



One of the long-term aims of the Arya Tara Mahila Trust is to help women from disadvantaged backgrounds become economically self-sufficient.

VARADA interviews three women who are engaged in one of ATMT's income generating projects. Read about these women's vision for the future.

One of the interviewees explains how much outside help would be welcome. There is a need for advice on business development, project planning and web design. If you think there is any way you could give practical advice to the ATMT please contact us at: e-mail: atmt@vsnl.net

atmtrust@gmail.com

www.indiansisters.org

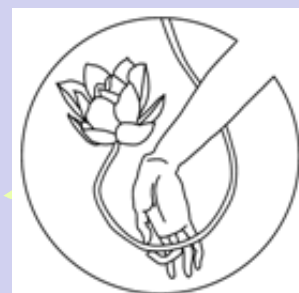
Until we meet again

The Editor

VARADA welcomes the many new Dhammcharinis who have been ordained in India since our last edition. May they be happy and find joy and fulfillment in their order lives.

The ATMT is a registered charity and can receive contributions from India and international donors.

The projects involved with the ATMT have all been set up as independent and autonomous, with a minimum amount of central organization.



Arya Tara Mahila Trust

Message from The Editor

Welcome to the second edition of our newsletter and another chance to catch up on developments in women's projects in India.

Despite the heat of early April, another new project successfully was launched in Pune. It is a community-based social project for girls and young women living in slums. Karunaprabha, the

team leader of this new venture explains why the project is needed.

In the news almost every day we hear about India's rapid economic growth. While increasing prosperity is happening for some people, this development is exacerbating the divide between rich and poor.

Broken Voices? - 'Women speak out' with energy and fire!

VARADA announces the publication of *'Broken Voices - 'Untouchable' women speak out'* by Valerie Mason-John, an award-winning black British writer. The book documents the lives of women from the most disadvantaged groups in Indian society, those formerly known as 'untouchable' or 'Dalit'. A large section of the book is based on interviews with Dalit women from a wide range of backgrounds. The ATMT and the British Arts Council sponsored the book and Valerie is generously donating the royalties from book sales to the work of ATMT projects.

Two members of the Trust participated in a five city tour of India sponsored by the

British Council., followed by an extensive tour of the UK culminating in the official UK book launch at Borders Bookshop in Charing Cross Road, Central London. Copies can be bought from our office.



An extract from the book - P 69

'When a son is born, sweets are distributed in the house and among the neighbours and there is great rejoicing. But when a girl is born people cry because they will have to give money for her dowry and take care of her because she is female. This gender bias begins right from the womb. If any Indian woman has enough money to have a scan to see what gender her unborn child is, she will have an abortion if it's a girl. There is nowhere that we females are safe. A girl is at risk in the womb and she is at risk when she is born. While growing up she is under her father's control, when she gets married she is ruled by her husband and her in-laws, and in her old age she is dominated by her sons. So everywhere men assert their power. A woman's whole life is dominated by male society.'

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Email: atmt@vsnl.net
atmtrust@gmail.com



Women's Empowerment Project starts in Pune

KARUNAPRABHA tells The Editor about her new social project.

We have started work in five slums in the Vishrantwadi area, Pune. The project is for teenage girls from 11 to 20 years of age who either go to school or have dropped out for some reason. We are including aspects of personality development, helping to develop self-confidence, negotiation skills, communication skills and also vocational courses so that the young women will be able to earn something and develop confidence about life.

The vocational training will include computer training and basic office skills so that they can get work in

situations such as doctors' dispensaries or hospitals.

Editor: You're a qualified doctor. What made you want to do this work?

KP: We work with girls and young women including the newly married

and we chose this group because if the woman is educated about health and nutrition then the whole family becomes more effective. If a healthy mother gives birth to a healthy child then the whole of India's population will eventually benefit..

Testing For Anaemia

In a recent Pune University survey, 89% of girls/young women were found to be suffering from anaemia. We arrange anaemia detection camps for the girls and then provide The treatment they need.



Community worker, Sunita with her class

The need for social action in a time of economic prosperity

Editor: I have heard that Pune is a fast-growing city, with many new shopping malls and IT parks, why is this work still necessary ?

KP: But in this big city, there are also many slums and those people are not getting good medical services from the city authorities.

I used to run a medical dispensary in the slums in Pimpri, Pune. We arranged awareness programmes, educating people about different diseases and helping to change behaviour. .From this experience, I could see that girls and young women were especially interested and if we could work with them this would be very helpful for the future. Prior to that, I was involved in leprosy clinics in another charity and a government hospital.

In that work, I earned enough money but felt empty somehow and when I came in contact with social projects such as young girls in hostels, I gained a lot of happiness from doing this work. I decided it is what I want to do. I want to give back what I have received from society. I am originally a village girl; but when I saw the slums in the city I wanted to do something for these people.

Editor: You have a Buddhist name, what does it mean to you?

KP: Karunaprabha means light of compassion. I like this name. When I hear other people call on me by my name, I think I have some of this quality but I want to develop it more and more, and to practise using this energy with people who need it.

Editor: Your project is mostly funded by the Karuna Trust, UK ?

KP: Yes, but we have a donation from an Australian charity called Bodhi. Of course we would like to expand the project. We are starting in only five slums but there are other girls and young women in many other slums who would benefit. If we can get more funding for that we can expand the programme to all the girls in Pune slums.

Editor: I wish you very well with the new project and look forward to including more about the project in future newsletters.



Girls meet the local police chief - Smiles all round!

Australia—THE GREEN ELEPHANT CHARITY SHOP



Last summer after feverish weeks of preparation, The Green Elephant Buddhist charity shop opened in Sydney, Australia, close to the Sydney Buddhist Centre. The project is the brainchild of two women

Dhammamitras, both of whom have asked for ordination. They have since been joined by a third women mitra, who also has asked for ordination. She gave up her well paid, part-time job in IT to become the shop manager, which is the only paid position in the shop. The profits from the shop, once they are fully established and have paid off the loans taken out for set-up expenses will be divided 60% to the projects for women and children in India, such as those run by

Arya Tara Mahila Trust, and 40% to the Sydney Buddhist Centre. The public has responded warmly and strongly to the shop, and are very interested in the Indian women's projects being supported.

Already in only a few months of operation the shop is breaking even and should soon be able to start paying off the loans taken out. We hope to make a profit distribution this financial year.

An enormous amount of vision, planning, enthusiasm and hard work is going into this project to provide money that will benefit women and children in India.

Sadhu,
Sadhu,
Sadhu.

What does the Green Elephant Shop sell?

The shop has been flooded with donations to sell and volunteer workers have stepped forward both from the Buddhist Sangha and from the general public. Apart from electrical goods and large items of furniture, almost everything is sold in the shop - clothing and shoes for men, women and children, books for all ages,



DVDs, CDs, household stuff, jewellery and lots more. Lots of people have

donated goods and clothes that they don't use any more but are still attractive and desirable to others.



Some European fundraising initiatives

Two of ATMT's Trustees, Karunadeepa and Jayamani were funded to visit Europe in the summer. They gave talks and took part in retreats in UK, Germany and Holland, raising awareness about ATMT's work and collecting some extra funding too!

In Germany, Amoghamati's new *Karuna Deutschland* has successfully raised an impressive Euro 6000 for ATMT projects. Her hard work and the commitment of her team will enable new initiatives to support women's development.

Shakyajata from Manchester,

UK, took up the challenge and is now fundraising to sponsor an Indian woman Dhamma teacher to travel with Dhammajyoti team support. Indian women from many backgrounds tell us they benefit from learning to meditate and studying the Buddha's teaching. They feel more confident and happy in their families and their working lives.

And in Croydon, south of London, Sue Bolton has started a cushion making enterprise which will fund poor women to escape the pressure of their family situations by going on retreat where they can rest,

study the Dhamma, meet other kindly women, eat good food and meditate. Even the \$2 per day retreat cost is too much for these women to afford despite the benefits of retreat life.

VARADA celebrates the generosity of ATMT's friends across the world



If YOU would like to help financially, you can download the FWBO (Dhammaloka) forms from our website: www.indiansisters.org

The newsletter of the Arya Tara Mahila Trust

Arya Tara Mahila Trust
Flat 12, Popular Nook
(opp Pratik Nagar Bus Stop)
Alandi Road
Yerwada
PUNE 411 006
Maharashtra
INDIA

Phone: +91 20 6524 9960
+91 20 6500 3465
E-mail: atmt@vsnl.net
atmtrust@gmail.com

**We're on line
at**

www.indiansisters.org

Indian Sisters

Women in many centres in India are searching for ways to develop new fundraising ventures, new ways of earning their living ethically and new ways to spread the Dhamma more widely in communities where no-one knows about Buddhism. Often, families will think of themselves as being Buddhist but have no way to find out what this could mean in their lives.

If you are interested and are able to help in any way, please contact us at our Indian address or by email: atmt@vsnl.net



Arya Tara Mahila Trust

Mudita Screen Printers - Nagpur

Interview with Shardha, Supriya and Vina

Editor: What are you trying to achieve in your Mudita project?

Supriya: We are doing screen printing on handmade paper. We are making greetings cards, invitations, visiting cards, wedding cards and business stationery.

Editor: When did the project begin?

Shardha: February 9 2005 but before that we did some training. I went on a three-month training course provided by the government for minimum fees. Then I taught the other two their skills

E: How long did it take you to practise so that you could make cards to be able to sell?

Shardha: It took time to practise the skills but especially to find the designs. The printing was fairly easy but making the sketches and DTP took time. Because we didn't have any money to rent any space, we worked in Supriya's house. Sometimes in her bedroom and her kitchen! We worked for the first three months without any personal payment.

E: Then what happened?

Vina: The Arya Tara Mahila Trust was able to give limited financial help and we were able to rent 2 small rooms (total floor area about 10 ft. by 15 ft.). Through this help we were able to pay ourselves minimal wages, We are still working from these two rooms.

E: It seems amazing that you are working from this small space, it always looks so neat and clean!

Supriya: One room is our office and the other room, the kitchen is for exposing (part of the screen printing process). Then in the office, we do the printing. This office space is also Shardha's bedroom!

E: I know it has been difficult to get started but how are things now?

Shardha: We have been able to pay ourselves a very small amount of monthly money but we don't have money for the things we really need to develop the business. We need a computer, a web page and many other things.

Supriya: We need people's help to develop the business by selling the cards, by donations, by developing this web page to help our sales. We are facing a critical situation. In India people don't like handmade paper and even screen printing goods. Here, people like shiny paper and lots of colour. So at the moment it is difficult to sell products in India. We're trying to sell our products in other countries. At the moment our friends are helping



The new team: Sumeeta, Shardha and Vina

us in Germany and the UK. So we're trying to develop these markets.

Vina: Sometimes Indian people want to buy but they want to pay less money. This year we are concentrating on foreign markets and then next year, we plan to develop the Indian market more.

Supriya: We are proud of what we have created

E: I know that at the moment, your main aim is to make the business successful so that you have some job security, but what's your longer-term aim?

Supriya: When our project becomes bigger we will be able to give other women work, also to help needy women and if possible help fund a retreat centre for women.

Vina: We also feel that we can help spread the message of the Buddha through our greetings cards.

E: Why did you choose the name Mudita?

Shardha: It is a Buddhist name meaning happiness in another's happiness. We want to share our happiness with everybody!

To order wedding or greeting cards, invitations or business stationery from **Mudita Screen Printers**, contact the ATMT office