

TRANSFORMING LIVES: STORIES OF CHANGE

KHUSHALI LIVELIHOOD &
KHUSHALI -TEACHER RESOURCE EDUCATION CENTRE (T.R.E.C)



SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM - DELHI BRANCH

'MADHUBAN' SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM - TALLA RAMGARH DIST. NAINITAL

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Disclaimer:

The narratives of women leaders of the Khushali Livelihood project from 4 villages in Talla Ramgarh were recorded and transcribed with their consent and have been presented here as narrated to the contributors. No attempt has been made to alter or rectify anything, especially the Hindi verbatim since it captures the women's expression in their own idiom.

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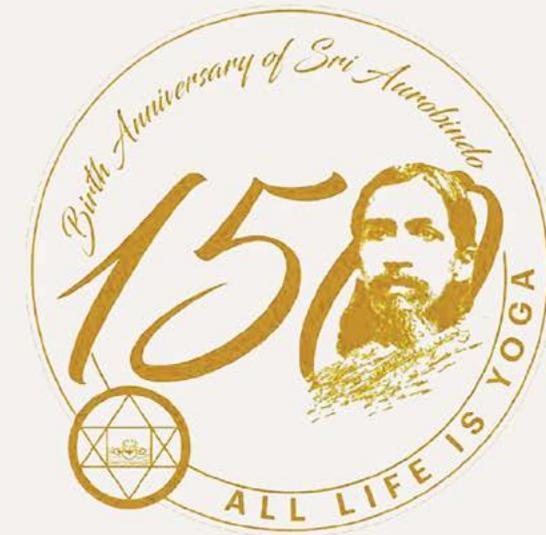
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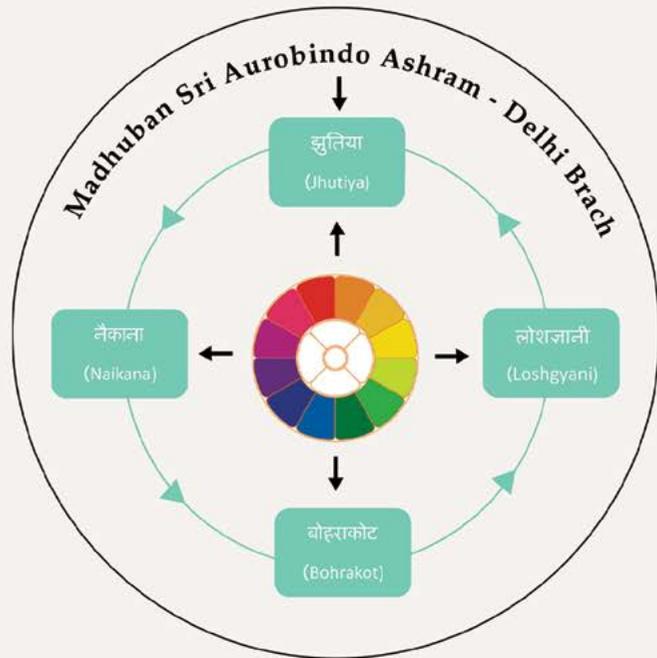
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“There is an ascending evolution in nature which goes from the stone to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from the animal to the man. Because man is, for the moment, the last rung at the summit of the ascending evolution, he considers himself as the final stage in this ascension and believes there can be nothing on earth superior to him. In that he is mistaken ...

*Sri Aurobindo came upon earth to teach this truth to men. He told them that man is only a transitional being living in a mental consciousness, but with the possibility of acquiring a new consciousness, the Truth -consciousness and capable of living a life perfectly harmonious, good, and beautiful, happy and fully consciousness “- **The Mother***

Women of khushali livelihood project come from within 5 km radius of Madhuban - Sri Aurobindo Ashram - Delhi Branch



- | | | | | | | | |
|--|-----------|--|------------|--|-------------|--|--------------|
| | Sincerity | | Generosity | | Progress | | Perseverance |
| | Peace | | Goodness | | Receptivity | | Gratitude |
| | Equality | | Courage | | Aspiration | | Humility |

"We are not here to do what the others do. We are here to do what the other cannot do because they do not have the idea that it can be done." -The Mother



Our methodology in working with the Khushali livelihood training module for village women is inspired by Sri Aurobindo's Three Principles of True Teaching and these are shared and practiced by all our mentors who come to work with our village community.

First Principle:
“Nothing can be taught”

Each woman has her own inner *swabhava* and inclination for a skill, as she learnt by seeing her mother or *ijha* at home. In alignment with their natural inclinations, they have subtly been exposed to information about design, measurement and needs of the commercial buyer in the city. Individual hand-work nuances reflect in their products, and though there are standards to follow, there is no machine-like sameness of the products they make.

The *Khushali* mentor at Madhuban in her attitude is not a task master, but a facilitator who learns along the path, and this is what connects her to the other women. When Shalini Didi from Gurgaon, comes for teaching Crochet, though she had the experience of the markets in the city, yet she first spent a lot of time to know her women learners, their individual knowledge and skills, and based on that she facilitated the learner with constant motivation for more intricate skills.

Second Principle:
“Mind has to be consulted in its own growth”

All women in the *Khushali* landscape had some inherent talent and individual style of learning as indicated in the previous point; while working with them we observed

that - their past conditioning through traditional schools they had been to, the homes that they grew up in, and the homes post marriage that they were now living in - had to a great extent taken away their confidence, and hence they were unable to confidently express their inner voice and creativity. Initially they were good followers, as they would just copy a design sans any personal interest or personal input.

Gradually as we built an integral learning environment with opportunities for them to articulate and experiment with their choices of colour and freedom to create new designs, they started becoming comfortable to share - what they liked, and soon we saw individual subtle variations in stitches emerging! A woman who used her left hand for knitting and crocheting was able to observe why her stitch was loose or tight as compared to a right-hand knitter. The women have expressed that in *Khushali* while learning a new pattern, their point of view was being listened to, their nuance of work was being respected and then guided for learning for the aspects of beauty, time management, quality control and market readiness skills.

We have seen that these women now are happy to share and teach others in the environment. Aspects of collaboration and individual growth are both felt as they now feel a sense of ownership for their own growth and the growth of their community.

Third Principle:
“To work from the near to the far”

The women have a cultural connect to their roots and from this intuitive connect emerge individual hues and

styles. We have learnt from this, and we saw that their choices of design too were coming from where they belonged in their early growing years, whether a Kumaoni, a Nepali, or a Garhwali, the craft had its own flavour and nuances of their native places; and we saw that the feelings of connect to their native hues emerged in their choice of colour, design along with an inherent common strain of celebration of festivals and landscapes from where they have emerged. These local experiences of the *Khushali* women have been constantly embraced as an integral part of any new learning that has been added to their skillset. Post an Aipan painting, when Uma Didi facilitated Warli art, the depiction of the mountainous peaks and deodar trees emerged in the designs, and are now an integral part of the work.

FOREWORD

Background and Foundation of 'Project Khushali' at Madhuban - Sri Aurobindo Ashram - Delhi Branch and its context to the voices of the women as harbingers of change:

Madhuban Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch in Talla Ramgarh is situated at a height of 5000 feet in a picturesque valley overlooking the mountain peaks of the Kumaon Himalayas.

The area consists of fruit orchards and small farms owned by local people. It is a home to migratory birds, diverse Himalayan flora and fauna and intersected by running rivulets.





This fertile land with its spiritual and mystic attraction has always been the refuge of human beings who are seeking a deeper connect with their inner light that is part of man's soul consciousness. Mostly all who live here are farmers with small land holdings. With the continuing vagaries of nature, their life is difficult, yet they are inherently rooted to their soil, customs and culture. Simultaneously they also aspire to raise their financial stability and seek better education for their children and medical facilities for themselves; and because of the lack of these provisions, migration to cities has been on the increase.

Poets of the stature of Rabindranath Tagore and Mahadevi Verma formed deep connects and contacts with this geo-biographical terrain. It is also called Dev Bhoomi - the land imbued in spirituality; Sri Aurobindo himself has referred to the region of Talla Ramgarh as "My foothold in the Himalayas." The Mother has called this terrain "Valley of Divine Love." Madhuban Sri Aurobindo Ashram-Delhi Branch was formally started in 2003 when a devotee Kurban Hussain gave his land to further build a worthy center of Delhi Branch.

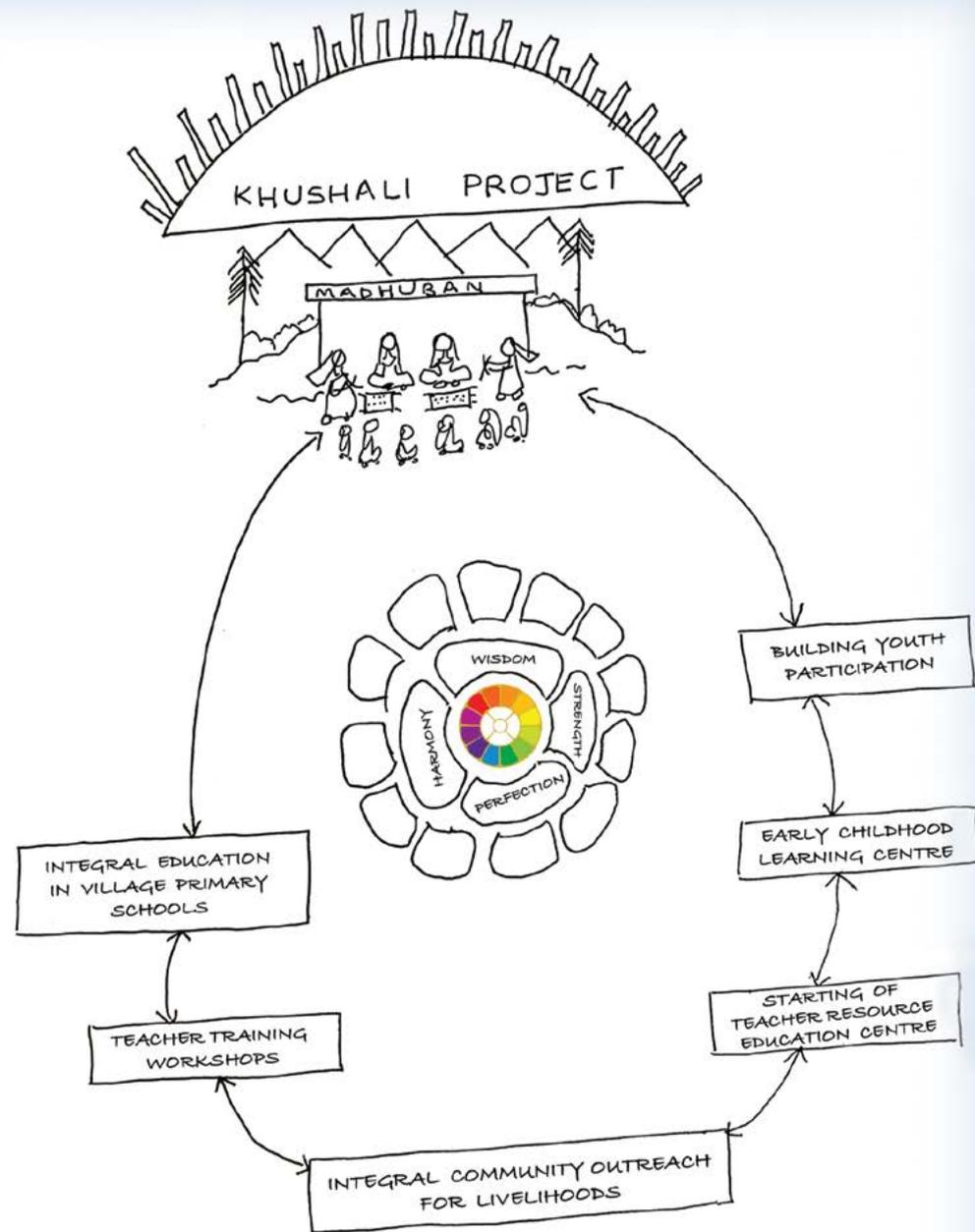
As per the mandate given to Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch, as the only Branch blessed and sanctioned by The Mother herself, the Madhuban Chapter started investing energies in the harmonization and organization of all our work in Integral Education for local private schools in the area. As we delved into building an Integral

Education framework, we realized that we needed to first establish interlinkages to life experiences of the children and teachers in the area, we needed to look at their social reality and immediate needs, and that is how we began investing in an active integral village outreach program, involving local schools, local parents and youth in the area.

As part of our community building, we initially worked with 10 villages but based on our needs of building experiences we realized that for any work to happen, distance and ease for community was important; with this learning we put our work focus for villages in the radius of 5 km around Madhuban, as this facilitates the community to meet regularly amongst themselves and be part of the process.

Our faith in village transformation has been a slow process inspired by Sri Aurobindo's National Education Agenda, an education philosophy that truly aims for an integral growth of all parts of the human being for our growth as individuals and as members of a community. In the light of this we focused our work to gradually create an environment that facilitates all of us growing together as learners, opportunities to observe our mind-spaces, emotions, physical well-being, our inner guidance/psychic being, all became an integral part of our daily community practices.

Guided by this philosophy and our experiences of integral living in the Delhi Ashram and explorations in Integral Education in our two schools in Delhi (1) Mirambika free progress School (2) The Mothers



"DO NOT PRETEND - BE
 DO NOT PROMISE - ACT
 DO NOT DREAM - REALIZE"..... THE MOTHER

International, we realized that for any progress all planes of the being and society need to be focused for development; hence, we started building engagement with the community of teachers, children, parents so that they can look at schools and homes as spaces for this Integral growth. Practices of self-observation, self-reflection, project work, within the realm of Sri Aurobindo's Three principles of true education helped to have it as a lived experience, supported by the community ethos.

This resulted in a much-needed change in the attitude of the teacher from being a taskmaster to a guide and facilitator, where she also had to consult the mind of the learners and not impose information, but learn from the child's own inner calling and inclinations. Each child had to be seen in context to his nearby home experiences and things around him before he was forced to learn things which were alien to his daily experiences. This was a new aspect for the village teachers and headmasters who though inherently spiritual, yet were following the education process that inwardly felt alien to them too.

Our initial years of work in primary schools was though accepted for its core spirit and actual implementation, but was rejected as the schools' felt parents wanted only literacy, and it was also easy for the teachers to teach from one book for all children, with one transactional top-down method that built same learning outcome expectation from all children as this was an easy and familiar pattern to follow.

We then understood that we needed to create our own chain of peer educators, we needed to include parents in



the process of building a learning village environment and that is how our village outreach livelihood project '*Khushali*' got seeded.

The spirit of project *Khushali* and our guiding force is the Mother's Symbol with its twelve petals representing the twelve powers of The Mother that we consistently keep as our core values.

In building the *Khushali* outreach program we have created 6 verticals (shared below) that facilitate in building the first rung of our village model for integral lived experiences. Each vertical has added an organic growth to support the community:

1. Integral Education in village primary schools: We began with first understanding how teachers teach in the context of the state and national curriculum frameworks. To this we added nuances of Integral Education project planning, gave infrastructure and material support for building local materials for education, worked on integrating Montessori methodologies and equipment.

2. Teacher training workshops: Post the first vertical we started mapping scope of teachers and children as learners, with emphasis on the physical, mental, vital and psychic parts of their being; we initiated aspects for self-growth of the teacher as a continuous learner by conducting in-service workshops on Science, Language, Physical Education,

Environment and inclusion of project work methodology.

3. Khushali livelihood project: We began the third vertical with a focus for creating a parent partnership; the aim was to include the parents and also for us to understand: the local needs and aspirations of parents, their challenges related to their socio-economic status. We looked at the reasons behind the increasing numbers of village people migrating to cities; and we felt that we needed to work on economic stability of these homes so that their children could get a stable economic backdrop for their development.

Somewhere in response to these community needs, we started the livelihood training work, again by keeping the core values of The Mother's symbol and using the methodology of the Three principles of Integral Education/living.

The outreach programme of Livelihood has grown slowly but exponentially for the Madhuban community with 12 village women being facilitated for leadership roles and 100 women for hand skills in an integral manner that develops both their self-time, physical well-being, mental faculties, vital emotional interchanges within themselves and their families in a manner that the focus is on all parts of their being. This integral whole persons focus on livelihood is a continuous work in progress .

4. Starting T.R.E.C (Teacher Resource Education Centre): Just before the onset of Covid, we had started our own peer educator program, and during Covid the TREC peer educators from 10 villages mentored online after conducting a survey with a focus on Perspectives in Education, Health,



and Livelihoods in the Talla Ramgarh region. This survey was an important milestone to understand local perspectives and forge our work ahead. Subsequently, a book on this research- '*Community Perspectives on Education, Health & Livelihoods in Talla Ramgarh, Uttarakhand*' was published. This is a valuable document for our learning of the grassroots reality and aspirations of the people. It also made us aware of the loopholes that needed our attention in further planning.

5. Starting Early Childcare Learning Centre (ECLC): Initially ECLC was started for children of the mothers who attended our training sessions. Now we have a regular Saturday, Sunday and holiday time learning center with an emphasis on children forming a relationship with their home and village as part of their education in an integral manner.

6. Building Youth Participation: Madhuban now offers computer training, English language classes and newly started Vocational Training courses. We have also conducted a Youth Aspiration Survey in local schools and Inter-College to understand goals of young people to learn skills that would stop the outward migration from villages to towns and open avenues of employment and entrepreneurship.

In the pipeline are :

7. Project Haryali for organic and self-sustained farming in the villages

8. Project to support government schools in the 5 km area at the anganwadi and primary grades

9. Project to support village inter and degree college students for communication and computer skills and short vocational courses as per NEP 2020 requirement

This documentation of village voices has emerged from our 3rd vertical - *Khushali livelihood project* and its organic integration with our 4th vertical - TREC.

- We now have a village cadre of master trainers in skills with leadership roles in these 4 areas:

(1)Knitting, (2) crochet, (3) stitching, (4) food processing.

The fifth area of Art and Crafts is gradually creating master trainers from nearby areas

- Project TREC-Khushali is still in its nascent stage and a lot still needs to be done, but it has had the good fortune of having various industry-experts, educationists and researchers as mentors to share with the community their own expertise and facilitate the following:

- Traditional hand-skills such as Crochet, Kantha, Stitching, Aipan, Warli painting with an understanding of present market design need

- Training for village level leadership programs in marketing, selling, identifying consumer needs

- Computer classes for: (1) store and stock in-charge for



documenting the stock, creating digital ledgers for in and out processes and procurement (2) mentor of ECLC, to create observations and reflection journal, lesson plans and centers stock and library

- Facilitation for Skills that facilitate setting of small stalls to creating a village fair this involved learning from the women's traditional and cultural wisdom, to this was added organizational inputs for creating a system of managing their produce as inventory and finances

- Khushali women initially were shy of selling their ware, but then they became very competitive, and even felt very bad when their produce was not sold. But now we see a gradual shift in their attitude towards being calm, focused and communicative about where they need to improve in their work; learning from the other is now a common scene, and practices of mutual sharing of feedbacks and reflections is finding a space in their work culture

- They independently have an experience of organizing local fairs in the Ashram and with some handholding have participated in exhibitions in Noida, Greater Noida Supported by GAIL India, and at the Delhi Blind School Diwali mela

- The five areas of livelihood now have two Group Leaders each; they facilitate learning and quality check for the

final products. Each woman learns at her own pace, in harmony with her inner consciousness and the ecology of the community that she is part of

- The goal of *Khushali* livelihood as a vertical is to re-instill pride in the women for their village and through their example eventually encourage small collectives of women in their close neighborhood to set up independent units of their own with their savings and maybe with government schemes they can be funded to grow as entrepreneurs

- The *TREC* vertical with the *ECLC* has started handicraft work in village primary schools as children immerse in fine aspects of knitting, stitching, crochet, local art and craft. This supports creativity, beauty, order, discipline, concentration in the children, it also seeds the traditional skill to be kept alive

- The web of interlinkages that have emerged has been a huge learning for all of us

- Eventually, our focus is: 'a whole village transformation' to build nuances that support integral living and working in harmony as an important foundation for *Aurogram*, which is the name suggested by us for this 'valley of divine love'

- We have gently facilitated the skills that were existing within the community and built a livelihood scope through the skills that the women knew and added to it the present market readiness skills of beauty and design

- In doing what we have done and are doing, as custodians, we constantly have to step back and then

guide; we constantly try to plan the work and reflect on the emergent realities of this very fragile mountain ecosystem

- We have sincerely tried to connect to grassroot voices of needs and aspirations, and also keep listening to the stories of needs and change, as they emerge in our Tuesday sharing circles
- These first in the series of narratives have emerged from the *Khushali Livelihood* project, wherein we have deep dived into the women's personal experiences as narrated to our Deepti Mehrotra, who has documented them with expertise and sensitivity, yet also being objective and focused to the main purpose of these narratives as the voices of change
- This compilation and context is an attempt from us to create a model for Education as a lived experience and we hope it can be replicated by others with the grassroot needs and local expertise of their own village community
- We hope this document captures the women's transformation and mirrors the most significant change in their own lives and how they have impacted those around them

The support for all these projects is essential and it is here that we need to acknowledge and thank:

(1) *Foundation of World Education* U.S.A (F.W.E) for their co-holding this aspiration of ours and making it their investment in the Integral work based on

Sri Aurobindo and The Mothers vision for life

(2) *Friends of Madhuban* - a group of supporters that seeded the TREC program with us

Our sincere Gratitude to: The Mother's child, Tara Didi, for her constant support and guidance as we attempt to carry The Mother's light through all work, we take up under the aegis of Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch.



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“Whatever is new will always meet opposition from conservative people. if we yield to this opposition, the world will never advance one step.”

-The Mother



Here I have the opportunity to be a leader. I teach other women and want to take this work forward.

- MAMTA MER

This work brings benefit to the area. I too feel the benefit. I have some income in my hands, and so do the other women who come here.

- NIRMALA BHATT



MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE AS EXPRESSED BY WOMEN ENGAGED IN PROJECT: KHUSHALI -LIVELIHOOD



Mamta Mer

Age: 34

Village: Jhutiya



Mamta joined in 2015. She says, “My motivation was, to learn to stitch knew things. I was stitching earlier, but it was limited to petticoat, blouse sort of items. The word went around, there will be training in Madhuban, I heard and I joined. The training was so good. We learnt to make school dress—skirt, shirts, shorts and so on, and yoga mats. For one year it was learning only, after that, income started. That felt good. The family also said, ‘good, you are learning and earning.’”

“I was very talkative earlier, chatarpatar, but now I have become quiet, very peaceful. This place has impacted me—it is so peaceful here. When we say the Mother’s mantra in our group, it is a special feeling. I’m very fond of the group. Women from the first batch went here and there—someone opened a shop, or set up on her own. I enjoy working in a group. It was the first time here, earlier I always worked alone. I like

it—cutting, stitching, together. I met many women. We go to each other's homes, we have become friends, we invite each other for weddings, festivals. One's family has increased—there are more relatives now!

“This is such a good place, I tell others. My family and neighbors say, ‘what a good place you're in!’ Because I learn new things, they give me orders—to make a poncho, bag, sweater etc. Had I sat at home, what new would I have learnt? That's how I am growing. Learning is endless—we learn new patterns, new designs. When trainers come to teach, they also learn things from us, like sari cover. Five or six of us go daily to the stitching centre, at SadaSukh. For two hours, we teach others, whoever comes to learn. The rest of the day, we do our knitting, stitching work.



“Here, I have the opportunity to be a leader. I teach other women, and have taught a group outside too —

I could handle it. We had a leadership training program, in which we discussed how to control our temper. Now if I feel angry, I go sit quietly somewhere. The anger just vanishes. My husband says, ‘there is a change in you.’ We have a buddy system, too, in our group—we share what's going on in our lives, with our buddy.

“At home, we are two women—devrani-jethani—we manage the cow, and housework. I brought my devrani here too for the training. She learnt to make flowers garlands, I take wool home for her, she makes garlands, if it sells, she earns the money. She isn't able to come here regularly on Tuesday, because she has a son, and is in family way again. I enjoy the joint family life. I might adopt a baby girl—my husband and I, we want to do this, and the rest of the family is supportive.

“In Ramnagar, where I grew up, I had friends from different castes and religions including SC, Muslims etc, my father's colleagues were also from different backgrounds. We had no feeling of caste discrimination. But in the villages there is casteist feeling, eating separately, sitting separately. When we work together as a group, there is some change. Mostly here at Madhuban we sit and eat together.

“In the group, we share our feelings, laugh and joke. There is give and take. It feels good. In the future, I want to take this work forward. I want to teach more women, and I want to work in the group.”



Nirmala Bhatt

Age: 62

Village: Bohrakot



Nirmala Bhatt joined in 2015. She says, “I’m the oldest, I joined when the group was first formed, I am from that time. From that batch, there are only a few of us left. That first training was in knitting, how to make new items based on samples. I came, thinking it will help my work to expand. That did happen—the work has kept expanding.

“I knew how to knit already. I learnt as a child. We studied up to class 5 or 6, after that we were at home. My father would get books and magazines for us, like Nandan, Parag, Dharmyug, I liked to read and so I had some knowledge of things. Being at home, we had time, so my sister and I learnt to knit. We had a passion for knitting. I would take the spokes of a broken umbrella and use it as knitting needles! In my maika, Someshwar, there is a Gandhi Ashram, and we made sweaters for the ashram. The wool was thick, sheep wool, so the work went fast—in a week I made three to four sweaters.

In my sasural too I knitted a lot, for my family and others. Every house in the village must be having some item of mine.

“In the training here, we learnt new designs. After that, Didi made the system, she said, ‘Come every Tuesday, give the items you’ve produced, and take the raw materials. I can stitch, by hand and sewing machine, but I don’t do it because my eyes are weak. Earlier, I knitted simple patterns—caps, mufflers, sweaters. Here I learnt to make more sophisticated things—shawls, long sweaters, decorative items. I learnt many new designs. Later, I learnt crochet too.

““This work brings benefit to the area. I too feel the benefit. I have some income in my hands, and so do the other women who come here. I can easily give something to my children and grandchildren, and I can buy anything I want to. Everyone in my family is happy that I come here. I brought my daughter-in-law here (Khushi). My little grand daughter comes along with us sometimes.

“By coming here a lot of change has come in me. I learnt how to meet so many people, talk to so many people, mix with so many. The atmosphere is lovely here, simple good people come and one gets to meet them. Otherwise I just knew my family and neighbors, we never went anywhere because we were always busy with work. It is only here that we meet different people. It is lovely to come here, a space away from home. Back



home there is always work—kitchen work, care of the goat, cow, and our patch of land. Today morning too I cut grass before coming here, for fodder.

“I think that till the end of my life, I will remain connected here. Often I tell my family, ‘I will leave you all and go and live there!’ I say it as a joke, if my grandchildren are pestering me. I say, ‘I’ll go live in Madhuban!’

"For all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony."

- Sri Aurobindo



"There is change in me: Earlier I used to learn; now i teach others. This gives me a lot of joy and i am a group Leader."

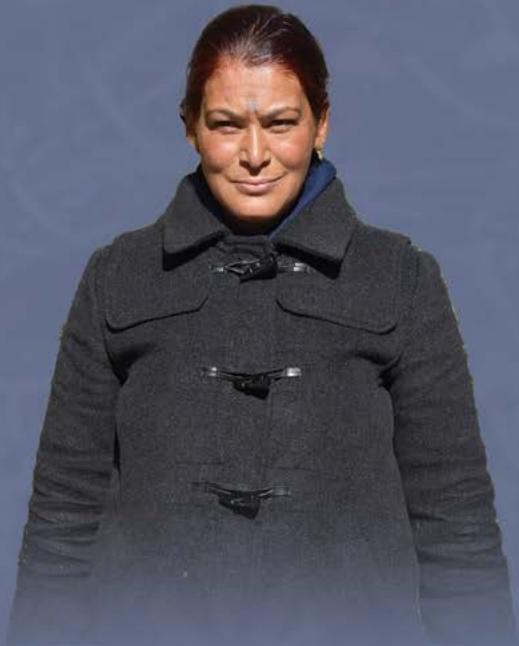
- MANJU MEHRA

"I have learnt a lot here. All my dreams have come true. My aspiration was, to do something, so I can earn and buy things for my children, so that we are not dependent."

- GITA BISHT



MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE AS EXPRESSED BY WOMEN ENGAGED IN PROJECT: KHUSHALI -LIVELIHOOD



Manju Mehra

Age: 38

Village: Jhutiya



Manju joined work with the women’s group in Madhuban in 2016. She says, “Earlier I used to make knitted items at home. I learnt knitting from my mother, and at school, in home science during classes 8 and 9. I used to make sweaters, shawls, socks, caps for family members—and for others in the village too, they paid for it. My mother made knitted items, similarly.

“I came here to show what I can do. They asked me to join the group. I learnt new things; trainers came from outside and taught us. I do crochet here. There is change in me: earlier I used to learn; now I teach others. This gives me a lot of joy. When other women come, I feel good because they get work, it helps them, and their families too. Most of all, I feel peaceful here.

“My family likes my working here. I have a job at the village dairy—from 6 in the morning. I check the milk,

its quality, we weight it, then it goes to Lal Kuan, where it is filled in packets and sold. I have been doing this job since 2011. From the dairy I go home, have bath and breakfast. Then I come here, from 9 to 2.30.

“I am a group leader. We go to all five villages. We speak to women and bring them here. There are 70 to 80 women in all now. Some of them come on Tuesdays, and we teach them what they need to learn. I am able to handle all this, with a lot of responsibility. I have self-confidence, I can speak and put my thoughts across.

“I brought my brother’s wife too for the training. Her three children came and learnt to make small items, like baskets. She does knitting, stitching, in whatever time she has. She handles the work around our cows, and the



agriculture. My mother does the cooking. My income helps the family. I am single but being an active member, I am fully part of my family.

“I will always work here, at the Ashram. I want to take my work forward. The work should make a lot of progress. Trainers should come, teach us. We will learn and do. I’ve been to Delhi ashram, Pondicherry ashram. Here I have work, and I get to see the world. I will never leave this place, this work!”



Gita Bisht

Age: 32

Village: Jhutiya



Gita joined here in 2016. She recalls, “My youngest child was just three years old. I met Indu Didi by chance in the market, she said, ‘Beti, why don’t you come to the ashram and learn something?’ I said, ‘I have no certificate, no schooling!’ She replied, ‘That is not necessary. We will teach you.’ I thought this is wonderful. So I began coming. Earlier I used to see others stitching, knitting, and I wished to do it. But nobody had ever taught me any of it.

“Here, first I learnt stitching. Then I learnt knitting. I saw one girl put stitches from one knitting needle, to the other, then back to the first. I tried to do the same, but it wouldn’t happen, it never grew. Yet, watching everyone, I learnt to knit. Didi said, ‘Make this’—showing me a sample sweater, socks. I didn’t know how to make them but I couldn’t refuse. At home, we thought, ‘Let’s try!’ My sister Sita had joined too. So we tried, and wonder of wonders, we were able to make items just like the

sample. When it happened, we developed courage. Whenever Didi shows us something new, even if we feel unsure, somehow we take heart and try, and we are able to make it!

“I have learnt a lot here. All my dreams have come true. My aspiration was, to do something, so I can earn, and buy things for my children, so that we are not dependent. My husband works as construction labour. I come here daily from 9.30 to 3 or 4 in the afternoon. And I earn from sale of items I make. Here, I learnt how to talk to people, my confidence grew. It gives me so much happiness. Earlier, I was shy, hesitant, wouldn't talk much to others. I knew only my family, and a few neighbours.

“I have taught 25 to 30 women, to knit caps, muffler, long frocks, sweater, gloves.... I taught another group how to make knitted flowers, elephant, mouse, tiger, Santa and other decorative items. Teaching has its tough spots. Didi showed me the photo of a heart and said, 'make it, and teach it.' In the middle of all the women, I couldn't refuse. I said, 'Put the stitches'. They said, 'how many?' Even I didn't know, but I looked closely at the photo, and said, 'Six stitches!' I kept making it myself, and it came out alright. The others were still learning, somebody dropped a stitch, somebody was slow, by then mine was complete. Learning and teaching has become easy for me.

“My parents, brothers and their wives live on the other side of the river, while my husband, children and I live

on this side. My family and my husband's family, we're all poor. Sita, I and one brother are illiterate, though our younger siblings went to school.'

“Earlier nobody paid me much attention. Nobody respected me, but now everybody notices me, and they praise me. In both maika (maternal home) and sasural (in-laws home), my value has gone up. The other day I made a pigeon, my father said, 'You've become a god! It looks as if it will start flying any moment!' My family really appreciates how much I've learnt in these five or six years and look up to me. My father says, 'Gita is my daughter and my son! She has earned the maximum respect for our family!' When any decision has to be taken, he consults me, more than my brothers. Coming here, I've gained knowledge, and I can say what I think. My mother has asked me to help her open a bank account. See, opening bank accounts was parents' work, they should have done it for us, but instead I'm doing it for them. "I've learnt how to do many things. Didi says, 'You have intelligence, Gita. Even if you never studied in school, there are many things you can do!' At Madhuban I have found enormous support. If I'd had this support from childhood, I would be far ahead by now. For the future, I think that whatever work the Ashram entrusts me with, I will accomplish, I will take it forward. I am very sure of this. I think this work will develop a lot.”

*“The Only work that
spiritually purifies us is
that which is done without
personal motives.”*

- Sri Aurobindo



My family respects me
for what I do. They have seen
me learning so much in the past
few years, and I am learning too.
I have changed a lot since
I first came here.

- SITA BISHT

I 'm finding a great deal of
change in myself. In the city,
I was just a housewife, but here,
I realized my own identity.

- KHUSHBOO BHATT



**MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE AS EXPRESSED BY WOMEN
ENGAGED IN PROJECT: KHUSHALI -LIVELIHOOD**



Sita Bisht

Age: 29

Village: Jhutiya



Sita joined in 2016. She says, “I joined because I was very keen to learn to stitch, knit. I’d asked at some other places but they wanted school certificates, which I never had. Here, no certificate was needed, so I joined. It was my dream to learn. I learnt stitching—by hand and on machine, Bina Dida taught us. I really liked it. It was a little difficult, but I was very keen to learn so I learnt. After a month I began learning knitting. We learnt by watching others, and Anju didi helped. In two-three months I was making items that sold—bags, mufflers, sweater, Santa.

“I liked coming to Madhuban, we felt like we have found a new mother here, who loves us, doesn’t scold us. Here one learns a lot. I even learn how to look after my children better, how not to shout at them, not to scold them, instead if one is angry then to be quiet, sit quietly, and explain things to them nicely. I get tired you see, and it’s easy to take it out on the children. I work in the fields too—the



tiny family plot—we plant tomato, simlamirch, beans, chillis, rajma, bhata (dal) etc. The produce is very uncertain. This year we planted peas but the rains didn't come in time, the plants dried up. If rains come, we sell one or two quintals, otherwise it is not even enough for the family.

"I grew up in difficult circumstances. My family was not well off, and we couldn't go to school at all. Other children of the village were going to school, even I wanted to go. But I couldn't go, there was too much work. I want my children to study and do well. I look after my children on my own—I have a son and a daughter. We live in a room next to my parents' house. My husband is not there; he had many bad habits, and it is much better, now that I am managing on my own. It is peaceful, and now I have

my earning in my own hands. My parents and brothers are next door.

"My family respects me for what I do. They have seen me learning so much in the past few years, and I am earning too. We make clothes for everyone in the family, Gita and I—nobody in the family needs to buy clothes from outside.

"I have changed a lot since I first came here. Earlier I used to talk a lot. Now I talk less—I am quieter, more thoughtful. This is because of the responsibility on my shoulders. I am determined to bring up the children and do my work here well. I would like to become a leader. I would like to teach others. I want the work to grow. I will never leave it; my future is here."



Khushboo Bhatt

Age: 33

Village: Bohrakot



Khushboo “I joined the group two years ago. My mother-in-law (Nirmala Bhatt) had already told me a lot about this place, that one can learn so much here. But I lived in the city, Kashipur, with my husband for several years; during the lockdown, we decided to return to the village. My mother-in-law said to me, ‘come, see the work and join if you want.’ My father-in-law said, ‘why don’t you go and see?’ I had never been to the Ashram earlier. There was a training workshop in food processing, and I joined it.

“ I learnt to make different jams, chutneys and juices. After that experience I said, `whatever I will do, I will do from here itself. That winter I went as a trainer, in a 48-day training, teaching food processing to 20-25 women of mahila samooths in Nathuakhan block. We were two trainers, Manju didi and I. I didn’t know whether I could teach, but I did, and I did it well. Those women still keep

in touch with me. It was very enjoyable, to learn and then to teach. I found that teaching others gives a special kind of joy.

“I’m finding a great deal of change in myself. In the city, I was just a housewife, absorbed in my children and household. But here, I realized my own identity. I learnt that I too am somebody. I found it so soothing to come here, very comforting. I felt I am somebody, I can do something. I joined the knitting and I earn from my labour, and buy things for the children.

“I was lost in just being a housewife, I had forgotten myself. I was educated, and knew stitching, knitting, but I wasn’t able to use any of it. Here I have found who I am, I am also something. Earlier people in the village hardly knew me. Now people in several villages know me well. I have found an identity. Earlier nobody knew me, now they say good things about me. It is nice to be appreciated and praised!

“Here I have learnt a lot of new things. I have the chance to be a leader. We have learnt that a leader is someone who has first to be good, not just expect the others to be good. We should not show the other person down, rather we should teach her what she needs to know. Also, we should not jump to conclusions. If there is a problem, we must listen to every other person, reflect on what they are saying, and then gradually the solution will come. We also learnt how to sell things, how we should behave if we want to sell to a customer.

“My father-in-law is very happy that I come here, he says, ‘you go, I will look after the children.’ My husband is very happy too, and supportive. Earlier I was home all the time, and even now I manage my time so that I give full time to the children—they are small, they need us otherwise they will feel neglected. My husband too can cook, whatever he knows, he too does if I’m not there. With family support, we can move forward. My husband’s sister came here with us one day, she liked it so much. Her daughter is staying with us for a month in the summer holidays and she’s coming to learn computer here. My children enjoy coming here and learn new things whenever they come. My six-year old daughter loves to come and draw on the computer!

“I am very interested in remaining connected and part of this. I don’t feel like going anywhere from here, I love it here. Even if I have to go out from here, I will remain connected. Never will I leave it completely. I feel that if more women from the villages come and join here, it will be good for them. I tell all the women around, ‘see, I was nothing, this place has made me something; come and see for yourself, with your own eyes.’ I want the whole village to join us. And I want the whole world to get to know of my village, through our products!”

"Whatever one does, it becomes useful if one puts a spark of true consciousness into it. The consciousness one has is much more important than the act one performs. And the most apparently useless acts can become very productive if they are performed with the true consciousness."

- The Mother



I always wanted to stand on my feet. Here I got the opportunity to meet many people .I found a sense of peace and comfort here.

- SUGANDHA SUYAL

I like it here a lot. We get opportunities in the ashram. I learn a lot of new things. When I tell people I'm in the ashram, people respect it. My family gets respect too. That feels good.

- NIRMALA BHANDARI



MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE AS EXPRESSED BY WOMEN ENGAGED IN PROJECT: KHUSHALI -LIVELIHOOD, ECLC & TREC



Sugandha Suyal

Age: 29

Village: Naikana



Sugandha joined the group in 2019. She says, “I joined the two-year teacher training course in 2019, because I was keen to be a teacher. Initially I felt odd—most of the others were unmarried, while I had children. I would think, how will I manage, there’s nobody like me here. Gradually, everything fell into place! It was a wonderful group, and we all mixed with one another. Many trainers came and held classes—we learnt language, activities, geography, maths, exercises. I’m learning computer too now, one hour in the mornings.

“I got the opportunity to teach from November 2021. We started a centre teaching children, at SadaSukh. Nearly 40 to 45 children, from various schools, started coming to it. There were three of us, and Hema di also helped us in the beginning. After a month, the other two left. I picked up courage, to run it on my own. Soon, there is to be a summer camp at the centre, I will be running it.

“My family sees it as meaningful for me to come here only if I earn some income. Earlier they would say, what are you going for, who will look after the children? When I began teaching at SadaSukh, I began earning—then they stopped saying anything. It feels good to earn, I don’t have to ask for money, I can buy things for my children (two sons). I always wanted to stand on my own feet.

“Here, I got the opportunity to meet many people, work with women in a group, and understand each one’s feelings. I found a sense of peace and comfort here. We work in a group, meditate in the morning, centre ourselves, light a diya. In school we had prayers, but there wasn’t this kind of feeling. Earlier, I used to get quite angry. Once, I got angry with the family, when they questioned my coming



here—I said, ‘Don’t worry, one day I will earn for myself!’ Mostly, my anger would come out on the children, because one can’t really express anger much with the adults. A change in myself is, that now I don’t get angry much.

“We are changing. In the same way, if more people join, if they take the step, there would be change in them too. I want to see change in this area. For myself, I would like to study further, because there is no age limit to learning. I have already done M.A. and D.ElEd. I would like to earn better and help the household, support my children to study and progress, and I too can make progress.”

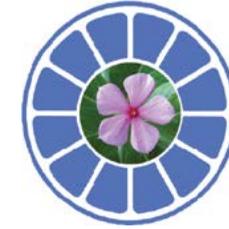
Sugandha had a 1 month training at Mirambika Delhi. Where she learnt the value of the letting children be free and choose their own activity. She learnt three principle of the integral education. Sugandha says that her confident level has been enhanced by this visit.



Nirmala Bhandari

Age: 22

Village: Bohrakot



Nirmala joined Madhuban in 2018. She says, “I had never thought of working here. Some of my neighbors, who are in the women’s group, told Didi about me, that I had studied computers, in Dehra Dun. I had applied for a job in Haldwani, but suddenly I got a call from here. I was interviewed and selected. I got a job within a month of finishing my computer course! Maybe it was Mother’s wish that I should come here. In November I went to Delhi Ashram for one month, to learn, and then returned here.

“I like it here a lot. In the beginning I felt a bit anxious because I was new. The work was easy. I work from 8 to 4, six days a week. We get opportunities, in the ashram. I learn a lot of new things. There are camps, workshops, we learn many things. Earlier, I hardly spoke to anybody earlier, apart from people at home, especially not to boys. Here I learnt how to speak to people, to guests, even to foreigners. Now I don’t hesitate, I speak up, with



anybody. When I tell people I'm in the ashram, people respect it. My family gets respect too. That feels good.

"Because this work is near home, there's no tension. My mother is happy—of course she would be tense if I worked outside, living on my own. I was in Dehra Dun but it was with an NGO, there was the hostel, and it was safe. Living on one's own is not so safe. And it is expensive—you pay for room rent, electricity, water, food, and end up saving nothing. Here I am able to spend for the household, and save, though not much. At home there is my mother, and my younger sister. My father passed away, while I was in Dehra Dun. My mother works at the anganwadi. My sister is completing Class 12, and learning computers here.

"I will keep studying, and prepare for jobs, even try for government jobs. If I go elsewhere, I will always remain

connected to this place. The connection will not break. Suppose I work in a job elsewhere, I will always help out here too. And the experience I'm picking up here will help me anywhere. I have the confidence to work, and talk to anybody without feeling scared. This will help me wherever I work. It is important to have earning in



one's own hand. If one earns, one can live, enjoy. Before marriage I will make it clear, I will work. Nobody can force me to stay at home! Anyway, I am not thinking of marriage now. I'll think of it after I'm 25! At present, I am paying full attention to my work and what's going on around me!"

“Of one thing you can be sure -your future is in your own hands. You will become the man you want to be and the higher your ideal and your aspiration, the higher will be your aspiration, but you must keep a firm resolution and never forget your true aim of life.”

- The Mother



The main advantage here is that one gets to meet many people, different kinds of people –from whom I learn a great deal. I feel more relaxed inside myself.

- HEMA BHATT

Working with women in a group is wonderful. We sing lot of songs. Leadership training was very useful.

- CHITRA NEGI



**MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE AS EXPRESSED BY WOMEN
ENGAGED IN PROJECT: KHUSHALI -LIVELIHOOD**



Hema Bhatt

Age: 40

Village: Jhutiya



Hema joined here in September 2021. She explains, “I thought I would work in education; I have taught earlier in a local school. In October I started the children’s centre at SadaSukh, many children joined. We took classes. Then schools opened and children began going to school. Now, I manage the store, and the accounts, for the women’s group. I see to the distribution of material—wool etc—and disburse payments. I joined the training for the women’s group, and the computer class as well. I was keen to learn new things, and also earn an income.

“The main advantage here is that one gets to meet many people, different kinds of people—from whom I learn a great deal. There are many changes in myself. I feel more relaxed inside myself. In the leadership class we were told, ‘First love yourself. Give attention to your own self. It is most important to give time to oneself, then comes everything else.’ I liked hearing this, and I do it—I give myself 5 minutes, or half an hour, to sit quietly, have tea, or talk with someone—time just for myself. I get up at 5

and until 11 in the night, I'm active—like a chakki one keeps working, on and on!

“At home, there are my devrani (husband's younger brother's wife) and me, and our children—she has one son, I have a son and a daughter. My husband is in the police, he comes home whenever he can. We have land, and orchards—peaches, apricots, plum, walnuts, apple, etc. Our house stands by itself, atop the mountain. There is no habitation for about half a kilometer.

“My devrani and I do all the work—care for the cow, clean the house, cook the food, everything. We have a monthly schedule—one month she does the morning work and I do the evening, the next month I do the morning and she the evening. We do puja and ring the bell daily, morning and evening, in our family temple. It is the tradition and we two keep it up. Here, formally I've to give four hours daily, but very often it gets longer. If a relative comes, one feels bad, like right now Kantibua is here (my husband's 90-year-old aunt), and we have to leave her alone in the day. My devrani works too. Her son and my daughter go to school together--both are around 12 years old. And my son is doing a job, in Kainchidham—as store manager!

“Many women joined the training here—some 80 to 85 women. On Tuesdays, some 20 to 25 women come, we give out the raw materials and distribute their earnings. “For the future, I think I would like to do something even better, than what I'm doing now. I'd like to take forward the work with women. The women of our villages know



a lot, but they are caught up in the household, are not able to come out, they don't have time. The main thing is, there has to be a source of income. Unless there's a source of income, why will people come? That's why we have to see how far this work can go. I would like to help draw more women into this work. For this, the work has to grow.

“I've seen the work in Kausani since childhood. Radha di is my husband's bua—she had gone as a child to Lakshmi Ashram and stayed on for life. She is well known for her work in education, teaching girls and women. Kantibua also went and worked in Lakshmi Ashram. Both of them did not marry, they have won so much respect for their work. We respect them a lot and our thinking is also different.”



Chitra Negi

Age: 43

Village: Bohrakot



Chitra joined here in December 2021. She says, “When I heard about the training, I came and gave my name. I wanted to learn new designs. Earlier I’d learnt from Mummy and others at home, but hadn’t really made anything much. My children have grown up, do their own daily chores—bathing, getting ready, everything. So I have a bit of time.

“I took training in crochet. I knew how to do crochet but did not know designs. I learnt to make ponchos, bands, shawls, toran, many items. I would come for the training and complete the left over housework in the evening. I liked it here because I found a lot of support, and encouragement to learn and make new things. We get the payment for whatever gets sold.

“Here I get so involved, I forget everything about home. Afterwards, we remember our homes. There is something apart from home too—this is the best feeling. The atmosphere here is so good. Everything is very

disciplined, time-wise—coming, going, yoga, learning, working, eating, and mantra, meditation. I love coming here, meeting everybody, even if sometimes I have to quickly run back home as soon as it's time.

“Working in a group with women is wonderful. If someone doesn't know how to do something, we ask each other. We sing songs—we sing a lot of songs. In the winter it feels glorious when we sit in the sun and sing. We sing the Ashram songs, and we sing local pahadi songs too, our own pahadi songs. We used to sing some of these songs in weddings, festivals, and now they are being forgotten. Nirmala Bhatt knows many pahadi songs, I have learnt them from her, when we sing together here.

“Leadership training was very useful. We learnt to make eye contact, and to understand each other's feelings,



empathy. We also take help from one another, and there are buddies, we get together and share what's happening in our life, as buddies.

“I'm very involved here now. Whatever work is given to us, I will do. Gradually we will keep growing, and I will like to remain connected and part of this, always. My family likes my coming here. They say, 'you do your housework quickly, and keep up with social commitments, and you go to Madhuban, how do you manage to do everything?' Both my sons say, 'go, you must go, otherwise you are just at home.'”

“An integral education which could, with some variations, be adapted to all the nations of the world, must bring back the legitimate authority of the Spirit over a matter fully developed and utilized.”

-The Mother



Leadership comes easily to me. I never feel like leaving from here. There is potential to do many more things with the group here.

- HEMLATA SUYAL

I like the atmosphere here a lot. It is very peaceful. I earn through stitching and knitting. I will always remain connected with Madhuban.

- KAVITA ARYA



**MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE AS EXPRESSED BY WOMEN
ENGAGED IN PROJECT: KHUSHALI -LIVELIHOOD**



Hemlata Suyal

Age: 48

Village: Naikana



Hemlata Suyal joined in December 2021. She says, “I heard there was to be training on making jams, pickles, in Madhuban. That was the first time I came to Madhuban. I liked it here very much, and first impression is last impression.

“I already knew how to knit and stitch. Here I began knitting many items. I’ve made socks, sweaters, all the items by now. Whatever we had knitted, we got payment for that. I realized that there is a source of income, and rather than gossiping or sitting around, we can work and earn. I brought my brother’s wife too, and she learnt to make flower garlands and bamboo baskets. She has two small children. I take the work for her, she does it and I bring it back.

“I was very good at my studies. I did B.Ed. and double MA., in Haldwani. I used to get very high marks. I loved to study. I began doing a job in a school, but my father



called me back home. After that I've been at home. The schools here were not paying anything, just 2 or 3000, so I didn't join teaching here. I remained single, unmarried. I was totally caught up in the household before I came here. My father keeps very unwell and it is my responsibility to look after him. Really, if I were not there, he may not have survived because he needs a lot of care. I see to his medicines, treatment. I do a lot of housework too. Both my brothers were in jobs, but during lockdown both lost their jobs. After that we are in financial distress. Before that we were fine, but now it is difficult to make ends meet.

"The family likes my coming here. I complete a lot of housework before I come, then the others manage, there's no problem. We all work in the orchard and fields.

There is some income from the trees, and some from the vegetable crops, but it is very little. My earnings have become very critical. We really need the cash I earn, to meet household expenses. I'm able to contribute. Whatever I can comes in use for our family needs.

"Leadership comes easily to me. We have had leadership training, I liked it. They told us a number of things which we hadn't thought of—we should be more aware of our anger, how we behave, how we should sort out matters in a calm way. Body language, eye contact, should all be kept in mind—if a customer is looking at us and we look elsewhere, we will lose the customer. I used to have some negativity, but all that has disappeared with the training.

"Sometimes I never feel like leaving, I always feel like being here, connected with the place. We work in a group. If I work individually, I will not be able to sell the items. In the local area only some will buy, but outside, these items are given more importance. So it is beneficial for us to work as a group, in an organized way, rather than separately. Although I love solitude, I also like working in a group, working together, taking everyone along. The work we have begun here should grow; we can take it forward. I can make many other things as well, such as flax-infused salt, I make it at home, I can more, to sell. There is potential to do many more things, through the group here."



Kavita Arya

Age: 42

Village: Naikana



Kavita began coming here in 2021. She says, “I first came for the training, and have learnt a lot. I used to knit and stitch earlier but after marriage I forgot all that, because I had to concentrate on doing agriculture. I joined here, to earn. I was working as a daily wage labourer—but then I developed diabetes and I’m unable to do eight hours of physical labour. I am the only earner for my family of five children. That’s why I came here, to earn. And secondly, I came because I love to learn new things

“I’ve learnt to make many things here. By now, I make most of the items. I like the atmosphere here a lot. It is peaceful. While we’re here, we are tension-free. At home there are a hundred tensions, but here we meet several people, we chat, and forget about home tensions. We talk with one another, we learn, we work. Senior women in the group teach us. They teach us very well, with lots

of love, of course they scold if someone keeps making mistakes. I go to Sada Sukhe very day from 9 to 2 and make things.”

“I am working hard, to earn through stitching and knitting. I was 16 when I got married. My husband and I worked on our own small field and could grow something. He became mentally unwell and left home several years ago. People began calling me, giving Rs 400 and lunch, to work 9 to 5 doing agricultural labour, washing, cleaning, gathering fodder, whatever they needed. My eldest son got a job, but then he became mentally unwell, and I am getting him treated. The second boy opened a hotel in Haldwani but has not yet begun earning. My sister-in-law adopted one of my daughters, while the younger daughter is completing class 12. We have hardly any



income from anywhere. We plant some dal etc. on the land, but nothing much. We have no cattle. Here, I am able to earn, but it is irregular, because it depends on the sale of whatever items I make.

“I will remain connected with this place. I will keep learning more and new things. I am confident I will keep learning. I enjoy stitching work. Stitching is something that requires me to sit and work, and I am able to do it for hours on end. I do it neatly—Didi says so too. I love to do this kind of work, I will keep doing it, and I will earn more and better. The work here will keep growing, and everyone will be able to make a good income, using our talents.”

“India is a country where the psychic can and must rule and the time has come for that here. Besides, it is the only possible salvation for this country whose consciousness has unfortunately been warped by the influence and domination of a foreign nation ...”

-The Mother



In Mirambika
I have learnt how to tell
stories to children and how to
sing songs... There is more
sincerity in my work

- BABITA ARYA

After coming to
Mirambika my confidence
has increased tremendously,

- INDRA ARYA



**MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE AS EXPRESSED BY WOMEN
ENGAGED IN PROJECT: KHUSHALI -LIVELIHOOD, ECLC & TREC**



Babita Arya

Age: 22

Village: Loshgyani



My village is 8-9 kms from Madhuban, but my school, GGIC, is just below Madhuban. My dada dadi both used to come to health camps in Madhuban—for eyes, teeth etc, they got eye operations too done there. They really liked it. But I had never been here.

In 2019 I had completed class 12 and was at home for 6-7 months. Then a person, Divan ji, came to our village and brought forms, from Madhuban. He was taking the form from village to village. I met him at the place where village meetings are held. After that I came to Madhuban. I filled the form, writing out answers to questions like, name, age, what we want to do etc. Some 35-40 girls came, and out of that only about 15 were selected. I was selected! My dream was, to become a teacher.

The course began in December 2019. We came daily, 9 a.m. to 3.30. I liked it very much. So much happened! I met many new people. I felt relaxed there, the environment was wonderful. Veronik didi taught us, and Vartika didi, Kamala di, Anju didi too. I was there for 6 months.

Then, I came to the Delhi ashram. Indira and Komal also came. First I joined vocational training—learnt tailoring, knitting, art and craft, handmade paper, English class, computer. Six months later, I was selected for the teacher training course. I joined Mirambika and work with the small children, in Red Group.

There is a lot of change in myself. I am more peaceful. I am much more responsible. I used to be childish at the time I came—just doing things for myself! Truth to tell, I knew nothing when I came here. I learnt everything here. I am taking responsibilities now. In Mirambika, I gauge this is what we can do with the children, I give my suggestion to Minoti didi, I think of something new for next day. I've learnt how to tell stories to children, to sing songs, to take initiative in every work. There is more sincerity in me, I can't say too much, but it is more now. I am much more friendly a person now. I feel that while working with children, one develops, one doesn't even know when and how one is changing. I am more helpful now, because earlier I was limited to the family. Now one sees, so many people, who needs help, and how can I help. Two years of the teacher training course will be complete in March.

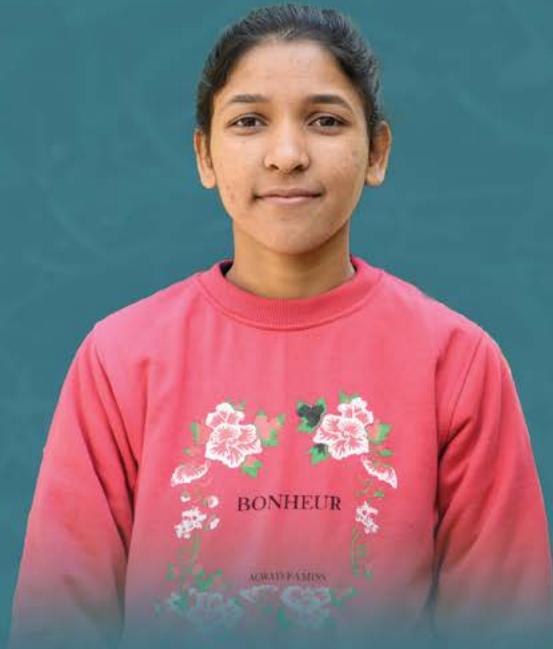
My parents were very happy when I came to Delhi ashram. It is a safe space; parents naturally worry about safety in a city like Delhi. Earlier I had hardly been out anywhere, just up to Haldwani at most.

I have two younger brothers, one is in school, the other will join college this year. My elder sister is married. Now

I am the eldest. I want to earn and help my family. My father was not well, he had an operation in hospital in Haldwani. Private treatment is very expensive. My Dada ji too is not well, last 6-7 months. My parents too are saying it's been three years, now take up a job. We have a lot of land and orchards--it is the source of livelihood. We grow vegetables, pulses; and there are plums, apricots, peaches, apples, pears. We have a cow—my mother collects fodder, cares for the cow. For the fields, now we have to employ labour: this is also expensive.

My dream is to earn and help support my family, and later, when I don't have pressure to earn, I want to work in the Ashram. My aspiration is to be a good teacher, and to improve the education in my area. I would really love to work with the Madhuban ashram, if Anju didi opens a school or learning centre, I would like to run it, to work in it. I want always to remain associated with the Ashram.





Indira Arya

Age: 21

Village: Jhuthiya



In 2019 I had just completed my 12th and was thinking of joining college. But then I thought of doing something different. Divan ji told me that there is a teacher training course in Madhuban, would you like take it up? I said, "Yes!" Since childhood my dream has been, to become a teacher, and teach children.

I was familiar with Madhuban, I used to come as a child, for races, this and that. Others in my family also had come to Madhuban. When I came to apply for the teacher training course, we were asked a few questions, I too answered all the questions, wrote why I want to be a teacher. That day we met Kamala didi too, she asked me to sing a song.

After I joined Madhuban, I got more and more attached to it. We went to Nainital for a 10-day oneness camp in Dec 2019 itself, met people from Pondicherry and elsewhere. I really liked it. Slowly I got to know about Sri Aurobindo and Sri Ma. I didn't know about them earlier, who they

are, what changes they wanted to bring into the world. I got to know about them, learnt the songs, chants.

Madhuban is beautiful. The flowers of Madhuban are so beautiful, I am happy when I see those flowers! We learnt many things in Madhuban. We met Anju Didi. She gave us a formula, CWC, Complete Work Cycle, how to complete whatever work we begin. And she taught us, make an aim, to write your observations daily, and for this she gave another formula, Same Time, Same Thing, Same Place – write one's observations at a set time every day. By observing oneself daily, we get to know about ourselves, where we need to improve. Then we can work at it, and improve oneself.

I came to the Delhi ashram after about 6 months. Although it was Covid time, we learnt a lot. We stayed on here. Most of the ashram was shut, there were very few people, but we were here. We learnt handmade paper with Naval bhaiya, and we kept busy with doing all the ashram work. The day would go by, without realizing. We kept learning, and didn't even know how much time is passing. Throughout, we kept learning.

After I joined Mirambika, the learning continues. In Mirambika, every moment there is something to learn. Sometimes I feel that not a day has gone by when I have not learnt something new. I learn from even children, from the environment here, from the elder teachers....



After joining this course, there have been many changes in me. My confidence has increased tremendously. Earlier, I wouldn't be able to speak the way I am speaking to you. There was hesitation.

There has been progress in myself—mental progress, and physical progress.

Emotionally I was already fine, I don't get angry, try to remain happy at all times, and I want others to be happy. Physically, due to the discipline of the ashram life, regular lifestyle, exercises, there has been significant improvement. There has been mental progress, I can say, a lot of improvement. I am doing my graduation too, in History, from IGNOU. I study on my own. It's going fine. I did well in my first year.

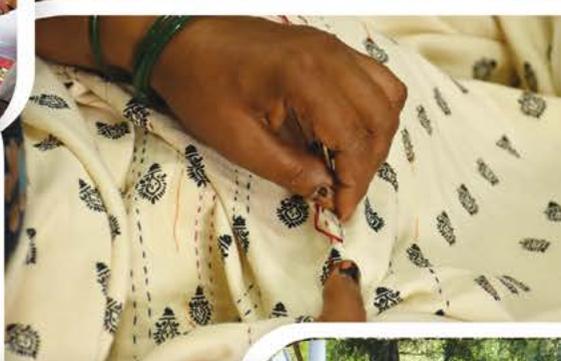


“Essentially there is but one single true reason for living: it is to know oneself. We are here to learn- to learn what we are, why we are here, and what we have to do. And if we don't know that, our life is altogether empty - for ourselves and for others”

- The Mother

Some more voices:

1. “जो काम हमने पहले से आता था, वो हमने यहाँ सफाई और तेजी से करना सीखा” -हेमा मेर
2. “Main yahan isliye judi hoon ki yahan se seekh kar mujhe apna khud ka kaam karne ka aatmvishwash aajaega” -Tanuja Mer, Knitting (basic) trainee
3. “Main Ashram ki pehli training se bhi judi thi, is baar maine aur logon ko joda, mujhe yahan aa kar nayi cheezein seekhna bohot accha lagta hai isliye main apna samay nikal ke yahan aati hu” -Basanti Devi, knitting trainee
4. “Pehle hum sochte the ki hume kuch nahin aata, par Is training ke madhyam se hume vishwash mila hai ki hum apne andar ki kala ko bahar nikal sakte hain” -Parvati Joshi, Aipan trainee



Journey of Khushali



12-2-56

Opening of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Delhi branch

Let this place be worthy
of its name and manifest
the true spirit of Sri Aurobindo's
teaching and message to
the world.

With my blessings



Relics at Delhi
Sri Aurobindo Ashram-Delhi Branch



Relics at Madhuban
Sri Aurobindo Ashram-Delhi Branch



*"Life must blossom like a flower
offering itself to the Divine"*
- The Mother

ABOUT THE BOOK

Transforming Lives: Stories of Change documents the lives of women engaged in the Khushali Livelihoods Project in the Madhuban (Talla Ramgarh) area. Beyond all the building of skills we have emphasized on each participant's connect to their inner light, led by their psychic self in sync with their other planes of being.

This includes their lived experiences of local: history, traditions, myths, customs, flora, and fauna as a rich foundation for their new learning and skills. This is part of a continuous qualitative impact and documentation project.



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