

EMPOWERING THE NORTHERN WOMAN

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Asia Resource Center Inter Peoples Cooperation (PARCIC) has been in the scene since the year 2004. Moreover, with the motive of empowering women from areas such as Jaffna and Mullaitivu, the project 'Sari connection' funded by Japanese International Corporation Agency (JICA) came into being in the year 2012.

NOT ONLY SARIS

Many out there might wonder what Sari connection is all about as it is still a project that is gradually beginning to grow. Being a typical Colombo youth, I decided to take a stroll down Colombo's famous Good Market that takes place every Saturday at the Racecourse.

The Good Market is a much loved place amongst many who live in Colombo as a result of the organic products sold and also due to the focus on concepts such as recycling, upcycling and reusing. Walking past the many stalls available at the good market, the little stall in a corner filled with colourful bags, pouches, hair bands, skirts and so forth is what captivated my heart and my eyes. It was love at first sight.

Named as the 'Sari Connection', this little stall might look like any other ordinary stall selling bags and pouches but what makes the 'sari connection' a tad bit



K. Pushpalatha

more extraordinary is the fact that all their products are made by recycling and up-cycling old saris collected across the island.

RECYCLED SARI PROJECT

This recycle sari project



Selvaranjani

launched by PARCIC aims to support female headed families in war-affected Northern Sri Lanka. Although many women who join this project are unable to sew, they are trained to become seamstresses who then upcycle donated saris to



create unique designs. Most products sold under the name 'Sari connection' are designed according to a Japanese style guide as trainers from Japan come to Sri Lanka to train the teacher in charge of this project who then teaches the women involved in this project. Once the products are

finalized they are then sold in various outlets in areas such as Colombo, Galle, Arugam Bay, Unawatuna, Waskaduwa, Hambantota, Kandy, Kalutara, Nuwara Eliya, Trincomalee and Jaffna. The proceeds obtained through the sale of these products are distributed back to the original



seamstresses back in the North who use this income to support their families.

As the seamstresses have no direct interaction with the customers, an event hosted in celebration of International Women's Day created the opportunity for the customers to interact with the women behind



the colourful products of 'Sari connection'. The event took place on 4 March 2016 at the Barefoot Gallery giving guests the time to not just interact with the talented women of the North but to also have an in-depth insight to the project 'Sari connection'. Having been a part of this event has helped in



learning that this project of recycling and upcycling saris has economically benefitted over 70 women and their families as a supportive livelihood since mid 2015. Ceylon Today also received the opportunity to interact with seamstresses K. Pushpalatha and Selvaranjani from Mullaitivu



and Jaffna respectively. On being asked to briefly share with us what they have to say about Sari connection, K. Pushpalatha stated that she has been involved in the project since the year 2015 and it has immensely helped her as this task does not require her to go outside her home. She went on to state that as she sews all the products at home it gives her the time to engage herself in household tasks as well. "Being involved with Sari connection is more than just a job to me. It's a hobby and a part time job through which I gain an income of about Rs. 3000 per week. I'm very thankful to Sari connection for getting me involved in this project as the income helps me fund my brother's education", shared Selvaranjani.

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Despite society moving forward, the women of Northern Sri Lanka still face difficulties

in working outside of their homes as the concept of allowing women to work and earn a wage is still not entirely accepted. However, the project Sari connection which solely focuses on the empowerment of women in Northern Sri Lanka has successfully achieved their goal of empowering the northern woman as K. Pushpalatha and Selvaranjani went on to express the following. "Unlike other NGOs that visit us, the project Sari Connection by PARCIC and the team behind Sari connection focus on sustainability and helping us earn a stable income. We were severely affected by the war and Sari connection has helped us not by just giving us some money like many other NGOs do but by giving us a job through which we earn an income for the work we do. It takes us about 30 minutes to cut all the saris and another 30 minutes to stitch a bag, so we sew around 3-4 bags per day."

Customer feedback is a vital factor when doing any task. On being quizzed with regard to the lack of interaction between the seamstresses and the customers, K. Pushpalatha shared the following. "We love to come and know what our customers have to say about the products but it's too far for us to travel frequently. Since we are always eager to know what the customers think of the products we sew, we constantly ask the Sari connection staff



who market our products about what customers have to say. Sometimes they ask for more colour combinations so we try to meet their requirements. Moreover, we are very happy to be here today as we can directly interact with the customers."

The effortless dedication that is put in by these women towards their job and their families is praiseworthy. Despite all the challenges that have come their way they continued to see the light at the end of the tunnel and turn all the impossibilities into possibilities. These empowering women have not only given prominence to will power but they have also inspired other women to keep the lamp of their dreams burning.

(Pix by Thilina Fernando)