

Women achievers do Haryana proud

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Bhumika Girdhar

Rajbir Deswal

Thank God, one doesn't have to stay disappointed any longer while trying to look around for women achievers in Haryana, who not only made the grade in life, but also made such enviable careers for themselves that one would not only be proud of them,

but would also want one's daughters to emulate, and follow them.

This was not the case until recent past, when there were very few women and girls who excelled themselves to the extent of becoming national and international icons, breaking free from the traditional mould a Haryanvi woman has historically been cast

in, despite her education. The present-day scenario paints the picture of women and girls of Haryana pursuing their careers post-education, which was not the case earlier, when girls, at the most, studied to find a match for themselves.

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FOLLOWED HER HEART

Hers was not a conscious effort to become what she is today but Bhumika Girdhar just followed her heart despite heavy odds to realise her goal of becoming 'someone who could bring about a change'. In her case, the choice fell on the professions of an actor and a director of films and documentaries, breaking yet another male bastion and closely following in the footsteps of the likes of Ekta Kapoor, who Bhumika thinks, has 'changed the face of Indian tele-series insofar as their content and presentation is concerned, although having her own share of controversies.'

Having studied Botany and coming from the semi-arid zone on the Haryana-Rajasthan-Punjab border, Ratia in Fatehabad district to be precise, one would really need to have conviction and courage to successfully ride the waves of resistance when the society around is generally biased against women making it to the fields held



Deepa Malik

women protagonists. Women who remained embroiled in turmoils and tribulations of various kinds but who kept up a brave front until they were either vindicated or won hands down, demonstrating to the society at large that 'Yes, if you follow your heart, you will have your way!'

Arujna Awardee Deepa Malik's success story is no ordinarily feted tale. One cannot talk about her without having a mixed sense of pride, bravery consistency, hope, commitment and conviction. She has been braving life with total paralysis below chest and three

spinal tumor surgeries (183 stitches between shoulder blades) for the past 13 years. Wife of a retired Cavalier Colonel and mother of two adult daughters, she is an international sportsperson and medalist, first paraplegic Indian woman biker, swimmer and a car rallyist with a difference, and first sportswoman to represent the country at international level in her category of disability (F-53).

Deepa received Arujna Award on

August 29, 2012 from the President of India. She began her sports career at the age of 36 and went on to become the oldest and most severely disabled athlete of the country ever to receive this award at 42 years of age. Deepa conducts motivational workshops and delivers lectures. Her statement, 'I wasn't born a handicapped' is as enabling as her conviction and forte are.

Saina Nehwal the Olympian, was born at Hisar to Dr Harvir Singh, senior scientist of Entomology at CCS

HAU Hisar, and Mrs Usha Rani, a graduate from Govt Degree College for Women. Saina stayed for

eight-and-a-half years at Hisar (1990 to 1996) starting her formal education from the District Child Welfare Centre, and then at campus school from LKG to fourth standard.

In 1996, her father shifted to the ICAR in Hyderabad, and the family joined him there. She has all through remained a bright student and an indulgent and keen sportsperson since her childhood. She won medals in the annual sports meet at campus school

International Women's Day falls on March 8

traditionally by their male counterparts. Bhumika believes that no creativity is worth its value unless it pays back the people it gets evolved of. She realised early in life the potential media has to mould the minds. She began with anchoring travel features on various channels, including Zee, and then she moved on to making her own documentaries and undertaking projects of various kinds.

All these have the positive side of development and research, contributing immensely to the building up of a society that is all encompassing and all accommodating. Bhumika laments the fact that women-centric issues remained elusive to the film producers and other serious media. Presently, she is on with a project—Disha—which will feature famous



Saina Nehwal



Shena Aggarwal

in Hisar too.

She owes her gratitude to the state of Haryana in clear terms, saying, "I am highly grateful to the Chief Minister, Mr Bhupinder Singh Hoodaji, for his generosity and sportsmanship. The Government of Haryana honoured me time and again by organising public functions in Bhiwani, Sonapat, Rai and at Gohana after I won a bronze medal in the shuttle badminton in London 2012 Olympics. I am helped so generously that there is no comparison to that in the sports history in India."

ENCOURAGING GIRLS IN SPORTS

"I know that girl to boys ratio in Haryana is alarming but there is a big factor that after my win in badminton, Geeta Phogat in wrestling, Kharab sisters in hockey, Krishna in shot put, that parents of girls have started looking at the entire scenario with hope and commitment. Parents are encouraging their kids irrespective of the gender, to join sports besides education," Saina, the Olympian winner of bronze, says in an email sent to *Haryana Review*.

She further acknowledges, "This has happened because of the encouragement from the Haryana Government. I would urge upon all parents to show their utmost love to kids who are the future of India. There are so many Saina's in Haryana who are

looking for encouragement. We are lucky that five out of six Olympians had their roots in Haryana", she said.

Shena Aggarwal, the topper of the All India Civil Services in 2011, comes from Yamunanagar. Having passed her Matriculation from Yamunanagar, she moved to Nabha for her Plus-2. She did her MBBS from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, but she says, "Civil service always remained at the back of my mind. It was just consistent hard work of one year that put me on the path of achieving my long cherished

goal of being an IAS officer."

When asked if she eyed the top position in the examinations, she smiled and said, "No, it came as a surprise to me." She gives the entire credit of her success to her parents and their incessant support to her in her ventures, be it pursuing medical science or competing for the country's most difficult, arduous and prestigious examination.

CONSTANT EFFORT

Shena says she did hard work but she wasn't madly pursuing her goal. It wasn't an obsession but constant effort for her. Although coming from an atmosphere typical of a small town, that too in a tradition-bound state, she encountered no handicaps in achieving what she is proudly acclaimed for today.

Harjinder Kaur's success story may seem like one scripted straight from a Bollywood flick, but it is the result of her sheer hard work, perseverance and determination. Born and brought up in Jind with her schooling in Hindi medium, it is very unconventional and enviable to be at the position she is today. After graduating in computer science from Delhi University and gaining corporate experience, she decided to be an entrepreneur, and set up her own IT company, started with the help of



Harjinder Kaur



Parul Kush Jain

bank loans etc. It was her decision to swim against the current since her near and dear ones advised her to pursue her job and not float an independent company which might succeed or might not. She stuck to her decision.

No wonder now she is the CEO of Comvision, a Gurgaon-based IT company, which provides corporate training as well. Women who bring about social change are the most courageous of them all, for it requires guts to take on a hostile system that wouldn't let you breathe easy if you try not to tow, and not to conform to the obsolete and redundant mores and manners. In a state with highly skewed sex ratio, where birth of a girl child is seen as a curse, it was very heartening to know that a poor family of Raj Kumar and Sarla from Sirsa celebrated the birth of their fourth girl child with 'Kuan Poojan', a social custom traditionally feted on the birth of a male child.

PARUL'S SUCCESS STORY

Parul Kush Jain comes from the mythological town of Safidon. Hers is a family of agriculturists with their land situated in village Anta. Parul's grandfather was into farming while her parents taught. A girl you can meet anywhere in the heartland is what Parul's simple persona demonstrates in ample earthy terms. That she commuted from Safidon to Panipat Thermal DAV School until her Plus-2, and thereafter having done her M Sc in Botany to ultimately make it to the Indian Police Service in the second attempt, is a success story any other ambitious girl would like to emulate to make the grade in life.

Given to suave manners, Parul likes 'everything about Haryanvis.' Also, she finds that 'Haryanvis have a typical bonding outside the state and come naturally to jell with one another—a typical country trait!'

Miss India Kanishtha Dhankhar, who represented the country at the Miss World contest, comes from Kasni village in Jhajjar district. Her father is a naval officer who, despite staying in Mumbai, kept affording his daughter the best education and made her visit their native place so that she



Kanishtha Dhankhar

stayed clung to her moorings and values. No wonder then that the grand-daughter of Chawli Devi, the Sarpanch of Kasni, had the potential to lead and show the way to others. Opting for a career in modeling now meets with enough approval in the tradition-bound milieu of the state which is showing signs of a definite evolution.

SCALING HEIGHTS

Mamta Sodha of Kaithal who comes from a very humble background had not only the dreams but also the guts to defeat the unassailable heights of Mount Everest. Before she attained her feat in 2010, she had been a handball player of repute. Mamta holds a Master's degree in Physical Education. Under the state's policy to promote sports and sportspersons and recognise her talent, Mamta has been appointed Deputy Superintendent of Police.

Meghna and Mimansa Malik, the two sisters from Sonapat, have excelled and outshone all other local girls in the field of media, anchoring, and acting. Meghna, an all-rounder during her student days, preferred the creative field of acting to academics though she remained a university topper. An alumni of National School of



Mamta Sodha

**Mimansa Malik**

Drama, she pursued her career in Mumbai, and acted in many serials and films. She is a well-known face of the Indian television, famous for playing 'Amma ji' in daily soap 'Na Aana Is Des Meri Lado'.

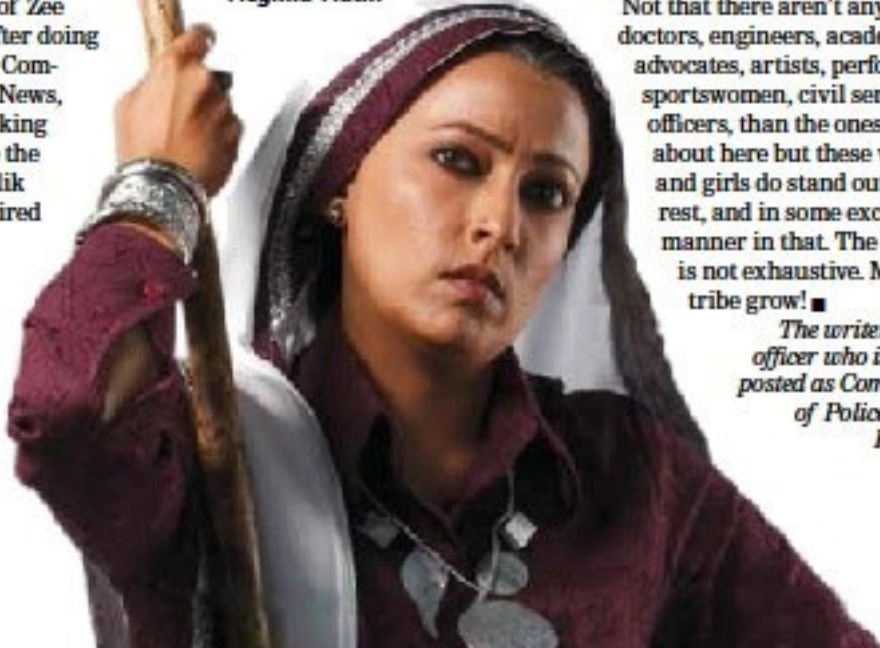
PASSION FOR ACTING

It was her passion which made her follow her heart to an offbeat profession of acting usually not taken up by Haryanvis. Her younger sister Mimansa too has an exceptional side to her career. She is the face of Zee News for the last 10 years. After doing her post-graduation in Mass Communications, she joined Zee News, and since then there's no looking back for her. Both sisters are the proud progeny of Dr R S Malik and Dr Kamlesh Malik, a retired principal.

Sonika Tanwar did her B.Tech. from Bhiwani and opted for an SSB which was held at Dehradun in 2009. Having been selected, there was no looking back for her, and she says she is most satisfied with what she has achieved in life. Working with male

officers in the Air Force, she doesn't feel out of place. "It's not a man or a woman that is there in a uniform, it is an officer wearing those ranks and responsibilities", she says.

"Working to promote the interests of an MNC or daylong dribbling of fingers on the keyboard of a computer never appealed to me as did the pride of having epaulets on the shoulders in a smart uniform," said Sonika

Meghna Malik

when asked about the career she chose for herself, now being a Flight Lieutenant in the Indian Air Force.

Coming from Bapora in Bhiwani, the village also of the former Chief of Army Staff General V K Singh, Sonika sounds confident of her moorings and upbringing in the family of an Army Junior Commissioned Officer though she laments the fact that the dyed-in-the-wool rural society did not like a girl breaking free from her mantle she was traditionally and dutifully supposed to flaunt.

"If I would be indisposed, people around suggested I should not be taken to a doctor, for I being a girl, that too a second one in the family, could be dispensed with", she recalls with pain. But she says that all the flak, even over her opting for an unusual career for a girl, was thankfully not conveyed directly to her but through her mother.

LANDMARK ACHIEVEMENT

In another landmark achievement, an initiative was taken by the women of village Bibipur in Jind District who organised a khap mahapanchayat to curb the menace of female foeticide. Recently, a distinctively remarkable incident took place in Sirsa. Here, a bride went with her baraat to the bridegroom's place and brought him to her parental house after the wedding. The whole event was cogitated to call for a change in the age-old mind-set to end the gender inequality.

Not that there aren't any more doctors, engineers, academicians, advocates, artists, performers, sportswomen, civil services officers, than the ones I talked about here but these women and girls do stand out of the rest, and in some exclusive manner in that. The list here is not exhaustive. May their tribe grow! ■

The writer is an IPS officer who is presently posted as Commissioner of Police, Ambala-Panchkula