

# Woman by Woman: New Hope for the Villages of India

## Leader's Guide

**Subjects:** Women's Health, Family Planning, Women's Studies

**Audience Level:** High School - College, Adult

**Length:** 27 mins.

**Objectives:** *After viewing, viewers should be able to:*

- discuss the changing role of women in India
- examine what personal and family circumstances allow the three featured women to overcome their traditional isolation
- explore why Janani chose to focus on teaching women about reproductive rights as these issues relate to other forms of empowerment
- be inspired to learn about the roles of women in other parts of the world, both in Western nations and in developing countries
- discuss the historical and current state of women's roles in those societies.

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### **Content:**

India, with one-sixth of the world's population, has been a land where grinding poverty and age-old traditions combine to keep entire populations of women in positions of subjugation, isolation, ignorance and powerlessness. But today, efforts toward change are taking root. The Indian government and international organizations are developing programs designed to give women the opportunity to participate in the larger society and become community leaders. One such program is Janani, which trains women to work side by side with their husbands, and teach others about formerly taboo subjects such as reproductive health and their own bodies. Three women trained by Janani to be rural medical practitioners (WMPs) illustrate the power of woman-to-woman communication and the progressive steps being taken to raise the consciousness and living conditions of women. Though filmed in India, the message of female self-empowerment in the shadow of a gender-biased society is international.

### **Before viewing:**

Initiate a discussion of what "reproductive rights" means. Since reproductive rights pertain to one's own body as well as to the partner relationship, consider the possible results when women have no participation in their own reproductive rights.

### **After Viewing:**

- Go back to the "before viewing" discussion and consider whether the results suggested are reflected in the reality of the traditional women's roles in India.
- What are some other ways in which women are discriminated against in India? (selective abortion; female infanticide; dowry deaths; less education, food and health care; longer working hours under less safe conditions)
- What is a rural medical practitioner or RMP? (a trained, community-based medical consultant able to deal with non-critical medical problems) Why were RMPs usually men? What needs are now met with WMPs and why are these women usually the wives of RMPs?



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- What has allowed Sarita, Rekha and Damayanti to overcome the traditional taboos against women in society? (Janani's training, their own courage and commitment, their forward-looking families)
- Why has Janani concentrated on training rural practitioners as reproductive rights counselors? (making decisions about one's own body and childbearing is vital to effective family planning, family support, female health and the health and future of children, and is essential in addressing issues related to population)
- The opportunity to choose a contraceptive is a major step in the rural Indian woman's life. What might the repercussions of making this choice be in her family and village, and how could this decision insure a better life for her and her children?
- Though married in the traditionally arranged fashion, Sarita and Pawan now have a working relationship unusual for rural India. Consider what has produced this change, Janani's role in it, how the villagers react and Sarita's new status as a role model.
- What is the traditional mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship in India? How and why has Rajkumari changed this, and how has Rekha responded?
- Damayanti and her husband hope their community activities will serve as models for their daughter Kiran's future. What is it they wish for Kiran and how would her accomplishments be in contrast to the usual role of women? (Kiran and her parents hope that she will not marry young and that she will go to college and have a career, perhaps in medicine.)
- Janani trainer Jaya says that empowering female rural practitioners is a first step forward in achieving a bigger thing. To what is she referring? What steps could you envision to follow this one? In what other areas of life would female empowerment make a difference to society in general?
- In many societies, women's contributions have been less valued than men's. Why would this happen? (the reasons are complex, but one can start with religious tenets and practices, as well as inheritance through the male line) Ask for volunteers to research this issue and report back to the class.
- Separate the audience into small study groups and ask each group to choose a society and research its historical and current role of women. The result should be a comparative look at women in both western and eastern societies, and in major international powers and third-world countries.
- Have the audience, separately or in pairs, draft a plan for the next Janani program in some other field, such as education or sanitation, using women in both traditional and non-traditional roles and stressing the benefits for the women and society in general.

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