

Annie

and

ankur kala



Annie Joseph – My life and work (inspired by Mother Teresa, Brother Roger and Medha Patkar)

Today as I sit down to write a testimony to the cause that I have dedicated my life to and reflect upon the many bridges that I had to cross to motivate and empower down trodden and marginalized women to dream and believe that they could lead a life of dignity and economic self-reliance, I am filled with awe and gratefulness to God for all that God has helped me to achieve during my journey of fifty years on this earth.

Living very close to Mother House in Calcutta (now known as Kolkata), I was privileged to know Mother Teresa in a very personal way from an early age of 2 in 1957. My parents were very generous by nature and one of Mother Teresa's first schools were in our family compound. As a young nun, Mother Teresa would come very often to visit her school in our home. As years passed I become deeply influenced by Mother's great love for the poor. I would often help in her house for the children, Shishu Bhavan, along with my younger sisters and other volunteers. Her kindness and generosity and her saintliness made a deep impact on my life.

Just after I completed my graduation, our family came in contact with Brother Roger of Taize, who was introduced to us by none other than Mother Teresa. An intercontinental team of young students, journalists and Taize Brothers had come to Kolkata in 1976 to experience and share the lives of the common people and to write the 2nd Letter to The People of God. It was indeed a great privilege to come to know Brother Roger and his team almost 30 of them as they lived in our home for a good month. I was invited by Brother Roger to go to Taize and this was another beautiful experience for me when I was able to share and reflect together with other young people from all over the world for almost 6 months. I also travelled to various parts of Europe, Hong Kong, Thailand and Africa. This was a great exposure as we lived in various slum areas, close to the poor.

When I returned to India to pursue my post-graduation in English literature (as I had wanted to become a professor) I went through a dilemma. The faces of the poor in my city, Calcutta constantly haunted me for months and I realized that the influence of Mother Teresa and Brother Roger had changed my life. And it was then that I decided to commit my life to the upliftment of the marginalized and destitute. I left my studies in literature in Jadavpur University, Kolkata and went to Mumbai to pursue my post graduation in Social Work. I enjoyed my studies in Tata Institute of Social Science (TISS) as we were exposed to various field visits along with a sound theoretical background about the causes and effect of poverty in our country, the ways to combat poverty, and many case studies alongwith historical and legal perspectives. I was once again privileged to have Medha Patkar, National activist of Narmada Bachao Andolon, as my Professor and Field Supervisor who was very passionate and at the same time extremely professional.

After completing my studies in TISS I returned to Kolkata, determined to do something especially for women. I realised that poverty and lack of education was the cause of so much inequality and suppression among women. In 1982, I worked as a volunteer for 1 year in Seva Sangh Samiti, Pilkhana a very big slum which has been so vividly described by Dominique Lapiere in his book "The City of Joy". It was a great exposure for me to witness the pathetic situation of families living in the slum and the role of women who were doubly exploited by their own families and also by society.

In 1982, Seva Sangh Samiti asked me to help set up a self-employment batik center for destitute girls so that they could earn a living. This was the beginning of **Ankur Kala**, a society through which I set up the unit with just 5 girls with 1 room and a loan of Rs. 5000/-. Gradually, as more girls and women came to our center, I introduced tailoring and then catering. Funds were indeed a great problem especially in the early years and I had to face many struggles to keep the unit going. Much to the astonishment of my colleagues from Tata Institute who were very well placed, a salary was unthinkable for 5 years while I pursued my dream. However, with strong faith and determination I went ahead and slowly but steadily I was blessed with dedicated colleagues and many well wishers who came forward to support Ankur Kala.

The purpose of Ankur Kala, which means 'seedling of art', is to sow seeds of hope among single, abandoned, destitute, orphaned, widowed and victimised women by providing self-employment training and motivating them to achieve economic and social empowerment. There are currently 575 women in the program, which has served approximately one thousand five hundred women over the past twenty-nine years. They come from slums all over the city and also from the suburbs. Most are aged 18 – 25 years, but a few are even in their 50s.

Women are selected through a process that involves interviews and home visits to make sure they are truly needy. After this they are given a one month trial period to get comfortable with the program, followed by a six month probationary period during which they are cared for intensively and taught basic writing and other skills.

Approximately 95% of the women stay on past this period. They receive a monthly stipend of Rs. 800/- to cover the expenses of attending the program in addition to receiving educational and medical expenses for their children, and any other emergency needs. Ankur Kala also opens and monitors a bank account for each woman motivating her to save a portion of her money every month.

The program provides training in six basic areas: tailoring, batik and making of jams, squash and pickles, silk screen printing & block printing on cloth and paper, and embroidery. It also provides functional literacy and trains the women in basic business management skills. This helps our women to become self-confident and clever enough not to get exploited.

Discipline is deemed important, and the women are taught to respect time and to be punctual. There is an emphasis on spirituality, too. Each morning is begun with a meditation in which Hindu, Muslim and Christian women all come together and pray as one community. This has also helped our women to develop a high level of integrity.

Formal training usually lasts two years though the program is committed to working with a woman until she is able to stand on her feet. Some students are encouraged to continue for two more years of senior level training and join the management of Ankur Kala.

Rural Outreach Programme – The New Challenge

Since 2004 Ankur Kala took another step in its mission to reach out to a larger section of marginalized women when it decided **to network with women living in the rural areas of West Bengal especially those who are more vulnerable to trafficking and HIV aids**. Ankur kala has tried to reach out to the rural areas in Mathurapur, Harindanga and also in Bankura. Apart from the various skill training, basic literacy and simple business management classes and marketing classes, Ankur Kala has also encouraged the concept of nutrition gardening among rural women. This has been done in partnership with another NGO, Development Research Services and Communication Centre (DRCS) and HASUS started **a kitchen gardening and community health training programme** in a few villages of South 24-Parganas.

This new initiative holds great promise for the future for **creating a sustainable rural model** for the economic and social empowerment of marginalized and destitute women living in the villages of West Bengal.

The Emerging Tree

Thus the **seed** of Ankur Kala which was sown by **me and my colleagues** in 1982 with great enthusiasm and hope has over the years grown from **a seedling to a plant and has taken firm roots to grow into a large tree meeting new challenges and sowing new seeds of hope** among a larger section of marginalized and destitute women in our society.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME	:	Ms. Annie Joseph
DATE OF BIRTH	:	23 rd September 1955
NATIONALITY	:	Indian
HUSBAND'S NAME	:	Valentine Raja Xavier
FATHER'S NAME	:	Late P. M. Joseph
MOTHER'S NAME	:	Late Mariamma Joseph
RELIGION	:	Roman Catholic
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	:	Senior Cambridge Examination from the Convent of Our Lady Queen of the Missions, Kolkata – 1972
	2)	B.A. in English Honours from Rani Birla Girls College, Kolkata – 1986
	3)	M.A. in English – 1976-1977 (one year) from Jadavpur University, Kolkata.
	4)	M.S.W. (Master in Social Science) from Tata Institute of Social Science, Bombay, specialising in Community Development – 1978-1980

In 1977 I was invited by Brother Roger of the Taize Community in France to visit Taize. I spent six months there.

Being inspired by the late Mother Teresa, all through my childhood years, living so near to Mother House (Mother's earliest school was in our compound) and again in Taize by Brother Roger and his Community, I felt called to serve the poor in our country, after returning from France. I then changed my studies from English Honours/Literature, in Jadavpur University to Social Science in Bombay Tata Institute (TISS)

At TISS I was very privileged to have Medha Patkar as my supervisor in Community Development as well as Mr. Panwalkar who was the head of my department. While at TISS I started for the first time a special evening study class and cultural programme for the children of the maintenance staff. I have been given to understand that these classes are still continuing.

After completing my Post Graduation, I was privileged to work as a volunteer in Seva Sangh Samity under the direction of Brother Gaston, Françoise and Leo Jalais, a very dedicated French couple.

After working for one year as a volunteer in Howrah, in 1982 I was able to start Ankur Kala with five girls in a small room provided by the Seva Sangha Samity and a small loan of Rs.5,000/-.

Ankur Kala was started with the objective of encouraging poor and destitute marginalized women to become economically self-reliant through Income Generation Programmes.

Over the last 31 years by God's grace and our perseverance, we have at present six departments – Batik, Tailoring, JSP (Jams, Squash, Pickles), Silk Screen Printing, Block Printing and Embroidary. Our Batiks are also exported to countries in Europe, New Zealand USA and Canada. 75% of our sale is local through exhibitions in various schools, colleges and public places and also through our showroom. At present we are reaching out to around 575 women in Kolkata and all over the West Bengal which includes skill training, education, networking and marketing of our handicrafts.

It is significant to mention that along with economic empowerment of our women, we impart marketing skills, literacy and education and above all a strong spiritual/value education which helps our women to develop in a holistic way.

In the course of our training programmes we have been able to create an Alternative Marketing Network for our handicraft products made by our women. Also, we have been able to formulate and implement a simple training programme on small Business Management and Accounting for our women and also for women from different parts of Kolkata who had participated in a craft training Project organized by Overseas Development Agency, a U.K. based organization in collaboration with Kolkata Metropolitan Authority (K.M.D.A) a government agency. This has become a regular training programme at our Centre where the women are taught the different aspects of planning, accounting and marketing.

During the last 31 years while I have been fully involved in building Ankur Kala I had the opportunity to :

- 1 Attend a 2-week course on marketing at IIM, Bangalore – 1995
- 2 Give various talks to the students of
 - a) St. Xavier's College, Kolkata – Women's Commission
 - b) Loreto College – Motivating students to be socially aware
 - c) Jadavpur University- on Communalism - December 2002
 - d) NIIT – SWIFT INDIA V2 WOW – November 2012
- 3 During the last 15 years travelled abroad to speak about problems faced by Indian women and practical solutions based on my experience of 29 years to the following :
 - Students and Faculty of Toronto University, Canada
 - Students and Faculty of Swarthmore University, Philadelphia, USA
 - Students and Faculty of University of Toronto, Canada
 - South Asian Women's Group-Montreal, Canada

- Artisans du Monde, Lyons, Strasbourg, France & Luxembourg
- Women's Group – UNICEF, Winnipeg, Canada
- Students and Faculty of Arizona State University, USA
- Students and Faculty of Ringerike Folkehogskole, Norway
- Students and Faculty of Ljungskile Folkehogskole, Sweden
- Women's Group, Bonn, Germany
- Social Activists – London
- Women's Groups, Holland

Besides being involved in Ankur Kala, I am one of the Governing Body Members of Asha Niketan, Kolkata – a community working for the mentally handicapped, a Coordinator of the Social Commission of the Catholic Archdiocese of Kolkata and a member of Maitree, a women's network in West Bengal.

4 Awards:

On behalf of Ankur Kala, I have received the following awards:-

- * Humanitarian of the Year Award (2010) by Care & Share, USA.
- * Bharat Jyoti Award ("Light of India" Award) 2008
- * Better City Better Life Award, 2011 (sponsored by INFINITY INFOTECH PARKS LIMITED, Salt Lake, Kolkata).
- * Nominated for 2006 Perdita Huston Human Rights Award, Canada
- * One of the recipients of "Bharat Excellence Award", from Friendship Forum of India of Delhi for the year 2011.

QUALITIES

- A passion to work for the empowerment of marginalized women with sincerity and dedication
- Ready to walk that extra mile to rebuild a fair and just society in India.



OUR MOTTO

NOT BY CHARITY NOR BY SYMPATHY
BUT THROUGH OUR
HARD WORK AND INTEGRITY
WE SHALL STRIVE FOR OUR DIGNITY



A Brief History – from a Seedling to a Plant and the Emerging Tree

Origin and Background:

In a society where more than 60% of the population live in poor economic conditions, the position of women is very insecure. Poverty along with male domination has forced women and children to play a submissive role and in most cases they become victims of oppression and exploitation forced to shoulder the burden of family life, both domestically and economically. Most women and many children are forced to work for long hours as vendors, domestic hands and farm workers for little money. Often, economic conditions also sadly force many of these women into prostitution.

The seed of Ankur Kala was sown in 1982 by Ms. Annie Joseph, a qualified social worker from Tata Institute of Social Science, Mumbai and a group of women artisans in Howrah, West Bengal in response to a growing need to motivate marginalized and destitute women to break free from the shackles of poverty and oppression and empower them to become economically self-reliant. She was deeply influenced and touched by Mother Teresa and Brother Roger of Taize, France. At a time when most NGOs and institutions were focusing on charitable activities to alleviate the hardships of destitute women by providing succour through health support and vocational training, Ankur Kala took up the challenge of creating a sustainable model for economic self-reliance by motivating women to achieve excellence in vocational skills and then produce and sell their handicrafts in the open market.

Starting as a self-employment training centre for Batik handicrafts, Ankur Kala has over the years added training in other vocational skills to meet the growing need among a larger number of marginalized women for economic self-reliance. Besides Batik, Ankur Kala started vocational training in tailoring, catering, making of jam, squash and pickle, silk screen printing and vegetable dye designing.

The seed of Ankur Kala sown in 1982 has grown over the years and today it has established itself as a leading institution in West Bengal for self-employment training in both vocational and business skills for marginalized and destitute women.

Social Empowerment – Going Beyond Self-reliance

In 1990 an in-depth evaluation of Ankur Kala's self-employment training and income generation programmes revealed a startling fact – achieving economic self-reliance alone was not sufficient to empower marginalized women to stand up for their rights and dignity. In most cases the women were looked upon mainly as bread earners for their families and their lives were firmly controlled by others in their families and society, thus preventing them from breaking free from social prejudices and growing into self-confident persons striving to live with dignity and hope.

To overcome this problem it was decided to add a new aspect to Ankur Kala's training programme – providing training in social empowerment through regular inputs in functional literacy, leadership skills, social awareness and gender issues. Thus a very important dimension was added to Ankur Kala's overall objective of rehabilitating marginalized and destitute women – Social Empowerment.

Introducing this dimension of social empowerment into Ankur Kala's training programme has infused a new dynamism among the women trainees who have responded very positively to the various inputs provided during their training. It has been very encouraging to observe that most of the women first come to Ankur Kala full of despair and insecurities and then slowly transform first into self-reliant persons through economic self-reliance (earning their own income, holding bank accounts) and then grow into supervisors and leaders prepared to motivate and help others and become agents of social change.

Our Mission

Our mission is to work for the rehabilitation and empowerment of the marginalized and destitute especially women and children in West Bengal.

Networking – reaching out to others

In 1995 Ankur Kala decided to open its doors to other NGOs and institutions to benefit from the various income generation programmes and small business management skills learnt and practiced by the women artisans of Ankur Kala. In 1996 Ankur Kala in collaboration with Overseas Development Agency (ODA), a British agency and Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authorities (CMDA) conducted a number of small enterprise management training programmes for bustee dwellers living in different areas of Calcutta. These programmes were very much appreciated by the participants and at the request of ODA and CMDA similar programmes were conducted again in 1987.

Thereafter over the years a large number of small enterprise training programmes have been conducted for women of other NGOs where Ankur Kala's senior women artisans and staff have taught how to start and run small business enterprises – through demonstration and classes in marketing, sourcing of raw materials, stock taking, accounting, bill making, selling.

Ankur Kala has also in partnership with another NGO, Development Research Services and Communication Centre (DRCSC) and HASUS started a kitchen gardening and community health training programme in a few villages of South 24-Parganas.

This new initiative holds great promise for the future for creating a sustainable rural model for the economic and social empowerment of marginalized and destitute women living in the villages of West Bengal.

Universal Spirituality

Spiritual inputs have been consciously given to our women. Each morning there is a yoga session which is followed by a short meditation and common prayer. Texts from various scriptures are read which emphasise the importance of being selfless, caring for one another, forgiving one another and not to fall into the glamorous trap of consumerism. Once a month each woman is encouraged to serve and help out another organization or centre as a labour of love. The entire staff and women share a solidarity meal of rice and salt once each month. These little inputs have made our women – women of substance

Educational Support for Children

Another important aspect of Ankur Kala's empowerment programme is to encourage the women artisans to send their children to school and to help them Ankur Kala extends financial support towards their school and tuition fees and purchase of books and stationery.

Saving the Girl child from Trafficking and HIV/AIDS

In the year 2005, Ankur Kala took another important initiative to reach out to the numerous girl children and teenagers living in the villages of West Bengal who were becoming victims of trafficking and HIV/AIDS. With the support of a rural ngo Haripur Amra Sabai Unnayan Samity (HASUS) Ankur Kala has started a number of pilot programmes at Lakshmikantapur in South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, in the field of vocational skill training and non-formal education for drop out girls. We are also studying the various ways in which we can effectively participate in community based education and skill training programmes for girl children at the village level to enhance their educational capacity and skills and thereby discourage their parents from forcing the girls into early marriage or sending them away to the city to work.

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