

CASE STUDY

No. 7

‘Education for girls means economic independence for women’



NAME: Parbati Devi
AGE: 37 Years
EDUCATION: Class X
MUKHIYA: Since 2015
PAST EXPERIENCE: Member of Dulmi Panchayat Samiti (Block Panchayat)

PANCHAYAT: Dulmi
PANCHAYAT SAMITI: Dulmi
DISTRICT: Ramgarh
STATE: Jharkhand

Parbati Devi had been serving the people of her village even before she was involved with the Panchayat. She used to help widows and elderly people with the process of accessing their entitlements. She is seriously concerned by evil social practices such as the dowry system, and cruel acts of superstition that are still practised in her village. She has a deep desire to see all the women in her village economically independent, and every girl avail of higher education, despite hurdles such as long distances to cover or non-availability of nearby colleges.

Parbati Devi is Mukhiya of Dulmi Gram Panchayat which comes under Dulmi Block of Ramgarh District, in Jharkhand. We met her first in front of the Block office, and then we moved to the premises of a nearby semi-government school to conduct the interview. She was accompanied by Mamta Devi, a Mukhiya of another panchayat from Dulmi Block. During the discussion we learnt that Parbati Devi had completed her tenure as a member of the Panchayat Samiti (Dulmi Block) before she became Mukhiya of the Dulmi Gram Panchayat.

Roles and Accomplishments

Parbati Devi has not received any training from the state since her induction as a Mukhiya but her earlier experiences as a member of the Panchayat Samiti and while performing social services personally, has enabled her to perform her roles and duties now. In the last two years, she has constructed 26 toilets, has had ration cards made for several households, constructed drains, ponds and land-leveling work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and with utilisation of the Panchayat's fund. She has also initiated the work of Gram Panchayat Development Planning (GPDP) where she plays a significant role in mobilizing village folk to attend meetings, and monitoring the process of forwarding plans to the Block Office. She informed us that kuccha work is done under the MGNREGS and pucca work with the Panchayat's fund. It is evident that the Panchayat utilizes its fund for the village's development.

Parbati Devi is also well aware of her important role in selecting the beneficiaries of the Prime Minister Awas Yojana (PMAY). She personally visits households to assess their assets to ensure that the right people get the benefit.

Challenges before Parbati Devi

The Anganwadi centre in Dulmi Block has two serious issues, says Parbati Devi. One is the non-maintenance of hygiene and the other is the non-conformity to the planned menu. She brought these issues to the notice of the Sevika of the Anganwadi. She also raised them once at the Deputy Commissioner's office in Ramgarh. The officials of the Women and Child Development department came to visit the Anganwadi centre in response to her complaint but no definite action has been taken yet.

Another issue is related to banking. The nearest bank is at least 7 kilometres away from her Panchayat. She called bank officials to a camp she conducted in the Panchayat where many people got an opportunity to get their bank accounts opened. Such actions of hers indicate her high confidence in her capability, as well as dedication to her people.

Parbati Devi, while involved in the welfare of everyone, is mostly concerned about the status of girls and women. She put the challenges faced by the gender forward to her Panchayat and asked for suggestions as to improving their conditions. Most girls do not attend college as the colleges are situated in either Ramgarh district headquarters (which is more than 30 kilometres away) or other distant places (such as Hazaribagh or Ranchi). They usually marry before they have the benefit of higher education. Therefore, establishment of colleges in nearby areas is a necessity. She also informed us that the dowry system is still prevalent in her society. Better education would help to reduce the cases of dowry demands, as acquiring skills would enable girls to choose their own livelihood. Education can improve one's confidence and give economic independence as well, says Parbati Devi.

She is also struggling to find a source of income-generation for women who stay at home. According to her, the Self-Help Group (SHG) alone cannot take on the economic burden of the women. Therefore, girls and women should develop their own skills to earn an income. She added that she would need external support such as from the state to help these girls and women to provide them such capacities. Parbati Devi aspires that girls get more education to bring parity into society and women have economic independence for the well-being of not only themselves but that of their family.

Another issue she brought up was the absence of a good hospital in a nearby location, for which reason people ended up visiting quacks. There is a primary health centre in existence but, according to her, it does not have good doctors. Parbati Devi is clearly aware of the dangers of non-scientific health treatments and is concerned about people using such services.

Like many Panchayats, her village also faced the issue of non-availability of labour to carry out work under the MGNREGS. Most villagers migrate to other places for work for two reasons: delay in wage release and the low amount of wages. Parbati Devi believes that provision of one Sachiv (Panchayat Secretary) for every Panchayat could address issues of dealing with Panchayat affairs. She cannot do much if the problem stems from the higher level (the state) but she will continue to do what is within her ambit of authority, she added. Given the load of responsibilities of a Sachiv, the Mukhiya ends up having to look after a lot more too, as it is impractical to assume that a single Sachiv to look into all the affairs of four entire Panchayats—as is currently the situation.

Parbati Devi concluded with saying that training in soft skills is not necessary, as there is a Sachiv who has those. Instead, her concern is on effective planning and execution of plans for the betterment of her people.