



PAHAL: TARA Akshar+ Towards Sustainability and Entrepreneurship

As we phase out after four years from Bhagwanpur, Haryana, one of the geographies of TARA Akshar+, efforts have been made to ensure the sustainability of impact created. One such initiative was to organise a group of neo-literates to start their own microenterprise.

Pahal is a Tailoring and Embroidery enterprise that was established to facilitate the neo-literates with a livelihood opportunity that enables them to become self-reliant and continuous usage of literacy skills acquired with TARA Akshar+ in a practical venture. The idea for this particular enterprise was conceived after understanding two important elements about the predominantly Muslim community that resides in the region - embroidery is a common practice amongst the locals, and the demand of embroidered garments and products like *Burkha* is high in the local markets. Hence, it was collectively decided to build upon the creative skills and strengths that were pre-existing and form a group that will not only lead the enterprise but also branch their skills out to other women of the village who aspire to develop their embroidery skills and encourage more people to attain literacy and grow into literate citizens who can extend the learning experience into different aspects of their lives.

After various discussions and meetings with the neo-literates of Bhagwanpur, passionate women came forward and participated to learn and grow through their entrepreneur skills. The model of the enterprise has been made in a manner that encourages participation in running a business as well as skill building for the post literacy progress. A two-week formal design and embroidery training was

organised with two master trainers in Delhi to build upon their existing embroidery skills and curate Summer Collection 2021. The rest of the team members were given Entrepreneurial Development training back in Bhagwanpur to facilitate them with an understanding of basic business practices. Conjugating their skill development at TARA Akshar+ with the entrepreneurial training, they now have a much better idea about the much needed practices that have the same wavelength as the updated trends of the rural and urban market. After finishing their design training in Delhi, the master trainers went back and trained their team in embroidery and design of a range of products according to the demands of the market. This way, the skills of the entire team was developed on two fronts - design and entrepreneurial, and it also gave the members to choose the role that fits them the best.

Our local partner, Village Development Society regularly assisted the enterprise with promotion and marketing activities. The journey of Pahal was initiated in January 2021, and so far they have received several orders for a wide range of products - bags, garments, bed sheets, pillow covers and double ply and triple masks during the COVID-19 lockdown.

This enterprise has served as a beacon of hope and a means for earning during one of the most challenging circumstances that all of humankind has faced and it continues to motivate the team to work and not give up during the grim pandemic. More importantly, it clearly highlights the multifaceted and long term beneficial effects of gaining literacy through programs like TARA Akshar+ where the exposure is wide enough to prepare the students to not only become literate, but also grow into a whole new person who experience a holistic progress and is an asset to nation building.