



Keralashree Consultancy

When the Kudumbashree officials saw the girl with a shabby dress and sickly physique who came to manage the Keralashree Consultancy, they wondered whether she would be able to do it. And that girl, Smitha, proved the officials wrong and later became 'Kudumbashree Smitha' who would shine the light of hope in the lives of many other women. The story of Keralashree Consultancy is the story of an amazing woman who made a place for herself in this world.

Smitha was a happy go lucky girl like any other teenager of her age until a tragedy struck her family. When she was in college, fate intervened in her family's happiness in the form of cancer. Her father expired and after gaining a degree and no job, Smitha, along with her mother and younger brother found it difficult to keep both ends meet. During those days, seeing the plight of her family, the then CDS Chairperson of Udayamperoor asked her to attend an interview at Thiruvananthapuram. The project was run together by Kudumbashree Mission, C-DIT and Reliance. The girl and her mother went to Thiruvananthapuram with some borrowed money. When she went to Reliance office, Smitha felt herself like Alice who went to the wonderland. She felt that she made a huge mistake. After the interview, she was one of the fourteen girls selected for the job. "That job was for 6 months. The salary was Rs 5000 per month. It felt it like Rs. 50,000 at that time", reminisced Smitha.

After 6 months, the contract ended and she started doing odd jobs. That's when her CDS

Chairperson came with the news. Kudumbashree had then decided to start a consultancy service as an Micro Enterprise for Kudumbashree women and their dependents. The aim was to get the women or their dependents a job at Government or quasi-Government departments – A



virtual employment exchange. Smitha jumped at the opportunity and at the interview one of the official casted doubt on her ability to manage the Consultancy. And that doubt changed her life forever.

Keralashree Consultancy was started in 2006. At present there are 5 employees including Smitha. They manage everything from providing jobs to needed women and managing tatkal counter of Railways. They manage parking area of the Ernakulam District Collectorate. Apart from this they also manage the AC waiting halls and parking spaces in railway stations in Ernakulam. They provide labour for housekeeping, cleaning, data entry, loading and unloading works, facilitation counters etc. They have provided labour to RBI, Spices Board, Shipyard, Water Authority, District Tourism Promotion Council, KBPS, KELTRON, Kalamassery Cancer Centre etc. and the list goes on. Their main income is from the service charge from these organizations.

Reasons for your Success?

Support from Kudumbashree is what made us who we are today. We got support from the District Collectorate, Railway officials, other Government officials and the public. The co-operation between our group members is also very evident. Issues within our groups are resolved immediately and we consider ourselves as a family. But the main reason for our success is that we never forget our past. That's what our mentors at Kudumbashree always tell us. We are also very patient with our customers. Initially the customers were very rude to us. But our patience helped us win over them.

Challenges faced?

It was difficult for our unit to initially get the jobs. The Kudumbashree Mission and the Collectorate got the jobs for us. When the Railways gave us the ticket counter, we faced our worst nightmare – angry, demanding customers! We had no idea about the job. We didn't even get training. We just got the computer and printers from Railways and one day we opened the counter and started the work. Initially, we failed miserably. We had to call Railways every now and then to clear our doubts. We really tested the patience of some customers. They yelled at us. We were reduced to tears sometimes. But we never talked back. We bore it all in silence. Seeing our plight, customers started empathizing with us. And now we can singlehandedly manage everything, even altercations between customers. Initially the ticket counter was handled by a private person and we also faced the problems created by that person. Now our ticket counter was first in turnover according to the Railways.

Now the major challenge faced by the Consultancy is regarding organizing the account books. We have sought the help of two erstwhile CDS accountants and appointed them. We also have the challenge of calculating GST. The Tax officials scare us. I hope everything will be OK.

Turning point in business?

Though in the initial years, we struggled, the turning point in our business happened in 2013. It was in the same year that we got the railway ticket counter. The Ernakulam Collector at the period was also very sympathetic to the us. He gave us the cleaning job at the District Collectorate and was instrumental in getting us the railway ticket counter job. We also got cleaning jobs at DTPC at around the time. The railway ticket counter later led to Railway parking and AC waiting Hall. And thereafter we had no dearth of jobs.

Future Plans?

We have big dreams. We want to manage parking in airport and we want our women to do the odd jobs at Info park. We want the railway cleaning jobs. We want our women to do house-keeping and cleaning jobs in all organizations. We want our turnover to increase. We want to give our women PF and ESI. But most of all we want to become a renowned big company.

Most happy moment?

We are what we are because of this organization. We are able to educate our children and meet both ends of our life now. We are able to earn. This is my happiest moment. Everyone has the same story to tell. We all come with our baggage of burden. We are happy that through us more and more women can stand on their own legs.

But my happiest moment was the recognition we got at the Neetham Gender Talk Show at Thiruvananthapuram, the city which had always been a nightmare for me. The city invoked painful memories of my father's illness which made my family destitute. Getting a recognition and chance to share my story in the same city was an unfathomable experience.

Message to Aspiring women?

"Our message is that you have to overcome your obstacles. Initially no one may help you. But once you prove that you can strive hard, the society and the world which shunned you once will stand by you and help you. All you need is the willingness to work hard. Success will be yours." – Smitha and Praseela.

The turnover of Keralashree Consultancy is Rs 6 crores during 2017-18. At present they provide jobs to 750 women. They have received recognition in the Neetham Campaign conducted by Kudumbashree. They were selected as the best Micro Enterprise Unit in Ernakulam District by the State Mission of Kudumbashree during the year 2017-18.

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