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>>> NEWSLETTER <<<

SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART

PROVINCE OF INDIA



**NEWS FROM THE BHOKAR
COMMUNITY**

Glimpses of our lives in the Bhokar Community

Supporting Children's Education

In Ashankur, Bhokar, I am involved with remedial classes for children of the *State Government School*, which includes 2 blocks of the Ahilyanagar district. We have 14 Centres in all, with approximately 280 children. The classes are run for an hour in the evenings. Each day we visit different Centres to guide and supervise the classes.



Alongside the regular academic curriculum, we conduct other activities, such as Yoga week, Environment Day, Medicinal tree plantation, Children's Day, a Christmas gathering, Annual Science Exhibition, Educational Tours as well as Written Examinations.

On December 7th, this year, we organised Children's gathering. We had added joy of the presence of Ms. Edith and Ms. Uthe, our supporters of *Remedial* Classes from the **Ensinger Foundation**, Germany. We invited children from nine neighbouring Centres, to dramatise the lives of local historical leaders and community helpers. They spoke with great confidence and ease, surprising us with their communication skills, and impressing the guests with their talents and courage. Their performance made me realise that latent talents only need to be tapped, and the right opportunities created, for them to shine.

The Christmas gathering and Children's Day were celebrated on December 21st. All 14 Centres prepared programmes on themes promoting *Organic Farming*, *Unity in Diversity* (religious conflicts), *Right to Education* for all children, *Care for the Environment* (saving trees and water, separation of wet and dry garbage and its use as manure), *Concern for the hungry* (do not waste food), *Values* (the mobile, a trap), ending with the *Christmas play* and dance.



Fr. Prashant SJ (Principal, Sangamner) and Sr. Maya SCN (Bhokar), were the chief guests for the

day. They were overwhelmed by the performances of each Centre, which highlighted the real burning issues of our world today. Everyone appreciated the programme and the messages delivered by young minds.

Every child received a Christmas gift, and the function ended with a meal served for all the children present.

I feel happy to work with these underprivileged children, to be involved in guiding and shaping their young minds. It is my small effort to touch many lives through our day-to-day living in our mission, trying to bring some joy to our broken world.

Sr. Agnes rscj

All Are Welcome...

As I reflected on what to write for the newsletter, I realised that the Advent season is a beautiful reminder to welcome Christ into our lives and hearts. This sacred time invited me to reflect deeply on our cultural philosophy of *Atithi Devo Bhava* — that the *Guest is God*. This value finds its true expression in the mission and daily life of our ministry here.



At Ashankur, hospitality is not merely a tradition, but a living expression of our commitment to dignity, care, and inclusiveness. Our Centre exists to empower women, nurture children, and build a just and compassionate community. In this mission, welcoming others with love and respect becomes the foundation of all our work. My responsibility here is to ensure that every guest - whether a visitor,

supporter, trainer or beneficiary feels received with warmth, simplicity, and genuine concern.

Guests who come to Ashankur are welcomed as members of one family.

They are received with joy and gratitude, and their comfort and well-being are given sincere attention. This spirit of hospitality reflects our belief that transformation begins when people feel valued, safe, and respected.

Hospitality at Ashankur is lived not only during special programmes or celebrations but also in ordinary moments—through a smile, a kind word, patient listening, and a readiness to help. In these simple gestures, our mission comes alive, strengthening bonds within the community and fostering a culture of mutual care.



Thus, hospitality becomes more than an action; it becomes a way of life rooted in love, unity, and service. By welcoming both guests and sisters with open hearts, Ashankur continues to live its mission—creating a space where compassion is practiced, relationships are nurtured, and Christ's presence is experienced in everyday life.

Rita D'Souza (Lay volunteer)

A Journey of Hope and Empowerment at Ashankur

At our *Ashankur Women's Training Centre*, every morning begins with quiet determination. Women arrive with hope in their hearts and a willingness to learn - carrying stories of resilience and dreams of a better future. As the hum of sewing machines fills the room, hands learn new skills, and confidence slowly takes shape. Through focused training in *garment stitching*, women gain not only technical skills, but also assurance that they can support their families with dignity.

For many women, *Ashankur* is more than a training centre; it is a place where confidence is stitched along with fabric. In the tailoring and garment-stitching classes, women learn practical skills that open doors to income and independence. As their hands move steadily on sewing machines, their self-belief grows stronger. Conversations during training often turn into reflections on dignity, equality, and the value of women's voices at home and in society.

Alongside skill training, *Ashankur* nurtures awareness about gender equity. Through simple discussions and shared experiences, women begin to recognise their rights and strengths. Slowly, they step forward – not just as learners, but as leaders within their families and communities.



Through focused training in garment stitching, women develop practical skills that enhance their confidence, creativity, and employability. Beyond skill acquisition, this initiative opens doors to sustainable income and greater decision-making power within their families. Rooted in *Ashankur*'s commitment to dignity, self-reliance, and social justice, it also reflects a shared vision of inclusive development where women emerge as active contributors and agents of positive change. For every garment stitched, they are paid on a monthly

basis, with many earning ₹ 8,000 - ₹ 10,000. For women who were previously unemployed, this income is not just financial support, it's a symbol of self-reliance. Currently, 25 women are part of the initiative, and each has a story to tell. Some speak of how they now contribute to household expenses; others beam with pride and say, "My children see me differently now."

The project has sparked a quiet confidence among the women who now share their ideas and proposals with confidence at community meetings. The company is scaling up the project, to include 100 women from neighbouring areas in the near future. The garments produced are being sold under a dedicated label called '*Styx Ways*', a name that carries not just style, but the story of every woman who made it possible. In an era where fast fashion is often tied to exploitation, this initiative stands out as a model for ethical, community-rooted enterprise.

Sunita's Story: From Uncertainty to Confidence

Sunita (name changed), a mother of two from a nearby village, joined the *Ashankur* tailoring training with hesitation. Her family depended on seasonal labour, and she had never imagined earning on her own. "I was afraid even to touch the sewing machine," she recalls with a smile.

With patient guidance and encouragement, Sunita slowly learned cutting, stitching, and finishing garments. What began as a skill soon became a source of confidence. Today, she stitches blouses and children's clothes for families in her village. The small income she earns helps support her children's education and household needs.

More than the income, Sunita values the respect she has gained. "Now people come to me for work. My children feel proud of me," she says. Through group discussions at *Ashankur*, she also learned about women's rights and the importance of equality. She now speaks confidently in community meetings and encourages other women to join the training.

Sunita's journey reflects the larger impact of *Ashankur*'s work. Through awareness sessions and shared learning, women begin to recognize their worth and voice. Gender equity is not taught as an abstract concept - it is lived through confidence, cooperation, and mutual respect.

Ashankur's journey of empowerment is deeply connected with care for the earth. Activities promoting biodiversity, tree plantation, and environmental awareness remind everyone that true development must be sustainable.

Each day at the *Ashankur Women's Training Centre* adds a new chapter to this ongoing story—of women discovering their strength, children finding their path through education, youth shaping their future, and a community learning to live sustainably.

Youth, too, find guidance and purpose at Ashankur



Through eight training sessions and life-skills programmes, young people are encouraged to think critically, work together, and contribute positively to society. They learn that true development includes responsibility towards people and nature.

My experience at Ashankur has broadened my perspective on integrated development - linking women's empowerment, education, sustainability and community participation. Engaging directly with women has reinforced the importance of creating safe,

respectful spaces where women can learn, express themselves and grow as leaders within their families and communities.

Sr. Prisca Tirkey rscj
