



Ms. Anne Ferrer
Recipient
Development and Welfare of Women and Children Award 2015

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

I came to India to Mumbai 52 yrs ago. For a few years, I worked as a Journalist and in the course of an interview; I met my future husband Vicente Ferrer. I was very much struck by his conviction that the eradication of extreme poverty was not a dream, but was a reality that could be achieved. I was motivated to accompany Vicente Ferrer to his next place of work and mission in life, the eradication of extreme poverty in a tiny corner of South India in Anantapur, Rayalaseema Region, and Andhra Pradesh.

In those years people from the poorer communities lived in great poverty with all its terrible consequences – they had no voice of their own, their lives were controlled by others, mortality was high and more than anything, they had no hope for a better future. They lived in a world which was very dark and where change seemed impossible.

People did not believe in education especially for girls, they thought education was only for the children of better-off families. The moment a girl was born, she was already considered as “belonging” to her future in-laws and not even accepted as a daughter of the family. For many years girls were married at the ages of 11 and 12, women had no income or property in their name and everything was in the hands of men. As a woman, I could not even speak directly to other women and had to speak through their husbands. Families struggled for one meal a day both men and women working as agricultural labourers and many as bonded labourers.

Working with a very small group of local volunteers and almost without funds, we set about the seemingly impossible task of trying to bring hope back into people’s lives and more important than that, that they themselves can be the ones to bring that change and be the leaders of their own development.

My dear friends it has never ceased to amaze me how much can be achieved with great faith and determination.

I have witnessed an amazing progress in families who many years ago were shackled in poverty, and ignorance:

People now believe that education is one of their inalienable rights, for both boys and girls and 100% of girls and boys are in school.

Girls and boys are reaching university, getting good jobs and supporting their families.

Women are strong individually and in groups, having their own income and as a group acting against such social customs as early marriages, preference for boys and forced abortions.

Special Action Teams comprised of women and men in the villages work with the organization against violence against women.

People now live with hope and have witnessed the change they never thought was possible.

Now people who have received so much support during more than 40 years are giving back. Each family, totally 115,000 families keeps a Hundi, and especially women and children eagerly put 1 or 2 rupees in the Hundi when they have it. In April every year, they break all Hundies. This year when they broke their Hundies they had collected more than 3 ½ crores of rupees all in change. With these funds, they are helping more than 700 children – orphans for their education. Poor persons are supporting those who are more in need.

It is a great honour for me to receive this Jammalal Bajaj award for work with women and children. For me it is recognition that extreme poverty can be eradicated, that women and children can bring change to their lives. This award belongs to them and I accept it in their name. I also congratulate all the other awardees of the Jammalal Bajaj award 2015 for their inspiring work. I would like to thank the Bajaj Group and the Foundation for every year recognizing and encouraging persons who are showing us that it is possible to have a better world.

