

CASE STUDY

No. 5

Boldness is what you need, not just higher qualifications



NAME: Silbiya Kerketta
AGE: 35 Years
EDUCATION: Class VII
MUKHIYA: Since 2015
PAST EXPERIENCE: SHG Member since 2004 (also runs a ration shop since 2004)

PANCHAYAT: West Tainsar
PANCHAYAT SAMITI: Kersai
DISTRICT: Simdega
STATE: Jharkhand

Silbiya Kerketta is the Mukhiya of West Tainsar Panchayat (Simdega District in Jharkhand), but it wasn't easy getting there. In as early as 2004, she chose to become an active member of one of the Self-Help Groups (SHG) of West Tainsar. After some time she and another co-member started a ration shop with the help of 15 other SHG members. The bold and focused woman told us that she wanted to work for the community although opportunities were limited. But opportunity did come her way in 2010, when the elections for Panchayats were announced. She summoned up the courage to contest for the post of Ward Member, when she realised that there were no development initiatives being undertaken in her village. Although she lost in that election, that was not the end of her story.

In the next Panchayat election, held in 2015, she aimed higher and contested for the post of Mukhiya. In that year, eight women stood for the elections, most of whom had higher educational qualifications, such as Intermediate and Bachelor degrees. Initially, Silbiya Kerketta was apprehensive about winning, but her persistence in doing as much as she could for the development of her village, won her success.

Winning the election brought some unexpected experiences in the political life of Silbiya Kerketta. Members of a political party asked her for money (Rs 5 lakh) just because she had become a Mukhiya and ran a ration shop. But she did not give in to their unspoken threat, even though people close to her suggested that she pay the money in case any harm was done to her. But she did not give into that either, and instead filed a complaint against the people who'd demanded the money at the office of the Police Superintendent of Simdega. Her complaint was well received and justice was served. The police caught the culprits and punished them. The increased sense of being a Mukhiya strengthened her resolve to fight against wrongdoers, Silbiya Kerketta told us with a smile.

While numbering some of her achievements, Silbiya Kerketta listed the 574 toilets constructed in her Panchayat, of them nearly 100 having been

built under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and rest from a fund called Jalsahiya (she was not clear about the Swachchh Bharat Mission and the incentives under it). Works like the deepening of ponds, dobha nirman, khet maramat and med bandhan, (pond construction, land reclamation and bunding) have also been done under MGNREGS. Silbiya Kerketta said that her role is mainly to monitor such activities, and see that people are paid for their work on them. She also decides how to use the funds to serve the needs of the villagers. She makes her rounds of inspection on a scooter, and does not depend on the Rozgar Sewak service to take her around, Silbiya Kerketta added.



Pond Construction

Silbiya has participated under two trainings at the SIRD (State Institute of Rural Development), Ranchi and several sessions at Vikas Kendra Simdega, since she became a Mukhiya. At Vikas Kendra, the training was on toilet construction and the method deployed for the best results. Whereas at the SIRD, the instructions taught were about government schemes and how to implement them. She admitted an unfortunate occasion when, having been approved and given the funds for toilet construction, she procured the materials as per requirement and distributed them to the ward members to carry out the work. But they did not work as they should have, nor could they protect the materials given them, and the work got hampered. When the funds came again, she did not distribute the work, having learnt from experience, and did the work on her own. Ward members expressed their dissatisfaction at not being given the responsibility, but Silbiya boldly retorted at a Panchayat meeting: 'Jab Mukhiya sab kuch kar rahi hai, to hum log kuch nahi karenge', suggesting that when the villagers saw her handle the job, they decided not to do anything themselves. She added that she wants to work but does not get the required support.

On her functions in the Panchayat, Silbiya Kerketta said that one of them was to send the villagers' requirements to the Block Development Office. Already, she added, the need for 10 hand pumps has been shared with the Block Office as there is lack of a proper source of drinking water in the Panchayat. Two drains and a boundary wall around the Panchayat Bhan have also been constructed in the village with the help of the 14th Finance Commission. She has also passed around 150 Old Age Pensions. Documents related to meetings are properly maintained. GPDP (Gram Panchayat Development Plan) was done at the Gram Sabha meeting where needs were prioritised. The GPDP report has been sent to the District and Block Offices.



Drain Constructed under 14th FC

Silbiya Kerketta said that ward members of Gram Panchayat repeatedly say: 'Hum log signature karenge uske bad aap kijiyege (We will first sign the reports, after which you will)'. To which she replies, 'To hum Adyaksh hai, ki aap log? (So am I the chief here or all of you?)'. At one point of time the BDO had intervened in this matter but the conflict is still on.

Silbiya randomly visits anganwadi centre and checks the meals are properly cooked and if the food distribution is fair. She monitors the attendance of the teachers in school, and warns them against not attending, or being absent without prior notice. She has been able to attend the child vaccination programmes just twice, due to other engagements, but plans to visit them frequently in the future. The positive things that enabled Silbiya Kerketta to work is the training that she received and well as the constant support from the BDO, which is aware, she says, of the good work she does even though she lacks proper education.



Girls going to school on bicycle

Silbiya wants to know more about the MGNREGS (for example, how to send demands, how to maintain master rolls) which are presently being done by the Panchayat Sewak and Rozgar Sewak. She wants to know about processing and procedures related to payments, especially digital payments. Regarding the 14th Finance Commission, she wants to know about the use of funds in appropriate and useful ways.