



Dream Weavers!

A Publication of Anoothi: The Creative Tribe of India

www.anoothi.org

Volume I, October, 2011

We are very proud and delighted to present the First Edition of the Anoothi Newsletter! Thus far, we have shared information about the Self-Help Group women in our newsletter "With Love, from Vatsalya". Vatsalya does play a very active role in creating these Self-Help Groups, works intensively towards changing their mind-set and encourages them to strive for economic empowerment. A number of these women have been trained by Vatsalya in making jewelry and home products which are now finding their rightful place in the market. Since Vatsalya is registered as a non-profit charity organization, we cannot organize the sales of the products these women made, and therefore, we created Anoothi. Anoothi is a for-profit enterprise registered as a business with an Import Export Code number. Unlike Vatsalya, Anoothi pays taxes and has registered TIN (Tax Identification number) as per Indian laws.

Anoothi; a Hindi word which means 'Unique' is now 3 years old. We feel that it's time it had its own platform from where we could share the stories of its women with friends. Men and women from many countries have been involved in changing the lives of these women and we would like to try and share with you how they have been impacted by a small gesture of compassion, a friendly talk or a little push to take charge of their lives... ☺

The First Step-Year, 2007!

We began, about 4 years ago, by reaching out to the illiterate poor rural women who lived in the neighboring villages of Vatsalya Udayan. We saw these women toiling hard, working as road construction laborers. While they worked, their small babies as young as 3 months would be sleeping in a make-shift cradle made of an old bed sheet hanging from the branch of a tree. The eight-hour work under scorching heat of about 43-44 degrees Celsius would earn them barely Rs. 100 (US\$2.2). They were unable to work the entire month first for the obvious excessive discomfort that risked the health and life of their infants. Then, the other children back home would remain uncared-for and unsafe while both parents worked. In addition, the irregularity of job availability further reduced their chances of getting a substantial monthly income that could make any significant difference in their living conditions. So, when we approached these women with a proposal of helping them find an alternative means of livelihood, some of them very promptly accepted. And

so we created our first Self-Help Group in October of 2007. It had 18 women from the most marginalized communities of Rajasthan. Today we have 13 groups, with a range of 14-18 women in each group. These 13 groups are at different stages, going by group development stages "Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing" as defined by Bruce Tuckman. It is an absolute pleasure and an insightful learning process to go through these stages along with these women and finally see them emerging as Winners. Here, we are talking about their ability to discover themselves, their inner strengths, their potentials and their decision to let that drive their life's journey... ☺

Each group chooses a name for itself; usually women, including goddesses who symbolize power and strengths! These are:

1. *Lakshmi Bai SH Group*
2. *Saraswati SH Group*
3. *Santoshi SH Group*
4. *Indira Gandhi SH Group*
5. *Gagan SH Group*
6. *Unnati SH Group*
7. *Bibi Fatima SH Group*
8. *Naya Kadam SH Group*
9. *Jagriti SH Group*
10. *Durga SH Group*
11. *Mandakini SH Group*
12. *Amba SH Group*
13. *Gargi SH Group*

Six of these SHGs are in a very good "Performing" stage and make wonderful products which we will share with you in the next section of the newsletter.

The Process

The creation and functioning of the Self-Help Groups is based on two main concepts of Micro-Finance and Micro-Enterprise. As part of their SHG activities, these women are educated regarding the significant role that they play not only in their family's economy but in the world economy and how they all have inherent inner strengths buried deep beneath the distorted social and cultural taboos. They are encouraged to see themselves as cherished human beings who are entitled to a life of dignity that is free of exploitation. Then the component of economic independence and its significance is brought into the group's agenda. Women participate by sharing their life stories and also expressing compassion and support for each other. The group selects its leader and rules are defined about creating a small SHG Fund. Generally, it would be something around Rs. 50 to Rs. 100 (US\$ 1 to 2) that would be agreed by the group to be the individual contribution. If there are 15 members, Rs. 1500 would be collected. The group will then decide how that amount will be spent for the benefit of the entire group or for a particular member of the group. The group also decides the time frame for recovering the 'loan' from the member,

interest to be charged (or not), etc. As the group begins to appreciate and manage this first stage of money management, we initiate the concept of Micro-Enterprise in the group. Depending upon the skills present, local trade and traditional crafts of the area and the interest of the women, we organize the skill-training for them. Within a time-frame of 6 months to 1 year, a woman is ready to earn Rs. 3000 to 5000 per month sitting at home!

Anoothi Partners and Supporters

Anoothi could not have done what it has been able to do without its amazing friends. They are all out to help Anoothi and provide unconditional support in the training, production, marketing and sale of Anoothi products. The list is almost enviable! I will be very brief in talking about them; however, you will learn more about them in our following editions.

Delta Donohue registered Anoothi US especially to market Anoothi India's products in the US...

Jasmine Nordman created a special website for the sale of Anoothi products in the US...

Maureen Anderson along with her sisters Julia and Joan and a host of friends organize the exhibition and sales of Anoothi products in Scotland...

Belinda Warn was one of our first trainers who taught Anoothi women to make necklaces for the Australian market...

Caroline Poiner and her two daughters organize exhibition-cum-sales of Anoothi products in Sydney. The title "**Dream Weavers**" for Anoothi Newsletter is an outcome of Caroline's creative thinking...

Devon and Colleen from Anchal (www.anchalproject.org) approached us last year with a proposal to create SHGs of Commercial Sex Workers which we did. They then trained our team and a selected group of women to make products of Katha work-A stitching work done completely by hand...

Mother Earth is a unique organization that promotes economic empowerment of women as well as ecological, traditional and cultural values in the creation of hand-made products. Anoothi has its first retail outlet at Mother Earth Bangalore (www.motherearth.co.in)

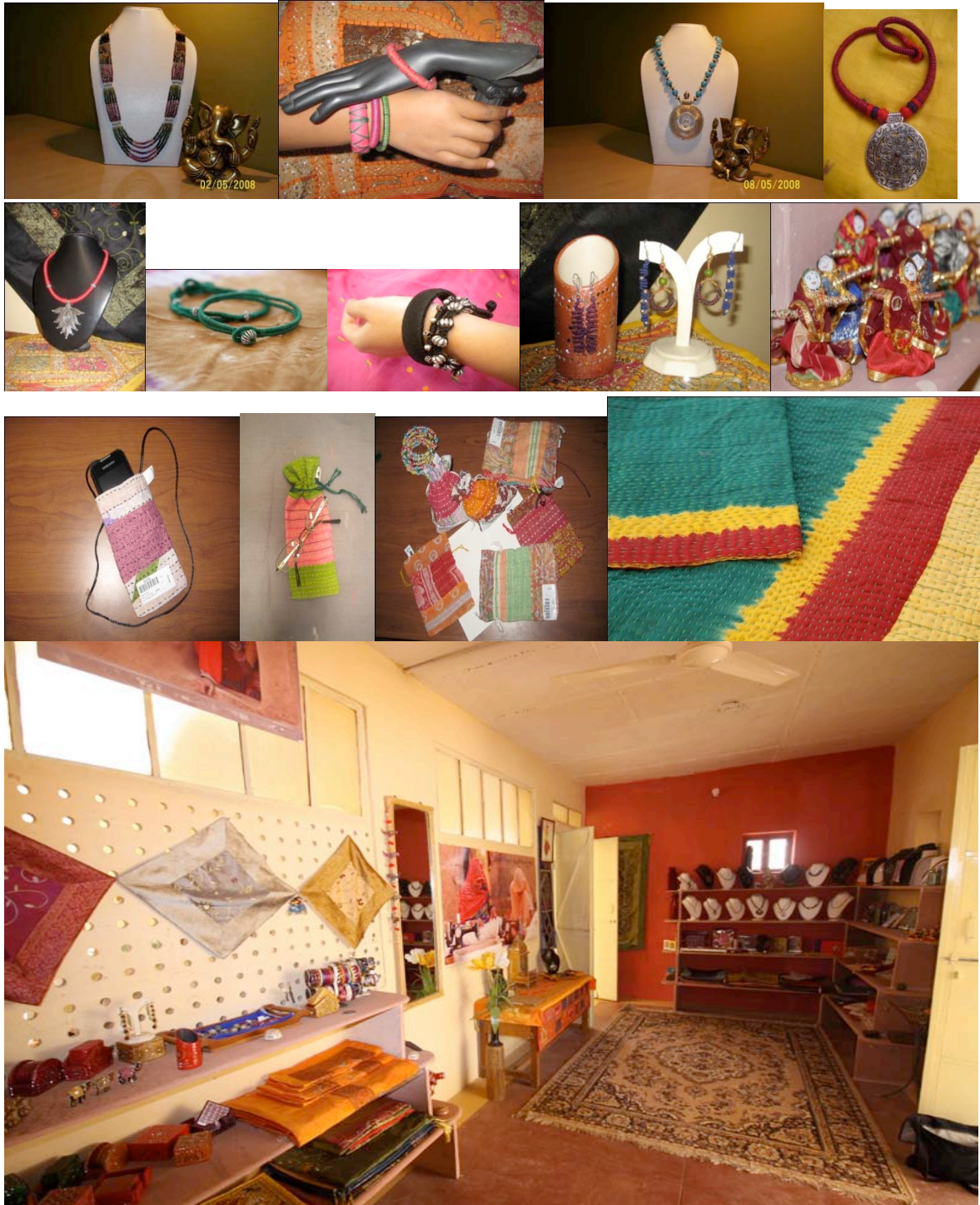
Sema Erdem from Turkey and **Jaakko Happala** from Finland ; the two IBM professionals invested their time, energy and professional skills in developing a five year strategic plan Anoothi in March,2011. Their contribution has been one of the greatest gifts and would be significant in growth and expansion of Anoothi.

Below are some pictures of the women of Anoothi and the products they make. We are updating our website and soon you will be able to access the details regarding different aspects of Anoothi...☺

Anoothi Women



Anoothi Products



Working with women living in diverse difficult circumstances is very humbling and inspiring in many ways. When they smile, in spite of what they have to go through, we are filled with deep compassion and respect for them. We went to them thinking we would change their lives but, in fact, it is our lives that are changing. These women are so strong even in their vulnerability, so warm and affectionate even though they were never loved or wanted as daughters themselves. As wives and

mothers, their struggles are endless but they always smile... ☺ We will leave you with some very impactful sentiments expressed by some of the women we work with:

- *I never was given milk as a child as it was my brother who got the best first. Now, I make sure that my daughter gets the best first! She is as precious for me as my son is...*
- *Working as a prostitute is the most humiliating and exploitative profession in the world. I died every day when I had to sustain that way. Now, I feel a new respect for myself...*
- *Whatever I could not enjoy as a child, I ensure that my daughter gets. She will also get the best education possible. I used to worry a lot as to how I would do it but now I have courage and money. I will work more and earn more money and make her a Doctor....*
- *Anchal has given us a new hope but we need more work... We are prepared to work hard...*
- *It is difficult for me now to return back to a decent respectable life but I will never let my daughter get in to this....*
- *I never thought we also had Rights!*
- *Where was Anoothi all these years? Why did you take so long to come to me? I could have been something... It's late for me now but it's ok, I know how I can help others and save them from getting in to that hell....*
- *I breathe easy now; need not worry about "what ifs...?" Working with Anoothi, I feel bold and strong so that I can handle problems and if I cannot, you are there...*

Anoothi Finances:

Anoothi turnover in the last three years has been as follows:

<i>Year 2008-2009</i>	<i>:</i>	<i>Rs. 922,120 (US\$20,491)</i>
<i>Year 2009-2010</i>	<i>:</i>	<i>Rs. 1,267,480 (US\$28,166)</i>
<i>Year 2010-2011</i>	<i>:</i>	<i>Rs. 1,025,312 (US\$22,784)</i>

*Anoothi donates 50% of its profit to Vatsalya Udayan and spends 25% on the medical and health care of its women. The remaining 25% gets invested back into the business. In the last three years, Anoothi has donated **Rs. 90,000 (US\$ 2000)** to Vatsalya. Our dream is to generate at least 30% revenue through Anoothi to support Vatsalya's rehabilitation interventions by year 2015. Looks a bit difficult given the current international economic scenario but we will do our best...☺*

We will be back with the next edition of this quarterly newsletter. Meanwhile we will look forward to your feedback and if you have any questions, please do write to us.

Thank you...☺

Jaimala

Edited by: Patricia Roger Little, Ireland