

From fishing to driving

A case study of two Safa Tempo drivers

compiled by Suman Wagley

Franchising SKILL (F-Skill) Community Based Employment and Training Programme Ekanta Kuna, Lalitpur, Phone: 5548621, Fax: 5555301, email: fskill@helvetas.org.np

Originally from the remote Beltar VDC of Udayapur district, Ranju and Gayatri Majhi migrated to Kathmandu district ten years ago with their families in search of better opportunities.

Theirs is a story like countless others these days. Everywhere one can find people who have left their families and homes in their villages hoping to find a better life in the city. One can find youth who have turned to often violent means in frustration being unable to fend for themselves. What sets these two women apart from all the rest is the fact that they have actually managed to build a better life for themselves and their families.

Majhis(1), the indigenous group to which these two women belong, have long been earning a livelihood by fishing in the Sunkoshi river in Eastern Nepal. Whatever is not consumed is sold to buy clothes and other necessities. Their straw houses



are constructed along the banks of the river. With the escalation of violence in the country, most Majhis in the area have been displaced.

Furthermore, pollution of the river has made fishing scarce. Increasingly, most Majhis have had to look for other sources for their livelihood. In recent years, most have turned to other occupations for their livelihood; Ranju's husband is a carpenter and Gayatri's husband works as a mason.

When both women were referred to the Franchising Skill Office, they had been living in Kathmandu for over eight years during which time they had tried their hands at all sorts of work. According to Ranju, they started with working on pashmina shawls to making stone effigies. Their earning during this time was

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Ranju and Gayatri Majhi

around Rs. 80.00 per day when there was work. In early 2004, both women participated in two month driving training implemented by F-Skill franchisee Mahima Motor Driving Centre along with twenty other participants belonging to Indigenous Janajati groups.

After completion of training, both started driving the same Safa Tempo(2) along the Lagankhel-Baneshwar route. In the initial months, both took turns in driving the same vehicle. Finally after some months having convinced the owners that they could indeed hold their own while driving, both received separate vehicles.

(1) Majhi meaning fisherman. Majhis are one of the 61 Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal.

(2) Electric three wheeler vehicle

The job is not easy. One has to start at 6:00 am in the morning to complete at least 8 trips a day but both have managed to earn about Rs.5,000.00 per month. Tempo drivers also have to shout out loud to attract passengers and occasionally they run into trouble with the traffic police for parking in the wrong place. In addition, they also have to argue with difficult passengers who think they can get away by paying less fare to women drivers.

"After seeing what we have achieved, our friends often ask us where we received the free training. We are quick to tell them about the F-Skill programme."

Ranju Majhi



"In this job, one cannot sit by meekly while other people take advantage of you" states Gayatri, "you also have to be able to argue with people if you are right".

When asked about what their children do while they are at work, both replied that the children go to the same school and after returning from school, they cook and eat by themselves. The older children take care of the younger ones. Ranju has 4 children (ages 16, 12, 10 and 8) while Gayatri has three (ages 14, 12 and 10). Being able to send all their children to school and to provide for the children for the two women is their greatest achievement. Today Ranju and Gayatri are completely different people from the two shy women who came into the F-Skill office nearly a year ago. They are proud of what they have achieved in a short time. According to them, if they had not been lucky enough to be referred to the F-Skill programme they would still be working the few odd jobs that came their way relying on their husbands' meager pay (*semi-skilled carpenters and masons earn around Rs. 4,000.00 per month*). According to them, other women have also asked them where they got the opportunity to attend such a free training. They have referred some of their friends and relatives to the training.

These two women are an example not only for their own community but for women throughout the country. Though illiterate, (both can hardly sign their own name) they chose to make a difference by themselves. When traveling by Safa Tempo along the Baneshwar- Lagankhel route, there is hardly any driver that does not recognize the two. For two women that traveled the distance from Udayapur to Kathmandu with nothing but the clothes on their backs, this is a big achievement.

What takes a year for a man to do takes a moment for a woman.