

Stories
of Women Artisans and Warli



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Introduction



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UNDP aims to tackle inequality of opportunities for the poor and marginalised groups through its signature solutions including demonstration projects and programmes on ground. Given that women's economic empowerment is central to poverty reduction and shared prosperity, investing in capacity enhancement and improved access to new skills, financial and digital opportunities for girls and women is one of the key focus areas of our work in India.

Women Artisan Skill Enhancement Project (WASEP) supported by Larsen and Toubro Infotech (LTI) is being implemented with the aim to generate livelihood sources and enhance income of women in Mumbai and Thane districts of Maharashtra by focusing on revival of the traditional art form of Warli.

Given that women's participation in economic activities is restricted by unpaid care work, lack of mobility and capacity constraints, the interventions are designed specifically to enable them to work from their homes while acquiring a new skill set. Through training on making Warli art products, the project addresses the gap in local economic opportunities for 2,200 women, across all age groups. By organizing these upcoming artisans into groups, training them on both institution building and product designing, and linking them with suitable markets, WASEP provides them avenues of income generation through community entrepreneurship.

These women artisans have now acquired a level of self-esteem and confidence that has allowed them to take greater ownership of their own life and use their agency in family affairs. Each of the twenty stories curated in this book accentuate the common sentiment of resilience, perseverance and economic empowerment. Whether it is Vaishali Gaikar whose skills gained popularity through a senior citizen's home, Desna who had an uphill task of convincing her family to let her step out of home for art lessons, or Yamini, who overcame her fear of public speaking and was able to interact with customers directly. These are women who were financially empowered, found a space to express themselves symbolically and rediscovered their social standing. I hope that their success would inspire all of us to place much greater emphasis on economic empowerment of women in our current and future programming strategy.

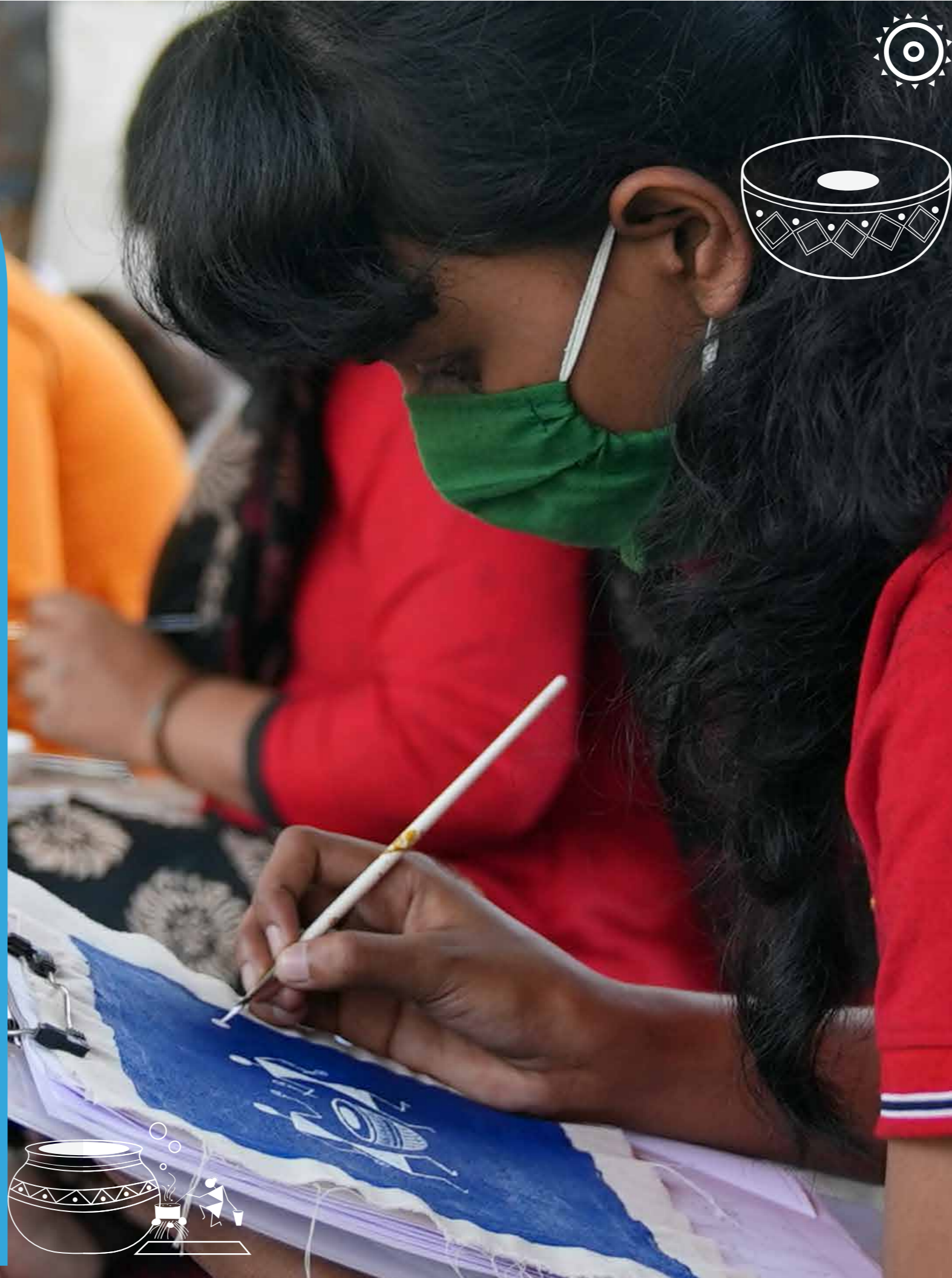
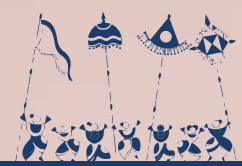


Table of Contents

Contents	Page
Introduction	1
Artisans	
Vaishali Gaikar	3
Gayatri Gaykar	5
Desna Dabhade	7
Vaishnavi Nathbua	9
Yamini Nath	11
Savita Vasatkar	13
Anita Khandagale	15
Vidya Avsarmol	17
Maithili Patil	19
Mansi Patil	21
Photographs	23
Divya Patil	25
Vaishnavi Agiwale	27
Joshilee Patil	29
Sunanda Patil	31
Bhakti Jadhav	33
Geetanjali Jadhav	35
Sanika Patil	37
Radhika Zaprekar	39
Darshana Jadhav	41
Kalpana More	43



On a Quest of Learning



Vaishali Gaikar

At a glance, Vaishali Gaikar appears to be a shy, unassuming young woman. But beneath the quiet demeanour, she is a passionate one with a burning enterprising streak.

Vaishali completed her secondary education from the science stream followed by a D.Ed from the National Association for Blind (NAB). Up until recently, she was a tutor at a private coaching centre in Angaon. While her mother takes care of the house, her father runs a small transport business and her younger sister is pursuing a degree in Hotel Management. Though she has her sights set on a career in teaching, she is an eager student when it comes to learning new skills. Along with her day job as a tutor, she learnt to stitch blouses and make decorative articles from micron-weaving.



And when the opportunity to learn Warli art came knocking in 2018, she happily stepped up to it. A quick study, she quickly graduated from painting on paper to the likes of clay, leather, fabric and more. She was delighted that with Women Artisan Skills Enhancement Project (WASEP), not only did she learn a new skill, she could put it to practical use and market her art.

When Corona struck, Vaishali lost her day job overnight as the coaching centre closed down. Even her father's business took a drastic hit. Times were bleak, and this is when young Vaishali's enterprising spirit shone. Intrigued by the sudden popularity of masks, she got one from the market for herself. She examined it closely and opened up its stitch. She decided to combine her blouse-stitching skills and Warli painting skills to create her own set of masks. Marketing them was a challenge, but Vaishali wasn't deterred. She sent pictures of her first mask to an uncle who offered to buy it. Surprised at her initial success, she quickly took to approaching friends and fellow teachers with her creations. But her real first blessing came from the senior citizens' home where she volunteers. While she spoke of it to one of the bedridden residents about her masks, word spread quickly and she received an order for 40 masks.

Such bouts of success have awakened a new confidence within Vaishali to experiment more with Warli painting on masks. When asked why she spreads herself thin with lessons, micron items and Warli painting projects, the girl simply says "How much can you keep expecting from your parents? I want to come into my own and even fund my wedding with my own money". Kudos to Vaishali for brushing aside any helplessness she felt and moving on to paint a picture of a self-reliant future for herself.





Gayatri Gaykar

Passion knows no time

Gayatri is a mother to two boys - a 14 year old and an 8 year old. Her husband works as a driver. But before her life began revolving around her family, crayons and paintbrushes were her inner circle. Gayatri loved and had a knack for art from her school days. Though her connection to art grew distant over the years, she could never sever ties with it. Whenever she would find a blank piece of paper from her sons' notebooks, she would draw.

She drew simple sceneries, but she drew them with love. When WASEP began the first batch of training for Warli painting in Angaon, Gayatri was excited, but could not be a part of it due to a complication with her eyesight. But after recovering from the condition, she got a second chance to learn Warli painting.



Gayatri became associated with the project in 2019, and has been all smiles since then. She trained and then painted several different products from pots to frames to masks. Her family shares in her joy for painting. Whenever she practices Warli painting at home, her younger son turns into a mock mentor, giving her tips and at times even trying his hand at some Warli art himself. Such is her reignited passion for art that at times, Gayatri completely loses track of time when she gets engrossed in painting a frame. On more occasions than one, she has looked up only after finishing her artwork to realise that it was 2 AM!

The prospect of earning through her art encouraged Gayatri even more. Though she had been a part of training on cooking and other skills through the local self-help group, Warli was the first to offer her a means of income. Warli painting gave her first-ever salary. And she thinks it's only right that she spends it on art supplies for future projects.

Though a shy, reserved person, Gayatri loves to flaunt her art and talk about it. Using her WASEP training, she has painted elegant designs on her own handkerchiefs and purses. When she steps out to social gatherings, it catches the eye of her relatives and friends and Gayatri is happy to not just speak about her Warli art, but encourage her friends to learn it as well. Currently, Gayatri is preparing to take her art to the next level, saving up to buy a canvas and paint stories as beautiful as hers on it.





Where there's a will, there's progress



Desna Dabhade

Aarey Colony is one of Mumbai's few surviving green covers, a quaint area in the heart of a bustling city. A cluster of houses in the interior of this area is what Desna Dabhade calls home. She lives with her husband, who is employed as a blue-collar worker with Mahindra & Mahindra, a school-going daughter, and her in-laws.

In 2017, she was introduced to the art of Warli by a friend and quickly took a liking to it. Enthused with the idea of learning something new, she joined a training programme by WASEP. The pride and contentment of earning money through her own skill was a newfound joy to her. But it wasn't easy to get to do what she wanted.

Her mother-in-law was reluctant to allow Desna to continue with Warli art. Even though Desna was diligent enough to never let the art affect her household chores, her mother-in-law got worked up about Desna spending just a couple of hours away from home.

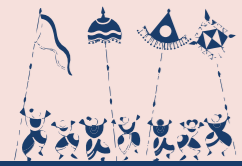


Many arguments ensued and Desna had to fight for herself. But she was patient. Over many discussions, she persistently urged her in-laws to look at the benefits of adding to the household income through Warli art. Her mother-in-law finally gave in to Desna's strong will, and Desna hasn't looked back since.

Among other things, Desna is the most grateful to WASEP for giving her opportunities to participate in exhibitions. She considers publicly showcasing her art, getting direct customer feedback on her products and interacting with other artisans, an extremely enriching experience. She dreams of participating in more exhibitions beyond WASEP in the future.

COVID-19 has severely impacted the livelihoods of artisans like Desna. But having been empowered by WASEP with confidence and a zeal to hone her craft, Desna has now picked up her paintbrush once more, to create beautiful magnets with Warli motifs. In 2021, she has already started earning by creating magnets and masks. She plans to save her earnings as an emergency fund for a rainy day should a lockdown-like situation occur again. Strong women, vocal about their wishes can bring about a change for the good, and Desna exemplifies this perfectly.





A teacher embracing studenthood again



Vaishnavi Nathbua

Hyphenate old Vaishnavi is a kindergarten teacher in Angaon and has the perfect demeanour for it. She is friendly, soft-spoken and observant. But refreshingly, she is as excited as the tiny tots she teaches, to learn new things. It was this attitude that led her to WASEP in 2019. Her aunt was part of the first batch of the programme, and her experience encouraged Vaishnavi to become a part of it as well.

Before the training, Vaishnavi had no idea about Warli painting. But her interest in the art form soon piqued and she thoroughly enjoyed painting on different products such as frames, lamps and pillow covers. Among these, she is partial to frames and finds them the most attractive. When she is not painting elegant designs with her paintbrush, she scribbles delicate prose with a pen.

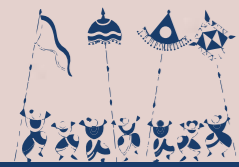
Vaishnavi is a budding writer as well. She writes about everyday life. A few of her articles have been published in the local newspaper as well as the popular Marathi magazine series 'Diwali Anka'.



Another admirable quality of Vaishnavi is that she loves to share her knowledge. Sometimes during an art session in her kindergarten class, Vaishnavi draws simple Warli designs on the blackboard, which her young students do their best to imitate.

After two years with the programme Vaishnavi is eagerly looking forward to an opportunity to participate in an exhibition. She views it as a test for herself, about her knowledge of Warli art. She is keen to learn negotiation tactics and interact with customers directly. Here's to Vaishnavi to keep learning and keep growing!





A mother who followed in her son's footsteps



Yamini Nath

Yamini is a housewife and lives with her husband and two sons. She occasionally took on a few tailoring jobs for sewing blouses, but that was as far as her entrepreneurial streak went. But this changed when WASEP came to Angaon. Yamini joined the training in 2018, and within a span of two years, she has turned into a master trainer herself! From being completely unaware about Warli art, to training diligently as a student, and then training a new batch of 40 women as a trainer, Yamini has come a long way in a short time. Although she has worked on many products since her association with the project, Yamini's favourite are the art frames. She feels they are the most attractive to look at and has even hung one at her own house. Every time she looks at it, she feels cheerful and a sense of pride in her art.

Yamini's younger son studies in 4th standard and is quite active in extracurricular activities like singing and performing on stage for school plays. Though she had immense stage fear, Yamini always supported her son's activities. Once he asked her, "Aai, if I can sing, dance and act on stage, why can't you be on the stage too?" And that innocent question stuck with Yamini for a long time, till WASEP gave her a stage. During the initial phase of her training in 2018, the trainer encouraged Yamini to speak in front of the class



Yamini had never done anything of the sort before. She was extremely nervous, and her throat went dry, but she gulped her fear and stepped up to speak. She gradually eased into her speech and was delighted that she could speak in front of a class. "That day, I was happy that I could fulfill my son's wish", she beamed. Since then, Yamini's confidence has grown leaps and bounds.

When she had an opportunity to participate in exhibitions at Vile Parle and Colaba, Yamini confidently spoke about Warli art to hundreds of women who came to shop at the exhibitions. Today, she is completely at ease speaking in front of huge crowds and is grateful to WASEP for her newfound confidence. She found the experience of participating in the exhibitions so enriching that she would excitedly urge others in her class to experience it for themselves at least once. Having interacted with customers directly, Yamini is now keen to understand more about market trends and what kinds of designs and products people are looking to buy. But for Yamini, her own growth isn't enough. She wants to spread the word about WASEP to women in neighbouring villages and encourage them to participate in the training. Here's hoping Yamini soon takes her passion for Warli to a bigger stage.



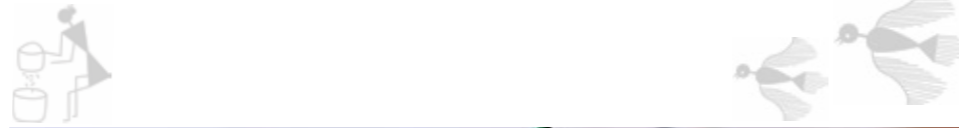


Reclaiming the past, for a future



Savita Vasatkar

Till 2018, Savita's identity was limited to that of a housewife and a mother. And then WASEP came to Angaon. Savita joined the first batch for Warli painting in 2018, and today has added the feather of being a master trainer to her identity. Before she began her training, Savita was unaware of Warli art. She started by learning to paint shapes and simple elements like leaves and flowers. Driven by curiosity to know more, she looked up the art of Warli painting on YouTube and Google, and that's when she realised its potential. In addition to the designs taught in training, she began exploring different ones from the Internet and tried to integrate them with classroom designs.



Even after becoming a master trainer, her learning curve hasn't stopped. She constantly tries incorporating new elements in her Warli designs. Savita's happiness and enthusiasm with the art form has even caught her daughter's attention. When Savita is working from home on a product, the little girl sits down next to her mother and tries to imitate her Warli designs. "She's improving day by day", says Savita with a wide smile. Her batch of new trainees is another factor of pride for Savita. She feels proud that, after having learnt a new skill, she is able to share her knowledge with more women as a trainer.

For some time, a worry that she may be falling short in providing educational support to her children has been gnawing at her, but she had been reluctant to take any action for it. But being associated with WASEP unlocked a new level of confidence within Savita. In addition to being a trainer, she has now decided to pick up her education from where she left it before marriage. She has recently enrolled in the second year of college to complete her degree in Economics.

Kudos to Savita for building up the courage to paint a beautiful future for herself and her family.





Riding on new experiences




Anita Khandagale



Anita lives with her husband, who works as a security guard, and two children. Unit 22 is a cluster that is deep within the jungles of Aarey, and almost cut-off from the bustle of Mumbai, even while being in its midst. Some women from this cluster step out for odd jobs at the Santacruz Electronic Export Processing Zone (SEEPZ) estate, the nearest place that will offer them work to sustain themselves and their families.

But others are not so fortunate. Bound by household and caregiving duties as well as conservative in-laws, many women can't step out of their homes to seek work even if it is the need of the hour and they have the potential. So when WASEP initiated Warli art training in the area, women welcomed it with open arms and grateful smiles.



Anita was one of them. Not only could she learn a new skill, but even put it to practical use and earn from it, right from her home. But things were not easy at the start. In the small cluster with cramped homes, there were none big enough for 20-25 ladies to assemble for the training. But Anita stepped up to solve this hiccup. She offered her own front yard for the training programme. And since then, for 4 years, Anita's porch has become the place for the women of Aarey to come together and work on Warli art products.

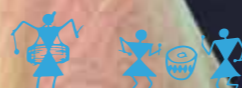
In her 4 years of association with the programme, Anita has worked on varied products such as tea coasters, jute bags, bottles, file-folders and more. They say real change begins when you step out of your comfort zone, and Anita exemplifies it. During the course of her training, Anita and a few of her fellow trainees were asked to visit the LTI office for an exhibition. In all her years of living in Aarey, Anita had never taken a local ride till this moment. Nervous and excited, she requested her husband to accompany them on the trip. After dropping Anita and her colleagues at the LTI office, her husband gave her directions to find her way back and left. The journey back was the first ever independent one that Anita experienced! She realised that there was much to be learnt when she stepped out of her locality and now eagerly looks forward to new experiences.

Anita's fondest memories of the programme are of the exhibitions she participated in at the Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) and at the LTI corporate office. At BKC she experienced the great value that Warli art commands, as she witnessed sales worth Rs.10,000 on each day of the exhibition. At the office of Tisser Artisans Trust, she had her first tryst with the world of online training in February 2021. Anita and two of her colleagues, all of whom knew little about online learning, let alone online teaching, had an opportunity to conduct a session on Warli art for the corporate employees online. Anita looks back on it as one of the proudest moments of her life!





A sweet story of success



Vidya Avsarmol

Vidya takes care of her small house in Unit 22 of Aarey, and her husband, in-laws and two children along with it. Her husband works with the police department. Even though her in-laws are a stay-at-home couple, the responsibility of domestic chores and taking care of both the children falls solely on Vidya. And so Vidya cannot go far from her home to seek work, leaving her young children behind. Doing so would be viewed as shirking her responsibilities by her in-laws.

When WASEP initiated training in Aarey, Vidya eagerly took the opportunity to learn something new. Vidya has been associated with the project since 2018. Since the training and the work that followed soon after, took place within her community, she found it easy to balance it with her household duties. Even her in-laws could not fault her for taking up Warli painting within the locality.



And after having painted Warli designs on a few products, Vidya received her first ever salary through the art form. As a gesture to commemorate the special day, she purchased sweets for her family, for the very first time, with her own money. Her children were delighted, and it even helped her sweeten the rapport with her in-laws further. Among all the products she has worked on, Vidya has a special fondness for designing and painting jewellery pieces with Warli art motifs. Another favourite are the mojris. Her eyes twinkle as she speaks about how she went about painting the mojris with the base colour first and then embellishing them with elegant circular designs around the sides. She is now keen to brush up her finishing touches and hopes to work on many more interesting products. Keep painting, and keep growing, Vidya!





Commitment is an art



Maithili Patil

Maithili shares a special relationship with her husband, in addition to one of a life partner. That of a business partner. Maithili was a housewife and her husband used to work in a company, when he suddenly lost his job. Instead of despairing and fretting over the situation, both Maithili and her husband put their minds into devising an alternate source of income. Soon, they came up with the idea of opening a small general (kirana) store from a part of their house in Asnoli. The income from the shop covered the domestic expenses and together, they had soon saved enough money to start a poultry shop as well.

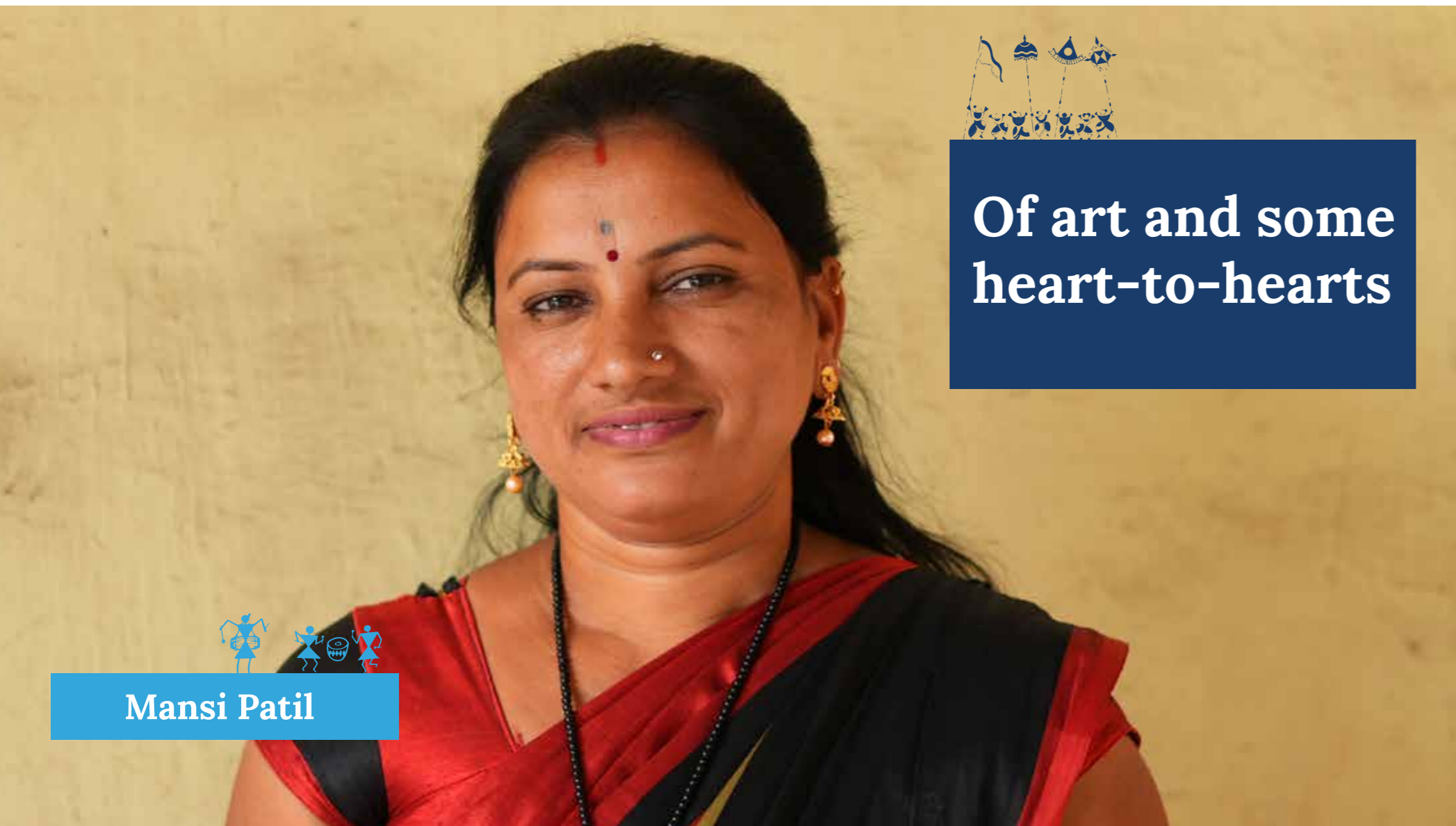
Maithili's husband and her in-laws are well cognizant and supportive of her entrepreneurial aptitude. Before WASEP began their training schedule in Asnoli, Maithili knew about Warli only vaguely. The thought of learning something new excited her and she signed up for the first batch. Such was her commitment to the training and working for the project that if no family member was available in the afternoon, she would close her kirana store for two hours to attend the class.



Maithili is also a part of a Self Help Group. She relates strongly with the cause of financial support for women, having gone through trying times herself when her husband lost his job, and seeks to empower other women to cultivate a habit for saving of funds and using them to turn their lives around. The ladies in the group began pooling any amount that they could spare, as little as Rs.50 every month to build a contingency fund for members as well as other needy ladies. Today, their contribution has grown to Rs.200 per month, and they have even helped out some of their own members in their times of need, like the COVID-19 lockdown.

The mention of masks, popularised by the pandemic, reminds Maithili of a special experience from the WASEP program. There was an urgent requirement of a big consignment of Warli painted masks within a very short time. Not one to shy away from challenges, Maithili, along with a few other ladies stayed up the entire night to paint 100 masks till 5 AM! In the middle of this night, Maithili started feeling a little ill. But even then, she was true to her work and completed the task at hand. Maithili and her group have developed an unparalleled liking for Warli painting and a deep sense of responsibility towards the program. They no longer see it as just artwork they can earn from but as a way to bond and an opportunity to push their own limits of professionalism. Maithili is now looking forward to an opportunity to participate in her first exhibition for Warli art.





Of art and some heart-to-hearts

Mansi Patil

Mansi is a housewife who lives with her husband, father-in-law and her 9 year old daughter. Her husband is a small-time zamindar and farmer. Having studied till 10th standard, Mansi had come across the Warli art form in school, but never had a chance to learn more about it. Years later in a happy coincidence, WASEP started a batch for Warli painting right in her village - Asnoli.

Mansi was eager to try her hand at the art form and promptly signed up for the program. Ever since her daughter was born, Mansi wanted to contribute towards the household. But with no formal degree, she couldn't get a job and had resigned to being a housewife. But WASEP gave her the opportunity she had always hoped for. With her earnings through Warli painting, she can now add to the household income and is even saving funds for her daughter's higher education.

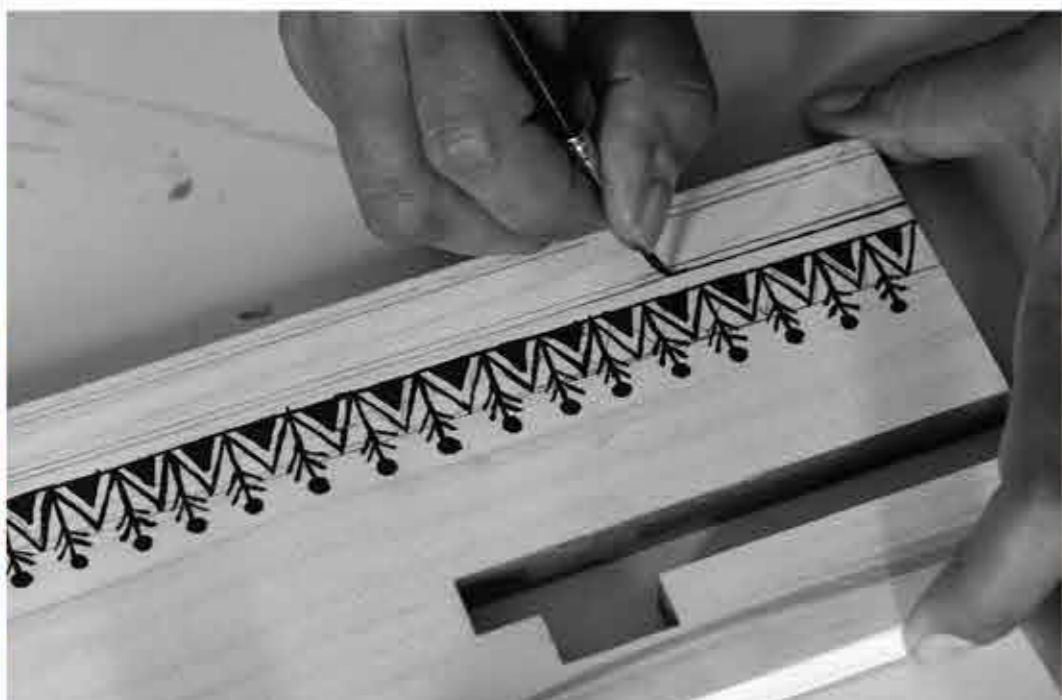


Along with painting, Mansi has one more artsy skill up her sleeve. She likes using broken pieces of trinkets and making new jewellery pieces like necklaces from them. Though her friends have admired and asked her to make some for them as well, Mansi has turned them down. "It is something I do only for myself, not for money," she says. But she is thankful to WASEP for giving her more than financial independence. Since there is no other woman in her house, Mansi has no one to share her innermost feelings with.

"You can't talk about every little thing with your husband, and my daughter is too young. But Warli painting sessions gave me the friends I was missing in my life." When the ladies gather to work on Warli paintings together, along with helping each other to improve their art, they also converse about their problems and feelings without any inhibitions. This was exactly the outlet Mansi was looking for and is glad to have bonded with a group of friendly, understanding ladies.

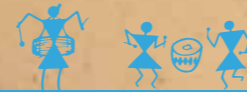
WASEP has not only empowered her with an artful skill, but has also given her the emotional strength to freely express herself to her new friends.







A picture of solace



Divya Patil

Divya, is a quiet, shy and an unassuming lady. She is mother to a 4 year old girl and her husband is an employee of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

He travels 4 hours one way to his place of work and then back again. Alone at home for a better part of the day, Divya would find it challenging to fill the hours after completing her domestic chores. When the Warli painting training sessions began in Asnoli, Divya enthusiastically signed up.

Though she knew little about Warli art before being associated with the program, she was excited to learn something new. Before joining the program, Divya would casually sketch and paint when she was bored. WASEP gave her occasional hobby a much bigger purpose. She could now fill in the empty hours of the day and even earn a small amount while doing so.



As the training completed and work started pouring in, Divya enjoyed trying different designs and painting on different products like frames and masks. Divya has kept aside the entire amount that she has earned so far from Warli painting without spending a rupee from it. She wants to accumulate a significant sum and then spend it on something big, instead of spending it in bits and pieces. Her favourite experience with the project goes back to the time when she and her group had received an order to paint patches.

She had so much fun deciding on different designs and patterns for the patches and bonding with the group that it has become a permanent happy memory in her mind. She giggles like a school student even as she recounts the day. She is happy that the program gives her, and many women like her who are bound to their homes a chance to step out and take a break from their household chores both physically and mentally.

Divya is appreciative of WASEP for not only giving housewives an opportunity to experience the pride of earning for their families but also a semblance of 'me-time' where they can focus only on themselves and their Warli art projects.





A palette full of talent



Vaishnavi Agiwale

Vaishnavi is a young, bright ambitious woman with a warm smile that makes you inadvertently smile back. She happily shows off a tattoo on her forearm which spells her husband's name. On the first glance, she seems content as a housewife living with her husband, mother-in-law, brother-in-law and her one-year old son. But beneath the calm demeanour, she is bursting with energy, enthusiasm and a hunger to learn as many new things as she can.

After her graduation, Vaishnavi started working as an assistant at a clinic as a learning experience. But soon she had to quit her job when she got married and moved to Asnoli. She couldn't bear to be a typical housewife and be content with just household chores. And so, she started keeping herself busy in the afternoons by trying to learn new things off YouTube.

Vaishnavi is a self-taught mehendi artist, make-up artist and quite adept at hairstyling. The women in the cluster often approach her for help in getting dressed up for weddings, and despite her household chores, Vaishnavi always makes time for them. She would even try fancy recipes on weekends in a bid to keep doing something new. So when WASEP began Warli painting training at Asnoli, Vaishnavi was the first through the door.



She quickly developed a genuine liking for Warli art and once training was complete and paid work started coming in, she enjoyed working on different products like Diwali lamps, cushion covers, bottles, frames and more. Not only did she ace the designs taught at training, but would occasionally have fun trying her own designs or replicating some from YouTube videos, on the products.

The mention of Warli painting brings a twinkle to her eyes. She enjoys the relaxed, happy vibes in the Warli painting class as women gather to paint together amidst sharing tips, jokes and freewheeling chats. From her first income through Warli painting, Vaishnavi has bought a painting of Lord Ganesha to hang in her home. It was her way of commemorating the good beginning of her second innings as a working woman.

Besides Warli painting, Vaishnavi is now learning to sew blouses as well, and wants to combine the two skills in the near future. After starting to earn again, she has gotten the confidence to voice out a long-standing wish to her husband and rest of the family; that of opening a parlour. With a paintbrush in one hand and the possibility of a make-up brush in the other, Vaishnavi is living her life in colour.





An art prodigy in the making



Joshilee Patil

Meet Joshilee, a first year BSc (Bachelor of Science) student from Asnoli and a budding artist. The fact that she had loved drawing and painting since her school days and she had a talent for it was no secret in the cluster.

So when WASEP began Warli painting training in Asnoli, the women wholeheartedly urged her to participate and Joshilee happily complied. She has been associated with the project since 2019 and is one of the youngest participants in her batch. Being already fond of art, Joshilee took to Warli painting like a fish to water.

Soon, she was already working on commissioned projects like painting frames and masks. Joshilee also helps her mother with all the domestic chores regularly, while managing her studies. When the Covid-19 pandemic struck and colleges were shut down, she suddenly found herself struggling to fill the hours. Even Warli painting sessions had to be discontinued owing to the lockdown and restrictions on public gathering.



She then turned to YouTube and her sketchbook to keep herself occupied. She would look up interesting artworks and replicate them on her own. One day she had a surge of inspiration and decided to paint one of the walls of her home. Though her parents were supportive of her idea, her elder brother was furiously against it. He scolded her and tried dissuading her from it, but Joshilee didn't give in. She painted a beautiful and elegant design of a sprawling tree and some birds around it on the wall. After he saw the completed artwork, her brother was stunned at how well she had done it. Now he is quite appreciative of her art and has grown to deeply like the painting on the wall.

Joshilee is still awaiting her first earnings from her Warli painting projects. Unlike many young girls, she has no big shopping plans for the money. In fact, she doesn't want to buy anything for herself at all, but wants to buy something special for her parents with her own money. Here's hoping that from one wall, Joshilee soon paints the town colourful with Warli and other beautiful artworks.





Of paintings, friends and precious moments

Sunanda Patil

Sunanda is a 50 year young student of Warli painting from the Women Artisans Skill Enhancement Project. Though she now identifies herself as a housewife, she wasn't always so. Sunanda, her husband and her two kids - a son and a daughter were a family of very limited means. Although both her husband and she were educated only till 10th standard, Sunanda was adamant for her children to be as highly educated as they wished to be. And so, she took a job so they could afford a decent education for their children. Today, both her son and her daughter are working as well qualified engineers.

When WASEP started the first batch of training for Warli painting in Asnoli, Sunanda could not be a part of it even though she wished to, since she was still working. But as both her children settled into their respective jobs, she retired and became a housewife



Having been a working woman for a better part of her life, Sunanda soon felt restless being at home the entire day. Though domestic chores kept her busy for a while, the afternoons became especially lonely as all the other members of her family would be at work. She feels that WASEP's second batch for Warli painting in the village came as a blessing to rescue her from a state of loneliness and boredom. After training, not only did she have a great time painting masks, pillow covers and frames, but also found company in her fellow trainees to spend her days with.

One incident during the training phase increased her respect for the project to a new level. Sunanda, along with a few other ladies from her batch were invited to participate in a training session at a corporate office in Borivali. She was quite overwhelmed at being admired and being treated with respect as an artist by high-ranking corporates. It was a new feeling for her and one she is sure she will never forget.

There's one more special memory that Sunanda is thankful to WASEP and Warli painting for. While she was still learning, her daughter would occasionally look over her art and give her certain inputs. It became their exclusive mother-daughter time. Once, they both sat down and painted a Warli art wall frame together to hang in their home. Sunanda considers it as her most favourite artwork till date. Sunanda's family is now renovating their house to prepare for her daughter's wedding. Though they now have enough money, Sunanda feels proud that with her earnings from Warli painting projects, she can make her own little contribution to the fund along with every other member of the family. She looks forward to painting another Warli art frame along with her daughter to adorn the walls of her newly renovated house.





Something to call your own

Bhakti Jadhav

Bhakti is a part of one of the batch of newest trainees of WASEP in Jhidke. She has been associated with the project since the beginning of 2021. Hers is a family of six with her husband, in-laws and two children. Bhakti had heard about Warli painting but had never had the opportunity to explore the art form.

When WASEP started a new batch in her town, she was curious to find out whether she had the talent for it. Eager to try her hand at something new, she joined the program. The fact that the master trainer was Mrs.Prachiti, a friend who had been a trainee before like herself and had now turned trainer, gave Bhakti more confidence. She felt at ease asking Prachiti for help with doubts and difficulties in artwork.

Bhakti has painted masks and coasters with Warli motifs since being associated with the project. She especially enjoyed painting coasters with delicate designs. Bhakti's family is extremely supportive of her newfound interest in Warli painting.

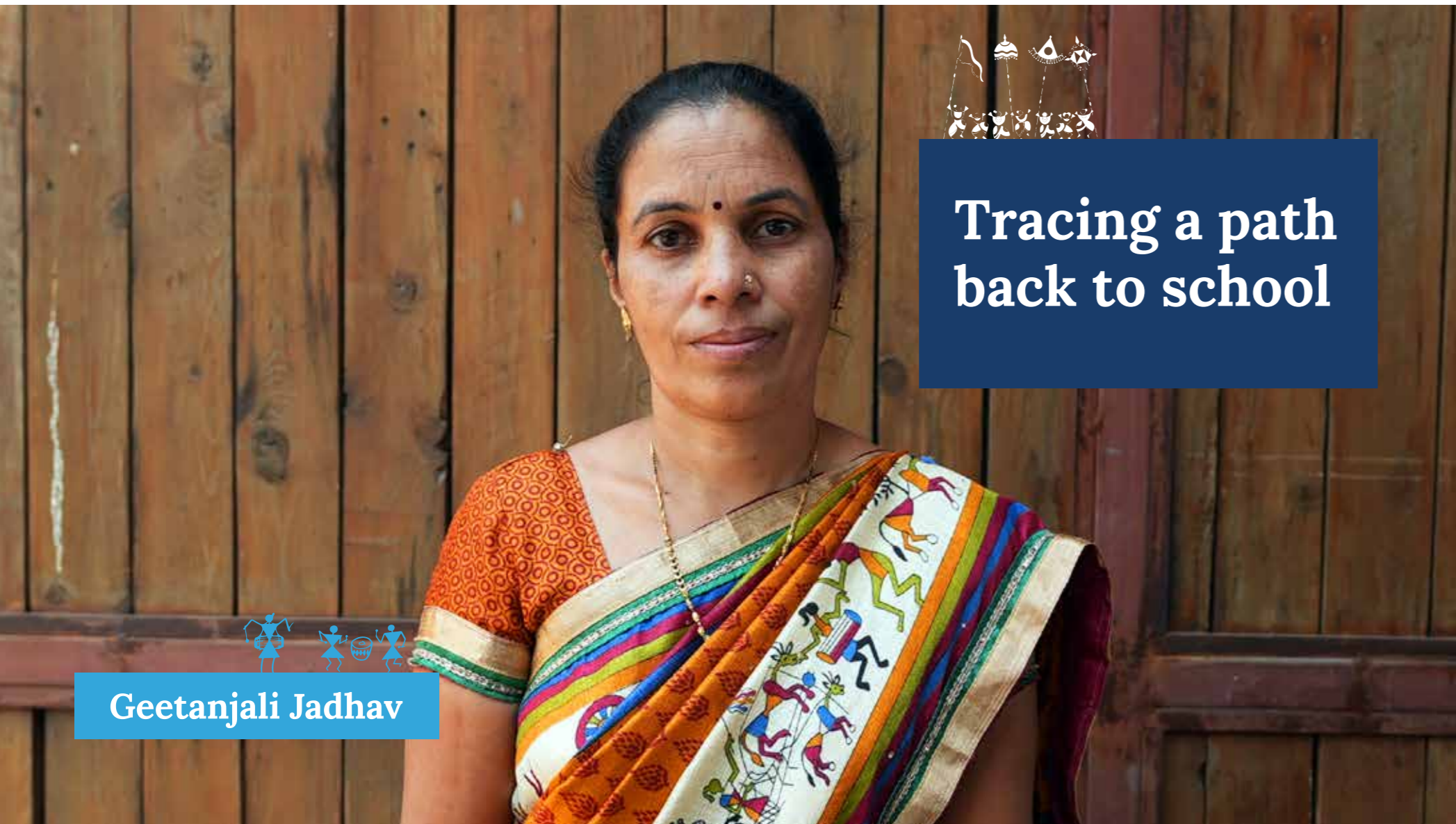


Her husband, impressed with her improving skill in such a short time, has asked her to paint one of the walls of their home with Warli art as well! Bhakti is deeply appreciative of the project for giving many housewives like her an opportunity to be financially independent albeit in a small way. She feels it is important for women to have a small amount of money that is completely theirs. "Sometimes it's difficult asking your husband for money without explaining what you exactly need it for. The earnings from Warli are my own, and I don't need to justify the way I spend it to anybody."

Occasionally, when her children fall short of pocket money, they are more comfortable asking Bhakti for a little extra money than their father. Though Bhakti would hesitate before, now she can happily indulge them. But she also has a bigger plan for her income from Warli painting. She wants to save up a good amount and spend it on good quality art material so that she can paint more frames and articles and sell them for a good price.

Even a small amount earned from art can fuel big entrepreneurial dreams for many women like Bhakti, just as the project intends to empower them with. Here's to many budding women entrepreneurs like Bhakti, growing from strength to strength in the near future.





Tracing a path back to school

Geetanjali Jadhav

Geetanjali's story is one of love, grit and determination and an inspirational one for many. She was married off right after she completed 10th standard and education came to an abrupt end. After just eight years of marriage, Geetanjali's husband passed away. But she had little time to grieve and despair, as she single-handedly took on the responsibility of their three young children.

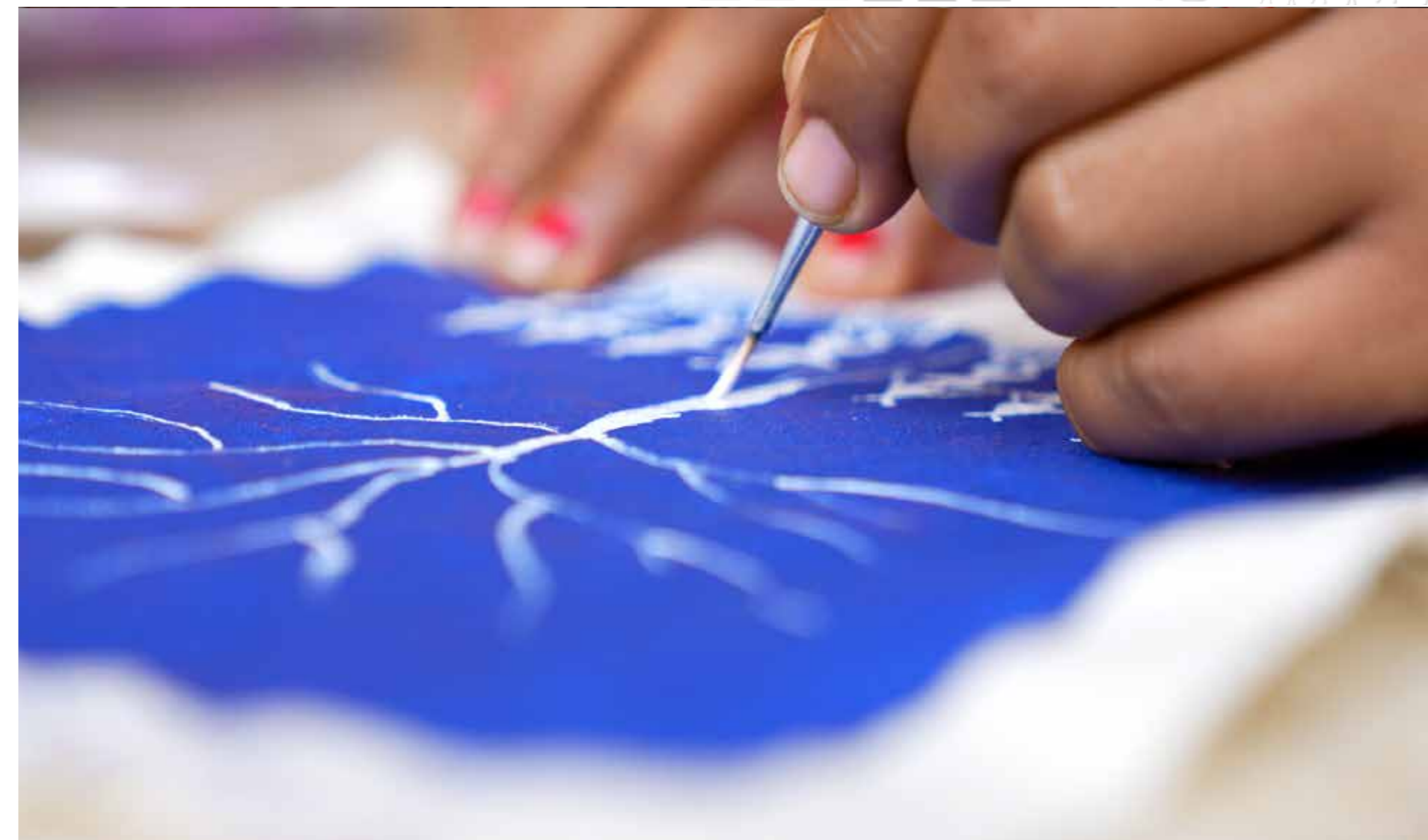
Times were tough, and Geetanjali put her children's needs before everything, taking up any and every kind of work she could to feed them and keep them in school. From selling papads to setting up a clothes cart in the market to working as a domestic help, she did it all. Geetanjali would roll the papads and make packets herself to sell in the market. From the money she made, she would keep aside a small amount to again buy groceries for the next batch of papads.

But that was not enough. So she would travel alone from Jhidke to Bhiwandi and buy clothes at a wholesale rate and sell them from her cart at the Jhidke market.

When times got even tougher, she worked as a domestic help in other people's houses as a help to save her own from financial troubles. Her struggle has paid off. Today, all her children are well educated and have respectable jobs. One of her daughters is an optometrist and has her own shop while another daughter has a degree in Pharmacy and teaches at the local college.

After years of hard work, Geetanjali has taken a step back from being the breadwinner of her house, only to engage herself in a new challenge. When WASEP began training sessions for Warli painting in Jhidke, Geetanjali signed up, excited to try her hand at something new. On the first day of the training, she remembers feeling like a school student again, after 25 long years, with paintbrush replacing the pencil. She was so thrilled to learn something as beautiful as Warli art for the first time in her life that she could not stop gushing about her first class to her children at home. Every time she worked on a product for Warli painting like masks and frames, she only felt happier. She enjoys it so much that she gets restless even if a single class gets cancelled!

Though she has been a breadwinner for her family for more than two decades, the earnings from Warli art are extremely special to her. "Whatever I earned before, was to fend off hardships. Till now, I have always earned for my children. But this is the first time I'm earning for myself, by doing something I actually like." This is the first time in her life that Geetanjali is thinking about herself and her own happiness. Till now she only wanted her children to excel at their goals. Now, with Warli painting, she has found something she too wants to excel at and make her children proud.





Art always comes in handy



Sanika Patil

Sanika is a happy, content housewife living with her husband, in-laws and two children in Jhidke. But there is much more to her story. Her husband is the sole breadwinner for the family and works at a service centre for gadgets in the town of Bhiwandi. For a long time, Sanika has wished to ease some of her husband's financial burden, but having quit her education after the first year of B.A. for marriage, she had no real means of getting a job. The addition of domestic chores and caregiving responsibilities towards her children and her aging in-laws made it even more difficult for her to consider taking a job.

But she still tried, in her own way. Sanika learnt sewing and began stitching blouses from home for the ladies within the community. Her designs and perfectly tailored fits soon caught the eye of many and she started receiving more stitching orders. When WASEP came to Jhidke, Sanika saw it as another opportunity for learning something new as well as yet another source of income for her family. So along with the needle and thread, Sanika added a paintbrush to her kitty. Unsurprisingly, her deft hands picked up the skill of Warli painting with ease and Sanika enjoyed painting delicate designs on many different articles. Seeing her knack for Warli painting, her in-laws were supportive of her continuing her association with the project.



Now, when Sanika dedicates her time to painting at the class or at home, her mother-in-law looks after her grandchildren. Sanika's stitching skills and now her art is enabling her to do what her heart has wanted for a long time; making a meaningful contribution to her home fund. Sanika is now looking forward to elevating her Warli painting skills and hopes to create Warli-inspired blouse-designs in the near future.





Radhika Zaprekar

Radhika is one of the newest members of the Women Artisans Skill Enhancement Project having joined in February 2021, but has already made up her mind to continue with Warli painting for a long time. But the road till here has not been an easy one for her. Right after her 12th standard, Radhika was married off to a much older man who was less educated than her. Radhika's husband was 9 years older than her and had only studied till 9th standard. He was also a quick tempered man. The fact that Radhika was more educated than him and much younger irked him and he would often lose his temper with her for no reason. The couple also has three children.

Radhika lived with her in-laws at their big home in the village before she and her husband had to move out due to differences of opinion with the rest of the family. They moved to Jhidke and rented a small room. Things seemed to be going well for sometime till the Covid-19 pandemic struck.



Radhika's husband changed the seat covers of cars and buses for a living. When the lockdown happened, his workshop was shut and he lost his job. It was then that he realised that one person cannot do it all, and that dual income was necessary to run a household. Since then he has been supportive of Radhika and encouraged her to find a job.

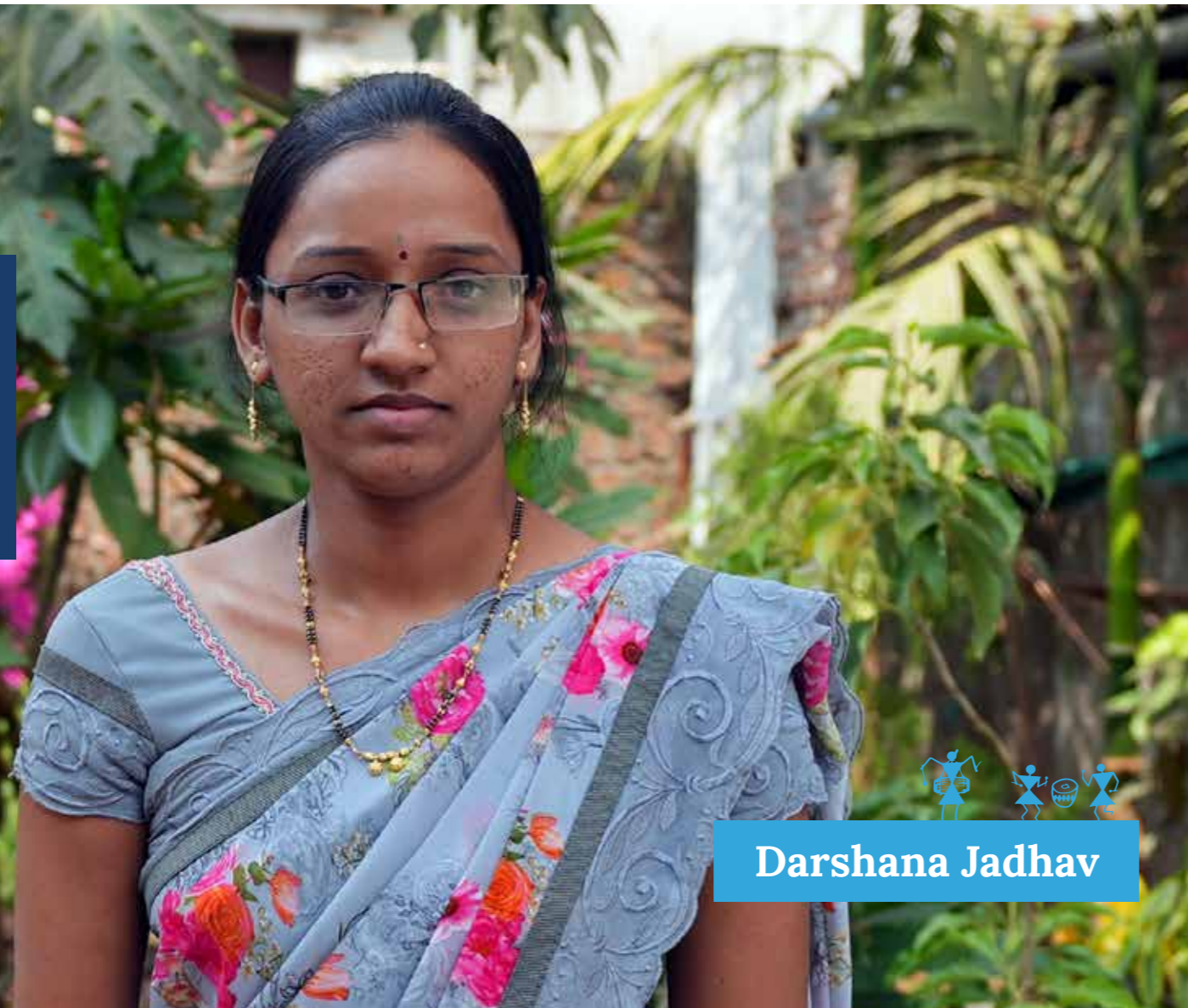
Though Radhika is new to the project, she has already shown potential, having done splendid work on masks and frames. She was delighted that even after a long gap in education, she was able to learn a new skill quickly. In a short while, she has grown so fond of the Warli painting class that if both her daughters were out for school and there was no one at home to take care of her toddler son, she would bring him along, but never miss the class. One day, she was on a video call with her mother and showed her some of her Warli art designs. Her mother wouldn't believe that Radhika had painted them and she got her to paint a few designs on the call to prove it!

But the most overwhelming moment for Radhika was in regard to her first earnings from Warli art. Though she is still awaiting it, she expressed a wish to invest her first salary in a group account to buy better art supplies in the future. Radhika expected to be reprimanded for her view, but her husband's reaction was completely unexpected for her. He completely agreed with her decision and even offered to add some money from his own pocket to the account for her art supplies. Here's hoping Radhika keeps discovering new shades to her relationship and to her own potential in the future.





Of broadening horizons



Darshana Jadhav

Darshana's story exemplifies the triumph of will and positive outlook in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Darshana's husband was a manager at a hotel in Thane. After the birth of their daughter, Darshana wanted to seek work and support her husband with the household expenses. However, her husband did not trust the day-care facilities in their vicinity, and so Darshana had to stay back home to take care of their daughter. When the pandemic struck and brought the lockdown, all the hotels were forced shut and her husband lost his job. Owing to the high rent and a difficult financial situation, Darshana and her husband had to relocate to their village, Jhidke, with her in-laws.

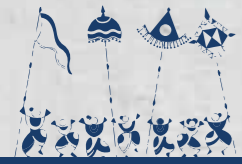


After three months of inactivity they had to devise a way to improve their financial situation and together, they decided to open a small shop. They pooled their savings and borrowed some money to set up a small shop in the Jhidke market, selling pooja items. Now, with the support of her in-laws to take care of their young daughter, Darshana could step out to work at the shop while her husband reached out to meet people to bring in business. Painting has a special place in Darshana's story. She shares a heartwarming and an unusually artsy rapport with her father-in-law. Darshana and her father-in-law are both fond of painting, and last year even painted Diwali lamps together for their home.

So when WASEP training began in Jhidke, Darshana had the unwavering support of her family members to join the project. During the time of the training, her husband would take over Darshana's shift at the shop so she could attend the class. And if he was unable to be at the shop during those hours, Darshana would shut her shop for two hours but regularly attend the training. When Darshana would practice Warli painting at home, her father-in-law would curiously observe her and try replicating some of her designs. In addition to Warli painting, Darshana also makes different articles like buntings, lamps and TV covers by weaving micron threads and sells them at their shop. Darshana and a few of her colleagues were quite excited to try something beyond their training, and so they bought pieces of cloth from their own money to try Warli painting on cloth as practice. Darshana especially wants to polish her skills and create framed paintings so that she can put them up for sale in her shop.

Darshana wants to urge more housewives from her locality to become a part of WASEP or even other such training programs. "Learning something new will always broaden your views. If I hadn't even tried, I would have never known whether I can do Warli painting so well. Women need to give themselves a chance to discover their own hidden talents". Here's hoping Darshana's love for painting and her entrepreneurial spirit makes her shop a huge success.





Finding joy in simplicity



Kalpana More



Kalpana has been associated with WASEP for four years and is happy to indulge everyone who asks her about it with many happy stories. She found out about WASEP's training through a local Anganwadi sevika (female member) and was curious to try her hand at something new. She enjoyed the training and getting to learn new designs and art techniques immensely, and before she knew it she had developed a deep liking for Warli painting

Before being involved in Warli painting, Kalpana would often feel that the clock moved too slowly in the afternoons when she had nothing to do at home and no one to speak with, as her husband was away at work and both her grown-up sons would spend most of the day out of the house.



But with WASEP training, she felt that time would fly quickly when she was engrossed in Warli painting along with friendly banter with her fellow trainees. She realised that Warli painting not only helped her use her free time constructively, but also made her feel nice and calm, and it felt good to take her mind off a predictable daily routine for some time. So far, she has worked on many interesting products such as trays, flower pots, mats and frames, and is eager to work on many more products. She found unequivocal support from her family for her decision to be associated with WASEP. Her elder son works for the upliftment of poor tribal (adivasi) groups and he strongly supported Kalpana to learn and promote Warli painting which is an ancient tribal art form.

While Kalpana was happy for an opportunity to learn a new skill at her age, getting paid for Warli art assignments only boosted her enthusiasm and confidence to continue being a part of WASEP. She keeps aside her earnings from Warli painting as an emergency fund for a rainy day like a lockdown situation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of her fondest memories with WASEP is that of a time when she participated in an exhibition at the LTI office. Kalpana couldn't believe her eyes and ears when visitors from abroad complimented her artwork and was extremely flattered. It was the first time she had received such lovely compliments and cherishes that memory to this day. "Warli painting is a beautiful art form which conveys that simplicity can be attractive. It makes you feel nice just by looking at it" she says with a warm smile. May we all find joy in simple things like Kalpana has.



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