



State Participants at Aajeevika India Food Court 2019



HOMEMAKERS TO TASTEMAKERS... STORY OF HER DELHI



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Acknowledgement

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana- National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM) was launched by the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) Government of India in June 2011 with an objective to promote community based organisations for enabling rural poor to increase household income through livelihood options and promoting access to financial services.

The national level SARAS Mela which was held from 10 to 23 October, 2019 at India Gate Lawns, New Delhi is an initiative by the MoRD for promoting rural handicrafts, generating employment and increasing the income of rural artisans. With this objective, NRLM has focused on empowering SHG women to design and develop products including handicraft, handloom and handmade natural food products.

Aajeevika India Food Court, organised in collaboration with Kudumbashree National Resource Organisation was a great hit amongst the Food Lovers of Delhi. The event brought together foodservice entrepreneurs from 19 States who brought on the platter healthy and ethnic cuisines from different parts of the country.

I would like to acknowledge efforts of our SHG entrepreneurs from the community network who are bringing entrepreneurship at the community level. I would also like to thank team of CAPART for their meticulous arrangements and untiring attendance and the IEC team of MoRD for making the SARAS Mela a high visibility event.

I would like to extend my gratitude to all the senior Government officials and my colleagues for taking out time to visit the SARAS Mela and Aajeevika India Food Court. I am elated by the response we have received for this initiative and lastly, would like to express my special thanks to all for extending moral and financial support to our SHG movement.


(Alka Upadhyaya)



Foreword

It is with immense satisfaction and pride that I share stories of struggle, rigour and success of our women from the SHG network supported under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana- National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY- NRLM). The mission has been working towards empowering women by providing them voice, space and resources. Today the community network has a membership of more than 5 crore women in 57 lakh SHGs coming from different social, cultural and economic background.

The Saras Aajeevika Mela 2019 was organised by Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) under NRLM programme to promote rural artisans from SHG network. The mela witnessed participation of more than 400 artisans from 30 States and Union Territories who showcased different types of handicrafts, handloom and handmade food products. The fourteen day mela was complimented by a food festival displaying talent of more than 120 entrepreneurs from 19 states. The key highlights of this event were a display of freshly cooked traditional food, usage of biodegradable cutleries and Water ATMs to minimise plastic use. Coming from 19 states these women are first generation entrepreneurs who are beacons of hope and prosperity for their families.

The Aajeevika India Food Court was curated by Kudumbashree, Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission under the leadership of MoRD, NRLM. Kudumbashree has pioneered the concept of India Food Court and has been making remarkable efforts in revolutionising the sector of foodservice. Many partner SRLMs like Bihar and Telangana are in process of being supported by Kudumbashree National Resource Organisation for promotion of SHG run foodservice enterprises. In its recent time, Kudumbashree NRO has trained a pool of resource persons, known as Café Mentors, in foodservice administration and management. I would like to thank Shri. S. Harikishore, Executive Director, Kudumbashree and his team of professionals and mentors for executing Aajeevika India Food Court at India Gate Lawns for the first time.

With this experience of Aajeevika India Food Court, NRLM hopes to develop a national level brand of 'India on your plate' to promote and encourage lakhs of women for taking up entrepreneurship. Such initiatives are aimed at establishing an ecosystem for the community women. I am hopeful that SRLMs of different states would take up such initiatives at regional level Saras fairs and will work towards making it a valuable addition to the SHG women's income.


(Leena Johri)

Joint Secretary to the Govt. of India

Preface

The inspiration for Aajeevika India Food Court comes from Kudumbashree, with its 20 years' experience in mobilising rural women towards entrepreneurship. 'Café Kudumbashree' is an umbrella brand under Kudumbashree, the Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission, which operates with an aim to promote various types of foodservice units.

'Café Kudumbashree India Food Court' was conceptualised by Kudumbashree in 2015, when it had collaborated with Mathrubhumi news daily as part of their Mega consumer festival at Thiruvananthapuram with an objective to provide a platform to first generation entrepreneurs to explore their culinary skills and to market diverse food traditions of India under a single roof. The success of this model has led to its replication at the subsequent Saras melas organised in Kerala by Kudumbashree in collaboration with the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. More than seven such food festivals have been organised till date as part of Saras melas and exhibitions which has witnessed participation of more than 820 entrepreneurs from the DAY-NRLM SHG network across the nation.

With this one of kind experience of organising food festivals in Kerala, Kudumbashree was entrusted with the responsibility to curate Aajeevika India Food Court 2019 at India Gate Lawns, New Delhi. It was a unique initiative taken up under the leadership of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, and Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana- National Rural Livelihood Mission, where empowerment of rural women met entrepreneurship. This event brought together more than 120 entrepreneurs from the SHG network of 19 states. The teams brought together an array of ethnic cuisines, under a single roof.

Learning from the experience of providing delicious, healthy, hygienic, and reasonably priced dishes, the entrepreneurs attracted maximum customers, and are looking forward to use this knowledge to step up their livelihood activities back home. The book, "Homemakers to Tastemakers...story of her Deli" is dedicated to all the entrepreneurs from NRLM community network who have stepped forward to revolutionise the foodservice sector. The book presents 25 stories of courage, hard work, and cooperation, of women and transgender community who came from various corners of India to make this event a grand success.

Kudumbashree is grateful to the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India and NRLM to have provided the opportunity to coordinate Aajeevika India Food Court 2019. I would like to extend my gratitude to all the entrepreneurs for their patience, dedication and hard work. I would also like to thank all the State Rural Livelihood Missions for their cooperation and support. It is hoped that this partnership is able to bring more and more women into the foodservice sector in the coming years, to serve 'India on your plate'.



Shri. S. Harikishore, IAS
Kudumbashree, Government of Kerala



Where the story began...journey of India Food Court

"You don't have to cook fancy or complicated masterpieces- just good food with fresh ingredients."

These words by Julia Child resonate with our entrepreneurs who are taking first steps towards food-service sector in India.

Kudumbashree's foray into foodservice sector began very early when women led food based micro enterprises were promoted. The mission made remarkable efforts in promoting women entrepreneurs in foodservice with freshly home cooked meals as USP of their businesses. As the next step, focus was to develop a brand under which healthy and hygienic home cooked food could be provided to people. The umbrella brand known as Café Kudumbashree, came up under which several canteen/catering units were promoted by Kudumbashree. The objective of this brand is to create high standard foodservice business models by raising the standards of hospitality in catering and restaurant enterprises. Kudumbashree has focused on universalising the operations of café/catering units under the brand through specialised training, technology and management support and further bringing individually commissioned projects under one umbrella.

In order to provide larger platforms to these units, Kudumbashree took initiatives in organising such units into food courts and conducted food festivals as part of their capacity building. Kudumbashree took first steps to earmark funds at District Missions for the exclusive conduct of food festivals. With time the units got exposure at regional, national and international platforms through fests, exhibitions and expos.

The concept of India food court was developed in 2015 when the Malayalam news daily, Mathrubhumi, collaborated with Kudumbashree for their Mega Consumer Festival at Thiruvananthapuram. The idea was conceptualised to provide a common platform for marketing diverse food traditions of India under single roof. It was participated by more than 11 states and 60 entrepreneurs. With its grand success, the second food court was organised with Saras Mela held at Kollam in 2016. The warm response to the fusion of art, craft, culture and food has made these food courts an annual occurrence and are now organised jointly with Saras Melas in collaboration with the Ministry of Rural Development. Till date, the national resource wing of Kudumbashree, known as Kudumbashree NRO, has organised more than seven such food courts which has witnessed participation of more than 800 entrepreneurs from 15-20 States and UTs across India.

The success of India Food Court lies in its unique approach in following a common protocol of operation where a healthy, hygienic environment is ensured at every level of programme conduct. Further, standard operational practices like wearing proper uniform, personal and kitchen hygiene, maintenance of clean dining space, scientific waste management, proper medical checkup, compliance to legal formalities and food and fire safety norms etc. are some areas of emphasis. These are ensured through proper training before the start of the food court event. The participating entrepreneurs are provided with detailed orientation on the standard norms, dos and don'ts of food court that helps them in familiarisation with the professionalism required in running a foodservice business. In addition, India Food Court works according to the green protocol and therefore does not use plastic or other non-biodegradable materials. The art and design of the stall is also done using natural materials such as jute and coir.

For facilitation of such food courts, Kudumbashree NRO has developed a human resource pool. The team includes master chefs and trainers from AIFRHM (Adebha Institute for Food Research and Hospitality Management, a yuvashree enterprise under Kudumbashree, formed to aid this process), mentors and development professionals from Kudumbashree NRO. The latest addition to the pool is Café mentors, who have been identified and trained by Kudumbashree NRO in foodservice administration and management.

During the past India Food Court events, the entrepreneurs have generated a collective revenue of upto two crore seven lakhs. With such platforms, the women from SHG network have got a chance to convert their traditional knowledge on food into an economic activity. The units participating in such platforms have realised the higher profit margin available in foodservice business. The exposure has helped women in developing professional knowledge on business operations, stock management, marketing techniques, hygiene, food quality, customer relations and customer service.

Ultimately, the model aims at creating acceptability for SHG based foodservice unit and products, mainstreaming them by providing with support under national brand of Aajeevika India Food Court with an effort to serve 'India on your plate.'

The initiative has set new entrepreneurship culture in the café and canteen sector that has resulted in creating awareness towards importance of such platforms for our SHG women and creating an end to end cycle of prosperity from SHG to SHG.

FROM ONE STEP TO THOUSAND MILES

Suma from Ulsoor, Mysore has never travelled outside her state, Karnataka. Standing in front of the India Gate, she remembers seeing pictures in her old school textbooks but never thought she would be able to see it in real.

A Micro enterprise Consultant (MEC) helping women to start small businesses, it is her first time participating in an Aajeevika India Food Court. The only daughter of her parents, 32 year old Suma is an ITI diploma graduate and supports her family with a monthly income of 5000-6000 rupees from her work as a MEC. Her father is a farmer and her mother a homemaker. Both of them are supportive of her endeavours. Before starting work as a MEC, she ran a small pet store for birds, and even did some tamarind processing from her own house. But it was the work with her Sanjeevani Self Help Group (SHG) that got her out of the four walls.

When asked about her experience of coming to Delhi, Suma says, "I am a little overwhelmed with the crowd. But I am excited to interact with peo-

ple from so many different states. After a long day of busy sales and cooking at the food court, Suma says the best part of the day is when after the sales counters have closed, each state exchanges food with each other and everyone gets to enjoy food from other states." She is a huge fan of the momos from Sikkim and loves the food from Punjab too which she has never tasted before. She recollects that her train travel was also a bit challenging since they were travelling with a lot of heavy utensils and raw materials.

Suma is really proud of the risk the all women team took and how they have gotten themselves this far. "No women have travelled this far from my whole extended family. There was barely 10 minutes stop at Yeshwantpur station and we had so much luggage. We were a bit worried that we will not be able to do it. But with god's grace, we managed everything well. Now, with this food court I hope just hope sales are also fine, and that we get to take some healthy profit home," says Suma.





THE MAKING OF A LEADER

Vaishali Gangurde had a life altering encounter in 2013 when few Zilla Panchayat officials visited her village in Vinchur, Nashik to spread awareness on the benefits of forming Self Help Groups (SHGs). Nashik, being the wine capital of India, is blessed with huge grape output every year and hence as an example the officials suggested that a SHG may be formed and the business of raisins (dried grapes) can be undertaken. From Vaishali's desperate stand point for ending the trap of perpetual poverty in which her family is, this idea appealed to her and she harped on. She was now determined to make a difference for her family and convinced 10 friends from her neighbourhood to form a SHG. With the help from Zilla Panchayat she formed her SHG with the main intention to start a raisin production business and named it as, "Hari Om Dry Fruits". The business started with employing 12 women wage labourers in 2013 and today it employs 100 women and sells five to six tonnes of dry grapes a year in fests like SARAS and in the local market.

Her SHG was later absorbed in by Umed (Maharashtra State Rural Livelihood Mission). Once a part of Umed, the natural leader in Vaishali started seeing new windows of opportunity and wished to specialise in one more sector; food service. Given her passion for cooking, she decided to attend the various fests organised by Umed along with her SHG members to run food stalls alongside her dry fruits stall. Her managerial skills and leadership qualities gained her great prominence within the SRLM and

became one of the first persons to be nominated or invited by the SRLM whenever such opportunities came up.

Today she attends seven to eight such major fests in a year and puts up her food stalls. Her experience with food courts and melas has helped immensely in her success as an entrepreneur in the foodservice sector. Aajeevika India Food Court 2019 is the third such mela that she has participated in. Vaishali well articulates the ultimate outcome that interventions like India Food Court seeks, "Kudumbashree's trainings during India Food Courts have been a great help for me. Ensuring cleanliness, food safety, being presentable, stock management and various other important things I got to learn through this. That is the secret behind my success in many fests. People usually overlook such aspects and my knowledge always gives me an edge over the competitors."

Vaishali now dreams about supporting other SHG women in her village to set up a canteen as she believes that there is scope for one there. This is to start with. She hopes to build capacities for more such women in rural Maharashtra with the help of Umed and undertake interventions in foodservice sector for generating livelihood opportunities for the poor. Her vision for empowering women and willingness to impart knowledge with utmost commitment is what sets a leader apart from the rest.



**APPATLO POCHAMPALLICHEER-
ALUNESEVADU, IPPUDU BIRY-
ANI CHEF! THEN A POCHAMPALLI
WEAVER, NOW A BIRYANI CHEF!**

42 year old Navaneethaakka barely has a minute to spare. Her Hyderabad Dum Biryani sells out soon after they start serving. The aroma from the stall fills the air and does enough advertising for Telangana in the huge hall of Aajeevika India Food Court 2019 at New Delhi.

Coming from a small village of Koyyalagoodam in Nalgonda District, Navaneetha belongs to a family of traditional weavers. Their handloom products and tie and dye clothes from Pochampalli are well known. However, heavy competition among the weavers in the village made them look for alternative sources of income and Navaneetha's father, Lakshmiah, switched to food business and started catering for small events and functions across the village. Navaneetha, her elder sister Yamma and their brother Bhaskar became his little helpers since childhood and picked up cooking from him. And the same team, now joined by Bhaskar's wife Madhuri, has come for Aajeevika India Food Court.

The family continues to do weaving as a primary occupation. They would take their sarees and other handloom products for exhibition and fairs at Hyderabad and other nearby towns. It was Navaneetha who noticed that the food stalls at these fairs would always gather a better crowd and eventually earned a fair profit. Gradually, she discussed with her brother and decided to try their hand at food business around 5 years ago.

"Inka appatinunchitiruguledu", "There has been no looking back since then," says Navaneetha.

Having had experience of travelling for melas, they had a good grasp of crowd behaviour even before their first food stall. This helped them plan well in advance and prepare enough food to serve. The family now has an annual schedule of events and exhibitions that they regularly participate and earn an average profit of upto 10 to 12 lakhs annually. From SARAS Melas in several states, to monthly Handloom melas in Hyderabad, they barely have a month in a year without an event. Navaneethaakka has a lot of stories to share from these melas. Of merry times and even of tiring ones. She has won various awards for highest turnover, most tasty food, and even for their hygiene standards. At the SARAS Mela 2018 held at Chengannur, Kerala, the family incurred a huge loss of around 1.5 lakhs when the heavy floods hit Kerala. However, this did not deter the family from coming back next year with more energy and more tasty food. "Arre, Idhi business kadha. Kindhapyanaavvuthauntundi, tension padamaka, These are business matters. Gain and loss keeps happening. Not to worry much about it," says Navaneetha.

The horizon of opportunities has widened so much for this weaver from a small village that Navaneetha hopes to explore more and take a new flight every day.





DREAMS WITH NEW WINGS!

Rukmani Chandrashekar, a 43 year old from Durg, Chhattisgarh feels that she has come a long way from her home village to Delhi. Rukmani started her entrepreneurial journey with a tailoring unit. Burdened with family responsibilities and desire to offer good education to her children, Rukmani wanted to do something more. She says stepping out of the house and meeting people in the selfhelp group network has provided her a lot of information about the livelihood opportunities. One such opportunity was when she got training on food packaging and it was only looking forward then. She mentions, "I started packing home-grown haldias haldi powder. With time I started selling dhaniya and channa. The response from my customers made me realise the importance and demand of authentic masalas in the market."

After gaining this experience, she mobilised the women of her self help group and started making Chhattisgarhi snacks and delivering it to people in the neighbourhood. Understanding the importance of marketing the snacks, she printed small cards describing the snacks that they pre-

pare and distributed it at events and markets. To attract the customers towards her shop and to receive more order she provides free home delivery and ensures that the order is delivered within 3-4 days from the day it was placed.

She expresses that her dreams have grown new wings as she says, "Main badi business wali ban gayehun." After coming to the Aajeevika India Food Court Rukmani says that the exposure has been motivating as she has got the first hand experience of going to big markets and buying stocks. "Abhi tak toh 1000 rupaya ka saman ek baar me laate the aur apni dukan me nashta banate the, lekin ab ek din me 15000 ka saman khud bazaar se leke aaye, uskahi sabb hi likha."

With the ability to grasp the information, utilising the opportunity as it comes her way, strategising her work and acquiring entrepreneurial skills, she wishes to expand the reach of her business. She wants the Chhattisgarhi snacks to reach the different states of India so that people get to know about the snacks varieties that the state has got to offer and appreciate this diversity.

PRATIUKSHA, OUR ENTREPRENEUR WITH THE DREAMS OF COLLECTIVE GOOD!

Pratiksha Chanakar, 49, born and brought up in Goa is a big-time food lover. She says, “Mujhe khana pasand hai, khilana pasand hai aur jo mere hath ka banaya hua khana taste lekar khate hai unko dekhke mujhe bahut anand aata hai”. A winner of best seller at SARAS Mela, Kerala for selling all the handloom bed sheets and pillow covers that she brought from Goa, She says ‘I am exploring my qualities as an entrepreneur by trying all the things she is passionate about.’

Her love for food and feeding others has kept her attached to the foodservice business. She says “Main khana sirf ghar pebanane ke liye nahi banana chahtihu, main chahti hu ki mera banayahua khana bahut sare log khaye aur wo khane se unko bahut khushi ho.” For this reason, she takes orders for birthdays, marriages or small functions. She has got three other people who help her in preparing food. In furtherance of getting orders and attracting the customers, she packs the dishes that she prepare in boxes, carries them wherever she goes and make others taste it. She says, “Whenever I give them dishes to taste,” I ask, “Aapko khana kaisa laga? Iskoaur acha bana sakte hai kya?” This curiosity,

knowledge and desire to feed others and take a step up with her food business made her request the State Coordinator of Goa SRLM to send her to Aajeevika SARAS Mela Delhi as a foodservice entrepreneur.

The always smiling and entertaining face behind the counter of Goa food stall at Aajeevika India Food Court 2019 believes that the key to attract customers is to always keep a broad smile on the face, engage with them in conversation and make them smile when they visit you. It is because of her behaviour that Goan sea food dishes like prawn curry, fish fry, chicken xacuti, fish suleman, etc. made heads turn at the food court.

She says she has started doing the same by promoting livelihood opportunities like catering, beekeeping, poultry farming among the women from her community. With excellent marketing, customer relationship, group management as well as leadership skills she wants to start the canteen services in collaboration with the women offer self-help group to promote and generate sustainable livelihood opportunities for them.





TAKING A NEW FLIGHT!

Meet Gurpreet Kaur, our entrepreneur from Pinjore, Haryana. She has been actively involved in SHG since 2014. Gurpreet has been working as a teacher for an adult education programme and came across an opportunity to start her own business. She started 'Khalsa Catering group' and took regular catering orders for food, tea and snacks for SHG and other meetings. Her catering group also participated in the Rakhi Mela organised under Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme and earned profits by setting up food and snacks stalls within their village. Since then, they have been trying to tap business opportunities by catering food to nearby schools and training centres.

Gurpreet attended Aajeevika India Food Court, 2019 with her fellow SHG members. A team of six, Gurpreet was involved in handling kitchen operations far away from the limelight of the front counter of Haryana stall. Her Bajre ki Kh-

ichdi was gaining popularity and Gurpreet didi was happy looking through the glass windows smiling that people are enjoying her cooking. Recalling her preparation for the India food court, Gurpreet says, "A training session was lined up by the Panchkula district unit of the Haryana State Rural Livelihood Mission with Red Bishop-a Haryana Tourism Corporation unit, in order to boost our confidence and improve catering skills. I actively participated in the training and learnt different cuisines, preparation styles and chopping techniques."

Boosting with confidence, Gurpreet now plans to apply her learnings from the food court in expanding her catering unit. Gurpreet and her husband hope to provide better quality of education and life for their sons. She believes that her exposure to the Aajeevika India Food Court was a good opportunity to bring about a new start to her family.



A STORY OF COURAGE AND PERSEVERANCE

To cope with the burden of family responsibilities and discrimination from her in-laws, Maya Devi wanted to start a small snacks counter. The idea attracted her but the only challenge for Maya was the investment it required. Her parents gave her some money and helped establish a snacks corner in a nearby chowk in Thethaitangar block. For Maya, this was also an opportunity to provide an employment to her husband. Though she was not very skilled, she was smart enough to employ one more person on a daily wage at the stall from whom she learned how to prepare various snack items. She also engaged herself in mid-day meal activities in a village school and continued doing it for over 15 years. Her enterprise added some more to the family income but even then the family had to raise money from their next of kin to get the daughter married and it led to some financial burden on the household.

In 2014, when Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society(JSLPS) started forming SHGs in Thethaitangar block, Maya Devi became a member of Amrit Ajeevika Swayam Sahayata Samuh which became a life changing event for her. As a member of the SHG, she got a loan of Rs. 30,000 and established a proper hotel from a small snacks corner. “By the time we opened our

hotel, I had become a confident entrepreneur in foodservice and had years of experience as an asset. I had a clear plan and I knew how to run my business successfully,” she shares proudly. Presently she also provides tiffin service to patients and officials in a nearby hospital and few offices. Today Maya has her own house.

Maya has created a very good customer base in her area. Her enthusiasm, humility and entrepreneurial spirit impressed the SRLM. In 2016, the Block Mission Management Unit of her block selected her to put up a food stall in Jharkhand SARAS Melafor 22 days along with 4 more women. In 2018, Maya and the other SHG women in the group got their next opportunity to participate in a SARAS Mela in Delhi where she headed the team. Initially her husband was not very comfortable about her going to far off melas. But now he has changed his outlook and Maya is effectively supplementing her family income by participating in such fares. Apart from the monetary benefits, Maya is more interested in exploring new opportunities, cuisines, connections, ideas and to grow as an entrepreneur. Maya aspires to start an institutional canteen with the support of Block Resource Center of thethaitangar block under SVEP.



WHERE THERE IS WILL, THERE IS WAY

The endeavours of this food service unit from Tanuku, Andhra Pradesh started when they were selected as Community Resource Persons under one of the NRLM programmes aimed at promotion of micro-enterprises of the rural poor. The four of them, Sandhya, Kanakadurga, Sirisha and Nagabhavani would often prepare tea and snacks for their official group meetings. Impressed at this, it was their Field Mentor who suggested that they should take up food business on a larger scale and maybe even attend events and exhibitions. But it was easier said than done. Their families and relatives were not so supportive of the idea of them cooking and serving food to others. This was looked down upon and they were certain that they would not be permitted to do this, let alone travel to different states for it. But where there is will, there had to be a way, and these women found that way. At their homes, they would inform about a 10-12 days residential training for resource persons, and would travel to these fairs. At their first attempt at Pattambi SARAS Mela in Kerala, the team made a total profit of One lakh twenty thou-

sand and each member took home a profit of twenty four thousand rupees.

Returning with such a success gave Kanakadurga some confidence and she spoke to her family about her wish to work in the food business and was eventually supported by her mother and her husband. The four of them were gearing up for Aajeevika India Food Court and so Kanakadurga's mother helped her in mastering traditional recipes such as Potharekulu and Hyderabad Dum Biryani. Sandhya and Sirisha remark, "After saving a few thousand rupees earned from the festivals, we gradually spend the money for household expenses. We say it was our additional payment for work as a CRP-EP". Nagabhavani says that she spends this money on herself and her daughter. All three of them cannot hide their smiles while sharing this secret that they plan to keep. The 4 member team from Andhra Pradesh have come really far, literally and figuratively, to be part of Aajeevika India Food Court at Rajpath, New Delhi. There is no stopping them from dreaming higher and getting what they want.





VANDANA, A CHANGEMAKER FROM THE COMMUNITY

As the sizzling sound of pouring another round of Chilla hits the tawa, 47-year-old Vandana Tiwari from Dongargarh, Chattishgarh starts talking about her life experiences. She is a thin woman with eyes full of dreams and hands full of responsibilities for the women of her community. Being the president of the Cluster level federation (CLF) she strongly believes in empowering other women. She says, “Aapko pehle khudsha shakt banana hoga tab hi aap dusre ko shashakt kar-sakte ho, aur agar aap swayam me shashakt ho to dusro ko shashakt banana aapki zimmedari hai.”

As an active SHG member and a community leader, Vandana has been taking up multiple opportunities. She has an earnest desire for her children to be well educated. She opened a small stationery shop near her children’s school and started selling pens, notebooks, etc. after which she expanded her shop and turned it into a Kirana Store. She also got associated with the Anganwadis where she used to impart awareness on health, cleanliness and hygiene among the community members. She says, “Humme ye kaam karke kuch paise nahi milte the lekin samaaj ki sewa karne ke liye humme ye sab karna acha lagta hai.” Her will to serve the community made Bihan, the State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLM)

of Chhattisgarh appoint her as a cadre for them.

After joining Bihan, she has been the face of promotion for a lot of their programmes. When she came to know about the livelihood opportunities that are being promoted by the state, she initiated the conversation about opening a food canteen in order to provide higher education to her children as well as to promote Chhattisgarhi snacks. Getting the desired support from SRLM and an appropriate place for her business, she is now running her canteen called ‘Mast Kalewa’ in the Panchayat Collectorate. She serves Chhattisgarhi dry snacks like Chousela, Gujjiya, Chakkali as well as Chilla, Fara, Angakarki Roti, etc. in her canteen. She says people from District or other States who come to the Collectorate for a visit or meeting often ask her to pack the dry snacks to take back home.

With her one hand still trying to fulfill the demands for Chillas at the food court, her eyes full of pride and face with the broadest smile she says, “Mahilao me dridh shakti hai, jo duniya badal sakti hai, bus aage badhte jana hai, ish-duniya ko dikhana hai, ham sabko sath-sath aage badhte jana hai.”





GANGA, FROM A COMMUNITY LEADER TO AN ENTREPRENEUR

27 years old, Ganga Devi from Guna, Madhya Pradesh is a community resource person for forming self help groups in the villages. With the experience of starting more than 200 self-help groups, she shares that she has tried to reach out to the people belonging to different social groups like Dhakad, Khuswaha, and Bhugaon in her vicinity so that the benefits of being associated to a self help group can reach everyone.

Apart from this, she is also running a catering unit under Mahila Samuday Sangathan which provides food in the trainings that are organized in the blocks for the community network. Relating the experience of providing foodservices to social inclusion of various communities through self help groups, she says, "Jaise khana logo ko jodhta hai aur wo sare bhed bhaw mitata hai, waise hi maine bhi koshish ki hai logo ko Samuh se jodne ki aur bhed bhaw mita neki."

Sharing her experience of running the food catering service, she explains that while cooking for 50-60 people she generally requires 3-4 group members and if the requirement is high then she gets more people from her self help group. She

shares that she used to take her husband's help for marketing and monitoring purpose but now she has started taking ownership of the operations. She now monitors, manages and helps the women to do the cooking work and she looks at the logistics and management part of it. She says "Khana banana to mujhe aata tha lekin usme baki ki chize jaise market jana, saman leke aana, kaun se chiz kitni matra me aur kaha se kharid ni hai, saaf safai ka, khaneki delivery karwana bhi aana chahiye."

With the experience of being a community leader as well as someone who has been into the food sector, she will now be running a catering centre in the Collectorate of Guna, Madhya Pradesh. She says that she has been fortunate that the opportunity to represent Madhya Pradesh at India Food Court, Delhi has come to her now. She will take away all the learning from her first-ever food court experience about customer handling, stock management, understanding customers and market back with her. She says, "I will share these experiences and learning with the members of Mahila Samuday Sangathan and will come to the next food court with my group."

HARBINGERS OF CHANGE

In 2017 Kudumbashree took an epochal step by starting special transgender units in Kerala with an objective to mainstream the community and to generate livelihood opportunities for them. The Kudumbashree experience speaks volumes on building livelihoods as the most effective tool for empowering people. The far-reaching reverberations of this monumental step, today, have even reached the lawns of India Gate in the national capital.

At Aajeevika India Food Court 2019, Kerala Stall No. 1 has turned heads with the overwhelming response it garnered from Delhites. Items like Nannari Milk Sharbath became a new experience for them and one of the most sought after in the event. This fresh juice corner was run by three transgender individuals from a special Kudumbashree unit in Kerala. This is the inspiring story of Amrutha, Anamika and Pranav, one of the forerunners from the community who have now become an essential part of Kudumbashree's legacy.

Amrutha aspired for nothing but a dignified life. She was one of the first members from her community to join Kudumbashree and has proven herself as a competent entrepreneur ever since. With the help of Kudumbashree, she today runs a juice stall in Ernakulam Collectorate, a pickle manufacturing micro enterprise, undertakes organic farming, and participates in fests like India Food Court to supplement her annual income. She is a source of inspiration for her people and today her primary motive is to walk the talk for her people. She says, "Transgender commu-

nity in Kerala, even today, is not that open to the ideas pitched by stakeholders like Kudumbashree. They can't be blamed, of course, their bitter experiences in life always compel them to stay away from the mainstream. I have devoted my life for their cause after joining Kudumbashree and I want to inspire my community so that more and more people come up to join us in this drive, which I believe is the need of the hour."

Amrutha is a motherly figure for many from her community. Among them are Anamika and Pranav, a trans-couple who has accompanied her for the event. They both live together in Anamika's home after Pranav was disowned by his family when he revealed his identity to them. Anamika is pursuing an air-hostess course and is also interested in fashion designing. She says, "Amruthamma usually takes me along when she goes for such events as she knows that I have my dreams and I need money for it. Cochin Biennale was one such major event which helped me earn good revenue and now this India Food Court is even better in terms of revenues."

Pranav adds, "I never understood who I am and what I am. My orientation has been conflicting since teenage. I could never come out to my family. They had showered me with all their love and care for over two decades and then suddenly one day I became a complete stranger to them, despised and hated. I had to leave my home as I became a burden for them. Anamika, Amruthamma and Anamika's family are my family now. They gave me shelter and a new found hope.



And now after attending India Food Court I have a new found purpose in life. I will go back and start my own juice stall."

People like Amrutha, Anamika and Pranav are shattering the age old traditions, showing the way ahead

and becoming one of the many harbingers of change for their people. They serve as a ray of hope for thousands who live in fear, secrecy and complete dejection. For their physical condition which they never got to choose, that shall not be the end of the world for them anymore.



“FROM FARM TO NON-FARM... THE EXPERIMENTAL JOURNEY OF **MUSHROOM** FARMERS FROM ASSAM”

200 mushroom farmers from Chandapur block of Kamrup district, Assam have formed a mushroom cooperative this year. The idea has been to promote mushroom farming and value added products for the cooperative. Deepjyoti, a mushroom farmer and a fashion designer expressed, “The number of women farmers are increasing day by day, therefore farming mushroom should not be our only goal. Gradually we have to search for other possibilities and scope so that we can continue with our farming and make it sustainable”.

Deepjyoti and her friend Tulika had introduced the people visiting Aajeevika India Food Court 2019 to a variety of mushroom based recipes. Their story as mushroom farmers goes back to the Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission’s initiative for enhancing rural lives and livelihood. Deepjyoti and her friend Tulika, like many other women grabbed this opportunity and formed a 25 member group under the project in 2018. With regular handholding by the SRLM and MDF (Mushroom Development Foundation) they became trained in mushroom farming. Deepjyoti says, “Mushroom farming is easier and new. For any woman who has a family to look after and cannot go out or stay out for work for a longer

period, mushroom farming is an easy way to earn money”.

To diversify the utilization of mushroom they started experimenting and introduced mushroom in various traditional dishes of Assam. By trial and error they came out with some mushroom dishes like mushroom laddoo, mushroom pickle, pitha and murabba, pudding etc. Their experiments were tested at one of the SARAS Melas organized by ASRLM where they introduced their diverse mushroom products to a wide range of customers. Both of them were praised for their innovation and most of their dishes became popular. Deepjyoti acknowledges that she has acquired entrepreneurship spirit from her mother who also helped her during this food service initiative. Gradually they started participating in local melas with wide acceptance for their dishes and gave good competition to other food service enterprises in those fairs. Their new initiative and approach caught the eye of ASRLM and finally they got a chance to participate in Aajeevika India food court 2019 at India Gate to represent Assam. With this exposure, Deepjyoti and Tulika intend to share their knowledge on big platforms and inspire other rural mushroom farmers to come up and experiment.



ORGANIC AAJEEVIKA

This was Amarjeet Kaur's first India Food Court event; she set up a snack stall, 'Bebe di Rasoi', with dahibhallabeing the highlight. Having involved herself in organic cultivation and sales for the past 14 years, Amarjeet and her group of three SHG women supplied organic flour to another team from Punjab at the Aajeevika India Food Court 2019.

Amarjeet Kaur comes from a family of farmers, with her parents, in-laws, and husband mainly growing wheat and corn. In addition to growing an acre each of organic wheat and corn with her husband Vichitra Singh, Amarjeet also maintains an organic vegetable garden in her house. Having joined the KhetiVirasat Mission in 2006, a movement which is working to promote organic farming, Amarjeet initially brought together the women of her village for a meeting and explained its significance. The women then took up growing vegetables in the empty spaces in their houses. Each woman in Bhotna village grows a specific vegetable, and they exchange these vegetables with each other. Amarjeet proudly says, "You will get organic vegetables in all households of our village."

Since 2006, Amarjeet and her fellow women organic farmers from Bhotna village have been

able to motivate farmers in 23 villages in Barnala district to shift towards organic farming. This group has evolved into a Self-Help Group by the name of Sukhmani in 2016, and has set up a weekly organic shop in Barnala district. The rent of the shop is taken care of by the District Mission Management Unit, Punjab State Rural Livelihood Mission, so as to promote sustainable and healthy livelihoods.

After having joined the SHG network, Amarjeet has been able to participate in markets and melas with chemical-free products from her village. According to her, Punjab has been infamous for adulterations and overuse of chemicals, and that the concept of organic food crops is bringing about a much-needed change in the health and nutrition of her fellow farmers and consumers. While working for motivating farmers, Amarjeet used to hear pessimistic comments from farmers that organic crops do not yield much; however, "farmers who used to run away at the mention of organic crops are today turning organic", she says with pride. Amarjeet hopes to set up future food stalls with 100% organically sourced material from her village, as well as plans to take up organic farming to more fellow women in her home state.





HORIZON IS THE LIMIT: THE PIONEERING WOMEN OF ATTAPPADY

Kerala (Attappady) stall at Aajeevika India Food Court 2019, New Delhi, became an instant hit with the public who flocked into the India Gate lawns to experience India's culinary vibrancy. With their specialities like the aromatic Vana Sundari chicken (Herbal Chicken) and Mulayari Payasam (Bamboo Rice Kheer), these women with innocent faces won over the hearts of Delhiites. Behind the glitter of their majestic success, the story of their past struggles is concealed and that warrants to be heard.

In 2014, in the backdrop of deteriorating human development indices in Attappady, a tribal block of Kerala, the State Government looked forward to placing the native tribal communities in the safe hands of Kudumbashree. Thus Kudumbashree came to intervene with its special project in Attappady to deliver holistic development for the community and to ensure their socio-economic welfare. One of the major objectives was to develop sustainable livelihoods for the people of Attappady. At the face of dull agricultural opportunities and conditions in the region, Kudumbashree had a herculean task at its hand to look beyond agriculture and to build capacities for the community in areas where they otherwise would never venture into. One such intervention was in the foodservice sector in an attempt to mainstream local tribal delicacies. By providing visibility to the dishes the aim was in building a steady source of income for the community. A batch of 33 women underwent a series of intensive trainings and a team of ten women from a particular clan of Devagundu hamlet emerged as the most suitable to be seasoned to undertake café initiatives in venues like India Food Courts and thereby taking the tastes of Attappady to the national platforms.

Six women; Maridhi Raju, SanthaVelinkari, Valli-

Chandran, Sijimol, Reshmi Velinkari and PonniMugan represented their team at Aajeevika India Food Court 2019. This team has participated in three India Food Courts since 2017 and in numerous local fests in Kerala. This has become a valuable addition to their otherwise paltry family incomes which hitherto greatly depended on government schemes like MGNREGA. These women were also successful in mobilising the men from their families to help them with their endeavour and most of their families are now engaged in the business and run their own food kiosks. In due course of time, the men have also learned the preparations and today they are able to manage the production and kiosks all by themselves as the women are away attending various fests.

SanthaVelinkari opines that, "The forest and its produce is all that we have. We never undertook agriculture fearing trespassing of wild animals, MGNREGA was the only relief at one point of time. After the special project of Kudumbashree started in Attappady there has been a considerable change in us. Our lives are no longer miserable and directionless."

The real spirit of the Devagundu tribe is reflected in the compassionate words of Maridhi Raju, wife of the village chieftain and a participant, "We travelled for 3 days in a train to reach Delhi. We were all excited as once we could never dream of visiting the capital of our India. But along the way I was saddened to see the state of a lot of people in railway stations. I believed that poverty in Attappady was the worst in the world. But the people I saw, I could relate with them. Today we are fortunate because of the steps the government took for us. One day I wish to travel this far in a train and not see such poverty in our country."

FROM MUNDWA TO RAJPATH

Behind the buzzing crowd enjoying the famous Dal Baati Churma at the Rajasthan counter, stands proud, Chandudevi clad in her pretty Ghaghra Choli. This is her second time at Aajeevika SARAS Mela and she still cannot believe that she has come this far from her small village, Mundwa in Nagaur District.

Born in a family of farmers, Chandudevi along with her husband did what they knew best, farming. The family would cultivate Jowar, Bajra, Moong and Til for sustenance and self-consumption. Her journey took a turn when she joined the self-help group (SHG) formed under NRLM, in her village. Her group would save small amounts of money and she started taking loans from this. These loans became a huge support for her to run her household in the farming off-season. Gradually she became a regular sight at her Cluster Level Office and was employed as a sweeper/peon there 5 years ago. This gave her a direct access to information on a number of events and exhibitions hosted by Rajeevika (Rajasthan State Livelihood Mission). Inspired by other women at such events, Chandudevi decided that she was ready to try something new. She also realized that local food preparations which were almost a daily routine for women like her could be exotic and highly demanded outside her village. It is then that she

entered food business and started putting up her stall at events hosted by Raajevika. "Shaadi byaah mei khaana pakaane ko toh phir chutti nahi miltina, didi. Naukri bhi toh nahi chod sakte. Par Mele mei jaate hai to acha lagta hai," says the didi when asked about expanding her catering business back in her village.

Although minor, these events started bringing in some amount of money and inspired her family to scale up. She came to Aajeevika India Food Court 2019 along with her husband Moolaram, and her eldest son Kartik. He has also taken a keen interest in these events and loves the fact that he gets to travel along with his family to all these places. At the last SARAS Mela held at Pragati Maidan, her stall had total sales over a lakh and took home a profit of around Rs. 50,000. "Such events are not just about business," exclaims Chandudevi. She is also amused at the diversity of people, food and cultures that she gets to experience. She even went on to invite other state teams to come host stalls in her village so that her village folks could enjoy these varieties. Using SRLM events as a platform and a decent source of income, Chandudevi and her family have definitely found love for their Daal Baati Churma!





A HOME-GROWN SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEUR!

Merina Tamang is a 40-year old entrepreneur from Sikkim. She single-handedly runs a canteen in her village Rumtek Busty, where she makes varieties of chowmein, momo, fale, chilly chicken etc. Aajeevika India Food Court 2019 is her fifth such event. Given her experience in foodservice, the Sikkim Rural Livelihood Mission has selected Merina and Dhanmaya, a fellow SHG member, to ensure that a new set of people got to attend each Food Court events.

Merina was born and brought up in Darjeeling, where her parents worked at a tea factory. They both lost their jobs when the factory closed down, driving the family into poverty. At this juncture, Merina started working to secure an income source for her family. She started a snack shop in Darjeeling. However, she had to migrate to Delhi and later to Mumbai after her father passed away, for better opportunities. After working many jobs such as beautician, salesperson, and chef, Merina was not satisfied with her career. She decided that it was best to run her own business, and was waiting for an opportunity to start one.

A few years after her marriage to her husband,

Bimal Pradhan in 2010, the couple moved to Sikkim to take care of his parents. However, they were not able to find suitable jobs. Merina was not interested in jobs; she thought “I have skills, I can do something of my own, and why should I not use that?” and planned to start her own enterprise. Her husband and her SHG supported her in setting up a canteen. Bimal got motivated by Merina’s hard work and went ahead to find a regular job. Today, Merina is able to earn revenues around Rs. 30,000 every month from her canteen. Along with Bimal’s income, the couple is able to run the family comfortably. “Our shop is not big in size or situated in a busy junction. However, the shop still runs well and we are able to live a comfortable life. I take up all household related expenses, and Bimal saves his income in the bank for our future,” says a smiling Merina.

Merina is an expert cook; she says, “I can make most of the dishes of Sikkim; tourists who visit Sikkim enjoy the Fale and Chowmein prepared by me.” Truly enough, the Sikkim stall at the Aajeevika India Food Court was brimming with customers full of praises for the food.



A WOMAN OF METTLE: A SUCCESS STORY FROM THE VENICE OF THE EAST

Feeding someone can be considered one of the holiest of all acts. Running an enterprise to feed people at the least prices imaginable, one of the most virtuous things to do. This is the story of Jaya K. R. from Alappuzha town in Kerala who is feeding the common man good quality food at cheap rates. Her enterprise is definitely at par with other government run canteens/kiosks across the country which sell subsidized food to the people. And that is not all, the more one speaks to Jaya, an inspiring story of her adorable journey gradually unravels.

A dynamic woman, Jaya became part of Kudumbashree network in the late 1990s. From being a member, she became the leader of her neighbourhood group federation. Leading the women of her community for eight years, she resigned from the position and started working as an Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) worker. She possesses an amazing ability of motivating and mobilising women under Kudumbashree for its various initiatives.

It was in 2011 when the then Finance Minister of Kerala Dr. T. M. Thomas Issacon his visit to

a professional theatre in Alappuzha suggested Kudumbashree women to start a catering unit and provide food services for the event, Jaya got inspired to start a canteen, "Five Star Catering Unit". Jaya's enriching experience with Kudumbashree had already made her an outgoing leader with good managerial skills. And with this success Jaya decided to travel across Kerala to learn new recipes and to learn new skills to ensure high standards for her business. Five Star Catering Unit grew at a steady pace and its customers had all praises for the food. The business got a lot of encouragement as it earned regular customers who placed orders with her. As a leader Jaya, grabbed all the opportunities to train her team members into professionals. She approached the Kudumbashree Alappuzha District Mission and arranged for skill training for the team. Satisfied with the team, the district official started placing orders with the unit for its official events and programmes and the business further flourished. But the compassionate leader in her did not let confine herself to her enterprise. She wished to build capacities in the community by training and supporting more such units in Alappuzha. She has facilitated such trainings

for hundreds of SHG women and has herself trained a team of ten. This team later went on to start a canteen in Alappuzha District Court with support from Kudumbashree. "We have to understand the term women empowerment in its larger sense. Awareness classes and exercises alone will not serve the purpose. Giving them the necessary skills to earn a living, to be financially independent and to be a contributor to the family income and hence gaining decision making power within the family is the starting point of women empowerment," Jaya opines.

Today Jaya is in the gratification of having accomplished one of her long-standing dream of starting a starting a government subsidized food stall. She along with another team of nine women started the "Subiksha Canteen" in Alappuzha where food is subsidized by the district administration. In 2019, Kudumbashree NRO notified her to attend the selection process for Café Mentors. Showing justice to her impeccable record of achievements, she cleared the process with flying colours and today she is all set to use her expertise in a national platform.



DIDIYON KI NAYI PEHCHAN

DIDI KI RASOI!

'Didi ki Rasoi' is an innovative initiative by Jeevika, State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLM) of Bihar which aims at providing livelihood to women in the foodservice sector. The concept has been inspired from 'Cafe Kudumbashree,' Kerala, an umbrella brand developed by Kudumbashree to promote different models of foodservices. The entrepreneurs have undergone trainings for catering, hotel management, maintaining hygiene & cleanliness, taking care of patients, developing customer relationships and increasing the confidence. Didis run their canteen in the government hospital of Hajipur and have represented it at a lot of SARAS Mela platforms in Bihar.

With the rasoi marking its first anniversary on October 10th, Didis shared that they feel confident about their work. They said that they have provided training to other didis who are going to start the canteen in other blocks of Bihar. Sharmiladidi says, "Jab ham dusri mahilao ko prashikshan dete hai tab hame aur sikhne ko milta hai. Hamlog ko yaad aata hai ki hame hamare aspatal me aur kaunse chizpe dhayan dene ki jarurat hai ya konsi chizpe ham dhayan dena bhul gaye hai."

The entrepreneurs have been responsible for

providing food to the patients in the hospital as well as to the doctors, staffs and visitors (on demand). They serve 4 meals to the patient starting from morning till dinner time for Rs. 100. They make sure that proper hygiene and cleanliness is maintained while serving the meals. Sangitadidi says, "Kabhi kabhi mari zaisa bolte hai ki aapke hath ka khana khake ham jaldi theek hoke jaarahe haiyaha se, to hamein bahut acha lagta hai". They also take special orders on the occasion of elections and provide packed food to people who are on election duty. For their labour, the entrepreneurs draw a fix salary of Rs. 8000 per month.

"DidikiRasoi" has empowered the women socially and economically. Sharing about their life transformation, Didis exclaim, "Working as owners of this rasoi has provided us a platform to step out of our houses and work to earn a living."

Sharing the joy as they make Litti Chokha together at the India Food Court kitchen one could also see the excellent division of work among the team. Passing smiles, owning their work, dedicating their time with a collective effort to feed, the team of 'DidikiRasoi' gleams with pride.







FROM NORTH-EAST TO NORTH, AN ENTREPRENEUR IN THE MAKING!

Bhubaneshwari belongs to one of the 21 indigenous tribal communities of Tripura called Jamatia residing in Matarbari R.D block in South Tripura. She became a member of a self help group in 2016 and since then has been actively supporting the Tripura State Rural Livelihood Mission as a trainer and in formation of new SHGs. She supports SHGs in mobilizing women for bank linkages, acquiring job cards, imparting awareness to women on importance of democratic platforms like Gram Sabha and their rights and entitlements. She earns Rs. 200 for attending a CBO/SHG meeting. Her husband works with Gram Rozgar Sahayak under MGNREGS. Both of them earn a decent amount to look after their four-member family. Bhubaneshwari and her husband also practice farming and livestock rearing for subsistence.

Bhubaneshwari is an entrepreneur in the making. Although she has never operated a business, she has an experience of providing cooked food for marriage ceremonies, CBO trainings and meetings. When Bhubaneshwari came to know about Aajeevika India Food Court from her block team, she was really interested. She gladly expressed that when she asked her husband about this opportunity her husband and mother in-law responded positively. They told, “We don’t have the necessary economic conditions that we can afford a Delhi tour. If you have got a chance you go and tell us how the capital city looks.” The support from her family, interest towards food service and courage to stay away from home for 15-20 days made it easy for her to grab the opportunity and represent her state on a national platform. Bhubaneshwari became the youngest

Jamatia member amongst the women to participate in India Food Court.

After getting selected for the food court it was time for her to prepare for this big opportunity. This was the first time she was participating in a national level mela. “We were so excited that we collected bamboo shoots, rice and other materials from the forest and farms to prepare the traditional dishes of Tripura keeping its authentic taste intact”.

After coming to Delhi, Bhubaneshwari interacted with the fellow entrepreneurs coming from other states and took inspiration from their stories of struggle and success. Though she is not very fluent in Bengali and Hindi, and knows only her native language Kokborok, that did not limit her. She is a quick learner and hence started catching Hindi soon and interacted with other entrepreneurs and her customers.

Bhubaneshwari is keen on starting a canteen business with her SHG members. The SHG has started identifying opportunities and location to establish a food service business with the support from block and district units. Now Bhubaneshwari has had considerable exposure in food services through this India food Court. She feels more confident and encouraged to establish an enterprise and guide her group in operating it successfully. “I feel thankful and happy that I was selected for this food court. I know that after listening to my experience many women in our CBO network will be inspired to create their own identity by starting their own enterprises.”

A FLIGHT TO SEAMLESS SKIES: SEEMA DIDI'S TALE



Bringing the tastes of sangrekisabji, pyajpakora and many other snacks from Churu, Rajasthan, Seema Kunwar is a budding entrepreneur. This is the first time she is participating in Aajeevika India Food Court, SARAS Mela in 2019. The scale, skills and delicacies showcased in the mela has already earned her appreciation. She is planning on bringing her team in the next SARAS as well.

With a wide range of responsibilities on her shoulders, being a mother of two kids, domestic work at home and fields, working as an accountant at her Village Organisation (VO) and a Community Resource Person for Enterprise Promotion (CRP-EP) under Start up Village Entrepreneurship Program (SVEP) in her block (Taranagar); Seema didi has mastered the art of multitasking as well. In her pursuits of self-identity and betterment of family she is supported by them. Though initially her mother-in-law was hesitant to permit her for CRP-EP training or even for a visit to SARAS, Seema's determination for the work & her husband's support has won cooperation from the joint family too.

She accredits her Self Help Group (SHG) for transforming her from the rural woman who fumbled at her introduction in a SHG meeting, mixing up her name with her village's name to a woman who is a CRP-EP now. The one who gives community trainings and is confident enough to speak in front of a mass gathering. She shares that access to credit via her SHG has helped her and her fellow women to keep running their households despite anything. Once, when the

village was affected by drought, her SHG distributed their Community Investment Fund money as loan among them to look after their needs. During that time, Seema's husband had also not got the payment from the company he works for in Bombay (Mumbai). So Seema used her share of loan to pay the school fees of her children's private English-medium school and bought fodder for her cattle.

"It is not common for a woman in my village to go out. So, when I started working as a CRP-EP, I was often questioned that where was I headed hanging a purse and all. Being a Rajput, I was further looked down as women in such families would always cover their head with a long ghunghat as a mark of respect for elder males, they would not even talk much in front of them...However, I often do not cover my head when I am out working, but would rather talk elegantly and respectfully with elders," tells Seema with a face beaming with confidence. Educated till tenth, Seema is seen as an asset for her village especially the elderly women who now see her as a source for providing information and access to the 'sheher' (city) and its facilities.

"I had told my father-in-law that participating in Aajeevika India Food Court might be a good learning experience. I promised them that I will be bringing something back home. During the event, I have been sending some money back home. What is better than going home for Diwali with Lakshmi ji?" says a delighted and hardworking Seema.

THE ROYAL CHEFS AND ARTISTS OF LUCKNOW

Afsana runs a food catering and a chikan embroidery business with her fellow didis from Bharti SHG at Ganeshpur village in Lucknow. She hopes to be able to set up a canteen with the group's earnings from Aajeevika India Food Court 2019. Having lost her husband to a sudden illness five years ago, with three children to support, Afsana was struggling to make ends meet. "I did not know how money is made, I knew nothing about the world," she says. With her education and knowledge of tailoring, she got a job in a school to teach tailoring; she saved up from the job with great difficulty and invested the money in setting up a chikan embroidery business with her newly formed SHG team.

When UPSRLM officials at the Lucknow District unit were looking for SHGs for catering services, Afsana and her team readily engaged in the work. Afsana says, "My cooking is enjoyed by my in-laws and other family members. So I thought why not engage in cooking as a business". She is grateful to the District officials of NRLM to have

visited her village and motivated her group to set up this unit. Apart from food orders for government events, the 'Bharti Self-Help Group Catering' started by Afsana is also engaged in providing food at private parties and functions.

Today, along with her embroidery business, Afsana wants to start a group canteen unit in her locality. She prefers the foodservice business over any other work because of the relatively lesser risk associated with it. About the Aajeevika India Food Court, "Before coming here, we were worried about how such a large-scale mela would work, and if we would be able to sell our items. However, we have had full support from our families. My late mother-in-law had supported me with my idea of catering unit. Galawati Kabab (minced meat patties) is my signature dish, which was enjoyed by her. I didn't expect people to like my kababs so much. I would like to give my 100% each day," says a slightly tired but satisfied Afsana. Truly enough, the Lucknowi Galauti Kabab has made a buzz at the food court.





WEARING MULTIPLE HATS

Komal Devi from Bhaniawala Panchayat, Dehradun, wears multiple hats, with the chef's hat being one of them. Komal has set up the Uttarakhand stall at the Aajeevika India Food Court 2019 with a team of four other women from the Sandhya SHG, of which she is the president. She also holds positions in the Village Organisation and Cluster Level Federation. Having been a part of the SHG network for 19 years now, Komal has also worked as a Resource Person at the Community and the Block level, and is currently a State Resource Person with the Uttarakhand State Livelihood Mission (USRLM), helping in the formation of new SHG networks in the State.

Komal has brought together some SHGs in the locality to work in multiple areas such as canteen, catering unit and packing of monthly dry food for children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers associated with anganwadis. In 2009, this group of SHGs started putting up stalls at fairs by selling packed dry food. They ventured into food service when they noticed that food stalls had a great demand. "I am interested in

cooking and trying out new dishes; even if I don't try many new food items, I like making them for others," Komal says. The USRLM unit at the Dehradun District had then helped them enter the foodservice business by facilitating the setting up of the canteen, "Indira AmmaBhojanalaya", as well as encouraged their food packaging work with a government order for take home ration.

With multiple livelihoods, each SHG didiin this group makes an income of at least around Rs. 10,000 per month. About the women of her multiple-SHG community, Komal says, "As the President of the Village Organisation, I make sure that not just one SHG or sister benefits; we all want each other to move ahead in life. While some of us are at the Uttarakhand stall in the mela, other didis are working in packing dry foods for anganwadi, and in a month-long catering project".

Uttarakhand stall at the Aajeevika India Food Court is truly a multi-starrer, with authentic pahadicuisine such as chainsoo, jhangoreki kheer, dal tikkietc. selling like hot pancakes.





A GATEKEEPER OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE COMMUNITY!

Aajeevika India Food Court 2019 is Raj Kumari's fourth such event; she brings a different group of SHG women each time, so that they all get an opportunity to witness the mega event and set up their own livelihoods. The Tamanna Self Help Group, of which she is a member, earlier used to engage in sales of clothes embroidered by them; the group used to put up stalls in SARAS Melas across the country. However, since Raj Kumari began having issues with her eyesight, she could not continue the work anymore. The group has since then diversified into the food service sector, with two other women apart from Raj Kumari running a catering centre at Kallarbhani Panchayat in Patiala.

Raj Kumari's husband currently works as a peon in a school. However, he used to be unemployed earlier, and Raj Kumari used to work multiple jobs to make ends meet. "I have done teaching, cleaning, and many other jobs. I was never satisfied working under someone else. Joining a SHG has helped me gain independence and having my own business. I like cooking for hundreds of people," she says.

The idea for a catering business came up when a few guests at Raj Kumari's house appreciated

her food. She thought it was possible for her to cook for more people, and make a livelihood out of her talent. "In the beginning, my friends and neighbours ordered food for small gatherings. Once, we made food for a group of hundred people and the guests appreciated the cooking; I got encouragement from their compliment. Slowly, our capacity increased to cooking for a group of 200-300. You can see how people are turning up in huge numbers for the India Food Court; however, I'm not worried. I know we can manage it," says the confident entrepreneur. The chholebhature and makkeki roti with sarsonkasaag have become a hit at the Aajeevika India Food Court, exceeding the expectations of the group by a huge margin.

The Patiala district unit of the Punjab State Rural Livelihood Mission has encouraged Raj Kumari's work by ordering food from the Tamanna SHG for their events. Truly enough, Raj Kumari feels her life changed after joining a self-help group. She has learned important lessons such as customer relations and food plating after having attended four India Food Court events, and plans to apply these learning outcomes in a group canteen once she returns home.

EMPOWERED THROUGH SOCIAL CAPITAL!

“I don’t know whether my children will be able to take care of me in future but I have social capital to fallback”- addressing her family and friends.

The counter of West Bengal State at Aajeevika India Food Court had crowd eagerly waiting for bengali delicacies. Gathering orders from the customers, SampaNaskar starts narrating her story. She hails from Rajarhat Block and is a SHG member since 2014. She has served as leader of Cluster Level Federation. Looking at the long menu of items from the stall it can be understood that Sampa is thorough in the knowledge of Bengali cuisines and what would be liked by the customers. It was in 2016, that Sampa, along with five other leaders of CLFs was identified by their SRLM to start a canteen. The canteen has been running successfully for three years now.

They have established a wide customer base including many district level government offices. Sampa also participated in two State SARAS Melas and generated huge sales with her canteen group. During Durga Puja and Diwali they get orders from various sources. Sampa expressed that they are always backed by the SRLM whenever they approach them for support and guidance. Sampa also says, “More than that the group I am working with is very cooperative, understanding and approachable. Coming from different CLFs, we all were initially scared to work in a group but now we have become a family, and we support each other emotionally as well.”

Things were going well for Sampa until her husband’s sudden demise this year. The loss of her husband hit her hard and she took a long time to recover from this trauma. The members of her canteen group were on their toes to support her and made all the attempts to bring her back to her cheerful self. The burden of responsibilities grew for Sampa. She started working harder than ever. With increasing responsibilities Sampa had to leave her position in the CLF and completely dedicate her time to run the canteen, look after her husband’s business, take private tuitions in the evening and run a tailoring unit in free time. “We both had a dream to give our children all the opportunities to grow and prosper in life that our parents could not afford. He is no more but I will make all possible attempts to fulfill those.” Her in-laws, sister and her friends in her canteen group all are helping her in all possible ways. Sampa and her canteen group want to foster their enterprise. Though the team has participated in three State SARAS Mela, this is their first exposure to represent their state on a national level platform. Though she is excited and wanted to explore more such opportunities, it is really difficult for her to come to such a distant place along with her group as her children have to be looked after. During such events when the group is out she usually takes care of the canteen. “The strength of being in such a cooperative is my support and together we can walk a long distance backing each other in our need and in all our vulnerabilities.”





TAKING THE FIRST STEPS!

“Food is something which will never go out of demand, even if you are in a situation of distress you will cook or eat food. There is no option people will stop eating food and therefore getting into the food business is a very nice idea,” says Hina Khan a 33-year-old entrepreneur from Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh.

Being the secretary of SankulSahitya Sangathan CLF she says that it is her first-time experience at India Food Court and she is grateful for the opportunity. She shares her experience and tells that she has got multiple exposures in different sectors such as tailoring, bangle making, etc. which she was able to convert into temporary business opportunities as well. She started a tailoring center of her own by taking a loan amount of Rs. 75,000 from her self help group which she repaid as she was able to run the business successfully. In addition to that, she was also able to train 12 women under her who all also started earning livelihood because of the tailoring skill that they learned. But sadly due to external issues she had to discontinue.

After attending a training in Bhopal on catering and food services she realised that she has an inclination for making new varieties of food


items and feeding it to people. Ironically she never learned how to cook food and it was only after her marriage that she picked it up as her in-laws are food lovers. She says, “Pehle jo chiz-abhi dekha nahi tha aur khaya nahi tha who chiz-khaya aur usse kaise naya pakwaan banayajata hai ye sikha bhi aur jab wapas aake apne ghar me banaya aur sab ko khilaya bhi.”

Owing it to the support that she gets from her family, comprises made by her husband, her son and her in-laws, she says that even though her maternal parents died, her in-laws have motivated her a lot in taking up new things. It is because of their support that she has been able to come till here. The understanding of the food sector, as well as the shared vision & support from the family members, have made her now look at food sector as a livelihood opportunity where she can invest her efforts and energy passionately.

With the experience of supporting women from the community towards livelihood initiatives and reflecting on her first-ever experience from India Food Court, she aspires to go back to Jabalpur with all her experience and learning to start a hotel of her own.

IN THE WORDS OF OUR DIDIS

'शेव' नाम श्री इलिका जति घुर्ग्यावी । अई अमभव
 नवा अहिजे । आङ्गिका इडिग्रा कुट कट नडुन
 दिल्ली २०१९ जनव अहोवव २० अविभव नवा २०
 अविभलिके दोरा इडिग्रा कुट कट अमभव कवीन
 अमत्रि वड्ड जल नमिल । वड्ड नडुन कभा
 अकिलो, वड्डनव नवा व्यवसायलिके वड्ड
 अकिलो अर्जन कविलो । विमोसकै हेफे
 अकिलव अविभग केडिग्राई नाडुविव नोरावो ।
 अमभव कुडुअवमीव अकिलो कर्मकर्तलै
 वड्ड वड्ड प्रगुवाड अणन कविलो । इडिग्रा
 कुट कट दीर्घजीवि इडुंक तावे कअनन कविलो ।

श्री इलिका जति घुर्ग्यावी


ग्रासीज स्वयं सहायता समूह की महिलाओं
 के लिए यह एक बहुत बड़ा संच है। यहाँ
 आकर प्राथमिक शब्दों की महिलाओं को अपनी
 शब्दों के वैयक्तिक खाने की पहचान करवानी
 और लोगों को यह सीजन चखाने का बहुत
 बड़ा और अच्छा मौका मिला।
 और अपने अन्दर छिपी हुई क्षमताओं की
 उभारने का मौका मिला।

धन्यवाद

ലക്ഷ്മി സാധനം കൂട്ടിച്ചേർക്കുന്നതിനും മറ്റും കൂടുതലും
 കോളനിയെ പറ്റി കേൾക്കാനും എല്ലാക്കാർക്കിനും
 പങ്കെടുക്കാനും പാടില്ല. ക്രമം നൽകി കയ്യെത്തിക്കിയിട്ട്
 ഉപയോഗിക്കാനും കഴിയും. ഉൾപ്പെടെ നന്നായി
 നന്നായിട്ടും മറ്റും കേൾക്കാനും കഴിയും. കേൾക്കാനും
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 കേൾക്കാനും കഴിയും. കേൾക്കാനും കഴിയും.

അനന്തൻ
 കോളനം

ఆంధ్రప్రదేశ్ లోని అన్ని జిల్లాలలో
 పలు గ్రామాల పరిశోధనలు. అందులో విశేషం
 'వనశ్రీ' అనే అన్ని జిల్లాల పరిశోధనలలో
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గృహి
 గాంధీ, ఆంధ్ర

ఆంధ్రప్రదేశ్ లోని అన్ని జిల్లాలలో
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मैं हूँ दिल्ली के इंडिया गैड से। अफन समुह के अनाये
 हमच कलेवा ला दिवा बट कारे फुड कोड सा मैला
 अच्छा लगिस वा। मैला सा दुसरा राज्य के बहनी-साई
 मिल के अच्छा लगिस.

वंदना राणी निवासी
 राजगढ़गौड, धनलीसगढ़

आम्ही ही food court मध्ये खोल्याची पहिली
 खोली. पण म विखरारी. ब्यापकी मंत्री होत.
 खोल्याचे होव्यानेके आम्हाला प्रोत्साहन मिळाले.

"जय भारत जय गोवा"
 धन्यवाद

प्रतिक्षा प्रकाश चननकर
 श्री वरद विनायक म.म.ग.

मैं अफसना खान उत्तर प्रदेश लखनऊ से आजीविका इंडिया फूड
कोर्ट में इंडिया गेट पर आया। यहाँ पर अपनी जगह के अलग
अलग पकवानों का फूड स्टाल लगाया जैसे गलावटी कबाब, राही
दुकांडा, कोरमा, पिरयानी को बहुत पसंद किया गया। हमारी सौदा से
जपदा अच्छी सैल हुई और लोगों का उत्साह देखने का मौका
मिला। मैं चाहती हूँ कि समय समय पर हमें राखे प्रोग्राम में
भाग लेने का मौका मिलता रहे।

अफसना खान
उत्तर प्रदेश

मेरा कां राकड़भागी है! मैं उभिता मैरिट ली मैंचर जं
मैं फेहरी फेह सगभ मेले फेह आपकी चमू ली ठेहा
काह आही जं अडे अभी फेहें हेंके उट्टे अडे जाग
मंही ली ठेही चहा रो जं माई फेहें हलगा नी
री माहिर जाडा फेहेंही फेहें हीम यंड हलगा पर
फेहें माई चगुउ हपीआ Reaction भीलगा अडे मैं
छाईली जं नी सिजेरी ठेहा मेरे काह फेहें आहिया
जं मैं छाईली जं फेहें फेहें का है ठेहा आपहा हीम
अडे हयाउिट उे अगही रागी मैं वहीगा ठेहा हूँ हूँ
वे आह !

- Punjab