

# *Global Foundation for Humanity*

*2010*



*Pictured here are Shoba and Sunita. Shoba is taking a Computer Training course and Sunita is working on a Masters in Economics. We have been able to secure scholarships for the two of them and hope they will continue to help the younger girls at the school. They are role models and have changed their lives through education. We are so proud of their efforts and hard work.*

*Everything comes to us  
That belongs to us  
If we create the capacity  
To receive it  
Rabindranath Tagore*

## President's Report 2010

### The Veerni Project in Rajasthan

**Life in Rajasthan.** In a newsletter of the World Bank in December 2009, there is a moving description of life in the desert where the Veerni Project has spent the last 17 years.

*“In the western reaches of the Great Indian Desert in Rajasthan, vast stretches of scrubland extend far into the distance. Hillocks and dunes, unsuitable for farming, rise up unexpectedly, interspersed with dry and thorny vegetation. Little hamlets lie scattered across the barren wastes, and small clusters of thatched round roofs barricade themselves with walls of stone against the unrelenting desert winds. Occasional flocks of sheep and goats traverse the dusty expanse, providing the nomadic tribes of the desert with one of the few means of livelihood in the region. Change has been slow to come to this harsh and inhospitable terrain.”*



This year there has been no monsoon and no crops.

*“In prolonged isolation, traditional patterns of life, still largely feudal, have lingered on. Women continue to be relegated a subordinate role, often leading a voiceless existence. Girls have traditionally not been valued, left uneducated, and married off early to ease the economic burden on the family.*

*Spending on them is considered a waste because they have to be sent off to their husbands' homes all too soon. Geography too has played its part in keeping things so. With villages being few and far between, schools are spread thinly on the ground, making it difficult for parents to send their daughters to learn even if they want to.*

*Unsurprisingly, poverty levels are high and rates of literacy, especially among women and girls, are very low making the area one of the most educationally backward regions in the country. Rajasthan has 13 districts where the female literacy is below 40% and the gender gap is 30%. It is therefore crucial that all necessary efforts are made to ensure that youth develop knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to find jobs in the rapidly evolving Indian economy so that India's demographic growth is transformed into a global competitive advantage.”*

It is our goal that women will be included in this evolution and growth. Their equal status can be achieved through education which Veerni endeavors to provide.

## **India today**

As the world's largest democracy and a rising power, India is playing a larger role in the international stage. However, as an Indian journalist Palagummi Sainath writes, "*While absolute poverty may not have increased, India remains at an abysmal rank in the UN Human Development Index and is positioned at 132nd place in the 2007-08 UN HDI index.*" It is the lowest rank for the country in over 10 years. In 1992, India was at 122nd place in the same index. It can even be argued that the situation has become worse on critical indicators of overall well-being such as the number of people who are undernourished (India has the highest number of malnourished people, at 230 million, and is 94th of 119 in the world hunger index), and the number of malnourished children (43% of India's children under 5 are underweight, the highest in the world) as of 2008. The child malnutrition rate in India is twice as great as sub-Saharan Africa. The World Bank also noted that while poverty is often the underlying cause of malnutrition in children, the superior economic growth experienced by South Asian countries compared to those in Sub-Saharan Africa, has not translated into superior nutritional status for the South Asian child.

Although more than 103 million people have moved out of desperate poverty in the course of one generation in urban and rural areas, a 2007 report by the state-run National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS) found that 77% of Indians, or 836 million people, lived on less than 20 rupees per day (USD 0.50 cents), with most working in "informal labor sector with no job or social security."

## **India and population growth**

Despite progress, and although India has created several impressive goals to reduce its population growth rates, the high population growth rate remains a symptom of poverty. When India gained independence from the United Kingdom sixty years ago, the country's population was a mere 350 million. Since 1947, the population of India has more than tripled. Population projections for India anticipate that the country's population will reach 1.5 to 1.8 billion by 2050. While only the Population Reference Bureau has published projections out to 2100, they expect India's population at the close of the twenty-first century to reach 1.853 to 2.181 billion. Thus, India is expected to become the first and only county on the planet that will ever reach a population of more than 2 billion (China's population is likely to drop after reaching a peak of about 1.46 billion in 2030 and the U.S. isn't likely to see a billion).

## **India and gender**

A Hindu saying: "**Raising a daughter is like watering your neighbor's garden.**"

Killed, aborted or neglected, at least 100 million girls have disappeared and the number is increasing. In India and China, 120 boys are being born for every 100 girls. In the 0-14 age group in **India, there are 190 million males and 172 million females, a difference of 18 million.**

Female infanticide is the intentional killing of baby girls due to the preference for male babies and from the low value associated with the birth of females." (Marina Porrás, "Female Infanticide and Feticide".) It should be seen as a subset of the broader phenomenon of infanticide, which has also targeted the physically or mentally handicapped. As with maternal mortality, some would dispute the assigning of infanticide or female infanticide to the category of "genocide" or, as here, "gendercide." Nonetheless, the argument advanced in the maternal mortality case-study holds true in this case as well: governments and other actors can be just as guilty of mass killing by neglect or tacit encouragement.

### **There are 42.7 million women missing in India.**

From the information gathered by Veerni team on Child marriage, we have come to know that one of the causes for this crime is DOWRY. The financial burden on the parents forces them to get their daughters married at an early age and more so ever they are socially obligated to do so at the time of any elderly deaths in the family where every related member would marry their child (not considering their age), because of the myth that the departed soul would bless the couple and at the same time they would save on the expenditure of an individual marriage ceremony.

The bias against females in India is related to the fact that "*Sons are called upon to provide the income; they are the ones who do most of the work in the fields. In this way sons are looked to as a type of insurance. With this perspective, it becomes clearer that the high value given to males decreases the value given to females.*" (Marina Porrás, "Female Infanticide and Feticide".) The problem is also intimately tied to the institution of dowry, in which the family of a prospective bride must pay enormous sums of money to the family in which the woman will live after marriage. Though formally outlawed, the institution is still pervasive. In the case of a civil servant, the combination of dowry and wedding expenses usually add up to ten times of what they would earn in one year. "*Given these figures combined with the low status of women, it seems not so illogical that the poorer Indian families would want only male children.*" (Porrás, "Female Infanticide and Feticide".) Murders of women whose families are deemed to have paid insufficient dowry have become increasingly common. India is also the heartland of sex-selective abortion. Amniocentesis was introduced in 1974 "*to ascertain birth defects in a sample population, 'but' was quickly appropriated by medical entrepreneurs. A spate of sex-selective abortions followed.*" (Karlekar, "The girl child in India.") Karlekar points out that "*those women who undergo sex determination tests and abort on knowing that the fetus is female are actively taking a decision against equality and the right to life for girls. In many cases, of course, the women are not independent agents but merely victims of a dominant family ideology based on preference for male children.*" This practice has reached the Veerni villages. In some of those villages, the under six years of age sex ratio in low castes show that the population is 700 girls to 1000 boys.

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## Child Marriage

Despite India's economic and educational reform efforts in the last decade, the prevalence of child marriage remains high. According to a new study led by Anita Raj, associate professor of Social & Behavioral Sciences at BUSPH, Boston University School of Public Health, nearly half of adult Indian women, aged 20 to 24, were married before the legal age of 18. Those child marriages were significantly associated with poor fertility outcomes, such as unwanted and terminated pregnancies, repeat childbirths in less than 24 months, and increased sterilization rates.

*"The prevalence of child marriage remains unacceptably high," Dr. Raj and colleagues wrote, These results suggest that neither recent progress in economic and women's development, nor existing policy or programmatic efforts to prevent child marriage and promote maternal and child health, have been sufficient to reduce the prevalence of child marriage in India to that of most other developing nations."*

However, according to an article in the New York Times in November 2009, more girls in India are refusing to become child brides. However, it takes a brave girl to fight the system. For some girls, the dangers of taking such action can be life threatening. Veerni motivates their parents and has been successful in some cases in delaying such marriages and convincing them to continue their daughters' education.

Two visitors from UNICEF, who are working on the issue of Child Marriage in Rajasthan, took stock of the situation of the Anganwadi (village based workers) and commented that all work carried out is on 'paper only'.

When interviewed, villagers blamed it on 'Tradition'. Various excuses offered were:

If married early, the girl will be secure and will be protected from sexual abuses. She will be safe at home from 'queer' eyes. If a girl is married off early, parents are saved a lot of expenses like paying for her education or training. She learns to take on responsibilities for household work.

*"These are lame excuses", opined Tripti, the representative from UNICEF "which by no means go in favor of tradition."*

As Veerni reported, they wanted to know from the team about the pre-natal sex determination tests being carried out in Jodhpur or Jodhpur District. We told them that it is being done quietly, nothing is given in writing to the customer and the sonologist charges a lot for the same. No government rule has been able to stop it totally. The desire for a male child rests not only in villages; it has its roots amongst the high class also. Female feticide is a *'death un-sung!'*

Punjab tops the list with Rajasthan close behind. In Jodhpur, this shameful, ignoble act is prevalent in the Shekhawati community, particularly in the Sikar district of Jodhpur. It is also being practiced, unbelievably in the Jain community. Unbelievably because the Jains are known for Ahimsa or non-destruction. It is said that they will not even hurt a fly or kill an ant. Dr. Usha (Veerni consultant doctor) spoke to 3 or 4 Jain families about it and they admitted that this is going on due to the fact that an expensive dowry has to be given to the girl.

**One of the serious consequences of the high prevalence of child marriage in India is that it fuels fertility risks.**

The Veerni team has been working for years to counsel the villagers on this vital issue and has made progress on creating awareness of the evils and debilitating nature of these practices. A lot more work needs to be done, but ultimately it is only through girl's education that meaningful changes will take place. The government is remiss in not enforcing the already existing laws that have outlawed these practices generations ago.

## **Maternal mortality**

According to an article in the **New York Times** last month, there has been a sharp decline in maternal deaths worldwide. This is increasingly due to access to care, education and an improvement in income worldwide. In India, there has been progress, but the rate remains at 450 per 100,000. The progress is partly the result of increasing hospital deliveries and a financial incentive for women to have their children in hospitals; however, in Jodhpur, the number of maternity beds has not increased and a wonderful friend of mine who is an obstetrician at the government hospital maternity unit tells me she delivers babies in the corridors and on the floor. The women are two to a bed. There is now an ambulance service in several parts of India including Jodhpur called 108 which operate in a radius of some 60 to 80 kilometers. In the first three months of operation, they delivered 80 babies in the ambulance. The ambulances are fully equipped and well staffed with trained paramedics so the chances of a woman delivering on the way to hospital are good. Interestingly enough, the head of the 108 ambulance organization is none other than the former Veerni Project statistician, Shekhar Joshi, so we have a friend in the administration.

## **India and Education – A challenge for girls**

India has made huge progress in expanding literacy to approximately two thirds of the population by increasing primary education to a 95% attendance rate and just over 50% in grades 9 and 10. Despite this, 35% of the population is illiterate and only 15% reach high school.

Education is a high priority in the Veerni Project.

## **Secondary school**

**Secondary school is the new bottleneck in the education system as the demand is growing.** The number of secondary school students is expected to increase from 40 to 60 million over the next decade. An increasing share of these students will come from rural and lower income groups.

Expanding secondary education is critical to the rising aspirations of young people in India. Life patterns are undergoing change in these times of transition as the old order is yielding a place to the new. Young people will not be silent as were their parents in accepting poverty as a way of life.

## **The Effects of Secondary Education for Girls**

One of the most influential figures in the world today is the adolescent girl. Worldwide, there are 600 million girls growing up in developing countries. Allowing these girls a secondary education will

change their opportunities and choices, which will have tremendous effects not just on their own lives, but on their families. As a mother, she is more likely to send her own children to school and have them immunized. She will contribute to the community, the economy and democracy.

➤ **Effects of girls' education**

1) *Decrease of maternal mortality:*

A girl who continues education through secondary school is likely to get married and have children later in life. She will bear fewer children, resulting in a decrease of maternal mortality. Additionally educated women are more likely to seek medical care and deliver in a hospital.

2) *Educated healthy children:* An educated mother will have more resources available to care for her children, decreasing infant and child mortality. She is more likely to send her children to school and have them immunized.

3) *Decreased malnutrition:* She will use resources for proper nutrition, reducing malnutrition.

An educated mother will have more resources available to care for her children, reducing malnutrition and the resulting diseases. .

4) *Higher chance of earning an income:* Finishing a secondary education will increase a woman's chances of finding employment, gaining economic self sufficiency and the respect of her community. She will thus take her rightful place in the community.

5) *Less domestic violence:*

Educated women are more likely to resist violence.

➤ **Girl's Community**

1) *Role models*

A few educated women can change a village as role models for women and girls, encouraging others to gain an education.

2) *Female teachers*

Once educated, women can return to their villages to teach the next generation, thus benefiting the community.

➤ **Economy**

1) *Reduced population pressure:* With educated women having fewer children, the population growth will slow down, reducing population pressure.

2) *Faster economic growth:* A World Bank study shows that increasing the percentage of women with a secondary education boosts the annual per capita income growth.

➤ **Democracy**

1) *Political participation:* Educated women are more likely to participate in politics. A World Bank study suggests that governments function better and are less corrupt when women participate in the political process.

## **The Veerni Institute**

Veerni has been at the forefront of the movement making secondary education available to rural girls. The Veerni Institute in Jodhpur set up in 2005 to allow village girls uninterrupted secondary schooling, now houses 100 girls. We were able to achieve our goal of increasing enrollment at the Veerni Institute from 85 girls to 100 girls for the 2009-10 academic year.

Veerni girls are eager to learn and are interested in becoming doctors, lawyers, teachers and police officers. To create tomorrow's leaders, it is crucial to give girls all the necessary tools so they can think independently and creatively, the give them the skills to continue their studies or enter the job market.

As we know, marrying at a young age prevents girls from staying in school and establishing independent financial security. Veerni wants to ensure girls are mature enough to make their own decisions. While some of the girls have come to the program already married as child brides, we have been able to keep them in school and from joining their husbands below the legal age. In some cases, they are pursuing college studies and delaying their effective marriage and childbearing.

Having successfully run the Institute for over five years, Veerni is now expanding the curriculum to include more creativity in the education system. For instance, Veerni is introducing a literary prize for classes 11 and 12 for prose, poetry and theatre in memory of Mary Anne Schwalbe, a Veerni supporter for many years.

The Veerni Institute program now includes extra tutoring for the girls, computer training for classes 10-12, sewing and crafts training, sports such as cricket, handball and traditional Indian games and weekly health screening by the Veerni medical advisor. The Veerni nurse visits on a daily basis.

Dr. Reena Bhansali, a Child Psychologist and Career Counselor, is a regular visitor to the Institute. Visiting the school on a monthly basis and giving individual counseling to a number of girls, including some of our child brides. These girls suffer from added anxieties concerning their future and Veerni is aiming to provide them with maximum support. She also takes up individual cases when necessary.

The results of the 2008-09 final exams were very heart warming. 85 students took exams and 78 passed. The girls who didn't pass received tutoring.

We have received results for 2009-2010 final exams and have some wonderful news. All the girls in Classes VI, VIII, X1 and XII passed their final exams. We had two girls out of 16 in Class VII fail and two girls out of 23 in Class IX fail, but we will work closely with them and get them extra tutoring. We are still awaiting the results of Class X.

Two of our girls, Shobha and Devashree, had been selected as trainees at Umaid Palace Hotel, one of the most prestigious hotels in Rajasthan and a member of the Taj Group. They are doing their apprenticeship in the housekeeping department for 1.5 years and are given a stipend, in addition to room and board. Three girls of this academic year have been accepted in the same program of apprenticeship at the same hotel and will be earning 3000 rupees a month. This is considered a sizeable income for a family and remarkable for an 18 year old girl.

## **Goals for the future**

We now have 100 girls enrolled at the school and would like to accommodate more. The plan for the development of the hostel would provide an additional floor on the Northern Wing with bathrooms on either end. The cost for this work would be \$28,885. We do not have the funding to carry out this work, but hope to raise the necessary funds in the near future.

## Veerni Institute Activities

We have been very fortunate to be part of the Girls Learn International Inc. sponsorship program. Our sister school, Glen Ridge High School, located in Glen Ridge, New Jersey, adopted the Veerni Institute in 2008. It is a very nice experience for all students involved and they get to learn about each other. The students in the US have sent the girls photos, letters, friendship bracelets and have also raised funds for Veerni. In the photo below, Jacqueline is sharing a scrapbook the Glen Ridge girls sent to India.



In return, the Veerni girls sent a beautiful scrapbook to Glen Ridge High School, along with a package of local crafts, all carefully wrapped.



In the photo above, the girls at Glen Ridge High School open up the beautiful scrapbook sent from Veerni.

## Improvements at the Veerni Institute



New basins were installed –  
The Maharani comes to inspect them.



The Computer Room

## Jacqueline's visit to the school in February



On my last day in Jodhpur, I took the class 12 girls for a farewell lunch to a restaurant called On the Rocks. We had a lovely time. For all of them it was their first experience in a restaurant. Rashmi, the Veerni Project Director, and Reena Bhansali, the Veerni Counselor, also attended.

## Lunch with Class 12 Girls “On the Rocks”



The Veerni Institute provides rural girls in Rajasthan with secondary education, which is mostly unavailable to them in villages. In order to achieve their dreams, they have to fight the prevailing culture which denies education to girls as they are seen fit only for marriage. Veerni helps them to realize their dreams. The girls are empowered and look forward to leading healthy and productive lives. They are able to study, participate in fun activities, such as dancing and sports, and most importantly, they are thriving. They are forging friendships and thinking about what they would like to do in the future. We want all girls to have the opportunity to go to school and enjoy their lives. The girls appreciate the opportunities created for them at the Veerni Institute and we are very grateful to our wonderful supporters.

## Child Brides



This is Pryianka. She is the head girl of the Institute and helps the two wardens who are responsible for the welfare of all the girls. Pryianka is also a child bride, but her in-laws have agreed to allow her to complete her education. She is fortunate in that her husband is going to college and is keen that she finishes her education. She plans to finish college and would like to join the police force. Like many of the girls at the Veerni Institute, she wants to work for the safety and protection of girls and women and help end child marriage.



Guddi, a child bride, was married at the age of four to 40 year-old man. She is from the Vishnoi community and her father is illiterate and was an opium smuggler. Her sister is also illiterate and is now living back home, destitute with two children as her husband is serving 25 years in prison. It has been a struggle to keep Guddi in school, but after meeting with Guddi's father a year ago, we convinced him to allow Guddi to finish her studies. Her father has also said that she will not be obligated to go to her husband, now in his mid-50's, if she can get work to support herself. We are so delighted to say that Guddi passed her Class XII exams and has been offered an apprenticeship position at the Umaid Bhawan Palace Hotel. She is working so hard to change the cycle of poverty and illiteracy in her family and we have been committed to her well being since she entered the school.

The Times of India article

4 RAJASTHAN

THE TIMES OF INDIA, JAIPUR  
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2009

# THE REAL-LIFE 'BALIKA-VADHUS'

*In a new trend, child brides in rural Rajasthan are increasingly speaking out against the illegal practice*

**Mandita Sangupta / The**

**Jodhpur:** At 16, Shobha Choudhary is the first and only girl to have finished school in her village Rajokha. In her first year of computer studies, Shobha could be any regular teenager. Only she's been married since 1986 when she was in Class III and the boy in Class I. Her husband is a Class I dropout, now a stone quarry worker. Harassed by her grandmother from studying after Class VI, Shobha's brother turned her at night. She passed Class X as a private student with her father and brother's support. There was no stopping her after that. On the pretext of appearing for a test, she ran away to Jodhpur, staying at an NGO hostel. She wants to be a policewoman, "to stop child marriages."

India's child marriage figures are frightening. A Unicef report released in October recorded that nearly 25 million girls in India were married in 2007 by the age of 18, noting that children may be engaged or married before they turned 10. More than a third of the world's child brides are from India, the report added.

Victims ensure there's no child marriage in the next generation.

India's child marriage figures are frightening. A Unicef report released in October recorded that nearly 25 million girls in India were married in 2007 by the age of 18, noting that children may be engaged or married before they turned 10. More than a third of the world's child brides are from India, the report added.

The statistics, in these parts of rural Rajasthan, child brides were silent puppets, stifled within the walls of patriarchy. But now young girls, their mothers and 'bahus' are raising their voices loud enough to be heard beyond the courtyard. They've emerged from the shadows, intent on ending child marriages that force 10-year-olds to become mothers, often even earlier. They are convincing parents to send girls to school, and strongly protesting against marrying off younger kids in the family. Girl after girl has one con-

... conviction that they won't allow their daughters to be married off in similar manner

... simply said she'll commit suicide if need be, but will not go to her 'husband', who is physically challenged and hearing impaired as well.

The biggest hurdle for these girls is the absence of legal help. Goddi, 17 is a Bikaneri, daughter of a handicapped father. Her brother-in-law has been jailed for 25 years. Her family, as is her community, is known for petty crime and untram trade. In Class XII, Goddi is worrying herself sick. She managed to escape to Veerni, which had adopted her village and brought her to their Jodhpur girls hostel after Class VIII. Next year after graduating from school, she'll be on her own again. She'll be sent off to her husband, well into his 50s. Goddi's adamant she won't return.



It's not difficult to see why Goddi doesn't remember her marriage, knows her parents didn't get her wedded and is hoping for some small miracle that will ensure she doesn't have to return to that life. "Meri sister kaisevare saath rehti hai. Uske baadhe hain. Uske five kach karna hai," she says. Her voice is steady, her eyes searching. She too wants to be a policewoman. She knows her marriage is illegal but how many people will she fight if she has to return?

Each girl has her own unique story. Each is tunnelling her way out of the age-old practice that corners them into becoming puppets. But they are all convinced on just one point. "Jo karo the henge. We're not thinking of our lives. But we'll ensure we don't marry our daughters when they're babies," says Shobha. In her smiling determination, one can hear the rumble of change.

Initiatives such as the Veerni Project are helping power the change. When the NGO first started in 1980, their vehicle was stoned and threats made against volunteers. But perseverance paid off. Counsellors now are welcomed on their weekly visits to villages where they discuss everything from women's overall health to why child marriage is a no-go. Veerni has a girls hostel in Jodhpur where they bring young girls after class VI or VIII to complete their schooling, free of cost. "We protect them from marriage till Class XII," says Jacqueline de Chollet, Veerni's chief patron. In the hostel, girls are also educated about their own health and nutrition, and reproductive issues. As the girls become responsible, parents too realise their healthy girls are no liability.

The fight isn't easy. Sharda, 18, of village Akkholi, managed to stave off going to her 'in-laws' but now they've demanded she either join her husband or pay up the mandatory Rs 50,000 to call off the marriage, a marriage Sharda doesn't recall. The panchayat has apparently told her 'in-laws' they can't do anything other way. It's all outright illegal but Sharda is in a fix. Her parents died of AIDS a couple of years ago, she lives with an ailing grandfather and has

LOST INNOCENCE: Each child bride has her own unique story but all of them unite in a conviction that they won't allow their daughters to be married off in similar manner


Priyanka and Sunita with **The Times of India** journalist Nandita Sangupta who wrote the article on Veerni and Child Brides.

## Nutrition

As mentioned earlier, malnutrition remains an on-going and vast public health problem – not one that Veerni can undertake single handedly in our villages. We were successful in alleviating malnutrition when we ran intervention programs for children under five with the nutritional biscuits and the use of Spirulina as a micronutrient. It seemed like an important breakthrough. However it is not possible for Veerni to continue this program on an on-going basis as we do not have the resources. We have shown the value and feasibility of such a program, but it can only work in the context of cooperation with government intervention. Because the supplements were locally made and in the case of Spirulina grown in India, this method of treating malnutrition is an Indian solution and has a degree of sustainability.

After years of working in the field of malnutrition, Veerni has produced a recent report with the assistance of the Institute of Desert Medicine in Jodhpur. A copy of the report is available upon request.

## Save the Girl Child

Veerni has been following the story Badami since 2003 and this is an update. When Veerni first discovered Badami she was acutely malnourished and severely anemic, all due to the fact that she was a girl. She weighed just 5.5 kg, less than half the weight of a healthy two-year old

Badami's grandmother and her parents did not want her because she was a girl. She was not fed properly and became acutely malnourished. To make matters worse, she was taken to a 'shaman' (witch doctor) who branded her with a hot iron on the back of her neck to ward off evil spirits. When Veerni came to know about it, the team took the responsibility of treating her with medicines, dressings and proper nutrition.

Badami always looked sad but came to recognize the Veerni team's love and affection for her. At the age of 7, Badami (with Veerni's Medical care) had reached a normal height and weight and was restored to a normal healthy nutritional state.



**Badami in 2003**



**Badami in 2010**



Badami is happy and healthy thanks to the commitment of the Veerni team. Here she is with Jacqueline.

She is attending school and dreaming of becoming a teacher. At this tender age she says that she does not want to get married until she is older.... maybe 18 or 20.

## **Introduction of the Rajdadiji Veerni Keru Project**

Dedicated to the cause of empowerment of women, His Highness Maharaja Hanwant Singhji Charitable Trust took a unique initiative and established “Thakur Achal Singh Women’s Training and Empowerment Center” in a property recently donated to the Trust. The Trust has repaired and refurbished the dilapidated building and has made it available to the Rajdadiji Veerni Project for operational running of the Center for which no rental will be payable to the Trust.

Ms. Jacqueline de Chollet and Ms. Anne Vincent, in collaboration with the Global Foundation for Humanity and the Veerni Project, have worked tirelessly to combat gender discrimination in the Jodhpur district of Rajasthan. The Veerni Project’s mission is the empowerment of women and adolescent girls in rural Western Rajasthan through development, medical, educational, and social programs. The aim is to improve their quality of life while providing them with the skills and confidence needed to achieve economic independence, a key factor for real social change. Veerni generates a comprehensive and long-lasting impact on rural communities by mobilizing women in grassroots campaigns. In Hindi, *Veerni* means “heroine” – a word which symbolizes Veerni’s mission of encouraging women to claim their rightful place in society and their inalienable human rights. This “*lifting up*” of women is proving to be pivotal in ending the destructive cycle of discrimination and subjugation as these newly empowered women engage in the struggle themselves.

## **Keru Mission statement**

***"To empower women and girls of the under-developed region of the Thar Desert to lead healthy and productive lives through access to training and development"***

## Thakur Achal Singh Women's Training and Empowerment Center



### **Keru -Background information**

Keru village is off the Jaisalmer Highway, short of Rajwa and is home to the Bheels (scheduled tribe/ST) hutments. We provided the village with a school and a hand pump. There is a bank in the village and is connected by road. It is the Gram Panchayat (local government) Headquarters. A large number of men work in stone quarries and most suffer from TB. Some villagers are engaged in agriculture and some in animal rearing sheep, goats and cattle. There are also small traders. It is a composite village with women remaining dependent on the men. Total population of the village is 8,158 with 4,276 males and 3,882 females, grouped in 1296 families. The breakdown of population is 2,626 SC/ST, and 5,532 others (general and other backward class, OBC).

### **Objectives:**

- To conduct basic training courses of 8 to 12 weeks for 20 to 30 women per course and adolescent girls. Sewing, and crafts in needle work. Three to four basic courses will be scheduled per year;
- To conduct advance training courses of 8 to 12 weeks for candidates who successfully complete the basic training as mentioned above. Three to four advance courses per year will be scheduled. Specialized training in the selected activity will be organized so as to ensure that the trained individual is able to produce items of acceptable quality;
- To market the items produced by the trained individuals. This will be done through liaison established by Veerni team. Profits will be distributed between the worker and the Center in a pre-determined ratio. This will gradually make the Center sustainable.

The syllabus will include basic literacy, bookkeeping and awareness of social issues and all aspects of women and adolescent girls' health programs. Health screening and services will be delivered as required.

As the Rajdadiji Veerni Keru Project develops and income is generated, The Thakur Achal Singh Women's Training & Empowerment Center will take on additional responsibility.

### **Establishment & Roles and Responsibility of the Veerni Project**

The Manager of the Veerni Project will be in charge of the Center. The Veerni team (Rashmi for nutrition & anemia, Priyanka for health and Santosh for HIV/AIDS and general awareness on family

planning) will visit the Center as per the approved program and impart training on subjects assigned to them.

In addition to the Veerni team, the following will be specifically assigned to the Center: one education teacher, one needle work teacher and one supervisor cum accountant.

The Thakur Achal Singh Women's Training & Empowerment Center at Keru should be responsible for the following: one peon, one security guard, electricity, water, building maintenance, telephone, etc. Twenty sewing machines, tables, chairs and durries belonging to the Veerni Project are being loaned to the Thakur Achal Singh Women's Training & Empowerment Center for the period of one year to be renewed after evaluation of the program.

### **Veerni Promoters**



Gangha – Promoter from Asanda who is studying for her class 10 Exams

At the promoters meeting last February we announced that their role would be terminated as of July. This was met with great disappointment on their part. We explained at length to the promoters that during those years, Veerni had empowered them in raising awareness on health, education and their rights. . Through Veerni, they learned how to reach for outside help and we will always be available to them. As most of them now have mobile phones they are in regular contact with Veerni and bring cases to our attention when needed. Veerni had spent many years in their villages and it is up to them at present to continue with their work and take responsibility. Veerni is mindful of not creating a continued

dependency and making the promoters understand that their status in the community has been enhanced by their work and the support they have enjoyed from Veerni. This is what empowerment is all about.

The main reason for this decision is that circumstances have changed. Many of the promoters have joined the NREGA program (the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee act which guarantees a 100 day of wag employment to a rural household). As a result, village women are not available to conduct their work with Veerni on a regular basis and to participate in projects. However we have kept one village Megwal ti Dhani, where all of the population is scheduled caste (untouchable) as this village is extremely poor and not covered by government services. We have two promoters in this village. The first one is an educated young woman who is studying in her second year of college. The other one is a disabled young man who has no other means of earning a living and works hard for Veerni. Although this village is so deprived, we have at present four girls in the Institute and hope to have two more this coming academic year. This is a challenge for these girls as their educational ability is below par, but with the help of intense tutoring, we are hopeful that they will pass the entrance exam.

Veerni will continue the health activities through regular health camps and the help of the promoters will be required and remunerated. Our health camps will be conducted with the help of AmeriCares, an important US organisation that provides medicines and occasionally doctors. AmeriCares has a big program in India based in Mumbai. Veerni feels that health camps can be more useful as it allows the screening of cases and the follow up in a more systematic manner with the assistance of specialists in different fields.

## The Veerni Team



Atul Trivedi, former Veerni Director has left and is no longer with Veerni and nutritionist Rashmi Rathore has been promoted to Project Director. Otherwise the team remains the same with the help of a great nurse, Priyanka. We also have Reena Bhansali, as a counselor to the Veerni Institute girls and Dr. Usha Bhargava, as a consultant doctor and contributing writer. We are very appreciative of the Veerni staff who are a warm and loving family to the population in the villages and the girls at the Institute.

## Conclusion

This last year has been eventful and dynamic for Veerni. Veerni has taken on a life of its own. It is evolving constantly, as we are always ready to adapt to new needs and circumstances as they arise. At present we are expanding in the area of education both academic and in skills training. The Institute is a thriving establishment. Thanks to the complimentary system of education we are offering the girls with extra tutoring, computer training, skills training, career and psychological counseling, as well as health and sports. The girls are gaining confidence and passing their exams. They will be able to realize their dreams. If you recall the girls who came to The Veerni project five years ago, so shy and now confident young women finishing college and looking forward to further studies like Sunita who remains a role model.

In the past year we initiated the Keru Program to build an ongoing institution that will serve the young women of the surrounding villages of the Thar Desert. It is by establishing a village based program, that Veerni can establish a long term institution that will lead women into development. Because this program offers several complimentary skills training, in addition to sewing and tailoring, such as basic literacy, accounting, health, education and screening, that inroads will be made in the development of these young women. This program will take time to show real results but Veerni is confident that the investment in each individual will have a multiplying effect in the community.

We have done the ground work in health, education and women's rights. As you can see from some of the individual stories, there are many instances where women and girls have gained their rights. Veerni shows the way to women who are victims of abuse and turn victims into empowered women such as the case of Chukha. Chukha knows where to turn if she needs help. As one of these women said, "Veerni is my true parent".

As you can see, Veerni is making a lot of progress, opening new areas of opportunity because one of the unique qualities of the project is its flexibility. I want to thank all of our board members and contributors to the work of Veerni for their ongoing support and the trust they have shown us over the years. Because of all of you, many lives have been touched. Veerni's combination of compassion and discreet activism has transformed the lives of women and girls and we can feel proud of the achievements of the project. We can look forward to Veerni's new ventures and our continuing commitment to empower women and girls to take their rightful place in a modern India.

Jacqueline de Chollet, May 2010

## VEERNI INSTITUTE

### Estimated Expenditure (Budget Proposal for 2010-2011 Session)

<u>S. NO.</u>	<u>HEAD OF EXPENDITURE</u>		<u>TOTAL</u>
1.	Head of Expenditure		3,545,955
	(a)	School Fees	6,690
	(b)	Hostel Fees	23,931
	(c)	Stationary	960
	(d)	Uniform	1,400
	(e)	Bedding, washing etc.	720
	(g)	Misc. expenses (taxi, vocational tours etc.)	70
		Total for one girl per annum	33,771
		Total for 100 girls per annum	3,377,100
	(h)	Unforeseen Expenses (5% of 3377100)	168,855
		Total [1]	3,545,955
2.	We may consider adding additional expenditure, if deemed proper, as under :-		1,244,800
	(a)	Salary of tuition teachers, psychological & career counselor, PTI teachers & wardens (only if we appoint them)	672,000
	(b)	Expenses on sewing center (teachers' salary, material & maintenance)	106,800
	(c)	Expenses on medicines (approx Rs 1000 yearly on one girl) 1000x100	100,000
	(d)	Salary of Veerni staff (administrator, health worker, and supervisor) may be only certain percentage of salary). This figure is for full year	366,000
		Total [2]	1,244,800
		<b>G. Total [1+2]</b>	<b>4,790,755</b>
		<b>USD \$</b>	<b>\$106,461</b>
	<b>[Approx expenses on one girl per annum Rs 47,908 (USD \$ 1064)</b>		
	<b>TOTAL FOR 100 GIRLS = USD \$ 106,461</b>		
	<b>1 USD = 45 RUPEES</b>		

## RAJDADIJI VEERNI PROJECT

### Overall Estimated Budget for the year 2010-11

<u>S. No.</u>	<u>Head of Account</u>	<u>Estimated Expenditure</u>	
		<u>2010-11</u>	
		<u>Rs</u>	<u>US \$</u>
01.	Hostel Program	4,790,755	\$ 106,461
02	Keru sewing, crafts & education Center	769,355	\$17,096
03.	Village education Center	59,720	\$ 1,327
04.	Establishment Expenditure	505,600	\$ 11,236
05.	Administrative Expenditure	135,575	\$ 3,013
06.	Maintenance of Vehicle & Other Conveyance	74,000	\$ 1,644
07.	Other Expenditure	12,000	\$ 267
	<b>TOTAL AMOUNT</b>	<b>6,347,005</b>	<b>\$ 141,044</b>

**Note:**

*1 US \$ = 45 Rs*



Mangi is the past



Rashmi is the future

Mangi is still an impoverished little girl, but Veerni wants her to become like Rashmi, a confident and educated girl who will take on the world.