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DISCOVERING THE SWEETNESS OF A CHIKOO ORCHARD



YALLAVVA (Karnataka)

Yallavva Durgappa Bajententhri managed to defy society's orthodox thinking that the life of a widow is over and of no use. She changed life not just for her family but also inspired other women in her village.

Yallavva is a resident of Kaladagi, a tiny rural village in Bagalkot district of Karnataka. Widowed in her mid-40s, she had no choice but to take on the role of breadwinner – a financial role reserved mainly for men in her patriarchal Bajantri community. She began knitting handicrafts and selling broomsticks to support daily expenses and her son's education. They barely made ends meet.

Her formal introduction to the idea of micro-entrepreneurship turned towards financial sustainability into a giant leap. She was invited for the session by women cadres in her village who had been trained by Future Greens Samsthe under the Disha project – an initiative by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). These women are usually members of the existing self-help groups, who are eager to foster development within their villages. They provide relevant knowledge required to start their own business and support the use of available resources through Future Greens Samsthe and Disha.

The orientation taught her the basics of local lucrative and popular businesses, marketing strategies, negotiation skills, and ways to increase her income.

Intrigued, she enrolled for a 3-day workshop on seeding, cultivation of orchards, and harvesting techniques held at the University of Horticultural Sciences, Bagalkot.

Armed with some theory, the question was where to begin? The cadres and Future Greens were there to support her, helping her take a loan of ₹50,000 from ICICI bank. She added the ₹20,000 from her savings and invested in leasing out a Chikoo orchard in her village.

Harvest of just half the produce yielded ₹50,000 that Yallavva invested in the additional lease of a tamarind orchard. Her income has now more than doubled. Additionally, it's been socially empowering. "I now own the orchards where my parents worked as labourers," Yallavva says proudly. She now plans to set up a juice centre along with ten other women in her village.

Her story is becoming more an inspiration and less of an exception in Kaladagi! An increasing number of women are breaking traditional barriers and turning to entrepreneurship to support their families.