

ANNUAL REPORT
FOR THE PERIOD 1st APRIL TO 31st MARCH, 2014

Introduction

“When woman moves forward, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves.” This was the prediction of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and keeping this in mind, Ankur Kala forged ahead with its mission of empowering marginalized and destitute women including women living in the rural areas of West Bengal for many of whom, the struggle for daily existence includes facing the trauma of economic, social and gender exploitation.

During this year, our focus was on travelling to other parts of India and to study women’s Projects which are successful in economic and social empowerment and this included SEVA in Ahmedabad, KIRAN Project in Varanasi and Bagnan Mahila Bikash Co-operative Credit Society Ltd. in our own State of West Bengal.

These exposure trips and educational tours were possible due to the financial support given to Ankur Kala from Trade Aid, New Zealand.

The team of core group women and new coordinators was led by Annie Joseph, the Secretary & Chief Coordinator and these exposure trips gave fresh insights especially on the various models of self help groups in our country.

Ankur Kala’s Training Programme:

Our skilled training included tailoring, batik, bandhni, block printing, catering, silk screen printing and JSP (Jams, Squashes and Pickles) and we were able to train 32 women during this period. Each of these Departments was well monitored and evaluated periodically.

Marketing and Exhibition:

Throughout the year, Ankur Kala was successful in putting up exhibitions in various schools, colleges, banks, corporate houses, churches and other public places. In all, we had 85 various exhibitions and a total of Rs.2,58,424/=. Leading Corporates like WIPRO, Spencers, IIM, Joka and HSBC came forward to welcome Ankur Kala.

Seminars & Workshops:

Much emphasis was given to discuss and to share about the spirit of Ankur Kala during the financial year and we had invited various resource people to talk about how to keep Ankur Kala as an organization vibrant through committed services to the marginalized and under privileged women working in the urban and rural areas.

On 21.1.2014, Sister Regina from Germany had come to give us a talk on the spirit of the organization and on 8.7.2013, a team from Ankur Kala along with Madhuri Chaudhuri, Teresa Lethorn, Kiran Begum, Banu Khatoon, Banu Khatoon's daughter Anisha Khatoon, Shibani Bag, Tandra Chakraborty and Arpita Banerjee visited the organization CHETNA at Burdwan and Brother Sarto the Director of Chetna was the resource person for the seminar. Madhuri and Teresa attended a Counselling Course in Bandel conducted by Father Pradeep Roy in the beginning of the year 2014.

Annie Joseph attended the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women) Convention organized by Swadhina which was based on laws pertaining to Womens' Rights.

Outreach Programme:

Our outreach programme in Mathurapur, South 24 Parganas and in the suburbs has been actively carrying on. Thanks to the committed teachers - Shahdev Halder, Bandita Bhandari, Sanatan Naiya, we were able to give education to 19 students of class X and 2 students of Class XII dropout women who were able to appear for the Class X and XII examinations.

Our Kitchen Gardening programme has been carrying on well and we have 63 women successfully doing their own kitchen gardening under the leadership of Ashok Bhattacharya and Tandra Chakraborty.

Our Production units have been continuing in our 3 Centres at Joynagar, Gobindapur and Chandpur and 45 women have received tailoring training. Out of these 10 women have joined Mathurapur production unit and are able to earn their livelihood. We continue to support the adivasi women in Bankura, Chhachanpur Mahila Kalyan Samity Project .We deeply regret the sudden demise of Lakshmi Murmu who was one of the Founder Members of this organization. At present, the organization is being managed by Reba Murmu. Ankur Kala actively supports them by marketing their specialty which is honey.

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Spiritual Inputs:

As in the previous years, each month, our women and coordinators visited the Home for the elderly – St. Joseph's Home and the home for the mentally challenged – Paripurnata, to give them a helping hand.

Apart from this, we continued to have a solidarity meal once in a month where we all share a simple meal of rice porridge and prayed for the many millions of hungry and starving people all over the world. This has helped all of us to remain spiritually strong and sensitive to the needs of others. We also continued with our daily meditation before work every morning where women from all communities come to pray together invoking God's protection and blessings and for peace in the world.

Children's Day:

Along with the fun and games our coordinators and senior women were able to narrate inspiring stories of great leaders of our country. Candle making, crafts and drawing were organized for the children. Around 16 Children participated in our programme. There were songs, recitation, video show and games. Teresa Lethorn conducted the story telling programme. This has been a tradition for Ankur Kala where our children are told stories with the message that they should grow up having good values.

Summer Camp:

Summer Camp was held on 8th June, 2014 at Ankur Kala premises. Our senior coordinators along with the core team women organized the entire program. There were about 12 children who participated in this Summer Camp. They had a wonderful time. Different games were organized along with classes on candle making, crafts and drawing and Value Education.

Visitors/ Volunteers :

During this year, we welcomed many visitors from various parts of the world. TOVE from Norway visited Ankur Kala with a group of 15 women on 4.1.2014. Hilde from Germany visited Ankur Kala on 16.1.2014. Fr. Abraham from USA visited Ankur Kala on 14.2.2014. From TTV (Ten Thousand Villages), Kathleen and Shanon visited Ankur Kala on 18.1.2014 and gave us many inputs for our new projects in our batik and bandhni.

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Mr. Sasank Mohanty from BASAID, Switzerland, visited Ankur Kala's rural projects on 14th December 2013 in Mathurapur and Sonarpur. Apart from this, we had 34 students from Loreto College and St. Xavier's College who came to do their internship in Ankur Kala. Two students from IIM, Joka also came last year. We had a young volunteer, Pauline from Germany who worked in Ankur Kala for 3 months. Our women and Coordinators gained much from each of these visitors and volunteers.

Export Orders:

This year we received good export orders for batik and bandhni products from Ten Thousand Villages – USA. Many thanks to TTV for helping us to design some beautiful products which had a good market.

Apart from this Ankur Kala exported its products to individual friends and well wishers in Canada, Netherlands and Sweden. The total amount of export orders received during this year was Rs.8,41,687.50

Local Sales:

Our local sales increased to Rs.17,89,158.50. This was possible due to the tireless efforts of our core team and senior level women who would cheerfully show up at 6.00 A.M. when required even on a Sunday to sell at various places.

Grants and Donations:

Grants & Donations of Rs. 26, 95,648.15 were received from overseas friends and well wishers and Rs1,68,760 were received from local friends and well wishers .

Ankur Kala gratefully acknowledges these grants and donations from our friends and well wishers who help us to continue our programme activities. Many thanks to all these wonderful well wishers for their kind support.

Special thanks to Nitya Pooviah for the cheque of Rs.50,000/- towards our Endowment Fund.

Dividend:

During the year Rs. 67,070.31 was received from Mutual Funds as Dividends. Due to these contributions we were able to support our Women's Health programme which included providing nutritional food and snacks, subsidized lunch, medicines and medical tests. These funds also helped us to hold non-formal educational classes for the women and to encourage and support their children's education.

Sonarpur:

Sonarpur is 20 kms away from Kolkata where we have a plot of land which is about 61,600 sq. ft. and we grow organic vegetables and fruits. The vegetables were used for the daily lunch and the fruits for making JSP items throughout the year.

Thanks to the efforts of Mr. Ashok Bhattacharya and his team, we were able to enjoy the fruits of our labour! Throughout the year, we were able to get various vegetables which were a great blessing for our women's nutrition programme. We were also able to have mangoes, tomatoes and organic vegetables and fruits which we used to make our JSP (Jam, Squash and Pickle) products which are popular with our customers.

Future Plans:

- We continue to develop our land in Sonarpur so that we can produce more organic fruits and vegetables and also herbal medicines.
- We will soon apply for an FPO License (Food Processing Order) as we have already received the permission from the village authorities to put up a building at Sonarpur for making Jams, Squashes and Pickles. Construction has already begun.
- We need to focus on the sale of jam, jelly and squash products as there is a growing awareness and demand for our chemical-free food products.

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- We are working towards expanding FRIENDS OF ANKUR KALA in other countries and also in our country so that we can be financially stable for our future programmes.
- We continue with our efforts to build an Endowment Fund for Ankur Kala and we are already approaching corporate houses and individuals.
- We plan to expand and to strengthen Ankur Kala Society by having more active members from various spheres of life.

Conclusion:

Currently, Ankur Kala is reaching out to almost 725 women and their families. However, it is our goal to reach out to many, many more women and their children who are being increasingly marginalized both in the city and in the villages of West Bengal. Yes, much more needs to be done and we count on your continued support. We thank each one of you for your generous support and for being our active partners in our mission of Sowing Seeds of Hope.

We wish to thank each and every well wisher and donors of Ankur Kala, some of them especially from Europe who have faithfully supported Ankur Kala over the last 32 years. Blessings from above have always had been there with Ankur Kala and its staff and women and the Governing Body Members who have persevered with such rare dedication over these past 32 years. Sincere efforts are being made to create an Endowment Fund so that Ankur Kala can become self-sustainable.

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