of mindfulness and non-reactiveness to avoid conflict and violence. This verse and teaching leaves no space for physical, verbal, emotional and/or mental abuse that we wouldn't like done unto ourselves.

Amrapali offers food to Buddha

At one time, Amrapali desired the privilege of serving food to the Buddha. At a time when Ganikas and Courtesans were provided wealth and luxuries, there was still a largely held perspective of their impurity and their tendency to distract other seekers on the spiritual path. It is amidst this mindset that the Buddha accepted the invitation against the wishes of the ruling aristocracy of Vaishali due to King Ajatashatru. Amrapali received the Buddha with her retinue, and offered meals to him. Soon thereafter, she was so deeply touched by his unconditional love and acceptance that she renounced her position as courtesan, accepted the Buddhist way, and remained an active supporter of the Buddhist order (Monsoon, 2019).



There are many such stories in which Ganikas and sex workers were not looked down upon and due to their sincerity in practicing Buddhism and the path of Dhamma were initiated into the Sangha. In this way, Buddhism attempted to get at the source of these acts of violence by combating it with the practice of unconditional compassion, benevolence, love and acceptance of all.



Jainism

Ahimsa or non-violence is the core tenet of the Jain Dharma and is emphasized in countless Sutras and scriptures of the Jain tradition, simultaneously rooted in the teaching that what we do unto others eventually comes back to us, hence all living beings are fundamentally equal and one; this concept cuts across the Dharmic traditions. The common teaching between the Hindu and Jain tradition, especially for ascetics, is:

अहिंसा परमो धर्मः

ahimsā paramo dharmaha

Translation: Non-violence is the ultimate dharma.

This can be seen inscribed on the walls of the Jain temples which shows its significance in the religion.

Here are some more sutras on non-violence that reflect this core teaching cutting across Jainism:

एवं खुणाणिणो सारं, जंण हिंसइ किंचणं ।
अहिंसा समयं चेव, एतावतं वियाणिया ॥

evam khu nānino sāram, jam na himsai kimcanam ।
ahimsa samayam ceva etavamtam viyaniya ।

- Sri Suyagadanga Sutra - Second Ang Sutra

Translation: No living creature should be killed or harmed. We have to understand the principle of non-violence in its true form and thus have a sense of equality towards all living beings (Barvalia, 2012: 10).

से णं भंते! णाणे किं फले? विण्णाणफले

se nam bhamte | nane kim phale? vinnanaphale

- Shri Bhagwati Sutra

Translation: No one should be humiliated, disrespected or oppressed.

Non-injury to all sentient beings is the only religion.

- Yogashastra (first truth of Jainism)

“Kill not, cause no pain. Non-violence is the greatest religion.”

- Tirthankara Mahavira

People indulge in violent activities against living beings, individually and collectively, in many ways; discerning this, a wise man neither himself inflicts violence on these bodies, nor induces others to do so, nor approves of their doing so. It is not right to do violence to one's own body, nor to inspire others to do so, nor to approve of doing so.

- Acaranga Sutra, Chapter 1

जीववहो अप्पवहो जीवदया होइ अप्पणो हु दया ।
विसकंटओव्व हिंसा परिहरियच्चा तदो होदि ॥ 793

- Bhagavati Aradhana, 797

To kill any living being amounts to killing one self.

Compassion to others is compassion to one's own self.

Therefore, one should avoid violence like poison and thorns (that cause pain).

Violence is a great impediment to spiritual awakening, and someone who indulges in doing harm to living beings will not get enlightenment; harming other beings is always harmful and injurious to oneself - it is the main cause of someone's non-enlightenment.

- Acaranga Sūtra, 21

तस्मा न ह्युसे परौ अट्टाकामो ।

Tasma na hiuse parau attakamo

Translation: If you put yourself in another's position, you cannot harm another's life or limbs.

- Uttarādhyayana 24, 21-25

Tirthankara Mahavira said:

In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self.

I so pronounce that all the sages of all times state, speak, propagate, and elaborate that nothing which breathes, which exists, which lives, or which has essence or potential of life, should be destroyed or ruled over, or subjugated, or harmed, or denied of its essence or potential.

In support of this Truth, I ask you a question – “Is sorrow or pain desirable to you?” If you say “yes it is”, it would be a lie. If you say “No, It is not”, you will be expressing the truth. What I want to add to the truth expressed by you is that, as sorrow or pain is not desirable to you, so it is to all which breathe, exist, live or have any essence of life. To you and all, it is undesirable, and painful, and repugnant.

That which you consider worth destroying is (like) yourself. That which you consider worth disciplining is (like) yourself. That which you consider worth subjugating is (like) yourself. That which you consider worth killing is (like) yourself. The result of actions by you has to be borne by you, so do not destroy anything.

-Jain Sutra: Acharanga and Kalpa Sutra

आम्मवत्सर्वभूतेषु सुखदुःखे प्रियाप्रिये ।
चिन्तयन्नात्मनोऽनिष्टां हिंसामन्यस्य नाचरेत् ।।

**- Yoga Shastra by Shri Hemchandracharyaji.
Dwitiya Prakash/Chapter-2, Gatha-20**

Translation: In happiness or suffering, in joy or grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self. We should, therefore, refrain from inflicting upon others such injury as would appear undesirable to us, if inflicted upon ourselves.

7 वयं पुन एवमाइक्खामो, एवं भासामो, एवं पण्णवेमो, एवं परूवमो –
सव्वे पाणा, सव्वे भूया, सव्वे जीवा, सव्वे सत्ता, ण हंतव्वा, ण अज्जावेयव्वा,
ण परिघेयव्वा, ण परियावेयव्वा, ण उद्दवेयव्वा । एत्थ वि जाणह णत्थित्थ
दोसो । आरियवयणमेयं ।

8 पुव्वं णिकाय समयं पत्तेयं पत्तेयं पुच्छिस्सामो— हं भो पावादुया! किं भे सायं दुक्खं उदाहु असायं ? समिया पडिवण्णे या वि एवं बूया—सव्वेसिं पाणाणं सव्वेसिं भूयाणं सव्वेसिं जीवाणं सव्वेसिं सत्ताणं असायं अपरिणिव्वाणं महब्भयं दुक्खं । ति बेमि ।

Shri Acharang Sutra, Bhag-1. Adyayan-4,
Uddeshak-2, Sutra-7,8

Translation: I so pronounce that all the sages of all times, state, speak, propagate, and elaborate that nothing which breathes, which exists, which lives, or which has essence or potential of life, should be destroyed or ruled over, or subjugated, or harmed, or denied of its essence or potential.

तुमं सि णाम सच्चेव जं हंतव्वं ति मण्णसि । तुमं सि णाम सच्चेव जं अज्जावेयव्वं ति मण्णसि । तुमं सि णाम सच्चेव जं परियावेयव्वं ति मण्णसि ।

तुमं सि णाम सच्चेव जं परिघेयव्वं ति मण्णसि । तुमं सि णाम सच्चेव जं उद्देयव्वं ति मण्णसि ।

Shri Acharang Sutra, Bhag-1. Adyayan-5,
Uddeshak-5, Sutra-6

Translation: That which you consider worth destroying is (like) yourself. That which you consider worth disciplining is (like) yourself. That which you consider worth subjugating is (like) yourself. That which you consider worth killing is (like) yourself. The result of actions by you has to be borne by you, so do not destroy anything.



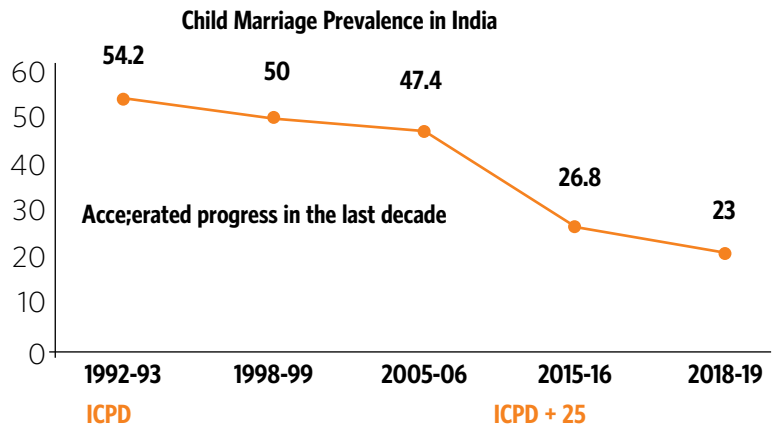
Child Marriage



What is Child Marriage?

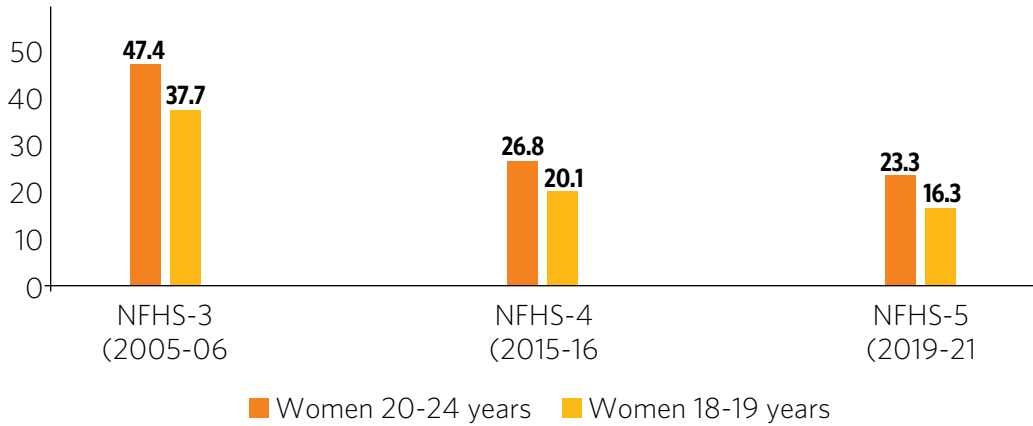
- Child marriage refers to the marriage of a person before the minimum legal age (girls under 18, boys under 21).
- It is a punishable offence. Despite the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006), the practice remains widespread due to socio-economic factors, socio-cultural norms, among other reasons, in many parts of India even today.

Trends and Status of Child Marriage in India



- The median age at marriage in India is increasing over time.
- Child marriage prevalence reduced from 47.4% in 2005-06 to 23.3% in 2019-21, registering a decline of 24.1 percentage points during the last decade.
- Child marriage among younger women (18-19 years) declined from 37.7% in 2005-06 to 16.3% in 2019-21.

**% of Women married before 18 years of age, India,
NFHS-3, 4 & 5**



Potential Factors and Reasons Contributing to Child Marriage





Harmful social norms of a patriarchal society often place lower value on the socio-economic status of a girl child. Social norms also cause families to want to control girls' sexuality and link it to notions of family honour - these often end up normalising practices of child marriage in societies.



Girls with no education are 16 times more likely to be married before age 18, and girls with only primary education are 13 times more likely to be married before age 18, than girls with higher levels of education (UNFPA). The need of the hour is investments in quality secondary and higher education to enable girls to gain knowledge and skills, and expand their life-options.



In poorer areas, families with more children may have difficulty in making ends meet and see marrying off their daughters as a way to reduce the financial burden.



Crises caused by conflict, generalised violence, natural hazards - including climate change and disease outbreak - hunger and poverty worsen the factors that drive child marriage. Marriage can be seen by parents as a method of protecting girls from violence or to lessen the burden in the face of growing economic uncertainty or access to security in places of increased crime and violence.



Wherein they are seen as a burden/liability and therefore, child marriage is a way of passing on the responsibility and relieving the burden.

Thus, it is evident that there can be multiple variables that can influence child marriage, and it is made worse by poverty, lack of education, harmful social norms and practices, and insecurity. Its drivers vary between communities and it looks different across - and within - regions and countries.

Consequences of Child Marriage



Key Messages

- Child Marriage is a punishable offense
- Child Marriage violates the fundamental rights of girls to lead a life of dignity and their rights to health, education and protection.
- Child Marriage places girls at a higher risk of violence and exploitation.
- Be it a daughter or a son, first provide them an education, then plan for their marriage.
- Everyone, boys and girls, has an equal right to education.
- Educated, empowered and skilled girls and boys play a vital role in building a prosperous and progressive society.
- Child marriage robs girls and boys of their childhood, denies them the chance to determine their own future, and poses grave threats to their health. This can have intergenerational consequences for children, families and communities.
- Healthy and prosperous society will be built by the physical, mental and emotional development of daughters and sons.
- Only when we are able to see the girl child not as a burden, not as paraya daan, to be wed and to go to someone else's home, not as a liability for whom we have to collect dowry for, someone can't carry forward their lineage and/or perform their parents' last rites, we are able to challenge all these misconceptions and break free from the shackles that prevent our society from truly thriving and progressing forward in all respects.
- Ending child marriage is essential to enable millions of adolescent girls and boys the opportunity for a better life and to realize their full potential.





Scriptural References on Child Marriage

Hinduism

आ धेनवो धुनयन्ताम् अशशिवीःसबर्दुघाःशशया अप्रदुग्धाः।
नव्या-नव्या युवतयो भवन्तीर् महद् देवानाम् असुरत्वम् एकम् ॥
ā dhenavo dhunayantām aśśivīḥ sabardughāḥ śaśayā apradugdhāḥ |
navyā-navyā yuvatayo bhavantīr mahad devānām asuratvam ekam ||



-Rig Veda 3.55.6

Translation: An unmarried young learned daughter should be married to a bridegroom who like her is learned. Never think of giving in marriage a daughter of very young age.

ब्रह्मचर्येण कन्या युवानं विन्दते पतिम् ।
अनड्वान्ब्रह्मचर्येणाश्वो घासं जिगीर्षति ॥
Brahmacharyeṇ kanyā yuvānaṁ vindate patim |
Anaḍvānbrahmacharyeṇāshvo ghāsaṁ jigīrṣhati ||

- Atharvaveda, 11.5.18

Translation: Girls too should educate themselves as students and only then enter into married life

Interpretation: The Sukta emphasizes also that girls should receive the same level of training as boys (Vedavachaspati, 2003).

चित्तिराउपबर्हणं चक्षुरा अभ्यञ्जनम् ।
द्यौरभूमिः कोश आसीद्यदयात्सूर्यापतिम् ॥
Chittirāupabarhaṇaṁ chakṣhurā abhyanyjanam |
Dyaurbhūmiḥ kosh āsīdyadayātsūryāpatim ||

-Atharvaveda 14.1.6

Translation: When a girl ignores external objects and develops foresight and a vibrant attitude through power of knowledge, she becomes a provider of wealth of skies and earth. Then she should marry an eligible husband.



Four Stages of Life

In Sanatana Dharma, there are four general stages (ashramas) of our spiritual life being: Student, Householder, Forest Dweller and Renunciate. The Jabil Upanishad was the first systematic mention of the four ashrams. Specifically we see that the stage of becoming a householder follows after the period of life dedicated to studies.



1. Student - By spending the first quarter of life dedicated to our studies, we learn discipline and knowledge; this makes us self-reliant and self-sufficient.



2. Householder - In the next quarter of our life, we acquire wealth and fulfill family and social responsibilities.



3. Forest Dweller - In the third quarter of life, we retire from family responsibilities and spend time in service and devotion to God.



4. Sannyas (renunciate) - In the last quarter of life, we strive for liberation, to lead a life like a renunciate or an ascetic, to spend time only in realization of God.

Interpretation: It is believed that one's lifetime is to be equally divided between these four stages - one-fourth of one's life is spent in each of these ashramas depending on life expectancy. For example, if life expectancy is supposed to be 100 years old, then it should be 25 years as a student, from 25-50 years of age in householder, from 50-75 in vanprastha and from 75 onwards in sannyas. It can be seen to advise the importance of completing one's years as a student with full dedication before moving into marriage.



Shri Savitri Bai Phule and Mahatma Jyotirao Govindrao Phule (April 1827 - 28 November 1890)

Indian social reformer, social enlightener, thinker, social worker, writer, philosopher and revolutionary activist (also known as Mahatma Phule and Jyotiba Phule).

In September 1873, Jyotiba Phule formed an organization named 'Satya Shodhak Samaj' in Maharashtra. He was a strong supporter of providing education to all sections of the society.

His main objective was to provide the right to women to receive full education and he strongly opposed child marriage. Phule wanted to free the society from the evil practices and the trap of superstition. He wanted to save women from gender discrimination. He opened India's first school for girls in Pune.

Phule was very disturbed and saddened by the condition of women at that time, and that is why he firmly decided that he would continue to bring revolutionary changes in the society. He himself provided education to his wife Savitribai Phule. After that, Savitribai took up the task of educating women and continued to do so for the rest of her life. Savitribai Phule was the first female teacher of India (NCERT, 2008).





Sikhism

Rahitnama is a book in which an elaborate code of conduct of Sikhism is mentioned. There are many rahitnamas written by different Sikhs from time to time. The Prem Sumarag is one of them, edited by Randhir Singh in 1953. The fourth chapter, on marriage (*sanjog*), starts with the recommendation that the girl should be married at a suitable age and forbids marriage when a boy or a girl is of tender age. Furthermore, in the ninth section of the chapter, it is stated that the girl and the boy should be married when both are grown up (*javaan*). Sikhism disapproves early marriage (Singh, 1956).

Reversing the attitude towards women and girls

Bhai Gurdas Ji was a scholar in the court of Guru Arjan Sahib. Guru Arjan Sahib called his vaara “keys” to the Guru Granth Sahib. In one of his vaaras, he reverses the common attitude of women and girls being a burden on the family, and illustrates a more idealistic picture (Kaur, 2017).

ਪੇਵਕੜੈ ਘਰਿ ਲਾਡੁਲੀ ਮਾਊ ਪੀਉ ਖਰੀ ਪਿਆਰੀ।

Payvakarhai Ghari Laadulee Maaoo Peeoo Kharee Piaaree |

Translation: In her mother’s home, the girl is dearly loved by her parents.

ਵਚਿ ਭਰਿਵਾਂ ਭੈਨੜੀ ਨਾਨਕ ਦਾਦਕ ਸਪਰਵਾਰੀ।

Vichi Bhiraavaan Bhainarhee Naanak Daadak Sapravaaree |

Translation: Among the brothers she is a sister, and she lives joyfully with her maternal and paternal grandparents.

ਸਾਹੁਰੜੈ ਘਰਿ ਮੰਨੀਐ ਸਣਖਤੀ ਪਰਵਾਰ ਸਧਾਰੀ।

Saahurarhai Ghari Manneeai Sanakhatee Pravaar Sadharee |

Translation: In her in-laws’ home, she is celebrated and accepted as the reformer.



Buddhism

The Buddha taught the Dhamma out of compassion for the world, offering parents the practice of “Four Sublime States of Mind” to facilitate them in raising their children and not taking them as burdens:

- Metta — loving kindness or goodwill
- Karuna — compassion
- Mudita — sympathetic joy
- Upekkha — equanimity or “even-mindedness”

“These four states, well-practiced, will help parents remain calm throughout the difficult period of child-rearing. This is the right or ideal way of conduct towards living beings. These four attitudes of mind provide the framework for all situations arising from social contact. They are the great removers of tension, the great peacemakers in social conflict, the great healers of wounds suffered in the struggle for existence; levellers of social barriers, builders of harmonious communities, awakeners of slumbering magnanimity long forgotten, revivers of joy and hope long abandoned, promoters of human brotherhood against the forces of egotism” (Dhammananda, 2015).



In Buddhism, marriage is not a social or religious obligation, a means for procreation, or a romantic notion of love. It is simply an option for each individual to create a partnership which is enriched and enhances the lives of both when it allows for the people involved to grow spiritually and move towards liberation. If both individuals believe marriage will bring them happiness and keep them on the path of enlightenment, then they are free to make that choice. The issue being with child marriage that the young bride has not had the chance to mature and develop to her fullest capacity seeing through her education, child marriage reduces social outcomes for girls and hence, child marriage in Buddhism is rare due to the perceived harm it causes



Jainism

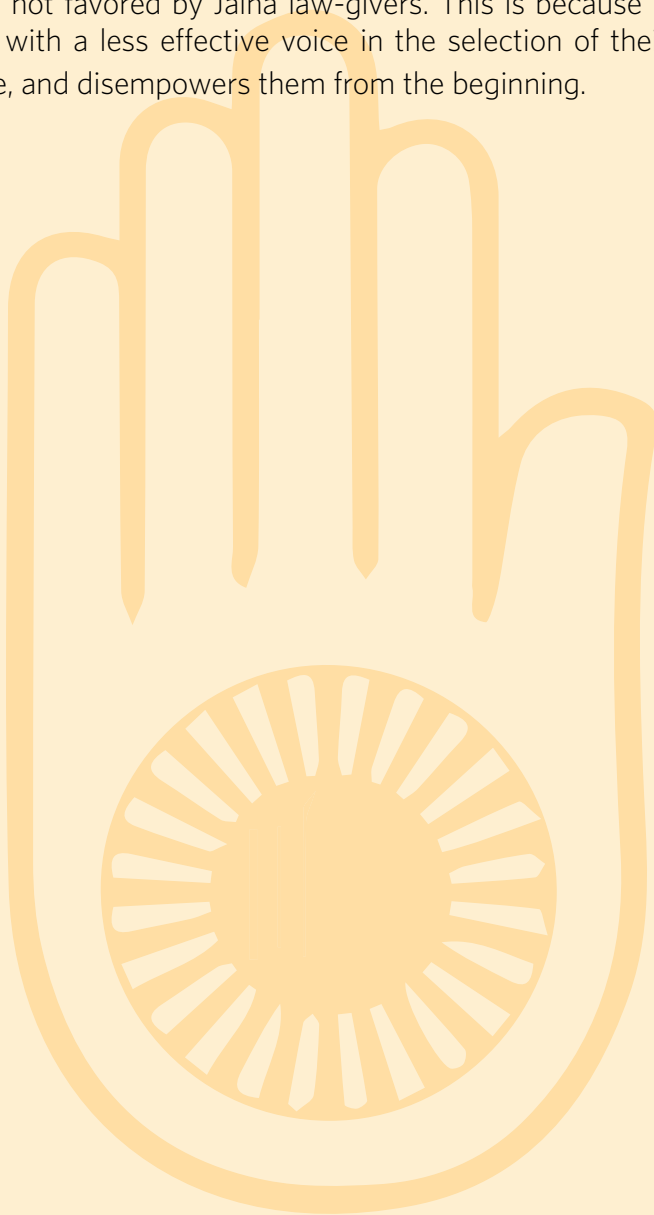
The first Tirthankara, Lord Rishabhdeva, stated, “only when you would adorn yourself with education your life would be fruitful because just as a learned man is held in high esteem by educated persons, a learned lady also occupies the highest position in the female world” (Sangve, 2023). During the rise of the Jain tradition in India, it was pertinent that the family, the temple, the school and the state served as powerful agents for the spread of education among women.

Jaina women kept up the pace of education with men and also made original and respected contributions to literature. Along with men, Jaina women also added to Kannada literature. The greatest name among them was Kanti who, along with Abhinava Pampa, was in the Court of Hoyasala King Ballala I (A. D. 1100-1106). She was an impressive orator and poet who completed the unfinished poems of Abhinava Pampa in the open court of King Ballala I. Similarly, a Jaina lady named Avvaiyara, ‘the Venerable Matron’, was one of the most admired amongst the Tamil poets of her times (Sangve, 2023).

The Jain tradition holds dear the memory of Jayanti, a daughter of King Sahasranika of Kausambi, who remained unmarried for the purpose of dedicating her life to religion and philosophy. When Mahavira (the 24th Tirthankara) first visited Kausambi, Jayanti discussed with him several profound metaphysical questions and eventually became a nun. This demonstrates the heights she was able to climb to when left free to follow her aspirations.



Child marriage started to come into greater practice after 300 BC, after which women's education in India suffered a great deal. Child-marriage was not favored by Jaina law-givers. This is because it leaves brides with a less effective voice in the selection of their partners in life, and disempowers them from the beginning.





Conclusion

We hope this toolkit is a useful and effective messaging and reference guide for faith leaders, faith-based organisations and faith actors to empower them as agents of change to abate and reverse Gender Inequalities, Gender-Based Violence and Child Marriage.

This toolkit attempts to not only explore the factors responsible for Gender Inequality, Gender-Based Violence and Child Marriage prevalent in India, and the negative consequences of these disparities on women and girls, their families, their communities and the nation as a whole but also shares scriptural references and faith-based messaging that can help reverse these disparities, cultivating a more gender balanced society.

We believe that for India to maintain its position as a global growth leader, more concerted efforts are required at local and national levels, and by all sectors of society to provide a conducive environment to empower women to be free to become all that they want to be.

Breaking the cycle of injustice requires concerted collaboration and action between governmental and non-governmental actors including but not limited to faith leaders, faith-based organisations, political leaders, corporate leaders, educators, healthcare authorities, legislators, the judiciary and the mass media to promote gender equality and enhance the value of women and girls.

In this spirit, we hope that this Toolkit will empower Faith Leaders and Faith Actors to share this vital messaging with masses and to utilise these tools for facilitating mass behaviour change, initiate healthy dialogue and one-to-one conversations on these issues, and utilise various other means to bring about a more gender equitable and gender balanced society.



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Acknowledgements

The completion of this toolkit could not have been possible without the participation of people whose names may not all be enumerated. Their contributions are sincerely appreciated and gratefully acknowledged.

Above all, we would like to thank Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswati ji, Co-Founder of the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance (GIWA), President, Parmarth Niketan and Dr Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati ji, Secretary General, Global Interfaith WASH Alliance (GIWA), President, Divine Shakti Foundation for their invaluable guidance and continuing blessings for this initiative.

We would like to thank UNFPA for its technical inputs and support towards the consultations that led to development of this toolkit.

We are grateful to Hon'ble Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Smt Anandiben Patelji, Hon'ble Governor of Kerala, Dr Arif Mohammad Khanji for their gracious review of the text, their insights and for lauding the initiative from its conception to the Nari Sansad in October held at Parmarth Niketan, Rishikesh.

We would like to express our deep appreciation and indebtedness, particularly to the following faith leaders, institutions and individuals, for their endless support, insights, helpful comments and wise suggestions as well as corrections. Their inputs have proved highly useful in strengthening the toolkit.

- Pujya Rameshbhai Ozaji "Bhaishriji", Renowned Spiritual Orator, Eminent Kathakar, Founder, Sandipani Vidyaniketan
- Rajyogini BK Sapna Didi ji, Senior Rajyoga Teacher of Brahma Kumaris
- Giani Ranjit Singh ji, Head Granthi (Priest), Gurudwara Bangla Sahib, New Delhi, India
- Devi Chitralkhaji, Renowned Spiritual Orator, Eminent Kathakar, Founder of GSD

Hospital

- Pujya Sant Murlidhar ji, Eminent Kathakar & Gurumaa Smt. Meena Murlidhar ji
- Dr Chinmaya Pandiyaji, Pro Vice Chancellor, Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya
- Pujya Gurudevshri Rakeshbhaiji, Founder, Shreemad Rajchandra Mission, Dharampur
- Pujya Vivek Muniji, Disciple of HH Acharya Shri Sushil Kumarji Maharaj
- Ven Bhikkhu Sanghasenaji, Founder, Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre, Ladakh
- Sushil Goswamiji Maharaj, National Convener of Bhartiya Sarv Dharm Sansad
- Sardar Paramjit Chandhokji, Chairman, Delhi Gurudwara Bangla Sahib
- Dharmacharya Shantum Seth, an ordained Dharmacharya in the tradition of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh & Mindfulness teacher
- Rajyogini BK Dr. Binny Sareen ji, Peace Ambassador and Spiritual Leader, Rajyoga Expert, Mount Abu
- Geeta Kathpalia Ahujaji, Secretary, All Religion Parliament of India
- Ven Khenpo Rangdol, Vice President, Doon Buddhist Association
- Piara Singh ji, Gurmat Sangeet Bal Vidyalaya, Rishikesh
- Giani Gurmail Singh ji, Kathakar, Gurudwara Sri Hemkunt Sahib, Rishikesh
- Sardar Gurbachan Singh ji, Gurudwara Sri Hemkunt Sahib, Rishikesh
- Kalpesh & Shailesh Solanki, Gauravi Gujarat & Eastern Eye
- Mr. Akhilesh Mishra, District Project Officer, Ministry of WCD, Government of Uttarakhand
- Smt. Neera Misra, Chairperson-Draupadi Dream Trust, Author, Visiting Prof. Public Speaker
- Triveni Acharya, Founder of Rescue Foundation

Deep gratitude also to the experts and scholars who reviewed this document and provided their invaluable feedback and insights, especially to:

- Dr Ravindra Panth, Director, International Buddhist Confederation, New Delhi

- Dr. Bimalendra Kumar, Professor, Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, Faculty of Arts, Banaras Hindu University
- Dr. Neerja A. Gupta, Vice Chancellor, Sanchi University for Buddhist-Indic Studies
- Dr. Kanchan Chandan Mehra, Professor, Punjab University, Gender Studies department
- Shreemad Rajchandra Mission Team
- Sourajit Ghosh, PhD Scholar (Global PhD Program), SBSPCR, Nalanda International University 2020 - 2023

Lastly, we would like to thank the GIWA Team who has worked tirelessly on this document –Ganga Nandini, Director of Project Implementation, Global Interfaith WASH Alliance, Dr Priya Parmar, Sukhnoor Kaur Oberoi, Rohan Maclaren and so many others who have worked very hard to get this toolkit prepared.

This book is not exhaustive but intends to support faith leaders to direct gender balanced messaging to bring about gender equality in our society as the foundation to a more just and peaceful world. We have designed this Toolkit to facilitate dialogue and to inspire action around these key themes and hence, we welcome all feedback, thoughts, suggestions and encourage you to share them with us by email at info@washalliance.org





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