



EDUCATE - EMPOWER - EQUIP

"If you empower a child in India, you empower the Family, the Village and the Community - Forever"



Sewing to the Nations

Vahi walked from the class with the delicate piece of paper held tightly between her fingertips. Just moments before, she had stood together with the other graduates of the tailoring school in her cherished pink dress sari.



"Hold still now," the man with the camera had said. The light flashed, bringing stars to her eyes, and for the first time ever, she had her picture taken. Vahi was glad for the chance

to show off the sari she had designed and sewn herself. Tomorrow, however, was an even bigger day for her. Tomorrow, the competition would begin.



She rose with the sun, changing as fast as she could into her day-to-day sari, and leaving her new pink one tucked safely away. The workday was agonizingly long, but finally, the sun dropped far enough to

make farming impossible. She skipped through the field, ignoring the dirt and sweat that clung to her clothes, and arrived home with just enough light left. Vahi hurriedly changed into her new sari, fumbling the cloth in her excitement and nearly dropping it on the dirt floor. She finished dressing and hurried toward the small home used by the tailoring school.

Ducking under the open doorway into the one-room hut, she nearly ran into the woman in front of her. Everyone from her village who had graduated from the tailoring school stood packed in the tiny space surrounded by three treadle sewing machines, one against each wall. Only three of them would be able to work that evening, with the lack of machines. She shook her head, excitement curbed somewhat by reality. Never could she and her husband afford one of those beautiful machines, even if they saved every rupee. Then, a little thrill shot up her spine. That was what this competition was all about. Each graduate would have a pattern to sew, and the winners would have a paying job sewing patterns in the shape of elephants for a special project funding more tailoring schools across India.

A paying job! With the money from both migrant farming and sewing, perhaps she could afford one of these fabulous machines!

She'd been told an interview with the Global Helps partners was a part of the competition. She fidgeted a little at the thought before forcing herself to stop. Her story wasn't the same as it was six months ago. The school had given her a hope she hadn't had before. They'd equipped her with the skills that could mean a better future for her and her family. All nervousness gone, Vahi watched as the contest began.



Over the course of several nights, all the women had a chance to sew an elephant. At last, Vahi got her turn. Working for as long as she had the

borrowed machines available, she crafted an elephant design from her choice of fabric that would later become a stuffed toy. This was a design she had imagined since the start of her courses six months ago, but only now did she have the skills to pursue it.

At the end of the contest, bag in hand,



Vahi met with her teachers and told them again her story of how her family had been in farming for generations without education and often without food. Migrant farming was a demanding job, both physically and on the spirit, as between the planting season and harvest, little work could be found. They would travel miles from their home, just to be turned away. Farming was all she knew, all she had ever known. A broad smile spread across her face. That was no longer true. She had learned everything they had taught them at the tailoring center and even if she did lose the contest, she had a skill now that master tailors in the city could put to good use during the off-season.



They took her picture again, thanked her, and she returned home. An odd sensation squirmed through her stomach, and she didn't think it was fear. Anxiety maybe, but never fear. She fell asleep with that thought.

Late that next evening, Vahi returned to the small hut to find only two other women inside. What did that mean? Could she possibly have won? Her teacher's words confirmed her growing hopes.

"Congratulations!"

Could it be? She and the women with her stood frozen as it slowly dawned on them. They had won! They were the winners!

"As a surprise, not only will each of you be employed as part of our elephant project, but we have something for you," he paused and then went on, "your own treadle sewing machines."



The shock and then the sheer joy overwhelmed Vahi's system as tears streaked down her face. Maybe someday she wouldn't have to work the farms, subject to someone else's whims. She could work right here at home with her very own machine. A smile blossomed across her face once more.



Today, we have four tailoring schools running in villages in northern India with more coming this year. Every six months, a class graduates, and we give the graduates a chance to be a part of our elephant project.

We want to give every woman the opportunity to support themselves financially.

At the end of six months, we host a sewing competition where the winners become a regular member of the project. We don't tell them this at the beginning, but every winner is also gifted their very own treadle sewing machine. Many of our graduates go on to teach our classes to future tailors and start businesses.



The elephant patterns sewn by our competition winners are shipped flat by our partners to us in the United States, where volunteers stuff them and add eyes, ears,

and a tail. For every donation of a hundred dollars or more, an elephant and a plaque detailing the story of a woman in India will be given as a gift. Each elephant helps fund further projects among the rural poor of India.



For information on these Elephants and Plaques, contact Global Helps Network at GHN@GlobalHelpsNetwork.org with your request or text "elephant project gift set" to 253-261-0656.

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