

Ms. Chinni Swamy
Founder-Purkal Stree Shakti, Dehradun



I am an artist. I used to work on some patch work quilts as a hobby. When I came to live in Purkal village I felt that the women here were suppressed and lived a very hard life. I felt the only way to empower them was to help them earn a decent income. As this area does not have any indigenous craft I decided to teach them what I had tried my hands at namely patch work and quilting. My only aim was that we could sell these quilts and the money would go to the women. The number of women grew from 1 to 60. I had never heard of Fair Trade but we were following Fair Trade principles. I first heard of Fair Trade from Ms. Sarah Mitts from the United States of America. She had come to work as a volunteer in our organization. She was a very strong believer of Fair Trade. She suggested to me that we should apply for FTFI membership. She felt that we should have no difficulty in getting this membership as we were already following all the Fair Trade principles. We applied for the membership and became members in July 2011.

I started **Purkal Stree Shakti Samiti in Dehradun** with the sole aim of empowering the women of this area. Initially I was doing every work myself-- designing, purchasing, training and selling. My house was used by the women to produce their handicrafts. As we grew bigger, we managed to get some funding for putting up a work place for them. We made sure that the place will be airy and well lit and had all facilities such as toilets and drinking water. Medical checkups were organized every year and we provide free spectacle for those who needed them. When a lot of women came with little children to work, we decided to start a crèche and learning center for these kids so that the mothers could work and earn with no worry about their little kids. Now the women have organized themselves into 10 self help groups with their own bank accounts. Several of them now hold responsible positions in the management such as trainers, design assistants, supervisors and quality controllers. Every month I have a meeting with all the women apart from regular interaction with the self help group leaders. I talk to the women about Fair Trade very often. We celebrate World Fair Trade day and Fair Trade fortnight. We also talk to our customers in our shop about Fair Trade. Apart from following all the other principles of Fair Trade we are working on a clean environment. We have tied up with another NGO in the city to have garbage collected from three neighbouring villages after segregating green, recyclable and non recyclable waste. We do this work through children of the villages who teach the adults about pollution and about how to care for our environment.

The Fair Trade Forum have been very proactive in the spreading the message of Fair Trade around the country. We are constantly in touch with them through mail and their monthly news letter. As for other members, as we are not in a big city, we are unable to be in frequent touch with them. The annual convention is an event we never miss. We also participate in the Fair Trade Fair organized by Sasha every year. The Sasha shop also sells some of our products.

The Fair Trade movement has to gather force in our country. We are hoping that FTFI will take steps to publicize our Fair Trade shops which in turn will create more awareness. For us grass root workers, this is of greatest importance. We will be so happy when customers stop asking us why our products are expensive and we have to explain that we pay Fair wages and do not permit sweat labour.

Our people are travelling more and get more exposure through Media and the internet. I feel more people are getting aware that the price of a product should be able to support a Fair wage for the artisan as they are also entitled to earn and have a good life.