

Hear me out: Story of Ashaben a vegetable vendor

The clock strikes five and I usually begin my day with praying god that “Bhagwan aaje mara chokrao samu joje ane amaru kaik saru karje”. (Oh god, today kindly look at my children and do some good to us). These are the words of a mother of 4 children and a vegetable vendor Ashaben Vithalbai Patni who at just at the age of 28 is contended with her own life and is only worried about the future of her growing up children. She wants to educate her only daughter – the eldest child of hers so that she does not have to struggle as she did.

Ashaben is a vegetable vendor at Khodiyalnagar near Bapunagar in the city of Ahmedabad. Her family consists of her 4 children 1 daughter and 3 sons and her husband in total 6 members. Her children are going to a municipal school and she finds it difficult to continue their studies as she does not have enough money to get books and other necessities.

The place where Ashaben keeps her vegetable hand cart is near a foot path is over-crowded with other vegetable vendors as more and more people are loosing their jobs and are trying out their hands by taking up vending as work as it does not require any capital or investment. Previously her husband used to go to textile mill and did some labour work which helped and supported her family. Now the mill closed down and he lost work.

For her the struggle in life began very early soon after she was married, her husband was unemployed for few months and did not go for any work. For few days the family strived without food



Photo: Ashaben

Earlier Ashaben and her husband together use to earn Rs. 200-250 daily. The area where she sells vegetables is surrounded by many small scale diamond polishing factories. Thus, workers working in diamond factories while returning home in the evening usually buy vegetables from her which gave her a regular income.

But now due to closing down of diamond polishing factories many workers have migrated to other places, many workers have started doing some other work, many have returned to their native places and few of them have entered into selling vegetables which has made their living very difficult and problematic.

She is sitting at home without any work since 9 months due to competition and crisis and they have kept only 1 hand cart. Together they are now earning only Rs. 100-150 daily out of which she spends Rs. 10/- against conveyance, Rs. 20/- as tea and other expenditure and Rs. 20/- to labourer. Thus, the total net profit which she gets into hand is only between Rs. 70 – 80.

I cannot stop feeding to my family so I have taken loan of Rs.25000/- against security of my ornaments. I don't understand what I shall do to solve the problem. This made me once again go for taking a loan of Rs. 20000/- at 6% rate of interest.

“Mandi ne karne amaro maal pan vahechato nathi” (Due to financial crisis we are unable to sell vegetables) states Ashaben with a grief and worry on her face. Ashaben complains that she has not got any other additional skill and she is also illiterate which has cut off her hands and has restricted her from receiving any other work.

Ashaben is currently undergoing a dual role and stress of a worried mother who wants and dreams for bright future for her children and at the same time wishes a peaceful life for her husband.

Cry from heart: Hansaben a waste picker

“Aavi, Aavi, navi gadi aavi chalo chalo jaldi nahitar badhu vinai jase”. these are the words loudly spoken by Hansaben a woman working as a waste picker at sewage farm dumping site in Ahmedabad informing all present at the sewage farm meaning “Come come the new container has come be quick or everything will be collected”. This is the same general routine followed daily by nearly 200 waste pickers at the dumping site.

Hansaben Keshubhai Solanki lives at Narol village, a remote area in the city of Ahmedaabd and is facing with a double edged sword both extreme poverty and double discrimination - as a woman from a poor family.

Hansaben’s day begins with waste and ends with thoughts and hope how can she collect more waste tomorrow so that she can get more money and feed her 2 small children with full meal at least for some days. She has 2 daughters elder of 5 years and the younger one is of 1.5 years.



Hansaben is 25 years of age and is collecting waste since she was 8 years of age. She accompanied her mother in collecting waste since childhood as the financial condition of her parents was not good. She could not even go to school so does not know how to read and write but she can count the currency notes and understand the figures verbally.

‘Aa kagaal che to ame loko jivvana nahitar kai nahi kari sachie’ (because of this waste paper we are alive or else it would be difficult to survive).

‘Hu to bachpan thij kagal vache moti thai chu’ (I have grown up between papers since my childhood). Still I am with it; there is a prevailing relationship observed between me and paper. I think I will end my life with paper.

Photo : Hansaben

With tears in her eyes and trembling voice Hansaben narrated about a life changing and unforgettable incident in her life before 2 years. If this was not enough one night my husband got a severe attack of *bronchial asthma* and as I could not understand anything what was happening to him I thought I have lost my husband. Instead of taking my

husband to the hospital I started crying, shouting and beating myself which turned my mind blank.

For taking my husband to hospital I have borrowed Rs. 25000/- at 3% rate of interest. Doctors have advised that my husband must take rest and must not involve in any hard work so he is not doing any work.

He was working as a salesman in a small garment shop and earning Rs. 2000/- per month. The income is totally stopped and now the family is solely dependent on my work. In addition every month we have to spend Rs. 200 – 250 for medicines of my husband. I am not able to make a balance between my basic needs and ends.

'Adhuru ma puri aa mandi aavi ne pitha par badha na bhav ghati gaya' (in addition due to financial crises rates of waste at scarp shops has enormously reduced which worsened my problems). I start my work early in the morning at 6.30 am and return home by 5:00 o'clock in the evening. I get tired and not able to take adequate care of my children neither am I able to do any other work for increasing my earnings.

Pretense of Silence: Shantaben a vegetable vendor

“Mari to aakhi jindagi gai, have to ben kaik saru thai to saru, hu to bahuj thaki ane heran thai gai chu” (Many years of my life has passed hoping for some miracle to happen as I am very much tired and suffered a lot). Very nicely spoken by Shantaben a vegetable vendor at the Jamalpur natural market, one of the main and largest market in the city of Ahmedabad. Lots of pain and tenderness seen in her eyes, her body proved about her under nourishment and imbalanced diet, her pale face and dull voice were adding lots and lots about her situation which she was unable to express

Shantaben is a 55 year old woman with 4 children all living separately out of which 2 daughters who are married and 1 son also married with 3 children. The younger son is the only one who helps her in vending vegetables with her and supports the family. Or else no one else is bothered or serious about doing any work sincerely and earning some additional money which can support and improve the living of the family.



Photo: Shantaben busy with her daily work

Shantaben is a native of Karnataka, after marriage nearly before 40 -45 years her husband in search of work migrated to Gujarat and started going to textile mills as a labourer. Slowly the mills started getting closed and her husband started getting less work which made Shantaben also get involved in earning. *“Nana nana balko ne sachavva mate kaik kaam to karvu pade ne etle hu ghanu badhu biju kaam karti hati”* (To take care of my small kids I have to do some work so I did many small work) I used to go to grind spices, go as labourer for masonry work and do some other household work to feed my children.

She regrets that she was not able to send her children to school and today she makes herself responsible for their down trodden and lives full of struggle. She forgets her pain which she is undergoing since more than 35 years. Showing grey hair on her head she says selling vegetables through out the day just by drinking 2-3 cups of tea and returning back home at 8.00 pm in the evening cooking an only meal of the day and feeding the family is a normal routine for Shantaben.

Before November 2008, I use to earn Rs. 150 – 170 daily and now as the number of vegetable vendors has increased which has created a great chaos in the existing market and reduction in my earnings.

As the purchasing power of people is going down constantly, so people are buying lesser quantity of vegetables and 2 – 3 days they do not at all purchase vegetables which affected my stomach and serving of food in the plates at home. My regular customers have also started buying less because of high prices of vegetables and which are unaffordable and even they do not have money. At present I am able to earn only Rs. 100/- daily by great difficulty makes my family to eat at least one meal a day.

The sense of responsibility and faith in almighty God lead Shantaben to stand firm in times of severest hardships. She is still waiting for the situation to improve and the time when she can relax and feed her family enough food.

Story of Struggles and Hope: Story of Tasleembanu a readymade garment worker

Markets are flooded with colourful, different new patterns of ready made garments. We do not know the hands working behind it. The hands that work behind stitching of these beautiful garments have lots of pain in it. Yes, the story of Tasleem Saabir Hussain Nagori exactly describes the hard work, the silent cries and snobs of her children when they are forced to sleep with less food in the stomach.



Photo: Tasleembanu with her youngest son

Life has been a continuous struggle for Tsleembanu living in poverty, not knowing where her next meal would be coming from, Tasleem faced a bleak future. Tasleembanu lives in Shahpur Nagoriwad in the city of Ahmedabad with her 3 children. Tasleembanu struggles to meet her daily needs, educate children, and cook good food for her children and at the same time look after the health of the family. The dragon of financial crisis has affected many self employed people. No money no food for any one

I was studying in 8th standard and since then I have started helping my mother in stitching clothes, me and my mother both stitched clothes for neighborhood people up to mid night 3 pm for sustaining the basic necessities of our family. The struggle for meeting the daily needs of the family made the bond between us stronger.

Her husband drives an auto rickshaw which Tasleembanu has borrowed a loan on her name and she is paying interest on it. Her husband never hands over any earnings and goes for work whenever he feels like and rarely gives money to her for household

expenditure. Tasleembanu is not allowed to move out of the house for any work which makes her tensed and more worried about future of her children.

She has borrowed more than Rs. 50000/- at 10% rate of interest in last 3 months and is unable to pay even the interest regularly resulting into the mounting up of interest. As she was unable to pay school fees for her daughter she was not allowed to enter into the school. From borrowed money she paid the fees and continued her daughter's education.

Since November 2008, most horrible time is going on in Tasleembanu's life as her husband has gone away and lives with his parents and is least bothered about taking care of her or children. He has taken away all her ornaments and frequently comes to only take money or for any need. The work available in the market is less and is able to get work only for 2 days in a week thus she is left without work for more than 20 days in a month. To feed her children Tasleembanu started working in nearby 2-3 houses washing clothes and cleaning. But as usual her husband scolded her ordered her to stop going out and working and do the work which can be done by staying at home.

Tasleembanu has to go and meet contractors and employers in different areas in getting the raw material for stitching. She works through out the day and she makes it possible by any means to earn atleast Rs. 40 – 50 which can feed her family. But due to less work available she is able to earn only Rs. 40/- per day which is not sufficient for her family in this time when the prices of all the necessities are shooting high.

Even though I work up till late nights, I am unable to meet two ends. Day by day the situation is turning worst and the income is also reducing as there is no work available with the contractors in the market. Thank god I get help and support from my mother in all respects in terms of economical, social and moral which gives me a ray of hope and strength to live life or else I am alone in this world.

Cry from the heart: Sultanabanu acquiring livelihood through stitching

Sultanabanu Iqbalbhai Sipai , a widow at the age of 37 and mother of 3 children – 1 son and 2 daughters looks over matured to her age. Wants to rush back to work which can make her earn some few more ruppes by which she can get some good food for her children. She lives at Sakra Gachi ni chali in gomtipur area in Ahmedabad. She lives back her past days and strongly tells that she wants to educate her son and make her a saheb (officer) and make her daughters life easy.

'Mere sauhar dedh saal pehle mar gaye'(I lost my husband before 1^{1/2} years). His death was an unexpected and accidental death he fell down without any specific reason and got brain hemorrhage and expired on the spot.

As usual I was ill- treated by my inlaws and I was always passing my each day living under pressure and totally dependant upon either my husband or my in-laws.



After death of my husband I am not able to look after my children properly I do not have any cash. I live in Ahmedabad in a house for which rent is Rs. 800/- per month and I am suppose to spend Rs. 100-150 for electricity bill. Education of my children is also adversely affected and they are transferred to a Municipal Corporation School and I am unable to arrange for school uniform, books and other necessary requirements.

And daily there arises a list of items which are required by the children while going to attend school. I cannot spare money to buy the things. Thus, I am upset and worried about how to make arrangement for all these requirements.

With a minor earning of only Rs. 50 – 60, and no one to support I face lot of troubles arranging for food, clothes and other requirements. Simply getting kerosene also is difficult for which I pay high prices of Rs. 30 per liter. Many times I do not have enough money for buying kerosene so I have to either borrow money or else I request and get it on credit. But for how long people I will buy things on credit.

‘Hu to allah ne dua karu chu ke jaldi mara chokra ne moto kari de ane kaame lagadi de jethi mane ane mari dikario ne sachve’ (I pray to god to quickly make my son mature and grow and make him work so he will start looking after me and my daughters).

I can stitch simple clothes like petticoats, frocks, covers so I am make sure and possibly do what ever work I get.

Due to financial crisis I am not getting enough work so I also do work of colouring kite strings, made rakhees, etc. I am able to earn around Rs. 50-60 daily. But I think to meet with the basic requirements at least Rs. 100 are required which I know for many days in the month I am not able to earn. I have borrowed Rs. 10000 at 5% interest rate from one of my relatives which has sustained my family in these crucial and difficult days.

I feel very sorry and helpless as I am not able to serve 2 meals a day to my children and at that moment I miss my husband and think about many more single mothers like be raising children one handedly without anyone’s support.