

Dargah Hazrat Inayat Khan Hope Project Newsletter

Edited by Kamini Prakash and Heiko Schrader

No. 11

The Women of Samrat

Samrat, the Thrift and Credit program of the Hope Project, gives the women of Basti Hzt. Nizamuddin the opportunity to take an active role in creating a brighter future for themselves and their families. Once a month, these women gather to deposit savings, learn to keep accounts, apply for loans, and exchange ideas. But who are the women of Samrat, and what are they doing with their money?

We spoke to these women and asked them to tell us their stories. We asked them about their daily routine, their personal lives, and their financial lives, their motives to save their money, their goals and their dreams. Here is just one of these incredible women:



Rehana has joined the group about 4 years ago. She is a 38-year-old wife and mother of 4 kids. She is a domestic worker by trade, but is well respected among her neighbors for the work she does going door to door teaching women the Koran. While neither she nor her husband has any formal education, their children are all in school, and she has high hopes for their future. She learned the importance of saving the hard way. Twelve years ago, her mother passed away and it became her responsibility to care for the entire

family. She desperately needed money and did not know what to do. Though it was hard for her, she asked her brother for some money to tide her over. She had never asked him for help before and was devastated and humiliated when he refused. Somehow she managed, but more trouble was to come. There was a bad time in her marriage when her husband left her on her own with no money and no food. She gets very emotional when she recalls what it was like before she joined Samrat and was forced to beg relatives for money. It was especially difficult, she says, because "God may know everything about us and our lives, but I was ashamed to show my position to others."

Rehana knew she would have to start saving her own earnings so that she would never have to beg for a loan again. When she heard about the Thrift and Credit program, she decided to give it a try. Her neighbors were suspicious of Samrat at first but Rehana had faith it would all work out in the end because, she decided, "they can take my money, but they can't take my luck!" She has hidden her membership from her husband out of respect for him. He would not be happy if he knew that she has more money than he does, and she is afraid of the abuse she might have to suffer. Still, she is determined to make both their lives better. So far, the money she has saved and the loans have helped her finance construction on their home and pay for their daughter's marriage. Rehana's husband knows the Hope Project and does not mind her leaving their home to come here. She would not be able to get out of the house to attend meetings if they were held anywhere else. Samrat has made a big difference in her life. Rehana says that she gets ideas from fellow Samrat members that help her manage the issues in her own life. When she's with the other women, she is able to forget her own problems for a little while.

Rehana's husband is a rickshaw driver, and rents the vehicle he drives for a high daily price. After she pays off her current loans, she is saving her money so that one day she will be able to buy her husband his own rickshaw. She dreams of a time when her children will have good jobs and her husband will have a steady income. She is determined to make her dreams come true, even if she has to do it on her own.

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Hope for Muslim Women in India (Broadcasted on ARD on International Women's Day)

When the 22 seamstresses at the Hope Project turn the wheels of their sewing machines, it is anything but a normal event. The women are all Muslim and many come from traditional, conservative families. Before they could start using their skills in tailoring, stitching and embroidery for earning a living, they had to overcome several obstacles at home.

Farzana Parveen, 40 years, Seamstress: *My husband was initially against it. But he himself was unemployed so he could not say much. We were economically dependent on my sister who paid for everything. He finally realized that this situation could not go on any longer. Today he is no longer against me working.*

Farzana Parveen can today earn money for her husband, her 3 daughters and a disabled niece. She hopes that her daughters can get the education that she never received. Moreover she has made many friends, apart from her family. Farzana and the other women learnt their skills from Shahida. But for Shahida, it goes beyond teaching a mere skill.

Shahida, 42: *I am happy that I can help other women, who need my help, so that they can start working and earning money. I try my best to convince their families but there is huge resistance to women working. Women are supposed to stay at home and look after their children instead of going to work.*



The Hope Project has over the years established its position in the narrow, winding alleys of Nizamuddin, a historical Muslim neighborhood in New Delhi. It provides instructors and sewing machines, purchases the necessary material and distributes the work. The women work mostly at home. However, they also participate in the marketing of their products by going to Christmas bazaars and retail shops in search of buyers and selling their jute bags, embroidered T-shirts, scarves and pillow covers. Marketing is an important aspect of the Project, according to the supervisor of the group, Mohini Prakash.

Mohini Prakash: *The women still find it a bit difficult to sell their handicrafts, to go out of the basti, take a bus and negotiate with shop keepers. So, we try and train them in all aspects that are required for running a business.*

Poverty has remained an integral part of the lives of many people in Basti Nizamuddin. Women, especially have to bear the brunt of it, according to the Executive Director of the project, Kamini Prakash:

Kamini Prakash: *Women here marry very young and live a secluded life at home. For many women it is difficult to seek medical care, livelihood options and an education outside the basti. We provide these options here in the basti and at the same time encourage women to step out of their environment and stand on their feet.*

The Sky is the Limit

Salma stands out in the basti. Every morning she gets up and proceeds to work, bag in hand and head held high. This seemingly simple act inspires many other girls in the basti to come to the Hope Project school and continue their education. Each one of them aspires to be like Salma and develop her own identity.

The youngest daughter of Mr. Saleem Ahmed dropped out of regular school, like so many of her friends. But instead of sitting at home, she decided to continue her education at the Hope Project. Now she works as a computer operator and also sells credit cards on the phone for ICICI bank.

“My father and my friend, Arpana (also a Hope alumni) pushed me to go for a job. It’s true that the job has given me economic support but more importantly, I have been able to overcome my doubts, hesitation and fears of the world outside. I have the confidence to deal with problems. I also have job offers and can choose the job I want. I believe that girls must get the opportunity to go out. As long as we are good, everything will work out. One should not worry about what the rest of the world thinks. I know that I have to go ahead. The Hope Project gave me a chance to continue and finish my schooling. I learned how to use the computer, and participated in theatre workshops and family life education classes. I want to become a successful computer professional.”

We wish Salma all the best. She is just one more Hope graduate, like Arpana, Ayesha and Devkali, who has proved that the sky is the limit.

The Hope Classroom



Of unmasked curiosity



Of bright eyed wonder



Of cynical challenge



Of fierce defenses



Of unhesitating laughter

Photos and Text:
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Curriculum Advisor



<http://www.sufiorder.org/>
<http://organisationen.freepage.de/hopeproject/>
<http://www.hopeprojectindia.org>

DARGAH HAZRAT INAYAT KHAN HOPE PROJECT

Initiated by Pir Vilayat Khan in 1975

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International Board members

Pir Zia Inayat Khan, Richard Glantz, Martin Zahir Roehrs
 Anna and David Shahabuddin Less, Carmen Hussain, Abrar Khan
 Gert Johan Manschot, QuanYin Lynne Williams, Heiko Schrader

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HP International Board Extended

The International Board of the Hope Project was constituted by Pir Vilayat in order to direct and support the development of the organization. In the last year, the project has added two new members:

Ms. Quan Yin Lynne Williams, MD is a long-time supporter of the Hope Project as well as a teacher in the Sufi Ruhaniat International and initiate in the Sufi Order and Sufi Movement. She is the representative from the Ruhaniat to the Hope Project Board. She trained first as a Pediatrician and then as a Psychiatrist and Child Psychiatrist with a deep interest in health care and education for children. She is most happy to be a grandmother, a state which calls for us to hold "The Whole World in Our Hands". Quan Yin lives and practices in Washington State in the western US.

Mr. Abrar Khan (India) brings 28 years of experience as an academic, learning facilitator, manager and program developer. Currently a training and management consultant, Abrar worked as a senior advisor with the Center for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) and taught in the Department of Social Work, Jamia Millia Islamia, a University in Delhi.