



*"Mein bhi ek gareeb parivaar se hu, ek gareeb parivar ki takleef kya hoti hai, yeh mein acchi taraf janti hoon"*  
(I too come from a poor family, I know the hardships of poor families)

# MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

## A STORY OF DILIGENCE FROM ALLEPPEY

It is important for men to understand why a female wants to step out of her home and work – Suma S Dharan

"When I work in the field now, the poverty and vulnerability of people reminds me of my childhood," recollects Suma S Dharan. Having worked across many Indian states, she is acutely aware of her roots and is unafraid to expand her horizons.

Early years of marriage were extremely challenging for Suma. Her husband's meagre earnings were insufficient to run the family. To make ends meet, she used to work day and night. Suma describes this phase of her life as the most challenging and painful.

Suma joined an 'Ayalkoottam', a local Self-Help Group (SHG) in her village in the year 1996. Subsequently, she worked her way up to become the Chairperson of the Area Development Society (ADS). In the year 2014, Suma was posted as a Mentor in the state of Maharashtra. As there was no one to take care of her children at home, Suma convinced her elder daughter to take care of the family. "I pushed myself hard and decided to leave," recollects an emotional Suma.

Suma had worked in many states including Maharashtra, Sikkim, Goa, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. Her initial years in the field (in Maharashtra) shaped her as a strong and independent woman. She succeeded to learn and communicate in Marathi. She managed to mobilize women to become active participants in SHG activities and the village welfare programs. She recollects, "It is important for men to understand why a female wants to step out of her home and work. They (men) should know more about our work." While working in the villages, Suma would often talk to men to create awareness around the idea of women empowerment. She also encouraged men to be part of the SHG meetings. She proudly says, "Slowly their tendency has changed and they have become sensitive towards the idea of women coming out of their homes to work."

Suma began working in Mizoram in the year 2018. She visited each and every household in the villages to invite women for the SHG meetings. Women were busy working during the day and hence had to mentor the meetings during night. She recollects, "Women felt that if I have come all alone from Kerala to their village to work, it is important they turn up for the meetings and listen to what I had to say." Owing to the consistent efforts of Suma, women in Mizoram now are far more aware of their rights and entitlements and are actively working towards achieving them.

Suma says, "Being a Mentor I feel we should also do things that benefit the village community. For instance, I have sponsored an orphan child's education in Jharkhand. Apart from sponsoring the education of such children, I also make it a point to educate the school staff and teachers to be sensitive and attentive towards children coming from the underprivileged sections of society. I am grateful that Kudumbashree has allowed me to serve the communities in ways that I can."

Today Suma is proud that her work allowed her to become educated and aware of her surroundings. It has also helped groom her personality. She recollects, "Back in Kerala, people are obsessed with gold. If we have to attend any kind of gathering, we would dress up in gaudy gold ornaments. However, after working across the country and having met women from various backgrounds, I have realised that it is not gold ornaments that make a woman look beautiful, but the confidence to be comfortable in her skin that makes her beautiful. I must confess my taste and habits back then were gaudy," she giggles.

Suma's children are now educated and well settled. For her, joining the Mentoring programme of Kudumbashree National Resource Organisation (NRO) is the best decision she has ever made.



**Suma S Dharan**  
Mentor Resource Person  
Serchhip Block  
Serchhip District  
Mizoram

