

Kumbaya – The Journey

It has been eighteen years since the day women from Neemkheda village came to our house and saw patchwork cushions made out of old clothes. From the colourful pieces sewn together they picked out the shirts and kurtas we used to wear. The next day, building an earthen dam in the scorching sun with head loads of clay, they said they wanted to learn how to stitch on the sewing machine. And so we started Kumbaya with three borrowed sewing machines, a box full of scrap, and a book on quilting techniques left behind by a friend.

Looking back, these years have been about creating the business of manufacturing from scratch, in the middle of nowhere. For women whose hands would be burnt from carrying hot iron *tagaris* or mudpans, whose bare feet would be cracked walking on earth baked by the piercing rays of the sun under the Tropic of Cancer. The idea of Kumbaya was born here, from them, on this dry landscape. Born from the rippling strength of their tattooed arms, the flamboyant prints on their swinging clothes, the glint of silver on their ankles; from laughing women dead serious about stitching.

Kumbaya is a social venture bringing women together to learn a skill and earn their way out of poverty. The making of Kumbaya has been about charting a course on unknown terrain imagining an economic enterprise that works for poor tribal women. Finding contemporary, competitive solutions that equip women from a remote rural agricultural tribal area to manufacture for mainstream markets and discovering the versatility of the simple sewing machine. Locating places, prices, weaves, dyes and prints of fabric. Building work sheds, installing generators and assembling machines. Ensuring fair wages, calculating costs, calibrating prices, setting terms and evaluating returns. Loving materials, their shape, feel, colour, texture, weight, size and structure. Conjuring images from these to make prototypes and define quality. Learning from wiry women accustomed to moving all the time, from forest to field to hearth carrying heavy loads, a skill that needs stillness, precision and craftsmanship. Its about the tension of making principled decisions in the thick of real life markets.

The Heart of Kumbaya is the Producer

Kumbaya is an ethical business, an intricate web of interlinked activities driven by commitment to its producers. Every product we design, every exhibition we attend, every sale we make, every document we prepare is with awareness of what the final impact could be on the producer. For instance, our production planning team continuously ensures that fabric is sourced and cut on time so that producers have enough pieces to stitch every day of the year. Our design and sampling team constantly creates a range of new and innovative products not only to keep pace with the market but more to assure work to each and every producer – customized to their different skills and specific needs. Supervisors at the sewing centers guide and encourage producers at each stage of production so that they remain motivated to improve their output and deliver high quality. The quality check team has to be aware that theirs is a role of high responsibility. Even a single piece gone wrong could lead to the cancellation of an entire order and ruin our reputation as a brand. Similarly, the client interaction and marketing team has to know that every negotiation, email, conversation with a

demanding client or a single well taken catalogue photograph could mean a sale, a large order, an opportunity that means wages for our producers. One person in charge of any activity is inextricably linked to the entire cycle of design, sampling, production, marketing and sales, with the unequivocal imperative of being accountable to the well being of the producer.

Design Principles

Kumbaya's design principles derive from being rooted in a remote, rural, backward region – no skills, no raw materials, no roads, no transport, no electricity, no buildings, no markets, no money, no traditional craft, no way out for poor women. Overcoming these taught us how to look at problems and solve them – only after walking into walls, creating chaos, tripping over our own mistakes, of course, which finally led to practical innovation. And none of this would have meant a thing without the unexpected windfalls - times when pieces effortlessly fell into place, a streak of luck, a benefactor at our doorstep at just the right time.

For us, design means many things. Not just the way the product looks. It means the work that makes it, the work that it will do, who will work on it and who will it work for. It means the construction, materials, prices, communication, the whole complex process that makes the product appeal the way it does. It means fair practices, particularly in India, where multitudes of skilled craftspeople earn less than a minimum wage while designers earn the premium for using their skill.

From trial and error, practice and prototype, the design principles come down to -

- ❖ Design with minimum means to get maximum impact
- ❖ Design compassionately so that women can stitch perfectly within the shortest possible time
- ❖ Design responsibly to reduce tedium while enhancing skills and capabilities
- ❖ Design to minimize risk - between the sample, the stencil, cutting, joining, finishing and packing
- ❖ Design classics, products that are always liked and used, even years later
- ❖ Design with simplicity, uncluttered form shorn of excess
- ❖ Design with naturalness, following the curve of the body, the drape of fabric, the line of the stitch
- ❖ Design so that prices are affordable for as many people as possible
- ❖ Design with waste till there is none

These are some of the principles behind the successful range of marketable products that are easy for the women to make, provide them with high wages, are reasonably priced and are constantly in demand. We make simple, well cut garments of good quality fabric and we do patchwork.

Patchwork is easy to do but gives the effect of beautiful intricacy, adding high value to very small quantities of cloth. Machine stitched patchwork enables women to earn more in less time. And it uses up all the waste cloth generated from garment production.

The process of arriving at the final design is by making samples or prototypes, again and again if required till it fits perfectly, washes well, fall gracefully, looks good, is easy to use and most of all, can be impeccably executed by the producer. From the sloper, a sample of one size is made, washed, and fitted on standard body forms and live models (people working at SPS) before a paper pattern is finalized. This chain of activities is repeated on all sizes. Then, a small test production run is done at the centers. The paper patterns are readjusted, tested again and perfected before the design goes into production. In the past year, we have more people working in our sample making team, supervised by our master sample maker. This is so that we can experiment prolifically with new designs and styles. Our skilled senior producers are frequently involved in making samples, giving critical inputs in stitching and transferring skills to junior tailors.

Marketing and Publicity

Our image reflects exactly who we are, what we do and what we believe in. Our value proposition to the customer is an affordable, aesthetic, distinctive, quality finished product in line with international trends for the discerning urban buyer made by women who are proud to be skilled and earn enough to make a difference to their circumstances. By purchasing this product the customer aligns, supports and participates in their endeavour.

Kumbaya's product portfolio ranges from garments for men, women and children, accessories, home linen and gift items. Combined with our pricing strategy, the products are designed to cover wide and diverse customer segments and multiple distribution channels. For a small enterprise like ours, this is the strategy that covers for risk.

We do everything to sell. From taking care to post a single piece to a customer in response to an email, to taking on large whole sale orders; from working with small boutiques on assortments, to producing for different retail shops and standing from morning to night at our crowded exhibitions, catering attentively to each and every customer.

Till now, pure appreciation of the quality, design, cut, fabric, stitch, and range by customers pulled Kumbaya into the market. The product speaks every time – and that we have never had to, is immensely gratifying. Inquiries follow after someone bought a kurta, saw a bag or a bedcover or heard about Kumbaya from friends. From our rough and tumble '*dukaan*' at the SPS campus and a single 'Greenshop' located in an unknown hill station in the Nilgiri's, Kumbaya 'flew off the shelves' to several Tribes India outlets in major cities across India and became the substance for four more Greenshop stores in tourist hot spots, has a full range available in Kriti's boutique in Pondicherry and a signature patchwork range at 'Daaram' in Hyderabad. And the demand continues to grow - from retailers in Delhi, Gurgaon, Cochin, Bangalore and Mumbai.

However, it is critical that we bring in more orders to guarantee work to more producers. As a first step, we have launched a Facebook page – we have received order queries, feedback, likes and appreciation. We plan to develop a consistent and regular communication strategy through blogs and Twitter. To keep in touch with our customers, we have built an exhaustive mailing list to inform them about new products, updates, exhibitions and so on. And we are ready to test online marketing. Instead of setting up an online shopping portal of our own, we have been advised to place our products on popular online shopping portals first and see the response.

Exhibitions are the most important part of our brand building and marketing approach. Kumbaya participates in well known exhibitions, located in landmark areas, with high footfall, where we can directly speak to customers and invite them to have a look at our work, product and purpose. Face to face interaction with customers is an intense arena of learning for our local team. Traveling out of a remote area, they are exposed to urban sensibilities and prices, competition, quality parameters, criticism, bargaining, praise, questions, trends – and experience a sharp, quick, comprehensive market response. The overwhelming response immediately inspires, improves and energizes their work further. We have done exhibitions in Delhi, Bangalore and Cochin. We are exploring opportunities in Mumbai and Chennai. We will also be applying for fair trade certification to improve our standards, strengthen the brand and reach out to a more cognizant international market.

The Retail Experience

For Kumbaya, 2012 – 2013 was about new retail partnerships. So far, Kumbaya's main retail partners were 'The Green Shops' in Coonoor, Ooty, Kotagiri, Mysore, run by Last Forest Enterprises and 'Tribes India' outlets managed by TRIFED across the country.

Kumbaya is now also available at a new store in Pondicherry, called Kriti. The shop 'Kriti Creations' was inaugurated on 8th July, 2012 and stocks almost our entire range (garments, bags, home linen and accessories) along with products from Last Forest Enterprises (honey, coffee, spices etc). Customers were ecstatic about the designs, variety, quality, prices and display. But most of all, they were thrilled about buying beautiful things that they wanted to own and contributing towards a cause at the same time.

Pondicherry is full of possibilities because of its French colonial history and the philosophical influence of Shri Aurobindo and the Mother. People from all over the world have settled there over the last century. Their spiritual quest for harmony is translated in practice through work within communities and villages, on the environment, architecture, design and sustainable manufacturing. It is a place where new ideas are awaited with keenness and excitement.

We are guided by every retail partner's specific context in determining the products, styles, fabrics and price and so we often customize the product range. For the Pondicherry shop, we made garments in light cotton, half sleeve shirts for men and cap sleeve clothes and capris for women. Over the year, we have consistently been receiving orders and feedback from Kriti.

From a garment label on a Kumbaya kurta at a Tribes India Indore outlet, an organization called 'Once Upon A Time' (OUAT) tracked us down. OUAT is a new organization formed by two women who have worked in the corporate sector, traveled with their husbands and have relocated to different cities. Figuring out new towns gave them an insight into the needs and aspirations of frequently transferred customers in urban areas. They have turned this insight into a marketing opportunity. For stay at home wives, new to a town, living in gated communities, they offered small exhibitions of our products on a regular basis. OUAT has sold our products at Mhow, Delhi and Goa and given us ideas for Photo Frames, Table Mats, Table Runners etc. We made a number of samples based on their requirements, which have been added to our product range. Over the year, they experimented with different marketing models on a small scale - individual exhibitions, trunk shows at their homes and merchandising to bigger stores. OUAT is now exploring plans of opening an online store. For Kumbaya, the partnership with OUAT has been useful to understand working with startup enterprises that have limited capital and scale.

Pricing

At exhibitions in Bangalore, Cochin and Delhi, we met retailers who own shops, boutiques and outlets in places such as Gurgaon, Cochin, Pune, Ahmedabad and Delhi. Most were small enterprises, or startups run by individuals, very appreciative of our work but indecisive. Talking to them made us think: What should our pricing and terms of engagement for new unknown retail partners be? With our philosophy, how do we price our products and give discounts to remain competitive while covering costs while ensuring modest margins? How do we make it easy and attractive for retailers to sample our range and over time, increase the order size and build a long term relationship? Who can we trust?

The limitation in retailing with others is that no one wants to risk keeping the entire line. Cherry-picking from our range, they want odd assortments, small quantities, only some sizes, long credit periods - raising the level of difficulty for us. This year, a significant part of our time was devoted to coming up with a viable pricing and discount model, based on feedback and experiences with retailers.

With quality and design comparable to famous brands like Fab India and Anokhi, Kumbaya is known for its affordable pricing. Our prices are considered more 'honest' than other NGOs and green product initiatives working with waste. Very often, business consultants and well wishers advise us to raise our prices. However, after testing the market, experimenting in small doses repeatedly, we discover that customer sensitivity to a change in price is high and immediately affects demand.

The immediate response of 'wanting' in the first time buyer is the most valuable and revealing moment. It is in that precise second, as desire flares that Kumbaya becomes embedded as a brand in the customer's head. Or not.

So, we work hard to fine tune our prices such that we cover our costs, sell good volumes, create demand, guarantee work to all our producers, keep pace with inflation and competition, and make a profit to invest in the future. We juggle with many factors to arrive at the perfect price point.

Some large retailers associate lack of experience and professionalism with social ventures like ours. They drive a hard bargain and we have to negotiate hard to maintain the objectives of our enterprise. In all these situations, to work out prices and a discount policy that keeps it simple and attractive for clients and makes it viable for us, means tuning in to what the customer wants, fostering relationships over time and actively seeking customer input. This is what finally makes the MRP for all our products sound just right: doing justice to the product, the producer and the customer. We have developed four discount slabs, whereby the client gets a discount on the total MRP depending on the size of the order. This enables customers to purchase any kind of assortment they want and get an attractive discount based on the quantities they buy.

This year, the ethics of orders from TRIFED posed a completely different challenge. TRIFED is the Government of India's marketing arm for products made by tribal artisans. It is our largest wholesale buyer for the products made of handloom fabric. As always, we have been negotiating a revision of rates since March 2012. Our handloom cloth supplier Dastakar Andhra Marketing Association (DAMA) has been steadily raising the price of handloom cloth. On the other hand, TRIFED pressurizes us to reduce our prices. TRIFED's response to our rate revision requests is always extremely difficult and unpleasant. Despite real, detailed, transparent, innumerable costing sheets, perfect accounts (their investigation team checks the purchase bills for raw material!) and lower prices, they continuously pressurize us to reduce our prices even further. Their unaccountable and bureaucratic Price and Purchase committee not only takes months to approve our prices, but also tries to compel us into lowering our quoted rates by withdrawing large orders, in the hope that we buckle under pressure.

We have to work out solutions to this deadlock because we feel that TRIFED supports tribal artisans, their orders provide employment to our producers. Kumbaya reaches different cities in India through their retail outlets. And the handloom waste generated from their order is the raw material for our patchwork bedcovers and cushion covers. These patchwork bedcovers and cushion covers are our highest selling signature product and a source of high income employment for our differently abled producers, whom Kumbaya is deeply committed to.

Apart from teaching us valuable lessons in patience and making trade-offs, our experience with TRIFED has made it crystal clear that we have to proactively seek other clients who understand the reason behind Kumbaya and give us sizable and consistent orders to reduce our dependence on a single organization.

Building Relationships

We invest in long term relationships with vendors and customers and make time to nurture trust, commitment and stability. Ease of financial transactions, supply and transport of goods to and from

a remote area, adherence to quality specifications enables and empowers us to take on large orders, ensure quality and meet deadlines. Cloth dealers from markets in different cities have given us credit, discounts, timely deliveries. Credibility with buyers comes from complete honesty and transparency, being open and responsive to their ideas and by keeping our promises. It is only then that buyers are willing to invest and stock our products.

Today, we have regular suppliers, weavers and printers of the exact fabric that a design may demand from all over India just a phone call away. From vegetable dyers and block printers of Bagru in Jaipur to hand painted batik printers in Ujjain, from DAMA in Hyderabad to suppliers of export quality cloth in Delhi. There are buyers across India who believe in us enough to order more, each time.

The Kumbaya Team

The Kumbaya centers are managed by a team of skilled and trained local people. The local team supervises training, production, sourcing, and accounting. We believe that investing in the capacities of a local cadre, who have a stake in the development of the area, consolidates the growth and sustainability of Kumbaya. They have an intricate grasp of production processes, as they have been producers themselves. Given the growing and diverse requirements of Kumbaya, they form enduring teams, continually upgrading each others' skills to be multifaceted, substituting for each other when the situation demands and even producing themselves when there are large orders and deadlines.

The team has been shaped by the struggle to develop diverse, intricate and skilled capabilities required to run Kumbaya. With no professional experience and no formal training, our managers have devised apposite strategies for management. Instead of a hierarchical, rigid structure, a collaborative team has evolved. Highly differentiated in terms of capabilities, aptitude and experience, our team has an edge - as their work in Kumbaya necessitates nimble-footed adaptiveness and complex interdependence. Their combined knowledge is what continuously helps Kumbaya to find robust solutions in an unfamiliar, volatile market environment.

However, at the current stage that Kumbaya is in, we need a bigger team of people with professional competence. While multitasking is a virtue, we need to reduce the workload on members, enable each member to leverage her skills and strengths, concentrate on her tasks and dramatically improve the quality of her output. As Kumbaya rapidly expands its product range, establishes new market linkages and increases its production capacity, streamlining its operations is now an imperative. For instance, we need specific people to look into the efficiency of production and ensure highest quality. We need dedicated personnel to coordinate activities associated with dispatching of products to clients, sourcing of raw material, inventory management, client interaction, communication, marketing, and design to enable Kumbaya to reach the next level of business. However, talent acquisition from urban centres or local areas poses a significant challenge.

The Challenge of Finding People

So far, apart from the local team, we have had professionals from urban centres with a background in social work or rural management who have joined Kumbaya. Out of the 4 people who had joined the programme four years back, only one person (woman) remained, sincerely learning every aspect to become programme coordinator. After 4 years of valuable inputs, she had to leave for personal reasons. We started looking to recruit a person in her place and advertized on popular job sites catering to the social sector. We received a large number of applications, but found none with the kind of skill sets that Kumbaya needs.

Kumbaya requires people who have multiple interests such as design, materials, fashion, manufacturing and fabrication, production management, business, women's empowerment along with having excellent interpersonal skills, a sensitivity to the context that we are in, a willingness to collaborate, pay attention to detail, be willing to learn new things outside their sphere of knowledge and the ability to find joy in the everyday. Very few educational programs gear people for a job profile like this. Very rarely do we find a person who is interested in social work and creative arts at the same time. People from schools of social work or rural management usually do not come with this interest. And people from design institutes do not want to live and work in a remote area like ours. Finally, the commitment offered by such people is usually for a maximum of one or two years. During this period, a considerable amount of time is dedicated in training them and teaching them practical aspects of the job. By the time they settle into their roles, it is time for them to leave. This entire exercise requires time and resources. So to get someone with skills, commitment and at a modest salary is a huge challenge for Kumbaya.

During the recruitment process, the shortlisted CVs came down to a very small number and thereafter the candidates were contacted for initial telephonic interviews. Shortlisted candidates were called for an interview to our campus. Finally, out of a 300 CVs, we were able to recruit two candidates. Out of 5 promising candidates with qualifications in subjects such as business administration and fashion management, no one came because they had better offers outside.

Recruiting for Kumbaya made us explore a number of avenues. We searched for free job sites which cater to NGOs like Dev Net Jobs and NGO BOX. We tried more professional services such as Naukri Dot Com and Monster India but they charge high fees without the commitment headhunt specifically to our requirements. We put the job posting on a design forum. We wrote to the placement cells of a number of institutes such as Jamia Millia Islamia, TISS and IRMA. We reworked our website such that we could post the opening online. From the Young India Fellowship (YIF) program we recruited young, high achievers from different fields, with a year's training in the liberal arts, willing to contribute their skills to grassroots organizations.

Looking for new people is a constant activity and recruiting for one post can take up to 6 months. We have to allocate the time and resources to do that. Additionally, it takes time and effort to train them. Most often, fresh graduates with no work experience join us. These are energetic people who have high expectations, especially people who give up lucrative offers in urban areas and decide to come and work with us. At the same time, we have to strengthen the skills of our local team and reduce their dependence on external professionals. This means that external professionals who come

to work with us allocate time to transfer skills to our local team of professionals – in communications, marketing, or business.

Visibility through Facebook, websites, blogs and other social networks, makes it easy for us to tell the world who we are. We hope to interest more people through these avenues.

For the first time, we offered internship positions with Kumbaya for students from design schools. The Srishti School of Design and Technology in Bangalore will be sending two interns to work with us during May - June 2013.

Highlights

- ❖ **Sales** crossed 61.9 lakhs in 2012 -2013. They were 39 lakhs in 2011-12, 38 lakhs in 2010-11, and 32 lakhs in 2009-10. The breakup of sales is as follows:

Sales from Retail		
Organization	Sales Amount	Percentage of Total Sales
TRIFED	Rs. 24.65 lakhs	(39.8%)
Last Forest Enterprises	Rs. 11 lakhs	(17.8%)
Kriti	Rs. 6 lakhs	(9.7%)
OUAT	Rs. 2.7 lakhs	(4.4%)
SPS Neemkheda Campus	Rs. 5.8 lakhs	(9.4%)
Total	Rs. 50.15 lakhs	

Sales from Exhibitions		
Organization	Dates and Location	Sales Amount
Dastkari Haat Samiti	1st to 15th January 2013, Dilli Haat, New Delhi	Rs. 7 lakhs
A Hundred Hands	31st October to 4th November 2012, Bangalore	Rs. 2.6 lakhs
A Hundred Hands	6th to 9th December 2012, Cochin	Rs. 1.16 lakhs
TRIFED	26th to 30th January 2013, Bhopal	Rs. 47,000
TRIFED	1st to 10th February 2013, Bhopal	Rs. 60,000
Daaram	Hyderabad	Rs. 25,900

Total		Rs. 12.1 lakhs (19.5% of total sales)
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❖ **Production**

No. of pieces produced in two centers - 16421

No. of patches made by differently abled producers - 5882

No. of finished patchwork products made - 867 including 219 Patchwork Bedcovers

Value of patchwork products made out of pure waste – Rs. 7.7 lakhs

❖ **Cloth Purchased**

Handloom – 11826 meters – Rs. 11.5 lakhs

Bagru print – 3594 meters – Rs. 3.6 lakhs

Cotton Export Quality – 15930 meters – Rs. 9 lakhs

We bought 31350 meters of different varieties of cloth worth Rs. 24.1 lakhs. It is our endeavor, while working to provide employment to tribal people of the area, to also use and add value to traditional textile crafts like handloom weaving, hand block printing with natural and chemical dyes, and embroidery. Kumbaya products are enhanced in this way and dedicated at the same time to the support of many incredibly skilled artisans across the country.

This year, we made our way to Jaipur in search of new fabric. Our journey led us to fabrics that are beautiful, traditional and environment friendly. We found 3 dealers in Jaipur. Since all of them are suppliers to Fab India and other major brands, we were assured of quality and quantity. From the natural dyed, hand block prints of Bagru and Kaladera, to the screen printers of Sanganer, we were able to purchase stock and place cloth orders on this trip. Bagru and Kaladera are village towns of the Chhipa community in Rajasthan that has been involved in traditional printing techniques for the last 100 years. These prints are acclaimed all over India and are known as Bagru prints. The prints of Bagru, unlike other prints, involve a different method, using mud resist processes to enhance and fix colour. This unique method of printing employs wooden blocks on which the desired design is engraved. The carved block is then used for replicating the design in preferred colors on the fabric. Bagru prints are famous, not only because of their designs but also for their rare quality of being eco-friendly. Even today, artisans use traditional vegetable dyes for cloth printing. The color blue is made from indigo, greens by mixing indigo with pomegranate skins, red from madder root and yellow from turmeric.

❖ **Online catalogue**

Kumbaya has a fully updated online catalogue where photos of garments, home linen, bags, gift items and accessories have been uploaded with the respective product codes. This catalogue is available on the Kumbaya website www.samprag.org/kumbaya.htm, with every photograph watermarked. A size chart for each style in garments and other products has also been put up on the website so that customers can easily decide which size is the best fit for them. The catalogue can be continuously updated with new images and also new product categories. The catalog has made it very simple for us to share our designs with existing and new customers via email.

❖ **Facebook**

Leveraging the power of social networks to increase our visibility, online presence and brand identity, Kumbaya set up its Facebook Page in October 2012. Through Facebook, we have been able to share information and updates about our exhibitions, new products, catalogues, and retail outlets. Within 10 days, we had more than a hundred ‘likes’ on Facebook.

❖ **New Products**

Over the past year, Kumbaya developed a number of new styles in garments and designed products in new categories. These products have been tested in the market during exhibitions and have been found to be successful:

- Bias cut dresses and tops
- Reversible garments - kurtas, tops, pajamas with pockets
- Turkish Trousers
- Quilted Jackets
- Bags – Wash Bags, D Bags, Tote Bags, iPad Covers, Clutch Purses
- Accessories – Ari Embroidery Bead Necklaces
- Head Gear – Berets, Sun Caps, Sun Visors
- Gift Items – Photo Frames, Patchwork Folders

❖ **Awaaz: the Hindi Newsletter**

We produced a Kumbaya special issue of ‘Awaaz’, a quarterly newsletter in Hindi for circulation among SPS’s women Self-Help Groups. It gives an introduction to Kumbaya, its philosophy, its training and production activities and it also includes the success stories of some of our producers. We designed the issue with simple minimal text and many photographs so that it was easy for the SHG members to understand. The Kumbaya Awaaz issue has been very useful to handout to people as a brochure, since it provides a comprehensive overview of Kumbaya in an attractive manner. We plan to produce a similar document in English.

❖ Dastkari Haat Samiti

Kumbaya became a member of the Dastkari Haat Samiti (DHS) in New Delhi, a nationwide association, started by Ms. Jaya Jaitly, which brings together artisans from across the country and offers them a common platform to market their craft. Dastkari Haat Samiti has over 1500 members. They organize exhibitions not only in India but in other countries as well. Two years ago, Ms. Jaya Jaitly was very appreciative of our products at the TRIFED exhibition in New Delhi. She advised us to become members of DHS. Immediately after becoming members, we were invited to participate in DHS's prestigious annual bazaar at Dilli Haat, New Delhi. The fair was organized from 1st January to 15th January 2013. Unfortunately, at the same time there was immense pressure from Trifed to participate in TRIFED's Aadiship Mela to be held right after, from 16th to 31st January 2013.

According to Dilli Haat rules, an organization cannot exhibit for longer than 15 days at a stretch and cannot have a stall more than once in 6 months. Therefore, Kumbaya had to make the difficult decision of choosing between the two exhibitions. Kumbaya decided to participate in the DHS Crafts Bazaar, keeping in mind that TRIFED had stopped organizing exhibitions in New Delhi for the past two years because of which we lost out on an important sales opportunity in Delhi. This proved to be a very good business move as Kumbaya was not only one of the highest selling stalls, but was also recognized by a number of retailers who own stores across the country. The total sales at the DHS Crafts Bazaar were Rs.7 lakhs. 10% of the sales were paid to DHS as rental charges.

Axis Bank provided a credit card machine which was extremely helpful in boosting sales during the exhibition. 18.5% of the total exhibition sales were through credit cards. For the entire duration of the exhibition, the Kumbaya team was constantly catering to a crowded stall, full of demanding customers. Among the many stalls at the exhibition, all selling high quality and attractive products, Kumbaya remained one of the most popular and high-selling stalls throughout. Kumbaya was also held up as an exemplary stall which meticulously maintained its accounts, despite having to deal with a constant stream of customers and honestly declared its sales figures every day. Patchwork bed covers, cushion covers and bags were some of Kumbaya's most popular items. The biggest compliment was from a designer who compared Kumbaya's patchwork bed covers to the work of the famous Indian artist, S. H. Raza.

❖ Earthy Goods and Indian Artisans Online

During the exhibition at Dilli Haat, we met Ms. Reshma Anand, Founder of the Earthy Goods Foundation to get ideas on making Kumbaya a more productive, profitable and streamlined enterprise. We invited Reshma to visit our organization in Bagli, observe our processes, interact with our team and give us insights on improving our production, marketing and sales operations. We have also put up our profile on Indian Artisans Online, a portal developed by Earthy Goods to provide details of Indian artisan groups to serious buyers across the world.

❖ Women Weave

Women Weave is an organization dedicated to training women weavers in Maheshwar. We produced an exclusive collection of women's garments in 2009-10, with fabric developed and woven by them. The fabric is a high end hand spun and hand woven Khadi, block printed with natural dyes in Bagh and used by India's haute couture designers. As both Kumbaya and Women Weave work in the same area, three hours away from each other, there is a great synergy between the two organizations. This year, Women Weave wants us to stitch more garments for them, using their new fabric. Some of the styles will be ours. Taking the association forward, our discussions were about understanding each other's costing formats, pricing and operations and were an invaluable learning experience for both teams. We believe that to make any association long lasting, transparency and convergence towards mutual goals play a key role and Women Weave shares the same idea.

❖ **Gond Painting Workshop**

For fun and creativity, a 3 day Gond Painting Workshop was organized for our producers in September. Shri Rajendra Uike, a Gond artist from Dindori, conducted these workshops in the Neemkheda and Bagli stitching centers, where producers and the SPS team had a good time painting and drawing various objects and motifs guided by the master. Some of the producers were holding a pencil and a paintbrush for the first time. The paintings were so striking that we will be screen printing them for our products.

❖ **Health Awareness Workshops**

A workshop on 'Women's Health and Anemia' was organized at the centers for our producers. The workshop content included the diet plan of women and the nutrients consumed through food, the importance of blood and its functions in the body, symptoms of anemia and its treatment, food and other supplements that can help to prevent and cure anemia. The workshop was conducted by Ms. Sabita Dishemaru, a young girl from Nepal who was interning with SPS. A workshop on 'Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)' was also organized. The workshop content included information on various types of sexually transmitted infections and their symptoms, the precautionary measures to be taken and the importance of hygiene in preventing these diseases. Women found the information useful and liberating as they are not able to share their problems either with their husbands or other members of the family due to embarrassment. Their silent suffering ruins their physical and mental health. It was an important step for Kumbaya producers, to be made aware of the basic hygiene required to stay healthy and disease free.

❖ **Innovation and Recycling in Design**

There is nothing known as waste in Kumbaya. Every scrap of fabric finds its way into patchwork cushion covers, cloth bags, doormats and throws, braided handles for our newspaper bags, in fabricard price tags, gift bags and stationery. Creation of value by fabricating patchwork has one of the highest wage to non-wage ratios. Our signature patchwork bedcovers, made by differently-abled producers sell out at Rs. 3300 a piece. Training pieces that used to be thrown away were redesigned into useful products. By adjusting the dimensions, making beautiful designs with contrasting threads

and using coloured patches for pockets and bands, attractive cloth bags are made which can be used to pack our Patchwork Bedcovers. Hakoba cloth waste was combined with cotton prints to make the pineapple patchwork design for a new range of patchwork bedcovers. These bedcovers ensure the same amount of wages for our producers, look very different from and are less expensive than the Handloom Patchwork Bed Covers. Large pieces of indigo dyed Bagru cloth waste was stitched together to make bedcovers to set off the unique character of each print. Combined Bagru indigo prints give a rich blue look and invite the viewer to admire each motif separately. Since the patchwork is not so intricate, we were again able to produce a new design at a lower price. We experimented with another fabric combination this year, bringing together Bagru with Kalamkari fabric to make cushion covers. In this way, two different handcrafted natural dyed and printed fabrics complimented each other to create a new look. Our packaging is made of newspaper stitched into a carry bag with our logo photocopied on reused paper and our goods are transported in recycled cardboard cartons.

❖ Sizes

We introduced two plus sizes, XXL and XXXL for our women's garments because of customer feedback this year. Sizing is always a challenge - Asian, European, American sizes are all different, and they have regional variations too. Similarly, in India, sizes for Delhi will be different from sizes in Bengal, Madhya Pradesh or Kerala. Making large sizes is a whole new range of challenges. Body forms for plus sizes assume uniform proportions, whereas real people may have small shoulders and wide hips or vice versa. The pricing changes dramatically because of the extra cloth required per piece. Usually, we save cloth and the end cost to the customer, by cutting extra large size sleeves along with small size fronts or backs from the same width of cloth. In plus sizes, however, the front or back takes up the whole width. The sleeves have to cut from additional lengths, increasing the cloth required per piece. We work out individual prices for each size from S to XL and then carefully calibrate an average price that is fair to all sizes. In the same spirit of fairness, we price our plus size garments separately so that an S size customer does not have to subsidize a XXL size customer. We try to make our dealers understand this practice. However, we mostly fail as this is not usual industry practice.

• The Satwas Story – A New Kumbaya Chapter

The expansion of the SPS SHG programme to many more locations has meant the inclusion of more itinerant women – landless, migrant, displaced, desperately seeking survival. In such locations, it is an imperative for Kumbaya to empower women who are looking for better, more remunerative and more fulfilling working conditions. We have opened a new center which, if successful, could respond to the economic needs of many more women of the area and scale up Kumbaya's production.

In June 2012, 15 women from SPS promoted SHGs in Kantaphod visited the Kumbaya Neemkheda center with the request to open a new training and production center in Kantaphod. The Kumbaya team had already visited Kantaphod in May to discuss the possibilities with women who showed

keen interest in learning stitching. Kantaphod was chosen as a Kumbaya location not only because SPS's women's institutions there are strong, but also because there are no opportunities for women apart from agricultural labour in the area. Many women here belong to families that have been displaced and rehabilitated from the Narmada Sagar Dam site.

Based on our past experience with a center at Sanawad, we found that the critical input required for the success of the project is a sense of ownership. In our case, not many skilled professionals from the Indore garment industry are ready to relocate the village and manage centers. Moreover, hiring them quickly disintegrates into a situation of low productivity and blackmail because we create dependency on people with no stakes in the growth of the project. The success of Kumbaya centers hinges on the fact that they are run by people from the local area whose lives are inseparably linked with its performance. Therefore, in Kantaphod we decided that we would invest time, money and energy in capacity building to create a model where the women will run the unit themselves. Five women from SHGs in Kantaphod started their training with Kumbaya in July. They were trained to be supervisors, master tailors and trainers.

We set up tough conditions this time. The five women had to stay at our center in Neemkheda for 3 months. They would work for the whole week and go home to Kantaphod only during the weekends. Their training period continued till the end of September. Instead of delivering everything at their doorstep in Kantaphod, and lose start-up time on discovering problems, we worked out a system that not only evaluated their seriousness about the project, but also enabled them to experience the difficulties, deadlines, challenges and advantages that they would face firsthand, in the near future. By doing this, they would also be able to share their experiences directly with other women in Kantaphod. Two out of these five women were also being trained in supervision and management - checking product quality, maintaining registers and stocks, making labour payments, anticipating requirements and the importance of systems and discipline at centers.

By December, sewing machines and furniture were purchased, a suitable place was found, repainted, repaired and electrical fittings installed. Throughout the process, we were closely in touch with the SHG team in Kantaphod. Our Kantaphod center supervisors screened the application forms, short listed the first batch of 20 trainees and made home visits to meet these women to gauge their need and interest in joining Kumbaya. We held a meeting with all these women at the new center to introduce the programme and the training process. All the women were extremely keen on joining the program. The new Kumbaya centre at Satwas was inaugurated on 17th January, 2013 with 20 trainees.

Their training will be complete by April 2013. Thereafter, they will start the next stage of production training, where they will focus on improving the quality of their stitching so that they become producers and start to earn.

Up Ahead

- ❖ Lee and Hundred Hands – a possible collaboration with Lee jeans through a Hundred Hands where we make products from recycled denim
- ❖ Having interns over from reputed design schools such as the National Institute of Design, Srishti School of Design and the National Institute of Fashion Technology
- ❖ A solo show in Delhi at Earthy Goods studio in Lado Sarai, a popular art district in New Delhi
- ❖ Exhibitions in other cities like Mumbai, Pune and Chennai
- ❖ Internet Marketing through existing on-line market places
- ❖ Artwork for screen and digital prints
- ❖ Making Kumbaya into a company