



Jyotirmaya Khara, Secretary, Sahara, explaining low-cost LED lighting system to villagers
 GIVING

Light Up A Heart This Diwali

A small donation from you this festive season could illuminate an underprivileged home, in a manner that's eco-friendly

BINDINSHA SARANG

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What do you plan to do this Diwali? Light up your home with several lamps. Watch your children burst crackers while you share sweets with family and friends. Maybe perform a puja. Or play cards till the cows come home. That's exactly the way Diwali is meant to be celebrated—with lights, friends and festivity.

Ashish Dhar, 36, will be doing all of this, and more. Even as he was planning his festivities months in advance, the Mumbai-based project manager in a private firm knew that he wanted to go beyond the regular celebrations. He was aware that even as millions of homes

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there would be millions for whom it would be yet another night spent in the company of smoky kerosene lamps.

Moved, Dhar decided to include an underprivileged tribal family in Orissa in his celebrations. On 15 September, he used the good offices of GiveIndia—an umbrella NGO that vouches for the credentials of 200-plus charities—to donate Rs 1,500 to Sahara, an Orissa-based NGO, for the installation of a low-cost solar-powered light-emitting diode (LED) lighting system in a tribal home in the backward district of Koraput.

Where to donate

NGO	Website	Donate at	Donation amount (in Rs)
Sahara Orissa	http://www.sahara.org.in/ *	http://www.giveindia.org/	1,500
Rural Organising for Social Improvement Foundation (ROS)	http://www.rosifoundation.org/ *	www.giveindia.org	4,266
South Orissa Volunteer Action (SOVA)	http://www.sovakoraput.org/	http://www.sovakoraput.org/	1,200

**Donations can also be made at the respective URLs*

Says Dhar, of his act: “It’s a small amount for me, but it will make a big impact on the life of a family that doesn’t have access to electricity.”

Dynamics of light

Sahara was launched in 1991 by Jyotirmaya Khara, one of the 50,771 people in 206 villages affected by the Upper Kolab Dam Project; of this number, more than 3,067 families were displaced completely. Says Khara: “In the aftermath of the displacement, they had to live in sub-human conditions. Villages lacked basic facilities such as schools, roads, electricity and potable drinking water. Sahara looks to create a reasonable, just atmosphere for the displaced.”

Alongside spearheading socio-economic development, training farmers, promoting community health programmes and propagating primary education, Sahara installs low-cost solar-powered LED home lighting systems in the district. “Villagers here have been waiting for grid electricity for the last 20 years. More than 5.7 million households in Orissa are dependent solely on kerosene lamps for light. Kerosene costs them Rs 15 a litre, and an average household consumes 80 litres of the fuel in a year. This adds up to an expense many of them can barely afford,” Khara adds.

Solar power, of course, is a tried and tested alternative. In India, a country that enjoys abundant sunshine, the solar panel is capable of absorbing enough energy during the day to power two LED bulbs after sunset. The apparatus is zero-maintenance and even a lay villager can do nominal repairs, if required.

Sahara, with its involvement in issues related to the environment and public health, also appreciates the fact that one set of solar-powered lights does away with 2.5 kg of carbon dioxide produced by the combustion of a litre of kerosene. The smoke does not only aggravate global warming, but it is also carcinogenic.

Still in shadow

The solar panel and lamp cost Rs 2,200, of which the beneficiary family pays approximately 30 per cent, that is Rs 600 in instalments of as little as Rs 50 a month. Sahara chips in with a contribution of Rs 100. A contribution of Rs 1,500 from the donor enables a family to get a solar lighting apparatus installed in the house.

Already, says Khara, more than 1,000 homes have been equipped with solar lights; Sahara plans to reach 1 million homes by 2015. In order to promote a real sense of involvement and participation, every donor receives a detailed report about the beneficiary family, along with their photos.

Sahara is, by no means, the only NGO working to bring in a bit of the sun into the underprivileged Indian's life. In the interiors of Tamil Nadu, ROSI Foundation has provided nearly 140 solar lanterns to tribals living in huts and caves. A solar lantern equipped with a radio—the kind the NGO prefers to hand out to promote the locals' communication with the outside world—costs Rs 4,266.

As we curse the government every time there is a powercut, or rev up our environment-unfriendly generators and inverters during power cuts to continue the frantic pace of our urban lives, we rarely spare a minute of thought for those who are used to living in the dark. This Diwali, you could change all that and, in the process, illuminate not just your own home, but someone else's too. Who knows, their blessings may just make your next Diwali brighter than ever and leave your face radiant with satisfaction.

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