

SPRING 2024 / ISSUE 2

# HER Journal

WOMEN'S GLOBAL VOICES

*HER WORK:* Business & Investment | *HER STORY:* Inside look | *HER WORLD:* Community

# HER RESILIENCE TO OVERCOME

**FEATURE *HER STORY:***  
Finding Hope

***HER JOURNEY:* KGF INTERVIEW**  
An Interview with Christine Stephens  
& Rebecca Stanley

***HER WORLD:* Community**  
The Lingering Shadow of the Devadasi System

PUBLISHED BY

**KGF**

Kairos Global Foundation  
Mobilize. Equip. Transform.

ADDRESSING POVERTY & INJUSTICE IN HER WORLD

Last month we celebrated International Women's Day. In honor of that special day, I'm thrilled to share these stories which exemplify the resilience of women who've overcome major challenges despite unequal or lacking opportunities.

Despite facing marginalization, injustices, and oppression, women around the world exhibit remarkable resilience, overcoming challenges and rising above adversity. Among other articles, this issue gives a glimpse into the predicament of two young girls from

Manipur, and the lives of girls subjected to an oppressive practice. The myriad ways they have to navigate through obstacles with courage and strength, truly embodies the spirit of resilience. Their life narratives remind me of **Maya Angelou's famous poem, *I Rise***,  
(It's so good, I had to share it with you.)

These words encapsulate the indomitable spirit of women, resilient in the face of adversity, empowered to overcome and taking their rightful place in society. From the depths of struggle, women emerge like phoenixes, their resolve unbroken, their determination unwavering.

This **resilience to overcome** is not an empty struggle for women but a pursuit to freedom; freedom from oppressive forces, belief systems and practices, freedom to possess and freedom to express. This edition of HERJournal amplifies the importance of such a freedom—freedom to live, learn, and work. Through insightful articles, we see how at all levels, it is essential for women and girls to thrive and realize their full potential. As women demonstrate resilience, the world is called on to stand in solidarity with this struggle for freedom, equality, and justice. We do this not with wishful thinking, but with undying 'Hope' that rose from the cold dark grave promising all of us the **ultimate freedom to be 'Imago Dei'** (*image of God*).

May a reading of the treasures inside this issue inspire and motivate us to take action, no matter how small, in bringing hope and freedom to the lives of women everywhere.

Let us rise!

Rebecca Stanley  
Editor of HERJournal &  
President of Kairos Global Foundation



### ***I RISE!***

By Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors  
gave,

I am the dream and the hope  
of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise.



# HER Journal

WOMEN'S GLOBAL VOICES

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

### 5 **HER JOURNEY:** KGF INTERVIEW

An Interview with Christine Stephens  
& Rebecca Stanley

### 8 **FEATURE STORY**

**HER STORY:** Inside look  
Finding Hope

### 12 **HER WORK:** Business & Investment

A Path to Safer Workplaces

### **HER WORLD:** Community

13 The Lingering Shadow of the Devadasi System

16 A Right to Proper Housing

20 A Look at International Women's Day 2024

### 23 **HER VOICE:** One Last Word

The Power of Women Coming Together

### STORY CONTRIBUTORS:

KAITLYN FARRANCE

MERCY KAPPEN

VIJI HARI

TARA METZGER



Mobilize.Equip.Transform



# KGF

Kairos Global Foundation

[www.kairosglobalfoundation.org](http://www.kairosglobalfoundation.org)

Her voice matters & her journey is worth sharing.

## HERJOURNEY...

Bringing you interviews of remarkable women who are using their difficult journeys to impact the world around them.

Listen in at [kairosglobalfoundation.org/herjourney](https://kairosglobalfoundation.org/herjourney)



**HERJOURNEY**  
LIVE & IN PRINT

*Brought to you by*

**KGF**

Kairos Global Foundation



# HER JOURNEY



AN INTERVIEW  
with Christine Stephens  
& *Rebecca Stanley*



In our first ever HERJOURNEY, KGF President, Rebecca Stanley, interviewed Christine Stephens about her life growing up in the northeastern state of Manipur. Christine shared many insightful pieces of wisdom and encouragement.

**Becky:** Tell us what the typical day is like for a woman in the Northeast.

**Christine:** The typical day is long and hard. Women are the first to get up and the last to go to bed. It's a very hard life.

They get up at 4 in the morning. Set the fire and then cook for the whole family. Everything is manual, even harvesting the rice, for every meal. Collecting water is another chore, walking two or three miles just to get water, carrying it on their back. After collecting water, they'll do some of their house chores, feed the family. They may have to go and take care of elderly family members before even going to work, usually in the fields. They do this every day, without much respect and then too, many live with domestic violence. Many of the husbands drink and are very abusive. And yet the women depend completely on their husbands for everything. They don't have a voice even to make decisions for themselves. They are marginalized and this is not just in the Northeast. This is very much how life is like for women throughout rural India.

Though men have a part to play, unfortunately, they do not play their part well. Due to the male patriarchal dominated society, they think it is the job of the woman to take care of and do everything. Women are subjected and subjugated.


**Becky:** What types of opportunities do women have?

**Christine:** There is very little opportunity for education for girls in the rural Northeast. Most of the parents don't want to invest in their daughters because they see them as only born to give birth and take care of family. Education is powerful and not for girls.

Women have very few opportunities. There is no health-care or mental care and no care from husbands. There are no job opportunities in the Northeast. Whoever can come down into Central India to get an education does so, but not many have that opportunity. There just aren't a lot of options for girls or women.

**Becky:** This is the case for women in rural areas throughout India. And this is why it is so important for nonprofits like KGF to work in rural areas to provide skills training and microloans. Along with our partners, we provide opportunities for women who have no other options. Providing capital for micro-businesses and helping women to develop skills provides a tremendous value to these women. But also, we are helping

Pictured below: Christine Stephens while in Manipur

A photograph of Christine Stephens standing in front of a rustic wooden house in Manipur. The house has a corrugated metal roof and is surrounded by lush greenery and flowers. Christine is wearing a red t-shirt and black pants. The text "Life is unfair but be strong and do not give up." — Christine is overlaid on the left side of the image.

“Life is unfair  
but be strong  
and do not  
give up.” — Christine

HER JOURNEY

women to create a strong network of support. All of which is extremely empowering.

**Becky:** What advice do you give to young women?

**Christine:** Just focus on using your pain and suffering for good and to be a blessing for others.

Life is unfair but be strong and do not give up. Stand up for what you wish to be. Don't give up!

*“Use your suffering  
for good & to be a blessing  
to others.”*

**Becky:** Christine is working with initiatives happening in the northeast and is working with young girls and women.

**Christine,** how has your life journey impacted you in a way that has caused you to give back to your community?

**Christine:** My life journey is an interesting and challenging one. It has been hard. But all my life, God has been so faithful, He is so good.

I don't have very good child memories like others. But God has used it all for good—my heartaches and doubts and he has trained me well. Because of my mom we became first generation Christians. There were so many things that happened in my life that brought me close to God but there are some major events that have impacted me and caused me to want to give back.

I had four bothers, but now three, because God has taken one back. When I was in the eighth grade, we experienced hell on earth because my father drank. He would come home from work and drink and was so abusive to my mom—every single night for four long years. I would often think, “How can a man be so abusive, so brutal to his wife?” Every single night, my brothers and I, we were so scared and I was the oldest. We looked for someone to help but there was no one around to help us.

I also experienced sexual harassment so many times, I just felt so broken. I started to hate men and I wondered, “Am I just here for a man? Why is man so brutal and abusive to woman?” During that time, I hated men so much and wondered why was I born as a woman.

But even in these difficult years, God showed His faithfulness. God has saved me so many times in my life. In the northeast, we have drug problems and insurgencies. One day I was traveling with a group of people and the car that I was traveling in was ambushed amidst an insurgency. And the people that I was traveling with were killed. I could see

the men who attacked us, but I was unharmed. God saved me for a purpose, still today. One other time, I was at the beach and there was a tsunami. If I would have remained there five minutes longer, I would not be here. God saved me.

And yet another very difficult situation that I experienced was when I gave birth to my second son. Right after having a c-section I was diagnosed with dengue. My baby was in ICU for ten days and I was unable to see him.

After I finished college, I was working with an organization and my mom called me saying, “You have to come home, your father is sick.” He was asking for me. And I rushed back. By the time I reached home, he was gone. I'm grateful, that though I experienced hard times with my dad when I was young, in the later years, my dad was the best teacher, the best adviser and the best friend for me.

Then in 2012, God took my youngest brother. He left behind his young beautiful daughter and wife.

Life is not so easy but God has brought me through such hard times and trained me well for a mission such as this that I am prepared to come alongside a little girl or a woman who are so vulnerable like I was. We were able to save a group of girls in Manipur.

(Christine and her husband have traveled to Manipur to take relief and minister to the people there where ethnic violence erupted in May of 2023. Many villages have been left in rubble. Hundreds of people have been killed. Children have been orphaned and families are living in relief camps even to this day. Christine shared that every time she saw a little girl, she would think back to her younger years and say, “that was me” and her heart would break. She would think, “I need to do something.”)

**Becky:** What is one thing you would say to women who want to give back, invest and help girls and women?

**Christine:** We can do so much together. I can't do it alone. But we can do so much together. Let's join our hands together and save those little girls...

*“I can do somethings  
but together  
we can do great things.”*



# Finding *Hope*

We interviewed two college students who grew up in Manipur, India. Both of these young women spent a portion of their childhood living in the Hope Children's Home, a Christian home run by our partner, IGL.

Rosey lived at the home for 9 years. Kimte lived there for 8 years. Both girls were 10 years old when they were taken to the home. Each of them share a bit of their journey from their childhood in Manipur to their new life as college students in Salem, India. Both girls have experienced very difficult circumstances but have grown in their faith. They were living at the home when riots turned violent and spread throughout the state last May. Despite the tremendous challenges, they have become quite resilient and are overcoming any challenge that comes their way.



HER  
RESILIENCE  
TO OVERCOME



**Describe what your life was like before you went to the home and the circumstances that led you to be taken to the home.**

**Rosey:** Before finding refuge in the home, my life was in shambles. I lacked proper schooling. My grandmother was abusive and I rarely had enough to eat. With the passing of my mother when I was five and a father who remarried without caring for me, life became a continuous struggle. We consistently faced financial hardships. It felt as if there was no one around to offer me guidance or support during those lonely and challenging times.

**Kimte:** The financial struggles were a constant challenge, particularly for my mother, who, as a single parent, bore the responsibility alone. We were in a perpetual state of need. Looking back, I believe that **God paved a way** for us by guiding me to the children's home.

**How did life change for you once you moved to the home?**

**Rosey:** When I came to the home, I began to see the brighter side of life. I gained a supportive family and friends who provided guidance and instruction, akin to what a child should receive from their parents. More importantly, I deepened my understanding of God, embraced Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior. I experienced a profound sense of His presence. In essence, whether it's in the physical, mental, or spiritual aspects, the home played a pivotal role in shaping me into the person I am today.

**Kimte:** Staying at the Children's Home has profoundly transformed my life. I encountered Jesus during my time there, for which I am immensely grateful. Not only did our financial situation improve, but I also underwent a miraculous journey toward better health and academic advancement. The home provided a nurturing environment where I learned invaluable life lessons. The comprehensive education I received covered a wide spectrum of subjects, and being surrounded by individuals with diverse personalities was both challenging and enriching. This experience has significantly shaped my ability to understand and relate to others.

**If not for being in the children's home, would you have finished school another way?**

**Rosey:** I can confidently say that if it weren't for the children's home, I wouldn't be where I am today, and I wouldn't have completed my schooling.

**Kimte:** No, completing my schooling seemed improbable before coming to the children's home. The support, both financial and inspirational, that I received during my time there became the driving force behind my successful com-

pletion of schooling. The people who have supported and guided me over the years have instilled in me the inspiration and ability to pursue further studies. Describing the children's home as a blessing is an understatement; it has been an invaluable and indescribable gift that I hold in the highest regard.

**At what point did you start to think about going to college and having a career?**

**Rosey:** After coming to the children's home, I was encouraged to **dream big, to leave the past behind, and to channel my painful experiences for the greater good, not just for myself but also for others.** The belief that if others can achieve, so can I. This ignited my journey toward envisioning and pursuing a career.

**Kimte:** From childhood, the idea of attending college and building a career has been a constant in my thoughts. Although I wasn't certain about the specific career path, there was always a determination to do something that would bring positive change to our lives and establish financial stability through my efforts. This mindset is deeply rooted in witnessing my mother's enduring struggle over the years, working tirelessly to meet our basic needs. Her unwavering dedication has served as a profound inspiration, motivating me to aspire to a fulfilling and stable career.

**How did day-to-day life change for you and the other girls at the Children's home immediately after the May riots?**

**Rosey:** After the May riots, our lives underwent a complete change. We felt a heightened sense of insecurity, leading to frustration that, at times, consumed us. Everything became more expensive, and daily life became more complicated; even a simple task like withdrawing money from the ATM required standing in line for hours. Fear occupied our thoughts. **Our bodies jerked at loud sounds.** At night, we could not turn on the lights, and we would sleep with our running shoes on, always ready to run in case of any emergency.

**Kimte:** Honestly, life has undergone significant and, particularly, emotional changes. Regarding daily routines, the abnormality of not attending school due to such circumstances is quite unsettling. The lock down confined us indoors, with most shops closed and a curfew enforced daily. The riots exposed the instability of life. As girls, we felt more susceptible to the trauma induced by gunshots, people shouting, and the tense atmosphere. The **uncertainty of the future** left us with a constant awareness of the possibility of danger.

## HER STORY: Inside look

“During those challenging times, we learned to appreciate life and resorted to **constant prayer for solace**. Living in fear, even within the confines of our own homes, was a distressing experience. The lack of safety and constant anxiety permeated our daily existence, making it a profoundly difficult period.”

— Kimte



**Describe your emotions when you found out that you were going to Salem so you could go to college and what it was like to leave the Children's Home and travel to Salem. Were you scared? Did you wonder if you were in danger at any point?**

**Rosey:** When I found out that I would be traveling to Salem, I experienced mixed emotions. I felt happiness at taking another step in my life, but simultaneously, **sadness overwhelmed me** as I contemplated leaving the home. However, there was also a slight sense of fear, although I knew they would never put me in danger but only decide what is best for me. I can confidently say this because they provide me with the love and care that I don't even get from my family.

**Kimte:** The prospect of attending college in Salem filled me with excitement because I had never envisioned studying outside Manipur. However, the thought of leaving home entirely, with uncertainty about when I'll return, brings about a unique set of emotions. I had already imagined every aspect before the journey. Despite being informed about our future, it initially felt like a distant reality, but the day arrived suddenly.

Considering the backdrop of the riots and contemplating my future, I found myself caught between emotions. While I may not have been directly helpful during the tumultuous times, the reluctance to leave my family alone lingered. Surprisingly, I wasn't scared; perhaps it's because I always felt I was in safe hands. After crossing the state and leaving the riot-affected area, I did feel a sense of safety. I can confidently say that fear never entered my thoughts.

**Share a bit about how your day-to-day life has changed since starting college classes and being in a new place, away from Manipur.**

**Rosey:** When I started college, I needed to make a lot of adjustments as the food, cultural practices, and everything else were different. In class, the teaching was primarily in Tamil, with some English. It wasn't difficult to adjust because I knew why I was there and how privileged I am. Of course, **God has been good to me, helping me throughout my life**. He has blessed me with good friends who have supported me in various ways.

**Kimte:** Significant changes have marked my experience – a cultural shock, disparities in food, clothing, and lifestyles, and a struggle to adapt to the differences. My **introverted nature intensifies the challenge of fitting in with the local people**. Constant adjustments are necessary due to the cultural variations, including language barriers, as many here don't speak English. Connecting with others has been a hurdle due to the linguistic differences.

Navigating through distinct thought processes and ways of dealing with people further adds to the complexity. I began my journey by keenly observing their lifestyle and thought patterns. Despite continuous learning, I find it difficult to claim that I completely fit in even now.

Nevertheless, I am determined to embrace every opportunity for learning and self-improvement, both



# “If others can achieve, *so can I*” —Rosey

culturally and academically. Despite the challenges, I see each experience as **a chance to grow and broaden my understanding of the world around me.**

**Share what your future plans or goals are. What caused you to pursue this direction/degree? What were you most excited about as you thought about the opportunity to attend college?**

**Rosey:** In the future, I aspire to be there to help and comfort someone in need. I chose this course because, as humans, we often feel weak and helpless when we are ill or suffering. In those moments, I want to be the strength for others.

**Kimte:** My future plan revolves around pursuing my dreams relentlessly, achieving them, and embracing a continuous journey of learning. I am deeply committed to contributing to society and making it a better place. The degree I am currently pursuing, a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), is a uniquely comprehensive course that delves into various aspects of people, society, and prevalent issues. This program has been the driving force behind my decision to pursue it.

Attending college is a monumental blessing for me, considering that I am the first and only person in my family to embark on this educational journey. The excitement of turning my dreams into reality, coupled with the sheer joy of attending college, fills me with gratitude. I am sincerely thankful for this opportunity and eagerly look forward to the possibilities it brings.

**What changes do you want to see for those back home?**

**Rosey:** Let's love and live together in peace again. There's no winner in war. Let's focus on building a better future for the next generations. I want them to **stand firm in their faith**, be confident in what they are doing, and I want them to enjoy every moment of it.

**Kimte:** I hope that they would be able to overcome this problem and live normally again. And through this experience I just hope they would learn to love God more and be united. **I want to see all the people united and call to our God regardless of age.** We need many changes but all these changes can only start if we change in our heart. I hope everyone's heart will be healed especially those who suffered severely during this time of chaos. May we start to flourish again. ►



**Opposite page:** Girls from Hope Children's Home

**Pictured above:**

Christine Stephens comforting one of the girls orphaned in the Manipur riots.

These four girls recently moved into the Hope Children's Home. Pray for them and the other 15+ new girls who were orphaned due to the continued ethnic violence that started in May 2023.

## Her Right to *Speak up* & Say 'NO!'

### Why does sexual harassment remain so pervasive in India?

In a recent article, Nyaya Sarthak shared that ingrained cultural stigmas, power imbalances, **lack of female empowerment** in work settings, poor legal enforcement, and inadequate prevention education have normalized harassing behaviors in many Indian workplaces.

**Empowering women** and helping them to understand their rights is key to fighting injustices that remain in the culture.

**Up to 80%**  
of women in India face sexual harassment in the workplace, during their careers.

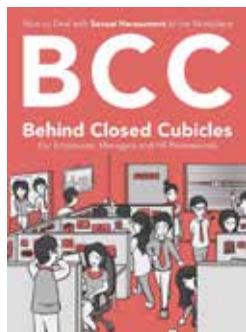
**57% of women**  
reported sexual harassment in their workplace in the past year.

**Sexual crimes**  
against women continue to rise

**Every 93 seconds**  
a sexual assault occurs in the US

Viji Hari is a specialist in diversity and inclusion, and prevention of sexual harassment at the workplace. She is also a serial entrepreneur, Founder of CecureUs ([www.Cecureus.com](http://www.Cecureus.com)), and an author. Viji has authored two books, one of which *Behind Closed Cubicles*, is a collection of short stories based on real-life sexual harassment incidents from across the Indian corporate world. This is a great resource for managers, HR Professionals and any working woman.

[www.vijihari.com/books/](http://www.vijihari.com/books/)



## A Path to *Safer Workplaces*

By Viji Hari

### The situation described below happens all too often...

In the vibrant heart of a growing large city retailer, a story unfolds creating a catalyst for change. A popular store, known for its vibrant atmosphere and bustling crowds, became the stage for an incident that would underline the importance of POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) compliance in the retail industry.

Priya, an enthusiastic sales associate, was known for her helpful attitude and bright smile. One day, as she was assisting shoppers, she encountered a customer whose behavior swiftly turned from complimentary to uncomfortable. Initially, he praised her assistance, but his words soon crossed boundaries. His remarks were laced with unwelcome, inappropriate advances. The customer frequented the store just to meet and talk to Priya.

Conflicted, Priya grappled with the situation. Should she dismiss these comments, as she feared backlash not only from the customer but potentially from the store management too? Or should she stand up for herself, despite the customer's prominence in the community?

She mustered courage to report the incident to her manager. This marked a pivotal moment for the store. Management was forced to confront the reality that their POSH policies, while well-intentioned, were inadequate in dealing with harassment from customers, not just internal staff incidents.

By combining POSH compliance with local culture and community, businesses in India can lead the way in creating environments where everyone feels valued, heard, and safe. There is untapped potential in India for growth and innovation. Yet, the journey towards realizing this potential is paved with responsibilities, notably the imperative to create safe and respectful workplaces through POSH compliance. The significance of this compliance transcends legal obligations, embedding itself in the moral fabric of organizational culture.

### Based on my experience working with 400+ corporations, 1,000+ workshops across industries and sectors, here's what I've observed:

- Every organization has at least 8% to 10% of sexual harassment incidents at their workplace. And less than 1% of the victims have the courage to come forward to file the complaint.
- Many organizations still fear reporting harassment incidents and consider talking about sexual harassment as taboo.
- The Ministry of Women and Child Development revealed that the number of **registered complaints under POSH has seen an uptick, suggesting both an increase in awareness and incidences of harassment.** However, many organizations, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), large retailers and educational institutions, **still lack a formal mechanism to address such complaints.**



A young girl with dark hair, wearing a bright yellow dress with green floral patterns and green leggings, is walking from left to right in the foreground. She is looking towards the right. In the background, there is a large, ancient stone temple structure with intricate carvings and pillars. The scene is set outdoors during the day, with warm sunlight illuminating the temple's facade.

**HER WORLD:** Community

## “Servant of God, *but the bride of the whole town.*”

Devadasis, an ancient tradition implying “servant of God,” involves young girls, some as young as four, being ‘wedded’ or ‘dedicated’ to a temple deity, essentially leading to a form of child exploitation. The practice is succinctly illustrated by a Marathi adage, “Devadasi devachi bayako, sarya gavachi,” translating as “servant of God, but the bride of the whole town.” Cloaked in religious worship, history proves that this practice inevitably leads to the sexual exploitation of girls.

Over the years, the Devadasi system has been interpreted through various lenses. While some view it as a form of religious devotion, others highlight its exploitative nature, pointing to the denial of basic rights and the vulnerability of girls to sexual exploitation. This contested history necessitates a nuanced understanding, acknowledging both the romanticized narratives and the harsh realities faced by the survivors.

Though this practice has been abolished by the Supreme Court, this tradition persists primarily in rural regions and is still prevalent in the modern Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana.

Our esteemed guest contributor, Mercy Kappen, the Executive Director of Visthar, sheds light on the system’s harmful legacy, the ongoing struggles of survivors, and the vital work of organizations like Visthar in empowering and ensuring a sustainable future for them. This article primarily highlights the situation in Karnataka, despite the practice being found in several Indian states.

According to a religious doctrine, if a family dedicates their daughter, the deity will be pleased and will bless the family. This is among the main justifications for why people continue to follow this custom.





# The Lingering Shadow *of the Devadasi System*

By Mercy Kappen

## A Journey Towards Gender Justice

I have been with Visthar ever since its inception in 1989. Here, I found a platform for my passion and have been playing a significant role as a ‘co-creator’ of the institute and currently as the Executive Director. My passion for social justice was ignited in the late 1980s by my mentor, Sebastian Kappen, a renowned philosopher and liberation theologian. My work also draws deep inspiration from Paulo Freire’s philosophy of education as liberation. Our gender trainings are built on Freire’s methods, encouraging participants to critically analyze real-life situations, identify root causes, and develop actionable plans for change. This is an ongoing journey – a continuous cycle of reflection, learning, and collaboration. Our goal is to create a space where women and girls are not merely observers or beneficiaries, but active agents of change in their own lives and communities. Working with communities in South India solidified my commitment to fighting for a just world.

Our journey towards gender justice began in 1991 with a workshop titled “Understanding Feminism.” This workshop opened our eyes to a new perspective, prompting us to create forums for community leaders to delve deeper. These forums explored how gender shapes every aspect of life, from the economy and education to healthcare and the prevalence of violence. Our reach extended beyond India, as we offered training programs to NGOs and faith-based organizations across Southeast Asia and Southern Africa. Early on, we grasped the vital connection between dismantling caste and class inequalities to achieving true gender equality. These systems are like intertwined roots and hence the need for an intersectional approach to deal with the multiple oppressions and marginalization.

In 1995, a study we conducted on violence against women sparked the creation of Bandhavi. This shelter home became

a haven for women in crisis, particularly for the survivors of domestic violence. Bandhavi provided a safe space for healing and rebuilding lives, offering legal aid, medical care, counseling, and vocational training, empowering women to move forward with confidence. In 2005, Bandhavi shifted its focus to supporting girls at risk, *especially those from the devadasi community*. Our program equips them with the tools they need to build self-esteem, understand the social injustices they face, and develop the leadership skills necessary to take control of their lives. Today, over 150 girls directly benefit from this holistic, residential empowerment program.

## Lingering Stigma: The Devadasi System in Karnataka

The Devadasi system carries a complex and often misconstrued legacy. While romanticized in certain circles of India as a tradition of temple dancers and musicians, it masks a deeper history of exploitation and marginalization for young girls and women. The Devadasi system finds its roots in ancient India, with historical evidence suggesting its presence in Karnataka as early as the 6th century. Initially associated with temple rituals and performances, the interpretation and practice of the system evolved over time. However, the core element remained the dedication of young girls, often from marginalized communities, to a deity through a ceremony resembling a marriage.

Despite being officially banned in 1982 under the Karnataka Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Act, the practice continues to exist in certain pockets of the state. This persistence underscores the need for continued efforts to address the root causes of the system, empower its survivors, and dismantle the social and economic factors that perpetuate its existence.



# Bandhavi: *A Beacon of Hope*

**“Awake, Arise and Educate  
Smash Traditions – Liberate”.**  
—Savitribai Phule

The scars that the Devadasi system left run deep. In the face of the ongoing challenges faced by Devadasi women and their girl children, the Bandhavi project initiated by Visthar in 2005 stands as a beacon of hope. The mission of the project is to empower girls at risk, fostering self-reliance and dignity. Bandhavi implements various strategies to achieve this, including:

**Residential care facilities:** Providing safe and secure housing for girls from Devadasi families allows them to access education and healthcare facilities while fostering a supportive environment.

**Leadership development programs:** These programs equip girls with the skills and confidence to advocate for their rights and become agents of change within their communities.

**Education:** Providing access to quality education, including life skills, vocational training, and higher education opportunities, equips girls with the skills and knowledge to gain economic independence and build fulfilling careers.

**Healthcare:** Ensuring access to comprehensive healthcare services, including reproductive health awareness, is crucial for the well-being of Devadasi women and their families.

**Building a Support Network:** Bandhavi creates a safe space for women to share their experiences, access counseling services, and build a strong support network, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

## A Collective Responsibility

The Devadasi system in Karnataka serves as a stark reminder of the vulnerabilities faced by marginalized communities, particularly women and girls. Recognizing its harmful legacy and ensuring the well-being of its survivors is a collective responsibility. By raising awareness, and advocating for change, we can work towards a future where every individual can enjoy their fundamental rights and live a life of dignity and opportunity.

## THE DARK SIDE OF THE SYSTEM: A Web of Exploitation

The Devadasi system in Karnataka, while often romanticized, masks a brutal reality for young girls and women. Here, we delve into the exploitative aspects that defined this system:

### 1. Forced Dedication and Denial of Basic Rights

Girls, as young as four or five, were dedicated to deities through a ceremony called “dedication” or “marriage” to the temple. This robbed them of their childhood and denied them the right to choose their future. Education was considered unnecessary for Devadasis, further limiting their opportunities and perpetuating their dependence on the system. They were denied the right to marry or form families.

### 2. Sexual Exploitation and Gender-Based Violence

Devadasis were often pressured or forced into prostitution, either by priests, dominant-caste men, or temple authorities. This exploitation exposed them to physical and emotional abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, and social stigma. They had no control over their bodies or lives, leading to constant vulnerability to non-consensual sexual activity.

### 3. Perpetuation by Social and Economic Factors

Families from marginalized communities, trapped in poverty, saw dedicating their daughters as a means of survival, hoping for financial support from the temple or patrons. The rigid caste system played a significant role. Devadasis, mostly from lower castes, were seen as “impure” and deemed suitable for such a life, perpetuating their marginalization. Limited opportunities for women in education, employment, and overall societal participation made the Devadasi system appear as the only option for some families.

**4. The Lingering Stigma** The social stigma associated with the Devadasi system continues to haunt many women, hindering their opportunities for employment, education, and social acceptance. Their families struggle with poverty and lack access to basic resources like quality education, healthcare, and secure housing. This lack of resources further restricts their ability to break free from the cycle of marginalization.

### 5. Intergenerational Trauma and Psychological Impact

The experiences of exploitation and societal exclusion leaves a lasting psychological impact on Devadasi women and their families. This manifests in various forms, including depression, anxiety, and difficulty forming trusting relationships.

# The Right *to Proper Housing*

By Kaitlyn Farrance



The dedication of a new house is a big deal in rural India. Everyone gathers around. The team prays over the family and the house. As you can imagine, for a woman to go from a hut with no door to a real house with a door and a lock—It's truly a celebration.

*Pictured this page: Our partners in the field gather with a woman and her daughter to dedicate their house. The hut next to the new house was where this mother and her daughter lived.*





## The Building of a Home

Public infrastructure such as hospitals, schools and roads are crucial to any community, yet nothing is as intimate as our home. Home is the place where we spend time with loved ones, learn about life, eat, sleep and take refuge from the elements. For so many in rural parts of our world, housing is made from whatever can be found and is affordable. For years, the best strategy was to build better infrastructure after a disaster.

### Why not build better now?

In 2022, The World Bank reported over 1 billion people lacked proper housing. The International Human Rights Law defines adequate housing in areas of:

- **Security of tenure**
- **Availability of services**
- **Affordability**
- **Habitability**
- **Accessibility**
- **Cultural adequacy**

Individuals living in poverty or those facing discrimination are the most at risk. Common areas of discrimination include, gender, sex, age, religion, disability or ethnic background. If this wasn't enough, they are also more at risk to climate events and international crises.

The Gorkha earthquake hit central Nepal in 2015 killing 9,000 people. The aftermath of the earthquake left hundreds of thousands of people homeless. Building better infrastructure after a disaster is necessary. But at a certain point we have to ask ourselves. If better infrastructure can save lives and limit disaster; why not build better at the start?

### Housing is Public Health and Education Infrastructure

Bad housing profoundly effects the everyday lives of many people. Inadequate housing correlates with:

- Poorer physical and mental health
- Inferior education for children
- Lifetime impaired earnings and job opportunities

The Global Program for Resilient Housing invested in concrete floors in rural Mexico. Results of the program brought better physical and mental health to everyone involved. Results of the program concluded:

- 52% decrease in rates of depression
- 78% decrease in parasitic infections
- 69% increase in rate of life satisfaction.

*Pictured this page: A house in rural India after a monsoon hit.*



**India has the highest population on earth with 70% of its population living in villages. Many of these villages only have natural materials that *won't last*.**

## HER WORLD: Community

### Housing is Social Justice Infrastructure

Refugees, single mothers and victims of gender-based violence are seeking asylum from crisis. Urmila Pawar, a woman who lived in Maharashtra, describes what her home looked like growing up.

“Both of them (Urmila’s mother and father) saved bit by bit and built a small house with two small rooms and a tiled roof. The outer one served as a hall and the inner room was a kitchen. Later on, Baba (Urmila’s father) constructed a verandah... The verandah had a tin roof. He made the floor with soil beaten hard; it was polished smooth with dung.” - The Weave of My Life, Ch 1. Pawar

Urmila lived in a simple kachha home built with an unbaked clay roof and soil flooring. Tilled roofing of these kind need repairs every year when the harvest season is over. If not properly repaired, they risk the odds of the roof falling through. Urmila describes her flooring as beaten soil polished with dung. Not only is this a sanitation concern, but in some climates they risk parasite infection. In tropical climates tungiasis infection is common in floors that aren’t sealed properly. Tungiasis itself is not known to be deadly. Bacteria complications such as tetanus and gangrene are common and can be fatal. This is especially true in communities without local hospitals.

### Housing is Economic and Community Development Infrastructure

Where we live is much more than an address, its where we’re from. Home is where families develop, keep a job, and generally have stability. When communities have limited options, a vicious cycle of poverty reins.

### Housing is Life Saving Infrastructure

An estimated 1.3 billion people experience a significant disability. Tragically, the mortality rate can be up to 20 years earlier than those without a disability. Infrastructure accommodating disabilities can be a challenge for many communities. It cannot happen without one step at a time. Homes need to be the first place where the differently abled can live their lives. New plumbing could mean new independence and a restoration of dignity.

### High Risk Areas in Rural India

It can be difficult to identify who will best benefit with housing assistance. India has the highest population on earth with 70% of its population living in villages. Many of these villages are using natural materials that aren’t meant to last. Kairos Global Foundation partners with those who are on the field. From the grassroot level, we can identify who will benefit from our assistance most.

We live in a world where hurricanes, earthquakes and monsoons take many lives each year. If homes were more resilient for the climate they were made for, more people

would thrive. Home is where all our efforts to build a better world start. We can invest in a better future where adequate shelter is a human right. **Let’s build better, one house at a time.**



KGF’s President, Rebecca Stanley recently had the privilege of dedicating a house for a widow and her three daughters in the rural village of Medukadu. They previously lived in a shack by the side of the road. Their hearts were filled with joy to receive this blessing. Housing for women-led households are a huge need today in rural India.





# INDIA *Summit*

**Come be a part of this Globally  
Intimate Conversation...**

This ten day networking opportunity has something for everyone. Whether you're a business professional, an entrepreneur or have a heart to engage and work alongside women in South Asia, this is a unique chance filled with relationship building, collaboration and meaningful encounters.

Interact with rural women leaders, gain insight into their challenges and explore opportunities for partnership...

- Visit a village
- Be a part of a water well, home or Sharon Mart dedication.
- Take part of a leadership panel discussion



## KGF

**Kairos Global Foundation**  
Mobilize.Equip.Transform

**Learn more at [kairosglobalfoundation.org/indiasummit/](http://kairosglobalfoundation.org/indiasummit/)**



### International Women's Day Celebration...

What began in 1972 as a United Nations celebration has transformed into a movement which celebrates commitments to build a better future for all women. This year's theme is "Inspire Inclusion" which emphasizes the importance of fostering a world where women are not only physically present but are actively valued and empowered across all spheres of life.

#### In India

Women gathered in many rural villages throughout India to celebrate International Women's Day Wednesday, March. 8, 2024.

Through song and dance and Rangoli art, women came together to express solidarity and reaffirm their commitment to supporting one another. Women came together to sign a pledge committing to a better future. The celebration promoted awareness against gender-based violence, skills training and inspired women to be agents of change within their communities.

#### Legal barriers for women globally

Legal discrimination continues to discourage women's involvement in the economy. Some discriminatory laws omit women completely. In seven countries, women are legally unable to work in specific fields. Other laws are subtler and enforce stipulations in how women work. In 16 countries, married women aren't able to get a job without their husband's permission.

Additionally, in 44 countries women are legally unable to work at night. Without the equal opportunity to get involved in the economy, whole communities suffer.



Globally, women are not given the same financial rights as men. Women are more likely to experience issues with a lack of collateral and credit history. **An estimated 1 billion women worldwide do not have their own bank account.** Without equal financial rights, women aren't as able to get involved in the economy.

A vast majority of women remain excluded from access to opportunities, decision making, and equal participation. To include women in the conversation of development as a stakeholder and not a beneficiary, and engage their full agency, is key to the development of communities.

**Kairos Global Foundation works to amplify our sisters' voices throughout the Global South.**



Kairos Global Foundation

Mobilize.Equip.Transform



# In other parts of the world, *Her voice was heard!*

#InspireInclusion



## SOUTH KOREA

Photograph: Ahn Young-joon/

A woman from Mexico with a message drawn on her face about the situation in her home country attends a rally marking International Women's Day 2023 in Berlin, Germany\*



## BERLIN



## NORTH KOREA\*



## PHILIPPINES

A Filipina activist yells as police block a protest march

REUTERS/Eloisa Lopez



## CHINA

Churches in China celebrated International Women's Day (IWD), inspiring women to live out their faith and pray for world peace and economic development.

(Photo: Church Of Our Savior In Guangzhou)  
China Christian Daily)



## NIGERIA

Women sing and dance during the International Women's Day celebration at the Mobolaji Johnson Stadium in Lagos, Nigeria.\*

\* Photos on this page: from NY DailyNews <https://www.nydailynews.com/2023/03/08/international-womens-day-2023-celebrations/>



# Because a donor half a world away, *believed...*

*A woman in a rural village  
now sits weaving a life  
of hope & a bright future  
for her family.*

**Believing you can make a difference** can ignite the start of transformation in a whole other part of the world. And that transformation will likely impact a whole family, not just for a season, but quite possibly for generations.

Once a woman has gone through our skills program, she may apply for a micro-credit loan. Loans are used to start up a business, purchase equipment, animals or materials. For women on the receiving end, it is so much more. A loan truly gives a woman the chance to create a brighter future for her and her family.

Learn more about micro-credit loans through our KGF Education Fund and how you can make a difference in the life of a woman in South Asia.

**Visit us at**  
**[www.kairosglobalfoundation.org/donate](http://www.kairosglobalfoundation.org/donate)**

Mobilize.Equip.Transform



# KGF

**Kairos Global Foundation**  
Mobilize.Equip.Transform





## The Power of Women *Coming Together*

By Tara Metzger

Tara serves on the Board for Kairos Global Foundation and lives in Middletown, Ohio.

A couple months ago my mom was cleaning out a drawer in my childhood bedroom. She handed me a letter from Dorothy, a saint of a woman who attended my church when I was a girl. It was dated April 12, 2000. At that time, I was 17 years old and I estimate Dorothy was about 75. She wrote that she was praying for me. She knew I was going through a difficult time. She told me that I was a precious girl, full of potential and she knew God would guide me. She explained that over the years she learned **God created us with resilience and the ability to rise above heartache and tough times.** She told 17-year-old me that God put that same built-in resilience in me. She said that she loved me dearly and just wanted me to know that.

I had known Dorothy my entire life. She watched me grow up. How kind it was of this woman 60 years my elder to take the time to reach out to me. I have no doubt that she felt God pull at her heart and she followed that nudge to let me know that I was seen, I was significant, I was prayed for, *and I was loved.* Just a few years later I felt God was nudging me, God was whispering that I should go to India. My family met the Stephens family when I was about four years old. My dad, Rev. Claude Robold, and Rev. Samuel Stephens hit it off and became great friends—brothers from the other side of the world. Over the years our families grew close. As a little girl I dreamed about the day I would travel to India, a place my father traveled every year. At the age of 20 I told my mom and dad I thought God was telling me it was time.

I was nervous and excited as I made the 18-hour trip to India. I was so graciously welcomed by the Stephens family. They treated me as if they'd been anticipating my arrival my entire life. The first few days of the trip I was overwhelmed by the culture of India. There were so many people... everywhere! Every sensory experience—sight, sound, taste, and touch were new to me in this country.

The poverty I saw in the slums of Mumbai was like nothing I had ever seen. I asked what I was looking at and they explained those were houses. It looked like boxes and rubble to me. I saw tiny, beautiful children begging in the streets. The sounds of the crowds and the honking of the horns to signal a right of way in traffic was more chaos than I was used to in the street. There were cows in the road and entire families riding on one motorcycle.

As we traveled around this completely new culture, I was absolutely stunned to see the impact this family and organization were making. We visited rural villages, hospitals, orphanages, community centers, vocational centers—the good they were accomplishing was mind blowing to me. It was during this trip I was able to really get to know my friend Rebecca Stanley. I had known her for years but during this trip she became my sister Becky from India. She introduced me to women and children who had such little material things but were full of the joy that comes with Christ in your heart and people alongside of you who care. The calling Becky felt in her heart and the work she was already doing to help lift the people around her, at the age of 22, was beyond inspiring to me.

During my time in India, the anxiety of travel and culture shock faded and the difference the love of Christ makes became clearer than ever before. The Stephens family, IGL, and now, Kairos Global foundation, are allowing the love of Christ and the work of their hands to transform the lives of the people of India.

Now, 20 years later, I am humbled by the opportunity to work with Kairos Global Foundation. I hear stories of the women in India who need us. I think about their challenges, and I try to put myself in their shoes. These women are daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers just like me. Women are nurturers. We take care of what is around us. We look at our families and those we love, and we can't help but want to uplift, nurture, and heal. The women of southeast Asia need our support to overcome extreme poverty, abuse, and discrimination. They need us to lift them into a life of opportunities that all women deserve. No matter who we are or where we come from, all women deserve healthcare, safety, education, supportive community, job opportunities, and a sense of self-worth. Women deserve an opportunity to take care of their families. **Let us join in the sisterhood of humanity and provide these opportunities.**

I look back at the letter from Dorothy and I want to be like her. I want to come alongside the women in the world who need us to tell them they are seen, significant, prayed for, supported, and loved. I want them to know that God created them to be resilient and overcome their hardships, but they do not have to do it alone. When we unite with the common goal to help them, we can change the world. ►

Mobilize.Equip.Transform



**Kairos Global Foundation**  
Mobilize.Equip.Transform

### **Why is it called the Kairos Global Foundation?**

In Greek, the word *kairos* translates to *opportune time or the right time*. It's a pivotal moment where a word or action could have monumental results. For the women receiving training and microloans to fuel their careers, this important moment offers meaningful and productive career opportunities that would otherwise be impossible. **With education and the funds to drive their dreams forward, they can shed the burden of harsh working conditions for little pay, and embark on a life free from poverty.**

### **KGF'S VISION**

**Holistic transformation** of rural communities through **empowering women** WORLDWIDE.

**Learn more at**  
**[www.kairosglobalfoundation.org](http://www.kairosglobalfoundation.org)**

