

## Dashing Fulmabai

Nestling in the Melghat in Amravati Dist is Jamunnala village. And from this village, starting her life as a destitute laborer on irrigation projects, roads and farms, Fulmabai today represents the Jambhli Grampanchayat in Jamunnala. A member of a Korku tribe, Fulmabai is the first woman Sarpanch in the history of the village.



Fulmabai Dayaram Belsare is considered the pioneer of the micro credit in the village. She also has a major contribution in forming the self help groups in other villages viz. Kamapur, Jambhli, Bela, Slona and Tetu. Fulmabai had keen interest in politics her maternal uncle and aunt were active in politics.

She married Dayaram Belsare at the age of 16 and begot four children. Her Father-in-Law was once the Panchayat member and hence her entry in the politics was uneventful. Fulmabai started her political career in her villager by forming 'Ambabai Bachat Gar all women Self Help Group'. After about a year its functioning, she contacted Dist. Rural Development Agency and borrowed Rs. 10000 under their scheme. The group went in the sale of Mahua which fetched them double the profit. She immediately repaid the loan. Their promptness encouraged DRDA to train the group members in making fennel, wax candles and leaf plates. The group members had more inclination for catering business and so they gradually settled into this business. Whenever there is any govt. function in Melghat today, the catering contract is always awarded to this group.

With Fulmabai's initiative, there are three more self help groups in the town today. She also organized women in the neighbouring villages through the self help groups. She went about forming twenty bank officers also got acquainted with her. She easily conversed in Hindi and therefore for any problem in the bank people would insist that she should accompany them. All those women who were connected with SHGs decided in 2004 that she should contest the Panchayat elections. Women from the village Jambhali also supported her and she easily won the elections. Initially, she was nominated as Vice Sarpanch. But within a year, the Sarpanch had to be removed from the post. Fulmabai replaced the Sarpanch with a unanimous agreement.

She took up many pending works in the Panchayat as soon as she was nominated Sarpanch. The roads were concretized and the sewage gutters were constructed. Kamapur village was facing grave water scarcity. She collected representations from the villagers and got a borewell dug. She relentlessly pursued with the Zilla Parishad for construction of the water tank. Even in Kamapur, she initiated the road concretization work. She ensured that the poor needy widows and families below the poverty line in Jamunnala, Kamapur, Jambhli and Bori villages were allotted houses. For this purpose she

deliberated on the issue in the Panchayat and selected genuine cases for allotment with unanimous approval.

Fulmabai provides information on the government programmes and schemes in the SHG meetings. And therefore, it becomes easy for her to bring the issue before the panchayat meeting. She insisted that the construction work should first be provided to the labourers and masons in the village. She also made it a point to avoid the contractor and provide the work to the local people first. This proved to have dual benefits viz. the public work was now being done with the people's participation and it created employment opportunities for the people. As Chairman of the Education committee of the Zilla Parishad, Fulmabai brought about many changes in the education system with the help of the Headmaster of the school. The funds available for the children and that helped create a sense of belonging for the students.

She was also keenly watching the nearby health centre Anganwadi. She was informed that the woman who is required to cook Khichdi for the children is misappropriating part of it everyday. Acting on the information, Fulmabai caught that woman red handed and made her accompany to the panchayat Samiti. But before she could proceed, two three persons supporting the corrupt lady came on the bus stop and severely beat her up. She fell unconscious and had to be taken to the hospital at Chikhaldara. When she revived she went to the Police station and lodged a complaint.

Fulmabai is not educated but has a very sharp inquiring mind. She has adopted herself to gather more and more information and make best use of it in the real life situation. She is now linked to Mahila Rajsatta Andolan

(Source: Towards Empowerment 2009)