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 Mind — Question Box and
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HANDS UP FOR RURAL INDIA

Across India, organisations are coming up with innovative ways to empower India's rural population. SOWMYA RAJARAM finds a green button on a metal box that holds the answers to questions about life, and other such inspired initiatives that will save the pretty motif on your granny's saree, and help MPs in Delhi Skype with a village sarpanch.

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IT'S a scenario most Indian women are familiar with — lofts and storage space above cupboards and under beds crammed with suitcases that are stuffed with their mothers' silk sarees. These are duly aired, checked for mothballs and repacked once every year. This is also a scenario ripe with potential for the revival of traditional weaving tech-

niques, believes Harriet Vidyasagar, Consultant and Founder of Out of India, a web-based resource that helps people stay connected with things Indian. Women of India, one of its initiatives, seeks to empower Indian women by leveraging technology for development, and creating a web-based resource for them.

Saree Conversations is one of its forthcoming projects slated for a summer 2012 release. "A lot of NRI women in the US are sitting on a treasure trove of old sarees that they have collected (to wear) during weddings but find no opportunity to wear anymore. The younger generation doesn't wear them either, and these fabrics, styles and designs lie around, rotting, while traditional forms of weaving continue to go extinct in rural India," she says.

The idea of Saree Conversations, therefore, will be to hold a series of talks, lecture-demos and exhibitions across the US, with the goal to help preserve the handloom textile tradi-

tions of India and support a group of women weavers back here in Karnataka. "We want to generate income opportunities for weavers by engaging these women to show us what they have, educating them about its history, and taking the idea back to the weaver to see if the motif or design can be incorporated into a new, modern garment, like the stole, for the younger lot to wear."

Vidyasagar sees this as a way to generate employment for rural communities and prevent the loss of crafts.

She has company in working to put India's rural communities on the digital map and make them aware of the need to preserve their tradition and way of life. Organisations and entrepreneurs are now seeking ideas to empower India's villages by providing them with information, technology, and the awareness of practices that will keep them up to date with developments in the rest of the country.

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