

‘ GOOD PRACTICES ’

**BY RELIGIOUS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS
IN PREVENTION OF CHILD MARRIAGES**

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most prevalent forms of gender-based violence is child marriage. In India, 47% of the girls are married by 18 years of age, and 18% are married by 15 years of age (UNICEF, 2014). Among the worst-affected states are Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (DASRA, 2014). The DLHS (District Level Household Survey) 4 (2012-13) reports that 15.9% of the girls in Andhra Pradesh are married before 18 years of age, while 10.7% of girls are married in Telangana before 18 years of age.

A Baseline Study commissioned by Plan Netherlands and local context analysis fed into strategising a five-year (2016-2020) “Pathways of Change” advocacy initiative called the Girls Advocacy Alliance (GAA) Programme which envisions a world wherein all girls and young women enjoy equal rights and opportunities and benefit equally from development outcomes.

The GAA is a global initiative of Plan International – Plan Netherlands, Terre des Hommes – Netherlands and Defence for Children – ECPAT Netherlands. In India, Plan India is implementing the project in 9 districts of Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Telangana (TS) in partnership with **Mahita** while Terre des Hommes – Netherlands is implementing the programme in 6 districts of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The project primarily advocates addressing child marriage and child trafficking, and promoting Secondary Education (SE) among girls and Job Oriented Vocational Training (JOVT) for young women in both the states. – This as per the project can be achieved by working with 4 key actors i.e. Communities, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), government and private sector. The GAA believes that inclusive economic growth is possible when there are ‘equal rights and opportunities to girls and young women’. This contributes to the elimination of violence against girls and young women and their economic exclusion thereby reducing their vulnerability towards child marriages and child trafficking.

The programme closely works with Communities, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), government and private sector in bringing the desired change.

PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT

One of the key and influential agents of change in altering the norm and practice of child marriage identified in the programme are community leaders; of which Religious and Community (R and C) leaders are the most powerful influencers within the larger community as per GAA.

Given their close proximity to the community and the influence they have on families and larger communities in terms of marriages and girls' access to education, GAA saw much potential in this target group to be able to change social norms or at least begin to question the existing norms. Hence, the engagement with this particular group.

During the first 18 months of the project implementation phase, the programme intensively initiated dialogue with various R and C leaders on child marriage and child trafficking issues in the priority districts. A few orientation/ sensitisation meetings were also conducted on these topics. As a result of this, it was observed that the active participation and positive response of the R and C leaders in the programme activities ensured the support of community towards GAA programme in prevention of child marriages. It was also observed that many R and C leaders were adopting effective practices to address child issues in their districts and communities.

Hence, it was decided to document their efforts and initiatives to address child marriages. These effective practices could help the programme to encourage other R and C leaders, communities and the government to replicate the same model for addressing child marriages in their geographical areas of operation.

METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this exercise was to identify best practices (in prevention of child marriages) among the R and C leaders from priority districts of GAA in the states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh and document the same as 'Good Practices in the Prevention of Child Marriages'.

The methodology comprised of desk review and key informant interviews. The main reference documents for the desk review included the GAA Baseline Study, the Theory of Change narrative and the quarterly and annual reports submitted to Plan India. Based on the Terms of Reference (ToR) and the desk review, and keeping the sensitivity of the topic of child marriages, a semi-structured interview guide was developed.

Plan India and Mahita engaged with 700 R and C leaders across both the states in the first 18 months of the GAA intervention period, of whom 30% were Muslims, 40% were Hindus and 30% were Christians. A mapping of these stakeholders was done, and a purposive sampling method was adopted to involve them as key informants. **Mahita** and lead partner teams identified a total of twenty-two (22) **R and C** leaders (belonging to Hindu, Islam and Christian faiths/religions or belonging to other traditional groups) who, during the project implementation phase, were found to demonstrate effective practices for addressing the issues of child marriages in their geographical operational areas.

A brief profile about each person was shared for better understanding of their selection for the interview. The list of respondents and other details, including the gist of the interviews is annexed as an excel sheet.

Following are definitions of various community leaders with whom **Mahita** - Plan has engaged in the first 18 months.

- Religious leaders are the guides to religious congregations/communities of followers through the trappings of their

faith. By and large, their primary roles are similar: performing the rites and ceremonies that a particular religion requires, such as birth rituals, coming-of-age rituals, death rituals, solemnisation of marriages etc.

- They are also the keepers of religious tradition and often take on the role of moral leader as well as teacher or guide.
- Community leaders are leaders who have a following within their community (religious or caste-based communities). They are perceived by others out of the community to represent the community and are often asked for their opinions on important matters. A simple way to understand community leadership is to see it as leadership in, for and by the community. Traditional leaders and caste leaders/*kula* leaders form part of the community leadership.
- Caste leaders are those who are nominated as leaders within caste groups or caste-based organisations and are key in deciding the norms and rules for each of their castes. Traditional leaders are those who lead groups largely tied to a tradition, profession or a custom.

Apart from this, the definition of child marriage followed in this Study is as follows:

According to the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989, a 'child' means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

Thus, it defines child marriage as '*the practice of marriage of children under 18*'.

A good practice was defined as a technique or methodology that, through experience and research, has proven to reliably lead to a desired result and is therefore recommended as a model.

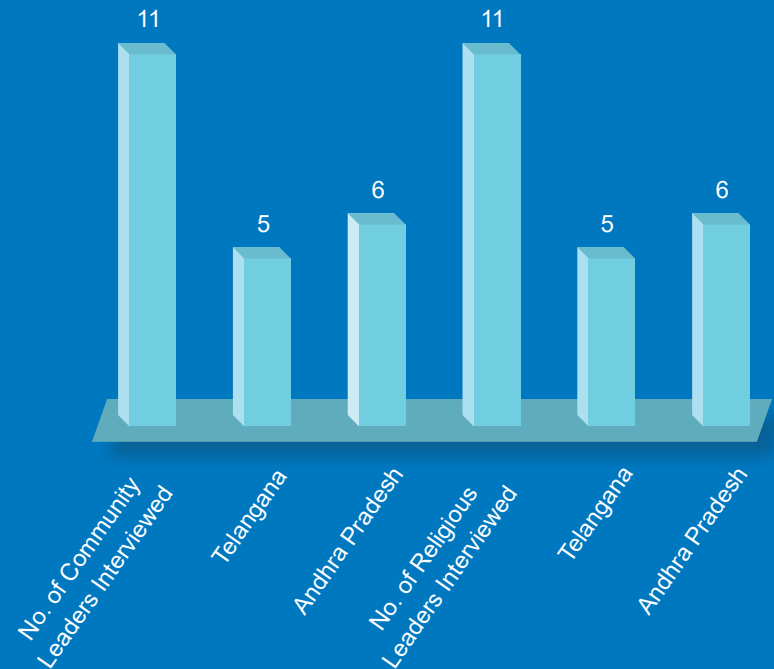
Respondent Analysis

A total of 22 identified R & C leaders (3 females and 19 males) were interviewed, either in person or telephonically between 16th April 2018 and 7th May 2018 based upon their availability. Out of the 22, 50% of the respondents constituted religious leaders (11) while the other 50% constituted community leaders (11).

Since women are relatively rare in top positions of religious leadership, no female religious leader could be identified for the interview while only 3 female community leaders from the districts of Telangana State (Hyderabad, Adilabad, Sangareddy) were interviewed.

10 respondents belonged to the Hindu faith groups, 7 to Islam, 3 to Christianity and 2 belonged to the secular traditional groups. For practical and logistic reasons, 17 respondents were interviewed telephonically, while 5 were interviewed in person.

50% respondents hailed from Telangana State (Hyderabad-1; Adilabad-4; Vikarabad-4; Sangareddy-2) while 50% respondents hailed from Andhra Pradesh State (Krishna-3; Krnool-6; Vishakapatnam-2).



INFORMATION CAPTURED THROUGH THE INTERVIEWS: REASONS FOR CHILD MARRIAGES

Some of the **reasons** reported by the R and C leaders for child marriages were as follows:

- Illiteracy leading to ignorance and low level of awareness among parents about the ill-effects of child marriages.
- The practice of child marriage is an acceptable social and traditional norm adopted by some communities, since generations. It is based on the belief that girls married at a very young age are more malleable and can be moulded or trained to fit into the husband's or in-law's household.
- Poverty drives early marriages of girls because the economic burden is reduced by having one person less in the family to be fed and taken care of.
- Parents feel pressurised that delay in marriage could affect their daughter's future marriage prospects since strong caste ties limit the availability of suitable marital partners. Therefore, marriages are fixed as soon as parents identify a suitable groom, without paying heed to the age of the girl.
- In some instances, it was reported that child marriages are a route to child trafficking. Parents fall prey to men from other states (Rajasthan and Gujarat) who offer a bride-price (money) to the parents of the girl on the pretext of marriage and sell them to either brothels, factories or rich families as domestic helps.
- Migrant tribes consider adolescent girls as a 'liability' needing extra-care, protection and **safety** while always being on the move. Therefore, they see early marriage as a means to get rid of this responsibility.
- The persistence of patriarchal principles in the society do not allow young girls and women folk to take decisions for themselves. Therefore, they quietly submit themselves to the will of the men-folk from the community.

- Love marriages and inter-caste marriages are not favoured in the Indian orthodox society. Indulging in pre-marital sex, losing virginity and pregnancy out of wedlock are considered a taboo. Child marriages are seen as a solution by the parents to the perceived need to control the sexuality of young people so that their children neither fall in love, nor have serious romantic inclinations or elope to get married.
- The trend of minor girls eloping to get married to the person they fall in love with is increasing among the younger generation. The parents blame it on their exposure to cinema, digital and other social media.

GOOD PRACTICES ADOPTED BY RELIGIOUS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS TO STOP CHILD MARRIAGES

i. Active participation in sensitisation programmes on child marriages

- All the R and C leaders interviewed attended the orientation/sensitisation programmes conducted by Mahita and were well aware about the issues of child marriages and the government departments and services (such as the Collector assisted by Child Marriage Prohibition Officer, Child Welfare Committee, Juvenile Justice Board, District Child Protection Unit, and Child Helpline) that could be approached if they had to refer or register any cases of child marriages. Most of them were aware about the legislative frameworks governing child marriages too.
- The capacity building helped the R and C leaders to have a thorough understanding of the issue, which is an effective practice to curb child marriages.

ii. Agents/source of information and role of facilitator

- It was found that almost all the R and C leaders interviewed, were aware of the Conditional Cash Transfer Schemes (such as *Bangaru Talli*, *Kalyana Lakshmi*, *Shaadi Mubarak*, *Giriputrika Kalyana Pathakam* etc) for girls implemented by the State Governments in both the States which either directly or indirectly contribute to prevent child marriages.
- They expressed that such financial incentives play an enabling role in removing the existing gender barriers and denting the parental perception of considering the girl child as a 'liability'. The R and C leaders facilitated the community members to avail the benefits from these schemes as applicable.
- It was observed that few R and C leaders encouraged women community members to comply with the

Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act, 2002 and register their marriages for their own security and protection.

- There have been many instances where the R and C leaders have referred cases of child marriages to the government departments concerned and ensured that such marriages were stopped.
- Few R and C leaders have narrated examples of how they have approached CSOs involved in protection of child rights and prevented child marriages from being solemnised.

iii. Commitment to the cause

- It was evident that all the R and C leaders interviewed were personally convinced about the cause of prevention of child marriages. They showed ownership and commitment to the cause by expressing their willingness to work for the cause either verbally during meetings or by submitting the same as a written Commitment Letter to **Mahita**. They have also pledged support to play a proactive role to stop child marriages in their purview.
- Coming together of inter-faith leaders and leaders from diverse community backgrounds on a common platform and engagement in various dialogues to stop child marriages helped them to recognise the need, and accept the importance of working in collaboration for a larger common goal thus lending moral authority to campaigns to end child marriages. Respecting theological differences and pledging to work together in harmony to stop child marriages is a good practice.
- Most of the R and C leaders reported that the issues of child marriage are included in the agenda of some of their internal formal group meetings as well as larger gatherings of communities, where appropriated.

iv. Promoting social awareness on child marriages

- The R and C leaders encouraged their community and wider public to support the cause of stopping child

marriages. Since the R and C leaders are respected and revered, they have a strong say and their advice is mostly followed by the community members. Therefore, they were found to maximise opportunities to spread awareness about child marriages on various platforms. For example, when invited as resource person or speakers/chief guest at any functions, or on occasions of observation of special days, where relevant, a message on importance of schooling/education, protection of child rights through positive parenting, provision of child-marriage free environments for healthy societies is shared to improve situation for girls and young women.

- The R and C leaders were found to use the existing structures of their faith (such as *Satsang Ashrams*, *Pravachans*, temple-guided meditation or prayer sessions, Sunday schools, youth and women ministries, clergy and theological institutions, Friday mosque sermons etc) and delivering social messages (especially regarding stopping of child marriages) during preaching, spiritual teachings or addressing community gatherings. This is an impactful and cost-effective way to spread the message to a wider audience, thus bringing about socio-behavioural change and creating an enabling environment for girl children to enjoy their rights.
- Few R and C leaders made good use of the Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials distributed by **Mahita** to support the awareness campaigns to stop child marriages. The effective usage of these posters, information pamphlets/brochures and audio-visual communication material was demonstrated as an effective practice to promote positive behaviour.

v. Community awareness generation and counselling

- All the R and C leaders interviewed were involved in providing psycho-spiritual guidance and counselling of the youth and their family members under their purview regarding the legal age of getting married and the implications of child marriages mainly on health of the girl child.
- One female community leader, who was directly affected by the practice of child marriage regularly counselled young girls and boys about physical and mental health (depression and psycho-social problems)

arising out of child marriage and early motherhood.

- Few R and C leaders have reported using Youth Clubs, Child Clubs, Self-Help Groups and other community member groups from within the community to act as watchdogs to prevent and report any incidence of child marriage.
- Some R and C leaders conducted awareness programmes and counselling sessions with young people from school and colleges about the negative consequences of child marriages which helped the girl children to speak up for themselves in front of their parents to postpone the 'groom-hunting' process until they attained the age of 18 years. If at all they are forced to get married before the legal age, they are empowered to speak up and cooperate with investigating officers of child marriage.
- There are certain times of the year when child marriages are at their peak. This is around the months between April to June when girls finish their school or junior college and are having a school/college break. They are free to seek admissions for higher studies. But many parents who are daily wage earners and have to go out to work do not prefer to leave their girl child at home and hence prefer to get their daughters married. Also, there are certain communities where prevalence of child marriage is higher. Few R and C leaders tapped this time of the year to strategically intensify their awareness activities and suggest alternate programmes for the girls to be meaningfully occupied in activities such as computer classes, vocational skill trainings, life skills training programmes etc.
- Since elopement of minors was found to be high in these districts, a few R and C leaders also spent extra time in value-based education to discourage child marriage by eloping.

vi. Direct actions by R and C leaders to stop child marriages

- Every religious leader ensured that they verify the age of the couple by verifying age-proof documents before agreeing to solemnise the marriage. If they come across any minors during this process, they refuse to get

them married and do a one-on-one counselling of the parents and children about the consequences of, and alternatives to, child marriage. They suggest postponing the marriage until the minor attains the legal age.

- The temple priests are approached by community members for horoscope matching before fixing any marriage. If the priests come across any minor, they immediately refuse to match the horoscopes and do a one-on-one elaborate counselling of the parents to postpone the marriage plans. Even otherwise, they confirm the age of the couple before agreeing to perform any marriage.
- One community leader mentioned that a marriage bureau run by one of their community members compulsorily asks for age proof of the boy/girl before registering them or beginning the process of match-making. Even the decorators and food caterers from their community are being sensitised to ask for age proof of the couple before accepting any orders for wedding/reception ceremonies.
- Efforts were made to prevent child marriages from being solemnised at an early stage of 'marriage match-fixing,' rather than waiting till the day the ceremony is scheduled to take place. The R and C leaders also ensured that information regarding those parents who were stubborn and not complying with the legal age of marriage reached the higher officials before time so that they may have time to take the necessary action. Before escalating the issue to the enforcement agencies, the R and C leaders tried to use informal ways to convince the parents to postpone the marriage.
- All the R and C leaders interviewed, emphasised the importance of educating the girls. They were also of the opinion that young girls should be made aware of their rights at an early age. Few R and C leaders were directly involved in promoting school enrolment for school drop-outs. Some were involved in non-formal education and running of Bridge schools for school drop-out children. They ensured that girls returned to

CHALLENGES FACED BY R AND C LEADERS IN PREVENTION OF CHILD MARRIAGES

- Child marriage is a deeply rooted socio-cultural practice and hence demands patience and long-term persistent efforts to bring about social and behavioural changes to stop child marriages, especially in rural areas where the society is predominantly ruled and organised according to the caste system.
- Tribal hamlets and habitations located in interior areas and difficult terrains are difficult to access and reach out to in order to disseminate the social message and importance of preventing and eliminating the practice of child marriages.
- Many instances have been seen where the efforts by the CSOs, officials or police to take action against the offenders are met with resistance, threats and physical violence. Sometimes, political interference also waters down the efforts of stopping child marriages. This discourages people from taking stringent actions.
- The R and C leaders are mostly totally occupied with their existing commitments to their faith and community-related activities. Working on elimination of child marriages requires a more focussed, multi-pronged comprehensive strategy of working with various stakeholders, especially girls and the people around them, and the legal system and policies that influence the cause. The R and C leaders expressed that though they would personally like to contribute more towards the cause of elimination of child marriages, practical constraints (such as lack of time, lack of human resources) restrict their intentions.

SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS BY RELIGIOUS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS AS THE WAY FORWARD

During the interview process, few respondents shared that though they were not directly involved in the implementation of certain practices, they would like to make few recommendations to end child marriages such as:

- Intensive community mobilisation efforts are necessary to bring about social change. Since vast geographical areas and sometimes difficult to reach terrains need to be covered. Additional manpower (whose capacities are built, and who receive consistent follow-up support) or gender task forces could be created to help reach messages to far and deep grassroots levels (marginalised and vulnerable individuals and groups in particular).
- Community volunteers could be used to enlist the adolescent girls in a particular village by method of a house-to-house survey and track them until they attain the age of 18 years to keep them safe from child marriages and trafficking.
- Keeping the patriarchal norms in mind, more boys and men should be involved in awareness-raising programmes and should be engaged as champions to stop child marriages.
- Young girls should have easy access to health services. Health camps for young girls and their mothers should be regularly conducted at the local health centres. Counselling should be provided by sharing examples of under-age pregnancies to prevent child marriages. ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activists) is a village level health worker who provides health services to the community. Since she has close contact with every family in the village, she could be motivated to create awareness on the adverse health effects of marriage and child-bearing before the age of 18 with adolescent girls.

- Creativity in delivering social messages should be explored. Participatory street plays, puppet theatres, *burra kathas* (an oral storytelling technique) and other traditional folk media techniques could be used to discuss and debate child marriages and collectively seek community support to denounce the evil practice.
- Media should be tapped more effectively to highlight the negative impact of the practice of child marriage. With technological advancement, and access of young rural populations to digital media, responsible social media projecting case studies and good practices of elimination of child marriages through interesting web-series, tele-serials, social films, documentaries, advertisements, public announcements, social media discussions should be explored.

CONCLUSION

The voices of the R and C leaders captured in this study reaffirm that child marriages are a threat to childhood which hinders a young girl's right to education, endangers her health and cuts short her personal growth and development. The R and C leaders under the programme have pledged to come together and collectively influence responsible behaviour to stop child marriages which will eventually contribute towards actual decline in child marriages in the districts of operation. The culturally-sensitive communication and programming (including using culturally-sensitive IEC material such as posters, audio-video material) facilitated by Plan India and Mahita has so far been successful in demonstrating mutual respect and establishing successful partnerships towards working for a common cause with R and C leaders. These efforts and collaborations need to sustain to improve the efficiency of interventions and to make a difference in protecting the rights of young girls.

INTERVIEW WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS

No. of leaders interviewed	11
Andhra Pradesh	6
Telangana	5

List of Community Leaders Interviewed

1. Community Leader

Date of Interview	16-04-20 18
Name of the Person	Jaggu Annapurna
Gender	Female
Religious Affiliation	Hinduism
Name of the Religious/ Caste/Tribe Order	
Designation	Goshala Nirvakarala and Lady Panthulu
Category	<i>Community Leader</i>
State	Telangana
District	Hyderabad

Profile: She is one of the strong community leaders in the Borabanda community and has been engaging with

the community for a long time. She is revered by all community members irrespective of their own religion. She is known to take yoga classes for people from the community and feels very strongly about the education of girls and women.

Summary of Interview: Mrs. Annapurna shared that she runs a *goshala* and a temple. She conducts free tuitions for children and yoga classes for all in interested in the community. She is involved in counselling the youth regarding the ill-effects and legal complications of child marriages who come in touch with her either for free tuitions or in her community activities. She also addresses the adults who attend the yoga classes regarding the disadvantages of child marriages. The youth are informed that those marriages which are performed after attainment of legal age tend to be happier ones because the couple are mature age-wise to handle the issues of adjustments,

misunderstandings, health, parenthood, upbringing of children, financially managing homes independently etc. Bridge schools for non-formal education is another platform to educate people regarding child marriages. Lack of awareness about appropriate age of marriage is an issue in her area. Mrs. Annapurna narrated an incident when a child marriage (8th class student) took place around a year ago. They managed to stop the public function, but the family members got the couple secretly married on the same day. The girl had been through two abortions already and is an example of the negative consequences of child marriage to others in the community. After the intervention of **Plan India and Mahita** and Girls Advocacy Alliance, the awareness has improved and community members think twice before getting their child married before the legal age. All members in their community are encouraged to get all marriages registered. People are informed about the incentives from the government if a girl is married after 18 years and many of them are availing this scheme. Marriages cannot be stopped if information comes on the same day as the marriage because it becomes a matter of insult for the families, financial loss and causes fights between people. But when information about a child marriage is received atleast

a week before it is easy to intervene and postpone the marriage. Solution to prevent child marriage is to educate parents and children, send children to school, involve young girls in vocational trainings and regular counselling for all. Children get influenced into falling in love by watching TV or browsing objectionable content on the internet. Many times young children elope claiming to fall in love. Therefore, regular counselling is a must, including counselling for boys. Schools should be approached to regularly counsel the children.

2. Community Leader

Date of Interview	19-04-2018
Name of the Person	Vijaya
Gender	Female
Religious Affiliation	Hinduism
Name of the Religious/ Caste/Tribe Order	Caste Council
Designation	Mala Sangham Mahila Society
Category	<i>Community Leader</i>
State	Telangana
District	Adilabad

Profile: She has been very active in GAA programmes and strongly advocates education for girls.

Summary of Interview: Mrs. Vijaya identifies herself as a lady social worker who helps to form Youth Associations and create awareness programmes on child marriages. One of her roles is to motivate and guide youth in the right direction and promote anti-ragging drives in colleges. She counsels them to share those experiences with her, which they have been unable to share with their parents. She guides youth not to fall for infatuation before becoming mature enough to handle emotional issues. She coordinates with *anganwadi* teachers. As far as her area is concerned, child marriages have reduced to a large extent. She shared that she likes to serve society and talks about the importance of training young women in tailoring to enable them earn a livelihood in future. She was the first to start *Mala Mahila* Society in Adilabad. Later, many followed suit.

Women Self Help Groups have been created to become self-reliant. So far, 250 members are registered with them, out of whom 100 are unmarried girls. Family counselling is another major tool she uses to prevent child marriages. She emphasises on

education. She informs parents who are contemplating child marriages in her community, about the legal implications of child marriages and dissuades them. She shared that she was instrumental in stopping child labour to a certain extent in many shops in her neighbourhood. She started as a *beedi* worker, went onto tailoring business and earns around Rs. 1000 per day. She shared that hers was also a child marriage, and hence she speaks about physical and mental health concerns of early marriage to others.

3. Community Leader

Date of Interview	21-04-2018
Name of the Person	Abdul Raqueeb
Gender	Male
Religious Affiliation	Islam
Name of the Religious/ Caste/Tribe Order	Caste Council
Designation	Muslim Community Leader
Category	<i>Community Leader</i>
State	Andhra Pradesh
District	Visakhapatnam

Profile: He is an ex-Child Welfare Committee Member as well as runs an NGO. He is also a very strong community leader in the district and has played a prominent role in persuading other Muslim leaders.

Summary of Interview: Mr. Abdul Raqueeb shared his opinion that mostly, today's generation of educated Muslims marry at the right age, as majors. The Muslim community leaders educate their people about the negative consequences of child marriages. They have marriage registers to note the details, including the age of the couple. *Qazis* are also instructed not to encourage child marriages. He shared that different departments of the State are involved in checking whether the marriage being performed is as per the law. Therefore, child marriages are prevented to maximum extent. Mr. Raqueeb confided that some *qazis* prefer to adhere to the Muslim Personal Law (*Shariat*). He further elaborated that as per their religious texts, Aisha was just six years old when she was married to Muhammad who was in his 50s, and only nine when the marriage was consummated. Child-brides were not uncommon and waiting until the child came of age to consummate the marriage was the norm to unify families during olden times.

He also shared that the *Quran* states that marriage is void unless entered into by consenting individuals. He gave this religious context for marriages from Islam religion and shared that he advocates for marriages of adults. He said that awareness levels are good in his community. But elopement of youth and indulgence in physical relationships are commonly seen in the community these days. Rural girls get attracted to the urban boys. Lot of homework is required to stop child marriages by counselling. He shared that sometimes it has adverse effects too. He shared an instance where a couple committed suicide for stopping their child marriage and hence such issues need to be tackled with great sensitivity. Mr. Raqueeb suggested that age-proofs should be verified as a mandate by all the religious leaders who are authorised to solemnise marriages. He expressed that though there are legal instruments to prevent child marriages, there are still a lot of loopholes in the system which needs to be addressed with a social dialogue with various policy makers as well as responsible citizens.

4. Community Leader

Date of Interview	23-04-2018
Name of the Person	Syed Roshan Ali
Gender	Male
Religious Affiliation	Islam
Designation	Muslim Community Leader
Category	<i>Community Leader</i>
State	Andhra Pradesh
District	Kurnool

Profile: He is the AIIMEVA President in Kurnool District and has been attending and sometimes leading GAA meetings. He has conducted meetings in the AIIMEVA as well. He was one of the first persons to assure us that no child marriages would be solemnised in his community.

Summary of Interview: Mr. Roshan Ali shared that he started the *Sevasthamb* Organisation for Society development and also another organisation named Peoples Alliance for Secularism and Democracy. Through these organisations, he influences his community elders and families to fight for social

causes. Prevention of child marriages is one such social cause which has his attention. One remarkable initiative in the direction to stop child marriages in his community was by making Aadhar card mandatory for registering the *nikaahnama*. This way, the age of the bride is verified.

He educates his community about the ill-effects of child marriages. He says that it is sometimes challenging to stop the practice of child marriages in tribal areas because they get offended and become aggressive when they perceive a threat to their sociocultural practices. Mr. Roshan feels that transformation in society is a collective process and government machinery should play a proactive role. Government schemes are excellent but implementation down to the grass root level needs better mechanism for audit and validation.

5. Community Leader

Date of Interview	23-04-2018
Name of the Person	S. Mahboob Basha
Gender	Male

Religious Affiliation	Islam
Designation	Muslim Community Leader
Category	<i>Community Leader</i>
State	Andhra Pradesh
District	Kurnool

Profile: He is very active in the slum communities with heavy Muslim population in the district of Kurnool. He is very active in creating more awareness on GAA themes and has requested IEC materials in Urdu so that it can be widely disseminated in the slum communities.

Summary of Interview: Mr. Mahboob Basha conducts awareness programmes on social issues in his community in which he talks about the negative consequences of child marriages too. He shared that during *namaaz* on every Friday, the clerics from the mosque share important messages on various social causes. They speak about the importance of education and reasons for not performing child marriages. He shared an example of a preaching message that marriages are sustainable and blissful only when adults are mutually, mentally and physically ready for the

responsibilities that come with marriages, therefore, child marriages should be discouraged. Education of youth is their top priority because they are the future citizens of the world and they have to be moulded properly.

6. Community Leader

Date of Interview	23-04-2018
Name of the Person	B. Shamshuddin
Gender	Male
Religious Affiliation	Islam
Designation	Asst. Secretary, Minorities Welfare Department and Muslim Community Leader
Category	<i>Community Leader</i>
State	Andhra Pradesh
District	Kurnool

Profile: He is a Muslim Sunni leader and has attended meetings of GAA. He has been key in creating awareness on the community and has asked for support in doing street plays and IEC.

Summary of Interview: Mr. Shamshuddin of Minorities Welfare Department shared that they are into women's welfare and child development programmes and as part of that, they educate women on all social issues and stopping child marriages is one of the issues. Most of the Muslim religious leaders educate the community on their rights and also conduct welfare awareness programmes. He said that more focus should be on information-sharing and awareness-raising in the communities so that instead of being preached about what is right, they should be able to make their own the decisions about marrying their children only once they are legal adults. Innovative ways of using IEC and behaviour change methods to bring about this change in society is essential.

7. Community Leader

Date of Interview	26-04-2018
Name of the Person	R. Maipal
Gender	Male
Religious Affiliation	Secular
Name of the Religious/ Caste/Tribe Order	<i>Kula Vivaksha Porata Samiti</i> (Not faith-based)

Designation	President
Category	<i>Community Leader</i>
State	Telangana
District	Vikarabad

Profile: This group is especially key in creating awareness amongst the SC communities in the district and can also play a big role at the state level. They too have been very active in GAA meetings as prominent community leaders.

Summary of Interview: Mr. Mahipal works for the empowerment of *dalits* through education. He shared that the oppressed in his area do not have access to water borewells, temples etc but through proper dialogue with government officials and interactive conferences with the community they are finding solutions to their issues. They have taken the route of pre-marital counselling at the local police stations to stop child marriages. They have published few books to educate the marginalised sector for their betterment. They have conducted *gram sabhas* or committee meetings to discuss and eradicate unwanted social practices like child marriages.

8. Community Leader

Date of Interview	26-04-2018
Name of the Person	G. Narasimhulu
Gender	Male
Religious Affiliation	Secular
Name of the Religious/ Caste/Tribe Order	Telangana <i>Rythu Sangham</i>
Designation	President
Category	<i>Community Leader</i>
State	Telangana
District	Vikarabad

Profile: This group is very active in Vikarabad amongst the farmer families and has promised us to take this forward within their own association in Vikarabad. They have also been keen on reporting of the marriages to the district functionaries and very active members during GAA interventions.

Summary of Interview: Mr. G. Narsimhulu of Telangana Rythu Sangham – Vikarabad shared that they work mainly on farmer-related issues. They treat all castes and religions on equal levels. Child

marriages still do take place in his area. Whenever they get any information about child marriages taking place, their association intervenes and informs the concerned police station or Child Line department to take action. Since theirs is a close-knit community, their day-to-day affairs are interlinked and mostly they sort it out without police intervention by spreading the basic message of awareness on girl child and how early marriages affects the health of the girl child. His suggestion is to encourage unemployed youth from the community to be trained as Volunteers for Social Change in eradicating child marriages by paying them a small honorarium. He also suggested that a platform should be created for the youth to have a regular interface with key stakeholders in the community such as the Village Revenue Officer, Mandal Revenue Officer, *anganwadi* teachers, ASHA workers, the Police department officials and other NGOs working on social issues. This model can be effective to make youth responsible for the cause of child rights including child marriages in the country.

9. Community Leader

Date of Interview	03-05-2018
Name of the Person	Vijaya Kumar Nakka
Gender	Male
Religious Affiliation	Hinduism
Name of the Religious/ Caste/Tribe Order	Krishna Zilla <i>Yanadi Girijana Aikya Sangham</i>
Designation	President
Category	<i>Community Leader</i>
State	Andhra Pradesh
District	Krishna

Profile: He belongs to the fishing community (*Yandi* caste). He is the president of the community which comprises of about 1600 families in the district. He has been active supporter of the GAA programmes and has been very vocal on the issue of child marriages which are prominent in his community.

Summary of Interview: *Yanadi* tribe is a fisherman community. They work with 1500 families in 6 *mandals* of *Yanadi* tribe. Since 2005, Mr. Nakka is working in an NGO which primarily focusses on community and

gender issues. Mr. Nakka shared that girls were getting married at early ages in the community, and even now one can see such practices occasionally. Parents are of the opinion that they go fishing for their livelihood and instead of letting a young girl stay at home unattended, it is safer to get her married.

Since the last one and half years he is associated with Plan India and Mahita through which issues related to child marriages are being addressed by the group. Information about the *Giriputrika Kalyana Pathakam* (a scheme designed to provide a one-time financial assistance of Rs. 50,000 to each tribal woman who gets married) is provided. The *Sangham* helps the eligible members with the application process such as procurement and submission of age-proof, Aadhaar card, marriage certificate, income certificate and caste certificate to avail benefits of the scheme. Mr. Nakka feels that illiteracy contributes towards early marriage. Therefore, through his *Sangham*, he ensures that children are sent to school for education. For school drop outs, Bridge schools have been established in 3 *mandals*. Regular awareness programmes are conducted for community members about the appropriate age of marriage and the physiological and

psychological reasons for recommending the same. But he expressed the need for more intensive awareness programmes such as information documentary films or street plays to be used to highlight good practices regarding stopping early marriages.

10. Community Leader

Date of Interview	073-05-2018
Name of the Person	Prabhakara
Gender	Male
Religious Affiliation	Hinduism
Name of the Religious/ Caste/Tribe Order	<i>Kurma Sangham (Golla Yadav Community)</i>
Designation	President
Category	<i>Community Leader</i>
State	Telangana
District	Sangareddy

Profile: She belongs to the *Golla- Yadav* Community and is one of the few women leaders in the district of Sangareddy district and has been crusading against child marriages and gender equality in the district and

is regular in the GAA meetings.

Summary of Interview: For tenth class students, awareness programmes/camps are regularly conducted where young girls in the age group of 13-16 are counselled against child marriages and to continue pursuing their higher education for a good future. Because of this, the situation has improved in the area and child marriages have reduced. But sometimes in remote villages, parents still insist on getting their children married if they get a good proposal because they wish to get rid of their responsibility by getting their daughters married at the earliest. She shared an incident where a child marriage was stopped by them with the help of an NGO and the parents gave in writing that they would postpone the wedding until the girl attains 18 years of age. She suggested that all caste associations along with their workforce members should conduct regular meetings in remote villages where all community members should be made aware about the legal complications of child marriages and the benefits of getting children married only after they attain the legal age of adulthood. *Mahila Sanghams* also should be involved in such awareness programmes because they have a better say in

the community. In schools and colleges too, such awareness programmes should be conducted regularly. She said that NGOs such as Plan India and Mahita could be invited to such Caste Association meetings so that they may guide them to perform even better.

11. Community Leader

Date of Interview	07-05-2018
Name of the Person	Venkatesham
Gender	Male
Religious Affiliation	Hinduism
Name of the Religious/ Caste/Tribe Order	<i>Mudiraj Kula Samajam</i>
Designation	President
Category	<i>Community Leader</i>
State	Telangana
District	Sangareddy

Profile: He belongs to Mudiraj community (Categorised as BC) from Sanga Reddy District and has been very keen on working on child marriage issues in the district and especially in his community and actively

participates in GAA interventions.

Summary of Interview: Mr. Venkatesham expressed that lack of awareness, illiteracy and poverty contribute towards child marriages in their community. Education and livelihoods are important to curb this practice. They conduct regular group meetings where among other social topics, awareness about the negative consequences of child marriages are highlighted. Because of this, to a certain extent, child marriages have reduced within the community. But at times, they face challenges too.

Mr. Venkatesham shared that it is easier to stop child marriages at the match-making (pelli choopulu) stage. But once all the arrangements are made to perform the wedding, relatives of the girl can become aggressive and can get into physical violence on being stopped from performing the function. This creates rifts within the community. Therefore, it is important to prevent child marriages at the early stages by creating awareness about legal compliances.

INTERVIEW WITH RELIGIOUS LEADERS

No. of Leaders Interviewed	11
Andhra Pradesh	6
Telangana	5

1. Community Leader

Date of Interview	17-04-2018
Name of the Person	Janab Habibullah
Gender	Male
Religious Affiliation	Islam
Name of the Religious/ Caste/Tribe Order	<i>Mudiraj Kula Samajam</i>
Designation	Qazi
Category	<i>Religious Leader</i>
State	Andhra Pradesh
District	Krishna

Profile: We started engaging with him recently but he has been very keen on the issue. In fact he is one of the few leaders who has requested for IEC material in Urdu and said that his congregation will get it printed

and display it in the place of worship.

Summary of Interview: Janaab Habibullah informed that Muslim marriages are performed by deputy *qazis* and imams who perform *namaaz* 5 times a day. He was of the opinion that culturally, child marriage law cannot be forced on Muslims. In Islam, after a girl attains puberty she becomes eligible to get married. He expressed that Nature has created a mechanism which directs the readiness of youth coming of age for child-bearing. Therefore, if women get married early after attaining puberty, ideally, one cannot interfere with it since it is a religious aspect of Islam. But then he was quick to add that he encourages marriages only after age of 18. He said that health issues can arise from early marriages which have to be addressed in a proper way. He felt that there was a need to concentrate on rural areas more with awareness-raising programmes because illiteracy

contributes to child marriages. The Government is doing its bit by fixing the legal age limit for marriage and announcing beneficial packages to curb child marriages. Everyone should follow these rules and stringent action should be taken against the defaulters. He ensures that age-proofs are inspected before he solemnises any marriage in his community. But he said that sometimes it becomes a challenge to validate the authenticity of Aadhar card because wrong age of children is documented in order to get away with early marriages. He felt that the solution to prevent early marriages is to empower young women. Women self-help groups should be formed and every young woman should be trained in some or the other vocational trade such as tailoring or enrol in some skill-based programmes so that they are meaningfully occupied and are kept away from the thoughts of marriage. He shared that he had discussed this idea with the minority welfare department as it can create self-reliance for Muslim women. He felt that the girl child is looked at as a burden in society and that this attitude needs to change. He suggested that Community Meet programmes should be conducted on Sundays with a focus on awareness-raising regarding child marriages. Imams in village mosques should be provided

orientation or trainings in Urdu. He further expressed the need for printing of IEC materials in Urdu and distribution of the same among the local *imams* and leaders which could help curb child marriages in their community. He felt that manpower is required to address this issue. He covers the geographical area from Nuzvid to Jaggayapet revenue divisions. But it would be more effective to reach out with such programmes in the entire district and hence the need for additional human resources.

2. Community Leader

Date of Interview	17-04-2018
Name of the Person	Rev P. S. Vara Kumar
Gender	Male
Religious Affiliation	Christianity
Name of the Religious/ Caste/Tribe Order	The Fellowship of Bible Centred Ministries
Designation	Pastor
Category	<i>Pastor and Christian Leader</i>
State	Andhra Pradesh
District	Krishna

Profile: Even though a Christian, he helped us in mobilising Hindu and Muslim leaders since he feels strongly about the issue. One of the most active leaders in Krishna District and committed to the cause.

Summary of Interview: Rev. Varakumar shared that child marriages among backward classes, Mala and Madiga communities are more rampant in Krishna District. He worked towards awareness creation among pastors and Hindu priests. He conducted church level congregation meetings to stop child marriages. He said that motivating parents is the first step towards curbing child marriages. He felt that since *anganwadi* workers play a crucial role in informing higher authorities about these practices in the community, they should be regularly approached for updates regarding the activities in the community. At his end, healthcare awareness programmes were conducted. According to him, pastors and social workers together have stopped a lot of child marriages from taking place in his operational areas. Rev. Varakumar shared that technological changes in the society are creating a transformational havoc in the minds of the parents regarding teenage girls especially in the Yadava community and also in the Uttara

communities. Number of female college drop-outs, more so from SC Community is high due to love affairs or rumours around it. This leads to peer pressure among parents to get their young girl child married at a young age. The parents feel that protecting a girl child is a challenging task in the current generation of vices and hence marriage is a solution to get rid of that responsibility. Sometimes, Rev. Varakumar has come across situations where political leaders also support child marriages. He narrated an incident where a *sarpanch* hurt an *anganwadi* teacher for interfering with a child marriage case and it turned into an ugly legal battle. Health camps are being used as a tool to stop child marriages. Women political leaders should exercise more influence over such serious issues. He added that **Mahita** programmes have brought lot of changes at the grassroot level and all the participants at such programmes take an oath not to perform and participate in child marriages. He suggested that every *mandal* should have Task Force committee with around 8-9 people of multi-religions to guide policymakers and the Government regarding issues surrounding child marriages. One of the challenges expressed by him was that though Government rules exist about prevention of child marriages, strict implementation is missing.

3. Community Leader

Date of Interview	19-04-2018
Name of the Person	Khijar Yafai
Gender	Male
Religious Affiliation	Islam
Name of the Religious/ Caste/Tribe Order	The Fellowship of Bible Centred Ministries
Designation	District Qazi and President of Dar-ul-Ansar Society
Category	<i>Religious Leader</i>
State	Telangana
District	Adilabad

Profile: He is the senior most leader in the Islam community in the district of Adilabad and his association has been very active in the district activities of GAA. He has been able to pave the way in demonstrating some good practices in encouraging community members to wait till their daughters turn 18 to get them married.

Summary of Interview: Mr. Yafai shared that child marriages have reduced considerably in their

community. He has announced that that he will never solemnise any marriages till the girl attains 18 years of age. But he shared that teen pregnancies are an issue in his area. During teenage, sometimes young girls get carried away with what they see on TV or under the influence of friends and get into physical relationships at a young age. When they get pregnant, elders see marriage as a solution to end the embarrassment. So, though Mr. Yafai still does not solemnise such under-age marriages, there are other clerics who do so considering the special circumstances.

If approached, he tries to convince such parents to wait until both the boy and the girl become majors before performing their marriage. He said that most of the marriages take place during summer season. Mr. Yafai spoke about the Shaadi Mubarak scheme, which has contributed in reducing child marriages to a large extent. Underprivileged sections of the society are made aware of all the government schemes and they have all the necessary certificates to avail the entitlements. He further shared that in Islam, registration of certificate through Nikahnama is mandatory for any marriage to gain a legal status. Mr. Yafai runs the Dar-ul-Ansar Welfare Society which

helps people in distress and also helps in awareness raising regarding societal issues.

4. Community Leader

Date of Interview	19-04-2018
Name of the Person	Anthony Alexander
Gender	Male
Religious Affiliation	Christianity
Name of the Religious/ Caste/Tribe Order	Halleluiah Gospel Society Ministry
Designation	Pastor
Category	<i>Religious Leader</i>
State	Telangana
District	Adilabad

Profile: He is a very active associate member for all the GAA district level meetings and discussions on the issues of child marriages.

Summary of Interview: Anthony Alexander is a pastor who is running an orphanage for boys. He is working for Hallelujah Gospel Ministries in Adilabad. For the last twenty years, he has been serving the society,

especially the downtrodden. He also runs a programme which helps in the education of girls until graduation. He talks about the legal issues regarding child marriages with the young girls and during his sermons in the Church. He also participates in awareness programmes pertaining to child issues where possible.

He attends training programmes which help him to have a better understanding of such serious issues. He does not allow child marriages to happen under his purview. He shared that around 80% of the people have understood the seriousness of this issue in his operational area. He feels that responsibility should be transferred to citizens.

He suggested that through posters and ad campaigns, awareness raising should be more intense in remote villages. Tribal areas are the major focus areas and efforts should be made to reach out to them more.

5. Community Leader

Date of Interview	19-04-2018
Name of the Person	Yakub Baig
Gender	Male

Religious Affiliation	Islam
Designation	Religious and CWC Member
Category	<i>Religious Leader</i>
State	Telangana
District	Adilabad

Profile: He is a strong community member who is also revered by district functionaries and NGO members and very strong supporter of GAA interventions in the district. Given that he is a prominent person in the district as well, his ideas on child marriages and education of girls are well-respected by his own community and he is often sought for suggestions in important matters.

Summary of Interview: Mr. Yakub Baig informed that he covers 4 districts plus Ramagundam and Karimnagar. He shared that he comes across many instances of child marriages, especially in the SC, ST communities. He shared an incident about the wedding of a 17-year-old minor girl and the way they managed the resistance from the community by using *gram sabha* to stop the child marriage and by involving

the District Collector and Superintendent of Police as well. There are instances when he found that *mandal* level officers were not serious about stopping child marriages and have tried pushing such cases under the carpet. Mr. Baig was of the opinion that awareness programmes about the seriousness of such issues should be conducted on top priority for government officials. Child Welfare and Development department should educate girl children in tribal areas. In his work experience, he sees that many people from Rajasthan State come to Adilabad on the pretext of work (mainly textile trading) and involve in child trafficking. The easiest way they find is to lure parents into early marriage of their young girls by giving them money for marriage. They then take the girls and sell them either to brothels or to other people/factories as labour. Due to factors such as poverty, illiteracy and seeing a girl child as a liability, families from tribal backgrounds find such proposals attractive and do not even care to check the background of such men. Especially the nomadic tribes, who move from one location to another, find young girl children a big burden because they need to be extra-protected. Therefore, they get rid of their responsibility by getting the girls married as soon as possible. Mr. Baig suggested that volunteers and those

people linked to *gram panchayat* office and ASHA workers, should be involved to tackle such issues. Since ASHA workers are in direct contact with the families in villages/tribal hamlets, they should be used as a source of information about tracking young girl children. *Mandal*-level awareness on *Kalyana Lakshmi* Scheme is important and the information should percolate to all the people in the villages/tribal hamlets too. All Government Department officials should adopt certain *mandals* and stop child marriages and child-trafficking. Regular discussions in *gram sabhas* about tracking young girls and safeguarding them should be the critical factor to stop child marriages. Stakeholders such as teachers, VRO, *panchayat* secretary, *anganwadi* workers, youth, village leaders and parents should come together collectively to stop the practice of child marriages.

6. Community Leader

Date of Interview	23-04-2018
Name of the Person	K. Shiva Prasad Sharma
Gender	Male
Religious Affiliation	Hinduism

Name of the Religious/ Caste/Tribe Order	<i>Chinna Keshava</i> Temple
Designation	Purohit
Category	<i>Religious Leader</i>
State	Andhra Pradesh
District	Kurnool

Profile: He has committed that he would not solemnise child marriages and will help in creating awareness amongst other *purohits* as well.

Summary of Interview: Mr. Shiv Prasad Sharma expressed that he conducts marriages only for girls who are above 18 years of age by cross-checking their birth or educational certificates. Before marriage, there is a practice of horoscope-matching. There the time and date of birth is important. When he sees that either the boy or the girl is a minor, he counsels the family members to postpone the marriage plans and wait till their children attain the legal age of marriage. He is also involved in conducting awareness programmes to stop child labour and child marriages. Usually he shares such social messages in informal temple meetings. He suggested that every marriage should be

registered mandatorily and that the government should validate the marriage cards. He also expressed that every community head should be involved in creating awareness and stopping child marriages.

7. Community Leader

Date of Interview	23-04-2018
Name of the Person	Raja Shekhar
Gender	Male
Religious Affiliation	Hinduism
Name of the Religious/ Caste/Tribe Order	
Designation	District President for Purohit Group
Category	<i>Religious Leader</i>
State	Andhra Pradesh
District	Kurnool

Profile: He has been attending our programmes from the start and is the district president of the purohits and has taken quite a lead in taking the GAA messages ahead in the district.

Summary of Interview: Mr. Raja Shekar is part of an NGO named Society for Training and Employment [STEP] which covers 4 districts in the Rayalaseema area of Andhra Pradesh. They work on training the unemployed youth. He opines that prevention is better than cure and hence education is very important. Girl children should be educated on top priority basis. He also shared that grass root level awareness should be conducted, more so in Rayalaseema districts where child marriages are rampant due to poverty and illiteracy.

They have motivated people in the community by creating awareness, especially focussing on the health of young girls. They also share information about the government schemes in the communities. For instance, they share information about the Chandranna Pelli Kanuka scheme aimed at extending financial support to the brides from Below Poverty Line (BPL) backgrounds where Rs 50,000/- is deposited directly into the girl's account. The criteria is that the girl has to be 18 or above to be eligible for this incentive. This has contributed to curb child marriages to a great extent in the area.

8. Community Leader

Date of Interview	23-04-2018
Name of the Person	V. Baleshwaraiah
Gender	Male
Religious Affiliation	Hinduism
Designation	Achari Purohit
Category	<i>Religious Leader</i>
State	Andhra Pradesh
District	Kurnool

Profile: He has committed that he would not solemnise child marriages and also will be influencing other *purohits* to coronate and prevent child marriages. He has come forward to fix IEC materials in religious places in Kurnool.

Summary of Interview: Mr. Baleshwaraiah, expressed that through his community, he insists that girls should be married after the age of 18 and boys above 21 years. Through informal chats and at platforms such as community crossroads evening chats, they discuss social issues including prevention of child marriages. Since he is a social worker, he works closely on

school drop-out issues. He ensures that such school drop-outs do not succumb to child marriages. In close coordination with government officers, he works on awareness raising programmes. They also educate young girls and their parents on the physiological aspects of women's health due to early marriages. He is ready to support an awareness drive in his area.

9. Community Leader

Date of Interview	25-04-2018
Name of the Person	Rayavaram Krishna
Gender	Male
Religious Affiliation	Hinduism
Designation	Purohit
Category	<i>Religious Leader</i>
State	Andhra Pradesh
District	Visakhapatnam

Profile: He is one of the *purohits* (Brahman Samar) and has been quite active in GAA programmes. He has been helping and mobilising other *purohits* as well.

Summary of Interview: Mr. Krishna Pantulu shared

that being a priest he educates members of his community about the ill-effects of child marriages. He never solemnises marriages of minors. He counsels young people who approach him to focus on education, being independent in future. He also talks to them about the importance acquiring life skills and about the appropriate age to get married. He strongly advocates that a chapter on the illegality of child marriages and factors why they must be banned should be included as part of the curriculum in schools. This way, young girls and youth themselves will be empowered with information thereby making it possible to oppose their family's attempts to get them married when they are still minors. Youth can be game changers in bring about social changes. To stop child marriages, he also shared that his community of priests encourages the family members to do a thorough check on the background of the bride/bridegroom, especially the age and maturity.

He says that marriage bureaus and mediators who fix marriages should first and foremost verify the ages of the prospective brides/bridegrooms before even accepting the proposal of 'match-setting'.

10. Community Leader

Date of Interview	26-04-2018
Name of the Person	John Livingston
Gender	Male
Religious Affiliation	Christianity
Name of the Religious/ Caste/Tribe Order	Shekinah Prayer Fellowship
Designation	Pastor
Category	<i>Religious Leader</i>
State	Telangana
District	Vikarabad

Profile: He heads a big association under this group of Christians, mostly consisting of people who have accepted faith but have not converted themselves on paper. Since most of the people are neo-Christians, the norms around marriages are still the same and child marriages could be prevalent, though the church is trying hard to stop such practices.

Summary of Interview: Pastor Livingston shared that he regularly disseminates information regarding the social evil of child marriage practices during his

preaching at the Church. He solemnises marriages only after strictly scrutinising the age of the to-be-married couple. He inspects the documents and says that he has zero-tolerance for child marriages. Since he is very strict, he shared that people in the community are scared to approach him with any request for child marriage.

He expressed that young girl and boys should be educated about the ill-effects of child marriage and they should be equipped with knowledge as to whom to approach and where to go for help in case their parents try to fix their marriages before they attain the legal age. The children should be aware about the laws governing child marriages and that child marriages are a violation of their rights. Children themselves should take up the roles of being advocates to prevent their own marriages or their peers before the legal age. Pastor Livingston gets invited as a resource person to address gatherings on such social evils and he shared that he takes advantage of such big platforms to spread the message of preventing child marriages.

11. Community Leader

Date of Interview	26-04-2018
Name of the Person	Vishwam Panthulu
Gender	Male
Religious Affiliation	Hinduism
Name of the Religious/ Caste/Tribe Order	District Jangam Samajam
Designation	Poojari and President of District Jangam Samajam
Category	<i>Religious Leader</i>
State	Telangana
District	Vikarabad

Profile: He has been regularly attending GAA programmes and has also committed that he will be taking forward the key message against child marriage in his congregation. Since he himself solemnises marriages, his own commitment has been key. He is very vocal in his support to our programmes.

Summary of Interview: Mr. Vishwam Pantulu is the Vikarabad District President of *Jangam Samajam*. He works as a government school teacher. He is

authorised by his community to solemnise marriages in his caste. As a priest and an educator, he expressed that education is the best tool to stop child marriages. Through his organisation, he ensures that no child marriages take place in his community. Age is always verified before solemnising any marriage. Sometimes it is seen that parents give false information about the age of the girl child but on cross verification, he counsels them not to encourage these unethical practices and directs them towards correct practices as per the law of the land.

He is actively involved in sensitising the people in his community on prevention of child marriages. He speaks to them about the ill-effects of early marriages which can have an adverse effect on the health of a young girl. Early child-bearing can lead to birth of children with development disabilities. There are times when the villagers approach him for bonafide certificate or some social support. This is the opportunity that Pantulu uses to talk to people individually, counsel them and convince them to continue educating their girl child. According to him, this contributes towards prevention of child marriages to a great extent. He also educates people about the *Kalyana Lakshmi* Scheme

initiated by the TRS Government, which he feels acts as a good motivator to prevent child marriages in his area and also curb dowry menace indirectly.



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