

Veda Jyoti

“Light of Knowledge”

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HONOUR WOMEN

International Womens' Day, celebrated in March every year, is an opportune time to reflect on the true nature of this celebration. It is not only a day on which we recognise the significant role women play in our lives and in greater society but, most importantly, it gives women a platform to highlight the inequalities and prejudice they continue to face. It reminds us there are still social stigmas regarding the treatment of women in various parts of the world. The lone voices of women often go unheard and many continue to be excluded from realising their full potential.



The challenges that many women face are a sad reality, and a sign that we are yet to develop as a caring and compassionate society. It is not just a day to be celebrated by women, but one to be celebrated by all who recognise and share in their plight. It signifies “A Call to Action” to stand up and confront these injustices, and establish ways to overcome them.

Let's take a deeper look at some of the issues that women face.

Gender Based Violence (GBV)

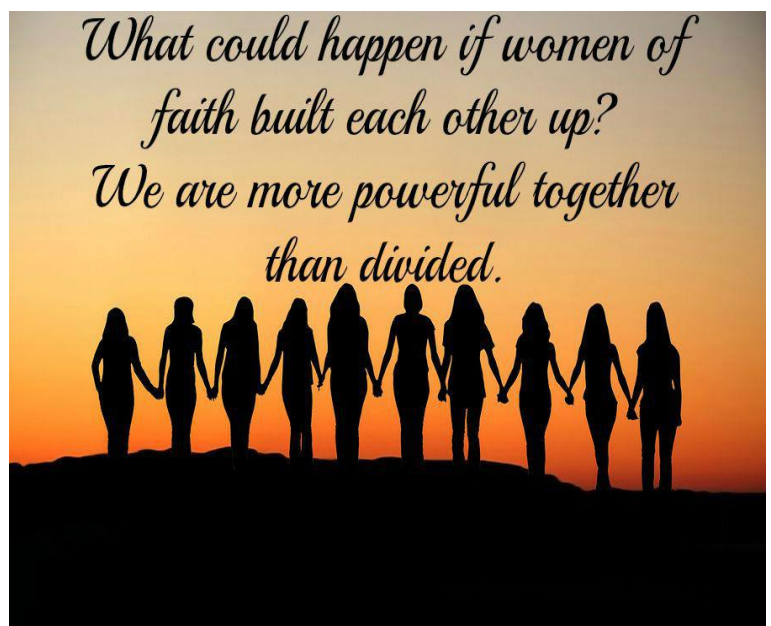
Gender based violence is a widespread problem in South Africa with women mainly being on the receiving end. Patriarchal power structures dominate in many societies, where male leadership is seen as the norm and men hold the power. Patriarchy is a social and political system that treats men as superior to women – where women cannot protect their bodies, meet their basic needs or participate fully in society and men then commit violence against women without hesitation.

Divorces

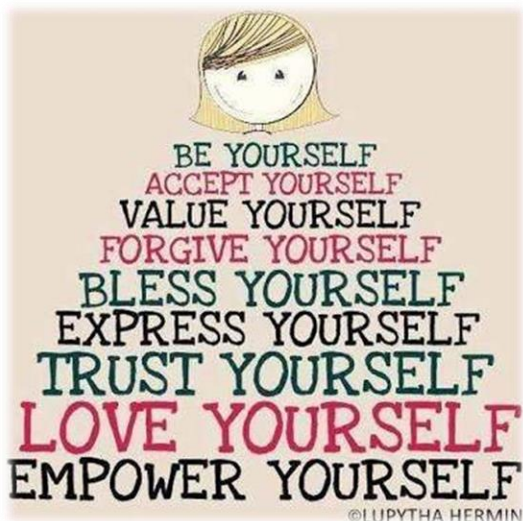
Today the law has changed to allow fathers equal rights to the custody of the child, but we all know that in most cases the mother is naturally preferred for custodianship of the child. Commonly, the woman is left with the responsibility of nurturing, sustaining and providing a loving environment for the child in which to grow, where the male role has simply been relegated to paying maintenance and visitation rights. Females need to be very assertive in making their position very clear, and it rests with them to ensure that the father plays a more meaningful role in the life of the growing child.

Women Empowerment

Humanity is at a stage where a more tolerant and equitable society needs to be developed in which all form an integral part of it, irrespective of gender, colour or creed. The empowerment of women socially, economically and emotionally needs to be addressed to redress the failures of the past. Some societies are slowly moving towards empowering women, especially in terms of education and in taking more leadership roles. Though progress has been made there is still much that needs to be done in this regard. One of the ways forward, is for women themselves to ensure that they support each other. The combined voice of women is very powerful, and it can uplift our communities. It takes true courage to stand for what you believe in. In 1955, at a meeting of Federation of South African Women, a suggestion was made: "Let us go to Pretoria ourselves and protest to the Government against laws that oppress us." After that the words – You strike a woman, you strike a rock! became a slogan for women to rise up against injustices.



It takes true courage to stand for what you believe in. In 1955, at a meeting of Federation of South African Women, a suggestion was made: "Let us go to Pretoria ourselves and protest to the Government against laws that oppress us." After that the words – You strike a woman, you strike a rock! became a slogan for women to rise up against injustices.



Women are organising themselves better and standing up against prejudice and injustice, telling success stories and raising their voices so they can't be ignored. The society we live in is ever judgemental and it is easier to put each other down than uplift and guide each other. Hence the Vedas declares: "mitrasya cakṣuṣā samikṣāmahe" which verily means - *May we look upon each other as friends.* For men, the responsibility must be greater, whether a brother, father, friend or neighbour, one needs first and foremost to treat every woman with respect. Together we have a responsibility to stand up whenever there are injustices against women and protect their dignity, for we are part of one universal system and injury to one is injury to all!

Vedas and Women

The Vedas, being a universal body of divine knowledge clearly states that all creation is equal. The principles of the Vedas do not allow for the subjugation of any living form, and with the feminine divinity at its core, stands as a model for women empowerment in the world. **Vedas state** - "Among you (mankind) there are no superiors or no inferiors, no middle ones either. You become great from small beginnings. You make progress in different ways by dint of your merits. By birth you are all high born because you are all children of Mother-Earth."

The respect for women and purity of women, as well as their protection is highly referenced and valued in the Vedas. Parents are instructed and advised by the Vedas to educate girls from a young age in all spheres of life and spirituality. Of the many Vedic references, some examples are:



Yajurveda 10.26: "O woman, you provide bliss and stability to the world. You are source of valour. These women are pure, sacred, worth being revered, worth being served, of great character, and scholarly."

Atharva Veda 11.1.17: "These women are pure, sacred and respected through reverence."

Atharva Veda 20.96.15: "The person who assaults a woman or her children posing as her brother or protector shall be punished severely."

One can therefore realise that the Vedas are against all the violence and inequality that women face in society today and call for their protection, equality and dignity!



Reference

- <https://www.saferspaces.org.za>

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