



DURGA INDIA'S MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

September 2023 | Vol. 4

DURGA DARES

www.durgaindia.org



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It is true that women have very few spaces for leisure. When I look at women I encounter in my day to day life, they're always at work. Cooking, cleaning, doing mundane chores, day after day, year after year. I asked my mother when she had relaxed last, and she said "*Fursat kab milti hai? I've got work to do.*"

So, when does a woman rest? When does she go for a stroll, when is she 'without a care in the world'? When does she just be; without worrying about the numerous roles she occupies - mother, sister, aunt, wife? I don't know many women who would have answers to this question. I don't either. But this month, I'd like to invite you all to take a breather, take a few minutes off, and take in the peace that comes with being 'free'. This has been a space that signifies *fursat* for me. Leisure. And what a wonderful, creative little bubble this is.

Winnie Pande

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DURGA'S LENS: WOMEN AT WORK

PHOTOS BY LIKHITHA SHETTY, PROGRAM FACILITATOR AT DURGA INDIA. IN FRAME ARE WOMEN POURAKARMIKAS DURING OUR SESSIONS WITH THEM. WE ARE SO HAPPY TO HAVE MET THEM AND LISTENED TO THEIR STORIES.





“WHERE IS THE CHILI POWDER?”

By Ravitha Prabhakaran, Associate Director at Durga India. Edited by Winnie Pande.

Saroja's eyes were watering profusely after her eye surgery. In the hospital, her husband, Prakash, had eaten the food served by the staff reluctantly, but now that she was home, Prakash, and his father, Nanda, squatted upon mats, and waited for the food that had for so long graced their tongues.

In 35 years of marriage to Prakash, not once had Saroja taken a day off. Her work began at the break of dawn; where her body had memorised the routine. Her feet would take her to the cow shed, where she'd milk the cows, after which she'd toil in the rice fields. Her hands knew exactly which stone against which she'd wash Prakash's clothes, and when she'd wring them to dry, the water dripped down her arms, leaving the end of her saree wet.

House help made no sense to the men she stayed with, or to the women she knew. It was an unsaid deal - that if Saroja could not enter the kitchen when she was menstruating, the women in the neighbouring house would send across food for Saroja and Prakash. Shanti, her neighbour, and the women in her village did not complain, so why should Saroja? Prakash didn't enjoy eating food from hotels, and his palette was now perfectly adjusted to the spices and condiments of Saroja's kitchen.

A day passed, and no food came Prakash's way. He grumbled about it, and spoke loudly with Nanda about this absence, outside Saroja's door. Then, another day passed, but this time, Saroja could hear Prakash thanking Shanti profusely for the meals she had just brought home. Saroja's eye was bandaged, but she could picture her bringing in ragi mudde, while her other hand clutched rice and pickle in banana leaves, wrapped with string. The third day, Prakash peeked into Saroja's room where she lay under the fan, and hoped that her feet would walk her to the kitchen again. Saroja snored, her lip twitched; her frame as thin as Prakash's patience.

On the fourth day, the clothes had piled up in Saroja's room, and the kitchen lay silent. Shanti had left for her brother's home in Salem. "So no food from them, then", Prakash had lamented. Nanda's cough echoed through the house. Saroja's vision was blurry, and her eye felt like sand. She held up the bottle of eyedrops and pried her eye open with her thumb and index finger. Ah. A moment's relief.



Prakash, on seeing this, and Nanda's unwillingness, to enter the kitchen, had no other choice but to go to the place, where for long, only Saroja's footprints had been imprinted on the ground.

On a shelf above the pots and pans, where a dated calendar looked back at him, were numerous steel jars. He placed the pot on the stove, unsure of what to do next. "Making daal, is it? It will be great for my stomach", Nanda called out. Prakash grumbled in response. Never had he felt so small and confused. He lowered several jars from the shelf, and opened each one, but nothing made sense to him. What went into daal? Could it be the strong, warm masala that was in the first jar he had opened? But what about the other boxes, and their contents? Did he have to put in oil? How much? Did the oil go first? How long should the dal be cooked?

Feebly, he called out to Saroja, "Where is the dal? Where is the chili powder?"

"Check the shelf, everything is there."

"It is not here, I have checked. How do you find things in this clutter?"

"Enna, where will it go? The chilli powder is the third box, from the right. Found it?"

Saroja was right. In his hand, Prakash now held chili powder.

"And the salt?"

"The first box from the left."

Correct. He now had salt.

"What else do I put in it?"

"Put some jeera. And *manjal*. The last two jars on the shelf."

Wow. It was like magic; Saroja knew every ingredient on that shelf.

"Come here, it is getting too difficult to ask you for everything. I'll make the dal, you just tell me what to do."

Saroja, now in her 36th year of marriage to Prakash, never had a day off from work. Her vision was blurry, but she hurried out of her room. Nanda, who lay on the bed in the hall, witnessed a sight that was all but normal: A woman, with almost no vision in both her eyes, feeling the boxes and containers, and directing a man, whose eyes were as sharp as a hawk, to heat up water, throw salt in the vessel and cook them a meal for the day. Nanda turned to his side. He knew he'd have a familiar meal now. Whew! What a tiresome week it had been for him and Prakash.

We also wanted to take this opportunity to thank our partners: Kantar India Foundation, the CSR arm of Kantar India; Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies; CGI, and Utopia India Pvt Limited for their support to Durga's cause.

KANTAR



CGI



DO YOU KNOW HER NAME?

She was one of India's first female physicians and the first Indian woman to practice medicine. She studied in Scotland and when returned, she was labelled a 'whore'. She and her husband fought the case and won!

Do you know her name?

- a) Annie Besant
- c) Anandi Joshi
- d) Kadambini Ganguly

In 1977, she became the first Indian woman to travel to Antarctica.

Do you know her name?

- a) Bachendri Pal
- b) Meher Moos
- c) Anandi Bai Joshi

WORD SEARCH

A	L	L	I	E	S	R	E	B
E	O	B	A	E	M	E	E	Y
Y	O	U	C	M	P	L	A	S
I	B	I	R	P	B	B	A	T
S	O	O	R	A	W	O	R	A
V	A	B	N	T	E	I	N	N
O	O	E	O	H	R	E	S	D
C	O	M	M	Y	N	I	T	E
E	D	H	O	I	S	E	A	R

1. ALLIES
2. ENABLE
3. BYSTANDER
4. BOYS
5. EMPATHY

BURIED TALES

Illustrated by Lalithashree Ganesh.





To be continued...

UNVEILING RESILIENCE

By Tithi Banerjee, Intern at Durga India.

In the shadows, her spirit seemed strong,
 She is opposed to everything that is bad.
 She refuses to hide her courage.
 She refuses to acquiesce in the face of harassment.

She finds her voice and begins to surge,
 In muttered taunts and leering glances.
 She'll declare, no longer silent,
A shift in the game, an end to harassment.
 Her strength is a lighthouse,
 Guiding others through the darkest night.
 We will shatter the bonds together,
 Put an end to the anguish, and release the pain.

We will face the day with resilience,
 As strong women, we will pave the way.
 For it is only through our togetherness,
 That we can see a future where all women are genuinely free.



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