

特別寄稿

## Social Fashion by Gnadaa Japan Fashion for social change

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Gnadaa Japan is an aid project that supports the livelihoods of war-affected women in Sri Lanka. We promote the concept of Social Fashion—clothes that you love, which are not restricted to new trends—while providing vital income for low-income women to become economically independent. As a consumer of our products, your role surpasses simply searching for goods. By supporting Social Fashion, you become a messenger and participant in a global civic movement, helping to make the world a better place, especially for women.

Gnadaa formally started in 2009 in a small seaside town called Trincomalee, located in the northeast of Sri Lanka. This town was ravaged during the country’s 30-year civil war, which ended in 2009. We began by working with six women who were former refugees or had lost family members and property. During the war, many residents had fled their homes in search of safety or had become refugees abroad. The fighting also left many women widowed after their husbands were killed. In response, we started a sewing center. Sewing is a sustainable project because many women already sew their own clothes. Once they learn basic sewing

skills, they can quickly improve and earn higher incomes. Gnadaa also helps protect their culture by respecting family and religious values. We do not operate as a charity but rather aim to achieve sustainability through empowerment.

The name “Gnadaa” means “walking” in Tamil, the dominant language of Trincomalee. Our sewing center produces a variety of products, including embroidered bags, silk accessories, belts, and cushion covers. The center is supported by a group of Japanese women who are my friends. We believe sewing and fashion create special connections between Sri Lanka and Japan. Whether rich or poor, we all appreciate fashion, and we believe in the importance of women living independent lives.



This strong connection is important for understanding one another and working as partners. This embodies the true concept of Social Fashion. We are communities that believe in each other's ability to share ideas through the world of clothing and beautiful accessories.

However, several challenges remain unresolved. During the pandemic, lockdowns prevented everyone from visiting the Trincomalee sewing center. We even had to cancel our annual workshops for women and close the sewing center to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This forced us to think of new ways to continue the project. One decision was to shift our focus to hand embroidery, which could be done safely at home, allowing the women to continue working while staying safe.

We shared our progress using the BE Hive function at the University of the Sacred Heart. Gnadaa Japan displayed photographs of our sewing center, messages from the women, and our collaborative work with university students. Our main activities included showcasing our products and explaining the concept of Social Fashion. The hard work of our youth supporters in creating a platform for Gnadaa Japan

was crucial. We highlighted the importance of providing safe livelihoods for women in developing countries. This message was discussed at a talk show with members of Hana-hana SDGs<sup>1</sup>, where we explored the value of sustainability in aid projects, the importance of respecting local culture, and the need to create spaces for women to balance their family responsibilities with their work. The most important takeaway was the need to listen to each other so we can learn and create together.

In 2023, we finally began producing new items, and our next step was to help the women establish their own sewing centers. This was a new opportunity for participants, involving a training school to help other women in their communities. Another essential aspect of Social Fashion is the development of equal societies.

The women we supported for many years, and whom you have supported by purchasing our products, are now ready to help others. This cycle demonstrates that the dream of Social Fashion continues.

Thank you.



1 A university-recognized club with the motto “WANT, not MUST DO,” the club is working to realize a society where “no one is left behind” and is involved in various activities both on and off campus to achieve the SDGs.