

Scent of the blooming flowers

HEMA DEVI

**“gaon ki auratein shehron ki tarah
kaam thodi na kar payengi”**

“Do-do bacche hue, upar se bhains ke liye roz jangal se ghaas lana, lakdi lana, aur ghar ka pura kaam; 8-pass mein kya likha padhi kar paungi ab main?” (With two kids to look after, and to get fodder grass and firewood from the jungle ; what work can a 8th-pass like me do now?) she asked when offered to work at the milk dairy.

The elder women in the village taunted her for working in the market full of men, and shamed her for roaming around carrying milk from customer-to- customer. Today, the 34-yr-old home-maker manages a dairy with turnover of more than 7 lakhs all on her own, and the women in the village ask her if their daughter-in-laws can find some work too. It’s an irony how people change with your success. This lady is an inspiration for the women who think they have missed their chance.

Starting from her house at the hill top, she starts her day’s journey on foot at 6:30 every morning, to reach the market. Some people said, *“gaon ki auratein shehron ki tarah kaam thodi na kar payengi”* (women in the village can’t work like those in cities), while others pointed fingers at her saying, *“jab ye grahakon ko jawab bhi nhi de sakti, toh ye kaam kaise kar payegi”* (when she can’t answer the customers, how will she be able to work), but, contrary to everyone’s expectations Hema di kept working silently. After failing in high school, an early marriage and 12 years of married life, she picked up a pen for the first time after joining the work in Saraswati Milk Dairy, an enterprise by Saraswati Swayatt Sahkarita, a women co-operative in the villages around Garampani, Naintal. Today, she is sorted after by every customer for her satisfactory service at the dairy and complimented by her colleagues for maintaining all the milk distribution and financial records on her own.

It’s funny how she re-checks twice to make sure she makes no error even when calculating on electronic calculator.

When asked about how has her life changed after she started working, she giggles and says “my teeth were missing in the front, I got them filled with my first salary and don’t have to cover my mouth everytime I



talk to someone". It's not new how women in our Indian households don't always get a chance to take care of themselves and it's only when they become financially self-dependent do they start to cater to their personal needs. She started her journey with the help of her women co-operative, and now she is happy to not have to wait for her husband to come home to pay their children's school fee. She gladly talks about her investments in some gold jewellery, a life insurance policy and has already started saving for her daughter's marriage.

Hema di's colleagues laugh how she didn't even know which shop to buy soap from! She explains how it was always her husband and mother-in-law who were in-charge of money in the house and she hardly got a chance to buy anything herself. "Today, I can go to the bank alone with thousands of rupees and have no problem, but back when I started, I was scared to even go alone to a nearby shop to buy matchstick, I always asked some one to come along", says she while giggling like a young girl.

From being under-estimated by her own husband and in-laws, she is now a confident women who answers every customer's query, keeps a track of every penny and manages her work and household chorus, all at the same time. It may not be paying her fat cheques, or giving her a luxury life, but she is happy today to have come out into the world and make a small niche for herself in the society and get acknowledged by her family and relatives.



INDIRA BISHT

“Mera humesha man karta tha ki main bhi bahar nikal kar kuch karun, khud apne pairon par khade hun.”

Daughter of a retired Army personnel, she always had the enthusiasm to do things just like her brothers and never liked to be restricted in the limits of only kitchen and household-chorus. “Mera humesha man karta tha ki main bhi bahar nikal kar kuch karun, khud apne pairon par khade hun. Bas raso aur gai-bachde mein hi uljhe rehne mein mera man nhi lagta tha”, said she. But unfortunately, her enthusiasm started dying after more than 10 years of marriage when she started thinking that she had missed her opportunities and was submitting into the daily monotonous life. “Jab husband bahar hote the aur paison ki zaroorat hoti thi, toh bacchon ki fees ke liye bhi koi paise nhi deta tha; beemar hone par ya achanak zaroorat padne par bahot mushkil ho jati thi.” (While the husbands are out, away from the house to make some money, it often happens that they don’t come home for days and the women run short of cash for daily needs and are left helpless.) When opportunity knocked her door, she grabbed it without thinking twice.

She, like any other home-maker takes care of all the household chorus and her two kids and runs all errands of the house alone since her husband works away from home. Her zeal and enthusiasm to learn more, do more and achieve more motivated her to step out of the house. After starting to work at a retail outlet (Community Facility Centre) of the Saraswati Swayatt Sahkarita, today she is responsible for a business worth a turnover of more than 10 lakhs. She often gets irritated when the work gets too much and maintaining records of all expenses and income becomes tough but she doesn’t think of giving up. She elaborates that after taking a step forward, she is not willing to go backwards now. “I want to learn more, maybe, if you could teach me computer, I can keep my records much better and not get so fussy so often”, she giggles.

“Pehle bank mein jane mein bhi dar lagta tha, ab toh humko bank manager bhi pehchanne lage hain; logon mein izzat bhi badh gyi hai.” (Earlier, I was scared to even go to the bank, now, even the bank manager has started recognizing me; people have started respecting me more.) With great pride and confidence in her voice and smile on her face she says, “ab apne haath mein do paise hain toh achanak zaroorat padne par dar nhi lagta”, “beti ko dance ka shaukh hai, uske dance ke liye skirt banane ke liye ab husband se permission nhi leni padti aur beti ka man bhi reh jata hai, mere liye toh ye hi badi baat hai.” (Now that I earn a little, I don’t get scared if a small expense comes suddenly on my way”, “my daughter is fond of dancing, I can get her dance costume without fearing for my husband’s permission and still keep her happy, this itself is a big deal for me.)

Always scared of travelling alone even to Haldwani, (nearest city from Garampani, her village), when her father recently took ill and passed away suddenly, she immediately took a leave and left for Delhi on her own with her two kids while her husband was away on duty without hesitating much as she had a little saving in her account and some cash in her hands to get her through the tough time. When her elder brother offered her a monthly financial support recently, she confidently declined saying that she could earn enough for her need.

With all responsibilities of a mother and home-maker she is now pursuing her further education through IGNOU at the age of 32 and is an inspiration to woman of all age, and a pride to womanhood.

Her story may be a simple one, her achievements may not sound very tantalizing, but, hers is a story of a regular woman trying to achieve very regular ambition. Her courage to step out and stand on her feet in spite of all the discouragement and shaming in the beginning by the elderly in the village where people are used to seeing woman in the kitchens and jungles (for firewood and fodder grass), it's an unimaginable struggle to be what one wants to be.

-Anjana Rathore

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