

Tie a Yellow Ribbon

- Rahul Chandawarkar

Pune: Diwali may still be a few days away, but Ishanya design centre and speciality mall will open its doors to 30 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working with below-the-poverty line (BPL) and disadvantaged women by offering them free I space to exhibit their products and wares

The speciality mall has offered space from October 3 to 6 at its Arcade 3 centre to the NGOs to put up their stalls to sell the products made by their women. Supriya Sule, NCP MP will inaugurate the event at 3.45 pm on October 3, while Kiran Bedi, Magsaysay awardee, will give away certificates to the NGOs at 12.30 pm on October 6, the concluding day of the event.

Ishanya has been running a foundation for women in Gujarat and Maharashtra for the last 20 years, where underprivileged women are helped in starting self-help groups (SHGs) and manufacturing cloth bags and handicrafts to ensure sustainable livelihoods.

Says Parul Mehta, director of Ishanya: "The idea struck us when we realised how difficult it was to market our foundation's handicrafts and cloth bags. We thought we should offer space in our mall to the NGOs in the spirit of Diwali."

"This initiative has been called the 'Yellow ribbon pre-Diwali NGO fair' because the colour yellow denotes happiness and positive energy. We will sell yellow ribbons to our customers on all four days and will also encourage them to write messages on an opinion board, suggesting ways and means in which we could take this movement forward." Parul said that the yellow ribbon event will be an annual fixture.

The NGOs could not have been happier. Says Sheetal Kharkar, volunteer at Maher, "We run multiple centres in the city for destitute women and children.. Our women make candles, bags, purses, Warli and Batik art, but we always have a tough time selling them. The Ishanya initiative is a godsend. We will be able to reach out to so many well wishers."

Sangeeta Bagul of Lohegaon village did a course in food technology at the Kasturba Mahila Khadi Gramudyog Vidyalaya at the Aga Khan Palace and started Ruchi Food Products with a mere Rs 500, four years ago. Today, her team of 10 women produces pickles, masalas, sherbets and chutneys, which the market across Pune city "It is a big day for us to step into a large mall like Ishanya to sell our products. We have been working very hard and this is a blessing," says Sangeeta.

Vandana Chavan, former Pune Mayor, who heads SMILE (Savitri marketing initiative), which helps underprivileged women from the slums of Pune produce papads, pickles, jams and handicrafts like purses, bags and artefacts, says, "The Ishanya opportunity will help our women gain in confidence as they will interact with a variety of customers"

The inaugural Yellow Ribbon event has been supported by many city based corporates like Thermax, Praj Foundation, Sterlite, Avinash Bhosale group and Forbes Marshall.