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International Women's Day, 8 March, is celebrated globally. The theme for 2023 resonates with the Arya Samaj approach: **"A world free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination. A world that's diverse, equitable, and inclusive. A world where difference is valued and celebrated."**

Against this visionary backdrop are the realities of gender-based violence, gender disparities due to poverty, cultural and even religious practices. Patriarchy and social practices still need to be overcome. If about half the population of the world are affected, then we cannot be a free or noble society. We cannot realise *Krinvanto Vishvam Aryam*, Rig 9.63.5 highlighted by the founder of the Arya Samaj, Swami Dayanand Saraswati which means 'Make the World Noble'.

In attempting to provide pathways to the future, to improve the physical, spiritual, and social well-being of all, we have gathered a few in-depth articles all written by women and about women and gender.

In this issue we present a feature article entitled "Strengthening your being, instead of being a victim forever" by Shanta Maharaj. This is followed by a piece authored by Sudhira Sham on "Patriarchy and Gender Based Violence". The article on "Teenage Pregnancies: Can we Overcome the Bias?" is authored by Deepika da Costa.

We thank Dr Pingla Udit for sharing the Tribute she delivered at Dr Frene Ginwala's funeral with us.

In publishing this, we honour the late Dr Frene Ginwala, the first speaker of our democratic parliament who championed women's rights and democracy.

Your contributions and comments are welcomed. Please see the last page for the criteria for articles.

Veda Jyoti Editorial Committee:

Arthi Shanand, Karuna Mohan, Kirun Satgoor, Ressma Rambaros, Shobana Singh, Sudhira Sham, Usha Debipersad.



ओम मा नो वृकाय वृक्ये समस्मा अघायते रीरधतायजत्राः।

Aum mā nō vṛkāya vṛkyē samasmā aghāyatē rīradhatāyajatrāḥ.

Meaning: Subject us not to evil, to wolf-like creatures or anyone designing to do us harm.

Rig Veda 6.51.6

ओम मा व एनो अन्यकृतं भुजेम मा तत्कर्म वसवो यच्चयध्वे।

Aum mā va ēnō anyakṛtaṁ bhujēma mā tat karma vasavō yaccayadhvē.

Meaning: Let us not suffer for the sin of others. May the one who hurts us be the victim of his own evil designs.

Rig Veda 6.51.7

Discussion:

We ask God to protect us from all forms of harm from the outside. Let us not be harmed by those wolf-like (people who morph into vicious) creatures, those who are ill intentioned with a desire to see others in pain and wishes to bring harm unto others.

Strengthening your being, instead of being a victim forever

The one who has suffered harm should not pay for the sins of the sinner, as it is he who has committed the sin who must pay for his own sins. Whomever creates an evil act and causes hurt unto the victim will pay for their sins.

As we celebrate International Women's Day this month, we recognise all the achievements of women and their progress towards achieving gender equality we also know that many women have been subjected to gender-based violence, oppression, unequal treatment at home and at work, denied access to education, child labour, job segregation and sexual harassment. Women continue to be underrepresented at every level.

Gender based violence causes women and children to be harmed. These include physical, sexual, and psychological violence that causes harm. Almost every woman has experienced some violation whether it's being groped at without consent, cat calling or rape, they need to make their voices heard, enough is enough!

Femicide is an issue linked to gender and the girl child. It is important to empower women to know their rights so that they could eliminate heinous acts against them, to help eliminate hunger and to help eliminate gender stereotypes.

In some countries girls are not allowed to go to school and thus harmed and unable to make progress. Feminists are constantly taking up the struggle of the advocacy in terms political, economic, and social equality. The imbalances of power in gender inequality and discriminatory patriarchal practices against women are root causes of gender-based violence in society. These patriarchal attitudes often favour men over women. Education is the key to a better life for all and hence there should be no discrimination of gender in terms of education.

It is against this background that women should understand that although they are sinned against, they are not the sinners and those who intently violate them would face the consequence of their actions. In a country where women are honoured there is prosperity and progress.

Author: Pt Shobana Singh

Gender Based Violence has become a term that is commonly heard and used. It creates images that are unpleasant and full of pain. The media has played a significant role in bringing cases to the fore and exposing perpetrators. Our courts, in South Africa and abroad have a queue of cases yet to be heard. In some countries this is an accepted form of behavior.

I have heard statements that a woman is like a drum, and in order to create music that is pleasant you have to beat the drum. This was a statement that was made directly to me by a male in Bangalore in December 2014 and it stuck in my mind. This irked me, as the person making this statement was some self-professed holy man who guided worshippers to shrines. He assumed that I did not understand a word of Hindi, a blind assumption that I ignored. Another statement that I have heard rather often, and this by senior women of households in reference to daughters in law was that they (the matriarchs of the household) have done their time with drunk abusive husbands, it is now the turn for the daughters in law to adapt to life with their sons and stop complaining. The famous comment referring to the roof over her head and a husband, what more could a woman possibly want in life.

Violence against women takes many forms, physical, or emotional, public, or private, online, or off, perpetrated by a stranger or an intimate partner. Regardless of how, where, or why it happens, it has serious short- and long-term consequences for women and girls, or anyone who is a victim. In addition, serves to prevent their full and equal participation in society.

I will attempt to refrain from dwelling on the actual abuse and instead empower women with coping strategies. Not everyone has access to qualified registered social workers, psychological counsellors, therapists etc., but in sharing information, we share knowledge. I will touch on a case or two that have been dealt with by me in my professional capacity for you to have a better idea of the situation, relate to it wholly or partially and then take the necessary steps.

To move forward as a society the most important thing we need to do is to stop the stigma associated with gender-based violence (GBV). GBV is not only men on women violence, but also any act of violence where the other is abusing the one gender. In a society as diverse as ours, there ought to be total support irrespective of the sexual orientation of anyone. Every individual is worthy of and deserves to be respected and honored as a creation of the almighty.

GBV does not occur in isolation. Interventions to protect the mental health of survivors must take into account may social aspects and financial constraints of both the individual as well as the state funded organisations. On the note of financial constraints, let us not forget that many victims remain in relationships due to financial dependency. I will aim to address this later in this article.

Survivors of GBV need help to cope with immediate physical injuries, sometimes these injuries are extremely severe requiring medical intervention, as well as psychological and social support, security, and legal redress.

Those providing support should have the knowledge, skills, and compassion required to help GBV survivors. This is not rocket-science, and everyone deserves to be empowered to assist where necessary. However, one must be mindful that there is a vast difference between support provided by an untrained person and that provided by a professional. Such well-meaning support by someone who is not qualified to do so, can in some cases lead to more harm as the situation is highly sensitive and requires professional intervention. We must always act under the assumption that gender-based violence (GBV) is occurring and constitutes a life-threatening protection issue, regardless of the existence of evidence.

GBV is a specific form of trauma because the violation involved is extremely invasive and leads to feelings of shame, self-blame, and guilt. When combined with fear of being injured or killed, it is even more traumatising. Women are very good at covering up a situation but there are some signs of altered behaviour that can signal cause for concern.

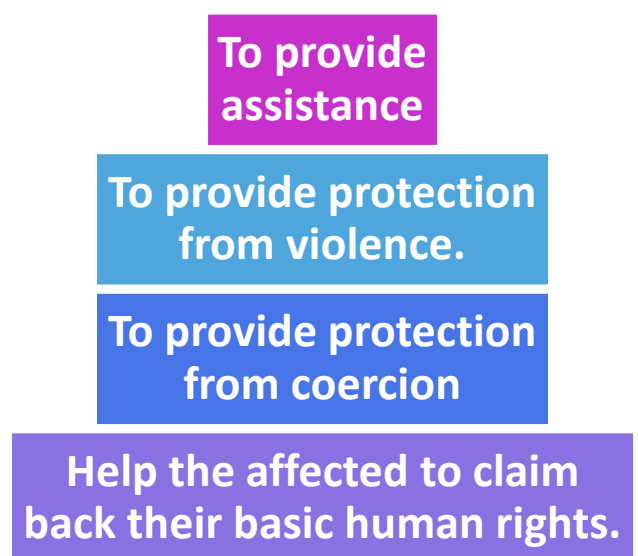
Initially the shock reaction may last for minutes, days, or sometimes weeks. Reactions to this shock may include panicked agitation and confusion, or an almost mute withdrawn state. Subsequently, if the survivor is injured, she will start to feel pain from her injuries. Post-traumatic symptoms appear more gradually.

Intense imagining and re-experiencing of the original trauma is characteristic and is associated with simultaneous efforts to avoid reminders of what happened. You might find extreme forms of behaviour where the victim could also become very hyperactive or even appear to be almost euphoric as a cover up for their inward hurt and pain.

Often the victim shows an inability to sleep, hyperactive vigilance, or an exaggerated startle response even for the smallest sound or any other stimulus. No person is alike and responses to traumatic events such as GBV will vary. Many women and girls who have had very difficult experiences are resilient. This resilience, and their ability to join together to support one another, are important resources to build on. We need to remember that social or cultural stigma, together with psychological trauma, often prevent victims from seeking help after GBV.

In South Africa, we would like to assume that we are a rainbow nation and that we are all living together in harmony. The reality is that this is not the case. Communities are amid conflict, not on proportions of war, but there are undertones of great conflict. Our mechanisms are not functioning, and this is the root cause of great frustration. It is becoming increasingly difficult for social service departments to provide adequate service for victims of GBV. There is an increasing difficulty in training helpers to handle or supervise GBV cases or create conditions for healing afterwards. It is an accepted norm that protection should do no harm, yet many victims fall prey to the so-called guardians of the law in exchange for assumed protection from the perpetrators.

The four pillars on which we should build our support for victims are:



To provide assistance

This is an extremely broad statement and the danger of providing assistance can in some cases lead to dependency where the victim goes from one scenario of enduring abuse because of dependency, to one of being dependent on the assistance that takes them out of the abusive situation. I would like to relate a scenario that might highlight the danger of becoming yet another person the victim depends on, and how difficult it will become for you eventually. This often takes place at the cost of the relationship you share or once shared with the victim.

Case: Victim was married to someone she knew through family contact and was not aware of his drug addiction. During the first few weeks of marriage, they occupied the general family home living in absolute material luxury, and thereafter moved into their apartment. He would isolate her in the bedroom, literally lock her in and only open the door when he needed to sleep. Whilst this might seem like some movie script, such things are taking place. His idea was to destroy her mentally into a nervous breakdown and to appear to be delusional about his behaviour. It was extremely difficult to get her to face her emotions and express them. She married into this family in the hope of uplifting the social status of both herself and her parents by association. In seeking assistance, the victim with the help of family moved to another city and started therapy. The victim was not showing progress and priests as well as legal services were also engaged. Eventually the victim was advised to reduce individual counselling because of dependency and not growth, and to attend group therapy for self-esteem.

I am quoting this incident because well-meaning individuals who are not qualified to deal with this will eventually do more harm to the victim by being there at their disposal. When you have a personal relationship with the victim, it is very difficult to create boundaries because you are seen as being cold and not wanting to assist. Instead of placing yourself in such a predicament, rather refer the victim to a professional. When we provide assistance: we need to ensure that we know what we are doing, that proper channels are followed, and we create boundaries. I understand this is easier said than done, but as cliché as it might sound, you cannot pour from an empty cup.

To provide protection from violence.

Speak up, speak out

- Let survivors and activists know you stand with them, help them to amplify their voices and stories. Engage in dialogue, both in person and online. Make it your duty to push forward and to start your own conversation about gender-based violence.

Know the issue—and the signs

- Seek advice from credible organisations, and do not keep this to yourself. The more we share this knowledge, the easier it would be to identify and support victims. Know what to look for by familiarizing yourself with the different kinds of violence.

Call out harassment

- Common forms of harassment like online bullying, catcalling, inappropriate comments, and jokes serve to make women and girls feel unsafe. This reinforces biases and stereotypes that perpetuate misogyny (*ingrained prejudice against women*). It further contributes to a culture of impunity, in which women can be harmed without consequence.

For many women, harassment is a daily experience. Be it online, on the street or the workplace. The more you ignore inappropriate behaviour, the more you are normalizing it. At work look out for the so-called ‘culture’ of the organisation and if you are uncomfortable, then protect your personal space. It is not always possible to comment or question this if your daily survival depends on your job. However, it is possible to maintain your moral standard even if it comes at the cost of being regarded as “old fashioned, a square, antisocial, etc.”

Challenge beliefs on masculinity

- Traditional concepts of masculinity tend to emphasize traits like aggression, strength and control. When we fail to challenge these beliefs, everyone loses. As a society, it is our duty to support the men and boys in our life to embrace caretaking, emotional expression, and other traditionally non-masculine traits like being sensitive, showing empathy etc.

Toxic masculinity drives violence against women. Men whose beliefs and behaviours reinforce male dominance and gender inequality are more likely to inflict violence. Please bear in mind that there is no harm in being the provider and protector as the head of the household as a male, but one needs to take that in the context of the vows taken to assume those roles and not to harm women or take away their right to dignity and respect.

Support women's organizations

- Investing in women's movements matters. Support the women's wings of associations. Gone are the days when women's organisations were seen as Kitty Parties. Strong women lead organisations, or women lead wings of organisations are a crucial factor in driving policy change on gender-based violence.

Call for better responses and services

- Join forces with supportive NGOs and create partnerships. It is also important to get more involved by volunteering services to support victims of GBV. You do not have to deal with the victims directly but you can contribute your services in raising funds etc. for them when they are kept in safety.

Services for women and girls experiencing violence can be the difference between life and death. This means that shelters, hotlines, counselling, and all support for survivors of gender-based violence need to be available for those in need, even during crises and emergencies.

Push for stronger laws and support leadership in favour of human rights

- We need stronger protection mechanisms to prevent and eliminate violence, harassment, threats, intimidation, and discrimination against women human rights defenders and women's rights advocates and activists. It is vitally important to educate yourself on the stances of political candidates and representatives. Follow up with them from time to time and make sure that your voice is heard as an organisation

Become the woman leader you want to see in the world, no matter how small the group you lead is.

Build solidarity with other movements

- We are stronger when we work together. Violence against women and children is inherently connected to other forms of harm and injustice, including racism, homophobia, (*prejudice against gay people*) xenophobia, (*prejudice against people from other countries*) ableism, (*refers to prejudice and bias, as well as discrimination against people with disabilities*) poverty, and climate change. Strengthen the fight against gender-based violence by getting involved in other social and political movements and getting activists from those movements involved in yours.

The links below will assist you to find out more:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/discrimination/womens-rights/>

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/>

To provide protection from coercion

Coercion is a mental game that is played by those in power, using either words to brainwash the victim or money to bribe the victim into silence. This is not something new that is done to those in vulnerable positions. Unless we provide an alternate to the victims, the power of coercion will not be curtailed.

The question that arises is 'how do we ensure that one does not fall prey to this?' Engaging in dialogue with our children is the very first step. No child is too young to be taught skills to identify and report coercion. If the child is too young to be taught to report coercion, then it is clear that a child should never be left unattended or in the care of any adult that could pose a danger to the child.

Our silence has filled too many graves of different sizes carrying different genders that have fallen prey to GBV and it is up to us to put an end to this.

Uninformed children grow up into uninformed adults and here the power of coercion by perpetrators of GBV becomes a very strong tool that they use. It is not about creating confident adults but creating adults with a positive level of self-esteem. Many people who appear confident are carefully hiding their low self-esteem using this brave mask. Coercion is an external factor that can be identified and controlled if the power to do so is imparted to our children before they become statistics.

Help the affected to claim back their basic human rights.

Rule number one is that you should never become a broadcaster of anyone's experience of violence. Continuously speaking about the past causes the victim to visit that past and to relive the trauma. The first basic human right is that of respect. It is your duty to accord the victim that respect without being intrusive.

I have noticed that some organisations and groups call upon victims to speak about GBV without realising that in some cases, they are opening wounds that are trying to heal. In addition, when we engage with victims of GBV, we also need to empower them to understand that they are not the ones at the bottom of the ladder of character and values, but the perpetrator is.

Listening without judgment is a skill that we need to learn and use. I have often been in groups where victims are discussing their situations and instead of adding to the current tone at the time, I move away to the possibility of growth that exists in coping with such adversities. This

makes the victim feel a sense of accomplishment in trying to cope with the violence.

The right to dignity is vitally important. There is no need for anyone who has been violated to be further violated by society and communities. Respect and dignity go hand in hand and should be the pillar that you help the victim to rebuild with all the stones that GBV has thrown at them. There is so much more to share, and it is only through dialogue that we can stand tall against GBV.

Lastly, I would like to share this extract from a handbook that was used to deal with victims of GBV in areas of war and major unrest.



The Butterfly that could not fly - Note from a therapist.

"A traumatised woman entered my office for therapy. She talked in a low voice. 'When I look back, I see only the terrible things that happened to me, day and night it visits me. When I look into the future, I only see worries and problems. I see no hope. My life has become a dark place. My body is numb, I am alone and I find no rest. Am I going insane?'

After she left, I wondered: 'How can I, as a helper, explain healing of trauma to this woman? How can I show her that her reactions are normal responses to an abnormal experience? That she is a survivor. How can I bring hope and dignity into her darkened life?'

I drew what she had told me on a sheet of paper in front of me. The trauma-memories were on one side, and she was squeezed between The Past and the huge problems of The Future. I had drawn a butterfly!

There she was the butterfly woman that could not fly! I used this metaphor to explain the woman's healing process. This metaphor gave the woman the distance she needed to talk about her symptoms without wakening the trauma.

Patriarchy and Gender Based Violence

The Butterfly Woman made it possible to talk about the impossible. We could share her experiences, and I could show her a way forward. We talked and practiced how to restore wings, strengthen, and ground the body, her thoughts, feelings, and heart. We found resources that made life worth living again.

Butterflies are meant to fly, freely and in their own way. Just as women should be free to live their own meaning in peace and dignity.”

Together we can give our victims of GBV wings to fly, we can strengthen them and make their lives worth living again, and we can give them courage to reclaim their power. It is not for us to become the heroes in their lives but to ensure that they discover the hero within themselves.

Author: Ms Shanta Maharaj



In the third decade of the 21st century we observe the changes that have taken place in society regarding the status of women. But, what about the changes that have not taken place? If we listen to what women say and how they say it, we realise that many women, who, through years of conditioning both in the home and workplace as well as in the cultural and religious organisations they belong to, are not confident that they are competent. Even though they may be highly educated and financially liberated, holding high posts in large corporations or in the medical, legal, educational, and academic fields, they doubt their self-worth and allow more dominant male counterparts to second guess their decisions and their opinions. While we have large numbers of highly qualified, confident, outspoken, and successful women, there are many who shrink away from confrontation even when they know they are right.

Patriarchy has been perpetuated over millennia, despite evidence in the Vedas that men and women have equal status. During the Rig Veda period in India, women enjoyed high social status and had great opportunities for intellectual and spiritual development. They produced great works of literature and art and there were many students and teachers of the Vedas. This later changed as the priest class became dominant and introduced patriarchy and the caste system and reduced the rights of women.

It is easy to identify the factors that allow patriarchy to flourish and remain dominant in many societies.

One main cause is method of upbringing of children. Unempowered women raise daughters who are lacking in confidence and self-respect. They also have no ability to deal with abuse from macho males. The girl child is raised to be submissive, and the boy child is raised to be confident and aggressive. The tradition in many Hindu families is that males are seen as the privileged children and are allowed more freedom to choose and act than the females. This is being slowly eradicated but remains a niggling habit.

Poverty is also a major factor because it keeps women uneducated, unskilled, and docile. Very often the poverty-stricken father chooses to educate the son rather than the daughter. The cycle is perpetuated because not

all these people are reached by programmes that are meant to help them. Many poor people are subjected to multiple injustices which erode their confidence and sense of self-worth. Women who do not have formal education and exposure are often unaware of their rights and their lack of access to information keeps them tethered to abusive men. Traditionally many men regard wives as their property.

Gender based violence is not confined only to the poor. An increase in murder of partners of both sexes is being reported regularly. While many murders are a result of greed, a large number may be attributed to patriarchy, where men exert their control over their partners to the extent that if they do not comply with their demands, they are killed.

Religion is a very real and very powerful contributor to the practice of patriarchy. Religious practices also give more power to the males, giving them important roles in ceremonies and rituals. Among Hindu orthodox groups women are forbidden to participate in many of these ceremonies and are relegated to menial tasks. Priests are mainly male and use obscure rules to prevent women from gaining any power. Menstruation is regarded by orthodox Hindus as a sinful state and the treatment of women as being not worthy to enter holy sites, increases feelings of inferiority among many Hindu women.

Muslim women are not even allowed into the main prayer hall of mosques in some countries and are subjected to strict dress codes. In some Islamic states, women are not even allowed to leave their homes unless accompanied by a male relative nor are they allowed to drive. Recently in Iraq, women were arrested for appearing in public without a burqa. In Afghanistan women may no longer attend university. It is ironical that Islam, being the youngest of the major religions is becoming more oppressive than many other religions. With the rise of Hindutva in India, women have taken a backseat in organised religion as the mainly male members of Hindu organisations have begun to raise anti-Islamic issues rather than simply encourage pride in Hindu culture and practice.

The role of Television serials “soapies” is also not to be ignored when it comes to perpetuating patriarchy. Numerous programmes glorify unrealistic practices that lead people to believe that that men are more important than women. The famous tradition of Karva Chauth appears in every soapie, observed with great fervour by women, even those whose husbands maltreat them.

We realise that patriarchy has a definite role to play in gender-based violence. Men who abuse women have learned from watching the abuse of their mothers. Likewise, women learn to accept abuse in relationships as the norm.

Swami Dayanand, a great reformer, and forceful women’s rights campaigner introduced significant changes in people’s attitudes towards women. He was a firm believer in equal opportunities for women and introduced new concepts that removed many of the oppressive traditions that kept women powerless. In spite of the heroic changes he introduced, women in the Arya Samaj are not given the status of equality in the general body of the Arya Samaj in India. They largely play a secondary role in the organization.

Fortunately, in South Africa, the situation is different. There are more women priests than men and the President of Arya Samaj is a woman who is supported and given freedom to preside over the matters pertaining to the organisation. Majority women form the committee that compiles the journal of the organisation and have total freedom regarding the content with caring support and encouragement from the men.

While mindful of the religious aspect of the Arya Samaj, there is also emphasis on social action, human rights, and global concerns such as climate change. Again, there is total freedom with regards to subject matter. The organisation is committed to empowering women, and we are moving into the second quarter of the 21st century with much hope and confidence.

“When women gain agency, it indirectly challenges some of the unwritten rules that say women are less than men.”
Anita Zaidi: President - Gender Equality, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

“Yatra Naryantu Pujyante Ramante Tatra Devata,
Yatraitaastu na Pujyante Sarvaastatrafalaha kriyaah”
‘Manu Smriti 3.56’

Where women are honoured, divinity blossoms there,
where women are dishonoured, rejected, or treated as
commodity, all action no matter how noble remain
unfruitful.

Author: Ms Sudhira Sham

Teenage Pregnancies: Can we Overcome the Bias?

Teenage Pregnancy is one of the greatest problems of our time. When children give birth to children the knock-on effects especially on the mother's health can be immense.

It is estimated that 21 million girls aged between 15 and 19 years in developing countries become pregnant every year and about 12 million of them give birth. Apart from health risks for the mothers and their babies, it also leads to other issues like dropping out of school, limiting their future economic opportunities, and continuing poverty.



Between 2018 and 2019 some parts of South Africa experienced a surge in teenage pregnancies partly attributed to problems experienced in accessing contraceptives. The South African Medical Research Council revealed that before the pandemic 16% of young women aged between 15 and 19 had begun childbearing, the prevalence was higher in rural areas at 19% and figure in urban areas was 11%.

Given the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in South Africa, the Arya Samaj Women's Forum (ASWF) held an online webinar to discuss the issue and its impact on society. Avasha Gopalsingh, a senior social worker and Dr Ray Maharaj, a specialist obstetrician and gynaecologist participated as experts in the webinar.

Factors such as the experimentation phase, peer pressure, exploitation as well as cultural and family values are linked to teenage pregnancies. Being an adolescent in South Africa was a double-edged sword. On the one hand you are still regarded as a child with limited cognitive skills sets and decision-making ability, who requires protection. However, on the other hand adolescents are afforded sexual rights and have certain guaranteed rights over their bodies.

Adolescents grapple with mental health problems, drugs, and early sexual debut. In this mix, HIV and STIs also need to be considered. Globally at least 15 % of pregnancies

were in the adolescent group. While teenage pregnancies are not unique to South Africa, it was the lower socio-economic groups and developing countries where it was more prevalent. Research indicates that while teenage pregnancies showed a decline around the world, it is not the case in most African and Latin American countries.

From a clinical perspective the bodies of young girls were not ready to handle pregnancy, the pelvic area was too small, and they end up being rushed to theatre to have C-sections, increasing the burden on the health system. In addition, the uterus of a young girl does not contract in the same way as that of an older woman. The adolescents often also suffered from anaemia due to a lack of a balanced diet. They struggle to breastfeed and take proper care of babies.



Teenage pregnancy involved both boys and girls, however it causes massive social upheaval for the girls, their parents, schools, communities and creates financial instability. Adolescent pregnancy in girls between 10 and 19 years old, remains a serious health and social problem associated with numerous risks within the context of family, school, and neighbourhood contexts.

Parenting is always challenging, but especially during the adolescent period. As a transitional period between childhood and adulthood characterised by the onset of

teen hormones, growth spurts, as well as rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial growth – teenage pregnancy forces young girls and boys into adulthood.

From 2017 to 2018 the number of pregnancies in girls aged between 10 and 14 was particularly high. In some cases where a girl under 16 years of age was found to be pregnant it was statutory rape if the father was over 18 years of age. In the eyes of their parents these girls, especially in the 10-to-14-year group were still regarded as “babies”.

Over a five-year period from 2017 to 2021 there was a 47.5 percent increase in the number of teenage pregnancies in South Africa. This highlighted other serious issues like sexual violence and gender-based violence.

Parents and caregivers should receive training on how to talk about issues of sexuality. This is something that the Arya Samaj could consider in its social action programmes.

The head of the Arya Samaj Women’s Forum Dr Serela Ramklass indicated at the webinar that the organisation was concerned about the quality of life of these young women, their safety and security and the endless cycle of poverty and dreams deferred. She noted that the Women’s Forum was keen to get involved in programmes that can make a difference in their lives.

Sources:

Dr Kim Jonas, Teenage pregnancy during COVID-19 in South Africa: a double pandemic, South African Medical Research Council

Mandisa Ndlovu - South African teen pregnancies keep rising, Mail and Guardian newspaper, 11 Nov 2022

Author: Ms Deepika da Costa

A TRIBUTE TO FRENE NOSHIR GINWALA (1932-2023)

Dr Ginwala passed away on Thursday 12th January 2023 and was cremated on Saturday 14th January 2023. In this tribute we honour and celebrate the life of a special soul and a comrade to many activists of all races: an icon, a rare and unique woman leader, an intellectual and a great feminist activist.



Acknowledgement to Parliament SA.

I knew comrade Dr Frene Ginwala for 37 years. My first encounter with her was outside the Commonwealth Institute in London. What caught my attention was the simplicity of her attire – a simple sari on the streets of London. She has been a dear comrade, friend, sister, mentor, and we shared a special bond of sisterhood.

She has left a great legacy of service and contribution to our liberation history and the history of democratic South Africa. Her tenacity and strength facilitated a safe passage to those leaving the country into exile, and for all those who would serve the country from the outside. She worked closely with the African National Congress President, Oliver Reginald Tambo, and his team. She was recognized internationally on her research work on sanctions against apartheid, and the arms and oil embargos.

Upon her return from exile her intellectual prowess especially on constitutional matters and rights of women was evident. In this respect she was one of the key thinkers on taking South Africa out of isolation and re-entering onto the world stage during democracy. She led these processes with gravitas and in a very humble manner.

As a policy expert she brought gender policy thinking into the African National Congress and into its Women's League she created a quest for equality and rights. Were it not for her commitment to women there would not have been a National Coalition of Women that united women from all occupations: maids and madams, workers and employers, Afrikaner and African women. Our democratic constitution would not have had equality entrenched if it were not for the leadership that comrade Frene gave to this cause.

I salute this loving sister, comrade and revolutionary through and through!!



Acknowledgement to the Bubblegum club



Acknowledgement to SA History On-Line

In 1990 South Africa witnessed a woman with great intellectual capability and confidence that she was labelled feisty by the newspapers. She was a role model for many women as she stood tall and held her ground.

The most remarkable moment in our country was when she gave leadership as the first Speaker of Parliament and ensured democratic practices, free speech, and correct actions: allowing for debate and set the decorum in a democratic parliament. She made the parliament accessible to be a people's parliament and ensured that accountability was paramount.

Indeed, it was a historical moment was when she led our Father of the Nation, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela to parliament to assume his right role as leader of the country in 1994.

Right till the very end she never left the political space as she was intellectually engaged with current debates both locally and internationally on account of her sheer brilliance.

May she go with peace and love!!

Hamba Kahle

Author: Dr. Pingla Udit

Message from the President

Dear Readers

Namaste

On 12 February 2023, the Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha based in New Delhi, launched an ambitious programme. It will take us all towards the 200th birth anniversary of Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati which is in 2024. It was Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the "Maker of Modern India", who raised the awareness on the oppression and exploitation of women and acted to bring about a change to the existing system.

In his quest to build a society of nobles, he advocated that women were equal partners in society. In this sense, he imagined a world where men and women were equals. In the latter part of the 19th century he picked up the discrimination women faced in being denied an education, in child marriages and in the burning of widows. To ensure an equitable and inclusive society and to end the bias, he promoted the remarriage of widows and education for the girl child.

He did this by revealing that the knowledge contained the Veda was for humanity and that women could recite the Vedas. In South Africa we have promoted and developed women as teachers who ensured that next generation

knew our language, Hindi. We encouraged and empowered women to become purohiths.

Today we know that a gender equal world, a world free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination still eludes us. Those of us who have been educated and have become professionals owe a debt of gratitude to our parents, teachers and to the Arya Samaj founded by Swami Dayanand that advocated the development, education, and participation of women in society. It is our duty to continue the work that Swami Dayanand started and bring about an end to the new forms of bias that women face, be it gender-based violence, abuse, bullying, teenage pregnancies or racial prejudice.

In the Arya Samaj we accept women as equal participants. It is up to the women to step up and participate fully in the structures of organisations and in society. It is for the men in the Samaj, to support, encourage and accept this.

We live in a diverse society. Mutual respect for gender choices, racial groups, cultural practices and tolerance of religious practices and political differences must be built. We all must work towards a world where difference is valued and celebrated. Together we can forge women's equality in practice and showcase the values and ethics set down by Swami Dayanand.

Pt Arthi Nanackchand Shanand

Sanskrit words explained

अनुरक्ति

Anurakti

Meaning: devotion, affection, love, passionate or attachment.

An attachment to someone or something, this includes one's principles and values.

Loving them or liking them - e.g. mother and child forming a close attachment.

Being passionate of belonging to ones' country or land.

Anurakti is also a name given to a girl child.

BACK TO THE VEDAS LECTURES



Topic

The Prestige and Status of Women in the Vedic Literature: Reflections on Today's Society

Speaker

Ms Oosha Devi Chirkoot-Lalla

Wednesday 15 March 2023 7pm to 8pm (GMT+2)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81299888772?pwd=bnFxRTcxS0htWTBDWE5FYVgza2w2dz09>

Meeting ID: 812 9988 8772

Passcode: back2vedas

Announcements

You are invited to send articles to the editorial committee for publication. Please email your submissions to admin@aryasamajsa.org

Acceptance conditions:

1. All submissions must be in word for the attention of the editorial committee.
2. All Sanskrit words must be in Italics.
3. Photographs submitted must be in high resolution.
4. All references must be cited.
5. The limits for articles will be as follows:
 - 5.1. Short articles & messages three hundred words,
 - 5.2. Current issues and social justice up to nine hundred words
 - 5.3. Feature articles 1500 to 3000 words,
 - 5.4. Secondary articles up to 1500 words.
6. The acceptance of articles will be considered based on the following criteria:
 - 6.1. Vedic teachings,
 - 6.2. Principles of the Arya Samaj,
 - 6.3. Social justice and social action,
 - 6.4. Relevance to current issues.

To contribute to projects of the Arya Samaj contact admin@aryasamajsa.org
Please send your comments and suggestions to admin@aryasamajsa.org

Rig Veda 9.63.5

कृण्वन्तो विश्वामार्यम् "Krinvanto Vishwam Aryam" Make the World Noble

Yajur Veda 36.18

मित्रस्याहम् चक्षुषा सर्वाणि भूताननि समीक्षे mitrasyāham chakṣuṣā sarvāṇi bhūtānani samīkṣe May we all live in friendly cooperation and mutual trust

मित्रस्याहम् चक्षुषा समीक्षामहे "mitrasyaaham chakshushaa sameekshaamahe" May we look at all with an Equal and Friendly Eye

Veda Jyoti Founding Editors were Pt Nardev Vedalankar (1913-1994) and the late Manohar Somera



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