



Prasad Durga

The art of giving

Daughter of Dwaraknath Reddy, former owner of Nutrine Confectionaries, **Anita Reddy** traded the sweet life for one of service. Through the Dwaraknath Reddy Ramanarpanam Trust (DRRT), the 60 year-old has transformed thousands of lives—indeed, her contribution in the field of social work was recognised with the award of the Padma Shri in 2011. “Although my father was wealthy, he gave me a grounded upbringing,” she says. “After he lost a few people close to him, he began to follow the teachings of Bhagavan Ramana Maharishi and started the Ramanarpanam trust for the welfare of the poor. I was deeply influenced by his philanthropic bent of mind and continued in his footsteps.” DRRT has been the catalyst of initiatives across sectors like housing, education, economic empowerment and art across Andhra Pradesh and even Bengaluru.

In June 2014, Reddy received the prestigious Art Mantram Women Achievers Award for her contributions in reviving the heritage art form of hand-painted Kalamkari. Her tryst with the art began unwittingly, when Purushottam, an impoverished artist from Srikalahasthi, a temple town in Andhra Pradesh, knocked on her door to sell a piece of his work. That meeting 15 years ago was an eye-opener to the dire conditions in which Kalamkari artists lived. Reddy then visited Srikalahasthi, where she discovered the sorry plight of the artists, who had exceptional skills but no recognition. “I did what I always do best: reach people at the grassroots level,” she shares. “I reached out to the community, door to door, spent hours with them, understood

them better, and this eventually helped me to successfully organise them. Next, the objective was to create a suitable market for this fascinating piece of art that was not getting its due.”

In 2000, Reddy set up Dwaraka (Development of Weavers and Rural Artisans in Kalamkari Art) to help the artists become economically independent by creating Kalamkari products that could cater to a global market. This involved reaching out to art connoisseurs, corporate firms, apparel designers, interior decorators and individuals to market the product. “Well, I had a great product at hand, which only lacked the right kind of positioning and exposure. I was passionate about creating a sustainable model that would help the artists thrive. From 350 artists in the year 2000, we are now creating livelihoods for 3,000 people,” says Reddy with pride. This remarkable turnaround is solely attributed to Reddy’s passion for the art. But then, Reddy has always walked the talk. When her children got married, she used Kalamkari artwork on the wedding gifts and cards, creating a special opportunity for the artists to showcase their work. Reddy’s work is not limited to heritage. For the past 35 years, she has championed many social causes, including working with slum dwellers to identify an appropriate legal space for their housing rights. And she has created Dwaraka Plus to empower women artisans. How does her family react to the unconventional path she has chosen? “My family has taken all this in their stride and always backed me.”

—Ramya Srinivasan